

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

Introduction

Program #1046

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EDDIE: Who is the leader of your church? Who's the head of the church to which you belong? Is it some individual man? Is it some council or group of individuals that serves as the head of the church to which you belong? I hope you'll open your Bibles to Revelation 1 as we study today on *The Truth In Love*.

EDDIE: Thank you so much for joining us on *The Truth In Love*. Mark Teske is with me today on the program. We're going to be looking today at Revelation 1 and studying what that chapter has to say about Jesus, the head of the church.

MARK: In Matthew 16, when Jesus received the confession from Peter that He indeed was the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus said, "Upon this rock," (this confession that you made), "I will build my church." We see that Jesus was indeed the head of the church. He is the establisher of it. And as a result, He has all authority, as we read in Matthew 28: 18. When we look at Revelation 1, we see Jesus as the head of the church and just what that means in a practical way.

EDDIE: In Revelation 1:11, Jesus, in talking to John in this vision said, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." Today we are beginning a series of lessons that will focus on these seven congregations and the letters that Jesus dictated to John for him to write down and send to these congregations. Our lesson today is going to serve basically as an

introduction, as we look at chapter 1 which emphasizes Jesus as the author of these letters and the ultimate author of this book, through the Holy Spirit's inspiration of John and the visions that John saw. We will establish what the scriptures teach about who actually is the head of the church. We will start in the book of Ephesians.

MARK: Yes. In Ephesians 1:10, Paul writes to the church at Ephesus that, "In the dispensation of the fullness of the times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him." So He's going to gather together all things in one, in Christ. That would obviously be the church that he's discussing there.

EDDIE: Yes. He comes back to that on a number of occasions in the book of Ephesians, where he emphasizes the church and establishes the reality of who is the head of it. One of those places is in Ephesians 1:22-23, where Paul talks about this plan to sum up, or bring things together in Christ, (in His body) which was God's ultimate plan. That plan involves the church and Jesus as the head over it, where he says that "God has put all things under His feet," (speaking of Christ), "and has given Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all." So the church is the body of Christ. Mark, as you correctly pointed out, He is the head of the body. He's the one that is the leader of His church.

MARK: It is interesting, in looking at verse 23, that the church is the fullness of Christ. And exactly how we complete deity is a concept that really is quite deep. Honestly, I don't feel adequate to explain that in detail, but one thing that does jump out as we look at that is that the church plays a role much more important, and much deeper than it may otherwise appear at the surface, as Paul in this letter to the Ephesians, points out to us very clearly.

EDDIE: Another place where he references the church and its place in God's plan is in Ephesians 3:10-11 where the Bible says, "To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." The church is itself an expression of the manifold

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EDDIE: Just by way of some final application, we want to emphasize with this lesson that Jesus is alive and well, He knows what's going on in churches, and He is the head of His church. Why would we want anybody else to operate and serve as the head of the church to which we belong? We ought to try to be the kind of individual Christian, and churches ought to want to be the kind of church that He desires that we be. And that's what this study is going to be about over the next few weeks, as we look individually at these particular congregations mentioned in chapters 2 and 3. It'll be to look at what the Lord had to say to these congregations to help them to be the kind of church that He really wants them to be. So I hope that you will look forward to that study as we look at these congregations in the coming weeks. We appreciate very much your being with us today, and we want you to contact us if there's something of a spiritual nature that we can help you with. Our address is P.O. Box 865, Hurst, Texas, 76053. You can contact us by our e-mail address, which is requests@thetruthinlove.com or you can contact us through our website, www.thetruthinlove.com. We're offering something today on the program which is absolutely free. Anything that we offer, whether it's a CD or a DVD of the program, transcripts, or whatever we have that we're able to offer won't cost you a thing. We're not interested in your money. We just want you to have the information. And one of the things that we're offering today (that Mark is holding up) is a booklet entitled *From My Heart To Yours*. It was written by a faithful gospel preacher, brother Maxie Boren, who has appeared on *The Truth In Love* in years past. It's a very helpful booklet that, as you strive to understand what God's will is for your life and what God would have you to do in order to be saved from sin and how to be pleasing to Him, will help you immensely in that journey. So if you'll contact us and request *From My Heart To Yours*, we'll be glad to send that to you. Thank you again for watching. Mark, thank you for being here. We'll see you again next time.

