

SE7EN Letter One, to Ephesus: The Loveless Church Believers Statesboro 9-12-21

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Seven is a series about seven letters written to seven churches in Asia Minor.

It's approximately 95 AD, 60 years after Jesus died and rose again and about 30 years after the events of the early church, recorded in Acts, and persecution against Christ Followers has increased. John, the last living Apostle of the original twelve, has been exiled from the Roman Empire to the remote island of Patmos. There, Jesus in all His glory appears to John and gives him a Revelation of things to come.

The Revelation begins with Seven Letters to Seven Churches in Seven Cites. (**Revelation 1:1-5**)

Jesus sent these letters to the Seven Churches to commend them for what they are doing right, rebuke them for what they are doing wrong, and encourage them to repent. These letters encouraged the church to keep living a life worthy of their call and great commission as they wait for Jesus' return.

Revelation 1:4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, (or "sevenfold Spirit", the Holy Spirit.) (Isaiah 11:2-3)

5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father —to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. 7 "Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him." So shall it be! Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

Write Seven Letters and Send Them to The Seven Churches

Revelation 1:9-11 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, 11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

- You can still visit some these cites today. (*Insert Map*)
- Horseshoe shape cites that were on the ancient roman mailing route.

What if we at Believers Church received a letter from the glorified, majestic, all powerful, conquering Jesus (not baby Jesus meek and mild)? The Jesus with eyes blazing like fire! (Revelation 1:14) Would this letter Commend or Condemn, Reward or Rebuke? Thumbs up or down?

As we see what Jesus said to each of these Seven Churches, we are going to be asking ourselves, "What would Jesus say to us?" Individually and corporately as a church.

What would Jesus write to Believers Church in the city of Statesboro?

What would He say about our love for God? / Our ability to endure in trials? / Our faithful service?

Each of the Seven Letters follows a similar pattern, but not all elements occur in each:

- A command to write
- A description of the glorified Lord
- A positive evaluation
- An encouragement, or warning
- An exhortation to the spiritually alert
- A promise to the overcomer.

These words of Jesus are relevant to us today in our times of global unrest. Is God still talking to the church, yes! The question is- are we listening?

Open the ears of your heart and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you.

A command to write: Revelation 2:1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

Ephesus: The city of Ephesus was a major trade city, known as the Gateway to Asia. It was a city of influence, like LA or Hong Kong today. The church in Ephesus was one of the leading congregations in Asia Minor and an influencer to the other churches. The church began during Paul’s second missionary journey with his short visit in Acts 18:18-21 and was firmly established with Paul’s third missionary journey with a two-year extended stay in Acts 18 and 19. Paul wrote an epistle to the Ephesians, rich in doctrine and practical guidelines for life.

A description of the glorified Lord: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars (the pastors or church leaders), **in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.** (Lights to the world).

I Know Your Deeds

Revelation 2:2 I know your deeds... Jesus is walking among the Seven Churches, the Seven Golden Lamp Stands. (**Revelation 1:12-13 and Revelation 2:1** who “**walks among the seven golden lampstands.**”) Therefore, He knows their deeds.

A positive evaluation: Revelation 2:2 I know your (A) deeds, (B) your hard work and (C) your perseverance. (D) I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

An encouragement: Revelation 2:3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. (There is a lot to like about this church!)

They have pushed through hardship and to sum up the Ephesian Church we could use the word **ENDURANCE**. The stuck with it no matter what.

A team of people who endure is vital for church growth and ministry. People who sometimes don’t feel like it, but they say, “*I’m showing up anyway and getting it done in the name of Jesus Christ.*”

Believers Church, it’s not the time to grow weary!

What hardships had the Ephesian church endured? **Wicked people** and **false apostles** for one. (vs. 2)

- The church is supposed to be a hospital for sinners, but after years some still hadn’t changed.
 - Sometimes we have to say, “Sorry we don’t do that here”.
 - We just have to say, “No”. These things may be acceptable in our culture today, but not in a relationship with Jesus. The world considers that normal, but not here.
- We believe in love, acceptance, and forgiveness; but we also believe in transformation and change.
- We are also warned to watch out for and protect our church from wolves in sheep clothing. False apostles, prophets, and teachers.

These boundaries keep the church healthy and Christ honoring in all we do. We are Holy people. And when the Undercover Boss Jesus comes around, we want a glowing job review. (Rev. 2:2) “Well done!”

The Warning: Revelation 2:4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. This battle tested, enduring church lost their love for Jesus somewhere along the way.

Love is primary. Without love everything the church does is worthless. (1 Corinthians 13)

- The Ephesians fell in love with Jesus and burned all their idols. (Acts 18-19)
- They learned to bear with one another in love, unity, and peace. (Ephesians 4:2)
- They would speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16)
- They were to live a life of love with Christ as their example. (Ephesians 4:32)
- Paul exhorted them to walk in the way of love. (Ephesians 5:2)
- Now as a 30-year-old church they lost their first love for Jesus. (Revelation 2:4)

What about us? Maybe you've been a Christian for 10 - 20 years, you've seen it all and done it all and you are expecting to hear "Well Done" from Jesus... Watch out!

