

## **EPHESUS: Returning to Our First Love (Rev. 2:1-7)**

<sup>1</sup> *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, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember 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. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He 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)*

### **I. THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS**

- A. Ephesus was the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Asia Minor with a population of approximately 250,000 people and a public theatre seating 25,000. It was a financial center in being a leading seaport on the Mediterranean Sea. This seaport city was known for immorality. Ephesus was also a major center for idolatry in Asia. The central place of worship in the city was the great temple of Diana, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (425 feet long, 220 feet wide, 60 feet high held up by 127 marble pillars). It combined religion and sexual immorality. The silversmith trade was prosperous because of the demand for gold, silver and bronze idols of Diana to be used as one's household deity (Acts 19:25).
- B. This church was a revival center for Asia (Acts 19:26) being the third most prominent church in the Book of Acts after Jerusalem and Antioch. It was a lampstand bringing light to many. Paul first came to Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem from Corinth at the end his second missionary trip in AD 52 (Acts 18:19-21). He initially preached in the synagogue for several months then left. Priscilla and Aquila stayed to train Apollos and the disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 18:24-28).
- C. Paul returned to establish a church on his third missionary journey (Acts 19-20) which he used as his ministry base for three years (Acts 20:31). The people responded so fervently to the gospel that the market for purchasing idols dramatically reduced. The once fervent worshipers of Diana had become red hot in their devotion to Jesus. The revival resulted in many coming to Jesus with such extreme devotion that they burned magic books worth 50,000 silver coins or drachmas (Acts 19:13-20). A drachma was an average day's wage (\$100/day would have been \$5,000,000).
- D. Paul prophesied to the elders warning them that false teachers would rise up as 'wolves' that would harm the church (Acts 20:17-38). After Paul left, Timothy became the primary apostolic leader (I Tim. 1:1-3). In approximately 65 AD, John became the primary apostolic leader there until his imprisonment on the island of Patmos about 60 miles from Ephesus. At this time, Jesus' mother Mary also lived there. John wrote Revelation about forty years after Paul established the church. The church of Ephesus was the recipient of 8 NT books (Gospel of John, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Revelation). Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus.

## II. JESUS' REVELATION OF HIMSELF: HE HOLDS, ANOINTS AND PROTECTS

<sup>1</sup> *These 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)*

A. Jesus emphasized specific aspects of His glory as seen in Rev. 1:12-20

<sup>13</sup> *In the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man...16 He had in His right hand seven stars...20 The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels (literally messengers) of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches. (Rev. 1:13, 16-20)*

B. *He who holds the seven stars in His right hand* – emphasizes His tender care and commitment to help the messengers (angels) or apostolic leaders over the church. Jesus desires to anoint His servants as bright stars that reflect light to equip the church as a lampstand touching the region.

<sup>3</sup> *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. (Dan. 12:3)*

C. Jesus holds the stars or leaders in His right hand as He supports, directs, delivers and anoints them. The right hand is the hand of kindness that protects when attacked (Ps. 17:7); delight (Ps. 16:11), blessing (Ps. 18:35), power (Ps. 20:6) and honor (Heb. 1:3).

<sup>7</sup> *Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand, O You who save 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 in protecting those who walk holy before Him.

<sup>14</sup> *For 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, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you. (Deut. 23:14)*

## III. AFFIRMATION FOR FAITHFULNESS: PERSEVERANCE IN LABOR AND TRUTH

<sup>2</sup> *I 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; 3 You have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary...6 This you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (Rev. 2:2-3, 6)*

A. *I know your works, your labor, your patience* – Jesus knew they were a hard working church. Patience means perseverance. They were steady and faithful under pressure for decades.

