



NEW LIFE

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“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

Vol. 13 No. 37

LORD’S DAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2009

The Letter to the Church in Ephesus

By Dr Dennis E. Johnson, Part 2 of 8 “The Seven Letters of Revelation”

Adapted from TABLETALK from Ligonier Ministries – May 2009

Ephesus was the site of the first congregation that Jesus addressed in the Apocalypse, and the New Testament tells us more about the history of this church than about any of the others. Planted by Paul during a brief visit, this congregation was nurtured by Paul’s co-labourers Pricilla and Aquila, then by the eloquent Apollos (Acts 18:19-28). Paul subsequently returned to Ephesus for an extended (three-year) period of ministry, marked by the victory of Christ’s gospel and Spirit over demonic powers and the entrenched commercial interests surrounding the city’s world-famous temple of Artemis (19:1-41). Later, bidding farewell to the Ephesian elders, Paul summoned them to be vigilant to protect God’s sheep from “fierce wolves” and false shepherds (20:29-30). Writing from prison even later, Paul summoned this church to “unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,” a maturity that would enable them to stand firm against “human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph 4:13-14). The apostle insisted that the church exercise theological discernment: “Let no one deceive you with empty words” (5:6).

Now in His revelation to John, the Lord of the church identifies Himself as the one who “holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands” (Rev 2:1), ruling His churches and indwelling them by His Spirit, as they hold high the gospel’s light in a spiritually benighted world. As He walks among His churches, much of what Jesus sees at Ephesus attracts His approval. The church has taken to heart Paul’s warnings about predators from without and home-grown deceivers from within, so Jesus commends the church for its theological discernment in exposing fraudulent apostles (vs 2) and refusing to tolerate the Nicolaitans, whose behaviour Christ Himself hates (vs 6). The perspectives of the Nicolaitans were no doubt well-known to first-century churches, but today we must be tentative in describing their error. From Jesus’ rebuke to the church at Pergamum (which, unlike the Ephesian church, condoned their teaching) we infer that the Nicolaitans, like Balaam long before, lured God’s people into sexual immorality and idolatrous feasts (vs 14-15).

The Ephesians’ refusal to tolerate the Nicolaitans’ practices may be related to another quality for which Christ commends them: for the sake of Jesus’ name, they had endured suffering, being marginalised in a city where economic life was driven by flourishing religion tourism and banking industries, both associated with the temple of Artemis, and by Ephesus’ celebrity as a centre of occultic arts (see Acts 19:19-41). To withdraw from the pagan celebrations of Ephesus’s trade guilds and its celebrated landmark was to risk financial ruin, but these Christians were “enduring patiently and bearing up for [His] name’s sake” (Rev 2:3).

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Yet Jesus also found a flaw in this “valiant for truth” congregation: “you have abandoned the love you had at first” (vs 4). Some have thought that the “first love” from which Ephesus had fallen was its devotion to Christ Himself. However, unlike the compromising churches at Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea, the Ephesus church could not be faulted for flirting with Christ’s rivals, nor for cooling zeal for their King. It makes better sense to conclude that “the love you had at first,” which had waned, was their love for one another. Paul had taught this church that their health as the body of Christ was dependent on “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). But it seems that the key qualification – “in love” – had been overlooked in their zealous defence of the truth. Their words were faithful to the Word, but they were failing to “do the works [they] did at first” (Rev 2:5).

Keeping a firm grip on both poles – truth and love – is a constant challenge for redeemed sinners who swing like pendulums from one extreme to another. Too often, churches and their leaders either stand for biblical truth vigorously but lovelessly or else that preserve apparent unity and love at the expense of truth. Of course, when the truth of the gospel truly grasps our hearts, love for others must result; and, by the same token, the love that delights Jesus grows only in the rich soil of fidelity to God’s truth. Jesus’ sobering threat to remove the Ephesians’ lampstand – to snuff out this truth-loving congregation’s witness to truth amid its pagan community – shows how seriously He regards His summons to blend doctrinal fidelity to the Bible with sacrificial love for the saints.

