

“I KNOW YOUR WORKS”: THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

Introduction

- 1) John hears and sees the Lord Jesus in a glorious and stunning divine appearance (Rev. 1:10-20)
 - a) “What you see, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches...”
 - b) Jesus is seen standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands – Jesus in the midst of the seven churches, in the midst of His people who are called out of the world into His blessed fellowship
- 2) Seven letters of revelation from Jesus to the seven churches of Asia revealing the mind of Christ concerning the condition and needs of each congregation (Revelation 2-3)
- 3) Herein is revealed Jesus’ assessment of His people – principles and lessons applicable to any local church today
- 4) It encourages us within our local church to examine ourselves in light of His penetrating Word

I) THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

A) *Local congregations in Asia minor*

- 1) Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea (1:11)
 - a) Form a geographic circle – Revelation to be circulated from church to church
- 2) Gospel had gone out from Ephesus through Paul’s teaching (19:9-10)
- 3) Two churches mentioned elsewhere in NT
 - a) Ephesus (Acts 20:17; epistle to the Ephesians)
 - b) Laodicea (Col. 4:13, 16)
- B) “*Seven*” – complete and perfect spiritual number; used throughout book of Revelation
 - 1) Representative of conditions of Lord’s people at that day and time
 - 2) Preserves principles for local congregations of God’s people at all times and places

II) THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

- A) Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was “at hand” (Mk. 1:15)
 - 1) Also said He would build “His church” and give the “keys of the kingdom” (Matt. 16:18-19)
- B) The church began on Pentecost when the gospel was preached, souls were saved, and those saved were “added to the church daily” (Acts 2:47; 5:11; 8:3)
- C) The New Testament church
 - 1) ***Built by Christ*** (Matt. 16:18)
 - a) Christ is its Head – authority (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 3:17)
 - b) The work and worship of the church must be according to the authority of Christ
 - 2) ***Purchased by the blood of Christ*** (Acts 20:28; Rev. 5:9)
 - a) Christ is its Savior (Eph. 5:23)
 - 3) ***Made up of those who are sanctified, saints*** [*ekklesia* – the called out] (1 Cor. 1:2)
 - a) One body (Eph. 4:4); organize and work within local congregations (Rev. 2-3)
 - 4) ***Kingdom of Christ*** (Acts 2:30, 34-35; Rev. 11:15; 19:16)
 - a) Citizens of Christ’s kingdom receive forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14)
 - 5) ***Holy Temple/Priesthood*** (Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 11:1)
 - a) Offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ
 - 6) ***House of God*** (1 Tim. 3:15)
 - a) Pillar and ground of the truth; a building
- D) The manifold wisdom of God is made known by the church (Eph. 3:10-11)

III) LESSONS FROM THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES**A) *Symbolized as seven lampstands* (1:12, 20)**

- 1) Lampstands hold lamps that give light – the church is to shine the light of divine truth!
- 2) Christ will remove the lampstand if a church fails to be a light for the Lord (2:5)

B) *Christ knows “our works”*

- 1) Mentioned in each letter – something true of every church
- 2) Jesus is interested and watching – knows our activity and condition (cf. 2:23)
- 3) Comforting to Christians ignored and/or hated by a godless world (Psa. 26:1-3)
- 3) We must take care that we conduct ourselves properly (1 Tim. 3:15)

C) *Can learn from the condition of other congregations*

- 1) Encouraged by good examples; warned by bad examples (1 Thess. 1:6-8)
- 2) Church autonomy does not protect any church from the rebuke of faithful brethren

D) *Lessons from specific churches*

- 1) *Ephesus* – working church, expose error, but left first love (initial bond of love)
- 2) *Smyrna* – impoverished church faithfully enduring persecution
- 3) *Pergamos* – held fast in face of persecution, but fellowshiped error
- 4) *Thyatira* – increasing in works, but allowed error to influence
- 5) *Sardis* – dead as a church; needed to repent and strengthen what remained
- 6) *Philadelphia* – small, but remained faithful
- 7) *Laodicea* – lukewarm and self-deceived

E) *Keys to spiritual and eternal success***1) *Having an ear to hear the Spirit of God***

- a) We must have our minds on things above, not on this earth
- b) We must search the Scriptures and take a stand on the truth of God
- c) We must be able to discern between what is true and what is false

2) *Overcoming* – “He who overcomes” with promise found in each letter

- a) Reward comes to those who finish the race, endure every test, stand against every contrary wind, resist the devil

Conclusion

Each congregation of God’s people stands in the same place as the seven churches of Asia – Christ is watching and we are under His divine scrutiny (Acts 20:32)