

Rev 25-09-28a

Greetings. Welcome to the Sunday morning service here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 28th of September, 2025.

My how the time does fly. We're continuing our study in the book of Revelation. We are beginning the second church letter in chapter two, which is the letter to the church at Smyrna.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study and we'll begin. Father, we are so grateful for another opportunity to spend time studying your word and appreciating it and seeking to understand its meaning and purpose in our lives. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will bless the truth of the Lord Jesus to each of our hearts.

Help us to be clear eyed and motivated by what we learn in the further advance of our lives in redeeming the time in seeking to bear fruit that prepares us for service and function both now and in the ages to come. We ask it in Jesus name, amen. Revelation chapter two.

After an extensive look at the introduction in chapter one, the wonderful vision of the resurrected Lord Jesus that precedes and introduces these targeted messages from the Lord Jesus Christ to believers, all of us who have an ear to hear are the recipients of these letters. They are designed to be read by others than the named recipients. Many times you find this conceit or this technique in communication.

The screw tape letters is a great example by C.S. Lewis. There is this correspondence back and forth, but C.S. Lewis didn't wrap it up and try to drop it down a deep hole to screw tape. It is for consumption by believers overhearing conversation as it were.

That's the nature of this. This is manifestly directed to us just as the other epistles of the New Testament may have been addressed from an apostle to a group or groups in a region or in a town, but all things are written for our instruction. So this is very much pertinent, not just to a group of believers who engage in fellowship and united efforts and prayer and so on, but also as individuals and both elements are present as we saw last time.

Quickly reviewing the letter to the angel of the church of Ephesus, Jesus said, right? 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. That's the word *bastazo*, B-A-S-T-A-Z-O. That's the verb it comes from.

Here is something they cannot bear, but they labor. This is a *copao* or their labor. It's the noun form, *copas*, your patience, your *hupomone*, and you cannot *bastazo*.

You cannot bear, you cannot tolerate, you cannot carry the load of these who are evil. You have tested those, *perazzo*, same word we saw for testing or temptation in James chapter one. Those who say they are apostles and are not.

Somebody is making a claim and it is not true. Make a note of that, put a little mark in the margin beside it because you're going to have a chance to make another little mark in the margin very soon, just a few minutes. They say they are apostles and are not.

What is an apostle? What is the claim to being an apostle? An apostle is a designated communicator of the truth of Jesus Christ. Prophets were designated communicators of God's truth in the Old Testament and into the first generation of the church. There was a gift of prophecy, revealing truth from God as needed to the people of God.

When there is not existing communication, existing scripture, God fills in that gap. We are without excuse because what may be known of God is not only manifest in creation and in our hearts, but we have special revelation as needed. Prophets have carried it under appropriate circumstances.

Apostles in the New Testament, designated by the Lord Jesus in every single case. They claim in Ephesus to be apostles. They say we're apostles and they are not.

This is plural. There is more than one. This is sort of a movement.

It's become a thing. It's a trend. It's an innovation.

Well, who says that all knowledge died with Paul or with his protege Timothy? Remember this happened in Israel where they became dissatisfied and decided that are we not all priests? We can come before the Lord. We can come to the altar. We can bear strange fire.

And you saw the consequences of those who decided that although God had designated specific individuals to serve, well, we can do that. This has been applied when it comes to women who want to be ordained pastors and leaders of churches. Teaching is a wonderful function.

Anybody that God calls and equips can teach, but women are not to exert authority in a church group over men. The question is, can you share truth and you're not exerting authority? That's a separate study. But to decide that we have a new view of God's structure, well, I think the woman ought to be the head of the man in our marriage.

I think the church ought to be co-equal with the Lord Jesus in authority to communicate truth as Catholicism has done for many centuries. This carries a severe penalty. These individuals are arrogating to themselves the function of apostles, and they must necessarily innovate concepts and teachings and teaching for doctrines, the traditions of men.

And there is inevitably a deception because they are purporting to tell us what God's will, what God's word, what God's plan and purpose is, and they are inventing it. I heard God speak. God told me this is what to think, this is what to practice, and danger, danger, danger.

