

TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

Revelation 2:1-7

Intro: The greetings of the Apostle John in chapter 1, verses 4 and 5, make it very clear that this book was actually an epistle to the seven churches mentioned in chapters 1, 2, and 3 of this book. It is also thought that the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, earlier in the NT, was also a circular letter to the same churches. This idea has grown out of the fact that in some of the MSS of Ephesians, the words, “at Ephesus,” are missing.

This has led to the idea that the letters to the seven churches of Asia were an indication of the prominence and importance of these churches in the first century. They were predominantly Gentile churches, being in Gentile territory, although there probably were Jewish believers in all of them. But the point is that these churches were very influential, and it could probably be said that, as these seven church go, so does the work in the other churches go.

Those of you who have read these letters, know that our Lord Jesus followed a certain plan as far as the content of each letter was concerned – not exactly, but similar enough that those who read these seven letters, can hardly escape the notice if they are paying attention to what they are reading. Let me take the letter to the church at Ephesus as an illustration, in a general way, of the plan:

- 1) The angel of the particular church to which the letter was especially addressed, the one we can call, *the addressee*. If you get a letter from someone else, you are the addressee.
- 2) The identification of the One from Whom the letter came, the Lord Jesus Christ, taken from the appearance of the Lord in chapter 1. So our Lord is *the addresser*. If you write a letter to someone else, you are the addresser.
- 3) What the Addresser knew about the church, usually a commendation.
- 4) Any rebukes which the church needed, coupled with a warning(s).
- 5) How corrections were to be made.
- 6) An appeal for those heard to hear what the Spirit was saying to the churches. So each church was to listen as though all seven letters were written to all seven churches.
- 7) Finally, a promise.

Not all of these details are always present, nor are they necessarily in the same order. But these points are generally the points that the Lord was

making with the churches. Let us examine them in this first of the letters, to the church at Ephesus.

Before we begin, however, let me make this point. Just as these letters were each primarily addressed to one church, but, in addition, were to be listened to, and applied to all seven churches, so like the rest of the Bible, these letters are to be listened to and applied to churches everywhere, and until the end of time. What the Lord approved of in those seven churches, is what He approves of and encourages in Trinity Bible Church. What displeased Him, still displeases Him. What they needed to do, we need to do, and what they were not to do, we are not to do. So there is a very personal message for all churches in these letters which were first written and sent to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Not everything in every letter would apply to us, but what does apply, needs to be applied. And the same is true of all of the NT epistles.

Now let us begin with:

I. THE ADDRESSEE (Rev. 2:1a).

It is written “unto the angel of the church of Ephesus.” Remember that “angel” basically means *a messenger*, and is generally taken to mean the pastor of the church. Why the pastor? The answer to this question is a major point to be made in Pastoral Theology which might be taught in a theological seminary.

A pastor is not free to lead a church any way that he wants to. *He is obligated by the very position which he holds to hear the Word of God himself, and then deliver it to the people over whom God has given him oversight.* The Lord gives us our message; we are under a divine obligation to give the Word to the people of God.

Now in this particular instance the pastor of the church at Ephesus was to read the Word, to really hear it, and then, on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ, to give the message to the people of God.

There may be, and doubtless were, things in this letter which the believers in Ephesus may not have wanted to hear, but the pastor was not to be guided by the likes and dislikes of the people. He must in love and grace

give the Lord's message to the Lord's people. To do anything else, or anything less, would mean that he was being unfaithful to the calling that had come to him from the Lord.

I know that as a pastor, I can't be reminded of this fact too often. And that same charge is upon everyone in Trinity Bible Church who stands before us to minister. *Our message is the Bible, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else!*

Now the second point:

II. THE ADDRESSER (Rev. 2:1b).

Cf. Rev. 1:12-13, 16a, 20b.

After the Lord was raised from the dead, He appeared to His disciples for forty days, and then He returned to heaven, but only after He had said to them, "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). How could this be? How can He be there in heaven, and here on earth? And how can He be equally present with all of His people all over the earth, not just with them as churches, but with them as individuals? We can't be two places at one time, *but He can and He is because He is God!*

Have you heard of the omnipresence of God? Yes, you have! And this is what it means. He is present with every church, every individual believer, all of the time! He loves the Church. He gave Himself for the Church. He is present with us today as we gather together. He really is. And so He knows all about us. And this brings me to another great theological Word: He is omniscient! He knows more about Trinity Bible Church than we do! And He knows more about each one of us than we know about ourselves. Seven times, once each in the seven letters, the Lord said, "I know..." Do you think that He wants us to believe that?

What did He know?

III. THE LORD'S COMMENDATION (Rev. 2:2-3).

He knows, and He remembers. Cf. Heb. 6:10, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and (labor of) love..." But what did He know? He commended them for three things:

- 1) For their diligence in living for Him and serving Him.
- 2) For their hatred of evil.
- 3) For their orthodoxy, their stand against false apostles.
- 4) For their persistence under affliction.

All of these were commendable, and the Lord did not overlook them. But these were not all that He knew.

IV. HIS REBUKE (Rev. 2:4).

All the things for which the Lord commended the church could not compensate for the lack which also the Lord *knew* and *felt* and *regretted*.

He knew it, but do you suppose that they in the church knew it? As important as it is for us to be obedient to the Lord, and to continue to serve Him when others have stopped. And as important, extremely important as it is for us to hate evil, and false teachers with their false doctrines. And regardless of how we may stand in times of testing. It is possible for us to be and to do all of this, and yet to let our love for the Lord grow cold, and to become less than it was when we first knew Him.

