

Revelation of Jesus Christ Study 11

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.'

We have been studying the seven features of this first letter to the Church of Ephesus. We have seen that it contains a pattern that will follow in all the rest of the letters. First the commendation, and then the concern and the counsel.

The seven features are as follows:

**The correspondent,
The church,
The City,
The commendations,
The concern,
The command,
The counsel.**

Tonight we will take up the last three of the features to this great church in Asia minor.

THE CONCERN

Rev 2:4

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

Despite all the praiseworthy elements in the Ephesian Church, the penetrating, omniscient gaze of the Lord Jesus Christ had spotted a fatal flaw.

Though they maintained their doctrinal orthodoxy and continued to serve Christ, that service had degenerated into a mechanical orthodoxy,

At one time they had love:

Eph 1:5; 3:17-19; 6:23

15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints,

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

23 Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Forty years later the affection of the first generation of believers had cooled. The current generation was maintaining the doctrine handed down to them, but they had **left** their **first love**.

That love could include love for God and Christ, love for each other, and love for the lost.

It is love defined as obedience:

2 John 1:6

6 And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.

They had dropped to the place where they were carrying out their Christian responsibilities with diminishing love for their Lord and others.

This grave danger is aptly illustrated by the disaster that ensued when Israel's love for God cooled. Through Jeremiah God rebuked His people for forsaking Him.

Jer 2:2-13

2 "Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, The love of your betrothals, Your following after Me in the wilderness, Through a land not sown.

3 "Israel was holy to the LORD, The first of His harvest. All who ate of it became guilty; Evil came upon them," declares the LORD."

4 Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel.

5 Thus says the LORD, " What injustice did your fathers find in Me, That they went far from Me And walked after emptiness and became empty?

6 "They did not say, 'Where is the LORD Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, Through a land of deserts and of pits, Through a land of drought and of deep darkness, Through a land that no one crossed And where no man dwelt?'

7 "I brought you into the fruitful land To eat its fruit and its good things. But you came and defiled My land, And My inheritance you made an abomination.

8 "The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me, And the prophets prophesied by Baal And walked after things that did not profit.

9 "Therefore I will yet contend with you," declares the LORD, "And with your sons' sons I will contend.

10 "For cross to the coastlands of Kittim and see, And send to Kedar and observe closely And see if there has been such a thing as this!

11 "Has a nation changed gods When they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory For that which does not profit.

12 "Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD.

13 "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water.

In a powerful and striking passage Ezekiel also pictured Israel's abandonment of her first love for God:

Ezekiel 16:8-15

8 "Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine," declares the Lord GOD.

9 "Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil.

10 "I also clothed you with embroidered cloth and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk.

11 "I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your neck.

12 "I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head.

13 "Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty.

14 "Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you," declares the Lord GOD.

15 "But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing.

As it had in Israel, the honeymoon had ended at Ephesus. The loss of vital love relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ opened the doors to spiritual apathy, indifference to others, love for the world, compromise with evil, judgment, and ultimately, the death of the church altogether.

Despite its outwardly robust appearance, a deadly spiritual cancer was growing at the heart of the Ephesian church.

And this was Christ Concern!

THE COMMAND

Rev 2:5

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.

The great Physician issued a prescription to the Ephesians which, if followed, would cure their spiritual malaise.

1st They needed to **remember** (Lit. "to keep on remembering") **from where** they had **fallen**.

Forgetfulness is frequently the initial cause of spiritual decline, and the Ephesians needed to recognize the seriousness of such a lapse.

2nd They needed to **repent** in a deliberate rejection of their sins, because to fail to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength is sin

Mark 12:30

30 AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.'

3rd They needed to demonstrate the genuineness of their repentance and **do the deeds they did at first.**

They needed to recapture the richness of Bible study, devotion to prayer, and passion for worship that had once characterized them.

Richard Mayhue writes that Jesus' confrontation of the Ephesian church models how believers are to confront:

- 1st Confronting was done with love and with the goal of restoration (*v 4-5*)
 - 2nd Encouragement preceded correction (*2:2-3, 6*)
 - 3rd Christ openly and concisely stated the problem (*2:4-5*)
 - 4th He told them how to be restored (*2:5*); remember your past, repent of your error, return to our best
 - 5th Christ clearly laid out the consequences if they did not obey (*2:5*)
 - 6th He wrote with the expectation that they would respond positively (*2:7*)
- (*What would Jesus say about your Church?* [Scotland, G.B.: Christian Focus Publishers, 1995],51)

Underscoring the seriousness of the situation, Christ warns the Ephesians to take the necessary steps to recover their first love for Him.

He demanded that they change or be chastened:

"I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent."

The coming to which Christ refers is not His second coming, but His coming to them in local judgment on that church.

Failure to heed the warning would cause Him to **remove their lampstand** (symbolic of the church *Rev 1:20*) **out of its place.**

Tragically, Christ threatened divine judgment that would bring an end to the Ephesian church.

THE COUNSEL

Rev 2:7

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

The letter closes with an exhortation and a promise.

Christ's exhortation ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*** closes each of the seven letters (*2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22*)

It emphasizes the sober responsibility believers have to heed God's voice in Scripture.

The use of the plural noun **churches** signifies the universal nature of this invitation each time that it appears.

This call cannot be limited just to a group of overcomers in a single church; it must apply to all churches. Every church needs to hear every message

The promise, as are those associated with the other six letters (*2:11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21*), is addressed to **him who overcomes**.

The term does not just refer to those who have attained to a higher level of the Christian life, but identifies all Christians.

The Apostle John defines it that way in his first epistle

1 John 5:4-5

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

All true believers are overcomers, who have by God's grace and power overcome the damning power of the evil world system.

Christ promises the overcomers at Ephesus that they will **eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God**.

The **tree of life** is first referred to in *Gen 2:9*, where it stands in the Garden of Eden.

That earthly tree was lost due to man's sin and he was forbidden to eat of it (*Gen 3:22*), but the heavenly tree of life (*Rev 22:2, 14, 19*) will last throughout eternity.

The **tree of life** thus symbolizes eternal life.

The **Paradise of God** is heaven:

Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4

43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

4 was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

The example of the Ephesian Church warns that doctrinal orthodoxy and outward service cannot make up for a cold hear.

Believers must carefully heed Solomon's counsel:

Prov 4:23

23 Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.

Those whose love for God has cooled would do well to heed the exhortation that Hosea addressed to backsliding Israel:

Hosea 14:1-3

1 Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, For you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

2 Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to Him, " Take away all iniquity And receive us graciously, That we may present the fruit of our lips.

3 "Assyria will not save us, We will not ride on horses; Nor will we say again, ' Our god,' To the work of our hands; For in You the orphan finds mercy."

And to those who return to Him God promises:

Hosea 14:4

"I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely"