



Sermon Series: The 8th Letter
July 10, 2022
CHRIST FIRST CHURCH

Sermon #1:
The Church at Ephesus
Revelation 2:1-5

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INTRO: Turn your Bibles, or turn them on, to the last book of the New Testament, the Book of Revelation. When you find the book, go to chapter 2. Steve Schaub did an outstanding and thorough job of introducing this great book to us last Sunday. Today, I am starting on the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor.

Our series is called, THE EIGHTH LETTER, and will consist of 9 weeks, or sermons. We had the Introduction last week. There will be seven sermons preached on the seven letters written to the churches, and then one final sermon that will address where we stand as a congregation, and help us make application to what we will hopefully learn from God's Word as we make our way through this important and meaningful section of scripture. I hope you are as excited as I am to get into this series.

OPENING: These seven churches mentioned in chapters 2 & 3 of Revelation were seven literal congregations, as we learned last week. There's good reason to believe that seven churches were chosen, because seven is the number of completion in the Bible. The letters that address these seven churches were sent by Jesus Christ, Interpreted by the Holy Spirit, and dictated by John.

These letters, although historical and spiritual in significance, are also prophetic in nature. They indeed address literal congregations that were in existence during the first century, yet through the Word of God, they continue to speak, with relevance, to congregations today.

These literal churches, all being part of history at the same time, represent the entire church age from Pentecost to the rapture. Each of these letters, although different, have a lot of similarities. The pattern of each letter is basically the same. At the end of each letter is the exhortation to "*hear what the Spirit is saying*". It would do all churches good today, to hear what the God is saying in these chapters. And that's why we are here!

The first letter is to the CHURCH AT EPHESUS. Although Pergamum was the official capital of the province of Asia, Ephesus was by far its greatest city. A Roman writer once called it Lumen Asiae, the Light of Asia.

Ephesus was located near the mouth of the Cayster River only three miles from the coast. It became the commercial and religious hub of all of Asia Minor. It was given the title "Supreme Metropolis of Asia." It also contained one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Artemis (Diana). It was the center of mystical cult worship. The temple was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and 60 feet high, with great folding doors and 127 marble pillars, some of them covered with gold. The worship of Diana was 'religious immorality' at its worst. And it's against this backdrop that this great church was born.

Let's read together...

Revelation 2:1-7 *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 I know your deeds, your labor, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate those who are evil, and you have tested and exposed as liars those who falsely claim to be apostles. 3 Without growing weary, you have persevered and endured many things for the sake of My name. 4 But I have this against you: You have abandoned your first love. 5 Therefore, keep in mind how far you have fallen. Repent and perform the deeds you did at first. But if you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6 But you have this to your credit: You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant the right to eat from the tree of life in the Paradise of God."*

If you have a pencil or pen, and something to write on, and I hope you do, please take notes and notice...

I) THE INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER: v 1 *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands."* In this verse we are introduced to both the AUDIENCE and the AUTHOR of the letter.

It starts by addressing *"the angel of the church..."*. As Steve mentioned last Sunday, there are some differing opinions even among conservative evangelicals as to who the angel of the church may be. What we do know is that the word translated "angel" here is the Gr. word, ángelos (ang'-el-os), and it means, messenger of God or angel. It's used more than 180 times in scripture. It's always masculine in its usage. It's used of both angelic heavenly beings and of human messengers, such as John the Baptist. By doing a proper exegesis of these letters, it's easy to conclude that it's not a heavenly being God is referring to in these verses, but rather, a fallible, prone to sin, human. And since pastors are messengers of God's good news to the world, and deliver God's Word to His people, the best explanation seems to be that the angel here is the Pastor or Overseer of the church. Or we could say Elder or Bishop, (those titles are all synonymous with one another). It is my interpretation that God is addressing these letters to the pastors of these individual churches, so that the pastor can deliver the message to the congregation.

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write..." Here, the glorified Christ gives John this command to write. The command is in the aorist imperative = do this now; don't delay; it is important. According to Chapter 1:11 it was the entire scroll, from Revelation 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, that would have been circulated among the seven churches. So, much like you and I today, all the churches mentioned in these two chapters would have been privy to the whole content of this book and would have had the opportunity to learn from it. These first few verses are addressed specifically to the congregation at Ephesus.

"These are the words (this is the solemn pronouncement) of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands." Here we have the first snapshot of seven very specific pictures of the risen glorified Savior, Jesus Christ, as He reveals Himself to His readers.

I) THE INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER: v 1 CONTINUED These are the words of Him..." Make no mistake, these are not the words of a man, but rather the God/man, Jesus Christ. And when Jesus speaks, we need to listen.

We are told that He "holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands." What a glorious picture! Jesus holds the seven stars, the pastors, in His right hand. We read in **Isaiah 48:13** "My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together."

Exodus 15:6 "Your right hand, O Lord, (is) glorious in power, your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy."

Psalm 18:35 "You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great."

Isaiah 41:10 "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

There is something special about the right hand of God. And He holds his messengers in His right hand. That brings me comfort, to know that I am cared for supported by God himself. There is also the sobering thought that if He holds me in His right hand, at anytime I choose to be disobedient, He can very easily close His hand on me. I take that thought very seriously.

"...and walks among the seven golden lampstands." God is with us! He's not just way off in the heavenlies, He is present with us and within us. **Isaiah 57:15** "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in a high and holy place, and with the oppressed and humble in spirit, to restore the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the contrite." Now notice...