The Bereans were wise to search the scriptures and see if these things are so. What scriptures

were they searching? The Old Testament. There wasn't a New Testament in the days of those Bereans.

They looked at the Old Testament scriptures. This is what God has given us, and it is sufficient revelation to determine what is true and what is not. We have a more fulsome revelation, but it is still the means by which we discern truth from error.

As it says in Hebrews, we are those who by reason of exercise, practice, experience, have their senses sharpened to discern good and evil. Hebrews chapter 5. So if someone says they're an apostle and they are not, wise believers such as these in Ephesus need to be able to spot it and not put up with it. I will not tolerate you adulterating the truth with your human ideas, claiming that they came from God.

To have a human notion and tell people that God is its source is in this category. We have people publishing books, YouTube videos, espousing progressive Christianity, deconstructing, reconstructing, and all of that is a pseudo-apostolic function. You remember in Corinthians when Paul says, you know, desire the better gifts when they were getting all hung up on tongues.

And then he says, I will show you a better way. And then you have the love chapter. Well, these people say, I will show you a better way.

And then they put forth their picking and choosing, cherry picking, proof texting. This isn't really an appropriate part of scripture for us anymore. We're just going to choose the parts that we like.

Scripture is only inspired in spots. And I will tell you the spots. False apostles, you have found them to be liars.

You have spotted the falsehood and it is a pattern. It isn't a mistaken understanding or a faulty interpretation on an occasional basis. A liar is a practicing deceiver.

It is habitual. And you have persevered. The word persevered goes back to your patience, persevering and patience, and have labored all three of these words.

The perseverance and patience. Patience goes back. It's hupomone that was already mentioned.

Persevering is bastazo. You don't bear the false apostles. You have borne in the true sense.

You are bearing the proper things. You are enduring and persevering with the right things. Same three verbs, hupomone and kopao or kapos for labor to the point of exhaustion and bearing up with bastazo for my name's sake.

And you have not become weary. You haven't flagged. You haven't laid down your heavy load and parked yourself under a tree.

Nevertheless, I have this against you. You have left your first love. This is a specific area of weakness.

When you qualify for the condemnation, Jesus is going to go on to give the area of vulnerability that is often found with. It accompanies those who have their doctrine straight and who don't put up with error and falsehood and work very, very hard. But the point can often be reached where I love the life.

I love the doctrine. I love the work, but I have lost sight of the one I should love. And we settle into loving our situation and loving what we are doing.

And it is correct. And our doctrine is sound and we don't let error in, but we start to love the life and love the work and love the situation and lose the foremost love. First is not chronological.

It is priority. The foremost love, first and greatest commandment, according to the Lord Jesus, love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, all your might. When you are exercising your mind, when you are employing your might, it is out of love for God, not, you know, I find this very gratifying and satisfying.

I can see where I've been. This is good stuff right here. And we lose sight of our relationship with the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember, the threefold practice. This is a remedy if we fall away from the foremost love. And it is also the practice to maintain and ensure that we don't lose our foremost love if we are those who are serious about having a right understanding and who are working hard to apply that knowledge, to be those who are wise.

When we lack wisdom, James 1, we ask of God. He gives to us generously and without reproach. We are those people.

To maintain that and to not slip, to not fall, what do we do? Three things. Remember the importance. Be aware that we've got to pay attention to not losing our first love.

Don't fall away from it. Change our minds if we have fallen away from it. Repent and do.

Remember, repent and do. The foremost works. It will be the same works, but they are characterized by, driven by, in the context of the foremost love.

This is given first. And we saw these doubled verbs all the way through. The one thing that wasn't doubled, Jesus said you cannot bear those who say they are apostles and are not.

And you have found them to be liars. But finding the falsehood and the deceit that distracts and deflects people away from both love for God and the worthy work done in and for His name now gets repeated. This you have.

You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Because inevitably false doctrine leads

to false practice. It leads to works of the flesh.

It is wood, hay, and stubble. It is well-meant. Lord, Lord, in your name, did we not do many works? And Jesus says in reply, I never knew you.

Depart from me. In your name, we worked. But I don't know you, Jesus says.

