

**Revelation
2:1-11
“Sweet and sour churches”**

I. Intro

II. Vs. 1-7 Desiring the desired One

III. Vs. 8-11 Bitter blessings

I. Intro

These words of Jesus not only fit the time frame in which they were written but also different church ages, as well as different aspects of every individual believers' life. I mention this as we might be tempted to quickly pass over this section of scripture thinking that these words have no significance towards us personally, nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesus words to the seven churches follows a specific format that John records. *Not every church listed contains every ingredient but there are many similarities.* **The ten ingredients in**

Jesus words to the seven churches are:

- **Author**
- **Approval**
- **Accusation**
- **Admonition**
- **Atonement**
- **Announcement**
- **Appraisal**
- **Appeal**
- **Accreditation** (only Philadelphia)
- **Accommodation** (only Philadelphia)
 - A. In five of the seven churches Jesus **approves** of something about them.
 - B. In five of them He has an **accusation**, although these vary from church to church.
 - C. In five of them He has a word of **admonition**
 - D. In five of them He has an **announcement** or promise.
 - E. Three of them He makes an **appeal**
 - F. Once does He offer an **atonement** (Ephesus), **appraisal**, (Laodicea) **accreditation** or **accommodation** (Philadelphia).

Of those ten ingredients, that make up Jesus words to the seven churches, what encourages

me is that in each of those seven churches starts off with the Author identifying Himself. No

matter what the condition of His Church or the individual Christian, *they never cease being His Church! They may be warned that if they continue in their course of behavior, they will be removed or spewed out of His mouth but nevertheless at the time of His words they were still His. Truly Jesus is the “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2)*

II. Vs. 1-7 Desiring the desired One

Vs. 1 In Chapter 1:1 John told us that the unveiling of Jesus came from the Father to the Son to an angel. Here we notice that Jesus tells John to write to the angel of the Churches. Several things cause me to believe that John was writing to pastors and not angels:

- a. First, are we to believe that John was receiving a message from the Father to the son to an angel only to write it down for another angel? This seems to me to be a bit cumbersome. I mean why not just tell the angel himself.
- b. Why tell an angel at all, I mean the words here are clearly meant for the Church and not for angels.
- c. I believe the most probable interpretation of the word “*angels or messengers*” is pastors. The problem with this interpretation is the fact that John sees that Jesus has the *stars* in His right hand. *Referring to pastors as stars in light of our contemporary definition of that word bothers us. The word literally means that which is strewn over the sky and depicts the visibility and light in which the pastor ought to be in the world that abounds in darkness.* That being true, I can’t help but think of the contemporary definition as *I see how often the Church has become more identified with the “star” rather than the One who holds the star. We must guard our hearts from “star gazing” instead opting for “Son worshipping”!*

Vs. 1b **Author:** Next notice that John sees *Jesus not only in the Church’s midst but walking about.* In other words, *Jesus is active amongst the Church seeking to minister to it because He is preoccupied with it.* The name Ephesus literally means the “*desired one*” and *I think that it is important that we see ourselves as desired by Him.* His desire is towards us as we are His desired ones.

Vs.2-3, 6 **Approval:** “*I know you works*”, *appears to each of the messages to the seven Churches and it reminds us that Jesus is aware of everything about us from our service to our*

motives for our service. In dealing with this Church Jesus commends them for four specific things:

