

A SERMON SERIES ON THE LETTERS TO THE 7 CHURCHES

CHARACTER.

OF THE CHURCHES.
8-WEEK MIDWEEK WORSHIP SERMON SERIES



An 8-Week Mini-Series on the 7 Churches in Revelation
Wednesday, July 30th, 2025

Sermon #2: 'Busy, but not Biblical!'

Revelation 2:1-7

Last in our study through Revelation 2-3:

- Last wednesday I made you aware that God had moved strongly in my heart that we needed to take a break in our study of 1st Samuel.
 - *In following the Lord's leadership, we began our new sermon series which is called 'Character of the Churches!'.
 - *During this series we will travel through Revelation 2-3, verse-by-verse, as we look at the 7 Churches that John sent a letter to that were located in Asia Minor. (Modern-day Turkey).**
 - Last Wednesday we had an overview of Revelation 2-3.

- Tonight, we begin with the first Church that John spoke to, the Church in Ephesus.

'Busy, but not Biblical!'

Revelation 2:1-7

Sermon in a Sentence:

The Church at Ephesus was busy and did some things very well, but what they were busy with was not inline with the Biblical principles that they were founded upon.

Intro:

- 'In and out of love' is a phrase that many young people use when talking about someone they feel attracted to
 - The band 'Bond Jovi' made the phrase famous when they wrote and recorded a song entitled ***'In and Out of Love'***
- ***With the current divorce rate being at 50%, and has been that for quite sometime, as a society we have run into more and more marriages with the phrase coming up 'I don't love you anymore'***
 - Sadly, this phrase is usually uttered from one spouse to another.
 - Sometimes the reaction is shock and tears...
 - ***After all, marriage is a covenant you make for life.***
- The phrase 'you don't know what happens behind closed doors' would certainly be applicable in this case.

- *When this situation tragically occurs in a marriage, it is not usually a one time event that caused it, but a slow place lack of serving one another.*
- The first Church that John chooses to address, was the Church at Ephesus.
 - *By all accounts from the outside looking in, the Church at Ephesus was strong.*
 - Some of those strengths John will point out.
 - But he will also point out that the ‘look’ the Ephesian Church was putting out there was deceiving.
 - *The Lord (who spoke through John) knew it. No matter how hard we try to deceive others, the Lord always knows what’s truly going on.*
- *More on the Church at Ephesus, contextually:*
 - The Church at Ephesus was very similar to a lot of Churches today.
 - They were doing a lot of good things.
 - *But what they weren’t doing was of important to John, he loved them, so he told them the truth.*
 - *The Church at Ephesus had gotten really busy in doing some great things, but those ‘things’ were not necessarily Biblical and were what the Church was commissioned to do.*

■ *In our text tonight the Church had lost the most important thing, making Christ and the Gospel top priority.*

- The condition at the Church at Ephesus has become the condition for many Churches today.
- This condition for the Church at Ephesus today (and Churches who have lost their first love), is not *hopeless*, but it is certainly *critical*.

Question to Ask:

How does the Church at Ephesus exemplify busyness that may not necessarily be Biblical?

Truth #1: Christ is the Protector. (v. 1)

- The Church at Ephesus is one of the most unique of the 7 that John wrote too.
 - *It is the only Church in the New Testament to which two apostles addressed leaders to them.*
 - Years earlier when the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians there in Ephesus, it was certainly one of the most exciting Churches of the day.
 - *In addition to Paul’s letter to them, which is one of the strongest in the NT in regards to the theological truths revealed, they also had some stellar Pastors, not just for their time, but of all time!*

- Paul led the congregation there for a time.
- Timothy served there.
- As did John.
- *Which goes to show strong Pastoral leadership is great, needed, and Biblical, but there comes a time when the people must obey the Word and not just depend on the Pastors.*
 - *In Revelation 2:1, the Lord Jesus is reminded the Church that it was He who was in control of the ministry of the Church and had placed the stars in place.*
 - This is a scriptural example of how easily and quickly a Church can forget that God's pastors and teachers are gifts to the Churches. He can move them at any time.
 - We must enjoy our leaders while we have them, not burden them.
 - 'And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[a] and teachers,' Ephesians 4:11
 - *God gifts us with those who lead us in the Word.*
- As we dive into verse 1, we must not forget that in each of the 7 messages to the Churches in Revelation 2-3,

John includes a personal description of Jesus Christ from the vision of Christ as found in Revelation 1.

- *In this particular description, Christ is the protector of the saints, especially those at Ephesus.*
 - There's 2 important things to point out here...
- *The Wonder... (v. 1a)*
 - 'To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand,'
 - *That word 'hold' there in verse 1 is very important to look at.*
 - **Word Study**
 - The word 'holds' comes from the greek word **Kraton** κρατῶν which is a present active participle, which indicates that the Lord is holding on continually.
 - He never stops!
 - *This is a description of Christ's character from Revelation 1, (verse 12, 16, 20) should cause us to wonder at how magnificent He is.*
 - The verb **Krateo** (which Kraton comes from), doesn't just mean to merely hold something, but to grasp or exercise power.

- ***Christ holds the stars, the Churches, and has power over them!***

- In ***Colossians 1:18***, we are told that Christ is the head of the Church!
 - ‘And he is the head of the body, the church.’
- Christ is showing His authority, which is a wonder to us but also gives a strong warning...

- ***A Warning... (v. 1b)***

- ‘who walks among the seven golden lampstands.’
- ***Sometimes when it comes to protecting someone, a warning is necessary.***
 - ***Not only does the first part of verse 1 show us that Christ is exercising authority, He is actively watching what is going on in His Churches. His Bride.***
- That word ‘walks’ in verse 1 is very important.

- ****Word Study****

- That word is translated from the greek verb, ***Peripaton περιπατῶν*** and is also a present active participle. This means the action of the verb is continual, so that Christ is still walking among His Churches.

- ***The seven lamps are the light and impact that Christ Himself has allowed to be there.***

- I take it to mean the 7 stars are the Churches, the lampstands are their impact, and the angels could be the Churches.

- ***Christ is clear he’s in control of all.***

- ***With Christ walking among the lampstands, He is cognizant of what is going on in His Church. Good and bad.***
- ***Christ was watching Ephesus...***

- Dr. Paige Patterson estimates that 100,000-250,000 people lived in Ephesus at the time.
 - According to Acts 18:18-19 and Acts 19:1-10, Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla evangelized and founded the Church at Ephesus.
 - Paul felt as if it was such a significant city, that he needed to stay there for 2 years, which he did.
 - ***Paul had quite the eventful ministry there, even having a riot breakout, and would meet with the elders (Pastors) at that Church at Miletus in Acts 20:17-38.***

- ***There Pastoral heritage, like this Church, was very strong.***

- Paul, Timothy, and John.
- What a heritage, what a danger...
- Dr. Daniel Aiken said:
 - ***'Here is a second-generation Church that apparently was living off the prestige and momentum of the past. The past was great, but their present condition was spiritually perilous.'***

- Christ is the protector, He is a Wonder, and He gave a warning...

Truth #2: *Credible Purity.* (v. 2-3)

- ***John uses the sandwich technique which many leadership classes teach today.***
 - Start with a compliment, put the critique in the middle, and end with a compliment.
 - ***I believe that Baptist Church members would do well to apply that to our personal conversations with each other. Don't always feel the need to start off with the negative!***
- When it comes to compliments, the Church at Ephesus definitely had a few.
 - Compared to some of the 7 Churches we will look at who did not have any positives said about them, this is a big deal!

- ***When looking at the passage as a whole, it seems as if they were busy on things that were not necessarily Biblical. Let's look at the text:***

- 'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.'
Revelation 2:2-3 ESV

- ***Before we get to the Chaotic priorities in their Church, it's important that we look at the commendable purity of the works that they were doing that John did make clear.***

- I believe there are ___ commendable and pure deeds that the Church at Ephesus was guilty of:

- ***No Tolerance for False Teaching. (v. 2)***

- 'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.'
- ***As we will see in verse 6 momentarily, false teaching was rampant in Asia.***
 - ***In the capital city of Asia at that time, you can expect false teachers to be***

everywhere, and I'm sure they tried to enter into Ephesus.

- *This city would have been the cultural center of the world at that time, and would have been a magnet for those individuals claiming apostolic authority but embracing positions inconsistent with the New Testament.*

- Verse 2 is clear that they cannot bear with those who are evil.
- Holiness and purity matter to them!
Holiness and purity should matter more to us in the Church than it seemingly does at times.

- *They stand against evil in a city that would have undoubtedly been an epicenter for evil.*

- May we learn from this and not tolerate false teaching, and evilness.

- ***Remaining Doctrinally Sound. (v. 3)***

- 'I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.'
- *Because they are remaining in the doctrine that they have been taught, they are enduring for the sake of Christ.*

- ***Any Bible believing Church who stands against false teaching and evilness time and time again, will have to patiently endure.***

- Apparently according to the text there in verse 3, they had yet to grow weary.

- They endured the persecution that they received, and doctrinally, kept going on.

- ***What about our doctrine?***

- ***Our doctrine should go beyond just saying 'we affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message'***

- ***Doctrinal Check-in Questions:***

- What do you believe about Jesus? His Person and His Work?
- What is the Gospel?
- How are people born again?
- Do you believe a Holy life should complement our confession of Christ and not contradict it?
- Do you teach anything contrary to or in addition to the Word of God?

- They are commended for their doctrinal purity.

- ***Are we doctrinally pure and sound in what we believe and how we live out what we say that we believe?***

Truth #3: Chaotic Priorities. (v. 4)

- For a moment, let's just say that you had attended the Church at Ephesus while traveling on the road.

- *Let's say your home Church would've been Corinth, Rome, or Jerusalem and you just stopped by for a service from a like-minded, Bible believing Church.*
- One of the Pastors, let's say Tychicus, stands up to give the announcements, here's what you may have heard...
 - *Immediately after this service, we'll have a prayer meeting.*
 - *The ladies will meet in the room next door for Bible Study.*
 - *The men will meet in the patio for Bible study.*
 - *At 11 o'clock the Sunday School will begin.*
 - *The Gospel will be preached by so and so.*
 - *This afternoon at 2:30 there will be a street meeting.*
 - *This afternoon at 4:30 PM the young people will meet.*
 - *Then Choir practice at 5 PM.*
 - *A class on the Holy Land at 6 PM.*
 - *Then back tonight at 7 PM for Worship.*
- *Wow! And that's just in one day, the Church at Ephesus was busy with programs, but not necessarily proclaiming the Gospel!*
 - Just because we have strong programs, doesn't equate to a strong Church.

- *I sense that was part of the message that John was seeking to get across when he wrote what he did in verse 4...*
- 'But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.' Revelation 2:4
 - According to everything on the outside, social media posts, and everything that was being said of the Church, they looked healthy!
 - *The doctrine was spot on, the lifestyles of the members had matched their doctrine, so what had they lost?*
 - *As Paige Patterson insinuated in his commentary, there is no-where else an indication in Scripture, a presupposition, that this was even an issue with them.*
 - But John is clear that it evidently was.
 - I personally believe that to say they lost their first love, *was their love of Christ!*
 - Which I take to mean, that they were on the brink of becoming a pharisee Church.
 - A Church that loves legalism and defending itself and correcting others, more than the Lord.
 - *They were doing all the right 'Church things' and it's possible that no one would've called*

out an issue with them, but the Lord, through John certainly did.

■ ***Because Christ knows what's going on in and among His Churches.***

- Sometime in their past, along their ecclesiological timeline, they had left the right motivation.
 - ***They were no longer seeking to practice good doctrine, have stellar classes and programs for the sake of lostness and love for Jesus Christ, but there was a heart problem there.***
 - The head was right, the heart was not. Have you personally ever fallen into this before?
- ***This is what happened at Ephesus:***
 - ***'Obedience out of duty had replaced obedience out of love for Christ.'***
 - Do you obey Christ because all the 'Church' rules say you should? Or do you obey Christ out of your genuine love for Him?
- So, this may cause us to be intrigued to ask the question: ***How can such a 'perfect' Church as Ephesus fail to love Christ the way they were led and called to originally?***
 - Ephesus had done well, they were commended for that. But maybe it was the maintenance of that success that became more important to

them, than their love for Christ. ***Which can happen to ANY Church and sadly, often does.***

- A Church can quickly get to the point that the Church at Ephesus did, when we value ***maintenance*** over ***ministry***.
- Maintenance can either drag us down and have us doing things other than ministry, or maintenance can build us up with a false idea of what success is in the Kingdom of God.
 - ***We can fall in love with being the maintenance worker of our success to keep what we think the engine to that success is, while we lose our love for Christ.***
- We can maintenance our successful sunday school class to where we forget to lead them to love Jesus.
- We can maintenance a men's, women's, or prayer ministry so well that we forget to lead them to love Jesus above all.
- We can have so many services, training unions, all these different things, and forget to lead people to Jesus, and just look to the attendance book and see how many were present that day...
 - ***Sometimes, that's what we look for in our success when that's not what our***

Lord looks at who is walking amongst the lampstands. He looks at the heart...

