

STUDY NO 11:- “THE HISTORY OF CHRISTENDOM.”

STUDY 11, WEEK 1:

Introductory

- (1) Many “Church Histories” have been written, but being of human authorship, their value may be doubted. Men may record, numbers, wealth, influence and what seems to be success, or otherwise. But there is One who looks upon the heart, and who searches the hidden secrets there. He alone can say “I know” (John 2.24,25; Revelation 2.2,9,13,19; 3.1,8,15), therefore He alone can record history truly. This He has done, and His “History of Christendom” may be found in Matthew chapter 13, and Revelation chapters 2 and 3.
- (2) We must note the difference between “Church History” and “The History of Christendom”. As already referred to in these Studies, according to the teaching of Scripture, the word “Church” covers true born-again believers of the period between Pentecost and the Rapture. “Christendom” covers all who profess the Name of Christ, whether true or false. Christianity- is a heavenly ORGANISM. Christendom is an earthly ORGANISATION. Alas that many belonging to the former are found in unscriptural connection with the latter. And this latter organisation will one day be united with the other religions in one universal system which will recognise and incorporate the ethics of each. We read of God’s judgment upon this system, as to its POLITICAL aspect in Revelation 17; and its COMMERCIAL aspect in Revelation 18. Before this Judgment falls what is the Divine Call of Revelation 18.4? And of 2.Corinthians 6.14 to 7.1. with 2.Timothy 2.19?

The Parables of the Kingdom, and the Letters to the assemblies
“The things which ARE” (Revelation 1.19)

Read repeatedly and prayerfully, making your own notes as you proceed, Matthew 13 and Revelation chapters 2 and 3. The Key to the proper understanding of the REVELATION is found in chapter 1.19 in which each of three divisions is introduced by the words “the things which” — thus : -

“The things which thou hast seen”	Chapter 1.
“The things which are”	Chapters 2 and. 3.
“The things which shall be hereafter”	Chapters 4 to 22

- (1) In bringing us to this verse 19, the writer has already described the things which he had seen — what are they? What a revelation of the holiness of God, and of the jealous observation of the One who moves among His people. He sees all that is contrary to His desires in that which professes His Name, bringing judgment to bear upon all that offends Him, and, at the same time, seeking to stir up the affections of His people towards Himself. Notice also that in pursuance of the principle found in 1.Peter 4.17, Christian assemblies are first addressed, and afterwards Israel and the Nations.

- (2) There are, perhaps, three main ways in which “the things which are” (chapters 2 and 3) may be viewed.
- (a) They were assemblies actually existing at the time of writing, and in the localities named. And undoubtedly like all else that was written aforetime (Romans 15.4), these Seven Epistles may be received and used for our edification and guidance, “that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”.
 - (b) Undoubtedly too, we have here prophetically, the condition of affairs at the end of this “Church Age” when assemblies will be found corresponding, spiritually, or carnally, with one or other of the assemblies referred to here.
 - (c) They give a prophetic outline of Christendom from the days of the apostles up to the Rapture. In this connection notice:
 - i) The position of the Lord “in the midst” of the lamp— stands, which represent ? Rev: 1.20. See 1.13,20; 2.1.
 - ii) The symbolic number of Divine Perfection (seven) — 1.4, 11, 12, 13 ,20.
 - iii) The word “mystery” (and see the Note on that word in Study No: 2, Second Week) — 1.20.
 - iv) The space given to each compared with the size of the book.
 - v) The comparison of the Seven Messages with the development of the evils named in the corresponding periods of the actual history of Christendom.
 - vi) That the REVELATION is for ALL true bond-servants of God - 1.1.

Therefore we may say that the Lord specially selected these seven assemblies, because they had certain characteristics which correspond to the history of Christendom. They trace, in successive stages, Christendom’s history from Pentecostal power and devotion through the centuries, in all the main features of spirituality, victory, decline and failure, down to its close with Laodicean apostacy and final rejection by Christ.

