

Revelation 2.1-7

“All for Jesus: Head, Heart, Hands”

MANY: “Church TODAY is NOT LIKE the PURE Church of First Century”

Church Today CORRUPT – Filled with HYPOCRITES and PROBLEMS

Early Church > GOOD OLD DAYS > “Early Church – Alive & Real”

TRUE – Church TODAY has Problems – filled with PEOPLE – LIKE ME!

But Seen Churches in 40 countries of World – Amazing People / Great Things!

NOT TRUE that First Church was PROBLEM Free Church > See Proof Tonight

TONIGHT Begin Study Letters of Jesus Christ to 7 1st C Churches Roman Asia

Cannot Judge a Church by its Website: If look Closely you’ll SEE Problems!

Strong Doctrinal Precision > Weak Love for God and Hurting People

Considered Aloof > Rejected by their Neighbors > > Stigmatized

Compromise > Climbed into Bed with Leaders of Political and Society

Secret Sexual Scandal spread across the Congregation

All Image > No Substance > Despite Impressive list of Activities

Small Minority struggling to Hold On in City that Hated Them

Church can be Halfhearted > Neither HOT or COLD

Just DESCRIBED 7 Churches from Good Old Days of 1st Century

Ephesus - Smyrna - Pergamum - Thyatira - Sardis - Philadelphia – Laodicea

IMPORTANT Question > Focus of Study: “What does Jesus think of Church?”

1. Lord among the Lampstands

a. Individuals CHURCHES are Collections of People > Diverse Characteristics

Churches have PERSONALITIES like the PEOPLE who are THERE

That’s PRIMARY Reason why church in 21st C basically like church of 1st C

One Pastor told Me: “My church would be a great place except for the people!”



7 Letters from Jesus to Churches in Roman Asia / Turkey

Probably all 7 Along Roman Circular POSTAL Route

1st to Ephesus ‘the metropolis of Asia’

Closest to Patmos > 100 kms. across Aegean

¼ of Million Citizens > Major City in Roman Province of Asia

Had One of World’s Largest Libraries > Was Popular Center of Occult Arts

Magnificent Temple to Mother Goddess > Artemis to Greeks / Diana to Romans

1 of 7 Wonders of the Ancient World > Shrine to Pilgrims > Source of Pride and

Income to Ephesian Leaders > Scandal to the Ephesian Christians

Each Individual Ephesian is addressed by the Lord Jesus -

v. 7 “He who has an ear, let him hear” People in Church > Each One Hear!!

LETTERS TO ONE CHURCH > Message to ALL CHURCHES thru ALL TIME

Some say 7 Churches SYMBOLIZE different ERAS of Church History – NO!

v. 7 “what the Spirit says to the churches” > Phrase ends ALL 7 LETTERS

Paul also wrote letters to Seven Churches >

Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica

HUMAN AUTHORS wrote Transient Message carry church members thru Life

DIVINE AUTHOR > wrote Timeless Message for all God’s People in Christ

b. Insight WE Judge Churches by Buildings, Programs, and Websites...

Jesus Analysis more PENETRATING v. 2 “I know your deeds...I know that you”

OF COURSE > He walks among the Lampstands > He dwells among His People

7 Churches: Diagnostic Analysis of Him whose “eyes were like blazing fire” 1.14

“We likewise need Christ-like discernment, illumined by the Spirit and by these examples, if we are to evaluate our own church situation accurately and respond faithfully.”

Vern S. Poythress

c. Inseparable WHEN JOHN SEES CHRIST > HE SEES THE CHURCH

v. 1 “him who...walks among the seven golden lampstands”

JOHN’S 1st GLIMPSE of Glory “when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, *and among the lampstands was someone* "like a son of man," 1.12,13

50+ years before JOHN HEARD PROMISE OF RISEN JESUS

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28.20

Seminary Prof “No matter how frustrated you get with your church, remember that they are the BRIDE of Christ – Loves so MUCH He DIED for them!”

