

DEAR CHURCH,

Study of the Seven Churches in Revelation

We can see the state of each of these seven churches – and the state of our own walk with Jesus – by looking at what Jesus has to say to each church during these next few weeks.

Bible Fellowship Discussion Guide

Open It

1. Why does love—even the most committed love—sometimes grow cold over time?
2. What is something you remember loving dearly as a child that you eventually outgrew?

Explore It

1. Who was addressing John with this message? (2:1)
2. Jesus praised the church at Ephesus for what deeds? (2:2-3)
3. With what in the Ephesian church was Christ unsatisfied? (2:4)
4. What did Christ command the church at Ephesus to remember? (2:5)
5. How did the church at Ephesus need to change? (2:5)
6. What warning was given to the church if it failed to obey Christ's words? (2:5)
7. What did the church at Ephesus have in its favor? (2:6)
8. Whom else did Jesus want to benefit from this message? (2:7)
9. What final promise was made to "him who overcomes"? (2:7)

Get It

1. If Jesus were to write a letter to First Baptist Marble Falls, what do you think He'd say?
2. If Jesus were to write you a personal letter, for what would He commend you, and in what ways would He correct you?
3. What do you think Christ meant when He said, "You have forsaken your first love"?
4. What does it mean to repent?
5. At what time in your life did you feel closest to God or the most dedicated to God?
6. How would you assess the health of your relationship with Christ right now?
7. What can cause us to lose our love for God?
8. How can we keep our commitment to Christ from waning over time?

Apply It

1. What is one step you can take this week to build the quality of perseverance in your faith?
2. What can you do or say to encourage a Christian friend to remain loyal to Christ.



Brief Commentary on Revelation 2:1-7

By Matthew Henry

These churches were in such different states as to purity of doctrine and the power of godliness, that the words of Christ to them will always suit the cases of other churches, and professors. Christ knows and observes their state; though in heaven, yet he walks in the midst of his churches on earth, observing what is wrong in them, and what they want. The church of Ephesus is commended for diligence in duty. Christ keeps an account of every hour's work his servants do for him, and their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. But it is not enough that we are diligent; there must be bearing patience, and there must be waiting patience. And though we must show all meekness to all men, yet we must show just zeal against their sins. The sin Christ charged this church with, is, not the having left and forsaken the object of love, but having lost the fervent degree of it that at first appeared. Christ is displeased with his people, when he sees them grow remiss and cold toward him.

Surely this mention in Scripture, of Christians forsaking their first love, reproves those who speak of it with carelessness, and thus try to excuse indifference and sloth in themselves and others; our Saviour considers this indifference as sinful. They must repent: they must be grieved and ashamed for their sinful declining, and humbly confess it in the sight of God. They must endeavour to recover their first zeal, tenderness, and seriousness, and must pray as earnestly, and watch as diligently, as when they first set out in the ways of God. If the presence of Christ's grace and Spirit is slighted, we may expect the presence of his displeasure. Encouraging mention is made of what was good among them. Indifference as to truth and error, good and evil, may be called charity and meekness, but it is not so; and it is displeasing to Christ.

The Christian life is a warfare against sin, Satan, the world, and the flesh. We must never yield to our spiritual enemies, and then we shall have a glorious triumph and reward. All who persevere, shall derive from Christ, as the Tree of life, perfection and confirmation in holiness and happiness, not in the earthly paradise, but in the heavenly. This is a figurative expression, taken from the account of the garden of Eden, denoting the pure, satisfactory, and eternal joys of heaven; and the looking forward to them in this world, by faith, communion with Christ, and the consolations of the Holy Spirit. Believers, take your wrestling life here, and expect and look for a quiet life hereafter; but not till then: the word of God never promises quietness and complete freedom from conflict here.

Extensive Background on Revelation 2:1-7

By Enduring Word Commentary - *David Guzik*

A. Jesus' letter to the church at Ephesus.

1. (Rev 2:1a) The character of the city of Ephesus.

