



Ephesus
How is Your Love Life with Jesus these Days?
Revelation 2:1-7

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As we learned last week, Jesus had John specifically address seven churches and they were named in a very particular order. This book was intended for all believers, but these seven churches and the order they were referenced was intended to also communicate prophesy, in advance, about the history of the church up to the moment that Jesus Christ, in fulfillment of John 14, returns to take His church to be with Him for all eternity.



The first church on that list is Ephesus. But before getting too deep into this first letter, we need to step back and examine how we got here.

Last time we were together I referenced John having an Eli moment and then did a really bad explanation of what that means. But since this is something that each church also had to deal with, I want to go back and cover that as it is an Old Testament concept.

Then I want to take a look at the church order, then we will talk about Ephesus and the letter Jesus dictates to John.

Eli, as we learn in 1 Samuel 1, was the High Priest when the Tabernacle was in Shiloh during the time of the Judges. We are not told much of his background other than learning that Eli, who started off well in the service of YAHWEH, had drifted, a lot.

First, we are introduced, without much of an introduction, to him sitting at the entrance, since he was also apparently a judge, of the Tabernacle. In his life, there had been moments that he needed to make decisions about his faithfulness in following the Lord. Based on the word choice about him, we learn he has had multiple Eli moments, moments to decide to be faithful, or not be faithful, and his decisions have been poor. So poor that since the text does not provide his title, it is intended to convey to us as we read about him, that he has been rejected as the High Priest by YAHWEH and has disqualified himself. On top of that, he has two sons who were in unbelieving believers.

Here is a man who started off well, but during the course of his life, had made decisions regarding his walk that resulted in him drifting away, rather than moving towards, the Lord. Each was an Eli moment. We have them as well, those times in our life when we must decide, will we walk with Jesus on this matter, or will we decide without praying about it.

By the time a young boy named Samuel arrives at the Tabernacle. It has become rather obvious that as a believer, Eli will not be finishing well. And his sons, they are headed for destruction since they are unbelievers (1 Samuel 2:12).

After Samuel arrived, Eli tried to correct his sons, but they had already reached the point with the Lord that they were doomed. The reality, the entire family had and was enriching themselves and literally fattening themselves on the sacrifices being brought to the Tabernacle by not observing the law they were required to follow.

The Lord sent a prophet to Eli to warn him and tell him judgment is coming (2 Samuel 2:27-36) providing close to his last Eli moment, once which he failed to take seriously.

Then there was the event with Samuel. One night, as Samuel slept in the Holy Place just outside the Holy of Holies, he heard a voice calling him. He told Eli and for once Eli made a wise decision and counseled Samuel to talk to the one who was calling him. When the Lord walked through the curtain and showed up right in front of Samuel, this young boy sat up and listened to what he was told. It was a final Eli moment, he had already gone too far, and the Lord had Samuel tell Eli, his number was up. Yes, Eli was indeed judged, his boys died violently, the Ark of the Covenant was taken captive, and Eli died in a freak accident as a result of hearing the news. Obvious judgment from God.

There were numerous opportunities for him to make good decisions, we aren't told about them, we are only told of the results of the bad decisions and how, for a believer who has refused to acknowledge or pray about the basics, he reached the point where he couldn't pray and seek the Lord on those things which were truly important. Things like whether to allow the Ark to go into combat with the army.



The Eli moments he had in his life, are those decision points which, when they are all added up, led to this believer, not finishing well.

As we saw last time, John had already made decisions all of his life leading him to being in exile for the Lord.

His Eli moments had produced fruit since he had remained faithful to the Lord. Now, he has had the moment where Jesus Himself showed up in devotions and wants to reveal to Him, what the Father has just revealed to Jesus.

Each of the seven churches are about to receive a report card from Jesus. After the rapture of the church, all of us will have a one on one with Jesus Christ as well, our meeting is not one regarding a report card, it is a job evaluation. Basically, since we have been saved, what have we done with it and why?

There are events taking place in each of the seven churches that reveal how the leadership and the flock of each church have dealt with their Eli moments. These points of decision in their walk with the Lord. These are the things which are, that Jesus commanded John to write about.

The seven churches that Jesus addresses are real churches that existed in Asia Minor at the time the letters are written to them by John. John is familiar with each one of them. He may have even taught in each one of them.

