



The Seven Churches and the Seven Seals

Part 2

September 12, 2021

Last Sunday, my goal was to provide a large scale over view of Genesis to Revelation to provide some context and insight regarding my sermons for the next two months. There is much to cover and specifically, it will be impossible to cover each chapter in a verse by verse process due to time restraint. Hence the reason why I gave out the breakdown of the Book of the Revelation in a chapter and verse analysis in so that you all can go and study with a bird's eye view.

In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, there are seven specific Churches that the Apostle John is writing to on behalf of Christ with particular instructions, insights, corrections and admonishments for each Church. The Angel of the Church that is noted in this passage of Scripture is agreed upon by Theologians and Bible Scholars to be a reference to the Pastor over each Church.

Hence the reasoning behind statements such as, “And too the Angel of the Church in Ephesus” and so forth on down the line of the Seven Churches that are listed.

Notice that the letter to each Church was being addressed directly to the Pastor of each Church body because it would seem that Christ was not only bringing order to His Church, He was directly correcting the Pastor of the Church as well. Which is a sobering point for me as being a Pastor and Under-Shepherd under the direction of Christ.

My goal of addressing these Seven Churches is for us, as the Church Body, to learn from the mistakes of those who have gone before us as well as learning what to do.

It's not simply about learning from the Failures but also the Successes of the First Century Church. Christ, through the Apostle John, provides commendation as well as condemnation; He challenges as well as counsels His Church to ensure that that they stay on task.

To provide some historically context to the scenario that is depicted within these two chapters of Revelation is as follows. The Apostle John has been banished to the Isle of Patmos under Roman penalty. While on the Island, John receives a divine visitation and revelation of things that were, which are, and that which shall be; Past, Present, and Future.

These seven Churches were not just any Churches. They were the seven primary Churches that the Apostle John had apostolic authority and oversight for and were the Seven Churches of Asia. These were seven literal Churches that had Pastors and Congregations; these seven Churches are not metaphorical nor satirical in nature.

However, it is suggested by Scholars of which I am in agreement with that these Seven Churches, though literal in their existence in time and space at their point of history, these Seven Churches can also give us insight to the Seven Specific Church Ages that will manifest in descending order. Allow me to provide some examples for understanding regarding this view.

Seven Church Ages

1. Ephesus, the Apostolic Church - 33AD - 100AD
 - a. Jesus Christ the Messiah to the Apostle John
2. Smyrna, The Persecuted Church - 100AD - 313AD
 - a. The Apostle John to Emperor Constantine
3. Pergamos, The State Church - 313AD - 476AD
 - a. Emperor Constantine to the Fall of Rome
4. Thyatira, The Papal Church - 476AD - 1453AD
 - a. Fall of Rome to Constantinople
5. Sardis, The Reformed Church - 1517AD - 1790AD
 - a. Fall of Constantinople to Missions Emphasis
6. Philadelphia, The Missions Church - 1790AD - 1900AD
 - a. Missions Church to a Lukewarm Church
7. Laodicean, The Lukewarm Church - 1900 - Current
 - a. Lukewarm Church leads to the Great Falling Away
spoken of by the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

Out of these Seven Churches and Seven Church Ages, we not only are able to glean insight from what Christ shared with each Church but we can also look at the overview of the text and easily discover where we are at in the prophetic timeline. We are in the Age of Laodicea globally and the next step is a great falling away. So with that said, let us begin our process of overview of the first three Churches that Christ addresses.

The first one is the Church of Ephesus noted in Revelation 2:1-7. The Church at Ephesus being the largest Church during this First Century time frame, it was birthed in the Apostolic Age under the Headship of the Apostle Paul, noted in the Book of Acts; specifically in Acts chapter 18.

Ephesus was a sinful place with idolatry and idol worship but it had a powerful church that was combating the demonic principalities behind these idol gods. Perhaps it is because of this that the Apostle Paul notes in his letter written to the Corinthian Church regarding fighting the Beasts at Ephesus found in 1 Corinthians 15:32? Perhaps, but this is simply a thought to suggest a potential tethering point for insight.

With each Church that Christ addresses in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, there are four specific arenas or categories of sorts that Christ addresses with each: Praise, Reproof, Recommendations, Action Steps

Ephesus was one of the largest Churches of the First Century Church. It owes its genesis to the Apostle Paul while on his second missionary journey found in the Book of Acts 18:19-20. It was located in a very wicked city which was given over to the worship of the Goddess Artemis (Mother Goddess of the Earth) Of the seven Churches mentioned, this is the only Church where reference is made to the Apostles, thus the Apostolic Church.