<sup>12</sup> *Here is the patience (perseverance), of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. (Rev. 14:12)*

<sup>12</sup> *The signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. (2 Cor. 12:12)*

- B. ***You labored for My name's sake and have not become weary*** (v. 3) – they were zealous to establish a true biblical message and to maintain diligent outreach to others.
- C. Jesus remembers all our efforts in serving others because of love for Him.  
***<sup>10</sup> God is not unjust to forget your...labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints... (Heb. 6:10)***
- D. ***I know that you cannot bear those who are evil*** – they would not tolerate false ministries who promoted impurity (doctrinally and morally). They exposed false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13). The church is to confront (Mt. 18:15-18; Eph. 5:11; 2 Thes. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:19-20; Tit 3:10-11).  
***<sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him... (2 Jn. 10)***
- E. ***You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars*** – they “tested” the visiting ministries and required that they hold to biblical standards. We must test the message and lifestyle of ministries. Paul prophesied that false teachers would come to them.  
***<sup>29</sup> For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. (Acts 20:29-30)***
- F. ***You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate*** – two main views of the Nicolaitans
1. This refers to followers of Nicolas, the Jerusalem deacon who fell into error (Acts 6:5). This was the common view among the early church Fathers. For example, Irenaeus in the second century taught that the Nicolaitans were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh, especially with immorality. This is antinomianism which teaches grace in a way that allows people to continue in sin without repenting. This distortion of “liberty in grace” that allows for compromise with a sinful culture is prevalent in the church today.
  2. The "Nicolaitans" is a transliteration of two Greek words "Nico" (to rule) and "Laos" (the people). Therefore, “one who rules over the laity.” This view refers to any teaching that exalts the clergy over the laity or to any church system that exalts leaders over people.

#### **IV. CORRECTION FOR COMPROMISE: NEGLECT IN CULTIVATING LOVE FOR JESUS**

***<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. (Rev. 2:4)***

- A. They put labor and growing their ministry reaching into all Asia before cultivating a heart of love for Jesus. The first and great commandment is to love God with all our heart. This will empower us to love people much deeper and with consistency. Lovers always outwork workers. They became like the foolish virgins parable in Mt. 25:1-13.  
***<sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup> This is the first and great commandment. (Mt. 22:37-38)***

- B. ***You have left your first love*** – they left or neglected their original heart of devotion for Jesus that was seen in the great revival in which the church was started in Acts 19. Service and doctrinal purity are very important but they can never replace our love for Jesus.
- C. ***I have this against you*** – Jesus loves us enough to speak against us in redemptive rebukes.  
<sup>19</sup> ***As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (Rev. 3:19)***

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

<sup>5</sup> ***Remember 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)***

- A. Jesus gave this church a three-step process to restore their love: remember, repent and act.
- B. ***Remember from where you have fallen*** – They were to remember how they used to feel about Jesus. We are to think on God’s past goodness to us and our past love and devotion for Jesus. They left their love for Jesus but not their hatred for evil.
- C. ***Repent and do the first works*** – they were to repent of their negligence and then act in ways that would fan the flame of their affection for Him. To repent is to “change our mind and life vision” to agree with devotion for Jesus. The first works are those which are first in priority to God and those which we originally embraced in our walk with Jesus. Loving is top priority to God.
- D. ***I will remove your lampstand from its place*** – the lamp stand of a ministry speaks of their witness to others in the nations. A lamp often speaks of one’s ministry as it brings God’s light to others (Mt. 5:15-16; Rev. 1:20; 2:5; 11:3-6; Zech. 4:2; Is. 62:1; John 5:35). Ephesus was the bright light of all Asia. The ministry that loses its tender love of Jesus will soon lose its light of ministry even if it is diligent in service and sound in doctrine.
- E. ***I will come to you quickly*** – a reference to Jesus’ coming to them in judgment to discipline them (not a reference to His Second Coming). This church no longer existed after the fourth century.

**VI. PROMISE FOR OVERCOMERS**

<sup>7</sup> ***He 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)***

- A. I will give to him to eat from the tree of life –
- B. In the midst of the Paradise of God –  
<sup>2</sup> ***In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits...The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations....<sup>14</sup> Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life... (Rev. 22:2-14)***

## VII. SUMMARY OF JESUS' MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS

The Ephesian Christians were affirmed for their diligent work and perseverance in standing for truth. Some see this church as represented by the New Testament Church (approximately from AD 30-100) with its zeal to work and doctrinal purity.

