**Revelation Bible Study**

**Week 3**

**The Things Which Are**

Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation contain Christ's seven messages to the church. These chapters will perhaps be the most solemn of all the studies in Revelation. They will not speak about things to come, but about things which are. Yet, this is a message to believers today.

Some people believe that the last recorded message of Jesus to the church was the  
Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19. It is not. Jesus's last recorded message to the church was His stern, sovereign, simple, specific calls to repent. In fact, five of seven churches to whom He spoke, He called to repentance. That is 71.4 percent.

This is not a section to which the reader can give a cursory glance. This is the message to the church. Two aspects of the church need to be studied.

**First** is the universal aspect of the church. The word catholic means "universal." It does not speak of a denomination where the Pope presides, but the word catholic, used in its purest sense, is a word that talks about the church universal—the church of Jesus Christ everywhere. That is one aspect of the church—a universal body.

**Second**, Jesus talks specifically of a local church. The local church is to be the expression of the universal church. That is why the Lord instituted local churches, to express the universal church. If it is physically possible, a believer should be a member of a local church. The believer's expression to Christ should be an expression through a local church, not just to say, "I am in the church universal."

If believers have health and strength in their bodies, they are disobedient if they are not members of a local church. Membership connotes that individuals are involved; they fellowship with God's people, and grow with them. They are under the teaching and discipline of God's people. It means they have joined with the vision of a specific body of people.

There were about 100 churches in the entire world at the time the Book of Revelation was written. Christ sent messages to only seven. Here is why. First is the reality reason. These were seven churches that had real problems and challenges.

The second reason is the geography reason. Looking at a map of the Aegean Sea and the world in which these letters were written, one will notice that they were written to a group of cities in what was called the Roman province of Asia. (This is not the Asia people think of today when they think of China.) All seven of these churches were in about a 100-mile radius of each other. They formed a configuration similar to a comma—from Ephesus over to Smyrna and Pergamos, all the way down to the tip of the comma at Laodicea. This means it was geographically easy for a circular letter to   
to these churches from a man who was in the Aegean Sea writing to them.

The **third** reason this letter becomes important to these seven churches is simple—this a letter of history. Most scholars agree that each church represents a period of the  
2,000 years known as the church age. From the time of the Ascension until now is the  
"church age." The church age is the period where Jesus is represented to the world through the churches, from the first century until now. Scholars believe that each one of these churches-Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira- represent a different age in the church.

**Fourth**, the importance is not only for a reality reason or a historical reason or a geographical reason, but it is also for a universal reason. These seven churches represent the problems that are perhaps the most observable in all churches. There are problems of spirituality, doctrine, and duty. In fact, these churches so represent all churches that Jesus could address His message to these seven churches and say that almost any problem a church encounters, one can find a message from the seven churches about that problem.

**Finally**, there is one more reason why Christ addressed just seven churches. He wrote to these seven churches because He is a sovereign Christ who is writing this letter. The number seven is God's perfect number. It is God's number of perfection. Therefore, in writing this to the seven churches, He is saying "This message is perfect. Hear this message. No one can add to it; no one can take away from it. It is a perfect message.”  
It is His last will and testament to His church. Even though it has been a long time since He spoke this message, it is as contemporary to believers today as the morning news. This is the reverberating, echoing message of Jesus Christ, Lord of the church, to the church and to every believer.

**The Message to the Church at Ephesus (2:1-7)**

Chapter 2, verse 1, addresses the angel (messenger) of the church at Ephesus. One should notice that in all these letters there is a reflection back to chapter 1. Each message has at least one or more of the characteristics of the glorified Christ who is presenting the message. Also, there are two points that should be noticed in each letter. In point one, He always compliments the church. The first thing He does is to tell the church what it is doing well. Second, He admonishes the church about things that need to be corrected.

In the complimentary section to the church at Ephesus, Jesus said: "I know your works" (v. 2). He is saying this is a productive church: "I know your works, your labor, and your  
patience." The word patience means "perseverance." This is the kind of church that would not give up. He continued, saying, "I know that you cannot bear those who are evil." This means they were doctrinally pure. It was a clean, holy church. Then, He said: "You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars." In other words, there are some people who have even come in and tried to say they have a new doctrine. But this church discerned them and found them to be hypocrites. This is a discerning church. Again, He says, "And you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake." The church at Ephesus quickly and publicly identified with the name of Jesus. Finally, He commends them by saying, "And you have not become weary. "They had a "never-say-die" attitude for the cause of Christ. What, if anything, could be wrong with this church?

