

The Loveless Church
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Revelation 2:1-7

Before we get into the depth of this revelation written to the church of Ephesus, we need to get a background on them as well as the city of Ephesus itself.

It was a wealthy and powerful city of the Roman Empire. Because of its location, affluence and beauty, Ephesus was a place of great commerce. It was the New York of its time. It was also known as the Central Bank of Asia. Ephesus had a financial institution on nearly every corner.

Ephesus boasted of its diversity and its open religions. Many temples existed there but none as grand as the temple to Diana – The seventh wonder of the ancient world. This temple was 425 feet long, 260 feet wide, and 100 feet high. It had a combined seating capacity of 24,000. Ephesians worshiped the goddess Diana. She was a black, cow-like buffalo-shaped idol with paps hanging down from her. The paps were there to remind people of a baby suckling its mom; but in the case of Diana, people had a constant image of her paps as a place where they were to glean spiritual insight. So in the midst of this you have eunuchs, prostitutes, singers, dancers, and criminals doing things that are not to be mentioned among the Saints. It was so bad that one of their historians named Heracltas said, “The morals of the temple were worse than the morals of animals, for even dogs don’t mutilate each other.” He also said, “The people there were only fit to be drowned.”

Ephesus had the greatest harbor in Asia Minor. More trading went on there than in any other city in that region. And with much trading, buying and selling, there were many people. There were also four great roads that went into Ephesus, thus making Ephesus known as the marketplace of Asia or the gateway to Asia. In later times when the martyrs were brought from Asia to be thrown to the lions in the arena in Rome, they would come through Ephesus on the highway and it therefore became known as the Highway of the Martyrs.

No wonder Paul says in **1 Corinthians 16:8-9** “But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”

Let’s take a look at the people who God had already used in Ephesus. He had previously sent Aquila and Priscilla. Apollos, Timothy, even John had also been there, but the most amazing thing is that the people in Ephesus also had the apostle Paul right in their midst, and they wanted to kill him. See **Acts 19**.

Paul had written a letter to the Ephesian church after it had been established; after their labor of love which had been received with joy. Yet it had been forty years since he wrote that first letter, and now here in Revelation we see that a new letter arrives and its Author is Jesus Christ.

These letters that Jesus has written to the seven churches must be taken seriously, for these letters will encourage us, challenge us, and correct us.

If there was ever a spiritual tune-up to be given, this is it for the Christian church!

1. Each of these letters was actually written to seven real congregations in the first century.
2. In each letter to each church, Jesus says, “I know your works.”
3. In each letter to each church, there is a verdict from Jesus regarding the condition of the church.
4. In each letter to each church, Jesus says, “To him who overcomes.”
5. In each letter to each church, Jesus says, “He that has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”
6. In each letter to each church, Jesus gives a description of Himself that pertains in a particular way to what that church is in need of.

These are personal letters to each of us today. They tell us that these seven attributes should exist in every local church and that in the life of every

Christian we may experience any one of these attributes during our lives. It's an exhortation to us today!

Revelation 2:1 "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 lamp stands ...' We already know who the seven stars are, and who the seven golden lamp stands are (**Revelation 1:17-20**) but he brings them up again. Why?"

Jesus wants to reinforce the accountability aspect of this church's leadership and membership for their witness, actions and service.

Notice He says "He who holds the seven stars." The word "hold" is the Greek word *krateo*, which means to have in the grip; to have seized with dominance, to control by direct use; to have all authority over another.

Jesus says it does not matter what you think or what you say, He alone is in charge and we all have to answer to Him. Then He goes on to say that He walks in the midst of the seven golden lamp stands.

Jesus wants His churches to know that He is still there and that He wants to know the atmosphere of His churches. What does it feel like? Is it warm and inviting? Is it caring and reaching out?

Verses 2 and 3 say "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; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary."

Before Jesus gives them the condemnation, He gives them the commendation. You will see this as a pattern in His letter to the churches.

He says:

1. "I know your works." **James 2:14** ["What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?"] Their works proved that their faith was real.

2. “I know your labor.” This word “labor” means that they served so faithfully and so long that when they stopped, they would hit the bed exhausted.

