

A Truth About Revelation 2 And 3

The Primary Teaching Regarding Revelation 2 & 3 is Not Eras

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One of the best known and strongest beliefs held by those who came out through the scattering of the Worldwide Church of God is that Revelation 2 and 3 describe eras—that is, seven long periods of time, from the founding of the church during Christ's lifetime right up to the present and continuing on to Christ's return.

But is this true? Is there any part of it that might be true? On what Biblical basis is this concept founded?

That Herbert Armstrong was zealous in carrying out what he believed was true, and carrying out his responsibility before God, is not in question. There were occasional doctrines wherein his teaching was wrong, or not completely correct, but he nonetheless preached them with his typical, convincing fervency. I find no fault with that whatsoever. He did exactly as he should have, and I hope that I do the same.

I was not privy to the beginning of this concept. As far as I was aware, it was almost always in existence because elements of it appeared in the booklet that the Radio Church of God titled, *A True History of the True Church*, which was first published in 1959 and authored by Herman Hoeh.

I want you to turn to Matthew 16:18. Jesus is the speaker:

Matthew 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

There is no doubt that this verse had something to do with the founding of this concept. However, even here, this verse is somewhat misunderstood. The dominant interpretation in the church is that the word "hell"—that is, *hades*—means "grave." That understanding is incorrect.

What God is describing here is an active, military-like engagement. He is describing a spiritual war. Brethren, the grave is merely a receptacle. A grave does not make war. The phrase "gates of hell" that Jesus used, and Matthew correctly copied, is a metaphor describing the forces of evil. The forces of evil are Satan and his horde of demons. It is *they*, not the receptacle, that makes war against the church, and Christ is asserting that

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the forces of evil will not prevail against the church.

Jesus in no way pictured His church—which is His spiritual Body—as being anything but dominant in the warfare against the Adversary and his minions. Now be assured: Christ has already defeated Satan, as shown in the encounter that is recorded in Matthew 4 and Luke 4.

Those of us—His brethren—who have faith have nothing to fear regarding His willingness and His ability to overcome Satan on our behalf. Knowing that it is the church that is on the offensive ought to be faith-building.

The church is a family that is descended from Jesus Christ. He is the Father/Founder of that family. He is the second Adam. All of His brethren are descended, as it were, from Him. Families do not just pop out of the ground. They come from somewhere. Each and every family has people who came before it called ancestors.

It is common for families to search out those who are their ancestors—from whom they are descended. Biblically, the Jews and Levites have kept extensive records of who came from whom, because important assignments and responsibilities were given by God to those families.

I know that I am descended from a German couple named John and Mary Reichenbach, whose names abruptly appear in some official document—I think it was a marriage certificate—in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1832. To the best of my knowledge, nobody has ever traced my roots any further back than that.

Now Herman Hoeh traced out the roots of the Radio Church of God by seeking doctrinal similarities of religious groups named in histories written (in some cases) as long as 2,000 years ago. Interestingly, information that he found about groups determined that they were spiritual ancestors of the present-day church of God, and all of this interesting information came from the groups' enemies.

He found names like the Nazarenes, the Bogomils, the Paulicians, the Athengany, Waldensians, Lollards, Sabbatarian Baptists, and there were others besides. He also found the names of some of the leaders of those groups, such as Polycarp, Polycrates, Constantine of Mannanali, Peter du Bois, Peter Waldo, Walter Lollard, Stephen Mumford, and two men whose first names only were recorded: one named Arnold, and the other Henri.

These organizations and men were then fitted by Herman Hoeh into the list of churches

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in Revelation 2 and 3 according to the time periods in which the organizations existed and the men lived. Thus Dr. Hoeh was able to arrive at a chain, apparently linked through the centuries by common doctrines.

There is no doubt that the church has continued to have an unbroken life from the time it was founded because **Christ** did not die. But the question remains: was it Christ's intention that we should understand Revelation 2 and 3 through this "eras" method of interpretation? I believe that even if it is possibly a true interpretation, it is because God's Word often serves more than one purpose. But it is still neither the most accurate, nor the most important one.

