

WEEK 2: EPHESUS - THE LOVELESS CHURCH

Jesus sent a personal message to seven first century churches in Asia Minor. Even though these messages were sent to specific churches of that time, they can also apply to the church today. We can learn from each of these messages and heed the warnings of Jesus so that we might avoid the problems that they fell prey to.

We begin with the church at Ephesus. At the time this letter was written, Ephesus was a major city of Asia Minor and a seaport. Paul had visited Ephesus around A.D. 53, about 43 years before this letter in Revelation was sent to them.

Ask God to open your heart to hear what He wants to say to you through the message to the church at Ephesus.

DAY 1: JESUS AND THE CHURCH

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:1–7. Today our focus is on verse 1.

1. How is Jesus described in verse 1 and what does this description imply?
2. As you read Paul's farewell address to the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:25-32 some 43 years earlier, what was his exhortation to them? What was he most concerned about for this church?
3. According to Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:3-7, what were some earlier issues in the church of Ephesus?

II. Looking Upward

4. How would you recognize a "false teacher" in the church today?

5. How can we protect our church from being “led astray” by false doctrines?

6. God is in control of all that happens in and around us. How have you seen His sovereign hand at work in your life recently?

III. Looking Deeper

What warnings and descriptions are we given in these passages concerning false teachers?

Matthew 7:15-16

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

2 John 7

IV. Looking Reflectively

Be on guard against false teachings. Stand strong on His Word.

Are you grounded in God’s Word?

How susceptible are you to being pulled away from the truth?

DAY 2: THE COMMENDATION

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:2-3, 6

1. What was the church at Ephesus commended for?
2. In light of Paul's farewell message to the elders of this church in Acts 20:28-32, which you read yesterday, how has this church done over the years in following Paul's exhortation?
3. What does it mean that one "cannot tolerate evil men" and why would that be considered a strength? How would you define an "evil man" today?

II. Looking Upward

4. What is the balance between not tolerating an "evil man" and loving the sinner? How do we work this out in a practical way in our lives?
5. This church was commended for their perseverance and not growing weary. Is there currently a situation in your life that is causing you to grow weary? If so, how are you handling it?
6. How does one practically persevere and not grow weary?

III. Looking Deeper

We don't know who the Nicolaitans are. There are several viewpoints but they are simply speculation. What do we know for sure about the Nicolaitans based on the Scripture itself in Revelation 2:6 and 2:14-15?

Jesus commended them for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which He also hates (2:6). What else does God hate according to these verses?

Proverbs 6:16-19

Jeremiah 44:2-4

Zechariah 8:17

Are you guilty of any of these things in your life?

IV. Looking Reflectively

God desires for His children to persevere and not grow weary, to exhibit spiritual discernment, and to hate what He hates.

Which of the commendations mentioned in verses 2-3 would He be able to commend you for?

DAY 3: THE CONCERN

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 2:4

1. What is the criticism of the Ephesian church? Why is that surprising in light of how Paul concluded his letter to the Ephesians more than 30 years earlier (Ephesians 6:24)?

2. What was He referring to when He said, "... you have left your first love"?

Read Mark 12:28-31

3. What does it mean to "love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength"?

4. According to these verses, how do we show our love for Christ?

John 14:15, 21, 23

John 4:19-24

II. Looking Upward

5. What are some possible causes of someone leaving his first love? What would be some warning signs that one is moving in that direction?

6. What role, if any, do emotions play in loving Christ?

III. Looking Deeper

Read 2 Corinthians 11:1-4

In a similar way, as Jesus was concerned about the church at Ephesus, Paul was concerned for the Corinthian church and their relationship with Christ. Describe Paul's concern for the Corinthians.

What does it mean to be led astray from "the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ"?

IV. Looking Reflectively

“Beware of anything that competes with loyalty to Jesus Christ. The greatest competitor of devotion to Jesus is service to Him.” --Oswald Chambers¹

“The Divine Lover still sorrows when His love is unrequited, and pines for our continuing, deepening, maturing adoration.”²

Have you ever left your first love? If so, describe the process of how it happened. How did you rekindle your first love?

Are you in danger of leaving your first love now? What are some potential areas in your life that could cause you to leave your first love?

DAY 4: THE INSTRUCTIONS AND WARNING

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:5

1. What are His instructions to the church at Ephesus?

2. Why would it be important to remember from where they had fallen?

3. What is repentance and why is it necessary? What is the difference between remorse and repentance?

¹ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Westwood, N.J.: Barbour & Co., 1935), Jan. 18.

² John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3* (Mill Hill, London: Monarch Books, 2003), 28.

4. What is He implying when He says, “or else I ... will remove your lampstand out of its place”?

II. Looking Upward

5. What “deeds” might fan the flames of your love for Christ and others?

6. What are some principles we can draw from Revelation 2:1-7 concerning how we should confront others in an area of concern?

III. Looking Deeper

Read John 15:4-6

What similarities do you see in this passage and the warning to the church at Ephesus?

Read Hoses 6:6

Why would this be true?

IV. Looking Reflectively

*"The church that loses its love will soon lose its light, no matter how doctrinally sound it may be."*³

*"One cannot stand erect spiritually and see one's sin as God sees it. It has to break the heart. Has yours been broken?"*⁴

³Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 572.

⁴Dan DeHaan, *The God You Can Know* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 22.

Does your love for God need “rekindling”?

Is there something in your life that you need to repent of?

DAY 5: THE PROMISE

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 2:7

1. There is disagreement among scholars as to what this verse means. Some believe that the “overcomers” are a special class of believers. However, I agree with the view that the “overcomers” are all believers. How do these Scriptures support the second view that He is referring to all believers?

1 John 4:4

1 John 5:4-5

Revelation 21:5-7

2. What insight do we gain from these passages concerning the “tree of life which is in the Paradise of God”?

Genesis 2:8-9

Genesis 3:22-24

Luke 23:43

Revelation 22:1-2

3. So, what exactly is He promising to those who overcome when He says, “I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God”?

4. Why might this promise be especially relevant to the Ephesian church?

II. Looking Upward

5. As you look back over the letter, how would you summarize His message to the church at Ephesus?

6. What are some lessons for life that you can draw from this passage that can be applied in your own life?

III. Looking Deeper

In this world, we will have many adversaries, and yet Jesus promises us victory to overcome them all as we abide in Him as overcomers. According to these verses, who or what are our adversaries and what are the means for overcoming them?

John 16:33

Galatians 5:16-17

Ephesians 6:10-13

1 Peter 5:8-9

IV. Looking Reflectively

“The cross is the blazing fire at which the flame of our love is kindled, but we have to get near enough to it for its sparks to fall on us.”⁵

Is your love for Jesus an undying love or is it “dying out”?

⁵ Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, 33.

