

Looking Backward So As To Look Forward

Sunday PM 03/25/18

Introduction:

Change is gradual except when it is not. Another way of saying this is change seems to be slow and we hardly notice it; but there are times when it comes along suddenly. Example: Story of placing a frog in a pan of cold water and turning up the heat. The frog will allow itself to boil to death due to the gradual change. But then there is the volcano where it blows and everything is different. I think it is a good time to think about the future by looking at the church at Ephesus.

I) Ephesus in Acts

A) Early preaching of Apollos, *Acts 18.24ff*

1. He knew only the baptism of John, *v. 25*.
2. Apollos was taught the way of God more accurately, *v. 26*
 - a. Meaning he learned about the baptism of Jesus.
 - b. But what about those he had taught?

B) Paul comes to Ephesus, *Acts 19.a ff*

1. Doctrinal problem concerning baptism again appears, *v. 3*
2. Paul explained the baptism of Jesus, *v. 4*
3. They were baptized the name of the Lord, *v. 5*

C) The effect of the Gospel at Ephesus

1. The name of the Lord was magnified, *v. 17*
2. Many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds, *v. 18*

3. Many burned their books of magic, *v. 19*
4. The word of the Lord grew mightily, *v. 20*
5. The power of the Gospel can be seen in the riot in this chapter. *v. 21ff*

D) Many places and people are like those in Ephesus

1. Untaught and unlearned but willing to do what is right when they see what is right.
2. They were placed in a difficult circumstance due to the world around them.
3. But they kept on serving God and growing. Sometimes the key is simply to preach the Gospel and get out of the way.

II) Ephesus in Revelation (about 30 to 40 years later).

Revelation 2

A) The good

1. Labor- working; patience- longsuffering nature of the church; did not put up with evil. *v. 2a.*
2. Doctrinally they were "sound", *v. 2b.*
 - a. Doctrinal soundness is important as other churches in Revelation were blamed for allowing false teachers and their influence.
 - b. Perhaps they had a good visitation program; a good teaching program, a good outreach in their community.

B) The bad, *v. 4*

1. They left their first love.

- a. Did they lag behind in zeal and enthusiasm?
They were working!
 - b. Did their religion become stale and lukewarm-without the heart?
 - c. Did they lose their love for God and Jesus?
Matthew 22.37.
 - d. Did they lose their love for each other as this was a later generation from *Acts 19*?
2. Perhaps it was a combination for these things but what we can say is they lacked the kind of love God demands.
 3. Notice they were told what to do but not how to do it. They were to repent and turn back to their first love.

III) What would God say about us?

A) Remember where you were five years ago.

1. What changes have occurred in your personal life and in this congregation? Some have been gradual and some sudden.
2. Have they been good or bad? We have had deaths, marriages, graduations, illnesses, etc.
3. Some people have left due to doctrinal issues and some for other reasons.

B) How about your love for God, Jesus, the brethren, and others?

1. Everybody would say we could always be more loving. I don't anyone who would say that they have cornered the market on love.

2. But how do we grow in love for God, Jesus, the brethren, and others?

C) Let me share something that is on the board in Sam's classroom.

1. Am I excited when I go to Bible Class? (From personal experience I know young people like Bible Classes. They like learning and doing things.) How about us as adults?
2. I always study and complete my Bible Class, or I sometimes do that, or I rarely do that.
3. I make it a point to read some of the Bible every day. *2 Timothy 2.15.*
4. I follow along in my Bible each sermon. (I am mentally involved in each sermon.)
5. When I see a command in God's word, I obey it.
6. How noble are you? *Acts 17.11.*

Conclusion:

By looking backward at Ephesus we see an imperfect group of people striving for perfection in *Acts 19*. Looking forward in Revelation we see they had obtained doctrinal purity but not spiritual maturity. When we look backward about 5 years what do we see? What do we see now? What do we hope to obtain in the future? Let me tell on myself. A while ago I was feeling down and said to Regena, "There was a time we talked about what we wanted to do. We have gotten to the point in our lives where I think about what we have done." Recently she reminded me of someone who did not become successful in his new business until he was in his mid-60's. There is still more to do now. Use the past but only to look forward to the future.