

NCC Roots Spring 2020...7 Churches and the Rapture...led by Terry Cooper

The 7 Churches Session #2....2/19/2020 (Context and Ephesus)

- Let's begin with the thundering voice of God giving specific instructions to the Apostle John.

Revelation 1:10-11 (NLT2)

¹⁰ It was the Lord's Day, and I was worshiping in the Spirit. Suddenly, I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet blast. ¹¹ It said, "Write in a book everything you see, and send it to the seven churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

- I told you last week that the Gospels are filled with the words and actions of Jesus, but this is the only place in the Bible where Jesus specifically dictates a letter.
- Write down everything John. Write down the things now and the things of the future...write it all down for the people now and the people of the future generations.

Revelation 1:19-20 (NLT2)

¹⁹ "Write down what you have seen—both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen. ²⁰ This is the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

- The 7 stars in the right hand of Jesus are special angels assigned to the churches or the pastors/leaders of those churches.
- The 7 gold lampstands are the 7 churches (Jesus in the middle).
- Before we begin reading about the first of the seven churches (Ephesus) we need to understand something about the seven churches.
- These 7 churches were actual churches with actual people in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey).
- These 7 churches also represent a spiritual picture as well. They represent all the churches from every generation since the time of Christ and they also represent all the Christians from every generation since the time of Christ.
- So, as we read these 7 letters, we must apply them specifically to the church of that day and today. Specifically, to those people then and to our people now.

Dr. Reagan classifies the 7 churches like this:

1. Ephesus-Legalistic
 2. Smyrna-Persecuted
 3. Pergamum-Liberal
 4. Thyatira-Pagan or Cultic
 5. Sardis-Dead
 6. Philadelphia-Alive
 7. Laodicea-Worldly and Apathetic
- Remember these 7 churches could be read in order and applied in order since the time of Christ.
 - Example the first church, Ephesus, operated in a very legalistic time of church history and the last church (Laodicea) operates in a very worldly and apathetic time of history...today.

- But there are also people with these 7 characteristics in every church since the time of Christ.
- What I'm trying to say is there is both a spiritual and a physical element to these 7 church stories.
- Now, we can start with the first church letter of Jesus to Ephesus.

Revelation 2:1 (NLT2)

¹ “Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands:

- Who is the letter written to: the angel of the church in Ephesus (actual angel or pastor/leader)?
- Who is the letter from...Jesus!
- What's in Jesus' right hand...seven stars which are the leaders of the church and He's walking among the seven lampstands which are the churches themselves.
- Holding high and walking among...He's here now...not far away (the church needs to know).
- Jesus is holding high the very thing/people that He is sending the letter to.
- Can you see how this connects to what Jesus told Peter before the cross?

Matthew 16:18 (NLT2)

¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build **my church**, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.

Matthew 28:18-20 (NLT2)

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: **I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**”

Ephesians 4:15-16 (NLT2)

¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, **growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.** ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

- It's Jesus' church, Jesus' bride and He built it. He holds it together and now... *the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands*
- He sends instructions to it for all future generations...He's talking to us right now...what will He tell Ephesus and us?

Revelation 2:2-3 (NLT2)

² “I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. ³ You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.

- He knows everything...every little secret...He knows!
- He's watching the church as He walks among the seven golden lampstands.

Romans 2:14-16 (NLT2)

¹⁴ Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. ¹⁵ **They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts**, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.

¹⁶ And this is the message I proclaim—that **the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life.**

- He knows everything, every secret thing...this is why confession is so important...He already knows.
- If He already knows, why do I need to confess.

1 John 1:8-9 (NLT2)

⁸ If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

- Coming clean is confession...just tell the truth and yes Jesus already knows the truth.
- Confession is to agree with God...we are sinful...and confession brings our healing and cleansing.
- He also knows this... ***I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance.***
- Jesus is walking among the lampstands then and now and He knows about our sin and He knows our hard work and patient endurance. He sees the good and the bad in us...He knows!
- He knows it's not easy...it wasn't easy for Him either.

Matthew 26:37-39 (NLT2)

³⁷ He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed.

