

THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS



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Week Two - January 16, 2022

Writing a study on the church of Ephesus brought back memories of great sorrow. We were once part of a thriving church that did many things right, but “lost their first love.” It was heartbreaking. This letter from Jesus to Ephesus not only has a clear message of “what happened” and “what the problem is,” but because of God’s grace, it gives us a solution and a promise.

DAY 1

“Ephesus was an inland city three miles from the sea, but the broad mouth of the Cayster River allowed access and provided the greatest harbor in Asia Minor. Four great trade roads went through Ephesus; therefore it became known as the gateway to Asia. It was the center of the worship of Artemis (Greek), or Diana (Roman), whose temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The apostle John was pastor of the church when he was arrested by Domitian and exiled 50 miles southwest to the island of Patmos.” - **MacArthur Bible Commentary**

We are going to start our study this week by looking back at the life of the Apostle John. Look up each of these verses and use the blanks to write something you observe about John. Take special note of anything related to his relationship with Jesus

Mark 1:19-20 _____

Mark 5:37-43 _____

John 1:35-40 _____

John 13:21-26 _____

John 20:3-8 _____

Matthew 17:1-9 _____

Matthew 20:20-24 _____

Mark 3:17 _____

John 21:1-7 _____

John 19:26-27 _____

Answer in your own words: Who is the Apostle John?

DAY 2

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands." - **Revelation 2:1**

As you answer these questions, look back at what John writes in Revelation 1.

Who is "the angel of the church?" _____

Who are "the seven stars?" _____

What are "the seven lampstands?" _____

ENCOURAGING THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

"I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance." - **Revelation 2:2a**

How would define the word 'perseverance'?

This letter is addressed to the leadership of the church of Ephesus. We're going to take a little journey through scripture to look at other passages on church leadership and the qualities that ought to be reflected in them. As you consider this, read 1 Peter 5:2-3. List four attributes of a 'God honoring' leader.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____

Read Acts 20:28 and Matthew 20:26-27. Describe in your own words how leaders are to care for their flock.

What leadership requirements are found in Titus 1:7-9?

"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." - **Revelation 2:2b**

You may have heard the phrase: "a wolf in sheep's clothing". This refers to a leader that may show the outward appearance of a quality shepherd, but internally is out for something else. The God-honoring church, like Ephesus here, is one that uses spiritual discernment and carefully evaluates leadership by their doctrine and behavior. And we should be using scripture to shape that evaluation!

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." - **Phil. 2:3**

"Be sure you know the condition of your flocks; give careful attention to your herds;" - **Prov. 27:23**

How do these two verses work together to reveal the 'heart condition' of a Godly leader?

"You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary." - **Revelation 2:3**

The church of Ephesus was founded nearly 40 years before this and remained tirelessly faithful to God's Word no matter the obstacles. Spend some time in prayer for our leaders and our church. Redeemer Bible Church is 6 years old. Pray that 34 years from now the same would be said for us.

DAY 3

"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love." - **Revelation 2:4**

This is the climax of the letter. Though Ephesus had much to be commended for, it's clear they had one major problem. Jesus' address to this church builds to this moment.

On day one, you spent some time looking up scriptures about the life of the Apostle John. It is clear he had a unique and special relationship with Jesus. It seems perhaps he understood agape love more than the other disciples. Yet even the very church he pastored at Ephesus was being corrected for forsaking their first love.

How do you think this happens to a church that seems to be doing everything right?

What causes church leadership to do this?

What about the congregation? How would a church body start going down this path?

Ask God to examine your own heart: Is Jesus your first love? Was there ever a time you were more passionate about your love for Jesus than you are right now? What is the trajectory of your love for Christ over the last few years?

DAY 4

"Remember the height from which you have fallen! **REPENT!** And do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." - **Revelation 2:5**

What 'things' did they do at first? What 'things' would be considered pleasing to God?

In your assessment, would you say that Redeemer Bible Church is doing the 'things' referred to here?

What will happen if there is no repentance?

What do you think would happen to Redeemer if we lost our first love and didn't repent?

"But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." - **Revelation 2:6**

Who are the Nicolaitans?

"Nicolas means 'one who conquers the people.' Irenaeus writes that Nicolas, who was made a deacon in Acts 6, was a false believer who later became apostate; but because of his credentials, he was able to lead the church astray. And, like Balaam, he led the people into immorality and wickedness. The Nicolaitans were involved in immorality and assaulted the church with sensual temptations. Clement of Alexander wrote, "They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence." Their teaching perverted grace and replaced liberty with license." - **MacArthur Bible Commentary**

Jesus now encourages the church again. What does he encourage them with now?

Consider your own life in light of the commendations and corrections of Jesus in this letter. What is encouraging? What is convicting? What do you need to continue with in confidence? What do you need to confess and turn from?

DAY 5

"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**

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. In Hebrew, the word hear is shema. This passage in Deuteronomy starts out that way. "Hear o Israel." This is the Jewish confession of faith. This word shema (hear) is an action word. Sometimes we can think that just means "listen." But listening is incomplete. Shema carries with it an understanding of response. It means to listen AND respond. If you haven't responded, you haven't heard. You might note this word repeats in each letter to the churches-along with 'repent' and 'overcome.'

Given this understanding, what would it look like for us to truly "shema what the Spirit says to the churches"?

Overcome is my favorite word in all the letters. To overcome is to be a victor and one who conquers. It recalls these words from 1 John 5:4-5. "...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the son of God."

This promise restores our faith relationship with God through the Son and gives the gift of eternal life! Are you an overcomer?

How does living as an overcomer affect your perspective day-in and day-out?

Since this letter is written directly to church leadership, what is our responsibility as a church body to help them never to 'forsake their first love'? We are to **cover them in prayer**. Pray for their health. Pray especially for spiritual protection around them every day! Pray for their families!