- (3) Note how each message consists of 7 parts:
- a) The Address.
 - b) The special character in which the Lord presents Himself.
 - c) Commendation, where possible.
 - d) Blame, where that is found.
 - e) A call to repentance.
 - f) An exhortation to hear.
 - g) A promise to the one who overcomes.
- (4) Take a large piece of paper. Rule it into seven vertical columns, as large as possible. At the top of each column write the name of the assembly addressed. In the left hand margin (outside the columns) write item (b) as found in paragraph 3above, and in each column how the Lord is described. Then (c) to (g), filling in the appropriate columns. Carefully done, and with meditation, something of the blessing promised in chapter 1.3 will be experienced, and much that edifies will emerge later.

(5) Examine carefully the diagram which follows. This is to illustrate the teaching of the Seven Epistles. Note the “L” shape, to indicate that the first four phases of Christian profession (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos and Thyatira) followed one after the other. One gave place to the other. But the last four (Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea) though coming into existence one after the other continued to exist side by side, and run on thus to the end.

<p>EPHESUS (Rev: 2.1—7) “The Sower” (Matt: 13.3—9, 18—23) 1st Century (33—100 A.D.) O.T. Type, Solomon.</p>	<p>Notes</p>		
<p>SMYRNA (Rev: 2.8—11) “Wheat and Tares” (Matt:13.24-30, 36-43) 2nd and 3rd Centuries (100—313 A.D.) O.T. Type, Rehoboam.</p>	<p>1. Observe that as soon as SARDIS appears alongside THYATIRA, Christendom obscures true Christian testimony. The Thyatira phase (the rise of Roman Catholicism) was so corrupt that it inevitably influenced, and did so permanently, any attempted recovery.</p> <p>2. The ways in which the kings of Judah and Israel are typical, should be worked out. But, for example, the assembly in Ephesus and the period to which it refers, first planted and in its best state, corresponds with the kingdom of Solomon in its first glory. The stormy reign of Rehoboam corresponds to the disturbed Smyrna. And so on with the remainder of the kings mentioned.</p> <p>3. What is not clear on first examination will be understood as progress is made through the Notes.</p>		
<p>PERGAMOS (Rev: 2.12—17) “Mustard Seed” (Matt:13.31,32) 4th and 5th Centuries (313-500 A.D.) O.T. Type, Jeroboam.</p>	<p>4. What is the exhortation at the end of each of the Seven Messages? How does this show that even Divine communications will meet with no response if a receptive moral condition is lacking in the hearer?</p> <p>5. It is worthy of note and careful study to see how our Lord presents Himself to each of the assemblies in a character that exactly meets the particular need of the assembly, and which will help the overcomers to gain the victory over those peculiar difficulties and temptations that mark each assembly</p>		
<p>THYATIRA (Rev:2.18-29) “Leaven” (Matthew: 13:33) 6th Century onwards. O.T. Type Ahab.</p>	<p>SARDIS (Rev: 3.1-6) “Treasure” (Matt: 13.44) 16th Century onwards. O.T. Type, Jehu.</p>	<p>PHILADELPHIA (Rev:3.7-13) “Pearl” (Matt: 13.45,46) 19th Century onwards. O.T. Types, Hezekiah and Josiah.</p>	<p>LAODICEA (Rev: 3.14-22) “The Net” (Matt: 13.47-50) 20th Century onwards. O.T. Types, Manasseh and Zedekiah.</p>

