

WHAT DOES JESUS WANT TO SAY TO OUR CHURCH?

Part Four—The Church of Ephesus—A Backslidden Church

Text: Revelation 2:1-7

INTRODUCTION:

1. The Patmos discourse from the ascended Savior is a sure part of God's plan for the ages.
 - a. At Calvary, Christ reveals His passion and love for fallen man by dying for us.
 - b. On Mt. Olivet (the Ascension), Christ reveals His plan by which the Gospel should be presented to fallen man. The Church will take it. The Great Commission is given.
 - c. At Patmos, Christ in His letters to the seven churches reveals the patience of His love in that He is pleading with the church to carry out the plan and tell the story of His redemption and free salvation to the world.
2. At Mt. Olivet, Jesus Christ tells us to take the gospel everywhere. It has to do with the message and our responsibility of telling it.
3. The Patmos message declares that something is wrong with the candlestick (the church), that something in the lives of the churches is hindering their service. It has to do with the messenger and their personal lives.
 - a. The Master is not satisfied with the state of affairs found in His churches today.
 - (1) The people sit in darkness.
 - (2) His plan and command are disregarded and disobeyed.
 - b. He is pleading today for churches to get into His plan and program.
4. Notice the unity of the message:
 - a. Not seven messages, but one. Each overcoming church receives all that is contained in the seven promises.
 - b. These letters to His churches are the only messages that Christ has spoken to His followers since His ascension to heaven.
 - c. It reveals the need and importance of every church of every generation.
 - d. It is a comfort and promise to all churches who insist on being true to the Bible and to the Lord God Almighty.
5. The present-day heresy about the church is answered by these seven letters.
 - a. Heresy one – There is an invisible church to which all the redeemed belong and local churches are not important. Notice seven local, visible churches, seven letters.
 - b. Heresy two – That the church passes through seven stages and in the seventh stage, the church will be spewed out of His mouth and be lost again. It is possible that the church may lose its light but not its salvation.
6. The fact is that churches of the seven types have existed in every generation since the church was founded.

I. THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS WAS A REAL CHURCH THAT WAS LOCATED IN MODERN-DAY TURKEY (VERSE 1)

A. "Unto the angel of the church" – The letter is addressed to the Pastor at Ephesus (verse 1).

1. The Lord speaks to the church through the Pastor. Notice all seven letters from Jesus.
 - a. The Pastor is God's messenger – angel.
 - b. The Pastor is invested with Christ's authority.
 - c. The Pastor is subordinate to God.
 - d. The Pastor is servant to all.
 - e. The Pastor is not to do the bidding of all but He is to follow God.
 - f. The Pastor is not a Lord but a shepherd, neither is he to be lorded over.
 - g. The Pastor is to shine in darkness.
 - h. The Pastor is not to show himself, but the Master.
2. Notice the letter is directed to a definite Pastor of a definite church.
 - a. It is not an invisible, universal something.
 - b. The church was to shine for the Lord.
 - c. The church is to shine with a borrowed Light, the Light of Christ.

B. Facts about the church at Ephesus.

1. Ephesus was a wicked city, an idolatrous city.
2. Ephesus was the site of the Temple of Diana.
3. Ephesus was no easy place to shine for Christ.

C. "These things saith He . . ." Remember, this is not John speaking, but rather Jesus Christ (verse 1).

1. Notice that Jesus draws attention to Himself.
 - a. He is the upholder of the church and pastors.
 - b. He is the center of all things, the preeminent One (Colossians 1:18c).
2. Jesus must always remain the center of His church. If He is, there will be unity, love, souls saved, power for service, and provision provided.
3. As He walks in the midst of His church, He is there not only for blessing, but also for the inspection of His church.

II. NOTHING IS HIDDEN FROM GOD IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES OR IN HIS CHURCHES (VERSE 2)

A. "I know thy work, thy labors and thy patience . . ." He sees all and knows all things.

1. He sees and knows our works. He may not look on them as the church does.
2. He looks at our works, not as the world looks at them.
3. He looks at our works as the Omniscient God.

B. Thank God for working churches who serve according to God's plan.

1. The work that counts is work according to God's plan.

2. Many churches are busy working, but their work is not the work that Christ told them to do.
3. Often there is a great difference between church work and Jesus' work.