“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,”

a. To the angel: As discussed under Revelation 1:20, this angel may be the pastor of the church at Ephesus, or an angel looking in on the workings of the church at Ephesus. In some way, this angel represents this church; but the letter isn't written just to the representative, but to the whole church.

i. “I consider what is spoken to this angel as spoken to the whole Church; and that it is not his particular state that is described, but the states of the people in general under his care.”
(Clarke)

b. Ephesus: This was a famous city in the ancient world, with an equally famous church. Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years (Acts 19:1, Acts 10, Acts 20:31). Aquilla and Priscilla, with Apollos served there (Acts 18:24-28). Paul's close associate Timothy (1 Timothy 1:3) worked in Ephesus. According to strong and consistent historic tradition, the Apostle John also ministered there.

i. “Surely it was a place of great privilege, of great preaching.” (Robertson)

c. Ephesus: This great city was also world-famous as a religious, cultural, and economic center of the region. Ephesus had the notable temple of Diana, a fertility goddess worshipped with immoral sex. This tremendous temple to Diana in Ephesus was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was supported by 127 pillars, each pillar 60 feet tall, and it was adorned with great sculptures.

i. “The Temple of Artemis was also a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be kept safe under the protection of deity.” (Longenecker in his commentary on Acts)

ii. “Ephesus was a stronghold of Satan. Here many evil things both superstitious and satanic were practiced. Books containing formula for sorcery and other ungodly and forbidden arts were plentiful in that city.” (Gaebelein in his commentary on Acts)

2. (Rev 2:1b) Jesus describes Himself to the church at Ephesus.

These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

a. He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: These images were taken from John's vision of Jesus in Revelation 1. They emphasize the authority of Jesus in the Church (He holds the seven stars) and His immediate presence in the Church (He walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands). This introduction stresses that Jesus is central to the church, and should be recognized as central to the church.

b. Holds: This is the ancient Greek word *kratein*, and is an emphatic and complete word. Jesus has these churches, and holds them securely. The churches belong to Jesus, not to the leaders of the churches or to the people of the churches. He holds them.

3. (Rev 2:2-3) What Jesus knows about the Christians of Ephesus.

I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

a. I know your works: Jesus looked at His church, and He knew its condition. It was no mystery to Him. There may be sin or corruption hidden in a congregation, but it isn't hidden to Jesus. He would say the same thing to us today, both as individuals and as a congregation: I know your works.

i. "There are also working Christians who do not approach to laboring; yet a lifetime of such work as theirs would not exhaust a butterfly. Now, when a man works for Christ he should work with all his might." (Spurgeon)

b. Your works, your labor, your patience: Jesus knew what this church did right. They worked hard for the Lord and they had godly endurance. Patience is the great ancient Greek word *hupomone*, which means "steadfast endurance." In this sense, the church in Ephesus was rock-solid.

c. You cannot bear those who are evil: The Ephesian church pursued doctrinal purity. Paul warned the Ephesians in Acts 20:29-31: For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. From this commendation of Jesus, we know that the Ephesians took Paul's warning seriously.

i. The church today, like the Ephesian church then, must vigorously test those who claim to be messengers from God – especially those who say they are apostles, because deceivers will speak well of themselves. The greater the evil, the more deceptive its cloak.

ii. "This was grand of them: it showed a backbone of truth. I wish some of the churches of this age had a little of this holy decision about them; for nowadays, if a man be clever; he may preach the vilest lie that was ever vomited from the mouth of hell, and it will go down with some." (Spurgeon)

d. You have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary: Also, the Ephesian church continued doing these things without becoming weary. They showed a godly perseverance that we should imitate. By all outward appearances, this was a solid church that worked hard, had great outreach, and protected the integrity of the gospel.

4. (Rev 2:4) What Jesus has against the church at Ephesus.

