

Rev 25-09-24a

Greetings to all. We are here at Grace & Truth Bible Church on the 24th of September, 2025. We're in the book of Revelation.

We are now in chapter two. We are looking after a fairly comprehensive introduction at the first of the letters, the epistles that the Lord Jesus sends to the seven churches of Asia, the Roman province of Asia. Without further ado, let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study.

We will pick up our look at Ephesus. Father, how grateful we are for this time of fellowship in your word to be renewed and restored and encouraged through the ministry of your spirit, to be inspired by the example of our Lord Jesus, your son, our savior, who came and showed us the way that we can live a life that is enabled and empowered through your word and your spirit. We pray as we look at this portion of the revelation together, that the Holy Spirit will teach us, help us to understand it, and most importantly, to see its pertinence and application in our own lives.

We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. We can read our passage by turning to Revelation chapter two and noting that in verse one, we have the following words, to the angel of the church of Ephesus write, these things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil.

And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. And you have persevered and have patience and have labored for my namesake and have not become weary. Nevertheless, I have against you that you have left your first love.

Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, repent and do the first works or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." We began this last time and noted that this is the first of the seven churches. There is a sense in which it holds the place symbolically of the firstborn. And you remember in the Old Testament economy, organized and communicated by God, there is a double portion blessing that was given to the firstborn.

Yeah, among the sons of Jacob, of course, it was forfeited by Reuben, then by Simeon and Levi and Judah and ratcheted all the way down to the 11th son, Joseph. And other portions of that firstborn blessing lodged with Judah, with Levi and so on. Ideally, the priesthood, the rulership, the double portion would have all resided with Reuben.

But the malfeasance, malfunctions, disobedience resulted in loss of those privileges, those opportunities. So here we have a double portion in the sense that the church at Ephesus has things doubled. What do you notice here? Jesus says, I know your works in verse two.

We begin, let me just give you a quick review of verse one. The appellation, the title that Jesus claims for himself is he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. What does this mean? What should we draw from that? Two things, because there are two symbols.

The first, he holds the seven stars in his right hand. We were just told at the end of chapter one in verse 20 that the seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches. Those who communicate, those who bring the truth of God to the group, one to many, from faith to faith in an ideal circumstance.

So what does it mean that they are held in Jesus' hands? It's a little bit of pop quiz review. What's the meaning of that? What's the meaning of the stars in his hand? These communicators, the communicator for each group is directly accountable to Jesus Christ, not to a denomination, not to a bishop, not to a cardinal, not to a Pope, not to any form of higher authority. The head of the woman is the man in Ephesians and the head of the man is Christ.

And when it comes to the church, the Lord Jesus is that man. The church is pictured as his bride. There is no interlocutor.

There's no space. There's no other intermediary. The communicator for the group is directly accountable to Jesus Christ and should be getting his message directly from Jesus Christ.

This is the word that was with God and the word that was God, the word that became flesh and dwelt among us. He has, through the apostles, the apostolic witness recorded in the New Testament, given us the word, the truth. And communicators are under a very heavy responsibility to communicate accurately.

Not only are the stars in his hand, but they are held there. Secondly, and the application of that is, we need to find and stick with a fellowship that has a communicator that is obviously in that situation, feels himself accountable to Jesus Christ and is rightly dividing the word of truth, is studying it, sharing it, improving his understanding of it. If you want to be in a church that the Lord Jesus is communicating with, is walking in the midst of, and is going to grant opportunities as well as guidance and rewards, look for a communicator.

And there are many. There are 7,000 that haven't bowed the knee to Baal. It's not just like there's only one or two churches in the whole country.

Wherever we are, and how do we know if we're in one of those? The communicator is responsible to teach God's truth, truth as it comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the way and the truth and the life. How do we know if we're receiving that? Who is it that leads us into all truth? Who is it that convicts us and warns us away from falsehood and deceit? It's

God's Holy Spirit. So there is a necessity for us to cultivate the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, who will answer our asking and seeking and knocking, not with a rock or a snake or a scorpion, but with the manna from heaven.

