



REVELATION

FOLLOWING THE WAY OF THE LAMB

WEEK 03
Remember your First Love
Rev 2:1-7

Dwelling in the Word

1. Prayerfully read through Revelation 2:1-7 and reflect on the following questions: 1) What words, phrases, or images stood out to you? Why? 2) What does this passage communicate to you about God? 3) How would you like to respond to what God may be desiring to accomplish in you?

Digging Deeper

1. What difference does it make that these seven letters/messages are given to specific first century churches that were facing specific issues? In fact, the entire the book of Revelation is written to this group of churches. How does that change the way we should read them?
2. Jesus is portrayed as intimately acquainted with, and concerned for, the church in Ephesus (as well as the others). What difference does this make for your reading of the passage? What difference does it make for your attitude towards church in general?
3. Ephesus is a prominent city in the New Testament (see Acts 18:19-21; 19:1-41; 20:17-38; Ephesians). How does the message to the church in Ephesus fit with its “important” history? Did they, like the city itself, rely on their proud history? Explain.
4. While there was much to be commended about the Ephesian church (2:2-3, 6), Jesus’ condemnation cuts to the heart: “You have forsaken the love you had at first” (2:4). What makes this charge and its consequences so severe? (Consider what the NT says elsewhere about the importance of love: Matt 5:43; Mark 12:29-31; John 13:34-35; 15:9-17; 1John 3:11; 4:19-21 1Cor 13; Gal 5:13-14; James 2:9-10).
5. Perseverance (the Greek word is also translated “patient endurance”) is mentioned twice in the first three verses of this letter to the church in Ephesus (2:2, 3; see also 1:9, 2:19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). Reread the verses and reflect on what they were actually persevering through.
6. The reward for the victorious is the right to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God (2:7). What does “victory” look like for a Christ follower? What is the significance of the image of the tree of life? (read Gen 2 and Rev 22:1-2, 14, 19).

For Groups

1. The message to the church in Ephesus opens with a section of encouragement. Begin your time together by encouraging one another. Be creative and specific: Take time to speak words of affirmation over each other of the person sitting next to you, or write notes of encouragement, etc.
2. Is there someone in our broader church community that you feel could use a word or action of encouragement? Consider how you could encourage that person this week.
3. In 2:5 we read, “But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first!” (NLT). As you have pursued a life of following Jesus, how has your love for Jesus changed, either in ways that have drawn you closer to him or ways that have maybe led you away from him? How has this impacted your love for others?
4. Brainstorm as a group of ways you can rekindle your first love for God, one another, and your neighbour.

Living it Out

1. Verse 7 says, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” In every age, the Spirit speaks and the church listens! What does this mean for modern Jesus followers? Prayerfully read and reflect on Rev 2:1-7 a number of times this week and allow God’s Spirit to speak to you through this passage.
2. The failure of the church in Ephesus was a failure of the fundamental Christian ethic: love. Think about some practical steps that you can take to rekindle your love (1) for Jesus; (2) one another; and (3) your neighbour. Try to do them with God’s help this week.

SEVEN PASTORAL-PROPHETIC MESSAGES

Revelation 2–3
September 24, 2023 | Tyler Williams

TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

“St. John’s vision is not a private ecstasy... it is ‘for the seven churches that are in Asia.’ All Revelation is. The gospel pulls us into community. One of the immediate changes that the gospel makes is grammatical: we instead of I; our instead of my; us instead of me.” — Eugene Peterson



THE SEVEN CHURCHES

- Written to specific historic churches, at a specific time, to address their specific situation so they can follow the Lamb faithfully in their day.
- We have to understand them first in their context and then discern how they may apply today.
- There is **nothing** to suggest that these seven churches represent a spiritual history of the church.

PASTORAL-PROPHETIC MESSAGES

- The major challenge the churches are facing is pressure and/or persecution with a strong temptation to accommodate.
- Called to “persevere” in their faith (*hypomone* υπομονη) – to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty, *patient endurance*, *steadfastness*, or even *nonviolent resistance* (1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12).

PASTORAL-PROPHETIC MESSAGES

1. Address – to the church’s “angel”
2. Christ’s Self-Description – from opening vision.
3. Commendation – in all but Laodicea.
4. Condemnation – in all but Smyrna & Philadelphia.
5. Challenge – exhortation or warning.
6. Invitation – to hear & heed.
7. Promise – to those who are faithful.

