

MESSAGES TO THE CHURCH

Revelation Two and Three

Introduction

- A. Only the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, can accurately inspect each church and know it is true, because He sees the internals, not only the externals.
- B. The message is to seven, but Christ intends all His churches to read it.
- C. “He that has an ear...” implies the message is for individuals as well. The church is made up of individuals.
- D. Before Christ judges the world, He judges His own people (1 Peter 4:17).
- E. Jesus intends to see that the church He establishes, is kept safe.
- F. The Holy Spirit is certainly sending a message to the church today!
- G. Each of the letters has one distinctive note, a single operative word or vital challenging phrase to sum up the whole message.

EPHESUS (2:1-7)

- A. The letters are similar in their arrangement:
 - 1. A description of Christ as coming from His appearance to John in 1:13-20.
 - 2. A Commendation.
 - 3. A condemnation.
 - 4. A challenge to correct the problem.
 - 5. A promise if they obey.
- B. What is the message to Ephesus? “***Repent, you have left your first love – remember that and repent.***”
- C. **Description of Christ to Ephesus!**
 - 1. “***He that holds the seven stars in His right hand.***”

2. Previous leadership at Ephesus!
3. This shows Christ's control over the church.
4. Our security lies in the fact that we are in His hands.
5. Second: ***"He walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands."***
6. This speaks of Christ's activity in the church – seeing and rebuking its sinfulness and seeing and rewarding its good works.

D. **Commendation!**

1. Christ praises their work and their labor and their patience.
2. Christ praises their patience separation from those who would bring unscriptural doctrines in the church.
3. Christ praises them for separating themselves from false deeds.
4. Who are the Nicolaitans? What are their deeds? Why does Christ hate them?
 - Compromise.
 - Ecclesiastical system.
5. Christ praises them for their endurance.

E. **Accusation!**

1. ***"I have this against you, that you have left your first love."***
2. This busy, separated, sacrificing church really suffered from "heart trouble."
3. First love is the devotion to Christ that so often is characterized in the new believer: fervent, personal, uninhibited, excited, and openly displayed.
4. They were busy maintaining their separation and were neglecting their adoration.
5. Labor is no substitute for love and purity is no substitute for passion.
6. There is difference between **left and lost**.

F. **Admonition!**

1. First love can be restored if we follow the three instructions Christ gave.

2. ***Remember.***

- “Keep on remembering” What you have lost and cultivate a desire to regain.
- To fall from love is failure and cannot be passed off as maturity or growing out of youthful zeal.

3. ***Repent.***

- This means to change your mind and confess.
- Reaction to being made aware of failure.
- Jesus’s answer is Repent.

4. ***Repeat your first works.***

- Suggests restoring the original fellowship.
- Satan does a masterful job of creating a sense of dissatisfaction with first works.

G. **Challenge/Promise!**

1. This makes it clear that I am responsible for my position in Christ.
2. “Overcomers” are not a spiritual elite group.
3. The promise to “eat of the tree of life” is based on being an overcomer.
4. The tree of life promise.
5. The Paradise of God promise.

SMYRNA (2:8-11)

A. What does the Spirit say to Smyrna? “***Be faithful and realize that you are rich.***”

B. Smyrna!

1. This church was a much-persecuted church in a wealthy city that had little time for Christians.
2. From AD 100-313 Satan unleashed a violent attack in an effort to obliterate it.
3. Ten Emperors from Nero to Diocletian (284-305) fed Christians to lions while thousands of spectators cheered. Many were crucified or clothed in animals' skin and then tortured to death by wild dogs. It is estimated that five million Christians were killed during this period.
4. Persecution cannot and does not stamp out Christianity.

5. There was an easing of persecution when Constantine took the throne, and this was a more effective weapon against the church. We will discuss this in greater detail in the message to the church at Pergamum.

C. The Church at Smyrna!

1. Despite the severity of persecution, the church reached its greatest numbers in proportion to world population during this time.
2. It became such a dominant factor in the Roman Empire that Constantine made Christianity the State Church in 313 AD.

D. Description of Christ!

1. Christ describes himself as One who can save them. Just like this church, Jesus was also persecuted.
2. “***The first and the last***” is a claim to be eternal.
3. “***One who became dead and who has lived***” ***claims*** that death is not Christ’s nature and therefore, He was “***become***” dead.
4. Life is the nature of Christ; therefore, He lives after dying.

E. Commendation!

1. One of the greatest commendations is that there was no condemnation.
2. “***I know your tribulation and poverty.***”
3. “***But you are rich.***”
4. “**Suffering is imminent.**”
 - Ten days of tribulation.
 - Satan cannot control its timing and duration.

F. Christ’s Challenge and Exhortation.

1. “Do not be Afraid.”

2. "Keep on being faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."
3. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.

PERGAMUM (2:12-17)

The Spirit is saying *"Do not back off! Stand up for freedom! Resist the encroaching pressure of power politics and pagan ideologies."*

A. Is this just ancient history?

B. The Compromising Church!

1. Persecution only caused the church to flourish, so Constantine made the Christianity the state religion.
2. What seemed a blessing turned out to be a great curse.
3. Pagan practices introduced into the church.
 - AD 300 – Prayers for the dead.
 - AD 300 – Making the sign of the cross.
 - AD 375 – Worship of saints and angels.
 - AD 394 – Mass instituted.
 - AD 431 – Worship of Mary.
 - AD 500 – Priests dressing different from laity.
 - AD 526 – Extreme unction.
 - AD 593 – Doctrine of purgatory.
 - AD 600 – Worship services in Latin.
 - AD 600 – Prayers to Mary.
4. Postmillennialism was introduced when the church was made the state religion.
5. Compromise was a big problem, caused by the merging of church with state.

