

The Church of Ephesus – Losing Our First Love

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church

Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.

April 7, 2024

Text: Revelation 2:1-7

Purpose: Jesus has left His church with seven letters found in the Book of Revelation. These letters apply to today's church as well. If we would be open to the Spirit's leading, we can identify ourselves and repent and return to our first love – Jesus Christ.

I don't know about you, but I have found I have a great talent at some amazing things!



- Forgetting someone's name 10 seconds after they tell me.
- Buying produce...and throwing it away two weeks later.
- Digging through the trash for the food box I just tossed, because I already forgot the directions.
- Making plans. And then immediately forgetting what those plans were!
- Leaving laundry in the dryer until it wrinkles. Then turning on the dryer to dewrinkle. Then forgetting it again.
- Calculating how much sleep I'll get if I can just "fall asleep right now."¹



Today I want to begin a new sermon series based on the seven churches found in chapters two and three in the Book of Revelation. I think now would be a good time for us as a church to re-evaluate why we are here. What is the mission and purpose of Spilman Memorial Baptist Church? What are we supposed to be doing? Are we focused upon the things we need to be focused upon? Are we really about the Lord's business or are we only going through the motions without any real purpose and direction?

I bring these seven sermons to you because I feel we are at a place in the life of this church, where we honestly need to grapple once again with some important issues. We need to do some soul searching and begin to ask some of the difficult questions. I am not coming here today to “beat the sheep” as one minister once called some of his sermons. Rather, I am here proclaiming God’s clear and specific words to His church.



As we work through some of these churches over the next several months, keep in mind that not every word to every church applies to us here at Spilman. But also keep in mind, that maybe they are some words of rebuke and conviction that actually do apply to us here at 601 Madison Ave. Kinston NC. It is my prayer that the Spirit of God will speak to our hearts and convict us in the areas we need convicting and the Spirit will guide us to repent and turn back to the Lord and honor Him with our lives, resources, and service.

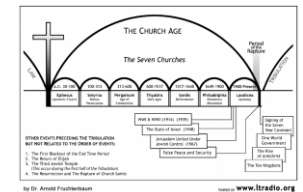


Back in May of last year, Amber and I had the opportunity to travel to Greece. While on that trip, we visited the city of Ephesus as well as the Isle of Patmos. John the beloved disciple was in exile while on the Isle of Patmos. We visited the cave where John dictated this prophetic book. This vision of John’s was a revelation of Jesus Christ. That is why the title of the Book is “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is not “Revelations” as some pronounce, it is a singular, declaration of one person, Jesus Christ. In chapter one we see a fearsome Christ standing before John causing him to quake in fear. Jesus wants His followers, the members of these seven churches, to grasp what **was**, what **is**, and what **is to come**.



In Revelation 1:19, Jesus is giving us the key to understand this apocalyptic book, this book of eschatology, this writing of the end times. Jesus said to John, “*Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.*” Chapters two and three deal with the things that are presently seen. Chapters four to the end of the book deal with the things that will take place later – after the church is removed from this world.

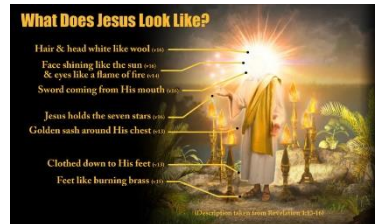
Over the years, many people have written volumes on this passage of scripture. Some have interpreted these seven churches to be the seven phases the church is to go through. If you



This church was established by Paul on his second missionary journey. He returned later and spent three years there. As you study the Book of Acts, you will see Paul sent Timothy to this city to become its pastor. Later John the Apostle, the one that is writing this letter now, became Ephesus' pastor. It was while John was serving there in Ephesus that he was taken captive and exiled to the Isle of Patmos.

II. The Description of Christ

As I mentioned earlier, in each letter to each church there is a description attributed to Christ. In this letter to the Ephesians, Christ is portrayed as *“the one who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamp stands.”* This is a demonstration of God's power to lead and guide the church, no matter what problems may arise.