I am sure he was not aware of the things that Jesus provides him insight into, even in the first church, Ephesus, where John was the Pastor. He had been in exile for a while now.

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. (Seiss 1901, 149)

As we dig into these seven letters, each church that is referenced has four interpretations connected to the letter. Each letter is addressed to a specific church and the angel of that specific church. There is a historical, point in time application to each letter with a direct message for the church in John's time. At the end of each separate letter there is the admonition "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Each church, "each one is a composite picture of the church. There is something that is applicable to all churches in all ages in each message to each individual church. In other words, when you read the message to the church in Pergamum, there is a message for your church and a message for you personally." (McGee, Thru the Bible Commentary 1997, 898)

This is prophecy regarding church history from Jesus, personally.

Each letter applies to the church it was addressed to. Each letter also applies to a historical period of church history describing the church during that time. Each letter is always also applicable to all churches in history as well as today. Each of the churches have always existed at the same time throughout time. And they all exist today. But the overall characteristic of the church during the point in time being discussed, is the one that shows up being addressed in the letter.

Here in the last days, the major characteristic of churches today is that of Laodicea.

Each letter also applies to you and me.



The Seven Letters

These churches are prophetic descriptions of church history from Pentecost to the Second Coming.

1. Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7) = the church of the Apostles, A.D. 33–100 (Pentecost to John)
2. Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) = the church of Persecution from Rome, A.D. 100–313 (John to Constantine)
3. Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17) = the church embraced by and becomes the state, A.D. 313–590 (Constantine to Gregory)
4. Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29) = the church runs the state, Papal Rome, the Pornocracy and the rise of Orthodoxy, A.D. 590–1517 (Gregory to Luther)
5. Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6) = The Reformation and Eli Moments lost, finishing poorly, A.D. 1517–1792 (Luther - Carey)
6. Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13) = The Modern Missionary Movement and Eli Moments Won, finishing well, A.D. 1792–1914 (Carey to rapture)
7. Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22) = Period of Apostasy, the Unbelieving Believing Church, not finishing at all, A.D. 1914 – the Rapture (WWI – Now and Soon)

The last four churches are all ones that are connected with the rapture. They will all be in existence at the time Jesus comes for His church and identifiable as the rapture is referenced as a reality for each to be ready for.

- Thyatira – Orthodox Church
- Sardis – Protestant Reformation Church
- Philadelphia – End time true church, missionary church
- Laodicea – End time phony bologna (progressive) church

As the report cards are in the process of being issued by Jesus, we will see the following highlights:

- The churches in Ephesus and Laodicea are both in grave danger of losing their lampstands.
- Nothing good is said about the churches in Sardis and Laodicea.
- Nothing bad is said about the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia.
- And one church, Laodicea, needs salvation and is promised to be left behind in the rapture except for the few who find salvation.

Church 1, Ephesus

Revelation 2:1–7

““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: ‘I know your deeds and your labor and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people, and you have put those who call themselves apostles to the test, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured on account of My name, and have not become weary. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 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 I will remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But you have this, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.’” (NASB 2020)

The church in Ephesus was founded by Priscilla and Aquila. Paul passed through the area after leaving Corinth he and the team spent a short time in the synagogue, but Paul left for Antioch for some R&R (Acts 18:18-22). He did leave Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus to teach.



Apollos spent some time in Ephesus as well and had his doctrine fine-tuned by Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:24-28) since he was only acquainted with the Baptism of John the Baptist. Apollos went to Corinth and Paul, on his third missionary trip, returned to Ephesus and was there for two years.

While there, the Lord did mighty works, and miracles through his ministry there. In typical Pauline fashion, after a riot led by members of the guilds building false gods and losing business due to all of the conversions taking place in Ephesus.

Paul would later pass back through Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem and the arrest that would lead to him being in Rome. When he passed through and stopped, he held the first Pastor's conference we see in the scriptures (Acts 20:17-38).

As Paul left the area, he asked Timothy to remain there as pastor (1 Timothy 1:1-7) but this was to only be a temporary assignment. Sometime in the mid-60s, after the start of the Jewish revolt that would lead to the fall and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, John arrived in Ephesus and would be based there, ministering to the churches in Asia Minor and pastoring in Ephesus, until he was exiled.

When John arrived in Ephesus, it was a booming city of about 250,000 people. It was also the home of a major temple to Artemis (Diana).