The Parables of Matthew 13

- (1) The purpose of these Parables is to illustrate or reveal “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (verse 11). In its present form this Kingdom covers all who profess faith in Christ, whether truly or otherwise.
- (2) Do not confuse “the kingdom of heaven” with “Heaven” Many are in the “kingdom of heaven”, professing, as they do, to be ruled by heaven. Yet they will have no place in Heaven, because their allegiance to the King (Christ) is only formal, and then only when it suits them (Matthew 7, 21—23; Luke 12.1).
- (3) These seven Parables present to us the “mystery” form of the Kingdom. They present the history of the Kingdom while the King is absent. The “mystery” form implying a Divine thought remaining hidden until specially revealed by God to those enlightened by Him to understand. See Mark 4.11; Luke 17.20, and compare Ephesians 3.3—7.
- (4) Note the separation of the first four parables from the last three. How is this shown? See verse 36. The first four emphasise the OUTWARD form, where evil exists the last three give the INWARD form and have to do with the secret counsels of God, and showing that God’s work is with success, in spite of the opposition of Satan. All together give the History of Christendom, from the beginning when Christ sowed the Good Seed, until the end with the Christian profession a mass of worldliness, pride and blasphemy and all under the cover of Christ’s Name. This empty profession Christ will “spue out of His mouth”, utterly destroying it in a scene of one of the sorest judgments of God. Connect Luke 12,47.

STUDY 11, WEEK 2:

THE BEGINNING OF CHRISTENDOM

(1st Century, 33—100 A.D.) “He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world” (Matthew 13.37,38).

Suggested Reading: Matthew 11.12; 13.3—9, 18—23; Rev: 2.1—7.

The Apostolic Period (1st Century, 33—100 A.D.)

Refer to that portion of the Diagram under “EPHESUS” and “The Sower”. God had been seeking fruit from Israel (compare Matthew 21.33,34), but now He is giving the Good Seed to the whole world. Identify the Sower — verse 37; the Seed — Luke 8.11; 1.Peter 1.23; and the four different “grounds” into which the Seed falls. The fruit? Connect Matthew 21.43.

The Light Shining

- (1) The early chapters of ACTS give the history of “the church which was at Jerusalem” (Acts 8.1). Separated from the world, and brought together, at perfect unity with one another — Acts 2.41-47; 4.32,33. They were truly a “golden lampstand”, giving out light for God. We read later of assemblies in Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus and in many other places (9.31; 11.19—26; 15.41; 16.5). All were of the same pattern, acknowledging the one Head, and with the one Holy Spirit as the Power and Guide in all their worship and service. They had the Word of God as their only Standard and Rule of faith.
- (2) The effect of such a testimony was striking. “Many thousands” (“myriads”, R.V. margin) believed, (Acts 21.20). Great cities like Ephesus, Athens, and even Rome, were stirred by the Gospel, and by those among them (“these that have turned the world upside down” — Acts 17.6) who had been called out and brought together, answering to the word EKKLESIA, bearing witness individually and unitedly, to the risen and living Lord who “worked with them, confirming the Word with signs following” (Mark 16.20). And see Acts 8.4.

The Light Dimmed

- (0) A true testimony for God can be maintained only by a right spiritual condition, by holding fast to the Truth and by continuing in the path of separation from all that is worldly. If the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched, departure from the Truth results. Even in the lifetime of the apostles there was the tendency to go back to Judaism (Acts 15.1,2). Then the teachings of pagan philosophy and the traditions of men (Col: 2.8). Then destructive heresies (Jude 3 and 4), and “wolves” (Acts 20.29,30; 2.Tim: 2.17,18). Thus was the light of early Christianity made dim.
- (1) When Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus they were in their best condition (though he warned them — Acts 20.29,30). When John wrote towards the end of the first century, they had fallen from “their first love” (Rev: 2.1—7). Compare Jeremiah 2.2. The warning that the lampstand would be removed was evidently ignored, for the Ephesian phase passed away, giving place to that of Smyrna. May the Lord’s reproof and appeal to the assembly at Ephesus speak to our own hearts.

STUDY 11, WEEK 3:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTENDOM

(2nd to 15th Century, 100 to 1517 A.D.)

“While men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat” (Matthew 13.25).

Suggested Reading: Matthew 13.24—43; Revelation 2.8—29.

II. The Martyr Period

(2nd and 3rd. Centuries, 100 to 313 A.D.)