III. The Diagnosis of the Church

In almost every church there are many things for which the church can be praised. With Ephesus, we find five positive things and one negating characteristic mentioned.



First, this church was a **dynamic** church. It was busy working and doing what the Lord would have asked them to do. Sometimes we want to steer away from the idea of works because we are not saved by them. We are saved by grace. But over and over our faith is demonstrated by what we are

willing to do for God. These people were praised for the good they did in the community.

Some churches spend their entire lives in maintenance mode. They are only maintaining what someone else has started. They never transition into the mission mode. But that was not true for those at Ephesus – they were busy working.

It was a **dedicated** church as well. As David Jeremiah in his book, *Escape the Coming Night*, related to this study on Ephesus said, there is a difference between the idea of work and labor. For someone to labor, it is exhausting. It means going and going even when you are tired.



True work for God involves personal sacrifice and dedication. It requires something that is costly to you. How many of us simply tip God and never really sacrifice? King David was to bring a sacrifice unto the Lord. When he arrived at the place of sacrifice, the man who lived there offered David, free of charge, his oxen and the plowing implements for the kindling. David refused because he realized the offering had to cost him something for it to be truly a sacrifice. He purchased the land, oxen, and wood at a great cost and presented it unto the Lord.



The scripture says that Ephesus was dedicated. It was also a **determined** church as well. The word patience is used twice in reference to this church. It was patient in its service and it was patient in its suffering. How many of us were patient

in our service this past week? Did we grumble as we served or were we patient? If we were to be persecuted for exercising our faith, would we have grumbled, complained, and demanded our rights? Or would we have been patient?

This church at Ephesus was under severe persecution as we can read in Acts 19. They were hated and despised, but they did not give up. Christians like the Ephesians get better the tougher things get.

It was also a **disciplined** church. Verse two says that they “cannot bear those who were evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.”

They were willing to test those people that floated through town claiming a superior relationship to God. They knew the word and tested those that were contrary to the word of God and actually removed them from the fellowship.

There are some churches that actually implement church discipline. There was a time when churches took membership seriously and put people out of the church. They did not want one member’s actions to reflect poorly on the reputation of the church in the community and removed their names from membership. The church records in the church that I served in Fremont had removed a few for “unfaithfulness.” I am not sure what they were unfaithful to ... but it was enough to remove their names.

How many names would we have to remove today if we once again implemented “unfaithfulness” as a reason to remove their names from the roll? Would it be a good thing to purge our rolls of those who never come, never give and

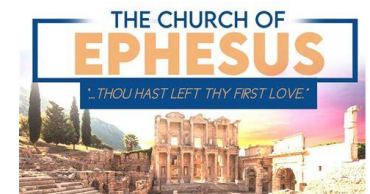


never show up? I don’t know of any group that would allow you to remain a voting member and not attend and support it monetarily and with attendance. But the church at large has become a beggar for members and will retain even the worst unrepentant sinner today in membership. We have cheapened membership and not insisted our members attend, participate, and support the work and purpose of the church. Because of that many churches are weak and unproductive.



Ephesus was a dynamic church, a dedicated church, a determined church, a **disciplined** church and it was also a **discerning** church. It fought hard to remain pure in its doctrine and teachings. They would not allow someone into their church that claimed apostolic authority who were not true apostles. According to history, there were some people traveling across the area around 150 A.D. that claimed they had received their authority through association with one of the original apostles. Ephesus barred those individuals from participating and exercising authority over them. They barred the group called the Nicolaitans. Scripture is not very clear about who these followers were, but some have speculated they elevated the clergy over the laity. Others have put forward the idea that they allowed and promoted sexual immorality. Either way, the church stood against them and upheld pure doctrine.

This church was doing many things well, but as scripture says, they were lacking in one thing – only one little thing. But it was

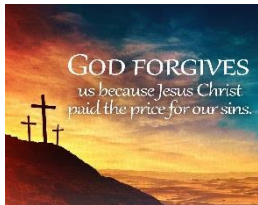


enough to catch the watchful eye of Jesus Christ. They had left their first love.



