

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

by William McCarrell

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CHAPTER 2

EPHESUS: THE APOSTOLIC (POWERFUL) CHURCH

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:1-7)

SUGGESTIVE STUDY OUTLINE

I. The Command to Write. Vs. 1

II. The Church Addressed. Vs. 1

III. The Description of the Speaker. Vs. 1

1. Holdeth seven stars.

2. Walketh in midst of candlesticks.

IV. The Commendation. Vss. 2, 3, 6.

1. For works and labor.

2. For patience (steadfastness)

3. For stand against sin.

4. For loyalty to truth.

5. For concern as to CHRIST's Name

6. For hating Nicolaitanism.

V. The Criticism -- Rebuke. Vs. 4

1. Left first love.

VI. The Call to Repentance. Vs. 5

1. By remembering fallen state.
2. By correction of sin.

VII. The Warning as to Judgment. Vs. 5

1. Loss of testimony
 - a. Quickly

VIII. The Encouragement. Vs. 6.

1. As to hating Nicolaitanism.
 - a. Hated by CHRIST.

IX. The Appeal to Hear -- Act. Vs. 7

X. The Exhortation To Overcome. Vs. 7

XI. The Reward for Overcoming. Vs. 7.

1. Eat of tree of life
 - a. In Paradise of GOD.

SPIRITUAL POWER EXPERIENCED

Each letter in Revelation two and three offers much foundational truth for Christian doctrine. Their warnings and exhortations, expressed in such statements as "**know thy works**," "**He that hath an ear let him hear**" and "**to him that overcometh**," assure abundant truth for spiritual life. Each letter presents a prophetic foreview of a period of the Church's earthly history. Ephesus pictures the first century Apostolic Church. During this period, the Christian Church was characterized by such Gospel proclamation, godly living and spiritual power as to cause a noted historian to state that the manner in which first century Christians lived and died constituted the chief factor in the overthrow of the Roman Empire, which ruled the world for seven hundred years. That which armies, navies and nations could not do was wrought by the prevailing prayers, triumphant living and dying of saved ones.

The Church name, also the description of the Speaker (CHRIST), strengthens the practical and prophetic aspect of each church message, by fitting significantly into the testings, warnings and comfort set forth. "**Ephesus**" means "*desired*." It also means "*having relaxed -- let go*." The Ephesus Church had enjoyed spiritually enriching fellowship which had produced fruitful service. All was endangered through losing its first love for CHRIST. CHRIST's reminder that He holds stars of the Churches in His right hand assures of His authority in directing Christian's testimony. The stars typify messengers of the Churches (1:20). Stars reflect God-given light to this world during its night of darkness and sin. Christian testimony and messages are ever dependent upon and governed by a resurrected, living, glorified CHRIST, -- the CHRIST described as walking in the midst of golden candlesticks, which represent GOD's true Church (Revelation 1:13). CHRIST lives in the midst of His own: "**For where two or three are**

gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20) to direct, increase or even remove His light.

LOSS OF SPIRITUAL POWER

The Ephesian Church was commended by CHRIST for its works -- labor (toil) -- patience in trial -- steadfastness in service -- repudiation of false teachers and error -- witness against sin -- and separation from all that dishonored GOD. Nevertheless it was rebuked because defeated and fallen in GOD's sight. It fall was caused by being occupied with past accomplishment, present work and future plans more than with CHRIST. Service was displacing the Son. Program was endangering spiritual power. Christian activity was displacing spiritual fellowship. Like Martha, they were in danger of becoming so occupied with doing for CHRIST as to miss being like CHRIST. Service placed before CHRIST-likeness produces fretfulness and murmuring. Martha, **"cumbered about much serving,"** critically suggested work to CHRIST. Mary, placing instruction in GOD's Word and CHRIST-likeness before service: **"Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her"** (Luke 10:38-42), becomes fruitful in every good word: **"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God"** (Colossians 1:10) in every age till He comes: **"Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her"** (Mark 14:9).