C. "And how thou canst not bear them which are evil." Here was a church that stood against sin.

1. This church hated sin.
2. Today, many churches are promoting sin. What a change!

D. This church was sound in the faith. "Thou has tried them . . .".

E. A church can be sound doctrinally but slack in service.

1. These are churches that believe in soul-winning but are not winning souls.
2. These are churches that believe in baptism but are not baptizing anyone.

III. GOD SAW THAT THIS CHURCH WAS A FAITHFUL, HARD-WORKING CHURCH (VERSE 3)

A. "And hast borne . . ." This good church was attacked by the world and society of that day.

1. They had borne reproach and criticism. Christian friend, the name of Jesus has never been a popular name to the lost world.
2. They did not give up, give in, or give out.
 - a. They were patient.
 - b. They kept on laboring.
 - c. They waited for God's due season (Galatians 6:9).

IV. EVEN GOOD CHURCHES OR GREAT CHURCHES ARE NOT PERFECT (VERSE 4)

A. The Lord knows the good and the bad about all churches.

1. Notice He mentions the good things first.
2. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we always did this?

B. Notice the indictment against this church.

1. They were sound in doctrine, defective in love.
2. They were right in discipline, wrong in devotion.
3. They were greater in their first works than last. They were:
 - a. Lacking in early fervor.
 - b. Slowing down spiritually.
 - c. Slacking in enthusiasm.
 - d. Letting the revival fires die down.
4. Because they had left their first love, they were:
 - a. Failing to grow spiritually.
 - b. Growing in the wrong direction.
 - c. Grieving the Lord.
 - d. Backsliding and unconscious of it.

V. THE LORD'S INSTRUCTION TO A CHURCH WITH A PROBLEM (VERSE 5)

A. Notice the remedy offered by God.

1. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen . . ."
 - a. We must not live on low levels.
 - b. Every spiritual height should be maintained, every commission carried out.
2. "And repent."
 - a. We are to change our mind and our direction.
 - b. We are to turn to our Christ – our first love.
3. "And do the first works . . ."
 - a. To leave their first love was to forget their first works.
 - b. First works are soul-winning and witnessing. See the first work of the Great Commission.
4. "Repent" here means to:
 - a. Renew their spiritual activity.
 - b. Renew their zeal.
 - c. Renew their consecration.
 - d. Renew the revival spirit.
 - e. Renew their prayer life and Bible study.
 - f. Renew the stand against sin.
 - g. Renew the reality of His second coming.
 - h. Do the first works – win others to Christ Jesus.

B. Consider His alternative for the church which refuses to repent (verse 5b). Just as our custodian removes a light bulb that ceases to burn, Jesus Christ will remove His light from His churches that cease to win others and shine for Him.

VI. FOR A GOOD CHURCH TO REMAIN TRUE, SHE MUST CONSTANTLY GUARD AGAINST SATAN'S INTRUSION (VERSE 6)

A. The word "Nicolaitans" means "The Rule of the People".

1. These were self-appointed church bosses.
2. These were ruling cliques within the church.

B. "Which I also hate." The Lord leaves no doubt as to what He thinks about the Nicolaitans.

1. He hates the self-appointed bosses.
2. He hates those who try to run the church or the Pastor.
3. He hates those who covet authority and strive to have the preeminence (III John 9).

C. The New Testament church has but one Head, one Book, one Guide, one Pastor, one Commission, and one Hope.

1. Jesus Christ is the Head.
2. The Bible is the Book.
3. The Holy Spirit is Guide.

4. The Pastor is God-called, God-sent, Holy-Spirit empowered, and church-recognized.
5. Our Commission is to win the lost, baptize them, and teach them the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20).
6. Our Blessed Hope is His soon return (Titus 2:13).

VII. OUR LORD'S STERN COMMAND TO THIS CHURCH AND OUR CHURCH (VERSE 7). "HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR . . ." THIS MEANS TO HEAR AND OBEY

A. We must take notice of the Word of Christ today.

B. We are the church. If we as Christians have left our first love and first work, the church has also.

C. The promise to His redeemed – the overcomers.

1. Our means of overcoming (Revelation 12:11).
2. Who is He that overcomes? (I John 5:5).
3. This is the promise to all Christians: "to eat of the tree of life" preserved until the proper time in the Paradise of God (Genesis 3:22; Revelation 22:2).

CONCLUSION: Christian friend, nothing about you in your personal life, nothing about our church is hidden from the Lord. What does God see in you and what does He think about what He sees? Will you repent and return to your first love? Lost sinner friend, will you come and trust Jesus Christ as your Savior today? Tell how to be saved.