Refer to the Diagram under “SMYRNA” and ‘Wheat and Tares”.

Christianity began with true “sons of the Kingdom”, but Satan was quick to introduce his men. While the Lord’s servants slept (through negligence, or through human “charity” and what is called tolerance) certain “crept in unawares” (Jude 4), and thus was Christendom born.

“Smyrna” means “myrrh”. It is bitter, but fragrant when crushed. Days of terrible persecution at the hands of the pagan Roman emperors, followed the Apostolic period. The order was given (as it has so often been given since) that Christianity must be rooted out. But God graciously overruled, and even used this persecution to purify His true people (compare 1.Peter 1.7), and to halt the spread of corruption among them. We may note that the all-knowing Lord finds no fault with the assembly at Smyrna.

III. The Compromise Period

(4th and 5th Centuries, 313 to 500 A.D.)

Refer to the Diagram under “PERGAMOS” and the “Mustard Seed”. “Pergamos” means “lifted up” or “actual marriage”. Lifted up with pride, and married to the world (compare Judges 16.19). The Mustard Tree symbolises worldly power (Ezekiel 17.3; Daniel 4.20—22).

‘Who are the birds? Matthew 13.4,19; Revelation 18.2.

Humble Christianity (the following of Christ) changes into the great political force of Christendom. The majority found the corrupting patronage of Imperial Rome preferable to the purifying fires of persecution. The Emperor Constantine found that he could overcome Christianity more easily by uniting it with Babylonian paganism to make a “State Religion”. So that Satan now took his place where? Rev:2.13.

All this prepared the ground for that which was to follow and remain.

IV. The Papacy (Romanism) Period

(6th to 15th Century, 500 to 1517 A.D.)

Refer to the Diagram under “THYATIRA” and “Leaven”. Leaven in the Scriptures always signifies evil. Here it is that weakened and corrupt teaching which has been presented to the world as “Christian”. Whole nations became “Christianised”, but not converted, by accepting this mass of false teaching and evil practices, the heart of which is a man—made priestly- system, substituting the visible (temporal) for the invisible (eternal) — 2.Corinthians 4.18.

Corresponding to the woman of Matthew 13.33, whose name is used here? Revelation 2.20

And how does she appear in Revelation chapter 17? For the Thyatiran phase continues and will blossom forth into its fullest worldly- brilliance as the “Union of World Religions”.

STUDY 11, WEEK 4:

THE FINAL STAGE AND END OF CHRISTENDOM

(16th Century onwards)

“Lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot” (Revelation 3.16).

Suggested Reading: Matthew 13.44—50; Revelation 3.1—22.

V. The Protestant Reformation Period (16th to 18th Century, 1517 to 1800 A.D.)

Refer to Diagram under “SARDIS” and “Treasure”.

The field is the world. The treasure, the Lord’s true people in it. The world is His, by right of creation (John 1.3,10; Col: 1.15—17; Heb: 1.2) and by right of purchase (Matthew 28.18,19; 1.John 2.2).

And very specially, “His own” (Matthew 20.28; John 13.1; 17.2; Acts 20.28; 1.Cor: 6.20; 1.Tim: 2.6; 1.Peter 1.18,19).

How is “for joy” (Matthew 13.44) connected with Hebrews 12.2.? “All that he hath”? See 2.Cor: 8.9; Philippians 2.6—8.

“Sardis” means “things remaining” (Rev: 3.2). Though founded on the revival of the truth of JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH the Protestant Reformation was such mainly outwardly (like that of Jehu). A vast number were separated from Romanism, but the new mass, though having a name to live, was really dead. However verse 2 indicates that there was “treasure” hidden, and that which, little regarded by men, was still able to “strengthen the things which remain”. The work of the Reformation therefore, though good, left much undone. The political element mingled with the spiritual and “State Churches” were multiplied. Little attempt was made to separate Christians from the world, though much was done to separate them from Rome.

