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### Church: Whence and Whither?

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# the church

*whence &  
whither?*

by  
CHESTER J. PADGETT

*m/c*  
as featured over  
broadcasts of

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant and important studies the Christian can make is that of Church History. This booklet is designed to enable the believer to trace through the history of the Christian Church using the inspired sketch of Revelation 2-3.

#### AN IMPORTANT STUDY

That this is an important study is emphasized by the fact that there is developing in the world today a WORLD CHURCH — a Church that will sooner or later envelop all denominations and religious groups in the world, and bring all men under her dominion (Rev. 13). No one will be able to escape dealings with the ecclesiastical despotism of the end times. Thus — Church History is pertinent to our times.

But this is not the only reason for the study of Church History. *All history is significant.* History is, in reality, "His Story." God is the Prime Mover in history; and in the actions and inter-actions of men the Almighty is working out His sovereign purpose and bringing all things to their predestinated end (Eph. 1:10). This is not an accidental world, nor an accidental universe; nor is the deterministic philosophy the answer to historical phenomena. The only answer is GOD! And the history textbook for the Christians is the Bible, the WORD OF GOD.

Again, the study of Church History is of value because a knowledge of the antecedents of the church enables the present-day Christian rightly to *explain the contemporary situation*, and thus church history, as well as all history is seen to follow the law of cause and effect, and to fit into a pattern of meaning.

Once more, Church History is of value to the student because from its study the believer can learn *many practical lessons*. Has the Church failed in the past? Then the present-day believer can profit by these mistakes and avoid them. Has the Church succeeded and triumphed in yester-year? Then let the contemporary Christian profit by this record and go and do likewise.

When a person studies Church History he becomes acquainted with the *finest personalities and the most brilliant minds of all time*. No other organization in history can boast of such illustrious sons and daughters as can the people of God. What other group in history can boast of a Noah, an Abraham, a Moses, a David, a Solomon, an Isaiah, a Paul, an Augustine, a Martin Luther, a John Calvin, a John Bunyan, a Charles Spurgeon! If the student is wise, some of this greatness will "rub off" on him, and this seems to be part of the purpose of God in giving and preserving the record (Romans 15:4).



One other thing — the study of Church History introduces the student to *many related areas of truth* which are invaluable to his intellectual equipment, especially in the service of Christ and the Church. He will follow the development of Christian Doctrine, the outline of Christian Ethics, the organizational development of the Church, the thrilling story of Christian Missions. Who would not become a better Christian with such information as this?

#### THE BASIS OF THE STUDY

The basis of our study will be Rev. 2-3. This fascinating and vastly significant portion of the Scriptures gives an inspired sketch, from the lips of the Son of God, of the progress of the Church from the time of its inception to the time of the Rapture.

In our study I will attempt to give a brief exposition of each of the seven letters included in Rev. 2-3, and then dip into the record of Church History and note how the Saviour's delineation coincides perfectly with the actual development of the Church through the centuries.

#### INTERPRETATION OF THE SEVEN LETTERS

Now, probably the first question to arise is this: How do we know that Rev. 2-3 is rightly interpreted in the light of the prophetic-historical method? The answer to this question is two-fold. In the first place the record of the entire book of the Revelation is *chronological*. Now, this fact is the very **KEY TO THE BOOK**. Revelation begins with an unveiling of "THE SON OF GOD" following His redemptive work, risen, ascended and exalted at the right hand of God as **THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH** (ch. 1). Then the record continues to give an unveiling of the **CHURCH IN HISTORY**, from the beginning to the Rapture (ch. 2-3); next comes the unveiling of **THE CHURCH IN GLORY**, Raptured and triumphant (chs. 4-5); following this comes the unveiling of events subsequent to the end of the Tribulation — the **RETURN OF CHRIST** (ch. 19); the **MILLENNIAL REIGN** (ch. 20); **THE GREAT WHITE THRONE** (ch. 20); **THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH** (chs. 21-22).

## CHAPTER II

### PRELUDE TO THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the Providence of God the chief divine purpose in the calling of Abraham and the building of the nation of Israel was accomplished, that is, the giving of the Old Testament Scriptures, and the provision of the Son of God, the son of David according to the flesh.

Now the time had come for the creation of the "new man" spoken of by Paul in Ephesians 2:15 — the international fellowship of believers, the further development in the plan of God of His Church. To this fellowship will be added, during the Millennial Kingdom, another vast company of the elect, and then, at the end of time, God will sum up all things in Christ, and the blessed family of God will inherit the eternal ages.

#### THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

There are several Scriptures of tremendous importance in throwing the light of God upon the founding and development of the Church in the New Testament dispensation. One of these is Matt. 16:13-18. In this passage Peter makes a comprehensive analytic and conclusive appraisal of the Lord Jesus Christ. His conclusion? That Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God!

In response to this God-given enunciation of the Apostle Peter, the Lord Jesus said, ". . . upon this rock I will build my church." Upon what rock? Peter? Of course not. Upon the rock of Christ's Deity. If there is any doubt in any mind about the Saviour's meaning, let that doubter refer to I Cor. 3:11. Here Paul clearly indicates that the foundation upon which the Church is built is Christ—*not Peter!*



### CHAPTER III

#### THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

A.D. 30-100

(Rev. 2:1-7)

One of the important points of interest in each of the seven letters addressed by the Lord Jesus to the churches is the title He reserves to Himself—a different one to each church, corresponding to the primary need or condition of that particular church.

#### THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

(Rev. 2:1)

In His letter to the church in Ephesus He speaks of Himself as “he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven candlesticks” (v. 1). In other words the Lord Jesus is the *Sovereign Master* of the ministers of the church, and He is the central figure and active Head of the Church.

The Lord Jesus alone has the right to universal acclaim in His Church as its Saviour, its Lord and Master. He is the only Head of the Church, and no man dares to seek to usurp this place of dignity and authority. How tragic that human church leaders have attempted through the centuries to exile the Son of God, and eclipse Him in the eyes of the whole world! Today millions of so-called Christians give more worship and veneration to the *mother of Jesus* and to the *Pope*, than they do to the Lord Jesus Christ!

#### CHRIST'S COMMENDATION OF THE EPHESIAN CHURCH

(Rev. 2:2, 3)

The church in Ephesus was an active church, a model church in many ways. The Saviour begins by indicating His careful observation of this Church—“I know thy works.” This refrain is given over and over in this section. The emphasis is on the *knowledge* Christ has of each of the churches, of the Church as a whole, and of each individual Christian's life! This is an encouraging truth on one hand. It teaches the believer that the Head of the Church does not permit anything done for Him and in His Name to go unnoticed. At the Judgment Seat of Christ (II Cor. 5:10; I Cor. 3:11-15) rewards will be given out to every faithful child of God.

On the other hand, the fact that Jesus knows the believer's works is a sobering truth. He knows our laziness, our slovenliness, our carelessness, our lack of sincere and sympathetic identity with the work that is closest to His heart—the great missionary program of the Church (Matt. 28:18-20). This, too, will be brought out at the Judgment Seat (I Cor. 3:11-15; II Cor. 5:10).

### A SPIRITUAL MEMBERSHIP

This Church had no room in its fellowship for those who were known opponents of the Christian way of life—“thou canst not bear them which are evil” (v. 2). What a monstrosity is a church that opens wide its membership to the unregenerate! Many churches are far more interested in loading their church rolls with names than they are in getting souls to Christ! It is true that the Church in the world will never be perfect, nor will its membership—no matter how carefully screened the candidates—be completely regenerate and fully spiritual. Matthew 13 makes this clear. But the Church must fulfill its responsibility in making reasonably sure that each person admitted to membership confesses the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

### A QUALIFIED LEADERSHIP

The church in Ephesus put their leaders to the test (v. 2). During the 70 years or so following the Saviour's death, resurrection, and ascension, there came many false leaders into the fellowship of the Church, claiming apostleship, and seeking the leadership of the people of God—but with ulterior motives and without the call of Christ!

The Apostle Paul dreaded the prospect of this development, which he knew to be inevitable. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul indicates his deep concern: “Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:17-18). Paul suspected, perhaps, that out of the church in Rome would come that scandalous system called the “Roman Catholic Church”—an ecclesiastical system fulfilling Paul's warning with amazing accuracy!

Again, when the Apostle called the Ephesian elders to meet with him in Miletus (Acts 20), he revealed his deep concern about the impending invasion of false teachers and false teaching in the Church he loved so well.

“For I know this,” he said, “after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (vv. 29-30).

The church of the Apostles (the Ephesian church) carefully checked each leader and repudiated those who proved to be false. This was to the credit of that Church as is indicated in the Saviour's commendation; and yet, as we shall see shortly, the roots of subsequent Romanism were already buried in the church in Ephesus, as in all other churches, and ultimately burst through to develop into the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Middle Ages!



#### A COOLING DEVOTION

The believers in the church in Ephesus persevered in spite of every obstacle and hindrance (v. 3). The management of the church was not an easy task even under the close personal supervision of the Apostles, but the church remained true to its calling, to its doctrine, and in its daily living. But there was a tragic weakness inherent in this church. Jesus said, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (v. 4).

This indicates that there was a tendency on the part of the leaders and the people to get their eyes off Christ and get them fixed on someone or something else! Here is the beginning of a lessening devotion to Christ and the substitution of another object of devotion.

What causes a Christian to leave his first love? There are many things, but the main problem of the believers in Ephesus seems to be that they were just *too busy*. Like Martha, the Christian can cumber himself with much serving and neglect the part that Mary chose, namely, sitting at the Saviour's feet and learning of Him.

The steps back to Christ are long and tedious, but they must be taken (v. 5). They include a vivid recollection of precious closeness to Christ; repentance, or turning away from all known sin; and active service in the energy of the Spirit rather than in the energy of the flesh!

#### THE WARNING

The warning is terribly serious: "Or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove the candlestick out of his place . . ." (v. 5). Many a Christian and many a Church is now powerless—no testimony, no life, no sparkle, no dynamic, no goal, no mission, no usefulness. The end result is a *dead* church—the candlestick removed, and "Ichabod" written over the door! What a tragedy!

#### THE BEGINNING OF CLERICALISM

But the Church in Ephesus had another strong commendable feature—it hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes (v. 6). The Nicolaitanes were a "clergy" class developing within the church. They were a group of leaders who felt that they constituted a special priesthood and were in a class by themselves above the rank and file! Right here is the beginning of Romanism. This unscriptural concept was gradually developed until it completely captured the Church, as we shall see.