Where is the love? It's a great song back in the 70s. Where is the love? You said, was mine all mine till the end of time? Was it just a lie? Where is the love? This is the hazard. If we sort of pride ourselves on being hungry for the truth and pursuing it wherever we can find it, watch out that it doesn't become an end in itself.

And I start loving the number of notebooks I have filled and the number of notes I've made in my Bible and the joy of discovery and of grasping new truths. And it's a very stimulating and wonderful thing. But if it doesn't result ultimately in turning the corner into looking heavenward and on our knees praising our Heavenly Father for His grace and His goodness and the expressions of His character and the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of deity and bodily form.

If we don't come away ultimately saying, what a great and mighty God, what a wonderful Savior. This is the remedy. Remember the first love.

Change our minds and ensure that that is the goal of our work and our study and our filtering truth and error and make sure that everything we do is in that light and is an application of that truth. That's the message from the Ephesians. How wonderful is that? He that has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Lord Jesus is commending and warning the Ephesians for, because it can happen to any of us individually or as a group, as a fellowship.

And you look around and see a lot of fellowships. I can name some off the fingers of at least one hand, maybe two, that were ICE churches, Isagogic categories, exegesis, original languages, my pastor digs deep. And those churches hollowed out, split, and in some cases disintegrated and are no more.

It can become a personality cult and people end up appointing their pastor as an apostle. And he doesn't disabuse them of that. He doesn't cure that.

He doesn't reject and excoriate that. And he ends up sort of enjoying the popularity or whatever, and he ends up kind of acting like an apostle. There are some minority denominations around here where on the sign when you pass their church, it says the apostle, you know, Bob is our pastor.

So, so important to keep the structure straight. Keep the lines of communication straight. Don't let somebody get on the radio and start giving orders and it didn't come from the head shed.

That's Ephesians. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. These

first letters are grouped because that exhortation precedes the overcomer promise.

We're going to see it in the next couple. What is the overcomer promise? To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. This is where we left off Wednesday.

So what is intended here by the tree of life? And there are misunderstandings of this. First of all, who is the overcomer? And we covered this last time. You often see people going to first John five, four, where they will talk about this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.

But if you turn back to first John real quick, look at the next verse just a few pages back from where we are. First John chapter five, whoever, whatever is born of God overcomes the world. Okay, if I'm a believer, I'm an overcomer.

Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. Notice it says whatever and not whoever, as I almost misquoted it. This is why I like to look at the page and not rely on my memory.

Whatever is born of God, look at the preceding verse, pertains directly to our study. This is the love of God that we keep his commandments. We keep the commandments, we perform our labors out of love for God.

His commandments are not burdensome, it's not more than we can bear, it doesn't crush us. Whatever is born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the son of God.

Looking at this, people think, well, salvation makes one an overcomer. Sometimes, the devil is in the details, sometimes the delight and the clarification is in the details. Look at this again.

What do you notice when you look at verse 4 and then you look at verse 5 with respect to overcoming? Little pop quiz here, an observation test. What do you observe in verse 4 and verse 5 related to overcoming? Take a look at it. Whatever is born of God overcomes, what's the tense? Present.

Whatever is born of God is overcoming and this is the truth that is born from God, this is the Savior that is born from God, this is believers who are born of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. These are the things that are involved in the ongoing overcoming of the opposition, the persecution, the distractions, the attacks that come from the world. The only way to overcome what the world and the devil and the flesh throw at us is that which originates with God.

Makes good sense, right? And this is an ongoing thing. If you want ongoing victory, you've got to have an ongoing relationship with God and an ongoing dependence on what is born of God, what originates with God. Fellowship of born-again believers in our periphery can be included in this.

So you see that, right? Now look at the next phrase. And this is the victory that what? Has overcome. This is the victory that has overcome the world.

It doesn't have a D on it. This is the victory that has overcome faith. Your faith, our faith, the variant here doesn't really matter.

We as believers, our faith has overcome. It has delivered us into the realm where we have access to these things that come from God. So the first hurdle, don't believe in God.

Don't claim the Lord Jesus as your Savior. Don't begin to walk the narrow road and head for the straight gate. The victory that has won the initial battle is our faith.

