



The Church in Ephesus Revelation 2:1-7

"You've Left that First Love Feelin' "

Jeopardy Daily Double:

This Church was the only one of the seven to have received a previous inspired correspondence:

Who was Ephesus?

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians (60AD), the Church was vibrant, rich in doctrine, and marked by love. Paul praised their faith in Jesus and their love for all the saints (Ephesians 1:15), urging them to walk in love, unity, and spiritual maturity. They were speaking the truth with love.

By the time Jesus addressed them in the Revelation (95AD), their orthodoxy remained strong, but their love had grown cold. They still rejected false teachers and persevered in service, yet the warmth of devotion that once defined them had faded into formality.

- Paul's Ephesians were alive with love *and* truth.
- Jesus' Ephesians had truth, but had left what He called, "First love."

What is "first love?"

If you go back and read the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians, you notice one obvious similarity between the two letters: The apostle Paul repeatedly uses the imagery of a bride to describe the Church's relationship with Jesus Christ. It is something we can all relate to.

It's easy to miss the first two bridal references:

☞ "Ephesus" in Greek means *darling*. We are the Lord's darlings. Roger and Anita call each other "Darling" in the animated 101 Dalmatians - it's their pet name for one another. We recognize it as a term of endearment.

☞ Ephesians 1:14 says the Holy Spirit is "the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." Receiving the Holy Spirit is God's pledge that He will complete what He has begun in us and with us. Bible teachers often call this the Engagement Ring Analogy, because the Greek word for "guarantee" is *arrabon*. It was commonly used in ancient times to refer to an engagement ring.

☞ In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul compares the love, sacrifice and unity between a husband and wife to that of Christ's love for His Church.

☞ In Second Corinthians 11:2, Paul speaks of the Church as "betrothed" to Christ, expressing his longing to present her as pure and faithful.

☞ This imagery reaches its fulfillment in Revelation, where the Church is depicted as the Bride of the Jesus. In Revelation 19:7-9, she is ready for the Marriage Supper, and in Revelation 21:2 & 9, the New Jerusalem is described as a bride adorned for her husband, symbolizing the Church in her perfected state.

☞ Getting back to the letter Jesus wrote, notice Jesus says to them, "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." '

That reminds you of... Adam & Eve, in the Garden of Eden - the first **marriage**.

First love is the love of espousal - the Church's devoted, intimate affection for her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

Rev 2:1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands

The church at Ephesus was founded by the apostle Paul during his third missionary journey. He stayed there for about three years. The other six churches of Revelation were likely established by converts returning home from Ephesus.¹

Ephesus was a major center of the Roman world, with a population of perhaps 200,000 or more. Acts 19 tells us the Gospel spread widely from there. During Paul's three years of ministry, many were saved and trained, and the church likely grew to several hundred, perhaps even a few thousand, meeting in homes under shared leadership.

What we call the Church at Ephesus was likely a network of small house fellowships scattered throughout the city rather than a single large congregation.

There is always criticism of the modern church for owning buildings and meeting as larger groups. Christians want to get back to an early church vibe.

There *are* examples in the NT of believers gathering in larger groups. In Ephesus Paul held meetings in a kind of lecture hall, the School of Tyrannus (Acts 19). We do as God leads.

In chapter one Jesus interpreted the seven stars and seven lampstands. "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches."

If you read the early church fathers, e.g., Irenaeus and Ignatious, they didn't see any conflict between Jesus addressing one "angel" and the existence of many meeting places in Ephesus. They viewed the church as a single spiritual entity under one God-appointed representative - its angel, most likely the city's leading pastor or bishop.

All seven churches were located in what is now modern-day Turkey. If you began at Ephesus and traveled to each of the others, you would encounter them in the same order presented, with each city roughly thirty to fifty miles apart. In fact, it was a postal route.

Rev 2:2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

¹ Paul followed the will of God in his journeys. The Lord knew where He wanted to plant churches. It isn't always logical.

Jesus commended their diligence, determination, and discernment. The Ephesians were doctrinally sound, intolerant of false teachers, and faithful in their service. They stood strong against deception and spiritual compromise.²

Rev 2:3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

Of course in serving the Lord you get physically fatigued, tired, and spent. **But not spiritually, because God the Holy Spirit in-dwells you.** Galatians 6:9, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."

We all know people who were once vibrant in serving the Lord who have pulled back, becoming spiritually apathetic or complacent. It's obvious.

The busiest believers can be owners of a lonely heart, and it's not obvious at all. You never go up to somebody and say, "*You are so busy serving the Lord that I know you must have left your first love!*"

Perhaps the best exposé of this is in First Corinthians 13. Even a thing like martyrdom is nothing without love.

The believers in Ephesus had been in fellowship together for around 40 years. Does that remind you of anyone? *It's us!*

In the Psalms, David mentioned, "I have been young once but now I am old." Those of us in that chapter of CalvaryHanford's history ought to concentrate on finishing strong. Many Bible characters did not. Many contemporaries have not.

We typically consider a biblical generation to be 40yrs. We are right at that transition, following God's leading. Go to YouTube and watch our 40th anniversary message, *There's a New Shepherd in Town.*

Rev 2:4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Did they gasp? Did someone say, "What?" Did some begin to weep? Did wives elbow their husbands?

² Did you know that Mormons are now Christians? I tuned-in to see a rather large conservative Christian event. Glenn Beck was the headliner. He identified himself as a Christian. When asked about his being a Mormon, he told a story about Billy Graham listening to his testimony, then saying to a critic, "He sounds like a Christian to me." Beck went on to say he rejects the Nicene Creed, and that he is not trinitarian. They are *not* Christians.

Were there those who disagreed? Or who immediately thought of others that were guilty of this - but certainly not them?

