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**A0517 - Apr. 24, 2005 - Revelation 2:1-7 - Ephesus: Church of Loveless
Orthodoxy**

Typically, as you study a NT book the author gives doctrine first and then application of the doctrine. For example, in Ephesians Paul gives doctrine in chapters 1-3 and application of doctrine in chapters 4-6. Or in Romans Paul gives doctrine in chapters 1-11 and application of the doctrine in chapters 12-16. Things are just the opposite in Revelation. Application comes first and then the doctrine. Chapters 2-3 give the application of the doctrine found in chapters 4-22. Chapters 4-22 become a motivation to live rightly in the present age. The reason for this reversal of the normal structure is John's purpose of giving a chronology of events according to chapter 1:19. The Church precedes the Tribulation, Millennial Kingdom, and New Heavens and New Earth. John is playing on the principle that future beliefs are powerful motivators. So John is giving us the present application of a future eschatology. "In light of what's coming in the future I want you to live this way in the present". This was the content of the 1st of 7 blessings in the book. **Revelation 1:3** *"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near."* It's not just enough to read the words, it's not just enough even to read and hear. You must read, hear, and obey the things written in Revelation. So, when we come to chapters 2-3 and we find truths that have a general application to the present Church Age. The motivation to keep these words is the future prophecy revealed in chapters 4-22.

Last week I introduced to you the structure of the seven letters. Each letter is structured almost identically. All begin with a...

Recipient & Description of Christ
Commendation
Condemnation
Exhortation
Promise

As per this first letter to the human messenger of the church in Ephesus the structure is as follows...

Recipient, Destination, & Description of Christ (2:1)

Commendation (2:2-3, 6)

Condemnation (2:4)

Exhortation (2:5, 7a)

Promise (2:7b)

Recipient, Destination, & Description of Christ (2:1)

Revelation 2:1 To aggelos tes en Epheso ekklesias grapson. Tade legei o kraton tous epta asteras en te dexia autou, o peripaton en meso ton epta luchnion ton chruson.

Translation 2:1 To the messenger of the church in Ephesus write: “The One who holds fast the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:”

Notice first, the recipient of the letter is said to be an **angel**. The Greek word here is *aggelos* and means “a messenger” or “an angel”. In this context the *aggelos* is a human messenger and not an elect angel. These *aggelos* are implicated in the sins of the churches and therefore cannot possibly be elect angels. Further, there are difficulties knowing just how the communication process would work. Thus, it is best to see these *aggelos* as human messengers. Some commentators try to say this human messenger was the pastor but pastors are never identified as *aggelos*. Alternatively, and better, the letter is addressed to a human messenger who is a spiritual representative of the church. He need not hold any specific office. He need only be a man who was sent from the church in Ephesus to visit John on the Island of Patmos and who returned to his church with the Book of Revelation including the particular message to his church. So, it should be translated, **To the human messenger who represents the church in Ephesus write...**

The **church** (*ekklesia*) comes from two words *ek* – “out of” and *kaleo* – “I call”, hence. “called out”. The church is composed of “called out” individuals. We’ve been “called out of” the world system. In this context the term **church** refers to a local church in the city of Ephesus. This church was founded about 40 years before the writing of the Book of Revelation (~56AD). Paul had spent 3 years preaching and teaching in Ephesus and wrote his letter to the Ephesians in 62AD while in prison in Rome. John came to Ephesus about 4 years later and ministered there until he was banished by Emperor Domitian to the Island

of Patmos. So, the Church in Ephesus had the best and most extensive Bible teaching in the Gentile world.

Second, the destination is Ephesus, a large city located on the western side of Turkey on the coast of the Aegean Sea.

Geographically, Ephesus was the most important city in Asia. The population hovered around 350,000. It was a very prosperous shipping port until the silt from the mountains (in the SE) found its way down the Cayster River and filled the harbor. Numerous attempts were made to clean the harbor but there was little success. So much silt has built up over the centuries that the ancient ruins of Ephesus are 9 miles inland. As the shipping business went south they discovered another way of making money: the selling of metal images of the Greek goddess Artemis (known to the Romans as Diana) or metal trinkets of parts of the temple. The temple itself was one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

It was 360 feet long x 180 wide x 60 feet tall (bigger than a football field). It had huge columns that were made of various colored granites so that when you walked by and the sun reflected off these rocks you saw a beautiful shimmer of colors. To make money the locals would stand along a great highway known as the Arcadian Way and sell metal trinkets of Artemis or parts of the temple to the tourists.

This highway was 70 feet wide and stretched from the docks down to the Great Theatre. Everyone who came to Ephesus walked down this street. At the end of it stood the Great Theatre where the crowds gathered to indict Paul because of his preaching against idol worship (Acts 19).

For more on the economic, religious, geography, and history of this city you can order the first audio lesson in the Ephesians series.

Third, in v 1 we have a description of Jesus Christ, the one giving the message to the messenger from the church of Ephesus. As I said last week each of the seven letters repeats a description of Christ from chapter 1:4-18. Here He is described as **the One who holds fast the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands**. This comes from chapter 1:12, 16, and 20. In chapter 1 Christ merely **had** the seven stars in His right hand, now he **holds fast** the seven stars in His right hand. In chapter 1 Christ merely stood among the seven golden lampstands now He walks among the seven golden lampstands. That he **holds fast the seven stars** signifies that Christ has absolute

control over His seven messengers and that he **walks among the seven churches** signifies that He is keeping a watchful eye on each of the seven churches.

4 Commendations (2:2-3, 6)

Revelation 2:2, 3 oida ta erga sou kai ton kopon kai ten hupomonen sou kai hoti ou dune bastasai kakous, kai epeirasas tous legontas eautous apostolous kai ouk eisin kai eures autous pseudeis, ³ kai hupomonen echeis kai ebastasas dia to onoma mou kai ou kekopiakes.

Translation 2:2, 3 'I know your works and your labor and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; ³ and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

In verses 2, 3, and 6 Christ commends the church in Ephesus. He says, **I know**...Of course He knows...He's omniscient and He **walks** among the churches (2:1). He knows their spiritual condition. He knows our spiritual condition. He knows the spiritual condition of all churches at all times. The word here for **know** is not *ginosko* which would signify progressive knowledge but *oida* signifying absolute knowledge. Christ has absolute knowledge of the spiritual condition of the church in Ephesus. But Christ specifically points out four things that He knows....

First, He says **I know your works** (*ergon*). This means He knows their deeds, their actions. When Christ says **I know your works** He's talking specifically to the human messenger (these are singular genitives) but the application is to the whole church in Ephesus because the human messenger is a spiritual representative of the whole church. Specifically, what **works** does Christ **know**? He knows their **labor and perseverance**. **Labor** is the external expenditure of energy; doing something up to the point of exhaustion. **Perseverance** is the inward patience of a person in spite of the hard labor.

Second, Christ knows the area where they have been laboring and persevering; it was in the area of not **tolerating evil men**. It takes a lot of work to not tolerate evil men. Evil men disturb the sheep in a local church by misleading them into heretical doctrine and sinful acts. They were not tolerating the evil works of men (as per 1 Cor 5). Are these evil men Christians or not? The word **evil** (*kakos*) refers to people who are “good for nothing” in an area in which they should excel. For example, a gifted archer, soldier, or football player who ought to excel but has a lazy work ethic and therefore he's “good for nothing”. These evil persons are likely the **Nicolaitans** of v. 6 so they were either believers who had been

deceived into heretical doctrines or unbelievers. Christ hates the **deeds of the Nicolaitans**. Their works were “good for nothing”. The Ephesians labored at **putting to the test those who call themselves apostles**. The word **put to the test** is *peirazo* and meant they were investigating in order to disapprove of them. The church had been successful and had rightly concluded that they were false apostles.

Paul had warned the Ephesians of false teachers 40 years before. Turn back to **Acts 20:29-31**

²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

This was a prophecy and it was clearly being fulfilled within 40 years. Men had risen up, spoken false teachings, and were, according to the present tense in v. 6 drawing away disciples after themselves. Therefore, Christ commends this church for being alert and not tolerating these evil men.

What was their apostolic claim? They would not claim to be one of the 12 (Acts 1:20-21). The 12 were with Christ from His baptism until His ascension. Most of the 12 were killed before 70AD and John later says that the 12 apostles' names will be on the 12 foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:14). They would not make such an unbelievable claim. Their claim required investigation so they must have claimed that they saw Jesus in His resurrection body and were commissioned by Him as apostles. There were more than 500 who had seen Jesus in His resurrection body but only a subset of these were actually commissioned by Christ to be His apostles (e.g. Paul, Barnabas, Junius, Andronicus, et. al.) These men were claiming to be a part of that subset. This would make them authoritative apostles on the level of Paul. But how did the Ephesian's detect their false apostleship? Five tests. First of all, did they preach the gospel without charge? **2 Corinthians 11:7-15** indicates that apostles taught free of charge in order to hinder men from claiming apostolic authority. Paul says men who require or desire payment for their services are *“false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.”* Robertson says these were men “Masquerading as apostles of Christ by putting on the outward habiliments, posing as ministers of Christ (“gentlemen of the cloth,” nothing but cloth)...The prince of darkness puts on the garb of

light and sets the fashion for his followers in the masquerade to deceive the saints.”¹ Secondly, false apostles might have preached a different Jesus (2 Cor 11:4)? Thirdly, false apostles were identified by asking the question “did you receive a different spirit than what you originally received” (2 Cor 11:4; 1 John 4:1-6)? Fourthly, false apostles tended to preach a different gospel (2 Cor 11:4)? Fifthly, false apostles were not able to do miraculous signs (2 Cor 12:12). These self-proclaimed apostles were tested and found to be false apostles by the Ephesians. Their tireless labor and perseverance was commended by Jesus Christ.

Third, Christ knows that they **have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary**. John repeats two of their characteristics. They have **perseverance** and they have **endurance**. Why? Not **for My name's sake** but **because of My name**. Their perseverance and endurance was fueled by a love for the pure gospel message. It was not selfishly driven. They said, we're going to stick up for the purity of the truth no matter what the cost. These are people who did not tolerate false gospels. How often have ministers caved in to the pressures of false teachers? I know they can get tired of the pressures. People keep knocking on the door or calling wanting you to teach this or wanting you to teach that. It's a lot of pressure and eventually most ministers cave in to the pressure. They don't have the guts to stand up for Jesus Christ and His word. They don't have the perseverance and the endurance to stay the course. It's a hard, grueling course. Satan wants to destroy churches that stick to the truth. The Ephesians had stood up under the pressure and were victorious

Now, who were these evil men? Grammatically, verse 6 picks up where v. 2 leaves off, giving us precise identification of the false teachers.

Revelation 2:6 alla touto echeis, hoti miseis ta erga ton Nikolaiton a kago miso.

Translation 2:6 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

They are the **Nicolaitans** and Jesus Christ hates the **deeds of the Nicolaitans** as do the Ephesians. Notice, they hated the **deeds of the Nicolaitans**. It doesn't say they hated the **Nicolaitans** themselves, but only that they hated their **deeds**. Here's where we get the biblical definition of tolerance. Biblically, Christians are called to **hate the sin but not the sinner**. We tolerate the sinner, not the sin. Modern culture is unwilling to accept this distinction. The modern definition of tolerance says you must tolerate my actions. Any rejection of a person's actions is considered a judgment and intolerant. But that's inconsistent because they are judging us as being intolerant! For example, can a person

hate the act of homosexuality while still loving the homosexual? The Bible says “yes”. Jesus ate with the sinners, by doing so He was not advocating their sin in the least. He condemned sin itself but He loved the sinner. So, the Ephesians thought the same way Jesus thought. They **hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which Christ also hated**, but they did not hate the Nicolaitans themselves.

Who were the Nicolaitans? The Nicolaitans were followers of Nicolaus of Antioch, one of the seven original deacons from Acts 6:5 that went apostate. This explanation has strong support from the early church fathers Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Jerome, Augustine, Eusebius, and many others. All these early men testify that the Nicolaitans were licentious antinomians. This means they took sin lightly and were against following NT commandments. Obviously the Ephesians are commended by Christ for hating the sinful deeds of this sect. Christ hated them too. Notice Rev 2:14-15 where the Church of Pergamum is condemned for tolerating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Now that’s the commendation. Let’s back up to v. 4 to see the condemnation. This church also had a severe problem...

1 Condemnation (2:4)

Revelation 2:4 alla echo kata sou hoti ten agapen sou ten proten aphekes.

Revelation 2:4 'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

While this church was commended for their 1) hard labor, 2) intolerance of evil men, 3) not growing weary, and 4) for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans Christ says in v. 4, **'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love**. This was a critical problem. So critical in fact that in v. 5 Christ threatens to come and remove the church if not corrected.

