

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

THE LOVELESS CHURCH Revelation 2:1-7

INTRODUCTION

The world is full of churches. In almost every one of our American towns there's a white church with a steeple, a stone church covered with vines, a modern church built at angles, and usually the church with the most impressive stained glass windows.

Some churches have chairs down the aisles, while others have pews. Some churches sing only traditional hymns, while others offer a more contemporary worship style. Some churches are so full that they have people standing in the foyer, while in others the pastor stares over empty rows to reach the eyes of the timid souls in the back. Some churches are committed to the truth of God's Word, while others are more concerned with entertaining the masses.

There are many kinds of churches and hundreds of different denominations. Regardless of what a church looks like, how many people are in the church, what their service looks like or what denomination the church is, the only true church is made up of individuals who have embraced Christ as their Lord and Savior.

So it seems to me that the important question about a church is not what it looks like in regards to the building or the style of service, but what it looks like to Christ? Have you ever thought about what the church must look like to Christ? What would Christ say about the church? Let me ask this question, what would Jesus say about our church? What would Christ have to say about Valley Bible Church?

While we may have to guess at what Christ would say about Valley Bible, this morning we will begin looking at a passage in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, where Christ evaluates seven particular churches in Asia Minor that highlight the characteristics that our church should and should not have. Remember that these are seven literal churches in the seven postal districts of Asia Minor and that the apostle John had previously ministered to these seven churches prior to his exile on the Island of Patmos.

We begin today by looking at the message to the church in Ephesus. Please turn in your Bibles to **Revelation 2:1-7** and let us read what Christ has to say about the Ephesian church.

We will examine 6 aspects of the message to the church in Ephesus so that we might understand the characteristics that Christ desires His church to possess.

I. The First Aspect of This Message is The Commission to Write to the Church in Ephesus!

This commission is recorded for us in **Revelation 2:1**. John records, "*To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:*" Notice that there are two features in this commission to write.

- A. The first feature of this commission is that it is written to an angel.

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Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The term angel can literally be rendered “messenger” as in **Luke 7:24** or **James 2:5**.

So the letter is addressed to the messenger in the church at Ephesus. ***Who is the messenger of the church?*** It is the message giver or in other words the pastor or teaching elder of the church.

Why is the letter directed to the pastor? The letter is directed to the pastor of the church because he is responsible for the spiritual condition of the church and because he is the one who can communicate this message to the congregation.

B. The second feature of this commission is that it is written to a church.

In particular it is directed to the church in the city of Ephesus. It is necessary that we have a good understanding of what the city of Ephesus was like.

So, what was the city of Ephesus like?

- The city of Ephesus was a city of Geographical Importance!

The city was located on the Cayster River about three miles upriver from where it flowed into the sea. Those disembarking at the harbor traveled along a magnificent, wide, column-lined road called *The Arcadian Way*, which led right to the center of the city. It was also located at the intersection of four of the most important Roman roads in Asia Minor.

- The city of Ephesus was also a city of Political Importance!

It served as home to the Roman governor of the province and possessed the status of a free city, meaning that it was self-governing and free from oppressive Roman control.

- The city of Ephesus was also a city of Commercial Importance!

It was one of the oldest and largest cities in Asia Minor with an estimated population of 250,000 to 500,000 at the writing of this letter. Since it lay at the crossroads of civilization, it served as an important trade and banking center. It was also known for its great library, opulence and wealth.

- The city of Ephesus was also a city of Religious Importance!

Religiously the Ephesians primarily worshipped Diana, the goddess of the woodlands and fertility. The temple of Diana was one of the wonders of the world, dating back to the sixth century B.C. The temple served as one of the most important banks in the Mediterranean world. Since the temple area possessed the

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right of asylum, it also provided sanctuary for criminals who could reach the temple grounds prior to being apprehended. The temple of Diana was also unspeakably vile. Her idol was a gross, monstrosity, popularly believed to have fallen from heaven (Acts 19:35). The temple grounds were chaotic, filled with many priests, temple prostitutes, bankers, criminals, musicians, dancers, and frenzied hysterical worshippers. Such a picture gives us a good indication of the moral climate of the city. One that was spiritually bankrupt.

