

God's Promises to His People that Overcome



- Part 1: The Church at Ephesus
(Based on the Seven Churches in Revelation)

Statement of Purpose for these Essays

The Lord is impressing upon me that this is the hour of the "forerunner spirit" that is "preparing the way for the second coming of the Lord." Just as John the Baptist, in the "spirit of Elijah," at the first coming of Jesus declared, I believe the Lord is bringing this message forth to prepare the Bride, the Body of Christ, the Church, for Jesus' soon return. Many within the Body of Christ have a "warning alarm" that seems to be within them. It is imploring them to exhort every one of us within the Body of Christ to "Consider their Ways;" to "repent for the Kingdom of Heaven (Jesus' return) is at hand;" to "turn towards and kiss towards" the Lord like never before (return to your first love); to beware of false prophets and prophesy; to beware of seductive, "new" doctrines; etc.

I am not really a "Book of Revelation" guy. I leave the interpretation of most of the Book to "greater minds than me." However, it seems as though the Holy Spirit has guided me to Chapters 2 and 3 concerning the truths of the "warnings" as well as the "promises" that Jesus pronounced over and to the seven churches. I know that there are many interpretations of these scriptures. However, the Lord clearly expressed to me that these scriptures were also referring to people's hearts in these days. They are "warnings" to church leadership as well as to the rest of the Body of Christ.

I believe we are in the hour of "perilous times" for the Body of Christ. I believe that the end time dispensation is "revving up." Behold, He is at the door and HE is knocking. In the two chapters I had mentioned it states seven times, "Let him who has ears, hear and heed what the Spirit is saying to the churches." (Amplified Version) In the Biblical text, when something is mentioned more than once in the same context, it is saying that it is not just doubly or triply important. It is saying that it is "exponentially" important. That means that Jesus is saying to "listen and heed to what the Spirit is saying" - to the 7 power which means -10,000,000 worth of importance.

Revelation 3:19 and 20 states as follows, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." I believe that this is the crux of Jesus' message to the seven churches, the seven types of "hearts" of people, the seven types of leaders or leadership within the Body of Christ. He loves us so much that He will rebuke and chasten us. Jesus desires and will have a Bride that is "spotless and without blemish." There is no changing that no matter how we want to spin it to make us feel better. He tells us to repent for He is "at the door" and He is "knocking." He is speaking to our hearts - the heart of everyone who calls them self a believer. Will we hear His voice? Will we hear the urgency of His heart? Will we "open the door to our hearts" to the possibility that maybe, just maybe, we need to have "ears to hear and heed what the Spirit is saying" - to each of us, personally, as well as corporately.

To all of the churches mentioned, Jesus states promises to those who “overcome.” As we go forward, we will review each church and what the promises are to those who “overcome.” For the purpose of our discussion, we will break down Jesus’ message to each of the churches into the following segments:

- A brief history or description of that particular church location
- The description of Jesus given to that particular church
- A description of what that church did well and was commended for
- A description of what that church did not do well and was chastised for
- The things that Jesus told each church to overcome
- The promise given to those who overcome

“He who is able to hear, let him listen and heed to what the Spirit is Saying”

Seven Churches in Revelation

- **Ephesus – Revelation 2:1-7**
- Smyrna – Revelation 2:8- 11
- Pergamum – Revelation 2:12-17
- Thyatira – Revelation 2:18-29
- Sardis – Revelation 3:1-6
- Philadelphia – Revelation 3:7-13
- Laodicea – Revelation 3:14-22



The Church at Ephesus – Revelation 2:1-7

- **A Little about Ephesus** - Ephesus (Ephesos- Greek - meaning “permitted”) Ephesus was a maritime city of “Asia” (Asia Minor or modern day Turkey). It was the capital of Ionia and under the Romans, a proconsul in Asia, situated on the Icarian Sea between Smyrna and Miletus. The Church in Ephesus was founded by Paul while on his second Missionary journey (Acts 18:19). At the time of the writing of Revelation, the Apostle John was a very old man, yet Ephesus was considered the “seat of authority for the church in that entire region, primarily because John was considered to be the “bishop” over the Church at Ephesus thereby overseeing the other churches in that region. Thus the reason behind the description of Jesus that follows.

- **Description of Jesus** - *“... These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;”*

He is the One who holds the churches and their messengers in His hands. Even though Ephesus was thought to be the “seat of authority” for the churches in that region, it is ultimately Jesus who is the Head over all the Church. He holds the churches, their leaders, and their messengers (apostles and evangelists that they send forth) within His hand. They are under His authority.

- **What that Church did well** - *“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....But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”*

They did not tolerate wickedness and faithfully “tested” those who say they are of Jesus but are not. You do not grow weary and endure patiently. They labored well in bringing forth the Kingdom. They were doing the works of the Kingdom. At first glance it sounds like a thriving, growing church that any pastor today would love to see their church be functioning in. They hated the works of the “Nicolaitans” – the corrupters of the people, just as Jesus “hated them. Twice Jesus mentions His “hatred” of the Nicolaitans. Here, when He is speaking to the Church in Ephesus and again to the Church at Pergamum.

