



Sermon: Ephesus: Abandoned Love

Series: VII Letters of Revelation

Scripture: Revelation 2:1-7

Speaker: Chantha Chhim

Map 1: Paul's Missionary Journey

Map 2: Turkey

Map 3: Turkey

Revelation 2:1-7, “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

[Revelation 2](#) begins a series of brief letters to [seven churches](#) that existed during the apostle John’s time in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Each of these messages includes information apropos to each church, and from these messages we can draw lessons applicable to our own lives today. The first letter is to the church in Ephesus. [Ephesus](#) was a city on the western coast of Asia Minor, near the mouth of the Cayster River. The city was famous for its temple of Diana (or Artemis, [Acts 19:27](#)), and pilgrims came to Ephesus from all over the Mediterranean world to worship the goddess.

The first thing to note in this letter to the Ephesian church is that the message is from the Lord Jesus Christ: “To the angel [or messenger] of the church in Ephesus . . .” ([Revelation 2:1](#)). This is not John’s message to the Ephesian believers; it is a message from the Lord, the One “who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.” The lampstands are the churches themselves, set as lights in a dark world; the stars are the pastors of the churches, held in God’s hand.

Jesus affirms the Ephesians' positive actions: "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary" ([Revelation 2:2-3](#)). The Ephesian church was a hard-working group of believers full of fortitude. Also to their credit, they were gate-keepers of the truth and did not compromise with evildoers, and they showed patient endurance in bearing up under hardship.

However, Jesus also notes their shortcoming: "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your [first love](#)" ([Revelation 2:4](#)). They were hard-working, but they no longer had the same passion for Christ as when they first believed. Their work was no longer motivated by love.

Jesus called the Ephesians to repent: "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first" ([Revelation 2:5](#)). In this case, the corrective was to remember the heights of their former love, repent (change their mind about their current status), and return to their previous way of doing things. It was time for revival in the church.

Jesus warns His church of impending judgment if they did not repent: "I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" ([Revelation 2:5b](#)). In other words, their punishment would be the disbanding or destruction of the Ephesian church. The light in Ephesus would go out.

Jesus adds another commendation concerning doctrinal purity: "But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate" ([Revelation 2:6](#)). We don't know much about the [Nicolaitans](#) and their doctrine, except that it was heretical. Irenaeus, an early church father in Lyons (modern-day France), wrote that the Nicolaitans promoted fornication and a compromising position on eating food sacrificed to idols, leading many into an unrestrained, carnal lifestyle.

Jesus then promises a blessing to those who heed the word: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" ([Revelation 2:7](#)). The "tree of life" and the "paradise of God" refer to the new heavens and new earth, discussed in [Revelation 21-22](#). Those who conquer, or the "overcomers," are simply believers ([1 John 5:4-5](#)). The Ephesian believers could look forward to the future glory of eternity with the Lord.

Like the Ephesian church, we can easily fall prey to a cold, mechanical observance of religion. Like the Ephesians, many tend to focus solely on doctrinal purity and hard work, to the exclusion of true love for Christ. As this letter shows, no amount of zeal for the truth or moral rectitude can replace a heart full of love for Jesus (see [John 14:21, 23](#); [1 Corinthians 16:22](#)).

1. Dynamic Church

2. Dedicated Church

"I know your works,

3. **Determined Church**

your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil

4. Disciplined Church

5. Discerning Church

but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

6. Declining Church

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Remember: *Remember therefore from where you have fallen;*

Repent: Change your mind. Stop it!

Repeat: Go back and do the works you did at first.

I. **Jesus' letter to the church at Ephesus.**

1. (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.

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 19:10](#), [Acts 20:31](#)). Aquila 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.

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.

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:**

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. (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.**

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.

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. (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.

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)

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.

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.

5. (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.

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**).

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.

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. (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**.

7. (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 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!**