

REVELATION

Lesson 2 w/Answers

Revelation 2:1 - 3:22

This past week we discovered that the Book of Revelation is a singular, but complex, revelation of Jesus Christ to the Jews, the Church, and the Gentile world as Christ is revealed as the true Messiah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is coming as King to rule and judge and to set up his earthly kingdom ("the things to come"). We also saw that today ("the things that are") he stands at the center of the Church as the Lamb of God who died and rose again in order to give us eternal life. He is "the first and the last" and is revealed, or unveiled, through this book which he told John in Revelation 22:10 "not to seal up". Therefore we should study and learn all that this most amazing book has for us as we eagerly await his return.

This week we will look at the seven churches: the original addressees of this "letter". Who were they, why only seven when so many more churches existed by that time, what did Christ have to say about them that was good, and what did he criticize them for? In answering these questions we can better understand "the church" that Christ is building and our own individual churches within His Church as well.

May God bless you as you study His Holy Word this week.

Read Revelation 2:1 - 3:22, then answer the following:

1. What is the purpose of the "Church"? To answer this question make a simple table: down the left hand side, list the names of the seven churches; across the top put two labels: strengths or commendations, and criticism or condemnations. Then for each church list the things Christ commended them for and the things he criticized them for. From this table, what do you believe Christ is telling us is the purpose of the Church and what is NOT? See linked Seven Churches Summary, thanks to Rose Publishing for allowing us to copy and use this material for teaching.
 - a. ANSWER 1: We can see that Christ instructs the churches that we are to endure, to accomplish work that can be hard, reject evil, persevere, endure suffering and poverty, remain ever loyal to Christ, refuse to deny Him, do deeds in love, faith and service, and be constantly seeking to improve our service while keeping our faith in Christ strong.
 - b. ANSWER 2: We are not to forsake our love of Christ, nor to tolerate cults, heresies, idolatry and immorality; nor should we rely on riches.
 - c. ANSWER 3: The above implies that a successful church may not be rich, it may not be large, but it will be exclusive with respect to keeping Christian doctrine pure; and it will not compromise in order to appeal to the world around us.
2. Name the churches about which Christ does NOT have anything negative to say (there are two). These would certainly then make great church models for us.
 - a. ANSWER: These two churches are Smyrna and Philadelphia. They endured, they kept Christ's word pure, they did not compromise, and they even suffered hardships all in the name of Christ. They never comprised nor lost their love of Christ.
3. Which church does Christ call a compromising church? (Since he condemns them for this there is also a message here for the church of today.)
 - a. ANSWER: Actually both the church at Pergamum and the church at Thyatira were accused by Christ as having tolerated cults, heresies, idolatry, and immorality. By tolerating false teaching and incorporating the worship of idols with immoral behavior, they had become churches that openly accepted everyone and every approach to "religion", while trying to also proclaim the gospel. Clearly you cannot do that, and Christ calls out both of them. They are told to repent!

4. Which church does he not have anything good to say? We can also learn much from this church as it represents things which are not pleasing to Christ and clearly are not to be a part of his church.
- a. ANSWER: The church at Laodicea. Their biggest sin was that of indifference and self-sufficiency. They had become completely incapable of doing Christ's work, believing in their own strength and taking no position on any doctrinal or moral issues affecting those around them. Preferring to be content in their own strength, they were completely ineffective, and will be spit out at the judgment. It is not too difficult to see why this is seen as the church that exists during the Tribulation period: It will be completely ineffective. Christ will send in its place the 144,000 converted Jews as his final witnesses; since the real church will have been raptured prior to the beginning of this period. (We will be discussing the doctrine of the Rapture in a future lesson.)
5. Can you discern why these seven churches were chosen? What do you suppose they represent?
- a. ANSWER 1: The letters were written to specific churches in Turkey (in Asia Minor) rather than letters to all the churches in Turkey. This means that Christ had a specific reason for picking these particular seven churches.
- b. ANSWER 2: Of note: all of the letters have the same construction.
- c. ANSWER 3: At the end of each letter, Christ commands "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...". We should note that He does not say "...let him hear what the Spirit says to a specific church", like Ephesus for example. This means that all of us, every church, is to listen and hear what the Spirit says. These letters are addressing us.
- d. ANSWER 4: It is reasonable to assume that at the time of the original writing, the conditions being addressed in these seven churches actually existed. It is also reasonable to assume that, at any point in church history, we can find these same conditions; and that, in reality, if we were to look closely at churches around the world today, we would also see these things occurring. This is what makes Christ's letters so relevant: they address the concerns, struggles, and needs of the churches today, just as they addressed those of specific churches in Turkey during that time period.
- e. ANSWER 5: These letters indicate that Christ is watching every local church everywhere in the world, and will hold each of them accountable. His accounting of each of the seven churches is very specific, indicating that he knows each church intimately and holds each of them accountable. This implies that He is doing the same today, and will hold each church today accountable as well.
- f. ANSWER 6: Many theologians believe that the seven churches address the seven stages of the Church, beginning with the Apostolic beginning of the church through to the Second Coming of Christ. If so, then the Laodicean church would be in place at the beginning of the Tribulation Period. This is not surprising, given that Apostasy will be the mainstay of the church at that time. The Laodicean description would certainly fit.
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So, let's recap what we learned about the following church letters:

The church in Ephesus - was clearly centered on works, so much so that it had lost sight of its "first love", the real purpose of a church - spreading the gospel message, seeking and saving the lost. It had gotten so focused on its programs and ministry areas that it had forgotten its real purpose.

The church in Smyrna - in a wealthy city full of riches, knowledge, and a lavish lifestyle, it was seen as poor yet standing firm on the gospel. They were not comprising the faith or the gospel to gain wealth, nor were they watering down the message to "fit in" or be "politically correct" with the sophisticated and wealthy citizens of Smyrna. They were surrounded by counterfeit Jews and constantly under attack from Satan yet they held firm. Christ had absolutely nothing negative to say to this church, he encouraged them to continue being faithful even unto death and he would give them a crown of life.

The church in Pergamum - a center of government, education, culture, idol worship, Pergamum was a challenge. Christ commended them, but also warned them. Clearly they had comprised the Gospel message. They allowed worldly

teaching to be incorporated with the teaching of the Word of God and had comprised their faith. In an apparent effort to welcome or include everyone they were allowing false teaching and in so doing comprised God's Holy Word.

As I hope you can already see, if we were to remove the names of these three churches we would readily detect lessons here for churches today. Focused on programs and works, trying to fit in or be politically correct, compromising God's Holy Word; .and we haven't look at all the letters yet. We also see good things, standing firm in the faith, be on guard against the false teachers and phony Christians who will try and comprise or mislead us and others seeking Christ. Christ doesn't tell any of these churches there's no hope. He clearly says there is, and he gives them specific things to do to turn their churches around, or to grow stronger in what they already have.

I encourage you to look at the last four letters this week. See what you can find about those cities and what life was like then and see if you can detect what Christ is teaching each of them. Once we have looked at all seven, we will have great insight into how we can help to build up the body we are a part of and how each of us can avoid the problems Christ points to in these letters.

Have a great week everyone! May God continue to richly bless you as you faithfully study with us each week.

Yours in Christ

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