



Editor's Note

Well, here we are in a new year! Is it something special or just a date change on the calendar? Already I know that I will not be perfect, and I know that the Lord will not give up His purposes for my life. What a comfort knowing that each morning I wake up to “new mercies” (Lam. 3:23). Are we giving thanks for them at the close of each day?

New Testament Overview

Part 7: The Revelation by Warren Henderson

The final book of the New Testament, *Revelation*, was written by John in approximately A.D. 95 (1:1, 4). After serving the Lord at Ephesus for many years, John was banished to the island of Patmos during the cruel reign of Emperor Domitian (1:9). The name of this book is derived from the Greek *apocalypses* which means “to unveil.” John was given the privilege of revealing the splendor of Christ and His future exaltation. John reminds us that Jesus Christ is the center of Bible prophecy (19:10).

The apocalypse would be revealed to John by displaying future events symbolically and not by audible words. Through the assistance of an angel, God would *show* John what was to be preserved in writing. Because God is the author of all Scripture, the use of symbols in our Bibles is consistent. This means that what is being “signified” (1:1)—or symbolized—in *Revelation* can only be rightly interpreted if established scriptural meanings are applied. For example, John saw a circular rainbow around God’s throne (4:3). A circle is endless and represents eternity (Ezek. 1:16-18) while a rainbow symbolizes God’s promises (Gen. 9:13), thus, the scene affirms that God keeps His promises forever. This illustrates the importance of literally interpreting what John describes unless the context ensures that only a figurative sense is meant. For example, a literal woman cannot sit on seven literal mountains so obviously some metaphoric representation is meant (Rev. 17:9), but wicked men calling on the mountains to hide them is poetic language to express desperation (6:16).

The Lord Jesus’ instructions to John provide an outline for the book: “Write the things which you have seen, and the things

How shall we show our gratitude “in deed and truth,” not just “in word and tongue” (1 John 3:18)?

Can we take more seriously the call to be more Christ-like this year, “to be transformed by the renewing of our mind” (Rom. 12:1)? It helps to remember that this appeal is made in view of “the mercies of God.”



which are, and the things which will take place after this” (1:19). In chapter 1, John describes what he has seen: Christ glorified. In chapters 2–3, John included seven letters from Jesus Christ to seven churches that were in Asia Minor at that time. Finally, in chapters 4–22, the apostle reveals things to come: pre-tribulation activities (4–5), tribulation events (6–19), the kingdom age (20), and the eternal state (21–22).

Things Which You Have Seen (Rev. 1)

John heard the voice of and saw an awesome vision of Jesus Christ glorified. Though Christ is poised to vindicate His name on earth, He is seen walking among the churches (i.e., lampstands) and scrutinizing their character and doings. His evaluation of them is contained in chapters 2 and 3.

The Things Which Are (Rev. 2 and 3)

The Lord sent a messenger to each of the seven churches in Asia Minor with an assessment of their conduct, doctrine, and deeds. The encouragement and warnings to these churches is timeless and was preserved that believers down through the ages might avoid the pitfalls of the past and live to be praised by Christ.

Ephesus was sound in doctrine and works, but did not love the Lord as they once did. Smyrna was a faithful church despite harsh persecution. Pergamos suffered from worldliness and permitted the Nicolaitans (a developing clergy system) to conquer them. Thyatira was controlled by a prophetess named Jezebel; her followers were idolatrous and immoral. Sardis had a lifeless profession. Philadelphia was experiencing revival and had an evangelical focus. Laodicea was materialistic and suffered from a

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In the previous article we looked at some reasons why the word *Outreach* is a useful word, both in private conversation and in the church. It reminds us of some important Bible truths: that God set an example in going out to those who are lost; that the earliest Christians went everywhere bringing God's good news to those who were lost; that this mission (or sending) includes every believer, those who answer questions and those who initiate conversations. Today, we'll conclude with a final way this word can serve us by helping to safeguard a precious doctrinal truth.

Before we begin, two reminders are in order. For one, this final point falls more in the category of "meat" than "milk." Accordingly, elders ought to study the subject carefully to make sure they understand it, and when appropriate, can explain it as simply as possible to others. Also, new and young believers in the church are not always keen about "doctrine," much less safeguarding it. They often prefer what they call practical ministry. In time they will learn that all good practice is founded upon sound doctrine, and doctrine properly presented will have a refreshing practical side. But elders are (hopefully) interested in safeguarding all doctrine in Scripture, both the milk and the meat.

The Nature of the Church, a Precious Bible Truth

So how can an understanding and use of the word *outreach* help us to protect an important Bible doctrine? We need to think carefully about this, as it involves the very nature of the church. What is the nature of the church as taught in Scripture? Most evangelical Christians will agree that "the church" comprises the whole body of redeemed saints in the present age. Terms like "universal church" are employed to describe it. There are no unsaved people in it, and a very large part of it is already at home with the Lord.

