

LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH TODAY ...



A CHURCH CEASES TO BE A CHURCH WHEN IT NO LONGER SERVES ITS MASTER WITH GENUINE LOVE AND DEDICATION.
(KISTEMAKER & HENDRIKSEN)



*Consider how far 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 NIV)

HEARING WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS (EPHESIANS 2:1-7)



*To those who win the victory I
will give the right to eat the
fruit from the tree of life,
which is in the garden of God.*

(Revelation 2:7b NCV)



I) We need to hear the Spirit as Christ reveals himself to those at Ephesus as the one who has authority over them and who knows them, 2:1-3.

- (Revelation 2:1–3 ESV) To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 **I know** your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 **I know** you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

A) Christ introduces and identifies himself in a different way to each of the seven churches.

With each reference he draws on the description in chapter one. He identifies himself differently to fit the unique circumstances of each church.

B) Christ knows their leadership—he holds them in his right hand.

He holds them in his power, provides for them, protects them and holds them accountable.

C) Christ knows the prevailing spirit of the church—he has been among them observing the people and the ministry of the church.

NEVER FORGET → CHRIST KNOWS ... He has observed their hard work and patient endurance; how they do not tolerate those who are evil; how they have successfully tested those who falsely claimed to be apostles; how they have suffered in his name and continued on.

THE APOSTLE PAUL WOULD HAVE BEEN
VERY PLEASED WITH HOW THEY HAD FENDED
OFF THE FIERCE WOLVES ...

- (Acts 20:28–31 ESV) Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 **I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;** 30 and from among your own

selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 **Therefore be alert,** remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

- (1 Timothy 1:3–4 ESV) As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, **remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine,** 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

BUT PAUL WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY SAD TO
OBSERVE HOW THEIR LOVE FOR JESUS CHRIST
NO LONGER HELD ITS PROMINENT PLACE IN
THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO HIM. ESPECIALLY SINCE
PAUL HAD PRAYED—THIRTY YEARS PREVIOUSLY—
THAT THEY MAY KNOW THIS LOVE OF CHRIST
THAT SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE.

- (Ephesians 3:14–19 ESV) For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 **and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,** that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

II) We need to hear the Spirit as Christ reveals what he holds against them, and as he calls them to repent and return, 2:4-6.

- (Revelation 2:4–6 ESV) **But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.** 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. **If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.** 6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

A) Christ holds it against them that they have abandoned the love they had at first.

**A LONG, EXTENDED BUT VERY IMPORTANT INTERLUDE
BECAUSE WE NEED TO KNOW ...**

WHAT WAS THE LOVE THEY ABANDONED?

(1) IT WAS ... GREAT COMMANDMENT LOVE

They had abandoned simple obedience to the command of our Lord to love him with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength. The most important commandment for living. Every other principle and rule for life either fits under or stands opposed to this commandment.

- (Mark 12:28–30 NLT) One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” 29 Jesus replied, “**The most important commandment is this:** ‘Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. 30 **And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.**’ ”
- (Matthew 22:36–38 ESV) “Teacher, **which is the great commandment in the Law?**” 37 And he said to him, “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.** 38 This is the great and first commandment.”

(2) IT WAS ... UNDYING LOVE

The incorruptible, undying love all true believers have for our Lord Jesus Christ.

- (Ephesians 6:24 ESV) Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ **with love incorruptible.**
- (Ephesians 6:24 NIV) Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ **with an undying love.**

(3) IT WAS ... ONE-MASTER LOVE

- (Matthew 6:24a ESV) **No one can serve two masters,** for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

Bible Fact – No one can serve two masters. If our allegiance to God is divided, then our allegiance will ultimately fall prey to whatever or to whomever has caused the division, **and we will**

serve that master. The person with divided loyalty is living in disobedience and open rebellion to God and his word.

An awful, horrible, yet biblical and very wonderful truth—Our love for God is to be so complete and so all-consuming ... that in comparison ... our love for everyone else—**including our families**—is to be like hate.

- (Luke 14:26 NLT) If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, **hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life.** Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.

THE GREATEST LOVE WE CAN HAVE FOR OUR FAMILIES IS TO LOVE GOD IN THE WAY HE TEACHES US AND COMMANDS US TO LOVE HIM.

However, it seems that this biblical approach to love is unacceptable to most people in the church. And as a result, the family has become the master in far too many Christian households. If you doubt this, just ask yourself this question—Who do I seek to please most on the Lord’s day? Who am I appeasing? Who is the master of my Sunday schedule?

The person with divided loyalties will not be able to receive wisdom from God because of his double-mindedness.

- (James 1:5–8 ESV) If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 **For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

B) Christ calls them to remember and repent and return.

Earl Palmer ... The “Ephesus problem” happens quietly and by gradual, imperceptible shifts of focus. Let me sketch in a contemporary scenario that may explain this devastating shift of focus. What happens is that a man or woman is first united with the Christian church because of having discovered and believed in Jesus Christ and His love. After a few years of being a Christian, that person becomes a leader in the church with very heavy responsibilities for the

fellowship.

But something happens along the way. That person who, because of giftedness and hard work may now stand at the vortex of church politics and decision-making, experiences a subtle shift in style of life. That person is adrift as a disciple and finds himself or herself motivated and nourished by the organization or by the controversy or by ambition to hold power.

The first love has been replaced while perhaps no one was aware of the replacement. The first love has been abandoned and in its place is the starchy, high cholesterol diet of activity and church work **that will never nourish the human soul.** [Palmer, E. F., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1982). 1, 2 & 3 John / Revelation (Vol. 35, p. 125). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.]

C) Christ warns them that he will personally remove his witness from them if they do not repent.

Beasley-Murray ... The removal of the lampstand from its place can signify nothing less than the end of Christ's recognition of the church as a church of his. It will become as devoid of Christ as the temple of Jerusalem became empty of God prior to its destruction. So grave is the sin of lovelessness in a Christian church. [Beasley-Murray, G. R. (1994). Revelation. New Bible commentary: 21st century edition (4th ed., p. 1428). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.]



III) Christ urges us to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, 2:7.

- (Revelation 2:7 ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

A) To be victorious in our battle to maintain our lampstand we must hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

As God's light-bearers we must evaluate our lives and the life and service of our church by hearing the Spirit as he speaks the words of Christ to us.

LESSON FROM EPHEBUS: We must never abandon what is most important—loving God first and foremost with all our heart, all our soul, all our

mind and all our strength.

If we do not listen to the Spirit, then we—and not God—will ultimately be the ones to decide what is most important. If this is true—and it is, then we will understand that the five churches came under the rebuke of Christ because **they had decided for themselves what was most important. The proud choose for themselves; the humble receive the teaching of the Lord.**

B) Those who hear and obey what the Spirit says to the churches are the overcoming ones—the conquerors, the victors—who are granted to eat of the tree of life.

- (Genesis 2:9 ESV) And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. **The tree of life was in the midst of the garden,** and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- (Genesis 3:22–24 ESV) Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” 23 therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. 24 **He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.**
- (Revelation 22:14 ESV) Blessed are those who wash their robes, **so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.**

*****2:5 ... if they fail to respond to Jesus' repeated call to repentance, the Lord will take drastic measures. **Jesus will remove the lampstand from its place, which means that as a congregation they will experience a complete spiritual blackout. A church ceases to be a church when it no longer serves its Master with genuine love and dedication.** The members may still come together, **but they meet for social and not spiritual purposes.** [Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953–2001). Exposition of the Book of Revelation (Vol. 20, p. 116). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.]