

While standing before John, the Lord Jesus Christ told him to: Write 1. the things which thou hast seen, and 2. the things which are, and 3. the things which shall be hereafter;

Then He explained **the things which John had seen:** ²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

Now He moves on to the second division, **the things which are:** the time of the Church on Earth. Soon, John will begin recording the things which shall be hereafter: the 7-year Tribulation, on Earth, after the Church is removed in the Rapture.

Rev. 2 verse 1: ' Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;'

We will see that at the beginning of each of these 7 letters to 7 specific churches of that time, Jesus begins by referring back to one of the descriptors of Himself. Here, He refers to Himself as: 'He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.' He is reminding every recipient of these letters that they are coming directly from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some would, undoubtedly think, 'Oh, this is just old John... is he still alive... just an old coot... why should we listen to him... we're beginning to develop much better ways to 'do church' here... we're just about to enter the new century... soon it will be AD 100! Jesus is pulling them back saying, I am your Lord Jesus Christ! I am the One who was crucified and rose again! I am the reason for your existence! Pay attention!

Verse 2: 'I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

Even then, while one of the genuine Apostles was still alive and writing, there were false apostles rising up, attempting to gather followings. We have it today: the 'new apostolic reformation.' There are so many, today, in the apostatizing church, the church that is rapidly falling away from the True Faith of Jesus Christ. They claim there are modern **apostles** today who walk in the same authority as the **Apostles** who walked with Jesus Christ and were tasked with writing the New Testament and the Gospels. When they were choosing who would replace Judas, the qualifications were clear: ' Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.' Acts 1:21 The qualification for a true Apostle was clear: first, it must be a man. Then, he had to have been with them from Jesus' baptism until He was taken back up to Heaven. Many of today's false apostles are women and none of them accompanied Jesus Christ anywhere, anytime.

Two of the most known for 'modern apostolic/prophetic pronouncements' today are Catholics and Mormons. That is the company in which 'modern apostles' find themselves and, most tellingly, NAR's do, today, press for reconciliation with Catholicism.

Even then... and since... those who call themselves apostles are liars.

Verse 3: 'And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.'

You are doing well; twice He commends their labor and their patience; you don't invite evil people to come to your assembly and then to remain in their sin.

Verse 4: 'Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.'

What a thing to hear from Jesus Christ: 'You've left Me!' He is our first love and it's the love which should never fade in a true Believer; a true child of God remembers who he is and why he is saved; it's all and only because of the Lord Jesus Christ and what He willingly suffered for me.

How do they leave their first love today? They transfer that love to their city; we are a church who seeks to love and serve our city; we are a church who works for social gospel; we are a church who loves our city so

much that we would never want to make them uncomfortable by pointing out their sin and need of a Savior or ever giving out the true gospel; It is so offensive; instead, we simply live the gospel; we must earn the right to be heard! If their lives are the gospel, that's a pretty crappy gospel, I would think. We are a church that is 'welcoming and affirming'... come as you are; no change of heart, necessary.

Verse 5: 'Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.'

What are the first works... not their patience, etc, the believers at Ephesus are still doing that. The first work of every believer is to love God; He is our first love; our hearts and minds, our souls and spirits, should always be reminding each other of all He has done for us, of the reality of our rightly deserving eternity in the Lake of Fire to where we will never go because of what Jesus Christ did on the Cross for us and of the reality of our never ending Eternal Life as we rule and reign with Him forever.

Did you notice that I said, 'our spirits and souls must remind each other of all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done for 'us.' And our souls and spirits must remind our flesh and then keep it in check. Does that sound foreign or silly? David spoke to his soul and strengthened it, himself; he said: 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.' Psa 42:11

Why are you worried, soul? Hope in the Lord; He is your strength.

'Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name... Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.'

Our responsibility is to take captive, not only every thought, but also, our souls and flesh. Our spirits are the only part of us that is always drawing us toward God and His will. Remember what we've learned in the past: our spirit always seeks to do God's will; our flesh always seeks to turn away and our soul must constantly choose. It is our soul who must be constantly reminded of all God has done and to be strong and courageous, to never tremble or be dismayed because the Lord our God is with us wherever we go.

Verse 6: 'But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.'

The evil that finally morphed into the darkness of Catholicism was already beginning in the Church; we see it mentioned here with Ephesus, although the Ephesians were resisting it, and we'll see that in Pergamos it was taking root and an evil root it is.

The word, Nicolaitanes, means: victory or destruction of the people, the laity, the 'lording over' of the people by the priests. This evil is nothing new when it begins to creep into the Church; it has always been the form of every false religion. It is the subjugation of the masses by the priestly class. In every derivative of Mystery Babylon which is, of course, the mother of all harlots, as we'll see later in this study, the priests rule over the laity, over the people.

Christianity, true Christianity, is different; we are all priests before God; we do not go to any other human to act as our priest; the only Priest who intercedes for us, before God, the Father, is the Lord Jesus Christ... that's it! That's why Catholicism is inimical to true Christianity because Catholicism relies on the huge and monstrous priesthood, beginning with altar boys all the way up to the pope. The people are enslaved by the priesthood from their first involuntary but mandatory sprinkling as an infant until 'Last Rites' as they lay dying. Their 'salvation' is not from the Lord Jesus Christ but is, rather, dependent upon the priesthood.

