

Rev 25-09-24b

We resume our study now in the book of Revelation. We're looking at this first letter and we will conclude it tonight, the one that the Lord Jesus sends to the group in Ephesus. We have arrived at the exhortation portion.

I will share with you before the next session a chart that gives several of the seven elements that characterize each of these letters. The first one being the self description that the Lord introduces his message with. In this case, he who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

This will differ and change with each subsequent letter. The commendation, knowing their deeds, their work, perseverance, not tolerating the wicked and those who claim to be apostles and are not, and the warning or the thing that the Lord Jesus has against the group. In this case, they have fallen from, they have lost their foremost love at the very heart.

This reminds me of a great tree that has grown tall and strong with abundant branches, looks healthy, leaves out. And yet at the very center, in where the heart would should be, it begins to get hollow and it will look great, look great, look great. And at a certain point when that rot and that hollowness is extensive enough, this wonderful looking tree suddenly is betrayed as sick to the point of no longer being there.

And the Lord Jesus' exhortation is the solution. And it is threefold. And that's where we pick up, which is to remember, to repent, and to do.

This is a wonderful way to think about the truth that we possess, that we reflect on, that we cycle through our thinking. First of all, we've got to stop and think. We need to remember the things that are priorities.

Remember our priorities, remember our goals, remember our values, grounded and centered in God's word, enabled and empowered by God's Holy Spirit that should transform us by the renewing of our minds so that we will be able to discern the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. This is back to that idea of discernment we saw in the first session. So remember, just flip the page to Revelation chapter 3 and look at verse 3. This is the letter to the church at Sardis.

Remember therefore how you have received and heard. When it says, when Jesus says remember, what is it we should remember? Well, this is fleshed out in the letter to Sardis. Remember how you have received and heard.

Hold fast to what you have received and heard that is true, that is worthy, that is biblical. Change your mind. Hold it fast and change your mind.

Hold on to the truth. The Ephesians are rejecting what is in error, but their grip on their love for

the truth is slipping. It's one thing to push away what is bad.

It is something else to cling to what is good. We saw that earlier on. So remember how you have received and heard.

Hold fast and repent. Turn back a few pages to 2 Peter. 2 Peter chapter 1, looking at verses 12 and 13.

Everything that he has said in the first 11 verses, I encourage you to go back and read that for the sake of time. I'm not going to review it. Just the last few, verses 10 and 11.

Brethren, be diligent to make your call and election sure. If you do these things, you will never stumble. The things that he has already mentioned.

And an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom. This is where the fulfillment of the overcomer promises takes place. So, an entrance will be supplied abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Verse 12, 2 Peter 1, for this reason, I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, even though you know them and are established in the present truth. Peter says, I think it is right. As long as I'm in this tent to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.

You go back to the ending of the gospel of John, where the Lord Jesus said, one of these days, somebody's going to address you and take you where you don't want to go. The Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover, verse 15, I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.

Reminder, reminder, reminder. I know you know these things, but I will not hesitate to remind you of what you know. Those in the group at Ephesus, they know these things.

They know the truth. That's how they can spot a liar. That's how they can reject a false apostle.

But we always need a reminder. This is why it's so important to go over what we have recently covered in Bible classes, what we've recently seen in our personal devotions, what we've recently discussed with fellow believers, to keep the truth circulating and present and available to our hearts and minds. I personally circled in this passage, I will stir you up by reminding you so that you always have a reminder.

I will not be negligent to remind you. Three times, Peter emphasizes the importance of being reminded. If we're reminded, what do we do? We remember.

And this is what the Lord Jesus says is the antidote and the preventative for falling as the Ephesian group did. We need to ensure that we don't have to wait for the exhortation. We don't have to wait for the command or the imperative.

We are already endeavoring to remember what we know. We are following Peter's exhortation. We're following the Lord Jesus' exhortation to don't let the truth slip away.

