

I. Introducing the 7 Churches of Revelation (Rev. 1:4, 11, 19-20)



- A. Biblical exegesis of the word “Church” - The Greek word "*ekklesia*," is used 115 times in the New Testament, and in most bibles, it is always translated as "church" (except in Acts 19:32-41). It is my opinion that a far better translation would be assembly, or congregation. Through the eyes of Jesus, His church is the people in this city who know and love Him. He does not see buildings He sees hearts.
1. It's important that we incorporate into our study that these churches were revealed to John as menorahs. The Menorah was a seven-branched candle or lampstand beaten out of a solid piece of gold, that served as one of the sacred vessels in the Holy Temple. It stood in the southern part of the Temple and was lit every day by the High Priest. Only pure, fresh olive oil of the highest quality was suitable to light the Menorah. John would have rightly understood this as a depiction of God's Israel. (Ex. 25:31-40, Zec. 4:2)

B. 4 Biblical Ways to Apply the 7 Letters

1. ***Individually***: The first way that we apply the letters is individually, to inspire wholehearted obedience and wholehearted love. When I read these letters, and I take it personally, not just as a preacher for something to say, but wanting to understand it for my own heart.
2. ***Historically***: The letters were first written to seven actual churches in John's generation to address their spiritual condition and to encourage them. You can still go and see some of these historical cities today. There is much insight to be had when you understand these cities in their historical context. Some teachers also see parallels of the spiritual conditions of the seven churches of Asia in the first century to the spiritual conditions of successive periods in the history of God's people.
3. ***Universally***: The letters were to benefit the church from the time they were given 2,000 years ago until today. They were written to equip local churches to walk corporately in these truths together. Jesus spoke to individuals ("he" who has an ear), then applied it to a group ("churches").
4. ***Eschatologically***: The letters are to prepare the end-time Church for the events of Rev. 6-19. Eschatological, is the theological term for the end times. This view uses the letters to prepare the end time church for the events in the book of Revelation.

II. Structure of the Letters

- A. The 7 pastoral letters that Jesus writes to His churches contain certain common elements of structure. The structure is made up of 5 different parts.
 1. **Revelation of Jesus' Identity** - First, Jesus calls attention to specific aspects of His own Majesty and Glory. These identities are not random. They equip each church to stand in the light of the unique pressures that hinder the fullness of love and maturity in them. It is no coincidence that the first thing Jesus does when addressing His people is to get them to focus on who He is.

2. **Affirmation and Edification** - Jesus gives affirmation for faithfulness. He lets us know what He esteems. He is making a point to say, “This touches My heart, that you are being true to this.” This causes our hearts to soar with love and bolsters them to overcome anything that hinders us from Him. This also gives us insight into what moves His heart, and what He wants.
 3. **Correction Provoking Depth of Love** - Five of the seven churches are given corrections. These areas that He corrected are issues that are present in the church today. It is my opinion that these specific areas of compromise and immaturity are going to increase in intensity as we approach the Day of the Lord. We do not want these areas in our own lives or in our ministries. If they are, we want to lay hold of the grace of God and the Word of God to correct these issues in our lives. The correction of Jesus in these letters applies to the churches’, “living condition” of love, not their “legal position” of eternal life through His sacrifice.
 4. **Exhortation to Respond** – He gives an exhortation of how we should respond, of what He wants us to do, and some action steps to take. Though He is the “Almighty,” He reaches out in mercy and gentleness, He invites us to come up higher and overcome hindrances. Often, there is an element of warning in these action steps. When He addresses compromise in our lives it is because of how toxic they are to our hearts. He knows if we continue in compromise, spiritual disease and death will grow searing our consciousness and dulling our hearts.
 5. **Promise for Overcomers** – The final element is the promise to the overcomers. In all seven letters, He pauses and gives a particular promise for them if they overcome the area they were being challenged in or exhorted to lay hold of. If they obeyed to partner with His grace, they had unique rewards associated with obeying those particular exhortations. Eternal rewards are very real and equip people to persevere. Not just persevere against persecution, but to persevere in obedience. They help us keep steady, to keep signing back up, to go wholeheartedly for the Lord.
- B. “To the Angel”- Another common element of each letter is that John is to address the “angel” of each one of these churches. I believe the angel refers to the apostolic leader over that church in that city. The word, angel, can mean “a heavenly being,” but it is the exact same word translated, “messenger.” It is my opinion that we should understand this as a human messenger. I do not think John was given a message to give an angelic being over that city.

