

A Future Journey with Christ

The Letter to the Seven Churches Part 1)

Revelation 2:1-17

INTRODUCTION:

SEVEN is a symbolic number which stands for totality or completeness. It gets this meaning because it is a combination of three and four. **Three** represents the trinity, or heaven, and **four** represents the earth. The earth representation is most likely because of the four directions and four seasons. Seven is the combination of heaven and earth, or the total creation.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Revelation 1:10-11 (NASB)

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet, ¹¹ saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

Prayer

John was commanded to write "**a book**" to **seven** churches in Asia Minor. John wrote one book that would be passed from church to church. We know that there were other churches in that area who would read it as well, but the symbolic number was more important to John than the literal number. The number seven symbolically means that when John addresses the seven churches in Asia who first read the book, he is also addressing the complete church, or all the local churches that will exist throughout history from the time of John's writing until Christ comes again.

I just realized something interesting this week. Paul also wrote letters to **seven** specific churches in the New Testament. They were Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. **Coincidence? Maybe.** The three remaining letters that Paul wrote to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon were personal letters. Just as Paul wrote his letters to seven specific churches which is scripture for all the churches of history, so this revelation to the seven churches is also scripture for the complete church.

You will notice a pattern in each of the individual letters.

- A unique description of Christ.
- An intimate knowledge of what the church is doing.
- Things they are doing right.
- Things they are doing wrong.

- An exhortation.
- "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
- A promise to him that overcomes.

BODY:

I. MESSAGE TO EPHESUS

Revelation 2:1-7 (NASB)

2 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

A unique description of Christ.

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

An intimate knowledge of what they are doing and Things they are doing right.

² I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; ³ and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

...⁶ Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Jesus begins by commending the church for several things. The scary part is the first four words. Did you catch them? "I know your deeds".

We know that. In everything we do, we need to stop and actually realize that He knows what I say, what I think, what I do, what I read, what I watch, and what I listen to.

And I don't want you to think that as he sees and hears that he stands there with a big stick ready to whap us over the head. No he stands there with a broken heart, disappointed in us, because he knows that if we would just allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives that our lives could and would be different. **But how stubborn we can be to fully trust in God's Word!**

And so here is the message for the Ephesians: Jesus tells them "You know guys it looks like you've got it all together, you work really hard as a church, and you do all the right things. You don't take your faith lightly you work hard at being Christians. It doesn't matter what happens you just keep going and going. You are the Energizer Bunny of Churches. You know the truth. There is no compromise with you. You have all the "i"s dotted and all the "t"s crossed. When false teachers show up you know your Bible inside out and you aren't afraid to show them the door. In a city as corrupt as Ephesus you have held the truth high and not wavered from it."

I don't know about you but if I was the church in Ephesus hearing all this stuff I'd be feeling pretty good about myself. Thinking "Yes that's right, we've done pretty good." Then comes the "BUT" word.

Things they are doing wrong.

⁴ But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

Just as the Ephesus church was feeling pretty good about themselves, they hear the word "BUT". Remember after the "but" comes the truth.

ILLUSTRATION:

Mr. Smith was working on the farm and severely cut his leg while working on a piece of farm equipment. He tried to bandage it at home to save on medical costs. After a couple of weeks the leg became infested with gangrene. So he had to go to the hospital anyway. It was so bad the doctors decided the leg would need amputated. After the surgery the doctor walked into the recovery room to give Mr. Smith an update on the success of the operation. "The operation went wonderful Mr. Smith, **BUT** we amputated the wrong leg!" So much for the wonderful operation!

Jesus uses the word "BUT". He says "Whoa, not so fast guys, there's something else. You have worked hard, you have been perseverant, you have not tolerated evil, you have hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, BUT...

I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! Ouch! That's gotta hurt.

We've all seen churches like that , they have the rules down pat, they can quote doctrine inside out, they cross each theological "T" just right and dot those "I"s! But there doesn't seem to be a whole lot of love or compassion in their fellowship.

An exhortation.

⁵ Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

Jesus finishes by telling the Christians in the Ephesian church that if they don't change their way that he will. Jesus warns them to "**repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place**". That simply means that if we as a church do not maintain our initial love for Christ and each other then we will be marked off that big heavenly list of Christian churches. We will cease to be a true church.

You understand that a church isn't a church because it's called a church right? A church is a church because of our love for God and our "neighbors".

⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

A promise to him that overcomes.

