

NASB 1977 The Revelation of Jesus Christ

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2 ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. 4 ‘But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 ‘Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. 6 ‘Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds 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 grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.’

I want to give you some background about the seven letters, taken as a whole, before we begin to dive into Ephesus.

This idea was taught to me when John MacArthur first went through this book of Revelation in 1971. 55 years ago. He gave me this skeleton which I have hung on to, even though in later times when he repeated the book of Revelation, this wasn't taught. I'm not sure if he changed his view or if he shied away from something that is more abstract than what he was comfortable with later on. I've found it helpful to this day.

In that first go round, and we had the full set of cassette tapes for many years, now gone to cassette tape heaven I suppose, John taught that there are 3 ways to consider these 7 churches. 3 realities.

First is that these were 7 real churches in 7 real places. On a map you can locate all of those ancient places in modern Turkey. And they follow in order a natural postal route beginning at Ephesus on the coast.

Then they go in a semi circle along a natural inland route in which these seven real places were centers, like county seats are to us. So each of these churches would branch out in spreading the gospel and reproducing themselves. Not so different from the California missions 250 years ago. That idea.

Real churches in real places. But next, they are types. In all ages of the church age there have been Ephesus type churches with similar strengths and similar weakness as that church. There are Sardis type churches. Thyatira type churches. Smyrna type churches in the throes of persecution. Philadelphia type churches with an open door with all of it's positive strengths.

And finally there is a big picture prophetic aspect of the church through the ages that corresponds in time, with lots of overlap, where you can point to the first few hundred years as an Ephesian church era, then a period of total persecutions which was a Smyrna era, then a compromise with the world church which was a Pergamum era, then a totally corrupt church which was a Thyatira era and then a Sardis era in which the church was dead. Dead. Then after the reformation along with the printing of the Bible in the peoples languages, a Philadelphian era of the church, and finally, before Jesus arrives, sadly, a Laodicean lukewarm era of the church that gets spewed, projectile vomited out of His mouth, I believe, at the rapture.

We could assign very rough dates, remember there is much overlap and always all 7 types in every era, but here is a rough assignment of dates of these seven eras, just for argument sake. Ephesus era (A.D. 33–100), Smyrna era (100–312), Pergamum era (312–590), Thyatira era (590–1517), Sardis era (1517–1700), Philadelphia era (1700–1900), and Laodicea era (1900–present).

As we progress through these different churches you'll see we want to avoid the problems and emulate the positive churches. We want to be a Philadelphia type church in the midst of the Laodicean era we live in. There's a reason I'm vocally negative about the evangelical movement in

America in our day. 3000 miles wide and an inch deep.

We want the depth and the missional open door that was set before the church at Philadelphia. We don't want to end up as projectile vomit like the ultimate end of Laodicea. We'll see those strengths to emulate and weaknesses to shun in every single church. These letters are for us! We want to emulate the things that please Jesus and reject the things He warned against.

So, with that in mind, let's look at Ephesus. If we could stop at the end of verse 3, we would say, this is who we want to be. This is our goal. This is the church we dream about becoming. It had so much going for it. Not the least of which it was rock solid doctrinally, perhaps to a fault, if that were possible.

This is an unbending Bible believing church in submission to the authority of the Word of God. That's our goal, right? Depth of foundation anchored in God's word. Immovable in storms. Anchored, immovable. Rock solid. Bedrock solid. And working tirelessly to advance the kingdom of Jesus.

What a beginning that church had. No wonder they were doctrinally sound! Paul left Acquilla and Priscilla in Ephesus and Apollos was also there. When Paul returned at the beginning of his 3rd journey, he spent two full years teaching at Ephesus.

God did such a mighty work in Ephesus that the whole ancient world was turned upside down. Rioting ensued. They had a book burning where all of the occult magic books were burned up and the people in the idolatry business who made little statue idols were suffering because no one wanted idols any more, so they had a riot. They shouted "great is Artemis of the Ephesians" for two hours.

They named that space capsule Artemis because they knew I'd be preaching about Ephesus this week. So powerful was God's working at Ephesus that people would touch an article of Paul's clothing and be healed. A

miraculous beginning for the church that spread throughout all of Asia minor. *all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.* Acts 19:10b

Such power was on display that Jewish exorcists were trying to command demons "*in the name of Jesus, who Paul preaches*". And the demons said, Paul we know and Jesus we know, but who are you. And the demon possessed person fell on the exorcists and they barely made it out alive.

