

## STUDY GUIDE

### GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

REVELATION

THE DEATH OF A LOCAL CHURCH

REVELATION 2:1-7

05/08/2017

#### MAIN POINT

A church can work hard, endure well and maintain sound doctrine, but if it lacks love, its platform will be removed.

#### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What did you think about the sermon? What thoughts stood out to you?**

**Can someone summarize the sermon?**

**Do you remember when you first gave your life to Jesus? What do you remember about it?**

#### APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Jesus praised the Ephesian church for working hard. How have the people at Grace worked hard? How might Jesus praise this church?**

**How important is doctrine? How important is it to fight for good doctrine in the church? Where do we draw lines and where do we give?**

**Jim made the contrast between liberal and bunker churches. Have you ever been apart of either? Do you think Grace is in danger of becoming either?**

**Jim said that a sign of a declining church is a lack of messiness. Do you agree? How have you seen 'good messiness' in a church?**

**Have you ever felt like you lost the love you had a first? Why did you feel that way?**

**In what ways have you lost your first love for Christ? How has that loss impacted your relationship with Him? Your other relationships? Your day-to-day life?**

**What changes are needed in your to help you better love Christ and others?**

## PRAY

Lead your group in prayer, thanking God for His work on the cross that made a personal relationship with Him possible. Pray that this week, God will help us pursue a passionate relationship with Jesus above all.

## COMMENTARY

### REVELATION 2:1-7

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2:1. Each of the seven letters is addressed to the angel of the church. Revelation 1:20 first mentions these angels, which are the seven “stars” in Jesus’ hand in 1:16. The Greek word *angelos* is often translated “messenger”—whether heavenly or earthly. This sense is surely in mind here. Each letter traces the following route: Jesus > John > messenger > church. Who were these messengers? The best suggestion is that they were pastors. The responsibility of pastors is to “shepherd the flock” entrusted to their care. What could be more pastoral than to convey safely a direct message from Christ, the great Shepherd?

The risen Lord emphasizes to the Ephesian Christians the characteristic that He holds the seven stars and walks among the seven golden lampstands. This is based on the portrait of Jesus in chapter 1—as is the particular characteristic of Christ noted at the beginning of several of the other letters. In this instance, however, the characteristic is strengthened. In Revelation 1:13 Jesus was simply among the lampstands (churches). Now He is walking among them, observing their deeds and their motives. Because He has been observing, He can both compliment and criticize.

2:2-3. The compliment section in each of the seven letters begins with I know. Jesus knows the facts about each of the congregations. The Christians of Ephesus were always busy. They received a triple commendation: deeds, hard work and perseverance. The apostle Paul praised the Thessalonian Christians for exactly these same virtues (1 Thess. 1:3). Deeds is the more general term. Deeds are expressed actively through hard work or passively through putting up with hardship.

The last sentence of verse 2 explains one aspect of the hard work of these believers: they had ejected evildoers from their church, and they had tested and rejected some false apostles. We do not know who these “apostles” were, but they claimed a great deal of authority for themselves. They were probably from a local sect called “Nicolaitans” that flourished in Ephesus as well as Pergamum (see vv. 6, 15). First John 4:1-3 describes a test for discerning false prophets. In verse 3 Jesus explains the perseverance of the Ephesians: they have endured hardships for My name, and have not grown weary. From their earliest days as a church, these Christians had put up with hostility from those who worshiped other gods (Acts 19:23-41). They had been vigilant over the years in all the persecutions that came their way.

2:4. In their pursuit of truth and their patience in persecution, these Christians had allowed a tragic flaw to infect their fellowship. Christ’s criticism surely stung: You have forsaken your first love. Some interpreters think this refers to the love (Greek *agapé*) they had for Christ when they were new converts. In the context, however, it refers mainly to their love for one another which Christ had said was the hallmark for His disciples (John 13:35). In rooting out error and expelling false teachers, they had grown suspicious of one another. Their good deeds were now motivated by duty rather than love.

2:5-6. Christ’s command to this loveless congregation was a three-pronged remedy. First, they must remember the days of their first love. They were not to live in the past, but to recall past greatness. Some no doubt resented the notion that they had fallen, but Christ considered loss of proper motive in the Christian life to be serious sin indeed. Second, they must repent of their loveless attitudes toward others. Third, they must return to the things you did at first, that is, works motivated by love for others.

This command is accompanied by a serious warning of the consequences the church faced if it did not repent: I will remove your lampstand. Although Christ has promised to build His church worldwide (Matt. 16:18), He guarantees

permanence to no individual congregation. A loveless church is no longer truly a church, and Christ has the right to extinguish such a congregation. Tragically, the Ephesian church ultimately succumbed, and neither the city nor the church exists today.

Verse 6 seems out of place here as a further compliment to these Christians. Logically it belongs after verse 3. Both the Ephesians and Christ rightly hate the practices of the Nicolaitans. Except for the two references to them in Revelation 2, these evil people are unknown in Scripture.

2:7. The commitment Christ makes at the end of each of the seven letters always includes three elements: the one who overcomes is praised; he who has an ear is addressed; and the message is commended as one that the Spirit says to the churches. To overcome is more literally “to conquer,” a reminder that the original recipients of Revelation were in spiritual combat. Such overcoming is defined in John’s first epistle: “For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:4-5).

The one “who has an ear” is the church member who both hears and heeds the message as it is read in the congregation. This reference by the risen Jesus is similar to the warning of the earthly Jesus concerning the importance of paying attention to His parables (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35). Whether originating from Galilee or glory, Jesus’ teachings are so important that His followers must “have an ear.” In the Book of Revelation, these teachings are further noted as communicated from the Spirit to the churches. The word of Jesus is the word of the Spirit. The Spirit is a distinct Person from Christ. The inspired words spoken objectively by the Son of God will be communicated to the members of the churches by the subjective personal illumination of the Spirit of God.

Christ’s commitment to the faithful believers in Ephesus—and to all faithful believers—who heed the message is that they will eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. To eat from the Tree of Life symbolizes eternal life with God. Paradise is a rare New Testament synonym for heaven (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7), borrowed from a Persian word for “garden.”