

Revelation Chapter 2

The Messages to the Churches. When you read Revelation chapters 2 and 3, it's important to see there are four applications to the messages.

Each message was given to the seven churches as originally addressed. And these churches were in existence in Asia at the time of the revelation. Many other churches existed in Asia at the same time, but the churches selected were representative of the spiritual conditions which existed at that time.

The message can also be applied historically. According to history, the Church has passed through eras similar to that which is described in each of the seven churches.

These messages can be applied to current churches of today. These special messages were written to the specific churches in Asia but the same strengths and weaknesses can be found in today's Body of Christ (Today's Church).

The messages can be applied to each of us on an individual basis. Look at the messages for each church during that time and ask yourself how you measure up personally today.

These messages were written by John in approximately 94 - 96 A.D., when the Church of Jesus Christ was a little over 60 years old. The church had experienced tremendous growth despite intense persecution. Under the rule of Rome, records show over 45,000 Christians were slain by crucifixion, burned to death and thrown to wild animals. In addition, corruption was springing up in the Church. When John wrote the messages to the seven churches, many believers were afraid about the unsure future. They were afraid of being strong enough to stand up to adversities that they would be facing and if they could endure the persecution.

To these early Christians Jesus gave his end time plan through these messages.

John was told to write what he saw in a book and send that book to the 7 churches in Asia. (Rev. 1:11). The entire Book of Revelation which includes the special messages to those 7 churches, was sent to those churches and a blessing was pronounced upon all who would read, hear and keep the words contained in this prophecy. Jesus wanted believers to know that He knew exactly where they were. He saw their good works, faithfulness and patience in the face of persecution. He also saw the bad which included their compromise, apostasy, indifference, and lukewarmness. He wanted them to know that despite persecution from without and corruption from within, He stood in their midst as a mighty conqueror and that through Him they too could overcome.

Christ's purpose in sending those messages to the seven churches was to empower believers to overcome the enemy. His purpose was to rise up His people in victory, to make them strong. When we take the mask off, we see that today's Church in its present condition is not ready for Christ's return. That's why Christ is again walking in the midst of His people preparing His Bride for His coming. By His Spirit, He is stirring us out of our complacency. He is revealing and

reproving sin, calling us to repentance, bringing us to a new, stronger position of dedication and commitment, and releasing a fresh anointing of His Spirit upon us.

As Jesus walks in our midst, He knows our individual and corporate strengths and weaknesses. His message to us today is the same as it was to the seven churches in Asia. "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

As we study the messages given to each of these churches, open your spirit to hear what the Spirit of God is saying to you. Ask God to reveal any problems that need to be dealt within your life. Yield yourself fully to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to purge anything from your life that is displeasing to Him.

Verses 2:1 – 3:22: Although these 7 churches were actual, historical churches in Asia Minor, they represent the types of churches that perennially exist throughout the church age. What Christ says to these churches is relevant in all times.

As we look at all of these churches, we must examine ourselves and our church and see just what category we fall into.

Verses 1-3: There are many things that we must note about these verses.

First, they are in red, so this is the Lord Jesus speaking. Literally there was just such a church sixty miles north east of the isle of Patmos. Second, we are reminded again here that Jesus holds these stars in His right hand. Jesus walks in the midst of this church; so we know quickly, it falls into the category of Christianity.

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"

“Angel”: The elder or pastor from the church (see note on 1:16, 20).

“Ephesus”: The city of Ephesus was one of the most important commercial and religious cities in Asia Minor. The most famous temple of the goddess Artemis (Diana), was located there. It was also John’s headquarters before his exile. Ephesus served as the “mother” church to the others, all of which were connected by the same Roman road.

There was a literal church of Ephesus. Many believe that this particular church was symbolic of the apostolic age from about (30 to 100 A.D.), it is called the Apostolic Church. I believe after viewing it carefully, we can see some of the churches in our own day falling into just this category. Here again, this message is sent to the ministering spirit of this church.

From the spiritual standpoint of churches today, we would see this church located in the midst of a very worldly surrounding but being a church holding up a standard against the evil

surroundings. This church would be a spiritual church guided and taught through the Holy Spirit of God. This church will be found working when the Lord comes back. They have been full of the power and presence of God. Jesus first tells them the good, then tells them of their weakness, as we see in the next verse. Even though this church has worked hard and not given up, we will see here that they have a few short-comings.

Verses 2-4: The church is commended because of its soundness of faith and its perseverance through persecution. However, its people have come under Christ's discipline for having "left" (not lost), their "first love" or former devotion to Christ.

