

## Session Eight:

### Revelation 2:1-7 The Church Of Ephesus

#### I) Introduction To The Seven Churches

- A) **Revelation 2-3** are Jesus' address to seven historical, physical and literal Churches. They were all located in what was then Asia Minor, but we know the area now as modern day Turkey.
- B) These letters are laid out in a purposeful way with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> letter to the two Churches in greatest danger. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> letters are written to Churches that are doing great. And the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> letters are to churches that are struggling.
- |                 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 1) Ephesus      | Bad shape   |
| 2) Smyrna       | Great shape |
| 3) Pergamos     | Struggling  |
| 4) Thyatira     | Struggling  |
| 5) Sardis       | Struggling  |
| 6) Philadelphia | Great shape |
| 7) Laodicea     | Bad shape   |
- C) Some have said that these seven Churches represent seven time periods in Church history;
- 1) Ephesus—first century
  - 2) Smyrna—persecution period of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries
  - 3) Pergamos—the Church of Constantine
  - 4) Thyatira—the middle ages
  - 5) Sardis—the reformation
  - 6) Philadelphia—the Church of the modern missionary movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century
  - 7) Laodicea—the Church of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century
- D) In my opinion, this is a dangerous way to interpret the scripture. Though many of these seven Churches might fit into a certain time period, it's still not a solid, safe way to interpret scripture.
- E) I believe in a threefold approach to rightly view these seven Churches. 1) Past (Literal, Historical Churches) 2) Present (The Church era) 3) Future (The final generation of Christians).
- F) It's believed these Churches were selected because they were on a circular pattern with Ephesus being the entry point to the other Churches. These were believed to be distribution Churches, meaning that from these 7 Churches the message would have spread elsewhere.
- G) The seven Churches were believed to be in a circular path for the traveling preacher who had been this way before. It's thought that from these Churches another messenger would then take the message to the other Churches. This was a common practice with New Testament letters.
- 1) **Colossians 4:16** *"Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the Church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."*

H) There is a common structure to all of the seven letters addressed by Jesus;

1) **The Address**

1. *"To the angel of the Church in \_\_\_\_\_."*

2) **The Attribute**

1. *"These things says He \_\_\_\_\_."*

2. In every address from Jesus to the seven Churches, Jesus shares unique aspects of Himself that He revealed to John in **Revelation 1**.

3) **The Approval**

1. *"I know your works..."*

4) **The Accusation**

1. *"Yet I have this against you..."*

5) **The Advice**

1. *"or else I will come to you quickly..." "repent, and do your first works..."*

6) **The Assurance**

1. *"To him who overcomes, I will..."*

(a) The assurance of reward isn't something that Jesus promises to the entire Church, but always to individuals. Jesus is offering incentives to those who overcome, but the rewards aren't automatic for everyone. There are 22 total eternal rewards in **Revelation 2-3**.

(b) The rewards of Jesus are for those that wait for the eternal future, not our temporal present. It's those only that have faith in Jesus to keep His promise that will have motivation by distant rewards.

7) **The Appeal**

1. *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."*

(a) This is a commandment to not only take Jesus' words into our ears, but also into our hearts.

(b) (The only place that this format is changed is in the last 4 letters, number 6 and 7 are reversed).

## II) History Of Ephesus

A) The city of Ephesus was the largest city of the seven Churches and a thriving metropolis. It was a large seaport that worked as an entrance into the other cities because of its proximity to the water. One of the seven wonders of the world was held there, which was the temple of Artemis.

B) Ephesus boasted of a large sports arena, theaters, a museum and shopping. It was a wealthy city and very pagan in its worship of the goddess Diana who was covered in breasts. And in the midst of this corrupt city, was a Church.

- C) The Church of Ephesus was founded by Aquila and Priscilla (**Acts 18:18**) under the leadership of Paul.

