

Letter to the Church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)

Before we look at the letter to the church in Ephesus, let's look at the introduction to the letters to the seven churches in Asia, in Revelation chapter 1.

Chapters 2 and 3 are letters to seven churches dotted around an area in modern Turkey called at the time, Asia Minor. Unlike the epistles, John is not the author of these letters, rather, he's just the secretary cum postman. The author of these letters is Jesus Himself. So if you've got a red letter version of the Bible, you'll instantly notice that these letters are in red type.

V 9-10. Jesus's instruction to St. John, saying, make sure there's plenty of ink in your pen.

V 19-20. The stars / angels are the pastors, ministers or vicars of the seven churches. The lamp stands are the churches themselves. A lamp stand doesn't emit light, it holds up the light. In the same way, our church must radiate Jesus's light, rather than our own. A useful tip is that all of these letters were published as part of the Bible because they were not exclusively applicable to the individual churches but also to ours as well as to you, as an individual.

Historical information about Ephesus. It was the fourth largest city in the Roman empire, a bustling trading city. In the centre was the temple of the Roman god, Artemis.

Revelation 2

V1. Jesus is saying He holds each of the seven stars (the pastors, ministers, vicars) in His right hand and walks among the seven churches. Is that true of every church leader and church, including ours, or was it just these seven? If it is, what effect does that have on the leader and our church?

V2. Jesus commends deeds and hard work. What deeds and hard work might a church need to do, in order to obtain Jesus's commendation? Two commandments, John 13:34 and Matthew 28:16-20. Parable of the talents Matthew 25:14-30. Is this in contradiction to Isaiah 40:31? Some use this verse as a cop out, let's just tread water, hang about and wait upon the Lord to do our work for us. Wait upon the Lord means, be patient and don't expect instant results.

V3. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word perseverance is defined as: the quality of continuing to try to achieve a particular aim despite difficulties. What might Jesus mean by the word perseverance in the context of this passage and what difficulties might He be referring to? Is verse 3 a repetition of verse 2a, or is He talking other definitions of that word? Here's Collins dictionary definition: continued steady belief or efforts, withstanding discouragement or difficulty; persistence.

Let's look at an example of perseverance in the face of adversity. Acts 19:21-29. The theatre is a 25,000 seat amphitheatre. Acts 19:35-41. This Alexander was quite a rabble rouser, and really got up the nose of Apostle Paul, 2 Timothy 4:14.

Back to 2b. On Freeview channel 66 called TBN and more so I see on Sky TV in the religious channels section, various TV evangelists, titling themselves as Bishop,

Pastor, even Prophet and Apostle. This is what Jesus says about titles - Matthew 23:8-12. Does Acts 14:23 and 1 Timothy 3:1 & 8 contradict Jesus's teaching?

This church has had more than its fair share of heretics, and dealt with them. Still in America, churches preach the prosperity gospel, the Christian life is about materialism, lifestyle and the acquisition of luxury goods. Many churches seem to have abandoned the Gospel and instead preach the manifesto of the Republican Party. Not so, this church in Ephesus.

So this church's performance review is going really well. You can just imagine the Minister, reading it out to the church's special meeting; he'd be gushing with pride, and then comes the bombshell.

V4. Remember, this church is like an ants' nest. Working in the face of adversity and hardship, but it's love for God had gone cold and so to be told that they make God feel like a marriage stuck in a rut must have hurt.

On a personal level, a hot relationship gone cold is something that nearly everyone can relate to. You go on a piping hot date, then a second one. Then you're 'an item', it's not long before you realise, this is the one, and you pop the question. Then you're setting the date and afterwards the honeymoon. A few years later, you'd rather go out with your mates than with your wife, and you'd rather watch telly than go upstairs for an early night. How might that translate into an image of a church's affection for God? There's, such a thing as working so hard for God, you forget about God.

V5. Are we talking worship here? Using Jesus's analogy of a passionate relationship gone stale; a couple may still tell each other they are loved, but unless that translates into a physical and emotional love, those three words are empty. So yes, you can sing choruses and hymns and even pray, but without that buzz in your heart, they are meaningless.

So when your relationship with God goes a bit flat or stale, practically speaking, how do you turn things around? How do you rekindle that first love, or as Jesus puts it, repent? Where the analogy falls down, is that when a couple goes to relationship counselling, the counsellor will try to find mutual fault. But that's not so with God, you can't blame Him, He's literally perfect, so the fault will always be with you, which is why you need to repent, but repent from what?

So you need to ask yourself some difficult questions; where are you going wrong? Is it sin or attitude or lack of communication, or what? Meanwhile, your enemy within will be telling you, you're just a lousy Christian, this is just how it is, get used to it. But whatever you do, don't get used to it, find the fault and repent. God loves you dearly, He wants that close relationship. It's precious to Him, it's why He sacrificed His Son.

We know that God is a sensitive God, He's not thick skinned, which is a good indicator of His love for you. Malachi 1:7-8. If God didn't love you, He wouldn't care if you neglected Him.

You also know from your Bible that God won't just put up with being treated badly. The books of Judges and Jeremiah are historical accounts of how bad things happen

to those who do. Jesus warns this church that if they don't return, He will close the church down.

V6. Another positive for this church is that they had a brush with a sect or a heresy called the Nicolaitans and dealt with it. Their activities are covered in the letter to Pergamos. If this is a letter, not only to the church at Ephesus but also to me personally, are there any dark areas in my life that should have been dealt with long ago?

V7. The tree of life makes an appearance. We last saw it in Genesis 3:22-24. Had Adam been able to eat of its fruit, he'd still be alive today. For the believer who perseveres, he/she will be able to partake of its fruit and so live forever.

The tree in Genesis is made of wood but I doubt that the tree in Heaven is. More likely, it's Jesus and it's His fruit that gives all of us eternal life. Remember, too, that you are a younger brother/sister of Jesus, who likened you to a tree that gives fruit, Luke 6:43-45. Fruit that gives eternal life as you witness and influence people around you towards that crucial decision.

So, how's Ephesus doing these days? A Google search -

Over time, Ephesus physically shifted to what is now the small town of Selçuk, only a five-minute drive from the Ephesus ruins. Honeysuckle perfumed, the air around the shops and streets I visited. The town is Muslim—as is 99 percent of Turkey. Even so, a small Protestant church of former-Muslim believers gathers in Selçuk for worship and fellowship.

<https://www.imb.org/2018/06/01/what-happened-to-the-seven-churches-of-revelation/>