Look at the next verse. What's the tense? Who is he who is overcoming the world? Our faith has overcome, gotten us into this realm. Who is the individual who keeps on overcoming? Do you notice there is a plural in verse four and it goes to the singular here.

The same John recording the same truth from the Lord Jesus. Our faith, your faith in verse four, plural. Here, who is he who overcomes? Continues to overcome, keeps on overcoming, but he who keeps on believing.

That Jesus is the Son of God. There's a lot contained in that, right? You can chew on that. I'm not going to elaborate it.

But there's a lot more than just assenting that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. And that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Ongoing faith in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God.

This means we understand who God the Father is. We understand the Lord Jesus. We understand everything that flows and originates and is born of the Father and the Son via the Spirit.

And comes to us through the apostolic witness and so on. We keep on. This is reflective of.

It's another facet of what Jesus has just said in the letter to the revelations. So, to him that overcomes. Who is overcoming? Notice this first of the overcomer promises here in Revelation 2, verse 7. To him who overcomes.

Not him who has overcome. Think about 1 John 5. Is overcoming. Practicing this.

Winding it up and making it go. In the present. Did it yesterday.

Doing it today. I fully intend to do it tomorrow. To him who is overcoming.

I will give. If you want real clarity here, you might line out give. This is grant.

Give sounds like I'm just going to present you with a gift. This is grant. You make a request and it is granted.

You have a desire. You have a prayer. You ask and it is granted.

The genie comes out of the bottle. Three wishes. I really wish I had a sausage.

The wish is granted and there is a sausage on the plate. You remember that great story. I wish the sausage was on your nose, husband.

And they have to use the last wish to get the sausage off his nose. And there went the great opportunity. I will grant to eat from the tree of life.

Which is in the midst of the paradise of God. What do you think this means? Second pop quiz question. What does this mean? Grant to eat of the tree of life.

Most immediate responses to this are, well, this is ongoing life in the eternal future. Eat of the tree of life. God said, I've got to kick Adam and Eve out of the garden, lest he reach forth his hand, eat from the tree and live forever.

So, this would be a synonym for eternal life, right? Wrong. Negative. Not the case.

Let me put it another way. Does your grant of eternal life, does your resurrection and future in the kingdom of the Son and the kingdom of the Father depend on whether or not you can get a piece of this fruit in your mouth? No. Our eternal life is grounded on, founded on, based on, rooted in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

The Lord Jesus accomplished the work that gives to us eternal life. Can't get any clearer than John 3.16. God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten Son. Whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Not, you got to be sure you're close enough that you can make a trip and grab a hold of that fruit. So, what does this mean? Grant to eat of the tree of life. Very interesting analysis here.

What does it mean? There is a privilege indicated here. You first of all have to dissociate the idea that all believers are overcomers simply by being believers. It would be kind of pointless to challenge believers to do better in each of these letters or to continue to do well and then put something that everybody's going to get no matter how badly they do just by virtue of salvation.

It does not follow. It isn't logical. This is a reward to those who overcome in these specific areas.

Across the course of a normal life, even if it's not overly long, believers will face challenges such as are detailed in each of these letters. The number seven, among many other things, indicates completeness and we will find ourselves challenged, tested. Everyone is going to be taught and have a grasp of some truth and that truth is going to be challenged.

Do we stick with it? Are we led away by a liar or someone who claims to be an apostle and is not? Do we, in the process of doing that and seeking out doctrinal truth, do we become prideful

and see that as an end in itself and do we get involved in work that we think is worthy and is reflective of a healthy Christian life and we look at it and judge ourselves to be in the middle of the narrow road but if we ever stop to ask ourselves the question, where is my love and appreciation, celebration and worship of the God from whom all of these things flows? Praise God from whom all blessings flow. What is born of God? And that is the priority. This is the Job test.

What if God takes away all of these wonderful things? What if your work and your fruit and your generosity to widows and orphans and your care for your ten children and your faithfulness and fair business dealings, what if all of that is wiped away and your health goes? Do you still love, respect and trust the Father? Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Curse God and die. Look at what He has done to you.

