

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN, CALEDONIA SUNDAY ADULT CLASS

REVELATION- CHAPTER TWO PART 1 NOTES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Letters to the Seven Churches: In each letter Christ identifies Himself and indicates that He knows and is concerned about the conditions in the church. Praise and promise, or reproof and warning, are extended according to that promise.

The First Letter: Ephesus Revelation 2:1-7

EPHESUS: At this time it was one of the greatest cities of the world having more Jews than any city outside Israel, except Alexandria, Egypt. Its temple of Diana (mentioned in Acts 19:21-41) was world famous and the altar of that temple carved in the fourth century B.C. was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The Ephesian culture was very sex oriented, centering as it did around the worship of Diana. Prostitution was part of the worship of this famous goddess. Ephesus also gained revenue by selling Ephesian Letters which were good luck charms for travelers, the sick, and those having difficulty having children. This was a busy city situated on several trade routes. Its port handled more trade than any other city in Asia Minor. It was 1,000 years old by the time John arrived. With the spread of Christianity the city became the third most important Christian city after Jerusalem and Antioch. The church there was founded by St. Paul. Mary, the Mother of our Lord, is buried there according to tradition. The city's grand boulevard to the sea became known as the highway for martyrs as thousands of Christians in chains were led down the great street to ships waiting to take them to the Colosseum in Rome. Today Ephesus is a small depressed village situated on swamp land called Aysalook. There is no trace of the Ephesian church today.

2:1 To the angel . . . Not the angel mentioned in 1:1. (See Rule #5), but the pastor of the congregation, as in 1:20. The angels in heaven require no letters from God written by men. They take their orders from God Himself. The word "angel" means "messenger". This letter is to the head pastor of the Ephesian church who is also God's messenger. This pastor was to share the letter with the faithful.

. . . write, . . . these are the words of verbal inspiration. As all the rest of Scripture (II Peter 1:20-21) Revelation is also inspired by God. Every word (verbal) was given by God. It is only in fairly recent times that teachers within the church were allowed to teach that the Bible is not the Word of God.

Him Who holds the seven stars in His right hand . . . identifies the One whose thoughts follow not as John, but as the glorified risen Christ the Lord of the Church. He not only has the church in His right hand but holds them in His right hand (see Matt. 23:37-39).

2:2-3 The Lord is aware of what goes on in His churches. He commends their industriousness for the Lord, their steadfastness in the truth, and their testing of all teachings in comparison with Scripture -- this is how you find out who is a false prophet. This takes a good deal of difficult research and careful thinking, but they have not given up on it. One of the errors, the doctrine of the millennial reign of Christ, began to infect the Ephesian congregation while John was there, and grew in influence while he was in exile. Ironically, modern believers in a millennial reign of Christ base their belief on this very book!

2:4 You have left your first love -- the Ephesian Christians were zealous about sound doctrine (Biblical teaching) out of love for Christ. They knew that false teaching ultimately destroys the life-giving Gospel, but that zeal had now degenerated to simply zeal for sound doctrine. They had forgotten the reason to be filled with zeal for sound doctrine, i.e., their first love, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a progression seen in the Ephesian congregation which has been seen many times in many churches since. It begins with a very Godly zeal for Christ through protecting sound teaching, which eventually can degenerate into a simple zeal for sound teaching which legalistically forgets the Gospel. This stage further degenerates into a church having merely the outward form of sound teaching (they talk about their sound teaching a lot, but don't practice it). Hence the first love, Christ, is missing, even though the outward form and language of Christianity is still present. The tone of Christ's letter does not seem to indicate that the Ephesian congregation had degenerated past the first step in this downward progression.

2:5: Repent! Go back to your first love because otherwise the Word will be entirely lost and you will cease to be a church (I will remove your lampstand from its place.) The Lord desires not only the right works, but our whole heart and being. A modern traveller found only three Christians in the present day village which was Ephesus. Modern day churches can be wiped out by silting up with the mud of sluggishness, indifference, and layer-on-layer of things which are foreign to the spirit and life of Christianity. (See Matt. 13:3-7.)

2:6 Nicolaitans -- Followers of Nicolaus who taught that sincere faithful Christians could openly indulge in pleasures of the flesh and still remain faithful to Christ. Their sect was found in Ephesus and Pergamum. Nicolaus was one of the first seven deacons of the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:5), but had come to completely abuse Christian freedom. It would appear that Jezebel, who influenced the church in Thyatira (2:20) was also a Nicolaitan.

2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear. This is call for all who read this to pay attention and heed the Lord of the church.

What the spirit says to the churches. Note the plural. While this message is specifically for the Ephesian church, it is also edifying for all churches. After it was read and probably copied down at Ephesus, the letter and copies of it would be distributed to the other churches. This was a common practice.

To him that overcomes . . . The Christian life is a struggle which can be lost for lack of perseverance. The devil's strategy for winning back to himself the souls of Christians: make it so hard to be a Christian that one eventually desires the easier life of non-striving while still retaining church membership. But no soldier for Christ is ever on inactive duty as this letter makes clear.

Note in verse 7 the great rewards for those who persevere and overcome. Where else do we encounter the tree of Life?

