

Is the Church Essential or Nonessential?

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write ... I know your works” (Rev. 3:7a-8a).

While these words were penned to a specific local church in Asia Minor, they also echo throughout eternity as a reminder for every church throughout the New Testament era. Christ is King and Lord over the churches. He alone has authority over the church.

However, in recent years, the church has seemed confused about its holy pedigree, its prophetic place and God’s great plan. Sadly, many people are questioning the value and the relevancy of what a church is in our day. This has led people to ask, “What purpose does the church serve today?”

More alarming is the reality that many people have now become comfortable not attending church at all. Sure, people will say they now do church online, but let’s be honest—viewing an online service is no different than listening to a radio teaching program while driving down the highway. It may be learning, but it is not church. It will not be church until God’s people create the opportunity to meet physically.

The truth is that tens of thousands of former church attendees have now found it much more comfortable and convenient to stay home. They have adopted a “wait and see” approach. This is exactly why I believe the Scriptures exhort us to be careful about how we value Christ’s church in these days and our meeting together (see Heb. 10:25).

The great news is that Jesus told the pastor in Philadelphia, “I know your works. Look! I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it” (Rev. 3:8a). No pastor, board of elders, governor, president or ruler in this world has the

authority to shut the doors of Jesus' church. Only Jesus has that right.

In 2020, it became evident that what was unfolding was the fact that God, though He didn't cause the COVID issue, was using it to test His church and purify His people. Pastors and Christian leaders shared a genuine concern to protect the welfare and health of their churches and communities. However, this later became a standoff between political agendas and obedience to the Word of God.

As we continue through 2021, the next phase of testing will most likely come to the church by way of persecution. The onslaught of societal issues will demand supremacy, trumping a biblical worldview.

That thought should not surprise the Western church. In every generation for the last 2,000 years, believers in every age and culture have been appointed to forms of persecution. The result was and will be excellent—a cleansing and purging of the church.

We all love the awesome dynamic biblical accounts of great exploits of faith and victories in the face of certain opposition and even death. Those accounts become our encouragement in trying times like these. The church that is taking a stand and has determined to obey Scripture, to be salt and light, to be the hands and feet of Jesus and to be the voice of hope to a perishing culture—that church will be deemed to be at odds with this world. Humanly speaking, the world will make many good and reasonable arguments as to why the church must stay closed and stand down—to comply in the face of “public safety” or “political correctness”—but its argument comes from its value system, while ours comes from Jesus Christ.

I believe we are entering into times of testing. These days of testing must come to prove that the church is neither

essential nor nonessential, but rather transcendent. The true church of Jesus Christ will be as a light shining on a hill, a beacon to those who are lost and willing to be hated by the world for the cause of Christ, which is the redemption of the souls of men. Let's take courage by remembering what Jesus went on to say: "For you have a little strength, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (Rev. 3:8b). {eoa}

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