

Revelations 2 “A Letter to a First Love Lost Church”

The seven letters follow a certain pattern, there are seven features in each of the letters, it is addressed to the angel of the church of ...

Christ the sender uses borrowed imagery He taught in chapter one.

Criswell wrote: All seven co-exist together: some that are aflame with missions Philadelphia, some that are paying the price with their lives Smyrna, some that are cooling off in their devotion Ephesus, and some that are taking it easy in Zion Laodicea.

Five of the seven churches Jesus has a commendation or something good to say before He criticizes them.

Sardis and Laodicea Jesus had nothing good to say about them.

All the Churches called to repentance except Smyrna & Philadelphia.

Christ has a complaint against 5 Churches (I have this against you) except Smyrna and Philadelphia has nothing bad to say against them.

Each Church called to hear what the spirit says to the Churches-plural

All Churches told: “To him that overcomes ... I will give ...

The Church at Ephesus. The third largest City in Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandra. Cayster or Kaystros River empties into the harbor which was connected to the east and west for trade. The city not the political capital of the region but the largest and most important city of the area. The temple of Diana (Art-e-mus) considered one of seven wonders of the world housed the Idol of Diana.

Alexander the Great captured Ephesus in 334 B.C.; but one of his Greek generals, Lysimachus, (lie-SIM-a-cuss) inherited it. By the times of the apostles, it was a thoroughly Romanized city ... with a Culture deeply colored by the pagan associations with the city's past. Artemis, the principal deity the Biblical Diana, actually went back to the old Asiatic goddess of nature; but by Paul's time her worship had taken on a different character.

The Temple to Diana, a sex goddess took 120 years to build and was 3 times larger than the Parthenon in Athens with 27 pillars or columns. They alleged the idol fell down from heaven. The idol probably carved from a meteorite cf: Acts 19 for more information on idol and temple. Mike Meyerhoffer says: “on a path has on the stone sidewalk a foot and a heart and a cross and you walked on the path to fulfill your hearts desires ... at the end of the street a house of prostitution”. They mixed idolatry and sexual immorality together like Israel & Judah did worshipping Asheroth in the Old Testament.

Paul founded the church at Ephesus. Priscilla, Aquilla, Apollos, Timothy and Tychius all ministered there. Great preachers do not guarantee great Churches.

John spent final years at Ephesus according to tradition Church fathers

Revelation 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

“... he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand ...” Christ's holding the stars in his hand, is different than 1:16 where He is described as “having in His right hand seven stars”. But here, he “holdeth” Greek krat-eh'-o use strength, to seize or retain suggests the utmost concern of the Lord for every single one of the Christians.

“... walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks ...” This indicates the active, constant, and persistent energy in which Christ as the “good Shepherd” is concerned with the welfare of every church and every Christian.

Revelation 2:2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

“... I know ...” This clause appears throughout the letters, reminding all people that,

Hebrews 4:13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

“... works ... labour ... patience ...” Like the other letters, except in cases where no commendation was possible, this letter begins with the Lord's approving and recognition of their good points.

Labor, patience, and no tolerance of evil, tested and rejected false apostles as Paul told them to do in Acts 20 ... took it to heart.

A century later Ignatius wrote a letter to Ephesus commending them.

“... apostles ...” In 65-68 AD, when older men like the apostles who would have been in their late sixties or early seventies were common, the claim to be an apostle might be reasonable to some. In 95 AD such a claim would be ridiculous! More evidence early date.

Revelation 2:3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

“... hast patience ...” Here again is the word which means not merely a passive submission to what must be endured, but the dynamic ability of endurance and faithfulness without discouragement by any or all difficulties.

For my name's sake ... The New Testament emphasis upon the name of the Lord is extensive. Salvation is in no other name Acts 4:12; all Christian activities are to be done in his name Colossians 3:17; we are justified in his name 1 Corinthians 6:11; we are baptized in his name Acts 2:38; 19:5; we are called by his name James 2:7; our sins are forgiven for his name's sake 1 John 2:12; we should believe on his name 1 John 5:13, etc. Here, the patient endurance of the Ephesian church was commended by the Lord himself because their faithfulness had regard to the holy name of the Son of God.

Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

The danger of legalistic heresy hunters is that they often loose their first love. Hating falsehood is not Loving Jesus.

The first love of every true church is our Lord himself; and what is indicated here is the departure (in heart) of the Ephesian church from their Lord who had redeemed them.

Matthew 23:38-39 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Love for God and others, if you love God you'll love His kids, compare Mary and Martha, we can get so busy doing the things of God, like Church work we forget to love Him and His people whis is the work of the Church.

A rock-hard conservative church religious machinery set in motion.

Matthew 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

This happened to this church because of lawlessness in society.

Easy for us to do. New believers tend to have spontaneous works of love, over time can lapse into religious routine.

Galatians 6:9-10 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. 10. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith

Doing good things but for a different reason than love, easy to convince ourselves we are spiritual can be replaced as love for motivation. Common but not good.

I Corinthians 13:1-3 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Revelation 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

There are actually three "R's" in this passage: Remember ... Repent ... Reform by "do the first works".

Repent and do the first works ... This is one of the most important clauses in the whole passage; it is the key to understanding what had happened. What were those first works which the Ephesians had stopped doing? They were the commandments of the Lord.

