

Revelation Lesson 23
Ephesus: The Lagging Church (Commendation) Part 1

Revelation 2:1-2 “Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:”

Last time in our study we wrapped up Chapter 1 in our study 22 week study of the first division of Revelation “the things which thou hast seen.” With the conclusion of the introductory matters of chapter 1, Jesus begins his presentation to the 7 churches. The 7 churches identified in Revelation 1:11 are specifically addressed. Each receives a description of its present condition with a necessary warning and a call to the overcomers to persevere. Of the 7 churches, 4 demonstrate a spirit of compromise—Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, and Laodicea. The church at Sardis is dead and the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia are presented as the faithful churches. Smyrna is the physically persecuted church and Philadelphia is the physically protected church.

With roughly two thousand years separating the 7 churches of Asia and the modern churches of the world, some question: “What is the relationship between the 7 churches mentioned in Revelation and churches today?” The messages, themselves, yield the necessary clues to answer the supposed question of relevancy. For believers of all ages, the issue is the same in connection with the Son of Man: forgiveness or judgment.

Think about it. The Lord instructs 6 of the 7 churches that there are both immediate and long-term consequences to their deeds. The threat of immediate discipline for a lack of repentance is given to the churches of Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, and Laodicea. Equally, each church is also warned about the possible rewards and punishments to be experienced at the Lord’s coming. A facet we often forget is that according to Hebrews 1:2 the last days began while Jesus was upon the Earth. Thus those 7 churches were as we are “in the last days.” This indicates that the messages to the 7 churches have both a “near” application and a “far” application within this age, the Church Age.

The the question of “relevancy” seems a superfluous one. This is bolstered by the fact that each message ends with the same remark, and that therein, the word *church* is plural thus this extends the message from each local church and extends the application to the church worldwide. Thus today we can claim the same promises and fear the same warnings. But, be that as it may, John Walvoord correctly stated the following in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: “*This portion of Scripture has been strangely neglected. While many turn to the epistles of Paul and other portions of the New Testament for church truth, often the letters to these 7 churches, though coming from Christ Himself and being climatic in character, are completely ignored. This neglect has contributed to churches today not conforming to God's perfect will.*”

The late Independent Baptist, Henry M. Morris, in his commentary, *The Revelation Record*, indicated that each church receives a message composed of seven parts: (1) salutation; (2) identification of Christ as sender; (3) assertion of knowledge; (4) comment and exhortation; (5) promise (or threatened) coming; (6) admonition to heed; and (7) promised blessing.

Now before we embark upon our new study, please ensure that you have your handouts. Also, please keep up with these because we shall refer back to them throughout Chapters 2 and 3. With that

introduction out of the way, let us begin looking at what Jesus said to the Church at Ephesus.

Unto the angel – As we stated previously and especially in last week's study, the word angel “ANGELOS” (AGGELOS) means “Messenger” and given that these are IN JESUS' RIGHT HAND (among other observations) we note that these are men, the messengers. This also is another reason why we have our King James Bible – it shows us we need to study, study, study in accordance with 2 Timothy 2:15.

of the church – Here we find another reasoning as to why the angels mentioned are men and not supernatural creatures. These angels are connected with each “local” New Testament Church. Never within the pages of the Bible are supernatural angels said to inhabit churches. Now, according to Daniel 10:20 there are supernatural angels connected to Nations and according to Matthew 18:10; Acts 12:12-15 and Hebrews 1:14 there are supernatural angels connected with children and the saved who act as Guardian Angels. Never though are there angels within the Biblical context that are assigned to Churches. Some say well they are said to be here in Revelation (as a rebuttal) but the case in point is one of I would say common sense: Why would Jesus have John (a human being) write a physical letter to a spiritual being? It simply does not make sense. So the “angel” is connected or linked with a physical church, thus indicating by 2 Tim. 2:15 (study to rightly divide or interpret the Word of God) these angels are the messengers or pastors of each of the churches mentioned in each of the cities.

Before I move on, I want to draw your attention to some the late Evangelist Oliver B. Greene stated in his Commentary: “Paul wrote to the *saints* in Ephesus (Eph. 1:1). John is writing to the *angel* of the Church in Ephesus. No doubt the reason for the more distant form of addressing the church was because the church had sunk so low morally that the Lord could not address it through John as to the saints. No doubt they had declined to a spiritual status where they could not be referred to in the true sense of saints; but as babes in Christ, eating milk instead of meat. During the day of Paul the church at Ephesus was made up of almost altogether devout saints; but in John's day the saints had departed from their first love.”

of Ephesus – Here is the first location named. We already went over some points about the city of Ephesus in Lesson 13. When we come to our study of the Church of Ephesus we find preachers have nicknamed this church and the rest of the Revelation Churches. The Church of Ephesus is called:

1. The Apostolic Church
2. The Church of the Faded Love
3. The Love-less Church
4. The Indifferent Church
5. The Preoccupied Church
6. My own to add to the list: The Lagging Church

The late J. Vernon McGee said this concerning the Church at Ephesus: “Now May I Say, The Lord Jesus Christ speaks to this church in the midst of crass materialism, degraded animalism, base paganism, and dark heathenism. Note this carefully, because I consider this message to be one of the most important of all.”

