**Revelation Bible Study**

**Chapter 2:1-7**

**The Church at Ephesus**

**Introduction to the 7 Churches:**

In several ways, chapter 1 is interconnected and introductory to the seven letters sent to the churches in the province of Asia in chapters 2 and 3.

First, Jesus addresses John at Patmos and tells him twice in chapter 1 to write letters to the seven churches on the mainland (1:11, 19). Second, in chapter 1, Jesus reveals himself in a vision as priest and judge over the entire world, who is the first and the last, the living one, who suffered death but is alive, and who has ultimate authority over Death and Hades. Third, in every letter to the churches in chapters 2 and 3, he emphasizes his authority to evaluate and judge each church by referring to one aspect of himself from that vision. Thus, each of the 7 churches is reminded of a different aspect of Jesus’ character, power, and authority (see chart).

Church Text Appearance of Jesus from Chapter 1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Ephesus 2:1 Seven stars in right hand; walks among the seven golden lampstands (1:13, 16)

Smyrna 2:8 First and Last, who died and came to life again (1:17-18)

Pergamum 2:12 The sharp two-edged sword (1:16)

Thyatira 2:18 Eyes as a flame of fire; feet as burnished bronze (1:14-15)

Sardis 3:1 Seven spirits and seven stars (1:4, 16)

Philadelphia 3:7 Holding the keys of death and hades (1:18)

Laodicea 3:14 Faithful witness (1:5)

Fourth, throughout the book of Revelation, God is vindicating the deity, person, worth, and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. He begins in chapter 1 by telling us that although his deity, kingship, and authority was misunderstood at his first coming, Jesus sovereignty and authority as Lord of the universe will not be missed at his second coming (1:7). And that sovereignty and authority carries over into his evaluation and judgment of the church as it is represented by 7 churches of Asia in chapters 2 and 3.

Also, on another note, these seven letters reveal a parallelism that is unique. Some are longer and others shorter, but each letter generally, consists of seven parts:

1. The address to each of the seven churches in Asia Minor

2. An aspect of the Lord’s appearance to John at Patmos (1:12-16)

3. An evaluation of the spiritual health of the individual church

4. Words of praise or rebuke

5. Words of exhortation

6. Promises to the overcomer

7. A command to hear what the Spirit says to the churches

The first three churches (Ephesus 2:7; Smyrna 2:11; and Pergamum 2:17) close the individual letters with promises. The last four (Thyatira 2:29; Sardis 3:6; Philadelphia 3:13; and Laodicea 3:22) conclude with a command to listen attentively to what the Spirit says to the churches. Jesus commends and rebukes four congregations: Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis. He praises two: Smyrna and Philadelphia. He reprimands one: Laodicea.

Multiple scholars say these seven are representative of the universal church throughout all ages. The seven letters are applicable to every time and place where God’s people gather for worship, fellowship, and evangelism. Although John only addressed 7 churches, it is God’s message for all churches throughout history.

The seven churches faced dangers that were common to all of them. They had to endure opposition from forces outside the church (i.e., “fire” from persecution) and false teaching from movements inside the church (i.e., spiritual deception). They were slandered by Jews (2:9); Jesus’ faithful witness Antipas was killed in the city where Satan lived (2:13); the prophetess Jezebel wanted the followers of Christ to participate in her idolatry, immorality, and indulgence (2:20-25); and, the Nicolaitans introduced false deceptive doctrines (2:2, 6, 15). The temptations to compromise were real, and yielding to them would prove deadly to the believer’s faith. Then there were the allurements to become lax in their Christian conduct and the enticement to rely upon earthly riches (3:1, 17). But Jesus commanded the readers and hearers of these letters to persevere and be faithful to the end and obey and hold on to what they had. If they did, they would have the privilege of sitting with him on his throne (3:21).

