Revelation Chapter 2 1-7 Ephesus Teaching Document

Review.

Last week we saw a very different image of Jesus.

The image of Jesus that John described spoke of ……..

* The Authority of Jesus
* A Jesus of Judgment
* The Power of Jesus

These are references that we may not have considered for Jesus before.

The reason for that could be that we still view Jesus in the past.

We still see

* Jesus at His baptism
* Jesus with the children on His lap
* Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane
* Jesus on the cross
* Jesus coming out of the tomb.

But those images are inaccurate for who Jesus is today.

John provided us with a new view of Jesus.

In fact, after spending 3 years of his life with Jesus, when John saw the Jesus that he described in Revelation chapter 1 John says that he fell at the feet of Jesus as if John were a dead man.

Why? Because John recognized that Jesus is God.

As we continue into Revelation chapters 2 & 3, we are going to see what Jesus has to say to His churches.

What is the Church?

Timeline

You are the church. The church is not a building or an institution.

The church is made up of all believers from the time of Pentecost until the moment of the Rapture.

Jesus said that the church is **His** and He said that **He** would build it.

Matt 16:18b

18b upon this rock **I will build My church**; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

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**“I** will build **My** Church”. It is **My** church and **I** will be the one who will build it.

So,

* The church is made up of believers, from the time of Pentecost until the Rapture.
* The church belongs to Jesus and He is the one that builds the church.

Let’s now begin to look at these 7 letters that Jesus is writing to His churches.

**Revelation 2:1-17 Teaching Document**

Each of Jesus’ letters to the Churches is organized in a similar manner:

There appears to be several **applications** for the letters,

1. **Historical** – a valid local application to that church at that time
2. **Universal** – describes all churches. In other words, every condition and element that is present in any church.
3. **Personal** – remember we are the bride of Christ, we are the body of believers that make up the church. And at the end of each of these letters Jesus says, “To him that has an ear” Jesus is talking not only to the congregation as a whole but He is talking to us individually and personally.

Organization of the letters:

1. Name of the City – meaning of the name coincides with the topic.
2. Title of the Author – defines the tone (Title almost always comes from Rev. chapter 1)
3. Commendations – to the church (this is what the church **has** done well)
4. Criticism – to the church (this is what the church **has not** done well)
5. Exhortation – to the church or the congregation (this is how to repair the problem)
6. Closure – to the individuals (he who has an ear…)
7. Promise to the Overcomer – individuals

**Perspective** – Jesus is in authority. This is His church. He is the One that is evaluating His church.

 Each of these 7 letters that Jesus writes is to the “Angel” of the church.

You might remember the image of Jesus that John gave us from chapter 1. Jesus was holding seven stars in His right hand and He was surrounded by seven golden lampstands which were the seven churches

John told us that the seven stars that were in Jesus’ right hand were the seven angels of the seven churches.

So Jesus is addressing each of the angels that are assigned to each one of these seven churches.

Tonight we are going to look at the letter to Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum. It is interesting to note that the name of the church tells us something about the condition of the church.

Ephesus – “Maiden of choice, darling, desired one”.

This speaks of a love relationship – this was the issue of the church of Ephesus.

The Church at Ephesus had left their first love.

Smyrna – In the Greek, Smyrna means Myrrh which speaks of suffering. We will see that is the condition at Smyrna, they are undergoing persecution and suffering.

Pergamum - means “marriage in opposition”. The church at Pergamum was married to the world while claiming to be married to Jesus.

So the name of each of these churches will shed some light on their condition.

Let’s take a look at the first letter that Jesus writes to Ephesus. Here’s some background on Ephesus

Ephesus’ most significant claim to prominence was the Temple of Artemis (or Diana). The Temple of Artemis was ranked as one of the Seven Wonders of the World and the pagan people of Ephesus were the keepers of the temple Goddess - Artemis. Artemis was described as the moon Goddess (similar to Semiramis or Ashtoreth). Artemis was considered the twin sister of Apollo and the daughter of Zeus or Jupiter.

The temple of Artemis housed the multi breasted image of Artemis which was believed to have come directly from Zeus or Jupiter

During the Roman period the Ephesians minted coins with the inscription, “Atremis of Ephesus”. They also crafted small idols of Artemis that were sold for profit to the pagan worshippers in Ephesus.

Paul and the believers in Ephesus had been so effective at preaching the gospel to the unbelievers that the sales of the Artemis idols severely declined.