Who are these Nicolaitans? This refers to followers of Nicolas, the Jerusalem deacon (Acts 6:5), who then fell into error. It is not clearly known if it was Nicholas himself who fell into error or if it was his followers after him who were the ones that perpetrated the false doctrine. This was the common view among the early church Fathers. Irenaeus in the second century taught that the Nicolaitans “were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh, especially with immorality.” This became and is known as “*antinomianism*” which teaches grace in such a way that allows people to continue in sin without repenting. This distortion of “liberty in grace” allows for compromise within a sinful culture that seems to be so very prevalent in the Body of Christ, today.

The word “*antinomianism*” comes from two Greek words, *anti*, meaning "against"; and *nomos*, meaning "law." Antinomianism means “against the law.” Theologically, antinomianism is the belief that there are no moral laws that God expects Christians to obey. Antinomianism takes a Biblical teaching to an unbiblical conclusion. The Biblical teaching is that Christians are not required to observe the Old Testament Law as a means of salvation. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He fulfilled the Old Testament Law (Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:23-25; Ephesians 2:15). The unbiblical conclusion that antinomianism takes is that there is no moral law that God expects Christians to obey. Antinomianism is contrary to everything the Bible teaches. God does desire, and He expects, us to live a life of morality, integrity, and love. Jesus Christ freed us from the burdensome commands of the Old Testament Law. However, that is known as a “covenant of grace” and not a license to sin (lasciviousness - Galatians 5:19; 2Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 4:19). Jude 1:4 points directly at this perversion of the truth and false doctrine - *“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

As a Christian we should desire and want to overcome sin and cultivate righteousness, dependent upon the Holy Spirit helping us. The fact that we are graciously freed from the demands of the Old Testament Law should result in the living of our lives in obedience now to the “law of Christ.”

Antinomianism is the erroneous belief that the Gospel frees us from obedience to specific, moral standards. It holds that salvation is given as a gift by faith and therefore, there is no need to repent. This distortion of “liberty in grace” allows for compromise in every way. If we look in the Body of Christ today, we see this false teaching being perpetrated by “well known” leaders and “deceiving even if it were possible, the very elect.” Yet, we see here that Jesus hated this teaching. It is abhorrent to Him. He detests it because it is totally opposite of His truth as found in the Word of God.

The Church at Ephesus was commended by Jesus for not tolerating this false doctrine. They were commended for not tolerating wickedness. They were commended for putting to the “test” those who said they were of Jesus but were not (wolves in sheep’s clothing). Jesus commended them for their steadfastness and endurance through difficult times. He commended them for their labors in bringing forth the Kingdom of God. Would Jesus be able to commend us in this same way, today?

- **What that Church did not do well** - *“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 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.”*

In the midst of all their “doing” and all their hard work in bringing forth the Kingdom and doing battle against the infiltration of false doctrines, they forgot about the most important thing to the heart of God the Father and to Jesus. They lost their passion for true intimate relationship with their “first love.” This is the most important thing to the heart of God - intimate relationship. It is at the very core of the prayer that Jesus prayed in John 17: 21, 23 - *“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.... I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”*

Listen to the severity of the result to this “loss of passion for relationship and intimacy with the Lord.” Jesus states that this type of church or individual has “fallen.” He tells them to “repent.” He tells them that if they don’t repent, He will remove them from their place. Wow!!! That is a stern warning and alarm to His Body. It would seem that this warning by Jesus would put to rest that inordinate “liberty in grace” teaching that is infiltrating the Body of Christ. If everything was covered by His grace (which in its proper understanding, is) and we don’t need to worry about sin (which again in its proper understanding, we don’t) - then why is there a need to repent? We need to repent (turn away from those things that we have been hindering us in our relationship with the “Lover of our soul”) and turn towards and back to intimacy and “oneness” with our God through a life of true holiness, purity and integrity.

- **What to Overcome** - *“To him that overcometh...”*

Obviously, Jesus was chastising them for losing their passion for true, intimate relationship with the Father and with Jesus and leaving their first love (their first priority in the eyes of God) because of the things they were doing well for the Kingdom. We must overcome and triumph over, the “church gravity” syndrome of getting caught up in doing the works of the Kingdom, of being so steadfast in battle against the enemy that we neglect and lose the first priority to the Father and Jesus - intimacy with our “first” and primary Love of our life. *“He who is able to hear, let him listen and heed to what the Spirit is Saying”*

- **The Promise of Overcoming** - *“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”*

Those that repent and overcome will be a partaker of the Tree of Life - Eternal Life. - Salvation!!

Praise the Lord!!! Isn't that what it is all about? We must check our heart, check our motives and consider our ways. Where is our passion? Where is our passion placed? Are we so busy about the Father's business so much that we are forgetting the Father? Has our ministry, our church or our leaders become our first love? Are we loving and worshipping the Father and Jesus with "reckless abandonment" or are we doing our ministry with "reckless abandonment" and abandoning our love for the Father and Jesus? Has spending time in church and in corporate times of gathering and service superseded our times of personal intimacy and relationship with Him? Have we become a "workaholic for Jesus" in place of being a true lover of Jesus?

*“He who is able to hear, let him listen and heed to what the Spirit is saying,”
- Both, corporately as a Body of Christ and individually as the Bride of Christ.*