- Now, Jesus, through John, gives us the correct plan moving forward...

Truth #4: *Correct Plan.* (vv. 5-6)

- ***An incredible thing about being a follower of Jesus is that we don't have to wonder where we stand with God. He will tell us, we've just go to listen.***

- In addition, He does not just correct us but convicts us, so that we may make the changes that are necessary.
- John includes the corrections that are needed for the Church at Ephesus.

- *As I said last week in our overview, I truly believe that Revelation 2-3 was for the 7 Churches in Asia, but is also for us as the Churches today.*

- *So this same correction we find here, is for Churches who have lost their first love, which is of course Jesus Christ.*

- I believe there are 3 things to point out in this corrected plan...

- ***A Plain Reminder.* (v. 5a)**

- 'Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.'
- Jesus asks the believers at Ephesus to look back in their past, and remember what they did in the beginning.

- *This reminds me of many believers today, folks who were on fire when they first came into a saving relationship with the Lord, who lost the desire and the passion at some point along the way.*

- W.W. said ***'we must remember what we have lost and cultivate a desire to regain that close communion once again'***

- Which means that we have to do something really hard, admit that we were wrong to begin with.

- How do we do this?

- *Go back in our minds and take person inventory.*
- *Evaluate where we are now, compared to where we once were.*

- ***Were you reading more consistently when you were on fire?***

- ***Were you attending Church regularly?***

- ***Were you sharing Christ?***

- What were you doing when your love was Jesus? Whatever it was, begin doing it again...

- ***A Potential Removal.* (v. 5b)**

- 'If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.'

- At any given time, Jesus can choose to remove the lampstand of any particular Church.

- *I believe during and after COVID-19 many Churches closed because Jesus was using that awful sickness as a way to prune His Church.*

- *When a Church loses their love for Jesus, they will eventually lose their light.*

- In verse 5, the phrase 'I will come' is not a reference to the Lord's return, but is instead His coming judgement then and there to that Church.

- *Once the lampstand is gone, it's only a matter of time, unless the Church chooses to repent and go back to the things that they were doing, until that Church will only be just a building.*

- A memory, a monument, a memorial, and no longer a MOVEMENT of God.

- *A Predator Remains. (v. 6)*

- 'Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.'
 - John remains true to the sandwich formula of delivering a hard truth.

- *He tells them that one thing they clearly have going for them, is that they*

undoubtedly hate the work of the Nicolaitans.

- *Who and or what are the Nicolaitans?*

- Only two passages in the NT refer to the Nicolaitans. Revelation 2:6 (here) and Revelation 2:15.
 - Church fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement, and Tertullian do mention the Nicolaitans, but only briefly.

- *One Church father, Irenaeus, in particular identified the Nicolaitans as the heretical followers of Nicolaus.*

- It is believed these individuals followed one of the first seven ordained Deacons, Nicolaus from Acts 6:5.

- It is believed that they practiced teaching different from that of the Bible by living in an indulgence of sin, practicing idolatry, and eating food that was sacrificed to false idols.

- We can't know for sure who they were exactly, but that could be a possibility.

Truth #5: Cherish the Promise. (v. 7)

- Just as each of the 7 messages to the Churches begin with a Christological statement drawn from Revelation 1, they all end with a promise drawn from the end of the book.

- *Just as the corrections to each of the Churches are applicable to all Churches, so are the promises...*

- ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’
 - ‘He who has an ear, let him hear’
 - *Means that we should ALL be listening to what the Spirit is saying and not just assume that it was meant for someone else.*
 - The one who conquers is a victor, and overcomes.
 - *When we keep the faith, finish our fight, and remain faithful to God, we will overcome this world and get to spend eternity with God!*
 - We will have the right, through Christ, one day to eat from the tree of life in God’s paradise.
 - *This takes us back to Genesis 2:8, and then forward to Revelation 22:4.*
 - *What Adam and Eve forfeited and gave up in succumbing to sin, we regain through Christ Jesus.*

Conclusion: