

Part 2 in the series on the Letters to the Seven Churches (Rev. 2 & 3)

Notes to preacher:

Important background on Ephesus is in Acts 18-20 and 1 Timothy 3.

Also read helpful notes in the *Concordia Self-Study Bible*.

Decide on a name sign you want to use for Ephesus and Ephesian. Consider using either E-City, or spell the abbreviation EPH.

Verse 6 of the text mentions the sinful practices of the "Nicolaitans." This group is mentioned again in verse 15, at the Pergamum church. The text does not explicitly explain who the Nicolaitans were, what they taught, or what they did. The footnote in the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* suggests that they were a "heretical sect within the church that had worked out a compromise with the pagan society. They apparently taught that spiritual liberty gave them sufficient leeway [room] to practice idolatry and immorality." I decided not to discuss the Nicolaitans in this sermon, because it was already too long, and the issue of the Ephesian rejection of false doctrine was already covered in verse 2. I am planning to discuss it in my sermon about the Pergamum church.

You may want to hand out the map, the chart for Ephesus, and study questions for next week (Smyrna).

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Ephesus, The Cold Church

One-week-ago we introduced a new series of lessons about Seven Letters Jesus in heaven sent to different churches in western Turkey. Today we read that first letter:

Revelation 2:1-7

Jesus said: Write to the announcer for the church in the city named EPHESUS:

[quote]

I hold seven stars in My right hand,
and I walk among seven gold lamps. I tell you:

² I know what you do,

I know that you work hard and you never give up.

I know you don't accept false teachings from evil people.

You test people that name themselves 'apostle,' but they really are not. You notice they are liars.

³ You have patience, and you suffer troubles for My name, and you don't give-up.

⁴ But I have something against you: In-the-past*[ago]* you had eager love. But not now.

⁵ Remember your love in-the-past was high, but now you fall-down. Change your hearts and do as you first did. If you don't change, I will come to you, and your lamp I will take away.

⁶ But you do something right. *[What?]* You know-that NICOLAITANS do evil, and you hate that, same-as me.

⁷ "My Holy Spirit now speaks to your churches. Every person must pay-attention. Every person that wins, I will give-him the right to*[can]* eat fruit from the Tree of Life, that tree God's GARDEN.

For all seven churches that received letters from Jesus, only one we know much: EPHESUS. The Bible in different places tells us many things about that city, and about that church.

This morning we will discuss much about EPHESUS. We must invent a name sign. *[Show the sign you want to use.]*

Paul established that church in Ephesus, with much help from several people:

- a married couple named AQUILA and PRISCILLA
- a skilled teacher named APOLLOS
- a young assistant named TIMOTHY

During Paul's 3rd mission travels, he stayed in Ephesus almost three years.

Dr. Luke tells us that people in Ephesus were very religious.

- They had the temple to the Roman GODDESS named DIANA. And that brought *[bring]* much TOURIST business to Ephesus.
- Many people were involved in OCCULT religions. And new Christians in Ephesus got a hard lesson that we can't worship Christ and practice OCCULT at the same time. ...can't!

Later, Paul traveled around Turkey, and he stopped near Ephesus. Church leaders came to Paul's boat, and he spoke with them a long time. Paul said:

"Be careful for yourselves and for all the people... I know that after I leave, some people will come like wild wolves and try to destroy the flock. Also, some from your own group will rise up and twist the truth and will lead away followers after them. So be careful!" [Acts 20:2-31, New Century Version]

Later, while traveling again, Paul wrote to his friend TIMOTHY:

"Stay longer in Ephesus... Command people there to stop teaching false things." [1 Timothy 1:3]

Later, John himself came to Ephesus, and he continued the same teaching.

Now, jumping into that first letter that Jesus wrote to the seven churches, the letter to Ephesus, we will see that all that warning from Paul, from Timothy, from John succeeded.

Jesus' letter opens,

"To the announcer for the church in the city Ephesus."

If you already studied this lesson, you noticed that your Bible may say, *"To the angel for the church in Ephesus."*

One-week-ago, we explained that the Greek word ANGEL means "announcer." God has several different announcers.

Spirit announcers, we name angels.

People announcers, we name preachers.

For these letters in Rev. chapters 2 and 3, various Bible teachers don't agree,

if Jesus means people preachers, or

if Jesus means spirit angels.

Which?

Really, it-doesn't-matter. Why? Jesus' information is for the church. And remember, in the Bible,

"Church" never means a building.

"Church" never means a meeting time.