Then, verse 4 begins with the word nevertheless. This word signals a contrast to what has been said. He knows where they are and how they are doing. Nevertheless, there is something they need to do. Here is what He says: "I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”  
  
He does not say,  
"You lost your first love." That is what many people say. However, one does not lose his first love, he leaves his first love. Love is more than emotion and feeling. Love is a decision. Jesus said, "You have abandoned your first love.”

I read a story sometime ago about the first five years of marriage, and how people lose their first love in the first five years. For example, the first year, the bride gets a cough. The husband says, "Oh, Sweetheart, I notice you have a cough. May I get up and bring you some water and maybe some cough syrup? Oh, Honey, you must let me help you!" The second year she coughs. He says, "Honey, I'm still hearing you cough. Maybe you should go and take something for that. I'm concerned. I love you." The third year she coughs. He says, "Louise! Do you mean you haven't done anything about that cough yet?" The fourth year she coughs. He says, "Now, look! I've been telling you for four years that you're going to die if you don't go to the doctor. My goodness!" The fifth year she coughs. He says, "Why don't you give us a break? You're sitting around, spraying germs, barking like a dog! Do something about that cough! I'm sick of hearing it!"

Do you know what he did? He left his first love.

One reason some people get disillusioned is that they start loving Christ's church more than they love Him. He never says, "Love the church." We are to love Him. One should never love the church more than the Savior of the church. One reason some people are disgruntled, disappointed, depressed, and disillusioned with the church is because they have placed their affection and attention on the church and the people of the church, and not on Christ. The people of the church will at one time or another reflect their humanity and imperfections.

But Jesus says, "Love Me." When people love the church and do not love Him, they are committing an act that is against Christ. In actuality, the church is engaged to Him. And when believers love only themselves, affection and worship are misplaced. God never says, "Just love the church." God's people are to love Christ.

Regardless of church affiliation, individuals cannot place their supreme affection on people. Jesus says, "If you leave your first love—Jesus Christ—you will be disappointed." But if believers truly love Him, He says, "I am forever the same, yesterday, today, and forevermore. I will never fail you. I will never leave you." He is the Lord of the church, and He alone deserves to be loved.

**The Message to the Church at Smyrna (2:8-11)**

Christ addressed the second church beginning in verse 8: "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write these things, says the First and the Last." There is the reflection back to  
Chapter 1. The compliments come next: "I know your works." This is a productive church. "I know your tribulation." That statement was not in the last letter, because they were not in tribulation. That statement means that the church at Smyrna was a suffering church.

Next, He says, "I know your poverty." This church is a poor church. But more important He says, "But you are rich." How can they be poor and rich at the same time? They are poor in worldly things, but rich in grace, love, commitment, and faithfulness. Then He continues, "I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan." In other words, God's people at Smyrna were facing severe opposition. There was an influence at Smyrna called "Satan's synagogue." The devil had a church at Smyrna composed of apostate Jews. That means people who had been Jews and had turned away and now they were a mixture of things. Furthermore, they  
were giving the Christians at Smyrna a hard time.

Out of seven churches, Smyrna is one of only two churches not reprimanded. The church at Smyrna was not called to repent. To the church at Smyrna, Jesus said, "You are under tribulation and suffering." Verse 10 says, "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer." Indeed, the devil was about to throw some of them into prison that they might be tested. Then, He said, "You will have tribulation ten days." Some people argue about the ten days, whether it means ten periods of world history or whether it is just ten literal days. Nobody really knows. What is known is that the believers were going to have a period of suffering. Then Jesus said: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

Christ had two messages for these believers. First, "Be fearless." They were not to be afraid of what men could do to them. Men can kill the body, but they cannot sentence  
the individual to the second death. The second death is hell. (Other places in Revelation explain the second death as hell.) In other words, they might be killed physically, but they would always remain in His hand. Second, He says, "Be faithful." When things are against the believer, Jesus says to be fearless first of all, and second, be faithful, and "I will give you the crown of life."

