

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Let's pray...

So for the next two weeks, we are going to be looking at the letters to the seven churches.

And as we look at each one individually, I want you to notice that they all follow a pattern.

There are seven elements that are found in almost all the letters.

We are going to see them addressed to a particular congregation.

We are going to see an introduction of Jesus Christ

We are going to see a statement regarding the things that Jesus knows are going on in the church.

And then we have a statement about the things that the church is doing that are wrong.

And then we will see Jesus give the church a command, followed by a command to all believers.

And then each letter will end with a promise of a reward.

So let's look at our first letter.

[Rev 2:1-29 NKJV] 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:

Now, last week I stated that the angel was the pastor or the leader of the church – so the letter is addressed to him to deliver to the congregation.

In this case, the church in Ephesus.

Ephesus was during this time, the second largest city in the world – next to Rome.

Now, in our Sunday morning study, as we have been studying 1 Timothy, you might remember that Apostle Paul established the church in Ephesus and he spent three years of his time there before he moved on.

And then later, he put Timothy as the overseer in Ephesus –

And because there were problems in the church in Ephesus – Paul wrote the epistle to Timothy.

So, one of the things that we will see here is that apparently Timothy took care of the problems that existed in Ephesus.

Now, why didn't Jesus simply say – “it's Me, Jesus”

Why did He have John write - He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

The reason is title stresses Jesus authority over the church – as He holds the church with His right hand.

And also, it stresses that everything in the church should revolve around Jesus -

2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 "and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

In verse two and three, Jesus commends the Church in Ephesus for the hard work they have done for the Lord.

If the church in Ephesus had a bulletin, it would be jammed pack with activities.

Breakfast with the Pastor

Lunch with the Pastor

Dinner with the Pastor

Outreaches for the homeless

Outreaches for single moms

Outreaches for the elderly and those that are in need.

Game night

Concert Night

Movie night

Not only would the bulletin be packed with activities, the teaching that was being taught from pulpit was also right on.

They were preaching God's word instead of the babblings and fables that Hymaneaus and Alexander and others were teaching in Ephesus during Timothy's watch.

It wasn't easy – but because of their hard work and their perseverance, they got rid of those false teachers and endured.

And Jesus commends them for doing so –

Now, we have the correction by Jesus -

4 "Nevertheless I have [this] against you, that you have left your first love.

I had you make a note of the word Nevertheless -

Because what Jesus is saying here is – “despite everything that you are doing – this bad thing that I am about to tell you outweighs everything you did”

What was the bad thing? You have left your first love.

Is he talking about their love for God or their love for others?

We can answer by saying that these two are inseparable.

We see John addressing this very issue in his first letter.

“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:20-21).

We can say with confidence that true love for others flows from our love for God.

The Ephesians were straying not in their doctrine, nor in their behavior, but in their affections.

This problem may be very hard to perceive. You may be doing all the right things and believing all the right things, and yet a coldness entangles your heart. You are a like a person who is home for Christmas dinner and on the outside you are laughing and warm and friendly, but you are thinking the whole time, “I wish I were with my friends instead of being here.”

Such a lack of love and affection can be excused in a number of ways. We may deceive ourselves by focusing on our good works and right beliefs, saying, “I must be alright because I am doing and believing the right things.”

The word that is used for **have left** in the Greek – is a word that is used referring to divorce.

Notice that Jesus says, they “left” – He didn’t say, they “lost”.

Because when you lose something, you don’t know where to find it. But when you leave something, you know exactly where it is.

Anyone can lose something by accident – but leaving something is a deliberate act.

Who was their first love?

Jesus Christ

The Bible tells us that our relationship with Jesus is like the marriage between a husband and wife.

You have the honeymoon period and then over time, either the relationship grows stronger or it grows colder.

We have all seen the movie Up right???

When Mr. and Mrs. Frederickson first get married, you could tell that they were in love – and then as they get old, we could still tell that they still loved each other very much.

God wants our love for Him to grow stronger, not colder.

Jesus is not asking believers whether they feel from the first instant when they get up in the morning and at every imaginable moment whether they feel love for him.

No, His point is whether love for Him is a regular feature and pattern for our lives.

It is like being married.

We don't feel every moment of the day joy and affection for our spouses, but if joy and affection are not a regular part of our married life, if our marriage is just doing the right things for our spouse, without any affection or joy, then our marriage is in trouble.

