

The Church with Heart Problems - Ephesus

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Reading:

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 lamp stands: 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, 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. 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place. 6 But you have this in your favour: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”*

1. Introduction - The Seven Churches of Asia

When we look at the book of Revelation we find obvious patterns that help us to understand the book more clearly.

The same patterns occur when you look at the writings to the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2-3. We can see seven comparisons (note the number 7 appears often):

- The **Commission** – *“To the angel of the church atwrite. . . .”*
- The **Character** – *“These are the words of him that”* Then, follow the words that paint an introductory portrait of that church.
- The **Commendation** – *“I know your deeds ...”* Then, there are favourable compliments that are listed to the church being addressed.

- The **Condemnation** – “*Yet I hold this against you ...*” Then, there is a list of criticism that is given in sequence.
- The **Correction** – These are varied commands that are not couched in diplomacy. God is really saying to the pastor and to that church “*fix the problem!*”
- The **Call** – “He who has an ear ...” This is spoken to all seven churches. (This part is uniform in all seven letters, except that in the last four it takes the seventh place in order rather than the sixth.)
- The **Challenge** – “*To him who overcomes ...*” Each of the letters has a promise for the overcomer who rises above the temptations and perils of each of the churches.

The real Jesus, the One who walks through the church, is described in Revelation 1:12-18

Rev 1:12-18 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lamp stands, 13 and among the lamp stands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

It is a descriptive picture of One who has the ability and authority both to redeem and also to judge.

2. The Church of Ephesus

Ephesus is the first church addressed in the seven letters. The city was located in the largest city of the Roman province of Asia. By the end of the first century, it had become one of the most thriving seaports in the world.

Now the silt from the Cayster River, brought down from the mountains, had begun to fill in the harbour. Careful engineering had kept some of the channels open but the port was only accessible to sailing vessels through great difficulty and it was losing its importance in the grand scope of history.

a. The History of the Ephesian Church – Acts 19

To gain an idea of the surrounding atmosphere that prevailed in the region of Ephesus, one would have to look back to Acts 19 where Paul found himself set at odds with the craftsman of the city.

The chief cult in the city was devoted to the goddess Diana. There was a huge temple that had been constructed there and was recognised as one of the wonders of the ancient world. The worship of Diana was attributed to her supposed fall from heaven and the craftsmen who worked with precious metals had formed idols for the Ephesians to worship. They formed a strong union of workers and when Paul arrived in Acts 19 and began to preach about a Christ that could save them from their sins, a furore arose.

- At Ephesus:
 - The disciples present had been taught only the baptism of John (the Baptist). Here, by Paul, they:
 - Were introduced to the Holy Ghost – Acts 19:1-6
 - Were baptised in Jesus' Name – Acts 19:5
 - Received the Holy Ghost – Acts 19:6
 - Paul taught for two years and three months in Ephesus – Acts 19:8-10
 - Special miracles occurred during this era at Ephesus – Acts 19:11
 - Handkerchiefs were sent out from Paul and healing occurred, demons were cast out – Acts 19:12
 - Books about witchcraft and other material was burned, the value being worth fifty thousand pieces of silver – Acts 19:19

Acts 19:20 *In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.*

- Then Demetrius got together with the other silversmiths of the city. The Bible declares they began to spread great confusion. Through this, Paul found himself facing a riot. Yet in all of this God was at work and people were prepared to go into the church.
- In the midst of all those troubles, the birth of the Gospel at Ephesus proved to be one of the early footholds of the church. This strong church in the face of the enemy found an ability to establish itself as a headquarters church and evangelise all the province of Asia.
- The qualities that made them fanatical pagans, once the Spirit had been instilled in them, resulted in them becoming zealous Believers.
- This church at Ephesus had amazing qualities:
 - It had a foundation constructed by the great Apostle Paul
 - It was sustained by the careful labour of Aquila and Priscilla
 - It had been favoured by eloquent sermons of Apollos
 - It had been blessed with a young pastor named Timothy, whom Paul described as one who was like-minded. Timothy would give the prime of his life to the church at Ephesus

- It was a blessed church, a godly church, a revival church; this was Ephesus

But now an entire generation has passed since the founding of this early group of men and women.

With the passing of the first converts came a cooling in the fervour and intensity of their relationship with God. The victories that the pioneers had won by labour and endurance became the accepted privileges that the children now enjoyed.

b. The Presence of Jesus in the Ephesian Church

Now back in John's vision, he notes Christ walking among the church at Ephesus, assessing the character and content of that church. We must never get an attitude in our lives that we do not want Christ to walk in the halls of our heart nor in the halls of our church.

The Lord is emphasised by John as a Preserver and Watchman (2:1). No matter how great the failure of the church may be, there is a God who will still speak to its leaders & people and will never abandon them to a total loss.

1) The Commendation

I know:

- Your deeds
- Your hard work
- Your perseverance.
- You cannot tolerate wicked men
- You have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false
- You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name
- You have not grown weary
- You have this in your favour: you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate

The commendation starts with the words "*I know your deeds ...*" Special notice is taken of the Ephesian church. They are known for their labour and endurance, it is a church that has not grown weary with its activities. Despite the excessive external pressures that have come to this church, they have stood strong and continued steadfastly.

