



DATE: October 30, 2011

TEXT: Revelation 2: 1-7

TITLE: "Maintaining the Love of Christ"

Chapters 2 and chapters 3 of Revelation give us a look what Jesus demands of His church.

Seven churches are named... they are praised and they are criticized. They were real churches...

but remember the number 7 in Revelation points to completeness.... they represent all churches.

Before we dig into our text I want to share a number of preliminary lessons

Preliminary lesson # 1 What makes a good church? What makes a church a true church? Ministers ask themselves this question all the time. We especially ask this question when we are searching for a job in a new church. In the Presbyterian system we do not have bishops who assign us churches. For us it is a search and an interview situation. The church fill out a resume (CIF). The Pastor fills our a resume (PIF) and you begin a search. A church will often get a 100 or more resumes. A Pastor will look at dozens of churches and interview with a number of churches.

Out of curiosity I pulled out of our files the New Bedford CIF that I read 15 years ago.

This is how you described NBPC and what very much attracted me to New Bedford.

“NBPC is a community of believers whose existence depends upon the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments whose purpose is to glorify God by following the Lord’s example of compassion and ministry

Our church has just been through a difficult and divisive time, however, these divisions are quickly healing and there is a renewed sense of spirit in our Worship..... we will continue to praise God in all we do, seeking to do His work in our community and throughout the world. Recent events in the greater Presbyterian Church have alarmed many of our members.....we believe the Bible to be the infallible Word of God and that salvation is through Christ’s death and resurrection.

Our church in New Bedford has been blessed with a wonderful setting and beautiful facilities, but we know that our most valuable asset is the congregation—the people for whom Christ came to save.

Let me say I have found these statement in The CIF to be very true (that is not always the case in CIF’S) We are a church that stands on the Word of God. We are a church that stands on the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We are a church alarmed by the denominational compromises. We are a church that believes in the infallible Bible. And most certainly the greatest asset of the church is the people. Men and women who love the Lord and love their church.

Have you ever thought what the lord would say to our church? What is this was in the bible.... “To the angel of the church in New Bedford. These are the word of the Lord Jesus

Christ.... I commend you for these reasons....” We then hear a list. “I hold this against you...”

We then hear a list. What would be in these two lists? Maybe after we have studied these churches we will return to this question.

I close this point with this truth. The question about church is not a new one. During the Reformation the Reformers like Calvin and Luther asked themselves what made up a “true church.” They came up with 3 and sometimes 4 answers. They are

1. The true church preaches the Word of God based on Scripture. They were clear ... church must teach the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the sin bearing atonement of the Lord, and justification by faith. If they do not they were not considered a true church of Jesus Christ.
2. The right use of sacraments. Baptism and the Lords Supper are gifts given to the church to mark the individual and the church as a child of God
3. The proper use of church discipline The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible says this... **“The purpose of church discipline is two-fold; first, to safeguard the purity of the church, and second, to be the means of bringing the offending party to repentance.”** The true church upholds the truth of Jesus Christ.

In our study of the 7 churches we will see these truths again and again.

Preliminary lesson # 2 What are the “seven stars in the right hand of Jesus”? We saw them in the vision last week and we see them mentioned again this week. Two possibilities.

Some believe they are the guardian angels of the churches. Although I do not believe this is the

correct understanding, I kind of like this idea. To think that every church has a guardian angel is great. An angel that watches over us and protects us and leads us.

That is not the most common understanding. It does not make a lot of sense to believe that Jesus gave the message to John who then gave it back to the angels. Most commentators believe that angels in Greek means messengers and John is giving this message to the bishops or ministers of the different churches. Ministers primary responsibility is to share the Word of God, received through His revelation, to the people of his or her church. this is the call we have. That is our responsibility.. That will be our standard of judgement when we stand before the throne of God.