That is what happened to the Ephesians.

Their affection was dried up.

Their works and beliefs had descended to the mechanical.

5 "**Remember** therefore from where you have fallen; **repent** and **do the first works**, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent.

Here we have the remedy –

These are commands – meaning they are not optional. All three must be done.

Remember –

Look back at a time in your Christian life when you used to do things out of love for Jesus instead of because "you had to"

When I became a Christian back in 1991, I had a hunger for the Word and fellowship and I found myself going to church services and/or bible studies 6 days a week.

I was even contemplating bible college.

I was taking my bible to school and reading it between classes.

All I would listen to were cassette tapes of sermons and worship songs on my Walkman.

As time went by, there was that cooling off – and then I found myself going to church on Sunday mornings only because I felt I had to.

So Jesus says that the first command is to remember a time when you were serving the Lord and that will bring the process of restoration.

Think about the Prodigal Son, he left – when did he come back? When he started to remember what it was like living at home.

Next command, repent.

What is the thing that has come between your relationships with the Lord?

It could be sin

It could be a disappointment – maybe something didn't work out the way you wanted it to. You feel like God let you down.

It could be work

Or it could be just day to day stuff that comes between your relationship with the Lord.

Whatever it is, repent.

Change your mind.

Turn around.

Then His last command – do the first works –

Find the kinds of things you used to do when you were in love with Jesus, and do them all over again.

It starts by repenting, changing your mind.

It continues by action, doing things that come from a love for Jesus.

Did you use to read your Bible all the time?

Did you use to pray all the time?

Did you use to go to church every chance you could?

Did you use to tell people about Jesus?

Then do all these things, not because you have to, but because you want to love Him more.

And these same lessons apply to marriage.

Remember what it used to be like.

Pray that God will restore your love.

Repent – get rid of the very real things or people that are hurting your marriage.

Repeat – start doing those loving things again.

6 "But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

The Nicolaitans were a group that infiltrated the early church and started to teach heresies.

Their teaching perverted grace and replaced liberty with license.

You could do anything you wanted!!!

In verse seven, Jesus is addressing all believers – he who has an ear, let him hear.

To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

(1 Jn 5:4–5 NKJV) —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 he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Jesus said we must “overcome”. It’s our “faith” that overcomes.

' 8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:

The Church in Smyrna is known as the persecuted church.

So Jesus uses the title here of **First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:** to remind the Christians in Smyrna that He is eternal and He is God – The First and the Last are titles that belong only to the Lord.

Also, it is a reminder that they served the risen Lord, victorious over death.

The church will be going through some rough days ahead.

Some would die.

They need to remember that Jesus is the One who conquered death.

The resurrection gives us hope that even if this life ends tragically, it’s not over.

9 "**I know** your works, tribulation, and poverty **(but you are rich);** and [I know] the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but [are] a synagogue of Satan.

Jesus knows their troubles. (I know)

Not only did the believers in Smyrna have hardships they faced day in and day out – they were extremely poor.

And if that wasn't enough, they were persecuted by other religious groups – one of them these Jews that Jesus describes as meeting in a synagogue of Satan.

But notice what Jesus says about the church of Smyrna – but you are rich!!!

Next week, one of the churches we are going to look at in chapter three, is the church in Laodicea.

That church was filthy rich – the opposite of Smyrna

And Jesus will say that they are poor.

Now, if we look at the letter written to Smyrna, we find no correction/rebuke.

Why?

Because suffering does some to the church.

It purifies it.

What is the command given to the church in Smyrna?

10 "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw [some] of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Do not quit – if you are faithful until the end, 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 shall not be hurt by the second death." '

Except for those who will be raptured, everyone on the planet will experience “death”, physical death, which is the “first death”.

Believers go to heaven.

Those who do not believe in Jesus will go temporarily to a holding place called “hell”.

At the end of the 1,000 year reign of Jesus on the earth, those in hell will be resurrected and face judgment before God at the Great White Throne.

They will then be sent into the Lake of Fire, which is the “second death”. (Rev. 20:14-

15)

[Rev 20:14-15 NKJV] 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

“He who is born once will die twice; he who is born twice will die once.”

12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

Why does Jesus use this title when speaking to the Church in Pergamos?

