



Week 1

Revelation 2:1-7

The Big Idea: If we are not careful we can become really good at practicing the Christian religion and fall out of love with the Christian Savior. If we've drifted away from Christ, it's time to run back!

Pre-Group

STUDY: Revelation 2:1-7

Before interacting with this guide, all leaders and group members should study the referenced text using the HEAR Method.

H: Highlight, or take note of, things in the passage that stick out to you as you read.

E: Explain what the passage means by asking simple questions of the text:

- **Why was this written?**
- **To whom was it originally written?**
- **How does it fit with the verses before and after it?**
- **Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?**
- **What is He intending to communicate through this text?**

A: Apply the text to your life. What does God want you to learn from this text?

R: Respond to God in prayer.

Questions for Study and Reflection:

- 1.) Are there times when you go through the motions of the Christian walk but don't feel close to Christ?
- 2.) How are you intentional to make sure you walk close with Christ?



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Major Themes:

1. Religious activity can never take the place of an intentional walk with Christ.
2. If we've drifted away from Christ the way back is to repent of our apathy.

Summary:

The church at Ephesus was the picture of a perfect church from the outside. Surrounded by a hostile culture, moral depravity, and cultural opposition it would have been easy for this church to cave to the surrounding pressure. The church could've accepted the moral drift of the city around them and gave in to the lax sexual standards of the city that was obsessed with the sex cult. The church could've given into the religious syncretism that was rampant in the region and just said that Jesus was one God among many. However, the church stood strong. They pursued purity and stood for truth. The perfect church.

Not so fast. In Revelation 2, Jesus commends the church for just how well they stood against the culture and depravity. He has one problem with the church though. They've drifted away from him. They are good at playing the part of a Christian, but they aren't actually in love with Christ. The church has settled for religious activity over a relationship with Jesus.

I think everyone who has been a Christian for longer than a month knows what this feels like. We believe rightly. We act rightly. However, as we go through life our affections for Jesus just cool off. Before we know it, we look like Christians but we don't even know Christ.

What do we do when we find ourselves in this situation?

Jesus gives us triple command. Remember. Remember who Jesus is. Remember what Jesus has done. Repent. Turn away from a life of going through the motions. Return. Go back to what it was like before when you were on fire for Jesus.



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Group Guide

Introduction

“Prone to wander Lord I feel it”

We all know these words by heart. We’ve probably sung them 1,000 times. We all know that they are true.

Relationships require intentionality. In every relationship, if we settle for going through the motions we will drift apart. The same is true for our walk with Christ. We can settle for religious activity, but if we aren’t intentional we will find ourselves far from Christ.

Opening question: Do you find yourself drifting from Christ sometimes? Why?

Understanding and Discussion

Have someone read: Revelation 2:1-7

Commendation: Jesus commends the church in Ephesus for their right beliefs and right activity.

It’s important for believers to understand that an important part of any church body is their witness to the outside world. The church is not called to assimilate to the world around them, but shine as light in the midst of a dark world.

Question: How should our church be like the church at Ephesus and stand out for purity in truth in the world?



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Concern: Jesus' main concern is that the people of Ephesus drifted far from Him.

Jesus' exact words are that they have left their first love, Him. The point is that the central part of Christianity is not just theological belief or religious activity, but a relationship with Jesus.

Question: Do you sometimes forget that Christianity is about a relationship with Jesus?

Question: What do you do to stay close to Jesus and make sure you aren't drifting?

Correction: Jesus offers correction by calling the believers back to Himself. Remember what Christ has done. Repent and turn away from an apathetic walk with Christ. Return to the way it was before.

Question: How do we return to Jesus if we've drifted?



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Prayer:

Before you pray, go around the group and ask if there are any prayer concerns.

Close your group in prayer by asking for God to draw us close if we've drifted.

Resources

The Teacher's Bible Commentary

I. Life Among Christ's People (Rev. 2:1–3:22)

The passage.—Each of the seven letters was to a “real, live church.” Each letter showed detailed knowledge of the life of the city. This included economic, social, political, and religious conditions, as well as geography and history.

