

New Testament Churches

*A Thirteen Lesson
Bible Class Study*



*a study of selected churches
in the Bible*

*by
J.S. Smith*

Introduction

The New Testament is a pattern book, which shows and tells us how the church should look and act. The various congregations in the New Testament show positive lessons as to how God wishes the church to behave and negative lessons which contain God's disapproval.

If the Bible student truly desires to keep God's commandments and respect his authority, he will study the New Testament and attempt to make himself and the church of which he is a member as close to God's ideal as possible. This series of lessons will help the student to understand the difference between God's approval and disapproval.

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Lesson 1: *The Church at Jerusalem*

The church with the distinction of being the first was found in the city of Jerusalem and had Mary and the apostles among its number. The Jerusalem church experienced highs and lows to great extremes. From their quick, early growth to the ill effects of regional famine, the saints in Jerusalem learned how to be content in any circumstances.

1. (Acts 2:1-13) Why were so many people in Jerusalem at this time? What religion was based in this city?
2. (Acts 2:40-47) How quickly did the Jerusalem church grow on its first day? Would you characterize the sermon that brought these conversions to be positive or negative in nature?
3. What benefits and problems might such quick growth bring?
4. What does it mean to “continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine”?
5. Was their attitude materialistic or spiritual?
6. How often did Christians gather in one way or another?
7. Did the Jerusalem church continue to grow?
8. Consider when new people enter a church. How should the veterans treat them?
9. (Acts 4:1-22) How many men were members of the Jerusalem church by this time?

10. Why were some members of the church thrown in jail? What did Peter say about this type of situation in his first epistle, chapter three, verses 13-17?
11. When they were threatened with further punishment, did the members of the Jerusalem church quiet down and curtail their evangelistic efforts and public discipleship?
12. What kind of character would these men need to respond to this discouragement?
13. How should we respond when discouraged from spreading the gospel?
14. (Acts 5:1-11) What was the effect upon the Jerusalem brethren when Ananias and Sapphira met their end for dishonesty? How could they otherwise have reacted?
15. (Acts 6:1-7) What problem began to plague the church in these days? How was it solved?
16. In our day, it is considered bad to try to convert Jews to Christianity. Did the members of the Jerusalem church share this phobia concerning the priests of the Hebrew religion?
17. (Acts 11:27-30, 2 Cor. 9:12-15) What traits are required to accept assistance when in need, as the Jerusalem church was in this time of famine?
18. (Acts 15:3-5) What false teaching was coming from some of the members of the Jerusalem church and troubling churches in other cities? Did the church ignore this error?

Lesson 2: *The Church at Thessalonica*

The church at Thessalonica received some of the earliest surviving apostolic letters. Paul was very fond of this church and extolled its virtues which had been retold to the world. Still, they had their problems. Fascination with the second coming of Jesus had paralyzed some of the Christians' physical effort, rendering them unfit, idle and given to gossip. Paul's two letters correct those problems and afford us great insight into the future.

1. (Acts 17:1-9) Where did the Jews gather in the city of Thessalonica? What is that?
2. Why would Paul choose to go there in particular?
3. What was the general composition of the converts made at Thessalonica?
4. Verse 5 reveals the motivation for the Jews' rejection of the gospel in Thessalonica. What characteristic of theirs caused them to respond so violently?
5. Who was Jason?
6. What is horribly ironic about the Jews' statement concerning kings to the city rulers in verse 7?
7. (1 Thess. 1:2-5) What was it that Paul remembered about the Thessalonian saints?

8. If we wanted to be like the Thessalonians in this regard, what would we need to do?
9. (1 Thess. 1:6-10) What comments does Paul make on the way they received the gospel (cf. 2:2, 3:2-5, 2 Thess. 1:4)? What had they given up?
10. What forms of tribulation must some endure to become Christians?
11. How prominent were the stories of Thessalonian faithfulness?
12. (1 Thess. 3:1-10) What kind of report did Timothy bring to Paul from Thessalonica? How should a good report on our brethren elsewhere affect us?
13. (1 Thess. 4:9-12) It seemed almost unnecessary for Paul to make these comments. What did Paul urge concerning their already good habits?
14. (2 Thess. 1:3-12) How were they holding up against this persecution? What did he promise them if they continued to do this?
15. (2 Thess. 3:6-15) What problem did they have in the Thessalonica church?
16. What was Paul's prescription?