- a. Vs. 2a “*Your labor, your patience*”: The word for “**labor**” is **intense labor or toil to the point of exhaustion.** It is often used in the N.T. to depict enduring under extreme trial. What we see in Jesus’ words is ***an approval because this Church was self-sacrificing as well as steadfast.*** This was not a quitter Church, this church had not “grown weary while doing good” (Gal. 6:9, 2 Thess. 3:13).
- b. Vs. 2b “*And that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars*”: Jesus describes them as being “**uncompromisingly pure.**” In Acts 20:27-31 Paul warned the Elders of this Church that false teachers would attempt to come in and it appears that they had heeded that warning from Paul as 30 years later Jesus commends them for guarding against this infiltration. They had examined the teachings of those that would seek to instruct them in the Word and those that did not line up with the teaching of the word of God were exposed as false teacher and liars!
- c. Vs. 3 “*And you have persevered and have patience and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary*”: This is the second time in two verses that Jesus describes this Church as having “**patience**”. ***They weren’t a bunch of complainers nor were they prone to discouragement during their service.*** Jesus tells us what the **key to their success** was in this area was, “*they labored for His names sake*” and not their own! **We will all grow weary in our service if it is based upon seeing results fashioned around our name and reputation, but if we serve the Lord for His names sake, His reputation we will have unswerving patience!** We will know that it is the Lord that “*adds to the church daily those who were being saved.*” (Acts 2:47).
- d. Vs. 6 “*But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*” The word “*Nicolaitan*” comes from two words “*nico*” meaning “*priest*” and “*laitans*” meaning “*laity*”. It describes a practice of lording over the people by setting over the people a man between God and the people. The reason for Jesus’ hatred of this practice is to be found in Paul’s words to Timothy in 1 Tim. 2:5 where he says, “*there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus*”. It is unfortunate that the Church had so soon adopted the practice of manipulation of the people by putting a priest in between god and believers. **The Church of Ephesus refused to ever be seen as a go between for man.** They may have left their first love, but their failure lie not in the attempt to become more important than the Lord.

Vs. 4 **Accusation:** “*Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*” **I**

wonder in light of Jesus’ approval how responsive I would be to these words? In spite of all

the positive attributes they had they were not growing more in love with Jesus. They had

become **so busy maintaining their separation that they had neglected their adoration.** **We**

are all to prone to this and it can be seen when we substitute labor for love and purity for

passion! we must maintain both if we are going to continue to grow more in love with Him. It is only when, “**We love Him fervently that we can serve Him faithfully!**”

Notice that they **did not lose their first love they simply left Him. When you lose something, it implies that you don't know where you left it but when you leave something you know where it is.** The word for **left** is literally “**forsook**” **to lay something aside.** They laid aside according to Jesus “**that which was most important**”. Their service was **mechanical motion without emotion!** In Jer. 2:2 the Lord through the prophet describes Israel’s “**first love**” towards Him by saying, “**I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.**” **The devotion we all first experienced with the Lord, fervent, personal, exciting, uninhibited. Our love will deepen but it ought not lose the wide eye excitement and wonder of our honeymoon with the Lord. All too often we have, treaded our honeymoon with the Lord to only a honey-do!** We can determine this by asking ourself, “**Have I ever been more in love with Jesus then I am right now?**” If the answer is yes, then we have fallen back and are not growing in our love.

Vs. 5 **Admonition and atonement:** Jesus does not just make an accusation without offering a solution and we see the “**Three R's of how to rekindle your love for Him**”:

1. “**Remember**”: “**Therefore from where you have fallen**”. The word here is literally “**keep on remembering**”. **We need to cultivate a desire to commune with Him by spending time doing the things you first did when you initially became a follower of Jesus.** You went to every Bible study you could, prayed at every opportunity, there was always praise songs going on in your head.
2. “**Repent**”: The word means more than just being sorry, it means **to change what we think, what we feel** as well as **what we do.** In other words, **we need to turn from anything or anyone that would hinder our devotion to Him.**
3. “**Repeat**”: “**And do the first works**”. The idea is going back and doing those activities that caused you to grow to begin with.

Jesus warns that there are consequences for the lack of acting, “**or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place; unless you repent.**” **The person or Church that**

leaves its first love will lose its light! If we do not seek to rekindle our love for Him, then we will cease experiencing His presence in our lives. He will no longer be moving about us, and His testimony will not be present amongst us. Jesus never stays long in a Church no matter how busy they might be for Him if they are no longer in love with Him!

Vs. 7 **Announcement**: The promise is conditional based upon those that “overcomes”. In 1 John 5:4-5 John told us just who the overcomers were, “*whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*” The tree is the cross, which must always be placed in the center of the believer’s life. Adam was banned from this tree so as to not remain in a permanent state of death but those whose trust in Jesus has secured their victory over the world are given to eat of the tree of life in paradise.