Acts 19 describes how Demetrius, a silversmith of these little Artemis idols gathered his fellow craftsmen together to complain about the decline of the sales of these idols of Artemis.

Ephesus was a place that was involved in idolatry and the church at Ephesus was effective at turning the people away from idolatry and toward the Lord.

The church was busy and influential.

Sounds pretty good right? Let’s see what Jesus has to say about this church.

**Title**: "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the **One who walks among the seven golden lampstands**, says this:

This title that Jesus used for Himself came from chapter 1. We will see this repeated in all three of the churches that we will look at tonight.

Jesus says this letter is coming from the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands. This speaks of the intimacy that Jesus desires with His churches.

This is a hint of what the issue is at the church of Ephesus. They are lacking the intimacy with Jesus that He desires.

**Commendations:** Rev 2:2-4 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

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The Church at Ephesus was doing well.

1. They were a busy church. Jesus said, “I know your **deeds and your toil**”.

+ The word **toil** can be translated “your hard, energetic efforts and activities.

+ You could say they were doers of the word and not hearers only.

+ They were a busy church. The church at Ephesus was looking outward. They were concerned with turning the pagans away from idolatry and toward the Lord. They were not a church that was only concerned only about themselves. This is the sign of a healthy church.

1. They were a persevering church. Perseverance means to bear up under a load or to persevere under difficult circumstances with an unswerving determination to go on. Jesus is referring to persevering under persecution. Ephesus was a tough place for believers to live.

Why?

 Many religious groups settled in Ephesus, and their practices included:

* 1. Emperor Worship - because they were under Roman rule, the citizens were required, once a year, to gather near an image of the Caesar and claim that Caesar was lord. Believers in Jesus Christ would not participate in this activity and were persecuted for it.
	2. Eastern Mysticism
	3. Worship of the goddess Artemis.

Sounds like our society today with the emphasis on religious tolerance.

But Jesus in His letter commends them for **not tolerating evil** **men**. Jesus is telling them that to tolerate evil is to turn away from the truth.

Jesus wants us to love people but hate their sin. This is a clear indication to the church and us as believers to be very careful about our practice of “tolerance”.

Do we see churches involved in this today? Absolutely.

We see churches performing weddings between same sex couples.

We see churches being pastored by men and women that openly profess homosexual lifestyles.

Jesus says that the churches are not to tolerate evil men. One of the goals of the church is to help people overcome evil practices through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are treading dangerous ground when we “tolerate” that evil instead of “overcoming” it.

The church at Ephesus was a busy church, they were a persevering church and they refused to tolerate evil men. They were also….

1. A Discerning Church – Jesus said “and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false

Before Paul left the church at Ephesus he predicted that men would rise up and preach false doctrine in an attempt to draw the church away.

Acts 20:28-31

28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 **and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 "Therefore be on the alert**

Paul’s advice was to be on the alert for those that would teach false doctrine.

How can you determine if the doctrine that is taught in a church is false? You must know the truth. You must first know what is in God’s word. If you do not know God’s word then you can be led astray.

Pastors should be focusing on the truth of God’s word and fortifying their members on how to discern the truth.

That is exactly what Peter, Paul, James, John and Jude were focused on in each of their letters that they wrote to the churches.

They wrote their letters and epistles to give believers the truth and to help them build their faith.

The believers at Ephesus knew God’s word enough to be able to identify false teaching.

Finally, Jesus says, and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

BUT

**Criticism**: Revelation 2:4 “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Is this possible? Can a church be influential at helping people to turn away from idolatry and toward the Lord, and persevere for the Lord and not tolerate evil men and know their scriptures so well that they can identify false teachers and not have love for Jesus?

Yes. How could this happen? How could a believer leave their love for Jesus?

It occurs when a believer does not develop biblical faith.

A believer that is only saved gets overwhelmed by the trials of the world. They may have even bought into the idea that when they accepted Jesus everything was going to get better for them.

But that is rarely the case. Most people that get saved get attacked spiritually. Things don’t get better, things actually get worse.

Because they lack the knowledge and understanding of what God is going to do in the future, they can easily leave their love for Jesus and go back into the world.

The believer that knows about the promise of the Rapture of the church and his glorified body is less likely to leave his love for Jesus.

The believer that knows that he will be married to Jesus at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is unlikely to leave his first love for Jesus.

