

Revelation 2:1-7 – Going through the motions in Ephesus

Handfuls, TSK, Epana, PNT, JFB, Nguyen, Constable, Robertson, Rienecker, Geneva, Family, Henry, GreekLexicon, Gill, Chilton, Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: **Revelation was a book of comfort to those who were suffering under Jewish and Roman persecution.** It was not intended to be a book of fear...about scary dragons...and demons with pitchforks. It was not intended to be a book of mystery. (It only becomes a book of mystery when people try to find something that is not there.) This is why the book is called a “revelation” not a “mystery.” **Those who read it in the 1st century understood what it meant.**

Obviously if this letter were written to the church to comfort them it would have been a comfort they would have received. After all, how much comfort could the 7 churches in Asia Minor have received from events that would take 2000 years later?

But why did Jesus choose these 7 churches to comfort? Why not 8 or 5? Were these more special than other churches? No, they were not. **Seven was a complete number, suggesting these 7 letters were not just intended for those 7 churches but were intended for all congregations of Jesus Christ throughout history.** History confirms those 7 churches sent those 7 letters to other churches, where they were received and brought comfort. So while the letters comforted 7 churches, all churches can receive comforts from them.

We will now start learning how God comforted his churches. Keep in mind that in order to receive God’s comforts, they had to address some of the Lord’s concerns.

The 1st church we will examine **the church in Ephesus.**

Our headings are:

Commendations

Concerns

Challenges

Comforts

Our goals are: That **you will learn of Christ’s love, be comforted in him, and share God’s comfort to a suffering church worldwide.**

Commendations

1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who **holds the seven stars** (angels) in His right hand, **who walks in the midst** of the seven golden lampstands (churches):

1. Ephesus was the capital city of Asia Minor, a province of Rome, and was called “the first and great metropolis of Asia.”

Ephesus was a “party” city which indulged in all forms of lewd entertainment. Ephesus had one of the largest open-air stadium theater— one that seated 50,000 people. Its ruins are still visible today. **Ephesus was where the Bacchanalian Mysteries were common** — where shameful things were done that we can’t even talk about.

Apostle Paul planted a church in this prominent city around AD51, and stayed and taught there for 2-3 years.

2. In the introduction of the letter, Jesus reminded the Ephesians he was living and walking among them and the other 6 churches, showing that he was their companion who knew of their troubles.

He was among them to help.

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.

3. Jesus praised the Ephesians for their good works saying: "I know...your works."
He meant he knew their good works intimately and loved their good works.

4. The Ephesians had worked hard - patiently and perseveringly under difficult circumstances.

Some were beheaded, others thrown to lions, and some were crucified. But the Ephesians did not become fed-up (weary). They kept fighting the good fight of faith. They preached the word faithfully, they administered the sacraments carefully, and they exercised discipline decisively.

"Labor" means to "work until tired" or "toil." "Labor" is a weak translation.

5. The Ephesians worked hard to repel evil men who were creeping in the churches to promote false teachings - men who claimed to be apostles, but were liars.

This is always a tough ask! Disciplining is never easy.

Who were these false teachers? These men were Judaizers and legalists who taught believers they need of something more than Jesus in order to be saved from sin... They needed works! Someone said: 'Judaism was the cradle of Christianity and yet it could have been its coffin because of Judaizers.'

So the Ephesians looked for these snakes in the church and removed them. The Ephesians proved these men to be false teachers from their knowledge of the Word of God. The false teachers were not dismissed without trial. The Apostle had earlier warned the Ephesians these types of men would come... One of the last warnings he gave them before his imprisonment!

Acts 20:29-30 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

Obviously, he would not have given this warning to the elders if the “wolves” would have come 40+ years later. (An argument against a late date for the writing of Revelation. It makes more sense this would have happened in the 60’s AD.

6 "But this you have, that **you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans,** which I also hate.

6. The Ephesians hated the actions of the Nicolaitans, just as Jesus did!

Who were the Nicolaitans? The Nicolaitans were the libertarians of the time... They claimed to be Christians but also claimed to have **freedom to commit idolatry, adultery, abortions, and homosexual acts, and to steal, and have sinful parties.** Nicholas means “eat” or “conqueror.”

7. Lessons:

a. Jesus is at the center of his churches. He knows the challenges each congregation faces: persecution, lethargy, indifference, corruption...he knows it all. **As then, Jesus’ presence among his people is to help them; it is not to occupy space.**

b. It is comforting to know Christ knows all your good works and loves them, even though other men might not know them, nor care for them, maybe condemn you for the, or simply ignore them. Don’t get tired of doing good.

c. This is a warning to those living complacent lives. Christ is there and he sees everything! This is particularly important for those who take libertarianism to the extreme. That is nothing more than antinomianism. Some Christians use this as an excuse to watch terrible movies, drink too much alcohol, and advocate to remove most reasonable safety laws!

d. God threatens those who threaten his church. Who can fight against him and win?