Yet His last word is not a threat but promise. Speaking not just to one church but to all, He makes a promise to “the one who conquers.” Thus, to “conquer” the Evil One is to combine commitment to Christ’s truth with fervent love for His family. To such conquerors the stricken but conquering Seed of the woman will open God’s paradise, giving fruit from the tree of life to those who speak truth in love (2:7).

The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

*By Dr Paul D. Gardner, Part 3 of 8 “The Seven Letters of Revelation”
Adapted from TABLETALK from Ligonier Ministries – May 2009*

How wonderful it would be if our church received an encouraging letter from Jesus, especially if it contained no criticism. Jesus has no censure for the church in Smyrna but reveals His deep compassion for a people who are faithful to the Lord and suffering persecution as a result.

It is difficult for many of us to imagine what it really is to suffer for the Lord. Yet this letter indicates all Christians should be willing to suffer for Christ. Suffering may take many forms. As this article was being written, I received an e-mail describing horrific persecutions of Christians in Orissa, India. Throughout all ages when people have stood clearly for the truth of Jesus Christ and have refused to compromise with other religious ideas, persecution of some sort has broken out.

In New Testament times, persecution usually comes from pagans (Acts 19:26-41) or from the Roman authorities (2 Tim 4:16-18). For Smyrna it also emanated from some in the Jewish community, and thus they were called “a synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9, see also 3:9). These strong words are similar to Jesus’ word in John 8:44: “You are of your father the devil [who] has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him.” The rejection of Jesus as Messiah and Lord points to the fact that others follow a pseudo-lord – Satan. Satan always stands behind the rejection of the one, true Lord.

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Here Jesus speaks of knowing the “tribulation” and “poverty” of this church in Smyrna (Rev 2:9). Their poverty may have been linked to their persecution. Perhaps they refused to take part in the religious ceremonies of the trade guilds of the day and so suffered economically. The word tribulation or affliction carries the idea of the persecution of Christians in the last days. Jesus used the same work in Matthew 24:9 to refer to the persecution and death that Christians would face for His sake. In Smyrna it was beginning to happen, and the Lord prepares them for worse to come.

However, from the opening verse the Lord brings encouragement. He writes that He is the one who “died and came to life” (Rev 2:8). The ultimate truth they must grasp is that, since Christ died and was raised, they can be sure that if they die they also will be raised from the dead. This is what Jesus means when He says they will not suffer “the second death” (vs 11). The first death may be at the hands of persecutors, but they will be raised by God and will never face the final judgement, the second death. Indeed, they will be given “the crown of life” (vs 10). Smyrna was famous for its athletic games, so this would have reminded Christians of the “wreath crown” given to the best citizens and athletes. Their persecutors regarded them as the lowest of the low, but soon the Lord will proclaim their victory as they receive life eternal.

But there is more encouragement. Jesus says they are really “rich” (vs 9). This is because, despite appearances to the contrary, they have the treasures of God’s grace and salvation (Col 2:3). There is also a more obscure encouragement here. The persecution will be limited to “ten days” (Rev 2:10). The picture is drawn from Daniel 1. Daniel and his friends are seeking to serve King Nebuchadnezzar and yet not compromise with the pagan world. They refuse to eat the meat served by the court. They then set “ten days” as a time in which to test whether they would survive just as well without meat. Under God’s sovereign protection, they survived the test. While the persecution in Smyrna was probably longer than the ten days (some persecutions lasted years), nevertheless, Daniel and his friends stand as a comfort to all suffering Christians. If in seeking to live without denying the Lord they find themselves persecuted, they will discover that the Lord is sovereign and has imposed a time limit. In fact, the persecution itself will come to be seen as the Lord’s “testing” (Rev 2:10), for His people will remain faithful and the Lord will vindicate them.