In the first century, however, the great temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and a major destination for pilgrims and tourists from across the Mediterranean. It was 130 × 70 meters [142 × 77 yards] in terms of its footprint—almost four times the footprint of the Parthenon. Its high roof was supported by more than 120 towering columns. (deSilva 2018)

If you were to go to Selçuk Turkey today, you would find that most of the stones that were used in the Temple, were repurposed and used to build a fortress that overlooks the city as well as the Basilica that John is said to be buried in. It is easy to see why there had been a riot as citizens began to come to Christ. The Temple complex employed thousands of priests and priestesses (sacred prostitutes). The building was bigger than the Parthenon in Athens and was the first to ever be built completely of marble.

Ephesus was the home of many sacred temples, however, including some to the emperors (Augustus himself commissioned one to Julius Caesar in 29 B.C.). The imperial cult thrived there. Indeed, under Domitian (81–96) Ephesus was named “warden” or guardian of the imperial cult (called a “temple keeper”), and a temple to Domitian was built. (Osborne 2002, 109)

To this church, a center of evangelism, goes the first letter from Jesus.

The letter is being sent to the church in Ephesus via an angel. Yes there is a physical church there, but the angel's involvement also shows us there is a spiritual component to this letter as well. There is a different angel involved in the oversight of each church thus the address to the angel.

Ephesus means “desirable,” such a term as a Greek applied to the maiden of his choice. Ephesus gives us a picture of the Church as it was in the beginning, when the Lord held the stars (His servants) in His hand, and controlled their ministry. (Ironsides 1920, 37)

Remember that term as well especially considering the indictment we read in verse 4. This church understood the assignment of being separated from the world and ensuring right doctrine.

This is rather amazing since Ephesus was a known financial center as well as a city with a reputation for, even in Rome, being immoral.



As Jesus address this church, He identifies Himself as the one who has complete control over the churches. The entire church is held in His hand and Jesus is tireless in His activity within each church.

Whenever and wherever we gather to worship, Jesus is there. Guaranteed.

Revelation 2:2–3

“I know your deeds and your labor and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people, and you have put those who call themselves apostles to the test, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured on account of My name, and have not become weary.” (NASB 2020)

If you are a false teacher, Ephesus is not a place you want to go to. Jesus praises this church for the serious work they do to ferret out false teachers. They understand it is a 24/7 job and the church is committed to and involved in the levels of spiritual warfare necessary to protect the flock.

Due to the size and location of Ephesus, and the amount of money to be found there, it was an obvious target for false teachers. When Paul wrote to the church there, he alluded to the issue.

Ephesians 4:14

“Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.” (NLT)

That was also why, in the early days of the church, Paul tasked Timothy to help them as well.

1 Timothy 1:3–4

“When I left for Macedonia, I urged you to stay there in Ephesus and stop those whose teaching is contrary to the truth. Don’t let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees. These things only lead to meaningless speculations, which don’t help people live a life of faith in God.” (NLT)

The leadership got the assignment. But something happened as they guarded the hen house from the wolves. They forget all about the care and feeding of the flock. We see this all over the internet today with “ministries” all over the place dedicated to sniffing out “false teaching.”

- They were doing things right.
- They worked hard and consistently.
- They did not stop; they knew the enemy they were fighting.
- They did not tolerate sin in the camp or even a hint of it in the camp.
- They jealously guarded the flock from the false teachers.

Is there a need for this today? Absolutely. Deception is still the number one attack vector for Satan. He has used it consistently since Genesis in the Garden of Eden. And because we are sooooo gullible, someone somewhere will bite. They always do.

Revelation 2:4–5

“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 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 I will remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.” (NASB 2020)

The dark side of that type of emphasis though is you begin to examine everything as false teaching, even disagreements over minor things in the scriptures. There are those today who have ministries that are so



based on Calvinism and reformed theology that if you teach something that is not in that wheelhouse, you are a false teacher.

This is a study of Revelation, not a study of tactics being used by so called sin sniffing ministries. But they exist. There is no love there and I have had to deal with them almost constantly for the past 14 years.

Their actions reveal graphically what it is that Jesus is providing to the church in Ephesus on their report card. They have lost their first love.

Don't get me wrong, they were doing a superb job of stopping those who were needing to be stopped. In the church today, that is now incredibly difficult due to the influx of so-called ministries that are not based in an actual church, but on the abilities of the one doing "ministry" to separate you from your paycheck.