#### REWARD FOR FAITHFULNESS

(Rev. 2:7)

Nothing done for the Lord Jesus will ever go unnoticed nor unrewarded. For the faithful in the opening decades of the Christian era the Saviour makes a remarkable promise, "To him that overcometh

will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (v. 7). The Old Testament account opens with the exile of sinners from the Garden and from the tree of life. The Christian era opens with the promise of Christ that His followers shall have access to this tree and to the blessedness of fellowship with God.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

A.D. 100-300

(Rev. 2:8-11)

The letter of Rev. 2:8-11 is addressed to the church in Smyrna. Even the name indicates the experience of the church in the period of time involved, namely, PERSECUTION! Smyrna means "myrrh," an ingredient of the embalming fluid used at the time, hence connected with death! And truly the Lord Jesus addressed himself to a church that knew the meaning of martyrdom! This was indeed a *persecuted* church.

#### THE RESURRECTED SAVIOUR

What a blessing and an encouragement to the church must the Saviour's self-appointed title have brought to these suffering saints—"these things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive." Death could not hold Him, nor can it keep its hold on those who are His. Death to a Christian is only a temporary experience as far as the body is concerned, for at the Rapture all believers will be raised with their resurrection bodies. Death for a believer, as far as his soul is concerned, is but the vestibule to glory; it is substituting sight for faith; it is being in His presence.

#### THE OMNISCIENT CHRIST

Again, the Lord Jesus indicates His omniscience and His careful consideration of the activity of His people—"I know thy works" (v. 9). Now, works cannot justify. The Bible is plain on this. But saving faith is working faith. The man who believes to the saving of his soul is the man who works to show his gratitude for the gift He has received from God.

#### THE CHURCH AND THE JEWS

The Saviour mentions "tribulation and poverty" (v. 9). These two things were the constant companions of the Church in the two centuries from 100 to 300 A.D. The persecutors were not entirely of the Roman Imperial leaders, but also included the Jews. This is the meaning of the statement in v. 9, "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan."

Since the inauguration of the New Testament dispensation *true* Jews are the followers of Christ. Those who have a spiritual right to align themselves with Abraham will acknowledge the Lord Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (John 8; Rom. 4). But this, apostate

Jews will not do. They insist that Jesus is an Imposter, a false Messiah, and they will not have this Man to rule over them.

No more vehement enemies of the Gospel have ever lived than unbelieving Jews. One has but to read the record of the book of Acts to observe how bitterly they opposed the preaching of the Gospel and the establishment of the Christian faith in the Empire.

#### TRIBULATION TEN DAYS

The persecuted Church is urged not to be filled with discouragement and disillusionment in the face of fierce opposition (v. 10), but to anticipate this as an evidence of its full identity with the Son of God (cf. John 15:18ff). Things were bad indeed, but they were going to get worse before they got any better! This verse (v. 10) makes a reference to tribulation for "ten days." Some Bible students and Church historians see here a reference to the ten terrific waves of intense persecution aimed at the Church by the Emperors and the people of this period.

#### PHYSICAL TORTURE AND DEATH

But words cannot frighten believers. This became more and more evident, especially as Christian writers unmasked the shallow arguments of the infidels and presented Christ and Christian faith with irresistible logic. Finally an alarmed Rome decided to take more positive action. This meant the sword! The miles of catacombs under the city of Rome bear mute testimony to the fury of the enemies of the Church. These catacombs are lined with miles of graves—the graves, for the most part, of men, women, and children who would rather die than recant their faith in the Saviour!

When the storm subsided—when the "ten days" of persecution were over—thousands of Christians had lost their lives, but the Church was more vital, more numerous, and more powerful than ever! Even as our Lord said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

#### IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PERSECUTED CHURCH ERA

##### *Judaism and Christianity*

During these two centuries (100-300), several important developments took place. One of these developments was that of the further cleavage between Christians and Jews. By the end of the first century it was clearly apparent that Israel would not become a part of the Christian movement. There was a great wall between Jew and Christian, and that wall was *Christ!* Israel had made up her mind. She would not identify herself with Jesus. Firmly and deliberately she turned her back on the Saviour, and with blind zeal (Romans



10:1-21) took the road that led straight to the inevitable judgment of God! The past nearly 2000 years have demonstrated the folly of Israel's choice, and the worst is yet to come—the tragic period of Jacob's sorrow, the great Tribulation!

#### *Incipient Romanism*

Another development of vast significance during the period of the Persecuted Church was that of incipient Romanism. The New Testament bears witness to the need of organization within the Church, but nowhere does it sanction the extent to which organization was carried in subsequent centuries.

Now, how did the trend toward ecclesiastical hierarchy get under way? Part of the answer is in the expediency of the times. During the centuries of bloody persecution the Church felt the need for organization in order better to defend believers and to preserve the purity of Christian doctrine. More and more importance was placed upon the office of the pastor of the local congregation until, finally, he was looked upon as the indispensable administrator of the grace of God!

According to the Pastoral Epistles of the New Testament, the pastor was an elder in the local church. There were other elders: some were ruling elders, others were teaching elders (I Tim. 5:17-18). Gradually the one or two elders in the congregation who evidenced teaching gifts were delegated more and more responsibility in the Church.