Concerns

4 "Nevertheless I have this against you, that **you have left your first love.**

1. Jesus had concerns about the Ephesians, however: He was concerned because they, in the busy-ness of their work, had become lukewarm in their love for him.

This is kind of ironic as the word “**Ephesus**” means “**ardent desire.**” Hear Apostle Paul’s warning to the Corinthians!

1Corinthians 13:2 - And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, **but have not love, I am nothing.**

The Ephesians were faithful in teaching and worship but somewhat lukewarm in their hearts.

They fed the poor and showed hospitality but they didn't really have their hearts in it.

2. Their passion waned, as can happen in a marriage after children come and life happens, so they just went through the motions of serving God.

God wanted the right heart behind right obedience and right worship.

3. Lessons:

a. Does a ball game, or food, or vacation make you more excited than the Gospel of Jesus Christ? It shouldn't. What about specific duties...like teaching your children, or loving your husband? Do you still do all your duties, but lost your zeal? Then know that Christ is concerned about you.

b. Specifically, how passionate are you about worship? You should be excited to join voices of praise to God!

Challenges

5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

1. Jesus called the Ephesians to repent of their loss of passion for him.

In order to motivate them to repent, Jesus said he would remove their lampstand from among the 7 lampstands if they did not repent. Jesus used strong language to show the seriousness of the sin. He spoke here as a Father would speak to his children.

Henry: "*The Ephesians must be inwardly grieved and ashamed for their sinful declension; they must blame themselves, and shame themselves, for it, and humbly confess it in the sight of God, and judge and condemn themselves for it.*"

A church that was full of good works, which faithfully chased-off false teachers, would be rooted out...all because of her waning love for her Savior.

2. Thankfully, one early church father, Ignatius, wrote that the church in Ephesus did repent and was preserved.

Their repentance was a testimony to other churches! Passion is contagious.

3. Lessons:

a This threat showed the great danger of having good actions and orthodoxy, but not having love behind them. Imagine coming to worship on Sunday, but dragging yourself...or complaining how cold it is! Or you sing because you are concerned other people might see you are not singing. Or you don't break the Sabbath because you think someone might see you.

b. To fix this problem of not loving with passion as you ought to, you must reflect on Christ's love for you. That's it. If you do, the passion will be rekindled. This picture of

love is at the cross on Calvary.

Comforts

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.**"

1. This was the same pattern Jesus used at the end of all 7 letters to the churches to encourage them to pay special attention to what he was saying to them and to return to holy living.

2. If the Ephesians accepted the challenge to rekindle their love, they would enjoy heavenly pleasures on earth and heavenly pleasures in heaven later.

What are those pleasures? The Ephesians would enjoy the fruit from the tree of life...a tree that Adam, your first father lost, but a tree that comes back to you through the 2nd Adam...a tree in a richer form.

Genesis 2:9 And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 3:22 Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" – 23 therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden

And yet, one cannot help but see this is teaching of eating of Christ...who was the product of the tree (literally: Wood) of life – the cross on which he died. Christ is wisdom.

Proverbs 3:18 **She (wisdom) is a tree of life** to those who take hold of her, And happy *are all* who retain her.

3. Lessons:

a. Rekindle your love for the Lord by conversing with him (worship) and communing with him (sacraments). Don't miss these activities. **Get more during the week.** Listen to good sermons. You need these comforts to be faithful.

b. It is easy in the busy-ness of life to become complacent and take the Lord for granted. It is easy to be indifferent to the Lord's things when you are. It is easy to get lazy after you have received much. But take warning!

Conclusion:

The Lord lived among the Ephesians and was aware of their difficult conditions. He praised them for their strong stand against false teachers. He praised them for their hard work in the church – properly teaching, exercising discipline, and administering the sacraments. But the Lord found they had waned in their zeal for him so he encouraged them to rekindle that love for him, otherwise they would run the risk of becoming extinct.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ, what great lessons these are for the churches today!

1. Some churches seem to think if they ignore discipline, water down the preaching, and loosely give the sacraments, they would attract more people and bring more glory to Christ, but this is the opposite of what Christ requires.

2. Some churches have their entire theology straight. They are orthodox. They worship properly. They do every outward thing God expects. But they have lost zeal and passion for Jesus. In both cases, two words apply: Wake up! Danger of extinction is ahead.

3. Go back to the cross and reflect on Jesus' love for you, you individually, and you as a church!

Finally, if God threatened the annihilation of the church he loved because they became lazy, imagine what he would do to you who never loved him at all. Does this make you afraid? Doesn't this make you want to beg him for grace to love him like you should? I hope it does! And I hope you will start pleading today.