**The Church at Ephesus, 2:1-7:** *To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 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 those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars, and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for my name’ s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore, from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

**The city of Ephesus:** The city of Ephesus had a varied history that went back centuries before this letter from John. It was an in-land city founded on the Cayster River in western Asia Minor (Turkey) in the 10 century BC. It was adjacent to the nearby Aegean Sea and its harbor made it a major center of trade and commerce; eventually, though the river dried up making the Ephesian harbor useless. However, throughout the first century after Christ, it remained an important and wealthy center of trade and religious artifacts, and as an administrative center for the Roman government. Its wealth from commerce and religion enabled Ephesus to rebuild the temple of Dianna (Artemis, Gk) destroyed by fire in 3rd century BC, which was considered to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Ephesians also constructed a theater that could seat an estimated 24,000 people. The city, itself, might have contained 200,000 people.

In addition to its temple to Dianna, the Ephesians built a temple to further the imperial religion of Rome. In A.D. 89-90, the city dedicated the temple of the Sebastoi (“venerable ones”, i.e., the family of Vespassian, Titus, and Domitian) and appointed temple wardens for the worship of the emperor. Civil magistrates had authority to force the people to worship the emperor Domitian and utter the statement, “Caesar is Lord”. However, true Christians were unwilling to place Caesar above Christ, saying that “Jesus is Lord” (I Cor 12:3). Thus, they suffered great persecution.

The level of morality among the city’s population was notoriously low. The people were superstitious, lustful, and violent. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who lived in Ephesus, supposedly commented that “the morals of the temple were worse than the morals of beasts, for even promiscuous dogs do not mutilate each other”.

Jewish residents in the city were numerous, influential, and rich. They had established a Jewish community and might even have enjoyed Roman citizenship. They built their own synagogue and had legal protection from Rome to observe their religion, including the keeping of the Sabbath.

When Paul came to Ephesus, the people welcomed the teaching of Christ (Acts 18:19-21); but, in time they rejected it and became hostile to Christianity (Acts 19:23-41). Yet, Paul continued there for 3 years with many converts among both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:17-20). Later, during his 1st Roman imprisonment, Paul sent a letter to Ephesus in 62 AD. After his release, he traveled there where Timothy was the pastor (I Tim 1:2-3). Later, John took up residence there and became well known and influential as its leader. However, during the concluding years of Domitian’s reign, the pressure on the church increased because of emperor worship, with the result that the church was persecuted and John was banished to Patmos.

**I. Christ Knows the Spiritual Condition in the Church at Ephesus, 2:1-4**

A. Christ begins by addressing the pastor of the church, 2:1:

"*To the angel of the church of Ephesus write*"; there is controversy here. Is Christ addressing an angelic messenger or a human messenger? Throughout the book of Revelation, angel (*aggelos*, Gk) is used 76 times almost always to designate a heavenly messenger. However, here, it might refer to a human messenger which could be a reference to the pastor of the church (translated 7 times as a human messenger; Jam 2:25; Luke 7:24, 27: 9:52; Matt 11:10; Mark 1:2, cf. 1:1). The pastor would be addressed since he is responsible for relaying the message to the people. Therefore, he is addressed first but the *whole church* is accountable for obeying the message (1:3).

B. Christ knows the condition of the church and the heart of every person, Revelation 2:1-2: *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 and your labor and your patient endurance and that you cannot bear those who are evil*”.

The description of Christ is that he "*holds the seven stars in his right hand*" and "*walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands*" and that he “*knows their works*”. This description of Christ comes from the previous chapter (1:13, 16). He “holds the seven stars in his right hand” which refers to his sovereignty and authority over the churches. When he “walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”, it *unmistakably* means he is present among his churches. “Know” (*oida*, Greek) is a word that means full knowledge which places strong emphasis on his omniscience. He has detailed information about everything they are doing. Therefore, his message to the church is based upon His full and complete knowledge of them. This description of Jesus emphasizes his presence among the churches along with his divine authority and sovereignty.

It is a warning to all the churches that he is fully aware of their activities and situations. He knows their hardships, shortfalls, but maintains his love and protection for them; he holds them in his hand.

