

Rev 25-10-15a

Greetings fellow members of Grace and Truth Bible Church and others who are interested in the study of this great letter from the Lord Jesus Christ addressed to the seven churches in its entirety, all 22 chapters. This is the 15th of October 2025 and we continue our study. Picking up in chapter 2 we are looking at the first three churches moving toward the center where you have the church at Thyatira.

Quite fascinating material we're going to look at tonight and so pertinent especially in the light of current events which are moving so rapidly you can hardly afford to not check the news every few hours and see what is the latest. We have an international situation that is in flux. We have an energetic president.

We have an active and virulent opposition and in the midst of it we are not only citizens of the earth and citizens of the U.S. we are also members of the body of Christ and all of these things have an effect and an input into our spiritual life. Our spiritual life of course is most important. Our identity in Christ is paramount and definitional so the way that we handle these various circumstances is most important and there is no better place to be led and guided by the Lord Jesus himself than our passage.

Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study and we'll get started. Father what an exciting time in which we live. What a great opportunity we have to learn, to grow in grace and knowledge, to bear the fruit of the Spirit, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, to mature to become those who are ready to partake of meat and not merely milk and who can move on to maturity not laying again the foundation as we saw in the book of Hebrews.

We thank you for this opportunity to fellowship together and be nourished, strengthened, encouraged and comforted by your word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will be active in our midst and in our hearts. Help us to understand it and to see how we should then live.

We ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Jumping right into the midst here you will recall.

You can use whatever memory aid you like but we have seen Ephesus, we have looked at Smyrna, we are moving into Pergamos and at the center of the Chiasm, that would be the fourth out of seven, we will find Thyatira and in the course of doing so we have noted that there is a specific purpose for each of these churches. It is no accident. It is not a happenstance.

The purpose that we find here is to make personal application in the present, not speculating on what might happen in the future, not necessarily trying to match up symbolic values with current events, although it is difficult not to see that world events are converging in such a way. But what we are primarily looking for is the usefulness, much as we do in the Old Testament, of seeing the words of the Lord Jesus to these specific groups in their specific situations and translating that into what we should be thinking and doing and observing in our own lives. We examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith and we make every day count, we make every

hour count, we take every thought captive for Christ.

So, let's just review one last time. When I say review, I hear these silent groans. Oh no, not a review.

Trust me, this is going to be useful because these are links in a chain and if you ever had to memorize the laws of the Navy on the strength of one link in the cable dependeth the might of the chain. Every link has to be solid and this is a chain of seven letters. They are interlinked and they correspond.

When we get to the church at Laodicea, the foundation we've laid looking at Ephesus is going to be particularly helpful. Each of these has a primary reflection. Thyatira is like a mirror in the middle and each of the churches as you move outward corresponds to its partner.

So, in Ephesus, the city, I tend to resist giving you a whole lot of historical detail, but it is somewhat illuminating. Pergamos was the official capital city of this Roman province of Asia, what we would call today Asia Minor. It's the western, southern two-thirds of the modern day nation of Turkey or Turquia, if you pronounce it like they do.

But Pergamos was the official capital of that province. But Ephesus was the greatest city. You might think of Washington, D.C. versus New York City in terms of cultural impact, overall influence within the nation.

So, a Roman writer called it Luminacea, which is the light of Asia. It had the greatest harbor in Asia in the time of John. All the roads of the Kastor Valley, Kastor was the river that it stood near.

Rivers flow into bays or harbors and Ephesus had this harbor. Greatest harbor in all of Asia. The roads came from Mesopotamia as far off as the areas of Colossae and Laodicea.

At Ephesus, the road from Galatia reached the sea coming by way of Sardis. So, these churches and the cities in which they dwell are interconnected culturally, geographically, linguistically, and certainly all being grouped within this Asian province under Rome. If you want an idea of what's going on in Ephesus, John might be alluding to it when we get to Revelation chapter 18 verses 12 and 13.

Merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, marble, cinnamon, incense, fragrant oil, frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, bodies and souls of men. This is what happens when you have a convergence of great highways and great river traffic and a good harbor. There is commerce.

The road that comes up from the to the south converged here as well. So, this made Ephesus the gateway to the area. And it is sort of the firstest with the mostest, and Jesus addresses it

first.

And this could well be one of the reasons. It's the entry point to this area. If you're going to come there, you're going to come, whether by land or by sea, you will land at Ephesus and then travel to these other cities.

Any Roman proconsul that came to take up office at his palace in Pergamos would land at Ephesus first and would travel through Ephesus on his way to Pergamos. And this was true of nearly all travelers. So, Ephesus is the wealthiest and the greatest city in that entire region.

It had political distinctions. It was a free city. This is a special distinction in the Roman Empire.

Certain cities had this status conferred on them because of some past service to the empire. It was within its own limits, self-governing. And it was exempted from ever having a Roman troop garrison stationed there.

The Romans didn't put troops there to enforce Roman law. They took care of themselves. They did their own policing.

It was secondly, A, number one, it's a free city. Number two, it's the center of worship of Artemis, or as you find it in Acts, Diana of the Ephesians. The temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, as you will recall.

It was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, had 120 columns, each of them 60 feet high. And each of these columns was the gift of a king. The various subjugated kings expressed their fealty by sponsoring one of these columns.

You may know, I used to have a book, I may still have it in a box somewhere, talking about temples of ancient Greece and Rome. And these things were mostly colonnades and porches with just the center part roofed over. And that's how the temple of Artemis was.

And it was roofed over with cypress. And the image of Artemis was one of the most sacred images in the entire ancient world. It was not pretty.

It wasn't like the Venus de Milo. It was an ugly, squat, many-breasted, almost black chunk. And nobody knew where it came from.

It had been there so long. But it was extremely valuable. They had a superstition about this thing that caused virulent adoration and attention to it.

You can review Acts 19. You remember the riot, great as Diana of the Ephesians and so on. That all happened around this temple and this, what you could loosely call a statue within it.

So this helped to make Ephesus a notorious center of superstition. There were little objects and charms that were made in Ephesus and sent out, and these were thought to have special power, remedies for sickness and fecundity or fertility. The population of the city was very

mixed.

There were six tribes. One was the descendants of the original natives of the country. Others were descendants of the original Athenian colonists who came and settled the city.

There were three other Greek tribes, and then one was the Jews. And so it was a center of religion. But because of the Temple of Artemis, it was also a center of crime and immorality.

The Artemis cult was very rife with temple prostitution, encouragement of all sorts of immoral behavior, without going into too great a detail. There were hundreds of priestesses. It was basically the red light district in a building.

And so it was a notoriously evil place. Heraclitus is one of the more famous of your ancient philosophers. He was called the weeping philosopher.

And when somebody said, why do you cry all the time? He said, no one can live in immorality. And he wasn't even a believer. So you would think this wouldn't be a very promising place for Christianity to gain a foothold in such a hostile and worldly, materialistic, self-centered pursuit of pleasure kind of place.

Yet, oddly enough, if you've ever seen this book, it's called Trench's Synonyms. It's an English speaking person's aid to getting glosses and translations from the biblical languages. But Trench, R.C. Trench, was the Archbishop of Dublin 150 years ago or so.

But he said, nowhere did the word of God find a kindlier soil or strike root more deeply or bear fairer fruit than Ephesus, the fruit of faith and love. And for that reason, if you look at Acts chapter 20, verse 31, you find that Paul spent more time in Ephesus than in any other city to which he traveled and ministered. He tells the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, remember that for three years, I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

And there are some traditions that say he may even have returned there after his second Roman imprisonment. Of course, we saw in our study of first Timothy, this is where Paul assigned Timothy to continue to minister after his departure. And that's first Timothy 1.3, remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine.

And we saw a week or two back that evidently Timothy was successful because the commendation that the church receives from the Lord Jesus is that they don't tolerate false teachers. In Ephesus, you find Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos. You can go to Acts 18.19, 18.24, and 18.26. And these well-known personages from the book of Acts are encountered in Ephesus.

Again, the address to the Ephesian elders and his very heartfelt words at being parted from them in Acts 20.17-38. But following Paul's ministry, it appears that the apostle John picked up and continued. And later church tradition says that he not only went there, but brought Mary, the mother of the Lord there. And there is a traditional site of the tomb of each of them near Ephesus.

So when John takes down this dictation, if you will, from the Lord Jesus, he, the Lord, recognizes, first of all, their toil. We saw that this is kapos. When Paul wants to talk about someone working hard, you remember the roster of commendable people and those to get to know who are worthy of fellowship and so on.