Make sure that it is present and we are applying it. So you can go on in 1 Peter chapter one and he talks about inspiration and we did not follow cunningly devised fables and so on. Cunningly devised fables, that's what is being pushed by these who say they are apostles and are not, but are liars.

It's mythology. It's alternate ways of casting scriptural truth and so on. So, remember that is the first step.

The first step. Secondly, repent. Repent.

What do we know about repentance? Verse five here. You can find this again in verse 16 of this chapter. How important is it to repent? You get to the church of uh the the church at Pergamos.

Sorry, I was still in Peter. I wonder I couldn't find my verse. When you get to verse 16 of chapter 2, the letter to the church at Pergamos, repent.

This is the exhortation. You get to verse 21 which is in the letter to the church at Thyatira. I gave them time, I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality and she did not repent.

Repent. Verse 22. Indeed, I will cast her into a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation unless they repent of their deeds.

Change of mind is what is expected. You find this again in Revelation 3.3, the verse we just reviewed. Remember how you've received and heard.

Hold fast and repent. Verse 19 of chapter 3. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent.

Chapter 9 verse 20. The rest of mankind who isn't killed by the plagues did not repent of the works of their hands that they should not worship demons and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. Even with the manifestation of divine power and judgment, they don't change their minds.

Same thing in verse 21. They did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. They don't change their ways.

Chapter 16 verse 9 of this book. Men were scorched with great heat. They blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues, but they did not repent and give Him glory.

God will exhort. He will encourage. He will instruct and hope that we repent.

He will send judgment. He will send tribulation. He will send bad times with the hope that we repent.

But it is a choice. It is up to us. In Acts chapter 17 verse 30, in rehearsing the days of old, the Old Testament days, Paul says, Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent.

He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. And He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. Acts 17, 30 and 31.

So remember, circulate the truth. Let the Holy Spirit empower that truth in our souls. This is how we make progress.

This is how we ensure that we have the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit and that all of the other armor of God is fully secured on us. Remember the truth. Change our minds where we need to.

If we detect that some part of that armor or weaponry has fallen away, if we detect that we're starting to hollow out in terms of our love and appreciation for the Lord Jesus and for God the Father, remember the truth. Review the truth that bolsters our love for God. Change our minds, change our ways, change our priorities, reshuffle our goals and our values, and then apply.

Put it into practice. Do the first works. The quickest way to summarize what the Ephesians are not doing is to look at someone who is doing it.

Look down at verse 19 of this same chapter. Revelation 2, 19. This is the third church here, the church at Thyatira.

To the angel of the church, actually it's the fourth church, the fourth church, the church in Thyatira, write, these things says the Son of God and I know your works in verse 19, your love, your service, your faith, and your patience. Many of the same things that you see in Ephesus. It adds diakonos, service.

This is the deacon, the waiting of tables, serving the needs of others. Your service, the order is actually reversed here, and faith, and your patience. Patience, very same thing Ephesus is commended for.

As for your works, what's the difference? The last are more than the first. The last are more than the first. Remember, repent, and do the first works.

Look at Thyatira in chapter two, verse 19. That's the difference. They have not lost their love and so their works of service patiently and vigorously undertaken count and they are commended.

They have a different problem. So if we look at Ephesus and say, yeah, I'm like the Ephesians on the commendation side, and I don't have their problem, we'll keep going. And it may be that Thyatira is a fit for our current state.

These letters are so wonderful for diagnosing and correcting whatever ails us, giving us ways that we can improve no matter what our spiritual status is. They're wonderful for this, both individually and as a group. What is the consequence of failing to heed the warning to remember, change minds, do the first works? I will remove your lampstand from its place.

Your group will no longer be an effective and glory-reflecting part of God's plan and purpose. You lose potential. You lose opportunity.

What is true of the group is also true of individuals. If we are here breathing air, God has a plan and a purpose for our life. Until we are no longer alive, there is a plan and a purpose.

