

"The Letters to the 7 Churches"

Part 1

Revelation 2:1-3:22

Introduction: Today in our study of the book of Revelation we are about to embark upon a journey which will take us deep into a treasure of spiritual riches. Over the next several weeks we are going to be studying the letters written to the 7 churches of the book of Revelation. Many people want to rush through the letters to get to the prophetic contents of the letter and in so doing they are missing a treasure of riches within these letters.

I believe I am safe when I say that our study of these letters will change our lives.

Now there are really 3 ways in which we can look at these letters and it is my desire to look at them in each of these ways.

1. **Practical view.**

This view will show us to see how these letters apply to our own lives.

2. **Perennial view.**

This view will enable us to look at these churches and see a progressive disintegration with several of these churches showing us the separate steps.

3. **Prophetic view.**

This view will allow us to see each of these churches representing THE TRUE church throughout the ages.

Our first focus is going to be on the PRACTICAL VIEW of each of the churches.

As we approach these letters we will see that Jesus Christ will identify Himself in a different way to each of these churches. Now each of the identities has a special meaning to each church based upon what they are facing at the time. At the same time each way in which Jesus identifies Himself is also connected to what we have already looked at in Revelation 1. Let me show you.

Notice Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18, 3:1, 7, 14

Every one of these Titles can be connected back to the vision in Revelation 1.

The Church at Ephesus

Revelation 2:1-7

Notice Ephesus 2:1

Let me give you a little back ground about this church. This church was started by the Apostle Paul. Ephesus was not the capital of Asia but it was the most important city. The city was strategically located for it sat as a cross roads to travelers. The city was a major sea port in John's day. Within the city there was one of the 7 wonders of the world and that was the temple of Diana. When Paul preached the Gospel in Ephesus God began to do many miracles and this then began to change the city of Ephesus.

Acts 19:18-20

¹⁸ *And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.*

¹⁹ *Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.*

²⁰ *So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.*

This movement of the Holy Spirit caused a great stir in Ephesus.

The church in Ephesus had been established and it had tremendous impact upon the world around it. There were great teachers who had filled the pulpit at Ephesus. There was Paul, Apollos, Timothy and John.

Notice Revelation 2:1 again.

The way in which Jesus identifies Himself here is very interesting. He was in the midst of them. This speaks to the condition of the church. We will see as we move through this letter to Ephesus that this church was guilty of the sin of DISTANCE. They were moving away from the Lord but He was in the midst of them and He desired to have the fellowship which they once had.

Even the physical condition within the city was a reminder of the distance which was growing between them and the Lord. The river which ran through the city carried much silt and the city continued to move further and further away from the sea which was the source of life for the commerce. The church was allowing themselves to also move away from the True source of LIFE which is Jesus Christ.

I. **The Commendation**

Notice Revelation 1:2

Here we see that Jesus commends these believers for several reasons:

1. **They were workers for the Lord.**

There was no reminder needed about how True faith produces works.

James 2:17, 20, 26

¹⁷ *Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*

²⁰ *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*

²⁶ *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

Here we see these verses in action.

Now we need to see here that Jesus missed nothing which they did in His name.

Hebrews 6:10

¹⁰ *For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*

2. **They were laboring believers.**

The word "labour" here refers to service combined with toil and trouble. These believers at this church were workers. They knew what it was to sacrifice for they were sacrificing every day. The idea here is that they labored unto weariness.

3. **They were steadfast.**

The word "patience" here refers to ENDURANCE. The point here is that these believers would not quit no matter how difficult the path. When they made a commitment to serve the Lord they saw it through to the end. They were obedient to the words Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth.

1 Corinthians 15:58

⁵⁸ *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

These believers were living examples of Jesus Christ in their service.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

² *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

³ *For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

4. They were separated.

Jesus said they could not BEAR them who were evil. The idea is they separated themselves from those who were involved in sinful lifestyles.

2 Corinthians 6:14-17

¹⁴ *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*

¹⁵ *And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*

¹⁶ *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

¹⁷ *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*

Notice Revelation 2:6

It is believed that the Nicolaitanes taught that grace was a license to sin.

5. They were discerning.

There were many false teachers in the days of the early church because Satan was doing everything he could to distort the Apostle's teachings. The Scriptures were being written so Satan planted many false teachers to confuse. But these people had been taught by Paul about the dangers.

Acts 20:28-31

²⁸ *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

²⁹ For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

³¹ Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

Notice Revelation 1:3

6. They stood up for the name of Jesus Christ.

These believers persevered, endured, worked, served, stood, and they never quit. If the letter stopped there it would have been the model church. But there was a problem.

II. The Condemnation

Notice Revelation 2:4

This was a very serious problem for Jesus threatened to remove their lamp stand. They had LEFT their first love. They no longer loved Jesus the way that they did when they were first saved. The fact that we are told that they LEFT tells me it was by choice.

Just like the silt which the river slowly carried into the sea so there was something which had slowly worked its way into their lives and had taken the place of Jesus.

Application:

This is something which we must guard against. Let me read for you the words of Ray Stedman on this thought.

There are always symptoms, signs, of this happening. Here are three of them: The first one, visible at first only to the individual, is the loss of the joy and glow of Christian life. It soon becomes humdrum and routine. You begin to feel like you have heard it all already. Even the church service loses its impact. It seems mechanical, routine, dull and drab. That is a sign you are beginning to lose your first love. Second, you lose your ability to love others. One of the great revelations of the Scripture is that the reason we love others is because we have first been loved ourselves. When we lose that consciousness of the wonder of Jesus' love we also lose our awareness of others and find our love for them fading. It is difficult to love. We become critical, censorious, complaining. We begin to choose our friends more closely and only associate with those we like. We lose the compassion that reached out to everyone at first. Then, third, we lose a healthy

perspective of ourselves. We become more and more important in our thinking. Instead of what the Lord wants and what will please him we begin to think of what we want and what will please us. Gradually, we become sensitive and touchy, unable to bear criticism. This begins to make divisions and often schisms in a congregation. Individuals in the church are no longer interested in evangelism. They are no longer concerned about those around them without Christ, but are focused on themselves, their own comfort, their own pleasure. Self-centeredness sets in.

I want you to hear what I am about to say:

Our priority must be RELATIONSHIP over service!

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸ *Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.*

³⁹ *And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.*

⁴⁰ *But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.*

⁴¹ *And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:*

⁴² *But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

III. **The Cure**

Notice Revelation 2:5a

Jesus gives to the believers at Ephesus 3 steps to getting back to where they needed to be.

a. **Remember**

They were to take the time to think back to what it was like when they loved the Lord.

b. **Repent**

They were to turn around. They were on a path leading them away from the Lord.

c. **Return**

They were to go back to the basics. They were to spend time alone with the Lord and His Word.

IV. The Warning

Notice Revelation 2:5b

They would lose their candle stick which means they would no longer be used to show forth the glory of Jesus Christ. Their impact to those around them would be diminished.

Conclusion:

This is a frightening letter. These people had no idea how far they had drifted. They thought all was well. But the Word of the Lord pierced their hearts and revealed to them there was a problem. What about your life? How is your love for the Lord?

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.