

7 Churches
The Routine Church
Revelation 2:1-7

January 8, 2017

HDBC

The book of Revelation is the written account of a massive vision presented to the apostle John, while he was exiled on the island of Patmos for his faith. The word **Revelation** is our word **Apocalypse**. It means an **unveiling**. In this vision, God revealed to John some things about the past, about the present and about the future. The bulk of the vision dealt with things that had not yet happened when John saw them, and quite frankly, many have still not happened. It is a fascinating book.

The vision opens with a picture of the risen, victorious Christ. John had seen Jesus as he was nailed to a cross so many years earlier. He had seen the life blood flow from his body until he was dead. He had also seen the resurrected Christ during the weeks following his crucifixion. He knew Jesus was alive again. He had seen Jesus ascend back into Heaven. All that was in the past.

Now, in this vision he sees Christ as we will all one day see Him, as a successful warrior who has defeated all enemies and is restoring all of fallen creation back to perfection and innocence.

From the very beginning John was instructed to write down the vision in order to share it with seven particular churches in Asia Minor. (Note 1:4). The entire Revelation is for these seven churches and ultimately for all churches. However, in chapters two and three there are unique messages for each of the seven churches. In this series we will look at each of the churches and each of the messages. The obvious goal is to allow the Lord to speak to us, as a church. I know He will.

A word about the seven churches . . .

1. These are seven distinct churches located in and around Ephesus. (modern day Turkey). These churches were located on a major postal route and are addressed in a counterclockwise order in terms of location.
2. Each letter is addressed to the "angel" or messenger of the church. I believe it to be the pastor. He is the spiritual leader through whom God leads the church.
3. In these churches we see characteristics common to churches of all ages. Jesus is the one who is making the judgment. He looks inward and knows exactly what each

church is like. Some are not what they appear to be to human eyes, but Christ sees and knows all.

4. Clear pattern found in all seven. Each letter begins with some description of Jesus, who is the author. With few exceptions each church is commended and criticized. Followed by counsel and a challenge.

EPHESUS: THE ROUTINE CHURCH

1. Christ is Presented as an Active Owner (2:1)

Each one reveals certain characteristics of Christ and his relationship to the church. In this first letter He is presented as an active owner. Note two things about Jesus.

The one who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

First, He holds the stars in His right hand. The stars and angels are the same. This is made clear in 1:20. But who are the *angels, stars*. Could be angels who are assigned to the churches. Possible, but I prefer a second possibility. The word translated *angel* means *messenger*.

I believe these are pastors of the churches. He holds them in His right hand. The right hand is a place of control. They are under His control because He is the owner of the churches and the leaders.

Second, He is seen walking ***among the lampstands (churches)***. He is watching, examining, assessing each one. He is a present, active owner. Remind you that this church belongs to Christ. HDBC is His church. Not yours or mine. And, he is actively involved with and in this church. He is not a distant owner, but a present owner/manager.

2. Church is Praised for its Positive Traits (2:2-3, 6)

Perhaps no church had as rich a heritage as the congregation at Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquilla, Paul's close friends, first introduced the gospel to that city. They were joined by Apollos. They laid the groundwork for the work that Paul did there. Paul stopped for a brief visit on his second missionary journey, but his most significant work there happened on his third missionary journey.

When he arrived there he met a group of Old Testaments saints, followers of John the Baptist. After hearing the gospel they were saved and baptized. This was the beginning of Paul's work in that city. He spent three years working there.

Later, toward the end of his third missionary journey, Paul stopped back by Ephesus and taught the elders the essential principles of church leadership. Timothy served as pastor there for a time (1 Tim. 1:3). According to the testimony of early church fathers John spent the last decades of his life at Ephesus.

Paul's ministry in Ephesus profoundly affected not only that city but the region. God affirmed Paul's ministry there through a series of miracles (Acts 19:11-12). Many people in Ephesus who practiced magic were being saved and brought their books to be burned in the sight of everyone. The value was added up to 50,000 days of workers' wages.

It is now four decades later. New generation in the church. 3 positive things:

A. Working Church (2a)

This church was active doing good things. Our Lord noticed these things.

Oida – Complete and full knowledge. He knows everything there is to know about every church.

a. Works

Deeds prove faith. We practice what we believe, everything else is just religious talk.

b. Toil

Laboring to the point of sweat and exhaustion. An all-out effort. They were a working church. Association letter would have looked good.

B. Pure Church (2b)

a. Moral Purity

Willing to stand for right. Held to a high and holy standard of behavior.

b. Doctrinal Purity

Seen in two statements.

False apostles and teachers (2b)
Nicolaitans (6)

Nicolaitans are also mentioned in the later to the church at Pergamum. Tradition says followers of Nicolas of Antioch, one of the seven men set aside to help with the food distribution in Acts 6.

Word means those who rule the people. Speculation was that they were attempting to form an ecclesiastical hierarchy, clergy and laity. Others say they were a group advocating licentiousness. Separation of spirit and body.

C. Enduring Church (3)

Courage to stand firm until the end. Refused to quit or give-up. Refusal to quit, regardless of the cost. Patience under difficult circumstances. Turns hardship and loss to glory and grace.

3. Church is Criticized for its Loss of Passion (4)

By all outward measurement this church appeared to be healthy and thriving. But the all-seeing eyes of Jesus spotted a flaw. Something that needed to be pointed out to them. They maintained moral and doctrinal purity and were consistent in their works and deeds. However, orthodoxy and Christian activity without a heartfelt love for Jesus was deadly.

Left their first love. *That honeymoon love of married couple, filled with passion and excitement. Energy and enthusiasm of new convert. Gone!* They had become legalistic and inflexible. Programs began to be more important than people. Christianity was more important than Christ. They were still doing the right things but from the wrong motivation. This was not a head problem but a heart problem.

Abandoned - forsaken - strong word. To **totally abandon**. Happens not purposefully or suddenly, but slowly and subtly. Drift out of love with God.

Other things have taken the place of priority. Lost the passion for Christ. Christ condemns their hearts, not their action. Possible to do good things with not-so-good heart. Their service had become mechanical.

4. Church is Challenged to Listen and Respond (5, 7)

A. Remember

Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen

Once blind, but now can see. Once in spiritual poverty, now child of king. Forgetfulness is often an early step toward backsliding.

B. Repent

Confess and determine to stop the pattern of sin. Decision of the will. Good old-fashioned re-dedication. Make complete turnaround.

C. Return to doing good deeds.

Deeds stemming from their passionate love for Christ.

Notice the warning: *Remove the lamp stand.* (5)

Cease to be a significant force in the kingdom of God. You will cease to be true church, or you will lose the power of the Holy Spirit. I've heard of that happening, and believe I have seen it. Churches who have no spiritual impact on community. Dried up spiritually. Believers cannot cease to be saved, but churches can cease to be churches.

Notice the Promise of Christ. (7)

Call to be spiritually discerning.

overcomes - aorist tense - one time act. New birth.

1 John 5:4-5

tree of life

God drove them from it in Eden, now invites us back to it. What a great reminder that God will ultimately make all things right for those who love him and who have trusted in His name for salvation.