

The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Behold I Am Coming Soon

Part 2: What is. (What John was seeing.) Revelation 2-3

“The Letter to the Church in Ephesus”

I. Introductory Observations Concerning the Letters to the Churches

A. Location of the Churches

1. Map of Asia Minor or modern Turkey



B. Common Features found in each letter with some exceptions

1. To: “For the messenger from the church in _____”
2. From: “The One Who...” and followed by a title or an attribute of Christ as described in 1:12-18¹
 - a) Common pattern of, “The One Who...,” see 2:1; 2:8; 2:12; 3:1
 - b) Exceptions: see 2:18; 3:7; 3:14”

¹ Garlands states that “the title (or attribute) which Jesus assumes in each letter...are tailored to the message which attends each letter.” (See III.B)

3. That He knows: “I *know*...”
 - a) The word “know” is best understood as “having known”. It’s like saying, “I am very well aware of...”
 - (1) This saying is a great reminder that our All-Powerful, eternal Lord Jesus truly “holds the seven stars in His right hand,” and is, therefore, fully aware of the various situations, trials and tribulations facing the seven churches (lampstands).
 - b) His knowledge is precise.
 - (1) He knows the precise commendation and encouragement.
 - (2) He knows precisely the areas of weakness and failing.
4. Commendations and Concerns. Each letter contains both.
 - a) The commendations usually follow the “I know” statement.
 - b) The concern usually begins with, “But, I have this against you.”
 - c) NOTE: Because He is All-Powerful and All-Knowing (see 1:14) His commendations and concerns are precise.
5. Action: REPENT
 - a) Look for these words:
 - (1) “remember”
 - (2) “repent”
 - (3) “do”
 - (4) “hold firmly”
6. Warning
 - a) You will see that the warning demands **obedience to the call to action**, “or else.”
 - b) NOTICE: The consequence for failure to act promptly and obediently COMES DIRECTLY FROM THE LORD according to His infallible Word!
7. Counsel (I chose to follow John MacArthur’s lead; “Counsel” over “reward”)
 - a) NOTICE: The reward of His counsel COMES DIRECTLY FROM THE HAND OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST and His abundant grace, mercy, compassion and love!

- II. Background information on the city of Ephesus: the setting and situation of the Church.
 - A. About Ephesus (Thank to William Barclay)

1. Pergamum was the capital of the province of Asia, but Ephesus was the greatest city. It had the title, "**Light of Asia**".
2. Ephesus was **the gateway to Asia**. It had the largest and most busy port.
3. Having the largest port in Asia it was known as **the Market of Asia**. It may well be, writes Barclay, that in Revelation 18:12-13, John was setting down a description of the varied riches of the marketplace at Ephesus
4. Also, being a port city, sadly the many Christians that were rounded up in Asia were being shipped off to Rome from the port in Ephesus. Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, called Ephesus **the Highway of the Martyrs**.
5. Ephesus was a very sinful city. Everything detestable and immoral was found in Ephesus. They worshiped the goddess Artemis. The Temple of Artemis was huge. But if you came to this temple you found "a cesspool of iniquity filled with temple prostitutes, dancers, eunuchs, drunkenness, orgies.
6. But **right in the middle of this den of sin God birthed the Church**. Our Lord Jesus, through the preaching of the Word of Christ by His Apostles and faithful followers, stormed the gates of Hell and the Light shined in the darkness!

B. The Founding of the Church

1. It is not known when, or by whom the church was founded. But we know:
 - a) In Acts 2:9 we are told that there were Jews from Asia in the crowd on the Day of Pentecost. So they took the gospel home.
 - b) In Acts 19:1, when Paul arrived in Ephesus (52 A.D.) on his second missionary journey, he found some disciples there. He spent at least three years teaching and making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ (see Acts 19:8, 10; 20:31)
2. Paul wrote his epistle to the Ephesian churches in 60-62 A.D. And by all appearances at that time the Church was thriving and growing.

C. The Apostle John and the Church in Ephesus

1. Garland writes, "Tradition holds that John left Jerusalem prior to its destruction and in about A.D. 66 relocated to Ephesus which was the main place of his ministry in the closing years of his life."
 - a) When exactly was John exiled to Patmos? I do not know. But, we do know that The Revelation was given to him around 96 A.D.

D. The Condition of the Church in Ephesus at the writing of this letter from the Lord.

1. See “The Letter to the Church in Ephesus”

III. (2:1-7) The Letter to the Church in Ephesus

A. To: The messenger from the church in Ephesus

1. Why the “messenger” is not an heavenly angel

a) The angels of God do not need to heed a word of repentance.

(1) They worship God. (Revelation 5:11-12)

(2) They obey God. (Psalm 103:20-21)

B. From: “The One” (followed by a title or attribute. See note in I.B.2 above)

1. The One *who holds the seven stars in His right hand* and

a) NOTICE: The Title Jesus assumes here would be very encouraging to the believers in Ephesus, and is very encouraging to us as we consider the *concern* Jesus reveals to this church; namely, they “have lost their first love.” Our Lord assures them that because it is He who **holds the seven stars in His right hand**, it is therefore He who keeps them secure.

b) “He holds them securely in His right hand.” And, “He has not left them, but they have left Him.

c) Therefore, there is hope in Jesus’ call for their repentance!