So, what about the church in Ephesus?

Perhaps no church in history had as rich a heritage as the congregation at Ephesus.

According to **Acts 18:18-26**, the gospel was first introduced by Paul's close friends and partners in ministry, Aquilla and Priscilla. While Paul initially visited the synagogue at the close of his second missionary journey (**Acts 18:19-21**), it was on his third missionary journey in which Paul likely founded the Ephesian church and ministered to the surrounding region (**Acts 19-20**). Later during his first Roman imprisonment, Paul would write an important New Testament letter to the Ephesian church emphasizing both the nature and purpose of the church.

The heritage of the church did not stop with Paul. According to **1 Timothy 1:3**, Paul's protégé Timothy served the church in Ephesus. And according to church history, the Apostle John served as elder of the Ephesian church prior to his arrest and imprisonment on the Island of Patmos.

The church in Ephesus had a rich 40-year history being instructed and influenced by teachers such as Paul, Timothy, and John. Here at Valley Bible, we have our own heritage of godly leaders who have sacrificed to lead and teach this body of believers. (Dale; Jim; Gerry; Lance, Dan and many of our deacons).

Hebrews 13:7 exhorts us to “*remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.*”

Let us respect our elders leaders and seek to imitate their faith as they follow Christ.

II. The Second Aspect of This Message is The Correspondent of the letter to the Church in Ephesus!

In **Revelation 2:1**, John goes on to record this statement, “*The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lamp stands says this.*” Who is the correspondent of this letter? Who is the real author of this message to the church in Ephesus? It is none other than Christ!

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Two images of Christ are highlighted here:

A. **First**, Christ has Complete Power over His Church.

He identifies Himself as “*The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand.*” The imagery here is drawn off the Vision of Christ in **Revelation 1:12-16**. Remember that the seven stars are explained in **Revelation 1:20** as being the seven angels of the seven churches. Remember that this is a reference to the messengers of these seven churches. These seven messengers demonstrate the function of spiritual leadership in the church and are under the absolute authority and complete control of Christ.

B. **Second**, Christ has a Continual Presence in His Church.

He identifies Himself as “*The One who walks among the seven golden lamp stands.*” This image is also taken from the Vision of Christ in **Revelation 1:12-16**. Remember according to **Revelation 1:20**, that these seven lamp stands symbolize the seven churches in Asia Minor. The emphasis here is on Christ’s continual presence in the midst of His church just as He promised in **Matthew 28:20**, “*and lo I am with you always even to the end of the age.*” We must remember that Christ has sovereign authority and control over His church. He is in control of those who lead the church and continually present in the midst of His church.

III. The Third Aspect of This Message is The Commendation Given to the Church in Ephesus!

As we move into **Revelation 2:2-3**, Christ commends the Church in Ephesus. Let’s Read! *What does Christ commend the church in Ephesus for?*

A. First, Christ commends their Sacrificial Works!

He begins by informing them that He knows their deeds. Certainly Christ possesses a full and complete knowledge. The Lord of the church knows everything there is to know about the church. The term *deeds* is a general term summarizing all that follows. *What were the deeds of the Ephesian church?*

- The first deed that Christ commended the Ephesian church for was their toil.

The term toil [KOPOS] denotes labor to the point of sweat and exhaustion. It describes an all-out effort, demanding all that a person has to give—physically, mentally, and emotionally.

The Ephesians were diligent workers in the church. In the midst of the pagan darkness that surrounded them, they were aggressively doing the work of the church. They were laboring to the point of exhaustion.

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- Do you toil for the cause of Christ?
- Do you labor for Christ to the point of exhaustion?
- Are you aggressively sharing the gospel with those who do not know Christ?
- Are you edifying the saints?
- Are you building up the body of Christ?
- Are you caring for those who are in need?

As believers in Christ, as members of the body of Christ, we can learn a lesson from the Ephesian church. Christ commends those who toil in the church to the point of exhaustion.

- The second deed that Christ commended the Ephesian church for was their perseverance.

