

Seven Pillars of a FAITHFUL CHURCH

Revelation 2 & 3

Introduction

The 7 letters written to the churches of Asia Minor by our Lord Jesus Christ.

What went wrong?

Seven Pillars of a Faithful Church:

- 1) A Willingness to Exercise Spiritual Discernment and Reject Evil
- 2) A Deep and Abiding Love for Christ
- 3) Courageous Endurance in Times of Trouble
- 4) A Faithful Witness in the Midst of Evil
- 5) Diligence in Christian Service
- 6) A Resolution to Pursue Purity
- 7) A Steadfast Commitment to Orthodoxy

I. ***A Willingness to Exercise Spiritual Discernment and Reject Evil: The Church at Ephesus 2:1-3***

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary'" (Revelation 2:1-3).

Commendation: toil, patience, endurance, intolerant of evil, discernment, forbearance, stamina.

The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand = The ministers of the churches.

Who walks among the seven golden lampstands = The presence of Christ in the church.

To *tolerate* false teachers is to allow evil to remain in the church.

How to recognize them:

1. They wear the look of a shepherd or one of the sheep, but inside they are ravenous beasts.

The foundation of the church is its doctrines—the teaching of Scripture. This must be guarded.

The church is defined in one place as “the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15).

“having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people” (2 Timothy 3:5).

2. They dwell favorably among you, but talk negatively behind you.

“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-31).

“twisted things” Gk *diastrepho*; from *dia*, ‘separation’ and, *strepho*, ‘to turn.’ ‘To seduce, mislead.’

Jesus Christ died for the sake of unity (cf. Ephesians 2:11-21).

Scripture is clear “that there may be no division in the body” (1 Corinthians 12:25).

“As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” (Titus 3:10-11).

“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them” (Romans 16:17).

“If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thessalonians 3:14).

3. They may desire to come into your home, but they should not be invited in.

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” (2 John 10-11).

4. They are often winsome, welcomed, and appreciated in the church, but they want to win your favor.

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

We must test what people are teaching, advocating, and promoting in the church.

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

“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:4-6).

“The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:10-12).

“You heed nobody beyond what he has to say truthfully about Jesus Christ. I have heard that some strangers came your way with a wicked teaching, but you did not let them sow it among you.” Ignatius

II. ***A Deep and Abiding Love for Christ; the Church at Ephesus; 2:4-5***

“But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (Revelation 2:4-5).

Admonition: *no love of Christ.*

“Those that have much good in them may have something much amiss in them, and our Lord Jesus, as an impartial Master and Judge, takes notice of *both*,” (Matthew Henry)

The church at Ephesus had received 4 commendations from the Lord:

- 1) hard work;
- 2) patient endurance;
- 3) exercising discernment,
- 4) not tolerating evil.

Love for God is the highest command (Matthew 22:37-38) and therefore, the loftiest Christian ideal; both with individuals and churches.

“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one died for all, therefore all have died” (2 Corinthians 5:14).

“controls/constrains” Gk *sunecho*; to compress with irresistible power all our energies into one channel.

“Love is jealous of any rival object engrossing the soul” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown).

"I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2-4).

"'Tis love that makes our willing feet
In swift obedience move."

The tragic progression of a dying church:

1st, Your love for Jesus Christ, once the primary motivation for all you did, slowly evaporates, severing the only acceptable motive for your existence as a true church.

2nd, Compromise with the world creeps in, by bringing its trends and culture into the church.

3rd, Expository preaching of depth and substance designed to bring conviction and transformation descends into shorter, lighter 'sermonettes' designed to make people feel good.

4th, The church begins to turn a blind eye away from the sin among the membership.

5th, The upward gaze of gratitude to God drops down as discontentment rises, petty squabbles flare up, the seeds of jealousy and bitterness are sown, and the church fractures and flat lines.

6th, Your lampstand is removed and you are a dead 'church.' All you have left is a social club, a religious meeting place, busy with facilities, events, activities, procedures, and programs.

Unless we are under the constant constraint of love to the Lord Jesus Christ we shall fail miserably.

*Knowledge, alas! is all in vain,
And all in vain our fear,
In vain our labour and our pain
If love be absent there. (Spurgeon)*