

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Small Group Bible Study

The Seven Churches (II)

SERIES INTRODUCTION

How would the people of God be tested in the Last Days in which we find our today? What would it take Satan to cause believers to eventually turn their backs on God, and discontinue their Christian race to heaven? Would it be death threat, licentiousness, false teachings, idolatry and unrepentance?

There is no perfect church in all of Christian history. Every church is a mixture of the 'well-done' and the 'be warned'. God's messages to the churches in Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira are relevant and applicable to them and to us as well. What have we done well that bring glory and praise to God? What warnings do we need to take heed so as not to grieve God and incur his judgement?

2 Aug

Your Poverty, Yet You Are Rich

Rev 2:8-11

9 Aug

Where Satan Has His Throne

Rev 2:12-17

16 Aug

Youth Adults Sunday

1 John 3:11-24

23 Aug

He Who Searches Hearts and Minds

Rev 2:18-29

Your Poverty, Yet You Are Rich

REVELATION 2:8-11

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

The name Smyrna means “bitter” and is related to the word myrrh. The city remains a functioning community today called Izmir. Back then, it was a city of 200,000; renowned for its wealth and contribution to the sciences and medicine. It was also a centre of emperor worship, having been granted the right in AD 23 to build the first temple honouring Tiberius. Each citizen is obligated to burn incense and say “Caesar is Lord”, a symbol of political allegiance than religious devotion. Nonetheless, Christians who refused to perform such act, upholding that Christ alone is to be honoured as God, were prejudiced and persecuted. (Extracts from “The Bible Exposition Commentary” by Warren W. Wiersbe; “The Bible Reader Companion” and “The Daily Devotional Commentary” by Lawrence O. Richards)

For Study and Discussion

1. Who is “the First and the Last”, and what does it mean? Cf. Revelation 1:8; 17-18; 22:12, 13.

2. God knows his church and what she is experiencing.
 - a. Affliction (v9) – What does God want his people to do? See also Psalm 34:19-20; 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7.

 - b. Poverty (v9) – Why is the church made ‘poor’ although she is ‘rich’? Consider also 2 Corinthians 6:10; 8:9.

 - c. Fear (v10) – What are they afraid of? See also Daniel 3:16-18; Matthew 10:28; 32, 33.

3. A large group Jewish community also thrived in Smyrna. The Jews, of course, did not have to patronize the imperial cult since their religion was accepted by Rome; but they certainly would not cooperate with the Christian faith. So, from both Jews and Gentiles, the Christians in Smyrna received slander and suffering. (Wiersbe, 1989)
 - a. According to Romans 2:17-29; 9:4, 5, what makes a Jew a Jew?

b. What does John call the Jews in Smyrna? How might they have treated the Christians? Why?
Cf. Rom 2:28; John 8:33, 44; 16:2).

4. What does it mean to have “an ear” to hear (v11; Matt 13:3-15)? Do you have such an ear to hear God’s word and leading?
5. What does it mean and also take to be “an overcomer”? (cf. 2:7, 11; John 16:33; 1 John 5:3-5) Are you an overcomer? What do you need help with to be a stronger overcomer?
6. What reward awaits an overcomer (vv10 & 11)? See 1 Cor 3:14; James 1:12; Rev 20:14.

Discipleship Pointers

Are you a poor Christian but rich in God’s sight? Or vice versa?

[Abstracted from Warren W. Wiersbe, “The Bible Exposition Commentary”, Vol 2., SP Publication, Victor Book: USA (1989), p573.]

There was no word of accusation given to the church of Smyrna! But the Lord did give them a solemn word of admonition, “Don’t be afraid!”

The Lord assured them that He was wary of the devil’s schemes, but He was in complete control of the situation. Some would be imprisoned, others persecuted; but their tribulation would not be long; in the Bible, ten days signifies “a brief time”. The importance thing is to be faithful, standing true to the Lord Jesus Christ unwaveringly - no matter what the government might threaten to do.

The “crown of life” is awarded to him who stood the test under trials, for God has promised to those who love him (James 1:12). The Lord has assured His people that there was nothing to fear, for they had trusted Him, they were overcomer - victors in the race of faith (Heb. 12:1-3). Even if they were martyred, they would be ushered into glory, wearing crowns! They would never face the awful judgement of the second death, which is the lake of fire (Rev 20:14; 21:8).

It costs to be a dedicated Christian, in some places more than others. As the end-time pressures increase, persecution will also increase; and God’s people need to be ready (1 Peter 4:12,13). The world may call us “poor Christians,” but in God’s sight we are rich.

Family/Group Moments

- Are you rich in God’s sight or man’s sight?
- If there is one thing that would cause you to stumble and fall out of the race of faith, what would that be? What do you need to do about it in order to stay in the race till the end?
- Take time to pray for suffering churches around the world, especially those in Syria and Iraq that under tremendous pressure to keep faith.

Where Satan Has His Throne

REVELATION 2:12-17

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Introduction

Pergamum was a major Roman city of Asia Minor. It was the Roman capital for the region where there were 3 temples for the worship of the Emperor – “the place where Satan has his throne” (2:13). It was also a major worship location for the Greek gods. Pergamum had major temples to Zeus, Athena and Asklepios (the Greek serpent god - The god of healing - a major centre of healing) It was the centre of parchment production; the English word parchment is a corruption of Pergamum. Parchment was expensive, so Pergamum had money.