Contemporary Christians who DO NOT NEED the Church

Stay Home on Sunday Mornings – Drink Coffee and Read the Sunday Paper!

Understand Sentiment – Be LYING if I did said I did NOT Feel that Sometimes

No place EARTH Jesus MORE Present when His Church gathers Hear WORD IMPOSSIBLE to Love Jesus and NOT do all I can to LOVE & Serve His People CONVERSATION – Morning / Evening Attendance? My IDEA – BOTH!

Surely we could SACRIFICE Something Else in 162 hrs of Week God GIVES

No CLOSER Experience to HOW Spend Eternity – Worship in Local Church

If you don’t LIKE Church – you won’t like HEAVEN – Not READY for it?

RESPONSIBILITY of the Leaders v. 1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus”

WORD ‘angel’ MESSENGER = Pastors > STEALTH Ref. for their Protection?

People knew NAMES of Leaders Churches > John hoped Roman Gov’t Did Not

“The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” Revelation 1.20

RISEN CHRIST HOLDS THESE LEADERS / THESE CHURCHES

v. 1 “him who holds the seven stars in his right hand

d. Important What MATTERS MOST > Is He there? What does He think?

GREAT HEROES SERVED the Ephesians Church

Apostle’s Paul & John // Apollos, Timothy: PRAISE Not go to MERE MEN

v. 1 “the church in Ephesus” v. 3 “for my name”

“to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” Ephesians 3.21

WITHOUT CHRIST > Church is CLOSED v. 5 “If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”

TODAY > Ephesus is Collection of Stones > Been There > just Ancient Relics

LAMPSTAND > LIGHT of Christ > MOVED, WHOLE CITY MOVED

Was Important Seaport > Cayster River so much SILT > Sea now miles away!

2. The People in the Pews

a. Commendation Jesus sees GOOD WORKS & Praises them...right model

We Should always TRY to Find SOMETHING Good about PEOPLE

Member of Mafia came to see a preacher. “My brother, also a member of the Mafia, has been killed. I need you to preach during his funeral. I beg you, please, say my brother was a SAINT!” The preacher struggled with how he could honestly say these words of praise. This was his solution: “Today, we have come to remember a terrible man. He was a thief. He beat people. He killed people. **But compared with Adolph Hitler, he was a SAINT!**”

1) Dilligence v. 2 “I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance.”

HARD WORK to Swim Upstream amidst the MORAL EVIL and IDOLATRY

To Shine the Light of Jesus amidst the DARKNESS OF ROMAN EPHEBUS

v. 3 “You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.”

GREAT STORY OF THE FOUNDING OF THE EPHESIAN CHURCH

“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them...and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly... In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.”
Acts 19.12-20

“Paul had left Ephesus and died long ago, but the unpopularity of Christians still lingered. Christians in Ephesus knew what it was to be hated, to be snubbed in public and maligned in private. Some found business hard, since they were losing customers. Others found shopping a problem as a number of tradesmen would not sell to Christians.”
John R.W. Stott

Perhaps ECONOMIC BOYCOTT for Refusing to Worship Emperor or Diana

“no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name”
Revelation 13.17

When the Going Got Tough > the Ephesian Christians KEPT GOING

2) Doctrine

v. 2 “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.”

Church was FOUNDED on STRONG TEACHING

“Paul entered the synagogue (in Ephesus) and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God...he had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord”
Acts 19.8-10

OVER 3000 hours of Bible Teaching by Greatest Theologian in Church History

Had their OWN JTC

Paul’s Letter to Church at Ephesus > RICH, DEEP TRUTHS of Theology

Paul’s Last visit with Ephesian Elders > DOCTRINAL WARNING

“Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!” Acts 20.28-31

PAUL to Timothy, Bp. of Ephesus – “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.”
1 Timothy 1.3,4