C. Christ first reveals the external condition of the church, Rev 2:2-3: *I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars, and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for my name’s sake and have not become weary.*

2:2 On the outside, the church at Ephesus looked very good. In fact, Christ *commends* their work (*erga*, Gk). “Work” is an *all-inclusive term* and is made up of “labor” (*kopos*, Gk) and “patience” (*hupomone*, Gk). The verse should be translated, “I know your work, *even* your labor and your patient endurance”. "Labor" (toil) is physical and mental work; it includes opposing evil men and false teachers. “Patience” refers to their steadfastness in the face of spiritual battles. “Patient endurance” is a better translation as it means to remain under something (e.g., a burden, task, responsibility, hardship). It is used 7 times in the book of Revelation (1:9; 2:2, 3,19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12) and always refers to believers not quitting in the heat of spiritual battle. The Ephesian church abhorred evil and detected false teachers among them (I Thes 5:21). The phrase "cannot bear" (*bastadzo*, Gk) means they did not put up with them. He says, *“And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars”.* “Tested” means they compared the teaching and theology of the so-called apostles with the clear teaching of Scripture (I Thes 5:21). When this was done, the “apostles” were identified as “liars” (*pseudes*, Gk).

2:3 *“And, you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for my name’s sake and have not become weary”.* There is much repetition in these 2 verses. In verse 2, Jesus commended the church for their external deeds, hard work, endurance in trials, detecting false doctrine, and calling the false teachers, liars. Now in verse 3, he summarizes their stance by praising them for their perseverance to endure hardship for his name. These words should be understood as a reference to the disciplinary action the church took with reference to the intruders. They banned them from re-entering the church and set an example for all churches to follow.

D. Next, Christ reveals the internal condition of the church, 2:4: *Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

2:4 The Ephesian church had many external deeds. However, instead of continuing with words of praise, Jesus rebukes and admonishes them. ***This was a shock to them***. In spite of their ceaseless efforts to oppose evil men who entered the church and subverted its members; in spite of tireless perseverance and enduring hardships for the sake of Christ’s name, something was amiss in Ephesus. *Nevertheless* (*alla;* strongest adversative in Greek, often translated as “but”), the Lord had something against the church; it had left its *first love*; literally, "your love, the 1st one, you have left". The word, “love” is *agape*, the deepest, most meaningful word for love in the NT. They no longer were motivated by love for the Lord as they had in the early years of their history (Acts 20:17-38).

The church, now, is not the 1st generation of believers that started the church 40 years earlier and which Paul addressed 10 years later in Acts 20. These people lacked the heart-felt love, devotion, and enthusiasm for the Lord which their parents and grandparents had in the beginning. They ceased to love the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength (Matt 22:34-40).

Some scholars believe that the ‘love” here that was abandoned by the Ephesians was primarily their love for each other. Perhaps, there is some aspect of this here since love for God leads to love of the word, prayer, worship, and fellow Christians. A decrease in our love for God would be reflected in a lack of love for these things including fellow believers.

***However, the emphasis of this love is our love for God.*** “First” is not simply first in time but first in importance. What Christ is saying is that you have left the most *important* love of your life.

It is that love we have for God when we realize our sins are completely forgiven in Christ and that we are *accepted in the beloved*. It is that love for God when we realize that we were chosen from the foundation of the world. It is that love for God when we realize that God sought us and called us to himself. It is that love for God when we realize that we will live forever with him. It is that love for God when we realize that nothing can separate us from the love of God. It is that love for God when we realize that “*Christ ever lives to make intercession for us*”. It is that love for God when we realize that we were freed from the sin nature to walk in newness of life. It is that love for God when we realize that all things work together for good. It is that love for God when we realize that “*his grace is sufficient for us*”. It is that love for God when we realize that Jesus is coming again to raise us up and give us a body like his resurrection body. It is that love for God when we realize that we will be glorified with Christ for eternity, sharing his glory with the Father.

Thus, the Ephesian church is soundly rebuked because although, they had warm, passionate, heart-felt love, devotion, and commitment to Christ, it now has been replaced by mixed feelings for him and by love for the things of the world (Lu 9:23-26; II Tim 4:10). Christ warns them in order to prevent further deterioration of their love, spiritual error, and departure from the faith (I Tim 6:10; I Jo 2:15; Matt 10:37, I Cor 7:34).

E. Note: It is extremely important to realize that no matter how good we look on the outside, it’s what on the inside that counts. If the inside is bad, it *entirely* negates whatever good we possess on the outside. It might even be that we don’t even know the Lord. Jesus said, “*Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness”* (Matt 7:21-23)*.*

**II. Christ’s Remedy for the Problem at Ephesus, 2:5**

The Lord not only points out their spiritual failure, he also tells them how to correct it. After severely criticizing their present spiritual condition, he commands them to restore *themselves* to their former position. He says, “*Remember therefore, from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works”.* Three exhortations are given to correct the situation: “Remember … repent … do the first works ..."

