

Lesson 5 - 29 November 2009

Christ in the Midst of the Churches

Lesson Scope: [Revelation 2](#)

Lesson Focus

Revelation 2 and 3 consist of Christ's messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Consequently, there are seven letters and each letter has seven parts, first an address, second a reference to some aspect of His deity, third an assertion of His complete knowledge of their affairs; fourth a description of their state, fifth an allusion to His coming, sixth a universal command to hear and seventh a special promise to the victor. In the letters to the last four mentioned churches the sequence varies, but in each, the seven parts can be distinguished.

The number seven occurs frequently in the Book of Revelation. As noted in this lesson focus, there are seven messages, and each letter to the individual churches has seven parts. Seven signifies completeness. Seven is also the combination of three and four. Three is the number of the Trinity, and four, in the Bible, often represents the world and man. Man finds completeness in a close relationship with God.

Also of special significance is the reference to some aspect of deity at the beginning of each message. Think them through for yourself, but the following ideas will help you get started: in the first, Christ is sovereign; in the second, Christ is eternal; in the third, Christ is the executor of justice; in the fourth, Christ is absolute holiness; in the fifth, Christ is Lord; in the sixth, Christ is the sovereign King; and in the seventh, Christ is the perfect God-man and the final revelation.

Christ walks in the midst of the churches. He perceives their true spiritual condition and calls each one to repentance or to continued steadfastness.

Lesson Aim: To receive encouragements and warnings from Christ's messages to the churches in Asia.

Theme Verse

[Revelation 2:11](#). He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Lesson Text

Backslidden Ephesus

Rev. 2:1-7

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; ²I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: ³And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. ⁴Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. ⁵Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. ⁶But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. ⁷He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Suffering Smyrna

Rev. 2:8-10

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; ⁹I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and *I know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Heretical Pergamos

Rev. 2:12-16

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; ¹³I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat *is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. ¹⁴But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit forni-

cation. ¹⁵So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. ¹⁶Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Defiled Thyatira

Rev. 2:18-25

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet *are* like fine brass; ¹⁹I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last *to be* more than the first. ²⁰Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. ²¹And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. ²²Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. ²³And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. ²⁴But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. ²⁵But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come.

Questions for Study

Backslidden Ephesus

1. Why were these letters addressed to the church leaders?
2. What are the involvements and importance of first love?
3. How can "first love" be regained?

Suffering Smyrna

4. Why does God allow hardship and persecution to come to the saints?
5. Is it fair to blame Satan for the trials and tests that we face in life? Explain.

Heretical Pergamos

6. What might be some current parallels to the doctrine of Balaam?
7. Explain the necessity of maintaining sound doctrine.

Defiled Thyatira

8. How can the church maintain purity in practice?

Analyzing the Passage

The seven churches of Asia were actual congregations of believers. Since they were not the only churches in Asia, it is significant that these seven were chosen. It is commonly understood that the term angel (messenger) refers to the leader of the church.

The first love (2:4) that the Ephesian church lacked can be compared to the love of betrothal. It is characterized by a desire to please and a slowness to find fault. It is the “more excellent way” spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13.

The church at Smyrna was experiencing severe persecution at the hand of the Romans. The unbelieving Jews who cooperated with them are said to be of the synagogue (2:9) of Satan. The synagogue, originally established to promote godly worship, no longer filled a purpose in the Christian Era. Its continuation represented Jewish unbelief and rejection of Christ. Satan is rightfully charged with the responsibility for the tribulation. The saints were encouraged to seal their faith with their blood.

Pergamos was a wealthy city known for its pagan worship. Reference is made to Satan’s seat (2:13) because of prevalent idol worship. The “*doctrine of Balaam*” (2:14) involved mixing Christianity with immorality and other pagan practices. The “*doctrine of the Nicolaitanes*” (2:15) involved the same sins.

The church of Thyatira was commended in many respects. However there was a woman, Jezebel, who was out of her place and claiming to be an inspired prophetess, she was influencing others to a life of unfaithfulness and idolatry. Severe judgment was pronounced upon her because she refused to repent. *Reins* (2:23) refers to the will and affections.

Principles and Applications

Backslidden Ephesus

1. *Christ, the Lord of the church, is intensely interested in the spiritual life of His people (2:1).*

He knows the total life and work of each life member. He sees past the outward profession to the motives and attitudes of the heart. He works through the leaders to communicate His message to the people.

2. *Christ honors the efforts of the church to warn against and counteract evil influences and false teachers (2:2-3).* Separation from the world is vital to a life of faithfulness. The skillful handling of Scripture builds personal conviction and arms the church against false teaching. The consistent

application of Scriptural principles puts Christianity into shoe leather. We can truly appreciate the protection and guidance that church standards provide.

3. *Doing right things cannot compensate for a lack of inner spiritual life (2:2-4).*

First Corinthians 13 enumerates a list of valuable contributions that are rendered worthless when love is absent. Love is the very essence of Christianity; it is the supreme law that governs the Christian's walk, and it is the strongest force possible to cause a person to do right.

