

4. The Message to the Church at Ephesus

In our last topic, we saw that John saw Christ in all of His glory. We also saw that Christ wants all Christians to have an understanding of the main events that are going to happen in the future once the church is taken to heaven. In this topic, we are going to begin looking at the message that Christ gave to each of the seven churches of Asia.

In the next several topics, we will be looking at the letters to the seven churches of Asia. These churches existed at the time this book was written. These churches also give us a picture of seven common kinds of churches that we can find today. In addition, they also give us a picture of a majority of the churches that existed at a particular time in the history of the church. Revelation 2:1-3 says, “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: “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.” The Lord began by talking about the good characteristics of the church in Ephesus.

We see that Christ was walking among the churches so that He could personally examine each church. This was a church that had many good characteristics. First, this was a church where they worked hard as they served the Lord. Second, the word translated “labor” speaks of hard and tiring work. 1 Thessalonians 2:9 says, “For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.” In this verse, we see that Paul, Silas and Timothy worked both day and night to help the Christians in Thessalonica grow. Third, the word translated “patience” in the New Testament is the characteristic of one who does not turn from God’s purpose for him even when experiencing great trials and suffering. James 1:2-4 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” Instead, we see that patience is developed through trials and testing.

Fourth, they could not bear those who are evil. The word translated “evil” means *of a bad nature, troublesome, destructive or injurious*. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.” The church at Ephesus refused to listen and follow those who encouraged them to sin. Fifth, they tested those who say they are apostles and not – can be used in either a good or bad sense. In a good sense, it means to test one’s character and faith to see if it is true and genuine. 2 Corinthians 10:18 says, “For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.” Then, 2 Corinthians 11:13 says about these individuals, “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.” Here, we see that the word is used in a bad sense it speaks of those who are false and not genuine.

Sixth, the word translated “persevered” means *to carry something that is a burden or a heavy load*. Galatians 6:2 says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. The church at Ephesus served the Lord even when it meant carrying heavy loads. Seventh, they had patience.

This is a repeat of characteristic three. Their patience was so great it was mentioned a second time. Eighth, they had labored for My name’s sake. This is another form of characteristic two and means to labor to the point of growing tired. In Luke 5:5 the word is translated “toiled”. That verse says, “But Simon answered and said to Him, ‘Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.’” Ninth, the word translated “become weary” means *to become tired, weary or sick*. Hebrews 12:3 says, “For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”

However, in spite of all these good characteristics, there was one sin in the life of the church at Ephesus that could destroy the church. Revelation 2:4-6 says, “Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. 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.” Here, we see that the one thing the Lord had against the church at Ephesus was that they had left their first love. Notice that it says they left not that they lost their first love.

The word translated “left” means *to forsake, to send away or to let go because it is no longer important*. This word is used in a good sense in 1 John 1:9, where it is translated “to forgive”. That verse says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The word is used in a negative way in Romans 1:27, where we read: “Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” In this verse, in Revelation, it is used in a negative way and speaks of leaving their first love because it was no longer important to them.

Their first love was their love for Christ. Paul had thanked the Lord for the faith and love of the Ephesian church in Ephesians 1:15-16. where we read: “Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.” Then, he prayed that this love might continue to grow in Ephesians 3:17-19, where we read: “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Paul said that they were rooted and grounded in love and prayed that they might continue to grow in their understanding of the love of Christ for them.

Here, John said that this leaving of that first love could result in their removal as a church even though they had sound doctrine, godly character and were hard working. Then, Christ gave three things for any church to do when they realize that they have left their love. First, remember from where you have fallen. This means to remember the love that they had for Christ when they first became Christians. Second, repent! Christ said repent twice or warned them that He would come and quickly remove their lampstand from its place. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 defines repent when those verses say, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

Even good things can become idols when they cause us to leave our first love. Third, repeat (do) the first works. This means to do what we do because we love Christ.

Christ said that they did have one very important thing right in what they were doing. They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which Christ also hated. The word “Nicolaitans” comes from two Greek words. “Nikao” means to conquer. “Laos” means the people. This is also the word from which we get the word “laity”. Diotrefes was such a leader. 3 John 9-10 says, “I wrote to the church, but Diotrefes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.” According to church history, Nicolas was a similar leader. However, he led many people astray into immorality and other evil actions.

Revelation 3:7 concludes the message to the church at Ephesus by saying, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” Only those who have spiritual life can really hear what the Spirit says to the churches. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” This verse makes it clear that spiritual understanding must be given by the Holy Spirit.

Those who have come to the Lord in repentance and faith do become overcomers. 1 John 5:5 defines an overcomer when that verse says, “Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” In this verse, we see that all Christians have become overcomers. In our verse, in Revelation, we see that the reward for those who become overcomers is the privilege to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” Revelation 22:2 says, “In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations.” Once Adam and Eve sinned they were taken out of the Garden of Eden and no longer allowed to eat of the tree of life. Genesis 3:24 says, “So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.” This was necessary so that humans would not eat of the tree of life and live with the consequences of sin forever. However, once we enter heaven we will no longer have sin and will be able to enjoy the tree of life forever.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand and explain why God warned the church at Ephesus to remember, repent and repeat the first works so that they would not be removed. That same thing is true for each of us today in our lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.