What does it mean that the Ephesians left their **first love**? The hint is given in v. 5 where they are called to **repent and do the deeds they did at first**. The church clearly had some good works, they are listed in vv 2, 3, and 6, but they were missing some of the works that would have been manifested had they not left their **first love**. So, they were missing works that naturally flow from their **first love**.

What seems to have been missing is their love for Christ. They had a strong concern for right Bible doctrine but their love for Christ had grown cold, causing stagnation and relationship problems within the church. In its place a lifeless, formal orthodoxy had taken root. This is always the danger for a church with high concerns for orthodox doctrine. We

never want to fall into the trap of letting our love for Christ and for one another grow cold. When indifference for one another begins it is a sign we have **left our first love**. Biblically, you cannot separate loving God from loving fellow believers (cf. 1 John 4:20). In other words a Christian might say, “I love God” but at the same time hate his brother. The Bible says this Christian is a liar! Love for God and love for fellow believers is inseparable. You either love both or hate both. This is because Christian love is defined in terms of obedience (1 John 5:2). When we disobey God we cannot be loving God. When we obey God, that’s when we love Him. And one of the commands is to love one another. Christian love can never be reduced to some mushy emotional response. John tells us elsewhere, do “not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth” and Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15, 23, 24; 15:10). So, Christian love is defined in terms of obedience. Therefore, what appears to be the problem at Ephesus is their lack of obedience to Bible doctrine. The doctrine is there they are simply not obeying it. They had left their **first love**. They obviously don’t love Christ because if they did they would love one another. They are orthodox in their theology and are willing to stand for it boldly but their application of that doctrine is absent. They are not obeying the commandments of Scripture, they are merely teaching them. The people are cold and lifeless. They hold to the teachings of godliness but their lives don’t reflect it. “The result for Ephesus was that the church had lost its testimony before the world.”ⁱⁱ It is absolutely critical for churches to maintain true Bible doctrine but it is even more crucial that churches live godly lives that reflect Bible doctrine. It is more important to love in deed and truth than with word or tongue. Whenever a church takes on an overzealous regard for doctrinal purity they run the risk of sacrificing warmth and brotherly love.

What had apparently happened in Ephesus is that the church’s original possession of love was now missing. “More than forty years had passed and the warmth of love that characterized the former generation was absent from the present group.”ⁱⁱⁱ We need to remember this as our church is now 25 years old and we fit very closely the profile of the Ephesian church. We have a very high concern for doctrinal purity and our struggle will be to maintain warmth of love. Christ’s rebuke in v. 5 indicates that loving warmth is absolutely essential. So essential in fact that if the Ephesian’s don’t correct this error then Christ will remove the church.

Exhortation (2:5, 7a)

Revelation 2:5 mnemoneue oun pothen peptokas kai metanoeson kai ta prota era poison. ei de me, erchomai soi kai kineso ten luchnian sou ek tou topou autēs, ean me metanoeses.

Translation 2:5 ‘Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

Therefore, Christ tells them to do three things to correct this error. **Remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first.** First command: remember. Remember what? **Remember from where you have fallen** (*pipto* - perfect tense...you have fallen...with effect that you are now in a fallen state). **Remember** what the church used to be like in its earlier years, the fervency of love and relationships among one another. This was a generation later, many of the original members were no longer present, but they had a generation of Christian tradition behind them and they knew about the church’s former warmth and love for one another. Therefore **remember**. This is the first step in restoring their former glory. Second command: repent. **repent** is the Greek word *metanoeo* and it means “change the mind”. The Ephesian believers were stuck in a habitual sin pattern. They didn’t just need to confess, they needed to have a “change of mind”. Their thinking was wrong. They thought that all that was necessary for a strong and lively church was orthodox doctrine. They were wrong. Fervent love is also necessary. Remembering their former glory would remind them that previously they had both orthodox doctrine and loving, fervent relationships. Therefore, they should change their mind and think the way the former generation thought. Third command: do the deeds you did at first. These deeds were apparently loving, warm deeds of fervent care and concern for one another. So, we have to **remember, repent, and return.** These are the three steps given by Christ to correct the church.