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

a. Nevertheless I have this against you: Jesus used a sobering word – nevertheless, which means "despite all that." Jesus took into full account all the good in the Ephesian church, yet despite all that, He had something against them.

i. Nevertheless means that all the good in the Ephesian church did not cancel out the bad Jesus is about to describe.

b. You have left your first love: Despite all the good in the Ephesian church, there is something seriously wrong. They have left – not lost – their first love. They once had a love that they don't have anymore. This can be described as “a definite and sad departure.” (Robertson)

i. The distinction between leaving and losing is important. Something can be lost quite by accident, but leaving is a deliberate act, though it may not happen suddenly. As well, when we lose something we don't know where to find it; but when we leave something, we know where to find it

ii. Though they had left their first love, everything looked great on the outside. If you would have attended a service of the church at Ephesus, you might have thought, “This is a happening church. They are doing so much, and they really guard the truth.” At the same time, you might have had a vague, uneasy feeling – yet it would probably be hard to pin down. It wasn't hard for Jesus to see the problem, even though everything probably looked wonderful on the outside.

iii. The problem was serious. Without love, all is vain. No wonder Jesus said, “Nevertheless I have this against you.” “A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. Lose love, lose all.” (Spurgeon)

c. Left your first love: What love did they leave? As Christians, we are told to love God and to love one another. Did they leave their love for God? Did they leave their love for one another? Probably both are in mind, because the two loves go together. You can't say you love God and not love His family, and you can't really love His family without loving Him first.

i. The Ephesian church was a working church. Sometimes a focus on working for Jesus will eclipse a love relationship with Him. We can put what we do for Jesus before who we are in Him. We can leave Jesus in the temple, just as the parents of Jesus did ([Luke 2:45-46](#)).

ii. The Ephesian church was a doctrinally pure church. Sometimes a focus on doctrinal purity will make a congregation cold, suspicious, and intolerant of diversity. “When love dies orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse, a powerless formalism. Adhesion to the truth sours into bigotry when the sweetness and light of love to Jesus depart.” (Spurgeon)

d. First love: There is a definite, sure difference in their relationship with Jesus. Things aren't as they used to be. It isn't that we expect that we should have the exact same excitement we had when everything was brand new in the Christian life, but the newness should transition into a depth that makes the first love even stronger.

i. A couple that has been married for a long time doesn't always have the same thrill of excitement they had when they first dated. That is to be expected, and is fine – if that excitement has matured into a depth of love that makes it even better than the first love.

ii. There is nothing wrong with that initial excitement, or wanting it to remain or be restored. “When we were in our first love, what would we do for Christ; now how little will we do. Some of the actions which we performed when we were young Christians, but just converted, when we look back upon them, seem to have been wild and like idle tales.” (Spurgeon)

5. (Rev 2:5-6) What Jesus wants the church at Ephesus to do.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place; unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

a. Remember therefore from where you have fallen: The first step in restoration for the Ephesian church is for them to remember. They need to remember from where you have fallen. This means remembering where they used to be in their love for the Lord and for one another.

i. When the Prodigal Son was in the pigpen, the first step in restoration was remembering what life was like back in his father's home ([Luke 15:17-19](#)). This is always the first step in getting back to where we should be with the Lord.

b. Repent: This is not a command to feel sorry, or really to feel anything. It means to change your direction, to go a different way. It is an "urgent appeal for instant change of attitude and conduct, before it is too late." (Robertson)

c. Do the first works: This means that they must go back to the basics, to the very first things they did when you first fell in love with Jesus. These are the things that we never grow beyond.

i. What are the first works?

- Remember how you used to spend time in His Word?
- Remember how you used to pray?
- Remember the joy in getting together with other Christians?
- Remember how excited you were about telling others about Jesus?

ii. We might say that Satan does a masterful job in creating a sense of general dissatisfaction with these first works. Christians will run after almost every new, strange method or program for growth and stability. Our shortened attention spans make us easily bored with the truest excitement. Sometimes we will do almost anything except the first works.

d. Or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place: Jesus gave them a stern warning. Unless they repent, He will remove their light and His presence. When their lampstand was removed, they could continue as an organization, but no longer as a true church of Jesus Christ. It would be the church of Ichabod, where the glory had departed ([1 Samuel 4:21](#)).