2. The One *Who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands*.

a) “**He** who walks in the midst of the churches **will always be with them**, even though they have forsaken a close relationship with Him.” (Garland)

(1) Matthew 28:20– “And, lo, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age!”

C. (2:2) He Knows– “I know your deeds (accomplishments) **and commends them**

1. He has known the reality of their deeds

a) I think that means He has known the genuineness and sincerity of their deeds.

b) Not one aspect of their deeds has gone unnoticed. In particular...

2. “Your toil and endurance” He **commends** their faithfulness under trial

a) The normal Christian life is full of toil (hard work)

(1) 2 Corinthians 11:27, “I have been involved in labor and hardships, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, many occasions when there was no food; I have been cold and naked.”

b) Endurance is a key attribute of faithful Christian living!

(1) Believers are to persevere under trials and find renewal daily in Christ and His strength.

(a) Galatians 6:9– “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the right time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (endurance, perseverance)

(b) 2 Thessalonians 3:13– “Brothers, don’t give up on doing what is right.”

(c) Hebrews 12:3– “**Consider Him** Who endured such opposition from sinners against Himself, **so that you** will not get tired and give up–”

3. He knows, and **commends them** for they cannot tolerate the evil practices of men masquerading as apostles.

a) They have been diligent to test these men and found them to be liars, false apostles!!

(1) The greatest danger facing the church in all ages comes from within the church. (Acts 20:29-31)

(a) When sound doctrine is compromised.

(b) When deeds and words are attributed to the Holy Spirit but are not.

(c) When Christ is denied supremacy

(2) The false apostles are marked by covetousness, deception and hypocrisy.

(a) 2 Peter 2:1– these false teaching “secrete” their false teaching by degrees. A little at a time.

(3) The believers in Ephesus are commended for “testing” these men.

(a) John urged the church to “test the spirits, to determine whether they are of God.” (1 John 4:1)

4. He knows that they have persevered and endured hardships and not grown weary and **commends** them for their endurance.

a) They are **commended** for bearing up for **His Name's sake**.

(1) This is a quality prized by the Lord. Jesus predicted that He would be the cause of believers being persecuted when they stand firm for His Name!

- (a) Matthew 5:11– “Blessed are you when people insult you, and persecute you and tell all sorts of evil lies against you because of Me.”

D. (2:4) His Concern

1. “But I have this against you: you have forsaken your first love.”
 - a) Despite all that He commends them for, He has a deep concern.
2. The basis of His concern
 - a) The Ephesians were well familiar with the topic of “love”.
 - (1) 20 times “love” is mentioned in Ephesians.
 - b) The love with which He is concerned includes “love for God and Christ, love for each other, and love for the lost.” (MacArthur)
3. The severity of concern
 - a) The church in Ephesus was almost 40 years old!
 - (1) O, how easy to forget the most fundamental calling for the Christian
 - (2) To esteem God above all! See Ephesians 5:1-2
 - (a) Be imitators of God
 - (i) (think of, and do what God loves)
 - (b) Walk in love **in the same way that Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us...**
 - (i) Self-giving, self-sacrificing like Christ

E. (2:5a) Action

1. Remember: Remember the height from which you have fallen
 - a) When someone *drifts* from God in their relationship their spiritual condition is poor.
 - b) These people had already fallen into spiritual decline.
 - c) This describes a loss in spiritual zeal and fervor (Rom.12:10-11)
 - d) Their deeds were merely works without any zeal for the gospel.
 - (1) It is not unusual for ministries to become simply social services. We must recover the supremacy of Christ and His gospel as our reason for works of service.
 - e) Their doctrine became dead orthodoxy
 - (1) Spurgeon: “When love dies orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse, a powerless formalism.
2. Repent:

- a) Retrace your steps and go back to the point where you went astray; the point where we grew tired of Christ and the gospel.
 - b) And call upon the Lord in full dependence as you did at first.
- 3. Do: "Do the things you did at first."
 - a) When everything you did was for Christ and His glory. A good exhortation, which gives a road map to "do the things you did at first" is found in Hebrew 10:32-35
 - (1) **"Remember** those earlier days after you had been enlightened, when you stood your ground in great battles involving suffering? Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the seizure of your possessions, knowing that you have better and lasting possessions. So, do not throw away your confidence, which carries with it great reward."
 - (2) Think: Do what you do with your heart and mind turned to and dependent upon the Lord!
- F. (2:5b) Warning: "Or else..." (KJV)
 - 1. Remember, Repent and Do (obey) "or else" The Lord Himself will come and *remove* their lampstand from its place.
 - a) Failure to repent **will** result in the testimony of that church being silenced. The Lord will no longer bless its presence in the community.
 - (1) The organization may remain but it will be dead.
 - b) The Lord will remove His people and His light from that dead and forsaken church, and move His testimony and His people elsewhere to form, or strengthen other churches. (Garland)
- G. (2:7) The Reward: For a fuller treatment of this verse go to **section I in the 5th message of our Revelation series, "The Letter to the Church in Smyrna" from Revelation 2:8-11.**