- 1) **remember** their past
- 2) **repent** of their error
- 3) **return** to their first deeds

Remembering their past should stimulate them to **repent** of their error which should cause a **return** to their first deeds. True love manifests itself in deeds (1 John 3:16-18). Christ didn’t just say He loved us; He actually laid His life down for us. We must follow this model. When Fredericksburg Bible Church was smaller there was probably more warmth and fervency for one another. As we grow larger we must be ever cognizant of the danger of losing that love, warmth and closeness. If we don’t, Christ, who walks among all the churches will condemn us in the same way He condemned Ephesus. We have had excellent Bible teaching at this church. Ephesus had two of the greatest teachers imaginable; Paul and John and they had more than 40 years of it, but something had been gradually slipping

away and that was the warmth, love, closeness, and fervency of the people. Therefore, we should **remember the past, repent of our error and return to our first deeds**. Why?

or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. Does this **coming** refer to a special coming to this church to judge them or does it refer to the Second Coming of Christ. Significantly, five of the seven churches mention Christ's **coming** (Rev 2:5; 16, 25; 3:3, 11). It is therefore best to take each of the five uses of **coming** in the same way. Since 2:25 and 3:11 clearly refer to the Second Coming then all the uses should be understood as referring to the Second Coming. Throughout the Book of Revelation Christ's Second Coming is presented as an imminent event. It can happen "at-any-moment". Therefore, since the Ephesian's don't know when Christ is coming but they do know that it can happen "at-any-moment" this should stimulate them to repent quickly and return to their first deeds.

But what did Christ mean when He said He **will remove your lampstand out of its place**? Did He mean He was going to destroy the church at Ephesus? Such is certainly the case. Ephesus today is just an ancient ruin. Or does this **removal** signify allowing the unsaved remnant of the church to go into the future 7-year Tribulation. The latter seems the best sense since the Second Coming of Christ is imminent in this context. So, the sense is this...if the church in Ephesus refuses to repent of their loveless orthodoxy then eventually the church will no longer be a testimony and there will be no genuine Christians in the church and therefore they will be cast into the 7-year tribulation. Whether or not the Ephesians did repent is a moot point since Christ's Second Coming has not yet occurred. This challenge remains for all churches similar to Ephesus since that day.

Revelation 2:7a o echon ous akousato ti to pneuma legei tais ekklesiiais.

Translation 2:7a Revelation 2:7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Clearly the church had already begun to lose its unity as a group of genuine believers, for only some of them had **an ear to hear what the Spirit says**. This church was a mix of believers and unbelievers. This exhortation is directed to individual believers. The word for **hear** means "to hear with understanding" and only believers can hear spiritual things with understanding. Notice that believers are to hear not only what the Spirit says to the Ephesian church but also to **what the Spirit says to the churches** (plural) meaning all seven of the churches. These seven letters become general letters that can be applied to any church that has similar problems.

Promise (2:7b)

Revelation 2:7b To nikonti doso auto phagein ek tou xulou tes zoes, o estin en to paradeiso tou theou.

Translation 2:7b To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

Verse 7b, however, is for the unbelievers in the church in Ephesus. Jesus says “**to him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.**” Who are the **overcomers**? The **overcomers** are the one’s who have genuinely believed that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:4, 5). So, this promise of eating **of the tree of life...in the Paradise of God** is a general promise given to all believers, not just a select group of believers. The **tree of life** recalls the tree in Gen 2:9; 3:22, and 24 which Adam and Even were barred from after sinning. While sin originally barred man from this tree, overcoming sin by trusting in Christ gives men the right to eat from the **tree of life** and live forever. However, this tree will not be located in the original Garden in Eden but in the **Paradise of God**. The word **Paradise** is from a Persian word describing a pleasure garden and park with wild animals built for the Persian monarchs. It certainly conjures up the original Garden in Eden. The permanent home of all believers in Jesus Christ will be a beautiful, serene, delightful place with Christ in the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev 21-22).

If you have not believed in the person and work of Jesus Christ there are three things you must know.

1. Each individual is a sinner and therefore stands separated from, and condemned by God (Rom 3:23; 5:12; John 3:18)
2. Christ died in the place of each individual sinner to pay for their sins (1 Tim 2:6; Mark 10:45; 2 Cor 5:21).
3. Each individual must personally believe (trust) in Christ's payment for their sins in order to be saved (Acts 16:31; John 5:24). Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and not by any human works (Eph 2:5, 8, 9).

ⁱ Robertson, comments on 2 Cor 11:13-14

ⁱⁱ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 140.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 141.

[Back To The Top](#)

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