The pastors of the larger churches, and the pastors of churches in the larger cities, gained considerable prestige and power. During meetings of the pastors of a given geographical section, the pastor of the largest church and host church usually moderated the meeting. This was the beginning of the movement toward the episcopal form of church government, that is, the rule of the church by one man representing an extended area.

By the end of the third century the pastor was looked upon by the congregation as the *only* member of the congregation who could preach and officiate the ordinances, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper. This view is the very heart of the later Roman Catholic system. But it is not of the Scriptures! Here is the origin of the special priesthood, a movement later to capture the Church and to rob the people of God of much of their God-intended responsibility in the Church of Christ!

#### PROMISED REWARD FOR FAITHFULNESS

With the passing of the centuries the situation in the Church became more serious. As an antidote to these developments the Saviour holds out as His reward for perseverance in the midst of great suffering the promise stated in v. 10, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." Once again, the emphasis is on the triumph

of Christ over death. The certainty of this is based on His Words of John 14:19, ". . . because I live, ye shall live also."

The life that Christ gives is eternal life—"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (v. 11) Here our Lord promises *permanent* triumph over man's great enemy—death. He speaks of the "second death." The first death is physical, the separation of soul and body; the second death is eternal, the permanent separation from God of the united soul and body in the fires of hell (Rev. 20:11-15)!



## CHAPTER V

### THE IMPERIAL CHURCH

A.D. 300-600

(Rev. 2:12-17)

Our Lord addressed Himself, in this third letter, to the church in Pergamos. The name means "marriage," and the light of the character of the Church as indicated in the paragraph under study, the Church is wedded to the world.

The Saviour speaks as the one "which hath the sharp sword with two edges" (v. 12). The sword is the Word of God, the Word of Truth and the Word of Judgment. The Church must ever adhere to the Bible as the ONLY standard of what is to be believed and the ONLY standard of Christian conduct. This Church was in danger of lowering its standard to the level of the world, and then seeking to become acceptable to the world. But God has said, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4).

#### THE COMMENDATION

(verse 13)

The Christians of this period are commended for their fidelity to the Name of Christ, and to the faith of Christ. Jesus was still central, and the Word was still upheld despite the serious persecutions just experienced!

#### THE CRITICISM AND WARNING

(verses 14-15)

##### *Two Dangerous Trends*

There were two dangerous trends apparent in this Church: one was the leaning toward collaboration with the State (Baalism), and the other was a strong tendency toward clerical rule (Nicolaitanism).

During the centuries from 300-600, the trend toward union with the world progressed to the point where Christianity became the *only legal religion in the Empire!* This sounds fantastic, but it is true! For two hundred years the Empire mercilessly persecuted the Church, taking thousands of lives and doing everything possible to annihilate the people of God. Now comes a switch! How did the about-face take place? All through the nominal acceptance of the Christian faith by Emperor Constantine.

#### EMPEROR CONSTANTINE

There is a question concerning the genuineness of Constantine's Christian faith, but he did make an outward confession of being a

follower of Christ, probably because he realized the indestructible character of the church. So he joined it!—and used it as a unifying factor of his reign. Constantine became the Emperor in the year 312 and ruled until 337. During this period of time he favored Christianity and did much to extend the Church and to popularize it among the peoples of the Empire.

In 313, the Emperor granted full religious freedom throughout the Empire, and soon after urged all the subjects of the realm to embrace the Christian faith. He exempted the leaders of the Church from taxation and military service; he did away with certain practices offensive to the Church; he gave the Church the right to receive legacies; he encouraged Sunday worship; he gave generously to the building of churches and the general promotion of the Church throughout the Empire.

When theological controversies arose and threatened to impair the unity of the Church, Emperor Constantine called Church Councils to determine the content of Christian doctrine, to formulate creeds, and to suppress heresy. In the years 325-590, there were no less than *five* general Councils held.

All these developments gave tremendous prestige and power to the clergy with the resultant formation of the hierarchy and the addition of certain doctrines not taught in Scripture, especially with relation to the government of the Church. In short, as our Lord predicted, "thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam . . . to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate" (vv. 14-15).

#### WARNING AND REWARD

(verses 16-17)

The Risen Christ as Head of the Church does not lightly observe the encroachments of man on His prerogatives. This He must resist and judge.

The overcomer in this period, as well as every believer in every age who will not capitulate to the world and will not enter into forbidden alliances with the world, is promised a three-fold reward: 1) he will be given to eat of "HIDDEN MANNA"—this is the true Word of God as over against the pronouncements of councils and the traditions of men; 2) he will receive a WHITE STONE—the badge of admission into the very holy of holies—far more important than membership in any earthly organization, even the visible Church! 3) a NEW NAME—a name more worthwhile than any title of man, let it be the pope, cardinal, archbishop, bishop, or priest!



## CHAPTER VI

### THE PAPAL CHURCH

600-1500

(Rev. 2:18-29)

The paragraph we now study constituted the longest letter addressed to any of the churches by the Saviour and it deals with one of the most crucial and tragic periods of Church History—the Middle Ages, also known as the “Dark Ages.”

During this period of nearly a thousand years the outstanding event or development was that of the Roman Catholic Church. It was during this millennium that the papacy reached the dizzy heights of absolutism in the realm of both religion and politics. Let us note the prophecy regarding this period of time.