**The Message to the Church at Pergamos (2: 12-17)**  
Christ's message to the third church—Pergamos—begins in verse 12. "And to the angel of the church at Pergamos, write these things says He who has the sharp two-edged  
sword: I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is." Satan had a congregation in Smyrna. However, Pergamos was the capital city. Satan had a throne  
at Pergamos. Then, Christ continued, " (But I know] you hold fast to My name." This is the section of the message where Christ compliments this church. "You hold fast to my name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr who was killed among you, where Satan dwells." One of the Christians at the church there had been martyred.

Then comes the section where He points out their flaws. He says, "But I have a few things against you." The word Pergamos means "married." This is significant because the devil had his headquarters at Pergamos. Scholars believe this headquarters was a result of influence from Babylon. Historically, a powerful occult center was situated in the heart of Pergamos. There were demons, devils, witches warlocks, and devil worship taking place in Pergamos.

There was a church there, but the church members were outnumbered by the devil worshipers. And some of the devil worshipers had begun killing the Christians. Jesus says, 'I see the good things you are doing there at 'hell's front door but I have something against you, because some of you in the church are married to doctrines that are evil and destructive. Therefore, I'm telling you to repent from being married to these doctrines. Tell the people at the church who are married to these doctrines to leave them. The two doctrines were, (1) the doctrine of Balaam, and (2) the doctrine of the  
Nicolaitans.

The doctrine of Balaam, to which some of these people were “married," was this: Balaam was an Old Testament prophet, greedy for money. In other words, Balaam would do anything or sell out anybody to get money. There was a king who paid Balaam to curse God's people (see Numbers 22--24). "If you will put a curse on them," the king said, "I'll pay you." But an interesting thing happened. Every time he would try to curse Israel, blessings would come out of his mouth. Balaam was  
getting paid to curse God's people, but it was not working.  
The king was getting upset with Balaam.

So, Balaam consorted with the king and advised him to corrupt Israel. They did so by doing two things: (1) By telling the people that sexual immorality was all right, and (2) By  
not enforcing morality. Purity can be damaged, if believers do not stand up and proclaim the Word of God. Through immorality and idolatry, Balaam led people astray and was  
paid for it. When he could not curse them, he corrupted them.

Here is what happened to the church at Pergamos. The devil had said, "Look, I couldn't curse you, but I have two segments of the church at Pergamos married to me." Jesus  
said, "I know what you're about at Pergamos. I know the good things you're doing, but there are two factions of the church at Pergamos who have married the devil's doctrines."

First was the doctrine of immorality—some were either winking at immorality or committing immorality. Second was the doctrine of idolatry—they were worshiping other  
things beside Jesus Christ.

Here is the bottom line: This is the line the church in America needs to hear today. Jesus said He would not tolerate immorality in His church. Then, He turned to those  
who were not guilty of immorality and said to them: "I will not permit idolatry." Christ warned the church at Pergamos that if they did not repent, He would "fight against them  
with the sword of [His] mouth" (v. 16).

The church at Ephesus never repented. Dr. H.L. Wilmington, a Bible scholar who has studied the Near East, wrote that today, within miles of the city of Ephesus, one  
cannot find a Christian church. Jesus is serious. He says, "If you cannot be fully for Me, then I'm not going to let My light shine through you."

If God's people leave their first love, then suffer, Jesus will say, "You do not please Me." Therefore, His message to the church is, "I've called you to be My light. I've called you to be My love. But if you dim the light, and prostitute the love, I will be against you." The church is about more than new facilities or larger attendance. It is about more than who the pastor is, or who the staff is, or what their reputation might be. The question is: "Is Jesus Lord?" God's people must ask themselves, "Have I crowned Him Lord?" "Do I have a life of purity?" and "When He speaks to me, do I repent at His feet and change my ways and bow to His lordship?"

The church is the representative of Jesus on the earth. The only Jesus most of the world will ever know is what they know through the church. The only Jesus many will see is the church. If believers do not love Him like they first loved Him, then they have backslidden. He cannot reach the world if He cannot touch it through His church.