

and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false; 3 and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary 4 But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. 4 Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent. 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.

Initial Questions 2:1-7

1. Who is *he* who holds the seven stars in his hand and walks among the seven golden candlesticks - vs. 1?
2. How does the Lord commend the Ephesian Church - vs. 2, 3?
3. Were these commendable characteristics enough to save the Church from the purging power of Christ - vs. 4, 5?
4. What is our *first love* to be?
5. Does the Lord tell this Church that after all no one is perfect, therefore, they are not to worry too much about their spiritual condition - vs. 5?
6. Who were the Nicolaitans?
7. Is this message and warning applicable to us today?
8. If John was writing to the Church at Ephesus (singular in chp 2), why does John conclude with the plural - churches, vs. 7?
9. How long must a Christian remain loyal and continue to mature in Christ - vs. 7?

The Church in Ephesus Chapter 2:1-7

Dr. Merrill Tenney (*Revelation Interpreted*, pp. 50-69) has an excellent simple preaching - teaching break down of each of the letters to the seven churches. The analysis contains seven factors which are as follows: (from p. 51 of chapter 5)

1. The Commission
2. The Character
3. The Commendation

4. The Condemnation
5. The Correction
6. The Call
7. The Challenge

We shall not follow this analysis in our comments, but it might prove beneficial for outlines study of the seven letters. The first city which the Lord visited was the New York of Roman province of Asia. This great metropolis had heard the Apostle "born out of due time" preach Jesus Christ as saviour. Paul had resided in that city of sin three years (Acts 19:1-10; 20:17-38). The mystery cults flourished there. Their apparent self-satisfied attitude stood at marked tension with the man banned to Patmos just sixty miles away. Pliny called Ephesus the Light of Asia. The light of that city must be understood in view of its sanctioning the Temple of Diana where every vile act imaginable was committed. It was a religious city in need of a saviour fit for the problem of reclaiming souls from the sink-hole of sin. Only one other city in the ministry of the great Apostle received so much watering and gave so little increase, and that city was the imperial city itself - Rome.

It was to this proud, arrogant, religious city that John was *Commissioned* to write to the angel of the Church.

Verse 1

The speaker is identified as the one "holding the seven stars in his right hand." This was Jesus Christ (see imagery in 1:16)! The speaker's first hand knowledge of the congregation is brought out by the imagery latent in the word (*perapaton* - pres. part) "walketh." Literally it says - "the one walking around" observing the conditions. His knowledge is not second handed - hear-say or grape-vine information.

Verse 2

The personal knowledge of the spiritual condition of the church is further brought out by the verb "I know (*oida* - 2nd perfect with present) - sense. Here Christ's *commendation* of the Church seems, on the surface, to put that congregation in the fore of spiritual victory. "Thy toil" implies that they were an active (busy) congregation. The next very vivid descriptive term presents the congregation as engaged in an exhausting type of work. The term John used was *kopon* which means a work

which is very hard, i.e., requires much energy. This is indeed commendable - so far! Many contemporary congregations are also busy keeping its membership busy. The Church in Ephesus was also a paradigm of patience. Surely the Lord loves a Church which exemplifies characteristics like "the light Asia" does. This congregation was also morally alert. It could not bear evil men" (*bastasai* - aor. act.). (Paul uses a form of this term in Gal. 6:2 - "bearing each others burdens). This congregation hated evil men to the extent that put them to the test and found them wanting.

Apparently, there existed in Asia more than one (plural of Apostles) who made the claim that they were Apostles of the Lord. The Ephesian congregation put them to the test (the passage does not say what constituted the test) and found that they were not Apostles. From this situation it appears that the Lord's Apostles (or at least many of them) were not personally known in Asia, or else this situation could have never come about. This congregation was so committed that they gave priority to the truth.

Verse 3

So concerned were the Christians in Ephesus to protect the name of Christ, that they did not grow weary (*kekopiakos* - perfect, ind.). The use of the perfect tense implies that they have been laboring for the Lord, and their concern enabled them to avoid becoming weary or tired of their work.

Verse 4

What possibly could be wrong with a congregation that worked so diligently to protect the purity of the Lord's name? This active church was condemned for departing from their first commitment. How could this be? John emphatically stated that this congregation was not merely in danger of or in process of leaving their first love; he stated that they had completed the act of leaving (*aphēkas*, 1st aor. act. ind.). This speaks eloquently against the denominational, anti-biblical doctrine of Eternal Security or Once in Grace Always in Grace.

Note: See Robert Shank, *Life in The Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance*, Westcott Pub. Springfield, Missouri, 1960. This is a very fine study by a Southern Baptist Minister, who once held the doctrine of Eternal Security, but after finishing this study, he rejected the doctrine. It has caused a great deal of discussion among Southern Baptists - both present and past generations.