This is a most amazing passage because we are inclined to feel that if we are seeking to obey the Lord, and to serve the Lord when others fall by the wayside. And if we hate sin in every form, and hate those who spread false teaching in the world. And especially if we keep going when our lives may be threatened because we belong to the Lord. Think about all of these things, and it may be that we are not doing half as much as the Ephesian believers were doing. How, then, do we measure up when it comes to loving the Lord?

What about your prayer life? Has it become a duty, and is no longer a delight? What about the Word? Do you read it just to be able to say that you have read it through again, or do you read it because you love the Lord and want to learn as much about Him as you can? What place does the Lord have in your life when you are not at church? Are you giving the Lord your time, and your money, and your service, without giving Him yourself?

Illus: The lady in my Tuesday Bible Class whose husband gave her everything *but himself*— a million dollar home, a new car every year, everything that money could buy. But he was too busy for her. And

she wanted him! That marriage finally ended in divorce.

Has this happened to our relationship with the Lord, only in reverse? Christ is the Bridegroom; we are the Bride. Are we so busy serving the Lord that we have forgotten that He does not need our service. He didn't save us just so He would have people to serve Him. He saved us because He delighted in us (as amazing as that is), and He wants us, more than anything else, to delight in Him. You know, you can be a pastor, speaking two or three or four times a week, and yet have a cold heart toward the Lord. If we really love the Lord we are going to trust Him, like Job did when He said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). That is real love.

Why did Peter deny that He even knew the Lord? It was because His love for the Lord was on the way down.

What does the Lord say about me? What does He know about my heart? Or about your heart? This is the worst kind of sin that it is possible to commit.

What is the remedy?

V. THE REMEDY (Rev. 2:5a).

The first thing the Lord told the church at Ephesus to do was to remember how things used to be between them and the Lord. Remember! We may be thinking about the future when what we need to do is to think about the past. Do you remember when you loved to pray more than you do now, and that then prayer meant, not just seeking things from the Lord, but being with the Lord. Do you remember when you loved to read the Word because it was there that you found the Lord, and delighted in Him, and were amazed that such a God would send His only Son to die for a sinner like you were? Oh, think back! Remember.

The second thing to do is to recognize, recognize that you have "fallen." You and I may be very active in the work of the Lord, and seeking each day to obey the Lord, but somehow we have lost sight of Him. Are the issues in our lives about which we really are unhappy with the Lord? Stand back, look at yourself, and I must do the same, and think, Was there a time in my past life, or in yours, when we really loved the Lord more than we do now?

If so, we need to repent. Now the word “repent” always has to do with sin. So if I don’t love the Lord like I used to love Him, on that very matter I am guilty of sin. In the words of Rev. 3:20 I realize that He has been knocking at the door of my heart wanting to come in to me to have fellowship with me and me with Him, and I have wanted to get back to Him, but somehow I just haven’t found the time.

If you and I had visited the church at Ephesus on a Lord’s Day morning, we probably would have been very impressed with what we saw and heard. But the Lord knew something, and felt it deeply, that we could not see with all of the good things that were going on. The church had left its first love of God and of Christ. Oh, their salvation was not in danger, but they were robbing themselves of the fellowship with the Lord that He so much desired to have with them.

Then comes:

VI. THE WARNING (Rev. 2:5b).

When is a church serving as a light in this world of darkness? It has to be a faithful church. It has to be a church interested in holy living. It has to be a church true to the Word of God. It has to be a church serving the Lord. But all of those things fall short if the chief characteristics of the people in the church is not a sincere and deep and growing love for the Lord Himself, not just for what He does for us, but just for the Lord Himself.

But before closing the letter, the Lord gave another word of commendation, perhaps as an encouragement for the church to really hear what He was saying to them.

VII. FURTHER COMMENDATION (Rev. 2:6).

Here it is “the deeds of the Nicolaitanes; in Rev. 2:15 it is “the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.” In Rev. 2:14 the Nicolaitanes are linked with “the doctrine of Balaam” who taught the children of Israel “to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.” So many expositors have taken this to mean the perversion of the doctrine of God’s grace, indicating that grace gives us the license to sin. The Lord was rejoicing that this was not the fault of the church in Ephesus. They hated their deeds, and so did the Lord.

Finally we come to:

VIII. THE APPEAL AND THE PROMISE (Rev. 2:7).

The believers in the early church did more hearing than they did seeing. There were not copies of the NT available to all for reading, and so they were dependent upon their hearing of the Word. But it is possible to hear, and yet not hear. We can hear the words, but not get the meaning of the words. Only God can give us the ability to hear, and He has given us two ears with which to hear. The Spirit speaks through the Word, and He speaks to the churches. It ought to be our constant prayer as we come to the Word of God that the Spirit of God will give us ears to hear and eyes to see.

What is the promise? See verse 7.

“The tree of life” is first mentioned as being in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were put out of the Garden of Eden so they could not eat of the tree of life. It is mentioned in Gen. 2:9; 3:22, 24; Rev. 22:2, 14.

“To him that overcometh,” or “he that overcometh,” are expressions that are found seven times in these letters to the churches. Walking in fellowship with the Lord here on earth, will most certainly bring its reward in heaven. But I am inclined to wonder if there are not ways in which we can partake of the tree of life here and now. The Puritans used to speak of the possibility of experiencing a heaven-like fellowship with the Lord in the present life. When by the grace of God we *overcome* the obstacles that stand in the way of true fellowship with God here in this world, there are present blessings awaiting us now.

Concl: As always, the Word of God calls us to constant self-examination of our hearts as to how our lives really measure up to the high standards of the Word of God. Let us not be satisfied to have read this letter today, but let us take it as God’s message to us, and by the grace of God, make any changes in our lives that God in His Word has indicated that we need to make.