C. Description of Christ!

1. "These things saith He who has the sharp sword with two edges."
2. This is an appropriate description to place over against the authority of the Roman government.
3. Christ's sword is a reference to the Word of God.
4. It is given as a cure for compromise.
5. Had the church heeded the Word of Ages, the dark ages would not have been needed.

D. Recommendation of Christ!

1. "I know your works, and where you stay, even where Satan's throne is."
2. "**To stay**" means "to have one's permanent residence."
3. Christians are normally called "**sojourners**."
4. The reference here is that they live in the place where Satan's rule is strongest.
5. The temptation to move where living for Christ is easier.
6. These Christians were doctrinally pure. Their sin was in taking in ceremonies of paganism which polluted them.

E. Condemnation of Christ!

1. Though their theological doctrine was correct, their practical doctrines were radically evil.
2. There were two major problems.

- The doctrine of Balaam (Numbers 24-25). Balaam's purpose was to compromise Israel and bring her under God's wrath (Numbers 31:16). New Testament form of the same doctrine.
 - The doctrine of Nicolaitans. They sought to persuade Christians that there was nothing wrong with prudent conformity.
3. Is the Nicolaitan belief still in the church?
 4. The Word of the risen Lord is that He will deal with this through His Word.

F. Christ's Admonition!

1. Repent or be judged by the Word of God.
2. Be sure of this – if there is a principle in the Word of God to which we have refused to submit, we will face that principle when we stand before the Lord Jesus at His appearing.

G. Christ's Promise!

1. First promise: "***To the one who conquers I will give him the hidden manna.***"
 - Manna is a symbol of nurture. It was heavenly food provided for Israel and typifies the spiritual food provided by God in His Word.
 - The hiddenness of the manna is an allusion to the hiding of the wilderness manna in the Ark of the Covenant.

2. Second promise: ***“I will give him a white stone and upon the stone a new name written which no one knows except he that receives it.”***

- In ancient times the white stone meant acquittal.
- It is the reward of final victory.

Conclusion.

Thyatira (2:18-29)

The Spirit is saying to Thyatira and to us, ***“Hold fast that which you have already until I come.”*** The Spirit is calling for ***“Christianity tenacity,”*** that essential ingredient of discipleship.

The great danger for us is that we might lose heart in following Jesus. Paul speaks about this by saying, “***You started in the Spirit, and you must not end in the flesh.***” His reference is to start with devotion and end with drudgery.

We have the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the same power men of the Bible had, which made them more than conquerors.

A. THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA.

1. The longest of the letters to the less important of the cities.
2. The problem at Thyatira, however, was far from being unimportant.
3. We are presented with four questions:
 - What was the situation at the church?
 - Who was Jezebel?
 - What did she teach?
 - What do the promises that Christ made, mean?
4. The letter opens with a description of the risen Christ.
5. Christ gives great praise to the church.
6. Then comes condemnation.
7. Here is the warning to us; A church which is crowded with people, and which is a hive of energy is not necessarily a real church.

B. THE CHURCH OF THE DARK AGES.

1. Four hundred years without a word from God.
2. “Dark” is the result of merging paganism with Christianity. It started at Pergamum and became increasingly emphasized at Thyatira.
3. They denied the “finished work of Christ” and therefore, emphasized a need for continued sacrifice. (sacraments, praying for the dead, burning of candles, the crucifix, penance, and others)

C. DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST!

1. “***Eyes as a flame of fire.***”
 - This is a *manifestation of divine glory* and denotes *piercing judgment*.

- Sins done in secret are exposed to God and judged.
- Every emotion and every thought are opened to Christ's gaze.

2. "*Feet are burnished brass.*"

- This indicates purification by fire.
- The purity of Christ is here contrasted with the corruption in the church.

D. CHRIST'S COMMENDATION.

1. This comes in the form of six words.

- Works. We are what we do.
- Love. Faith and love are essential virtues to Christian life.
- Service. Ministries is the emphasis here.
- Faith.
- Patience. Persistence.
- Increase in work. The high point is instead of decreasing in their works, they are increasing.

2. Explanation for the commendation.

E. CHRIST'S CONDEMNATION!

1. It is directed at evil doers and the church for tolerating this teaching.

2. It is in reference to a specific woman.

3. She is called Jezebel in a twofold sense.

- The temple to the goddess Sambethe where it is said that she received knowledge from a pagan god and then passed it the worshippers.
- The wife of Ahab.
- Jezebel adulterated pure worship with pagan practices.
- Again, it is an attempt to mix the church with the world.

4. The New Testament recognizes the function of women in prophesying.

5. Two errors of her teachings:

- Allowing believers to commit fornication.

- There is no harm in accepting customs and cultures of the world.
6. She remained obstinate in her sins, but in the absence of her repentance God pronounced judgment. There is no church in Thyatira after the second century.
 7. Future judgment of this church character. (2:22-23)
 - Intense suffering.
 - Followers will be killed.
 - All the churches will know that God is serious about sin in His church.

F. CHRIST'S COUNSEL AND PROMISE!

1. Not all of the church was party to this sin.
2. ***"I will cast upon you no other weight"*** (24).
3. Exhortation: ***"That which you have hold fast until I come"*** (25).
 - Purity is a treasure – guard it carefully.
 - The ***problem*** is one of authority and ruling well. They were allowing her to teach. They were tolerating this and therefore not ruling well.
 - The promise is that if we are overcomers, we will rule with Him in the Millennium.
 - ***"I will give him the morning star."*** In Revelation 22:16 Christ calls himself, ***"The bright and the morning star."***

Conclusion:

We can have Jezebel, or we can have Jesus. But we can't have both.

Jesus promises:

- Authority over the nations.
- Victory over all enemies.
- The Morning Star.