We will know in our hearts, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit. We are children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs according to promise.

The Holy Spirit is not going to sit idly by while we soak up falsehoods, while we are deceived, if, if and only if we have a seeking heart, we don't settle for what is convenient or what tickles the ears. We are asking God to reveal his truth, whatever it takes, whatever the cost. And then we live that truth and we stand up for that truth.

This is why the Holy Spirit is so essential. It is not enough to have a great doctrinal grip on biblical truth. It has to lead us and guide us, enable us and empower us and define the works that we do.

This is what's coming up here in this letter. So, he who holds the seven stars, that is the source of the truth and who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, walking in the midst, we should be aware that the Lord is near at hand. Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them, Jesus said in Matthew 18, 20.

A group larger than one, there is a presence for that group. Remember in John 14, 23, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word. My father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Notice, there is a corporate presence in a group. There is an individual presence for those who love the Lord Jesus, who have his words and keep them. Whether in a group or whether individually, we want the presence of Jesus Christ.

He walks among the lampstands, emphasis on his presence among those groups that are taught by a bright star that he holds in his hand, holds accountable, holds their feet to the fire, double discipline if they start going off track. They are to hear and heed. They are to be examples to the flock.

You read Paul's words to the Ephesian elders, this same group in an earlier day. So what else does it mean if there is a presence of the Lord Jesus with us individually and in our midst as a group? He is evaluating. This is why he can say to each of these seven groups, I know your works.

It isn't the Lord God prior to the flood saying, I have heard that there is goings on, I will go and see for myself. It isn't preceding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah that God will come to earth and see for himself the evil of the five cities in the plain. The Lord Jesus is present in our midst.

He isn't returning from heaven. He is always present and is evaluating the churches and is

going to judge them accordingly. He's going to render a judgment, a verdict.

After having observed, he knows their works. Based on knowing their works, he is going to both commend and condemn. Firsthand knowledge, not secondhand collating supposed eyewitness reports, he knows himself.

And by extension, if he is present in groups and is evaluating and judging and determining the future of these groups, how much more so when he is present with those who love him, who have and keep his word. Therefore, if the Lord Jesus is judging groups and judging us individually by way of application, we have no business judging one another. Churches don't need to be sharpshooting and condemning other churches specifically, calling out individuals and trying to punish them.

Judging, as you know, is not evaluation, it is punishing. I will ruin your reputation. I will bad mouth you.

I will besmirch you. I will gossip, malign, backbite against you. I will inflict a penalty on you because I find you to be out of line, off the mark.

We do not need to judge each other. We need to first judge ourselves. First Corinthians 11 31.

If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. It is quite sufficient, especially if we enjoy the presence of the Lord Jesus and he is the righteous judge and we are in fellowship and communion with him through the spirit who convicts of sin and righteousness and judgment. We have our hands full evaluating and judging ourselves so that we are not judged by a higher court.

Let's resolve it at the local level and it doesn't have to rise to the district court or the Supreme court. First Corinthians 11 31, Matthew 7, one through three, Jesus says, judge not, lest you be judged. For with the judgment that you judge, you will be judged.

And with the measure that you use, it will be measured back to you. Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye. So we need to have humility.

We need to have focus. We need to direct the laser clear and powerful discernment we have at ourselves. Now, at the same time, we are to discern the world around us and the people around us and the churches around us.

You know the difference between discernment, which is accurately evaluating whether something is good or evil, whether it is doing well or doing poorly, whether it is biblical or unbiblical, whether it is true or a lie, we are commanded by God to discern. Having discerned that someone loves and practices a lie, we leave the judgment to God. They will be outside in the eternal future.

Although, you know, the dogs, fornicators, all those who love and practice the lie, leave it to God. Do not attempt to inflict a penalty, but we are supposed to discern. 1 John 4, 1, same author as our book.

Test the spirits to see if they are from God. Test is perazzo. What does it mean to test? It means to examine closely.

And in some cases, that examination will involve some pressure or some trouble. This is the same word we have in James chapter one. When you are tested, here's what you do.

