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Studies in the Revelation, BIB 755  
Assignment #1  
February 17, 2005

### **The Seven Churches**

The first church of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, is the church of Ephesus. The church of Ephesus is what Dr. Combs calls the lacking church. In the dispensation or age of the church, this church began with the birth of the church in Acts, chapter 2 and concludes with the death of the last apostle, John. There are a few things that are mentioned about this church that are very interesting.

First, the church is commended for its works. They had labored, tested, and persevered all in the Lord's name and had not become weary. However, there is one thing that the Lord had against them. They had left their first love. The text does not say that they lost it, but that they had left it. This indicates that while going about the business of doing the work of the Lord, they had forgotten or actually forsaken their first love. They had forgotten that Christ came not to establish a legal relationship with them, but a relationship based upon love. It's so easy to get busy and forget the One for whom we labor.

They are also given a threefold prescription for finding the first love that they had left. First, they were to remember from where they had fallen. To remember what it was like when they first came to Christ and realized the grace, mercy, and peace that came in that new-found relationship. Second, they were to repent of that fallen state. And thirdly, they were to go back and do their first works. I believe that is the prescription for all who have left their first love in the Body of Christ yesterday, today, and forever.

The second church is the church of Smyrna. It represents the persecuted church. It was the church that endured tremendous amounts of persecution and yet remained loyal to the Lord until the end of their lives. This persecution was meted out for over two hundred years at the hands of cruel emperors like Nero and did not abate until the death of Diocletian. During this time in church history, multiplied thousands upon thousands of Christians died a martyr's death by being burned alive, crucified, fed to wild beasts, starved to death, etc...

Much can be seen of the persecution of this church in how the Savior is identified and its name. First, the Savior is identified as the One who was dead and came back to life. This conveyed to this persecuted church the promise of life that came only through Jesus Christ to those who lived and, if necessary, died for His name. Second, the meaning of this church's name is literally, myrrh. Myrrh was used in embalming and did not fully release its aromatic fragrance until it had been crushed. It was only after this church was literally crushed in the grip of the Roman persecution that the sweet fragrance of Christ was released. Christ's name was glorified by their deaths.

This first round of persecution finally came to a conclusion when the Emperor Constantine ascended around 345 A.D. and declared Rome a Christian nation. While history will reveal that Constantine was probably not truly converted, the tide of persecution did cease for awhile.

A final promise to those in this church is that they would not all be hurt by the second death. While all men, short of the rapture, will die a first time in this life: only

those who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will not suffer the second death which will occur after the Great White Throne judgment. This death will result in one being cast into the Lake of Fire to never see or experience the presence of God again.

The third church is the church Pergamos. This church represents the church of compromise. It is the church that compromised with the world. During this age of the church the first church-state relationship was formed with the degree of Constantine that Rome would officially be a Christian nation. In this arrangement, Constantine acted as political head of the Roman Empire while the Pope acted as the spiritual head of the new state religion that would come to be known as Roman Catholicism.

The home of this church is called the place of Satan's throne. From these passages and others found throughout the book of Revelation, we know that the home of Satan is none other than Rome. Rome is the seat of the great false church that began around 345 A.D. and will run right on down to the Second Coming of Christ when Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire forever.

This church is also accused of holding to the doctrine of Balaam. We know from Scripture that Balaam put a stumbling block in front of the Israelites by seducing them to have relations with the daughters of Moab. This action violated the commandment of God in that He had already told them not to intermarry with the heathen people of the land as that they would be unequally yoked.

Spiritually speaking, this is exactly what the Roman Catholic Church has done in that it has introduced idolatry into the church and seduced "would be" Christians to eat

food sacrificed to idols. This is the “*spiritual fornication*” that is referred to in Revelation 2:13.

Another warning that was issued to this church was that they also held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. The church of Ephesus had been previously warned about the deeds of the Nicolaitans and now those deeds had turned into doctrine that was accepted in the church. Of course, the Roman Catholic Church is still guilty of holding to this doctrine by re-establishing the priesthood and dividing the laity from the clergy.

The fourth church is Thyatira. This is the church of the Dark Ages. When Constantine instituted the first church-state church, he unwittingly created a monster as that it did not take long before the Pope had more sway over the hearts of men than did the emperor.

With the Pope fully in charge and the re-establishment of the priesthood in full swing; men were placed in the very bondage Christ came to set them free from. The Law of the Church became the law of the land and thus the world was plunged into what would become known as the Dark Ages.

While there is some commendation for the church as there is for all of them; there are even more strong words of rebuke. The church had allowed itself to be seduced by “*Jezebel*” to “*commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*” Most feel that Jezebel represents the great false church that began in 345 A.D. when the Roman Catholic Church was born and that the mass and the worship of saints is the vehicle for which the sins of sexual immorality and the eating of things sacrificed to idols is carried out to this very day.

