**PP** **Acts: To the End of the Earth**

**Part 53-Acts 19:11, Revelation 2:1-7 *A Case Study on Ephesus* 10/15-16/2022**

We are deviating from the book of Acts to take a closer look at the church of Ephesus and

particularly from the perspective of Jesus who years later, sent a letter to the church

This church was started by the Apostle Paul, then pastored by Timothy, the Apostle John as well

The letter of Jesus began: ***"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds***

***the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden***

***lampstands, says this:”* Revelation 2:1**

There is some speculation about who the ***‘angel of the church in Ephesus’*** is, but for several

reasons it is generally believed to be one leading the church, likely Onesimus

Jesus is the One Who ***‘holds the seven stars’*** the seven churches in Asia Minor, and He ***‘walks***

***among’*** these churches, also called lampstands

If correct, then Jesus speaks to His churches through anointed leaders, holding His churches

securely in His unbreakable grip, and is present in and among His churches, doing what?

Examining each of us, encouraging us, often convicting us, changing us, helping us

Now, what goes through your mind as you understand that even now Jesus is examining us,

evaluating us with a determination to help us grow in holiness, obedience, usefulness?

What follows in this letter to this church is a ***commendation, a criticism and a counsel***

**PP 1. Jesus gave a commendation to this church**

Ephesus was the market city of Asia, largely because it was located at an intersection of 4 major

roads, and it was built along a major river that led to the Mediterranean Sea

This city with a ½ million population held an annual, month-long spring festival, rivaling the

Olympics, with theater productions, concert halls, and a 25,000 person stadium

It had bathhouses, sewer systems, water fountains, and dominating its landscape was one of the

ancient wonders of the world, the temple of Artemis, daughter of Zeus, fertility goddess

It took 220 years to build this 60 feet high, 425 feet long and 220 feet wide temple, with 127

marble columns, 36 of which were overlaid with gold and jewels

The worship of Artemis fueled the city’s wealth, her altar and statue carved from a meteorite

It employed thousands of slaves, eunuchs and prostitutes and it was a sanctuary temple, meaning

that any criminal, regardless of the crimes, were given refuge if they made it within 200

yards of the temple grounds, one bow shot…a literal village of criminals sprang up

Yet even one of the city’s greatest philosophers, Heraclitus, reportedly said that the inhabitants of

 Ephesus were only fit to be drowned, so wicked were they

Not only did criminals prosper in Ephesus, so did the artisans who made the charms of Artemis,

the sale of which was fueled by the story of an undefeated Greek wrestler who wore one

tied around his ankle

So the magic arts thrived in this city as Pastor Kyle mentioned last week in Acts 19

Interestingly, sorcery and drugs in the ancient world went hand in hand

In speaking of end times events, the book of Revelation says unbelievers would not, **PP** ***“repent***

***of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”***

**Revelation 9:20-21**

**PP** ***‘sorceries’*** is translated from the Greek word, *pharmakeia*

The word originally referred to medicines in general, but it came to be used primarily of

mood-and mind-altering drugs used in occult practices to communicate with supposed

deities, but which were actually demons

Greek writers like Aristotle used the word as a synonym for black magic and witchcraft

You’ve heard of gateway drugs, but what you may not have considered is that mind and mood

altering drugs can be gateways for demonic influence and activities

Into this dark city Paul planted a church that would go on to plant several more churches all

through Asia Minor, western Turkey today

And Jesus had some very positive things to say to them: ***“‘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. I***

***know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not***

***grown weary.”* Revelation 2:2-3**

What a hard working church!

In fact, ***‘hard work’*** is actually just one Greek word and means exhausting, sweating labor

The Christians in this church left nothing in reserve, giving all their energy to serving God

Church is not a place for the lazy, or spectators or those on the sidelines or bench

The church got into the game, left it all on the field, tired but not ***‘grown weary’***, not giving up

They were watching out for false teaching, putting teachers to the test, enduring persecution

This church hated the ***‘works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.’* 2:6**

Who the Nicolaitans were is not exactly known, yet both Jesus and the church despised what

they taught and how they lived

What a commendable church: Hard working, discerning false teaching, enduring persecution all

for the sake of the name of Jesus, the glory of Jesus

Who wouldn’t be happy to be part of that church?

