

Ephesus: A Declining Love for God



"But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!"
Revelation 2:4 NLT.

- Do you love the members of your family more today than when they first became part of your family? Do you love God more today or less?

The primary key to understanding the purpose of the message to the 7 churches of Revelation 2-3 is not found in Revelation, but Ephesians 5:25-27.

*"25 For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her **26** to make her **holy and clean, washed** [*by water] by the cleansing of God's word. **27** He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be **holy and without fault.**"* Ephesians 5:25-27 NLT *NLT footnote

Jesus wants to purify and mature His bride, the universal Church, for the time she will be **united to Him**—whether walking through the door of death OR by means of the rapture (Greek ἀρπάζω—snatch away). The number 7 symbolizes *completion*. He wants His bride to be *complete*, or *mature*. The 7 churches represent 7 qualities for being spiritually complete, or mature. Furthermore, as Ephesians 5:25-27 indicates, Christ is presently cleansing the heart and mind of His bride by the water of God's word. Bible study is NOT JUST about **information**, but **transformation!** The message of the 7 churches is about Jesus preparing His bride (individual believer) to be united to Him. Are you ready?

Central Lesson

A maturing Christian has a GROWING love for God.

1. **Church:** The Church in **Ephesus** (2:1-7).
"Write this letter to the angel [messenger] of the church in Ephesus...." (7:1)
2. **Christ:** **HOLDS** the 7 stars in his right hand & walks among the 7 lampstands (2:1).
"This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands:" (7:1)
 - *"who holds the seven stars"* - Christ "holds" the 7 stars, the messengers (pastors). God's servants are held by the power of Christ.
 - *"in his right hand"* - the "right" hand depicts "power." The right hand is usually stronger than the left hand.
 - *"walks among the seven gold lampstands"* - pictures the "presence" of Christ.
3. **Compliment:** I know all the things you do, your **HARD** work, your patient endurance, you don't tolerate evil people, you have examined & exposed the claims of false teachers. You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. (2:2-3, 6).

*"2 I know all the things you do. I have seen your **hard work** and your **patient endurance**. I know you **don't tolerate evil people**. You have **examined** the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have **discovered they are liars**. **3** You have **patiently suffered** for me without quitting."*

*"6 But this is in your favor: You **hate the evil deeds** of the Nicolaitans, just as I do."*

- *I know all the things you do* - Christ is all-knowing. He knows our thoughts, etc.
- *I have seen* - hard work, patient endurance, don't tolerate evil people, examined claims of false apostles [discerning], patience in suffering, refuse to quit.
- *You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans*, - Little is known about the Nicolaitans. Scholars believe they were a group in the church that compromised the faith by engaging in pagan practices forbidden by God. We must guard against compromising scripture & holiness with this sinful world.

4. **Criticism:** You don't **LOVE** me or each other as you did at first! (2:4).

"4 But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!"

- Their love for God was declining rather than growing! They had all the right behavior - but lacked passion in their heart. Their love for God was going cold! Just as love between a husband & wife ought to grow deeper over time, in the same way, our love for God (and His forever family) should be growing.

5. **Correction:** Look how far you have fallen, **TURN** back to me, do the works you did at first, repent (2:5, 7).

"5 Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first...." "7 ...Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches...."

- *"look"* - Examine your heart and spiritual condition.
- *"turn back" "repent"* - to Christ and serve Him.
- *"do the works"* - Serve God with the same passion as when you were first saved.
- *"listen"* to the whispers of the Holy Spirit to your heart. The Spirit always whispers through God's Word. Read, study, discuss, meditate!

6. **Consequence:** **REMOVE** your lampstand from its place among the churches if refuse to repent (2:5). **Victors:** given fruit from the tree of life (2:7).

"5...If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches." "7 Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God."

- *"removed"* - from their position with Christ. That is, they will no longer be in the place of Christ's *presence* and *blessing*. The church will be spiritually dead!
- Choose to live in spiritual victory and be rewarded in heaven - *"fruit from the tree of life."* (Compare Genesis 3:22-24 with Revelation 22:2, 14)

Conclusion

A maturing Christian has a GROWING love for God.

Action Steps: ► Receive Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday's Bible study. ► Attend a small group. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.