i. Apparently, at least in the short term, the Ephesians heeded this warning. In the early second century (not too long after John wrote), Ignatius praised the love and the doctrinal purity of the Ephesians. "You, who are of the most holy Church of the Ephesians, which is so famous and celebrated throughout the world... you, being full of the Holy Spirit, do nothing according to the flesh, but all things according to the Spirit. You are complete in Christ Jesus." (Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians, Chapter 8. From the Ante Nicene Fathers Volume 1, page 52)

ii. From what Ignatius wrote, it seems that the Ephesians returned to their first love without compromising doctrinal purity. That isn't always an easy balance to keep, but the Ephesians apparently kept it, at least for a time.

e. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate: Jesus – probably so the Ephesians would not be overly discouraged – gave this church another compliment. They were complimented because they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans – but who were the Nicolaitans and what were their deeds? The doctrine of the Nicolaitans is also condemned in Revelation 2:15, and in that passage it is related to immorality and idolatry.

- i. Irenaeus (writing in the late second century) described what he knew of the Nicolaitans: “The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John, as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery, and to eat things sacrifice to idols.” (Against Heresies, book 1, chapter 26. From the Ante Nicene Fathers Volume 1, page 352)
- ii. Hippolytus, a student of Irenaeus (writing in the early third century) associated the Nicolaitans with the Gnostics: “There are, however, among the Gnostics diversities of opinion... But Nicolaus has been a cause of the wide-spread combination of these wicked men. [He] departed from correct doctrine, and was in the habit of inculcating indifference of both life and food.” (Refutation of all Heresies, book 7, chapter 24; ANF volume 5, page 115)
- iii. Others have emphasized the root meanings of the words that make up the name Nicolaitans. Nikao-laos means literally “to conquer the people.” Based on this, some point to presumptuous claims of apostolic authority and to the heart that sets up hierarchies and separates the “clergy” from the “laity.” Perhaps the Nicolaitans fulfilled all these aspects, being both an idolatrous immorality and a presumptuous, hierarchical, “hidden mysteries” system typical of Gnosticism.
- iv. The Nicolaitans, like all deceivers that come from the body of Christ, claimed “not that they were destroying Christianity, but that they were presenting an improved and modernized version of it.” (Barclay)

f. Which I also hate: These are powerful words, in that they came from our Savior who is so rich in love. Whoever exactly the Nicolaitans were, and whatever exactly they did and taught, we learn something from Jesus’ opinion of them. We learn that the God of love hates sin, and wants His people to also hate sin.

6. (Rev 2:7a) A general exhortation to all whom will hear.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

- a. He who has an ear: This qualifies everyone – or at least everyone who will listen. This letter was not only written to the church at Ephesus in the Apostle John’s day. It is written to us, and to all Christians throughout the centuries.
- b. Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches: Each one of these seven letters apply to all churches. We must hear what the Spirit says to the churches – not just to one church. These letters – each of them – were meant to speak to you, if you will only have an ear to hear what the Spirit says.

- i. “There were not seven books written, but one book in which these seven epistles were, out of which each church, or the church in it several periods, might learn what concerned it.” (Poole)

ii. “The churches of the land are sprinkled all over with bald-headed old sinners whose hair has been worn off by the constant friction of countless sermons that have been aimed at them and glanced off and hit the man in the pew behind.” (H.W. Beecher)

7. (Rev 2:7b) The promise of a reward.

“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

- a. To him who overcomes: Jesus made this promise to him who overcomes – but what does this overcomer overcome? We usually think of overcoming in dramatic terms of overcoming sin and in spiritual warfare, but here Jesus seems to speak of overcoming of their coldness of heart and lack of love marked by leaving their first love.
- b. I will give to eat from the tree of life: The promise for these overcomers was a return to Eden, a restoration, and eternal life. This was meant first in the eternal sense of making it to heaven, which was no small promise to a church threatened with the removal of Jesus’ presence. It is also meant in the sense of seeing the effects of the curse rolled back in our own lives though walking in Jesus’ redeeming love.
- c. In the midst of the Paradise of God: Originally, the word Paradise meant “a garden of delight.” Eventually, it came to mean “the place where God lives.” Where God is, that is Paradise!