It has potential to exploit. It has opportunities to fulfill. It has work to be accomplished out of love for God and love for one another.

The whole body fitly joined together. It edifies itself in love. We are only here so long as God can use us to be blessed and to be a blessing.

So if we're here, we need to ensure that we're in the very center of that plan and purpose. Otherwise, if God will remove a lampstand, a whole group of people for failing in this regard, how much more so an individual? Why stick around? Why be left except as a test to others? How much better to be on the positive side, on the productive side? But removing the lampstand, this is loss of opportunity, loss of potential, loss of reward, loss of blessing, unless you repent. Do you notice that repent also is doubled here? Everything for Ephesus comes in twos.

So when we come to the final portion here, this is a very helpful clue. I am at the end of a lone set of footprints in the unbroken snow here. This is what I think.

Take a look at verse six. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Great tankards full of ink have been spilled.

Dead seas of ink have been expended, trying to figure out who and what the Nicolaitans are. Does it come from Nicholas? He's mentioned as one of the deacons back when Stephen and the others are, and did he form some kind of weird sect? Is it based on the Greek Nike for victory and Laos people, the Nicolaitans? And I think there's traction in that. As I've said many times before, there is something about when you conquer a people, when you have victory over people, you then control them.

You lead them, you dictate to them what they should and should not do. They send tribute or they work in your fields or whatever. And I think that that's part of the reason that they are given this name.

But here's what I never saw before. See what you think of this. Did I mention several times now that everything in this letter seems to be doubled? The labor is doubled.

The patience is doubled. The exhortation to change your mind is doubled. What was not

doubled so far? You have tested those who claim to be apostles and are not, and have found them to be liars.

Notice the bracket that makes here toward the end of the letter with the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. I would submit to you that if you go back to not bearing those who are evil, look, if you want to know what a Nicolaitan is, here's my suggestion. I think this works.

Go back to verse two. You cannot bear those who are evil. So what do we know about Nicolaitans? They're evil.

You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not. These are false apostles. The New Testament.

You'll see it here shortly. And these are inveterate liars. Their entire pitch, their twisting and distorting of truth makes them liars.

You've rejected them. You've casted them out. You have found them to be liars.

You've identified them as such, and you don't listen to them as the implication. What is a false apostle? I think this is anticipated in the scriptures. For example, Matthew 24, 24, where Jesus said false Christs and false prophets will arise.

The prophetic witness is very similar to the apostolic witness, Old Testament prophet and transition period prophets, the gift of prophecy for groups that had not yet been contacted, visited, taught, trained by an apostle. The gift of prophecy brought those necessary truths. So Matthew 24, 24, false prophets will arise and deceive the people.

They are deceivers. Galatians 1, verses 6-9, those who preach a false gospel. And again, Paul says they are accursed.

1 John 4, 1, which we already saw, false prophets have gone out from us. Those are false apostles. But here's a primary passage, 2 Corinthians 11, 12-15.

Paul says, what I do, I will continue to do. He's been talking about those who are adversaries, those who oppose him, those who try to undermine him and subvert him and sabotage him. I, what I do, I will continue to do.

Notice the word do, do the first works. Paul says the best antidote to these false teachers is to do what I do, do it right, do it well, do it as under the Lord, do it out of love for the Lord and love for others. What I do, I will continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.

So these false apostles desire the approval. It's like Simon the sorcerer who wanted to be thought of like the apostles and asked if he could buy the gift of casting out demons and so on. They want to be regarded the way the apostles are regarded.

They love the approbation. They love the attention. They love the popularity.

They love to be quoted and cited and debated. They want to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. Verse 13, 2 Corinthians 11, such are false apostles, deceitful workers.

Remember when Jesus says they are liars, they are found to be liars. They're false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. The Lord Jesus appointed his apostles.

It wasn't done by a church group. It wasn't done by a pope. It wasn't done by a council of bishops getting together and making holy smoke.

