

TEXT SERMONS

SERIES: REVELATION CHAPTERS 1-3

MESSAGE #4

**EPHESUS**

**“THE CHURCH THAT HATED BUT DID NOT LOVE”**  
**REVELATION 2:1-7**

The last correspondences of Christ to His churches are archived, not in the first books of the New Testament but in the last book of the New Testament; not in the books of the Four Gospels but in the book of the Four Horsemen.

The last letters of a person also are very special. The letters of our Lord in Revelation chaps. 2 and 3, written to seven churches in Asia Minor, are letters that could just as well have been written to churches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and indeed the letters were intended by our Lord to be read by churches today. That is why we study and profit from them.

There were more than seven churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor. There were Colosse and Hierapolis, for instance, not mentioned by John. The seven churches that were addressed were doubtless selected by the Lord Jesus because of the conditions that existed in them.

The letters contain practical, perpetual and prophetic instruction. Practical instruction in that they were intended to address situations that prevailed at that time. Perpetual instructions for the conditions that existed in those churches have existed in churches perpetually to this very day and prophetic instructions for the order in which they are recorded mirror the entire history of the church age until the return of our Lord.

The basis of all correct applications of scriptural truth is the historical and grammatical interpretation of scripture. Therefore, an understanding of the historical context in which each of these churches existed will contribute much to help in the proper exegesis and interpretation of these letters.

As we study this correspondence to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 we need to be reminded that these are authentic and accurate evaluations of these churches by the Head of the church, the Lord of the Lampstands, the Christ of the Candlesticks. “His eyes like a flame of fire” (Rev.1:14) and His penetrating gaze misses nothing!

**Ephesus**

Ephesus is addressed first, perhaps because it was closer than the other six churches to the island of Patmos where John was a prisoner. Ephesus was sixty miles away on the mainland and had the distinction of being the capital of the Roman province and was the recipient of the first of the Lord’s letters.

As we examine the correspondence of Christ we will use basically the same format for the

study of each church as follows:

- The Place where the church is located;
- The Posture of Christ in relation to the church;
- The Praise He gives the church, if there is any;
- The Problem He addresses, if there is any;
- The Prescription He gives the church;
- The Promise He makes.

## **I. EPHESUS – THE PLACE.**

### **A. Its Name And Location.**

Ephesus was located on what today is the southwestern coast of Turkey. Its name means “Letting go” which is interesting in view of the condition of the church located there.

### **B. It Was a City of Great Commercial Importance.**

In commerce and wealth few cities surpassed Ephesus. It was called the Gateway to Asia. It was a great market for fine goods such as ivory, gold, silk, scarlet cloth, fine linen, brass work, marble and wine. It was also called “The Vanity Fair” of the ancient world. It was situated on the coast similarly to New Orleans, LA and was at the mouth of the Cayster River. It was a cesspool of corruption.

### **C. It Was A City Of Great Political Importance.**

For a time each year the Roman Governor resided in Ephesus because this was the capital of the Roman province. Cases were brought there to be tried before him.

### **D. It Was A City Of Great Religious Importance.**

Its greatest glory was the Temple of Diana. The temple was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide and 60 feet in height. There were 127 marble pillars, each dedicated to a King. Thirty-six of them were overlaid with gold and had precious jewels embedded in them.

In the temple was kept the image of the goddess Diana. It, they believed, had fallen from Jupiter. In Acts chapter 19 it is recorded that the Apostle Paul caused quite a stir when he went to Ephesus preaching the gospel and exposed the falsity of their beliefs. We read that, “a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: “Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.” (v.24-27)

Not only was the image of Diana kept in the temple but money was placed in the temple for safe-keeping which made it similar to a bank vault. It was also the center for prostitution and many other evil practices.

Hereclitus, a famous philosopher in that era, known also as “The Weeping Philosopher”, was said to never have smiled. He was a resident of Ephesus and said, “The inhabitants are fit only to be drowned.”

Such was ancient Ephesus. Paul ministered there longer than he ministered in any other city and it was there that some of his greatest victories were won. Acts chapters 18-20 record Paul’s ministry there. Paul’s understudy, Timothy, later pastored the church in Ephesus. By the time the Lord Jesus dictated the Ephesus letter to John, Timothy had died and the church’s best days were in the past.

Please do not discount or pass lightly over the historical background of the city of Ephesus. It figures prominently in what Jesus had to say to the church located there.

## II. **EPHESUS - THE POSTURE OF CHRIST.** Rev. 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 lampstands.’”

In each of the seven letters the posture of Christ is significant. It reveals whether the conditions in the church were good or bad. To the church in Ephesus, the Head of The Church appears as the Inspector of the church. We see Him walking in the midst of the candlesticks. We learned in chapter one that the candlesticks are the churches. (v.20)

In chapter 1:13 John saw Jesus “standing” in the midst of the candlesticks – the churches. Here in 2:1 we see Him “walking” among the various candlesticks. He is surveying, analyzing each. He is observing our churches today. What does He see? What would He write if He were to write a letter to our churches?

## III. **EPHESUS – THE PRAISE OF CHRIST.** Rev. 2:2,3

“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.”