#### FEMININE OPPRESSION

The Words of Christ are addressed to the Church in Thyatira. The word signifies “feminine oppression,” and becomes a symbol of the main character of the period—the suppression of the people of God by an impure woman: the “Mother” Church of Rome!

#### CHRIST OR MARY

The Lord Jesus addresses this church as “the Son of God.” How fitting for Him to thus speak to the Church which was beginning to elevate His *Mother* to a place of equal or superior rank and dignity! The whole world should give due regard to the pure character and high privilege of Mary in bearing in her womb the Son of God. Surely she is the representative of womanhood and motherhood at its very best. But nowhere does the Scripture indicate that she was a sinless nature, or that she was destined to become the “Queen of Heaven” and the Mediatrix of the Church!

The Lord Jesus Himself struck a deathblow to any future cult of Mary by speaking to her as He does in John 2:4, “Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come!” By this He means in effect—“I am not to take my orders from you, but from a higher authority. Even though you are my Mother, yet you have no part in the direction nor in the application of the work that has been given me, namely that of redemption!”

The Son of God states that He has “eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass” (v. 18). These are terms of observation, of disfavor, and of judgment. The holy Head of the Church, even the Lord Jesus, will not tolerate such blasphemies as were being sounded forth in this church, and her judgment is sure! (cf. Rev. 17-18).

## COMMENDATION

(verse 19)

Our Lord indicates His awareness of all that was going on in the Church. Some of the activity He approved of and commended, especially their charitable efforts. The emphasis is on *works*. This has always been true of the Roman system. It is preeminently a religion of works and human effort with the hope of attaining merit before God. The criticism of Romanism is not of its work, but of the ends of its work—the hope of obtaining salvation by meritorious endeavor. This the Bible does not teach nor sanction! The Bible teaches that all men are dead in sin and unable to help themselves; it teaches that Christ has done all the work necessary to save a poor lost sinner, and that in the light of His Cross human works are neither necessary nor acceptable (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 2:16; II Cor. 5:21, etc.).

Although works cannot produce merit with regard to salvation, yet they are the expected fruit of salvation (Eph. 2:10). And even in the case of the Roman Catholic Church of the period outlined by the letter to Thyatira their works in the behalf of others were recognized by the Son of God. Who is not grateful for the vast network of charitable and humanitarian projects of Romanism—the hospitals, the orphanages, the children’s and old-folks’ homes, the social and labor reforms influenced by the Roman Church! These efforts have done much to win the allegiance of millions of people to Rome over the centuries.

## CONDEMNATION

(verses 20-23)

But Rome’s philanthropic works are more than offset by the tragic consequences of her doctrinal and political meddlings! This is the Saviour’s condemnation—“Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols” (v. 20).

## SPIRITUAL FORNICATION

The emphasis in these words is on the *unscriptural teaching* of the Church in this period, and the practice of *idolatry*. These two things characterize the Roman Catholic system through the centuries, and today! Spiritual fornication and adultery is the forsaking of Christ and the truth of Christ and going into the arms of another lover! In this period, the people of God were guilty of leaving Christ and substituting the Church, of forsaking Bible doctrine and substituting the traditions of men! God never meant the Church to take the place of the Saviour. He is jealous for His Son (Matt. 3:17; Col. 1:18).



THE PATIENCE OF GOD  
(verse 21)

God gave the Church of the Middle Ages nearly *one thousand years* to repent! One thousand years to turn from her proud and arrogant despotism and to return to the simple and humble organization and service of the New Testament! And the issues were crystal clear! Great leaders within the Church itself, tremendously influenced by the revival of learning, the study of history, the study of the Bible in its original languages, and the increased interest in the Scriptures—these men strongly advocated reform within the Church, conformity to the Word of God, and the abolition of certain abuses and unscriptural teachings and practices of the Church!

ERASMUS

One of these men, critical of the Church, was the learned scholar *Erasmus* (1467-1536). This man believed that the best way to bring the church back to her first love and original purity was the publication of information about the early Church. Thus Erasmus published his famous Greek New Testament and Latin editions of the Church Fathers. With powerful irony and sarcasm Erasmus attempted to shame the leaders of Romanism into Church reform. Other writers and scholars of the time labored to the same end—but all without success. The Church was adamant.

BASIC PROTESTANTISM

Several decades before the Protestant Reformation the best scholars of Europe were convinced that the Church had deviated from Scriptural standards, and they called the Church to return to the three basic principles of Christianity, viz., 1) the Bible as the standard—the absolute standard of Christian doctrine and Christian living; 2) Justification by faith alone; 3) the priesthood of all believers.

But the official Church remained unmovable and adamant, and, as one writer states, the Church “entrenched herself in the dogmatic, restrictive, and pedantic scheme of scholasticism, which position caused the great conflict with the modern scientific spirit of inquiry and reason. The humanistic campaign against ignorance, traditionalism, and exploitation, the demand for religious reform, and the insistence upon saner methods of Bible study prepared Europe intellectually for the Reformation.” (Qualben, *History of the Christian Church*. p. 210)

THE JUDGMENT  
(verses 22-23)

God said, “I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your work” (v. 23).

The Protestant Reformation was not only a great spiritual awakening and a religious revolution. It was a bloody conflict between Catholics and Protestants—one of the bloodiest wars of history, a war of *thirty years* duration (1618-1648), and a war that involved the whole of Europe! Millions of people lost their lives in this conflict, many of them Catholics. God was true to His Word, and many in the Church were “killed with death” during the period that tore a great section of Christendom away from the “Mother” Church of Rome.

