**Jesus’ Letters to Churches**

Early in John’s Revelation, Jesus addresses seven churches in Asia; Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. These were real congregations with real commendations and problems, but I believe Jesus chose to address exactly seven for a reason. These churches are representative of local churches everywhere in every age who experience similar successes and failures. Here are three lessons we can learn by studying these letters.

**Our strengths don’t cancel our weaknesses.** In the cases of Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira, Jesus expressed appreciation for their efforts and perseverance, but followed up His praise with, “But I have this against you…” The good things they had accomplished did not negate the fact that they had lost some of their zeal or begun to tolerate false doctrine and immorality. Jesus appreciates the good we are able to accomplish, but He also expects us to take stock of our weaknesses, to repent and correct our mistakes.

**Faithful service in the face of difficulty is a life-long commitment.** In each of the seven letters, Jesus promises reward “to him who overcomes”. This life is fraught with illness, grief, adversity and persecution. That’s just the way it is. Jesus admonishes His disciples to “be faithful until death” and to “keep my deeds until the end” and to “hold fast what you have”. We overcome the world when we face the difficulties of life with grace and perseverance. Faithfulness until death doesn’t mean simply remaining faithful until I happen to die; It means remaining faithful even if my devotion to Christ causes my death. That is the level of commitment He expects.

**Ultimate judgment will be for individuals, not groups.** Jesus had some pretty stern criticism for both Thyatira and Sardis. But in both cases, He acknowledged that there were members who were striving to remain faithful and were not held accountable for the failings of others in their congregation. Whole congregations can be disavowed by Christ (removal of their lampstand – Revelation 2:5) and individuals may be responsible for the group’s rejection, but the judgment of Revelation 20 will focus on the individual, not groups. God’s “books” of every deed a person has done will be the basis of judgment and the only way for the bad stuff to be blotted out is by the blood of Jesus.

Every Christian must strive to walk in the Light as He is in the Light (1 John 1:7). We must be examining ourselves to ensure we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5) and confess our sins to God when we fail Him (1 John 1:9). If we do, we will be saved by the grace of God and the churches of which we are a part will glorify the One whose name we wear.

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