

Text: Rev 2.1-7**Intro:**

On the seven letters to the churches in general, Walvoord says, “Their incisive character and pointed denunciation of departure from biblical morality and theology have tended to keep them out of the mainstream of contemporary theological thought. Many of the evils and shortcomings which exist in the church today are a direct outgrowth of neglect of the solemn instruction given to these seven churches.”¹

“We call the contents of these chapters *Epistles*; but they are not so much messages from an absent Lord as sentences of a present Judge, engaged in the solemn act of inspection and decision.”²

“The seven so-called letters are not ‘epistles of Christ,’ but rather utterances, pronouncements, judgements passed upon the churches as they pass in succession under the eye of the supreme *Επίσκοπος*.”³

These statements ought to encourage you to take serious note of these next two chapters of Revelation. They are written for you. They tell of how the church should behave in light of the vision John saw in chapter 1 and the revelation he was given in chapters 4 to the end.

Read Rev 2.1-7

Proposition: The church that is satisfied with zealous performance risks leaving its heart behind.

I. Cautionary Salutation (1)

A. Addressee: The angel of the church in Ephesus

1. The city of Ephesus

¹ John F Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 51.

² J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Philadelphia School of the Bible, 1865), 149.

³ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 1999 rpt. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1906), 23.

“This was once an important and magnificent city — to proconsular Asia, about what Philadelphia is to Pennsylvania.”⁴

- a. approx. 60 miles from Patmos, est. pop. 200,000 – 300,000
- b. center of trade — terminus of the great road from Euphrates River and two other major routes
- c. seat of government (pro-counsel)
- d. home of the temple of Artemis/Diana, one of the wonders of the ancient world
- e. Paul laboured here for two years (Acts 19.8-10), did many miracles, spread the gospel through the region, wrote 1 Corinthians, also wrote to these people

Note: Paul’s ministry — early 50’s, Rev. written @ AD 95ish – church is over 40 yrs old.

- f. Apollos’ conversion place
- g. Timothy’s home, also by tradition, his place of death, the “victim of mob violence for his protests against the license and frenzy of the great festival of Artemis”⁵
- h. John’s own home and pastorate

“Ephesus was the first recipient of four New Testament books (Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Revelation) and possibly four more (John’s Gospel and his three epistles).”⁶

- i. now desolate, no inhabitants — Note: read Seiss’ description from his own visit there, sometime before 1865

“But Ephesus is a mere desolation now, altogether waste, without an inhabitant. The great market-place, where the exchanges of a renowned metropolis were

⁴ Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 1:120.

⁵ Seiss, 1:121.

⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Rev 2.1.

once conducted, I saw planted with tobacco, unenclosed, unattended, weedy, and forsaken. The great lizards, as we rode along, darted about in amazement at the sight of man, over fallen columns of porphyry and marble, and splendid cornices and capitals, which were once the admiration of the world. And silence, malaria and death brooded upon what was proudly styled 'the first of cities,' and embraced the names of some of the greatest in wealth and wisdom, religion and literature, arts and arms. The vast theatre, the largest ever constructed, which once rang with the shouts of the frenzied thousands who, 'all with one voice, about the space of two hours, cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians!' still shows its grand outlines of walls and arches; but old wild bushes are gnarled about its heavy masonry, and the camel was browsing in its forsaken circles as I rode through it. Even the glorious temple of the great mother goddess can no longer be identified with certainty. Two piles of colossal ruins are each claimed as its remains, and I plucked wild berries in both of them. Remnants of cyclopean walls, cause-ways, temples, streets, and houses, line the plains and hills and mountain-sides of a vast area which once was filled with their glory; but the whole place is a complete desolation, enveloped in a poisonous atmosphere, and tenanted only by things unclean and vile."⁷

"The city was a hotbed of cults and superstitions, a meeting-place of East & West, where Greeks and Romans and Asiatics jostled one another in the streets."⁸

2. The angel of the church

- a. A church is a body of Christian believers formally organized in a specific location.

⁷ Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 1:121–22.

⁸ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 23.

- 1) "The heathen Greeks used it to denote the select assemblies of free citizens convened for the transaction of public affairs, in which the common populace, strangers, and such as had forfeited civic rights, had no place."⁹
 - 2) Thus, the term by its common usage implies an official membership which is distinguished from non-members.
 - 3) "It means an assembly, convened by authority, and constituted of a specific class, out of, but withdrawn from, the general mass of the population."¹⁰
- b. The angel of the church ("the stars in his hand" see 1.20, 2.1)
- 1) The pastors of the churches
 - 2) Led, supported, by Christ (in his hand)

"The ministers of Christ are under his special care and protection. ... He directs all their motions; he disposes of them into their several orbs; he fills them with light and influence; he supports them, or else they would soon be falling stars; they are instruments in his hand, and all the good they do is done by his hand with them."¹¹

"Each Epistle is written to '*the angel* of the Church.' What is written we know to be meant not for him alone, for the command is to every one to hear 'what the Spirit saith to *the Churches*...' "¹² [see v. 7]

B. Addressor: The inspector of the churches

1. He holds all seven messengers tightly in his grasp (the seven stars) = his care over the whole church
2. He walks about amid the lampstands = an inspection tour of the seven churches

⁹ Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 1:117.