wisdom of God. This was God's plan from eternity. Remember, Paul says in this passage that this was all according to God's eternal purpose. And that purpose included the church and the existence of the church as the body of Christ, being that which operates under His headship and His authority, and is something that is an expression of God's multifaceted manifold wisdom. So the church obviously occupies, or should occupy, a very important place in the lives of people that are interested in pleasing God.

MARK: Once again, as we look at the concept of the manifold wisdom of God being made known in the heavenly places, it's really hard to understand exactly what that means and to describe it fully, as I'd like to be able to do. But again, it emphasizes how important the church really is and the design and the pattern that God has set forth in His eternal purpose that He accomplished in Christ Jesus.

EDDIE: Correct. Also in this book, Paul makes the point in chapter 4 regarding this body, the body of Christ of which He is the head, emphasizing the singular nature of it when he says in Ephesians 4:4, "There is one body." Now, that's not what we hear a lot of times with regard to the concept of the church in the religious world at large. We hear most often that there are many churches and that God doesn't care one way or the other which church you belong to. But that's not Biblical language. It's not Biblical terminology or a Biblical concept. Paul said, "There is one body." And in the book of I Corinthians, he talks about the unity that should exist there.

MARK: In I Corinthians 1:10, Paul says that we should "be perfectly joined together." That's not the divisiveness that we see. But again, the wisdom of God is made known through that one body, that united group that Jesus prayed for in His high priestly prayer that we read there in the book of John as well.

EDDIE: Absolutely. And from all of these passages we can find a number of applications, not the least of which and one that we've already talked about, is the importance of the church itself and how the church is not, as some have said, an afterthought of God, and something that God didn't have as a part of His original plan for mankind, but a plan that He had to come up with on the "spur of the

moment” just prior to the death of Christ. That’s not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that the church has been according to God’s eternal purpose and therefore is of mighty importance. So we need to be careful before we find ourselves being critical of the church in general and the concept of the church, and make sure that we’re looking at the church through Biblical eyes and from heaven’s perspective and see it for the beautiful thing that it really is.

MARK: In man’s wisdom, the church can be minimized, and we can say that it isn’t really practical the way God established and designed it. But that’s as false as it can be. As we read here in Ephesians, the wisdom of God is made known in the heavenly places. We don’t understand all the implications of God and the church as fully as we’d like to, but again, the thing that it stresses is how critically important it is that we pay attention to God’s plan for the church. And part of that plan is Jesus as the head.

EDDIE: That’s right. That takes us very easily into our study of Revelation 1, because as John introduces this letter and the specific addresses that Jesus is going to make to these individual congregations, evidently one of the things that He wants to establish right off the bat is to remind these congregations of who He is and that He is indeed the head of the church. So let’s begin our look at Revelation 1. I hope you have your Bibles turned to that passage. We’re going to start by noticing that in the very first verse of the book of Revelation, we’re clued in to part of the nature of the book and this type of literature when the text says that these things were “signified” unto John, which tells us, if you take off the last part of that word signified, and just look at the first part, you’ve got the word sign. And that’s what this is. It is a book that deals a lot in figurative language, or language that’s not intended to be taken literally. There are a lot of images here, and these images or symbols represent other things. It’s not always easy to figure out what those signs represent, but in some cases it is, because John will come out and tell us. He’ll say this represents this and this represents the other, and we’re given enough insight into that so that we can have a pretty good understanding of what some of those other signs are.

MARK: As we look at some of these signs, often as human beings we’d really like to be able to find a one-to-one correlation and say that

think we really get the point there.

EDDIE: Looking at verse 16, continuing his description, “He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp, two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.” There’s some imagery that I think, when we let the Bible be its own best commentary and using some common sense, we can get a pretty good grasp of what some of these images mean.