³⁸ He told them, ***“My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”*** ³⁹ He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, ***“My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”***

- He also knows about tolerance, the proper application of tolerance and the improper application of tolerance...listen carefully church (NASB & NIV also use the word “tolerate”).

Revelation 2:2-3 (NLT2)

² ***“I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. ³ You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.***

- The church doesn't tolerate that which is not true or that which is evil.
- The church doesn't tolerate liars...why...because the Truth operates only in Truth.
- The liar will not tolerate the Truth and the Truth cannot tolerate the liar...they are opposing forces and opposing spirits.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (NLT2)

¹⁴ Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? ¹⁵ What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever?

¹⁶ And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "**I will live in them and walk among them.** I will be their God, and they will be my people." ¹⁷ Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you.

¹⁸ And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

- The modern American church is struggling with this tolerance thing.
- Standing on the truth is hard work today... *I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance.* It's hard to walk against the flow...to stand against the darkness.
- Now, Jesus makes a specific complaint against the Ephesus church.
- Remember, these letters are not just to a specific church 2000 years ago, but to all churches in all future generations as well.

Revelation 2:4-5 (NLT2)

⁴ "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!

⁵ Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.

- *You don't love me or each other as you did at first*...something has changed in the body and perhaps they didn't even know it had changed.
- Can you love Jesus and not love the church?
- Do you love the church...that's not a statement about an organization or a building, but a people?
- Do you love the people of the church...do you love spending time with them?
- Somebody once said...church would be great if it weren't for all those people.
- I think they didn't know how far they had fallen from the truth and that's worrisome to me.

Luke 11:35 (NLT2)

³⁵ Make sure that the light you think you have is not actually darkness.

- Jesus' letter is not to condemn, but to bring the church to repentance and freedom.
- But what if you don't repent...what would happen then?
- *I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.*
- Is that possible, would He really do that, or it just a motivational bluff?
- Right after the challenge to refocus and repent...Jesus give them an encouraging word.

Revelation 2:6 (NLT2)

⁶ But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do.

- So much for tolerance...Jesus hates the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans...this is to their favor!
- Do you know who the Nicolaitans were...what was their evil?
- The Nicolaitans were **believers** who had compromised their faith in order to enjoy some of the sinful practices of Ephesian society, including idolatry and sexual immorality. The name "Nicolaitans" is roughly the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word for "Balaamites." Balaam was a prophet who induced the Israelites to carry out their lustful desires (see [2:14](#); [Numbers 31:16](#)).
- Does any of this sound relevant to the American Church?

- Tolerance and Nicolaitans in the same letter to the same church.
- Does anyone have ears to hear what the Spirit of Christ is saying to the churches because that's the next verse?
- A warning and a Reward in the final statement of Jesus to the Ephesus church, and to us today.

Revelation 2:7 (NLT2)

⁷ “Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

- The warning... You must listen and understand.
- The reward... I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.
- There are 13 specific rewards offered to the 7 churches and this is only the first.
- Do you know why it comes with a warning...you can't live without this tree of life!
- The Tree of Life represents “Eternal Life” and you can't live without it.

Revelation 22:1-2 (NLT2)

¹ Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ² It flowed down the center of the main street. **On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.**

- **Summary...**Jesus is currently holding the church in his hand.
- Jesus is among us now and He knows everything we do...good or bad...He knows.
- Jesus knows it's hard work to persevere and endure the opposition and temptations.
- Jesus knows if we tolerate sin in order to go along with the world...He knows!
- Jesus knows the liars and Jesus knows those who hold to the truth...He will settle it one day soon.
- Jesus knows those who have suffered without quitting (Word and Name).
- Jesus knows if you don't love Him like you once did...He knows!
- Jesus knows if you love others the way you once did too...He knows!
- Jesus recommends that we all look down and see how far we are from where we began.
- Jesus tells us to turn around and then He connects this turn around to “works” not ideology.
- ***“But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! ⁵ Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first.***
- What do you think it means... ***If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.***
- Do you know why so many churches are failing...so many people are falling out of church?
- Jesus applauds the church that hates the sin of pretending...Nicolaitans were pretenders that actually went along with the dark world.
- Is anyone listening and what's at stake here anyway?
- ⁷ “Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.
- We will cover the next two churches next week (Smyrna and Pergamum).