

## Ephesus: The Loveless Church

**Text:** Revelation 2:1-7

### Introduction:

1. **Imagine** we are the church at Ephesus. You come to church on the Lord's day and the pastor gets up and announces that he has a letter to read to the church, a letter from none other than Christ Himself, penned by the Great Apostle John. Can you imagine the impact of that? Can you imagine how you would sit up and listen? When we understand Christ intended each of these letters for all churches, then we should read each one, taking the message as coming directly from Christ to us as a church.
2. We now enter the second section of the Book according to the outline in chapter 1:19 – “the things which are” which is Christ's letters to the seven churches. The word ‘church’ occurs 15 times in these two chapters but after that it isn't mentioned until the very end of the Book in chapter 22:16. This is because the church is **NOT** on earth for the 7-year period of God's judgment!
3. We will now study Christ's letter to Ephesus in 5 segments:

### I. The Revelation of Christ (Vs. 1)

#### A. The Audience (Vs. 1a)

1. The angel – very likely the head elder/pastor of the church. The word ‘angel’ is sometimes translated ‘messenger’ in the New Testament. For example:
  - a. John the Baptist – Matthew 11:10 “...*Behold, I send my messenger before thy face...*”
  - b. John the Baptist's disciples – Luke 7:24 “*And when the messengers of John were departed...*”
  - c. Christ's messengers – Luke 9:52 “*And sent messengers before his face...*”
2. The assembly – the church of Ephesus. Consider the background of Ephesus...
  - a. Geographically
    - i. Cloud: “It was the chief city of the region of Lydia in the Roman province of Asia Minor at this time. Its prestige and wealth came largely from its strategic location.”
    - ii. Thomas: “Ephesus was a thriving metropolis by the end of the first century A.D. Commercially, it was the largest city in the Roman province of Asia...Highways connected it with most of the important cities of the Roman provinces composing Asia Minor. The combination of accessibility from land or sea made the city the prominent commercial center of Asia for a long time.”

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- b. Religiously – “religious life centered around the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis (Diana – See Acts 19:24, 27-28, 34-35). Her 425-foot-long (142m) by 220-foot-wide (73m) temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Each of its 120 columns was donated by a king. The image of Diana was one of the most sacred objects of worship in the ancient world...It was a grotesque, squat, black, many-breasted figure that was reputed to have fallen from heaven (Acts 19:27, 35)...Prostitution thrived there because the immoral activities were looked upon as sacred, and the prostitutes themselves were viewed as priestesses.” (Thomas)
- c. Spiritually – it was in this wicked, idolatrous and immoral city that a church was planted by the Apostle Paul and lives were transformed by the power of the Gospel. Paul visited the city while returning from Corinth to Jerusalem at the close of his second missionary journey about A.D. 52 (Acts 18:19-21). On his third missionary journey Paul returned to the city (Acts 19:1) and spent three years there (Acts 20:31).

### **B. The Author (Vs. 1b)**

“In each letter, distinctive features of His glory, as described in chapter 1, are chosen by the Lord and are applied to the spiritual condition of the church addressed.” (Phillips)

- 1. The Sovereignty of Christ (Vs. 1a) Christ is pictured as sovereign Lord in his holding of the seven stars and his walking amongst the candlesticks.
- 2. The Activity of Christ (Vs. 1b) Christ is pictured in His activity as High Priest, maintaining the lampstands. Note: The church is totally dependent on Christ for its spiritual life (Col. 2:19).

## **II. The Commendation of Christ (Vs. 2-3; 6)**

“In these special messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor, the Lord gave each assembly an “X ray” of its condition.” (Wiersbe) Christ commends the church because it was...

### **A. A Serving Church (Vs. 2a, 3b)**

- 1. Fervent service – ‘labour’ means intense toil, to work to the point of exhaustion/perspiration. This church took the work of God seriously! They understood that the Christian life was not about being served but about serving others. In this they were following the example of the Saviour Himself (Matt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45). Challenge: The entertainment, pleasure driven, society in which we live has affected the church. There are very few believers today that have a passion to labor for the Lord!