PASTORAL-PROPHETIC MESSAGES

1. Ephesus (2:1-7)
2. Smyrna (2:8-11)
3. Pergamum (2:12-17)
4. Thyatira (2:18-29)
5. Sardis (3:1-6)
6. Philadelphia (3:7-13)
7. Laodicea (3:14-22)

PASTORAL-PROPHETIC MESSAGES

1. **Ephesus** (2:1-7) ←
 2. Smyrna (2:8-11)
 3. Pergamum (2:12-17)
 4. Thyatira (2:18-29)
 5. Sardis (3:1-6)
 6. Philadelphia (3:7-13)
 7. **Laodicea** (3:14-22) ←
- Both churches are in danger of losing their Christian identity

PASTORAL-PROPHETIC MESSAGES

1. Ephesus (2:1-7)
 2. Smyrna (2:8-11)
 3. **Pergamum** (2:12-17) ←
 4. **Thyatira** (2:18-29) ←
 5. **Sardis** (3:1-6) ←
 6. Philadelphia (3:7-13)
 7. Laodicea (3:14-22)
- Varying degrees of those who remained faithful and those who have compromised

PASTORAL-PROPHETIC MESSAGES

1. Ephesus (2:1-7)
 2. **Smyrna** (2:8-11) ←
 3. Pergamum (2:12-17)
 4. Thyatira (2:18-29)
 5. Sardis (3:1-6)
 6. **Philadelphia** (3:7-13) ←
 7. Laodicea (3:14-22)
- Proved themselves faithful despite persecution

PASTORAL-PROPHETIC MESSAGES

- We are going to look at them in four sermons:
 - Ephesus (2:1-7)
 - Pergamum (2:12-17); Thyatira (2:18-29); and Sardis (3:1-6)
 - Smyrna (2:8-11) and Philadelphia (3:7-13)
 - Laodicea (3:14-22)

EPHESUS: REMEMBER YOUR FIRST LOVE

Revelation 2:1-7
September 24, 2023 | Tyler Williams

ADDRESS

- “To the **angel** of the church in Ephesus” (2:1a).
- “Angel” (*angelos* αγγελος) – a spiritual or human envoy who is sent to carry out various missions or tasks, *messenger, angel*.
 - Addressed to the “pastor” of the churches? Or personifying each church’s inner, spiritual reality? Or just addressed to a guardian-like angel?
 - Don’t know, though “Angel” makes sense in apocalyptic writing where angels are active as God’s agents.

ADDRESS

“the church in **Ephesus**” (2:1a).

- Ephesus was the largest city in Asia Minor (pop. 250,000)
- A significant commercial and religious centre.
- The church was well established (see Acts 18:19-21; 19:1-41; 20:17-38; Ephesians).



DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST

“These are the words of him who *holds* the seven stars in his right hand [1:16, 20] and *walks* among the seven golden lampstands” [1:13, 20] (2:1b).

- Jesus “holds the seven stars” – a symbol of authority; reminder that Christ is head of his church.
- Jesus “walks among” them – he is present with them and knows them.

COMMENDATION

“I know your deeds, [that is,] your hard work and your perseverance...” (2:2-3, 6).

- “Hard work” (*κοπος κοπος*) – trouble, work, labor, toil. Being vigilant against false apostles/teaching (2:2b); and the practices of the Nicolaitans (2:6).
- “Perseverance” (*ηγρομονη υπομονη*) – “You have persevered, endured hardships, and not grown weary (2:3).

CONDEMNATION

“But... you have forsaken the love you had at first...” (2:4-5a).

- “Love” (*αγαπη αγαπη*) – Love for Christ? One another? Neighbours? (likely ambiguous).
- Rigid orthodoxy (right belief) has led to failure of orthopraxy (right practice, e.g., love), or at least incomplete orthopraxy.

ANTIDOTE TO THE “EPHESIAN SYNDROME”

Remember!

Consider, remember, recall, call to mind
(μνημονευω).

ANTIDOTE TO THE “EPHESIAN SYNDROME”

Remember! Repent!

Repent! (μετανοεω) – remorse that leads to
changed behaviour.

ANTIDOTE TO THE “EPHESIAN SYNDROME”

Remember! Repent! Rekindle!

Rekindle (ποιεω) – re-do the things you did at first.

CHALLENGE

“If you do not repent, I will come to you and
remove your lampstand from its place” (2:5b).

- A solemn warning that underscores the
importance of love in following Jesus.
- The main thing about following the way of Jesus
is “experiencing God’s love for us through Christ
and then returning that love to him by loving
others” (Gordon Fee, *Revelation*, 27).

INVITATION

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7a).

- Like Jesus in the gospels (Matt 13:9; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; cf. Isa 6:9-10), here the living Christ, by means of the Spirit, calls churches to hear and heed what he is saying.
- While the message may be directed to Ephesus, each of the churches need to hear what is said.
- The Spirit speaks, the church listens.

PROMISE

“To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (2:7b).

- “Victorious” (*nikao νικαω*) – overcome, prevail, conquer.
 - Presumes we are in a spiritual battle (Eph 6:10-17; 2Cor 10:4-5; Rom 8:37-39; 1Pet 5:8-9; James 4:7).
 - The means of victory are crucial: for those aligned with empire: domination and violence; for those aligned with the Lamb: love expressed through faithful perseverance.
- “Tree of life” symbolizes eternal life with God (Rev 22; Gen 2).

RESPONSE

Remember, Repent, and Rekindle our first Love...

Love for God

Love for One Another

Love for Neighbour