

“TO THE CHURCHES, WRITE . . .”

THE CHURCH THAT LOST ITS LOVE

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

“TO THE CHURCHES, WRITE . . .”

MORE THAN A LETTER

*Write in a book everything you see,
and send it to the seven churches in the cities of
Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.”*

*“Write down what you have seen—
both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen.
This is the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand
and the seven gold lampstands:*

*The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches,
and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”*

REVELATION 1.11, 19-20

THE SEVEN CHURCH CHIASM

- A. Ephesus: an **unhealthy** church
- B. Smyrna: a **healthy** church
- C. Pergamum: an **unhealthy** church
- D. Thyratira: an **unhealthy** church
- C' Sardis: an **unhealthy** church
- B' Philadelphia: a **healthy** church
- A' Laodicea: an **unhealthy** church

- ▶ *chiasm (“chi” - the Greek letter X): a literary style presenting various elements in a manner that emphasizes balance or parallels*
- ▶ *In this chiasm, churches with the worst conditions form the boundaries; churches with serious conditions form the core of the sermons; the longest is at the center.*

- (1) Each church’s message is relevant to all churches throughout history.
- (2) Healthy churches (and healthy Christians) are the minority.

THE SERMON STRUCTURE

- ▶ Identification *“This message is from . . .”*
- ▶ Commendation *“I know all the things you do.”*
- ▶ Condemnation *“But I have this complaint against you”*
- ▶ Correction *“Repent! Otherwise . . .”*
- ▶ Admonition *“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit . . .”*
“To everyone who is victorious . . .”

NOTE: The “commendation/complaint contrast” appears in the first, third, and fourth sermons but is not found in the fifth and seventh, because Christ found nothing to commend. Nor is a correction found in the second and sixth, because Christ found nothing to condemn.

IDENTIFICATION

“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. 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.”

REVELATION 2.1

- ▶ Christ identifies himself as the One who is “powerfully present” as the Head of the church, exercising His authority and awareness. This has always been God’s proximity to His people—

For the LORD your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you. Your camp must be holy, so that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you.

DEUTERONOMY 23.14

COMMENDATION

“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. You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.”

REVELATION 2.2-3

- ▶ Christ is fully engaged with his churches, fully aware of everyone and everything. The Ephesians were passionate about the truth, attentive to not being misled, and determined in their perseverance.

God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them.

HEBREWS 6.10

CONDEMNATION

“But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first! Look how far you have fallen!”

REVELATION 2.4-5a

- ▶ How did the believers in Ephesus see themselves? Does Christ have a different view of us than we do of ourselves?

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.

Who can understand it?

*“I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind,
to reward each person according to their conduct,
according to what their deeds deserve.”*

JEREMIAH 17.9-10 NIV

- ▶ From their perspective, their accomplishments placed them in good standing with Christ—a perspective that is eternally fatal.

“On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’”

MATTHEW 7.22-23

- ▶ The fact was that whatever they had done that was commendable, it wasn’t motivated by Christ-like love and, in his evaluation, their “Christianity” was therefore worthless as a witness of their faith.

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

JOHN 13.34-35

- ▶ The primary proof of “first” love is obedience to Christ’s commands; disobedience dishonors God and is a rejection of fellowship with Him.

Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

JOHN 14.23-24

- ▶ Right beliefs are no substitute for obeying Christ’s command—just as there was no substitute for his own obedience to his Father’s commands.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in His love. . . . My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

JOHN 15.9-10, 12

- ▶ The example of Christ is our singular definition and measure of love, and our love for God is no more valid than the love we have for others.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

1 JOHN 3.16-18

- ▶ Accommodating, comfortable, or reasonable are not considerations that Christ accepts in evaluating the quality and measure of our love. He is looking to to see whether we have a *love that exceeds the bond of every other relationship and the value of every other priority.*

CORRECTION

“Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don’t repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.”

REVELATION 2.5

- ▶ “repent” - a complete change of heart and direction, effected by the grace of God and the enablement of the Holy Spirit
- ▶ Are you doing everything you were doing when you first came to Christ? Can you look back to a time in your life when you were more committed, connected, faithful, or prayerful within the body of Christ than you are now?
- ▶ “If you don’t change, I will come and remove you from your place.”

ADMONITION

“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.”

REVELATION 2.7

- ▶ The final aspect of each message was the admonition that Jesus gave to each church. It contained two parts: ⁽¹⁾ a “call to hear” that was addressed to the “churches”, indicating that this message was meant for all churches and believers to hear and heed, and ⁽²⁾ a promise, set in eternity, for the one who resolved to succeed in obeying Christ.

- ▶ In the NT, Jesus was the only one to use this “call to hear” terminology.

“In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

LUKE 14.33-35

- ▶ What is the Holy Spirit saying to present-day churches? to Moravia Assembly of God? to you? How can we be sure that we are hearing what the Holy Spirit is saying and not simply what we want to hear? What will you do in response to what you have heard today?

“In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “ ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.’ ”

MATTHEW 13.14

“To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.”

- ▶ In His original creation, God had planted two important trees: the “tree of life” and the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Adam and Eve chose to eat the forbidden fruit of the second tree and forfeited their right to the tree of life. The Apostle John wrote:

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

PHILIPPIANS 1.9-11

- ✓ In your daily decisions, how do you discern what is “eternity best”? ¹
- ✓ How are you pursuing a life that is set apart for God? ²
- ✓ Can you say that you deeply hunger and thirst for righteousness? ³
- ✓ How is Christ’s love within you compelling you ⁴ to acts of faith, ⁵ an obedience to reach lost people, ⁶ worship, fellowship and ministry with and service to the body of believers? ⁷

¹ Romans 12.2 ² 2 Corinthians 7.1 ³ Matthew 5.6 ⁴ 2 Corinthians 5.14 ⁵ 2 Thessalonians 1.11-12 ⁶ Romans 9.3 ⁷ Romans 12.9-13; John 13.13-16