## VIII. GOD'S FIRST PRIORITY: TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART

<sup>37</sup> *Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment." (Mt. 22:37-38)*

- A. The Holy Spirit is restoring the first commandment to first place in the Church worldwide. We must consciously cultivate the ability to be responsive to God with wholehearted love.
- B. Loving God with all of our heart is the first commandment (is not the "first option") because it is God's first priority. God sees this as the highest lifestyle that anyone can walk in. It is a glorious end in itself. We need a revelation of the supremacy of the first commandment to God.
- C. Loving God with all of our heart is the great commandment because it is great in impact. Loving God *always* has a great impact on our heart in that it leads us to love ourselves and others (believers and unbelievers). It is also a dynamic means to an end. Lovers out work workers.
- D. Service without the foundation of intimacy with Jesus leads to burn out, disappointment, and wounding. Thus, the service is not sustained over decades. I have seen many seek to serve others in ministry that continues for 3-5 years but then is not sustained after that because of burn out.
- E. The anointing to love God includes the supernatural ability to feel God's love and then to feel love back to God. This overflows in love to others. The reward of a lover is found in having the power to love. God's primary goal or assignment in our life is to grow in love, meekness and revelation. If our ministry assignment is our first priority then we easily get burned out and bitter.
- F. Satan's first priority against the Church is to lead us astray from cultivating the ability to be responsive to God with wholehearted love and extravagant devotion. If Satan leads us astray from the purity of devotion to Jesus then our service and love for others will eventually fail.

<sup>3</sup> *I am afraid, lest as the serpent (Satan) deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2 Cor 11:3, NAS)*

- G. The End-Time saints will marvel at Jesus and be "victorious in love" over the Antichrist.

<sup>2</sup> *I saw...those who have the victory over the beast (Antichrist)...standing on the sea of glass...  
<sup>3</sup> They sing...saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works..." (Rev. 15:2-3)*

<sup>7</sup> *For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. (Rev. 19:7)*

- H. 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 to God.
- I. Do you remember when you felt the joy of abandonment to Jesus when you first heard the call to extravagant devotion? The Lord wants that freshness to return to us. This requires cultivating a renewed responsiveness of love to God. Do not allow any substitute for the real thing. We must not allow our experience to be reduced to just language about being extravagantly devoted.
- J. People who are seeking to be truly devoted to the Jesus ask, “What is the most that God will empower me to give to Him?” We are not content with the minimum requirement of salvation. We do not ask, “What is the minimum that is required? What can I get by with?”
- K. Mary chose the good part. We must choose it. No one can choose it for us. This good way was sustained throughout her life. God honors the value we put on the relationship by giving us more according to our spiritual hunger but He does not love us more.  
*<sup>42</sup> Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her. (Lk. 10:42)*
- L. We must set our heart to grow deep in love. We must have a sustained vision to go deep in God. It takes focus and effort to go deep in God. We must set our heart like Mary of Bethany and David did. God’s primary goal or assignment for our life is to grow in love and meekness.
- M. 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. David sustained his passion for God for decades. He referred to seeking God “all” the days of his life.  
*<sup>4</sup> One thing I have desired...that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD... (Ps. 27:4)*
- N. Daniel sustained his prayer life with passion for decades (from about age 16 to 82 years old).  
*<sup>10</sup> Daniel...knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. (605-539 BC or 66 years) (Dan. 6:10)*
- O. If we have regular times in the Word, then we will be able to meditate on the Word through the day as our hands are occupied with service. Our spirit need not wither in our journey in God.  
*<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the man...<sup>2</sup> (whose) delight is in the law (Word) of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup> He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit..., whose leaf shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. (Ps. 1:1-3)*
- P. The Word is meant to create a living active dialogue in our hearts with God. We pray-read the Word or we converse with Jesus as we read it. We thank Him for certain truths as we ask Him to reveal them more. We commit to obey other truths as we ask Him for help to fully obey them.  
*<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit... (Heb. 4:12)*