Revelation 2:2 "I know thy works, and thy labor, 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:"

Notice Jesus always starts off by telling something good. Here He commends them for their hard work, and patience. To be patient is certainly a virtue, and one that most of us do not possess. This leader of this church and the people, seem to be working for the Lord.

"Them which say they are apostles": The Ephesian church exercised spiritual discernment. It knew how to evaluate men who claimed spiritual leadership by their doctrine and behavior (compare 1 Thess. 5:20-21).

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

This spiritual leader hates evil. Note that this leader seems to do as the Scripture suggests, and tries the spirits to see whether they are of God or not. This church does not just accept everyone who says he is an apostle. They judge the message before they accept the apostle. It seems that this church is well grounded in the Word. This church (the physical church), was one of the older churches founded by Paul and nurtured by Timothy. This physical church of Ephesus was located in a busy city.

"Hast not fainted": For over 40 years, since its founding, this church had remained faithful to the Word and the Lord. Through difficulty and persecution, the members had endured, always driven by the right motive, i.e., for Christ's name and reputation.

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

"Left thy first love": To be a Christian is to love the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:21, 23; 1 Cor. 16:22). But the Ephesian's passion and fervor for Christ had become cold, mechanical orthodoxy. Their doctrinal and moral purity, their undiminished zeal for the truth, and their disciplined service were no substitute for the love for Christ they had forsaken.

2 Timothy 3:5: "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

Probably this church has gotten too sophisticated for healing and deliverance. Perhaps some of the world's music had crept in unaware. Perhaps this church has begun to entertain more than teach. This church is more appealing to the world than to God.

Our first love, if we are believers, is putting Jesus ahead of everything else. This church's problems spiritually, can be seen in most of our churches today. God will not allow compromise, but on every hand, we see just that.

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."

“Remove thy candlestick”: God’s judgment would bring an end to the Ephesian church.

There is no substitute for undivided, fervent, undying love for Jesus Christ. Jesus warned the church at Ephesus to "repent, and do the first works; or else, I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove the candlestick, out of his place, except thou repent" He warned that if they did not repent, judgment would fall. They would no longer be a true light and witness to the world.

How many of our churches today are lifeless, dull, and mechanical? How many lack the light and witness of Christ and His power? The condition in this church, and in our churches and individual lives, did not happen overnight. It was a gradual process whereby believers left their "first" love, their passionate "bridal" love for Christ. The "first love" to which Christ called the church in Ephesus to return can be with the "bridal" love in a marriage relationship.

God expects holiness and righteousness of His people, and even more than that, He wants our pure love for Him. If you are going to church for any other reason than to fellowship with God and to learn of His will in your life, then you must ask yourself this question: Is what I am doing pleasing to God or me?

The wonderful thing about God is that He will allow us to repent. If we repent, He will forgive us, and give us another chance. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Jesus, in the verse above, is telling the physical church at Ephesus and the spiritual church of our day, to stop all of the worldly carrying on, and get back to church, like our ancestors. The church must love and reverence God. Just as Moses was told to remove his shoes because he was on Holy Ground, we must realize that in God's presence, we too are on Holy ground.

The things of the Spirit are from God as a gift. They cannot and should not be taught. The things of the Spirit are not received, because we have figured out a way to make God give them to us. They are received by us as a gift from God, because we are humble enough to receive them. Nothing is more wonderful, than for the Spirit of God to move in His church. The gifts of the Spirit are to be sought from God, but not to be used for our purposes. God still heals. God still

saves. God still raises the dead. God still delivers the oppressed. God does it; the power is His. We may be the instrument He uses, but it is not our power, it is His.

A new bride is so in love with her husband that he is the central focus of her life. When she takes her wedding vows, she promises to forsake all others and give herself solely to him. She eagerly anticipates his desires and lovingly tries to meet all his needs. She spends every possible moment with him. In this "bridal love" relationship, there is a special intimacy that develops between the bride and her bridegroom. She longs to know everything possible about him. She opens her heart to him, revealing her innermost secrets and desires. While they are apart from one another, she longs for him and eagerly anticipates when she will be with him once again. Because of her love, the bride puts her bridegroom first, before all else, including her own needs, desires, and ambitions.

It is this type of pure, fervent, self sacrificing "bridal love" for Christ that made the disciples willing to give themselves 100% for the cause of Christ. It was this type of love that burned up their own selfish desires, motivated them to serve Christ with single hearted devotion, and made them willing to lay down their lives for the cause of Christ. It is this type of love that we must have burning within us to enable us to fulfill the purposes of God in these final moments of time before Christ's return. Just as Christ called the church in Ephesus to return to their first love, He is walking among us today, calling us to repent and return to our first love.

