

June 16, 2019

I also hate.

Revelation 2:1-7

2:1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

2:2 “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

2:3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.

2:4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

2:6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

The message from Jesus Christ was delivered to the seven churches through Apostle John who was persecuted and exiled to Patmos. We want to read this message as “the message to me,” “the message of love,” and “the message of invitation” from Christ.

1. The Message to Me

The “Seven Churches” to which the message of Christ was delivered are the churches in Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis,

Philadelphia, and Laodicea starting from Ephesus. The seven churches had different characteristics and were placed in different situations. So, the Lord Jesus gave a different message to each of the churches according to the situation. But the message was not sent separately to the seven churches, but were put together in chapters 2 and 3 of the Revelation. This teaches that the message to each of the seven churches is unique, but that every message applies to all seven churches. The church in Ephesus does not have to read the message to the church in Smyrna, nor does the message to the church in Pergamum not apply to the church in Thyatira.

The seven churches are called, “church in Ephesus,” “church in Smyrna,” “church in Pergamum,” “church in Thyatira,” “church in Sardis,” “church in Philadelphia,” and “church in Laodicia.” The phrase “church in a city” means that each church is a manifestation of a universal and catholic church in each region. So, it can be said that all the messages to the seven churches described in the Revelation are messages that were told to all the churches at that time, represented by “the Seven Churches”.

The universal and catholic church is also “apostolic church,” and have continued throughout history. So, the message to the seven churches is also the message to the modern church. We would like to receive the message to “the Seven Churches” as a message to “All Churches” and “Message to Me”.

Each book of the Bible was written in each era and situation. When you study the Bible, you have to take that into account, but at the same time, the Bible has messages that transcend age and context. The Holy Spirit, the original author of the Bible, conveys the message to

us. Just as all of the messages to the Seven Churches are concluded with the words, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” let us listen to each message as the “Word of God to me from Christ through the Holy Spirit,” and obey the Word.

2. The Message of Love

The message to the seven churches is, second, the message of love for the church. At the beginning of each message is the figure of Christ, each of which depicts Christ that protects, supports, guides, and make the church live. According to the message to the church of Ephesus, Christ was described as “who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.” (verse 1). The “seven stars” are the angel of the church, and the “seven golden lampstands” mean the church. The angels of the church are called “stars” and the churches are called “candestands” because the church shines in this dark world, pointing the direction to go to the people of the world, and giving the people the light of truth, warm light of love, and the light of life. Moreover, Christ not only calls the church “lampstand”, but also “golden lampstand,” saying that the church is valuable and precious in the eyes of Christ.

Christ has the “stars” in his “right hand”, and the “right hand” represents the authority and omnipotence of Christ. Christ empowers and protects the church with his authority and all-power. “Walking among the seven golden lampstands” means that Christ is always with the church. This is perfectly matches the word of Christ, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching

them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20,) Jesus loves the church and faithfully fulfills his promise that being with you and empowers you before returning heaven.

The church of Ephesus knew and answered Christ’s love for the church. Jesus praise it and said, “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance.” (verse 2) Three words are used: “works,” “toil,” and “endurance,” which are described in Thessalonians 1:3 as “work of faith,” “labor of love,” and “steadfastness of hope.” The church of Ephesus had its “fruit” in their “faith,” “hope,” and “love.” “So now faith, hope, and love abide.” (1 Corinthians 13:13). It is wonderful that the church is praised by Christ in the “faith, hope, and love” that can be said to be the life of the church.

The church of Ephesus was sensitive to the truth of faith and eager to keep it. In fact, they found the falsehood of the “false apostles.” In addition, they took a firm stance on the Nicolaitans which were popular at the time. The Nicolaitans were those who claimed that Christians did not need to abandon their previous religions or keep away from the habits of people around them. All religions of the day had eaten the sacrifice of the idols, partaking to the spiritual powers of the gods, and did sexual activities with the shrine maiden. The Church did not require gentile Christians to obey the Jewish laws, but commanded “to abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.” (Acts 15:29). This was the resolution of the council of the apostles and elders, unanimously decided by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Nicolaitans teachings were clearly against this

resolution.

In the church of Pergamum, there were a few members who followed the teachings of Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:15). Christ rebuked the Pergamum Church, which allowed these people. But, to the Ephesus Church which took a firmer attitude to the Nicolaitans, he said, “You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” (verse 6) Christ is pleased with the Ephesus Church’s attitude towards Nicolaitans. Some people say that Christians should love everyone, and the word “hate” is not suitable for Christians. However, the Bible says, “O you who love the LORD, hate evil!” (Psalm 97:10) “Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?” (Psalm 139: 21). Rejoice what the Lord rejoices and dislike what the Lord dislikes. Being in the same mind as the Lord is love for the Lord. The church of Ephesus knew Christ’s mind, resonated with it, and answered the love of Christ with a firm attitude towards evil.

Today is a time when everything is sweet and good and evil are obscured. It is an age when the word “love” is interpreted without Christ and used according to human convenience. We have to keep ourselves from exchanging the love of God with human love. We would like to answer the love of the Lord.

3. The Message of Invitation

The church of Ephesus was a church that was loved and loved by Christ like this, but it is pointed out by Christ that “You have abandoned the love you had at first.” Elsewhere, yet, why did the church of Ephesus have to receive Christ’s rebuke about “love?” The church of Ephesus is not a cold church without love. I think it was a

hot burning church from the viewpoint of “neither cold nor hot” church like the church in Laodecia. The Ephesus Church is still a church that loves the Lord, but some mixture has been introduced into the pure love as before. A glimpse of former love has come to be seen. Christ said the church of Tiatilla “I know what we have done in the beginning and what we have done recently” (Apocalypse 2:19). The Church of Thyatira was now better than the beginning, but the church of Ephesus was the opposite.

We tend to be pessimistic about being inferior to that person compared to others, or to be proud to be superior to this person, but the Lord does not like that we compare to each other. People have different talents and gifts, and their growth rates are also different. It is wrong to compare each other and it is meaningless. Rather, it is better to compare yourself with last year’s self and this year’s self and compare how much you have grown in the past year in love for God. Even if you are immature or slow in growth, the Lord will give up if it has grown some faith or love more than when you first believed in the Lord. If faith or love has fallen further than when he first believed in him, He will blame it. The Lord encourages beginners to “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk,” (1 Peter 2:2) but many long-time believers grow. If there is something going backwards, he will say, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food.” (Hebrews 5:12)

But remember that these rebukes of Christ also come from his love. Christ said to the church, “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first,” (verse 5) but he

forgives, heals, restores, and empowers those who repent. It is a message of invitation to lead to victory. In “the message to the Seven Churches,” other than Smyrna and Philadelphia, he calls for “repent.” And after that, he gives promises to “the one who conquers.” The church in Ephesus has the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. The Tree of Life was what Adam lost for his sins. Christ has promised the restoration. The church is not only healed and empowered on earth, but also in heaven the church will have the ultimate restoration of everything.

It is by “repentance” that you can get this victory and take part in the full recovery. It is “a person who repents” as “a person who wins.” “Repent, and do the works you did at first.” This is not just the words of rebuke. It is the word of invitation for victory. Let us hear this message as a message to me, a message of Christ’s love, and a message of the invitation. And let us answer it.

(Prayer)

Lord Jesus, thank you for telling us that we have lost “the love of the beginning”. Guide us to repentance and bring us back to “the love we had at first.” Please increase our love for you. Remembering the love of the Father and the Holy Spirit we pray this from the bottom of our hearts. Amen.