Lesson 3: *The Church at Ephesus*

Paul arrives at Ephesus and finds something very disturbing. With his usual urgency, however, he quickly remedies the error and blesses the Christians in that city. The Ephesian church takes its place near the center stage of the New Testament record, appearing again amidst Paul's letters and finally in the Lord's.

1. (Acts 19:1-7) Where was Apollos when Paul arrived in Ephesus? What had Apollos been teaching in Ephesus before Aquila and Priscilla reproved him?
2. When Paul met these twelve men, what did they know regarding baptism?
3. Was this the one baptism commanded of people in the gospel age (Eph. 4:5) then?
4. How did Paul know that they were unfamiliar with events after John's preaching?
5. Does it appear that they even knew about Jesus at all?
6. What options did they have when Paul told them their form of obedience was insufficient?
7. What did they do about their baptism? What does their decision show about their character?
8. Did the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit come upon them at baptism? If not, when?

9. (Acts 19:11-20) What did the illusionists and magicians do with their books when they were converted?

10. What lesson would this have for us today?

11. (Acts 19:21-41) What interest made the silversmiths hate Paul and the Way of Christ?

12. How does this character flaw endanger people's souls today?

13. (Acts 20:17-38) When Paul finished his instructions to the Ephesian elders, what did they all do together?

14. Is it possible to have this kind of affection for our brethren today?

15. (Eph. 1:15) What two traits did the Ephesian Christians generally have?

16. (Rev. 2:1-7) How does Jesus commend the church at Ephesus at the end of the first century?

17. How does he rebuke them in the same letter?

18. How can one leave his first love (Christ) today?

Lesson 4: *The Church At Smyrna*

The church of Christ in Smyrna is mentioned only in the book of Revelation, but she is as close to the ideal congregation as could be found in Asia Minor in the first century. Christ praises Smyrna for her spiritual mindset and willingness to suffer loss for his cause. In the saints of Smyrna, the reader can learn how to avoid the second death and how to win a crown of life.

1. (Rev. 2:8-11) Who is being announced by the phrase “who was dead, and came to life”? How is the phrase appropriate to that person?

2. For what reason do you think he is reminding the Smyrnans of resurrection?

3. When can a reminder of the hope of resurrection to life be especially comforting to us today?

4. Deceived by infidels like the Sadducees, some early Christians began to doubt the resurrection of Christ. Many nominal Christians doubt its authenticity today as well. What does Paul say is the case if Christ was not raised (1 Cor. 15:12-19)?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

5. Who was the enemy of the Smyrnan church?

6. In New Testament times, the Holy Spirit redefined the qualifications to be a “Jew,” making the term a figurative representation of God’s people, not by fleshly descent, but spiritual regeneration. Consider Romans 2:28-29: who are the true Jews now?

7. Explain how the Smyrnan Christians could experience poverty and yet be called rich by Jesus (cf. Heb. 10:32-34, Matt. 6:19-20).

8. In what ways can a wealthy spirit be displayed by a person of little physical means?

9. What sad prophecy did Christ give the church?

10. Do you think that persecution of Christians is intensifying in our country? How?

11. What promise did Jesus make to those who persevered through the persecution? How did he phrase the condition placed upon this blessing?

12. What is the first death (Heb. 9:27-28)? What is the second death (Rev. 21:7-8)?

13. The New Testament strongly prohibits the Christian from seeking vengeance upon those who persecute him or the truth. How can we be assured that the wicked will not be excused (cf. 2 Thess. 1:3-10)?

Lesson 5: *The Church At Pergamos*

The church at Pergamos was one of those that had many good things to its account, but still had room for serious improvement. She had endured life in close proximity to great evil and the martyrdom of one of her own, but had also harbored some that held to false doctrine. The Bible student is met with a lesson on perseverance and impurity in the church at Pergamos.

1. (Rev. 2:12-17) In the scriptures, what is meant by the symbol of the “sharp, two-edged sword” (cf. Eph. 6:17, Heb. 4:11-13)?

2. Another entity is said not to bear the sword in vain (Rom. 13:1-7). What institution is this?

3. The center of Pergamos was a large hill covered with pagan temples, some of which were used to worship the Roman emperor. To what then does Satan’s throne likely refer? How did that one also use a sword for evil?

4. Early Christians were faced with an imperial ultimatum: Worship the emperor or die. What choice should they have made (Rev. 2:10, Acts 5:26-42)?

