

Revelation 2:1 - 7

1 "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:

2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 4 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. 6 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

JERUSALEM – Vandals scribbled anti-Christian graffiti on the outer walls of one of Jerusalem's best-known churches early Tuesday morning, Israeli police said.

Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said the perpetrators defaced a wall leading to the Church of the Dormition. The century-old structure is built on the site where tradition says the Virgin Mary died.

*The graffiti, which read "**Jesus, son of a whore, price tag,**" had already been removed by midmorning, said Rosenfeld.*

He says police are still searching for the assailants, though suspicion has fallen on a fringe group of pro-settler Jewish extremists who have carried out similar vandalism on churches, mosques and Israeli army property. They say the acts are in response to what they consider pro-Palestinian policies by the Israeli government, a form of retribution they call a "price tag."

Israeli police said. Extremist Jewish West Bank settlers are suspected.

Where are the riots? Where is the outrage and threats!

Isn't this interesting. Price Tag is extremist Jewish slang that links the acts to jews who are angry that the nation of Israel is making concessions to Palestinians. Jewish settlers on the west bank have been uprooted and the land returned to Palestinians.

So, jews are angry with arabs, palestinians, so they deface a christian church! Why didn't they deface a mosque and write *Mahammad, son of a whore*, which is probably true.

They understand that doing that to a mosque would start WWII, while doing it to a christian church just makes the christians and the jews both sad, while they quietly scrub it away.

A couple of thoughts to ponder in this;

Jesus said this; Therefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men. Mt. 12:31

The people who wrote those words, blasphemous words that make you heartsick, those people are still under the love of God, and that sin can be forgiven them if they repent and leave Satan's kingdom behind, and come over to God's kingdom.

Saul, was an Israeli extremist. If he had spray paint, he would have defaced churches with blasphemous words. Saul was an Israeli terrorist. Worse than the folks with spray can blasphemy. Saul was a murderer. A christian killer. But our God turned him into Paul, the apostle.

In 1 Cor. 6:11 Paul says; *And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Such were some of you. Isn't forgiveness grand!

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All of the letters have a similar format;

Salutation. (all from Ch. 1 description of Jesus)

Commendation. (all but 1 church have some things their doing right)

Condemnation. (2 had nothing to condemn)

Call to repent and restore.

Promises for over-comers.

A little about Ephesus.

No other church comes to mind that has enjoyed a grander beginning than Ephesus.

In Acts 18 we read about Ephesus the first time, and then it dominates the scene for many years. Paul left Priscilla and Acquilla in Ephesus, and they were joined by Appollos. Then Paul returned and spent 3 years there teaching.

When he visits the elders later on his way to Antioch and Jerusalem he says this.

Acts 20: 25“And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 “Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole council of God. 28“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31“Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did

not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

After Paul was gone, he sent Timothy to be their pastor, and later on, John himself was at Ephesus as pastor when Domitian exiled him to Patmos.

So this church had enjoyed a who's who of leadership. They had it all.

And spiritually they were beyond compare. In Acts 19 we have the story of their magicians, now christians, bringing their occult books and burning them. The value of the books was in the \$1,000,000's of dollars in our equivalent.

They meant business. Paul did many miracles at Ephesus, and many demons were cast out.

This church was Rock Solid! And yet we'll see, they fell short, even with all of the massive foundation they had.

Vs.1 “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:

What we'll find in each of these letters is that the salutation is tailored to the recipient somehow. We'll see that as we go through.

Smyrna, saints suffering death, the salutation is from the eternal one. Power over death.

Pergamum, saints engaging in false doctrine, the salutation is from the sharp two edged sword of the word of God.

Thyatira, saints in immorality, the salutation is the fiery eyes that search the hearts, etc.

I understood that but it took me some quiet time to see the connection of

the salutation here with Ephesus.

Do you see it? *The One who holds . . . the One who walks*

What do people who are in love do? What do lovers do? Hold each other. Walk with each other. Do you see the intimacy there.

Individually and as a church, we have a Saviour who wants to be intimate with us. He wants to hold us. He wants to walk with us. He wants that intimate time that lovers must have . . . to maintain a love relationship.

Church is business. Especially large churches. Families are business. Lots of responsibilities. Lots of work to do. Especially when the kids are small. It's just a lot of work. Exhausting work. Depleting work.