"Church" always means, what? People!

Jesus wants His Word announced to the people.

You maybe notice that old letters open:

"To who?"

then

"From who?"

Here next we see Jesus describe Himself:

[quote]

*"I hold seven stars in My right hand,
and I walk among seven gold lamps."*

That's a picture from chapter 1.

The seven lamps mean who?

The seven churches.

The seven stars mean who?

The announcers for those churches.

Next, Jesus describes the church in Ephesus. He says:

"I know what you do,

I know that you work hard and you never give up.

I know you don't accept false teachings from evil people.

You test people that name themselves 'apostle,'

but they really are not.

You notice they are liars."

Remember Paul's warning to them? Again and again Paul said,
"Guard the church against false teachers."

It-seems that they learned. They are really careful that they teach God's Word right, and they test all DOCTRINE. And Jesus praises them for that.

But what about us?

Can Jesus say that we also test all teaching, comparing it to God's Word? Do we accept only what the Bible says? Or do we follow popular ideas from our culture?

Sometimes, if you stand-up for the truth,
people maybe will mock you.

They will criticize you.

They will persecute you.

And that's exactly what happened to the Christians in Ephesus.
Jesus said:

*"You have patience,
and you suffer troubles for My name,
and you don't give-up."*

That's His praise for the Ephesian Church.
Now His criticism:

*"I have something against you:
In-the-past[ago] you had eager love.
But not now."*

Often we think **love for God** means *feeling*.

We feel excited about worship and praise.

We feel strong religion.

We feel goose-bumps seeing a pretty sunset.

But the Bible says that we show true love in action.
And the Bible says that we show true love to God,
in our actions for other people.

The Bible says that we show His love for other people, how?
We forgive people who do wrong against us,
the same as God forgives our wrongs against Him.

And notice that Jesus describes the Christians in Ephesus and their eager love in the beginning.

When person first learns about Jesus, and His love,
and that person understands that Jesus died on the cross for him,
forgiving all his sins,
and that person trusts Christ,
and Christ fills that person with His Holy Spirit,
that person wants to do, what?

That new Christian wants to tell everyone about Jesus.
That person maybe has faith as a baby,
and he doesn't-know much about the Bible,
but he is excited to tell the world "What Jesus did for me!"

The Ephesian church had strong Bible teaching. And Jesus praises them.

But they forgot the thrill of telling people about Jesus
and His love.

And they forgot to show mercy,
They forgot to serve people outside their group.

Jesus says:

*"Remember your love in-the-past was high,
but now you fall-down.
Change your hearts and do as you first did.
If you don't change,
I will come to you,
and your lamp I will take away."*

The "lamp" means, what? The Church!
And if He "takes away our lamp," what happens?
He closes our church!

The organization maybe will continue,
But if we ignore teaching the Bible correctly,
or if we ignore serving in mercy and love,
we are not His Church any more.

Now, Jesus closes this letter, giving us an invitation:

*"The Holy Spirit now speaks to your churches.
Every person must pay-attention.
Every person that wins, I will give-him the right to[can] eat
fruit from the Tree of Life, that tree God's GARDEN."*

Remember Adam and Eve. They sinned, and they must leave the
GARDEN OF EDEN. After[finish] they sinned, they can't eat from
the Tree of Life. ...until now.

We can see something really interesting about that Tree of Life.

The Bible has two words for T.R.E.E. in the Greek Language.
One word [dendron] means: "a green growing tree."
The other word [xulon] means: "hard rough wood Cross."

The Bible says that Jesus "carried our sins on the T.R.E.E. " ...
[xulon] the cross. [1 Peter 2:24]

Now, in Jesus' letter to Ephesus, the last verse says,

*"I [Jesus] will give-him the right to[can] eat fruit from the
T.R.E.E. of Life,*

the word for TREE that Jesus uses here is, what? hard rough wood cross!

Yes! His Cross is our Tree of Life!

The Bible begins with a story about the Garden closing, because Adam and Eve rebelled and ate from the wrong tree.

Now the Bible ends telling us that the Garden is open again. The tree of life that Adam and Eve can't eat, now with Jesus we can!

That rough wood cross,
that killed Jesus in our place,
That cross now gives us life forever,
with Him.

We pray:

*Father in Heaven,
Thank you for Your True Word.
Help us never become careless
about the things we teach.
Also keep alive
our love for You,
and Your love we show to other people.
Thank you for that Tree that gives us life.
Thank you for Jesus and His cross.
Amen.*