Suffering Smyrna

4. *Rest is found in knowing that Christ is observing and superintending the circumstances and experiences of His people (2:9-10).*

Christ is using the trials and tests of life to develop in us the virtues of humility, faith and patient endurance. Understanding God's provision gives us joy and purpose in the hardships of life.

5. *The devil is the source of persecution and hardship (2:9-10).*

His intent is to overthrow our faith and cause us to blame God for our difficulties. Christ reassures us with the hope of eternal life and the promise of escape from injury by the second death.

Heretical Pergamos

6. *God holds churches accountable for tolerating falser teaching (2:14-15).*

False doctrine inevitably leads to wrong practice. The teaching of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes allows for immorality and unequal yokes with the world. Calvinism minimizes personal responsibility but to do good works and fatalism makes God responsible for our mistakes. The church may never relax in evaluating, what is taught in her midst, taking issue with whatever conflicts with God's Word.

Defiled Thyatira

7. *God will reward those who hold fast to the faith, but those who turn aside will experience His judgments (2:-23-25).*

These absolutes are taught throughout the Scriptures and especially in Revelation. "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:13-14).

Important Teachings

1. Christ, the Lord of the church, is intensely interested in the spiritual life of His people (2:1).
2. Christ honors the efforts of the church to warn against and counteract evil influences and false teachers (2:2-3).
3. Doing right things cannot compensate for a lack of inner spiritual life (2:2-4).
4. Rest is found in knowing that Christ is observing and superintending the circumstances and experiences of His people (2:9-10).
5. The devil is the source of persecution and hardship (2:9-10).
6. God holds churches accountable for tolerating false teaching (2:14-15).
7. God will reward those who hold fast to the faith, but those who turn aside will experience His judgments (2:23-25).

Answers to Questions

1. *Why were these letters addressed to the church leaders?*

These letters were addressed to the leaders because they were in authority and responsible to do something about a matter of concern (Hebrews 13:17).

2. *What are the involvements and importance of "first love"?*

First love is the love of betrothal. A couple engaged to be married expresses a high level of devotion to each other. They have a strong desire to be together and to please each other. Each is very interested in the well-being of the other. First love sees the good in the other person and somewhat overlooks the weaknesses. First Corinthians 13 adds fine details to the involvements of first love.

First love is important because love is the very essence of God. Love is the first fruit of the Spirit. Love is the primary law that governs the life of a Christian; it is the fulfilling of the Law. Love is the strongest force possible to cause a person to do right. Love is at the very core of Christianity.

3. *How can "first love" be regained?*

Christ told the church at Ephesus to consider from whence they had fallen. "Repent, and do the first works." Repentance clears the way for restoring the "first works," and the proper feelings of love will follow.

4. *Why does God allow hardship and persecution to come to the saints?*

God is able to make all things work together for our good if we are His children (Romans 8:28). When our faith is tried, we develop patience and

are made perfect and complete (James 1). God cursed the ground for Adam's sake, hardships are common to all in this fallen world. God allowed Job's difficulties to prove the devil wrong. Through his grief, Job's friends were led to a better understanding of God's workings. Hardships cause men to seek after God.

5. *Is it fair to blame Satan for the trials and tests that we face in life? Explain.*

Not necessarily. Sometimes we bring trouble on ourselves by doing wrong, acting impulsively or refusing the counsel of others. In every trial and test Satan seeks our downfall. If we respond rightly, the Lord can use such times to build our spiritual strength, patience, and faith.

6. *What might be some current parallels to the doctrine of Balaam?*

To practice the doctrine of Balaam is to link arms with the world. Israel was told to not learn the ways of the heathen. We are instructed in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 to avoid yoking with unbelievers. This could also include cooperating with churches that do not teach and practice nonresistance and separation.

7. *Explain the necessity of maintaining sound doctrine.*

A church group's official statement of doctrine may be sound, but what is actually preached, taught and practiced shapes the people's frame of reference. Laxness in regulating the practice will eventually lead to adjustments in the doctrine. Neglecting to teach any aspect of the doctrine will leave the people vulnerable to error.

8. *How can the church maintain purity in practice?*

Faithful leaders play a large role in keeping the church pure. Their success depends very much upon whether or not their people want it to be so. If the church will be kept pure, men and women must fill their respective roles under God. Maintaining a pure church requires good doctrinal preaching and a willingness to carry out the needed discipline. The whole church must work together to accomplish this goal. Each member is personally responsible to keep himself pure.

Summarizing the Lesson

Christ is in the midst of the churches yet today. He is observing what each congregation is doing and allowing. He desires our faithfulness. He calls us to love and to good works. He challenges us to hold fast until He comes. Let us be ready to deal promptly with Satan's inroads of error in the church. A crown of righteousness awaits those who are faithful.

Research Guide

1. With the help of a Bible dictionary, research information concerning the cities where the churches were located.
2. The following Scriptures are pertinent to the lesson: 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; James 1.