

Christ's Last Words to His Church Series: Ephesus: Beware of Doing All the Right Things for the Wrong Reasons: Revelation 2:1-7

There was a church in the New Testament world that was doing all the right things for the Lord; but there was one problem: they were doing all the right things for the wrong reasons. Jesus addresses that problem in His first letter to the Churches in Revelation 2.

If you were arriving into the harbor to visit that church of Revelation 2 in Ephesus this morning, there is only one sight that would catch your eyes. Not the bustling harbor teeming with boats, not the roads lined with the exotic spices and goods from the east. No: it would be the lustrous golden gleam of the Temple of Diana.

The largest building ever built in the ancient world, the size of a city block, 10 stories high and covered with gold. It was the center of the worship of Artemis (Greek), or Diana (Roman), whose temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. To this cosmopolitan, world renowned city, Jesus sent this letter. Stand with me as we hear His Voice:

Revelation 2:1-7 "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.'"

Pray

POINT #1: CHRIST HAD A POWERFUL TESTIMONY AT EPHEBUS

JESUS ADDRESSES EACH ASSEMBLY 2:1a: "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write"

The word “angel” literally means “messenger.” Although it can mean angel—and does throughout the book—it cannot refer to angels here because angels are never leaders in the church. Most likely, these messengers are the seven key elders representing each of those churches.

Ephesus was an inland city 3 miles from the sea, but the broad mouth of the Cayster River allowed access and provided the greatest harbor in Asia Minor. Four great trade roads went through Ephesus; therefore, it became known as the gateway to Asia.

- **Powerful Founding:** The saints at Ephesus were heirs to the greatest days of Paul’s earthly ministry; and the longest.
- **Godly Nurturing:** Paul sent Timothy who stayed until church history records a mob killed him for his strong preaching against sin. John the Apostle lived there until his exile in Patmos; and then returned from Patmos to continue in ministry there.
- **Tremendous History:** Paul ministered there for three years (Acts 20:31), and later met with the Ephesian elders on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20). Timothy, Tychicus, and the apostle John all served this church. John was in Ephesus when he was arrested by Domitian and exiled 50 miles southwest to Patmos. Mary the mother of our Lord lived and died there.

POINT #2: EPHESUS WAS AN ASSEMBLY IN A VERY STRATEGIC PLACE

JESUS ADDRESSES EACH WITH AUTHORITY 2:1b ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands’

These seven stars are the messengers who represent the seven churches. Christ holds them in his hand, which means that he controls the church and its leaders. The sharp two-edged sword pictures the Roman, two-edged broad sword. It signifies judgment (cf. 2:16; 19:15) on those who defile His Temple, attack His people, or try to destroy His church.

POINT #3: JESUS APPROVED THEIR PURITY IN THE MIDST OF A WICKED CULTURE

JESUS ADDRESSES EACH WITH AN APPROVAL 2:2-3, 6: “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. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

There are 10 specific commendations from Christ, more than for any other church.

In v. 2 Christ points out these elements of obedience in the Church at Ephesus:

- (1) "I know your works";
- (2) "your labor": beyond work **kopos** to exhaustion;
- (3) "your patience" = Not passive 'remain under' but active, with great weight lifting and bearing;
- (4) "you cannot bear those who are evil": living in purity in the shadow of the magnificent palace to gross immorality, the temple of Diana;
- (5) "And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars": means they were orthodox and strong, and exercised spiritual discernment.

In v. 3 He continues pointing out their commendable spiritual qualities as a church:

- (6) "and you have persevered";
- (7) "and have patience";
- (8) "and have labored for My name's sake";
- (9) "and have not become weary": For over 40 years, since its founding, this church had remained faithful to the word and the Lord. Through difficulty and persecution, the members had endured, always driven by the right motive.
- (10) Finally in v. 6 Jesus gives them another high honor: "you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate". A problem in Pergamum also (vv. 12-15), this heresy was similar to the teaching of Balaam (vv. 14-15).

Nicolas means "one who conquers the people." Irenaeus (c. 130-202) writes that Nicolas, who was made a deacon in Acts 6, was a false believer who later became apostate; like Balaam, he led the people into immorality and wickedness.¹ Their teaching perverted grace and replaced liberty with license.