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2. Focused service – “for my name’s sake hast laboured” Their inner heart motive behind their outward service was a pure one. They were serving for Christ!

### **B. A Persevering Church (Vs. 2b, 3a)**

There are three descriptions of their perseverance...

1. ‘patience’ (Vs. 2 & 3) – word mentioned twice. The word means “endurance under trial” (Wiersbe). It means steadfastness, constancy (Strong’s). This church wasn’t going to give up at the first sign of trouble or trial. They were there for the long haul!
2. ‘borne’ (Vs. 3) – to bear up. “They bore up under pressures of various kinds. In context, it probably has something to do with the pressures they faced with dealing with the false teachers.” (Thomas)
3. “hast not fainted” – they labored to the point of exhaustion but they did not faint!
4. Challenge: This is a quality our Lord Jesus admires in one of His churches. Faithfulness pleases Christ!

### **C. A Disciplining Church (Vs. 2 & 6)**

This church had a zeal for the truth and this pleased Christ.

1. They dealt with Evil (Vs. 2b)
  - a. “canst not bear them which are evil” = note the contrast between their patience on the one hand in relation to the service of Christ and their impatience on the other hand in relation to evil men. They were very long wicked with the trials and tests of the ministry but very short wicked when it came to sin in the camp. This was godly intolerance!
  - b. This church was prepared to deal with moral leaven (1 Cor. 5). They were zealous about purity. You wouldn’t find them at the grand theatre watching some lewd Roman play. The total opposite to many churches today where sin is tolerated and excused in the name of love and grace.
2. They dealt with Error (Vs. 2c, 6)
  - a. False Teachers (2c)
    - i. ‘tried’ = to examine, prove and test. They didn’t just blindly accept a man’s claim to be a man sent from God. They had a testing mindset (1 Thess. 5:21). They didn’t just hand the pulpit over to anyone who walked in!
    - ii. There were many false Gospels even in the early days of the church. E.g. The Gospel of Judas which presented Judas as the only true Apostle who truly understood Jesus and betrayed Christ because Jesus asked him to do so!
  - b. False Teaching (6)

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- i. Their passionate love for the truth meant they also hated error. They had the same godly attitude as Christ Himself - "which I also hate".
- ii. Note: They hated the practice ('deeds') not the people.
- iii. Psalm 97:10 "*Ye that love the LORD, hate evil...*"
- iv. Psalm 119:128 "*Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.*"
- v. Romans 12:9 "...**Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.**"

### III. The Condemnation from Christ (Vs. 4)

#### A. The Choice – they had left their first love

1. 'left' = a wilful choice, not an accidental loss
2. "first" = foremost in time, place, order or importance. Also translated 'chief'. It does not say they had no love at all. It was a particular kind of love that was absent.
3. "first love" = the love of the first days. "The love of first conversion had waxed cold, and given place to a lifeless and formal orthodoxy." (Alford)
  - a. First Love = the believer's warm devotion to Christ which is often so conspicuous just after conversion. It is the love that drives an individual to not just serve the object of their love, but to spend time with them in intimate fellowship and communion.
  - b. First Love = speaks of the first, fervent, chaste and pure love of the newly-wedded bride. Christ is the bridegroom, and the church is His bride (Eph. 5:25) Jeremiah 2:2-3 "*Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the firstfruits of his increase...*"
    - a. Illustration:

Dr. Campbell Morgan tells of a friend of his who had a little ten-year-old daughter whom he dearly loved. Father and daughter were always together. But then one time something came between them which the father could not understand. When he went out for a walk, she always excused herself and told him she had to do something. One day it was his birthday and she came bouncing into his room with a smile on her face. She said, "Daddy I have brought you a present." Opening the box, he found a beautiful pair of slippers. "This is lovely of you to buy these for me," "But Daddy I did not buy them, I made them." The father said, "is this what you have been doing for the past three months?" "Yes," she said, "but how did you know?" "Well, for three months I wanted much of you, but you were too busy. I like the slippers a lot, but the next time buy the slippers, for I would rather have you my child than anything you can make for me."