VI. The Revival Period (19th Century, 1800 to 1900 A.D.)

Refer to the Diagram under “PHILADELPHIA” and “The Pearl”.

Note that whereas Romanism (Thyatira) and Protestantism (Sardis) stand for the great ECCLESIASTICAL system into which Christendom is at present divided, Philadelphia represents a MORAL movement, and should be contrasted with Laodicea. Philadelphia stands for moral recovery, Laodicea stands for moral departure.

Those represented by Philadelphia will be caught up at the coming of the Lord (1.Thess: 4.16,17) to escape what? Rev: 3.10.

We are in Laodicean days, but Philadelphia as a testimony will go on till the Rapture. It should therefore be our aim to be associated with what Philadelphia stands for, and from what Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea represent.

The Seeker and Purchaser of the Pearl of Christ. Compare the previous Parable with Luke 19.10.

The Pearl is the Church (Ephes: 5.25; 2.Cor: 8.9).

The name “Philadelphia” means “Brotherly Love”, which is one of the special features of the acting of the Holy Spirit in connection with the assembly and the period it represents.

Identify the following truths emphasised by the Holy Spirit in forming a Philadelphian testimony:

- i. The Person of Christ, His holiness, truth and Lordship
- ii. The Lord’s relationship to the Church as Bridegroom.
- iii. The Church’s relationship to the Lord as the Body and Bride.

Philadelphia thus describes a revived and restored spiritual condition, although of a small remnant, but who use their “little strength” to “keep His Word and not deny His Name”. The Living Word and the Written Word have special prominence among them.

A Fresh Work and a New Testimony

What has corresponded to this since Romanism and Protestantism took their places in Christendom? Regard for the Person of Christ and obedience to the Word of God have drawn many together away from worldly systems and organisations. It was with no desire to form a new “denomination” that many such came together at the beginning of the 19th Century. They simply returned to Christ and to His Word. They returned to the pattern for Christian worship and service shown in the New Testament and practised by the first assemblies of Apostolic times.

Gathering to the Lord’s Name alone

- (1) Thus a fresh operation of the Holy Spirit commenced. Many of God’s people became impressed with the possibility of a return to the teachings of the New Testament, not only in respect of the important questions of personal Salvation and conduct worthy of it, but also as regards the equally important matters of the order and testimony of assemblies of Christians for worship and service,. They put their convictions into practice. Leaving their various denominations they began to gather simply and only in the Name of Christ, in accordance with Matthew 18.20.
- (2) Such companies of believers sprang up everywhere, all over the world. When asked what they called themselves, they replied “Christians, brethren in Christ, disciples of the Lord” (Acts 11,26; Matthew 23.8; Acts 15.36). Christendom endeavours to give some denominational tag to such Christians to bring them into line with the rest, but these reject any sectarian name. They insist that a true disciple of Christ is not permitted to take any other name than those which God Himself has given His people. To take a sectarian and divisive name is to deny the Lordship of Christ, and the unity of the one Body of believers in Christ, introducing division “contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned” (Romans 16. 17).
- (3) Satan continually seeks not only to extinguish this testimony to Christ and His Word, but also to get its identity merged with and lost in Christendom. He reckons without the power and the faithfulness of God, though it cannot be denied that where pride and self- sufficiency has been allowed to prevail, there Satan has had certain success. Wherever God works for His own glory and for the honour of Christ, there will Satan be found in opposition and with his corrupting influences, as in the Garden of Eden, and even amongst the Apostolic assemblies.

In what guise may Satan appear? See 2 Corinthians 11.14,15. But failure on man's part does not result in the failure of God's operations. Failure should certainly humble us, as it did the Israelites after the defeat at Ai (Joshua 7). It should drive us to Christ and to His Word. Human failure is no proof that the Philadelphian way of assembling is not according to the will of God, and is not the way of true spiritual blessing.