III. Church of Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7)

- A. Historical Context - When this letter was written, the city of Ephesus was a thriving metropolis with eloquent walkways and booming businesses. It's population was about 250,000, which would have made it the 4th largest city in the Ancient World. The city had a flourishing seaport, and was strategically positioned at the intersection of many major Roman roads. These roads went throughout Asia Minor and the rest of the Roman world. These aspects helped give it such great wealth and popularity.
- B. Biblical Context - Paul founded the church on his 2nd missionary journey while on his way to Antioch. He then returned there two or three years later and remained for another three years (his 3rd journey). This was his base for evangelizing Asia Minor (Acts 19:10). Later on, the leadership work there was carried on by Timothy. Then, after Paul's death (approx. AD 66), John arrived in the city and began his ministry there. He remained there until his exile to the island of Patmos. About 40 years passed between the founding of the church and Jesus' letter to them. It is the traditional understanding that the largest revival in all the early church history took place there. (Acts 18-19, 1 Tim. 1:3)
- C. The Letter to the church of Ephesus
1. The Revelation of Jesus - He wants them to meditate on His identity as the One who holds them in his right hand and walks in the midst of His people. He holds, supports, directs, protects, and anoints His servants. He is deeply involved with His churches. His longing is to walk with us in intimacy as he walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden.
 2. The Affirmation and Edification - It is clear from these verses the doctrine of the Church in Ephesus was sound and accurately rooted in divine truth. They knew how to labor, persevere, and discern those who would come into their midst attempting to deceive them into receiving another Gospel. False teaching was prominent while Timothy was ministering in the city. (1 Tim. 1:3)

- a) Doctrine of Nicolaitans - The doctrine of the Nicolaitans was a belief that is based upon an error in the recognition of the mercy and grace of God as the grounds of salvation. It makes the fatal mistake that man can freely partake in sin because personal righteousness is not required for salvation. This teaching is dangerous because, as we give ourselves to sin and compromise it sears our conscience and dulls our hearts and minds. Nicolaitans held to the freedom of the flesh and sin, and teaching that the deeds of the flesh had no effect upon the health of the soul and consequently no relation to salvation.
3. Correction provoking Love - Ephesus' doctrine and leadership dynamics were strong and very biblically sound, but they let it replace their heart. Their doctrinal priority replaced their cultivation of love for Jesus. Positioning themselves for encountering God's love is the first and highest priority in the life of a believer. Soundness in doctrine does not necessarily add up to love for Jesus. Though He exhorted them for their sound doctrine, they had their priorities wrong. (Mat. 22:36-38)
4. Exhortation to Respond – Jesus calls them to repent from this and return to the freshness they had when they first accepted Jesus as their Savior. They have lost sight of the first and greatest commandment by turning to their own intellectual intuition and forgetting why they are considered Christians in the first place. If we are not being motivated by love, then the only other motivating factors are personal gain and/or an appeasement to God mentality driven by fear and condemnation. Obedience to God does a person no good unless it is done from a circumcised heart longing to be more intimate with God (Rom. 2:25-29, 1 Cor. 13:2, Gal. 3:19-29)
5. Promise for Overcomers - It is to those who overcome through love that will eat from the fruit of the tree of life. There is a connection between the tree of life and man's rule over the earth. Adam in his un-fallen state had access to this tree, but when he fell God kept him from it. In the future believers will have access to it again. The tree of life is not simply a symbol for eternal life alone but also represents the cosmic center of reality where eternal life is present and available, and where God dwells, clearly a promise for the enjoyment and fullness of eternal life. To eat of the Tree is to enjoy all that the life of the world to come has in store for redeemed humanity. (Gen. 2-3, Rev. 22:2, 14)