

THE THINGS WHICH ARE, 2:1--3:22

The background material listed various interpretive approaches to these letters to the 7 churches. This class assumes the normal usage of language in the futurist view.

Revelation is a circular letter to 7 actual churches (see earlier map). The appropriate part of the description of "The Glorious Lamb," Jesus Christ, revealed in the vision found in 1:12-20 describes the One who writes to each of the 7 churches.

Who are the "Angels" or "messengers" of the 7 churches addressed at the start of each letter?

2 Views: 1] The human leader in each church, the pastor; 2] Angelic beings who are God's appointed protectors for each local church. The 2nd view is taken here. Why write to angels? 1] to alert the angels to how God sees the true condition of each church; 2] to alert the church that they have individual angelic protection for the church.

Each of the 7 letters to these 7 churches follows a similar pattern. (See supplement). What Jesus Christ says starts with "I know..." Jesus says what He thinks of each church. What about our church? Jesus knows! He knows what is good, and he knows how individuals can ruin the reputation of the whole church, while others in that church are not to blame. Reading these letters also reveals how the enemy might try to infiltrate our local church today.

At the end of each letter, Jesus gives that church a challenge to the overcomers--"him (he) who overcomes." Who are the "Overcomers"? NOT a special group of Christians in the church who are super-spiritual, but all true believers. (See 1 Jn. 5:5).

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11,17, 29; 3:6,13, 22). This formula at the end of each letter is a challenge to listen to the reading, learn, and make corrections.

1 EPHESUS LEFT THEIR FIRST LOVE, 2:1-7.

Theme: misplaced priorities

V. 1 -- 7 stars = angels; 7 lampstands = 7 churches (1:20). Interpreted by Jesus, 1:20.

A. This church worked & endured under pressure, 2-3.

1. They worked under pressure.
2. They had no toleration for evil people.
3. They tested & discerned false apostle among them.

B. This church left their first love, 4-5a.

1. How do we know when we've left our 'first love'? Mk.12:30

"Heart" - When my delight in the Lord is no longer as great as my delight in someone or something else.

"Soul" - When my soul does not long for times of fellowship in God's Word.

"Mind" - When my thoughts during leisure moments do not reflect on the Lord.

"Strength" - When I claim to be "only human" & easily give in to things that I know displease the Lord.

2. Why do we leave our first love?
We give up 2 things:

- 1) We fail to sense our need for God. God's ex: Israel, Dt.8:11-14
We begin to transfer our trust to material things.
 - 2) We fail to acknowledge the greatness of God's love for us.
 3. What is the solution to leaving our first love? (cf. Rv. 2:5a) LESSON:
 - 1) Remember our need & His love.
 - 2) Repent -- change our mind and attitude.
 - 3) Re-do the deeds -- not merely activities, but with the transformed attitudes: desperate need for Him, and fervent love for Him.
 4. God will shut the doors of the church, 5b.
- C. Ephesus hated what God hated, 2:6. "Nicolaitans"
View 1 - followers of Nicolas (hopefully not proto-deacon Acts 6:5) -- advocated license in Christian conduct, including free sex.
- View 2 - name = "conquering of the people" -- lording it over.
LESSON: Do we hate what God hates?
- D. The Challenge to Ephesus, 2:7
Who are the Overcomers? See 1 John 5:5.

2 SMYRNA WAS FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH, 2:8-11.

Theme: valuable suffering

- A. Jesus spoke as the Eternal One who went through death already & was victorious! 2:8
- B. Smyrna experienced lots of physical threats, 2:9-10a. "I know" ...
 1. Present condition (v.9): Persecution - "tribulation" ==> thlipsis "hardship" of any kind -- poverty; blasphemy.
 2. Future condition (v.10a): more suffering ==> imprisonment (10 days). "the devil is" = metonymy for people.
- C. This church is challenged when persecuted, 2:10b-11. Be sure you're...
Faithful (10b); Listening (11a); an overcomer (11b).

LESSON: Get an eternal perspective on death. PTL that we have no physical persecution, yet.

3 PERGAMUM CORRUPTED THEIR DOCTRINE, 2:12-17.

Theme: Doctrinal failure

Some people enjoy good Bible teaching. But to what end? Do we only want to stockpile knowledge?

- A. The glorified Christ has a sharp sword (Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17).