They also had shown themselves to be committed to the Word of God. They had forced self-appointed apostles to align themselves with the Word of God and those who have refused to do so have been called false (v2). They are commended for this.

Much can be said about a church that has a purity of discipline in it. To gain a view of an undisciplined church, take a look at the Corinthians. The atmosphere was chaotic at best. Those who grumble about a church that has discipline and standards and guidelines for both leaders and laity are very foolish.

There were some other characteristics about this church that set it apart. It was a patient church. The patience of the Ephesians is mentioned twice in these verses. The second time that patience is mentioned is not as a feature of a soldier or worker but rather the patience of Him who can suffer and suffer in silence. This kind of patience brings forth something to us. Patience, endurance, and fortitude. An ability to stick to our tasks.

2) The Condemnation

The condemnation of this church:

- Had nothing to do with embracing false doctrine
- Had nothing to do with their refusal to support both home and foreign missions
- Had nothing to do with a huge church split
- Had nothing to do with allowing false prophets to take advantage of them
- There were no great scandals involving their leadership
- Their reputation as a church was spotless
- The organisation was still functioning smoothly

The condemnation of this church had to do with **only one thing**: Revelation 2:4 “*Yet I hold this against you: You have left your first love.*”

The fatal flaw is this: “*You have left your first love.*”

The Greek Word for ‘left’ is: ‘*Aphiemi*’ (*af-ee’-ay-mee*). Its meaning is to forsake, lay aside, leave, omit, to send away.

The inner springs of the life of this great church had begun to run dry.

3) The Correction

From this state the Lord gives them a correction that can be summed up into three words:

- Remember
 - Repent
 - Repeat
- 2:5 – “*Remember the height from which you have fallen.*” Perhaps their failure had been so gradual they did not even recognise it. The decline had been so slight that there would have been little noticeable change from day to day, but at the end

of a generation, the difference between the first love and the existing condition was quite obvious.

- 2:5 – “*Repent ...*” Repentance always means a literal change of mind and a reversal of a position that they had once held.
- 2:5 – ‘Repeat’ viz. “*and do the things you did at first.*” The first works were the things that had earlier set them apart from the world because of their devotion to Jesus Christ.

The church was not inactive but its activity lacked the warmth of love that is always going to be necessary for any church to really touch its world.

3. The Love Factor

The love of a Believer for his Saviour & Lord is critical. The power of a disciple’s love for Jesus Christ will cause him to do unimaginable things in his service for God.

John mentions here in this series of verses, that the first love must be restored.

a. The Peril of a Lost First Love

When men lose their early first love for Christ, there are some things that began to occur in their lives.

- Raw emotions began to rage in the heart as it did with Samson.
- When the temperature of one’s love begins to lower, you will find yourself among the men of Korah.
- When the altar of mammon begins to rule, you are sent away as the sorrowful rich young ruler.
- When the first love dies and you began to labour in the service of self, you become cynical, suspicious, and cold like the man in the book of Ecclesiastes.
- The man with the lost love usually has his head going in the right direction but it is his heart that has begun to stray.

Mark this down, the devil is going to use everything in this world to conquer your first love for God. He will use deception, treachery, charm, and depraved actions of others. He will try to use pride, ambition, selfishness, and even luxury to get you to give up the value of your own soul.

b. The Power of a Regained First Love

However, just as that may seem negative to every one of us in this place there is something that happens to men who regain their first love for God again.

When the first love is restored to us:

- Spiritual things that seemed to be far off are now within reach.
- Revival that seemed far away now seems to be in the next step.
- Life becomes full of meaning and of value for us.

4. Conclusion – The Power of the Overcomer

With all of that, there is a word that I would like to draw your attention to in closing. That word is “*overcomes*.” You find this word in every aspect of the letters to the seven churches:

- Revelation 2:7 – “... *To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*” (Ephesus)
- Revelation 2:11 – “... *He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.*” (Smyrna)
- Revelation 2:17 – “... *To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.*” (Pergamum)
- Revelation 2:26 – “... *To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.*” (Thyatira)
- Revelation 3:5 – “... *He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.*” (Sardis)
- Revelation 3:12 – “... *He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.*” (Philadelphia)
- Revelation 3:21 – “... *To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.*”

‘*Overcomes*’ is a word that tells us of battle and of victory.

- There is an inference that there might be an enemy lurking here.
- There is a hell in this word and there is a devil in this word.
- In this word, there is an understanding that your spiritual life is a fight, that everyday you are on a battlefield.
- Desire is in this word and desire satisfied is in this word. Our desire for more of God, more of His Spirit, more of His power, all contained in this word.

‘*Overcomes*’ gives us indication for one other word: ‘*Crown*’.

2 Tim 4:5-8 *But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. 6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

Something must burn within us. We are people of destiny. We cannot afford to have a desensitised church with a desensitised preacher. Our entire life has prepared us for where we are today.