Revelation 2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, (NICK-o-lay-tans) which I also hate. (2 theories are)

"... Nicolaitanes ..." some say were followers of Nicolas a proselyte from Antioch. Irenaeus (i-ren-NA-us) said that, "They are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to be a deacon, or a "server of tables" by the apostles. cf: Acts 6:4-7. Early church fathers thought he taught an early form of Jewish Gnosticism.

Anti-nomian (AN-tee-No-mee-an) the view that Christians are released by grace from the obligation of observing the moral law. Which means after you are saved, you can do whatever you want and still be saved like once saved, always saved.

Not sure what Nicolaitans doctrine was, but we may have a hint cf:

Revelation 2:14-15 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

Another theory is that Nicolaitans is a combination of 2 words:

Nicos - meaning dom-in'-ation, dominion, or to exalt, one over another

Laos - meaning the people, where the word lay-people comes from.

In other words, a division of the church into bishops with clergy, over people or laity, where the former lords over the priesthood of the believer. We can't prove that this word comes from the above 2 words

Revelation 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear ..." So! People do not receive spiritual information regarding their salvation from any inner impulses, dreams, impressions, or inner strivings of the soul, but by listening to the words given by the Holy Spirit inspired scriptures. Hinds said, "This shows that God's revelations are spoken to man, not put into his heart through some mysterious spiritual power."

Churches is plural here. All churches take heed, not just Ephesus.

There is no room for an introverted church. All congregations need to know what God is saying to other churches.

"To him that overcometh ..." The verb in this phrase can be translated conquereth, or conquers. It occurs only twice in the Gospels Luke 11:22 & John 16:33 and only once in the writings of Paul Romans 12:21. However, it is found in Revelation in all seven of these letters to the churches, and John also used it repeatedly in II John II John 1:2:13 &14, and I John 1:5:4,5.

The promises to overcomers are images taken from the last chapter of this book. New heavens, earth, Paradise, and Tree of Life. Paradise is from a Persian word meaning pleasure park came to mean Heaven.

“ the tree of life ...”, not to be taken literally, represents eternal life.

“ the tree of life ...” The Hebrew word in Genesis 2:9 was rendered by the Septuagint (LXX) translators with a Greek word which means, tree or wood; and the New Testament writers used that very same word (tree or wood) for all four passages where it occurs in Revelation and

Acts 5:30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

Acts 10:39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

Acts 13:29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”

I Peter 2:24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed

“... will I give to eat of the tree of life, ...” So for Christians the “tree of Life” is the cross upon which Jesus died.

Suggests that not everyone in the church will overcome the world.

John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

I John 5:5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

Here ‘believeth’ is used as an Synecdoche which is a figure of Speech in which a part represents a whole. “I like your wheels man” your car.

Later Revelation speaks of disciples, or Christians overcoming Satan.

Revelation 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

Could simply mean repent of sin, or lovelessness ... or He will remove their candlestick or lampstand. Turkey has very few churches.

It appears Jesus came and removed most if not all their candlesticks.

Revelation 2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

“... The first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; ...” Some have seen this identification of our Lord as peculiarly appropriate for a city which, itself, had lain dead for all the middle centuries of the first millennium B.C., but was then once more a favored city.

It was indeed a hostile environment in which the church of Smyrna lived. How tragically the once chosen people of Israel appeared in such a situation as that.

Revelation 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

Despite the claims of many commentators to the effect that no provincial persecution against the church by the state of Rome existed until the times of Domitian, hence supporting a late date for Revelation, there has recently come to light a great corpus of facts which point squarely to the times of Nero for just such an outbreak. The impact of the Neronean terror was mentioned both by Clement and by Tacitus, "thousands being put to death".

Revelation 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be

tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

“... I will give thee a crown of life ...” This and all similar promises given to these seven churches simply mean eternal life with God in heaven. Eating of the tree of life, receiving the white stone, or the morning star, etc., all mean the same thing.

Revelation 2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

“... shall not be hurt of the second death ...” Christ did not mention here "the first death"; but it is the death of the body to which all must submit. The second death is that of the soul, the absolute exclusion from God who is the source of life.

Christ did not utter any words of criticism or condemnation of this suffering church, offering only his love and encouragement.

Revelation 2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; The name Pergamum means citadel, but the word parchment, meaning paper of Pergamum, (PER-gah-mum) also derives from it. When political jealousy interrupted the supply of papyrus from Egypt, Pergamum invented the method of making paper from the skins of animals; and a great library was built there, which was later moved to Alexandria and consolidated with the library there.

By Christian times, Pergamum had become the chief center of the Roman emperor-worship, no less than three temples being erected there to Roman emperors, but with many other temples also, to Zeus, Athena, (ah-THEE-nah) Dionysus, (die-on-NI-sis) and Asklepios (the serpent-god of healing). Of these, the temple of Zeus (Soter Theos), the "saviour god," had a huge altar 40 feet high carved like a great throne into the face of the mountain dominating the city, perhaps suggesting the words, "where Satan's throne is".

Revelation 2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

Revelation 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

Revelation 2:15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, (NICK-o-lay-tans) which thing I hate.

Revelation 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Revelation 2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that over cometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Revelation 2:18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira (thy-a-TIE-ra) write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

Revelation 2:19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

Revelation 2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

Revelation 2:21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

Revelation 2:22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

Revelation 2:23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

Revelation 2:24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, (thya-TIE-ra) as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

Revelation 2:25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

Revelation 2:26 And he that over cometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

Revelation 2:27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

Revelation 2:28 And I will give him the morning star.

Revelation 2:29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.