#### B. The Causes – the things that can divert our love

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1. Is it the love of the world? 1. John 2:15-17 "**Love not the world...**"
2. Is it the love of money? 1 Tim. 6:10 "**For the love of money is the root of all evil...**"
3. Is it the love of family? Matthew 10:37 "**He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.**"
4. Walvoord: "The Ephesians' cooling of the heart that had overtaken them was a dangerous forerunner of spiritual apathy that later was to erase all Christian testimony in this important centre of the early church...The pattern is sadly familiar in church history: a cooling of the church's love for Christ, then its replacement by a love for the things of the world, resulting in compromise and spiritual corruption, followed by a departure from the faith and loss of effective spiritual testimony."

### IV. The Instruction of Christ (Vs. 5)

Christ issues four clear instructions to this church which they are to follow in order to be restored from their backsliding of heart:

#### A. Remember – "remember therefore from whence thou art fallen"

1. 'remember' = a function of the mind. We need to think about our spiritual condition. Solemn self-examination needed. We are to compare what we are now to what we were then, like the prodigal son.
2. "thou art fallen" = a serious matter! They were backslidden in Christ's eyes.

#### B. Repent – "and repent"

1. To have a change of mind, to turn around and go the other direction. Next step after acknowledging my sin.
2. Two types of repentance: 1. Repentance unto salvation (happens once) 2. Repentance as a Christian when I sin (ongoing as part of my walk with God)

#### C. Renew – "do the first works"

1. "first love...first works" = the two are connected.
2. If you used to pray, then start praying again! If you used to read God's Word with delight, then start reading it fervently again! If you used to be serious about personal separation because you loved Christ, then get serious about it again! If you used to attend church regularly, then start attending again! If you used to give to the Lord, then give again! If you used to be a witness, then start witnessing again!

#### D. Regard – "or else I will come unto thee...and remove thy candlestick"

1. Christ will judge swiftly – "I will come unto thee quickly"
2. Christ will judge decisively – "remove thy candlestick out of his place"

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- a. The lampstand represents light, the church's witness and testimony in a lost world.
- b. These lampstands are under Christ's focused attention, they enjoy His presence and blessing.
- c. The warning is that Christ will remove the church's witness and will abandon it. This may result in the physical closure of the church or it may result in the church existing physically but no longer being considered a church by Christ with no effective witness for His glory.

### V. The Invitation of Christ (Vs. 7)

#### A. The Plea (Vs. 7a)

1. To the individual – “He that hath an ear, let him hear” The church is made up of individuals and we ALL affect the spiritual temperature of the church. If the individual members of the church are weak, the church will largely be weak. If the individual members are strong, the church will be strong!
2. To the church – “what the Spirit saith unto the churches” The church as a whole must pay careful heed to the message of Christ.

#### B. The Promise (Vs. 7b)

1. The overcomer – a description of a true, born again believer. 1 John 5:4-5 *“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?**”*
2. “the tree of life” = was in the original paradise (Gen. 2:9)
  - a. The tree of life is found in heaven (Rev. 2:7)
  - b. The tree of life will be found in the New Jerusalem – Rev. 22:2 *“In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there **the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.**”*
  - c. Thomas: “This promise, like all the overcomer promises, looks forward to the last three chapters dealing with the millennial kingdom (chapter 20) and the New Jerusalem (chapter 21-22). **Never is the overcomer called upon to anticipate the dreaded woes of chapters 4-19.**”

### Conclusion:

1. Challenge to the church: Are we like Ephesus? Laboring but loveless?
2. Challenge to the individual: How is your spiritual heart temperature? Are you on fire for Christ like you once were or are you merely going through the motions outwardly with little passion for Christ inwardly?