**WHY THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

By Walter Guy

What is the significance of the letters to the seven churches found in Revelation chapter two and three? Since the Book of Revelation is primarily about end time events why are the issues of these seven ancient churches addressed? Obviously this is a matter of great significance to the Lord or He would not have made this a part of the end-time information He provided. Therefore it is important that we understand the “what and the why” of Christ’s message to these assemblies.

First a little background about the founding of these churches would be helpful. Their location was in what was called Macedonia, and it was the apostle Paul who was directed by the Lord in a dream to go there rather than to where he had planned – Acts 16:6-10. The result of Paul’s missionary efforts in this region was the formation of these seven assemblies of believers. This is the area now known as western and south western Turkey, an area then referred to as Asia Minor.

What is interesting to note is that none of these churches exist today as this entire region succumbed to the invasion of Islam, falling victim to the Muslim conquest by the sword around the ninth century. (Could this be the fulfillment of Jesus’s warning to the church at Ephesus that except they repent He would remove their candle stick from its place – Revelation 2:5?)

Why was the apostle John directed of the Lord to address each of these letters “to the angel of” each named church. Preachers and teachers have tried to say that the angel refers to the pastor of each church. However, if this was so then word pastor or shepherd would have been used instead of angel. The word *angel* means “messenger”, and the reason angel is used is so that it does not identify a person, a title of a man, or a position in the church. Each letter is a message to the assembly of believers in that particular city to deal with their particular issues. A further reason why angel is used as the addressee to each assembly is because the message is also to the church throughout the entire church age. Each message identifies issues that manifested in those assemblies and apply to the church as a whole throughout history which is why these letters are incorporated in the Book of Revelation.

The emphasis is on the message provided through the spiritual messenger (angel). The proof that these messages are for believers throughout the entire church age is found in the final verse of each letter which states, *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”*. Note that the messages are for the churches, plural, not limited to that single specific assembly in that city.

Since these messages apply even today we need to consider just what it was that had Jesus so alarmed about what those ancient assemblies were doing. Instead of breaking down each separate church in those cities, we need to consider the aggregate of all the issues addressed to find out what it is that should not be manifesting in the church today.

First we should understand that nothing we do is hidden from the Lord with regard to what we do in our individual lives and as assembled together in our church services. Each letter begins with the Lord saying, *“I know thy works”*; it can’t be any more clear than that! Where there is credit to be given for what they do that is right, He gives it by acknowledging what little faith remains, their efforts, their patience, and their steadfastness in persecution and opposition. He also encourages them to continue and even excel in those areas.

However, the Lord has very serious issues that He specifically identifies and warns them about, instructing them to repent. It is these issues as recorded in Revelation that also apply to the church today; issues that MUST be dealt with or the same consequences that He warned them about will also apply to those who engage is such activity today.

Jesus addressed the following: 1) False Ministers, ie: apostles, prophets, preachers, teachers, etc. 2) False Doctrines - of both man and demons, (yes, doctrines that come directly from the devil). These abound in churches today and are in every man-made denomination and independent assembly. 3) False Rituals, Practices and Observances – for example, consider our “religious” holidays which have pagan origins and are of the devil. 4) False Worship and Idolatry – referred to in scripture as “fornication”. 5) Occultism – in various forms as a result of believing and observing things that are not Biblical such as divination, false prophesying, etc. 6) Lost Love – or affection that is misdirected from the Lord to something or somebody else – for many Christians their church is the focus and center of their life instead of Christ. They fail to realize that the church is the by-product of a relationship with Christ, not Christ being the by-product of their relationship with their church. 7) Materialism – self-indulgence and preoccupation with the things of this world rather than the Kingdom of God. 8) Lack of Faith – dependence on man, government and something other than trust and dependence in Him and His Word. (This includes utilizing books written by men that are not scriptural and true and are in abundance today.)

Lastly, is the creation of man’s carnal institutions rather than what God has ordained. There are two churches in the world today; the one Christ is building, and the other one that man is building. It depends on who is in control, who directs the affairs and efforts, and who gets the recognition and the glory. The church that man is building is referred to by this writer as the I.R.S. – the Institutionalized Religious System, and it reflects man’s personality and human interests and traits. Whereas the church Jesus is building reflects the personality of Christ which is seen in His people – His church. Unfortunately, much of Christ’s church is involved in man’s church because people have not matured in the Lord enough to discern what is of God and what is of man or the devil. Think about it!

In His letters to the churches, Jesus warns of the consequences for failure to repent and return to full faith and true worship.

John 4:23-24 *– But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

Christians – it is time to get serious with your faith and worship and stop playing church. It is time to really be the church that He is coming for – living a life for Christ, not for self.

Ephesians 5:25b-27 – ….*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

Romans 13:11-14 – *And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts*

The church and its believers need to repent and change before we can expect our nation to come to repentance.

1 Peter 4:17 – *For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

It begins with the church to set the example. The main reason that our nation, and the world is in moral decline is because the church has lost its power to positively influence the world and bring the needed change to righteousness as did the early church which turned the world upside down. The early church paid the price; the present day church seems unwilling to pay the price but prefers to dwell in its own self-indulgent bless me doctrines. The church today suffers from the conditions that Jesus identified in those seven ancient churches. Now you can understand why the letters to those seven churches was included in the Book of Revelation that tells us about these end-times. It is “high time” to wake up to true righteousness and be the light of the world.

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It is also time to heed the words of our Lord Jesus Christ to the church as recorded for us in Revelation Chapter Two and Three.

*“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”.*