

The Church—A Lampstand

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Introduction

When Jesus came He came as the light of the world (John 1:7-9; 8:12; 9:5). As Christians God has called each one of us to be a light to the world as well. We all have an **individual calling** to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt. 5:13-16).

In addition to that, however, we have a **corporate calling** as a local church. God has placed the church on earth as His instrument to extend His kingdom and fulfill His purpose. He wants every church to be a lighthouse to their region—a beacon of hope, guidance and inspiration.

The Bible doesn't use the imagery of a lighthouse (for obvious reasons); it uses the imagery a lampstand. We find this imagery in the first chapter of the Book of Revelation where Jesus is pictured in His ascended glory as the Great High Priest. In this scene Jesus is walking among seven golden lampstand, each one representing a local church in Asia Minor.

Just as the high priest in the tabernacle ministered before the lampstand adding oil and trimming the wicks, so also Christ stands before His churches with a container of oil and His wick trimmer in His hand. Just as Jesus ministered to these seven churches of Asia, He also wants to come and minister to His churches today so that they can burn more brightly for Him.

Revelation 1:10-2:1

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." 12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. 19 Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. 20 The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches. 2:1 To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands..."

In this passage, Jesus, the builder and sustainer of the Church is walking among the churches (lampstands) trimming the wicks as needed and pouring in oil as needed.

God often uses symbolic language to help us visualize divine truth. The symbol here is the lampstand. To understand the symbol we can go back to the Old Testament where this symbol was more than a symbol but an actual lampstand in the Tabernacle of Moses.

God gave the Tabernacle of Moses to us to be an **example** for us (I Cor. 10:11).

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

The Tabernacle of Moses was a **shadow** of the good things that would come to us in Christ (Heb. 8:5).

The Tabernacle of Moses was a **parable** to us (Heb. 9:9 lit. Gk.). A parable is a simple earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

...which is symbolic for the present age... --English Standard Version

The purpose of an example or a shadow is to point us to the real or the true. The Old Testament is full of shadows and parables that are designed to instruct us concerning New Testament realities.

The New Testament is the infallible interpreter of the Old Testament symbols.

The symbol that we are looking at here is the lampstand. In order to better understand this symbol as it relates to churches we must go back and see where this symbol began in the Old Testament.

Exodus 25:31-40

You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its ornamental knobs, and flowers shall be of one piece. 32 And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side. 33 Three bowls shall be made like almond blossoms on one branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower, and three bowls made like almond blossoms on the other branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower—and so for the six branches that come out of the lampstand. 34 On the lampstand itself four bowls shall be made like almond blossoms, each with its ornamental knob and flower. 35 And there shall be a knob under the first two branches of the same, a knob under the second two branches of the same, and a knob under the third two branches of the same, according to the six branches that extend from the lampstand. 36 Their knobs and their branches shall be of one piece; all of it shall be one hammered piece of pure gold. 37 You shall make seven lamps for it, and they shall arrange its lamps so that they give light in front of it. 38 And its wick-trimmers and their trays shall be of pure gold. 39 It shall be made of a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils. 40 And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.

The Book of Revelation presents the local church as a lampstand.

The Purpose of the Lampstand (vs. 37)

*...so that they give light in front of it.
...so they reflect their light forward. –NLT*

The Church is to let the light of God shine forth in the darkness of this world. Even as Christ was the light of the world, the church is to be the light of the world. Even as Christ's life was the light of men (John 1:4), our life is to give light to mankind.

However, if the lampstand was to fulfill its function, it had to be constructed or prepared properly. The formula for the building of the lampstand is found in this Exodus passage.

The Preparation of the Lampstand

In order for the lampstand to fulfill its purpose it had to go through a preparation process. For our purpose here we will look at **six characteristics** of this lampstand that would make it well prepared for what it was meant to be.

1. The Lampstand was to be made of pure gold (vs. 31, 36).

You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold... (vs. 31)

Gold is a symbol that speaks of the divine nature. This gold was to be clarified until it was pure. This speaks of the fact that the lampstand was to be all of one metal with no impurities or mixture.

When we became Christians we were dug out of the earth as unrefined gold. In Christ we became partakers of the divine nature. We are now the building materials that God is using to build the church, His lampstand.

But gold cannot be used as it comes out of the ground; it must be refined and purified. It is God's design that through repentance, the new birth and the ongoing work of sanctification in our lives that the nature of God would thoroughly predominate the human or fallen nature.

This does not mean that we will be totally sinless, but it does mean that we are to be warring a good warfare against the flesh as good soldiers and putting on our armor of light (Rom. 13:12). It does mean that we do not let sin dominate our lives. It means that we are constantly gaining ground against the darkness (Eph. 5:8).

We are to press forward toward the mark of the high calling in Christ so that we might become the glorious bride without spot or wrinkle so that we can be joined one day to the holy Son of God in marriage (Eph. 5:27).

If we are full of mixture, if the light that is in us is darkness, we lose our ability to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Mt. 6:23). The message is "no mixture!"

2. The Lampstand was to be made of one piece of gold (vs. 31, 36).

*Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its ornamental knobs, and flowers shall be of one piece.
(vs. 31)*

This lampstand was to have perfect unity. Even though it had many branches and even more ornaments (66 in all), it was completely one—perfectly joined together (I Cor. 1:10).

There were no separations or divisions. They were many yet one.

The unity of the members of the church is a witness to the world (John 17:22-23).