MARK: Yes. Verse 20 tells us that the stars in His hand are the messengers or angels of the seven churches. The Greek word *anglos*, which is translated angels, is actually a common Greek word that also means messenger. So we don’t necessarily need to get dogmatic that these are heavenly beings dealing with the church, but it can be used in a non-technical way by just saying messengers of the churches, which could be the preachers or possibly the elders. There are various interpretations, but nonetheless, messengers on behalf of God to the churches themselves, several of which fit into that category.

EDDIE: Yes. It wouldn’t make a whole lot of sense, to me anyway, for Jesus to say, “John, I want you to write these things down in a book”, and then begin each of the letters in chapters 2 and 3 with, “To the angel of the church in Ephesus or Smyrna, write...” Why would he write something down on a piece of paper, and how could he send it then to some heavenly being? So it probably is some particular individual in each of those congregations. Revelation 1:16 also tells about a sharp, two-edged sword coming out of His mouth. Hebrews 4:12 has to come to mind there. “For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.” So he speaks of the word of God that comes from the mouth of Christ, and that’s certainly something that congregations ought to be interested in hearing.

MARK: We also see in this verse the image of the bright, shining sun, with the awesome strength and power that we can observe even from millions and millions of miles away. Again, that’s just an image that helps us to understand how strong and powerful God really is. And going back to the idea of the seven stars, one modern day thought that comes to me is that we talk about God having the whole world in His hands, and as we think of these seven stars in His hand, that imagery transfers into modern day English very well.

EDDIE: The concept of His purity is symbolized by the color white, and Him having the piercing eyes, the fact that He can see. He's in the middle of those congregations, right there among them, and He has this piercing vision to be able to see. So whatever He says about any of these congregations we know is going to be gospel truth, because He has that ability to see, as well as the fact that He is the standard of holiness Himself. These congregations are going to be exposed, both their good points and their bad points, by One who very much knows exactly what He's talking about, because He has that ability to see.

MARK: The illustration goes on further by saying that His feet were like fine brass refined in a furnace. Now, brass is a very heavy metal. I played football when I was younger, and the most important thing about being a lineman in football is your feet. If your feet are well planted and you have that firm foundation, you can do a whole lot of pushing and moving and really use your strength appropriately. And we see here that Jesus not only has that holiness, that purity, and the all-seeing ability, He also has the strength to carry out the things which He needs to do, which would be very comforting to these churches and these people as they see, in many cases, persecution right on the horizon.

EDDIE: I think it's very interesting the way His voice is described. It was the sound of mighty waters. In our conversations about this passage, you and I both have thought of the same thing in regard to the image that conjures up, and that's Niagara Falls. My wife and I had the opportunity to go there several years ago and to stand right at the edge of Niagara Falls and just hear the sound of that water as it powers over, (it's almost a deafening sound), and it conjures up clearly images of power and strength. And when the Lord speaks, it's an important thing and certainly should conjure up those ideas of strength and power.

MARK: It's more of an emotional feeling that strength and power bring to us, rather than trying to describe a voice coming, literally like the sound of water. The sound of water and the sound of a voice are very different, with the rushing sound being a very nondescript, non-telling type of sound, and a voice being very peculiar and specific. Trying to mix the two obviously doesn't work, but when we understand the emotional side, that strength and power that comes across through the word, I

this sign specifically means this, and that's really not the way figurative language works. Figurative language is something that appeals more to the emotions than to the intellect. And in our 21st century mindset, we may at first say that's not something that's common, but when figurative language is rolled into our current culture, there are some things about it that we really can understand.

EDDIE: Yes, absolutely. Some people get a little skittish and scared off from the book of Revelation initially, because they come across a lot of these signs and symbols, and they're scared by it because they don't know what to do with it. But figurative language shouldn't scare us, and it doesn't because we use it all the time. You know, if I were to mention to you the number 13, what would pop into your head? Most often you'd think of it as the bad luck number. If I said the number 7, you might think that we tend to view that as lucky number 7. So we use numbers figuratively to represent certain things, even in our culture. Color is the same way. Why does a bride wear white on her wedding day? Because it is a symbol of purity. So we understand in a general way what figurative language is all about because we use it too. It's just a matter of our coming to understand what certain colors and numbers signified to a different culture. And through studies of those cultures we can come to understand that. So if we have a better grasp of what some of these things meant in those cultures, it will help us to better understand some of the symbols in Revelation.

MARK: Yes. They are designed to appeal emotionally to us rather than literally. As we go through chapter 1, I think we'll see several cases, and we can highlight those as we go through.

EDDIE: In Revelation 1:12-13, we are specifically introduced to Jesus in the chapter, or at least to the circumstances that Jesus will appear in. John says, "Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands, One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band." John says he heard this voice that said, "What you see, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches." Then he said that he turned to see what the voice was, and there he saw seven lampstands. Some

translations may have the word candlesticks. He will tell us later what those candlesticks or lampstands represent.

MARK: In verse 20, he details that for us and tells us exactly what this figure means. And throughout the book of Revelation when that precision is required, it's interesting that John was inspired to give us specifically what that figure represents. It helps us in our understanding of those specific figures.

EDDIE: It gives a little foundation or little bits of security where you can go to and say we know what this means, because John comes out and tells you. These seven lampstands represent the seven congregations or churches of Asia that he just highlighted back in verse 11.

MARK: If we look at this passage from an emotional perspective, we can see Jesus as the head of the church walking among these various lampstands. He's there among them, and in the midst of them. He's not in some high off perch looking down at it, as the deist would claim, but He's there in the middle of them. And as we read through chapters 2 and 3, and the letters to the specific churches, we see He has a very intimate knowledge of each church. That intimate knowledge is set up for us in a figurative, pictorial sort of way as we see Jesus walking in the middle of these lampstands. He's there, involved and He's active as the head of the church.

EDDIE: Right. The concept of Jesus being right in the middle of His congregations can have two different effects, depending on how people are living their lives. That can be a comforting thing to think of the Lord being right there among you. And He'll say to each of these congregations as we'll look later at these letters, "I know your works." That can be comforting, or that can be frightening. If our works are not what they ought to be, then we might not want the Lord in the middle of what we're doing. But that's how John is introduced. I turn, and I see this one who's described later, incidentally, in verse 18 of chapter 1 as the one who was alive, then dead, and now alive forevermore. I think that's clearly a reference to the Son of God, and a reference to His death, burial and resurrection.

MARK: And that becomes very obvious when we see that there's only One person that fits the description of all those things. He says that He is "The Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last" (Revelation 1:11). Again, clearly Jesus is described for us in the beginning of the book of the gospel of John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1). There He was in the beginning, the first. And here we are in the book of Revelation seeing Him as head over all things, His church, the fullness of Him who fills all in all, and we see that coming out as the last and fulfilling that as well.

EDDIE: If you'll look at verses 14 and 15, we're again given more of this imagery. Remember, when you're thinking about what John is writing in Revelation, perhaps it's helpful for us to think of what's taking place here, as John is in a sense sitting in a theater and looking up in front of him on a stage as different things happen. Jesus told John he was going to see some things and he was to write down and describe what he saw. So John is sitting there looking at this stage where a lot of these things are playing out, and he's describing them. As he turns to hear this voice, he sees this one like unto the Son of Man, and he describes Him further. In Revelation 1:14-15, "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters." Now, there's a lot of imagery there, but I think, with some common sense and some understanding of some of the cultural things that we're aware of from that time and place, we can get a pretty good idea as to what John is trying to get across with these symbols and images here.

MARK: These symbols and images in verses 14 and 15 really do translate well into our culture as well. White is still the symbol of purity. When I was a kid, I used to like Superman comic books. I think of the illustration of Superman peering through walls, when I read the idea of the piercing, all-seeing eyes described here in Revelation 1. I'm not trying to be disrespectful to the Son of God, but that image of the all-seeing, omnipresent nature of Jesus as the Christ really highlights and helps us to understand Him working among these churches.