THEOLOGICAL RADAR WAS FULLY OPERATIONAL

No Scud Missiles of Heresy Snuck under their IRON DOME of Orthodoxy

v. 6 “You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

NOT SURE Who they were, or what they believed > Named only in these letters
NIKOLAOS – in Greek = “destroyer of the people” > fitting name of Sect

1 JOHN > Written by Ap. John very likely IN Ephesus, READ by THIS Church

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” 1 John 4.1

“You all live according to the truth and no heresy has a home among you; no, you do not so much as listen to anyone if speaks against the truth in Jesus Christ.” 2nd Century Letter to Ephesian Church by Bishop Ignatius of Antioch

RIGHTEOUS EXAMPLE of Orthodox BELIEF and BEHAVIOR

b. Criticism v. 4 “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.”

DILLIGENCE & DOCTRINE become DRUDGERY: No Longer a DEVOTION
Fallen from HEIGHTS of Devotion to the PLAINS of Mediocrity > Backsliding

Jesus WARNED - “Because of the increase of wickedness,
the love of most will grow cold” Matthew 24.12

COMMENTATORS ASK > Love for God or Man? > Answer? Yes! Inseparable!

Paul's final words in Letter to Ephesians

“Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” Ephesians 6.24

NOW 30 years have passed > Embers of their LOVE are COOLING

CHURCH: Hard Work, Steadfast, Doctrinally Solid > No Love COLD & HARD

BIBLICAL BALANCE - “speaking the truth in love” Ephesians 4.15

Love without Truth: TOO SOFT / Truth without Love: TOO HARD

EMPHASIS of Letter > They were TIRED v. 3 You have *persevered* and have *endured hardships* for my name, and have *not grown weary*.

“The church seems to have fallen back into the defensive posture of orthodoxy rather than continue the offensive of evangelism...thus the double reference to endurance.”
M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.

SUFFERING is SOFTENED & SWEETENED by Love> Without Sour, Cynical

ONLY YOU & Jesus know What is in YOUR HEART: But He DOES KNOW

He sees your DILLIGENCE & DOCTRINE > but he also wants your Devotion

PETER could be Forgiven for Denials > Impt. Question ‘Peter do you love me?’

True Love for God results in:

1. Deeper Worship

Student in Christian College in Tennessee > Served in Black American Church

All week studied Bible & Theology > Faculty of Excellent Teachers

Pastor > Average Sermons > Sometimes Faulty Exegesis, Weak Interpretation

Prayed: “Lord we love you today...Lord I love you...” Not just PASTOR TALK

Maybe my Theology was Purer, Many Sundays my Heart was HARD, COLD

Not trying to invade the SACRED CORRIDORS of your HEART

I do NOT Belong There > No Man Does > BUT GOD DOES > Made your Heart

Does not want you to just SING in Church, Wants you to WORSHIP: Love Him

“A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of *worshipers the Father seeks*”

John 4.23

GOD is Seeking Worship > He who NEEDS NOTHING wants our Worship!

Arrive at ZGC? Late? Argued w/ Spouse? Shouted at Kids? Grumbled at Traffic?

Any way to appear before LIVING GOD? Does this show you LOVE Him?

2. Prompter Obedience Love is more than just an Emotion > LOYALTY

"If you love me, you will obey what I command." John 14.15

How dare we claim to love Him if we ignore what He has told us to do.

Biblical love is GIVING, not GETTING > Give Glory, Praise, & Pleasure to God

“My heart I offer you, promptly and sincerely.” John Calvin’s LIFE MOTTO

“Every virtue carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. It seems probable that desire for sound teaching and the resulting forthright action taken to exclude all impostors had created a climate of suspicion in which love within the believing community could no longer exist.” Robert Mounce

3. More Sacrificial Love for Others

1st yr of College in CA > 2 yrs Believer Bible Study on campus of my former HS

Big, Aggressive MORMON Group > Surrounded by them on HS Campus 1 Day

Didn’t know much about them, 1 thing for sure > They were wrong, I was right!