Study and Discussion Questions for: REVELATION 2:1-7

1. Based on Revelation 2:2-3, what is the relationship between being brotherly and loving, and being gullible?

2. Do we still need to test everything that we hear and read as to its faithfulness to Gods Word?

How do we go about this testing and evaluation?

3. What is the First Love spoken of in verse 4?

How do we keep this first love first in all things?

4. (2:6) What are some examples of people in our own day who, like the Nicolaitans, use Christian freedom as an excuse to claim that they can be immoral and yet truly Christian? Who are they?

5. A great deal is involved in being steadfast in the faith or persevering, depending on the challenge. But in verse 7 a great blessing is promised to those who persevere. Read I Corinthians 9:24-10:13 and list some things we need to do if we are to persevere in faithfulness.

The Second Letter: Smyrna Revelation 2:8-11

Smyrna, today a city of 250,000 which the Turkish call Izmer, is full of life, brightness and activity. At St. John's time the city was well over 1,000 years old and its coins boasted that it was the first of Asia in beauty and size. It was already a city of 200,000 at the time of this letter. Smyrna has always been situated on productive trade routes and continues to be a major port today. This city, situated 35 miles north of Ephesus, is currently the southeastern headquarters of NATO. In this letter Christ encourages this church, Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. In 155, just about 60 years after this letter, the bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, was martyred at the hands of the Romans. Surely the words of this letter were in Polycarp's mind as he made his bold witness for the Lord, for as a boy, Polycarp had studied at the feet of St. John. According to tradition, it was Polycarp who read this letter to the church at Smyrna when it arrived.

Much of this letter concerns itself with the cost of following Christ. Eleven cities had applied for the honor of building a new temple to honor and worship the Roman Emperor. Out of them Smyrna was chosen. The people considered it a great honor to receive permission to build one of the most splendid temples ever for the worship of the Emperor. As a key center of religious allegiance to Rome, Smyrna received both status and wealth. Out of gratitude to Rome, Smyrna's leaders began a persecution of local Christians. The Roman's greatest prize in these persecutions was Polycarp, the leader of the great city's Christians.

The church there began as a product of St. Paul's preaching and continues strong to our own day. (Paul

converted Polycarp's parents.) About half of the population is considered Christian even though the Muslims have dominated the area for over 1100 years -- a witness of the Lord's blessing of this church for which Christ had only praise in this letter in Revelation.

2:8-9 Persecution for the faith had already begun but would be ended. Christ refers in v. 8 to His Resurrection as a comfort to those who shall lose all but Eternity with Christ and their own Resurrection at Christ's return. It was the Jews who would stir up the Roman authorities claiming that the Christians were against humanity and would not worship any Roman gods. These say they are Jews but are not, for being a descendant of Abraham is a spiritual and not a biological condition. (See Galatians 3:26-29 & 18, Matthew 3:9, Romans 9:6-8.) In reality those who reject the Promise in Christ, no matter who their forefathers were, are the children of Satan and go to his synagogue (John 8:39-47). One of Satan's most effect tactics is to work under the guise of religion.

Poverty Often the first Christians were of the lower, poorer classes their eyes were not so filled with worldly things that they could not see God's Word. The well-to-do are usually too distracted by the possibility of worldly gain, busy schedules in pursuit of what this life has to offer, and other such things to give the Holy Spirit a chance to guide their lives even if they do come initially to faith. But those Christians at Smyrna are rich in that they have allowed no false doctrine or ways to prosper in their midst.

2:10-11 A word of comfort from the One who has also seen the world's rejection. Their faith would be tested -- in the end only those who were truly Christs would remain confessing Christ but even their deaths are not the end but the beginning. Those who truly belong to Christ will remain in faith in all things.

10 days -- a time of limited duration -- a symbolic use of the figure - the point of comparison being time, not 10 days, and hence a short time, figuratively speaking (Rule #2). The comforting implication of this phrase is that a definite limit has been set to the suffering even before the suffering begins.

Second death -- eternal death. We are born into this life physically alive, but spiritually dead. Those who come to faith in Jesus Christ are given spiritual life, and therefore has a second life. When the believers life on earth ends, his spiritual life continues. However, the one who is spiritually dead, and then dies physically bears both spiritual and physical death -- a second death. He who overcomes, i.e. perseveres in the faith, will not lose their spiritual life, even if they lose their physical life. The implied warning is that those of the household of faith who do not persevere in the faith -- they either give up the faith, or lose it out of neglect to cultivate it -- will be subject to the second, or eternal death.

Study and Discussion Questions for: REVELATION 2:8-11

1. Two important identifying facts about Christ are listed in v.8. Identify them and explain their significance.

2. The Ephesian church which was chastised by Christ in His first letter is all but non-existent today. The church at Smyrna which was praised by Christ continues strong after almost two thousand years. What does this say about the future of a church which is not careful about error?

3. Verse 9: The Christians at Smyrna were poor in material things but rich spiritually. The wealthy at Smyrna had little time for non-productive (in this world) activities. Relate this to Matthew 19:16-30. Is this a universal principle?

4. (For your personal consideration.) If called upon to deny your Lord today or be burned alive (as was Polycarp) would you be able to remain faithful unto death? (Perhaps it would be good if this kind of faith was the subject of our prayers more often.)