

Seven Churches Series
Study #1: Church of Ephesus: First Love
Revelation Chapter 2:1 - 7
Bible Sermon Study Notes by Cary Rodgers, pastor

Revelation 1:10-11

- 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,
 11 Saying, **I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.**

Seven Churches – Revelation Chapters 2 - 3

1. Church of Ephesus

Before we look into the message that was given to Ephesus in Revelation 2:2-6, let's briefly highlight some historical facts and background about the city and the church of Ephesus. At the time the book of Revelation was written the Church of Ephesus was in a thriving banking and trade center in the city of Ephesus. The city was a busy port city on the west coast of Asia Minor known as the country of Turkey today. It was one of the largest cities of the Roman empire with a large trading post with a variety of consumers from around the Roman Empire. **At the time Paul evangelized and started a church there it was a very secular and pagan place. The majority of people of the city were caught up in commerce, entertainment, and the worship of the famous pagan goddess Diana better known as Artemis in the Greek.** Ephesus built an extraordinary temple to Diana. It was one of the seven wonders of the world. People from all around came to see it. The ruins are still visited by many even today. Matter of fact Paul while on one of his evangelistic campaigns in Ephesus, he caused quite a stir among the people with the gospel of Christ. The merchants who sold the little idols of Diana were fearful of losing business because of Paul's message. **The city's state of the art 50,000 seat amphitheater was one of the largest at the time. It was built to continually entertain with drama, musicals, and gladiator battles.**

Like John in Revelation, Paul also wrote a letter to the collective church in the city of Ephesus with messages of encouragement, instruction, correction, and warning and of course these messages can be found in the book of Ephesians.

Introduction

How does Jesus start his letter to the church of Ephesus?

Revelation 2:1

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.

This introduction is referring back to John's vision given in Revelation 1:13. Here we see Jesus as a high priest in the midst of seven golden candlesticks in the Holy place in the Temple in Heaven.

Revelation 1:20 reveals that the seven golden candlesticks represents Christ's Church and that the seven stars in His right hand represents God's messengers spreading His truth to the world. It is clear from the introduction that Ephesus understood that Jesus was the active head of His church to keep it pure.

Christ is in charge and He will keep His church pure. He is coming for a glorious church without spot or wrinkle.

Ephesians 5:25-27

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the **washing of water by the word**,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, **not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing**; but that it should be **holy and without blemish**.

All those who are truly connected to Christ's church individually are without sin, covered by the blood of the Lamb. We are saved individually as holy, without blemish. Only the holy without blemish collectively make up the true pure church of Jesus Christ.

What is the body of the letter to the church in Ephesus?**What were some positive things that Jesus says about the church of Ephesus?**

Let's go to the first section of the body of the message to the church of Ephesus.

Revelation 2:2-3

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:

3 And hast borne [sustainer or upholder of something], and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

In the name of Christ, Ephesus was very vigilant and active in upholding their Christian values and standards. Ephesus did not allow sin to be paraded in church especially among the leadership. Those who were in spiritual leadership positions such as pastors and were not living according to the standard of the Bible were not tolerated. Hypocritical leadership can lead many of God's people astray. Ministers **MUST** walk the walk of Christ.

Remember the church of Ephesus was in the midst of a very secular and pagan city. When the people accepted the gospel message of Jesus Christ, they decided to let go of the popular pagan practices and worship of the world.

Let look at an example of this in Acts 19:17 – 20. ***Referring to the people in Ephesus who accepted the gospel message of Jesus Christ.***

Acts 19:17-20

17 And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.

19 Many of them also which used **curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.**

20 **So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.**

The church of Ephesus did not have itching ears sermon!

James 1:21-22

21 Wherefore lay apart **all filthiness** and **superfluity [abundance] of naughtiness**, and receive with meekness the **engrafted word**, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

What was another positive thing that Jesus said about the church of Ephesus, which is found near the conclusion of the body of the message?

Revelation 2:6

6 But this thou hast, that thou **hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans**, which I also hate.

What are the deeds of the Nicolaitans in which Ephesus hated?

Nicolaitans (Greek) = “destruction of people” [Thayer’s Greek definition]

It is clear that the deeds of the Nicolaitans were designed to destroy God's people. They obviously used the garment of Christianity to excuse the deeds of the flesh. They rejected the 10 commandments and presented a cheap grace and sentimental love. They would say that “we don't have to worry about destruction, we are all under grace. We don't need to keep God's 10 commandment law.”

Nicolaitans rejected the everlasting covenant of Jesus, but claimed the name of Jesus. They were like many modern professed Christians today who serve a false christ that accepts worldly pleasure and celebrations - the fleshy desires of humans. This is straight humanism, the modern idol Baal worship!

Are the deeds of the Nicolaitans in modern professed churches today?

Matter of fact in Revelation 2:15 Jesus rebukes the church of Pergamos for embracing the doctrines of the Nicolaitans. So we can conclude here that it is evident that the doctrines of the Nicolaitans were very popular but not Biblical. Many churches such as the church of Pergamos embraced the false teachings, but the church of Ephesus refused to and Jesus praised them for it. Do you know what doctrines or teachings that you are embracing and believing? Are they supported by the word of God? Even though doctrines may be popular we must be like Ephesus and test all things by the Word of God.

