

Christ Community Covenant Church
Revelation: I have a letter for you!!
You have lost your first love – Revelation 2:1-7
Pastor Dave Scherrer - June 12, 2011

Revelation 2:1-7

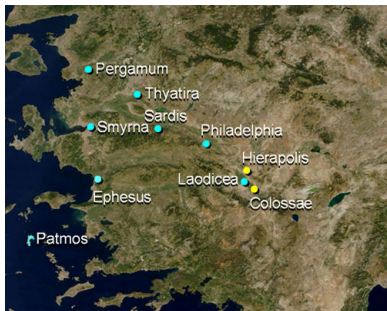
"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

The Letters: Specific letters to a specific time or timeless truths for all?

As we study Revelation we will see that God is addressing "the angel" at seven specific churches and generally He has some good things to say to them but he also has some hard things to say. I want our church to be one of the churches that gets a good report card in the end, and not just me but you too (this is your church too) will be held accountable so I think we should all pay close attention.

The letters are specific letters to specific churches at a specific time. It is critical that we keep in mind the cultural and religious context if we are to generalize to our specific time and place. The seven churches did exist in John's day in Asia Minor (what is now Turkey). They are all growing and have been in existence from somewhere between for perhaps 30 to 40 years, at least since Paul went on his third missionary trip to Asia in the mid 50's.



Ephesus – The City by the Bay

So specifically, this little letter is written to the church in Ephesus. Ephesus is at this time a very influential city. A combination of commerce, power and culture. Think of Ephesus being the financial center that we think of in New York City, having the political clout of Washington DC and the culture and brains of Boston, and maybe sexual licentiousness of San Francisco, too.

Ephesus was located near the mouth of the Cayster River only three miles from the coast. It became the capitol of Asia Minor and served as the doorway to the orient. Along with Pergamum, it was the center of Roman Emperor worship. It was the second largest city of the Roman Empire; ranking only behind Rome, with a population of more than 250,000 which also made it the second largest city in the world. The emperor had made Ephesus a free city and it was given the title "Supreme Metropolis of Asia."

It contained one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Diana, and was a center of mystical cult worship.



The temple was 430 feet long, 260 feet wide, and 60 feet high, with great folding doors and 127 marble pillars, some of them covered with gold. Three times the size of the Lincoln Memorial.

I have seen the walls and Hanging Gardens of ancient Babylon, the statue of Olympian Zeus, the Colossus of Rhodes, the mighty work of the high Pyramids and the tomb of Mausolus. But when I saw the temple at Ephesus rising to the clouds, all these other wonders were put in the shade." Philon of Byzantium

It was rectangular in shape, and approximately 260 ft by 430 ft. The building (the 323 BC version) consisted of a roof held up by 127 marble pillars, each 60 ft high.

The worship of Diana was 'religious immorality' at its worst. ***One philosopher, commenting on the moral climate in Ephesus, wrote that the inhabitants of the city were fit only to be drowned. He said that the reason he could never smile or laugh was because he lived amidst such terrible uncleanness.***

The reason this history is important is we can see the similarities of our 21st century cities to those of the first century. And that makes us pay attention.

This very little letter addresses the specific issues of the house church in this complex city and we will look at that in a moment. But this is also a letter to all the churches that follow after. At the end of the first chapter Jesus tells John to record the things that are and the things to come. This little section speaks to things that are AND to things that come. The warnings and exhortations given to the above churches apply to us today. Though each letter is written to a specific church, all seven letters close with the words, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." It is important to note, the word "churches" (*ekklesiáis*) is plural. John is writing for all who will listen!

It is not an accident that Jesus is writing to seven churches. "Seven" is the number of completeness, perfection, and fulfillment. These seven churches perfectly represent the strengths and weaknesses that are, were and will be characteristic of various churches throughout history. So let's slow down and take a look at these verses:

Revelation 2:1-2 (also 1:20)

'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, ***who walks among the seven golden lampstands***. "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, I am with you."

I know you

Jesus says to all the churches, "I know you." To five of the seven churches, Jesus says, "I know your deeds" (2:2, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). To the church of Smyrna, Jesus says, "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the blasphemy. . ." (2:9). To the church of Pergamum, Jesus says, "I know where you dwell. . ." (2:13). I like that. . ."I know where you live!!" This is a God who is paying attention. God knows us here at this church too.