REWARD FOR FAITHFULNESS  
(verses 26-29)

To the overcomer in this period God promises “power over the nations.” Why this promise? Because the goal and ambition of the hierarchy was just that. But they aspired to world domination not in God’s time nor in God’s way. The day is coming when the Lord Jesus, the rightful Head of the Church, will come and establish His rule over the world. At *that* time His people will be given “power over the nations” and not until that time.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE REFORMED CHURCH

A.D. 1500-1700

(Rev. 3:1-6)

Christ addressed Himself to the Church at *Sardis*. The name means, according to some, "an escaped few." Certainly, during the period of the Reformation there was only a "remnant according to the election of grace" who returned all the way back to the New Testament! We shall discuss this later in the chapter.

The Saviour uses an apt and pertinent title for Himself in this message to the Reformation Church—"These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars" (v. 1). By the "seven Spirits of God" the Lord Jesus indicates the total ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Reformation left much to be desired regarding the evident sovereign administration of the Holy Spirit. Could the denominational and schismatic character of the Reformation have been led of the Spirit? Could the doctrinal confusion that entered the Protestant movement have been led of the Spirit? We thank God for precious contributions of the great Reformers, and we rejoice in the new-found freedoms of the Reformation movement, but we could wish that the Holy Spirit had been given *His* place of rightful leadership in some of the doctrines and practices of the Reformation Church.

#### DEAD ORTHODOXY

Of this Church period Jesus said, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (v. 1). Nothing in all the world is deader than cold orthodoxy! The letter kills; it is the spirit that giveth life! The Reformation leaders were so busy formulating doctrine, building ecclesiastical systems, and guiding armies on the battle fields of Europe, that they had little time for the promotion of a devotional emphasis in the lives of the millions of people who departed from the despotism of Rome.

#### IMPERFECT REFORMATION

Again, the Lord Jesus pointed out that, good as the Reformation was, it had not gone quite far enough: "I have not found thy works perfect before God" (v. 2). Here was an opportunity for the leaders of God's people to sponsor a *thorough* house-cleaning, and to take the Church right back to the New Testament. But in this they failed. These men were the heirs of a thousand years of Roman Catholic philosophy, theology, and ecclesiology. They were steeped in the traditions of Romanism. We are not surprised that many vestiges of this system clung even to the work of the Reformers—doctrines and practices foreign to the New Testament, such as a special priesthood, infant baptism, the mass, formal liturgy, emphasis on works for salvation, etc.

## A REMNANT

But there were a few who went all the way back to the Apostolic Church (v. 4). This remnant is commended because they had kept their "garments" undefiled. What is meant by this? The Scripture is clear. The white garments of the saints speak of the righteousness which is theirs, imputed righteousness, God's righteousness, reckoned to their account, and received by faith alone (Rom. 5:1; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16). There are many Protestants, even today, who do not fully understand the great Scriptural doctrine of justification by faith, and who have stained and spotted their "garments" with the filth of human efforts (Isa. 64:6). But out of the Reformation, and subsequent to the Reformation, are those who have entered in to the very heart of the Gospel, and who rejoice in the righteousness of God—

" . . . a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for thy are worthy" (v. 4).

#### THE REWARD TO THE OVERCOMER

(Rev. 3:4-5)

The Saviour holds out three wonderful promises to those of this period, and of any period, who will obey His Word and uphold His Name. 1) *They will walk with Him*—this means sweet and blessed fellowship with the One who is truly *wise*, the summation of all true science and all true religion; 2) *They will be clothed in white*—this is not the foul clothing of self-righteous efforts and the product of human reason, but rather the spotless clothing of the soul coming through justification by faith alone; 3) *They will enjoy complete assurance of salvation*—" . . . I will not blot out His name out of the book of life . . ." (v. 5). Human efforts and human reason can never give full assurance, because who knows how much effort is acceptable, or what view of God and salvation is correct? Faith in the Word of God and the Son of God alone can give complete security!



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MISSIONARY CHURCH

1700-Present Time

(Rev. 3:7-13)

#### THE CHURCH

This letter is addressed to the Church in Philadelphia (v. 7). The word means "loving fellowship," and certainly there is evident here the sweet bond of fellowship that comes from the missionary enterprise of the people of God! The fellowship of believers is, without doubt, the most precious fellowship in all the world. That fellowship is greatly enriched by a common task, the unfinished work of Christ—world-wide missions, the evangelization of every nation, tribe, and tongue in the entire world!

#### THE TITLE OF CHRIST

(verse 7)

He speaks of Himself as "He that is holy." This refers to His character, and the character of those who follow Him and seek to accomplish His work in the world, The one great prerequisite of the servant of Christ is holiness!

The Lord Jesus speaks of Himself as "He that is true." What a welcome concept! How wonderful to love someone who cannot lie, cannot be false, has nothing to hide, but whose blessed life is an open book, transparent, naked to the investigation of the entire world! This is the character of the Saviour whom the Christian loves!

He speaks of Himself as having "the key of David." By this He has in mind the coming Millennial Kingdom. During this period, following the Tribulation, Christ will establish His righteous rule over the whole world, and will reign in power for a thousand years. The headquarters of His Kingdom will be Jerusalem, and there He will be seated on the throne of His father David—hence His reference to the "key of David."

