

Revelation of Jesus Christ Study 10

Rev 2:1-7

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 tolerate 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 'Therefore remember 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.'

To remind us of what we learned last week, we need to remember that in this letter there are seven features which becomes a pattern for the next six letters

The correspondent

The Church

The City

The commendation

The concern

The command

The counsel

We studied the 1st two on this list, the correspondent, and the Church in our last study.

Today we want to move forward looking at the rest of the features and see what they contain and what they mean for the Church at Ephesus.

THE CITY

Eph 2:1b

Ephesus

Although not its capital (Pergamum was the province's official capital), Ephesus was the most important city in Asia Minor. (since the Roman Governor resided there, it could be argued that Ephesus was the de facto capital.)

Its population in New Testament times has been estimated at between 250,000 and 500,000 people. The city's theater, visible today, into which the frenzied rioters dragged Paul's companions Gaius and Aristarchus (*Acts 19:29*) held an estimated 25,000 people.

Ephesus was a free city (i.e. self-governing, within limits), and no Roman troops were garrisoned there.

The city hosted athletic events, rivaling the Olympic games. Ephesus was a primary harbor in the province of Asia (by law incoming Roman governors had to enter Asia through Ephesus.)

The city was located on the Cayster River, about three miles upriver from where it flowed into the sea. Those disembarking at the harbor traveled along a magnificent, wide, column-lined road (the Arcadian Way) that led to the center of the city.

In John's day silt deposited by the Cayster River was slowly filling up the harbor, forcing the city to fight to keep a channel open.

That battle would ultimately be lost, and today the ruins of Ephesus are located some six miles inland from the sea.

Ephesus was also strategically located at the junction of four of the most important Roman roads in Asia Minor.

That along with its harbor, prompted the geographer Strabo (a contemporary of Christ) to describe Ephesus as the market of Asia.

But Ephesus was most famous as the center of the worship of the Goddess Artemis (Diana) a point of great civic pride:

Acts 19:27, 35

27 "Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence."

*35 After quieting the crowd, the town clerk *said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the image which fell down from heaven?"*

The temple of Artemis was Ephesus's most prominent landmark.

Because its inner shrine was supposedly inviolable, the temple served as one of the most important banks in the Mediterranean world.

The temple and its environs also provided sanctuary for criminals. Further the sale of items used in the worship of Artemis provided an important source of income for the city:

Acts 19:24

24 For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen;

Every spring a month-long festival was held in honor of the goddess, complete with athletic, dramatic, and musical events.

Paul may have anticipated this annual event as a unique evangelistic opportunity and have been waiting for it when he wrote the Corinthians that he intended to remain in Ephesus:

1 Cor 16:8-9

8 But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost;

9 for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

The worship of Artemis was unspeakably vile. Her idol was a gross, many-breasted monstrosity, popularly believed to have fallen from heaven:

Acts 19:35

*35 After quieting the crowd, the town clerk *said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the image which fell down from heaven?"*

The temple was attended by numerous priests, eunuchs, and slaves.

Thousands of priestesses, who were little more than ritual prostitutes, played a major role in the worship of Artemis.

The temple grounds were a chaotic cacophony of priests, prostitutes, bankers, criminals, musicians, dancers, and frenzied, hysterical worshippers.

The philosopher Heraclitus was called the weeping philosopher because no one, he declared, could live in Ephesus and not weep over its immorality.

Huddled in the midst of such pagan idolatry that characterized Ephesus, was a faithful group of Christians and it was to them Christ addressed this first of the seven letters.

THE COMMENDATION

Rev

Eph 2:2-3, 6

2 ' I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate 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.

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

I know says the Lord, the word know (*Oida*) indicates the Lord's knowledge in each of the seven letters.

This is in contrast with the word (*ginosko*) which refers to a progressive acquisition of knowledge,

Oida refers to complete and full knowledge.

The Lord of the Church knows everything there is to know about the church, both good and bad.

Such perfect knowledge is evident in each letter as the Lord condemns and commends the churches.

Watch the pattern here:

Before condemning them for their failures, the Lord commends them for what they were doing right.

He began by acknowledging their **deeds**, a general term summarizing all that follows.

Specifically, Christ first commended the Ephesian believers for their **toil**. (*Kopos*). This term denotes labor to the point of sweat and exhaustion.

It describes an all out effort, demanding all that a person has to give, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

The Ephesians were diligent workers for the cause of Christ.

Theirs was no spectator mentality; they did not want merely to be entertained. Nor were they content to eat the fruit of others' labor, but were willing to plow, plant, and harvest their own crop.

In the midst of the pagan darkness that surrounded them, they were aggressively evangelizing the lost, edifying the saints, and caring for those in need.

Perseverance, translates (*hupomone*) which denotes patience in trying circumstances.

In contrast, its synonym, (*makrothumia*) generally emphasizes patience with people.

(*hupomone*) does not denote a grim, fatalistic resignation, but a courageous acceptance of hardship, suffering, and loss.

This commendation indicates that, despite their difficult circumstances, the Ephesian believers remained faithful to their Lord.

Another praiseworthy aspect of the Ephesian believers was that they refused to **tolerate evil men**. They held to a high, holy standard of behavior and were sensitive to sin, undoubtedly following the Lord's mandate to practice church discipline:

Matt 18:15

15 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother"

Four decades earlier Paul had commanded them not to "*give the devil an opportunity*" Eph 4:27 and they were still reluctant to do so.

Nor was the Ephesian church lacking in spiritual discernment, since it "**put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and they were found to be false.**"

The Ephesians never forgot the admonition Paul had addressed to their leaders so many years earlier.

Acts 20:28-31

28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;"

30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Jesus adds a final word of commendation in verse 6

Rev 2:6

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

The **Nicolaitans**, mentioned also in the letter to Pergamum, cannot be positively identified.

The few references to this heresy in the writings of the church fathers link it to Nicolas, one of the seven men appointed to oversee the distribution of food in (*Acts 6*)

Some argued that Nicolas was a false believer who became an apostate, but retained influence in the church because of his credentials.

Others suggested that the **Nicolaitans** misrepresented his teaching.

Whatever its origin, Nicolaitanism led people into immorality and wickedness.

The letter to Pergamum links it with Balaam's false teaching that led Israel astray

The **deeds of the Nicolaitans** thus involved sensual temptations leading to sexual immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols (*2:14*), without regard to for the offense of such behavior (*Rom 14:1-15:3*)

They did this all in the name of Christian liberty.

It has been suggested that **"the teaching of the Nicolaitans was an exaggeration of the doctrine of Christian liberty which attempted an ethical compromise with heathenism"** (Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1957],61)

Irenaeus wrote of the Nicolaitans that they **"lived lives of unrestrained indulgence"** (cited in Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, 61)

Clement of Alexandria added that the Nicolaitans **abandon themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence"** (cited in Barclay, *The revelation of John*, 1:67).

Unlike the church at Pergamum, the Ephesian church did not tolerate the **Nicolaitans** but hated their heretical teachings.

For that the Lord commended them. Hatred was an appropriate attitude and exactly the opposite reaction to the tolerance of the Pergamum church toward the Nicolaitans (*2:14-15*)

The Bible reveals that God hates impurity:

Isa 61:8

8 For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; And I will faithfully give them their recompense And make an everlasting covenant with them.

Jer 44:4

4"Yet I sent you all My servants the prophets, again and again, saying, "Oh, do not do this abominable thing which I hate."

Amos 5:21

21 "I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.

Zech 8:17

17 'Also let none of you devise evil in your heart against another, and do not love perjury; for all these are what I hate,' declares the LORD."