

Lessons from the Seven Churches of Asia

Revelation 2-3

INTRODUCTION:

- A. The book of Revelation was originally written by the apostle John to the "seven churches which are in Asia" (Rev. 1: 4).
1. These were not modern denominations but separate local churches. John wrote to these churches regarding "things which must shortly come to pass" and events that would be "hereafter" (Rev. 1: 1, 19, 4: 19).
 2. These churches are identified as:
 - a. **Ephesus** . . . (2: 1-7) . . . **LOVELESS** Church
 - b. **Smyrna** . . . (2: 8-11) . . . **PERSECUTED** Church
 - c. **Pergamos** . . . (2: 12-17) . . . **COMPROMISING** Church
 - d. **Thyatira** . . . (2: 18-29) . . . **CORRUPT** Church
 - e. **Sardis** . . . (3: 1-6) . . . **DEAD** Church
 - f. **Philadelphia** . . . (3: 7-13) . . . **FAITHFUL** Church
 - g. **Laodicea** . . . (3: 14-22) . . . **LUKEWARM** Church
 3. Two of these churches are commended without any rebuke or indication of resident sin, Smyrna and Philadelphia.
 4. Five had sin and repentance needed to be experienced (2: 5; 16; 22; 3: 3; 19). Repentance had to be forthcoming or the "candlestick" (Greek, "lampstand") would be removed (cp. 2: 5).
 5. The lampstand is symbolic of light (cp. I Timothy 3: 15).
"Lampstand" seems to also stand for the church itself or God's recognition of the church (1: 20)
- B. "The territory here called 'Asia' was the Roman province embracing the western part of Asia Minor, of which Ephesus was the capital city.
1. The seven churches addressed were geographically located in this territory.
 2. There were other churches/congregations besides those mentioned in that Colossae and Troas are referred to in Colossians 1: 2 and Acts 20: 5-7
- C. Satan will not leave God's people alone.

ONE: Jesus knows the true spiritual status of churches/congregations.

- A. Jesus is figuratively described as having hair "white like wool" and his "eyes were as a flame of fire" (1: 14). He is presented as being in the "midst of the seven candlesticks" (1: 13).
- B. Such a description is indicative of Jesus' knowledge of the seven churches; hence, all his churches.
1. Of Jesus it is repeatedly affirmed: "I know thy works" (2:2; 9;13; 19;3: 1; 8; 15).

2. Jesus is said to "search the reins and hearts" (2:23).
3. Jesus is the judge and will judge "according to man's works".
4. Man can and often does fool man. The church at Sardis had a name that it lived, but Jesus knew the church was dead (3: 1).

TWO: God's acceptance and recognition of local churches is conditional.

- A. If the five churches did not repent, they would cease being the Lord's church (2: 5). Even when man elects to leave God, God remains faithful.
- B. Jesus extends an invitation to the church at Laodicea. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock, if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (3: 20).
- C. Churches can and do change. Not many years antecedent to the writing of Revelation, the church at Ephesus had been strong (Acts 20: 17 ff., Ephesians).
 1. However, they have now "left their first love" (2: 4).
 2. Please appreciate the fact that God's acceptance and recognition of his people is based on their doctrinal and moral stand (Revelation 2; 3, consider 2:14, 15, 16).

THREE: The lesson of good being done does not cancel out continued sin in other areas.

- A. The church at Thyatira had works, love, service, and faith (2:19). However, they also allowed false teaching and immorality (vs. 20).
 1. A similar situation prevailed in the church at Pergamos (2:13, 14).
 2. Notwithstanding the good in these churches, Jesus said "I have a few things against you . . . repent . . ." (2:20, 16).
- B. Too many local churches operate on the philosophy of "we know there are matters that are not right, but look at the good we are accomplishing."

FOUR: Each local church was autonomous.

- A. The New Testament clearly teaches the autonomy or self-government of local churches (1 Pet. 5:1-3).
 1. By contrast, Denominationalism exists and functions on the principle of each local body being tied to others and, in most cases, all the bodies having a central overseeing body.
 2. Apostasy in the area of church organization and leadership was one of the earliest slippery slopes that resulted in a departure from the faith.
- B. Each of the seven congregations was autonomous from all the others.
 1. That is God's plan . . . That is God's will on the subject.
 2. Anything more than that is an addition . . . And, anything less than that is a departure from God's word.

FIVE: The lesson that a local church can be doctrinally and morally correct, but still be wrong.

- A. As we have seen, being correct doctrinally and morally is a necessity to God's acceptance and recognition. However, one can "have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3: 5).
- B. The church at Ephesus is an example of a church that was doctrinally and morally correct but still not right with God (Revelation 2: 1-4). It is possible to perform the externals and the acts be correct, but without the basic and proper motivation, the "first works," love, devotion, sincerity, etc. (vs. 4, 5).

VI. The non-participants in false doctrine and immorality in the local churches were held responsible.

- A. Fellowship requirements not only involve avoiding participation in that which is wrong, but the reproofing and making known of the wrong. **Ephesians. 5:6-11** - " Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. "
- B. Please observe that the command to repent is addressed to the non-participants at Pergamos and Thyatira (2: 14-16; 19-20).
 - 1. They had not directly participated themselves, but they had "suffered" or allowed these sins to go unchallenged (1 Corinthians 5). Therefore, they also were in danger of losing their souls.
 - a. The faithful remain faithful amidst a situation that is not spiritually acceptable.
 - b. Change all the wrong that you can but never allow the wrong to change you.
 - 2. God wants the church to be pure and blameless. Strive to keep it so.

CONCLUSION:

- A. Five lessons from the Seven Churches of Asia have been observed.
 - 1. **Jesus knows the true spiritual status of churches.**
 - 2. **God's acceptance and recognition of local churches is conditional.**
 - 3. **The lesson of good being done does not cancel out continued sin in other areas.**
 - 4. **Each local church was autonomous.**
 - 5. **A local church can be doctrinally and morally correct, but still be wrong.**
- B. Many others lessons are there for study and learning Among them . . .

1. Triumph/victory is truly possible with Jesus.
2. God does not "overburden" His people.
3. God allows time for repentance.
4. Man is not allowed all the time he may want. The timetable belongs to God.

C. God's Plan for Man's Salvation