After Jesus praised the church of Ephesus for all that they were doing right, what significant message did Jesus give to them?

Let’s look at the second half of the body of the message that Jesus gave to Ephesus.

Revelation 2:4-5

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast **left thy first** [Gk: foremost] **love** [Gk: Agape love].

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.

Love (Greek): agapē (G26)

From G25; love, that is, **affection or benevolence**; specifically (plural) a love feast: - (feast of) charity ([-ably]), dear, love.

Agape Love is the type of love and affection that God has towards us and this the type of love we should have for each other.

1 John 4:7

7 Beloved, **let us love one another**: for **love is of God**; and every one that **loveth is born of God, and knoweth God**.

When Jesus is our first love we learn how to love each other.

It is evident from Jesus' rebuke of the church of Ephesus that they took their eyes off their first love, Jesus Christ.

Can we truly keep the commandments of God without the love of Jesus implanted in our hearts? No!

The commandments are spiritual. In our sinful flesh we hate the commandments of God. Only the love of Jesus implanted in our hearts makes it spiritually possible to love Jesus and God's commandments of God.

Romans 8:7

7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

Romans 7:14

14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

It is the love of Christ within us that give us the capacity to love Him, His commandments, and others. His love works in us to recreate with us a new heart and character.

2 Corinthians 5:14-18

14 For the love of Christ constraineth [Gk: to hold together] us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

15 And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

16 Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

The Love of God is the foundation of the Ten Commandments.

Matthew 22:37-40

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The Love of Jesus and the Commandments are inseparable. God's love does not excuse sin but calls all of us to repent and be converted.

Not only does the love of Christ cleanse you from sin, but gives you the power to love Him in return by keeping ALL of his commandments.

John 15:9-11

9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

The love of Jesus and the commandments of God is a unified message that has the power to convict souls of the truth. They must go hand in hand.

According to Jesus what happened to Ephesus when they left their first love / foremost Agape Love?

The church of Christ is a movement of people giving the truth of God with power and the glory of God NOT self. We are to reflect God's character. Does not matter all the right things we may do for God, SELF cannot be allowed to take any glory.

How did Ephesus leave their FIRST love?

First let's go to the Bible definition of true Godly love:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

4 Charity (Gk: Agape love) suffereth long, and is kind; **charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,**

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Ephesus at one time possessed all these principles of true agape love, but they abandoned one major principle which caused them to fall from their original position of their first and pure love. In Jesus message to Ephesus He mentioned many positive characteristics about Ephesus, but **He never characterized them for possessing humility.** If we go back to Revelation 2:2,3, we find that Jesus positively characterizes the church of Ephesus as being **patient, long-suffering, hating evil, and upholding truth.** But when you compare it with 1 Corinthians 13:4 -7 Jesus does not say that Ephesus "envieth not nor vaulted not itself or is not puffed up."

What is the opposite of humility? Pride.

What does the Bible say would happen to those who possess pride?

Proverbs 29:23

23 A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.

Proverbs 16:18

18 Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

PRIDE was the main reason why Ephesus lost or left their first love. Pride is idol worship of self and others. Whenever you take your eyes off Jesus and His love you will always walk in the pride of self!

"I" is the center of PRIDE and SIN. It is a disgrace to God. God hates it.

Ephesus taught the commandments of God without the LOVE OF JESUS.

Since Jesus reveals that Ephesus left their first love it is evident that they continued to teach about the commandments of God, but without of Love of Jesus! Remember it is the love of Jesus that gives one power over sin and power to keep the commandments of God.

What did Jesus tell Ephesus that they needed to do in order to continue to be part of God's true church?

Revelation 2:5

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**.

Repent in the Greek means to “think differently.” Repentance is an attitude of humility to turn from sin. Christ warned Ephesus to repent and return to that first love and do the service of Christ out of pure love for others and Christ and not self. If they refused to repent and continued in sin they would be removed from the true church of Christ by Christ Himself.

What does Jesus promise the church of Ephesus at the conclusion of His letter if they did repent?

Revelation 2:7 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.

On the prophetic outline what historical period of the Christian church movement does the message of Ephesus represent or symbolize?

The beginning of God's true church movement after His ascension into heaven started in 31 AD. It lasted until many of the apostles were martyred for their faith in Christ. Ephesus represents the early church period in its purity. This period is known as the apostolic period because many of the disciples also known as apostles were living at the time. Many churches like Ephesus during the apostolic period were challenged to maintain their first love and to uphold the standards and teachings of the church in its purest form. They had to deal with the temptation of becoming prideful of self because many people were added to the church daily.

Where is your first LOVE? Have you left it? What are the main lessons that we learned from the letter to the Church of Ephesus?

LOOKING RECOGNITION

When you surrender yourself to Jesus Christ, and keep your daily focus and worship on Him, and allow Him to work within you, good works will be automatic. The focus is on Christ and not yourself. **The love of God dwelling in your heart will produce the good fruit of works. But good works does not produce genuine pure love.**

Jesus says in Matthew 18:4 ⁴Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Nobody [preacher, teacher, evangelist, etc..] is exempt from being corrupted with pride and abandon the pure true love of Christ, especially when a lot of praise is being accepted.

Matthew 7:21-23

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

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