For Study and Discussion

1. How does Christ describe himself? (v12; Rev 1:16) What does he mean by this?
(Heb 4:12; Acts 2:37; Hos 6:5; Rev 2:16; 19:15)

2. What did Christ commend the Pergamum church for? (v13)

3. The church at Pergamum had 2 related problems. People were following:
 - a. The teachings of Balaam - What was this teaching? (v14; Num 31:15-16; 2 Peter 2:14-15; Jude 10-13)

 - b. The teachings of Nicolaitans (v15; Rev 2:6 - The Church at Ephesus were troubled by them as well. But unlike Pergamum who tolerated, Ephesus hated them. Refer to 26 July 2015 Bible Study - Question 5). What does Jesus think of them?

4. What did Christ tell the church to do? (v16) Who is Christ telling to take action - the church or those who follow these teachings or to both? What will happen if they do nothing?

5. To those who listen to the spirit and to those who overcomes (v17):
 - a. Who are these people?

 - b. There will be the two rewards:
 - i. Hidden Manna - What is this? (John 6:48-51; Heb 9:4) - Consider what manna is and compare it to what they are giving up in Rev 2:14.

 - ii. White stone - What is written on it? What is special about this name? What does this mean? (Isa 62:2; 65:15) Who also has a special name? (Rev 19:12,13,16)

Discipleship Pointers

- Christ is Lord. He controls the sharp sword which is the word of God - able to penetrate to the deepest parts of our body, soul and spirit. Let us take heed of his warnings and action before he come to us and wage war with us to deal with it.
- There is much persecution of the churches in the world today. Praise God that we live in a place where we can worship him. But this may not last forever. If persecution should come upon us, would we stay true to the Jesus? This is something we cannot really answer until it happens. But we must be prepared for it.

How can we stay true to God?

- We need to grow in the knowledge of our faith so as not to be swayed by false/bad teachings
- We need to grow in trust of God who demolishes falsehood with truth, and overcomes the wicked with righteousness.
- We need to rely on the God's promises and the hope of salvation in battling the wickedness that seeks to stumble us.

Family/Group Moment

- Do we have false teachings in the church?
- Do we know if we have false teachings in our congregation?
- Having a firm foundation in the Christian faith as a church would allow us to identify those who come into our midst to spread false teachings and to protect our congregation from their influences. Engage them, expose them, and exclude them should they continue in spreading false teachings.

He Who Searches Hearts and Minds

REVELATION 2:18-29

GENERAL SURVEY

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Introduction

Historically, during the first century, Thyatira was a politically and culturally marginalized city, finding its identity in its economic strength, with guilds (professional societies) dealing in metals and fabric (Acts 16:14 – Lydia was from Thyatira, a dealer in purple cloth). Guilds have patron deities which feature significantly in festivities regularly held to celebrate economic success. This week's passage looks at the Thyatira church's inclination to compromise and to tolerate ungodly teachings and practices, all in the name of economic progress. Does this sound somewhat familiar or contemporary?

For Study and Discussion

1. Each of the letters to the seven churches starts with a description of Christ (Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). How does the description of Christ in verse 18 shape the rest of the letter to the Christians at Thyatira? (cf. Revelation 1:14-18 - take time to read and re-read this passage, especially verse 18)
2. What characteristics of the church in Thyatira are known and commended by Christ? (v19; cf. Rev 2:5 – compare with situation in Ephesus). Do any of such characteristics describe ORPC? Why or why not?
3. There is a problem with the church in Thyatira (vv20-23; cf. Rev 2:2b – compare situation in Ephesus)
 - a. What is the problem?
 - b. What does Christ predict for the prophetess, her lovers and her children? Why?
 - c. What sins do we tolerate in our church? In our lives?

4. There are some in Thyatira who do not hold to the false teaching and sinful practices prevalent at that time.
 - a. What can and must such people do? (vv25-26a)

 - b. What lessons can we learn to apply to our present days? For example, how do we respond to someone who says, “As long as he really loves him (another man), it is be alright for them to be together. After all, God is love, right?” There are many other real issues that demand our right responses according to God’s word.

 - c. To what extent would we be responsible for those in church who do not (or struggle to) hold on and persevere in sound teachings and practices?

5. Christ promises future rewards to those who overcome and do his will to the end.
 - a. What are these rewards? (vv27-28) What do you think they really mean? (Rev 1:6, 5:10, 20:6, 22:5; Psalm 2:9; 2 Peter 1:19; Rev 22:16)

 - b. How do future rewards shape your present life, especially if those future rewards may appear to be “far off”? How does the way we live and organise our days on earth reflect an eternal outlook?

Discipleship Pointers

- Our whole life outlook must start with and be based on who Jesus Christ is and the Gospel. He is the Living One; He was dead, and behold He is alive for ever and ever! (Rev 1:18)
- In the light of Christ and the Gospel, he calls us to hold on, overcome and do his will until he comes again.
- Standing against false teachings and practices; persevering in godliness and good deeds that protect faith and promote hope in Christ.

Family/Group Moments

- In this year of SG50, pray for Singapore that we do not become like Thyatira, sacrificing all for the sake of economic and monetary gains.
- Pray that we will resolve to have a zero-tolerance towards sin in our personal lives. Where we see sin in others’ lives, may God give us grace, wisdom and humility to know how to deal with it.
- Look out spiritually for one another. Pray for one another, that we will not just live for the moment, but always keep faith in the Lord and maintain an eternal outlook.