

# **The Church at Ephesus**

## **Revelation 2:1-7**

### **The Apostolic Church**

Introduction: Revelation 1:19-20 gives an introduction to this passage of Scripture. With this message, we begin a study on the different periods of church history as seen in Revelation 2 and 3. As we study these two chapters we will see how God has provided us a window into church history in the Bible. We can see, looking back on history, that what God said to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 can very easily be seen in the various church periods down through the ages.

"At the time Revelation was written (around A.D. 95-100) there may have existed well over 100 separate and independent local churches in the world...Christ chose seven representative churches and addressed himself to these." In these messages to the seven churches are seen a representative of the problems that plagued the early church. "There can be no doubt that these letters were primarily intended for the communities to which they are inscribed, and deal with actual circumstances of the time." With this representation is also seen a future prophecy of the development of the church, culminating with the "age of the Laodiceans."

Each message given to the churches mentioned here in Revelation was addressed to the "angel of the church." This 'angel' has been a much discussed being down through the ages; yet with a careful study of the Word of God one can

come to a reasonable conclusion whom it is referring to. The word 'angel' comes from a word that, by implication, is also seen as the word 'pastor'. Since it is apparent by the context that this 'angel' is a person in a leadership capacity in these specific churches it would not be incorrect to believe that the 'angel' is, in fact, the pastor of the churches mentioned. The seriousness of the content of the messages to these churches would mean that a person in authority in the church be the one to receive them. In the polity of the New Testament church, even at the time of the writing of the book of Revelation, the leader, or head, of the church, under Christ, was the pastor. According to Hebrews 13:17 the one "ruling over" the church is the one that must "give an account" for the church and the people -- that person is the pastor.

Having established that these churches were real, literal churches, with pastors as their leader or authority under Christ, the next step would logically be to see what the message actually was, and what it meant.

The first letter was written to the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7). It is important to take a brief look at the city of Ephesus to understand the relationship of the problems the church had to the city itself. "The ancient city of Ephesus, located in western Asia Minor at the mouth of the Cayster River, was an important seaport. Situated between the Maeander River to the south and the Hermus River to the north, Ephesus had excellent access to both river valleys which allowed it to flourish as a commercial center. Due to the accumulation of

silt deposited by the river, the present site of the city is approximately five to six miles inland." Ephesus, at this time, had an estimated population of 250,000. "Ephesus in Paul's day was the metropolis of proconsular Asia and vied with Alexandria of Egypt and Antioch of Syria among the top three cities of the East." With all of this prestige and importance, it is not surprising the church there had lost its "first love" (Rev. 2:4). The message recorded to the church at Ephesus is one of recognition for a church that had stood strong against the Devil in the face of opposition. However, over time, with the growth of wealth in the city and the church, it is seen how the church, as is so common today under the same circumstances, lost that "first love" and had grown cold to the work of the ministry.

This church, symbolically, represented the church age period from Pentecost to 100 A.D. The admonition in Revelation 2:5 was that if the church at Ephesus did not return to their "first love" then their "candlestick" would be removed. This is referring to the removal of the church as a testimony for Christ, which was fulfilled in the fifth century. The church at Ephesus was seen as representing the sowing of the seed of the gospel and organization of the New Testament church.

This message will outline the passage in Revelation 2 that has the details about this church and we will show how that relates to church history, and how it relates to us today as well. Every message to every church has a message for our church today, as much as it is historical.

## **I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN THE CHURCH – VS. 1**

"Sovereignty is God's control over His creation, dealing with His governance over it: Sovereignty is God's rule over all reality." – Dr. Norman Geisler

### **A. He controls the affairs of the church – "He holdeth the seven stars in his right hand"**

1. The "seven stars," as already noted, are the pastors of the church. Nothing in the church is to happen without the pastor's knowledge and approval. If God is holding that pastor in His right hand, then God's sovereign will will be done in that church.
2. The fact that He "holds" them in His right hand indicates a place of safety. If God is holding us, as a church, then there is nothing that can harm us.

**Psa 18:35** Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great.

**Psa 73:23** Nevertheless I *am* continually with thee: thou hast holden *me* by my right hand.

**Psa 139:10** Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

**Joh 10:28-29** And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.  
(29) My Father, which gave *them* me, is

greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand.

3. The fact that the pastors of the churches are in His "right hand" indicates He has the authority and the sovereignty to do with them as He sees fit.

***B. He wants to fellowship with the churches as He sees fit – "He walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks"***

1. "He walketh" – indicates a position of fellowship and friendship.

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back to the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome

times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

2. "In the midst" – Our Father wants to fellowship with us where we are, but if we're not where He wants us to be He can't do that (1 John 1).

**Gen 3:8-9** And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. (9) And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where *art* thou?

## **II. THE SACRIFICIAL SERVICE OF THE CHURCH – VS. 2-3, 6 – "I KNOW THY WORKS"**

### ***A. It was an evangelistic church – "thy labour"***

The church at Ephesus represents the Apostolic church age more in this word than perhaps in any other, for the Apostolic church was one of soul-winning, evangelistic efforts.

**Act 17:6** And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

**B. It was a patient church (unlike the Christians Peter wrote to in 2 Pet. 1:6) – "and thy patience"**

**C. It was a separated church (unlike the Corinthian church – 1 Cor. 5) – "and how thou canst not bear them which are evil"**

**D. It was a doctrinally sound church – "and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars"**

**E. It was a persecuted but persistent church (unlike the Christians in the book of Hebrews – Hebrews 12:1-15) – vs. 3 – "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted."**

**F. It was a democratic church – vs. 6 – "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate."**

1. The word "Nicolaitanes" comes from two Greek words:
  - a) nikao (nikao) – "to conquer"
  - b) laos (laos) – "people"
2. Many believe John was speaking here to the growing distinction and distance between clergy and laity.

### III. THE FALLEN STATE OF THE CHURCH – VS. 4

#### A. *They were relying on past successes – “Nevertheless”*

##### 1. Living in the past is dangerous

**Luk 9:62** And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

**Php 3:13-14** Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing I *do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, (14) I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and which multiplied, and enriched, and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

– Abraham Lincoln

2. Relying on the past for today is dangerous – there needs to be growth and advance

**Heb 5:12-14** For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. (13) For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. (14) But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

**Heb 6:1-2** Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, (2) Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

***B. They failed to recognize God's view of their present condition – "I have somewhat against thee"***

1. This was an indictment, a judicial charge, against the church at Ephesus by God Himself – "I have somewhat against"
2. This was a specific charge, that carried with it a penalty for a particular people – "thee"

**Rom 14:12** So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

**C. They reversed their course of action from what it once was – "Thou hast left thy first love"**

1. They reversed voluntarily – "thou hast left" – see Ephesians 4:11-16

**Num 14:43** For the Amalekites and the Canaanites *are* there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you.

**1Ki 11:3-6** And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. (4) For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of David his father. (5) For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. (6) And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as *did* David his father.

**2Ch 29:6** For our fathers have trespassed, and done *that which was* evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD, and turned *their* backs.

**2Th 2:3** Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

**2Ti 4:1-4** I charge *thee* therefore before

God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; (2) Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. (3) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; (4) And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

When Cortez landed at Vera Cruz in 1519 to begin his conquest of Mexico with small force of 700 men, he purposely set fire to his fleet of 11 ships. His men on the shore watched their only means of retreat sinking to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. With no means of retreat, there was only one direction to move, forward into the Mexican interior to meet whatever might come their way. In paying the price for being Christ's disciple, you too must purposefully destroy all avenues of retreat. Resolve that whatever the price for being His follower, you will have to pay it.

2. They reversed from the very thing they loved the most – “thy first love.” They had a love for their Saviour, a love for their fellow believer, and a love for lost sinners. When we lose that first love, we've lost our “first love.”

In her book, *Living with Love*, Josephine Robertson tells a story. “In 1883, a youthful

clergyman, the Rev. Joe Roberts, arrived by stagecoach in a blizzard to minister to the Indians of Wyoming. This great, wild area had been assigned to the Protestant Episcopal Church by President Grant. Soon after Joe Roberts arrived, the son of the chief was shot by a soldier in a brawl, and Chief Washakie vowed to kill the first white man he met. Since this might mean the start of a long, bloody feud, young Roberts decided to take action. Seeking out the tepee, fifteen miles away in the mountains, he stood outside and called the chief's name. When Washakie appeared, Roberts opened his shirt.

"I have heard of your vow," he said, "I know that the other white men have families, but I am alone. Kill me instead."

The chief was amazed and motioned him into his tent. "How do you have so much courage?" he asked.

Joe Roberts told him about Christ, His death, His teachings.

They talked for hours. When Joe left, the chief of the Shoshones had renounced his vow to kill and resolved to become a Christian.

Washakie had seen love in action.

Every group which calls itself Christian would do well to decide what it should do to make love visible in the home, church, community, and world. For unless love becomes visible it is not love at all."

#### **IV. THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM IN THE CHURCH – VS. 5**

##### ***A. Recognize the failure – "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen"***

1. The only way to return to what they first were, they must needs first "remember" what they were – they must take a look at their position and compare to what it used to be
2. The word "fallen" means, "to drop away; spec. be driven out of one's course; fig. to lose, become inefficient:--be cast, fail, fall (away, off), take none effect." They didn't lose their salvation, they just lost their effectiveness and they lost their course, or way.

**2Pe 3:17** Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.

##### ***B. Repent of the sin – "and repent"***

1. This is not repenting again for salvation
2. The word "repent" means, literally, "to think differently, to change ones mind" – "This change is always for the better, and

denotes a change of moral thought and reflection; not merely to repent of, nor to forsake sin, but to change one's mind and apprehensions regarding it; hence, to repent in a moral and religious sense, with the feeling of remorse and sorrow.

**Mat 4:17** From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

**Mat 12:41** The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here.

**Mar 1:15** And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

**Mar 6:12** And they went out, and preached that men should repent.

**Luk 13:3** I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

**Luk 15:7** I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

**Luk 15:10** Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

**Luk 17:3-4** Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. (4) And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

**2Co 12:19-21** Again, think ye that we excuse

ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but *we do* all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying. (20) For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and *that* I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest *there be* debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: (21) *And* lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and *that* I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.

### **C. Return to the work – "and do the first works"**

1. The "first" – not only the chiefest, or best, but the first in order of what the church at Ephesus had done – the work of the Great Commission
2. "Works" – that which is brought into being or accomplished by labor – God wants us to work at being a Christian.

**Mat 5:16** Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

**Eph 2:10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

**Tit 2:7-15** In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine *shewing* uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, (8) Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. (9) *Exhort* servants to be obedient unto their own masters, *and* to

please *them* well in all *things*; not answering again; (10) Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. (11) For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, (12) Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; (13) Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; (14) Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (15) These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

**Tit 3:14** And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.

**1Pe 2:12** Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by *your* good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

## **V. THE SPIRITUAL SATISFACTION OF THE CHURCH – vs. 7**

### **A. *We'll be with others that succeeded – "To him that overcometh" – we'll be with other overcomers***

**Joh 16:33** These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

**Rom 12:21** Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

**1Jn 2:13-14** I write unto you, fathers, because ye have

known him *that is* from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. (14) I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him *that is* from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

1Jn 4:4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

1Jn 5:4-5 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith. (5) Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

Rev 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

Rev 15:2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, *and* over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

Rev 21:7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

## **B. We'll be satisfied with everlasting life – "will I give to eat of the tree of life"**

Gen 3:22-24 And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: (23) Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. (24) So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep

the way of the tree of life.

**Pro 11:30** The fruit of the righteous *is* a tree of life; and he that winneth souls *is* wise.

**Rev 22:2** In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* the tree of life, which bare twelve *manner of* fruits, *and* yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations.

**Rev 22:14** Blessed *are* they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

### ***C. We'll be where God is – "which is in the midst of the paradise of God"***

1. The word "which" is referring to the tree of life, which was originally in the Garden of Eden
2. The "paradise of God" is used instead of heaven because that is what Eden is referred to – that's what the word "Eden" means. God took the tree of life out of Eden, out of the first paradise, and placed it in heaven, the second paradise, which is better than the first for it shall never pass away.

Conclusion: The Apostolic church was the model church for us to follow, yet it failed to keep its "first love." Many churches today have done the same thing. The church ceased to exist in Ephesus, as was prophesied would happen in Revelation 2:5 if they did not repent, which they didn't. The same is true for us today. If we do not repent and return

to what God wanted us to be we will cease to be effective for God, and God will remove the "candlestick," the effectiveness, the light, from this town.

We need to ask the question the Apostolic church was unable to answer "yes" to - Are we still working?

This message takes us to about 100 AD. The next church age period is seen in the church at Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11. This was the period from 100 A.D. to 316 A.D. - the period of great persecution.