He says in Romans 16.12, greet Triphina and Triphosa who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis who labored much in the Lord. And that's your word, kapos, working hard in and for the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 15.10, Paul says, by the grace of God, I am what I am. Wouldn't this be wonderful if we can say this about ourselves? We look at ourselves, where we are, what we're doing, the opportunities God has given us, the places where our spiritual gift can function, those on whom we have an influence and those from whom we receive great blessing and one another fellowship and ministry. Paul says, by the grace of God, I am what I am.

And his grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me. And that is part and parcel of this Ephesian letter from the Lord Jesus. You're working hard, but is it the grace of God, grace expressing itself in love, that defines that work or has it become something more mundane, something more habitual or something of a knee jerk and not fully and truly dedicated to the Lord, not done heartily as unto the Lord, not unto men.

You can find Paul, because he wrote so prolifically in the New Testament, using this word all over the place. Galatians 4.11 is the last one I'll give you, where he tells them he is concerned that they may slip back and his labor will have been in vain. So this is the kind of toil, as we saw, that is exhausting.

It is exhaustive. It takes everything you've got. It's 110%.

You are dedicated. You know, there is endurance, be faithful unto death, and there is work where you almost work yourself to death. When this is done for the right reasons, when it is done by God's grace and in God's strength, it is commended by the Lord Jesus.

I know your toil, your work. Also, secondly, he praised their steadfast endurance, hupomone, to bear up under. I like what is said by William Barclay about this.

He says, this is not the grim patience that residedly accepts things. It is the courageous gallantry which accepts suffering and hardship and turns them into grace and glory. Such a great turn of phrase.

The old gray heads just had such an elegance of expression. It is not the grim patience which residedly accepts things. This is the courageous gallantry which accepts suffering and hardship and turns them into grace and glory.

We want that to be us, don't we? If I'm going to endure, I want it to count. I want it to reflect the

glory of God. I want it to be a place where God's grace is sufficient.

Paul, asking for his thorn in the flesh to be removed, God says, no, you need it. My grace is sufficient for you. It is often said that the life and endurance that Christ can give is in some ways exceptional.

There are things in our lives that we can only learn, that we can only accomplish in the crucible of suffering. His work on the cross on our behalf being the archetypal example. They also become a place where doctrinal integrity comes to the test.

When you have a lot of people and you have a lot of attention and there is a swirling culture and civilization around you, it is easy for ideas to get amalgamated, to be homogenized, to absorb things from the culture. Can't we see that today? The absorption of cultural righteousness, political righteousness, politically correct ideas being absorbed and somehow mashed up into Christian faith and practice. Someone decides that this is a good thing and it is acceptable to the masses.

Let me go find a way to justify it in Scripture. I will find a verse that I can contort and get it to support the view that makes me part of the group and acceptable to the wider masses and so on. The folks in Ephesus, the church in Ephesus resisted this.

When they tried to bring in false teaching, Paul warned them time and again. He warned them with tears. As he told the Thessalonians, I am sure he told every church, test all things.

1 Thessalonians 5.21. Test everything, even the things that sound right and that are pleasing. And you think, well, sure, I like that. Test everything.

Hold fast to what is good. Hold fast to what is good. The Holy Spirit leads us into truth that will tell us what is and isn't genuinely good.

Remember, when teaching occurs and you occasionally find a bit of awkwardness, suppose, as we have seen in past studies across the years, there is a trend, there's a fad, there's a new book, there's a new popular way of thinking or taking a verse out of context, and it spreads like wildfire through the general Christian community. Somebody may become famous as sort of the leader of that movement or the author of that book. How proper is it for other pastors or Bible teachers to call that out and to point out, in many cases by name, the perceived flaw in that? In 1 Corinthians 14.29, we tend to think, well, 1 Corinthians 14, temporary gifts, those are gone, so we can give that a very light touch.

The principles in 1 Corinthians 14 still apply, even though the expression of those principles in the function of temporary gifts, the gifts themselves may have gone, but the principles have not. And in 1 Corinthians 14.29, Paul says, if somebody is prophesying to the group, if they are forth telling, if they are speaking what purports to be the word of God, the word of truth, two or three can speak and let the others judge. The other prophets, the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

And there is to be some curation. There is to be some critique and management of what goes out under the label of the word of God. And those who know what the word of God is, if they hear something that is being labeled that are called to identify it and point it out.

