

THE ORTHODOX BUT LOVELESS CHURCH - 1

(Rev 2:1-4) 10/14/18

Grace Bible Church, Gillette, Wyoming

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

A. The Vision of Christ to the Churches

1. Seven Golden Lampstands (Rev 1:12, 20 cf. Rev 2:1 - Ephesus)
2. Midst of the Lampstands (Rev 1:13 cf. Rev 2:1 - Ephesus)
3. Eyes Like a Flame of Fire (Rev 1:14 cf. Rev 2:18 - Thyatira)
4. Feet of Bronze (Rev 1:15 cf. Rev 2:18 - Thyatira)
5. Seven Stars Held in Right Hand (Rev 1:16, 20 cf. Rev 2:1 - Ephesus)
6. Sharp Two-edged Sword (Rev 1:16 cf. Rev 2:12, 16 - Pergamum)

B. The Message of Christ to Literal Churches

1. Some see the churches as a literary device to show seven characteristics of the church at large. The problem is that these were literal churches in John's day in those literal cities.
2. Others see the seven churches as seven chronological periods in church history.
 - a. The problem is, who decides the divisions of history? Most of the divisions of these theories are inconsistent with the divisions of other theories.
 - b. Most would put our age into the last period. But how do we know that we are in the last period since we do not know when the Lord will return?
3. The best view takes the seven churches as seven literal churches because there were seven literal churches in each of these cities. In addition, the message to each church was specific to that church's literal situation.
4. Nevertheless, the messages, promises, and warnings to these churches certainly has application to all churches of all times ("hear what the Spirit says to the churches" - Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

C. The Letters to the Seven Churches

1. Greeting to the Angel of the Church
2. Title or Description of Christ
3. Commendation of the Church
4. Criticism of the Church (except Smyrna and Philadelphia)
5. Warning to the Church
6. Exhortation from the Spirit to the Churches
7. Promise to the Church

II. THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS

A. The City of Ephesus

1. In the ancient world, Ephesus was a major seaport and the center of travel and commerce. It was a seaport on the Aegean Sea where it meets the Cayster River. Silt has built up over the centuries so that Ephesus is now 6 miles inland.
2. A Temple was built to the goddess Artemis (Roman Diana) and was considered one of the seven wonders of the world. However, its worship was morally corrupt paganism. It had thousands of priestesses who were engaged in temple prostitution in order to have communion with the goddess. It was involved with occultic and shameful practices.
3. Through Paul's preaching, many were converted to Christianity. But a silversmith by the name of Demetrius, who made shrines to Artemis, incited a riot against Paul for hurting his trade (Act 19:4-5, 24-27).
4. A large amphitheater, holding 25,000 people, was a main attraction in Ephesus. It was designed for theatrical performances but later allowed gladiatorial contests. It was here that the crowds chanted "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" for two hours (Act 19:34).
5. It was in Ephesus that Aquilla and Priscilla explained the way of God more accurately to Apollos, a man mighty in the Scriptures (Act 18:24-26).
6. Paul helped start the church when he led some disciples of John to Christ (Act 19:1-6).
7. It was in Ephesus where the seven sons of Sceva, Jewish exorcists, were pummeled by an evil spirit (Act 19:13-16).
8. It was in Ephesus that many were converted and burned their occultic books worth fifty thousand pieces of silver. A silver coin was equivalent to a day's wage (Act 19:18-19).
9. Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years teaching the whole counsel of God and warning against false teachers (Act 20:27-29, 31).

10. Paul had written an epistle to this mature church in Ephesus some 34 years earlier (AD 62).
- B. Christ in the Midst of the Churches (1)
1. As was explained in the discussion on Rev 1:20, the “**angel of the church**” does not refer to an angelic being, but to the pastor and/or men (*angelos - angelic or human messengers, Jam 2:25*) who were the spiritual leaders of the church.
 2. The responsibility of the spiritual life of believers in the church is a grave charge upon the spiritual leadership (Act 20:28).
 - a. It encompasses the teaching, example, and leadership of the spiritual leaders (Heb 13:7).
 - b. It also encompasses the response of the church itself to the Word of God and to its spiritual leaders (Heb 13:17).
 3. Christ **walks among** the churches (**golden lampstands**) to build and protect the church. But as Head of the church, He examines and evaluates the church and its spirituality.
- C. Commendable Deeds and Doctrines (2)
1. This commendation from Christ is an outstanding acclaim. This was an active, hardworking, and discerning church. It is the type of church we would strive to be today.
 2. The **deeds** of the church in Ephesus involved meeting the needs of the body as well as outsiders (Tit 2:14; 3:14; Gal 6:10).
 3. It was a church that **toiled** [*kopos - as exhausting physical or mental exertion toil, labor, work {Joh 4:38}, Friberg*] in the ministry with a labor [*kopos*] of love (1Th 1:3).
 4. It was also a church that had spiritual discernment.
 - a. They had spiritual discernment in that they could not **tolerate evil men**, both outside the church or inside the church. This was a church that was sensitive to sin (Eph 5:11).
 - b. They also had spiritual discernment regarding false **apostles** (“**call themselves**”, i.e. self-proclaimed) and false teachers. They **tested** these men and their messages with the Word of God and **found them to be false** (Eph 4:14; Act 20:29-31).
- D. Commendable Faithfulness (3)
1. They were also commended for their perseverance through hardships in ministry. “**Perseverance**” is the Greek word *hupmonê* (*remain under*) that means to remain faithful while under hardships and difficulties.
 2. They **endured** (*bastazō - carry a burden*) all burdens for the Lord’s **name’s sake**. Because of their strong faith and understanding of the Scriptures they did not **grow weary** [*verb form of kopos*] (1Co 15:58).
- E. They Left Their First Love (4)
1. However, the Lord had one major criticism **against** the church in Ephesus. They had left their first love.
 2. “**Love**” (literally “the love that is **first**”) is in the emphatic position. Christ first draws their attention to their lack of love for Him.
 3. The problem is that they “**left**” their first love. The word “left” is the Greek word *aphiēmi* and literally means to send away (1Co 7:11; 1Jo 1:9). But it can also be a subtle letting go or neglecting (Mar 7:8), which is more likely the case with these Ephesian believers.
 4. The Lord did not say that they did not have any love at all for Him. Rather, they did not love Him like they used to love Him. They did not love Him with the same degree and intensity that they first had when they came to Him for salvation.
 5. It is at this point that we sadly say, that most likely, all of us do not have the love for Christ that we should. Most likely, all of us do not have the love for Christ that we did when we were first converted. If there is even the smallest degree of less love for Christ, then we have left our first love. If we have left our first love in any degree, then we have sinned (Jer 2:1-3; Mat 24:12).
 6. Some have suggested three explanations to describe the problem at Ephesus. 1) They had moved away from their original fervor for Christ. 2) They had come to put doctrine and/or service ahead of love and devotion to Christ. 3) Their service had become mechanical rather than an outflow from a loving relationship with Christ. Of course, it is possible for all three to be the case.
 7. Such a lack of degree can be manifested in other areas such as love for prayer, love for worship, love for church, love for believers, love for service, love for the world as demonstrated in evangelism.