¹⁰ Seiss, 1:118.

¹¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 2465.

¹² Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 1:154.

This form of address ought to cause caution on the part of the hearer. If you compare it with the other churches, every one that has some condemnation has a hint of warning and judgement in the salutation.

II. Commendation: rightness of religion (2-3, 6)

A. Orthodox zeal (2)

1. Note the intuitive knowledge of Christ as he observes the churches.
 - a. This word “I know” is used for each of the seven churches
 - b. This is knowledge of intuition, not knowledge gained by experience.

“The Apostles were deeply impressed by the Master’s knowledge of men. ... οἶδα emphasizes better the absolute clearness of mental vision which photographs all the facts of life as they pass.”¹³

2. The content of the Lord’s knowledge

a. The depth of zeal

1) Your works:

“that which displays itself in activity of any kind, deed, action ... of the deeds of humans, exhibiting a consistent moral character”¹⁴

2) Your labour:

originally, a beating, metaphorically hard work, as if your labour beats you up

3) Your perseverance:

ὑπομονή — bearing up under the load

¹³ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 24.

¹⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

3. Intolerance of evil: implies well-trained in truth, so as to know evil
- a. The description here is “you cannot bear” evil men, but we will see this word again

- b. Jesus Christ approves of intolerance of evil

Ignatius, writing about AD 110, fifteen or twenty years after Revelation, said, “indeed Onesimus himself greatly commends your good order in God, that ye all live according to the truth, and that no sect has any dwelling-place among you. Nor indeed do ye hearken to any one rather than to Jesus Christ, the true Shepherd and Teacher.”¹⁵

“This is God’s ideal, and every effort to amalgamate the church and the world is opposed to His mind and must end in confusion ... Someone asked Dr. A. T. Pierson, on one occasion, ‘Don’t you really think that the world is getting converted already?’ ‘Well,’ he said, ‘I admit that the world has become a little churchy, but the church has become immensely worldly.’”¹⁶

“To permit men known to be bad to be in *fellowship* or even in *office*, is common today, but is treachery to Christ — whom the Church represents. Further, it is deadly wrong instead of kindness, to the unsaved and evil, to have them in ‘fellowship.’ Some day they will curse you for such unfaithfulness!”¹⁷

4. Examination of false apostles

- a. Paul predicted the rise of false teachers, to this very church (Acts 20.29)
- b. The church took this admonition to heart and insisted on the right doctrine.

¹⁵ Ignatius, Letter to the Ephesians, 6 in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, electronic ed. (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 2000).

¹⁶ H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, 1930 rev. (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1920), 38.

¹⁷ William R. Newell, *The Book of the Revelation* (The Scripture Press, 1935), 37.

- 1) You need to know the right doctrine
- 2) You need the courage to ask the right questions
- 3) You need discernment to identify the wrong answers

B. Enduring labour (3)

1. Endurance [ὑπομονή - NAU “have perseverance”]

Hanging on despite difficulties.

2. Load lifting [βαστάζω, ‘shouldered the burden’ – NAU “have endured”]

- a. This word means to carry a relatively heavy load.
- b. It is used of a woman carrying a baby in her womb.

They could not ‘bear’ evil men, but they could bear much for His name’s sake.

3. Not grown weary – κιν “fainted” [verb form of ‘labor’ in v. 2]

- a. Perfect tense – “indicates a condition which continued when the endurance was at an end.”¹⁸
- b. When the end of the rope is reached, a knot is tied, and they just hang on.

The picture we are given is of a zealous, fervent, working, faithful, serving church.

C. Righteous hatred (6)

1. We will describe the Nicolaitans as best we can in connection with the church at Pergamos. But suffice this:
 - a. They were enemies of the truth
 - b. They were enemies of Christ
 - c. The Ephesians shared Christ’s attitude towards them, hating their *deeds* (Compare *teaching* in v. 15, at Pergamos)

¹⁸ Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 25.

2. Hatred of false doctrine and the works of false teachers is a Christ-like attribute.

“Hatred of evil deeds (α , not $\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$; contrast Ps 139.21f) is a true counterpart of the love of good, and both are Divine.”¹⁹

Psalm 139:21 Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? ²² I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.

Note the things that Jesus approves of. Those who do not hold to these kinds of positions are disloyal to Christ.

“These remarkable characteristics establish the fact that the church had served the Lord well, and few modern churches could qualify for such commendation.”²⁰

Again, the picture we are given is of a zealous, fervent, working, faithful, serving church... but ...

Something is wrong.

III. Condemnation: lapse of love (4-5)

- A. Forsaken affection (4)
- B. Fearsome warning (5)

IV. Consolation: assurance of life (6-7)

Note: The consolation is available to the overcomer only

- A. Condemnation tempered in consolation (6)
- B. The overcomer achieves the fundamental goal of true Christianity: the tree of life in paradise (7)

Conclusion:

We will conclude this message later, with a full exposition of the error of Ephesus.

¹⁹ Swete, 28.

²⁰ Walvoord, *The Revelation*, 55.

Let me say this in conclusion: it is possible as a church and as Christian people to be earnestly living for God but to (at the same time) earn His disapproval.

We need to beware and be warned! Do right, but stay right!