When our family was young, we were both like the guy who rides off in all directions madly. Kids. Stuff to do. Other demands. Pam likes to be with other women in Bible studies, and fraternal type clubs. Friendships outside of the home were always more important to her than to me. Just how we're wired.

And Pam is capable. Her and Pat Woods were just a formidable team. Awesome what those 2 ladies could do. And so they were in demand. Help with this group. Set up a pre-school. Teach. Dry apples. Make up mexican food for this group or that. On and on it goes.

I helped. Never enough, but I helped. But ultimately I was a wise husband, because I finally would put my foot down and say, there's got to be a little time left for me . . . or else! Give me that phone. You can't say no, but I can.

There's lots to do, and it's all good stuff, but lovers must carefully guard intimate time with each other . . . or love dies. I'm sure we came as close as any couple to that ragged edge.

The parallel is obvious. The church is like a large family. There's tons to do. Pastors and even elders can run themselves ragged.

And guess what. Hosea 4:9. Anybody know it? *And it will be, like people, like priest; So I will punish them for their ways And repay them for their deeds.*

Churches start to look like their pastors. like people, like priest.

When pastors start to get so busy their's no time to be a lover, with Christ, pretty soon their churches start to look that way too.

We'll see that in the commendation. Vss 2,3

2'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

Churches are businesses. My brother in law, Pam's brother Fred, just left a \$220,000 a year gig where he lives in So. Cal. to become a full time pastor at his church.

It's a California mega church. Probably 5 - 7,000 members. They've got 10 or 15 full time pastors. Fred's job is more like CEO of a large company. He's the number cruncher, business manager for this large business ~ church.

Churches. Families. Businesses. There's a LOT of stuff to do.

Jesus goes through the list with Ephesus. Deeds. Toil. Perseverance.

They were a busy busy place. They were the mother church for all of the other churches in Asia Minor. Their good deeds were non-stop. Every day, every day, good deeds in a crazy community.

It wasn't easy to be a church in Ephesus. Home of Diana of the Ephesians. There was a giant temple to this deity, Diana or Artemus, depending on if you were greek or roman. There was non stop

confusion, temple prostitution, cacophony, open markets, noise, craziness. Not an easy place for good deeds.

There had been riots, because the christians were mucking up the business of Diana idols. They were hated. Not easy. But the good deeds just kept coming. This was solid solid group. Jesus says, I know. I know. I see the good deeds.

And the toil. Hard work! Lots of hard work in a place that is anti-christian, anti-God. Jesus says, I know, I see the deeds and the hard work.

And they kept it going. This letter may have been 45 years after their founding. That's perseverance. Jesus says, I know your perseverance. Not easy. It was hard work and they kept at it year in and year out.

And they were modeling righteousness for all of the surrounding churches. Jesus says; *and that you cannot tolerate evil men*

What exactly does that mean. What does it look like when a church can't tolerate evil men? This is a big buggaboo in America. The land of the free. Part of that freedom, at least so we seem to think is the freedom to do as I please as long as it's not hurting you.

We live in the land of non accountability. Don't ask me what I'm doing. It's none of your business. I'm not accountable to you! That's America. But that isn't the church.

We ARE accountable one to another. Remember when Israel was traveling to the promised land. What did God's law require them to do with evil men? different punishments, including stoning to death. Where? Outside the camp. Why? Why?? Why is this so important to God? Because He witholds blessing from groups that are sin stained.

God made provision for this in the church. Very similar to Israel. There is a well defined process for church discipline. The church won't experience God's blessing unless it is pure.

Look around you at the vast wasteland that is the church in America. Powerless. Lukewarm. Dead. Why? We're impure, and we refuse to implement church discipline. It's like some anachronistic bad word to even talk about it in America. We're the land of the non-accountable, after-all.

Let's bring this home. Where is Tonopah Community Church in this regard. Well, for starters, there's no membership here. Hard to discipline a sinning member . . . if they're not a member . . . because we don't embrace membership.

Anybody can vote. Come one, come all. There's no statement of faith that members must agree with and sign. Nothing of the sort. So how exactly would we implement church discipline. It's not important here. Is it important to Jesus?

He commends this church because it's difficult to do this, it's ugly business, it makes your stomach queasy to think about, but they're doing it. They're doing the HARD stuff. They don't tolerate wicked men. Or women.

That may raise more questions than it answers. It's so foreign to us. Tolerance is the key word. We're all wicked men when we get here, right? There's time involved, and submission to God's word. We don't excommunicate people the day they show up.

We patiently teach and love them. But ultimately, if they're unrepentant, they can't just hang around forever. There's a process. It's important to the Saviour. It's difficult. It becomes the dividing line between a church that receives good things from the Saviour and a church that dies. Ephesus could NOT tolerate wicked men.

That's one thing, but this next gives us an idea of the level of their commitment to hard work. They were doing battle with satan . . . hard work.

and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false

What does THAT mean??

Paul had these guys that followed him everywhere he went. False apostles that showed up and said, Paul didn't get the whole message. His message is incomplete. Jesus is OK, and that's a good starting point, but God still requires you to follow all of the Jewish laws. You have to be a law keeper to get to heaven.

Sort of a Judaism with Jesus on top like the cherry topping. False! False apostles!

So how did the Ephesians get the doctrine and the wisdom to 'test' these false apostles and give them a pass or fail? One of my favorite passages. We started with it.

26“Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole council of God. 28“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

That term, the *whole council of God*, is dear to me. It's why I believe so strongly in verse by verse, book by book exposition of the scripture. We aren't picking and choosing among the high points. If you faithfully teach, verse by verse, passage by passage, sooner or later, probably later in my case, but sooner or later, we will have taught the whole council of God.

Just like tonight, we dabbled in church membership and discipline a little bit. That might get me in trouble in this church. But it's in the text, and we're going to go there, popular, or not. It's part of the 'whole council of God'.

That was ultimately why I got exasperated and left the previous church I was a member of. It wasn't going to happen, no matter how hard I pushed, or even helped on Sun. eves. It's important!

That's why this church could test and fail those who showed up and claimed to be apostles. They had that foundation that Paul gave them, and they had clear exposition, by Paul, for 3 years . . . the whole council of God.

So this church is working hard, day in day out, persevering, doing the good deeds, doing the hard stuff, testing the phonies, and they're consistently keeping it up year in and year out!

Vs. 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary

See that persevered and endured for My name's sake, and not grown weary.

There's 'flash-in-the-pan' churches. I'm a text book flash in the pan. This is the longest I've ever been faithful to a ministry assignment. We're in our 4rth year, counting what we did at the other church. And I do count that. Because of the graciousness of the folks here, I walked in the door, asked after the service if there would be any interest in a Sun. eve. bible study service, and they said, can you start tonight. I only missed a week in the changeover.

Still, I'm a flash in the pan kind of guy. In the past, I've always grown weary, and quit.

I was lucky enough to have been at Grace Community Church when John Mac came to preach. John's in his 43rd year. He is the very picture of a guy who has persevered and endured for the sake of Jesus name, and not grown weary.

In the mid 1980's John showed signs of getting weary. There was a coup of sorts. His own elders wanted to dispose of him. I remember that period. The sermons got a little flat. The honeymoon was definitely over. But John kept going for His names sake.

And I'm happy to tell you, John is better than ever. I just downloaded a sermon where he compares Romans chapter 1, the no God, Sexual sin,

Homosexuality, and murder of infants, to the party platform of one of the parties running for president. Good stuff. And fun to listen to. After 43 years! And he shows signs of having 20 more remaining. No loss of energy, at all! In fact he seems to be gaining!

That's Ephesus as far as the endurance! And you're thinking to yourself, wow, where is that church! That's a church I want to go to. And they truly were, a really really good solid church . . . except . . .

Vs. 4 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Somewhere in the busy-ness of raising the kids and all the other work that has to get done to keep the family going, mom and dad, don't spend any time at all together, walking, holding each other, and . . . they fall out of love.

Somewhere in the business of being a big important church with all of the responsibilities and hard work, and good deeds, and spanking bad members, and testing phony prophets, and years in and years out . . . ephesus forgot to be intimate, they were just too busy, to be intimate with the Saviour. They fell out of love.

Vs. 5 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

Not easy. In our parallel of a married couple, how do you get the heat back? This isn't easy to do.