People, it should cost us something when we follow Jesus. Jesus tells a story in **Mark 10:21** of how He asked a young man to follow Him. Yet to the young man the cost of following Jesus was too steep. [“Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.’”] Taking up your cross for Christ is an act of laboring out of your love for Him.

1 Corinthians 15:58 [“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”] Jesus calls us beloved because of our labor of love for Him.

3. “I know your patience, your endurance.” Their heart was right, therefore they could endure hardship and not give up. They were not whiners. They got better when things got hotter. **2 Timothy 2:3**: “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”
4. “I know that you can’t bear those who are evil.” This is church discipline being applied. If there was something going on in the church, they didn’t close their eyes to it, they dealt with it. **1 Corinthians 5:9-13** [“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person.’”]

Sadly, this is one reason churches today are so weak and polluted, we fail to deal with our sins within the body of Christ. The very God that walks in our midst asks us a question: “Do you hate what I hate?”

Psalm 5:4-5 [“For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, Nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity.”]

5. “You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them to be liars.” By comparing what had already been revealed to them in scripture with what some teachers were saying, they were able to quench false doctrine. **Acts 20:29-30** [“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”]

Also speaking on liars, **1 Timothy 4:1-2** says “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron ...”

When a church or a person starts to deviate from Truth, it opens itself up to satanic delusion.

6. Then He says, “I know you have persevered, have patience, have labored for my name’s sake, and have not become weary.” There are too many people who start their race well but never complete it. **Galatians 6:9-10**: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

The church of Ephesus never lost sight of what they were doing or why they were doing things. They knew that what they were doing had a purpose.

Verse 4 - After the commendation, Jesus gives them the condemnation. In this verse, He says, “Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left

your first love.” Wow! After all the good things said about this church, they still had a problem.

In the original Greek, it reads, “But I have against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first.” The word “abandoned” or “left” is the same word found in **1 Corinthians 7:11** when it says “divorce” or “put away”: [“But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.”] Wow!

This tells us that the church in Ephesus had become too busy to carry on with the love relationship they had at first with Christ.

Has the busyness of your ministry become so incredible, that you have forgotten why you do things for Christ?

When love for the Lord dries up and is replaced with service for the Lord, there is trouble. God wants us to serve Him, but not at the expense of our relationship with Him.

This is what has happened to some of you more seasoned Christians. You’ve become so refined and mature that you’ve fossilized in your chairs.

- You do nothing with no one and have become selfish.
- You once shared Jesus with others because you couldn’t keep your mouth shut.
- You once gave of your time because you knew your time belonged to Jesus.
- You once gave of your money because you believed that it would reach others for Jesus.

Now your new name could be Lazarus. You’ve been resurrected from the dead, but now you’re wrapped in old stinking grave clothes!

Notice that Jesus said they left their first love not lost their first love. When you lose something you don’t know where it is, but when you leave

something, you know where it is yet you've simply walked away from it. (The admonition: Go back to your first love!)

Verse 5 - Next we have the three R's: Remember, Repent, and Repeat.

1. Remember. I think we need to look at this in two ways.
 - a. What was so good about our life before Christ?
 - b. We need to remember the look we had on our faces when we began to serve Christ at first. Was it a look of being in love?
2. Repent. "Lord, I am not where I need to be with You." **Psalm 51:17**: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise."

Note this, we can run a great distance away from God, but it only takes one step to return to Him.

3. Repeat. I know what the Lord is calling me to do in order to keep my love alive for Him. One thing that He is saying to me is get up while it's still dark and I will hear from Him. What about you? What do you need to repeat? **Jeremiah 33:11** says "The voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say: 'Praise the LORD of hosts, For the LORD is good, For His mercy endures forever'—and of those who will bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. 'For I will cause the captives of the land to return as at the first,' says the LORD."

Verse 5 – "Or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp stand from it place, unless you repent."

Jesus says that they would lose their witness and that's exactly what happened. People, there is no longer the same church of Ephesus. **2 Corinthians 13:5**: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified."

Verse 6 – “But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” We’ll talk about this when we get to the church of Pergamos. But He makes it clear, they hate sin: not the people who commit sin but their sinful deeds.

Verse 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.” He who had an ear, let him hear.

This calling is for all who desire to live for the Lord, and it has a promise to the overcomer, an entrance into heaven.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

Wow!