

## Understanding Revelation Part 2

### The Church that needed a Second Honeymoon

Revelation 2:1-7

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." (Revelation 1:10-11).

What significance does what Jesus wrote to these churches in the first century have to our lives today?

1. I do not believe that the seven letters in the book of Revelation identify seven different periods of the history of the church, from the first century, right up until the second coming of Jesus.

The notion that these seven churches describe seven successive periods of Church history hardly needs refutation...

The epistles describe conditions which occur not in one particular age of Church history, but again and again

2. Our first job in interpreting the letters in Revelation chapters 2-3 is to discover the author's original intent, within the context of the first century churches.

3. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16)

Even though these seven letters had significance to the seven churches in the first century, because they are included in the Bible, they also apply to our lives today

4. As we get ready to study these seven letters, it is helpful to note that Jesus follows a similar pattern with each letter, which includes seven different items.

1. **The Name of the CHURCH.** The very first sentence of each letter identifies the name of the church the letter is sent to.
2. **A Revelation of CHRIST.** Each church receives a special revelation about the nature of Jesus Christ Himself.
3. **A COMMENDATION.** Jesus applauds them for what they are doing right.
4. **A CONDEMNATION.** Jesus rebukes them for what they are doing wrong.
5. **A COMMAND.** What Jesus wants them to do to change their ways.
6. **A CHALLENGE.** To every church, Jesus gives the same challenge: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
7. **A COVENANT PROMISE.** What Jesus has promised to do for the overcomers.

As we consider this first church, it would do our study well to see the background of the city of Ephesus.

It was a prosperous city with a strong commerce.

It was a very political city, considered free by even the Romans and had a democratic government.

It was also a pagan city.

A temple to the goddess Diana, one of the seven wonders of the world

It was a massive 425 feet long and 220 feet broad, contained 127 pillars 60 feet tall

The idolatrous worshipers would worship the moon in Her name.

This city was one of wealth and wickedness, yet it had a church that was faithful

For three years Paul labored there.

In Acts 18-20, we find that Paul led Aquilla and Priscilla to the Lord.

Apollos preached the baptism of John the Baptist and was corrected and began to preach Jesus.

A nucleus was formed and the Gospel began to spread.

Then opposition came.

Demetrius the silversmith was angry, Paul had hurt his business that drew support from the worship of idols.

\*\*\*Opposition always comes when you are doing right! But Paul kept preaching.

In Acts 19:18-20, we read, "And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. 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. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."

Revival broke out in the city of Ephesus.

\*Do you remember a revival in your own soul where you threw away the old because the new was so much better?

They had a fire about them.

They had a fervor to live for the Lord that abounded in their lives.

But lost the fervor! They needed to go back and be reminded of where it all began!

The letter to the church at Ephesus begins with a commendation in verses 2-3 and in verse 6.

When the Lord begins to correct His church, He begins with a gracious encouragement.

**\*You can serve the Lord without loving, but you can never love Him without serving!**

They were commended for things needed in the church today.

**First, they were commended of their deeds that were evident.**

Jesus said in verse 2, "I know thy works."

Each of the seven epistles in this and the third chapter, commences with, "I know thy works."

Each contains a promise from Christ, "To him that overcometh."

Each ends with, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

God knows our deeds and wants our future to be right.

God approved of the deeds of this church.

The works of which He speaks relates to how we occupy our time.

The things that occupy our time either honors God, disregards Him, or dishonors Him.

God should be involved in every area of our lives.

Our family, jobs, ministries, and even recreation should honor the Lord.

**Second, Jesus also knew their labor.**

This word means intense labor that is united with trouble and toil.

There are three kinds of Christians in the church.

First there are "shirkers", those that have not done anything and do not plan on starting anything now.

Second are the "lurkers" that hang around saying how everything ought to be done, they may get a little involved but they never give or commit to much.

There are a lot of "use to be" Christians in the lurkers club.

Third there are the "workers." This is the inner circle that knows what it means to labor.

They are the most involved, faithful in all, will give all and never complain.

Their desire to be faithful to the Lord is what drives them and keeps the church a happy place that honors the Lord.

**Third, Jesus recognized their patience.**

The word here means endurance - the church of Ephesus was a tough church.