The beginnings at Ephesus were pretty wild. Then later, Paul sent Timothy to be their pastor. And even later, after Rome chased all of the Jews out of Jerusalem in 70 AD, John the apostle landed at Ephesus and was their pastor.

So Ephesus enjoyed a who's who of godly leadership. Aquilla and Priscilla, Apollos, Paul, Timothy, John before he was abandoned to Patmos where he transcribes this letter from Jesus to the church at Ephesus.

That's who they are and how they began. Let's dive into this letter.

I "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

Jesus picks from all of the different aspects of the glorified vision to identify Himself with the churches He is addressing. And in each case, how He identifies Himself, from the vision, addresses some aspect that is unique to that church.

For example, Smyrna. The suffering church experiencing martyrdom.

8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

Satan is killing your children. Remember, I was before everything, I'll BE after everything, and they killed Me and I came back to life. Ultimate

power over the threat they faced. Every introduction is tailored uniquely to the specific challenges the church is facing.

So, back to Ephesus. A riddle.

1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

How does that introduction touch upon their experience. I'm going to come back to this, but I want you to let that roll around in your heads. Somehow that greeting and definition of authorship speaks to their unique situation.

2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

I know. Jesus knows. Omniscience. God is all knowing.

But even moreso, He knows because He walks among the churches. Jesus knows everything about His churches that He walks in the midst of. Nothing is hidden from those eyes that are a flame of fire. Intimate complete knowledge.

Jesus begins most of the letters with a commendation. Here's what you're doing right. But here's what is wrong. Of the seven letters, there are two which have only commendation, nothing to condemn. Smyrna and Philadelphia. Two have condemnation only with nothing to commend. Sardis and Laodicea. And three have this combination of good things to commend and bad things to condemn and remove in repentance.

In our case this morning at Ephesus the commendations are characteristics we can only long for. We want to be Ephesus, but without it's single problem.

2 *'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance,*

All of these words have a parallel with child birth. deeds is effort. Hard work. toil is work with pain. Stressful labor. And perseverance is the endurance. You keep going. Hard painful labor, but you don't quit.

I can't help think about Larisa. She is exhausted, all the time. She just never quits. And her health is trying to stop her but she just keeps going. I was thinking of her as we drove to Las Vegas the other morning. Cranking up for exhausting days of vacation bible schools, all over Nevada. 15000 miles at 15 miles per gallon at \$5 a gallon. Work, pain, endurance. \$5000 for gasoline alone. How does she keep it all going?

That defined this church at Ephesus. They were all about the work, the labor pains, and the endurance of bringing spiritual babies into the kingdom. Hard work. Painful labor. Keep it going, keep it going, keep it going. The work never ends.

Next commendation. Incredibly rare to find in the church in 2026. Discernment. Get ready for a shocker. Apparently, *Judge not lest ye be judged* Matt. 7:1 doesn't mean we never judge anybody about anything.

Jesus commends this church precisely because they do judge, with proper judgement, evil men. This church has no tolerance for evil. They jettison evil people, out of the church. Jesus commends that.

and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;

How do you test evil men? By knowing this book. This is courtroom speak. That word test is connected to the word found. In a courtroom we get the truth by testing each witness, and we arrive at a finding. This church tested those who claimed to be apostles, and their finding was; false.

The church was then, and is now, littered with false apostles. Jesus highly commends this church for having the discernment to test those who claimed to be teachers from God, against the scriptures, and rejecting those who are false.

They do not tolerate evil men. This church was doing the work of staying pure by expelling evil. Not easy.

3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

Perseverance and endurance. They haven't grown weary. Hard work makes us weary. But something drives this church to keep on keeping on. What is it that keeps them moving, even when it's hard, even when they're exhausted.

have endured for My name's sake

We're in a battle. Two names. Satan has captured the whole world in sin. Jesus is the only name that can break people out of that prison and call them out of Satan's authority to reign into God's authority to reign. Forgiveness of sins is the entry door. Jesus is the only way out of Satans world and into God's kingdom.

This church at Ephesus was working tirelessly to accomplish that. Calling people into God's kingdom, through the name of Jesus. Enduring everything Satan could throw at them in that battle. For His name's sake.

4 'But I have this against you

Those words are like an electric shock. What could Jesus possibly have against this Bible saturated church that never quits in the hard work and exercises the truth of God's word to keep itself strong and pure, set apart from all false teachers.

4 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Here's what happened, and I've seen it happen, it has to be fought against. You've got this massive rock solid building built upon the foundation which is Christ, then add to that, Acquilla and Priscilla, and Apollos, and Paul, and Timothy, and John and what happens is;

We're rollin. We can do church. We can do church like a steam roller. We can do church with blindfolds on and our hands tied behind our back. We're like a top that all of these guys set spinning and we can flat do church.

I've been in those churches. We're so competent at doing church, we can do it without Jesus. We've got this. Have you been in those churches. The rapture could happen and next Sunday morning after the rapture, that church would go right on like nothing happened. You couldn't tell the difference from the Sunday before the rapture with the Sunday after the rapture.

We're so competent at doing church, we don't even need Jesus. Don't need the Holy Spirit. We can crank this stuff out. Like a machine. And Jesus comes along and says, Hey, remember me?

Go back to verse one. I said I was going to come back to the relevance of Jesus telling them who is writing the letter.

I "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

You don't do church without Jesus. Jesus owns it. Jesus IS it. When you get so good at doing church that you forget about Jesus, you don't depend on Him being the cause, you no longer need the life juices from the vine, all the air goes out. Jesus holds the seven stars. Jesus walks among the

lampstands. The life of the church is His. He is the heartbeat. He is the lifeblood. He is the main thing.

They got so competent they forgot to love Jesus. Yeah, we're so good at this we don't even need Jesus any more. We can crank out church.

We've only been doing audio recordings for about 4 years. And usually I forget to start the recording before the pulpit prayer after the reading. But if you analyzed all of them that did get recorded you would find, I think, that I'm a broken record. Help us. Send your Spirit to cause your word to do it's work. We are helpless unless you come and work in peoples hearts.

I learned this lesson from this church at Ephesus very well. Jesus is the main thing. Nothing actually gets done, unless the Spirit does it. We want to experience Jesus. We long to see Him do miraculous inner work in peoples hearts amongst us. We love Jesus. He is the main thing. It all belongs to Him.

Think again about the dividing point of who is in fact a christian. God's kingdom of called out believers is set apart by regeneration. Every single christian is born again. Quickened from death to life by God's Holy Spirit. He gives us spiritual life, together with Him.

Now think about the single characteristic of living spirits as opposed to dead spirits. The walking dead. You'll be surprised where I'm going with this. We've been talking about the Spirit quickening dead spirits to life, together with Jesus.

But what is the defining thing that happens when that is real. Jesus defines what happens to reborn christians. From the Law of God. From the 10 commandments. From the shema of Israel;

Mark 12:28 - 30 *And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? 29 And Jesus answered him,*

The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: 30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

God created us for this. He made us for this purpose. We are to love Him with every fiber of our being, continually. *thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength*

Regeneration enables that. We fall hopelessly short, even after we are His people. But reborn, regenerated, true christians are those who have the capacity to love God. Flawed, but born again.

Jesus gets no love from fallen people. They have no capacity to love Him. But christians who have the indwelling Holy Spirit are born again to love Jesus.

But we can get so caught up in the work, in the toil, in the enduring, that we forget the main thing.

We're watching "The West Wing" for the 4rth time. For lack of anything else worthy of spending time watching. I have an increasingly low tolerance of bankrupt TV programs.

Last night, Leo, the president's chief of staff, is so consumed serving this president that he neglects his marriage to the point that his wife confronts him and then departs.

Lots of parallels for us. Exodus 20:

1 Then God spoke all these words, saying,

2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.

4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

5 “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

I the Lord your God am a jealous God. You make your wife number 2 and she leaves. How much more so our God who shed His only Sons blood to purchase us.

I'm guilty of buying and selling lots of toys. They come and they go. Big love affair for a limited time, and then I move on to something different. Like a revolving door. And I get a response from other people in the hobby. Why would you sell this thing or that thing. If I had it they'd have to pry it from my cold dead hands.