The believer that understands that he is going to return with Jesus to the earth to rule as a priest during the Millennium and avoid the Great White Throne Judgment and live in the presence of Jesus for the rest of eternity in the New Jerusalem is not likely to ever leave his love for Jesus.

The believer that doesn’t understand those things, though, is highly susceptible to leaving his love for Jesus, because he does not have what is necessary to be victorious over the world.

He lacks the knowledge of what God is going to do in the future. He lacks biblical faith.

The believers at Ephesus have left their first love and replaced it with works and called it Ministry.

But notice that Jesus didn’t say that they had **lost** their first love, no, instead they had **left** it.

The church did all the right things: working, serving, suffering for Jesus and discerning truth. Yet their love grew cold for their Savior.

Jesus is more concerned about what you do **with** Him than what you do **for** Him.

Jesus says before you serve Me, you must love Me first.

* After the resurrection Jesus sent the disciples to Galilee
* They went fishing – they caught nothing
* Jesus tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat
* They caught so many large fish that their nets were about to break
* Peter recognized Jesus on the shore and he swam back to the shore to meet Him

Remember what Jesus said to Peter. Peter, do you **love** Me more than these?

1) **Then** feed my lambs.

2) **Then** Shepherd My sheep.

3) **Then** Feed My sheep.

Too often we claim that we show our love for Jesus **by** the works that we do for Him.

Jesus says this is backwards.

You need to love me first then serve me.

Jesus is saying that your **love** for me is more important than your **works** for me.

Luke 10:38-42

 Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, **listening to His word**. 40 But Martha was **distracted with all her preparations**; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42 **but only one thing is necessary**, for **Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her**."

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Mary was at the feet of Jesus listening to His word.

What is the solution for this problem?

**Exhortation:** Rev 2:5-6 'Therefore **remember** from where you have fallen, and **repent** and **do the deeds** **you did at first**; or else I am coming to you and will **remove** your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent. 6 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

**Remember, repent, repeat, remove.**

**Remember** –

Remember from where you have fallen. Jesus is saying to go back to the basics. You have fallen away from the elemental things that caused you to become saved.

Salvation comes from believing the gospel. That Jesus died for your sins, that He was buried and that He was raised on the 3rd day.

Jesus is saying that you need go back to the very basic issues that resulted in your salvation.

It appears that the issue here in Ephesus is that even though the church is busy and influential, they have lost their salvation.

Why do I say that? Because the next step that Jesus gives them is to repent.

Not one time in the entire New Covenant is a **believer** ever instructed to **repent**. The only people that are instructed to repent are the unsaved or the non-believers.

The issue here at Ephesus is that people think they are saved but they have actually left their first love.

They are busy in the church and they are serving but they have walked away from their salvation.

Jesus says that these people need to remember from where they have fallen and they need to repent.

Only then can they repeat the deeds that they did at first. Only then will their deeds truly please Jesus.

If they don’t do that then Jesus will remove their lampstand. What is the lampstand?

The lampstand is the church. If they don’t remember from where they have fallen and return to the basics of their salvation by repenting of their sins, continuing their deeds, however good for Jesus, will have no value.

In fact, Jesus will remove their lampstand. In Jesus’ eyes, they won’t even be a church.

Serving Jesus is great but it has to be a result of your love for Jesus. It has to be because you recognized your sin, you believed that Jesus died for your sins, was buried and raised on the third day.

When you repent of your sins, you go from being unsaved to becoming saved. You are now filled with the Holy Spirit and your deeds have value and Jesus will not remove the lampstand from the church.

6 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate

#### Nicolaitans

1. Don’t know who they are
2. Nico –conquer, laitans – laity or people - “people conquerors” Could be a reference to the clergy that were oppressing the believers in the name of the church or the name of Jesus

Regardless, it is the DEEDS of the Nicolaitans that the church at Ephesus hated. Jesus commended them for this.

**REPORT CARD SUMMARY -**

 + deeds

 + Toil (hard work)

 + perseverance (patience)

 + cannot bear evil men

 + tested those who called themselves apostles and were not

 + persevered and have endured

 + have not become weary

 + hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans

 - left your first love

**Closure:** Revelation 2:7a "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

**Promise to the Overcomer:** 2:7b To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

If you overcome, I will give to you to eat from the tree of life.

This is the issue for the Church at Ephesus. They have left their first love and although they are serving Jesus, none of it matters because they have lost their salvation. They need to remember, repent and repeat or they will not eat from the Tree of Life

After the fall, God removed access to the Tree of Life.

Gen 3:24

4 So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

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At the end of the Book of Revelation, once Satan is destroyed and all sin has been judged, the Tree of Life will be available once again.

Rev 22:2

On either side of the river was the **tree of life**, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

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But you have to overcome. What does it mean to overcome?

1 John 5:4-5

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world — **our faith**.

5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but **he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

For you to be an overcomer, you must believe the gospel and continue to believe the gospel until you die.

* Jesus died for your sins
* He was buried
* He was raised on the 3rd day.

If you believe that until the day you die, you are considered an overcomer. That is how you overcome the world.

But notice verse 4. John says that to have **victory** over the world you must have faith.

There are great promises to those that believe the gospel until they die. But those people don’t have victory over the world.

They may be believers, they may be overcomers but you really can’t tell them from the rest of the world.

* They are the believers that worry.
* They haven’t overcome their sin issues.
* They actually look exactly like they did before they became saved.
* They live like the unsaved even though they are, in fact, saved.

What are they missing? They are missing faith. They have a strong BELIEF in the gospel and that makes them an overcomer, but they lack what is necessary to gain **victory** over the world.

John says this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.

What is faith about? The future.

From Hebrews 11:1 we know that faith is the assurance of those things that we have complete confidence in, that God is going to do in the future.

How do you develop faith? You have to know what God is going to do in the future.

How do you develop the **assurance** of those things that God is going to do in the future? You have to know what He has done in the past.

How does developing a strong faith give you victory over the world?

1. The overcomer that **only believes the gospel** is ruined if his car gets stolen or his house burns down. When you have faith, you know that you will live for the rest of eternity in the New Jerusalem in the very presence of the Father and Jesus, and today’s sufferings don’t even compare to the glory that you will share with the Lord by being in His presence.
2. An overcomer that **only believes the gospel** comes apart when he gets a diagnosis of cancer. When you have true biblical faith, a diagnosis of cancer is just an inconvenience. Because of your faith, you are looking forward to the glorified body that will never develop cancer.
3. The overcomer that **only believes the gospel** until they die might be completely frustrated that the entire world seems to be against Israel. When you have true biblical faith, you know that Jesus will return to fight for Israel at the 2nd coming and Israel will live in peace and prosperity for 1000 years during the Millennium.

There are great promises to those that continue to believe the gospel until they die. They are overcomers and the rewards are great.

But do you want to have victory over the world while you are here on this planet? The only way to have the victory that overcomes the world is to develop true biblical faith.

Here’s the good news. Just by staying with this bible study until May, you will develop the kind of faith that will give you the victory over the world that John is talking about.

**Is Jesus the Son of God?**

Jesus was declared the Son of God when He fulfilled what God (the higher authority) required of Him. These requirements are prophetic of the Son of God

* He was the promised Seed of the Woman (Gen. 3:15)
* He would be a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:3)
* He would be a descendant of Isaac (Gen. 17:19)
* He would be a descendant of Jacob (Num. 24:17)
* He would be from the Tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10)
* He would be a descendant of Jesse (Isa. 11:10)
* He would be a descendant of David (Jer. 23:5-6)
* He would shepherd His people Israel (Ezek. 37:24)
* He would be an heir to the throne of King David (Isa. 9:7)
* He would be anointed and eternal (Psalm 45:6-7, Psalm 102:25-27)
* He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah:5:2)
* He would be born to virgin (Isa. 7:14)
* He would be worshipped by shepherds (Psalm 72:9)
* Honored by great kings (Psalm 72:10,15 ; Isa. 60:3)
* The slaughter of Jewish children would be associated with His birth (Jer. 31:15)
* He would have flight to Egypt (Hosea 11:1)
* The way for Him would be prepared (Isa. 40:3-5)
* Preceded by a forerunner (Mal. 3:1)
* He would be preceded by Elijah (Mal. 4:5-6) – (Matt11:14, Mark 9:12-13)
* He would be declared to be the Son of God (Psalm 2:7, Prov.30:4)

Matt 26:63-64

And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN."

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Matt 27:40-42

If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, 42 "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.

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John 11:17-27

17 So, when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.

18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off;

19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother.

20 Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house.

21 Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.

22 "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

24 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,

26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

27 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."