
Revelation Msg 3
Dear Ephesus
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The Well Church of Lewisville

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Key Scripture: Revelation 2:1-7

Overview

This week we begin to look into the 7 prophetic letters to the 7 churches in Asia Minor. This week we will be using part of a study by Jack Kelley to break the letters into multiple parts, which help us understand that these letters have application, not just to the churches of the 1st Century, but also to the church and individuals today. In this message, we will discuss the letter to the church of Ephesus, which receives a rebuke for losing focus of Christ and focusing on the inward works of the church.

An overview of the make-up of the prophetic letters:

In a study of Revelation by Jack Kelley, Kelley points out that there are four levels of application regarding these letters.

Question (1) Answer

(1) Level One – Historical Application

(2) Level Two – Admonition Application

(3) Level Three – Personal as well as the Congregational Application

(4) Level Four – Prophetic Application

The Lord began each letter with a different one of the 24 titles that are used to describe Christ in the book, and the title He selects gives a clue to the letter's theme. The name of each Church also contains a clue.

(2) Each letter can be divided into seven parts,

- (1) The Lord's Title
- (2) A Commendation
- (3) A Criticism
- (4) An Admonition
- (5) A Call
- (6) A Challenge
- (7) A Promise

Two of the seven letters, **Sardis** and **Laodicea**, contain no commendation, and in two, **Smyrna** and **Philadelphia**, no criticism is given. **Pergamum** has no admonition, but has two criticisms. In the last 4 letters the challenge and the promise are reversed (Kelley).

We will dissect each letter into its component parts as we go.

Ephesus

To begin, let's take a look at Ephesus so that we have a better understanding of the setting where the Ephesian church was established.

Here is some information about the church in Ephesus

Ephesus means darling, or beloved, maiden of choice. Ephesus represents the 1st century church.

References to Ephesus in the Bible

Site of Jewish synagogue	Acts 18:19
Paul visits	Acts 18:18–21
Miracles done here	Acts 19:11–21
Demetrius stirs up riot in	Acts 19:24–29
Elders of, addressed by Paul at Miletus	Acts 20:17–38
Letter sent to	Eph. 1:1
Paul sends Tychicus	Eph. 6:21
Paul leaves Timothy	1 Tim. 1:3
One of seven churches	Rev. 1:11

History of the Ephesian Church

The history of Christianity at Ephesus began about A.D. 50, perhaps as a result of the efforts of Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18). Paul came to Ephesus in about A.D. 52, establishing a resident ministry for the better part of three years (Acts 20:31).

(3) Paul spent 3 years ministering in Ephesus

During his Ephesian ministry, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:8).

The Book of Acts reports that “all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:10), while Paul taught during the hot midday hours in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). Influence from his ministry undoubtedly resulted in the founding of churches in the Lycus River valley at Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae.

So influential, in fact, was Paul’s ministry at Ephesus that the silversmiths’ league, which fashioned souvenirs of the temple, feared that the preaching of the gospel would undermine the great temple of Artemis (Acts 19:27). As a result, one of the silversmiths, a man named Demetrius, stirred up a riot against Paul.

During his stay in Ephesus, Paul encountered both great opportunities and great dangers. He baptized believers who apparently came to know the gospel through disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1–5), and he countered the strong influence of magic in Ephesus (Acts 19:11–20).

After Paul departed from Ephesus, Timothy remained to combat false teaching (1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 4:3; Acts 20:29).

Many traditions testify that the apostle John lived in Ephesus toward the end of the first century. In his vision from the island of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor, John described the

church of Ephesus as flourishing, although it was troubled with false teachers and had lost its first love (Rev. 2:1–7).

After the Apostolic Age

In the sixth century A.D. the Roman emperor Justinian (A.D. 527–565) raised a magnificent church to John’s memory in this city.

Ephesus continued to play a prominent role in the history of the early church. A long line of bishops in the Eastern church lived there. In A.D. 431 the Council of Ephesus officially condemned the Nestorian heresy, which taught that there were two separate persons, one divine and one human, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Paganism and Idolatry in Ephesus

The Temple of Artemis (or Diana, according to her Roman name) at Ephesus ranked as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. As the twin sister of Apollo and the daughter of Zeus, Artemis was known variously as the moon goddess, the goddess of hunting, and the patroness of young girls. The temple at Ephesus housed the image of Artemis that was reputed to have come directly from Zeus (Acts 19:35)

(Youngblood, R. F., 1986, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville)

Let’s Read Revelation 2:1-7

To the Church in Ephesus

“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.

TITLE (Rev 2:1)

Here are important clues about the Jesus' Title in Rev 2:1. The seven stars as discussed last week are the 7 angels of the 7 churches. Jesus is stating his authority over the angels.

Read Hebrews 1:4

4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

Jesus then goes on to state that he walks amongst the lampstands, which are the churches.

Read Ephesians 1:22

22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,

Read Ephesians 5:9

9 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—

Jesus shows his authority over the church and also shows his fellowship and affection for the church.

Read Ephesians 5:25-27

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

(4) In Revelation 2:1, Jesus shows his authority over and affection for the church

Commendation (Rev 2:2-3)

Rev 2:2-3

2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

There are 6 things that Jesus commends to the Ephesians

(5) Jesus commends the Ephesians for the following 5 things:

- (1) Deeds and Hard Work
- (2) Perseverance
- (3) Cannot tolerate wicked people
- (4) Tested and rejected false teachings
- (5) Endured hardships for Christ's sake

Let's take a look at each one

(1) Deeds

Deeds do not save, it is grace that saves.

