

Why Do We leave Our First Love?

Revelation

What Does The Bible Say?

4 This letter is from John to the seven churches in the province of Asia. (Revelation 1:4 NLT)

9 I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God's Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us. I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus. (Revelation 1:9 NLT)

John is on the Island of Patmos for preaching about Jesus.

20 This is the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. (Revelation 1:20 NLT)

Jesus Christ is in John's vision and explains the meaning.

Chapters 2–3 of Revelation address the seven churches John greeted in Chapter 1.

Ephesus (2:1–7)

Smyrna (2:8–11)

Pergamos (2:12–17)

Thyratira (2:18–29)

Sardis (3:1–6)

Philadelphia (3:7–13)

Laodicea (3:14–22)

All seven churches follow a distinct and similar pattern:

a. A characteristic of Christ drawn from Revelation 1 (and other texts)

What Does The Bible Say?

“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands:

(Revelation 3:1 NLT)

20 This is the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. (Revelation 1:20 NLT)

b. A word of commendation and praise if appropriate.

c. Criticism for their sins.

d. A word of correction and warning.

e. A challenge and promise drawn from Revelation 19–22 (and other texts).

2. These were seven historical churches in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) at the end of the first century AD.

3. These churches were in and around Ephesus, the principal city of the province of Asia at that time.

4. These churches were located on a significant postal/travel route and are addressed in a counterclockwise order regarding their location.

5. Each of their messages has a word of wisdom and application for all churches throughout history until Jesus comes again. These seven churches do not represent the seven ages or dispensations of the church (usually seen as the church in the West).

Only two churches did not have Criticism: Smyrna (2:8-11) and Philadelphia (3:7-13).

Story of Polycarp, who was pastor of the Church of Smyrna.

Though its importance was diminishing, Ephesus was a politically, economically, and religiously significant city in the first century. It served as Asia's political center and was dubbed the "Supreme Metropolis of Asia."

Commercially, the major thoroughfares met there, and a significant seaport was still present. However, silt left behind by the Cayster River was accumulating near the harbor's mouth and would eventually cause the city's prominence to fade away.

The city served as the primary location for the worship of the fertility goddess Diana (Roman) or Artemis (Greek). The Diana temple became renowned as one of the "Seven

Wonders of the Ancient World" and a symbol of tremendous national pride.

The temple employed thousands of priests and priestesses, many of whom engaged in religious prostitution.

Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla established the Ephesus church through evangelization (Acts 18:18–19; 19:1–10). Paul spent at least two years working in the city because he thought it was necessary as a gospel outpost (Acts 19:10).

His tenure as bishop was not without incident, and there was a riot over the Diana temple. Paul later met with their elders at Miletus (Acts 20:17–38), and in the early 60s, he addressed one of his prison letters to them.

How Can We Obey?

2 “I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don’t tolerate evil people.

You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars.

(Revelation 2:2 NLT)

Jesus is pleased with our good works.

3 You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.

(Revelation 2:3 NLT)

Jesus is pleased with our dedication.

2 “I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don’t tolerate evil people.

You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars.

6 But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do. (Revelation 2:2 & 2:6 NLT)

Jesus is pleased with our sound doctrine.

4 “But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first! (Revelation 2:4 NLT)

Jesus is honest with us.

What is the love they had abandoned?

(1) their original love for one another; (2) their love for God; (3) their love for the gospel; (4) their love for Christ.

37 Jesus replied, “ ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ 38 This is the first

and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important:

‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Matthew 22:37–39 NLT)

5 Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don’t repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.

(Revelation 2:5 NLT)

Remember from where you have fallen.

But repent and return!

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves

has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Explore:

KEY TRUTHS:

- 1. Faithful Believers Overcome Persecution (Revelation 2:8-10, 12-13; 3:10-12)**
- 2. Faithful Believers Overcome False Teaching (Revelation 2:2, 14-16, 20-24)**
- 3. Faithful Believers Overcome Temptation (Revelation 2:4; 3:1-2, 15- 18)**

HOW IT FITS: Where This Lesson Fits in the Story of the

Bible: John's account of the vision of Revelation was written around the mid 90s AD.

Explore:

The seven churches of Asia were literal, historic churches.

Christ's words to each church were addressed to individual pastors who stood as representatives of the churches. There is a consistent formula for each message: identification of specific strengths (with the exception of the church of Laodicea), weaknesses (except for Smyrna and Philadelphia), instruction, warning, and promise for overcomers. While the church as a whole may have had a particular reputation, each church was made up of individuals. It is the behavior of individuals that is being addressed, as is noted in several of the letters. Churches and individual Christians today can benefit from identifying

similar characteristics, heeding the warnings, and embracing the promises given.

Faithful Believers Overcome Persecution

(Revelation 2:8-10, 12-13; 3:10-12)

Persecution was a common threat for most of the seven churches (Revelation 2:8-10, 12-13; 3:10-12). Each of these cities had prominent local deities that were worshiped. Added to that would be the “imperial cult” that demanded the worship of the Roman emperor. Christians would refuse to worship either of these false gods, and this refusal would not go unnoticed.

Membership in the trade guilds would have required some sort of sacrifice or recognition of the local deity (Acts 19:23-27). The unbelieving Jews were also eager to report Christians to the local officials for any “offense” (Acts 17:5-8).

It is important to recognize there has not been a time in the history of the Church that believers have not faced persecution

(John 15:18-20; 16:33). Even today, in some parts of the world, violent persecution against Christians is a continued threat. For others it may be more accurate to say Christians face opposition in the form of ridicule or discrimination. It is encouraging to understand the same promises given to first century churches are true today: those who are faithful, even to the point of death, will receive an eternal reward in God's presence.

It is interesting to note that of the two churches that had no negative statement from Christ—Smyrna and Philadelphia—the one would suffer an extended period (ten days) of tribulation (Revelation 2:10) while the other would be protected from whatever trial the rest of the world would face (Revelation 3:10). It hardly seems consistent to view the statement in 3:10 as meaning the future church would escape tribulation since the warning in 2:10 was that the church would experience extended tribulation.

What did these warnings mean to the first-century churches? Were the ten days of persecution (2:10) a reference to the ten periods of Roman persecution? Polycarp was the pastor of the church in Smyrna. He was a disciple of the apostle John and became a historic martyr by Roman persecution. You can read more about Polycarp at [bit.ly/who-was- Polycarp](http://bit.ly/who-was-Polycarp) and [bit.ly/ Polycarp-story](http://bit.ly/Polycarp-story).

However one interprets the end times, we have the example of countless believers throughout history that God provides grace and strength to endure persecution, and we have the assurance of God's Word of a crown of life for those who are faithful.

Explore:

The most common crown referred to in Revelation was a mark of honor (Greek *stephanos*: 2:10; 3:11; 4:4, 10; 6:2; 9:7; 12:1; 14:14), not a sign of royalty. This crown was like the Olympic-type wreath made of plants or flowers awarded to athletes or

victorious generals. Those crowns were temporary and would wither just as the strength of the victor would fade over time.

The crown of life, however, is awarded to the faithful and has an eternal quality that doesn't fade away (Revelation 2:10; 1 Peter 5:4).

The diadem (Greek diademata: only used three times in the New Testament: Revelation 12:3; 13:1; 19:12) was a crown of royalty.

Two imposters claimed royalty, the Dragon and the Beast, but both are cast down. There is only one King of Kings and Lord of Lords who is worthy to reign and His kingdom will have no end.

Crown Him with many crowns!