The church is also warned that it was given “*space to repent*” and did not. I feel that this space for repentance was given at the start of the Protestant Reformation when Martin Luther confronted the Roman Church with her wrongs and she refused to repent and instead began persecuting those who saw the truth in what Luther was saying. Instead of repenting, she sought to destroy those who questioned her absolute authority.

The church is also warned that one day, her judgment will come in verse 22. That judgment spoken of will be meted out in the predetermined foreknowledge of God at the hands of the Antichrist when he decides to destroy the Great Harlot in an effort to gain total power.

The fifth church is the church of Sardis. This is commonly known as the church of the Reformation. It is the church that came out of the Protestant Reformation with or thereafter with Martin Luther. Its very name means “rebellion”.

However, in the very first verse of the section it is warned that it has a name that it is alive and yet it is really dead and that its works are not complete as far as God is concerned. What does this mean?

Most feel, as do I, that the Protestant Reformation was a good thing. It changed the course of church history. It was the event that brought the world out of the Dark Ages and ushered in the Renaissance. Yet, it was not complete. Too much of the doctrine of the Roman Church was pulled over into the protestant churches; beginning first and foremost with the Lutheran Church. These include the doctrines of Baptismal Regeneration in the rite of infant baptism and the mass with its doctrine of

Transubstantiation. Unfortunately, many of the protestant churches of today still practice these doctrines.

This church is warned to remember the things that they had “*received and heard.*” I believe this is referring to the great truth that Martin Luther was divinely led to when he read that life-changing verse in Romans 1:17 which says, “*For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*”

This verse fostered the Reformation when it sunk deep into Luther’s heart and he began to clearly see the false doctrines of works that were being propagated by his beloved church. However, some of the doctrines of works were still carried over into the Lutheran Church and thus the encouragement to “*repent*” in verse 3.

The sixth church is the church of Philadelphia. The word Philadelphia means “brotherly love.” This is viewed as the true church as that it was pure and had kept its garments clean from the false teachings of Nicolaitanism and Balaamism. This church had not allowed that so-called propheticess, Jezebel, to sway them into idolatry.

In the dispensation of the church or the church age; this is the church in which we live today. It is the only church that had no reprimands from the Lord. Everything that was said to the church was positive in nature. This is the church that will see the taking out of the Bride or what is called the Rapture of the Church.

It is the great missionary church that has taken the Great Commission and gone into “*all the world to preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing them in the name of*

*the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*” This promise is seen in verse 8 in that the Lord has set before them an open door “*that no man can shut*” to reach the entire world with the gospel of Christ.

In verse 9, this church is promised that those of the “*synagogue of Satan*” who have persecuted them for so many years, and will continue to do so until the Lord comes back, will come and worship before their feet one day. That day may very well be at the White Throne Judgment when the church will help judge the unbelieving dead before they are cast into the Lake of Fire in Revelation, chapter 20.

And finally, verse 10 contains a very special promise for this church. They will be kept from the “*hour of temptation*” that is to come upon the earth after the church is removed in chapter 4, verse 1. This “*hour of temptation*” is the seven-year Tribulation that is to commence sometime after the removal of all born again believers to be with Jesus Christ.

The seventh church is the church of Laodicea. In the dispensation of the church, this is the church of the last days. This is the church that will usher in the Tribulation that began immediately following the rapture of the true church. It is commonly referred to as the “*lukewarm*” church of the last days.

In verse 15 the church accused of being “*neither cold nor hot.*” They are complacent and apathetic to the things of God. They have spurned a relationship with the God of the Universe for dead, empty religion and because of this they are threatened to be vomited out of the mouth of God. God has absolutely no pleasure in their self-righteousness.

They are further told in verse 17 that they think a lot of themselves in that they see themselves as “*rich*” and having “*need of nothing.*” Yet, the Lord warns them that they are “*wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.*” There is a huge disconnect between how the so called church of today sees itself compared to how God sees it.

The Lord then encourages them to “*buy from me gold refined in the fire,*” that they may really be rich in the things of God instead of the things of this world. They are further encouraged to “*anoint*” their “*eyes with eye salve,*” that they may see their wickedness and turn to the God of heaven who alone is able to clothe them with the “*white garment*” of righteousness.

One of the more interesting things said to this church is found in verse 20 where it says, “*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*” It’s interesting because in the opening chapter of the book in verse 12 and 13 we saw Jesus standing in the “midst of the seven candlesticks” which represent the seven churches; and yet now the Lord Jesus is outside of the church trying to get back in.

This last church had forced the Lord outside of itself and had become self-sufficient. They felt so sufficient that they no longer needed the Lord’s guidance and direction and yet Jesus still stands to this day knocking and will eagerly “*come in to him*” who opens the door and “*dine with him, and he with Me.*”

Yes, the admonition is clear and it comes at the closing of each of these seven letters when the Lord says, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*”