I am with you

The phrase which completes this verse, ***“The One who walks among the seven golden lampstands”*** is a reference to the intimate presence of Christ. The word ***“walks”*** is a word of comfort and immanence. It is a startling reminder that Jesus not only stands “in the middle of the lampstands” (see Rev 1:13); He also actively pursues His desire to have deep fellowship with us. This reminds us that Jesus loves us, cares for us, and has time for us. He is concerned with His church. Not just the church of China, Sudan, and India but even the church of America. Jesus loves His church, this church.

What a sobering reality! Jesus is present with us: right here, right now. He is walking among us to comfort and to judge. Both of these realities ought to change the way we live. OK let’s get into it.

The Good News

Revelation 2:2-3

“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.”

Jesus is in the business of appraising His church. He is the great Evaluator and one day He will examine our deeds (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10). What about this church did Jesus know? Jesus recognized their ***“deeds, toil, and perseverance”*** (2:2a). These three words build upon one another.

The word ***“works”*** (*erga*) refers to any action, task, or service. The word ***“toil”*** (*kopos*) is a word that means “to labor to the point of weariness.” In other words, “deeds done sold out!” This word stresses the depth or degree of their labor for the Lord. The final word ***“perseverance”*** (*hupomone*) refers to the capacity or ability to endure, to remain under pressure or pain, over the long haul.

The Ephesian church was an extremely orthodox church. They were strong in both doctrine and the work of the ministry. Jesus says, ***“You cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false.”*** The church at Ephesus refused to compromise their moral or doctrinal purity. They could smell a heretic a mile off because they knew God’s Word.

It is interesting to note that the first four churches in this list of seven dealt with false teachers (2:2, 6, 9, 14-15, 20). This is why the Pastoral Epistles (1-2 Timothy and Titus) challenge pastors to “teach” their congregations. Ultimately, each one of us must know the truth so that we can protect our family and friends from unbiblical doctrine. How well do you think our church is doing in this area? As elders, pastors, small group leaders, and Sunday school teachers, are we guarding the flock from false teachers?

We are all responsible to “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3).

In 2:3, Jesus again declares, ***“and you have perseverance and have endured for My names sake, and have not grown weary.”*** Some 40 years had passed since this church was founded. Two generations had risen up in the history of this church. All the while Ephesus had remained faithful to Jesus Christ. At the core of their greatness was their dynamic ministry. This was a hard working group of believers, constantly serving Christ. In a city where Christianity was not a spectator sport. They didn’t come to church to be entertained. They were actively involved in the work of ministry.

The Ephesian church is commended for their persistence and their purity, their diligence and their doctrine. On the surface, they appear to be a phenomenal church—the epitome of what every church should be.

The Bad News

Revelation 3:4-6

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Abandoned: But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. The word in Greek is clear, it is not lost, it is left, neglected, abandoned. They no longer love like they used to. They have the behavior down, but not the motive. And for God it is all about heart, not outside appearances.

The Four "R's"

Remember: the Ephesians had drifted into a mechanical, dogmatic, even performance based Christianity.

Performance Driven Love

They could pick out a false teacher, they had rigid expectations for what a believer's life would look like but they couldn't remember why those things were important. Some marriages get like this. You continue to go through the motions long after the fire goes out because you didn't stoke it. In this church, there wasn't the excitement of the early years of the love relationship. They let it grow cold.

Repent This is not primarily about feeling sorry though that is part of it. It is about turning and changing direction.

Return *"Do the deeds you did at first." You see this is about acts of love not acts of duty or obligation or ritual or habit. None of that counts. Only acts motivated by love.*

[Loving the body; 1 John 4:11, 20]

Remove I don't like this word. What does it mean for Jesus to remove a church? What it seems to mean is that if a given specific church will not love, it is not only not of any use, it is in fact a hindrance to the work of the kingdom.

John 14:15

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

1 John 5:3

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

2 John 1:6a

And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments

Only those who love obey – Only those who obey love



Prayer