They never had a temptation to throw up their hands and quit - they kept moving forward.

They were persistent, faithful and refused to faint.

But why were they doing what they were doing? Was it pride or duty?

They were still had a level of faithfulness, but without the love of God, it has no value.

Jesus then noted their discipline against evil in verses 2 and 6.

They would not tolerate evil in the church.

The modern doctrine of tolerance would not be tolerated!

**\*Today the most intolerant people are those that yell for tolerance.**

The church at Ephesus would not tolerate evil.

This was a church that took a stand for the things of Christ.

They knew that problems exist when sin is tolerated.

Many times people want to say, "the preacher should do something about it."

But here it was the entire church that stood together in unity against sin.

They despised loose living.

Some teach that the "Nicolaitans" were those that would wrongfully lord over God's people.

In today's theology the word has been broken down and that meaning implied to apply to pastors that are dictatorial in their leadership.

Though a pastor should be a strong leader, he should never be a dictator.

He should follow Christ and as he does so, the church should follow him.

But that is not the meaning of this word.

The church despised these teachings because it was a dogma of wickedness.

It is more likely that the Nicolaitans were a group that condoned fornication and had turned Christian liberty into a license to sin.

Some commentators compare them to those that condoned the sins of Balaam.

Much like many churches today that no longer preach holiness.

Holy living is not legalism!

The liberty of Christ has never been a license to sin.

Regardless of the true meaning, **the church at Ephesus despised the ways of those that were opposed to the things of Christ.**

**They were opposed because their doctrine was sound.**

Believing God and His doctrine was not a problem for this church.

They had tried those that had come and claimed to have been apostles and found them to be liars.

They identified false teachers and rejected false doctrine.

The modern church needs a good dose of this.

Just about anyone that come along speaking kindly is embraced by modern Christianity.

We need to be more like the church at Ephesus in this way and identify true men of God.

After the kind words of acknowledgment, Jesus goes to the heart of their problem.

It was a problem of their heart.

Imagine being praised by the Lord.

Imagine as they read the first part of the Letter to the church and how the church erupted into "amen!"

All of the sudden the mood changes.

There is a shocking announcement, "I have somewhat against thee."

How could this be?

They were faithful in deed and doctrine, but their hearts were calloused.

The shocking announcement was that this church had a shameful abandonment.

They had left their first fervor, their first love of the Lord.

They had not lost their salvation, but they had grown accustom to it.

The word here for love is the deepest and most meaningful word for love.

In the book of Ephesians, that was written over thirty years prior to the writing of the Revelation, there are around twenty references to love.

A few of those are:

Ephesians 1:15 *"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,"*

Ephesians 3:17 *"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,"*

Ephesians 3:19 *"And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."*

Ephesians 5:2 *"And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us,"*

Ephesians 6:23-24 *"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen"*

The fact is, God wants our hearts as well as our hands and heads!

A father and daughter always spent time together. All of the sudden the girl was withdrawn. The father was going to speak to her, but before he could his birthday came around. His daughter came in with a beautiful pair of slippers. He thanked her and said, "Dear, it was so nice of you to buy these for me" She said, "I did not buy them, I made them". The father said, "O that is what you have been doing for the last three months." That made the girl curious, and she asked, "How did you know that I had been working on them for three months?" The father answered, "That is how long I have been missing your company" The father was glad to have the slippers, but he wanted the presence of his daughter as well.

\*I want to serve the Lord, and He wants us to serve Him, but He wants us to love Him first.

When we serve without loving Him, the service is empty.

After the criticism, they are faced with a charge from Christ.

They are told to remember.

They were to literally "call to mind constantly" the grace of God and from where they had come.

We should remind ourselves of the grace of God, where we would be had He not saved us, and from whence we have come.

Galatians 4:8-9 says, *"Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"*

We must remember from where we have come and to where we have come.

We are no longer dead in sins, but alive in Jesus Christ.

We no longer belong to the damned, but are members of the family of God and should be delighted.

We are not bound in our trespasses and sins, but our members are to be yielded to righteousness.

So what are we to do?

We must remember and repent and turn from our wicked ways and run back to God.

We must confess that we have failed the Lord in not loving Him like we should.