The fact that many of us do not suffer much surely indicates that we are much too compromised with our world. We separate our world into the spiritual part and secular part. Christ is Lord of Sunday and when we pray, but not of the rest of the week. This leads to the compromise we so often experience. But the more people integrate their faith into every area of life, then the more they begin to encounter antagonism. I am convinced that if we truly lived as Christ would have us live, then Christians everywhere would experience the attacks of Satan.

This letter speaks to us all and exhorts us to remain faithful, not to fear what we “are about to suffer” and, if God calls, to “be faithful unto death” (vs 10). Let us realise what the cost might be and ask the Lord to help us stand for Him. May the church at Smyrna and the Christians at Orissa be examples to help us break out of our complacency and compromise so that we might seek the crown of life rather than the comforts and acceptance of this world.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	<i>Today: 13/09/2009</i>	<i>Next Week: 20/09/2009</i>	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We like to welcome Ariadne Dagoerag to our worship services last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Joey Seow	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Eld George Chew	Eld George Chew	
<i>Message:</i>	Travelogue to Thyatira	Travelogue to Sardis	
<i>Text:</i>	Revelations 2:18-29	Revelations 3:1-6	
<i>Organist:</i>	Anthony	Grace	
Evening			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Joey Seow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calling of Resident Minister: Continue to pray for the Lord's calling for Rev Timothy Ki to serve as our resident minister. Pray for progress with both his and Mrs Ki's visa application. • DHW Bible Study: Today, we will cover Lesson 17 (Genesis 24). Please spend the upcoming week preparing for Lesson 18 (Genesis 25). • Pray for those who are sick: - Yetta's mum (upcoming chemotherapy sessions), Constance (ankle), Douglas (knee pain), Barbara (Alzheimer's), Prema (thyroid and skin condition), Eld Jack Ford (old age and knees), Margaret (Asthma, Hay fever, lost her voice), Brian (awaiting appointment for wisdom tooth extraction) • Pray for those who are on travel: Sophia (S'pore), Lee-Wei (S'pore), Nicolas (Belgium), Rev & Mrs Ki (Australia) • Pray for those who are still progressing with their studies: Yetta, Hubert, Joshua • Pray for visa applications: Joshua (Student visa) • Please note that there will be parking restrictions in zone KQ for the next few weeks.
<i>Preacher:</i>	Eld George Chew	Eld George Chew	
<i>Message:</i>	Sale of the Vineyard	Search Me	
<i>Text:</i>	1 Kings 21:1-21	Psalm 139	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Grace	Anthony	
Other Duties			
	<i>Today: 13/09/2009</i>	<i>Next Week: 20/09/2009</i>	
<i>Ushers</i>	Daniel / Yetta	John / Evelyn	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	No Sunday School	No Sunday School	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Sharon	Jonathan	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>PA Crew:</i>	John	Joshua	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 18 Sept	7:30pm	Young Adults Fellowship: No YAF	
Sat 19 Sept	4:00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by John	
<u>Worship Service Collections</u>			
Offering:	30/08/09 - £129.00 06/09/09 - £1064.16	Lunch: 30/08/09 - £21.00 06/09/09 - £31.50	
	Love Gift: 16/08/09 - £200.00		
<h2 style="margin: 0;"><u>Our Father's House</u></h2>			
<i>Adapted from "In Green Pastures" by J.R. Miller, D.D.</i>			
We are in the Father's house in this world, though not in the best room of it, because sin has marred everything here. Still we are in the Father's house. His care is over us continually. His love pours its brightness all about us. His hand provides for our wants. Let us not think meanly of earth, for it is part of our Father's house. How near it brings heaven to us to think of it as but another room in the same house in which we were born and in which we have lived all our years! The life there is not a new life, but is simply the life we begin here continued there, with sin taken out and imperfection and all pain and suffering left for ever behind.			