

Session 2 Jesus' Message to the Church of Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7)

I. EPHESUS: RETURNING TO OUR FIRST LOVE (REV. 2:1-7)

A. Jesus' primary message to this church was to call them to return to their first love (Rev. 2:4).

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: ²"I know your works, your labor...and you have tested those who say they are apostles and...have found them liars; ³and you have persevered...and labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. ⁴Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand... ⁶But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷He 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." (Rev. 2:1-7)

B. Jesus affirmed their diligent work for His sake and in standing up for truth, yet required them to repent of neglecting to love Him. He offered a specific blessing to believers who overcame this.

II. THE CITY OF EPHESUS

A. Ephesus was the financial center and capital city of the Roman province of Asia Minor and its largest city with a population of 250,000 people. A seaport city on the Mediterranean Sea, it was a center for idol worship in Asia, hosting the temple of Diana, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The temple was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and 60 feet high, and held up by 127 marble pillars. It combined religion and sexual immorality. The silversmiths prospered because many throughout Asia purchased their silver and bronze idols of Diana (Acts 19:25).

B. Paul established a church in Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 19-20), staying there for three years (Acts 20:31; AD 53-55). The great revival in Ephesus impacted all of Asia (Acts 19:26). The people responded so fervently to the gospel that the market for purchasing idols was dramatically reduced. The once-fervent worshipers of Diana had become worshipers of Jesus.

¹⁰...so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord...¹¹God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul...¹⁹Many...brought their books [on magic] together and burned them...the value...totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰So the word of the Lord

grew mightily and prevailed...²⁶throughout almost all Asia, Paul has persuaded...many people... (Acts 19:10-26)

- C. Paul left Ephesus in AD 55, establishing Timothy as the primary apostolic leader (I Tim. 1:3). In approximately AD 65, John became the primary leader in Ephesus for a season. He was later imprisoned on the island of Patmos, about 60 miles from Ephesus. John wrote Revelation in about AD 90, almost 40 years after Paul first established the church. At that time, the church of Ephesus was the largest and most influential church since the church in Jerusalem was scattered in AD 70.
- D. Paul's final exhortation to Ephesus was that they love Jesus in sincerity (Eph. 6:24).
²⁴Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. (Eph. 6:24)

III. JESUS' REVELATION OF HIMSELF: HE HOLDS, ANOINTS, AND PROTECTS (REV. 2:1)

- A. Jesus highlighted His tender care for His leaders and to manifest presence in the Church.
¹These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands... (Rev. 2:1)
- B. Jesus clarified that the seven stars represented seven angels or apostolic leaders, one over each of the seven churches (Rev. 1:20). He entrusted a message to the leadership team of each church in Revelation 2-3. The "angel of" the church refers to the apostolic leader over each of the churches.
The word "angel" is *angelos* in Greek. It may refer to a human or angelic messenger (Lk. 1:11; 7:24, 27; 9:52). It was translated *messenger* in reference to John the Baptist (Mt. 11:10. Mk. 1:2).
²⁰The mystery of the seven stars... and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels [messengers] of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands...are the seven churches. (Rev. 1:16-20)
- C. ***He who holds the seven stars in His right hand***: He emphasized His tender care and commitment to help the messengers (angels) or apostolic leaders over His churches. Jesus desires to anoint His servants as bright stars that reflect light to equip the church as a lampstand touching the region.
 - 1. Jesus holds His leaders in His right hand as He supports, directs, delivers and anoints them.

2. David associated God's right hand with His kindness in protecting him from those who rose up against him (Ps. 17:7). God's right hand is also associated with God's delight (Ps. 16:11), God's blessing (Ps. 18:35), God's power (Ps. 20:6), and the place of honor (Heb. 1:3).

⁷Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand, O You who saves those who trust in You from those who rise up against them. (Ps. 17:7)

- D. ***He who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands***: Jesus is deeply involved with His churches, protecting those who walk with Him as Adam walked with God in the garden of Eden. When God's servants feel inadequate in their ministry or in overcoming temptation, they can confess that Jesus holds them in His right hand and walks with them in partnership to help them.

¹⁴For the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy... (Deut. 23:14)

IV. AFFIRMATION: PERSEVERING IN THEIR LABORS AND IN STANDING FOR TRUTH

- A. Jesus affirmed their faithfulness to minister diligently to others and their perseverance to stand for truth even under pressure for the four decades since the church was founded in AD 53-55.

²I know your works, your labor, your patience [perseverance], and that you cannot bear those who are evil. You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³and you have persevered...and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary...⁶This you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans... (Rev. 2:2-3, 6)

- B. ***You labored and have not become weary*** (2:3): They were diligent in ministering to many others. Jesus remembers all our efforts in serving others because of our love for Him (Heb. 6:10).
- C. ***You cannot bear those who are evil***: They would not tolerate false apostles who lied about their calling and promoted false doctrines. They tested and then exposed false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13), requiring them to uphold biblical standards and lifestyles. Paul prophesied to the Ephesians elders, warning them of false teachers who would rise up in their midst after he left (Acts 20:29-30).