**PP 2- Jesus gave a criticism to this church**

***“But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.”* 2:4**

There are a couple of possible meanings that Jesus intended here:

**PP***First*, it could mean that the enthusiasm they originally had for Christ was gone

After all, God once said to backslidden Israel, **PP** ***“I remember the devotion of your youth, your***

***love as a bride.”* Jeremiah 2:2**

This is the passionate, new love of newlyweds

Do you remember when you were first saved, that fervency, on-fire-for-Christ passion?

Does that still describe you months, years later, still loving His Word, still loving to be with God

in prayer as the best part of your day, when your soul just is at its most right place?

For this church and perhaps for some of us today, love for God has waned

**PP** *Second****,*** Jesus may have meant that the love they had for each other was gone

I often say that there is a difference between a friendly church and a loving church

A friendly church stops at the exit door of the church, a loving one follows people into the streets

The church at Ephesus was the former and not the latter

In trying to understand the new patterns we and other churches are experiencing since Covid, I

read an insightful article by The Gospel Coalition[[1]](#footnote-0)

Churches all over are see inconsistent attendance and severe uninvolvement

Members who normally never missed church, now attend 1-2 times a month

The article highlighted dangers facing churches since Covid, the second being: **PP** ‘Mission

over our Maker’ (from *The Remedy for the Church’s Post-Covid Malaise*)

The author means by this that the mission of reaching communities growing the church can

easily become a greater priority than loving and adoring our Maker

This makes God a means to an end, the language of idolatry

In other words, **PP** *‘God wants worshipers before workers’* A.W. Tozer

This is nothing new in churches as 2,000 years ago, the church at Ephesus began to focus more

on ‘doing’ over ‘being’, mission over maker, work over worship,

Gone was loving God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself

Without love, hard work becomes a joyless legalism, duty rather than delight

This is a deadly spiritual cancer in a church and warranted a correction from Jesus

**PP 3. Jesus gave a counsel to this church**

***“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”* 5**

Jesus commanded them to ***‘remember’*** the great love they once had for God and others

**PP *“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for
 all the saints,”* Ephesians 1:15**

Can you recall a time when you used to love God so passionately, hungered to study the bible,

experienced powerful times of prayer, but now that all seems so long ago?

The great affection you once had for God is gone, and now you trudge along in this spiritual life

The correction Jesus gave to this church were three commands, the first one being, ***‘repent’***

**PP** To repent is to come to the realization that undoes me, that what I did was more than

broke God’s rules, but infinitely worse, I broke God’s heart

Repentance is the doorway into the blessings of God, into eternal life and into His fellowship and

joy and mercy, and peace

If we will not repent, God has nothing to give us, we cannot even begin to enter His realm

Repentance is followed by a changed life, one where we ‘***do the works you did at first’***, living

out our love for God like we used to in the beginning

Jesus didn’t shy away from telling them the consequence if they refused to repent: ***‘I will come***

***to you and remove your lampstand from its place.’* 2:5**

A church that loses their love for Christ and one another is no longer an effective lampstand that

displays the character, love and glory of Jesus Christ

He will not bless her and He will remove His presence and blessing from that church

To conclude, let’s ask ourselves what requires both honesty and courage: Do we truly love God?

Do we honestly have a consuming love for Jesus?

I don’t mean by that do we have a friendly and appreciative attitude toward God, but rather, do

we passionately love God, like the groom looks at his bride coming down the aisle?

Do our thoughts return over and over to Jesus throughout the day?

Is our greatest desire being with Jesus talking with Him throughout the day in prayer?

Can an hour even pass without a deep longing to express to God our love for him?

Is that not you?

If so, brother and sister, repent, it is the doorway into that kind of a relationship!

Will you commit to call out to God with the Psalmist, **PP *“Will You not revive us again, that***

***your people may rejoice in You?”*  Psalm 85:6**

And let that renewed love well up from deep within and spill over to people so that they can be

loved like they have never been loved before!

That is the kind of church that Jesus says, *I am home…this is My church!*

Pray

1. The Remedy for the Church’s Post-Covid Malaise [↑](#footnote-ref-0)