As we will see, He had to make some separation between some of the Christians in Pergamos.

13 "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne [is]. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas [was] My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Pergamos was home to many pagan temples.

One of the biggest temples in Pergamos contained a “great altar”. This was thought to have been dedicated to the god Zeus.

But despite living in a place full of idol worship and persecution – Antipas martyred,

Pergamos was church that held on to their faith, even when things got tough.

14 "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

So here is the rebuke –

There were some believers who were holding on to another doctrine.

One of them was called the doctrine of Balaam –

If you read Numbers 22-24, Balak had hired the prophet Balaam to bring a curse on the invading Israelites.

Every time that Balaam tried to utter a curse, he ended up blessing Israel instead.

But all of that ended in chapter 25.

[Num 25:1-3 NKJV] 1 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. 2 They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.

The king of Moab sends Moabite women to have sex with the Israelite men and to worship their pagan gods – that way God's anger would turn against His people.

Later on in Numbers 31, we find out that Balaam is the one who taught Balak to do this.

So Balaam's doctrine was how he taught the Balak to entice the Israelites to compromise their faith.

The danger for Pergamos was not the difficulty of persecution, but the deception of compromise.

Therefore some were practicing sexual immorality and eating things that were sacrificed to idols.

They lived a life of compromise.

16 "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

Here we have what Jesus wants them to do – repent!

He wants them to turn from their compromise – and if they don't, He will confront them with His word.

17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna (this is God's perfect

provision, the true bread of heaven) to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone **a new name** written which no one knows except him who receives [it]." '

The new name can be a reference to the reservation that one has in heaven as one who overcomes or it could also be that we may all have a brand new name when we get to heaven.

18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:

Jesus describes Himself as “the Son of God”, as the one with burning eyes, and the one with brass feet.

All these are images of judgment.

This is His description of Himself to a church that is in big trouble.

19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and [as] for your works, the last [are] more than the first.

Jesus mentions a lot of good things that He sees in this church.

Not only does this church have good works, but their works are getting better and better over time.

They even had love – remember the church in Ephesus lacked love.

20 "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.

We don't know if her real name was Jezebel or if Jesus is giving this woman a symbolic name of a more famous woman who did something similar to what this woman was doing.

In the OT,

Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab, making her a Queen of Israel.

She was not Jewish, but was Phoenician.

She brought the worship of Baal and Asherah into northern kingdom of Israel.

She was responsible for the murder of the prophets of Yahweh and tried to have Elijah the prophet killed.

She was a seductress.

She had seduced Israel into worshipping false gods.

In the end she was a pitiful old woman dressing up to seduce the new king.

Jehu had her thrown out the window where she died and was eaten by dogs.

Jezebel is a picture of idolatry, deception, and seduction.

And the problem that the Church in Thyatira had was that they were gullible and they followed her.

God tells us that we are responsible to “test” the prophets.

(1 Jn 4:1 NKJV) Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Some people are out to deceive you.

You and I are responsible to God to get out our “test kit” (our Bible) and test things, comparing what people say to the Bible.

That includes the things that are spoken from this pulpit.

22 "Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 "I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

If you are bent on continuing in your sin, God will let you.

And your sin will one day bring you down.

Jezebel has been given time to repent and she has refused.

Her rebellion will end up in tragedy and will bring down those who are caught with her.

God does see what we do. God does care about what we do.

Judgment may not come today. It may not come tomorrow. But it will come.

There is a way out – turn around.

24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.

So Jesus is reassuring them that He knows that not everyone was following Jezebel.

They are not going to be judged for what this woman has been doing.

25 "But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

There were many faithful, uncompromising Christians in Thyatira. To them, Jesus simply said, “hold fast.” They must not stop doing what is good. They must not become distracted or discouraged from what Jesus wants them to be and to do.

How long do they need to hold on?

till I come.

We are to hang in there and stand strong for Jesus until He comes.

It is only then that the battle will be over.

27 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'--as I also have received from My Father; 28 "and I will give him the morning star. 29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

The reward for those that overcome –

Ruling alongside Jesus and the morning star –

What is so great about the morning star?

[Rev 22:16 NKJV] 16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

Jesus offered them a reward greater than the kingdom. He offered them the reward of Himself, because He is the Morning Star

Amen

Let's pray...