The Ephesian Church, sidetracked from the joyous thrill and spiritual enrichment of its first love for CHRIST, was missing the secret of spiritual knowledge, growth, praise, witnessing, service, unity, joy, peace, satisfaction and righteousness. These contribute to CHRIST-likeness and assure future reward which CHRIST desires for every saved one. Failing to continue first love for CHRIST, their CHRIST-honoring and spiritually enriched life would be displaced by spiritual pride, coolness, emptiness, and distraction. Unremedied, this prepares the way for error, sin, and defeat, followed by the disastrous experience of CHRIST being displaced by self, service, even religious systems. A noted preacher declared that no genuine servant of GOD ever departed from the Faith without first failing in his private devotional life with CHRIST. Satan ever offers saved ones good things to rob them of the best, which is CHRIST, robs of spiritual power and thus pleases Satan. How needful that saved ones remember that the Ephesian Church, though richly blessed with biblical light, busily occupied in sincere Christian endeavor, and even rich in martyrs, was referred to by GOD as "fallen" because of failure to be occupied with CHRIST.

MAN-MADE SYSTEM OR CHRIST

The reminder that Nicolaitanism was present, although not accepted by the Ephesian Church, added special weight to the LORD's warning. Word study yields that *nikao*, means **"to conquer,"**

and *laos*, means "*the people*," or "*laity*." It suggests the danger of man and man-made system supplanting CHRIST. Its threat warned that if victory were not gained regarding occupancy with CHRIST's Person, Nicolaitanism would result. How disastrously this came to pass! The first century Church, though wondrously blessed and used, did not heed CHRIST's "**first love**" warning. Though GOD permitted chastening in the second and third centuries through suffering and martyrdom pictured by the Smyrna letter, that Church as a whole did not repent regarding departure from first love for CHRIST. Failure to heed GOD's message through His Word and chastening then, as now, results in GOD's rebuking judgment through His giving over to error and spiritual corruption. Thus the period (third through fifth centuries) pictured by the Pergamos letter occurred.

Nicolaitanism, linked with Roman Catholicism, corrupted Christian testimony. This became a stranglehold during the period which is historically designated "The Dark Ages" (sixth through fifteenth centuries) and pictured by the Thyatira letter. Protestant religious systems, which began with real promise in the fifteenth century and deteriorated into spiritual deadness linked with Nicolaitanism are pictured by the Sardis letter. This curse now permeates the professing Christian Church, including Greek and Roman Catholicism, as well as Protestantism. Together they move on, fulfilling the religious system which is to be spued out by CHRIST, and pictured in the Laodicean letter (Revelation 3:14-22); also fulfilling that pictured by the scarlet woman (Revelation 17), which will be destroyed by Antichrist.

VICTORY REWARD

The letter to Ephesus sets privilege, opportunity and responsibility before every believer as to overcoming. Such persons will need to be overcomers in the professing church, as well as in the world of sin. They overcome through CHRIST. Their overcoming is rewarded with partaking of the tree of life in Paradise. Paradise means the sum total of all GOD's pleasure. The tree of life is CHRIST. It speaks of life that is free, pure, full, God-given, GOD-dependent, ever deepening, growing, blooming, expanding, fragrant, abundant, heavenly, eternal and glorified.

VICTORY PATHWAY

The exhortation, "**He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear**," assures that this message is to saved ones, as the spiritual ear is meant. Only born-again believers possess a spiritual ear. CHRIST exhorts to self-examination, personal judgment, cleansing, safeguarding and obedience as regards personal CHRIST-likeness, spiritual growth and Biblical service. Continuous enjoyment of first-love fellowship with CHRIST is the secret of such living. Waning or lack of first-love fellowship with CHRIST is evidenced by:

1. Saved one preferring to talk about things, events or persons, rather than about CHRIST.
2. Desire to read books about the Bible, rather than the Bible.
3. Waning interest in public worship of CHRIST.
4. Lack of occupancy with CHRIST.
5. Spiritual obedience becoming wearisome.
6. Tendency to gloss over Biblical error.
7. Avoiding responsibility in dealing with sin.
8. Lack of interest in salvation of souls.

9. Lack of interest in missionary work.
10. Being satisfied with flashy, religious exterior.
11. Lack of concern over personal sin.
12. Worldliness.

First-love fellowship and all that it involves is dependent upon experience of the new birth by the individual, yieldedness to CHRIST, Bible obedience and continual carefulness as to avoiding that which grieves the SPIRIT and thus robs of a SPIRIT-filled life

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