II) THE PRAISE OF THIS CONGREGATION: vv 2-3, 6 "I know your deeds, your labor, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate those who are evil, and you have tested and exposed as liars those who falsely claim to be apostles. 3 Without growing weary, you have persevered and endured many things for the sake of My name... 6 But you have this to your credit: You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

Here we have 8 to 10 things, according if you combine some or not, that God commends this church for. And he starts His commendation by saying... "I KNOW" GOD KNOWS everything about you and me, and this church, and every church. He knows the good, the bad, and the ugly. The Greek word translated "know", is the word, "eidō" (ā-dō). It means, to perceive with the eyes and other senses, to turn the eyes, the mind, and the attention to a thing, to pay special attention to. God knows all about us, because He is watching everything we do! DOES THAT EXCITE YOU, SCARE YOU? It should.

Let's look at these commendations for a moment. Now, I don't have time to spend the day here, so make sure you revisit these on your own and see what God is saying.

I) THE INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER: v 1

II) THE PRAISE OF THIS CONGREGATION: vv 2-3, 6 CONTINUED

Let's start with the first few... "I know your deeds, your labor, and your perseverance..." When He says deeds, this could refer to specific deeds or encompass all the deeds that follow in Jesus' commendation. Most versions say "your works." It's important to know that "works" don't save a person. We are not saved by good works or deeds. Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast." But we are saved FOR good works.

Ephesians 2:10 "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Are you a worker for the Kingdom or just a spectator?

Jesus goes on to say, "I know your labor, and your perseverance..." The Church at Ephesus was not a lazy church, but willing to work up a little "holy sweat," so to speak, because the Greek word for "labor" refers to exhausting physical or mental labor and in some contexts describes work that is fraught with difficulties, hardships or burdens. John MacArthur - "The Ephesians were diligent workers for the cause of Christ. There was no spectator mentality; they did not want merely to be entertained. Nor were they content to eat the fruit of others' labor, but were willing to plow, plant, and harvest their own crop." What a great word about this church, that they were willing to work for the cause of Christ! Can God say that about you? Are you willing to invest time in building the Kingdom?

Jesus goes on to commend their "perseverance". It's the Greek word, hypomoné (hoop-om-on-ay) a word which speaks of steadfastness, constancy, and endurance, when circumstances are difficult.

Chuck Swindoll - "The Greek term hypomone, implies endurance, under extreme hardship, in the face of life-threatening challenges or against seemingly impossible odds. The Ephesian Christians faced special challenges. Because they refused to bow the knee to the goddess Diana or the images of the emperor, they found themselves maligned, slandered, boycotted, and abused. Not unlike Jewish merchants in Berlin in the 1930s, Christians in Ephesus would have been the objects of physical violence, social ostracism, and economic repression. Yet they endured."

Oh, that we might have people in our day with as great a steadfastness.

(Read with comments) "...I know that you cannot tolerate those who are evil, and you have tested and exposed as liars those who falsely claim to be apostles. 3 Without growing weary, you have persevered and endured many things for the sake of My name... 6 But you have this to your credit: You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

10 things God commends about this church. It's quiet a list. But God being Holy and just and can't stop there as if nothing else matters. Notice...

I) THE INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER: v 1

II) THE PRAISE OF THIS CONGREGATION: vv 2-3, 6

III) THE PROBLEM WITH THIS CONGREGATION: v 4 *"But I have this against you: You have abandoned your first love."* "But" - This is one of the more dramatic terms of contrast that we have in the Bible. In Ephesians 1:15-16 Paul writes, *"For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers"* That was written around the 62-63 AD. And Paul would go on and make another 20 or so mentions of love in the Book of Ephesians. Now fast forward just 30 or so years and Jesus says in this letter to the church at Ephesus, **"YOU HAVE ABANDONED YOUR FIRST LOVE."** How does that happen? How can we be head over hills in love with Jesus, then in just a matter of a few months or years, find ourselves so far removed from that first love we had known?

And why was this such a grievous thing considering everything else they were doing well? It was Paul that said in, 1 Corinthians 13:1 *"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."* And he would go on to say in v 13, *"But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."*

Now let me hurry...

IV) THE POSITION THIS CONGREGATION WAS IN: v 5 *"Therefore, keep in mind (remember) how far you have fallen. Repent and perform the deeds you did at first. But if you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."* Here Jesus gives them three Rs, REMEMBER, REPENT or I will REMOVE.

Remember what? Ephesians 5:1-2 *"Be imitators of God, therefore, as beloved children, 2 and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant sacrificial offering to God."*

Listen to me for a moment, those of you that think of God as some cosmic grandfather who just wants to play with us and give us gifts, you need to know, GOD HAS NO GRANDCHILDREN, He only has children. And a father must discipline his children to keep them safe. And when God disciplines, He don't play! Remember, repent, or I will remove.

V) CONCLUSION: v 7 *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant the right to eat from the tree of life in the Paradise of God."* This is not a reference to some spiritually elite group of believers, but to all believers. John explains who the overcomers are in his first epistle, 1 John 5:4-5 *"everyone born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith. 5 Who then overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God"*

"I will grant the right to eat from the tree of life" - A gift from Christ for all believers, The tree of life is first referred to in Genesis 2:9, in the Garden of Eden. Now this tree symbolizes eternal life in Christ. And yet while it does symbolize life, the tree of life will be a real tree in "Paradise Found," just like it was in "Paradise Lost!" (INVITATION)