

UPPER ROOM ADULT BIBLE STUDY
The Book of Revelation
Pastor Jim Otte
Winter/Spring, 2021 (March 14, 2021)

Session 4: Revelation 2:1-17

1. **Overview:** The first two letters to the churches follow a similar pattern:
The command to write; identification of Jesus as the author; A diagnosis of the church's spiritual condition; A Commendation and condemnation; An Exhortation to repent and improve; A Wake-up call; and a Statement of promise

“To the angel^[a] of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. ²I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

- a. **“Ephesus”** – the wealthiest of the cities of Asia Minor. It was the center of the worship of Artemis (Diana), the goddess of fertility. Hence, temple prostitution was considered a spiritual profession. The temple of Artemis was considered one of the seven wonders of the world. Pagan superstition, crime, and sexual immorality were rampant in Ephesus. As a “free city,” it was not under Roman rule, but enjoyed self-rule. Acts 19:1-41 describes the ministry St. Paul began in Ephesus.
- b. **“words of Him who holds...and walks among”** – Jesus is the author of these words John is to write
- c. **“your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance.”** – the Christians at Ephesus worked hard to keep the gospel pure among them.
- d. **“you cannot tolerate wicked people”** – “wicked” are described as those with unrepentant beliefs and lifestyles influenced by the worship of Artemis.
- e. **“you have tested those who claim”** – they listened to the teachings of those claiming apostolic authority, with discernment. They found them to be false!
- f. **“you have persevered and have endured”** – their commitment to preaching and teaching sound, Biblical doctrines would have cost them dearly in their community. The payoff, however, was that the gospel was not compromised.

⁴Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. ⁵Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. ⁶But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

- a. **“you have forsaken the love you had at first.”** – the “first love” is loving God, and loving one’s neighbor, out of gratitude for God’s first loving us! Apparently, in the effort to preserve the purity of their doctrinal beliefs, they became arrogant and judgmental in how they treated others. Mercy and grace, and agapy love took a backseat to scrutinizing the beliefs of each other.
 - a. ***1 Corinthians 13:4-7.*** *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*
- b. **“Consider how far you have fallen!”** – they had blinded themselves to their loss!
- c. **“Repent and do the things you did at first.”** – “Repent” literally **“turn around in mind, heart, and action.”** Jesus exhorts them to maintain the highest standard of doctrinal truth, while at the same time, sharing the mercy, grace, and loving which God had shared with them in Christ.
- d. **“If you do not repent...”** – failure to maintain the balance or purity, with loving, would result in the death of their ministry.
- e. **“You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”** - a Gnostic sect, which taught its followers to compromise with the Greek world of hedonistic and self-serving pleasures. All of the members of the Ephesian church would have been new converts to Christianity, from the Greek religious idolatry.

⁷ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

- a. **“To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat”** – the Tree of Life, located in the Garden of Eden, was portrayed as being in heaven. Though refusing to compromise with Greek idolatry was commended, Jesus ties a “victorious” life to those who show grace and mercy, as well!
- b. **“in the paradise of God.”**

⁸ “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.

- a. **“Smyrna”** – located 40 miles north of Ephesus, Smyrna was a beautiful city, founded as a Greek colony in 1000 B.C. It was considered a “planned community,” with broad streets and beautiful landscaping. It, too, was a “free city,” in which culture and the arts flourished.
- b. **“your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich!”** – the Christian church suffered at the hands of the numerous and wealthy Jews living in the city. Jews

in 155 A.D. were responsible for the martyrdom of Polycarp, the great bishop of Smyrna. Jesus reminded them that, although they were poor in the eyes of how the community measured wealth, they were “rich” in His eyes.

- c. **“the slander of those who say they are Jews – but are a synagogue of Satan.”** – Judaizers were Jews who were insistent that the chosen people could only be strict adherents to Jewish law. “Slander” was the choice of weapons used against Christians, accusing them of:
 - a. Cannibalism – teaching the eating and drinking of Christ’s body and blood
 - b. “Love feasts” as orgies, instead of fellowship communion meals
 - c. Breaking up families as believers vs. unbelievers
 - d. Not loyal to Caesar
- d. **“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer”** – Suffering for the faith would follow. The Christians are encouraged to not give in to their fears: continue to find their hope, comfort, and courage in Jesus.
- e. **“some of you in prison to test you”** – note who is given the blame for imprisonment, as the real source of the persecution.
- f. **“you will suffer persecution for ten days.”** – “ten” as a multiple of 1000 (a symbolic number in Revelation; meaning a short period of time, with a definite ending)
- g. **“Be faithful, even to the point of death”** – faith in Christ might cost you the end of your temporal life (your first “death”).

¹¹ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

- a. **“The one who is victorious will not be hurt...the second death.”** – your first “death” is the end of your temporal life. The “second death” is the beginning of eternity for unbelievers in hell. The sequence of the “victorious” life is:
 - a. **Temporal life in faith in Jesus.**
 - b. **Dying in faith in Jesus.**
 - c. **Eternal life in faith in Jesus.**