The only apostles that have ever existed were appointed by the Lord Jesus himself and had certain qualifications that you can look up. These are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves, commissioning themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

He's no longer an angel of light. He's not Lucifer, the glowing one. He's a son of darkness now, as we've seen in Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28.

Therefore, verse 15, 2 Corinthians 11. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers transform themselves also into ministers of righteousness, which they are not, whose end will be according to their deeds, their works. So, what do we know about a false apostle? They're actually ministers of Satan.

They're doing Satan's work. They're carrying water for the devil out of arrogance, out of endeavoring to be self-important and self-gratifying, appointing themselves to be apostles. That's, in my view, how you identify a Nicolaitan.

We've got a description right here in the scripture. Back to the revelation. You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

We noticed in the first instance of this description that the Ephesian group cannot bear those who are evil. They are marked. They are besmirched.

They are noticeably involved with evil. Apostles are primarily communicators of God's truth from the Lord Jesus. So, they purport to offer ideas and perspectives and interpretations that reflect God in heaven and the Lord Jesus, but they don't.

They are found to be liars by those who know the truth. So, this is the doctrinal side. This is the teaching side.

The apostolic witness that they pretend to offer is actually lies, right? Notice in this recap toward the end of the letter, it is their works that are hated. Starts with their teaching. That's the source.

This is what engenders works of darkness, evil deeds. It begins with false doctrine. It begins with perverted and distorted truths, cherry-picking scriptures, cutting and pasting, proof-texting, reinventing the scriptures in a way that comports with the social gospel or whatever they're selling.

And they're almost always selling. Now, it is their works. You hate their works.

And Jesus says, I also hate their works. It goes beyond offering an alternative view of scripture that is not sound. It results in bad practice.

It results in indiscretion, in embracing that which is evil and counter to biblical truth. Starts with thinking, ends with acting. Starts with teaching, ends with deeds.

Looks like a symmetry to my eye. Everything else in this letter was doubled. I think your lying false apostles and their teaching results in Nicolaitan inducing people to evil works, unbiblical works, distracting works.

Now, notice here that in verse seven, we have the sevenfold repeated command from the Lord Jesus. He that has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. So interesting to me that this is a message addressed to a group, but the application here and the exhortation here is individual.

We would never know the difference if this verse read, let those who hear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches. But it doesn't say those. It says the individual, singular.

He that has an ear, let him hear. Hear and heed. Hear in an effective, meaningful way that produces repentance and a fresh impetus toward love and good works.

So while this is a group message, we are to understand it in terms of individual change of mind, individual remembrance, individual shifting of priorities and so on. He that has an ear, you will find this, and I don't have time to turn to these, but Isaiah 32 verse three, this is an Old Testament precedent for those who have an ear need to listen. Jesus uses this term in the gospels.

So you find it in Matthew 11, 15. If you're wondering, you remember Jesus saying, he that has an ear, let him hear. Wish we had time to visit those contexts and see why he's saying that.

I'll leave this as your homework, but look at it in Isaiah 32, 3. Look at it in Matthew 11, 15. Lord Jesus is speaking in each one of these cases. You find it in Mark 4, 23.

You find it in Luke 7, 16. And also in chapter 14, 35. And when you find an occasion being duplicated in the gospels, again, when it's doubled, it's very important.

So once again, Isaiah 32, 3, Matthew 11, 15, Mark 4, 23, Mark 7, 16, and Luke 14, 35. I think I put Luke with chapter seven and I messed up. That's Mark 4, 23, Mark 7, 16, and Luke 14, 35.

Please look these up. This is what John is harking back to when he records the Lord Jesus once again, saying, he that has an ear, let him hear. Pay attention to this.

Make personal application. It's singular. Group message, singular application.

Now, this is followed by the promise to the overcomer. Quickly now, to him who overcomes. Everybody that I've ever checked with go to 1 John 5, 4 and say, this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.