Let's Look at Revelation 2:1-7, "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

1. Praise - verses 2-3

- a. ² "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary."
- b. Notice a few points found in these verses. Jesus speaks of their works, toil and patience to endure in their faith walk and they are

not afraid to call out false Apostles and hold those in Spiritual Authority responsible for their actions and deeds.

- c. They were willing to bare up and endure the attacks from the social landscape around them and not grow weary of the attacks from the spiritual realm as well as the natural realm; attacks of man and demonic powers.
- d. However there are some concerns that Christ has which He addresses in verse 4.

2. Reproof – verse 4

- a. **4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.**
- b. They have abandoned the love they had at the first. What does this word abandoned in this verse mean in the Greek? The Greek word used here in this verse is the word, “aphiemi” pronounced (af-ee'-ay-mee) Strong's Greek #863 which means to send away or to leave alone. So when Christ made this statement, what could be implied is that the Ephesian Church, regarding their Love for Christ, was sent away or it was left alone. Could it be that we are

guilty of doing the same? We either abandon our faith or we banish it from our lives?

- c. However there are some recommendations that Christ has which He addresses in verse 5.

3. Recommendations - verse 5

- a. **“⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.”**
- b. Remember from where you have fallen
- c. Repent of your deeds that lead to the fall
- d. And do the works you did at the first.
- e. Christ is simply calling for them to remember where they once were, repent for missing the mark, and do what you did at the beginning that divinely placed them back in their rightful place as a Church who passionately loved Jesus!
- f. There are also some Actions that Christ outlines in verses 6-7.

4. Action Steps – verses 6-7

a. “⁶Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

b. Rev. 2:6, “⁶Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” What is the Works of the Nicolaitans of which Christ is making reference to?

c. We see this same notation in a forthcoming verse noted in Revelation 2:15 with the notation to the Doctrine of the Nicolaitans. What was Christ referencing to?

i. Theopedia.com notes regarding the definition and history of the Nicolaitans, “Nicolaitans were one of the heretical sects that plagued the churches at Ephesus and at Pergamum, according to Revelation 2:6,15. Irenaeus identifies them as followers of Nicolas, one of the seven chosen in Acts 6, and as men who "lead lives of unrestrained indulgence".

1. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

- ii. Irenaeus also relates them to Gnosticism, “John, the disciple of the Lord, preaches this faith (the deity of Christ), and seeks, by the proclamation of the Gospel, to remove that error which by Cerinthus had been disseminated among men, and a long time previously by those termed Nicolaitans, who are an offset of that 'knowledge' falsely so called, that he might confound them, and persuade them that there is but one God, who made all things by His Word" There is also historical evidence of a Gnostic sect called the Nicolaitans a century or so later.
- iii. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans appears to have been a form of Antinomianism, which makes the fatal mistake of believing that man can freely partake in sin because the Law of God is no longer binding. It held the truth on the gratuitous reckoning of righteousness; but supposed that a mere intellectual "belief" in this truth had a saving power.
- iv. That sounds familiar to our modern church era doesn't it? “Once Saved, Always Saved” “Gospel of Grace” “It doesn't matter how you live, it matters in whom you believe” “Grace is a License to Sin”

- v. That's take a moment to discover what other Early Church Father's had to say on the matter...
- vi. Irenaus said, "The Nicolaitans are the followers of that Nicholas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. The Nicolaitans lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these persons is very plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John. It shows that they teach that it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery and to eat things sacrificed to idols."
- vii. Tertullian said, "John, however, in the Apocalypse is instructed to chastise those persons "who eat things sacrificed to idols" and "who commit fornication" There are even now another sort of Nicolaitans." Note the last phrase, "There are even now another sort of Nicolaitans." Tertullian gives us insight into the fact the same spirit of lasciviousness that was manifest through the Nicolaitans was also manifesting in other times in Church History.
- viii. Tertullian also noted regarding this false doctrine, "I do not aim at destroying the happiness of sanctity, as do certain Nicolaitans in their maintenance of lust and luxury."

- d. The first half of verse 7 records, “**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**” The premise of this statement is found in one simple fact; if the church is listening then the church will obey by governing their deeds and life style.
- e. **The second part of verse 7 records, “To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”** Christ ends with the reward of following through and being obedient to His admonishment so let us all be willing to hear today what Christ is speaking to our Church.

We must all today make a lasting decision. A decision that each and every one of us will be held responsible for. My first question is are you listening to the Holy Spirit? My second question is are you willing to follow His leading? And if you do not know Christ then today is the Day of Salvation for you. Every person in this room has a final destination and that destination can only be one of two places: A place of Rest or a place of Torment. If we are willing to follow, if we are willing to listen, if we are willing to not turn a deaf ear to His instructions, then we will be more than Conquers today. (Salvation / Pray)