A. 2:5a *Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen.* The first thing they must do to restore their love for the Lord is to remember the place of departure. The verb is in the present tense and means “to keep on remembering” (they must continually remember “from where they have fallen” and go back to it). They must recall the faith and love of their spiritual fathers in the church, and admit that they have changed for the *worse*. I.e., they have drifted away from it. They must admit that their zeal and enthusiasm for Jesus Christ has greatly decreased compared to their spiritual fathers! They must realize they have fallen from their former height and lost their beautiful standing before the Lord (this is really sad). Their lackluster love for God has sadly caused them to forfeit their place of prominence in the eyes of God. KEY: The Lord knows the extent of our love for him. “From where you have fallen” is in the perfect tense (i.e., a past action with continuing results up to the present) and indicates that considerable time had passed since the decline began. God is very patient with us. **Their love for the Lord slowly drifted away. And the truly sad thing is that it had gone unrecognized.** Key: where are we in our love for the Lord?

B.2:5b *Repent (metanoew);* means a "change of mind or direction". It is in an aorist imperative tense, meaning a one-time action is necessary. They must, *once and for all*, in a quick and decisive way (Thomas 143), change their attitude toward Christ and resume their previous fervent love and devotion to him (Romans 12:1-2). **KEY: The use of the word “repent” should not be minimized: it means that *lack of fervent love for God is sin!***

C.2:5c *Do the first works;* the emphasis does not fall on the word “works”, but on the word “first”. KEY; Christis notemphasizing “works”, *per se*, but works *generated by love* for him. When they were first saved, their works were generated by heart felt devotion and sincere love and enthusiasm for Christ. Christ was very real to them and was the center of their lives. This was reflected in sincere and earnest reading and study of God’s word, prayer, worship, serving, and encouraging other believers. They were genuinely devoted to Christ in all these areas and enthusiastically helped and stood with one another (Heb 10:24-25, 32-36).

Now, however, sincere and earnest study, prayer, worship, and service had fallen off. They were doing these good works less and less often, and what they were doing, they did out of obligation and duty, because it was expected of them and, not out of genuine fervent love for Christ. Whenever they did something, they “were going through the motions”. They had grown cold spiritually and this was ***intolerable*** with the Lord! The issue was not so much what they were doing but the reason behind it. Their reason was no longer love for Christ, but obligation. KEY: they must repent and do a complete, 180 degree turn-around in their attitude. It would not necessarily require doing different things, but a change in their reason for doing them.

*Do the first works* means to do what you used to do at “first”, *out of love* for Christ, not because “you have to”. It means the same love, devotion, and enthusiasm in our hearts for Christ that we had at “first”, i.e., love and affection that is *revealed* by sincere reading and study and obedience to scripture, prayer, worship, and sacrificial service to him and others.

**III.Christ’s Warning if the Church does not Repent, Rev 2:5d**

*Or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand, unless you repent.*

A.Christ warns that if they do not change and repent, he will *retaliate* against them. *I* *will come* is very emphatic in the original language and its interpretation is controversial. Some relay it to a special “coming in judgment” against the Ephesian church alone (but he doesn’t leave heaven); or, to Christ’s actual end-time second coming at the Day of the Lord (Thomas 143). The former is supported by being more applicable to the judgment of a single church’s disobedience than to the judgment of that church at the second coming of Christ (Thomas 143). Coming “quickly” in special judgment against the Ephesian church means either Christ’s *immediate* judgment or the *certainty* of his judgment. In other words, if they don’t repent, Christ will “come” immediately to judge; or, he will certainly “come” to judge them at some unknown future time. It is either a threat to “come” immediately and judge the Ephesian church (but remember he doesn’t leave heaven); or, it refers to the certainty of his judgment at some indefinite future time. Either way, it is a certain judgment.

