

The Church God Desires

Revelation 2:1-7

September 9-10, 2017

John received this revelation which God gave Jesus in order to show His bond servants the things which must shortly, or quickly, take place, so now John is writing to the seven churches that are in Asia. There were certainly more than seven churches, but these represent the church in its entirety.

This book is the revealing of Jesus Christ in the latter days. He is the center of this letter and of the events that will take place in the end times. Chapter 1 gives a powerful and glorious picture of Jesus filled with symbolic meaning.

John heard a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet and when he turned to see the voice that was speaking, he saw seven golden lampstands and in the middle of the lampstands was one like the Son of Man. This is a picture of Jesus in His authority and glory standing amongst the churches. Notice what that says about the relationship Jesus has to His church; He stands in the center.

God wants the churches to understand the things which must quickly take place, but first God wants to prepare the church, so He sends words of commendation, but also words of correction. If the

church is going to be prepared, if the church is going to be ready, it must be strengthened spiritually and that includes bringing the necessary corrections.

At this point, the church has been gaining strength throughout the entire Roman Empire. They're making an impact like never before and know in all faith that their Lord is ruler of the kings of the earth. But success can sometimes be negative; it can make people rest on their laurels and no longer have the zeal they once had.

For example, let's say you're the New England Patriots and win the Super Bowl... again. It's hard to have that same drive that got you there and if you're not careful, you'll end up getting blown out on the first game of the season.

In Matthew 24:44 Jesus said, "Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect Him." This book begins with letters to the churches bringing correction and commendation and there is much for us to heed, or to keep, for ourselves as well.

He writes first to the church at Ephesus, a port town near the Mediterranean and a main highway from Rome to Persia. It was the largest city in Asia Minor of about 500,000 and the capital of the Roman government in that area.

The church in Ephesus was founded by Paul and later pastored by Timothy. John Himself lived there before he was captured by the Romans, boiled in oil and exiled to the island of Patmos.

I. Do Not Grow Weary in Doing Good

- There was much to commend about this church. They had done well in their serving; they toiled hard at good deeds and they toiled with perseverance, and they endured for the sake of the name of the Lord and did not grow weary.

A. Serve with the right heart

- Verse 2 – “I know your deeds and your toil and your perseverance...” The Lord is very much aware of our works – or lack of them.

Matthew 25:37, 39-40, “Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink?... When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to

one of these brothers of Mine, even to the least of them, you did it unto Me.’”

- This is part of being ready for the Lord’s return; by spending your life well and having the right heart toward others.
- The context of Matthew 25 is that when the Son of Man comes in His glory, He will sit on His glorious throne and all the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
- When Christ returns He will commend those who have a heart for the least and the lost because that’s His heart as well.
- The problem is that we live in a society that is fixated on celebrities and the most important people. The media track their movements, whole magazines are written so people can follow their lives, but God’s heart is quite different.
- They did much and were very effective. They fed the poor, they reached out to the lost, they helped the orphan and the widow.

- In this they were commended because they didn't grow weary.

B. Stand strong in the truth

- Another commendation the Lord gave the church in Ephesus was that they could not endure evil men; they tested those who claimed to be apostles, but were false.
- This church was *able to discern* because they had the truth to stand on. They had been founded by Paul, had Timothy as a pastor for many years, and finally, the Apostle John lived out his years there after he was allowed to leave Patmos.
- This is clear support for why it's essential to teach through God's Word in its entirety chapter by chapter, verse by verse. We must have the truth to be able discern the false.

I John 4:1, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Illus – There have been several denominations founded on truth at the beginning, but

became diluted in an attempt to become more socially accepted.

Instead of changing the world, they themselves were the ones that were changed.

Illus – In Africa, there is a custom of allowing visiting “pastors” to be introduced and then given the pulpit.

As soon as we discovered this, we put an end to it. We must be very careful who is allowed to take the pulpit.

2 Timothy 4:2-4, preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

Illus - I’ve been in ministry long enough to see many spiritual fads come and go in the church. There was the ‘get drunk in the spirit’ movement, and then there was the laughter movement, then there was the movement where everyone was barking like dogs, then there was the emerging church trend. But

God's purpose has never changed; He is transforming lives and using the word of God to do it.

Illus – When my kids were little I used to sing to them, “House at Pooh Corner,” by Kenny Loggins. I heard that song when it first came out on a vinyl record, then on eight-track, then on cassette, then on a CD, then an MP3 that can that can be played from an iPod. It's been through many formats, but it's still the same song. My girls loved to hear me sing it, and for the father/daughter dance at our daughter's wedding we danced to, “House at Pooh Corner.”

- In other words, that song never changed and the gospel doesn't change either. God still sends it forth with power to transform lives.
- Jesus stood amongst the lampstands, which was a picture of the churches. We are to be a place where the light and glory of the Lord shines out to the community.

C. Hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans

- Vs 6 -- Jesus commends them for this; but who were the Nicolaitans? Followers of Nicolas who had distorted the truth to lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. He

departed from correct doctrine in order to put a spiritual covering over worldly and licentious living.

- To show you just how strongly God feels about those who distort the truth to justify sinful living, He commends them for hating the Nicolaitans.
- The church in Pergamum also had some who held to this teaching...

Revelation 2:15, “Thus you also have some who in the same way hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”

- It’s one thing to come up with a strange way of justifying sinfulness, but it’s another thing altogether to draw other people into that error.
- If there’s anything that gets God angry, it’s when a stumbling block is placed in front of those whose hearts desire to worship God.

Illus – When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he chased out the money changers and those selling doves from the temple, turning over their tables in the process.

Matthew 18:6-7, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!”

II. Return to Your First Love

- After all the commendation, Jesus then addresses what He does not approve; that they had left their first love.
- There is real danger of allowing religion and ritual to creep into our lives.
- Busyness without love is the beginning of religion.
- Jesus then told them how to change direction, how to get back on the right track spiritually and in their relationship to God.

A. Remember the love you had at the first

Illus – Things can change over time; marriage can become routine; the job that was at first exciting can become mundane.

The first child is so special; flash cards are brought to the hospital and everything is written in a book. By the time the third or fourth one comes along, everything changes.

- The first thing Jesus wants them to do is to remember.

Psalm 44:20-21, If we had forgotten the name of our God or extended our hands to a strange god, would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart.

- If we have forgotten how wonderful things were at the first, one thing is for certain, God hasn't forgotten.

Jeremiah 2:2, Thus says the Lord, “I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothals, your following after Me in the wilderness, through a land not sown.”

- We need to remember the love we had at first. That's why communion is so

important, because it reminds us again of the great price that Jesus paid for our salvation.

B. Repent and do the deeds you did at first

- Many people don't like the word, 'repent,' but it's a word with a simple meaning, 'to change direction,' or 'to have a new mind.'
- John the Baptist was anointed by the Lord to call the people to change their heart.

Luke 1:17, It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the father back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

- Jesus told them to do the deeds they did at first.
- What were you doing when you were on fire for the Lord? Do those things again.
- Were you worshipping the Lord and singing with all your might? Do that again.

- Were you hungry after God's Word and reading it with an eager heart? Do that again.
- God wants you to fall in love with Him all over again.

Illus - There is a beautiful trend of renewing marriage vows. It's a way of saying, "I love you and I would do it all over again." In a similar way, there is something beautiful about falling in love with the Lord all over again. Return to your first love.