I always laugh and tell people, I sell my cars, and my cameras, I'm not too attached, but I keep my wife. I work at keeping this same woman I've had with me for 55 years.

Jesus requires us to put in the work to keep the love alive. It's the first commandment. It's the main thing. It's the reason He saved us. Both individually and corporately, as a church, the love of Jesus . . . is the main thing. He must be first in our hearts. It's a must.

Ephesus got so wound around the axle getting church done that they forgot the main thing.

5 ‘Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

Repentance is quitting the wrong thing and returning to the right thing. Always. That defines repentance. Leave the sinful thing and return to Jesus. Pretty simple concept.

Even at salvation, when our spirits are made alive, what do we do. Repent. We leave the old life behind, in order to have Jesus.

Remember. Remember the heat of that first love. You would do anything to have that. The treasure; you'd sell everything so you could buy it. The pearl that you'd sell everything else in order to have it. Jesus, who you would walk away from everything in this world, in order to have Him. Peter gets out of the boat and walks on water in order to get to Jesus. That was the heat of love.

Jesus says, remember that passion that drove you. That's the main thing. Everything else is secondary. Tertiary. Important, yes, but that main thing has to continue to be the main thing. And the main thing is love. For Jesus.

Love for the book. Jesus is the book and the book is Jesus. In the beginning was the logos. The Word. Capital letter W. The Word is a person. I struggle with christians who are indifferent to this book. Indifference to this book is indifference to Jesus.

*1 "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without cost.*

*2 "Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight yourself in abundance. Isa. 55:1,2*

Repent, and rekindle that first love. For Jesus. Or else. That's right, He doesn't sit around hoping churches and people who have cooled, come back. He orders them to repent and return. Or else.

5 'Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

WE don't have blow by blow details of what happened at Ephesus after they received this letter and warning and call to repentance. But I can tell you, there's no church in Ephesus today. Their lampstand was removed. Jesus is serious about love that cools and dies.

This little encouragement to complete what is lacking tickles me. Like a post script. They had so much they were doing right. This is like a little addendum;

6 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Please note. Jesus doesn't hate the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans are the mission field. But Jesus hates something they are doing. Hmmm.

It is lost to history what particular evil deed they were known for. We do have one clue from the era of the church fathers. Clement of Alexander says, "They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence." Apparently, Nicolas led a group of so called Christians into a lifestyle where they were involved in immorality and uncleanness and they plied the church with sensual temptations.

You can let your imaginations run wild. Do we have any groups these days that would give goats a bad name if we compared their morals to the goats?

Jesus commends the Christians at Ephesus for hating the same evil deeds that He Himself hates. We love the sinners. It's OK to hate the sin. Call

me a hater. I'm OK with that. As long as it's the deeds and not the people, I'm in good company.

Finally, is there an incentive here besides not having our lampstand uprooted and set aside? There totally IS.

7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'

Pay attention! Listen up! Yo! Dude! Lots of modern idioms. *7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

It's actually a restricted call. Dead people can't hear. This message and call to listen is selective. He who has an ear. You don't have an ear to hear spiritual truths unless you've been quickened alive from the dead spiritually. So this isn't for non christians.

You christians. Listen up. Why would I listen. Because the Spirit is speaking to the churches. This is a memo from God. God the Son through God the Holy Spirit has a message for the churches. Listen! Pay attention.

This isn't elective. This isn't optional. This is imperative. This is an order from headquarters. Get it done.

Each letter has an incentive to overcome. Always that word is used. He who overcomes.

Lots of ink spilled about who it is that's an overcomer. All you have to do is read 1 John. 1 Jn. 5:4,5 *For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

Every regenerated born again true christian is an overcomer. We are IN

Him who has overcome.

What is the incentive; Heaven. Paradise.

To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'

This first letter to the church universal is a call to be people of the book. People sound in doctrine. People who know enough to be discerning of good and evil teachers. People who labor tirelessly for the increase, for the gospel. And most important, people who are driven by an intimate personal love for Jesus that is the main thing.

Jesus is jealous. He will not tolerate being number 2 in your life. When He is number 1 love, all the other loves fall into place.