

## **“I KNOW YOUR WORKS”: THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES**

### Introduction

- 1) John hears and sees the Lord Jesus in a glorious and stunning divine appearance (Rev. 1:10-20)
  - a) “What you see, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches...”
  - b) Jesus is seen standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands – Jesus in the midst of the seven churches, in the midst of His people who are called out of the world into His blessed fellowship
- 2) Seven letters of revelation from Jesus to the seven churches of Asia revealing the mind of Christ concerning the condition and needs of each congregation (Revelation 2-3)
- 3) Herein is revealed Jesus’ assessment of His people – principles and lessons applicable to any local church today
- 4) It encourages us within our local church to examine ourselves in light of His penetrating Word

### I) **THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA**

#### A) *Local congregations in Asia minor*

- 1) Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea (1:11)
  - a) Form a geographic circle – Revelation to be circulated from church to church
- 2) Gospel had gone out from Ephesus through Paul’s teaching (19:9-10)
- 3) Two churches mentioned elsewhere in NT
  - a) Ephesus (Acts 20:17; epistle to the Ephesians)
  - b) Laodicea (Col. 4:13, 16)

#### B) **“Seven”** – complete and perfect spiritual number; used throughout book of Revelation

- 1) Representative of conditions of Lord’s people at that day and time
- 2) Preserves principles for local congregations of God’s people at all times and places

### II) **THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

#### A) Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was “at hand” (Mk. 1:15)

- 1) Also said He would build “His church” and give the “keys of the kingdom” (Matt. 16:18-19)

#### B) The church began on Pentecost when the gospel was preached, souls were saved, and those saved were “added to the church daily” (Acts 2:47; 5:11; 8:3)

#### C) The New Testament church

- 1) **Built by Christ** (Matt. 16:18)
  - a) Christ is its Head – authority (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 3:17)
  - b) The work and worship of the church must be according to the authority of Christ
- 2) **Purchased by the blood of Christ** (Acts 20:28; Rev. 5:9)
  - a) Christ is its Savior (Eph. 5:23)
- 3) **Made up of those who are sanctified, saints** [*ekklesia* – the called out] (1 Cor. 1:2)
  - a) One body (Eph. 4:4); organize and work within local congregations (Rev. 2-3)
- 4) **Kingdom of Christ** (Acts 2:30, 34-35; Rev. 11:15; 19:16)
  - a) Citizens of Christ’s kingdom receive forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14)
- 5) **Holy Temple/Priesthood** (Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 11:1)
  - a) Offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ
- 6) **House of God** (1 Tim. 3:15)
  - a) Pillar and ground of the truth; a building

#### D) The manifold wisdom of God is made known by the church (Eph. 3:10-11)

**III) LESSONS FROM THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES****A) *Symbolized as seven lampstands* (1:12, 20)**

- 1) Lampstands hold lamps that give light – the church is to shine the light of divine truth!
- 2) Christ will remove the lampstand if a church fails to be a light for the Lord (2:5)

**B) *Christ knows “our works”***

- 1) Mentioned in each letter – something true of every church
- 2) Jesus is interested and watching – knows our activity and condition (cf. 2:23)
- 3) Comforting to Christians ignored and/or hated by a godless world (Psa. 26:1-3)
- 3) We must take care that we conduct ourselves properly (1 Tim. 3:15)

**C) *Can learn from the condition of other congregations***

- 1) Encouraged by good examples; warned by bad examples (1 Thess. 1:6-8)
- 2) Church autonomy does not protect any church from the rebuke of faithful brethren

**D) *Lessons from specific churches***

- 1) *Ephesus* – working church, expose error, but left first love (initial bond of love)
- 2) *Smyrna* – impoverished church faithfully enduring persecution
- 3) *Pergamos* – held fast in face of persecution, but fellowshipped error
- 4) *Thyatira* – increasing in works, but allowed error to influence
- 5) *Sardis* – dead as a church; needed to repent and strengthen what remained
- 6) *Philadelphia* – small, but remained faithful
- 7) *Laodicea* – lukewarm and self-deceived

**E) *Keys to spiritual and eternal success*****1) *Having an ear to hear the Spirit of God***

- a) We must have our minds on things above, not on this earth
- b) We must search the Scriptures and take a stand on the truth of God
- c) We must be able to discern between what is true and what is false

**2) *Overcoming* – “He who overcomes” with promise found in each letter**

- a) Reward comes to those who finish the race, endure every test, stand against every contrary wind, resist the devil

**Conclusion**

Each congregation of God’s people stands in the same place as the seven churches of Asia – Christ is watching and we are under His divine scrutiny (Acts 20:32)