

**Revelation 2: 1-3; "The Lord Knows", Sermon # 13 in the series -
"The Faithful and True Witness", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on April 9th, 2006 in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ who stands in the midst of His churches and whose eyes are a flame of fire comes now to address the first church under consideration with the message that He specifically has for them. It is generally His pattern to make comment upon what is good and commendable about each church first, and then to raise objections and point out sins after that, upon which He calls them to repentance once he has set forth the truth of that particular church that He is addressing. The Lord knows that the church at Ephesus has a number of good things about what they are doing for His Name's sake, and He would commend them for it. We need to understand from this that the Lord knows that affirming what is good about a person or a church by one in authority over them will not necessarily create pride in them, but will rather help them on to a sober assessment of themselves. It is good for persons in authority whether it is a pastor or a parent, to affirm every good thing that is in ones under their charge so as to encourage them that they have been moving and thinking and walking in the right direction. It is always appropriate to do this first, before any criticisms, rebukes, and admonitions are given.

Not only does the Lord Jesus know all about the hearts and lives of individual believers and what they have done and are doing for Him, but He also knows all about a local church and what they have collectively done for Him, and what they are presently doing for Him. So what I want to do this afternoon is to ask, "What things does the Lord Jesus Christ know about the church at Ephesus which He would also commend to our church today as something He loves to see in any local church?" And as we look at the text we find that the Lord Jesus commends 4 things about the church of Ephesus that are worthy for us also to pursue. Let me list them for you.

1. He commends their works
2. He commends their labor
3. He commends their patience
4. He commends their intolerance of false doctrine

1st- The Lord Jesus commends the works of the church of Ephesus

The works are those things done by this church, that showed forth their obedience to the Word of God which had been entrusted to them by the Apostle Himself. And what the Apostle himself had entrusted to them were the commandments of the Lord Jesus and all the principles of truth related to their actions towards one another and also towards those outside the church. The reality of a true and saving faith in the Lord Jesus is seen in the believer's engaging in good works. You see this in John 3: 19-21 where John says, "And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done (or wrought) in God." Deeds are those things that we do with our bodies. Our faith must be seen by our engaging in good works. Before we know the Lord we are "practicing evil." We hate the light that would change the way that we think and the way that we live. But when we come to saving faith in Jesus Christ we come to the light of his truth and grace; and "in His light we see light." When His light comes to our souls it exposes the motives of all of our actions, whether our works are selfishly sinful, whether we are doing what we are doing from a desire to promote

our own welfare only, or whether our deeds are wrought in God. When our works or deeds are wrought in God, they are done by His grace and to His glory, that He might be honored and glorified by those deeds. And when those works are wrought in God, their orientation is toward loving and helping others by all that we do and say.

We are in the final analysis to be judged based upon our deeds or works. Christ is the one who will evaluate us, both now and then. In 2 Corinthians 5: 9-11, the Apostle Paul says, "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be pleasing to Him." "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." The works that Christ is commending in the church of Ephesus are good works which both the pastor and the people have done which are for Christ's glory and the advancement of His kingdom. In this case it would refer to the whole work of the gospel ministry and the faithful preaching of the word and faithful personal dealings on the part of the minister. And it would refer to the whole work on the part of the congregation to support the work of that pastor; and also extend to the building up of the church by itself; to love one another and serve one another so that the church as a whole would be strong in its labors to do what is right and to promote the cause of Jesus Christ outside the 4 walls of the church as well as within. The Lord Jesus knows our works.

2. This leads us on secondly to Christ's knowledge of our labors.

Our works for Christ are made up of labors to accomplish the desired end of keeping His commandments; the tasks and duties that have been assigned to us by our Lord Jesus and His Apostles that we engage in day by day. They are found in the commandments given to us in the New Testament and especially in the letters of the Apostles. Christ knows what we have been working at and what we are laboring to accomplish, both as individuals and as a local church. He does evaluate our labors and expects us to evaluate our own labors in light of His Word to us in verses like these. Listen to a few verses which will help us to understand this better. 1 Corinthians 16: 15 says, "I urge you brethren- you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of the Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry to the saints- that you also submit to such and to everyone who works and labors with us." "I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied." "For they refreshed my spirit and yours." "Therefore acknowledge such men." It is apparent from these verses that there is a devotion to Christ which translates itself into labors to and for the saints. It is grace working within Christ's people that leads them to devote themselves in labors that will serve others in the body of Christ and which will be such a good example of what Apostolic teaching is designed to accomplish that it will refresh the spirit of both the pastor and people. This is the kind of labor that each of Christ's people ought to pursue, giving it great consideration. It is the kind of thing that Paul mentions also in 1st Thessalonians 1: 2, 3 where he says, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in all our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father. The labors of the saints are labors of love on behalf of Christ and His body the church.