However, there are many arguments that this refers to Christ’s Parousia at the end of the age. Reasons for this include the following (Thomas 144):

1. It is more applicable to the broader context of the book of Revelation

2. If it is a local or preliminary coming, it bears little relationship to the theme of the book (1:7) and the apocalyptic portion (4:1-22:5)

3. Understanding this as Christ’s second coming harmonizes well with the use of *erchomai* (Gk; coming) elsewhere in the book. A special “coming” (where Christ doesn’t leave heaven) to judge the church doesn’t harmonize well with the use of *erchomai* for his second coming elsewhere in the book (1:7; [2:16]; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20).

4. This could be the abandoning of the church’s love for Christ at the end of the age (which is one of the signs prior to the second coming; compare 2:4 with Matt 24:12).

In conclusion, although the timing of this threat of Christ’s “coming” is not entirely clear, exegetically, connecting it with his actual second coming fits better with the overall theme of the book and the use of *erchomai.* However, a special “coming” in judgment seems to fit the context better than the actual second coming to judge one disobedient church. Also, how could Christ’s second coming be dependent upon the disobedience and lack of repentance of one church along with two others (Pergamum, 2:16; and Sardis, 3:3)? It seems unlikely that Christ’s *parousia* would be dependent upon three independent churches’ refusal to repent of sin.

B. In the immediate context of 2:1-7, it means if the Ephesian church fails to respond to Jesus’ *repeated* call to repentance, the Lord will retaliate against it. Jesus will “come” in judgment and the Ephesian church will be severely punished. Jesus threatened to remove their lampstand from its place. This means that the congregation will experience a *complete* “spiritual blackout”. Christ will either allow it to continue to slowly deteriorate, losing its light entirely and testimony and usefulness to him over time; or, he will somehow come suddenly and cause it to cease being a church all together.

C. KEY: Whether a church is allowed to slowly die over time; or, the Lord suddenly ends its existence, in the eyes of the Lord, a church ceases to be useful to him and a blessing to him when it no longer serves him out of genuine heart-felt love, devotion, and commitment.

D. History tells us that initially, this letter appears to have been taken seriously by the Ephesian church. Ten years after John wrote this letter, Ignatius wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus (*Ephesians* by Ignatius) in which he praised the church for their endurance and resistance to error. He noted that false teachers from Syria attempted to influence the church but that the Ephesians refused to listen to them. He commended them for being of one mind with the apostles in the power of Christ (Thomas 146).

**IV. Christ Reminds Them of Something very Important: Maintain True Doctrine,** **2:6:** *But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

A. Christ says in effect, not everything is lost yet; *this you have* (in your favor) *that you hate the deeds (practices) of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.* While sincere, heart-felt love for the Lord is the normal response to him, love for the Lord also carries along with it a *corresponding* hatred for what is wrong.

B. Nothing is known for certain about the Nicolaitans except for what is stated in Revelation. Note that the hatred is against the *works* of the Nicolaitans and not against the persons. Jesus hates sin but extends his love and forgiveness toward the sinner. While sin is an affront to his holiness, Jesus’ mission is to bring sinners to repentance. Ours should be, too.

C. Who were the Nicolaitans? Several opinions exist and they are all conjectural.

First, in the early church Irenaeus (disciple of Polycarp, who was discipled by John) taught that the Nicolaitans were followers of Nicholas, who was appointed as a deacon in Acts 6:5. He wrote that Nicholas turned out to be a false believer who became an apostate; and, because of his fame as a deacon, he was able to infiltrate and mislead churches. Many others support this view including Tertullian, Hippolytus, Jerome, Augustine, and Eusebius (Thomas 148). And like Balaam and Jezebel, he led the people into immorality and idolatry associated with eating sacrifices offered to idols (2:14-15, 20). Clement of Alexander said that the Nicolaitans “abandoned themselves to pleasure” and led lives of “self-indulgence”. Their teaching perverted grace and replaced liberty with license.

Second, some see these people connected to the gnostics, who adopted the way of Nicholas, offering sacrifices to idols and immorality while emphasizing superior knowledge as the way to God.