B. Pergamum is commended for courageous faith, 2:13.

Legend: Antipas ==> elder (bishop) burned alive inside a metal bull -- roasted alive as a martyr for Jesus Christ.

C. The church in Pergamum paid attention to attractive teachings that corrupted them, 2:14-15.

1. Some followed "teaching of Balaam," 2:14.

BACKGROUND: Num. 22--25. Balaam was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel. Balaam wanted the money so he got on his donkey to go. But he was stopped by God.

a. "way of Balaam" (2 Pe. 2:15) = selling prophecy for money. Num.22:20-22 ==> God told Balaam to go ahead, but He was displeased with his motive (i.e., money).

b. "error of Balaam" (Jude 11) = assuming that God would curse Israel.

LESSON: some Christians think we have no basis to support the godless nation of Israel, nor should they claim the land of Promise. God's promise is not based on their faithfulness, but solely on God's grace. The Jewish people never deserve the gift of the Land.

c. "teaching of Balaam" (Num. 31:15-16)

Balaam advised Balak to corrupt Israel by intermarriage -- sins of compromise of the standards of God's Word (Num.25:1-3).

LESSON: premarital sex; adultery; homosexuality.

2. Some held the "teaching of the Nicolaitans" 2:15 (see v.6 discussion)

LESSON: Are we listening to teaching that leads us astray? Ex: baptismal regeneration; infant baptism; God will save everyone; replacement theology (supercessionism) => God is done with Israel; physical healing - bring in Kingdom.

D. Pergamum was told how to make the correction, 2:16

1. Repent! Admit to God our wrong ideas and beliefs, 16a.

2. Make the correction or face immediate opposition from God, 16b.

E. Pergamum was given a challenge, 2:17

1. Challenge to hearers

2. Challenge to overcomers:

a. Receive the gift of hidden manna (cf. Jn 6:47-58, 63-64) - satisfaction.

b. Receive a white stone with a name (which no one knows) - self-identity.

4 THYATIRA WOULD BE SEVERELY DISCIPLINED BY GOD, 2:18-29.

Theme: Spiritual compromise

A. The Glorious Lamb's eyes of fire are ready for severe discipline, 2:18.

B. Jesus knows the positive characteristics of the people in Thyatira, 2:19.

1. Love, faith, service, perseverance.

2. Deeds are getting better.

C. Jesus is "against" a woman prophetess who leads the church astray, 2:20.

BACKGROUND: Probably Lydia of Acts started this little church (Acts 16:14). This "Jezebel" in Thyatira is apparently a prominent woman - like the "Jezebel" (1 K 19:1--21:26) of OT - wife of wicked king Ahab (1 K 21:25-26); epitome of corruption & symbol of sexual sins & idolatry. Idol ==> any time our devotion or admiration for someone or something becomes greater than God.

D. God gave this woman time to repent (grace!) before He promised to severely discipline, 2:21-24.

1. Nature of God's discipline, 2:22-23.

a. For adults (v.22)==> physical problems, 2:22 (diseases; Rom.1)

b. For children (v.23a)==> physical death.

2. Purpose of God's disciplines, 2:23b.

a. All churches will know that God knows what's going on.

b. All will know that God gives according to deeds.

3. God protects those in the church who are not involved, 2:24-25

E. True Christians in Thyatira are promised 2 rewards:

1. Reward of authority, 2:26-27

Recall—Psalm 2:8-9→ refers to Jesus Christ in fulfillment. Here, refers to saints!
“as I also have received from my Father!”

(Rev. 3:21, 20:4; Matt. 19:28)

2. Reward of the "morning star," 2:28. Jesus Himself, Rev. 22:16.

Cf. Rev. 22:16 where Jesus is called the “bright and morning star”

By this gift, He gives us Himself in His full glory & we shall be like Him.

LESSON (Thyatira): Are we paying attention? We cannot allow people in our church to go on in public, disgraceful, sexual sin. **SOME SINS ARE WORSE THAN OTHERS!** 1 Cor. 5:1-14. Follow the steps of Accountability Discipline found in Mt. 18:15-17 and leaders should put them out of the church if they are still unrepentant.

SUMMARY: These first 4 churches present 4 ways that the enemy might use to weaken us in our church. We learn how we can avoid problems in our church.

- express the solution to the problem of leaving our first love.
- be determined to remain faithful to Jesus when facing physical persecution.
- express the desire to develop skill to discern false ideas.
- accept responsibility for the initial steps in Accountability Discipline.