

**>>>>>> Lesson 03 <<<<<<<**

- 1) We will begin the discussion with verse 19.
- 2) As a refresher and review, we'll begin reading in Rev 1, verse 12.

**Rev 1:12-19 (NIV)**

- 1) Jesus tells John again to write.
  - a) First, what he has seen – the vision he had to this point and was having.
  - b) Second, what is now – meaning what Jesus is getting ready to expound to him for the seven churches. (chapters 2 and 3)
  - c) Finally, what is to take place later – this will be the prophesies of chapters 4 thru 22.

**Rev 1:20 (NIV)**

- 5) Take note here, John's vision is like a dream in some respects.
- 6) Ever have a dream where things happen that are left out?
- 7) John originally sees seven stars in Jesus' right hand.
- 8) The stars are now gone but we do not know where. We know this because:
  - a) Christ comforts John by placing his right hand on him.
  - b) Christ also acknowledges that they are gone when he refers to them here in the past tense.

**Letters to the Churches – Introduction**

- 1) As I stated earlier, chapters 1 thru 3 are almost like a separate part of the book within Revelation – being the context and letters to the churches and then 4 thru 22 cover the second coming and those prophetic events.
- 2) However, I believe we need to make sure we do not carry this thought of **separation** too far.
- 3) In actuality, we can look at these letters to the churches as a bridge between John's Day and the hour of his vision and writing and the day the events of the vision start to unfold.
- 4) Bonnie sent me an introductory lesson on the book of Daniel.
  - a) It made the point that this is another similarity between the two books.
  - b) The first chapters of Daniel are really a lesson in how we should live to please God.
  - c) Not unlike these first chapters of Revelation.
- 5) Additionally, as we will see, there are several references in these letters to the churches that actually connect to the prophesies that are coming.
- 6) We should think of these letters as not just applying to the 7 churches to which they were written but to all churches that exist in the world from that day until the return.
- 7) Obviously, they do!

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- 8) They could be and really are, a road map, a last word directed to all who read them as a real list of things to look out for and to be aware of as churches and, for that matter individuals.
- 9) The general pattern of the seven letters is in stages:
  - a) the correspondent,
  - b) the church,
  - c) the city,
  - d) the commendation or concern,
  - e) the command, and finally,
  - f) the counsel.
- 10) The correspondent in each case is, of course, Christ.
  - a) He identifies himself in each letter with an appropriate part of John's vision description of Himself.
  - b) In this identification, Christ chose the phrases from that earlier vision that best fit His approach to each church.
- 11) One of the curious things about each of the letters is that Jesus says "to the angel of ..."
  - a) The question arises is there really and angel or not.
  - b) Most think, based on the Greek word used which is usually translated messenger, and for other reasons, these "angels" are really the leaders of these churches.
    - i) Leaders in this case could be elders or ministers.
    - ii) At any rate, this is not likely to be a reference to "heavenly beings."
- 1) The conclusion of each letter contains the phrase, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
  - a) There are two points that need to be emphasized here.
    - i) First, it is the responsibility of each individual reading or hearing these letters to heed what God is saying.
    - ii) It is not just the responsibility of the elders or the ministers – it is ours!
    - iii) It is each of us in the collective whole that make our church what it is.
    - iv) Secondly, note the plural of "churches;" again, indicating that these letters should be distributed among all the 7 churches being addressed.
  - b) And, if I may be so bold, since we are dealing in apocalyptic matters, the number 7 (Seven) being complete, this is to be read by all churches throughout the ages.

### **Rev 2:1-7 (NIV)**

- 2) Christ commended the church at Ephesus for five things:

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- a) working hard
  - b) persevering
  - c) resisting sin – not tolerating evildoers
  - d) properly dealing with false apostles
  - e) enduring patiently and bearing up without becoming weary.
- 3) All of these characteristics show a church busy with good works and suffering willingly for the cause of Christ.
  - 4) The Ephesian believers knew evil when they saw it and did not tolerate it.
  - 5) One real clue to how they dealt with evil and immorality with Christ’s comment regarding the Nicolaitans.
  - 6) Not many references to this heresy are made by early church writers.
  - 7) Those that do link it to Nicolas who was one of the men appointed to oversee distribution of food in Acts 6.
  - 8) John MacArthur explains the Nicolaitans like this.

Some argued that Nicolas was a false believer who became an apostate (traitor) but retained influence in the church because of his credentials. Others suggested that the Nicolaitans misrepresented his teaching. Whatever its origin, Nicolaitanism led people into immorality and wickedness. The letter to Pergamum links it with Balaam's false teaching that led Israel astray. The deeds of the Nicolaitans thus involved sensual temptations leading to sexual immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols (2:14) without regard for the offense of such behavior — all in the name of Christian liberty.

- 9) Ephesian church did not tolerate the Nicolaitans but hated their heretical teachings.
- 10) Overall, the church at Ephesus faced a culture characterized by immorality not unlike us today.
- 11) Jesus was saying that they were handling that well.
- 12) **However**, Jesus says to them “you have forsaken your first love.”
- 13) Their first love was referred to here was likely tied to the reason they were doing all the good things that Christ just praised them for.
- 14) When we look at the book of Deuteronomy, we see many instances where the Israelites were admonished to do something but, in many cases, it was preceded by the statement “Love the Lord...”

Deut 6:5-6 (NIV)

Deut 11:1-2 (NIV)

Deut 11:22 (NIV)

Jesus said in Mark:

Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)

- 15) Every church should have pure faith and root out heresy as the Ephesian church had obviously done.
- 16) However, these good efforts must come from their love for God and others.
- 17) Maintaining sound teaching and moral and doctrinal purity without that love reduces the act to no more than the checklist mentality that we have spoken of so many times in the past.
- 18) We need both – obedience and love.
- 19) If we truly consider in scripture as we should, the love of God should come first the love for others.
- 20) Again, obviously, this applies equally to the individual as to the church as a body.
- 21) So, what happens if we do **not** get this right? We fall into the thing Jesus is saying ...  
4 ... You have forsaken your first love.
- 22) As with most if not all of Jesus' comments to the churches, this does apply to the church but can also apply to the individual as well.
- 23) When we are new Christians, we have much enthusiasm but not much knowledge.
- 24) We rejoice at our newly found forgiveness because we feel the full weight of our sin.
- 25) As we mature, we gain knowledge but, many times our enthusiasm may wain.
- 26) With that may come a lessening of the seriousness of sin in our minds and hearts
- 27) We may begin to lose the gratefulness for forgiveness – in essence, we begin taking God for granted?
- 28) As to the individual, I think this is losing our first love.
- 29) As to churches, every church should have pure faith and root out heresy.
- 30) However, these good efforts should come from a love of Christ and our brothers and sisters.
- 31) As the LABC puts it:  
In the battle to maintain sound teaching and moral and doctrinal purity, it is possible to lose a charitable spirit. Yet we need both. Prolonged conflict can weaken or destroy patience and affection. In defending the faith, believers must guard against any structure or rigidity that weakens love.
- 32) When the author talks about losing a “charitable” spirit, I believe he is actually saying loving spirit.
- 33) To both the individual and the church, Jesus' command and statement of consequences is the same.

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5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

34) We must always be in the mode of evaluating our progress toward what God wants us to be.

35) We are to be always growing not standing still or going backwards in our faith and our love for the Lord and our brothers and sisters.

36) Again, as individuals and collectively as a church.