

**>>>>>> Lesson 04 <<<<<<<**

- 1) We will begin our discussion at verse 7 but I'll start reading with the entire letter to the Ephesians beginning in verse 1 of chapter 2.

**Rev 2:1-7 (NIV)**

- 2) At our abrupt end to last week's lesson, we had been discussing the loss of our first love.
- 3) The basic and absolute conclusion of this is that we must never stop growing in our love for God and our fellow man.
- 4) We can do it all and get it all 100% right but if we lose that love "Our first love" all is for naught!
- 5) We must always be in the mode of evaluating our progress toward what God wants us to be.
- 6) We are to be always growing not standing still or going backwards in our faith and our love for the Lord and our brothers and sisters.
- 7) Again, as individuals and collectively as a church.
- 8) The conclusion of this letter (and for that matter, all the letters) contain the phrase, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
  - a) There are two points that need to be emphasized here.
  - b) First, it is the responsibility of each individual reading or hearing these letters to heed what God is saying.
    - i) It is not just the responsibility of the elders or the minister – it is ours!
    - ii) It is each of us in the collective whole that make our church what it is.
    - iii) It is impossible to have a church that is loving without members who are loving!
  - c) Secondly, note the plural of "churches";
    - i) again, indicating that these letters should be distributed among all the 7 churches being addressed.
    - ii) And, if I may be so bold, since we are dealing in apocalyptic matters, 7 being complete, it is likely that this means these are to be read by all churches throughout the ages.
- 9) Finally, the reward – if we do heed what has been said here, we will be given the right to live forever in the presence of God our Father
- 10) Here the letter concludes with another one of those eschatological references – "I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

**Rev 2:8-11 (NIV)**

- 1) This is the shortest of the seven letters.

## ***Revelation – NOTES – 2021***

---

- 2) Also, the first of two letters (the other to Philadelphia) that have no direct warning or condemnation.
- 3) Throughout its history, it appears that the more the church has been persecuted, the greater has been its purity and strength.
- 4) At the end of the first century, life was difficult and especially dangerous for the church at Smyrna.
- 5) The city was a longtime ally of Rome and was a hotbed of emperor worship.
- 6) Under Emperor Domitian, it became a capital offense to refuse to offer the yearly sacrifice to the emperor.
- 7) Not surprisingly, many Christians faced execution.
- 8) The most famous of Smyrna's martyrs was Polycarp, executed in approximately 150 AD.
- 9) While reading and studying this letter, I was thinking of the churches in Afghanistan.
  - a) The Constitution of Afghanistan allows the practice of religions other than Islam, as long as it is within the legal framework of Islamic laws and does not threaten the Islamic religion.
  - b) There is only one legally recognized Christian church building in Afghanistan, the Catholic chapel at the Italian Embassy which has been operational since the 1930s.
  - c) Under the Taliban, there were many more restrictions.
  - d) Obviously, things will likely revert to bad now that the Taliban is back in control.
  - e) Muslims who change their faith to Christianity are subject to societal and official pressure, which may lead to confiscation of property, imprisonment, or death.
  - f) Despite the legal restrictions, many sources claim that there is a secret underground church of Afghan Christians living in Afghanistan.
  - g) The US state department has stated that estimates of the size of this group range from 500 to 8000 individuals.
  - h) Estimates to the size of the Afghan Christian community in Afghanistan however are not reliable.
  - i) Due to the hostile legal environment Afghan Christians practice their faith secretly in private homes.
- 10) Though they suffered physical poverty, the Christians at Smyrna clung to their immeasurable spiritual riches.
- 11) As Scripture makes clear, persecution and trials are an inevitable and unavoidable part of the Christian life.
- 12) The example of the church at Smyrna instructs all churches on how to properly respond to these trials when they come.
- 13) John MacArthur calls the closings of each of these letters the counsel. In this case the counsel is:

## ***Revelation – NOTES – 2021***

---

Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. *11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.* He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

- 14) Simply put, if we remain faithful, no matter the circumstances, we will not suffer the ultimate second death – being put away into eternal punishment.
  - a) Of course, this is another eschatological reference.

### **Rev 2:12-17 (NIV)**

- 1) Pergamum was the center of four of the most important gods of the day — Zeus, Athene, Dionysus, and Asclepius.
- 2) The city was also a center for imperial worship.
- 3) Yet, in the midst of all this, they were holding true to the name of Christ.
- 4) Even when one of their own members was killed because of his faith, they did not waver.
- 5) We do not know the circumstance of Antipas' death only that it was because of his faith.
- 6) One possibility is that he was executed outright by the ruling proconsul.
  - a) He had been given “the right of the sword” which means he could perform execution without Rome's approval.
- 7) However, according to tradition, Antipas was roasted to death inside a brass bull during the persecution instigated by Emperor Domitian.
- 8) Even with their faith, the Lord had a few things against them.
- 9) To sum it up, the faithful church in Pergamum were basically turning a blind eye towards those in the congregation that were compromising the faith.
- 10) Idol worship, sexual immorality, and pagan worship were evidently being practiced by members of the congregation.
  - a) It was not unusual for Roman citizens who became Christians to continue to worship their household gods.
  - b) This worship involved sacrifice and partaking of the food that was sacrificed.
  - c) I have learned recently that the head of the household was responsible for all religious ceremonies and they were held within the house.
  - d) Priests were only concerned with state ceremonies to the major gods – not the household gods.
- 11) Jesus also mentions the Nicolaitans here.
  - a) As we spoke of earlier, those that followed the Nicolaitans involved themselves with sensual temptations leading to sexual immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols.
  - b) All of this in the name of Christian liberty.

## ***Revelation – NOTES – 2021***

---

12) When the Lord says Repent therefore! He is saying clearly – clean up your house or I will come do it for you!

13) The counsel here begins with a promise of hidden manna.

14) The hidden manna represents Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life who came down from heaven.

John 6:48-51 (NIV)