Let us go back to Revelation 2. We will just read some verses quickly. Jesus is the speaker:

Revelation 2:16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

That was said to the Pergamos church.

Revelation 2:25 But that which you have already hold fast till I come.

That was said to Thyatira.

Revelation 3:3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. If therefore you shall not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you.

Revelation 3:10-11 Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am come quickly: hold that fast which you have, that no man may take your crown.

Revelation 3:20 Behold, ***I stand at the door***, and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me.

Revelation 2:23 And I will kill her children with death and all the churches shall know that I am he which searches the reins and hearts: and I will give

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unto every one of you according to your works.

There was a similarity in that part of the message that I read to you that was in five of the churches. That is, that He in some way either said directly or strongly alluded to the fact that His return was imminent—in five of them.

Revelation 2:23 gives the implication that **all** of the churches are in existence at the same time, just before His return—"all the churches shall know"—not scattered out over eras of time, but giving the indication that every one of them exists at the same time.

Can we all agree that in the first century, when Revelation was written, that they all existed simultaneously—at the same time? Yes, they did. In fact, they all existed in the Western end of what is today Turkey, and in fact have been shown through ancient Roman documents to all be on the same circuitous mail route.

Revelation 1:11 Saying, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last [you all know who 'Alpha and Omega' is—it is Jesus Christ.]: and, What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches. . . .

So the same letter is going to go to all seven churches at the same time. It is going to be delivered along that circuitous mail route, or delivered by hand by a companion of John. This confirms that they all existed at the same time in the first century.

Revelation 1:9-10 I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet.

Revelation 1:19-20 Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks which you saw are the seven churches.

"Lord's day" simply means a day belonging to the Lord. This is important to understand. This is right out of the same book:

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Revelation 6:17 For the great day of His wrath is come, and who is able to stand?

That phrase "the great day of the Lord's wrath" shows a day that belongs to Him. It is not a single day; it is a period of time called "the Day of the Lord" in 50 or 60 places in the Old Testament.

Revelation 16:14 For they are spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

In chapter 1 we have the "Lord's Day." It is not a day of the week. It is the same day that is spoken of in those chapters as the day of God's wrath, and the day of the battle of God. You can see that in the verse we just read. So "Lord's Day" is not in reference to a day of the week. John was miraculously projected into the time just prior to Christ's return, and that time is called the Lord's Day. Revelation 1:19 tells us that John was to record what happened in the past, what was happening right then, and what would happen during the Lord's Day. I hope that is clear.

In the Day of the Lord—you can check this in Revelation 1:13—Christ stands *in the midst of the seven churches*—not just on some Sunday morning, but rather in that period of time just before His return, He stands in the midst of the seven churches. Not just one church (Laodicea); not just two churches (Philadelphia and Laodicea); He is standing in the midst of **all seven** at the same time. All seven are in existence **right now**.

The entire book involves the Lord's Day. The entirety of chapters 2 and 3 belong within the Lord's Day. This means, then, that not only did these churches exist in the first century, but all of them—individually and collectively—become types and representations of what exists just prior to Christ's return. The spiritual attitudes that existed in them are models of what exists right now.

Internally, within the book itself, I see no indication of them being eras, with the true church going through seven successive stages. Rather, through the centuries these seven basic attitudes will be found whenever and wherever the church is located.

Each person called of God is to learn from *each* of the churches. Each person is to learn from *each* of the churches. Each son of God is to thoroughly and honestly evaluate themselves in the light of Christ's revelations, and begin working on changing the flaws

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that he finds in himself.

This means that each of the churches has members within them that reflect *any* of the attitudes shown, but that very likely *one* of the seven attitudes will dominate any one of the seven churches named.

One final thought: despite the mixture of good and bad found in Christ's evaluation—despite some stern warnings from Christ—He still considered *each* of them *His*. He expects each son to make the changes *where he is*. Nowhere does He counsel anyone to jump from one group to another. The one exception to that is where false doctrine exists. Otherwise the sense is to work out problems where one is.

The issue is absolutely not where one is, but *what* one is. If a person is depending upon location, that person's spirituality is suspect. The issue is Christ and *His* power to change, *not* location.