

THE WORD OF

TRUTH

Bible Study Course

Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 8:32

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PROFESSED CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

The seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3, were literal churches in Asia during the first century. The character of these churches is used to identify characteristics that may now exist among the people of God's professing Christian church.

Jesus examines these characteristics and alerts the members of the various church groups as to the course their church is taking; whether that course is a path of false doctrine and deception, thus receiving His condemnation, or whether that course is a path of truth and faithfulness, thus receiving His commendation.

Let us now consider the report Jesus delivered to the churches. To believe that His words were exclusively for the seven churches of Asia, would be to miss the point of the admonition of Scripture. Christ is addressing every man in every age. We shall see that each one of us is included in one or more of the categories represented by the seven churches and as such would benefit from Christ's counsel.

1. How is Jesus described, identifying him as the One giving the instruction to the seven churches?

Revelation 1:8,11-13 _____

2. Where was Christ said to be standing as He made His address?

Revelation 1:13 _____

3. What was represented by the figure of the candlesticks?

Revelation 1:20 _____

Note: The candlesticks fitly represent God's Church. As a light to the world they reflect the light of Christ; in bearing the Gospel, they carry the light of the Word of God to every man (Matthew 5:14-16; Isaiah 42:6; Psalm 119:105). Represented as walking among the candlesticks, Christ is depicted as having a close and intimate concern over those who profess His name (Matthew 28:20). See also lesson 13 page 10.

4. What was Jesus holding in his right hand?

Revelation 1:16 _____

5. What did the stars represent?

Revelation 1:20 _____

Note: Compare John 10:27-29; Romans 8:35-39. Here again is reflected the love and concern Jesus has for His people. Those who faithfully serve Him are assured that nothing shall separate them from Him. However, there is one thing that will separate us from God --- See Isaiah 59:2; 2Chronicles 15:2.

6. What was the name of the first church addressed?

Revelation 2:1 _____

7. What did Jesus point out as the deficiency in the church of Ephesus?

Revelation 2:4 _____

Note: Under the leadership of the apostles, the church went to the world filled with the zeal of Christ and love for souls. In the passage of time, this zeal began to fade and Christ presents this loss of love and devotion as a spiritual fall. Evidently the members seemed unaware of their condition. Though Christ acknowledges that they despise false doctrines, this will not make up for their loss of affection for Him. Without a love for Christ there can be only an appearance, at best, of serving Him and keeping His commandments (1John 4:7,8; 5:2,3; John 15:10; 14:24; Luke 6:43-46).

God has always had His faithful, honest souls in every age through the history of man, they are referred to as "God's remnant people". They are those who are faithful to Him amidst the many falsehoods and conflicting doctrines of their day. The term does not exclusively mean the last group of devout Christians at the end of time, though this group of Christians will be called God's remnant. In every age, God's remnant will be motivated by the zeal of God (Isaiah 37:31-32; Philippians 2:12-15). They will have that first love experience that continues day after day.

How can we have that unbroken zeal for God, a continuous freshness and life in our Christian walk that just grows and grows with each experience ??? Simple! Here is a break-up of John 15:10,11

- a) Make a full and unreserved surrender to Jesus
- b) Study the Word of God *daily*
- c) Do what the Bible says
- d) Pray that God will show you what to do and that He will remove every trace of sin from your life, then do your part and co-operate with God to fulfil that prayer.
- e) Deal honestly and kindly (love) with your neighbour
- f) Set about to undo the effects of the wrong you have done
- g) Minister to the needs of others
- h) Do what is right, that others may see the power of the Gospel working in your life and thus prove the truthfulness of the promise of God to transform the life of one fully committed to Him
- i) Ask God to reveal to you the blessings contained in every trial
- j) Praise Him and thank Him continuously, even if that for which you are thanking Him is hurting you
- k) Plead with God that He will help you cultivate pure and holy thoughts
- l) Turn away your eyes from beholding any unholy thing
- m) Keep your conversation pure
- n) Learn to be content with what you have
- o) Ask Him for *faith*
- p) *Pray* for the power to accomplish all of these things and *believe* that God will fulfil it in you.

