

“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;

2 I know thy works, and thy labor, 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, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast labored, and hast not fainted.

4 Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first 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. 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

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.” (Re 2:1-7)

Introduction. This is a difficult book for it is a book of prophecy and the figures are often obscure. But a blessing has been promised to those who read and hear. It was the last biblical book to be written, probably 60 a.d. or 90 a.d. Those who take the later date do so on the basis of the tradition of the church; those who take the earlier date do so on how they desire to interpret the book. I think the latter date is correct for both reasons.

There are also various schools of interpretation: *preterist*: the events have largely come to pass already; *futurist*: the events have mostly yet to be fulfilled; *historist*: the book is a symbolic account of the history of the world; *idealist*: the book is a symbolic account of the sufferings of the church during this age and its preservation and triumph in Christ.

I think that the book is a sort of combination of all of these. Some is past, some is future, some is historical; it is all spiritual, and the book primarily deals with the spiritual warfare that the church is called to endure. It is not written for our curiosity, but for our faith.

Most of all, the entire book is about things as seen from the vantage point of Heaven, spiritual in nature, not seen with the eyes of the senses. Things are going on all the time that we know nothing about, but this book tells us about them, and that they are all directed from Heaven.

I think that what I say this morning will be relative to you and me, no matter which school of interpretation you prefer, for I will try to speak to the universal, not the particular. We are all agreed that there were seven such churches in Asia Minor, and these letters are to them; but they are also to us. These are much later than the epistles written by Paul or the other apostles. Many of these churches would be in their second or third generations by 90 AD, and probably only the Apostle John of all the apostles was still living, all of the others being martyred.

We will recognize in these churches good things, some of them bad things. Christ is Lord of all the churches and gives warnings and blessing to them. His words to John are things that John saw, things that are, things that will be. 1:19

The messages are to the “angels” of the churches. This word means “messenger” and is borrowed from the term used for the official reader or messenger of the Jewish synagogues. They would correspond to the pastors or overseers of the churches who are commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ, according to Ephesians 4.

The seven lamps would represent the perfection of the work of the Spirit in the world, Who has honored the church by naming her the pillar and ground of the truth. These messengers to the churches are to deliver the words of Christ to the churches and oversee the work of the church that their light will shine brightly to all the world. What a great honor Christ has given to His church and to His people. But let us look at the words.

To the church at Ephesus.

Nothing is left of Ephesus today. No trace of the great temple to Diana. No trace of great Christian Churches. No trace of Islamic Mosques that replaced those temples. Nothing is left but ruins. But for a time it was a great church having a great reputation in the Christian world, the recipient of a marvelous letter from the Apostle Paul, and signaled out for special attention by Jesus Christ to the Apostle John.

I want to point out a few things that will be instructive to us, a warning to us as individuals and as a church; things that are relevant at all times and places. **I. The Good things. II. The Bad things; III. Warning and Promises.**

I. The Good Things.

- A. They had good works. They tried those who said they were apostles and rejected the false. They did not bear with evil doctrine. Vs. 2. They bore with some other evil, but not with this evil. They were zealous of the truth and contended for it. This is good, but not the sum of our duty.
- B. They had labored. They endured trials. This is the meaning of “labor” taken from a woman bearing a child. Hard and painful.
 - 1. The ancient world was syncretistic, much like our day, and would react very strongly against those who separated between people in terms of the truth, for there was no such kind of truth, according to the pagans.
 - 2. Not only trial from the pagans, but from Christians who thought they were right and rejected the decisions of the church respecting false teachers, They were not often submissive and created factions and parties, hoping to draw off people after them.
 - 3. But the Ephesians had “borne” according to verse 3 which means to ‘carry a heavy burden.’

C. They were patient. They kept on keeping on. Patience is the result of testing and trials. Children want the reward right now; Experience teaches us to be content to wait for the Lord’s timing, to submit one to another, and keep on keeping on. “Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” The farmer knows there is a lot of work involved before you reap a harvest. Sometimes those who reap are not those who plant and water. The harvest is the Lord’s. But we are not to faint.

