

The Revealing Of The Church's Future

Part 3

Revelation 1:4-6, 10-11 [NIV] *“John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father, to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.” ... “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.”*

The glorified Christ instructs John to send a message to the churches.

Christ uses the vision He gave to His servant John to transmit a message of warning and concern to every Christian congregation everywhere.

The Son of Man is a person of His word, He said He will return, and He will.

That day of His return will be a day of mourning for those who did not prepare, for those who refused to believe what Christ said.

Revelation 18:1-3 [NIV] *“After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendour. With a mighty voice he shouted: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.”*

Babylon refers not just to one ancient city, but as meditation on the scriptures reveal, it is depictive of a world economy, a system of rule and government which is corrupt and influenced by evil.

Revelation 18:4-5 [NIV] *“Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.”*

We are warned by Christ through this vision given to John to separate ourselves from this evil system so we are not influenced by it, and receive with it the wrath of Christ’s judgement.

Revelation 18:6-10 [NIV] *“Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, ‘I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.’ Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. “When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: “‘Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!’”*

In a very short period of time this whole corrupt system will fall apart and destroy itself for it is based on pride and greed.

Revelation 18:11-19 [NIV] *“The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more, cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory,*

costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendour have vanished, never to be recovered.' The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!"

Note that among the goods being traded as part of the economy was bodies [people selling organ parts for transplants and scientific experimentation] and humans sold as slaves [young boys and girls sold into prostitution].

In total contrast it will be a day of great rejoicing for those who heed Christ's words and prepare themselves for that day.

Revelation 18:20 [Message Bible] *"Oh Heaven, celebrate! And join in, saints, apostles, and prophets! God has judged her [the Babylonian system]; every wrong you suffered from her has been judged."*

True justice has returned to the world.

Revelation 19:1-5 [Message Bible] *"I heard a sound like massed choirs in Heaven singing, "Hallelujah! The salvation and glory and power are God's, his judgements true, his judgements just. He judged the great Whore who corrupted the earth with her lust. He avenged on her the blood of his servants." Then, more singing: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her burning billows up to high Heaven forever and ever and ever." The Twenty-four Elders and the Four Animals fell to their knees and worshipped God on his Throne, praising, "Amen! Yes! Hallelujah!" From the Throne came a shout, a command: "Praise our God, all you his servants, all you who fear him, small and great!"*

A time of great rejoicing in heaven and in the church of Christ, His Body on earth.

John wrote what He saw and what He heard in the heavenly scene.

John detailed the judgements of God that would ultimately take place on earth.

The messages Christ conveyed through John to the churches were brief but very significant.

As we study these messages we are confronted with the questions:-

Why seven churches?

Why were the older churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome and Corinth not included?

We are finite, and do not know the full answer to these questions.

But we do know two things.

a) The Holy Spirit was dictating this message that would ultimately convey God's obligation to the entire Christian community throughout the whole world.

b) We also understand the use of the number seven elsewhere in scripture.

The number seven suggests wholeness and completeness, therefore possibly indicating the representative examples of the entire believing body of Christ on the earth.

These churches in Asia Minor were especially dear to John. No doubt he had assisted in their founding and for years had lovingly nurtured their spiritual growth.

Let us then consider the messages given to these seven churches.

The church in Ephesus.

Revelation 2:1-7 [NIV] *“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: **You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.** But you have this in your favour: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”*

The church in Smyrna

Revelation 2:8-11 [NIV] *“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty, yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. **Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”*

The church in Pergamum

Revelation 2:12-17 [NIV] *“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live, where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city, where Satan lives. **Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.** Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.”*

Balaam – today we would call the teaching of Balaam “*modern rationalism*”. It is justified to break the law of God if the end product seems to be of benefit.

Nicolaitans – to compromise with paganism to allow “*Christians*” to take part in some social or religious activities of the Pagan society to avoid embarrassment or persecution because of their beliefs.

The church in Thyatira

Revelation 2:18-29 [NIV] *“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: **You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of***

*food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that **I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.** Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations, 'He will rule them with an iron sceptre; he will dash them to pieces like pottery', just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. [Fellowship with Christ, **Revelation 22:16**]. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

The problem was that some had allowed wrong teaching to lead them into wrong actions. They had looked to a human leader rather than the Word of God as their guide in life.

The church in Sardis

*Revelation 3:1-6 [NIV] "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, **for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.** Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

The problem was they accepted Christ's sacrifice and teaching intellectually, in their mind but it had not reached their heart, was not the driving force of their lives.

To accept Christ's sacrifice is fine but what does it drive us to do out of true gratitude?

Romans 12:1-2 [NIV] *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

God's mercy towards us should drive us to become a "living sacrifice" and to seek to change our "mind set".

The church in Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7-13 [NIV] *"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no-one can shut, and what he shuts no-one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no-one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars, I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon. **Hold on to what you have, so that no-one will take your crown.** Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

The importance of enduring to the end faithfulness is a quality God seeks in us as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The church in Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-21 [NIV] *“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. **I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot.** I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. **I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see.** Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”*

Zeal for God’s Work and way of life is what was lacking in these Christians.

They had accepted the credited righteousness of God as a result of their faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. But were **not** preparing their wedding garment.

Revelations 19:7-8 [NIV] *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”* (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

This wedding garment is woven from the righteous sacrificial acts of good for those in need.

Becoming a *“living sacrifice”* out of love, laying down their lives [time] for the benefit of others.

From these brief messages it is very apparent that even in the early period of Church history, congregations were in need of correction and encouragement.

Thankfully God knows how to give perfectly both correction and encouragement, from the basis of love.

These passages of scripture give us a sweeping view of what Christianity is and what the churches are for.

Christianity is **not** just another religious persuasion as defined by a group of religious leaders.

Christianity is what the prophets of God, the seers and sages and apostles said it is as they were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak and write, that is the Holy Christian Bible.

Christianity is defined **only** by Holy Spirit inspired scripture.

We become Christians, disciples of Christ, as we imbibe and apply God’s Word in our lives.

God’s Word is the beating heart of the Holy faith that causes us to mature as Christians.

God’s Word must therefore be the driving force of our lives.

It is in God’s Word that our heart interest must be for it is in God’s Word that we have our hope of an eternal future.

Remember that God’s Word is available to us in two forms.

a) **Christ the Word of God** who is also our Saviour and High Priest.

John 1:1, 14 [NIV] *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” ... “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

b) **The printed Word of God**, the Holy scriptures, the Christian Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 [NIV] *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ.

2 Peter 1:19-21 [NIV] *“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, **but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**”*

The Holy Spirit, the Author of all scripture, will bring scripture to our remembrance as needed.

John 14:26 [NIV] *“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

The Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth through the Holy scriptures.

John 16:13 [NIV] *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, **and he will tell you what is yet to come.**”*

The Father – initiated the idea of creating children to be the object of His love.

Christ by expressing God’s love for us made it possible for us to become a Christian through His sacrifice.

The Holy Spirit is the person in the Triune Godhead who transforms us from a born-again from above babe in Christ to a mature created son of God, and this He does through the Holy scriptures that He inspired to be written.

Our relationship with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Truth, is critical to our maturing as a created child of God.

For the church as a whole Revelations emphasises two things:

- a) The divine authority given to our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and the only non-created Son of God.
- b) The power and the illumination the church needs to receive from the Holy Spirit. These will be expanded in future studies of Revelation along with a doctrine not always recognised. The authority given to the saints the believing created children of God.