So can we look at these “nicknames” and apply that to some or sadly many of our Churches today? Can that be said of our Church? What do you think our Church nickname is? More importantly what do you think Jesus would write to us or to “The angel of the Church of Danieltown...?”

write; - Again this word is a command by Christ to John to put pen to parchment. The word from the Greek language is GRAPHO (G1125) and has the meaning of write this down so it will not be forgotten.

These things saith – This is an interesting insight into the FACT of HOW the Bible was recorded (that along with the previous word – write). While this is identifying the speaker it also shows us HOW John received the Revelation. He heard “These things” and what are these things? Well, to you and I it comprises Revelation 2:1-7.

he – This is Christ. How do we know? Well, in my Bible the words are in RED. But that feature was not included in Testaments or Bibles until (do you remember from Lesson 9?) 1899 and 1901 respectively. How do we know Who is speaking? Well observe what the Speaker has...

that holdeth – The wording shows that the Speaker is holding something or several somethings. That word “holdeth” is KRATEO “KRA-TAY-O” (G2902) this word means what our English text says: Holdeth (Remember -eth endings mean “S” thus holdeth = holds in the modern tongue). In the first century, KRATEO had the meaning of to grasp and hold on to it. Never let it go. To have in one's power, be master of. Now I want you to get this too, this word in the Greek language - I use this not to confuse, but to reinforce the meaning here – is in the Present Active Participle (Which is a fancy way of stating: Continuous or Repeated Action that is accomplished by the subject of the verb. Who is the subject of the verb here? JESUS. What is the verb (action)? HOLDETH. Thus this indicates a Continuing Action thus this “holdeth” is a continual holding, in other words Jesus Keeps On Holding. WHAT IS HE HOLDING?

the seven stars – These were part of the 1st Mystery of Revelation we looked at last week and we saw that these stars were symbolic of the angels or the messengers. Thus when we combine this understanding with John 10:28-29 we again see a beautiful picture of the Believer's Eternal Security. Even when we get “out of line, etc.” we simply CANNOT lose our salvation.

in his right hand, - Again we must note here that those 7 Pastors are not exclusively only within Jesus's Grasp, but they are so mentioned due to them being the recipients and deliverers (audibly) of this message. Many (even men like McGee and Waite) attempt to imply that the Lord Jesus Christ holds the Churches in His Hand to imply His control or power over it/them. But such is not the case. How do we know? Simply put, if He had control over them why then these letters consisting primarily of rebuke? If this shows His control then – looking at Thyatira and Laodicea - we would be forced to conclude that these are NOT under His control and thus that would constitute a failure and that simply cannot be so with Christ. No, He has control over the SOULS of those who are Saved. What the saved do now is a whole different tale itself.

who walketh – McGee says: “*literally [it] means that He is walking up and down. I believe that He is still walking up and down in our day and that He is still judging the church.*” The word “walketh” means walks and symbolically this implies a relationship. So we see that Christ has a relationship with the Church (as this is what is symbolically represented by the golden candlesticks). But the question we shall see is whether or not the Church has a relationship with Christ her head?

in the midst – That is in the middle of. I like what Oliver B. Greene says here: “*...We see Him walking in their midst. He is moving about, taking note of every need of every individual, not overlooking the difficulties that may arise, the trials and temptations that may come.*” Y'all have no doubt heard the old saying: God won't put on you more than you are able to bear. But is that really what the Bible states? 1 Corinthians 10:13 states: “*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*”

That old Americanized Proverb is false – the Bible states the way we bear it is to escape from it – it being temptation. Without that escape – divinely provided by God – we then WILL do Mark Twain's proverb: “The surest way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it” or Oscar Wilde's “I can resist everything except temptation.” With Christ we are free to choose whom to serve. Without Christ we are slaves to sin. Once you and I got saved, Christ promised in His word (Heb. 13:5) to never leave us nor forsake us. So based on that promise: *“Jesus DOES walk among (or in the presence of) the believers. He neither slumbers nor sleeps. He is a very present help in time of need, and His help can be had instantaneously. He is available at all hours of the day or night. He walks in and out among the churches, He observes the ways of every believer, and He has grace sufficient for every need of every believer.”* - Greene.

of the seven golden candlesticks; - Again from last week we noted that these are symbolic of the 7 churches. Also in Lesson 14 we noted that these candlesticks were 7 separate lamp-stands, not the Jewish menorah.