Job never lost his first love. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Everything I had was born of God and came to me. If God decides to take it away, that is on Him. I trust Him.

I love Him. It is the Job test. So, what does it mean then to be granted the privilege of eating from the Tree of Life? There is a lot we could say about not all overcomers.

There are people who die a sin unto death, remember? In James, I do not say that you should pray for that. There is a sin unto death. Ananias and Sapphira died on the spot for lying to the Holy Spirit and to the congregation and so on.

So, we do not live forever because we eat from the Tree of Life in Paradise. We live forever because we trust the One who hung on a tree. This is a great quote from a guy named Mike Koukouras.

I really like the way he said this. Believers do not live forever because they eat from the Tree of Life in Paradise. They live forever because they trusted the One who hung on a tree and they were given the gift of eternal life.

So, the eating from the Tree of Life is used several ways in Scripture. And this helps us understand what Jesus is saying here. So, for example, you have in the Proverbs 3.18. We saw this in our excursion into Proverbs that wisdom is a tree of life.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, all her paths are peace. She, wisdom, is a tree of life to those who take hold of her and happy are all who retain her. This has to do with quality of life.

Proverbs 11.30. The fruit of righteousness is a tree of life. And he who wins souls, this is overcoming in the vicinity of the soul. You can go back and see our notes on Proverbs 11.

This isn't winning other people to Jesus. This is overcoming in soul battles. He whose soul is an

overcomer is wise.

And wisdom has already been said to be a tree of life. And the fruit of righteousness comes from that tree of life, represents that tree of life. That's Proverbs 11.30. You go to Proverbs 13.12. Hope deferred makes the heart sick.

Remember, hope dragged when we studied this. But fulfilled desire is a tree of life. When your hope is centered in the right way and God honors that expectation, it's a tree of life.

It partakes of the blessing and the things that are sourced in God. It is the quality of eternal life, not the fact that you are going to live forever. Finally, Proverbs 15.4. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life.

Wholesome speech, edifying one another, speaking the truth in love, being an encouragement and an encourager like Barnabas, the son of encouragement. The wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. We can do damage with the tongue.

You're going to see that coming up in James. So, it doesn't have anything to do with living forever. And if you think about this just logically, how did the tree of life work in the garden? It sustained Adam's physical life.

If he reaches out his hand and partakes of the tree, God says he will live forever. Live how? Live in this mortal body on this flat earth, this planet. That tree sustained physical life.

Eternal life is not sustained by the tree of life. It is enhanced. It is given capacities and opportunities and qualities that go beyond simply keeping us alive.

And that, of course, is the tree of life as mentioned in Genesis 2.9. And you see God talking about it in Genesis 3.22 and 24. So, in Revelation 22.14, we will turn to it very quickly as we go to the break. 22.14, looking at the river of life and the new Jerusalem.

Blessed are those who do His commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life. Blessed are those who have His words and keep them. They have the right to the tree of life.

This is a subset of believers. Outside, dogs, sorcerers, sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters, whoever loves and practices a lie. Notice the association in Jesus' words to the group at Ephesus.

You have found these who claim to be apostles and are not to be liars. If you overcome, you continue that, and you address these other problems in terms of your foremost love, you will be granted to eat from the tree of life. It is for those who do His commandments, which you are doing, but do them out of that foremost love, as a reflection of that foremost love.

So, it is no accident that, and there's kind of a question, in my Red Ink version, they revert to black in verse 14, but I am not sure that that shouldn't be red, because verse 13 is red, and verse 16 is red. I think the Lord Jesus may, there's no indication that there's a change in

speaker. This is the same Lord Jesus speaking at the end of the book, just as He does at the beginning, in my view.

So, do we want to be granted to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God? It isn't automatic, just because we're saved, and John 3.16 applies to us. It is a privilege for those who have His words and keep them, who develop that love. Lord Jesus and the Father come and dwell with us, just as the Holy Spirit has already been granted to us as a presence.

What an opportunity. That's the letter to the Ephesians. That's the first of the overcomer promises.

He that has an ear to hear. And if you can reach up and grab something on each side of your head with your fingers, this is us. What a great opportunity.

Let's pause here and take our break.