The minister also is laboring in the word and doctrine and in admonishing the saints. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 5: 12, 13 where it says, "And we urge you brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." "Be at peace among yourselves." What a great thing when a church labors together in this loving way.

There are also then, labors of evangelism which a church engages in, both individually and corporately. You see this in 1 Corinthians 3 where the Apostle describes his own labors and the labors of others on the foundation of Christ. Verse 8 says, "Now he who plants and he who waters are one and each one will receive a reward according to his own labor. The Lord rewards a man according to his work. And of course all of our work is based upon the grace of God working with us. In 1 Corinthians 15: 9 and 10 the Apostle Paul says, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." "Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed." We take no special credit to ourselves in all of our labors, but the Lord knows them and will reward them in His way and time. Sometimes He grants conversions and sometimes we can labor long and hard and not see much of this kind of fruit. But let us remember 1 Corinthians 15: 58 where it says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

3. Then 3rdly we understand from these verses that Christ knows the extent of Patience that we have exercised in our local church.

Our Lord mentions this in verse 2 as "your patience", and again in verse 3 saying, "and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for my name's sake and have not become weary." Here we can see how perseverance and patience go hand in hand in the Christian life. Perseverance is the grace of Christ at work in our lives which gives us the motivation and strength to continue to do what is right even when there are great obstacles and great oppositions to the success of our endeavors to promote Christ, His truth and His kingdom. Patience is bearing with the people and the situations that don't seem to be promoting the goals of Christ. It is a very commendable quality in any local church. For, you and I should understand that the Christian life is full of difficulties, obstacles and opposition from a number of sources. The Lord permits these; indeed He designs these for the good and the growth of His people in righteousness.

Without patience which is born of Christ's grace at work in our hearts, we would become discouraged and weary in all of our labors. But we see here how seeking the Lord for strength continually is very important; and also then learning to continue on in our labors no matter what difficulties are encountered. You see this in Luke chapter 8, verse 15, in Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower and the soils. Verse 15 says, "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience." Sometimes when we look at ourselves we do not see much fruit being born from the cultivation of a godly life. But a noble and a good heart keeps God's Word in the heart and it will bear fruit with patience. It says in Galatians 6: 9, 10, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." Here we can see that "growing weary" is just the opposite of being patient. Patience does persevere and it does not give up. In due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. How easy it

is to lose heart and to faint in the day of adversity; the day of difficulty and evil. But being patient is a part of faith, which believes that there will be a reaping time and reward for doing good and trusting that God will bring good results.

And then 4thly and finally- The Lord Jesus commends the church of Ephesus for their intolerance of false doctrine.

He says to them, "I know.... that you cannot endure, or bear, those who are evil." "And you have tested those who say they are Apostles and are not, and have found them liars." It is interesting that the way that people who do not know the Lord test us who do know Him is to see whether or not we will be tolerant of evil in them or in others. And if we are not, then they say that we are judgmental and they speak evil of us. But the Lord Jesus will commend any man or church which is intolerant of evil. A true church will not long be able to tolerate sin in her midst. It will not bear with those who want to introduce compromise with sin and introduce false doctrine. Isaiah 5: 20 and 21 says, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" God will curse those who try to introduce a different gospel into any true church of Jesus Christ, other than the one which was delivered to us by apostolic hands. Paul says in Galatians 1: 6-8, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some that trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

There were false messengers, men who are called false apostles here in our text. The church at Ephesus tested men's doctrine and looked carefully at what they preached and believed. They would not allow any man to say he was an apostle without having the credentials of an apostle. They would not permit those who came to them bringing any teaching which would contradict the plain teaching of what had already been delivered to them by the Lord's appointed apostles. If a man's teaching attempted to supplant the teaching of the Apostles and Elders, it was declared to be lies and the appropriate action of discipline or exclusion was enacted. Indeed, what is commended by our Lord is their perseverance, labor, and patience in this thing; guarding the flock from false sheep. The Apostle Paul had told the elders of Ephesus years before, and it is related in Acts 20: 28-31, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears." This is the kind of ministry that had prevailed in the hearts and minds of the elders of Ephesus and it is what is commended so highly by the Lord Jesus. I hope that you and I will together pursue these good works, engage in these labors without becoming weary. I hope that we will be intolerant of false doctrine and the false apostles who lie with their false gospel and the subversion of the pure word of God. May we hold fast the truth and labor together to hold it forth to the glory of our Savior in these days where the darkness of false doctrine and the smooth words of men who are in error are trying to prevail with us. If we will remember the words of our Lord and do them, I sure that He will be pleased.