5. How had the Christians at Pergamos responded to the martyrdom of one of their own?

6. What should faithful Christians remember if put in a situation where recanting seems the only escape from persecution (Heb. 12:1-4)?

7. What two false teachings were present in Pergamos? How were the sound brethren dealing with the error?

8. How did the apostle Paul deal with false teachings and practices in the following situations?

- Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:17-18):

- Judaizing teachers in Galatia (Gal. 2:1-5):

- Peter and Barnabas (Gal. 2:11-21):

- Sexual immorality in Corinth (1 Cor. 5):

9. List some prevalent false teachings in our day.

10. According to the pattern in Revelation 2:12-17, how would we be compelled to handle the situation if a teacher of error came into our midst?

11. How can we know what is truth and what is error (Acts 17:11, 1 John 4:1-3)?

Lesson 6: *The Church At Thyatira*

The church of Christ in Thyatira had much going for it: works, love, service, faith and patience. Unfortunately, the church was also known for tolerating a wicked false teacher who led disciples into the very depths of Satan. He warned the church about her presence and dangerous influence in the obvious hope of exposing her false doctrine and eliminating it.

1. (Rev. 2:18-23) As Jesus introduces himself in verse 18, it is obvious that he is trying to impress something upon the Thyatirans that might benefit us as well. What does Jesus mean by calling himself the one with “eyes like a flame of fire” (cf. verse 23, Matt. 7:21-23, Heb. 4:11-13) and “feet like fine brass”?

2. What effect upon them and us should these two phrases have (2 Cor. 5:9-11)?

3. List the five attributes that Jesus commends in this church. Briefly define each.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

4. What does the New Testament generally teach about the continual growth of Christians (Heb. 5:12-14, 2 Peter 1:5-9)?

5. What did Jesus have against the church at Thyatira?

6. If there were some members at Thyatira who recognized her doctrines as false, how could they show the love Jesus commended in this matter (Titus 3:10-11, Rom. 16:17-18)?

7. What one thing does Jesus identify as needful for Jezebel and her followers to avoid punishment?

8. What are some ways in which this Jezebel's doctrine is still taught today: sexual immorality and idolatry?

9. (Rev. 2:24-29) What are some methods for holding fast to what we have, our works, love, service, faith and patience, for example?

10. What did Jesus promise those who overcame the temptations in Thyatira?

Lesson 7: *The Church At Sardis*

Reputations are sometimes earned but no longer deserved. Such was the case with the church of Christ in Sardis in the first century. Jesus complained that they have a reputation for vitality, but were in reality already dead to good works and growth. Christ's call for them to revive is a warning cry to every church that grows complacent.

1. (Rev. 3:1-6) Jesus says, I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." What does this imply about the way other congregations perceived the Sardis church?

2. How can a church look alive and vital but secretly be dying or complacent?

3. What will make a congregation die?

4. Obviously, carelessness and a lack of vigilance can rob a church of its vitality. Jesus says, "Be watchful." Summarize each of the following passages that commend vigilance.

- Matt. 24:36-50:

- 1 Peter 5:6-9:

- 2 Timothy 4:1-5:

- Hebrews 13:17:

5. There were evidently still some salvageable Christians in Sardis who breathe new life into the congregation. They were charged with strengthening the church. How can we strengthen discouraged or straying brethren (Heb. 12:1-17, 10:24-25, Eph. 4:29, 1 Cor. 8:1, 1 Thess. 5:11, Jude 20)?

6. The Lord's prescription then is twofold: hold fast and repent. To what were they to hold fast? How are we commanded likewise to stand or hold fast (Phil. 1:27-30)?

7. What does Jesus mean by undefiled, white garments? How does a Christian keep his garments clean (Acts 8:18-24)?

8. How can a Christian defile his garments (James 4:17, Heb. 10:26)?

9. Jesus promised to testify on behalf of every faithful saint in the day of judgment. Why would Jesus refuse to testify for us (Matt. 7:21-23, 10:32-42)?

Lesson 8: *The Church At Philadelphia*

The word Philadelphia carries with it the meaning “brotherly love” in the Greek language and the church that met in that city definitely did not betray the name. In addressing the congregation at Philadelphia, Jesus found nothing to criticize, but complimented her on her faithfulness and dedication to him and each other.

1. (Rev. 3:7-13) What is Jesus talking about when he mentions open doors that cannot be shut on the Philadelphians?