The term perseverance [HUPOMONE] denotes patience in trying circumstances. It pictures courageous acceptance of hardship, suffering and loss.

Christ makes a second statement regarding perseverance in verse 3, where He says, *“and you have perseverance and have endured for My namesake, and have not grown weary.”* The Ephesian church continued to persevere in the work of Christ despite the moral darkness of the city. They had endured hardship, suffering, loss and criticism without growing weary. They had followed the example of their founder, the Apostle Paul who suffered beatings nearly to death, imprisonments, shipwreck, and criticism from the Judaizers. Yet he persevered for the sake of Christ, never growing weary. Likewise, as believers, we need to persevere in the work of Christ without growing weary despite the immorality of the world around us.

B. Second, Christ also commends their Spiritual Wisdom!

Christ says in verse 2, *“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.”*

1-The Ephesian church would not tolerate evil men. They had a high standard of holiness being sensitive to sin and false doctrine.

In particular they stood up against the Nicolaitans as Christ mentions later in verse 6. Christ says, *“Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”* Now, there is some disagreement as to what heresy is being mentioned here. Some believe that Nicolas in **Acts 6** was a false believer who became an apostate and retained some influence with the church. Others believe that these Nicolaitans misrepresented the teaching of Nicolas. Whatever the case the deeds of the Nicolaitans were clear and recorded throughout early church writings.

They were involved in all sorts of sensual temptations leading to sexual immorality. They exaggerated the idea of Christian liberty to the point of antinomianism.

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Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Antinomianism is defined as the practice of overcoming by indulging the appetites to the point of exhausting them. The Ephesian church did not tolerate such licentious behavior. In fact, they hated such behavior.

2-The Ephesian church also tested those claiming to be apostles and strongly dealt with those who proved to be false.

Even in the first century church, false doctrine and false teachers posed a serious threat to the church, but the church in Ephesus was, not fooled by false doctrine or false teachers. They were a doctrinally pure church.

In our day, there is much false doctrine and heresy being taught. There are many false teachers who have infiltrated the Christian church. Here at Valley Bible we have a commitment to the truth. We have a commitment to sound doctrine! We need to maintain this commitment because Christ commends it.

Even in our personal lives:

We need to be discerning as to what Christian programming we may watch on TV. We need to be discerning as to what Christian books we read. We need to be discerning as to what Christian materials that we might use to teach with.

Why do we need such spiritual discernment? Because, Christ hates false doctrine being spread within His church. If this was where Christ concluded this message, it would all be good news for Ephesus. Despite all the praiseworthy elements in the Ephesian church, the penetrating, omniscient gaze of the Lord Jesus Christ had spotted a fatal flaw.

IV. The Fourth Aspect of This Message is A Condemnation for the Church in Ephesus!

There is only one condemnation given to the church in Ephesus, however it is a serious one. Christ says in verse 4, *“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”*

Though they maintained their doctrinal orthodoxy and continued to serve Christ, that service had degenerated into mechanical orthodoxy. Christ had their heads and their hands but not their hearts. This is speaking of the corporate body as a whole. Certainly some in the church had not left their first love. There were certainly some who had never known the Lord at all.

Notice that the church did not lose their first love, but they left their first love. The word means to quit or forsake and emphasizes responsibility. They purposely forsook their love for the Lord, which resulted in routine mechanical orthodoxy. We see this same pattern repeated throughout the Old Testament with Israel especially in the book of Judges. Israel was also rebuked by both Jeremiah (Jeremiah 2:2-13) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 16:8-15).

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Despite its outwardly robust appearance, a deadly spiritual cancer was growing at the heart of the Ephesian church. They still possessed sacrificial works and spiritual wisdom, but they had lost their focus. They had been so busy doing the work of the Lord that they forgot the Lord of the work. They had forgotten to Love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and strength.

The lack of a vital love relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ would eventually open the door to spiritual apathy, indifference to others, love for the world, compromise with evil, and ultimately with the death of the church. This is recorded for us in church history. By the 5th century A.D. the Ephesian church would be no more.

As believers, we need to continue to remember Christ's great commandment in Mark 12:30, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." This love for God will manifest itself in love for others (1 John 4:7-8) and obedience to Christ's commands (John 14:15, 21). Let us remember that our work in the church should be the result of our relationship with Christ, of our love for Christ and serve the purpose of honoring Christ.

V. The Fifth Aspect of This Message is The Counsel Given to the Church in Ephesus!

What can the church in Ephesus do to correct the problem that exists? Christ offers a prescription for correction in verse 5. He says, "*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 lamp stand out of its place—unless you repent.*"

Christ offers a 3-step program for correction:

STEP ONE: The Ephesian church was instructed to Remember from where they had fallen.

Forgetfulness often results in spiritual decline. If we forget to read our Bible or pray for too many days in a row, then we are no longer disciplined to do so and spiritual decline results. The Ephesians were be called to remembrance. They were to recall their past commitments and reevaluate their present compromise. They needed to remember their strong spiritual heritage and the love for God that the first generation of Ephesian believers had possessed. As believers, we should also remember our commitment to Christ. We should remember and rekindle our love for the Lord.

STEP TWO: The Ephesian church was instructed to Repent.

The Ephesian church had not loved the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. Sure they had done some great works, but their motivation in doing these great works was wrong. Their heart condition was wrong. They needed to come before the Lord and repent. They needed to come before the Lord and seek His forgiveness and make the necessary changes in their lives. They needed to reject their sins, turn toward Christ and demonstrate their repentance with true love. As believers, we are also called to repent of our sins. When we recognize that we have fallen into sin, we need to come before the

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Lord with a contrite heart, confess our sin before Him and make necessary changes in both our attitude and actions.

STEP THREE: The Ephesian church was instructed to Repeat the deeds they had done at first.

They needed to demonstrate that their repentance was genuine by doing what they had done at first. They needed to serve the Lord with a burning heart of love. They needed to return to the deeds that demonstrated their true love for the Lord. They were to have a commitment to Christ, not to good works! They were to have a living faith, not a dead orthodoxy! What would be the result for the Ephesian church if they did not follow Christ's 3-step program? Removal of their lamp stand! Their refusal to repent would result in their removal as a church.

Loveless churches eventually lose their ability to shine in a dark world. The Ephesian church closed their doors in the fifth century. They lost their ability to shine and thus their lamp stand was removed. Here at Valley Bible, we all need to be committed to Christ with our entire being. We all need to demonstrate our love for the Lord. We need to be involved in the things that help our love relationship with Christ to grow. We need to be devoted to Bible study, prayer, fellowship and worship. And certainly we offer a plethora of ministry opportunities to help each of us grow in our relationship with Christ.

VI. The Sixth Aspect of This Message is The Challenge to the Overcomers in Ephesus!

Finally, Christ issues forth a challenge in verse 7. He says, *“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.”*

What an uplifting way to end a letter! This challenge is a promise given to those who overcome.

In **1 John 5:4-5**, the Apostle John identifies the overcomer as all true believers. So the overcomer is not referring to those who have attained a higher level of the Christian life, but it identifies those who are true believers in Christ.

What is promised to those who overcome? Christ says they will eat of the tree of life.

The tree of life is first referred to in **Genesis 2:9**, where it stands in the Garden of Eden. Access to the tree of life was lost due to man's sin, when he was forbidden to eat from it (**Genesis 3:22**). The tree of life appears again in the New Jerusalem in **Revelation 22:2, 14, 19**. The tree of life here symbolizes eternal life, while the Paradise of God is speaking of heaven (cf. Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:4).

The promise that is given to the overcomer is that of eternal life with God in heaven. What a precious promise for those in Ephesus who were true believers and had not left their first love. What a precious promise for those who would heed Christ's counsel to remember, repent and

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Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

repeat. All who overcome will receive the blessed reward of a glorified body and live eternally with God in heaven. As true believers in Christ, we are overcomers. As overcomers, we will share in this precious promise of eternal life with God in heaven.

CONCLUSION

So, back to our initial question. What would Jesus say about Valley Bible Church? I hope and pray that He would commend us not only for our sacrificial works and spiritual wisdom, but also our love for God.