We have internet-based ministries today that with the camera work and the way they present those meetings online, manage to produce in the viewer FOMO, the fear of missing out. The idea is to make you want to be there, in person. Why just watch, be there and experience the emotional high personally riding on the skills and capabilities of professionals working to get everyone emotionally charged up. This is not new. Back in the days of black and white broadcast television, this was done in much the same way as today. The "ministry" would provide the director, all they needed in those days were the cameras and recording facilities. Today, that is all in house.

Yes, they will use the Bible, out of context. Yes, they will assert things that for those with the gift of discernment seem a little off. But when someone starts telling you there are 5, 10 or 15 different ways that you can activate the gift of tongues in your life, run, do not walk away.

Here is the thing, we are to be in love with Jesus. We are to be in love with His word. That drives us to want to study His word and learn what is in it. Yes, we do indeed have to look out for those wanting to deceive, that is in my job description of shepherding the flock. But we are not to be so involved in ferreting out false teaching, that in the process we no longer reflect the love of the one who died for us.

When Christ first invaded the hearts of the lost in Ephesus, it was very different than what was there by 96 AD. "We see in Acts 19:1–20:1 that the church in Ephesus was so alive in Christ, so profoundly in love with Jesus, that it was making a powerful impact upon the world around it. All the residents of the province of Asia heard the gospel (Acts 19:10), the name of Jesus was extolled (Acts 19:17), and a burning of magic books revealed a radical paradigm shift in the lives of believers in the midst of the culture of Ephesus (Acts 19:19). In addition, the economy of the city was affected so much that the metalsmiths stirred up the entire citizenship body to hold an unscheduled meeting (Acts 19:23–41). Obviously, the church in Ephesus was impacting its world with the gospel." (Mulholland Jr. 2011, 435)

Jesus calls them to remember what that was like. Remember what it was was like when you first came to Jesus and discovered His love. As we do that, then we look back at where we are today, are we still in love with Jesus like we were then? Are we even more in love? Or are we busy about the busy ness of keeping on keeping on.

Jesus says here, take a step back and remember. I remember coming to Jesus. I was terrified of hell and decided I did not want to there so I told Mrs. Unruh "yes, I would like to receive Jesus." That was at VBS by the way. Yes, as we grow, we will indeed be involved in that.

One prayer later and the fear was gone. The only scripture I knew had been those verse I had memorized in a home Bible study in order to win a New Testament. I wanted to win, so the pagan memorized more verses than the saved kids. One was the 23rd Psalms, in King James English to boot and now saved, I kept going over that in my mind.



Jesus says remember how sweet it was as you began to learn about Him and He showered His love on you. As we remember, He then says, repent.

Our need as believers for 1 John 1:9 is real. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9, ESV)

And as we move to restore our first love with Jesus, we must remember that He isn’t condemning, He is loving us back into that love relationship we had at the very first.

Once we have done that, the next word is “DO.” Do the deeds you did at first.

Go back to listening to worship music. Rediscover your favorite book of the Bible and dig in, again, for the very first time.

Returning to the Lord, repenting and reestablishing our first love also reestablishes the connection with the Holy Spirit and look out, here comes the fruit, again.

Will Satan try and derail you? Yes. Will someone pull out in front of you one block from here after you leave today, maybe. But we are to recover our first love. Of course, it is our choice, we can say no, and many do.

I know of those who had an unshakeable love, and we had fellowship together as believers, brothers in Christ. I was excited for them to see that the Lord had called them into ministry, and they went off to plant a Calvary Chapel. I know several who did that and was privileged to be involved in discipling some as well who still pastor today. But the one who I grieve over is the one who lost his first love. Satan lied to him that he could obtain better fulfillment in life by getting involved in internet pornography rather than with his wife. Ultimately, losing his first love for Jesus, cost him his wife, his marriage, and his ministry.

The Ephesian church had ceased being a rescue mission, a hospital, and turned into a court; “this failure of Ephesus’ angel (and Christians associated with him) is probably especially manifested in lack of love towards other Christians.” (Boxall 2006, 50)

Making disciples is messy. Evangelism is messy. But seeing the fruit of lives changed forever by Jesus Christ is what keeps me going. This is what remembering does, it helps to restore our zeal.