Explore:

Faithful Believers Overcome False Teaching

(Revelation 2:2, 14-16, 20-24)

One of the biggest on-going challenges faced by churches is

false teaching. Scripture provides frequent warnings to be on guard against false teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Jude 1:3-4). The church at Ephesus had been diligent about testing false prophets and opposing false teachings (Revelation 2:2). But Pergamum and Thyatira struggled to maintain a pure faith. Both churches tolerated elements within their congregation that practiced some form of idolatry mixed with immoral behavior (Revelation 2:14-16, 20-24). Even seemingly minor compromises can pollute the church (1 Corinthians 5:6-13).

The teaching of Balaam (Revelation 2:14) is no doubt a reference to the Old Testament prophet who instigated the men of Israel participating in idolatry and committing sexual immorality with the women of Moab (Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16).

We don't know anything definite about the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 15) except they promoted some form of false teaching that was prevalent at the time since Ephesus and Pergamum both had to deal with them. Jezebel (Revelation 2:20)

could have been the actual name of the false prophetess in Thyatira or the name could be a symbolic reference to the wicked queen of Israel (1 Kings 18 and 19). Regardless, this false teacher was promoting sexual immorality and idolatry in the church of Thyatira.

There is a mysterious connection between idolatry and sexual immorality. Scripture identifies idolatry as spiritual adultery (Ezekiel 23:37; Jeremiah 3:6-9; Hosea 4:12-13). The worship of false gods frequently involved sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 10:6-8; 1 Kings 14:23-24). God desires for His people to be pure in their relationship with Him and each other. It is not loving for churches to excuse sin. It is a false teaching to say that immoral sexual behavior is acceptable to God. God designed marriage as a one flesh relationship between one man and one woman for life (Genesis 2:24). Any other type of sexual relationship is sin and is to be repented and forsaken (1

Corinthians 6:9-11). Scripture affirms the necessity for unwavering holiness in doctrine and lifestyle. Anything less is contamination. Jesus will war against those who tolerate false teaching or embrace sinful behavior in His church (Revelation 2:16).

Explore:

Who are the Nicolaitans? Some suggest they were followers of someone named Nicolas, perhaps even the early deacon in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5), although this is merely speculation based on the similarity of the name. They might have become a class of authoritarians or have been influenced by elements of Gnosticism, which incorporated Greek thought that the flesh was evil and the spirit was good so one could indulge the flesh without affecting the spirit. But Scripture refutes such dualistic separation, affirming that both body and spirit are to be holy and

pure (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 Corinthians 6:13, 18).

“There is no information about the Nicolaitans except for what we find in this chapter. It is possible that John used the term symbolically, describing those in general who practice or tolerate idolatrous and immoral behavior in the church.”

“Toleration of these errors endangers the church’s holiness, mission, and future existence.” (Gwyn Pugh, The Randall House Bible Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John and Revelation.)

Explore:

Faithful Believers Overcome Temptation

(Revelation 2:4; 3:1-2, 15-18)

Common temptations were immorality and idolatry, as we have already considered. But in the letters to the churches we also see that some, like Ephesus, had succumbed to the temptation to substitute sound doctrine in place of a heart relationship with Christ; while others, like Sardis, were tempted to live in the past.

Most lamented of all, Laodicea had fallen into the trap of self-sufficiency.

Although the believers at Ephesus received commendation for their doctrinal integrity, their love for Christ and perhaps their love for others suffered (Revelation 2:4). Correct doctrine is important, but Jesus wants more. Jesus taught that the identifying trait of His followers would be their love (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-8; 5:2-3). It is easier to follow a check-list of beliefs and behaviors than to sacrifice oneself to love as Christ loved and gave Himself for others. Yet, that is what Jesus calls us to continue doing.

Previous successes can't sustain the health of the church. The church at Sardis had a good reputation, but Jesus warned that the church was dying. The remedy was to wake up—recognize their dire situation—remember their mission and repent (Revelation 3:1-2).

