

JESUS CHRIST EXAMINES FOUR CHURCHES

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First, let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

INTRODUCTION:

Jesus examined seven churches in chapters 2-3. He used a different fact about Himself from chapter one in His introduction to each church. Each fact was related to the condition of the church. Seven in Scripture is a number of fullness, so what Jesus said to these seven churches applies to the full number of churches during the church age. There are many things to be learned from the Lord's examination of these seven churches, but His main purpose was to examine their witness to the world around them. They were lampstands from which the light of the Gospel was to shine in their cities and deliver the people from the darkness of their sin. If the churches were living in sin, their light no longer was bright; it would soon go out, was about to go out and may have gone out in one church. He commended their right-doing and condemned their wrong-doing; He exhorted them what they should do and promised them what He would do. The church at Ephesus represents churches that are sound in doctrine and diligent in labors, but they have left their first love for Christ. The church at Smyrna symbolizes churches that remain true to Christ in spite of severe persecution. The church at Pergamum is like churches that hold fast to Christ's name and do not deny their faith in Him, but they tolerate members that worship idols and practice the sins that go with it. The church at Thyatira epitomizes the churches that are commendable in much of what they do, but they let a false teacher remain in the church along with the followers of this false doctrine. Of these four churches only the church at Smyrna met His full approval. Christ's examination of all seven churches will give a sure standard by which any church can measure itself.

AIM OF THE LESSON:

Learn what Christ expects from you and your church and what He promises to those who obey Him. He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Rev 3:22).

OUTLINE OF THE LESSON (use the Study Notes to add to this lesson plan as the Spirit leads you):

I. The Church at Ephesus: Faltering Love (2:1-7)

When Christ addressed the church at Ephesus, He referred to Himself as the one that holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (2:1). **He is the INSPECTOR.** The lampstands represented the churches, which hold up the light of the gospel to the world. The lampstands have no light in and of themselves. The light comes from the members of the churches, who put their gospel light on the lampstands. In each church the gospel light should come from the pastor that sets the example in his witnessing and from his preaching in the pulpit to inspire his church members to love God and His Son. Then the gospel light will flow from them to the unsaved around them. The strongest light comes from a church where its members are in love with Jesus Christ and want to tell their family members, friends and neighbors the good news about Him. They will tell them about Jesus Christ and how He can save them and give them assurance of eternal blessings. But the light from a church is in danger of being extinguished when its members stop sharing the gospel light and the only light is coming from the pastor. If the next pastor does not share the gospel light and no one in the church is a witness for Christ, the light has gone out and Christ will remove that lampstand.

Christ commended the church at Ephesus for many good things that they did, but He reproved them, because they had left their first love for Him. When they first experienced the joy of salvation, they loved Him and wanted to tell others what a great Savior He is. This is called the first love of a believer. However, believers will lose their first love for Christ when they let something in the world replace their fervent love for Christ. When that happens they will slow down in witnessing of Him. Any church that chooses this way of life will raise a generation of members with little or no love for the Lord. They may go to church and even keep its membership pure, but their gospel light is flickering and will soon burn out unless they repent and return to their first works. Notice, their first works were witnessing of Christ from a heart filled with love for Him.

Now what does this have to do with the Lord holding the seven stars in His right hand? The "stars" are called angels, which simply means "messenger." It can refer to a holy angel carrying a message from God to someone on earth, or it can refer to a pastor carrying a message from God to his church. In this context, the stars are the pastor-messengers. The pastors are the "stars" in the hand of Christ. Pastors are responsible for the condition of the churches assigned to them (Heb 13:17). It is an indictment on the pastor who allows his church to abandon its love for the Lord and let them refrain from witnessing. The pastor must pray and preach on the greatness of Jesus Christ so they will repent of their sin and fervently love Him. Then they will tell others about Jesus Christ and the salvation He offers. This will keep the light burning brightly on their lampstand.

Christ had final word of encouragement to the overcomers in every church. They are overcomers by their faith in Christ to save them (1 Jn 5:4-5). The overcomers in Ephesus were told that they would eat the fruit of the tree of life in the midst of paradise. That means they will be in the New Jerusalem, because that is where this tree will be (Rev 22:2, 14).

APPLICATION: Do you still have your first love for Jesus Christ? Positive answers to the following questions will tell if you do. Do you love to tell others what Jesus has done for you and what He can do for them? Does your love for Christ help you stay away from the sins of the world? Does your love for Christ cause you give generously so others can come to know Him? Does your Bible study and prayer time draw you close to Jesus? Your answers to these questions will show how much you love Jesus Christ.

II. The Church at Smyrna: Fierce Tribulation (2:8-11)

When Christ addressed the church at Smyrna; He referred to Himself as the one who was "the first and the last, which was dead and is alive" (2:8). **He is the VICTOR.** The church at Smyrna was severely persecuted and the Lord used this title to remind them of His faithfulness: He is "the first and the last." He was with them before they were persecuted and He will be with them when the persecution is done. He also reminded them that He knows the pain of their persecution: He suffered persecution for them on the cross, even unto death. But He also experienced victory when He arose from the dead. He is alive! Therefore, He challenged them to stop being afraid, but to be faithful to Him, even unto death. They also will be victorious over death. They will receive the crown of life and not suffer the pain of the second death in the Lake of Fire (2:10-11; 21:8).

