

A Journey Into the Heavens
Ephesus - The Cold Orthodox Church
September 23, 2015

The Key to interpreting the book of Revelation is found in the basic outline in 1:19. After John's vision, he was commanded to write in three tenses:

1. The _____ - "Which Thou Hast Seen"
2. The _____ - "The Things Which Are"
3. The _____ - The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter"

The *things which thou hast seen* was the vision of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1:9-18. This introduces the main _____ of the book - The Lord Jesus Christ. *The things which are* refers to the letters to the seven churches addressed in chapters 2 and 3.

The churches are significant for several reasons. First, at the time John wrote, they were actual churches in real towns in Asia Minor. These seven churches were neither the largest nor most prominent of John's day. The churches at Rome, Jerusalem, and Antioch were surely more prominent and larger than most of these. Only two of these seven churches are previously mentioned in the New Testament - _____ in Ephesians 1:1 and _____ in Colossians 2:1. These churches were probably chosen because they collectively represented all churches of John's day, as well as in subsequent generations. The characteristics of one particular church of these seven may seem to dominate in a particular generation, but churches similar to any one of the seven can be found during any period in history.

Second, these letters were written to all churches of all times.. Just as the letters to the church at Rome (Romans) and the church at Corinth (I&II Corinthians) were originally written to a specific local church, they are also intended for churches everywhere throughout _____. It should be noted that at the close of each letter is the exhortation to "hear what the Spirit saith unto the CHURCHES." Therefore, it is obvious each letter, though originally written to a particular church, is to be read and heeded by all churches.

Third, each church definitely represents a particular type of _____. We can all find ourselves in one of the seven churches!

The fourth significance of these churches is much debated, but many believe these seven churches represent successive _____ of church history. This view holds that the spiritual characteristics Christ finds in His churches form a model of church history from the first century to the end of the age. We will begin our study of the seven churches with the church at Ephesus (2:1-7).

I. The _____ (2:1)

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write... The person sending the letter is Christ; John is simply the scribe who writes it down, as this book as with all Scripture is inspired by the very breath of God! At the time this letter was written, Ephesus was a flourishing city in an excellent commercial location on the western side of Asia Minor. It had a top notch harbor and was known as a major marketplace for world _____. Since the harbor could accommodate the largest ships in the world, Ephesus grew to become one of the largest and wealthiest cities in the world.

Ephesus was also the home of one of the _____ of the Ancient World - the temple of Diana (Greek, Artemis.) Diana was believed to be the mother goddess of the world. The Greeks dedicated the city to her and in the latter part of the 4th century erected for her the greatest temple in the world. Constructed of glittering Persian marble, it was 420 feet long (one and a half blocks) and 260 feet wide. It had 130 hand-carved columns, each standing 60 feet tall. Thirty-seven of these columns were studded with jewels and gold. Visitors from around the world were dazzled by this temple.

Diana was the goddess of fertility, and reproduction, so the worship of Diana was _____ beyond description. The temple had scores of priestesses who were nothing more than temple prostitutes who aided in the sexual worship of Diana.

One of the major commercial enterprises in Ephesus was the production of silver images of Diana. People came by the thousands from all over the world to the temple, where peddlers sold these images as good luck charms to keep people healthy and to protect them while they traveled.

Paul had visited Ephesus a little more than _____ years before the book of Revelation was written (Acts 18&19). He stayed there about three years, and during His ministry a revival broke out. (Acts 19:20) Due to the revival breaking out in Ephesus in the book of Acts we see that the worship of Diana was greatly affected and so were those that prospered in preparing the statues. (Acts 19:24-29) The riots that broke out in the city because of the revival and because of Paul's message forced Paul's departure, but the results of his three years of ministry continued to have an impact in Ephesus!

II. The _____ (2:2-3;6)

There was much about this church to commend. First the Lord praises them for their works and labor. The Greek word translated labor means "toil to the point of _____." The Christians in the Ephesian church put their very hearts and souls into their service to Christ even to the point of exhaustion.

This church was also commended for its patience, or endurance, as well as for its discernment and rejection of false teachers (2:2).

In addition, in 2:3 they are commended for not growing weary in the Lord's work, and in 2:6 for their hatred of the Nicolaitanes. The identity of this group is uncertain, however some believe the name refers to the exaltation of clergy over laity. This is concluded because of the origin of the word meaning "laity-conqueror." Others believe them to be followers of a heretic named Nicolas, and still others believe it is the heresy of compromise associated with the doctrine of Balaam in 2:14-15. However, no one knows for sure who the Nicolaitanes were.

Thus, it can be concluded the church of Ephesus had faithfully served the Lord since its inception by Paul more than 40 years earlier. From these facts alone, one would think this church was a model and completely pleased the Lord. However this was not the case as we see in...

III. The _____

Even though the church at Ephesus looked great from the outside-they were of sound doctrine, they could spot sin, they seemed to be doing all the right things-our Lord's all-penetrating eyes saw through the sham and recognized immediately ... thou has left thy _____ (2:4). Since it was just over 40 years since Paul had started the church, probably most of the Ephesian Christians were now second generation believers, and though they had retained their sound doctrine and faithful service, it had all become mechanical and _____.

The Lord wants not only our heads and hands, but our _____ as well. So how does you lose your first love? It is usually a gradual process that involves us becoming complacent and apathetic in our Christian life and making a routine out of our church attendance and service, or when our first love is replaced and we do not even realize it is happening.

IV. The _____

The command is basically to remember, repent, and return. Most of us remember that warm relationship with Christ we had when we first became Christians. Then, sometimes, as the years go by, we get all the right doctrines and right mechanics of the Christian life, but in the process our love for Christ becomes cold. When this happens we must follow the 3 R's for renewing our first love!

1. _____ - Psalm 105:5
2. _____ - The Lord wanted the Ephesians to say, "Lord, I am sorry. I want that first love again." This is exactly what every Christian must do that has fallen away from Christ!
3. _____ - The Ephesians were to go back and do what they did for the reasons they did them in the beginning.

The consequences of not remembering, repenting, and returning are found in Revelation 2:5. The Ephesians apparently did not repent because Ephesus no longer _____. In this city where Paul once labored night and day for three years, no testimony or light of Jesus can now be seen. Mohammedanism has taken over that part of the world, and Ephesus is nothing more than a heap of ruins.

IV. The _____

In each of the seven letters, everyone with an ear is called upon to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. This is a clear indication the message was not exclusively for the local church being addressed but for all Christians, as well as lost persons.

The "overcomers" in 2:7 are not the spiritually elite some teach. Instead the Bible clearly tells us who the overcomers are in I John 5:5. Sin excluded the human race from the tree of life, beginning in Genesis 3:22-24. However, when people turn to Christ in love and invite Him into their hearts, Jesus will allow them "to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." (2:7)

What are you doing with Christ today? Has Christianity become Mechanical and routine in your life, have you left your first love? Return to Him today and renew that relationship and _____ your love for Christ!!