

Christ is speaking to seven literal churches in Asia Minor. This is modern-day Turkey. There is a theory that these seven churches prophetically represent seven time-periods in church history. It is a fascinating theory, but it is not a profitable pursuit of trying to understand what these two chapters are saying to the Lord's people through all generations (Isaiah 48:17; I Timothy 4:13-16; II Timothy 3:16-17). It is best to think of these seven churches as an example or crosscut section of what is commonly found in churches at any given time.

**Ephesus** – lacked love.

**Smyrna** – suffered persecution.

**Pergamos** – worldly and tolerant.

**Thyatira** – corrupt and divided.

**Sardis** – dead.

**Philadelphia** – faithful.

**Laodicea** – lukewarm (nauseating).

In Revelation 1:12-20, Christ is portrayed as walking among seven golden candlesticks or lamp stands. He is holding seven stars in his right hand. This is showing us Christ, actively involved among His churches and intimately involved with the pastors of those churches, who are looking after their flocks (Acts 20:16-17,26-31; Hebrews 13:7,17; I Peter 5:1-4).

The message to each church has some common elements:

- A special description of the living Christ: Revelation 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14.
- A declaration of what Christ knows about that church: Revelation 2:2-4(6),9,13-15, 19-21; 3:1(4),8-10,15-17.
- A call to behold or to remember something; to repent or to be vigilant: Revelation 2:5,10,16, 22-25; 3:2-3,11,18-20.
- A promise for those who overcome trials and temptations with a call to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's message to the churches: Revelation 2:7,11,17,26-29; 3:5-6,12-13,21-22.

If we would fulfill the spirit of the New Testament, we would find ourselves very interested in being committed to a local body of believers (a church) and seeking to fulfill Christ's great commission together as a team (Matthew 28:18-20; I Corinthians 12:13-27; Philippians 1:1; 2:1-4,14-16; Colossians 3:12-15).

At the same time, we need to be concerned about the state of all of the Lord's people and His churches. As much as possible, we should communicate and cooperate with them (Romans 16:3-1; I Corinthians 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; 16:1,19; II Corinthians 8:23-24; 11:28; I Thessalonians 2:13-14; Hebrews 13:3; Ephesians 6:23-24).

# The Churches of Christ

Revelation Chapters 2-3

Scripture Reading: Revelation 1:19 – 2:7

The divine title of the book of Revelation is in the first verse. The divine outline of the book is found in Revelation 1:19.

- 1) The things which you have seen.
- 2) The things which are.
- 3) The things which shall be hereafter.

**“The things which you have seen”** - In the first chapter John saw the Blessed and Glorious Christ. **“The things which are”** - In the next two chapters John was to carry a message to seven existing churches. **“The things which shall be hereafter”** - From chapter four to twenty two John revealed things that would unfold at a later time. It is at this third section where interpreters of Scripture disagree the most.

For now we consider chapters two and three: **“The Things Which Are.”**

Christ has a glorious church planned (Matthew 16:15-18; Ephesians 5:25-27). It is a work in progress. One day all those who received Christ as Lord and Savior will be gathered together as one. So shall we ever be with the Lord (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Meanwhile, Christ’s Kingdom is filled with many churches. The Greek word for “church” was used to describe a business assembly: people who were officials in a community would be called out to do business. This word is used 121 times in the New Testament. There are four times it is used to describe other kinds of assemblies (Acts 7:38; 19:32,39,41). A few times the word is used to describe the church of Christ as an institution (abstractly) or to consider the church of Christ in prospect (the future universal church, gathered together by Christ).

Otherwise the word is “church” or “churches” – describing local assemblies of Christ’s disciples, worshipping and doing the Lord’s work. You wouldn’t have much of a New Testament to read if it were not for the fact that it is Christ’s plan for us to preach the Gospel and make disciples; baptize them and then, teaching them to obey all things that Christ commanded, organize the disciples into functioning local churches (Matthew 28:18-20; Hebrews 10:19-25 ).

Perhaps the key phrase found in Revelation chapters 2-3 is, **“He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches...”** See Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22.