But when we speak of the individ-

ual or local expressions of the universal church, things are not so simple; in fact they can get quite fuzzy. No question about it; local churches exist at different times and in different places throughout the world. The apostles addressed them and the Lord Jesus even sent some letters to several (Rev. 2, 3). But what is their nature?

Simply stated, the nature of the local church is no different than the nature of the universal church. However, in the thinking of many, a local church is an assortment of saved and lost people all coming together for religious purposes. Modern day "seeker sensitive churches" even tailor their programs and music to attract as many lost people as possible. Our purpose here is not to criticize others—the Lord is their judge—but rather we want to inquire what Christian assemblies seeking to follow the biblical pattern for the church believe. How would you describe your particular church fellowship? What does Scripture teach? What do we believe? Consider the following.

Some Important Considerations

In addressing and speaking to local churches in their day, how did the apostles address the churches? We read terms like "the saints," "holy," "beloved," "the elect"—even in churches like Corinth with all its doctrinal and moral confusion. But do we ever find

Do we ever find any apostle addressing the church as a mixed multitude of saved and lost people?

any apostle addressing the church as a mixed multitude of saved and lost people, or saying something like, "If there should be some unsaved person reading this letter..."?

Further, we have a clear record that the believers continued steadfastly in

apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2:42), but in context, these activities all refer to believers. We also read of "the equipping of the saints" (Eph. 4:11) but not a word about managing or preaching to the unsaved among us.

The Heart of the Matter

Now of course, our earnest desire is that the unsaved may come to know the Lord. But that is not the point in question. We're thinking about the nature of the church.

And here is the heart of the matter. The apostles always address the church as a holy and sinless company, not a mixed multitude! Why is this important? Because Christ as the Head of the body is holy, and you cannot have a pure Head with an impure body. Believers are viewed in such intimacy with Christ that we are described as already seated together with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:5).

Are we advocating sinless perfection? Certainly not. But viewed "in Christ," they enjoy an exalted position while struggling in daily life with "the sins that so easily beset us." God thus sets the standard or bar very high: nothing less than the perfect righteousness of Christ. It is the same principle as used in the OT to describe God's earthly people, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob..." (Num. 23:21). Thus, every believer looks up to and strives to imitate the Lord Jesus, and this is the best incentive toward holiness in life and in the church. This stands in sharp contrast to when the nature of the church is viewed as a collection of saints and sinners all mixed together. With this low standard, no wonder we hear, "Well, I may be bad, but I'm not as bad as so-and-so."

Someone will say, "But aren't there unsaved among us?" Yes, and we love to have them come in. But they are not part of the church, if we understand its nature. They are visitors, spectators! They are looking in on the family of

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Outreach (continued from page 2)

God as it learns together, and works together on relationships, worshipping and praying together (as Acts 2:42). Many have come to Christ in this way!

And how does all this relate to our word *outreach*? As the family of God, we are becoming equipped to be sent out to share the Good News with people wherever we find them. Our message is the gospel, not an invitation to attend church. We reach out to

them, not try to make them comfortable among us! Once believers understand the nature of the church, it can be life changing. Unity and harmony and serving matter; we're being prepared for outreach!

A final question: How are we to view unsaved friends and neighbors that may visit us? Let 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 provide the answer. It is the only place where we find a lost person

coming into the assembly. If the saints are engaged in what is stated to be for unbelievers (v. 22), a disappointing result follows. But if they are edifying fellow believers in the church, the unbeliever worships God and reports that, "God is truly among you" (v. 25). That's outreach even inside the church!

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Revelation (continued from page 1)

lukewarm commitment to Christ. While the Lord found something praiseworthy in most of these churches, He did rebuke five of the seven and called on them to repent.

The things which will take place after this (Rev. 4-22)

Chapters 4 and 5 occur prior to the Tribulation Period and just after the rapture (glorification) of the Church. The Church and perhaps glorified Old Testament saints surround the Lamb on God's throne. Besides receiving the praise of redeemed men and angels, the Lamb also receives a scroll from His Father, the title deed to the world.

The Tribulation Period begins when Christ breaks the first of seven seals securing this scroll (Rev. 6:1). Judgments occur on earth each time the Lord opens a seal; the first six seals are opened in chapter 6. Chapter 7 contains the first of several parenthetical explanations in the book. Each parenthesis momentarily halts the prophetic development to better explain what has been revealed before, then concludes with a brief prophetic glimpse ahead. This first parenthesis reveals that 144,000 Jews will be sealed by God to preach the kingdom gospel message on the earth (Matt. 24:14).

We also learn that a great multitude during the Tribulation Period will be saved because they chose death rather

than to follow the Antichrist. The seventh seal judgment ushers in the seven trumpet judgments of chapters 8 and 9. Each time an angel blows a trumpet a specific judgment occurs on earth.