1. Some fainting is physical
2. Some fainting is mental.
3. People faint at the worst possible times.

II. The Bad Things

- A. They had “left” their first love. “Left” means they had departed from it, or driven it away. They didn’t lose it; they left it. The verb is active.
- B. This may be related to the complain of Malachi concerning the priest in Israel who had abandoned the wives of their youths and married other wives. God said He hated these divorces. This is precisely the meaning of this verb. You have divorced your first love.
- C. This is love for Christ; not for His gifts, but for Himself. “if any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be anathema. I Cor 16:22.
1. He doesn’t mean excitement. Often in revivals of religion there is great excitement that cannot be expected to continue. I remember excitement I felt over basketball games we won when I was in high school. I think about these sometimes with a happy memory, but I don’t run down the street yelling as we did then. This is not what the Lord Jesus is saying. True love does not consist in excitement.
 2. He doesn’t mean the enthusiasm of the world—a shadow of love; a bare caricature. This might be attached to other things. New converts often are filled with enthusiasm: they have a sense of relief that sins are forgiven; that the Bible is making sense; that they have new and better friends. But all these things are the gifts of Christ and not Christ Himself. A girl may have a rush of excitement and enthusiasm when she receive that engagement ring a huge diamond in it, but her husband has a right to expect her to think more of him than she does the ring. The rush of excitement over the ring may fade, but her love and regard for him should grow and mature and be settled and secure.
 3. It doesn’t mean a change of vision. A church’s vision may change because of circumstances, for a vision is a way of focusing resource on things to do good. The need and the opportunity might change the vision of a church.
 4. It doesn’t mean a change of mission. A church’s mission may also change, for the mission is the specific tasks that are undertaken in order to complete the vision of the church. This may also change as circumstances change.
 5. But love for Christ does not change any more than a wife’s love for her husband will change if the circumstances of life change. Her labor may be different, as his will be, if circumstances require him to change his place of dwelling, his occupation, his service to the world. A good wife’s love will not be shaken by any of these changes. Paul had learned in whatsoever state he was, thereby to be content. His love could not be shaken by circumstances.

- D. In living the Christian life it is sometimes easier to get pumped up about Christ's gifts and not rejoice in Christ Himself. I believe this is exactly what Paul talks about. You have laid down your love for Christ, even though you are zealous about other things; things that are good and wonderful gifts, chief among them is truth; but truth cannot be maintained in the church if there is no love for Christ, resulting in no love for the people of God. Love for things is idolatry.
- E. Maybe Paul understood this weakness in the Ephesian church and saw this sin among “14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph 3:14-19)

III. The Warnings and Promises

- A. Warning: removal of the candlestick. Or the lamp, the light. Only God can do this. Such happened to Ephesus. The particular church is gone.
1. Repentance is required. “Left” used for divorce. You abandoned your love; He did not abandon you. You let Him drift away. You were not passive: this is an active verb. You did it; it did not happen to you.
 2. This is a fault in YOU. You did it. It is a sin that requires repentance. It must be faced and abandoned.
 3. The first works are repentance for sins and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what you need now. Repentance and faith are not something you do and then forget about. This is the very bread of the soul, and we are reminded every time we have the Lord's Supper.
 4. But it is good that they reject the Nicolaitans. The followers of Nicholas. This was probably a group that want to have both Christ and the idolatry of the temple of the Ephesians which involved emperor worship. This name appears elsewhere and the ancients seems to think it was connected to the cult of the Emperor. That is also around today in form, if not in name.
 5. God hates idolatry in all its forms.
- B. Promise.
1. To those who hear. You must have your spiritual sense of hearing: a mind that is bent toward knowing and obeying.
 2. Faith overcomes. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. It is the Gospel, the good news, the joyful sound that strengthens to soul to know and obey.
 3. Jesus said that those love who have been forgiven much; this is the reason that you will recover your love at the cross, by faith partaking of His shed blood and broken body; shed and broken for you.

4. The reward of faith is to feast on the bread of God, on the bread of life. To have our souls nourished in the Lord Jesus, for He is the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. Christ is the life of the church and Her reward. “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one cometh to the Father, but by me.”

Application

1. Let us make much of Christ. Let us tell the story of Jesus over and over again. Let us remember the fear, the guilt, the sins from which we have been delivered by our precious Lord, and renew our love and devotion to Him.
2. Let us glory in His righteousness and His strength. Where He gives His righteousness He also gives His strength.
3. Let us encourage one another that this is what the Spirit says to the churches [not just Ephesus].
4. You are the light of the world. It is Christ that lights the world in you and in me. To Him, therefore, is all the glory, the strength, the wisdom, the power, and the might.

Amen and Amen. May God bless you.