Make sure your faith hasn't grown cold.

Sometimes when your faith grows older, your love grows colder. This can happen in relationships. Maybe Jesus is saying to use today, "You have forsaken your first love – Me!"

- Me, as the pastor. As I minister, do I do it because I have to, or do I get to? Am I still radically in love with Jesus? Or some days is my heart cold as ice?
- You. Somewhere along the way you fell in love with your good works and sound bible teachings, but your passion for Christ grew cold. Outwardly, people couldn't tell the difference.

To the *seasoned believers*, I'm not talking to new believers- How do you know if you have a cold heart?

Three Symptoms of a Cold Heart

1. **COMPLACENT** – you find yourself just going through the motions. You see it in your worship. Do you remember the first time you heard the song, "Amazing Grace" and cried, saying *that's me*? The Salvation Call – you used to be excited for it, now it's just *here we go again*.
2. **CASUAL** - Relationships grow cold because couples stop doing the little things. They become too familiar and casual. Don't start treating Jesus like an old college buddy from the past. Jesus is not your old buddy, but rather the all-powerful Lord who bids you come and die.
3. **COMPROMISE** – When you compromise, your affections are or will be drawn to something else. In Ephesus the number one business was "Idol Making". If we are not careful, we will make idols in our lives too. Even good things can become idols.

An idol is anything that your love for is greater than your love for Jesus. Jesus second.

What about YOU?

- I grew bored. I lost interest in following God and serving the church.
- I was wounded. Someone hurt me in the past and I'm leery of it happening again.
Note: Wounded people tend to fall into legalism and religion instead of love.
- I became distracted by something else. My schedule is full of good things, but I don't make time to pursue the best things: loving God and serving people.

DRIFTING IS NATURAL – Don't lose hope. It is never too late to return to your first love!

BOLD NEXT STEP: This week I will continue to examine my heart according to these three symptoms of a cold heart: COMPLACENT / CASUAL / COMPROMISE

Next Steps to Get Your First Love for Jesus Back

Revelation 2:5 Step 1) **Consider how far you have fallen!** Step 2) **Repent** Step 3) **and do the things you did at first.**

Step 1) Consider how far you have fallen!

EX: Man at the Pharmacy drive through and asked them to pick out an Anniversary Card for his wife. Not too romantic. Do you remember your fist love and what you did for them when you first dated? Janet and I married 41 years ago. When dating you would give up sleep and drive as many miles as necessary to see them. You'd shower them with gifts, flowers, candy, hold the open the door for the one you loved, spend time with them, talk to them, and verbally an express your love and adoration.

Step 2) **Repent**

Consider how far and repent. Repentance means to take action and do a 180 degree turn around. Stop doing what you are doing wrong.

Step 3) Do the things you did at first.

Do the things you did at first, for the Ephesians that meant to destroy their idols.

In Acts 19, when they first believed in Jesus, they were baptized in water and received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. They destroyed their idols and those who practiced sorcery burned their books, valued at 50,000 pieces of silver. ((50k days wages - \$120 dollars X 50K = 6 million dollars)

Consider how far you have fallen! Repent. Do the things you did at first.

Chip away and start doing the things you used to do.

- Quiet time. Read your Bible, Pray, Life Groups, church attendance, speak openly about Jesus.
- Devote time to personal worship, you sing, you listen to song about Jesus making you closer to Him
- Fasting. Trading the physical time for spiritual time. Food or maybe fast social media or Netflix
- Serve. Best way to get your eyes off yourself.

Don't wait until you feel like it, take action and your heart will follow. Jesus doesn't say, "I want you to go back and feel the things that you felt at first." No, he says, "To DO the things you did at first." Emotions follow actions.

BOLD NEXT STEP: This week I will make a list of things I used to do when I first fell in love with Jesus and consider if I'm still doing them? If not, why? Repent and Return.

The Warning Continued: Revelation 2:5 If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Remove your lampstand: A church may continue to exist without being a light in the darkness.

Why did Jesus, as the CEO of the church and only one with authority to do so, give this word of warning?

- Because a church without love is lethal.
- When love leaves so does the Spirit of God. I'm told if you visit Ephesus today you will see some beautiful ruins, but no churches. No lasting Christian witness to Turkey in that region.

Revelation 2:6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. The name Nicolaitans is symbolic; meaning "Conquering the Laity." Apparently, this group claimed superior status that permitted idolatry and immorality (see 2:14-15)

An exhortation to the spiritually alert:

Revelation 2:7 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

A promise to the overcomer: To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Remember the Undercover Boss not only rebukes, but he rewards.

The exhortation is for all the churches and so is the promise.

- The dying thief on the cross was promised paradise with God, by Jesus (Luke 23:43).
- The tree of life (Gen. 2:9; 3:22-24) lost in Eden is regained in paradise (Revelation 22:2).

Paradise is promised to you if you repent. Is your heart cold and dead or alive in Christ and warm? What if you are already a Christ follower? Have you grown cold and complacent?

Repent and Return. Return to the cross where it all began.