Jesus said, “I know.” He is the omniscient One. Nothing is hidden from His scrutiny in our lives individually or in our church or churches collectively and corporately. He knew about:

### **A. Their Struggles.**

“I know your works, your labor, your patience.” I know your works, both good and bad; I know the rigors of labor, the struggles(original would suggest) you are having; I know of your patient endurance. These are all good qualities for which He commends them. He begins with positive comments. That is a good example for us to follow as well.

### **B. Their Strictness.**

“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” (v2) “You hate the deeds of the

Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” (v.6)

They were ardent haters of heresy and hunters of heretics. They hated evil and so should we. However, it is possible to be so consumed with hating evil that there is no loving of good. We must be balanced, as Amos admonishes us to “Hate the evil, and love the good.” (Amos 5:15)

### **C. Their Steadfastness.**

“and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.” Or, as the KJV “have not fainted.” Their opposition to the godless lifestyles around them did not win them any friends and the ACLU type of organizations of their day surely made life difficult for them. However, they persevered, they were not quitters. My homespun definition of “perseverance” is: “Keep on purring regardless of how “severe” things may be!

## **IV. EPHESUS – THE PROBLEM CHRIST ADDRESSES. Rev. 2:4**

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

“I know .... nevertheless.” Christ commends before He criticizes. The problem was disordered priorities: they had left their first love. They were all law and no love. They were straight as a gun barrel in their doctrine and discipline and just as empty as a gun barrel in their love. First love, how fervent, how devoted, how beautiful! But they had left that first, that early, that fresh first love.

Surrounded as they were by worshippers of a false deity and a society that tolerated every type of gross immoral and unethical behavior, these believers had reacted by being strict, letter-of-the-law, cross every “T” and dot every “I”, straight-laced legalists. They had their good points – they did not have corrupt doctrine, had not neglected discipline and were not engaged in immoral conduct. However, they did not have that all-essential, paramount Christ-like quality of love. They carried a stick but had no carrot.

Left! Not lost! Jesus said they had “left” their first love. Do not get the words wrong. They had just turned to other loves. Their priorities were misplaced. They were so busy laboring for Christ that they left off loving Christ. They were so focused upon separating from evil that they left off separating unto Christ. They were fixated upon hating those who were evil but they were not fascinated with loving Him who is Holy!

The Ephesian error threatens churches today. We can get so busy with programs, committees, boards, societies, functions – the peripheral – that we leave the central attraction, our Lord and Savior, the Head of the church. We can become so busy with doing the good that we fail to do the best. I believe that the average church needs to return to their first love, that honeymoon type of love that has eyes only for the Lover of our souls!

## **V. EPHESUS – THE PRESCRIPTION FOR THE CHURCH. Rev.2:5**

“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.”

Within this prescription are four propositions:

**A. Proposition number one: “REMEMBER.”**

Memory can serve as a great mechanism for rescuing us from the brink of tragedy. “Remember from where you have fallen.” This was a fallen spiritual Bride of Christ. They were not *what* once they were. They were not *where* once they were. They were a prodigal church and like the prodigal son needed to remember the warmth of a better relationship.

**B. Proposition number two: “REPENT.”**

Repentance has to do with sin. They had sinned. “Repent” means a change of mind with a corresponding change of conduct.

**C. Proposition number three: “REPEAT”**

“and do the first works.” Renew courtship with Christ – fall in love all over again, repeat the first acts of love.

**D. Proposal number four: OR ELSE REMOVAL.**

Repent or else! Else I will come and remove your lampstand – the testimony. The purpose of the church is to shine. “You are the light of the world.” Uselessness always invites disaster. The church that has ceased to shine has lost the reason for existence. Ichabod – the glory has departed.

**VI. EPHESUS – THE PROMISE TO THE CHURCH. V.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.”

The promise is conditional:

**A. There must be receptivity.**

“He who has an ear, let him hear.” This is the first of seven times the phrase is used in chapters 2 and 3 at the conclusion of each letter. Jesus says, “Listen to the Spirit.” If the church had listened to the Holy Spirit’s witness, it would not have drifted from its first love.

**B. There must be a response.**

“To him who overcomes...” Not only are they to hear the Spirit’s witness but they must act, obey, overcome by remembering, repenting and repeating the first-love deeds.

**C. There will be a reward.**

“I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” It is interesting that the Lord of the Lampstands would use this phrase which would remind the church of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. What was the first family’s sin? They left their first love and lusted after other than God’s will for them.

Notice that Jesus said to “hear what the Spirit says to the *churches*” – plural! Years before Paul had written to the church in Ephesus expressing his desire for them: “That you, being rooted and grounded in *love*, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — to know the *love* of Christ which passes knowledge.” (Eph.3:17-19) They had heard but did not heed.

All churches need to be warned of the danger of hearing but not heeding what the Spirit says to the churches. Leaving the first love does not happen all at once. First love can gradually cool off until the unheeding and unrepentant church is left without love, life or light.

Let us all pray and practice the truth of Elizabeth P. Prentiss’ hymn:

“More love to Thee, O Christ, more love to Thee!  
Hear Thou the prayer I make on bended knee;  
This is my earnest plea: more love, O Christ to Thee,  
More love to Thee, more love to Thee!”

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