We should be broken hearted and humbled that God desires us to love Him.

When we are humbled and broken, God will draw close.

**Psalm 34:18** gives a great promise to the ones that are genuinely broken before God. It says, *“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”*  
The Lord gets up close when our hearts are broken.

**After we remember and repent, we are to return.**

We must fall before the Lord and go back to the original fellowship when we were first saved.

We are to do the first works.

That is not speaking of being saved again, rather, it is saying that we should return to living with the same fervor that we had when we first became members of the family of God.

Many a young Christian has made a mistake of over zealousness, but they loved the Lord.

God wants us to grow but never let our love wane. I have been guilty of this.

Sadly, we get so consumed in what is around us that we get over the joy and love of being saved.

Oh that God would forgive us and help us to return to our first love.

**Jesus now gives the consequence of disobedience to this challenge.**

Chastisement will come, and will come quickly.

After chastisement, if the church does not repent, there will be an extinguishment, this is speaking of the death of their ministry.

Adam Clarke, explains that Jesus is saying that Jesus would:

Take away my ordinances, remove your ministers, and send you a famine of the word. As there is here an allusion to the candlestick in the tabernacle and temple, which could not be removed without suspending the whole Levitical service, so the threatening here is if they did not repent, unchurch them; they should no longer have a pastor, no longer have the word and sacraments, and no longer have the presence of the Lord Jesus.

**Sadly, history declares that the church at Ephesus did not listen and the Muslim religion engulfed the region and their light went out!**

Jesus kept His promise.

This vibrant church of the New Testament lost their first love and was overtaken in false doctrines.

**The church is in great danger of this again.**

We must return to the genuine love of our God and serve Him on that basis.

Not on the basis of duty or pride, but because we genuinely love Him.

In verse 7 there is a promise to those that are genuinely converted.

The saved are revealed as those that overcome, they are victorious over this life through Christ.

This is not a new word for Christ, for He declared it of Himself in **John 16:33**, *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”*

John understood the word as well **1 John 4:4**, *“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”*

**The idea of overcoming the world by the grace of God was not a new doctrine, but a fact of position.**

Jesus has overcome the world and so will His children.

Those that are genuinely saved will have the privilege of eating the food of heaven.

We will be allowed to approach the tree of life and eat of its fruit.

Sinners will not approach this tree, only those that have been redeemed and changed.

Only those that will experience this corruption putting on incorruption.

Revelation 22:24 refers to this food: *“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”*

**We must conclude by what we have seen that the work of the church of Ephesus was not the problem.**

God approved of their work - their problem was their level of love.

I am sure that they would tell you that they loved the Lord, but God knew their hearts.

Their lives had become mechanical.

We must be careful that our messages, ideas and even questions are clear.

What is it going to take for us to fall in love with Jesus again?

Ephesus was much like many of our cities in America.

Prosperous, no major problems and God’s people were rocked to sleep by the devil.

Everyone should minister, everyone should serve.

**But the devil does not care if you serve, as long as you do not love the Lord, he just wants to discredit Jesus.**

How can I not love Him back?

Dr. E. Stanley Jones tells of a girl who rebelled and ran away from home. She ran to a large city that was close to home. Before long she had no way of supporting herself. Frustrated by the city and her circumstances, she entered a house of prostitution. Her mother missed the daughter greatly. She had heard somewhat of her daughter’s plight, so she went to the large city and desperately sought to rescue her. She sought until her money was exhausted. Not having her child’s address, she left a photograph of herself in each house of ill fame visited. One day, the

errant girl saw on a mantle in a reception room, a familiar picture. It was the likeness of her first love... her mother. She went over and took the picture of that one that had loved her and gazed at the picture. She then notices beneath the picture, two words. Those two words were not meant for every person that came into that place, only for her. It was her that belonged to her mother. Those words were, , "come home." And the girl did, she ran home to the first one she ever loved!

We may run from God, but He desires us to come home and love him once again.

Discontented, excuses abounding, but mostly misery fills the life of a Christian that is away from the Lord.

You may be serving, a pastor, a staff member, a deacon, a choir member, a Sunday school worker, a children's ministries worker, or any other area servant.

Ask yourself, do you serve Him out of love or duty alone?

Have you left your first love?