Chapters 10 and 11 compose the second parenthetical explanation: Gentiles will control Jerusalem for 42 months and the supernatural ministry of two witnesses is described. Chapter 12 marks the midway point in the Tribulation Period; a war in heaven occurs then that will constrain Satan and his demons to the earth. Afterwards, Satan will murder much of humanity, including two-thirds of the Jews (Zech. 13:8-9), but God will protect a refined remnant of Israel from harm. Two beasts (the Antichrist and False Prophet) are introduced in chapter 13. As led by Satan, this unholy trinity mimics and mocks the Holy Trinity. John also speaks of the mark of the beast, which is forced on humanity.

Chapter 14 contains the third parenthetical explanation: the 144,000 previously sealed Jews are with the Lamb on Mount Zion. Also, three angels fly

over the earth to declare that God's judgment is coming and to warn those on the earth not to follow the Antichrist. A vision of Armageddon concludes

the chapter. Chapters 15-16 describe seven bowls of judgments poured out on the earth in quick succession. The fourth parenthetical section, a vision of

Armageddon concludes chapter 16.

Chapter 17 reveals the apostate Church as a harlot, who is tolerated at first but then is destroyed by the Antichrist. The Antichrist's defeat by Christ is also foreseen. Chapter 18 describes the obliteration of the Antichrist's political and economic system. Chapter 19 foretells of Christ's return to the earth with the armies of heaven and how Christ will destroy the Beast and his armies at Armageddon. The Judgment of Nations follows and will remove all those not fit to enter Christ's Kingdom (19:21; Matt. 25:31-46). The souls of the wicked are preserved in Hades until the final judgment, but the beast and false prophet are cast alive into the Lake of Fire.

Chapter 20 presents Christ in His Kingdom and Satan bound in the bottomless pit. After 1000 years, Satan will be released and he will deceive the nations into rebelling against Christ. Christ responds by destroying all His enemies (along with the earth) and then the wicked are resurrected to receive their eternal judgment at His Great White Throne.

Chapters 21-22 reveal a glorious heavenly city hovering above a new earth. Having successfully triumphed over His enemies and repaired the damage caused by sin, Christ returns a perfect creation to His Father (1 Cor. 15:28). Seeing all that Christ will accomplish for our good and His glory, John ends the book with an invitation for everyone to come to Christ in order to experience the full goodness of God. And they lived happily ever after!

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144,000 Jews will be sealed by God to preach the kingdom gospel message on the earth.

Wives' Corner

The Importance of Unity *by Kimberly Moffitt*

Jesus prayed in John 17:21-22, “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one.”


Unity is not the same as uniformity. Unity is each of us desiring to have the mind of Christ and being willing to align ourselves with His will. At a concert, if more than one piano is playing, they must be in tune with each other. But they are not tuned to each other, for if one is off, then all the others will be as well. Instead, they're all tuned to the same tuning fork. When each one matches the pitch of the tuning fork, they will also be in tune with each other. Then, though each piano plays different parts, they will sound together in perfect harmony.

Psalms 133 gives a beautiful picture of unity among believers. Unity is the work of the Spirit of God. He is the precious oil that flows down from the head of the High Priest, the Lord Jesus Himself. Colossians 3 says that love is the bond of perfection. Through the Spirit, the love of God flows down from the Head, and the Lord desires that it cover the entire body. We cannot *create*

unity, but we are called to *keep* it. There will only be true unity if we choose to focus on the person of Christ and see things the way He sees them. And how refreshing that is, not only to ourselves but to the heart of God. For where there is unity, God commands blessing.

Though unity is what God desires, it's not always the case in our local assemblies. In Philippians 4 we read of two women who were in sharp disagreement, and it was affecting the entire body. The Lord speaks through Paul, “I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.” These were women who knew the Lord. They had labored with Paul and with one another in the gospel. But something had gone wrong. The Lord does not reveal the specific issue but something had caused these women to be at odds. They needed to seek the Lord and know His mind. God cannot bless division. We need to be willing to let go of our own way and instead, do things God's way. To have “this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus,” is to have a humble mind; a mind that considers others; a mind that is willing to have the Lord change it if it is not seeing things clearly; a mind willing to wait patiently for the Lord to change the other person if that's what is needed.

Many problems in the local assembly are not caused by doctrinal differences, but by petty disagreements. When it comes to doctrine, we must stand firm on the truths of Scripture. However, when it comes to preferences, we need to get our focus off ourselves and back on the Lord. Philippians 4:4 tells us, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” True joy comes from pleasing Him, not in getting my own way. Verse 5 continues, “Let your gentleness [sweet reasonableness] be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.” The Lord Jesus is returning very soon. There is no time for nonsense. There's work to be done.

Hebrews 12:14-15 urges us to “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” Are you willing to lay aside your preferences so the Lord can be glorified and His work advanced? Is there someone you are at odds with over something non-essential that needs to be set right? I don't want to be the person in the assembly who is hindering the Lord from being able to bless. I'm sure you don't either. 

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Contact Info. Elders' ShopNotes, c/o 112 Doolittle Dr.
Bethany, CT 06524, USA
E-mail: alan7s@yahoo.com
Phone: 203-393-0078.

Publisher/Editor: Jack Spender
Editorial assistance: Ruth Rodger
Layout: Ryan Farrington

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