They sought to prove to me that they were REAL CHRISTIANS

Almost chanting, “We believe in Jesus Christ, we believe in Jesus Christ”

ENRAGED by them I shouted, “NONE OF YOU ARE CHRISTIANS!!”

Heads all across the Schoolyard Turned and Looked!

Mormons just walked away STUNNED > Get away from this MANIAC!!

I was Right – they are Wrong – but I did not act Right > I did not LOVE THEM

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.
1 John 4.20

3. Rekindling the Romance

a. Look Back v. 5 "Remember the height from which you have fallen!"

BUST OUT the Wedding Photos and Remember that Happy Day of Love!

"Remember" CONTINUOUS ACTION "keep on remembering, never forget"

PRODIGAL SON > Got tired of PIG'S FOOD > REMEMBERED

Father's Servants had BETTER GRUB > Here he was STARVING to DEATH

Do not LIVE IN the PAST: LIVE NEAR the CROSS where Jesus Died for You

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Galatians 3.1

"publicly portrayed, or announced on a poster" / OPENLY PRESENTED

PERFECT TENSE = PAST Event Continues to be SIGNIFICANT in PRESENT

Vivid Preaching of GOSPEL > PLACARDS Cross before their Very EYES

Paul asks Galatians to REMEMBER Their OWN Experience of God's Work

IF you WONDER about the LOVE of God > LOOK at the CROSS

b. Look Forward Temple of Artemis > Built on site of Ancient Tree-Shrine

JESUS exceeds Diana OFFERS TREE OF LIFE > Endless Delight, Eternal Life

v. 7 "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

"Tree of Life" > in the CENTER of the Garden of Eden

Tree was BLOCKED to SINFUL, CURSED Adam and Eve > Not Invited to Eat

"The LORD God banished him (Adam) from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life." Genesis 3.23,24

MERCY > Who wants to Live forever in Fallen, Sinful, Decaying Bodies?

NOW in Christ > New Heaven and Earth > New Creation by Grace

Jesus invites us to TREE of LIFE because He DIED on Tree of Wrath for Us!

NEW GARDEN > NEW TREE OF LIFE > People made New will Enjoy

“On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”
Revelation 22.2

Paradise regained is greater and more glorious than paradise lost

c. Look to Him

v. 7 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life”

Overcomers in Revelation: NOT Supermen & Superwomen, Bible Action Heroes

Those who have remained faithful to Christ to Very End, He is the Overcomer!

v. 5 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.”

“do the things you did at first” - NO FIRST LOVE / NO FIRST WORKS

Repentance > Active > Radical Redirection of your Entire Life in His Strength!!

Not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place

WITHOUT LOVE in the Church > There will be NO LIGHT IN THE CHURCH

Jesus WILL BUILD His Church > Hell’s Best Weapons Not Stop its Advance

NOT PROMISE to Buildings, Programs, Preachers, or Satellite TV Ministries

Seeing Man’s Cathedrals > turned into Bars, Brothels, and Mosques

Yet Relentless ADVANCE: God’s Truth: Lives Changed, Families Restored

LAMPSTANDS Moved: God Rearranges Furniture > NOT EXTINGUISHED

Question:

Is your light burning? Does His light shine here today? Do you Love Him?

“...the lampstand of the Ephesian church will be moved...a locality where before there was light may be left in darkness, but the light will not cease to burn and its brightness will enlighten others. The defection of a church is indeed a tragedy, both for the church and also for the local population on whom it should be beaming the light of the gospel. God’s work continues, however, and he will raise up other churches to shed forth the light of his truth.” Philip Edgcumbe Hughes

Revelation 2

¹“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. ²“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. ³I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵Remember 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. ⁶Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷He 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.’ ESV

1. How does the vision of Jesus (verse 1) address the specific situation of the church in Ephesus?
2. What does Jesus think is important in the church? Is that what is emphasized in the church of your homeland? Is that what we emphasize in ZGC?
3. What can you do to help your church be more like what Jesus expects?