What a great church: planted by Paul, nurtured by Priscilla, Aquilla, Apollos, Timothy, Mary, and John. The Bible devotes one of the most amazing chapters in the New Testament as a biographical explanation of why this church got such high marks, the highest of any of the seven churches. Now turn with me to:

The Acts 19 Biography of The Church at Ephesus

Acts 19 is the biography of the saints at Ephesus, a phenomenal grace-energized church, and in that account we find ***the timeless keys to a church God can use greatly.***

God's Word explains to us what makes Christ's church powerful in any culture. It is when:

- ***God's Son is magnified, and***
- ***God's People are consecrated, then***
- ***God's Word prevailed.***

¹ They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence.

Jesus was magnified and God's Word prevailed in this group of consecrated people in the New Testament church at Ephesus. The saints of Ephesus overcame the same pressures facing us as believers today: a pleasure-seeking culture, a mind-assaulting media, and a materialism-dominated way of life.

God's Word always has an answer for how to walk in the Spirit, abide in Christ, and see Christ's church prevail in an ever-darkening world. The struggle is always against our flesh and the Devil; and resisting² both is what we are charged with as an imperative from God's Word.

When God's Word Prevailed in Dark Ephesus

Acts 19 records one of the greatest revivals in Biblical history. Paul went to the godless heart of the Eastern Roman Empire called Ephesus. There he confronted the evils of culture that godlessness begets: materialism, pride, occultism, and sensuality—each of which is still a constant enemy of our walk with Christ.

The kingdom of darkness was left shaken to the core, confused and fighting against itself. Then, God called out a group of believers that would form one of the greatest churches of the New Testament era. By their zenith they numbered as many as 50,000 and were the home church of Paul, Mary, John, and Timothy.

Before we study through Acts 19 for a look at this incredible revival that swept through the church at Ephesus, remember the facts about this place.

Ephesus was a coastal seaport along the commercial trade route linking east to west. For hundreds of years the worship of Diana (or Artemis) had made Ephesus a thriving, and safe commercial center. The Temple was dedicated to Artemis a sex goddess, worshipped by unbridled immorality was at the center of everything done in that city.

Hundreds of prostitutes were always on the grounds to promote this unrestrained indulgence of the flesh. Ephesus was a magnet for not just the sexually enslaved; it was also the center of the promotion of the black arts, witchcraft, superstition, and all the powers of Satan. That helps us understand why Paul would tell these Ephesians that there was so much more than the physical world to contend with these words in Ephesians 6:12:

For we do not wrestle³ against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against

² A few months back we studied our spiritual immune system that is laid out in Scripture as having three factors: **spiritual health** (eating God's Word in Hebrews 5:13-14, Matthew 4:4; plus exercising each day by walking in the Spirit in Galatians 5:16); **spiritual armor** (understanding and uses the armor Paul commands us to use in Ephesians 6:10-18); and **spiritual warfare** (resisting the devil and his demons in James 4:7, I Peter 5:8-9). If you neglect any part of your spiritual immune system—Satan and his army have a point to step up their campaign.

³ The word "wrestle" refers to hand-to-hand combat with trickery and deception. That is Paul's description of how Satan and his hosts try to attack. Paul then lists four different designations of the spiritual world in opposition to God. Each of these words describe a different layer or rank of demons in the evil spiritual empire they serve. Satan's forces of darkness are highly structured for the most destructive purposes. Paul and Peter both name these same levels of demons (*Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22*).
macintosh hd:users:elishajohnwilliamcareybarnett:desktop:clw christ's last words:clw study guides:clw-11ephesus - beware of doing all the right things for the wrong reasons_110612am.doc Monday, August 29, 2011 Page 4

powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

So in this very dark, very worldly, very alluring place of sin—Christ's church was born. And Acts 19:8-20 records that amazing birth. Please turn with me and listen to what God can do when His Son is magnified, His Word unleashed, and His children are consecrated for His Glory.

Facing the Darkness

Acts 19:8-10

In Acts 19:8-10 we find the plan God laid on Paul's heart for reaching a society so much like ours. Paul faced off against the powers of darkness in Ephesus by one of the longest recorded times he ever got to spend teaching God's Word in a synagogue. Paul spent three months in intense Bible teaching right there in the shadow of Diana's Temple of Darkness.

Look how Luke describes that time in Acts 19:8-10.

*Acts 19:8-10 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, **reasoning⁴ and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.** 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*

Paul rented a lecture hall from a "Tyrannus" and using the customary lunch and siesta time observed each day in the Roman Empire⁵.