Again, He speaks of Himself as the One who "openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth" (v. 7). Now, what is this door? It would seem, in the light of history, that this is the door of world-wide missions.

#### WORLD MISSIONS

(Rev. 3:8)

The Lord knows all about this period, just as He does about every period, for He is the Lord of History. Thus He says, "I know thy works."

*This is the Church of the open door* (v. 8). Christ Himself has opened this door and expects His people to enter in. Again, it would seem that this is the door of missions, a logical conclusion based on the very meaning of the term "door," and also in the light of the period in history immediately following the Protestant Reformation era.

Note that this Church has *just a little strength*. The entire Church is not primarily concerned with the taking of the Gospel to the world; the organized Church is more concerned with the promotion of a social program, with schools, hospitals, social reform, etc. All these are good, but the task of the Church is evangelism. Far too few of the people in the Church recognize the basic task of the Church—thus the work is far from completion.

The Church needs to take lessons from Communism. In 1917 there were only 40,000 Communists in the entire world, and most of these were in exile from Russia. Since the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the number of Communists in the world has jumped from 40,000 to over one billion! This in less than 50 years! What is the answer to this phenomenal growth? The fact that the Communist believes that he is a missionary with the only message that spells hope for the world!

But for several hundred years following the Protestant Reformation the Church did little or nothing in an organized way to win the world to Christ! Not until William Carey (1761-1834), did the Church awaken to its great Commission. In the year 1792, Carey, with the burden of the lost souls of the world weighing upon his heart and soul, organized the first modern missionary society, and inaugurated the era of modern missions—a thrilling episode in the history of the Christian Church!

The missionary-hearted Church has "kept my Word," the Saviour stated. Missions is a farce without the Word of God. The Word of God is the basis of missions, the message of missions, the policy of missions. It is not just a coincidence that the more missionary-hearted a believer or a church the more central is the Word of God!

The missionary-hearted Church is true to the Name of Christ—"and has not denied by Name" (v. 8). The goal of Missions is to take the Name *Jesus* around the world. Christ is the focal personality in Missions. He is the rallying-point for the multitudes of earth.

#### THE OPPONENT OF CHRIST-CENTERED MISSIONS

(Rev. 3:9)

The Lord Jesus speaks of "the synagogue of Satan," and of those "which say they are Jews, and are not." Who are these? They are members of the liberal, modernistic Church, professing to belong to



Christ, to be true spiritual "Jews," and claiming to promote His work in the world. But the tragedy is that many leaders in modern missions are indeed "modern," that is, they are not true to the Gospel, they do not uphold the great Christian doctrines taught by the Bible, they do not seek to win the lost to faith in Jesus Christ as the only Saviour and Redeemer from sin.

In the midst of the 20th century, one of the most successful opponents of true Gospel evangelism and Bible-centered missions is the organized Church! There are areas today where a Bible-believing missionary is not welcome, and chiefly because representatives of the powerful World Council of Churches will not sanction him nor petition the government for a visa.

#### THE SAVIOUR'S PROMISE (verse 10)

Here is a wonderful promise—the promise of the Rapture *before* the Tribulation! We believe in the pre-tribulation rapture of the people of God because the chronology of the book of the Revelation demands it—the Church is in Heaven around the throne of God (Rev. 4-5) *before* the Tribulation breaks in all its fury on the world (Rev. 6-19)!

In this text the Lord Jesus states that He will keep His believers from the "hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world." This is, of course, the "great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21). This "hour of trial" is described in Rev. 6-19, and surely the child of God can thank God that he will not be here to participate in the horrors of that awful time!

#### THE WARNING (verse 11)

No believer will ever lose his salvation, but he does stand in danger of losing his reward! Christ said, "I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." What crown is He talking about? It would seem that He has in mind the soul-winner's crown. The Christian who has little or no concern about the condition of the world and the lost estate of the multitudes will lose his crown to the believer who *does* have an interest in these things! The reader is referred to the author's book, *The Father's Business*, for a treatment of the theme of personal soul-winning and world-wide missions.

#### THE REWARD FOR FAITHFULNESS (Rev. 3:12)

Christ promises to make the believer who overcomes "a pillar in the temple of my God." Now, the Bible-believing, Christ-honoring believer of this age is not recognized by the great Laodicean Church of

the end-times. More and more the so-called Fundamentalist and Conservative is being pushed out of the life and service of the liberal Church. He is not recognized as much of a "pillar" in this organization, but rather as a hindrance, a divisive trouble-maker! But let him not feel bad about this, for the Church of the Saviour's day felt the same way about Him, and pushed Him out, too. And the World Church of the 20th century has not changed—it has pushed the Saviour out of His own Church, so that in the last days of this dispensation He is found outside the Church knocking on the door! (Rev. 3:20).

But the day is coming when all the enemies of the Gospel, be they in the Church or out of it, will acknowledge the truth of the Word of God and the fact that Bible-believing, Christ-honoring believers were right after all! (v. 9).

Jesus says of those who love Him and share in the Rapture—" . . . they shall go no more out." That is, the work of world-wide missions is over. There is no longer any need to cover the earth with the Gospel, for all the peoples of the world will know the truth. The day of world-wide missions will then be over.