## III) Jesus' Address To The Church Of Ephesus

- A) **Revelation 2:1** *"To the angel of the Church of Ephesus write, these things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands..."*

- 1) As I covered last week, I believe that the word angel is best translated *Elder, Bishop, Apostle, Shepherd or overseer*. Jesus is addressing the leadership of the Church because the people are a byproduct of their leadership. By addressing the leadership, He will address the people.
- 2) Jesus, in His post-resurrection is pictured here as holding the messengers in His hand and walking among the Church. This means that today, Jesus is still speaking, leading, guiding and directing His Church.
- 3) **The Attribute** Jesus shares with this Church is that He holds the messengers in His hand and that He walks among the Church. Jesus is about the level one of the largest charges against any of the seven Churches to Ephesus. But He needs them to know that He is holding them and is willing to walk with them through the process.

- B) **Revelation 2:2-3** *"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have preserved and have patience, and have labored for My namesake and have not become weary."*

- 1) Prior to Jesus' giving them **The Accusation**, He is going to first **Approve** some of the things they are doing.
  1. They have labored well
  2. They have patience
  3. They hate evil
  4. They have good doctrine
  5. They have persevered
  6. And they aren't weary
- 2) Jesus says to them that *"He knows their works."* This means that He has intimate knowledge of both the good and the bad that's taking place in their midst.
- 3) From the outside, the Church of Ephesus was a thriving mega-Church enjoy great success.
- 4) Resisting evil teachers was and is a huge undertaking in the Church. Jesus praised the Church for their stand for truth, and for calling out false apostles. There is serious repercussions for calling out false ministries within the Church.

- C) **Revelation 2:4** *"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."*

- 1) After Jesus' **Approval** for some of the positive things they are doing, He now gives them **The Accusation**. Jesus, in great tenderness tells them the positives before He shares the negatives.
  - 2) In the midst of serving others, defending doctrine and addressing false ministries, the Church of Ephesus had lost its original reason for becoming a Christian, the love of God.
  - 3) This letter tells us that the leadership over the Church of Ephesus was serving others more than they were serving Jesus which resulted in a congregation that was busy working for Jesus, but had lost their love for Jesus.
  - 4) This is a serious issue and it's prevalent today in much of the Church. 3 of the 7 Churches were in this very spot; Ephesus, Sardis and Laodicea, working hard, but dull at the heart level.
- D) **Revelation 1:5** *"Remember therefore where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp stand from its place—unless you repent."*
- 1) Jesus' **Advice** to this church was threefold;
    1. **Remember**
      - (a) Jesus was calling them to remember what it was like when they first fell in love with Him. Do you remember when you couldn't wait to get to the prayer meeting, read your Bible, be with other Christians? Remember, Remember.
        - (i) **Jeremiah 2:2** *"I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness..."*
    2. **Repent**
      - (a) Jesus tells them to apologize for their neglect of Him. Call it what it is. It's not being busy, it's neglect.
        - (i) **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 7:9-11**
    3. **Return**
      - (a) This is a call to return back to the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle. Return to prayer, giving, serving, reading, fasting and sharing Jesus with others.
  - 2) Jesus' promise to the Church of Ephesus is that if they refused to repent, He would personally remove their lampstand from its place. I use to think that this had to do with losing your salvation, but now I understand it's speaking of their place of influence.
  - 3) Because the Church of Ephesus was a lampstand Church, it was being held accountable for what they were exporting which was more negative than positive. They were going to do more damage than good in the long run and if they refused to repent, they'd be put out.
- E) **Revelation 2:6** *"But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate."*
- 1) Jesus again affirms them for hating this destructive doctrine and He also says that He hates it too.

- 2) There is much thought around this idea, but some believe that this was a deacon from **Acts 6:5** who helped Christians sin under the grace of God. It's a doctrine that fills the Church today, and will continue to increase.
- F) **Revelation 2:7** *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God."*
- 1) Jesus gives the final **Assurance** of reward and the **Appeal** to listen. History tells us that close to the temple of Artemis there was a tree which created an asylum for convicted criminals if they could get to it.
  - 2) Jesus is very well implying that although the city of Ephesus allows criminals safety near this earthly tree, He will give them access to the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God, if they overcome. This isn't an automatic reward, it's based solely on overcoming.
  - 3) And His final **Appeal** to the Church of Ephesus is that they would first give their ear and then their heart to the voice of the Holy Spirit and respond rightly.