The fact of the possibility of apostasy from the Christian faith is categorically claimed in this verse. The first love is Christ!

Verse 5

They were commanded (*mnēmoneue* - sing. pres. imp.) as individuals to remember. The singular form of the term translated remember makes it apparent that repentance is an individual and not a group matter. What were they to remember? Before they could be restored, they must recall "whence thou art fallen" (*peptokas* - sing. perf. ind. - expresses the state of completeness) and repent (*metanōson* - sing. aor. imp.). As the command to remember was singular and imperative, so is the command to repent - singular and imperative - do at once before it is too late! Each individual member of the Church in Ephesus was commanded to repent! The consequences of repentance would be a restored relationship with the Lord or their first love. Christ declared unless they repented (conditional *ei de me* - "and if not") he would come and will remove (*kinēsw* - fut. ind. act.) their lampstand (the lampstand was identified as the church - 1:20).

Verse 6

After that warning, Christ again commends them for hating the works of the Nicolaitans. Who were they? The name is formed by combining *nikon* - to conquer, and *laos* - the people. Martin Kiddle is probably right in his views about the Nicolaitans. They were followers of Nikolaos, the "proselyte from Antioch" (see Acts 6:1-6). This view is at least the general patristic tradition. (See Martin Kiddle, Moffatt Commentary Revelation, Harper & Bros. N.Y., pp. 33-34 - In the liberal British tradition).

Verse 7

Jesus Christ warns and challenges the Church in Ephesus with these words (literally) "the one having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit keeps on saying to the Churches." Each individual is addressed, and charged with the responsibility of hearing (*akousatō* - sing. 1st aor. imp.). Each individual is commanded to hear immediately! This is not mere passive listening, but an active response to what is heard. Does this command of the Lord fit any contemporary congregations, or any of the legion of church attenders? How many of us listen

to the Word and just attend to what we like to hear? There is as much a responsibility to God to prepare to listen as there is responsibility on the part of the one who prepares to speak. Often Churches act as though only the speaker is responsible to prepare to speak and they are free from responsibility to prepare to listen.

Though it is to the Church in Ephesus that the warning is directed the conclusion is reached for all of the Churches (plural).

The promises of the Lord are available only for (literally) "the one overcoming (*nikōnti* - pres. part. i.e., continual victory). "I will give to him to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God." It is not to the indifferent Church member or to the infrequent attender that the promise is given, but rather to the one (individual) who continually overcomes (is ultimately victorious in his Christian life).

Note: See Ragnar Leivstad, *Christ the Conqueror: Idea of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament*, MacMillan, N.Y. 1954; also *Special Study* on Theme of Victory in The Revelation.

Review Questions

1. Who is the speaker addressing the Church in Ephesus - vs. 1?
2. Does the congregation at Ephesus have commendable characteristics - vs. 2? What were they? Discuss.
3. Does being busy in Church work necessarily mean that we are pleasing God - vs. 4?
4. Is it possible to fall from the grace of God - vs. 4?
5. What was the initial condition for repentance as stated in vs. 5?
6. Does John declare in vs. 5 that individuals had actually completed the act of falling?
7. What would happen, if they failed to repent - vs. 5?
8. Is there a responsibility for each of us to prepare to hear and heed the Word of God - vs. 7?
9. Discuss the spiritual implications of the tense of the verb - "hear" in vs. 7.
10. Are the warnings of this section of scripture only applicable to the Church in Ephesus - vs. 7?

SECTION 5

Text 2:8-11

8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lived again 9 I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synogogue of Satan. 10 Fear not the things which thou are about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to 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 the crown of life. 11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Initial Questions 2:8-11

1. How can a poverty stricken Church be rich?
2. What does the term *blasphemy* mean?
3. Does John believe that the Devil was a real person and responsible for evil?
4. How would being thrown into prison, try or test our faith in Christ?
5. Does the Lord expect us to be faithful, even to the point of surrendering our own lives?
6. What does the phrase - "the second death" mean?

The Church in Smyrna
Chp. 2:8-11

Professor William M. Ramsay called Smyrna the city of Life; it was also the seat of the Imperial Cult. Smyrna has existed from a millennium before Christ to the present. Today it is a city of over 250,000 inhabitants. "The Glory of Asia" stood 35 miles to the north of Ephesus. Damascus had her "street called straight"; and Smyrna has the Golden Street. This street was lined with infamous temples to Aphrodite, Asklepios, Apollo, and to the mighty Zeus. From a Christian perspective, its most notable contribution to the world of the N.T. was a congregation of the Lord's people. Polycarp was bishop of this congregation soon after its basic departure from the biblical concept of the Church and its polity. What did our Lord think of this Church?