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HOW AND WHAT CHRIST WOULD HAVE HIS MINISTERS PREACH TODAY

Reflections on Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

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The book of the Revelation was penned by John under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost at the end of the 1st century AD i.e. some 1900 years ago.

In a world that is frenzied in its search for the latest and in which so many dread the 'stigma' of being 'behind the fashion', it is essential for the Christian to ever bear in mind the words of Horatius Bonar's lovely hymn:

*I change, he changes not,
The Christ can never die;
His love, not mine, the resting-place,
His truth, not mine, the tie.*

*The cross still stands unchanged,
Though heaven is now his home,
The mighty stone is rolled away,
But yonder is his tomb!*

The essential character of Christianity, its message, its philosophy and its code of conduct, NEVER CHANGES for its "author and finisher" is Christ the unchanging and unchangeable One.

As we briefly consider something of these two chapters in Revelation it is essential that we, and preachers especially, bear this in mind.

These two chapters contain messages to the seven churches in Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. These churches were all in the area which we now call Turkey.

The messages were direct communications from the 'Great King and Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ.'

They were intimate and detailed, indicating the knowledge the Saviour has of His people. That in itself should cause us to tremble. The favourite lie of the devil is that "The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it," Psalm 94:7. These chapters show that to be a great deception!

I have but three main points which I desire to make and they are directed chiefly at ministers today.

I. PLEASE NOTE THE CORRUPTIONS WHICH HAD ALREADY ENTERED THE EARLY CHURCH

The apostles, with the exception of John, who was the last to die, were hardly cold in their graves, as we would say, and departure from truth was already taking place.

Of course, that departure had actually begun while the apostles were still alive, as the epistles, especially Galatians and Jude for instance, clearly show.

Of the seven churches in Asia only two escaped censorship from Christ in His letters to them. They were Smyrna and Philadelphia, 2:8-11 and 3:7-13.



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This fact has to be noted today most carefully.

Warnings

We are warned that: "The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils," 1 Timothy 4:1 and "that in the last days perilous times shall come," 2 Timothy 3:1. Peter issues a similar warning. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation," 2 Peter 3:3-4.

The point to be noted is that if there was the most serious departure from the faith and the embracing of terrible sins in the first century, and we are warned that there is much worse to come, what corruptions and departures may we not expect to take place in this evil, apostate God-denying age?

There is TODAY no room for complacency amongst God's ministers and elders regarding the purity of the church. God has sounded the warning and His warnings are neither frivolous nor unimportant. He does not cry 'wolf' when there is no danger!

On guard

The state of these first century congregations, some younger than the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, serves to underscore the importance for God's servant today to be on his guard over the flock of God.

Christ sees the corruptions amongst His people for He "holdeth the seven stars (His ministers) in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (the churches)" Revelation 2:1.

Just what does He see in our hearts today, in our homes and in our gatherings if, in the 1st century, where something of the power and blessing of Pentecost must have still prevailed, He saw such sins?

Minister and elders must face up to this question!

II. HOW CLOSELY CHRIST OBSERVES HIS CHURCH

A number of words and phrases indicate this.

"I know thy works"

The phrase "I know thy works" appears in every letter, 2:2, 9, 13, 19, 3:1, 8, 15. The word "know" means 'to perceive with the eyes'! Have we forgotten what it says of the eyes of Christ? "His eyes were as a flame of fire," Revelation 1:14, 2:18 and also 19:12. How searching and penetrating are such eyes! Daniel said the same of the eyes of Christ. "His eyes as lamps of fire," Daniel 10:6. His gaze can penetrate the deepest gloom! "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Hebrews 4:13.

"Few"

Again, notice the use of the word "few". Look at 2:14, and 20. Does not the use of this word, which means "little or small", indicate that His eyes sees all things and no sin is dismissed as of no importance. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" Habakkuk 1:13.

I believe that there is a tendency today for many sins to be trivialised and rated as unimportant, but how wrong this is in the light of Christ's comments in Revelation 2 and 3! Something as small as a fly can cause



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great harm! "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour," Ecclesiastes 10:1. Microscopic germs and viruses can cause much discomfort, pain and death. We certainly do not dismiss such because they are 'small'!! Neither can we be complacent about the inroads of sin, of worldliness and neglect of God's Word within the church.

It may be considered as 'nit-picking' by some foolish people but that is not how we see activities in medical centres, the scrubbing and latex gloves and masks worn by the medical staff when we find ourselves requiring treatment. We want our medics to show such alertness and care, do we not? And yet, they deal only with that which can harm the body. Ministers and elders are required to deal with those things "which war against the soul," and must therefore be avoided and shunned as the remainder of Peter's warning tells us. "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul," 1 Peter 2:11.

Personal

It is also to be noted that the Saviour gets very personal! He deals with the church on an intimate level. He knows the members of it and their activities and what it is they face in great detail. It has to be said that He 'notices' the good and the bad, usually mentioning the good things first.

