
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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Revelation 2: 1-7: "The Church of Ephesus"

General idea: John is asked to write a letter to seven churches, giving them encouragements, blessings, and condemnations. These are areas we all must carefully and seriously examine in our own church to see if we are doing our best for His highest! The letter is a clear proclamation of the sovereignty and eminence of Christ who stands in authority and judgment to show that He is in charge, that He does care, and that we need to get aligned with His will or else suffer the consequences. His Church is His Church; it does not belong to us even though we are the Church in unity and being. We belong to Him with a distinction and a purpose we must heed, take to heart, and practice to the best of our abilities and endeavors.

The church in Ephesus was both good and bad. They were doing some good because of their endurance in persecution. They did not tolerate false teaching or those with bad agendas that were contrary to God's precepts. They were doing so well, most people in their busy-ness who would go to a church like this might not have noticed anything was missing. Or, perhaps they would be the victim of the ugly that happens when a key component of doing Church is left out. They had discernment, but had trouble with loving. They lost the most important thing about being in Christ—the Fruit of His Love flowing through us so it touches others. No amount of sacrifice or good teaching can make up for a lack of love! People see Christ by how we exhibit character and love, and this church was not doing that. Then, Jesus passionately challenged them to get back to Him, get back to loving. To solidify His point and the importance of love, He warned them that if they refused to love, they would be refusing Him, and that they would be judged for it.

Vs. 1-7: The purpose here in these two chapters of Revelation is to show us how the leadership of these churches function from God's view, so to give us a heads up where and what we are to focus on. Jesus reprimands what we do wrong and compliments what we do right. Revelation also gives instructions to the seven churches.

- *To the/Say this* is a royal edict, as *The King Says!*
- *Angel.* The context here indicates this may be a human messenger, as people are used by God to convey His message.
- *Church of Ephesus.* Ephesus was the Roman capital of Asia Minor. It was located near modern Istanbul, Turkey. Its ruins are still visible today. It was once a jewel of a city with a population of 250,000. It had to move many times

due to the rising of the ocean levels and near by river silts, which have since receded. *Ephesus* means “Cayster” the god of the river. John himself may have planted this church, and Paul lived there for three years ministering to them while he wrote the Epistle of Ephesians. Now, it is only a small village where the ruins remain in sight (Acts 18:19-20, 26; 19:8-9, 8-38; Eph. 1:1-3, 15; 1 Tim. 1:3).

- *Golden lampstands* refers to God’s Light, as the Church is the light to the world for God’s Glory. Christ is the destiny and pattern we follow and emulate.
- *I know* shows His care, that Jesus is God and omniscient (all knowing and all seeing), and the One who is to inspire us (1 Thess. 1:3).
- *Perseverance* means *having confidence in God so we trust Him in difficult situations and still see His grace and love*. Perseverance is not being faint with relationships or within situations, but being able to persist in dealing with stress so we can accomplish what God calls us to. We can do this by being encouraging with Christ-like temperament (2 Chron. 32:1-8; Esther 7; Luke 16:22-31; 18:9; Acts 19:8-10; 26:19-23; Rom. 15:14-16; Gal. 6:9; Phil. 1:6; 12-14, 25; 2 Tim. 2:25; James 5:7-12).
- *Endured* means God shows patience by tolerating our misdeeds for a time for the sake of others who will benefit from it by their faith being strengthened. Our endurance will communicate encouragement for our *staying power*; it is contagious as in “you can do it, too!” When God seems far away and no one seems to care about injustice or your concerns, God is still there caring! He will vindicate and care for you, turning your suffering into His glory and a benefit to others, too (Prov. 6:9; Rom. 9:14-29; 2 Pet. 3:9)!
- *Tested* infers that we are called to test for correct doctrine, and the importance for any church to be giving real, dependable, true teaching (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Peter 3; 1 John 4:1).
- *Have not grown weary* means not to give up our hard work and ethics.
- *I hold this against you...first love*. They had forgotten the most important aspect of a church! This may also mean they had bad attitudes, too, that they were once enthusiastic but now are apathetic. They stopped the love that they had for Christ and for one another.
- *Forsaken* is a very harsh term meaning *abandon*, as in abandoning a child. There, love was left out. Sound doctrine without love and care is like salt poured in dirt; it is useless (Jer. 2:2; 1 John 4; Rev. 2:19).
- *Repent*. Jesus is calling them back to His love. He asks them to remember who they are and Who He is, to hold on to Him and to dwell in Him. When we

slip, it is gradual and we do not notice; sometimes, we do not care or see this as a problem. Thus, to call us back, Jesus sometimes must threaten judgment unless we start running our churches as they and we have been called to do. This is serious business! If an unloving church repents, it can be saved and rebooted to serve and glorify Christ. If not, it will close and be a rotten memory to the community and to Christ!