8. How did Christ refer to Himself, in addressing the church at Smyrna?

Revelation 2:8 _____

Note: This apparently strange introduction of Jesus would be significant to the Church at Smyrna. They would draw great consolation from the knowledge that their Lord had suffered as did they. For these are people who have suffered persecution to the point where they have now become a symbol of the oppressed, persecuted and martyred. Jesus had no condemnation for the church at Smyrna.

Christ's reference to Jews is not specifically a criticism of the Jews; He is using the name of the nation that He had chosen as His people to evangelise the world as a metaphor for every person that claims to be a Christian. A similar application of "Jerusalem" is used in lesson 1 page 3 and lesson 19 page 5.

9. What was the name of the third church Christ addressed?

Revelation 2:12 _____

10. Where is this church said to reside?

Revelation 2:13 _____

Note: Compare Revelation 13:2. Pergamos is situated in an environment of gross religious corruption, wherein "Antipas" died as a result of opposing this corruption. Antipas is not the name of an individual, but a reference to all of those people who took a stand against the false (non-biblical) doctrines and teachings of their time. Lesson 10 describes one such period.

11. If the situation of Pergamos was so corrupt, what doctrines did she hold that Jesus found so abhorrent?

Revelation 2:14,15 _____

Note: a) Balaam was a professed prophet of God, whose objective was not the cause of truth and righteousness, but his own covetous and earthly ambitions. To achieve his ends he worked to lead Israel into apostasy through sexual perversion and the worship of false gods.

The Church of God, Israel, when obedient to the God of heaven, was an invincible power that Satan recognised could not be overthrown, so he worked through the human agent of Balaam to seduce the people away from God, thus leaving them vulnerable to his destructive influence (Numbers 22-24).

It is Satan's objective to destroy every last trace of the worship of the living God, the Creator. He is hoping that this will give him influence in his argument that God has no claim on this earth and that the world is his totally. So long as there is a people who serve God, Satan cannot claim, before the universe, that he has unanimous worship from the people of earth. The witness of the righteous is a testimony against Satan that sin has no justification for its presence. Therefore, Satan is rebuked when he claims that fallen man cannot keep the commandments of God (Zechariah 3:1-8; Rev.12:9-11; Jude 9).

Just as Balaam was a professed man of God yet a stumbling block to his brethren and to the heathen, so there are professing Christians today who are a stumbling block to those who would know and practice the truth (2Peter 2:10-19; Jude 11).

b) The Nicolaitanes have been identified as a Gnostic sect (Gnostic, claiming to have a superior knowledge of spiritual things). Their founder is thought to be Nicolas from Antioch (Acts 6:5), though this is not confirmed.

The teachings of the Nicolaitanes include that the deeds done in the flesh do not effect the purity of the soul and consequently have no bearing on salvation. In other words, the sins we commit will not hinder our access to heaven! Unmasked, we can see this foolishness for what it is, but this is the essence of the sophistries propagated by Satan in many of the churches today. Remember, this is the message of Jesus Christ to the churches and is applicable now; it is not merely

human criticism. Study your Bible and get it straight from God, the source that will not deceive. See what God says about sin and eternal life (2Cor.5:10; Eze.18:20; Rom.6:23; Rev.21:27), is it the same as the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes?

c) The church at Pergamos seemed ignorant of the points that Jesus was making. They wanted to worship God (Rev.2:13), yet they were unaware that they were worshipping with corrupt doctrine. With love, Jesus sees that it is time to awaken those who would serve Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23,24) and alerts them to recognise their error and embrace the undistorted truth of His Holy Word, the Bible (Acts 17:30; Rev.14:7,8). Antipas and Smyrna both remained faithful to God and they lost their lives in defence of truth (Mark 8:35).