To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

The reference to the "tree of life" is probably symbolic of the cross. The Greek word (Xylon) that is used for tree in this verse is also used in I Peter 2:24 where it is translated "cross" or "tree" depending on the translation.

1 Peter 2:24 (NASB)

²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the (Xylon) or **cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.**

II. MESSAGE TO SMYRNA

Revelation 2:8-11 (NASB)

⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

A unique description of Christ.

The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

Smyrna had actually been destroyed around 590 BC and for the next three hundred years had existed as simply a collection of villages. In 290 BC Lysimachus rebuilt the city as one of the few planned cities in Asia. Its streets were wide and straight and the entire city had been designed to be beautiful. This is why Jesus addressed Himself as The one "who was dead, and has come to life". The residents of this city could relate because their city had once been dead and was brought back to life.

The other description that Jesus gave of himself was the First and the Last. This is a title that Jesus has used before to signify his eternal nature.

An intimate knowledge of what they are doing and Things they are doing right.

⁹ I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

The church in this beautiful city on the coast of Asia Minor apparently suffered much tribulation from the Jews. One was no longer God's people based upon their genealogy and circumcision, but by being a follower of Christ. They did not have material wealth, but Christ reminds them that, because of their faithfulness, they were actually rich. They did not store up treasures on earth, they treasure was in heaven.

Things they are doing wrong. (Nothing)

An exhortation.

¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Jesus warns them that they will face persecution and imprisonment. Even if that leads to death, know that death will be a victory for you. Christ has defeated death.

¹¹ **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

A promise to him that overcomes.

He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'

Christ did not mention the first death here; but it is the death of the body which all of us will experience.

Hebrews 9:27-28 (NIV)

²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The second death is that of the soul. It is a reference to the lake of fire in which Satan and his followers are destined to be thrown into when Christ comes again.

Revelation 20:14-15 (NASB)

¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. **This is the second death**, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

III. MESSAGE TO PERGAMUM

Revelation 2:12-17 (NASB)

¹² "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

A unique description of Christ.

The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

Because the city of Pergamum was the capital of Asia it was the administrative home of the Roman Governor. Roman governors were divided into two categories: those who had the "Right of the Sword" and those who didn't. Those who had the "Right of the Sword" literally had the power of life and death. On their word a person could be executed on the spot. The pro-consul who had his office in Pergamum had this right of the sword and at any moment could use it against the church. However Christ is reminding those believers that the last word is still with Him. He has the sharp two edged sword. Rome might be powerful but Christ is more powerful.

An intimate knowledge of what they are doing and Things they are doing right.

¹³ I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Romans didn't care what god or gods you worshipped as long as you were willing to worship Caesar. And so it was here that believers were required to take the title that belonged to Christ and ascribe it to Caesar by declaring "Caesar is Lord" and if they didn't they could be executed. For Christians there could be nothing more Satanic then that.

We don't know who Antipas was but he was killed because he refused to deny the name of Jesus. So they were commended for their loyalty and faithfulness even in the face of death. Then comes the word BUT.

Things they are doing wrong.

¹⁴ But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of immorality*. ¹⁵ So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

The church was no longer comprised of just those who had experienced a life changing relationship with Christ, now everyone wanted to be a Christian. And so all of a sudden you have a multitude of false teachers coming into the church.

The warning to the church today is clear. The numerical benefits which may come as a result of lowering our standards as a church are dramatically outweighed by the damage done as a result.

An exhortation.

¹⁶ Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

Christ is exhorting the false teachers to repent or He will use God's Word to destroy them when you comes again.

¹⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

A promise to him that overcomes.

To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

John's reference to manna was no doubt referring to his own Gospel.

John 6:31-35 (NASB)

³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." ³⁴ Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."

³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

Small pebbles were used as tickets to public functions, especially feasts. What is meant is simply that the ones who overcome shall receive a ticket of admission to the heavenly banquet. A very permanent ticket to an eternal feast.

The reference to a new name known only to the recipient probably suggests that no one who is unsaved can really know who God is. The redeemed and victorious alone understand what it means to belong to God.

This is very likely the name mentioned by John where he is describing heaven.

Revelation 22:3-4 (NASB)

³ There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴ they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads.

CONCLUSION:

The common exhortation to all of the churches remains the same:

To him who overcomes...Christ will give eternal life in heaven. How do we overcome Satan?

Revelation 12:11 (NASB)

¹¹ And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

He is Lord!