He names the 'Nicolaitans', 2:6, 15. He names His faithful servant, Antipas, 2:13. He identifies the false prophetess, 2:20, likening her unto Jezebel. He quotes their thoughts and words to them, 3:17. God is the same as of old. "I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me: for now, O Ephraim, thou committest whoredom, and Israel is defiled," Hosea 5:3.

The most cursory of examinations of these two chapters will indicate the intimate knowledge Christ has of His churches.

III. HERE WE HAVE CHRIST'S ANSWER TO SIN AND CORRUPTION WHICH HAVE ENTERED AMONGST HIS PEOPLE

Every letter to the seven churches begins with the words: "Unto the angel of the church . . . write."

Who are the angels referred to? They are the ministers of the churches. The Greek word 'aggelos' means messenger and that is exactly what a true servant of Christ is. He is His messenger.

To counter the sin that had crept in Christ gave each minister a message to preach. The letter sent to the individual ministers from Christ by the hand and pen of John the apostle, was to be read out from the pulpit by the minister and doubtless copied and circulated amongst the saints of God in the seven churches.

Let me state something that I do not wish to have anyone misunderstand. The Saviour did not command the ministers to hold evangelistic services or convene great 'teaching' conferences or invite well-known evangelical 'personalities' to their pulpits in order to counter this sinful invasion. NO! He gave each minister a message to preach which directly addressed the issues facing the churches. Name the sins! Name the individuals! Be blunt about the consequences which indifference and defiance would have upon the churches!

He did NOT tell them to be careful lest they offended any or risked losing members and to tiptoe around the issues they were facing. Rather, He showed to them that HE WAS OFFENDED and they must tell the saints that and make them aware of that most sombre, fearful truth and act accordingly.

Brethren, this is HOW and WHAT we should be preaching today!

The whole counsel of God

John 3:16 has its glorious place in "all the counsel of God", Acts 20:27. BUT it is not the whole of that counsel! Paul made that wonderful claim regarding his ministry just before he gave that solemn, faithful warning to the elders in Ephesus. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy



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Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that 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. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears," Acts 20:28-31.

Here is the bold bluntness of Revelation 2 and 3. Here is what a faithful minister ought to be doing in this day of departure and sinful infiltration of the churches of Christ.

Yes, condemn the film-makers and playwrights, the television producers and blasphemous comedians BUT DO NOT OVERLOOK THE WICKEDNESS THAT MAY BE ROOSTING IN OUR CHURCH RAFTERS!

That is the message of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 and we fail to grasp the essence of Christ's warnings if we do not lay firm hold on this truth.

Ian Paisley

This was the spirit of the early ministry of Ian Paisley. Sabbath by sabbath, he lifted up his voice against the wickedness of ecumenism, popery and the betrayers of God's truth within the Protestant denominations. Many times I heard it said back then that he should stick to the 'gospel' and leave controversy alone. Those who said that desired only to be free of the reproach of the cross that such preaching brought. They had not the mind of Christ and Revelation chapters 2 and 3 show that to be so.

A good minister

I can still recall Dr Paisley in the old Ravenhill church quoting a portion of God's Word in his own defence when he came under yet another attack for denouncing the wickedness infiltrating the churches. I was saved only a very short time, a mere month or two, but the words had an impact upon me and I learned that night what made a good minister of Jesus Christ.

The words were from Paul's first epistle to Timothy, chapter 4, verse 6. "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained."

The 'these things' which Timothy was ever to put the brethren in remembrance of were, of course, those things which the Holy Ghost had warned would come and threaten the purity of the Church of Christ, verses 1-5.

I can still see and hear the great preacher mockingly say that it was not 'how the minister elevated his little finger as he gripped the teacup and drank tea with the ladies of the congregation' that made a good minister but his crying out against the apostasy that surrounds us.

50 years

50 years have passed since that night but the apostasy has not gone away but has deepened, and like the flood-waters that have invaded many, many homes in the British Isles of late, has brought misery, heart-break and death in its wake. The apostasy and the spirit of this age have broken through many defences and laid waste many denominations. We shall fare no better if we do not use the only means by which apostasy can be resisted and kept at bay. I refer to the simple, searching message of God's Word, which, like Revelation 2 and 3, hit the sins of this age and those who advocate them and seek to apologise and excuse them.

We see that spirit of appeasement at work in our congregations. The wickedness of Stormont, its regime of power-sharing with terrorist murderers and its funding of all forms of wickedness including sodomy and blasphemy, is deemed acceptable and foolishly defended by some. Then there are the lowering of the walls of separation with evangelicals within the apostasy. Little is ever heard of a public denouncing of the sin that it is to refuse to separate from the apostasy and thereby become a partaker in its iniquity (2 John 1:10-11).



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That was not the ministry of the man who led the Free Presbytery Church in its heyday. If it is ever to see such days again then it must return to such preaching as that required of the angels of the seven churches in Asia.

May the Lord stir and revive His people and His servants again and bring us all back to our first love.

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