Paul didn't want to just be another religious peddler, living off the hardworking people of Ephesus. He wanted nothing to stand in the way of his message so he labored night and day with his own hands, and taught any and all who would come on the afternoon break time.

Look at v. 10: Paul did this daily for two years. That means Paul invested as much as five hours a day for 24 months. With the Sabbath days, that means Paul invested over three thousand hours in teaching into the church at Ephesus. That is equivalent to thirty-years of morning and evening sermons at this church all packed into two years. Paul gave them a lifetime of learning in a very short time.

⁴ The word "reasoning" (NKJV) is the Greek word 'dialoguing'. Paul did questions and answer times, he reasoned back and forth taking the Jews from where they were, into God's Word and back to an application for their life in Ephesus. After three months of this, when the unbelievers became "hardened" and started to attack those who had believed, Paul makes a strategic shift in his methods.

⁵ Usual work days went from 7 to 11 AM, then lunch and rest from 11AM-4 PM, and back to work from 4-9 PM. The Western Text actually says in the Greek text at this place 'from the fifth hour to the tenth'. From Paul's other writing we can assume that he worked at his tent-making business each morning, dialogued each day during the time off people had, and then returned to the shop to work from 4-9PM. If you look over at Acts 20:34 note what Paul reminded the church about his work ethic: *Acts 20:34 "Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.*

Listen to the results of this extensive and focused teaching time shedding Christ's light in that sin-darkened culture. I like to describe this as--

Penetrating the Darkness

Acts 19:11-12

Acts 19:11-12 Now God worked unusual miracles⁶ by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.

We already saw in v. 10 that Luke said that “all” who dwelt in the Roman province of Asia (which is roughly modern day Turkey) were exposed to God's Word. In the area surrounding Ephesus there are the famous seven churches that Jesus wrote to in Revelation. It is very possible that each of them were a by-product of this extensive and intensive proclamation of God's Word.

The word “handkerchiefs” is actual the word for the sweat rags of the workshop⁷. The word “aprons” is the word for the leather workers apron. There in the hot and humid seaside tent-makers quarters, the rags that Paul used to wipe his face as he labored to work to pay his way and the way of those who were with him—when taken from that shop by those who wanted him to help their loved ones, healed them. That is unusual. God honored Paul’s message, his hard work, and most of all his assault on the realm of Satan’s hold over these enslaved and sin-darkened people.

LESSON: God looks for men and women to use who are willing to work unhindered by the sacrifice, laboring with an undivided heart, proclaiming an undiluted message, investing even in a humble occupation—all to make the Gospel of Christ known. This level of commitment was not new to Paul.⁸

Paul sewed tents in the morning, taught the Bible all afternoon, disciplined fellow tent makers into the evening, went on visitation, prayed through sleepless nights and wrestled with the Devil. All that to get the Gospel out, and see a church born in the center of Satan’s lands of darkness. What a wonderful, inspiring servant of the Lord Paul must have been.

And as always happens: light attracts bugs. The powerful work of God was so amazing that Satan sent some bugs to hinder that work in Acts 19, they began:

⁶ Next, Luke records that “unusual miracles” took place. That is interesting because miracles in and of themselves are unusual, but these were extraordinary attestations by God of His Kingdom overcoming the reign of darkness in that whole area. Two types are noted—the hands of personal work of Paul and the power of God displayed through objects taken from Paul to the sick. Therein lies a bit of insight into the ‘unusual’ power displayed.

⁷ Those handkerchiefs and aprons were as one commentator puts it, were: “symbols which God chose to employ in order to underscore the characteristic of the apostle which made him a channel of the power of God. In the same way, Moses’ rod was a symbol. Cast on the ground, the rod became a serpent; lifted over the waters, it rolled them back. There was nothing magic about the rod itself; it was the symbol of something about Moses which God honored. So these sweatbands and trade aprons were symbols of the honest, dignified humility of heart, the servant-character which manifested and released the power of God.” ~ Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

⁸ In his first epistle to the Thessalonians he said: 1 Thessalonians 2:9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.
macintosh hd:users:elishajohnwilliamcareybarnett:desktop:clw christ's last words:clw study guides:clw-11ephesus - beware of doing all the right things for the wrong reasons_110612am.doc Monday, August 29, 2011 Page 6

Faking the Light

Acts 19:13-16

In the midst of these “unusual” miracles a clever group of opportunists wanted to get in on the action and started ‘selling’ the power of God. But God powerfully silenced their mockery.⁹

This event and the powerful outpouring of God’s power deeply penetrated the hearts of the believers. They saw clearly that God was Living and True and that they as His children must be:

Renouncing the Darkness

Acts 19:17-20

This was the turning point. The power of darkness was broken. Satan’s house was divided. Christ triumphantly opened the door to great ministry through this church.

*Acts 19:17-18 This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. 18 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. 19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So **the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.***

The most remarkable facet of Paul’s ministry to this church is that when Paul taught the Ephesian believers about the strategies of Satan, they collected and burned all of the objects associated with demonic and satanic contact.

LESSON: The level of their desire to repent and follow the Lord was seen in this costly choice to rid their lives of anything that displeased Him. Their example recorded by God in His Word should stir us to ask, “Have we likewise carefully purged out of our lives anything that displeases the Lord?”

As you look back at v. 19, doesn’t that verse amaze you? What did God lead Paul to do to prompt such a huge response in public with such great sacrifice involved?

God's Word records exactly what Paul told them that made them respond so dramatically to the evil around them. What Paul taught made them go home, search out, gather and BURN all of their expensive media.

The Power of

⁹ In the ancient world there were professional exorcists. They were magicians who had the reputation of knowing the individual names of the most powerful spirit beings. Among them were also even a group of Jewish priests who claimed to have knowledge of how to pronounce secret names of God, and thus they held special powers over the spiritual world. "So it was very natural for renegade Jewish exorcists to add Jesus' name to their incantations. But the situation was intolerable, and the Lord decided to purge the bandwagon by providing an unforgettable example. The seven sons of Sceva thought they would have another quick exorcism and an easy buck—until they intoned the name Jesus. Then the demoniac rolled his frenzied eyes and said, "I know who Jesus is, and I know who Paul is, but who do you think you are?" After that, all they remembered were some rights and lefts, the door opening, and streaking madly for cover! Oh, how the church probably loved to tell that story!" Hughes, R. Kent, Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.
macintosh hd:users:elishajohnwilliamcareybarnett:desktop:clw christ's last words:clw study guides:clw-11ephesus - beware of doing all the right things for the wrong reasons_110612am.doc Monday, August 29, 2011 Page 7

Consecration

One final point that is perhaps the most important one of all for each of us: when the church cleans house, when believers renounce hidden sins, when there is a banishment of all hypocrisy and pretense, and genuine holiness begins to permeate Christ's church—*unbelievers become attracted to this new way of life.*

The power of the early church was simply genuine holiness. Energized by grace they magnified Christ, God's Word prevailed in them, and they lived consecrated lives. The Spirit of God moved unhindered, flowed unquenched and God got all the glory. No one competed for the credit, no one sought to be in control. God reigned, the Spirit moved, and Christ was magnified. They had caught the message of Ephesians 4:22-24. They put off, renewed, and put on the new—just as God told them to do. The choice is still ours.

We must daily strip off any return of the rotting garments of the old life.

We must personally reject any hint of sensuality, selfishness, pride, materialism, and bitterness in our lives.

We must eat God's Word and ask for renewed minds by His Spirit.

We must work out our own salvation by choosing to do the disciplines that will develop a Biblical mind.

We must put on and wear our new, shining garments of light each day, and live the new us we became in Christ.

The Secret of Consecrated Living

God's Word explains that Christ's church powerful in any culture when:

- ***God's Son is magnified;***
- ***God's People are consecrated;***
- ***God's Word prevails.***

Jesus was magnified and God's Word prevailed in this group of consecrated people in the New Testament church at Ephesus. That powerful ministry was the result of a purged and obedient local church. One dear pastor wrote these words:

"What would be burned today if the Spirit's conviction swept this church? I think some DVD's, magazines, and videos would be quietly removed from out-of-the-way desk drawers or certain novels from the family bookshelves.

Perhaps some television shows, movies, web sites, radio stations, and video games would be boycotted. Some people would ask others to pray that they would be set free from whatever is dragging them down. And many would come to Christ

for forgiveness of sin and deliverance from the eternal wrath of God¹⁰.

Is that what Jesus sees here among us today?

¹⁰ Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.
macintosh hd:users:elishajohnwilliamcareybarnett:desktop:clw christ's last words:clw study guides:clw-11ephesus - beware of doing all the right things
for the wrong reasons_110612am.doc Monday, August 29, 2011 Page 9