

The Church in Ephesus

Paul Engel / General

The Churches of Revelation / Revelation 2:1–7

What can we learn from the loveless church?

- Let's look at the letter to the church at Ephesus.

Revelation 2:1 NKJV

"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:

- This letter is from Jesus, who holds the pastors of the churches in His right hand and walks among them.
 - Jesus is poetically saying it is the Lord who is speaking, not John.
 - Jesus holds the messengers to the seven churches in his hand.
 - Does it make you feel good that the pastor is held in Jesus' hand?
 - Jesus walks among the seven churches.
 - Does it make you feel good that Jesus walks among us?

Revelation 2:2 NKJV

"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;

- The leadership and this church work hard.
 - They are diligent about keeping evil out of the church.
 - Do we tolerate evil in the church?

- Remember, the church is the people gathered.
- Do we deal with evil lovingly?
- They test those who claim to have to Word of God and found some to be liars.

1 John 4:1 NKJV

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

- Do we test what people are saying to see if they are false?
 - If we do, how do we test them?
 - Do we spend time in God's Word so we can recognize falsehood?
 - Do we spend time in the Spirit, in prayer and meditation, so we can hear from Him when things are wrong .
- Are we willing to call those who call themselves sent from God liars if they fail?

Acts 17:10–11 NKJV

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.

- How many of you search the Scriptures to see if what I am saying is true?

Revelation 2:3 NKJV

and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

- This church has worked hard; they have patiently done their duty and not given up.

- Sounds like a good church, no?

Galatians 6:9 (NKJV) And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

- Notice they have patience and persevered for the name of Jesus.
 - How patient are we?
 - What do we say about God when things don't work out the way we want when we want it?
 - Do we work hard for the Lord's namesake?
 - Do we give money for the Lord's work but not ourselves personally?
 - Do we have ideas, but ask others to do the work?
 - Do we get weary?
 - Are we doing the work in our strength or the Lords?

Revelation 2:4 NKJV

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

- This church in Ephesus has done good works and performed their duty, but they have lost the love that marked the beginning of their relationship with Christ.
- We congratulate pastors with large well-organized churches.
 - Have you ever noticed, when pastors meet they ask how big their congregation is, not how healthy?
 - Are we more concerned with the size of our congregation than it's health?
 - Do you love your neighbors or just want them to fill the pews?
- We enjoy pastors who have spent time and effort preparing their sermons.
 - On average, it takes eight (8) hours of preparation for one (1) hour of sermon.

- Do we love to feast on the Word of God, or just nibble the sweets that taste good?
- Do we stop to think about our feelings toward Jesus?
 - Do we ever look at ourselves and ask if we are here out of habit more than love?
- Do we care if the pastor still has the love that brought him to the pulpit?
 - Do we care if we still have that love?

Revelation 2:5 NKJV

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.

- Jesus doesn't say give up what good you were doing, but repent from this loveless pattern and do those things you used to do when you first fell in love with Christ.
 - Go back to your first works, the things that you did when you first followed Jesus.
 - Remember when you first fell in love?
 - Go back and do what you did then.
- If this church does not repent, it will be removed from Jesus presence.
 - If Jesus removes the church from His presence, will there still be a "church"?
 - Sure, there will be an organization that calls itself a "church".
 - But it will not be a church of God, but a church of men.
 - They may have the forms and functions we recognize as a church, but Jesus no longer walks among them.
 - What do you think a "church" like that would look like?
 - Would we even recognize a dead church when we see it?
 - There are many churches today who do good works and strive to keep the

letter of God's Word, but have no love for Him in their heart.

- They will compromise God's Word because "God is Love". But they never ask themselves if they are keeping His commandments.

John 14:15

John 14:15 NKJV

"If you love Me, keep My commandments.

- Do we assume that Jesus still walks among these "loveless" churches?
 - Does Jesus walk among those in this church?
 - Do we assume He always will?

Revelation 2:6 NKJV

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

- One last positive note (the only church to get one), they hate the deeds of the Nicolaitians.
 - Note, they don't hate the Nicolaitians but their deeds.
 - Hate the sin, love the sinner.
 - For those of you who wonder, would God really someone to HATE, I looked up the Greek word translated hate, and you know what it means?
 - Hate or Detest!
 - So much for the image of a guy who hangs out with children and sheep!
- Who are the Nicolaitans?
 - From the New Bible Dictionary...
 - **Nicolaus, Nicolaitans.** Nicolaus of Antioch (Acts 6:5) is supposed to have given his name to a group in the early church who sought to work out a compromise with paganism, to enable Christians to take part without embarrassment in some of the social and religious activities of the close-knit society in which they found themselves. It is possible that the term Nicolaitan is a Graecized form of Heb. Balaam, and therefore allegorical, the policy of the sect being likened to that of the OT corrupter

of Israel (Nu. 22). In that case the Nicolaitans are to be identified with groups attacked by Peter (2 Pet. 2:15), Jude (11) and John (Rev. 2:6, 15 and possibly 2:20–23), for their advocacy within the church of pagan sexual laxity. References in Irenaeus, Clement and Tertullian suggest that the group hardened into a Gnostic sect.

- Do we seek to compromise with paganism? Do we compromise with the world?
 - Is Christmas about the Christ child or Santa Claus?
 - Is Resurrection Sunday about the tomb or the bunny & eggs.
 - Where in Scripture does it say it's OK to put on costumes and extort candy?
- Many of these traditions are fun.
 - Are we looking for a way to take part in social activities without considering their origins?
 - Rather, shouldn't we be looking for ways to bring these "holidays" into a focus on God?
- At least this pastor in Ephesus hated the watering down of God's Word to be included in the world.
 - How many pastors have been driven from their positions because they challenged traditions that have become compromised with this pagan culture?
 - How many pastors are afraid to challenge church traditions? Afraid that doing so might cost them their jobs?
 - How many of us would call for the removal of such a pastor?
 - How strong would the church be if it dealt with their shortcomings rather than papering over them?

Revelation 2:7 NKJV

"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.”’

- Listen if you can.
 - If we overcome our trials and keep our love of God
 - Notice the implied if. There is something we need to do.
 - Jesus expects us to overcome the trials in our lives.
 - Then we will eat of the tree of life.
- Do you have an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches?
 - Are you patient?
 - Working for Christ?
 - Bearing up under evil?
 - Do you test those who are teaching you?
 - Have you lost your first love?
 - Do you compromise to get along with the world?
 - Can you explain why you do what you do to those who do not know the Lord?
 - Does our Lord still walk among us?
 - Would we recognize Him if He does?