

Letter to the Church at Ephesus

“The Loveless Church”

INTRODUCTION:

A. **Revelation 2:1-7** - “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, 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;

3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.

4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place -- unless you repent.

6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

B. At the time John wrote the Revelation, Ephesus was the chief city of Asia Minor.

1. Known as a trade center.

2. Noted for its magical arts.

3. The temple of the heathen goddess Diana was in Ephesus.

a. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

b. “It glittered in brilliant beauty at the head of the harbor, and it was said that the sun saw nothing in its course more magnificent than Diana’s temple. Made of purest marble, upon splendid foundations, which in that marshy ground were at once costly and essential, it confronted the mariner immediately at the landing—place.”

c. Description:

1. Required 220 years to construct.

2. Largest building in existence at that time.

a. 425 feet long by 220 feet wide.

b. 127 columns 60 feet high and six feet in diameter.

3. The interior was open to the sky. In the temple was a statue of the goddess Diana, which the Ephesians believed fell from the sky.
4. The temple also contained many masterpieces of sculpture and painting, and its treasury was the “safety vault” of Asia.
 - a. The temple was destroyed by fire seven times, but each time was rebuilt on a larger and grander scale.
 - b. Located a mile and a half northeast of the city, and the road leading to it was paved with marble.
 - c. The temple area formed a sanctuary for criminals, as none could be arrested within a bowshot of its walls.

C. History of the church at Ephesus.

1. Probably the foremost of the seven congregations mentioned.
2. Founded by Paul. Acts 18, 19, and 20. 1 Timothy 1:3-4..
3. Established on Paul’s 2nd missionary journey. He returned and labored there three years during his 3rd missionary journey. In Paul’s effective labors there, he
 - a. Preached the gospel effectively.
 - b. Worked miracles.
 - c. Witnessed the bonfire of evil books.
 - d. Saw many people turn from darkness to light, from sin to salvation.
4. Paul wrote the Ephesian letter to the church at Ephesus.
5. In addition to Paul, other great servants of the Lord played a role in the church at Ephesus.
 - a. The eloquent Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew
 - b. Aquila and Pricilla.
 - c. Timothy.
 - d. John — later years.
6. From Ephesus Paul wrote I Corinthians in approximately 57 AD.
7. During Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, around 64A.D., he wrote his great epistle to the church of Ephesus.
8. It can be said that two apostolic letters were written to the Ephesian church one by Paul and the other by John.

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

A. **Verse 1** — Introduction to the letter.

1. From the One that holds the seven stars, and walks in the midst of the seven golden candle sticks.
2. Angel is a messenger.
 - a. Some say that this refers to the minister.
 - b. Some contend that it refers to the eldership.
 - c. Nonetheless, it is a messenger, a spokesman.

B. Verses 2, 3, and 6—**Words of commendation.**

1. “I know your works.”
 - a. This statement is made to each of the seven congregations.
 1. Ephesus - 2:2
 2. Smyrna - 2:9
 3. Pergamos - 2:13
 4. Thyatira - 2:19
 5. Sardis - 3:1
 6. Philadelphia - 3:8
 7. Laodicea - 3:15
 - b. **Psalm 139:23-24** - Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.”
 - c. Examine the statement — “I know your works.”
 1. “I” refers to Christ.
 2. “Know” comes from the Greek word “oida” which means “perfect or divine knowledge.”
 - a. Christ knew about these Ephesian Christians.
 - b. **Hebrews 4:13** - And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.
 - c. **Proverbs 15:3** - The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good.
 3. “Your works.”
 - a. Christ knows what is done and not done.
 - b. Christ knows the works done by individuals and congregations.
 - c. Christ does not confuse your works with those of others.
2. Someone has suggested that there are three kinds of workers in the church.
 - a. There are the “shirkers” who do nothing.
 - b. Then there are the “jerkers” who get off to a good start, and then like the old automobiles, they start jerking and sputtering and simply stop.
 - c. Then there are “workers” who get the job done in each local congregation.
3. With this group of Christians four things were right.
 - a. First, their life was right.
 1. They had learned to labor and wait.
 2. Without complaint they had endured fierce opposition, all for the sake of Jesus’ name.
 3. Work, toil, patience.
 - a. Patience means “persistence, triumphant fortitude, and steadfastness.”

- b. Patience is a word that means that we take “misfortune” and take the “misfortune” out of it, thereby turning it into “fortune.
 - c. Patience takes a stumbling block and turns it into a stepping stone.
 - d. **Galatians 6:9** - And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.
 - e. **Hebrews 12:1-4** - Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.
 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.
 - f. **1 Thessalonians 3:14** - “. . . Be patient toward all men.”
- b. Second, they had set themselves against all evil.
1. It is right to bear with a weak brother, but not with a false one.
 2. They had tested the doctrine of self—styled apostles and found them to be false.
 - a. These brethren did not swallow hook, line, and sinker everything that came their way.
 - b. They knew that there were false teachers in the world, and they put them to the test. **1 John 4:1** - Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
 - c. They proved all things and held fast that which was good. **1 Thessalonians 5:21** - Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.
 - d. Like the noble Bereans, they searched the scriptures daily to see if those things were so. Acts 17:11
 3. Discipline. They would not accept false doctrine.
 - a. Some brethren today cannot tell the difference between pure doctrine and false doctrine.
 - b. Some brethren today knowingly accept false doctrine.
 - c. Many congregations tolerate and even perpetuate false doctrine.
 - d. Even under the old law, God’s people were not to follow the multitude to do evil. Exodus 23:2
 - e. If evil characterized some of God’s people, these Ephesian brethren did something about it.

- f. They did not operate on the basis that it was none of their business.
 - g. They did not sweep it under the rug or claim that these evil brethren had dis-fellowshipped themselves from the Church.
 - h. They dis-fellowshipped all who would not be restored.
 - 1. **2 Thessalonians 3:6** - But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.
 - 2. **Galatians 6:1** - Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.
 - i. Someone has well said, “If the church has too little influence in the world, it is because the world has too much influence in the church.”
4. A great promise is given.
- c. Third, The doctrine was right.
 - 1. Doctrine is important. It does matter what one believes and follows in religion.
 - 2. The purity of their doctrine is brought to light in the sternness of the discipline they exercised. For Christians must silence false teachers and take a positive stand against immoral conduct.
 - d. Fourth. They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitians. Who were they?
 - 1. Someone has humorously said that the Nicolaitians were the first to lay a nickel in the contribution plate.
 - 2. Some believe they were followers of Nicolas of Antioch, who may have been one of the first deacons in the Jerusalem church. Acts 6:5
 - 3. Some believe that the words “Balaam” and “Nicolaitian” refer to the same thing. Therefore the Nicolaitians were doing the same thing that Balaam was able to get Israel to do . . . engaging in fornication and idolatry.
3. Yes, some things were right with this congregation.
- a. Work, toil, patience. (Verse 2)
 - b. Discipline (Did not bear evil men) (Verse 2)
 - c. Tested doctrines of “apostles.” (Verse 2)
 - d. Did not grow weary. (Verse 3)
 - e. Opposed the Nicolaitians. (Verse 6)
- C. Verse 4 — **Condemnation**.
- 1. The warm praise now changes to reproof and warning. Commendations of virtues cannot atone for faults or sins.
 - 2. The church had only one ailment, but that was a serious one — a heart ailment.

3. While they hated the things the Lord hated, they did not love all the things He loved.
4. While they would not tolerate false teachers and false doctrines, yet their first early enthusiasm for the worship and progress of the church had waned.
5. The church had left its first love. The congregation had been established many years, and their having lost their early spiritual ardor is not surprising when we remember the difficulty of holding a high level of anything.

a. What was supposed to be the first love of the church at Ephesus?

Answer — Christ!

1. We are to love Him with all our soul, mind, heart, and strength. **Mark 12:29-30** - Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.

And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

2. We, like the Macedonians, must first give ourselves to the Lord. **2 Corinthians 8:5**
3. Christians are to love Christ to the extent that they are married to Christ. **Romans 7:4** Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another -- to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.
4. If a man will not love Christ, he will be accursed. **1 Corinthians 16:22** - If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!

b. Question What pulled them away?

1. It could be that they got so involved in heretic hunting, that they became hard, critical, fault finding, and self-righteous.
2. Maybe like Demas, some fell in love with the world. God has expressly forbidden this. **2 Timothy 4:10** - For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica . . .

- a. **1 John 2:15-17** - Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world.

And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

- b. **Matthew 6:24** – "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

3. Some think that secret sin or ill may have driven Christ out of their lives.
4. A home without love is just a house. A church without love for Christ is just a pile of bricks, mortar, and a list of names.
6. Simply stated, they had lost a great degree of their interest and devotion. A major problem in many places today. When love begins to wane, other virtues are in danger.

D. Verse 5 — **Exhortation and Warning.**

1. Exhortation

- a. They were told to remember. Remembering can be powerful.
 1. The captives in Babylon remembered Jerusalem. Psalm 137
 2. The prodigal son remembered the comforts of home. Luke 15
- b. They were told to repent.
 1. “Repent” — Change mind, will, and way of life.
 2. Christ had to tell five out of the seven churches of Asia to repent or else.
 3. Simon the sorcerer. Acts 8:22

2. Warning.

- a. Extinction was threatened.
- b. To remove a candlestick would mean to take away their light and influence. Candlestick was the church there. Removing it out of its place would mean ceasing to exist.
- c. Conditional: The removal could be prevented only by the congregation repenting and returning of their first love.
- d. Are our lights on a candlestick or hidden under a bushel?
 1. **Matthew 5:14-16** - You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.
 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.
 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.
 2. **Philippians 2:15** - That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

E. Verses 6 & 7 — **Encouragement.**

1. They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans . . . and so did Christ. (Verse 6)
2. Each may hear if he wants to. (Verse 7)
3. Overcoming the world is possible. (Verse 7)
4. A great promise is given.
 - a. Christ held out a promise to motivate the Church. He offered a reward.
 1. God is a rewarding God.

2. **Hebrews 11:6** - But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
- b. “He that overcomes” is literally “he that keeps overcoming.”
 1. One victory is not enough.
 2. One must fight the good fight of faith daily.
 3. Yesterday’s homeruns will not win today’s ballgame.
- c. “The tree of life” is first mentioned in Genesis 3:22.
 1. Those who ate of it would live forever.
 2. **Genesis 3:22-24** - Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" -- therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.
 So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.
 3. In Revelation 22:2, the tree of life is on either side of the river of life.
 - a. It bears twelve manners of fruit.
 4. It yields her fruit every month.
 5. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.
 - d. Therefore, at some time not revealed to us, God removed the tree of life from the garden of Eden and placed it in Heaven.
 - e. Man lost the privilege of it on earth through sin. Man has regained the privilege to it through Jesus Christ.
 - f. Originally the tree of life was in the paradise of Eden. It is now in another paradise, the paradise of God. **2 Corinthians 12:4** - Referring to Paul, How he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.
 - g. Oh how we ought to long for the “paradise valley.”
5. Indeed, a heavenly reward is promised. There will be great joys in Heaven.
6. A heavenly reward is promised.
 1. Tree of life. Perhaps refers to the great joys in heaven.
 2. Paradise. Heaven will be exactly that.

CONCLUSION:

- A. Lessons from the letter to the church at Ephesus.
 1. Christ is omniscient (All Knowing). The Lord knows all, seeing both good and bad. He knows all about us . . . our words . . . our deeds . . . even the secret emotions of the heart.
 2. Christ seems more intent on finding the good than the evil in the lives of His

people. He sees the good before He sees the evil. He finds the good as a matter of delight, but the evil as a painful necessity. Let the Christian imitate Christ.

3. The Christian should hate everything that Christ hates and love everything that Christ loves. Proverbs 6:16-19.
4. When a Christian departs from love, he departs from God, “For God is love.” (1 John 4:8) If we lose love, we lose God.
5. The Christian that has left his first love has fallen, and stands in need of repentance. Christ calls upon us to repent.
6. That without the spirit of brotherly love, a congregation is doomed to extinction, no matter how pure her doctrine or stern her discipline. He is willing to receive us back when we are willing to repent.
7. We can understand the Lord’s will if we will hear and listen.
8. We have work to do, and we will answer to the Lord for how we do it.
9. Individuals and congregations have a tremendous responsibility to remain faithful.

B. Application of the Letter:

1. Let us not:
 - a. Become discouraged and nonproductive when we have difficulties and setbacks.
 - b. Use physical conditions and material circumstances as an excuse for not serving God.
2. Let us:
 - a. Follow John’s example of continuing to serve God regardless of circumstances or consequences.
 - b. Remember that all who “live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” 2 Timothy 3:12.
 - c. Remember that god will not allow us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear. 1 Corinthians 10:13 – “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”
 - d. Believe Romans 8:28 - “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

C. Faithfulness to the Lord’s will results in the reward He promises.