Each city was the center of a large area. So the letters, taken together, probably show the conditions of Christian life in most of the province.

The letters follow a pattern. Each is addressed to the “angel of the church.”

Each letter is sent from Christ. He has some trait which was stated first in chapter 1. That trait is chosen to fit the life and needs of the church.

Each church is assured, “I know thy works,” then praised for some virtue or blamed for some fault, or both. Smyrna and Philadelphia are praised. Laodicea is blamed. Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis are praised and blamed.

Each letter contains a special promise to “him that overcometh,” the faithful and uncompromising disciple.

Each letter comes to a climax with the challenge for the hearer to listen.

The virtues could be found in any church: endurance and patience (Ephesus), true wealth in Christ (Smyrna), stability in suffering (Pergamos), faithfulness in love and service (Thyatira), personal purity (Sardis), and true loyalty (Philadelphia).

The faults also could be found anywhere, any time: loss of love (Ephesus), compromise with false ideas and immoral conduct (Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis), spiritual deadness (Sardis), indifference and self-sufficiency (Laodicea).

Special points.—Why were there seven churches? Seven is one of several numbers which symbolize completeness. Probably these seven represent all the churches of the province, maybe all churches everywhere. The truths found in the letters surely would apply to all Christians. Some futurist interpreters see these churches as symbols or predictions of future or later periods of Christian history.

Doctrinal and moral compromise probably took two forms. Christians in Pergamos (2:14) and Thyatira (v. 20) compromised with paganism and society at large. They took part in local activities which gave honor to pagan gods and carried on sexual orgies. Those who did such things were following Balaam's counsel (v. 14; cf. Num. 24:14; 25:1–3).



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The Nicolaitanes (2:7, 15) probably believed that the body is totally evil and separate from the spirit. They felt that if one knows God, he is free to do anything with his body; so they practiced and encouraged immoral living.

“He that overcometh” is the term used to describe the true Christian. He is faithful to Christ’s truth, obeys his teachings, and cannot be conquered. This person truly shares in Christ’s victory over the world and its idolatry.

Each church is challenged to hear what the *Spirit* says. This fact is a reminder. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit reveals Christ’s truth to men.

Truth for today.—The believer compromises his loyalty to Christ by doing anything which violates God’s standards for conduct. One such act makes further compromises easier to make. Finally the “Christian” has nothing left worth suffering for, much less worth risking his life.

Consistent resistance to the world’s ways and standards finally becomes a risk of one’s life. Accepting that risk is the meaning of bearing one’s cross.

Coble, W. B. (1972). [Revelation](#). In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The teacher’s Bible commentary* (pp. 808–809). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Reading the New Testament

“You have abandoned the love you had at first”: The letter to the church at Ephesus
Revelation 2:1–7

An important commercial center on the Aegean Sea at the mouth of the Cayster River, Ephesus had become the most prominent city in the province of Asia by John’s day. It had long been the home for the cult of the goddess Artemis, whose temple was hailed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Destroyed by arson in 356 bc, the temple had been rebuilt to a size of 425 feet by 220 feet by 60 feet. It contained 127 marble pillars, 36 of them overlaid with gold and jewels. Ephesus was the third city in Asia to become a provincial center for the emperor cult and boasted a magnificent temple erected to the Flavian emperors (Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian). Paul visited Ephesus briefly near the end of his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19–21) and made it his primary base of teaching on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:1–20:1; cf. Acts 20:17–38).

Jesus identifies himself as the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands (2:1; cf. 1:12, 16). This self-designation, the “mystery” of which he has just explained to John (1:20), constitutes an appropriate opening to the seven letters and serves to anticipate the threat of removing the lampstand in 1:5.