Paul tells Timothy, you've got to call out this false teaching. Don't let them get away with it. Rebuke it.

Stick a cork in it. Make it stop. Expunge it from the group.

If they will not agree with sound doctrine, they've got to go. Very important. So, we saw not long ago, looking back to Matthew 7, the Lord Jesus said, beware of false prophets.

Matthew 7, 15 through 20, beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, i.e. they are coming from within. And these are tests from within.

It's important to notice the direction that these attacks come from. Some of them are an inside job. Others are outside pressure, outside oppression, suppression, or what's the word I'm looking for? Persecution.

Outside persecution. Others come from the inside. And it is corruption that is not identified and either corrected or caused to separate.

And it infects, metastasizes, and can eventually destroy the group from within. So, Jesus said in Matthew 7, 15 through 20, beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

You'll know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit. This is generally true of all of us.

Are we a good tree bearing good fruit? But the specific application here is the teacher is the tree. The prophet is the tree. If he is a true fourth teller of God's word, the product of that communication, the truth that is communicated, is going to bear fruit.

There will be life, there will be benefit, there will be joy and enjoyment, peace, and the other fruit of the spirit will pertain as a result of this telling forth of the word. If they are a false prophet, it is going to be thorn bushes and thistles, not grapes and figs. And you will find division, deception, departure, distraction, deflection, compromise, and those who tolerate and absorb false teaching will stumble and fall.

They will be ensnared, led astray, and captivated by their own desires. Falsehood comes in and takes down spiritual defenses. And we are our own worst enemy.

We can't control our desires. And when those desires conceive, they bring forth sin. And sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.

We lose the power to reflect the glory of God, to represent the Lord Jesus, to enjoy and reflect

His peace, and so on. Every good tree bears good fruit. Bad tree bears bad fruit.

Good tree can't bear bad fruit. Bad tree can't bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

What a tragedy to spend your life as an alleged teacher of the word of God, pastor of a church, or other Christian communicator. And because you yourself were deceived, and you became the blind leading the blind, and everybody falls into the ditch, the entire fruit of your life goes up in a giant flash fire, dumpster fire. How tragic.

Therefore, by their fruits you will know them. Notice how many times Jesus says, you'll know by the fruit. What is the fruit in our life? Do we come away encouraged? Are we more invested in the Lord Jesus as our Savior, in God in heaven as our Father, as our benefactor, as the one who knows our needs before we ask Him, as the one who hears and answers our prayers for our benefit? He doesn't always answer the way we think He should, because He's smarter than we are, and He knows how to work all things together for good, our good and His glory.

Do we come away with something in our hearts and in our minds and in our souls that brings us up short the next time we're in a conversation, and the topic starts to turn down a bad road, it starts to be gossip, or it becomes a source of conflict or division, or we're drawn into places we don't want to go and sing and hearing things we don't want to hear? The strength, the wisdom from God that we saw in those first 10 chapters of Proverbs especially, that preserves us, guards us, keeps us, guides us, enables and empowers us, that should be coming when we hear a Bible class. We should be freshly energized. It's like putting your phone on the charger overnight.

You pick it up the next morning, you want to pick it up, and it says 100% ready to go. I'll last all day. I won't let you down.

You won't be in the middle of making an important call, and oh, the phone died. How tragic if God is relying on us to be ready, to be willing, to be able to serve, to carry out stewardship, to be representatives, to be ambassadors for Christ, to be the members of his body that perform the things that the Lord Jesus performed when he was here bodily, and we run out of gas, we fail. Good tree bears good fruit.

By their fruits you will know them because that fruit arrives first in our own soul. Am I built up? Am I encouraged? Am I stimulated to love and good works? Do I enjoy the fellowship of other believers who similarly appreciate what's in the word of God? Is the fellowship valuable to me? I don't want to forsake the assembling of myself together with others because it is such a privilege and such a joy. It's up-building.

It's worthwhile. There are times when I think I've got about nine different things that I need to be doing, but right now I am in a place and doing a task that is inescapable. You have an appointment.

You have to be there. It doesn't matter whatever else you would, could, or should be doing. You are forced to be in a place at a time.

And there's a weird sense of relief for me that, well, I can't be doing anything else right now, however legitimate, however desirable, however needful it might be. This is my assigned place and my assigned time right now. And so I can relax because until this particular situation is finished, I can't be anywhere else.

