

## **Revelation: The Lord and the Church of Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7).**

**By Pastor Jeff Alexander (5/3/2015)**

### **Introduction**

1. Note again the order and arrangement of the letters in chapters 2 and 3, which focuses on their sad condition. The first and last were in grave spiritual danger. The middle three succumbed to compromise and had only a small remnant of faithful believers. Only the second and the sixth remained faithful in the face of severe persecution.
2. Each of the seven churches is examined and judged by the Lord of the churches, Jesus Christ, using: a commendation approving faithful obedience, a criticism of failure or unfaithfulness, counsel to repent and/or warning of judgment should the church fail to make the correction, and a challenge to obedience with promises of eternal reward.
3. Jesus assumes the role of Yahweh over the churches, introducing Himself with variations of the phrase, *“the words of Him,”* language used exclusively by God Himself. The formula, *“these things says the Lord Almighty”* (used over 100 times in OT prophetic writings), introduces the sayings of Jesus, which also emphasizes His divinity.
4. Jesus began by addressing each church through her representative angel to remind each that her main existence was spiritual and heavenly.

### **I. The Commendation**

1. Jesus knows the condition of each church because He walks among the lampstands (a metaphor for His presence) and declares, *“I know”* (knowledge that comes from observation and investigation).
2. What Jesus knows— they had diligently labored, painfully toiled, and patiently persevered (v. 2). They kept doctrinal purity through careful testing of false teaching (v. 3; Acts 20:28-30; Ignatius). They patiently endured great trials for the sake of Jesus’ name—identified as followers of Christ (v. 3). They hated the works of the Nicolaitans (v. 6).

### **II. The Criticism**

1. The charge: *“you have abandoned the love you had at first”* (v. 4)
2. The serious nature of the church’s failure is seen in the consequence of judgment (v. 5).
  - a. This personal “coming” in judgment is prior to His Second Coming.
  - b. This church, critical to the evangelization of Asia Minor (Acts 19), was in danger of ceasing to exist.
3. What is the nature the charge?
  - a. The various interpretations: (1) Failure to love God, (2) Failure to love the brethren, (3) Failure to love the lost. (4) Many see the zeal for doctrinal purity as causing the church to lose her passion for the Lord; yet that zeal is actually commended!
  - b. The key to understanding this fault is Jesus’ repeated observation of the church’s perseverance and endurance. (1) The nature of her persecution—“the long-haul grinding pressure to compromise” amid “societal pressure” was wearing the church down. (2) Jesus warned of this in Matthew 24:9-14. (3) Survival often leads one to silence and seclusion. (4) The

reference to lampstands (v. 1) with judgment threatened also points to the meaning. The primary purpose for the church is to be a light in the darkness pointing to Jesus (Matt. 5:14; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 11:3-7). This was to be Israel's business (Isa. 49:6; 51:4; Zech. 4:2, 11) for which she failed and was judged. The issue is ultimately her lack of dependence on the Spirit.

### **III. The Counsel**

1. Remember—always keep in mind what He saved you from, what He saved you to be, and how He saved you.
2. Repent—a change of mind resulting in a change of direction and behavior
3. Return—to the purpose for which Christ saved you, all-absorbing love to Jesus that first constrained you to devoted service (Eph. 3:16–19, 4:15, 16).

### **IV. The Challenge**

1. Jesus borrows His exhortation from the prophet Isaiah (6:9, 10) to advance the same caution.
  - a. The tragedy of Israel was that her devotion to her idols, her spiritual lethargy, and her stiff-necked resistance to correction made her deaf to the warnings of the prophets that divine judgment was imminent (Ez. 3:27).
  - b. When hearing stops, there is no remedy (Isa. 6:9, 10).
2. The church is often as tone-deaf as Israel and for the same reason— she thinks her place is secured (see Rom. 11: 20, 21).
3. Overcoming is the sole condition for inheriting the promise of salvation.

### **Reflections**

1. Christ will not tolerate unfaithful professors in His spiritual war.
2. Jesus commended the church at Ephesus for her diligence to doctrinal purity. But lack of true knowledge of God, lack of true fellowship, of habitual prayerlessness, or lack of warm and earnest contemplation of the Word destroys the value of doctrine. Unlived doctrine is deadening doctrine.
3. Have you had your spiritual hearing tested lately?