

## THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS

### **TEXT: REVELATION 2:1-7**

#### **Introduction:**

1. In the New Testament, there are actually *two* epistles to the Ephesians. The apostle Paul wrote the first one, in approximately 64 AD.
2. Then over 30 years later, a *second* epistle to the church of Ephesus was written. This second letter was written by the Lord Himself (Rev. 2:1).
3. The man who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (2:1) is referred to in Revelation 1:13 as “the Son of man.”
4. All seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3 end with the same message: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).
5. Ephesus was the most prominent city in the Roman province of Asia.
6. Ephesus is west of Laodicea, and is located on a gulf of the Aegean Sea. In the apostolic era, it was an important and flourishing commercial and export center for Asia.
7. The city of Ephesus was also a major center of heathen idolatry and worship. In Acts 19, we read of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. A big riot broke out, and Acts 19:34 says that for two hours the unruly mob cried out, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”
8. The temple of Diana in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In that ornate heathen temple stood an idol of Diana, the goddess of fertility. Her followers engaged in wicked, sensual and vile religious rites.
9. It was in this wicked city that the apostle Paul spent three years preaching the Gospel (Acts 20:31). Referring to the apostles’ ministry in Ephesus, Acts 19:20 says, “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”
10. After Paul left Ephesus, Timothy served for some time as the pastor (I Tim. 1:3). Also, the apostle John pastored the church for some time.

#### **I. A GREAT COMMENDATION**

1. The Lord told the church at Ephesus that He knew the quality of their service, and their obedience (2:2, 3).

2. In Rev. 1:14, the Bible says our Lord's eyes "were as a flame of fire." This signifies His omniscience. The Lord knows all things. He knows everything. Nothing escapes His attention.
3. In fact, if you study these seven letters to the seven churches, you will notice the same thing over and over:
  - To the church at Ephesus, "I know thy works" (2:2).
  - To the church at Smyrna, "I know thy works" (2:9).
  - To the church at Pergamos, "I know thy works" (2:13).
  - To the church at Thyatira, "I know thy works" (2:19).
  - To the church at Sardis, "I know thy works" (3:1).
  - To the church at Philadelphia, "I know thy works" (3:8).
  - To the church at Laodicea, "I know thy works" (3:15).
4. Our Lord knows our "works." We are not saved by our good works, but if we are genuinely saved, we will work (cf. Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:8).
5. James 2:18 says, "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."
6. The church at Ephesus was a working church. "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted" (2:3).
7. DL Moody used to say, "I get weary *in* the work, but I never get weary *of* the work."
8. Our Lord commended the church at Ephesus for their works and their labor and their patience (2:2). In fact, this commendation is repeated for emphasis (cf. 2:3).
9. Furthermore, our Lord commends them because they would not tolerate sin and false teaching (2:2, 6). "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" (2:2).
10. The church at Ephesus had discernment. They had strong convictions. They would not tolerate phony apostles and liars.
11. The church at Ephesus was commended for their patience (2:2, 3), but they had no patience for evil men and false prophets.
12. The apostle Paul had warned the elders of Ephesus that evil men would try and infiltrate the church (cf. Acts 20:17, 27-31).
13. Grievous wolves are always trying to sneak into churches. Jude 4 says they creep in "unawares." I work hard trying to keep the wolves out of our church.

14. Our Lord said in Matthew 7:15, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”
15. Before moving on, notice the contrast between 2:6 and 2:15. That which was hated in the church at Ephesus was accepted and embraced in the church at Pergamos.