With the Thessalonian Church, Paul could speak of "your work of *faith* and your labor of *love* and your steadfastness of *hope*" (1:3). It is striking that here in Ephesus their deeds do not stem from the true Christian characteristics of faith, hope and love. The heart was no longer involved.

Rev 2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent.

Your "works" aren't the problem. I'll let Albert Barnes explain.

"The counsel of the Savior is to do their first works. It is to engage at once in **doing what they did in the first and best days of their piety, the days of their "espousals" to God.** Let them read the Bible as they did then; let them pray as they did then; let them go forth in the duties of active benevolence as they did then; let them engage in teaching a Sunday school as they did then; let them relieve the distressed, instruct the ignorant, raise up the fallen, as they did then; let them open their heart, their purse, and their hand, to bless a dying world. As it was in this way that they manifested their love then, so this would be better suited than all other things to rekindle the flame of love when it is almost extinguished." There is one phrase in that quote that really ministered to me: "In the first *and best* days of piety."

Do you remember those first days after you met Jesus?

Those were some of the best days ever. Everything felt brand new - the weight of sin was gone. You learned what forgiveness really meant. You tasted grace that didn't depend on your performance. You felt deliverance - those old chains starting to break. You realized you'd been adopted into God's family, and Heaven wasn't just a place anymore - it was home. The Word of God came alive; the Spirit of God felt near; joy and peace flooded your heart in ways words couldn't describe. You couldn't wait to tell somebody - anybody - what Jesus had done for you. Those early days remind us what salvation really is: not just a decision we made, but a miracle God worked.

What about the one who grew up in the light? The one raised in a Christian home, who can't remember a day they didn't believe Jesus was real? How do they grasp "first love" when there wasn't a radical break from the past?

The truth is, first love isn't about *when* you were saved - it's about when the reality of Jesus' salvation becomes personal to you. For some, that happens in a moment of crisis; for others, it dawns gently, like sunrise. Whether you came out of the far country or were raised in the Father's house, the miracle is the same: the Spirit opens your eyes to see Jesus for yourself.

When that happens, even someone who's "always known" the Lord begins to know Him in a fresh, personal way. He is not just the God of their parents, but is their own Savior. Their heart awakens to grace; Scripture springs to life; love deepens, moving from familiarity into devotion.

In the rhythm of our everyday lives, we call this falling in love. And just as hearts race and anticipation stirs in human love, so our souls leap when Jesus Christ draws near. Robert Browning captures that moment beautifully in *Meeting at Night*.

*The gray sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep...
And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!*

He paints the thrill, the anticipation, the secret joy of meeting the beloved - the same way Jesus longs to awaken in us the fervor of our first love, as He calls the church in Ephesus: "Remember... repent... and do the first works."

Job said something we can adapt. He said it on account of his much suffering. But it is true of other spiritual experiences with our Lord, not only suffering. He said, "My ears had heard of You but now my eyes have seen You" (42:5).

That would be a great opening for someone who has been a Christian all their lives and wants to share their testimony. "My ears had heard of the Lord, but then my eyes saw Him!"

God had made Himself real to Job. He desires to make Himself real to you as well.

Rev 2:6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

The Bible mentions them in Revelation 2:6 & 15 as a group whose teachings and practices Jesus hated. We don't know a ton of specifics about them - even early

church fathers are vague - but the evidence points to a sect or group in the first-century church that compromised God's holiness. For sure they mixed Christianity with immoral behavior & idolatry, possibly promoting licentiousness under the guise of grace. The name "Nicolaitans" may mean *conquerors of the people*, hinting at leaders who abused spiritual authority.

Why mention them? When a believer drifts from their first love - when Jesus is no longer the burning passion of their heart - they become vulnerable. That's exactly where the Nicolaitans come in. Their teaching seemed to offer freedom, a way to live without restraint, mixing truth with compromise. But Jesus hates their deeds, and with good reason. They lead the lukewarm away from holiness, corrupt the church, and dull hearts to God's call. The danger isn't just in the doctrine; it's in what it does to a heart that has grown cold.

Guard your first love, because when your passion for Christ wanes, deception becomes far too tempting.

Rev 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." '

"He who has an ear is *everyone & anyone*.

"Let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches" means that if you're in Ephesus, you need to hear what the Lord says to the other six churches. What He says to you, He says to them; and what He says to them, He's saying to you.

Why this look back on the Tree of Life in Eden? The human race cannot receive its fruit until our sin is dealt with. God is assuring us that we will one day join Him in Heaven, sinless.

Jesus told them - twice - to "Repent!" Repentance is a direct command from God. The Greek word (*metanoēō*) literally means "to change your mind" or "to turn around," and it is almost always imperative in usage when addressed to people.

If you are like me, you probably think of repentance as tearing your clothes, pulling out your beard, sitting on an ash heap, and crying until there are no more tears.

What about the joy of repentance? John Owen's wrote, "Repentance is the sweetest work of all the graces of the Spirit; it is the turning of the soul from a lover of sin to the enjoyment of God, which is the chiefest of all delights."

Scholars and Bible teachers are quick to point out repentance is not just feelings. I understand that. But Jesus has put repenting in the context of marriage. That would be like saying marriage is not just feelings.

How do we implement all this? Think of it as an autostereogram. An autostereogram is a single two-dimensional image designed to create the visual illusion of a three-dimensional (3D) scene or object when you stare at it.

Pretty much everything about Christianity is you and I staring at our lives & experiences until Jesus comes into focus.

In First Corinthians 13:12 (KJV): "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

The Lord's mirror is not terrifying like Galadriel's, or selfish like that of the Evil Queen. He is the fairest of ten thousand, the bright & morning star. Look full in His wonderful face.