You know how young love can be – it can be so powerful, invigorating, life giving, captivating, enthralling, engaging, and possessing your very thoughts day and night. Maybe some of us need to think way, way back in order to grasp

this idea of returning to our first love. The members at Ephesus had forgotten why they were there in the first place. They had become so engrossed in the day-to-day activity of work, labor, dedication, devotion, discipleship, discernment, that they forgot about Jesus. They were faithful, but they forgot the reason they first came together as a group.



They forgot that Jesus had died for their sins. They once were so very far from God, and now they found freedom and forgiveness. They were once estranged but now they were restored. Jesus was calling them back to the place of beginning.

So many of us that have been married for years, need to be reminded occasionally that we need to go back and renew our commitment to our spouse. The church at Ephesus needed this same reminder. A marriage that drifts will eventually disintegrate into nothing but convenience and boredom. A church that drifts will eventually disintegrate into boredom and members will stray away to other areas of interest.



IV. The Demands Made to the Church

Fortunately, Jesus gives us the answer. It has a three-part solution.



Jesus says we are to **remember**. Remember what our life once was before we met Christ. Remember how lost we were in our sin.

Remember how we were estranged, unwelcomed, and rejected. When you first came to the Lord, you were excited about the newness you felt. Many of you wanted to tell everyone you met about Jesus. It was exciting to know that one day, when we die, that God has prepared a place for us, where we would no longer be condemned for our sin, but we would be forgiven and welcomed into God's family. Our greatest need is forgiveness for sin. It is not wealth, it is not health, it is not friends or family. Our greatest need is forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Jesus has given this to us and we need to remember that.

Secondly, Jesus says we are to **repent**. To repent we are to “turn around” turn from what we have been doing and go back to what we should be doing.

Jesus said to go back and “*do the first works*” once again. If you simply don't have the feelings of love you once had, Jesus said we should go and do those works again, those feelings of love will return. That love will be restored.



If you are married and you simply don't have that deep love like you once had, then maybe you need to listen to this advice and go and do those things you once did and that love will be rekindled. Take him or her out to eat. Go see a

movie together. Walk on the beach. Spend time with your spouse. Buy him clothes or buy her some flowers. Do the things that you once did to win his or her love.



I heard the story of a wife that complained her husband never said “I Love You.” He turned to her and said, “I said I loved you when I married you. If I change my mind, I will let you know.” That is a marriage that is in trouble.

We need to give attention to our relationship with the Lord or we too will be like that man. We need to nurture our walk with the Lord.

The same applies to the church. Come to Wednesday night Bible study where we have started a new study on the Book of Revelation, starting in Chapter one. Get involved in Sunday school again. Begin giving and tithing again. Get involved in a local mission project. Do the works you once did and that love will return.



When we have remembered and repented, we need to **repeat** those works over and over. Don't become weary of doing good. Keep doing what you know is right. Keep serving with gladness. Where the body goes, the heart will follow. Trust God that by doing the first works once again, that love will return and flourish.

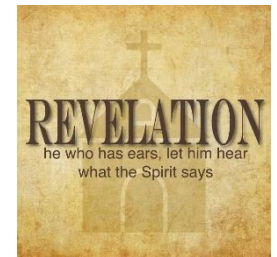
The consequence of failing to do as Jesus requests is tragic. Jesus said He would “*remove His lampstand*” from among the church in Ephesus. There is nothing more tragic than the remnants of a church attempting to do its work purely in

the flesh, instead we need to be a living body of believers, operating out of love for Christ and abiding in the Spirit.



To those that overcome, and repent, Jesus has promised us the privilege to eat from the Tree of Life. Even if the rest of the church doesn't repent or return to its first love, individually, we are promised everlasting life because we have been obedient and repented. Individually we are called to be faithful – no matter what others around us do.

My closing words to you this morning are the same words Jesus gave to the church at Ephesus, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*”



LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹Micky's Funnies, A Talent Funny, Jan. 10, 2024, forwarded by Lynn Garbert

² Outline from David Jeremiah's – *Escape the Coming Night*