So I'm obviously where I need to be doing what I need to be doing. And I can rest on the part of me that says, which priority do I observe next? What is the goal? And so on. So this should be the fruit in our soul.

Just run down the list. Do I have peace? Am I patient? Am I gentle? I used to think my besetting sin was impatience. I have discovered that another one of my besetting sins is un-gentleness.

To be so sure that you're right, that you push your idea. There are talking heads on TV that you know the guy is right, but back off, man. Put down the coffee.

Just be calm. Let your point carry its own weight. If it's true and right, let the argument carry the day.

You're not making it any stronger by yelling it or being angry when you deliver it or being forceful and talking to the exclusion of all others. Say what you have to say and do it carefully. Do it sensitively.

Do it considerably. Leave some air in the room. Don't suck it all out with, you know, well, this isn't because this is right.

I'm justified in delivering it very forcefully. The more right it is, the less force it needs from us. People who yell are not real sure they're right in many cases.

So this is the kind of fruit. We should be making improvement. We should see progress in overcoming our besetting weaknesses, our habitual failures.

And if whatever your source of Bible teaching, be it here or wherever, if you don't see progress, if you don't feel the wind of the Lord lifting you up so that you can mount up like an eagle and run and not be weary and walk and not faint, look and see if God has provided a better, more tailor-made source for biblical truth, because the genuine truth will absolutely strengthen us, help us, and uphold us with the right hand of God's righteousness. That's what His truth does. That is how the power of God comes into the life of the believer, is through His Word and in the presence and power of His Spirit.

So that has got to be happening in our lives, or we need to figure out what's wrong. Nothing wrong with the power of God. The power of God isn't kind of intermittent or unreliable.

It always works. So if it's not working in my life, I'm pretty sure I know where to locate the

problem. By their fruits you will know them.

There should be fruit, fruit of the Word, fruit of the Spirit, the Word and the Spirit, the power of God, the beneficial fruit of righteousness in our lives, which we enjoy. It is peace that passes all understanding. It is a life that you can't even describe to people who haven't entered into it themselves.

What a privilege. What an opportunity. What a foretaste of glory divine.

So this rejection of false teaching is essential. It is not the only thing that makes for a healthy Christian life, as we see going through this Ephesian letter. Because these people in Ephesus, they tested the prophets.

They examined the teachings. And what was erroneous, they rejected and expunged from their midst. But something got lost in the process.

Doctrinal purity, and some of us have been in churches that were very emphatic about doctrine and correct doctrine, deep doctrine, organized and structured doctrine, which is wonderful. I wouldn't trade that foundation in my soul for anything, but it is a foundation. And I don't want to live on a concrete slab.

I want to get that foundation. I want it to be straight, level, square. I want it to have plenty of rebar.

I don't want the thing coming apart. This is the reason when I went to seminary and I thought, well, what should I major in? I thought, systematic theology. You get everything.

It's like a spreadsheet. It's rows and columns and it meshes and it's an integrity and you get the whole thing. And I would do it over again.

I love systematic theology. For every truth in the word of God, I've heard somebody say this a few times, for every truth in the word of God, there is at least one other truth that limits it, conditions it, informs it, and keeps you from carrying it to an extreme. There is balance.

There is a fabric in the word of God. It's not just a rope that tugs things in one direction. It's a fabric.

There's warp and woof and it becomes strong. These fine threads woven together become this incredibly strong fabric of truth and we want to look at all of it. That's why we are so dedicated to context.

So in the course of doing that though, that foremost love was lost. Love for the Lord and love for one another kind of cooled and took a back seat to getting things done. And the reason for doing those works and exhausting themselves in the performance of them got obscured and Jesus said, I have this against you.

You've left your foremost love. Foremost love is a two-sided coin. Love for God, love for one another.

Heads is love for the Lord God and the second is like unto it. Loving one another in this age. But you have this going for you.

You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. I learned something new about the Nicolaitans. That's what we're going to pick up when we come back from the break.

Remember the fruit. The fruit is everything. The works are the works.

Fruit is in the spiritual realm. Works are visible. Fruit is invisible.

What's going on in our heart and soul? What is it that goes up before God as an acceptable sacrifice? Holy, acceptable. It's the fruit within. That's got to be there or the works don't count.

Let's pause here and take our break.