- D. ***You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans:*** The common view among the early church fathers was that this was a reference to followers of Nicolas, a deacon in Jerusalem who fell into error (Acts 6:5).

In the second century, Irenaeus taught that the Nicolaitans were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh, especially with immorality. This same distortion of “liberty in grace” is common today.

⁴Certain men have crept in unnoticed...who turn the grace of God into lewdness. (Jude 4)

- E. Another view of the Nicolaitans is that it is a transliteration of two Greek words: *nico* (to rule) and *laos* (the people), thus, “*one who rules the laity.*” This view refers to church systems that inappropriately exalt leaders with an authoritarian spirit over the people that they serve.

V. CORRECTION FOR COMPROMISE: NEGLECT IN CULTIVATING LOVE FOR JESUS

- A. Jesus corrected them for neglecting their devotion to loving Him that initially was so prominent in the great revival of Acts 19. Service and doctrinal purity are very important, but they can never replace taking time to cultivate our love for and communion with Jesus. It takes time to cultivate deep and consistent love for Jesus. It requires developing a heart focus that connects with Him.

⁴Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. (Rev. 2:4)

- B. ***I have this against you:*** Jesus loves His people enough to speak “redemptive rebukes” to them. Jesus corrected their neglect to cultivate love for Him in the midst of ministry labors. They saw increasing their ministry as more important than increasing their love for Jesus.

¹⁹As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (Rev. 3:19)

- C. The command to love God with all of our heart is the first and great commandment (Mt. 22:38). God's primary assignment in our life is to grow in love for Him. Ministry that does not flow from a foundation of intimacy with Jesus will always lead to being wounded, bitter, bored, and burned out.

VI. EXHORTATION TO RESPOND (WITH A WARNING): REMEMBER, REPENT, AND ACT

- A. Jesus called them to respond in three ways in restoring their love—to remember, repent, and act.

⁵Remember 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. (Rev. 2:5)

- B. **Remember:** They were to recall how they used to love and spend time with Jesus. We are to recall His goodness and our past devotion for Him. They left their first love, but not their hatred for evil. Do you remember when you felt the joy of abandonment to Jesus when you first heard the call to extravagant devotion? The Spirit will help us to return to the freshness of our first love.
- C. **Repent:** They were to repent of this negligence by changing their life vision, priorities, and lifestyle choices (the way they spent time and money) to pursue loving Jesus as the primary dream of their heart. By calling them to repent of this neglect, He was identifying it as sin, not just weakness.
- D. **Act:** They were to *do the works* or actions they did at first when their devotion to Jesus was fresh and strong. Mary “chose” the good part. *We must choose it.* It was sustained throughout her life.

⁴²One thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her. (Lk. 10:42)

1. Cultivating a responsive heart of extravagant devotion to Jesus takes time and effort. It is something that we must do deliberately. Love does not automatically grow. Rather, it automatically diminishes unless we intentionally cultivate a responsive heart.
 2. Sustaining a fresh walk with God through decades is the definition of living radically before God. We are not radical because we do something unusual for a few weeks or months.
- E. ***I will remove your lampstand:*** God's grace shone as a bright light from Ephesus into all of Asia. Being a “lampstand ministry” speaks of a ministry with far-reaching influence to other ministries. To have their “lampstand removed” was to lose the grace to influence others in a significant way.
Jesus would remove their lampstand so that their error would not be imparted to other ministries who assumed the “mega-church in Ephesus” had a good foundation and was doing things rightly.
 - F. ***I will come to you quickly:*** This is a reference to Jesus' coming to discipline them, to correct them, *not* a reference to His second coming. This church no longer existed after the fourth century.

VII. PROMISE FOR OVERCOMERS: ONE PROMISE

- A. Jesus will reward overcomers by allowing them to eat from the tree of life “in the midst” of Paradise. Adam walked with God in the garden of Eden.

⁷He 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. (Rev. 2:7)

- B. ***In the midst of Paradise:*** All believers will eat of the tree of life which grows “throughout” the vast New Jerusalem. Here Jesus may be suggesting a special blessing in eating from the trees “in the midst” of the New Jerusalem—a blessing offered to those who *overcome* their negligence to cultivate love for Jesus. Is there a unique quality of glory associated with some of the trees in the New Jerusalem? Are there trees “in the midst” of Paradise that are in closer proximity to Jesus’ throne?

⁹...God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden [of Eden]... (Gen. 2:9)

²In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits...¹⁴ Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life... (Rev. 22:2, 14)

- C. Jesus called believers to repent of neglecting Him while acknowledging that they persevered in their labor for His sake, refused to bear with false apostles, and hated the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans.