

Letters to the Seven Churches

Lesson #3, Chapter 2—Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum

My friend, Becky Hintz shared some of the writing tasks for this study in Revelation. Enjoy her insights as you work on this lesson. Ask the Lord to give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him (Eph. 1:17).

Read the letter to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7.

1. From verses 2-6, list the commendations Christ has for the Ephesian church.
2. We live in an age in which tolerance is considered a high virtue. Yet the Ephesian believers are commended for refusing to tolerate evil men! What does this indicate about God's view of tolerance? See also Psalm 139:19-22; 2 Jn. 7-11.
3. Christ rebukes this church for leaving its first love. After looking up Acts 19:1-29 and 20:17-38, describe the pedestal from which they fell.
4. The Ephesians replaced true love for God with doctrinal discernment, which in itself is a good and commendable thing! What "spiritual" activities or practices in your life can threaten to take the place of truly loving Christ? (See Luke 10:38-42 for another example of such an exchange.)
5. After detailing their sin, Christ gives the Ephesians a threefold command. What steps are they to take? What is threatened against the church if they do not repent (verse 5)?

6. If Christ were to look at your life, would He find that you, too, have in some sense “left your first love?” Following His command to the Ephesians, take a moment now to “remember from where you have fallen.” Was there a time in your walk when you were more zealous for the Lord? What did you do, feel, think about? What changed?

7. For the Ephesian church (and possibly for you) the next step is to repent—to return to a deep love for the Lord and the deeds that follow. But how does one do this exactly? Spend some time praying through Psalm 32, and record any insights you glean about how one can draw near to God.

8. Who is called to hear what the Spirit says to the churches (verse 7)? Who needs to pay attention to these letters?

9. At the end of each church’s letter, Christ gives a promise to “him who overcomes.” Look up 1 John 5:4-5 to see how John uses this designation. To whom are all of these promises made?

Read the letter to the church at Smyrna starting at Revelation 2:8.

10. From verses 9-11, what was this church experiencing? What were they about to endure?

11. When Christ calls them rich (verse 9), what does He mean? Read Matt 5:11-12, James 2:5, and Rev. 3:17-18 to see what it means to be rich in God’s eyes.

12. From verses 9-11, what encouragements, promises, and commands does Jesus give to the church at Smyrna?

13. Christ does not waste a single word. How could His self-description in verse 8 itself be an encouragement to these suffering saints?
14. What condemnations or rebukes does Jesus have for the church in Smyrna?
15. What is Jesus' purpose in writing to this suffering church? What is His tone and what strategies does He employ?
16. How can we follow Christ's example when we encounter suffering people? See Matt. 12:20; 2 Cor. 1:3-4; 1 Thess. 5:14.
17. As Christ's representatives on earth, we should always be ready to offer words of encouragement and hope to those enduring trials. What are some key Scriptural passages and promises that we can use to minister to the bruised and hurting? For starters, look up Ps. 145:14-20, Rom. 8:28, and 2 Cor. 4:16-18, and then add your own.

“Thou art the Lord who slept upon the pillow
Thou art the Lord who soothed the furious sea,
What matter beating wind and tossing billow
If only we are in the boat with Thee?

Hold us in quiet through the age-long minute
While Thou art silent and the wind is shrill:
Can the boat sink while Thou, dear Lord, art in it?
Can the heart faint that waiteth on Thy will?”

~Amy Carmichael

25. How have you been tempted to be drawn into the mindset of the Pergamum church, perhaps tolerating sins either in your own heart or in those around you, and then justifying such tolerance? What would be the solution to this problem, and what would you need to change?

“Consider that no sin against a great God can be strictly a little sin.”

~Ralph Venning, *The Plague of Plagues*