**5-14-23 Seven Churches of Revelation (Ephesus)**

**Revelation 2:1-7**

We can all speculate on what Jesus would say or preach if He came to Bethel. But we can know for sure what He said to seven other churches and see what is applicable to us. You will hear me repeatedly say the seven churches spoken of in Revelation existed in the past, but also, we can find these seven churches today, as well as the characteristics of these churches in the lives of individual believers today.

So, as we investigate what Jesus said about the church at Ephesus let us reflect on what we can learn about ourselves.

Ephesus was a church that Paul spent several years ministering at, and left Timothy there as the pastor, even the Apostle John had been pastoring it. Paul wrote 1 & 2 Corinthians while he was there. This church in Ephesus had had some stellar leadership in the past.

Look at how Jesus starts out His letter to the church at Ephesus.

**Read verse 1.**

Who should be in control of the church? Jesus Christ is the One who holds the ministers of the churches in His hands.

1. **Who Is in Charge?**

This means that the minister:

* Is chosen by the hand of Christ.
* Is placed where he is by the hand of Christ.
* Is cared for and protected by the hand of Christ.
* Is expected to be an instrument in the hand of Christ.
* Is responsible to the hand of Christ.
* Is to be held accountable by the hand of Christ.

Jesus Christ is the One who walks in the midst of the churches or the golden candlesticks.

This means that Christ:

* Is present in the very midst of the church.
* Sees and knows all about the church.
* Is present to teach and grow the church.
* Is present to provide and protect the church.
* Is present to guide and direct the church.
* Is present as the Light of the world to give light to the church.
1. **Commendation, The Good News First.**
* **Read verses 2-3.**

This church is commended for 5 things:

1. The church had worked hard and labored for Christ.
* In the Greek text, this gives us a picture of working until you are exhausted, giving everything, you have. Christ expects every church to work for Him with all they have. Every believer in Christ is a servant of His and should serve Him with every ounce of their being. Regardless of what others perceive that we do, the text says, **“I know your work, your labor...”** Jesus knows!
1. The church persevered.
* They continued regardless of the situations and circumstances going on.
1. The church did not tolerate evil men.
* Some of you may be thinking, “How judgmental of them”; but this is not talking about people in the church who were sinful, because they all were sinners. This is talking about tolerating things within the church that we know should not be going on instead of dealing with it.
* As believers it is our job to judge so that we can hold each other accountable. We are not to judge unbelievers, that is God’s job.
1. The church tested all the preachers and teachers of the church and rejected those which were false.
2. The church endured hardships for Jesus. (They did not grow weary)

Could these commendations be said of individuals here at Bethel? Absolutely! I have heard of testimonies and witnessed over the years about God’s people are here at Bethel.

1. **Complaint, The Not So Good News.**
* **Read verses 4.**
* We find in this verse that although this Church was doing all the right things, they had forgotten who they were doing it for.
* Jesus was no longer the priority in their Church. They were putting their lives first. They were more in love with the programs of “their” Church than they were the founder of the Church.
* The Church had lost its love for people. The people had started drifting apart and before they knew it, they had become a “Sunday Best” type of church. There are indicators of this type of church such as criticism, grumbling, jealousy, selfishness, etc... I’m sure existed.
* When faith is institutionalized, like the Pharisees in Jesus’ times, you end up praising God with your lips while your heart is far from Him!
* The Ephesian believers had not only become professional and mechanical, but they had also become deluded by the importance of service.
* They placed service above their love for Jesus Christ.
* Don’t we sometimes feel that way? Our service for God becomes the focus of our relationship with God, as if He is only concerned about what we DO for Him and not who we ARE to Him?
* They may not have stopped loving Him, but that deep, passionate feel for Him has gone. They are still busy for Him, but they are no longer in love with Him!
* We can be busy working for Him and yet not loving Him.
* When you’re in love, nothing you do for your loved one is a burden. When you lose that love, a simple task can be a chore.
* If the things we do for Him today have become more of a chore, a burden, a frustrating routine, it could be because we have fallen away from a love relationship.
* Jesus did not just tell them the problem. He gave them the remedy.
1. **Counsel, How to Fix the Problem.**
* **Read verse 5.**
* Jesus not only tells them the problem, but He gives them the solution to returning to Him.