Read Romans 11:6

6 And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

So why is Jesus complimenting them for their deeds?

Read James 2:26

26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Read Matthew 25:40

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Being a Christian requires some effort. Jesus is commending the Ephesians for their efforts. The church is called to be missioned and commissioned. The two must go hand in hand.

James 1:27 Says

27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Obviously the Ephesians were living out their faith by their deeds.

Do you feel that the deeds of our church and you personally support the faith?

If not, what are some things that you can do today to change this?

(2) Perseverance

Jesus put a lot of emphasis on their perseverance. In fact he commended them for perseverance in their deeds, and during their hardships. On top of this, he commends them for not growing weary!

Jesus is commending the Ephesians for not losing hope in difficult times and not giving up or in. Their faith in Christ had to be extremely strong to endure in a pagan infested territory where Christianity was targeted for economic, political, and religious reasons.

This is so important to remember. Christ does notice the struggles you go through. He commends you for your faith and trust in Him and His Word.

During hardships, do you grow weary? If so, are you operating in His strength or your own?

In Matthew 11:30, Jesus said:

30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Are you taking His yoke? If you are growing weary, you really need to ask yourself that question. When we are serving the Lord, we must learn to completely depend on Him and His strength. If we are wearied, then we are not spending enough time with the Lord.

The Ephesians have apparently learned to lean on His strength to endure.

(3) Cannot tolerate wicked people

The church must stand for justice and not put a deaf ear to the unjust.

(4) Tested and rejected false teachings

The Ephesians were plagued with hodge-podge, man-made religions. Often times, several religions were combined to form a new one. This practice was very common in ancient Rome. Paul obviously did a good job educating the church. Today, we have the same issues that the Ephesians faced. We have all kinds of false teaching and it is available 24x7. The Internet has opened the door in a big way as well as the media. This is a charge to know God's Word. This is the responsibility of every believer. If you have questions, go to sources that are known for teaching the Bible and not for forming their own opinions.

In the last days, many will be led astray. It is your responsibility to seek the truth and not be led astray by false teachers and false prophets. You now have the Gospel and the Holy Spirit.

(5) Endured hardships for Christ's sake

We have all endured hardships, but I doubt any of us have truly suffered for the sake of Christ. Many have fought this battle on our behalf, with the Ephesians being on the front-line of this horrific scene of injustice and persecution.

Many of the hardships that we endure are merely faith builders. If you were under the kind of persecution that Ephesus was under, would you endure for your faith or would you walk away?

The Criticism (Rev 2:4)

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

Already the church had become so busy in its service to the King that it had forgotten about the King!

The relationship He sought was turning into another religion.

The Apostle Paul made it clear in his letter to the Ephesians that it was not works that saved them but Grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 Says

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Admonition (Rev 2:5)

5 Consider how far you have fallen!

How many times have we heard friends comment about the “good old days” when they were new believers? How exciting and emotional it was, and how quickly our prayers were answered? The Lord wants us to stay that way.

Call (Rev 2:5-6)

Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Here's the remedy. Go back to doing what you did at first.

Remember when you couldn't get enough of the Bible?

When you showed up at church half an hour early, just because you loved being there, and didn't want to leave when the service was over? How you kept up a running conversation with the Lord that began when you woke up in the morning and didn't end till you fell asleep at night?

The Nicolaitans were a heretical sect that advocated a blending of pagan customs, like eating food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality, into Christian worship. There's only One worthy to receive our worship, and worshiping Him is the Church's primary purpose.

The lamp stand is identified in Rev 1:20 as the church, so removing it means removing the church of Ephesus. Though the ruins of Ephesus are extensive and impressive, requiring most of a day to see, when we were there a few years ago we found only the faintest traces of a 1st century church in Ephesus.

Challenge (Rev 2:7)

7 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Though the letter to Ephesus describes the Apostolic era, the church struggles with the same problems today. The church as a whole is too distracted with programs and plans, your congregation is too busy implementing them, and you're too busy helping. We're human beings, not human doings, and once we're saved being with the Lord in fellowship is our life's purpose.

Promise (Rev 2:7)

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

1 Because of the emphasis on good works and programs in the church today, many who call themselves Christians, and rightly consider themselves to be hard working members of their congregations, have never taken the time to meet the King they claim to serve and receive the pardon

He purchased for them with His life. How shocked they'll be to hear Him say, "I never knew you. Away from me you evil doers." (Matt. 7:23)

Answers to Handout Questions

(1) There are 4 levels of application in the 7 letters to the 7 churches which are:

- (1) Historical Application
- (2) Admonition Application
- (3) Personal and Congregational Application
- (4) Prophetic Application

(2) Each Letter can be divided into 7 Parts which are:

- (1) The Lord's Title. (2) A Commendation, (3) A Criticism, (4) An Admonition, (5) A Call, (6) A Challenge, (7) A Promise

(3) The Apostle Paul spent 3 years ministering in Ephesus

(4) (4) In Revelation 2:1, Jesus shows his authority over and affection for the church

(5) Jesus commends the Ephesians for the following 5 things: (1) Deeds and Hard Work (2) Perseverance (3) Cannot tolerate

wicket people (4) Tested and Rejected false teaching (5) Endured Hardships for Christ's Sake