Third, others see the Nicolaitans as a hierarchy of leaders within the church. This view comes from the meaning of the name “Nicolaitans”. It means "to conquer the people" (*nikao,* to conquer; and *laos,* people) and could be a forerunner to the idea of a church hierarchy, e.g., something like priests in the R.C.C., who rule over the people (Thomas 148)

Most scholars accept the view of the early church fathers as described above by Irenaeus and Clement of Alexander. However, whoever the Nicolaitans were, true love for God requires not only a heart-felt love for God, but also, a hatred of sin (Ps 139:21-22).

**V. Christ’s Reward for his True Church, 2:7**

To every genuine believer**,** Christ promises the reward of eternal life in the paradise of God. In 2:7 He says, *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

A. This first phrase, *He who has an ear, let him hear* comes from the often repeated and familiar saying of Jesus (Matt 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35). In Revelation, the saying is expanded to include the additional phrase, *what the Spirit says to the churches,* and it is repeated in each of the seven letters to the churches, 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22. The first phrase refers to the *God given* capability of a person to hear along with an accompanying willingness to listen. The second part is a command to listen attentively and obediently to the word of God given by the Holy Spirit.

B. Very importantly, the message to the church at Ephesus is directed not only to the congregation in Ephesus, but to all *churches*. The message is intended for churches in all locations and all ages, even up to the time of the 2nd coming of Christ. KEY: Because of its universal application for all churches in all ages, it is best to understand its prophetic implications as a near-far prophecy, with application first for the church at Ephesus; and secondly, for all the churches up to the time of the Parousia of Christ at the end of the age. This means that churches and individuals in existence right up to the time of our Lord’s return are subject to the same rebuke, warning, and judgment described in this letter if they (we) should leave their (our) first love *and not repent*.

C. *To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.* The promise *to eat from the tree of life* as well as all the promises to all the churches of Revelation (2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) are given *to him who overcomes.* The phrase “*him who overcomes*” (Gk *nikaw,* cf. “Nike”) is a present tense participle emphasizing continuous action. It is a reminder of the continuous battle all believers face throughout their spiritual lives, as well as the continuous victory that is ours through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 4:14-16; 13:5b). The term does not refer to some special class of believers who have attained to a higher level of the Christian life, but applies to *all* Christians. The apostle John applied the term to all true believers in the letter of I John. He wrote, *Whoever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. And who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*  All true believers, thus, are overcomers, who by God’s grace and power have overcome the devil and the evil world system (Eph 6:10-18).

D. Here is the promised reward: Christ promises the overcomers at Ephesus that they will *eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.* The *tree of life* is first referred to in Genesis 2:9, where it stood in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve sinned, God drove them out of the Garden and placed an angel with a flaming sword there to guard the tree (Genesis 2:9; 3:22, 24). By guarding that tree, God prevented our ancestors from eating the fruit of the tree of life and thus living eternally in the unredeemable state in which the fallen angels exist.

The redemption of his people, which Jesus Christ will bring to completion at his 2nd coming, includes the promise that *everyone* who overcomes will eat from the tree of life in paradise (Rev 22:2, 14, 19). The tree of life, probably, symbolizes (?) eternal life beginning after the Parousia of our Lord in the Millennial Kingdom. NOTE: The timing of the tree of life is controversial. See exegesis at chapter 22.

E. Now, what is the *paradise of God*? *The paradise of God* simply is Heaven*.* The Greek word for *paradise* (*paradeisos*) occurs three times in Scripture (Luke 23:43; II Cor 12:4; Rev 2:7). When the dying thief asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom, he said   
“Today, you will be with me in paradise” (Lu 23:43). This could only mean heaven. In Genesis, the expression Garden of Eden is translated “Paradise” in the Greek OT. It is derived from an old Persian word that meant a walled park. All this suggests that Paradise is Heaven, where God dwells, and that it is spacious, providing all the things God has promised believers in the life to come (Rev 22:2). It will be a delightful, wonderful place, free from the effects of sin, where we will live eternally in perfect fellowship with God and all believers. Thus, the word “paradise” occurs at the beginning and end of Scripture and describes the blissful life true believers will enjoy with Christ during his earthly Millennial Kingdom and throughout eternity.

F. APPLICATION: The example of the Ephesian church warns us that doctrinal purity and outward service cannot make up for a cold heart. We must carefully heed Solomon’s counsel: *Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it comes the issues of life* (Prov 4:23).