Don't blame God for your testing. So, Hebrews 5, 14, along with 1 John 4, 1. Hebrews 5, 14, notice that those who are mature have their senses, their perceptions, exercised by practice to discern good and evil. What is the difference? Is this good? Is it evil? Romans 12, verse nine.

Love should be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good. You don't know what to run away from and what to cling to if you cannot discern.

Discernment is important, but we stop at the point of that evaluation and determination. We do not move into the sentencing phase and decide that we need to penalize or hurt others. Without hypocrisy, love.

Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good. Romans 12, nine. So, that is the one who holds the stars, the messengers in his right hand and who walks among the lampstands.

And notice there are only seven. They are representative, and we're going to see how this representation works as we move forward. So, our next phrase, I know your works.

Ergon, like ergonomics, what facilitates getting the tasks done. Your labor, this is exhausting exertion. Working hard, working until you're tired without flagging.

So, it's intensive labor. Your patience, your endurance, in other words. And that you cannot bear those who are evil.

We're going to be returning to that here shortly. You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not. John said in his first epistle, chapter four, test the spirits, test those who purport to communicate and to represent truth.

You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them to be liars. They do not represent the truth. You might put a little asterisk next to that particular statement.

Then the Lord Jesus, in this sort of double portion to the first church, the way there's a double portion for the firstborn, Jesus reviews the things that he just said. Again, it's a double commendation. You have persevered.

Same word that was translated patience above. Patience and perseverance, same Greek word, hupomone. You have persevered and have patience.

You have labored, same word we had before for labor. This is kapos, K-O-P-O-S, intensive, exhausting work. And you have not become weary.

The works, labor, and patience are doubled here. What was not doubled? You cannot bear those who are evil. You've tested them.

You found them to be liars. That has not been doubled. So, looking at this pattern, what should we get out of this? You can say, well, is it prophetic? Is it gonna represent history? Or was this only for the day? Here's where the rubber hits the road.

When Jesus says, I know your works, and then he points out what they're doing well, and he points out what they're doing poorly. The diagnosis here is one that we should try on for fit, try on for size, because some of these are going to apply to us or apply to us at a particular time in our life. Others, not so much.

That's really not a problem I have right now. We get to Smyrna, I'm not really suffering. I don't feel persecuted.

I haven't suffered for my faith. Not yet, not now. Possibly in the past, possibly in the future.

But at the moment that we review these letters, persecution's not really an issue that we face. Suppose the Ephesian epistle does apply to us. We are getting with it in our spiritual life.

We are endeavoring to work out our faith and our hope and our love on a daily basis. We are watching for opportunities to be of service, to be supportive. And you say, you know, when Jesus says, I know your works, you're enduring, you're bearing a burden and you're holding up under it.

I see that you are working to the point of exhaustion in a worthy cause. As Theodore Roosevelt famously said in a quote, spending yourself in a worthy cause, you're doing that and you say, you know, that's me. I feel like when I evaluate myself, I fit that bill.

That describes me. I'm not laying around ignoring my spiritual life. I am flat getting with it as best I can.

This applies to me. And I'm holding up, I'm enduring, and it's not easy. It's wearing me out, but I am not quitting.

I'm not a quitter. I'm doing this and I'm doing it as under the Lord. And I don't put up with falsehood.

I don't listen to false teaching. I have enough of the word of God in my soul. When I hear stuff that's out of line, I say that is not true.

The people communicating this are liars. They are setting themselves up as alternative sources of truth and that's not right. They are false leaders, false communicators.

What does an apostle do? We'll see this in a minute. What do these people do? Well, there are those who set themselves up as though that's what they're doing, but they are perpetrating deceit. I've got them pegged.

I don't listen to them. I eschew them. I reject them.

I push them right out of my circle of influence. Good job. Guess what? We need to pay close attention to the rest of this letter.

Jesus leads with the commendation, drawing us in when it applies to us. We're listening. We're paying attention.

And what a wonderful way to not put us on the defensive right off the bat. Listen, you're really doing well here. And we say, tell me more.

I'm all ears. I'm receptive. I am open to whatever else you have to say.

