Revelation Chapter 2--The Messages to the Churches Part 1

Introduction--These are the things that <u>are</u> (ref v1:19)

- There were ~100 other churches, but these 7 were representative of spiritual conditions then & now
  - The other 6 churches were all within 115 miles; this region was were East & West met
- Letters were for entire church; same strengths/weaknesses can be found in churches & people today
  - Records show over 45,000 Christians had been slain & heresies were cropping up; many were afraid about the unsure future & concerned about being strong enough to endure persecution
  - Jesus knew their individual & corporate strengths, weaknesses & dangers but victory was sure & all was planned; He stood amongst them & thru Him they could overcome
- In the same manner Jesus' message is also to His church today to stir us out of our complacency
  - He reveals & reproves sin and calls us to repentance & correction of our shortfalls
  - Jesus' intent is to strengthen our dedication & commitment to Him thru His Holy Spirit
- Some believe that the order of the 7 churches follows the order of various eras in church history
- Open your spirit to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to you; ask Him to reveal your problems that need to be dealt with; yield yourself to the Spirit & allow Him to purge what is displeasing to God

⇨ As we study the churches, we must examine ourselves & our church to see just how we measure up

Revelation 2:1-7 To the Church in Ephesus

- *v1 Ephesus*--very important commercial & religious city in Asia Minor; population then ~200,000
  - Beautiful city constructed of white marble; Roman emperors vacationed there
    - Founded ~2000 BC by the Hittites; today is known as *archaeological ruins near the town of Selcuk*
    - Located in a very worldly environment; persevering & guided by the Spirit against the evil around it
      - Many pagan temples; Artemis/Diana was most famous & one of 7 Wonders of the ancient World
      - **Acts 19:23-34** tells of a riot fomented by silversmiths reacting to Paul's preaching
    - Paul ministered there 3 years; John had been bishop of Ephesus before he was exiled to Patmos
  - *Angel*--messenger, human or angel; *of the church*--likely the elder or pastor of that church
  - *Church*--labeled "the Apostolic Church" & founded the other 6 (carrying on Paul's efforts); to those that match churches to historic eras it was symbolic of the "apostolic age" (~30-100 AD)
  - *Right hand*--the hand of power; Jesus controls the church & its leaders
  - *Walks among*--denotes ministry & care in regard to His servants; *lampstands*--His churches
- *v2-3,6* **Commendations:** for sound faith, good works, discernment & perseverance thru persecution
  - *v2 Tested*--like the Bereans (**Acts 17:11**), they showed discernment on doctrine & behavior
    - Paul had warned of "savage wolves" & their own who would "distort the truth" (**Acts 20:29-30**)
    - Sounds like the leaders & members of this church were at one time well-versed in Scripture
    - Likewise, we must test what teachers tell us to ensure it is consonant with Scripture; sadly, there are many false teachers about in the world who redact or ignore Scripture and/or teach wrong doctrine
      - **2 Timothy 4:3-5** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, **4**and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. **5**As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.
  - *v3 Not weary*--they had remained faithful to the Word & to Jesus for over 40 years
  - *v6 Nicolaitans*--likely, heretics who preached compromise with worldly morality, that one must experience sin in order to understand it; perverted grace & replaced liberty with license
- *v4* **Rebuke** for having "abandoned your first love;" note: they had *left*, not *lost,* their first love
  - A Christian **must love Jesus** but their passion & fervor had become lukewarm & mechanical
    - Their doctrinal & moral purity; undiminished zeal for the truth & disciplined service were **no substitute for the love for Christ** they had forsaken; zealous **love for Christ** leads to evangelism

- **Matthew 22:37-38** Jesus declared, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' [38]This is the first and greatest commandment."
- **Charles Spurgeon:** It is the most serious ill of all; for the church is the bride of Christ, and for a bride to fail in love is to fail in all things. It is idle for the wife to say that she is obedient, and so forth; if love to her husband has evaporated, her wifely duty cannot be fulfilled, she has lost the very life and soul of the marriage state. As a church, we must love Jesus, or else we have lost our reason for existence. It is a disease of the heart, a central, fatal disease, unless the Great Physician shall interpose to stay its progress, and deliver us from it. No peril can be greater than this. Lose love, lose all. Leave our first love, we have left strength, and peace, and joy and holiness.

➢ This did not happen overnight; was a gradual process of complacency & compromise; signs of such:
- **Ken Cayce**:[1] 1) Christ is no longer the central focus in your life; 2) You neglect your relationship with the Lord & spend less time in prayer, worship & the Word; 3) You allow family, friends, job & your own desires to come between you & your relationship with God; 4) There is a loss of intimacy in your relationship with God; 5) You are caught in a cycle of dead works; 6) You are more tolerant of sin; 7) You will no longer have a burning passion for reaching out to the lost

➢ The early church (including Ephesus prior to this letter) preached the Gospel beyond their environs
- **Romans 10:17-18** Consequently, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. [18]But I ask, did they not hear? Indeed they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

➢ Knowing the Word of God is essential if we are going to meet Jesus' command & witness
- **Matthew 28:19** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
- **Romans 16:25-26** Now to Him who is able to strengthen you by my gospel and by the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery concealed for ages past [26]but now revealed and made known through the writings of the prophets by the command of the eternal God, in order to lead all nations to the obedience that comes from faith.

⇨ (IMO) No mention of Gospel preaching & evangelism--marks of apostles & fervent love for Jesus

⇨ **Tim LaHaye:**[2] I have found the best way for believers to retain their first love is to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16), by reading, studying & memorizing it on a daily basis.

⇨ Jesus asked Peter 3 times if he loved Him (**John 21:15-17**), then commanded "**feed** my sheep;" the meaning is to tend, care for & provide *spiritual* food--the **Word of God**! (IMO command to us, too)

- *v5* **Exhortation***: repent*--being transformed in heart & mind to forsake things displeasing to God
  - *Deeds*--like studying Scripture & applying it to their lives, preaching Jesus & evangelizing
  - *Repent*--the consequence of not repenting & correcting what Jesus rebuked would be judgment that would bring an end to the Ephesian church; Ephesus itself is nothing but ruins today
  - The type of love required burns up selfish desires & motivates to serve Christ sacrificially

⇨ Jesus will forgive when one repents, but not turning back to Him will bring judgment

- *v7 He who has an ear*--"ear of the heart" by which one hears truth; Jesus is speaking to individuals
  - 1) Those not reborn in the Spirit cannot hear God when He speaks; 2) even some reborn resist the Spirit's mastery of their lives (as in **Hebrews 5:11**); 3) those who are spiritually-minded will act as **James 1:22** bids, to "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only."
  - *Spirit*--the Holy Spirit; *overcomes*--definition of a Christian in **1 John 5:5**: "Who then overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."
  - *Tree of life*--first mentioned in **Genesis 3:22**, then in *v22:2*; those who eat of it will never die

⇨ Jesus lovingly gives opportunities to turn back to Him if only we grasp them

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[1] Ken Cayce; https://bible-studys.org/content/Books/4%20Discover%20Revelation/

[2] Tim Lahaye; Revelation Unveiled; page 50; Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids MI, 1999