Nothing wrong with that. I love that verse, but that's not what the Lord Jesus is saying here. Otherwise he would only need to say it once, not in all seven letters.

And the grant would not differ for each of the seven letters. What does it mean to overcome here? This is to hear and heed everything that was said in this Ephesian letter. See if you qualify for the approbation, for the approval, for the commendation.

If you do, keep doing that. If you find a resonance and you say, you know, I really think that fits me. Keep up the good work.

That is an overcomer. Don't fall away. Don't fade.

Don't fail. Don't lose your endurance. Don't lose your patience of hope.

Keep doing it. That makes you an overcomer. And note the pitfalls.

If you're guilty of the pitfalls, fix it. Remember, change your mind and start doing things in light of your foremost love. That's how to fix it.

If you're not failing in those pitfall areas, be on your guard. Be alert. It's a vulnerability.

When you fit the first part, you are vulnerable in the second part. Watch out. Pray.

Review the scriptures and bolster any weakness in your full armor of God so that you don't fall. Do the preventative. Prophylactic action in advance of disease is usually a good thing.

So heed both the good work and heed the pitfalls. That makes you an overcomer. This particular type of overcomer specifically described here.

So one who overcomes, hears and heeds the good work and the pitfalls. Jesus says to him, I will give to eat from the tree of life. This obviously harks back to Genesis 3, verse 22, where Adam is ejected from the paradise of God, lest he stretch forth his hand and partake of the tree of life.

The curse is reversed. The privilege and all of the wonderful blessings that pertain to the Edenic prototype will be possessed by the overcomer who not only continues his good work in faithful, enduring, exhausting labor, identifying error and eschewing it, but maintains all the way to the end. What a wonderful blessing.

What a wonderful promise. What great motivation to be sure we fit the good part and don't fall for the bad part. I will give to eat from the tree of life.

This is a benefit personally granted by the Lord Jesus Christ. He doesn't say my father will do it. He doesn't say the spirit will do it.

He doesn't say some angel will give you an access card. Jesus Christ himself. You think of that recent hymn that we enjoyed here in church, Brethren We Have Met to Worship.

And in the closing verse, it cites scripture that says the Lord himself will gird himself and serve sweet manna all around. It's a benefit and a blessing and a privilege administered personally by the Lord Jesus Christ. That blows my mind.

I can't even imagine the Lord Jesus himself, Lord Jesus Christ personally himself coming up to me and saying, Sam, come with me. See that tree? That's the tree of life. Feel free to pick a fruit and partake.

Beyond my wildest imagination. What an opportunity. It speaks of presence.

You have to be present with the Lord Jesus for him to grant that privilege. You have to be present in the paradise of God to partake of that tree. Note for future reference here, the order.

In verse seven, he who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. Verse 11, he who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. Then you have the overcomer promise.

It's that way in Ephesus. It's that way for Smyrna. It's that way in Pergamos.

Verse 17, he who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches, to him who overcomes. In the church at Thyatira, note, the overcomer promise is in verse 26. He who has an ear is in verse 29.

The pattern changes after the first three churches, after Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos, the he that hath an ear comes after the overcomer promise instead of before. Is it just stylistic variation? I don't think so. And after we finish these first three churches and get to the fourth, we'll note why the Lord Jesus consciously groups the first three churches in one category and the last four in another.

It's subtle, but it's very important. So what do we learn from Ephesus? We've seen it. Let's think about it.

Let's remember it. Let's change our mind if and where we need to and continue to do the works that are motivated by that foremost love, love for God and the second like unto it, love one another. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the wonderful truths that are ours to claim in this passage. We pray that

God, the Holy Spirit will minister them to our hearts, help us to remember them, see their pertinence in our own lives, put them into application and truly be those who qualify to enter your paradise and partake of the tree of life. We ask it in Jesus name.

Amen.