

The Revelation of Jesus Christ 2:1-7 Sermon Notes



Guard the Truth!

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Galatians 1:8-9

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Timothy 4:16

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. 2 Timothy 1:12-13

He [an elder] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. Titus 1:9

Resources for Further Study in Christian Doctrine

1. Beginner - Download our proposed doctrinal statement from the church website.
2. Intermediate - Read the great Puritan Thomas Watson's *A Body of Divinity*.
3. Advanced - Get your hands on Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* and read a chapter/week.
4. Hard Core - See if you can work through John Calvin's immortal classic *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

How to Approach the "Letters" to the Churches

The letters to the seven churches (Revelation chapters 2-3) are more accurately described as oracles or pronouncements, since they do not follow a strict letter format. Jesus is authoritatively speaking to his churches through his prophet, John. So how should we interpret these pronouncements?

First, we must interpret them historically. We should try to understand what was happening in those historic churches that occasioned Jesus' words to them. What would the message mean for those believers then?

Second, after identifying the message to the original congregation, we should then apply that message to ourselves. Each message ends with the phrase, "Let him who has ears hear what the Spirit says to the churches," indicating that these messages are meant for anyone who reads them. Furthermore, the fact that there are seven churches strongly suggests that the messages are to be heard and applied by all churches everywhere, since seven is a highly symbolic number in Revelation connoting totality or completeness.

Third, the historical setting of these messages should guide us in interpreting the following visions in Revelation. When we come to a vision, we must first ask, "What would this have meant to the original seven churches?" Asking this question

protects us from un-restrained speculation in interpreting Revelation's later visionary elements.

Finally, we should be aware of how NOT to read the messages to the churches in chapters 2-3. These "letters" are not a chronological map of successive church ages or stages. There is not an "Ephesian" church period followed by a "Smyrnanian" period, and so forth. All of the letters speak to all churches throughout history. Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit says to the churches!

What are the Seven "Angels" of the Churches?

Jesus begins each pronouncement by saying, "To the angel of the church in [name of city] write." What does he mean by the word "angel?" Some have suggested that the word refers to the pastor of a given church, or perhaps to a messenger from that church.

It is preferable to take this word literally as a reference to an angel, in the sense of a heavenly servant of God, for at least three reasons. First, the word angel throughout Revelation refers to angels in this sense.

Second, in Revelation 1:20 Jesus interprets two of the symbols from John's initial vision. Jesus informs John that the seven golden lamp stands represent the seven churches, and that the stars in Jesus' hand represent the angels of the seven churches. It would be strange to give the interpretation of a symbol (star) with another symbol (angel) if the text did not refer to actual angels.

Third, Revelation frequently speaks to the correspondence between heavenly and earthly realities. There are seven churches on earth with seven lamp stands before God's throne. There are likely seven angels in heaven as well who represent the earthly churches. And so the fact that the seven stars in Jesus' hand (Rev 1:16) are the church's heavenly representatives strongly suggests that the point is that Jesus holds the churches in his hands.