I'm not picking on Catholicism, specifically... it is simply the most obvious illustration of Babylonian Nicolaitanism but it shows it's ugly head in many churches; many of us have experienced it before we came here; a group of self-styled priests running roughshod over the people, especially over the seniors; that is the beginnings of Nicolaitanism and the Lord Jesus Christ hates it!

Our responsibility, before God is not to pretend that problems within a given church body don't exist or that it's OK because the 'priest' says it's OK... we are kings and priests unto God and we have a responsibility, before God to shine light on darkness within the Church when it is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. God used

that to bring us here, together. And let me repeat... I am not ascribing these kinds of errors to this local body of believers, in any way whatsoever! This really is the last outpost before the frontier which will open before us when Jesus Christ returns for us, one day soon.

Verse 7: ' He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.'

At the end of every one of these 7 letters to churches, Jesus ends with, 'To him who overcomes...' When He says, 'To him that overcometh...', of, or to whom does He refer? John knows the answer; just a few years before he received 'The Revelation,' in about AD 90, he wrote 1st, 2nd and 3rd John. In 1 John 5:1,4,5 we read, ' Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God... For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith... Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?'

This is the qualification of one who overcomes the World: 1. to be born of God by believing that Jesus is the Christ... 2. to have faith in Jesus Christ... 3. to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. In other words... every born again child of God overcomes the World and every promise that Jesus gives to 'him who overcomes,' is a promise to every born again believer.

He does not say that our Eternal Life will be dependent upon eating from the Tree of Life, only that we will be allowed to eat from the Tree of Life.

Let's use our God-given abilities to think and imagine...

The first time we see the Tree of Life, it is in the Garden of God which is in Eden, on the Earth: ' And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden... 'And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.' Gen 2:8

After the first sin: ' And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: ²³ Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. ²⁴ So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.' Gen 3:22

After they sinned, Adam and Eve were barred from eating of the Tree of Life so as to live forever.

Eden is called, 'The Garden of God.' 'Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God...' Ezek 28:13

Notice what Jesus says, here, to Ephesus, about the Tree of Life; it currently exists and it is in the Paradise of God.

We believe that Paradise is God's name for the pleasant part of Sheol because Jesus says, to the thief of the cross, 'Today, you will be with Me in Paradise.' They both went down to that place where Lazarus was. Jesus then emptied Paradise, taking all the righteous dead from the time of Adam and Eve back to Heaven with Him. Then, on the third day, the Lord Jesus Christ, by His own power, having conquered death by His sinless life, by His Divine power, came back to life, never to die again.

Here's where it gets really interesting, I think. Jesus tells John that the Tree of Life is, at that time, 'in the Paradise of God.'

The Hebrew word for Garden, as in, 'of Eden,' and the Greek word of the New Testament for Paradise, both mean exactly the same thing: 'a garden, a special fenced park, a grand enclosure or preserve, hunting ground, park, shady and well watered.'

The early Church fathers believed that God took Paradise, removing it from the lower parts of the Earth, taking it up into Heavenly places.

When Jesus took all those in Paradise, including Lazarus, the thief on the cross and all the righteous dead, that He took all of Paradise, itself, up to Heaven and that is the place where all those who've died 'in Christ' await

that special moment we've all been waiting for, the Rapture.

When Jesus tells John that those who overcome will be granted to eat from the Tree of Life which is in the Paradise of God and which we will see again, as described in Rev 22 as it is, then, in the New Jerusalem... since we have been given Eternal Life, eating from the Tree of Life will be, for us, a privilege but not a necessity. Some who live forever may, in fact, be dependent upon eating from the Tree of Life but not we, the Church, the Body and Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.'

Verse 8: 'And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.'

The first and the last, He which was dead and is alive. Remember... in each of these letters, Jesus introduces Himself using one of the descriptors which He used to identify Himself when John saw Him, at the first.

The Church was beginning to experience persecution. Notice that to the believers in Smyrna, He says, although you are physically poor, yet, spiritually, you are rich. The last of the seven churches, Laodicea, although they were physically wealthy, in reality, He will say to them, you are, in fact, impoverished spiritually: poor, naked and blind.

Regarding those who say they are Jews but are not, I'm reminded of today's 'Hebrew Roots' groups who are, mostly, Gentiles trying to act like Jews, following the Law, celebrating the Feasts, adhering to the dietary laws, they are pretend Jews, Gentiles playing 'dress-up Barbi-Jew.' Paul wrote against the false teaching of the Judiazers who were attempting to pull the Galatians under the Law.

Verse 10: 'Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'

We don't know, exactly, the persecution He is speaking of but it would be that of the early 2nd Century, the early 100's.

Verse 11: 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.'

Once again... every promise the Lord Jesus Christ makes at the end of each of these seven letters... 'to Him who overcomes...' every one of these promises is for, and to, every born again child of God.

What is 'the second death' which will not hurt any born again believer? We read this, regarding the end of the Millennium: 'And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. ¹⁴ And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. 'Rev20:11

Verse 12: ' And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; ¹³ I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.'

Pergamum was the home of the Altar of Zeus. It was built from 197-156 BC. And that is where the altar remained until the Germans came. A German engineer discovered the ruins in 1864. His name was Carl Humann. The Germans moved the Altar of Zeus piece by piece to Germany. The Pergamon Museum was opened in 1930. That Altar of Zeus, the altar of Satan, really, was very important to Hitler.