

Lesson 2

Revelation 2:1-7

Christ and the Churches – Ephesus, the careless and loveless church

Memory verse: “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.” Revelations 2:4

If you have ever moved to a new community and had to select a new church home, you know how difficult it is to examine and evaluate a church and its ministry. Imposing buildings may house dying or dead congregations, while modest structures might belong to virile assemblies on the march for the Lord. The church we think is “rich” may turn out to be poor in God’s sight (Rev. 3:17), while the “poor” church is actually rich (Rev. 2:9).

Only the Head of the church, Jesus Christ, can accurately inspect each church and know its true condition, because He sees the internals, not only the externals (Rev. 2:23b). In these special messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor, the Lord gave each assembly an “X ray” of its condition. But He intended for *all* the churches to read these messages and benefit from them. (Note the plural “churches” in Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.)

But the Lord was also speaking to *individuals*, and this is where you and I come in. “He that hath an ear, let him hear.” Churches are made up of individuals, and it is individuals who determine the spiritual life of the assembly. So, while reading these messages, we must apply them personally as we examine our own hearts.

Finally, we must keep in mind that John was a pastor at heart, seeking to encourage these churches during a difficult time of persecution. Before Christ judges the world, He must judge His own people (Ezek. 9:6; 1 Peter 4:17). A purified church need never fear the attacks of Satan or men. “It is a very remarkable thing,” wrote G. Campbell Morgan, “that the church of Christ persecuted has been the church of Christ pure. The church of Christ patronized has always been the church of Christ impure.”

Each of the seven messages begins with a personal description or designation of Jesus Christ taken from the vision of Christ given in Revelation 1. (In the case of Ephesus, see Rev. 1:12, 16, 20.) The Ephesian assembly had enjoyed some “stellar” leadership—Paul, Timothy, and the apostle John himself—but the Lord reminded them that *He* was in control of the ministry, placing the “stars” where He pleased.

How easy it is for a church to become proud and forget that pastors and teachers are God’s gifts (Eph. 4:11) who may be taken away at any time. Some churches need to be cautioned to worship the Lord and not their pastor! Of the seven churches, the Ephesus church was one of the five churches that received a warning from the Lord!

God’s re-entry program can be seen in this quotation (author unknown):
“*Something precious lies beyond the grave of those who maintain their “First Love” or who return to it before it is too late.*”

Things to learn: 1) Christ’s commendation 2) Christ’s condemnation 3) Christ’s correction

Discussion questions:

Q1 How much do you know about the church of Ephesus during the time of the apostles? What were Jesus’ commendations of this church when He spoke to John as recorded in Revelation 2: 2-3 and 6?

Q2 What is “first love” in verse 4 and why did Jesus condemn this church of such a condition?

Q3 When a church neglected her “first love”, can it be overcome and how would that be an encouragement with your relationship with God?