First of all you have to have 2 willing parties, don't you. Jesus is willing. But the church, in order to get back to where they were, has to understand their sin.

You're going 110% working and toiling and deeds and doctrine like an engine, steam in, expand, steam out, exhaust, steam in, expand, steam out exhaust, you're going at it 110%, somehow, year in, year out, you're keeping it up, year in, year out, and the Saviour shows up and says, 'fail'. Not good enough.

Stop! Stop the engine. Remember. Remember what it was like, being lovers, going for walks, just holding each other, for long minutes. Remember!

Repent! Our first priority, as lovers, was to each other. All this other stuff is secondary. We made the other stuff primary, and forgot to be lovers. Repent. Repent means change. Repent means stop, change directions, go a different way.

Do the deeds you did at first. Intimacy. Love. Remember when the only thing you could think about was being with the one you love. That's what Jesus wants. All the other stuff is important. But He wants YOU. First. You.

There are Ephesus type Christians. Christians who started out HOT. Hot for Jesus. Intimate with Jesus. Love, with heat. Is it sustainable?

After 42 years with the Saviour and 37 years with my wife, I'll say, yes. Yes. It's different when you're 60 than it is when you're 18. But it's the same. There's still heat. We still go on those walks.

Don't be an Ephesus type Christian. Check your relationship to Jesus. Did it grow cold somewhere during the years?

How important is it?

Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

Is divorce possible, with the saviour, in cases where love has gone cold and repentance doesn't happen? Apparently.

If you go to Joshua Project and get statistics for Turkey you'll find that the lampstands we're studying about here, are mostly removed. Turkey is 99.4% unreached for the saviour. That means that out of every 1,000 people, 994 have never heard the message about Jesus.

Dig a little deeper and you'll find that of the 6 out of a thousand, only 2 are really christians, the other 4 are nominal. Not very good news for Ephesus.

Frightening news for churches who have left their first love and are unrepentant.

Then Jesus says, *6 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate*

Jesus says, you've got this going for you at least. You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Some common ground. Remember what it was like to be on common ground with the Saviour?

Who are the Nicolaitans, and what was their sin?

No one really knows. There's a lot of guessing going on.

Ireneaus in the 2nd century says they were a sect of gnostics. If that's true, their deeds would have been a form of lawlessness that claimed the body was disconnected from spiritual life. It's going to do what it's going to do and it really doesn't make any difference. Sin it up.

Antinomianism. Lawlessness. Your spirits saved, alive with Christ, your body's dead, dying here. It doesn't matter what it does. Only your spiritual state matters. Let your body do what it pleases.

That's probably as good a guess as any. What may be true is that this and the other mention in the letter to the church at Pergamum so wiped them off the map that we don't have any info that's conclusive. One hopes.

Pergamum had embraced the false teaching. Ephesus had banished it, hated it. The difference was the foundation that Paul had laid on the word of God. Ephesus wasn't fooled for a minute by the latest trendiness. Call them old fashioned.

Looks like Jesus was old fashioned too. Ephesus hated it. Jesus hated

it.

Then the promise to those who will overcome. Every letter has this encouragement at the end. To him that overcomes.

When we were very little, my mom and dad were going to school in Three Hills, Alberta Canada. A missionary school.

Their monthly magazine from that school came for years. The Prairie Overcomer. I remember at age 5 being allowed into the print shop, where my dad worked as a volunteer (everybody at that school had to DO some of the work necessary to keep the place going). They would let me center the magazine in an ancient, even then, machine and step on the foot switch which send the staple through. Ca chunk. Ca chunk.

We would never do that now. It isn't . . safe . . ok, don't get me preaching on *that*.

Overcomers. The english translators could have used other words here. Him who Conquers. Has Victory. None seem adequate for old fashioned me. I want to be an overcomer.

7'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

Wow. The letter is about coldness. Death. Removal. Jesus says, repent, overcome, and I'll give you LIFE in the Paradise of God. Adam and Eve ate from the tree of death. I want to be an overcomer so I can eat from the tree of life in Paradise. The paradise of God.

Did you see the trinity at work in that encouragement to overcome. Spirit, I, first person for the writer who is Jesus, and paradise of God. All 3 persons of the trinity are pulling for you. Be an overcomer.