The church is not a social club or fraternal organization. It is

the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), commissioned to spread the good news of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

The only church in Revelation that is not commended in any way is the church at Laodicea. They thought of themselves as rich and in need of nothing, yet their self-sufficient attitude distressed Christ. All of their material strengths were, in fact, weaknesses (Revelation 3:15-18). Jesus warned of the deceitfulness of riches (Matthew 13:22) and the difficulty of one with riches to enter the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 19:22-24). It's not that riches are evil and poverty is a virtue—both conditions have their temptations. The temptation and deceitfulness of riches is the false belief that the wealthy can depend on their own resources and don't need God. Regardless of material possessions, a church or an individual believer cannot accomplish the work of God without God's help.

The picture of Jesus standing at the door and knocking is often visualized as an invitation to the lost to receive salvation.

However the context of this appeal to hear the voice of Jesus and open the door is addressed to the church (Revelation 3:20). It is a sad situation when Jesus has to request fellowship with His church. Yet He promises to dine with those who are willing to sit at the table with Him. This fellowship meal illustrates the close companionship Jesus desires to have with His church.

Explore:

To Them Who Overcome. Each church is given a promise to those who overcome. These promises may be related to the particular instruction or warnings of the individual churches, or they could be general promises for all faithful believers. Some

of the promises are a bit cryptic, but they all give assurance of eternal reward with Christ in Heaven.

- Eat of the Tree of Life (2:7) – The Tree of Life is reserved for those in God’s presence.

- Not be hurt by the second death (2:11) – The second death is spiritual death, marked by eternal judgment and separation from God.

- Hidden manna, white stone, new name (2:17) — A pot of manna was placed in the ark of the covenant as a reminder of ● ●

- God’s continual provision for His people. A white stone was used for admission or in court as a vote for acquittal, perhaps here symbolizing either access to God’s presence or innocence before God. A new name often signified a new relationship

(Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel).

- Authority over the nations and the morning star (2:26-28) –

The good and faithful servant was given authority over cities in the master's kingdom. The morning star could be a symbol of authority or it could refer to Christ.

- Clothed in white, name in the Book of Life (3:5) – White clothing signified both holiness and victory, both of which applied to those who are in Christ. The Book of Life is the record of the names of the righteous in Christ. Jesus said those who acknowledged Him would be acknowledged before His Father.

- A pillar in the temple of God, name of God (3:12) – A prominent place in the presence of God for all eternity. In

Revelation 14:1, those who had the name of God written on them were the redeemed ones who belonged to God.

- Sit with Jesus on His throne (3:21) – The place of honor prepared by the Father.

Explore:

Christianity is about more than going to church and living a good moral life. Being a Christian is about having a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School teacher or Bible study leader should want to see each of his or her learners enter into this relationship—their eternal destiny depends on it. As you work toward this goal, keep the following in mind:

Following Christ is about more than a mere decision; it is about a lifelong relationship. Jesus called us to make disciples, not

mere decision-makers. Aim for long-term faith, not momentary emotion.

Salvation is a matter of grace, not works. Our works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor do they keep us (Galatians 3:2-6).

Good works are a product of salvation, not a prerequisite to it.

Don't confuse sanctification with salvation. Holiness follows salvation; it doesn't precede it. Don't try to impose "Christian" expectations on men and women who don't know Christ.

- Keep it simple. Being born again is not complicated. Here's a simple way to explain it:

- Acknowledge your sinfulness and your need for a Savior (Romans 3:10, 23).

- Trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sins and in His resurrection (Romans 10:9-10).

Surrender your life to God's transforming power (Romans 12:1-2).

Most of all, remember that your job is to tell the truth in a way others can understand, answer their questions, and give them an opportunity to respond. If you do that faithfully, some will respond and join the band of Christ- followers. When they do, Heaven will rejoice!

Question 1 of 4

What does it mean to have the expectation of the imminent return of Christ? How does this affect the way we live?

Question 2 of 4

How does the book of Revelation contradict the false teachings of the prosperity gospel?

Question 3 of 4

What can we learn from the story of Polycarp?

Question 4 of 4

Why do you think Jesus was just as concerned with doctrine as He was with good works?