So consider, and I think a lot of us could think that we mostly qualify for this. We're not lazy in our Christian life. We take time out of a busy week to come to Bible class.

We review our notes. We pray. We review the prayer list.

We communicate with other believers. We're largely in this group that the Lord Jesus commends, and rightly so. So, kapos, exhausting labor, patience, hupomone, endurance under pressure, testing, perazzo, intensive scrutiny to the point that it can create trouble.

And you look at James chapter one for that. You found them to be liars. How do you know if somebody's lying? How can you be sure of your ground when you found someone to be a liar? You have to know the truth.

If you don't really know what happened, you don't know who's telling the truth and who's lying. If you find someone to be a liar, it's because you know the truth. And you say, what you're saying, buddy, that is not true.

You are telling a lie. And a liar isn't someone who lies once. Liar is an identity established by a pattern.

A fornicator isn't somebody who had a problem on one occasion. When you put E-R or O-R on the end of a verb, that is a practice. It's habitual.

It forms a pattern. It's the difference between sin and evil. So, found them to be liars.

It's a pattern. It's a way of life. It's a habit.

The perseverance, the patience, the labor are reiterated. But I have this against you that you have left your first love, your primary, foremost motivation. The measure of how well we're doing with faith and hope is love.

We do what we do heartily as unto the Lord. And not unto men. We let the mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus, who did what he did to the glory of the Father.

Philippians chapter two. So, for us who say, you know, I think this first description kind of fits me. Here is what we now need to check.

Do we still maintain our foremost love? This isn't the original love or the chronologically first love. So, we need to check. There are three things that we can do here for the solution.

And that is to, first of all, remember, then repent, and then do our works differently. It doesn't say stop doing the works, but you've got to do them in that foremost fashion, when you were defined by your foremost love, love for God, the first and greatest commandment. So, what is that commandment? Deuteronomy 6, 5, thou shalt love the Lord thy God, all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, all your mind.

Repeat it in, you got Deuteronomy 6, 5, right? Joshua 22, 5. Psalm 31, 23. New Testament. Matthew 22, 37.

Mark 12, 30. Luke 10, 37. First Corinthians 16, 22.

Now that last one, First Corinthians 16, 22, whoever does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Not only is it a failure to maintain the foremost love, but losing it entails a judgment. Curse is judgment.

I'll rip through those real quickly again. Deuteronomy 6, 5. Joshua 22, 5. Psalm 31, 23. Matthew 22, 37.

Mark 12, 30. Luke 10, 37. First Corinthians 16, 22.

It's the foremost love. We need to know these passages. We need to remember them and we need to think about them.

Why do I do what I do? Do I do what I do out of love? Or has it become performative? Is it habitual? Is it just a duty? I do it because I've always done it. I do it because I started and I need to finish. But that foremost appreciation and celebration of the Lord God in heaven has somehow fallen away.

So what is the solution? Well, we've got to have a change of mind. We've got to change our mind. First of all, remember.

We're going to see this when we get to the church at Sardis. Remember, repent and do the first works. It's easy to say, but there's more to it than meets the eye.

So we'll pause here and take our break. But the first and foremost application is, does the beginning of each of these letters apply in any way to me? If it does, the commendation portion, the description portion, if it applies to me, I've really got to focus on, am I guilty of, I

have this against you? If I don't, if I say, you know, I don't really think I've lost my first love. I just appreciate the Lord like crazy.

Then we need to be alert. We need to watch and pray that we do not somehow get distracted and lose it. It's a, it's, it is the vulnerability for those who are working really hard.

It's a vulnerability. If we haven't succumbed to it, praise the Lord. But we need to set a special watch on our hearts that we don't get complacent or stop being alert to this possibility.

This is the most common vulnerability for those who fit the first description. Here's what can happen. And we pray God to give us strength, to give us understanding, to give us perception if we're starting to fall away so that we can remember, change our minds and keep on doing those first works.

Doesn't mean that we're all going to be failing, but if we're not failing, we better watch. It's the most vulnerable area. Let's pause here and take our break.