We are given 3 steps to returning to our First Love:

1. **“Remember from where you have fallen…”**
* Can you remember your love for Christ when you were first saved or when you felt His presence during a great time of need? Remember the Lord’s presence, the love that existed between you and Him.
* Recalling the sweet memories of the past will rekindle your love for a person. Remembering the things someone has done for you rekindles our appreciation for that person. Sadly, we often do that only at funerals when people give eulogies.
* It is when we sit down and think about God’s goodness, when we count all of His blessings, and recall our past experiences with Him, that we are most drawn to Him.
* Remember when He provided for our needs miraculously, when He touched you and healed you from a sickness, when He opened the way for you and you found a new job, a new hope...
* Remember where you were before God found you and saved you? Remember where you were headed? Remember all the things He has done out of His love and faithfulness to you?
1. **“Repent…”**
* You realized that you have moved away from where you ought to be. Or rather, your heart has moved away.
* Repent is to stop where you are and turn around.
* Don’t go on with the same routine; don’t carry on with the busy serving. Or with all the burdens and the stress.
* Don’t argue and make excuses, stop explaining, and justifying and get right.
* Stop and get back to Jesus.
1. **Return, “do the first works…”**
* Remember the time you were excited about worship? Wanting to read the Bible, and make markings? Longing to get together in fellowship?
* Get back to doing those things. It can be different for each of us, but you need to get back to DOING what you did at first.
* Or maybe we have allowed something to creep into our life that wasn’t there at the beginning – a sin, a habit, a relationship, an attitude. You did not have it at first.
* As believers we must repent and ask God for strength to ‘remove’ it from us.
* Our love for Christ is more important to Him than all our service to Him.
* Strict obedience and service alone are not enough. Love for Jesus must come first. The thing that sustains us is love.

**Matthew 22:37, Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’**

1. **Consequences, or Else.**
* **Read verse 5-6.**
* Jesus warned them of what would happen if they did not heed to His counsel.

Jesus’ 2-fold warning:

1. Jesus warned them that He would remove their Church.
* **“I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place…”**
* Let me point out to each of you that just because a local congregation has a building and some people coming to services doesn’t mean that it is a living church. There are many churches that are dead, and their buildings are like dead corpses. If Christ’s presence is removed from a church, they have had it!
1. Doctrine purity is not enough.
* **Verse 6** tells us that they stood up against the false teachings of the Nicolaitans. They fought against those things that were wrong and that is great; but without love at the center of the church, it is just a place full of rules and regulations. It becomes a place of dos and don’ts, not a place that reflects the love, mercy, and grace of Jesus Christ.

*The name “Nicolaus” means “conquer the people” and suggests a separation of clergy and laity in the churches. This sin began as “deeds” in Ephesus (v. 6) but became a doctrine in Pergamos. So it goes: deceivers introduce false activities into the church, and before long these activities are accepted and encouraged. -Warren Wiersbe*

1. **Conqueror’s, victors!**
* **Read verse 7.**
* The **“overcomer”** is a person who overcomes, conquers, and gains victory. All Christians will overcome in the end.
* While we are on this earth, we need to overcome those things that pull our heart and love away from Christ. Whatever possessions, whatever pleasures, whatever it is that has dampened the believer’s first love for Christ-it is that thing that the believer must overcome.
* Because we are “conquerors” through Jesus Christ, we “will be given the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God”.

**Conclusion**

The invitation for the “lost” unbelievers: If you are here today having never received God’s gift of salvation, then you will not enter Heaven when you leave this earth. The Bible says you must believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God raised from the dead and you will be saved.

The invitation for the “saved”: Christians, have you allowed Jesus to be knocked out of first place in your life? If so, you need to remember, repent, and do those things you once did.