12. The fourth church in Christ's address was Thyatira. What rebuke did Jesus direct toward her?

Revelation 2:20 _____

Note: Jezebel was the wife of Ahab, king of Israel, during the time of Elijah (1Kings 16:29 - 22:40). She was a wicked, domineering and ambitious woman who hated the God of Israel. She led the nation into rebellion against God and set up the idolatrous practice of Baal worship.

Many modern day Christians do not bow down to, or reverence idols or images, yet most of these same Christians would hold worldly possessions more dear than their commitment and dedication to the God they profess to serve. This is just as much idolatry and just as condemned, as the worship of false gods (Colossians 3:5; 1John 2:15-17).

It is the non Biblical teachings and so called traditions of men that the Elijah message is designed to expose, alert the professed followers of Jesus Christ and call them into the light of the undistorted Truth.

The Church of Thyatira who accommodated the idolatrous Jezebel, had allowed the leaders and teachers to instruct her in doctrines that, while having the appearance of piety, seduced the people away from God. The members think they are on the road to heaven, but the false doctrine leads them to think that they are good enough and they do not have to overcome every last sin. The consequences of this complacent understanding is to be found wanting and condemned in the judgement (lessons 15, 16, 17 describe our responsibility during the judgement). "Wanting" see...Dan.5:27; Job 31:4, 5, 6; Psalm 62:9.

13. What happens to a church that is content with a mixture of Christ's doctrine and man's traditions and suppositions?

Isaiah 3:12; 9:16 _____

Matthew 23:15 _____

2 Timothy 4:3,4 _____

Note: The most deceptive and dangerous doctrine is that which is a blend of truth and error. Satan rarely appears as a demon from hell, he is usually manifest as an angel of light (2Cor.11:3, 4, 13, 14, 15).

14. Observing the tolerant attitude of Thyatira and their acceptance of worldly doctrine, by contrast, what will characterise the true servants of God?

Zephaniah 3:13 _____

Revelation 14:4, 5 _____

Note: The passage from Revelation relates to the saints of heaven and describes the character they possessed while on earth. Notice that they were not defiled with women and there was no guile in their mouths. A woman is a symbol for a church. A corrupt woman represents a corrupt church, while a pure woman symbolises a pure church (Revelation 17:1-6; Jeremiah 6:2). These faithful followers of Jesus are not tainted by man made doctrines and traditions, but walk as Jesus walked (1John 2:3-6).

The second point relates to "guile", guile is deceit, these saints have not embraced error and do not speak false doctrine and lies.

15. The church of Sardis had a name to live up to, they were said to be a living church. In Christ's address, what did He say was the true heart condition of Sardis?

Revelation 3: v.1 _____ v.2 _____

Note: Living up to a reputation may be the motivation behind some of the greatest lights in the church. Having lost their love for God and forgotten the sweet savour of the Gospel that won them to the faith, their religion degenerates into cold formalism with only a facade of piety. They are spiritually dead. Jesus warns that we should keep watch over ourselves that we not die, seeking Him to strengthen the faith that remains (Rev.3:3; Luke 12:35-46; 2 Cor.13:5).

16. What is the name of the sixth church in Christ's address?

Revelation 3:7 _____

Note: For this church there is no rebuke, only commendation. The church of Philadelphia is the living counterpart to the church of Smyrna. The faithful of Smyrna were martyred at the hand of persecution, those of Philadelphia are the saints who are living their faith and survive in the face of much worldly opposition and persecution. It is this Church into which the living remnant of God's people will belong; look at the glorious prospects of deliverance through all persecution, read Revelation 3:7-13, note v.10. Those faithful saints whom God mercifully lays in the dust, will join the triumphant Church of Smyrna and will rise to eternal life when Jesus comes. On the other hand, the Philadelphians are the people of God who will be alive when Jesus comes. These people are again referred to in Revelation 14:1-5.

17. What is written on the forehead of the saints?

Revelation 3:12; 14:1 _____

18. How does Jesus describe the condition of the seventh church, that of Laodicea?Revelation 3:15, 16, 17

Note: This church is in the most dangerous condition that a church can attain. She thinks that she is rich with the gifts of heaven, so righteous and untainted and does not discern her true condition, that of having fallen from grace. She is lost and does not recognise it, neither will she listen to the warnings of reproof.

A classical example of just such a church... is the Jews (John 8:37-47). In the passages of Revelation under consideration, the name "Jews" is used in a figurative sense to represent those who make a false profession. Notice that it is those who say they are Jews and are not, but do lie, that are the people who persecute the heritage of God (God's people) (Rev.2:9,10; 3:9). The persecutors are the people in the churches under the control of Satan notwithstanding their profession of being a Christian church (Matthew 23:27-36; John 8:44).

Please remember that these are the words of Christ, not the words of men. Let us not be like Laodicea and resist the straight testimony of the True Witness (Rev.3:14). It is always a shock to learn that what we have believed for a lifetime needs a few changes that we may be in harmony with the Head of the Church, our beloved Saviour, Jesus. With what then, are we to harmonise?... the WORD of GOD. Read it and ask God to give you the power to do what it says and you will know Jesus as never before. Guaranteed (Jeremiah 29:11-14; John 7:17). It is upon this, the *Word of God*, that Jesus cleanses his people and presents to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but it should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:26,27; John 17:8,11,14).

19. How did the Jews react to hearing that their religion was not as God centred as they thought?

Acts 6:8 - 7:60 (notice particularly 7:51 - 60) _____

20. Jesus has not yet abandoned Laodicea. What invitation has the Saviour laid open to her that she may live?

Revelation 3:18-19 _____

Note: "Gold" represents faith in God to deliver from every sin (1Peter 1:7; review lesson 4). "White raiment" represents the character of Jesus reproduced in His saints (Rev.19:8; see lesson 5, Q6). "Eyesalve" is what Jesus applies that our eyes may be open, that we may understand the word of God and discern between right and wrong (Ephesians 1:17-19; Psalm 119:18; Luke 24:27-31,44,45).

21. What will Christ do for those He loves?

Hebrews 12:3-11, Revelation 3:19 _____

Note: The reclamation from sin is not an easy process. It took the life of the Son of God and we too must be crucified with Christ, dead to self and born again, with the old life passed away and remade in the likeness of the Righteous (Galatians 2:20; 2Cor.5:17).

Jesus removes our cherished idols and darling sins, as gently as possible, using only that discipline necessary to accomplish the work (Lamentations 3:32,33). Though, to us, the disconnection from sin can seem to be a painful transition, but it is only difficult to let go of our sins when we want to hold on to them. Once we have made up our mind to obey God, the battle is over, Christ is our power and Satan is defeated. Having resolved to choose Christ, the forsaking of our sin becomes a delight, not a deprivation or sacrifice.

22. Having expressed the condition of the churches of Asia as recorded in Revelation, what is Christ's attitude now (1900 years later) toward the churches of the world, and what is His present view concerning the rules for those who desire to be counted among the true and faithful saints?

Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8 _____

23. If you or I have any of the unchristlike characteristics, as described in Christ's address to the seven churches, we can expect the same rebuke as was given to them. Why is this so?

Acts 10:34,35 _____

To some degree, we have all seen in our churches the unchristlike characteristics of the seven churches of Asia, as related to us by Jesus. Does this mean that our church is lost? Does it mean that you and I are lost? To the one who earnestly wants to serve Jesus and follow in His steps, these revelations would cause him to face some serious self examination and afflict his soul. "Where do I stand" should be the cry of everyone that names the name of Christ.

In our next lesson we shall see the outstretched hand of Jesus and the hope He offers to all who would follow Him, for He has pledged....

Not one honest soul will be lost

(Joel 2:32)