Here are seven warning signs that signal that a church or individual has left their first love.

- (1) Christ is no longer the central focus in your life;
- (2) You neglect your relationship with the Lord and spend less time in prayer, worship and the Word;
- (3) You allow family, friends, job and your own desires to come between you and your relationship with God;
- (4) There is a loss of intimacy in your relationship with God;
- (5) You are caught in a cycle of dead works;
- (6) You are more tolerant of sin;
- (7) You will no longer have a burning passion for the lost.

Your works were motivated by intense love and devotion to the Lord. Compare your love for the Lord today with what it was then. Has your love grown deeper or has it lost its fervency? Are your works motivated by a passionate love for God or are you doing them merely out of a sense of duty? Ask the Lord to forgive you for leaving your first love. Begin to do your first works again. Make a new commitment to the basics of prayer, worship, and the Word. Fan the flame of the dying embers of your first love through renewed communion with the Lord. This fervent love is required of all those who belong to the Lord. Jesus called this the first and great commandment:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." "This is the first and great commandment." (Mat. 22:37-38).

The worst thing in all the world would be to have walked closely with God, and because of compromise and worldliness lose out with God. We read in this verse, if this is the condition of you or your church, REPENT. Jesus, having said this one thing that He has against them, goes immediately back to praising them as we see in the very next verse.

Revelation 2:6 "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

Notice here that Jesus, as this church, hates the sin and not the sinner. The deeds are hated, not the doer. There seems to be no record of the Nicolaitans except for this mention here. It is possible to hate evil and still not be living a pleasing life in God's sight. Worldliness is something we must avoid entirely.

Nicaulous and Baalam are in the same category. Probably evil with no certain root. The doctrine of Baalam, Nicaulous, and the Jezebel church thought that being Christians freed them from the moral law. They believed that idolatry and fleshly things would not be held against them, because they had been set free by Christ. Some of the liberalism we see in the churches today stem from this very belief.

So many are trying to bring Jesus down to our level or to elevate us up to His level. This is a very dangerous doctrine to make ourselves into gods. That is why Lucifer was thrown out of heaven. Worldliness must not be mingled in with worship of God. We must not only not participate in this, but hate this practice.

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."

We all have ears, but this is speaking of that inner ear of the heart that receives the truth. Note here that Spirit is capitalized meaning God's Spirit. This is not just any spirit, but the Holy Spirit of God. We also see here, that He is speaking to the churches, and suddenly jumps to individuals in the church when He says:

"To him that overcometh". According to John's own definition, to be an overcomer is to be a Christian (see notes on 1 John 5:4).

We are not saved collectively but as individuals. We as individuals must decide who we will follow. We notice here also that there is something to overcome. We must overcome lustful temptations of the flesh.

All believers in Jesus will eat of the tree of life. Jesus is the Tree of Life. True believers enjoy the promise of heaven (see notes on 22:2; Gen. 2:9).

God is a Spirit; Jesus is a Spirit who was housed in a body for His stay on earth. We are a spirit, as well, housed in a body. If we are a believer, our spirit will immediately go to heaven when it leaves our body. The body will rise at resurrection and rejoin our spirit. The tree of life is in

heaven. Paradise is the garden in heaven. This is a heavenly restoration of the Garden of Eden. The heavenly, being even more wonderful.

Revelation Chapter 2 Questions

1. Who was this message sent to?
2. Who sent it?
3. What three things did He commend them for?
4. Who could this church at Ephesus not bear?
5. What should we do to see if someone's message is true?
6. What three different ways can we look at these churches?
7. Jesus walking in the church tells us what?
8. Before they accept the apostle, what does this church do?
9. This physical church of Ephesus was founded by whom?
10. Who had nurtured it?
11. What does Jesus have against this church?
12. What will God not allow?
13. What might have been some of the problems?
14. This church has begun to _____ more than _____.
15. What must they do to make it right with God?
16. If they do not, what will happen?
17. What two things does God expect of his people?
18. What does He want even more than that?
19. Who is our advocate with the Father?
20. Why was Moses to remove his shoes?
21. What message can we get from that today?
22. How do we receive Spiritual gifts from God?

23. Can the things of the Spirit be taught?
24. Who is the healer and the deliverer?
25. What would be the worst thing in all the world to happen to us?
26. What one word says what we should do if we have compromised with the world?
27. The last thing Jesus is pleased with them for is what?
28. What three groups believe that being a Christian exempts you from moral law?
29. What is a very dangerous doctrine of our day?
30. To him that overcometh, what will he receive?
31. Where is Paradise?
32. What does this Paradise garden restore?
33. What do you see in the church of Ephesus that is present in your church today?