VERSE 2

I know – Here we start a first in our series another verse in the same Lesson!! Here we start verse 2. Now when the One minute Manager book series was written, it seems to me they took notes from Jesus. I say that because if there is something “good” or “praiseworthy” about each Church Jesus mentions it first – hence the word “commendation” in our title. Now, the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is God, to me, is proof enough that He knows. The word here has two meanings depending on the context. One meaning is “to see” the other is “to know” and thus this context implies not merely that he “sees” (this is how Eugene Peterson put it in The Message) but rather the KJB translators were absolutely correct in rendering this word as “know” due to the context further down. Think about this, if you denote ONLY that Christ “saw” then that would not allow Him access as the Omniscient One – The All-Knowing One. To merely allow Him to see would merely relegate Him to His Omnipresent (Everywhere at Once) Status. This shows that He KNOWS what they are THINKING. What they are doing, why they are doing what they are doing! He has inherent knowledge. RABBIT TRAIL – This is why I do not like Santa Claus - “He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake....”

thy works, - McGee rightly states here: *“We need to understand that He is speaking to believers. The Lord Jesus does not ask the lost world for good works.”* As a matter of fact recall Titus 3:5 *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”* I often refer back to Matthew 7:21-23 to show that if EVER there was a moment to be SAVED BY WORKS that would be it (BTW, that scene shows the Great White Throne Judgment Revelation 20:11-15) but we see NONE are saved by their works. Also, for those who are Church workaholics, please understand that all work is not necessarily well pleasing in the sight of God look at the case of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42).

and – Even though they are both joined by the connector or bridge “AND” the implication here is that there are a few items Jesus states that He knows about.

thy labour, - Many think work and labour mean the same thing. So, the word *labor* carries a meaning of working under weariness. In the Gospel of John Chapter 4:1 it says that Jesus became wearied with His journey. That was the weariness which Ephesian believers experienced. They suffered weariness in their labors for Him while upon their pilgrim journey.

and thy patience, - The wording “THY PATIENCE” indicates that the patience belongs to someone. In this case it is THE CHURCH'S Patience. For them to have patience (which means to endure) then they MUST have endured Tribulations. Note Romans 5:3-5 *“And not only so, but we*

glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: 5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Again, patience as used in the New Testament is (Waite tells us) “characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials, and troubles, and sufferings.” Indeed they were for the most part heeding Hebrews 12:1 “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,”

and how thou canst not – Again, as with the Patience, we find there is another “group” application. I find it interesting also that even though this is addressed to each “messenger” or pastor, the message of course is not to him, but for him to deliver to the flock, understanding this as such, I find it interesting that the Church is addressed by Christ as a single unity as is taught in Romans 12:5 “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”

bear - This word means a burden or something heavy that is held up. But coupled with the previously seen negative “not” it means that the Church is NOT bearing.

them which are evil: - The “thing” the Church at Ephesus is NOT BEAR”ING” or upholding are “them which are evil.” If each of us decided on our own what “evil” is then NOBODY would be left at Church. But since they are praised by Christ we find they used the standard of God – His Word – to determine such and used such to protect the congregation. So what would be classified as “evil?” Well we would be here all night if we defined ALL the evils of the Bible. But suffice it to say that the Bible sees evil as starting when we do not seek the Lord and His way. See in 2 Chronicles 12:14 “And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD.” So WHY did Rehoboam do evil? Because he prepared NOT HIS HEART TO SEEK THE LORD. There is the start of ALL EVIL. Furthermore, we are admonished to: Psalms 34:14 “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” and Psalms 119:104 “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.” and finally in the “so-called” Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:13 “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

and thou hast tried – Here we find the Church at Ephesus “tried” some people. How? In a court? No. The Word tried means to: “Put to the test” or “to find the proof”

them which say – We see here that those who “were tried” are “them which say” thus their power was in their mouths (note the plurality here – them). In other words these folks said something. What did they say?

they are apostles, - “Them” said that “they” were apostles. How did the early church know? Well, I think (save for the evidence given to us in Revelation) that the Scriptures make it plain.

1. The office of Apostle was given by Christ.
 1. Ephesians 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
2. The number of Apostles is given.
 1. Luke 6:13 And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;
 2. Revelation 21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.
3. The Apostle Paul states he was chosen to be an Apostle (many times)
 1. Galatians 1:1 Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)

2. We could find that evidence of Apostleship could somehow be demonstrated as stated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.
4. Finally since the office/gift of Apostleship was given by Christ alone, no man or board can make someone a TRUE apostle.
 1. Acts 1:16-17 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. 17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.
 2. Acts 1:26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.
5. In conclusion I think that since the Bible states there are 12 APOSTLES. Then there are 12 APOSTLES. No more, no less. Furthermore, both Judas Iscariot and Matthias were NUMBERED with the Apostles. Paul IS AN APOSTLE – How? BY THE WILL OF GOD.

and are not, and hast found them liars: - Again, these Imposter Apostles were found, having been tried or tested to be FALSE APOSTLES. Just like many are today, and they are joined by False Teachers, Preachers, Messiahs, Prophets, etc.

Well, we have not reached the end of Jesus' Commendation of this lagging Church, we have gotten merely to the end of verse 2, so until next time, let us bow our heads in prayer!