

CAN ONE PERSON MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Being a Church That Makes a Difference
Revelation 2:1–3, 8–10, 12–13, 18–19; 3:7–10, 17



LET'S BEGIN HERE

“You can’t judge a book by its cover” —that’s a phrase we’ve all heard before. It simply means you can’t evaluate people by externals—clothes, appearance, or size.

What’s true of people is also true of churches—you can’t tell the effectiveness of a church by its building. The small church building on the corner with the peeling paint and cardboard taped over broken windows may house a group of vibrant Christians who are making a real difference in their community. And down the street could be a large, ornate church that feels like a mortuary inside.

To discover the traits of an effective church, we have to examine what’s on the inside. Fortunately, Jesus Himself shows us what to look for.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Seven Letters to Seven Churches

In Revelation 2 and 3, John recorded seven letters that Christ dictated to him and addressed to seven first-century churches in Asia. Only once in Scripture did the Head of the church reveal His evaluations about local church bodies. Possibly, He chose these churches because they were located at strategic cultural crossroads and had the most potential for making a difference in their day.

For His searching evaluation, Christ selected:

- The church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1–7)
- The church in Smyrna (2:8–11)
- The church in Pergamum (2:12–17)
- The church in Thyatira (2:18–29)
- The church in Sardis (3:1–6)
- The church in Philadelphia (3:7–13)
- The church in Laodicea (3:14–22)



Quotable

*Jesus doesn't
look at the size
or location of
a church. He looks
at the mind
and the heart.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Tragically, for two of the churches in Asia—Sardis and Laodicea—Christ issued no praise at all. But to the other five, He pointed out several positives. By focusing on Christ’s statements of approval, we will find five difference-making qualities that our churches can emulate.

2. Characteristics of Churches That Make a Difference (Revelation 2:1–3:22)

- ***Ephesus: Persevering Commitment to Orthodoxy***

The Ephesian church was able to think clearly, distinguish truth from error, and pursue righteousness. The apostle Paul had given them solid theological ballast that stabilized them in the seas of persecution and kept them on course when the winds of false teaching started to blow.

- ***Smyrna: Unswerving Courage through Suffering***

Jesus said to Smyrna’s church, “I know your tribulation” (Revelation 2:9). He, too, had borne the weight of suffering. The Greek word for “tribulation,” *thlipsis*, means “pressure.” Under the oppressive weight of persecution, the believers in Smyrna faced imprisonment and even death. But they had a priceless, Christ-given crown—eternal life—awaiting them.

- ***Pergamum: Uncompromising Witness That Remains on the Cutting Edge***

Pergamum was the capital city and cultural center of Asia with a library rivaling the renowned library of Alexandria. Above the lofty city, an imposing altar to Zeus was situated in the front of the Temple of Athena. Christians were indeed living “where Satan’s throne” was (2:13), but with Christ’s sharp “sword” (2:16) of truth, they were slashing a hole in Satan’s kingdom.

- ***Thyatira: Increasing Zeal for Things Eternal***

As with the Ephesian believers, the Lord commended those in Thyatira for their deeds, namely the ones done in love, faith, service, and perseverance—and Jesus pointed out that their deeds were becoming greater and greater. There was no slowing down these Christians! They were on the move, cruising forward, always looking ahead.

- ***Philadelphia: Ever-Enlarging Willingness to Accept Whatever Challenges God Brings***

Jingling the keys of opportunity, Jesus opened a door of hope for this church. The believers may have had only “a little power” (3:8), but that was enough; they had kept His Word and remained devoted to Him, and Jesus honored their faith.



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3. Warnings from Two Churches That Failed to Make a Difference

- *Sardis: Guilty of guarding its public image but denying the reality of its emptiness.*
Warning: We ought not be more concerned about our image than about the reality of what's happening in our souls.

- *Laodicea: Guilty of having a private opinion of itself that was completely unrelated to true facts.*
Warning: To make a difference in the world, we must be wary of false pride and hypocrisy.



LET'S LIVE IT

To be a church that makes a difference takes commitment to orthodoxy, fearless faith in the face of antagonism, advancing into the cutting edge of a lost world, passion and vision for the future, and faithfulness to go through the doors that Jesus opens.

Which of these five characteristics of churches that make a difference seems the most daunting?

How does your church make a difference?



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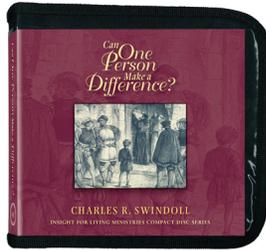
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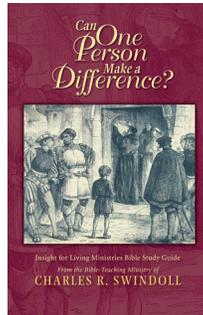
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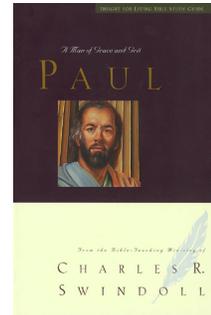
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