- (4) Thus there are many assemblies of Christians today, seeking to be guided by the Word of God alone, and seeking to maintain worship and service after the pattern of the first Christian assemblies of the New Testament. May we be found with them, keeping His Word, and not denying His Name, eagerly helping along that which will merit His approval and praise.

VII. The “END” Period
(20th Century plus, 1900 A.D. onwards)

- (1) Refer to the Diagram under “LAODICEA” and “The Net”.
This Parable of the Net shows the final results of the preaching of the Gospel. The sea is the world of mankind. A multitude is caught. The “good” are those who humbly acknowledging their sinful state, receive the Saviour, and are cleansed in the precious blood He shed on Calvary's cross.
The “bad” are those who superficially and carelessly take His Name. They are “bereft of the truth, supposing that godliness is a way of gain” — 1 Timothy 6.5 in the R.V. The end for these is judgment and eternal damnation.
- (2) “Laodicea” means “righteous people”. It is the last stage of Christendom, full of self—righteousness, spiritual pride and luke-warmness with regard to the Truth and the Authority of Christ. Notice that Christ Himself is OUTSIDE (verse 20), but still knocking for admission into individual hearts (since the whole mass is hopelessly corrupt and doomed).
- (3) This is a solemn warning to all Christians. Many may quote Matthew 18.20, but Christ is not in their midst, He is really outside. They may be blameless in regard to doctrinal theory and morality (notice that they are not blamed in these respects). But pride, selfishness, covetousness, love of money and property, self-will and insubordination to the will of their Lord and to the elders He has appointed over them, have thrust Christ outside and in His sight they are ? And in spite of what they say they are — verse 17.
Let all who profess the Name of Christ, whether as individuals or assemblies; examine themselves, their lives and their witness against the picture here given.
- (4) The “spewing—out” takes place when Christ comes (1 Thess: 4.13—18), for then all that is false will be exposed. This event will complete the whole history and course of Christendom (as much) from the days of the apostles to the Rapture of those who are truly the Lord's (2 Tim: 2.19). We are living in the last days of “THE THINGS WHICH ARE.”

Conclusion

- (1) There is a clear pathway now for every Christian. The general failure of Christendom does not lessen the force of the commandments of the Lord. Many will admit this in individual life, but there is a widespread idea, even among true Christians, that we must put up with matters of corporate testimony, that there is no remedy for existing conditions. Certainly there is no remedy while there is adherence to teaching which is not in accord with all the Truth in the Scriptures.
- (2) That there are true children of God mixed up in the worldly conditions of Christendom does not mean that we too should hold the true teachings of God’s Word lightly. The servant of the Lord “must not strive” when it is a question of personal preference, but “gentle unto all, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves” (2.Timothy 2.24,25). However, may we also seek grace to know when we should “earnestly contend for the faith which was once (for all) delivered unto the saints”. Jude 3.
- (3) Those who come together with others of like precious faith, to form Scriptural assemblies, will not boast of attainments, or that they are any better than others. They will first acknowledge that they are humble folk seeking to be guided by the living Lord and by His written Word of instruction for them. They will confess that their one desire is to be well—pleasing to Him (Hebrews 13.21), to be faithful ambassadors and true witnesses to “the unsearchable riches of Christ”. To effect this they “continue stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2.42), as was the example set by their fellow— believers at the beginning of the Christian testimony.

STUDY 11, QUESTION PAPER

Please answer all questions and e-mail your answers to answers@churchtruths.com It is suggested that each answer will be approximately 300 words, but please supply whatever answers you are able to complete.

- (1) How would you differentiate between the terms “Christianity” and “Christendom”?
- (2) In what way do you consider Jeroboam (1.Kings 12.26—33) to be a type of PERGAMOS (Revelation 2.12)?
- (3) What is the meaning of the name LAODICEA? How does this help to illustrate the final phase of Christendom?
- (4) How does Ahab’s wife Jezebel illustrate Romanism?
- (5) What are the two main characteristics of Philadelphian testimony?
- (6) What is the end and doom of Christendom?