- *Remove your lampstand.* Judgment will be at hand soon, unless they repent! Jesus threatens them with judgment if they do not start to love again! This is also a parody of words since the city of Ephesus had to be removed and then moved.
- *Nicolaitans* was a heretical group that venerated Jezebel and Balaam with their horrible demeanor, false teachers, and manipulators. They also were experimenting with Gnosticism, believing that their Christian liberty gave them the freedom to practice sin, idolatry, immorality, and engage fully the pagan culture while remaining Christians (Acts 6:5). What angered Jesus further is that they taught they were “improving” Christianity by teaching people to compromise their faith so they could join in the culture and avoid persecution. “Nicolaitan” means *conquer the people*. Apparently, this church also micromanaged and lorded over its people just as a cult does today, which is also very bad and ugly (Matt. 21:20-27; 23:1-12; Acts 6:5).
- *The Spirit* means *hear the Word of God*. It refers to the vision of the prophecy and perhaps the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, too (Amos 3:1; 4:1; 5:1; Rev. 1:10; 14:13).
- *Him who overcomes/one who conquers* means to win an athletic event or military campaign. It refers to persevering in the face of adversity and being better for it. This does not mean we earn our salvation nor have any effect regarding it; rather, it means to be faithful. Our growth in Him demonstrates our faith; it is our growth in Christ that keeps us here on this earth. No matter what is facing us and no matter what we have experienced, what we go through in life is meant to form our character and maturity. What we learn is what we carry into eternity. When we fail and do not overcome, it is disappointing in our Lord’s sight. Being faithful is the key that opens to us the door to living in the New Jerusalem (John 13:34; 16:33; Phil. 1; 1 John 4:20; 5:4-5; Rev. 2:11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:1-22:5).
- *Tree of life* means access to God’s blessings. The tree of life was in the Garden of Eden from which humanity was locked out after the Fall. The promise here is the restoration of Paradise, and that this tree will grow again (Gen. 2:9; 3:22-24; Ezek. 47:12; 2 Cor. 12:2-4; Rev. 2: 14, 19; chaps 21 -22)!
- *Paradise* means, “pleasure garden.” This points to our restored, sinless state and/or the millennial kingdom (Gen. 2:8; Ezek. 28:13; Luke 23:43; 2 Cor.

12:4).

Revelation was written to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor, which is now modern Turkey (Rev. 1:4, 11). The principle purpose for the writing is to encourage and chastise them for how they were running their churches (Rev. 2:1-3:22). John was fully convinced that Christ would triumph over the forces of Satan and his work in the world. He then exhorted them to be faithful and discerning between what is false and what is truth, and warned them not to worship the Emperor or to comply with evil, apathy, or compromise. He restated the importance of discipleship and Christian formation so they (we) could be authentic Christians of excellence and distinction, bringing no disrepute to Christ or His Church.

God's purpose for John in Revelation is not that he be condescending or judgmental. Rather, it is so he could offer hope and encouragement to the Church. At the same time, it points out the issues and problems so we can address them and move from our ways to His Ways. If we just sit and point fingers at problems, ignore them, rationalize they are OK, or worry we might offend people and do nothing about fixing them, we do the Church, God, and ourselves a disservice. We are called to know what we are doing and His precepts so we can be better for His glory. Let's take a hard look at our church and see where we are with what He has called us to, and have the courage and fortitude to fix what we are not doing right so we can seek being our best for His glory.

Jesus ends this letter with the importance of listening and heeding His precepts. We are to allow the flow of the Spirit, and to be Spirit-led, not self-led, especially with how we lead the Church. A church can only be successful as long as love is penetrating and being modeled from its leadership and members. When love is lost, so is the church (1 Cor. 13)!

Preterist view: Sees this passage as addressing actual historical churches.

Futurist view: Believes as the Preterist and Historicist, too. Many theologians of all these views hold that they are historical and point to all churches, and that there is no hidden meaning in these chapters.

Idealist view: Sees these churches as symbolic with no specific reference in history, place, or time, but rather as a template for church history and the seven ages of the Church. Both Idealists and Historicists see **Ephesus** as the Apostolic Age to 100 A.D.; **Smyrna** is the church under persecution 100 to 300 A.D.; **Pergamum** is the church after Constantine and the Dark Ages of corruption 313 to 500 A.D., false teaching, and carnality. **Thyatira** is the Middle Ages of the power of the Papacy and corruption, 500 to 1500. **Sardis** is the Reformation 1500 to 1700 (Reformed denominations attack this position because Sardis is described as actually being dead). **Philadelphia** is the church with evangelism

and missionary movements, 1700 to the present. **Laodicea** represents the liberal churches from 1900 to the End of Days.

Historicist view: Sees this passage as parallels to all churches, which every church that ever was or will be will fall in one of those seven “categories.”

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. How important is it to you to be loved? How important is it to you to love others? How are the two connected? What can we do to make sure we never forget or lose our first love?
2. How would you appraise your church from this letter? What is your church doing right as listed here, and what is it doing wrong?
3. This church of Ephesus is being praised for its good and is also threatened with judgment if they do not start to love. Why would Jesus use such strong language with them?
4. Why do you suppose this church had trouble with loving? Do you think people could become victims of the ugly that happens when a key component of doing Church is left out?
5. How does Jesus show His care in this passage? Knowing that Jesus is God and omniscient, all knowing, all seeing, and the One, how can He inspire you to love more?
6. What would cause some person or a church to stop loving? Have you ever experienced this or seen it happen?
7. What does it mean to your church that Jesus is in charge and that He does

care for you? How can this help you be aligned with His will? What if your church refuses to heed Him? Does He have the right to judge your church? Would you deserve to suffer the consequences? Why do many Christians feel the answers to these questions is “no?”

8. Why would someone think that are “improving” Christianity by teaching people to compromise their faith so they can join in the culture?
9. What happens when we run our churches to please ourselves or for our comforts and ideas? Do you believe that if we refuse love then we are refusing Christ and we will be judged for it?
10. Do you believe that no amount of sacrifice or good teaching can make up for a lack of love? People see Christ by how we exhibit character and Love. What can you and your church do to be better at loving?
11. What is the condition of your church? What can you do to implement the prime purpose of glorifying Christ as a purpose statement or active slogan that is understood and applied?
12. What can you do to carefully and seriously examine your own church so you are all doing your best for His highest? What would it take to make the needed improvements? How would the people in your church handle some examination?

"My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" Psalm 84:2.

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