1. Remember – we must (imperative) remember, right now, today, where we were in Christ.
2. Repent – as we remember, we find ourselves in need of repenting, of changing our minds and this is to be a point in time decision that must take place.
3. Do – as a result of repenting, we then must do what we did at first. This is not optional.

This is one of two churches that is in danger.

When Jesus tells us this here, it is serious business for the flock in Ephesus and for us too. For the church, failure to restore that first love will indeed eventually lead to their no longer being a church.

That church I was saved in, they lost their first love and began to be so afraid of the changes taking place in the culture that they completely missed out on the Jesus Revolution of the late 60’s. Not for lack of some of us to get something going for Jesus, but they would not hear of it. This was, after all, a church that most public prayer took place using King James English. They lost their first love and adhered instead to traditions that were not Biblically based.



The lampstand for that church has been removed and it no longer exists. What are those steps again? Remember, repent and do. Simple, but hard.

I have counseled many who wanted to return to those days of new birth, but the present and all the sin they did since then got in the way. Jesus still is telling us the same thing today, “remember from where you have fallen.”

Jesus turns back to something else they have indeed gotten right.

Revelation 2:6–7

“But you have this, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.” (NASB 2020)

Nicolaitans is a compound word. Nikao means “to conquer,” and laos means “the people.” We get our word laity from that. (McGee, Thru the Bible Commentary: The Prophecy (Revelation 1-5) 1991, 71)

“We know little of the Nicolaitans. They were evidently followers of someone named Nicolas, who was perhaps the proselyte from Antioch who was one of the Seven (cf. Acts 6:5). Irenaeus, who lived in the late second century, wrote that the Nicolaitans were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh. According to him they were sexually immoral and they ate foods sacrificed to idols. The word Nicolaitans is a transliteration of two Greek words that mean to conquer and people. Consequently, Nicolaitanism has come down through history as typifying any system that seeks to dominate rather than serve people.” We will see them in Pergamum too. (Constable 2003, Re 2:5)

Be wary of those who want to lord it over the flock and dominate the people. That activity is hated by Jesus.

Revelation 2:7

“The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.” (NASB 2020)

This means we are to listen and to emphasize the point, Jesus has taken an idea that shows up in Exodus 29:20 where in the dedication of a priest, blood from the sacrifice is applied to the lobe of the right ear. This means the priest is ready to listen to the Lord. We also are to also be ready to hear His words.

We are to listen to what it is the Holy Spirit is saying not to just the church in Ephesus, but to all of us. Are we listening? Listening implies we have taken care of the issue of our first love; we are in relationship and deeply in love with Jesus. The call is to be an overcomer.

There are two ways to do life. As an overcomer, or having been overtaken by the wiles of the devil.

What we will see here is “the overcomers in Revelation are not those who have conquered an earthly foe by force, but those who have remained faithful to Christ to the very end. The victory they achieve is analogous to the victory of Christ on the cross.” (Mounce 1997, 72)

Jesus tells us here that the one who is an overcomer, the one who has a life characterized of walking in the Spirit and because of that has overcome the evil one, we get access.

The divine security guards currently stationed around the tree of life will recognize that we have full access. We have already been promised life by Jesus. John told us that statement from the King in his gospel.



John 10:10

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (ESV)

As an overcomer, the believer has privileges and has access, Access to the Garden of God and access to the tree of life. John is looking back at Genesis 2:9 and intentionally linking us back to it.

The blessing Christ promised here is referred to first in the Garden of Eden, was denied to Adam and Eve because of sin, has been anticipated by saints and prophets of all ages, and will ultimately be restored and realized in the new heavens and the new earth. The tree in the eternal city will be a literal, physical tree intended by God to depict the fullness of eternal life and to teach eternally the lesson that the life God gives is the source of fruit, and fruit is the very product of that life (Rev. 22:2). The healing leaves on the tree will minister to or serve the saints as they serve God. The eating from the tree is an enjoyment of life in its grandest realization and it depicts eternal life in the New Jerusalem. (Wong 1998, 226)

So, as we reach the end of verse 7, my question is this, have you left your first love? We are going to pray and we can agree together and decide together to restore that.

If you have never experienced that, today is your day.

Romans 3:21–24

“But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” (NLT)

Romans 10:9–13

“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.” Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”” (NLT)

ABC’s of Salvation

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.



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