



## **Ephesus—the loveless church Revelation 2:1-7**

### **Messages to seven churches**

In Revelation 2 & 3, Jesus Christ, sovereign and present over all, reviews the health seven of leading churches in western Turkey. The number seven is symbolic in that what is applicable for the original churches is also true for all churches at all times, including Windsor Road Christian Church. Jesus comes to our church gathering every Sunday. Don't miss the significance of the presence of angels among the churches. All of heaven is involved in our lives. Divine forces are at work and watching! Here's a brief outline for each message to the churches.

1. Christ introduces himself.
2. Christ evaluates what is going well.
3. Christ criticizes what must change.
4. Christ calls for repentance, warning what will happen if he is ignored.
5. Christ promises victory to those who overcome!

The phrase, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" is in reference to idols who have eyes but do not see and ears but do not hear. In other words, you become what you worship!

### **The message to Ephesus . . .**

The city of Ephesus was a prosperous harbor town of 250,000 with a vibrant trade route. It hosted one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the Temple of Artemis. Artemis was a Greek goddess of forests and hills, virginity/fertility. She was often depicted as a huntress carrying a bow and arrows. As the "Lady of Ephesus," idols of her displayed a grotesque, soft-porn, multiple breasted cult image. The ancient temple was an asylum/sanctuary. Criminals could flee there and be protected from prosecution. The temple brought in quite a healthy economy and the Apostle Paul was nearly torn to pieces in riot that was caused when he preached the gospel.

The church at Ephesus was started around A.D. 56/57 by the Apostle Paul, and a husband/wife team, Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 18 & 19). Paul was there three years and was very tight with the eldership. The church at Ephesus is the background for several NT books such as: Acts, Ephesians, possibly Colossians, 1 Timothy, 1 John, and Revelation.

### . . . It's good to be right

Against this idol-infested culture, the church at Ephesus thrived and Christ affirmed three strengths: (1) their *toil*—literally, their work to the point of exhaustion. It was a busy and active church full of believers who served with diligence; (2) their *endurance*—they stood unswervingly in their loyalty to Christ even though they were assaulted by the pagan temples of Greek mythology and the Emperor worship of Rome; (3) and their *orthodoxy*—the church could sniff out false doctrine in a heartbeat. They tested what was taught. They would have nothing to do with the evil lifestyles of false teachers. They stood up against the cult of the Nicolaitans (“victory” + “people”), a group who wanted compromise with the immorality of the idolatrous culture of Ephesus. The Ephesians were never snowed by these doctrinal deceivers. Orthodoxy was perhaps their most stellar achievement.

### . . . but it's not enough to be right!

Yet over the years; their love—for God, for one another, and for the lost—had become cold. It was a subtle but serious erosion. Jesus Christ complimented their calloused hands but criticized their calloused hearts! The essence of Christianity is love.

*But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:4-5 NIV)*

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-18 NIV)*

Christianity is a love-driven faith! So when Jesus sees love leaking from our lives, He knows that it's just a matter of time before the dynamic and organic life of his church morphs into a grinding, bureaucratic, corporate-feeling machine. This happens in organizations, congregations, and marriages! Jesus says, “Remember and repent!” Don't wait till you feel sorry! Fix it! Go back and remember your earlier season of selfless, authentic love! Change!

How can the inner workings of the heart be changed from a dynamic of fear and anger to that of love, joy, and gratitude? Here is how. ***You need to be moved by the sight of what it cost to bring you home.*** The key difference between a Pharisee and a believer in Jesus is inner-heart motivation. Pharisees are being good but out of a fear-fueled need to control God. They don't really trust him or love him. To them God is an exacting boss, not a loving father. Christians have seen something that has transformed their hearts toward God so they can finally love and rest in the Father. (Keller 2008, 86)

### **Christ's light will not shine where Christ's love does not burn!**

*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. (Revelation 2:7 NIV)*