## **II. AN IMPORTANT WARNING (2:4)**

1. The church at Ephesus had left its first love (2:4). Perhaps the gradual declension was almost imperceptible. Outwardly, everything seemed to go on as usual.
2. But they had grown cold. They had lost their enthusiasm. Their services were becoming mechanical, routine and ritualistic.
3. Their fire had gone out. They no longer had the same fervency. Their preaching services were beginning to dry up. The power of God was no longer present.
4. AJ Gordon was a great 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher. He pastored the Clarendon Street Baptist Church in Boston. When he first arrived the church was cold and very formal. They had a paid (unsaved) choir, which he wisely got rid of. They had to work hard to get the church back on track because they had left their first love.
5. Gordon wrote this, “Ecclesiastical corpses lie all about us. The caskets in which they repose are lined with satin and are decorated with solid silver handles and abundant flowers. Like the other caskets, they are just large enough for their occupants with no room for converts. These churches have died of respectability and have been embalmed in self-complacency.”
6. “Thou hast left thy first love” (2:4). What are some of the warning signs? We need to watch out for certain signs:
  - When Christians would rather talk about sports, or their job, or shopping, or worldly entertainment, or other frivolous things, than talk about the things of God.
  - When prayer and serious Bible reading is neglected.
  - When there is a lack of interest in preaching services, prayer meeting, Sunday School, missions conference, revival meetings, etc.
  - Vance Havner said, “People go where they want to go. Where their hearts are their heels will follow.”
  - When regular church attendance and godly living becomes wearisome.

- When Christians are cheap and stingy. Vance Havner heard some of these cheap Christians complain that they cannot figure out their tithe. He said, “If it was coming their way, they’d figure it out!”
  - When Christians make excuses for lukewarmness and backsliding. Some new Christians are zealous and fervent until they meet up with a few wishy-washy Christians. Then they start to cool off. How sad!
  - When Christians will not deal with besetting sins.
  - When Christians can grieve the Holy Spirit and not seem to care.
  - When there is a lack of interest in winning souls.
  - When there is a lack of interest in missionary work.
  - When Christians are just about as worldly and carnal as the unsaved.
7. Isaac Watts wrote many great hymns, including “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”
- “Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”*
8. Is that how you feel about the Lord Jesus Christ? If not, then you need to repent (2:5). You have left your first love.

### III. AN URGENT CALL TO REPENT (2:5)

1. Twice we see the word “repent” in Revelation 2:5. Repentance means a change of mind which leads to a change in direction – “and do the first works; or else...”
2. The church at Ephesus was warned that their golden candlestick would be removed. A candlestick is of little value without light, and their light was starting to go out.
3. They needed to repent, but they did not repent. So our Lord had to eventually remove their candlestick. Today the great city of Ephesus is a desolate wasteland.
4. Today there is no Christian witness in Ephesus. It is part of modern-day Turkey, a Muslim country (cf. Acts 19:1, 20). This is the judgment of God upon a people who would not repent.
5. Vance Havner said it would be either “revival or removal.” Ephesus chose removal. It is far better to have revival!
6. Repentance always precedes revival. And remembrance must follow repentance. Our Lord says in Rev. 2:5, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent...”

7. The prodigal son was in the hog pen, when our Lord said in Luke 15:17, “He came to himself.” In other words – he remembered, and then he repented. And then he returned to his father (cf. Rev. 2:5). This reminds us that genuine repentance always leads to action.
8. We need to remember...to think...to do some soul-searching. Remember, it is the Holy Spirit who gives us this great love for Christ.
9. Romans 5:5 says, “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. The letter to the Ephesians, like the six other letters in Revelation 2 & 3, closes with an invitation – “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (2:7).
2. The Holy Spirit is speaking, and so we must listen.
3. There is an invitation, and there is also a promise: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (2:7).
4. Who is he “that overcometh”? First John 5:5 says, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”
5. If you are saved, then according to the Bible, you are an overcomer. First John 5:4 says, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.”
6. In all seven letters, the final challenge is to the overcomer is addressed not to the church, but to the individual – “To him that overcometh” (Rev. 2:7). It is not, “To them that overcome...”
7. In all seven letters, the invitation and the promise is always directed to the individual. The action of the church must begin with the response of each individual member.