2. Verse 8 contains three commendations of the church there. List them.

3. Paul wrote the church in Corinth about the strength of churches, too. Consider 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. This passage teaches Christians about the need for one another. Though we may appear to have little strength to the world, we may be very strong as God judges. Describe Paul’s teaching concerning hands and feet and ears and the nose.

4. What does Paul say to the Corinthians about the members which seem to be weaker? What is his point?

5. Sometimes even strong members are made weak by intense suffering. How are the problems of the church shared?

6. Jesus commends the Philadelphians for keeping his word. What attitude were they showing by their obedience (John 14:15, 15:14, 1 John 2:3-6)?

7. He also commends them for not denying his name. On one occasion, Peter denied Jesus. What could have caused the fearless apostle to deny his Lord? How can this same feeling tempt us to deny Jesus?

8. In what ways can we deny the name of Christ?

9. How did Peter react when he discovered that Jesus had seen his denial (Luke 22:54-62)?

10. What crown do Christians anticipate wearing for all eternity (2 Tim. 4:6-8)? What are the conditions for obtaining one?

11. How did Paul describe perseverance in Philippians 3:7-14?

Lesson 9: *The Church At Laodicea*

Jesus casts a stern rebuke in the direction of Laodicea, where the members had grown complacent and lukewarm in their dedication to the gospel. Waning zeal is a problem that has plagued God's people for ages.

1. (Rev. 3:14-22) Jesus says the Laodiceans were neither cold nor hot. What would it mean if they were "cold"? What would it mean if they were "hot"?

2. Describe what it means for a Christian to be lukewarm. What are some signs of lukewarmness?

3. Why do Christians sometimes become lukewarm?

4. How does the lukewarm Christian affect Jesus?

5. How did the Laodiceans perceive themselves, according to Christ's indictment (verse 17)? How did Christ perceive them in these very areas?

6. All this is figurative language. What does it mean?

7. How can we judge the true wealth of a person (Luke 12:13-34)?
8. How might the lesson of the widow in Luke 21:1-6 have affected the Laodiceans?
9. What was the Lord's counsel for the Laodiceans to get themselves right?
10. How can a Christian avoid becoming or remaining lukewarm?
11. What will a zealous Christian do when a gospel meeting is scheduled?

Lesson 10: *The Church At Corinth*

No church in the New Testament seems to have had more problems than the one in the city of Corinth. The members there were fracturing and dividing over nearly a dozen concerns. Rather than tell them to agree to disagree, Paul shows the Corinthian saints how to come to a unity of understanding regarding the doctrine of Christ.

1. (1 Cor. 1:10-17) What was the cause of division at Corinth?
2. What did Paul command them concerning this disagreement?
3. Was Chloe's household a bunch of gossips?
4. (Acts 18:1-11) How long was Paul at Corinth?
5. (1 Cor. 2:1-5) How had he spent his time there?
6. (1 Cor. 3:1-11) Why did Paul call the Corinthian spiritual infants?
7. Beyond the obvious problem of denominationalism, how can this type of attitude be a problem in modern churches of Christ (cf. 3 John)?

8. (1 Cor. 5:1-13) How had the Corinthians reacted to sexual immorality in the church? What did Paul make them do?

9. (2 Cor. 2:5-11) Did his prescription apparently work?

10. (1 Cor. 6:1-8) What impression would people get of a local church where the members were suing one another?

11. What did Paul recommend they do rather than suing one another?

12. (1 Cor. 8:1-13) To what lengths did Paul urge the Corinthians to go to avoid causing another member to stumble and fall away?

13. (1 Cor. 11:17-34) What was their problem with the Lord's Supper observance? How were they to deal with this problem?

14. (1 Cor. 14:26-40) Why were their worship assemblies so confusing and disorderly?

Lesson 11: *The Church At Philippi*

It is clear that the church in Philippi occupied a special place in Paul's heart. The sense and execution of their fellowship enriched his labors and his joy beyond anything. In the Philippian church, we find an example of a congregation worthy of praise. We also read many warnings on how to maintain that level of integrity and dedication.

1. (Phil. 1:3-8) How were the Philippian saints “partakers with [Paul] in grace”?
2. (Phil. 1:9-11) Paul here gives a list of virtues he wishes to find in the saints of Philippi. List some of them:
3. (Phil. 1:19-26) Paul hoped the Philippians would provide something on his behalf that he might continue to persevere. What was that?
4. (Phil. 1:27-30) In encouraging them to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, he describes two parts to meeting that admonition. What are they?
5. (Phil. 2:12-18) Why might it be easier to be faithful with Paul around than with him absent? How does this attitude sometimes hinder us from being faithful? How can we cure it?

