

Lesson # 4 -- The People of Jesus Christ at Ephesus.

Introduction

- A. Every Christian has, at least in our better moments, a sincere desire to bring honor and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. We want every man, woman, boy, and girl to recognize His worth, to pray to Him, sing to Him, and live in obedience to His Word.
- B. As we read the Bible we find that such a desire is in harmony with the will of God. In fact the Church has been designed to bring honor and praise to the Lord Jesus.
- C. When we make this a personal matter we ask, "Where do I begin and what must I do to fit into God's plan?" The answer we find in the Bible is, "Learn what it means to be a Christian in a Scriptural Church -- and act accordingly."
- D. As we study these seven Churches let's pray that we may be able to grasp what it means to be such a Christian and how we can become that kind of a person.
- E. The Scripture: Revelation 2:1-7.

I. Introduction to the Church at Ephesus.

- A. William Barclay, in his book The Revelation of John, states that Ephesus was "The first and the greatest metropolis of Asia." The following is a summary of his description of the city.

- 1. Ephesus had the greatest harbor in Asia at the time of John.

Located on the Western coast of Asia Minor (Turkey) Ephesus was the city through which all travellers passed whether going East or West. This made her the most sophisticated and wealthiest city in all Asia.

- 2. Ephesus was a free city and honored by the Roman Empire.

A few cities at that time has been given the honor by the Empire of Rome to be self-governing and to be able to conduct her affairs without the supervision of a Roman garrison. Ephesus was one of these. She also chosen to be the place where governmental leaders would stay, when out of Rome, and where the yearly games of Asia were held.

3. Ephesus was the center of the worship of Artemis (Diana).

The Temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was 425 feet long and 220 feet wide. The image of Artemis in this Temple was one of the most sacred in the world at that time. Acts 19 records the pagan fanaticism related to its worship.

4. Ephesus was an immoral city and a haven for criminals.

The religion associated with the Temple of Artemis had to do with sacred prostitution. In and about the Temple were hundreds of priestesses who gave themselves to an immorality approved by the government. The Temple also conferred the right of asylum. Any criminal who could reach it was free from prosecution.

5. Ephesus was the center of the notorious Ephesian Letters.

These Letters were sold as amulets and charms. They were supposed to be an infallible remedy for all types of sickness, and a guarantee of any success the owner desired. People from all over the known world came to buy them.

- B. The Bible reminds us that Paul stayed longer in Ephesus than in any other city, Acts 20:31. He sent Timothy there to be the pastor of the church, I Tim. 1:3. It was also the city mentioned in relation to Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos, Acts 18:19,24,26. One of his farewell addresses was given to the pastors from the city and area of Ephesus, Acts 20:17-38. If such a fine church could be established by God in Ephesus -- no city in the world should discourage us.

II. The Title of the Lord Jesus.

Unto the angel (pastor) of the church of Ephesus write, These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (lampstands). Rev. 2:1

A. The explanation of the title.

It has been said that the title, chosen by the Lord Jesus to describe Himself, was related to the need within the church. As we read about this church in such a city as Ephesus, we understand how the believers there would be in constant need of encouragement. That is the thought behind this title.

It was surely a comfort to both pastor and people to know that the Lord Jesus held the pastor in His hand and was "in the midst" of the church to reveal His love, grace, and sovereign control.

B. The application of the title.

1. For the Lord Jesus to hold the pastor of a church in His right hand emphasizes the truth that the Savior is the Head of the Church. He understands the need of each group of believers and has given to them the leader or leaders through whom He could meet that need. For the pastor this would mean that he serves under the headship and sovereign protection of the Lord Jesus.
2. When the Savior spoke of Himself as "in the midst" of the seven churches the thought has to do with the redemptive relationship He had established with His people. The emphasis is on the nearness of the Lord Jesus to every believer as their Redeemer-Priest to sustain them and fill their life with meaning as His light-bearers.

III. The Commendation of the Lord Jesus.

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil, and thou has tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars, and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted . . . But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. Rev. 2:2,3,6

A. The explanation of the commendation.

1. In speaking of their labor and patience twice the Savior indicated how important their work was to Him. They were engaged as a group of believers in carrying out the will of God in Ephesus and the surrounding region. As we read these words we think of people being saved and disciplined, of homes being established on Christian principles, of the gospel being preached, and of believers witnessing on the job
2. We also recognize that the believers had a good deal of discernment. They were able to tell the difference between true and false leaders. And in particular they had repudiated the heresy of the Nicolaitanes -- who believed it was right to eat meat offered to idols and engage in immorality.

B. The application of the commendation.

God expects us to obey Him, to do His will, and to have the discernment to keep ourselves from sensuality and heresy. If there were ever a group that could use the problems of their age and city to excuse themselves from wholehearted obedience -- it would be this church at Ephesus. They are an example to us.

#### IV. The Admonition of the Lord Jesus.

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Rev. 2:4

##### A. The explanation of the admonition.

1. It is helpful to remember that while love and actions are inseparable, love is the motivation for actions of obedience.

If ye love me, you will obey what I command. Jn. 14:15 NIV

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous. I John 5:3

2. What had happened to these believers at Ephesus had to do with the reason why -- the motivation behind -- their good works.
  - a. As young Christians their love for Jesus Christ filled their life and their obedience was its evidence.
  - b. Now they were still living lives of obedience, as the commendation indicated, but without the vitality of their former love.
  - c. If this were allowed to go on without correction, it would eventually cause these Christians to question the reason for their manner of life. They would then become formalistic and legalistic in life. Christianity would turn into religion. This often happens in the 3rd generation.

##### B. The application of this admonition.

1. We must ask if our life is motivated by love for the Savior.
2. We must understand that there is no substitute for love.
3. We must recognize the terrible danger of formalism.

#### V. The Counsel of the Lord Jesus.

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent . . . He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Rev. 2:5,7

A. The explanation of the counsel.

1. The instruction: "Remember, repent, do the first works."

By exhorting these believers to "remember" the Lord Jesus asked them to compare their life with how they lived when they were young Christians. He wanted them to recall how they had formerly loved Him, how joyful they had been, how easy it was for them to sacrifice for Him and to witness to Him.

The command to repent indicates a further evaluation of the Savior beyond that of His commendation. Their good works were acceptable -- but they were without a spiritual foundation. They had fallen into disobedience regarding the first command.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,  
and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is  
the first and great commandment. Matt. 22:37,38

The way to recovery was to "Do the first works." He is here speaking of the affection, the tenderness, the devotional attitudes, the delight in prayer and praise that once was such a motivation for their spiritual life. The Lord Jesus called them to choices of faith -- not emotion -- so they may recover their lost love for Him.

2. The warning: "Or else I will remove thy candlestick."

Whether we speak of the individual believer or a group of believers (church), the power and purity necessary to maintain the light of the gospel -- is rooted in love for the Savior.

Many churches have lost their candlestick -- and today they go on with their religion -- oblivious of the loss! To ask them for evidence of their genuineness they would point to their good works! We may not allow that to happen to us.

3. The promise: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life. . . "

In the final chapter of this book (22:2,14) the Tree of Life is described as intimately related to the throne of God and the river which flowed from that throne.

To those in Ephesus who would turn back and regain their first love -- the Savior promised the right to eat of that tree. Does this refer to all believers, or only to those who choose to live for the Savior? Whatever the answer -- let us make sure we are among the overcomers.

B. The application of the counsel.

Have we lost our first love?

When are we going to remember, repent, and do the first works?