Jesus praises the church for its toil (2:2) and endurance (2:2, 3). He mentions the latter twice, elaborating the second time in terms of bearing up for his name’s sake and not growing weary (2:3). This is probably to be understood within the context of those false teachers whom the Ephesians have successfully countered. That Jesus speaks of “those who call themselves apostles” (2:2) shows that these teachers claimed not only to be Christians but also to have positions of authority within the church (cf. Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29–30). How the Ephesians “tested” these self-proclaimed apostles is not clear, but the



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Ephesians correctly determined these individuals to be “false.” Just why these people are deemed false is also not clear, nor is their connection, if any, with the Nicolaitans (2:6), a group also present at Pergamum (2:15). Their positive reception among at least some of the Christians there suggests that the Nicolaitans, if not claiming to be Christians themselves, at least did not come across as being overtly opposed to the church. Here Jesus speaks merely of their “works,” which both he and the Ephesians “hate” (2:6; cf. Ps 139:21).

The problem with the church at Ephesus is that it has abandoned “the love you had at first” (2:4). The result is that the church has suffered a significant fall and no longer does “the works you did at first” (2:5). The thought is that of Jer 2:2, where the Lord tells Jeremiah to proclaim in Jerusalem: “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness in a land not sown.” The “love you had at first,” therefore, is the initial zeal and commitment that characterizes a relationship. For the church at Ephesus, as for Israel, that initial zeal for God has waned. That is why the situation at Ephesus is so serious. The ability to identify and oppose false teachers is meaningless if it is not matched by a fervent love for God. The only recourse is that the Ephesians “repent” (twice in 2:5) and do the works—unspecified here—they did at first, which demonstrate their love for God (2:5). The significance of repenting or not repenting will be an important theme in the book (cf. 2:16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19; 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11). The threat of the removal of their lampstand (2:5)—i.e., church—is both serious and readily understandable to the inhabitants of a city whose landscape was constantly changing. Ephesus faced the never-ending problem of its harbor silting up, and today the coastline is six miles away from the ruins of first century Ephesus.

The promise to the conqueror is that he will eat of the tree of life, which is in the “paradise” of God (2:7). “Paradise” (*paradeisos*) can simply mean “garden” (e.g., Ecc 2:5), and the source of John’s image is Gen 2:9 (cf. 13:10), which mentions the tree of life amid the “garden” (LXX *paradeisos*: thirteen times in Gen 2–3; cf. *Life of Adam and Eve* 1:1) of Eden. In the LXX “paradise of God” is found four times (Gen 13:10; Ezek 28:13; 31:8, 9). In Gen 3, God expels Adam and Eve from the “garden” lest they eat of the tree of life “and live for ever” (Gen 3:22); he then places cherubim and a flaming sword “to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). In Judaism there developed the notion of a future paradise in which will be planted the tree of life (e.g., *Testament of Levi* 18:10–11; *2 Enoch* 8:3–7; *4 Ezra* 8:52), though sometimes paradise was mentioned without a reference the tree of life (e.g., *1 Enoch* 32:3; *4 Ezra* 7:123; *2 Baruch* 4:3–6; Luke 23:43; *2 Cor* 12:3), and vice versa (e.g., *Apocalypse of Moses* 18:4; *5 Ezra* 2:12; cf. *1 Enoch* 24:4–25:6). In a passage strikingly similar to this passage, *Testament of Levi* 18:10–11 reads, “And he shall open the gates of paradise; he shall remove the sword that has threatened since Adam, and he will grant to the saints to eat of the tree of life.” Overall, it is clear that the tree of life had become an important symbol among some Jews regarding their hope for the future. This is certainly true for John, who will mention the tree of life—but not paradise—again (22:2, 14, 19).

Although this Jewish background is the most natural setting within which to understand the tree of life in paradise, one should also note that a sacred tree was associated with the temple of Artemis in Ephesus. The notion of God’s (rather than Artemis’s) special tree would perhaps have had particular relevance for the Ephesian Christians.

Once again, the use of the present tense to speak of Jesus as “coming” (2:5; RSV “will come”) is striking (cf. 1:7). To be sure, it is followed by a future (“[I will] remove”), but the reader gets the impression that Jesus is in some sense *always* “coming.”



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Trafton, J. L. (2005). [*Reading Revelation: a literary and theological commentary*](#) (Rev. ed., pp. 32–34). Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing.