

Date:

*The early Church of Jesus*

**PRAY** Lord, there are lots of things that get in the way of my love for you. Help me to make a fresh start with you today as I read your Word.

**READ** Revelation 2:1–11

**REFLECT**

During my adult life I've been a member of three different churches, depending on where I worked and lived. As I think back, I realise they were all different. Some had strong teaching; some didn't. Some were active in the community; some weren't. Some had lots of people and resources; some didn't. For a variety of reasons they all had their strengths and weaknesses. That's the sense we'll get as we read Jesus' assessment of the churches in the first century.

*The church in Ephesus (2:1–7)* The good news about this body of believers was that they were activists; they were willing to work hard (2:2). Not only that, they were careful to avoid false teaching and even suffered for their beliefs. The bad news was they'd forsaken their first love, Jesus (2:4). They were like a husband who provides everything his family needs but who is unfaithful to his wife. If there's not true love for Jesus in the church, its members are just going through the motions and Jesus doesn't like that. The way to rekindle dying love is to repent and start again (2:5).

*The church in Smyrna (2:8–11)* Smyrna was one of two that were singled out for commendation only (the other is in Philadelphia, 3:7–14). But, to the casual observer, this church may have looked like a failure. They were poor, they were being criticised, and their members were about to suffer persecution and imprisonment (2:8–10). That's not such a great formula for church growth. Or is it? Today, places where the Church around the world is facing the greatest persecution is also where it is experiencing the fastest growth. That doesn't mean we should throw our own churches into turmoil in an effort to boost attendance. But it reminds us that when Christians stand strong for the gospel, as they must in persecution, people will be attracted. Jesus called that faithfulness (2:10) and that's what he wants to see in his Church.

**APPLY** What would it mean for you to stand strong for the gospel this week?

**PRAY** Spend a few minutes praying for the churches you've been part of or come into contact with in your life.

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**PRAY** Thank God for all the ways your involvement in the Church has helped you grow closer to him and to others.

**READ** Revelation 2:12–29

**REFLECT**

I know people who have been searching for the perfect church all their lives. They evaluate the pastor, preaching and programmes wherever they attend, and then move on. It's important to find a church that loves Jesus and believes the Bible, and it may take some finding. But, as Groucho Marx once said, 'I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member.' Churches aren't perfect because they're made up of imperfect people.

The two churches in our reading today certainly weren't perfect:

*The church in Pergamum (2:12–17)* These believers had a wonderful history: they had remained true to Jesus during a period of unusual stress and persecution (2:13). But that spiritual victory was long past; now they were being enticed by false teaching (2:14,15). There are churches and denominations today that have a wonderful history of evangelism and outreach but who have lost their commitment to the gospel and biblical teaching. As a result, they are gradually dying. Jesus says the way to fix that situation is straightforward: 'Repent!' (2:16).

*The church in Thyatira (2:18–29)* They were a loving, faithful, serving and persevering congregation (2:19). What pastor wouldn't be happy with that? But the church in Thyatira had the same problem as Pergamum: they were tolerating false teaching (2:20). And notice that it led to immoral behaviour. When human reason takes a higher place than biblical principles the Church begins to look no different than the world. For example, a recent survey found that Bible-believing Christians were just as likely to divorce as non-Christians.

All this raises an important question: how do we live with the fact that there's no perfect church? Jesus says, 'Hold on to what you have until I come' (2:25). In other words, remain faithful to the gospel and God's Word and eagerly look forward to his return. We can do that no matter what church we belong to.

**APPLY** What would Jesus say about your church? And your contribution to it?

**PRAY** Lord, you know the church isn't perfect and neither am I. Even so, help me to hold firmly to the gospel and to look eagerly for your return.