Included in the reward of the faithful in the day of rewards is the following: "I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God . . . And I will write upon him my new name" (v. 12). What does all this mean? We think it must mean full and wonderful identity with God and with Christ and with the people of God and the glory of God in the coming dispensation. As this present age progresses, the Christian will be tolerated less and less, for he will stand in opposition to the trend of internationalism and ecumenicalism which he knows leads to world-slavery. He will not be popular in the eyes of the "world-citizen." But he *will* be popular in the eyes of God, and this is by far more important!



## CHAPTER IX

### THE CHRISTLESS CHURCH

1900 to Present

(Rev. 3:14-22)

This paragraph describes the spiritual condition of the Church of the end-times, and what a tragic situation it is! Here is the Son of God, the Redeemer of the Church, shut out of His own Church. Here is Christ knocking for entrance, standing outside seeking admission to the Church which belongs to Him! The answer to this riddle, of course, is that He is dealing, in this era, with a Church in the world which has substituted Socialism for Salvation, ecumenicalism for individualism. Thus the Lord Jesus appeals to the individual (v. 20). The vast organized Church of the end-time has no time for the Son of God! It is too busy building a world religious system in conjunction with the developing world State.

#### THE TITLE OF CHRIST

(Rev. 3:14)

Jesus is *the Amen*. This means that Christ is the summation of God's redemptive purposes for the universe. He is the end of all things, not the political and religious ambitions of end-time internationalism!

He is *the "faithful and true witness."* How His character contrasts with the scheming duplicity and double-talk of contemporary world leaders! How many promises and agreements and covenants have the leaders of Russia, for example, made and broken! In the midst of intrigue and the complicated political and religious machinations of ruthless and unscrupulous men, what a breath from Heaven to meet One who is indeed "faithful and true"!

Christ is *the "beginning of the creation of God."* Not that *He* was created, but He is the creator, the One who began Time and gave History the push that has carried it to the present moment. This all speaks of His Sovereignty over History. He is working out *His* purpose in the world and in the Universe—the very purpose for which He created all things.

#### THE CONDITION OF THE END-TIME CHURCH

(Rev. 3:15-17)

##### *Apathetic*

The Laodicean Church is *lukewarm*—neither hot nor cold, thus sickening to the Saviour! According to this Scripture, the Church existing just prior to the Rapture and the Second Advent is self-satisfied, complacent, blindly optimistic, indolent with regard to Gospel urgency.

##### *Spiritually Ignorant*

"And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (v. 17b). How true this is of the Church today! The contemporary Church does not know its own spiritual condition. It is not aware of the truth of God's Word. It does not know what time it is prophetically. It is sound asleep to the impending doom pronounced by the Word of God. Spiritually, the vast system of world Christendom is in a deplorable and desperate condition! In this condition it will be relatively simple for an ecclesiastical hierarchy to take complete control without so much as a word of protest from those who profess to be "Protestant"! This is the situation that we are instructed will prevail during the coming Tribulation period (Rev. 13).

#### THE SAVIOUR'S COUNSEL

(Rev. 3:18)

##### *True Riches*

The Son of God speaks to this Church—He speaks in grace and love—but to no avail. He urges the Church to acquire a true sense of values, and to store her warehouses with the "gold" of spiritual and eternal truths—the truth of God's Word.

##### *Gospel Righteousness*

"White raiment" is the imputed righteousness of God received by faith alone. This Scripture doctrine has always been submerged by men in the waters of human effort and human merit. This is the basic trouble in the Laodicean Church. The problem is theological. Men are not thinking right because they do not accept the Biblical concept of human depravity. Emphasis on an innate goodness of man which is not there leads to shallow and temporary construction in any area of human endeavor.

##### *Eye Salve*

The Bible cannot be interpreted without the aid of the Holy Spirit who gave it. The most brilliant mind cannot comprehend the truth of God apart from divine enlightenment. This is David's thought in his prayer recorded in Psalm 119:18. It is the Saviour's teaching in Matt. 13:13-17 and Matt. 16:17. It is Paul's instruction in I Cor. 2:14.

#### THE PROMISE

(v. 20)

Apparently the Lord Jesus has no assurance that the Church will open its doors to Him. He addresses Himself to the individual and offers Himself to "any man"! To the man who responds, the Son of



God will enter his life, He will bring with Him the very sweetest fellowship and best of spiritual provision.

#### THE REWARD

(v. 21)

What is the reward offered by the Lord Jesus Christ to the believer who lives in the period of the Laodicean Church? It is commensurate with the faithfulness of the believer in this "perilous" time: "To Him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne." Full and faithful identity with Christ in times of apostasy brings full and complete identity with Him in His Glory.

#### CONCLUSION

Thus we have travelled through the centuries with the Church. We have followed her from her first birthday at Pentecost, through the Apostolic era, through the period of persecution, through the time of her disastrous flirtation with the Imperial powers, through the long darkness of the Middle Ages, through the valiant efforts of the Reformers to restore her to her original beauty, through the dramatic era of world-wide missions, and through the tragic period of her terrible indifference to the blessed Bridegroom—right up to the moment of His appearing.

The coming of the Bridegroom is the next event on the schedule of prophecy. And with the closing words of the book of the Revelation we complete our study—"Even so, come, Lord Jesus."



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