Preliminary lesson # 3 I want to say a word about Ephesus. Ephesus was the chief city of Asia Minor. It was the New York city of the region. A great harbor by a great river and the commercial center of the region. It was also the center of religion. The Temple to Artimos or Diana in Greek) was considered one fo the 7 ancient Wonders of the world. If you read Acts you see the there was a riot in Ephesus as the followers of Diana tried to kill Paul. This is another

truth of Ephesus.... never has a city has greater Christian leaders. Paul visited Ephesus during his second missionary journey. Paul returned during his second Missionary journey and stayed there for 3 years. Priscilla and Aquila were leaders of the church and Timothy was the leader for many years and received his letters from Paul while at Ephesus. Finally, John himself was the leaders of the church in the late 80's or early 90's.

They were commended by Paul in his letter to them. He said this **To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Jesus Christ.** At the end of the letter Paul writes **“Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.”**

One final word about Ephesus. The city no longer exists. The ruins of Ephesus are now 6 miles away from the Mediterranean. The river that flows to the Sea deposited silt and created a swamp that now stands between the ruins and the water. The church of Ephesus is gone.

I now want to share three lesson from our text. The first and the last will be very short. The middle one is the key to our text.

Lesson # 1 Notice the words of praise for Ephesus *Revelations 2: 2-3 states...*

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

This is what the church was commended for... they stood up for truth. They were being attacked from outside the church by the Romans... and from inside the church by false teachers. They with stood these attacks. They maintained the truth. They rejected the false teachers. They remained orthodox in the faith.

Let me say in this day and age this is an important lesson. Truthfully from outside the church and inside the church we are being attacked by false teachers. The message of Jesus Christ is mocked by the world and perverted by some inside the church. We need to continue to stand for truth. We must continue to stand of the words written 15 years ago in the CIF. We see the Bible as the “infallible Word of God.”

Lesson # 2 The church stood on the truth of God... but lost their love. *Rev. 2:4-5*

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Here is the tragedy of the church... they maintained the truth but lost their love. Orthodox

but unloving. They lost their love for Jesus Christ and for each other. In the 30 years from the time of Paul wrote to the church commending them for their love... they became hardened and unloving.

Do you know people like this... they maintain truth... possibly even correct Christian truth.... but do not share love. They will declare that a person is going to hell... but don't seem to care for the individual. Or churches that are quick to condemn sin... but do not try to love the sinner or even love each other. At times a church can be the most unloving institution around.

Let me say this is a difficult balance in this day and age. Often any standing up for the truth is seen as a act of hatred. We as Christians must work hard at love. It must be genuine and sincere

Yes, we condemn sexual sin... yes, we clearly say homosexual actions are sinful... but not more so than heterosexual sin. We must sincerely love those who struggle with homosexuality... it is a terrible struggle... and we must love couple who are living together... it too is a terrible struggle.

Here is the key to loving others.... we recognize that we too are sinners. We are no better than anyone else. The only difference is that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to live in some obedience to Jesus Christ. This is a gift from God. "There but by the grace of God go I." is true. No we need to love others to Christ. And it must be a sincere, non-condescending love. The church must be at the forefront of offering ministry to the sexually conflicted, to those who choose abortion, to the unwed mother, to the drug addict, to the angry.

In our trips to Mexico we often go to a woman's prison. Kim will tell you nothing has touched her life more. These women are all in prison for drug addiction and prostitution. But the opportunity to minister is wonderful. To give bath products. To give products for their children who are in prison with them because they would starve if they were not there. To pray with them. Their repentance is real and genuine. To see them come to Christ.

We live in a hurting world. Let us be known for our love. Yes, standing up for truth is required in this mixed up world.... but let us be seen by the community as a place of love.

Lesson # 3. Notice the wonderful promise of eternal life and paradise given to the

“overcomers.” *Revelation 2: 7*

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

The word “overcome” is the same word as “conquer” We share in the victory of Christ.

We have overcome the struggles of the world. Through repentance and loves we join in the everlasting life promised by Christ. We Eat of the tree of life. Late in Revelation we will see that the Garden of Eden will be restored in the new Jerusalem(rev 20). It will be the “Central park” of the new city. In the garden will be the Tree of Life. And we will be able to eat of it’s fruit. We will be in paradise.

Let us maintain the truth of God’s word... but let us forever act love for Christ and love for each other.

AMEN