III. Vs. 8-11 Bitter blessings

Vs. 8 **Smyrna was located 35 miles North of Ephesus on the coast of what is now called Izmir in Turkey.** It was founded by Alexander the Great and was best known as the direct trade route between Rome, Persia, and India, and as such was a wealthy community. Based upon verse 9 we know that it had a large Jewish community as well. **The name Smyrna comes from the root word myrrh, which is a bitter herb, used for embalming, perfumes and was an ingredient in the holy anointing oil for temple priests.** The name fits the time frame of the 2nd century Church that lasted 200 years and was a time of the greatest suffering the Church ever experienced as over 6 million believers were put to death for their faith. This Church, we are told in Church History, had a very famous pastor that was a disciple of John’s that has become widely known by a book that was translated into English based upon his death called “*The martyrdom of Polycarp*”. It tells the story of this pastor who was burnt alive in 155 A.D. for refusing to

renounce Jesus as Lord and King. His words still hold great truth as he spoke saying, “**For 86 years I have served my King who saved me, and He has never done me wrong. How can I now blaspheme Him?**” When told that he was to be fed to the Lion’s he responded by saying, “**Bring them on! We are not accustomed to repenting of goodness in order to do something evil.**”

Smyrna, like their pastor Polycarp, **demonstrate the availability of grace while under persecution. It is one of only two churches that Jesus has no words of accusation to say to it, the other is Philadelphia.**

Vs. 8b **Author**: Jesus is speaking to the suffering Church and in so doing identifies with their suffering by telling them that He is “*the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life*”. The reference is that of His death and resurrection as the only One who, being eternal, became incarnate and died. **He was willing to die on their behalf while they were still sinners; could they do anything less than suffer that they might inherit eternal life?** The Bible tells us that there are **four reasons why believers suffer**:

- a. **Disciplinary**: 1 Cor. 11:30-32, Heb 12:3-13
- b. **Preventive**: 2 Cor. 12:7 (*Paul kept from self-exaltation*)
- c. **Educational**: Rom. 5:3-5, James 1:2-4
- d. **Purification**: 2Cor. 4:11-12 (*causes us to be a better witness*)

Vs. 9 **Approval**: “*I know your works*”, Jesus knows just what we are going through, we don’t have to sell Him on our needs, He knows our struggles. Heb. 2: 9 tells us He was tempted in every way as we are yet without sin. They are approved on two things:

- a. “*Tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)*”: Literally this phrase means, “*crushed by constant trouble being destitute like a beggar*”. It is the same Jesus who while upon this earth said in Matt. 8:20 “*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.*” Because this Church refused to participate in the sins of the world they were stripped of their jobs and wealth. **To the world they were poor but to Jesus they were the ones that were rich.** There were not many Christians who would practice compromise because by just being a believer meant that you lost everything. **Jim Eliot** once wrote, “**He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he can never lose!**”

- b. *“And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan.” **This reference is to the Judaizers who were trying to get the believers to practice traditions above their relationship thus they used persecution to accomplish this task.** Yet it didn’t work as they practiced what Paul taught in 1 Cor. 3:11 *“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”**

Vs. 10 **Admonition:** Jesus gives **this church two exhortations:**

1. *“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.”* Literally **“stop being afraid”!** **Because nothing they were going to suffer could rob them of the blessings that were already theirs in Christ. Their suffer was only going to accomplish their glorification.** The testing would produce a far great weight of glory and it was only a short time (**10 days**) compared to eternity. **The number tells us several things:**
 - a. Their suffering was for a specific period of time and had a marked boundary.
 - b. Ten is the number of human failure and **this could speak to them that this suffering had nothing to do with the Lord only with those in the world.**
2. *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”* **Apparently as yet none of them had died so the Lord wants them to understand that death has no permeate hold upon them instead death was the greatest opportunity they would ever know. Victory is certain, and it is important for us to see that a crown always follows the cross!**

Vs. 11 **Announcement:** The message is for whoever reads it and has a heart to apply the truth.

The 2nd death is defined for us in Rev. 20:14 and 21: 8 as *“Death and Hades were cast into **the lake of fire.** This is the second death.”* *“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in **the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.**”* **The lake of fire was never intended for man but rather for the devil and his demons only those who refuse to love the truth to death will go there and it is they themselves that are punching their own ticket.**