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

We are instructed to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-7). This includes unity among leadership, unity among the members of a local church and unity in the greater Body of Christ. We strive for this not for ourselves but for our higher calling as Christ's light to the world.

3. The Lampstand was to be made as a hammered work (vs. 31).

...the lampstand shall be of hammered work... (vs. 31)

This is interesting because the one piece of gold that was to become this beautiful light-bearer for the Lord would be made with hammers.

God called skilled workmen who were led and directed by the Holy Spirit to pound on this lump of gold until it took the proper shape (Ex. 31:1-6; 36:1).

This kind of work is not possible with cast iron. If you pound on cast iron it will break. This is only possible because gold is a pliable metal. As we remain pliable before the Lord He uses the hammer of His word to mold us and shape us into the image that He has in His mind for us (Jer. 23:29).

“Does not My word burn like fire?” says the LORD. “Is it not like a mighty hammer that smashes a rock to pieces?” –NLT

As we submit or yield to the dealings of God or the hammer of God we can become a thing of beauty that will be a showcase to the world. The process is often painful, but the result is spectacular and something to be treasured.

4. The Lampstand was to be perfectly balanced (vs. 32).

And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side.

It had a central shaft (representing Christ) with six branches, three on each side.

Everything that God builds has balance (e.g. the human body).

If the lampstand had not been in balance, if it had been weighted too much on one side or the other, it could easily have fallen over, spilt the oil and, perhaps, even caused a fire. When we are not in balance it is easy for us to stumble and fall.

In athletics as in all of life, balance is essential. As Christians we must also have balance in our lives—in our personal life, our family life and our social life.

The local church must also have balance. The lampstand had its six branches gathered to the shaft and it had 66 ornaments all in perfect balance.

The number 66 speaks to me of the 66 books of the Bible. We are in perfect balance when we teach the whole counsel of God as presented in all 66 books of the Bible. The entire Bible represents what God believes about everything.

Balance is emphasizing what God emphasizes. The church must be careful not to overemphasize what God does not overemphasize. It must be balanced in its teaching. Here are some areas that must be in balance or right proportion.

Evangelism, Discipleship, Healing, Praise & Worship, Mission & Outreach, Love, Faith, Grace, Water Baptism, Repentance, Deliverance, Spiritual Warfare, Fellowship, Gifts of the Spirit, Fruit of the Spirit, Etc.

Every truth found in the Word of God can be taken to an extreme. When that happens it diminishes the rest of God's truth and can actually become a heresy. One definition of heresy is "truth taken to an extreme."

All 66 ornaments are needed on the lampstand, but all must be in proper balance if the lampstand is to be God's light or reflection to the world.

The key to balance is emphasizing what God emphasizes. Teachings based on 200 verses should receive more attention than teachings based on one or two verses. We get in trouble when we "major on the minors."

5. The Lampstand was to be built according to the pattern (vs. 40).

And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.

The lampstand was God's idea. God not only came up with the idea, He came up with the design. It was not up to Moses or the "creative arts department" to change or try to improve on God's pattern.

God is the one who provided the pattern for the lampstand and He is the one who provides the pattern for the church. He does this because He is committed to the lampstand accomplishing the thing for which it was designed and He is the only one who knows what will work and stand the test of time.

Jesus said, “I will built my church.” This is His church in the fullest sense of the word. He conceived it, designed it, provided the builders to build it, bought and paid for all of the materials for it. He alone will get the glory for it when it is finished.

The church’s success is dependent upon our building God’s house, God’s way. To tamper with the pattern is to risk both failure and possible judgment.

6. The Lampstand was to be regularly maintained (Ex. 25:38; 30:7-8).

And its wick-trimmers and their trays shall be of pure gold. (vs. 38)

It was the duty of the high priest twice a day to come into the Holy Place in the Tabernacle and maintain the lampstand. This involved primarily two things:

a. Trimming the wicks

Keeping the wicks trimmed of all burnt out and unproductive areas kept the light burning brightly with less smoke to cloud the flame.

b. Adding more oil

Additional oil was essential because it was the continual supply of oil that was to keep the wick from burning up and burning out before its time.

Believers and local churches need to continually allow the great High Priest to come through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to cut away the unproductive and burned out areas of our lives and ministries submitting to the trimming process.

Believers and local churches need to be waiting on the Lord for a continual supply of the oil of the Holy Spirit so that they are operating on Spirit power instead of human sweat and effort.

Closing Challenge

As we seek to be that lamp burning brightly for the Lord, we need to allow the great High Priest to walk among us today and do His work of trimming and anointing with oil. As we position ourselves before Him today ask yourself these questions.

1. Am I warring a good warfare against sin, maintaining my separation from worldliness to be a light to the world—pure gold?
2. Am I dealing with offenses with other believers and allowing myself to come into a place of unity in order to become a unified witness to the world—one piece?
3. Am I living a life of submission to the Word of God and a life of obedience to the voice of the Holy Spirit as he shapes me for use—hammered work?

4. Am I a balanced Christian who is allowing Christ to touch every area of my life and keep me from extremes in any area—balanced?
5. Am I conforming my life to the pattern of God's word in my finances, home-life, business endeavors and relationships so that God can pour out His blessing on me?
6. Am I maintaining my personal lamp allowing the Holy Spirit to trim my wick and fill me afresh every day so that I can burn brightly for the Lord?

Isaiah 60:1-3

Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.