6. What becomes of a good deed done with grumbling and complaining?
7. (Phil. 2:25-30) How did Paul desire the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus? Why?
8. (Phil. 3:2-6) What did Paul mean by calling himself and his readers “the circumcision”? What is “the mutilation” about which he warned?
9. (Phil. 3:17-21) Whom did Paul want them to mark, or note?
10. (Phil. 4:3) What was the problem of Euodia and Syntyche? What was Paul’s command?
11. (Phil. 4:10-20) How had the Philippians helped ease Paul’s distress?
12. What did the giving of this mean to the Philippians’ own standing with God?

Lesson 12: *The Church At Antioch*

The church at Antioch also held a special place in Paul's heart. It was from here that he began each of his three evangelistic trips. Antioch also holds the distinction of being the place where Gentiles gained in acceptance among their Jewish brethren as Christians.

1. (Acts 11:19-30) Why were most of the dispersed Christians preaching to Jews only?
2. What authority now existed to take the gospel to the Gentiles as well (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 10:1-11:18)?
3. What evidence exists that God approved of these men from Cyprus and Cyrene preaching Jesus to the Gentiles?
4. What was the racial composition of the Antioch church? What was the racial composition of the Jerusalem church? Which of the two was racially superior?
5. How did the Jerusalem church react to the news of a local congregation of Greeks worshiping "the Jews' God"? What did this prove about their character?
6. Of what race were Barnabas and Paul (Acts 4:36, 22:3)? How did they treat their Gentile brethren?

7. What name did the disciples take first at Antioch?
8. How do we know that God wanted them to be so called (1 Peter 4:16)?
9. When were the disciples first called Methodists, according to the Bible? When were the disciples first called Presbyterians, according to the Bible? What should this teach us?
10. What prophecy did Agabus deliver? How did the Antioch congregation react?
11. What does this action prove about their perception of their Jewish counterparts?
12. (Gal. 2:11-14) How did Peter initially treat these Greek brethren when he visited Antioch? Why did he change his behavior and attitude?
13. What effect did Peter's influence have on the rest of the Jews there in Antioch?
14. Was Paul satisfied with a racially divided church? Should we be?

Lesson 13: *The Church At Rome*

The members of the church at Rome must have been a remarkable lot, for they worshiped Jesus in the very city where saints who refused to bow before Caesar were put to death. Here, the apostle Paul spent many years himself incarcerated for preaching the gospel. The church at Rome is an example of courage and perseverance.

1. (Rom. 13:1-7) Although they lived near Satan's throne, the seat of the Roman empire's government, Paul here instructs them to be subject to governing authorities. There is one obvious limitation to that command (Acts 5:29). What is it?

2. How could the Roman saints manage to stay faithful and at the same time, clear of the emperor's wrath?

3. It is reported that certain Roman emperors demanded to be called, "Lord God Caesar." Should a Christian have submitted to this command?

4. (Rom. 14:1-6) The Roman church was composed of both Jews and Gentiles and sometimes this difference in culture led to misunderstandings and distrust. How should the stronger members—the Gentiles who understood these components of the law of Moses were taken out of the way—have treated the weaker ones—the Jews who clung to the old ways?

5. (Rom. 14:7) Explain the broad implication of this statement.

6. (Rom. 14:7-13) How can we be guilty of putting a stumbling block in a brother's way?

7. What is the penalty for stumbling blocks (Matt. 18:6-7)?

8. (Rom. 14:19-23) List the things that make for peace described in each of the following passages:

- 1 Peter 5:5-6:
- 1 John 4:20-21:
- Ephesians 4:29-31:
- Philippians 2:3-4:
- Ephesians 4:32:
- Ephesians 4:15-16:

9. (Rom. 15:14) List the three qualities Paul thought the Roman saints had.

10. (Rom. 16:1-5) Who was Phoebe? Who were Priscilla and Aquila?

11. (Rom. 16:16) How did Paul describe the other congregations with which he was familiar?

12. (Rom. 16:17-18) How did Paul want these loving saints to handle divisive people in the church?

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J.S. Smith
Fort Worth, Texas
Electronic Mail: jeffssmith@mac.com
Internet: www.electronicgospel.org
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