APPLICATION: Are you suffering persecution? If so, turn to the Lord for comfort. He knows exactly how you feel. He suffered unto death for you. But He also can give you hope. He conquered death and promises to give the crown of life to those that trust in Him, so they will never suffer the pains of the second death.

III. The Church at Pergamum: Foolish Tolerance (2:12-17)

When Christ addressed the church at Pergamum, He spoke of Himself as the one that has the sharp sword with two edges (2:12). **He is the WARRIOR.** This church had offended the Lord by having members that held the doctrines of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans (2:14). The Lord called for their repentance or He would war against them with the sword (word) of His mouth. This sword is different than the ones mentioned in Eph 6:17 and Heb 4:12. It was a large, pointed sword used by thrusting it into the enemy soldier (cf. Rev 19:15). Christ would thrust His sword into the heart of the one that refused to repent.

What were these doctrines that so offended the Lord? The doctrine of Balaam was designed to bring a curse upon Israel. He taught Balak to send his Moabite women to entice the Israelite men to commit fornication with them and worship their god. Balaam's doctrine worked and God caused 24,000 Israelites to be killed. Some in this church taught the doctrine of Balaam, ignoring its dread results that happened to Israel. Another party in the church followed the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which may have used their liberty in Christ as a reason for allowing them to do the same things that the Balaamites did. It seems that they considered this a cultural matter that they had to perform to exist in this society. Christ hated these immoral doctrines being taught to His people. Although many in the church had been faithful and Antipas had even died as a martyr, the inroads of these two wicked doctrines were so serious that deadly warfare against those who held these false doctrines was the only answer that the Lord had for the problem.

Christ promises the overcomer that he will eat of the hidden manna. Manna was the food that supernaturally sustained Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 16:32-34). Christ is the hidden manna that sustains the believer in this life, but in a greater way He will keep them strong for 1000 years in His Millennial Kingdom and continue to do so throughout eternity. That is a great blessing. The overcomer also is promised a white stone with a new name written on it. The meaning that relates the white stone to the marriage feast of the Lamb is a good choice. In the games a white stone was given to a victorious athlete with his name on it. This stone would admit him to a special feast in honor of the winners. Those that put their faith in Jesus Christ are overcomers. They are given a white stone that will admit them to eat at the marriage supper of the Lamb. .. This meaning ties together the promises of the hidden manna and the white stone.

APPLICATION: There is great danger in false doctrine. Do not ignore it, because it will not go away of its own accord. Do not embrace it, because it will bring the chastening of the Lord upon you. Oppose it. If it is in your church and the pastor will not take action against it, prepare to leave it. This is serious business.

IV. The Church at Thyatira: False Teacher (2:18-29)

When Christ addressed the church at Thyatira, He called Himself the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire and has feet like fine brass (2:18). **He is the JUDGE.** Although Christ commended the church at Thyatira for many good works (2:19), the church allowed a wicked woman, like Jezebel in the Old Testament (1 Kg 16:31-33), to teach false doctrine in

lesson may be copied, but not sold for profit or modified without permission from Roger L. Peterson

the church. She taught the believers that it was permissible for them to worship idols and to commit fornication with the temple harlots. Some of the members in the church liked that doctrine and became a follower of her. When Christ examined this church, He set the record straight and called for her to repent, but she refused. Therefore, Christ vowed to send great tribulation and death to her and to all that followed her.

He has eyes are like a flame of fire (2:18) that penetrates into the deepest parts of a person's life. Nothing is hidden from Him. He knows all things and will judge every person in the church according to their works (2:23). He is a perfect Judge that will make no mistakes. No one in the church could hide their secret sins of idolatry and fornication from His eyes. Furthermore, His feet are like fine brass (2:18). God uses brass as a symbol of judgment in Scripture. Christ will use His brass feet to stomp out all unbelief and wickedness in the church with righteous judgment.

When Jesus Christ comes again to be the King of the earth, He will judge all nations, but He will not be the sole judge. He has promised every overcomer, who has kept doing His works to the end, that they will judge the nations with Him. They will rule the nations with a rod of iron and break them to shivers like a clay pot (2:26-27). This kind of judgment sounds like these faithful overcomers will begin to rule when Christ comes to judge the nations at the end of the Tribulation (19:11-14) and they will continue to judge the nations throughout the millennial reign of Christ.

The second promise that Christ gave to overcomers is the morning star. The morning star shines brightly in the sky while it is still dark and gives hope that the dawning of a new day is coming soon. Christ claimed to be the morning star (Rev 22:16) and He gives hope to the believers that He will come in the Rapture before the dawning of the Millennial Kingdom while the world is in deep darkness. The promise of Christ's coming for the church believers in the Rapture before the Tribulation will allow them to be judged by Christ for their works (2 Cor 5:10) to determine the place that they will serve in His Kingdom. This will prepare them to rule with Him over the nations

APPLICATION: Abide in the Lord and diligently keep His commands, so you can judge the nations with Christ. If you are a believer, but have sinned against Him, repent without delay. There is no way that you can hide what He sees and escape His righteous chastening. If you are pretending to be a Christian, but still love the world and the things of the world, repent now. There is no way that you will escape His judgment at the great white throne (Rev 20:11-15).

LISTEN TO THE LORD AND LET HIM CHANGE YOUR LIFE.

[Teachers: There is much more information on these four churches in the Study Notes. Check it out.]