

EFC

February 25, 2024

Revelation 2:1-7

“Something’s Missing...”

Good morning, English Fellowship Church. My name is Jeremy, and I’m one of the Pastors here. I’m grateful to be with you this morning, to open God’s Word that we may hear from Him and grow together by the power of the Holy Spirit. This morning, we continue in our series in the book of Revelation.

If you’ll recall from last week, we were invited to look with John, and see Jesus: the Eternal Ruler, Final Judge, one with God, who is our Savior. I pray you have been encouraged and moved to worship!

Revelation now moves into a section where Jesus tells John to write a letter specifically to each of the seven churches in Asia Minor that were already mentioned. In the letters we’ll find Jesus encouraging, correcting, and calling for repentance and faithfulness. Jesus speaks to the specific needs and realities of each church. Since these letters are also intended for all of God’s church from Christ’s ascension to heaven until Christ’s second coming, it is written for us as well. We are called to evaluate ourselves in the light of what Jesus says to each of these churches.

Pray.

Something’s missing....

There were some good things about the church in Ephesus, but they were lacking an essential ingredient to be a church.

Revelation 2:1a "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

Ephesus

- Most influential city in Asia Minor
- Economically prosperous
- Major trade route hub
- Strong Imperial Cult
- Temple of Artemis – one of the ancient 7 wonders of the world
- Missionary work there – major Christian center

Revelation 2:1b “The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.”

Him who “grasps” the seven stars in his right hand / Him who “walks” among the seven golden lampstands (like a teacher walking around the classroom to observe how all are taking the test)
Both highlight Jesus’ authority over His church, and the seriousness of the message

Jesus goes on to give an analysis of this church, and He begins with approval of their patient endurance in ongoing commitment to the truth.

Revelation 2:2-3 “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.”

Jesus commends the church in Ephesus for their patient endurance, which showed itself in their careful and ongoing commitment to the truth.

Commitment to the truth through discernment: they tested those who call themselves apostles and are not. They didn't simply accept a messenger on hearsay; rather, they tested their message to discern if it were true or not.

Remember, Ephesus was a hub of major trade routes, so they would have had visitors from all over, bringing all sorts of messages about life, God, and how to follow God. On top of that, the temple of Artemis was such a major part of life in Ephesus, that its teachings would have permeated much of life! No wonder the church needed to use discernment and “test” what they heard, to see if it was true or not.

What did this testing look like?

Studying the Scriptures like the Bereans (Acts 17:10-11 “The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea... they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”)

Considering the teaching of the apostles: (“Acts 2:42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...” – remember, Paul had ministered in Ephesus for over two years!)

Evaluating the fruit of the “apostles”: (Matthew 7:15-16 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.”)

Commitment to the truth through not “bearing” with the false teachers, and instead, finding them false.

This is a matter of courage. It is one thing to discern that someone or something is false; it is another thing to have the courage to actually say it like it is.

Finally, commitment to the truth through hating what God hates. A little later on in this message Jesus commends the Ephesian church like this: Revelation 2:6 “Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

All of this was hard work, as is the Christian life. Sometimes I think we are guilty of expecting the Christian life to be easy...

Jesus commended this church for testing the teachings and teachers that came there way, for not putting up with the teachers who were found false, and for hating the deadly lies like God does.

Now, Jesus turns to address an area of deadly lack in the life of this church. Something essential was missing.

Revelation 2:4 “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.”

It is not enough to hold correct doctrine; love is also essential for a church to be healthy, and indeed, to be a church at all.

John MacArthur captures how essential love is in our relationship with God and our lives as God’s people, using marriage as an example: “How would you like it, ladies, if your husband came to you some time and said, “I don't love you anymore but nothing will change?” Is that enough? “I'll still earn a living, I'll still eat with you, sleep with you, drive with you, I'll still father the children and be your husband. Nothing will change, I just don't love you.” Devastating. How would you feel if your wife came to you and said, “I don't love you but nothing will change?””

Mark 12:29-31 “Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

This church was faithful in their commitment to the truth, but they had abandoned (divorced) the love they had at first – love for God, and love for one another.

The truth is, both truth and love are essential for our relationship with God and with one another. But it is all too easy to fall off on one side or the other: cold commitment to orthodoxy without warmth of love for Christ; fuzzy “love” that is not based in any concrete reality of who God is, or what it means to actually love our neighbor. Head without heart, or heart without head – but the Christian life requires both.

This is Jesus’ evaluation of the church in Ephesus. What would He say about us?

Endurance in our commitment to the truth.

Are we discerning when messages and messengers come our way? Much like Ephesus, Google and youtube and tiktok and all sorts of technology bring us messages from all over the world. There are so many, in fact, that it can be exhausting to constantly test what comes our way. But it is essential that we do not grow weary, for lies are all around. We need to prayerfully study God’s word, for it is the standard. We need to consider the historical teaching of the church (obviously under the authority of Scripture, but it is important to consider). We need to evaluate the fruit of the lives and teaching of those who claim to teach in the name of Jesus.

And when, through careful consideration in submission to the Scriptures, we find someone false, we need to have the courage to say so. Not popular in our day to call anyone false or evil; however, that is what faithful commitment to Scripture as God’s revelation requires – those who disagree with God are false and evil. Don’t listen to their teaching, don’t attend their churches, warn others who may be listening, etc.

This is hard work, but it is essential to walk faithfully with Christ.

If this is true of us, be encouraged – and keep walking in the strength God provides.

How about in the area of love – love for God, and love for others?

Do you seek God and desire to know Him, to walk with Him, and to love Him more and more? Or are you just going through the motions of the Christian life? Do you honor God with your lips, but deep down inside you are bored, rebellious, or indifferent?

Is your life characterized by love for your brothers and sisters around you, right here at EFC? John wrote elsewhere, "If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." (1 John 4:20) Do you desire the good of each person in this room? Your neighbors on your street? Do you look for ways to show that love through service, giving, and forgiving?

If you find your heart aflame for God and Christ, and you eagerly desire and seek the good of those around you, praise God for His work in your heart!

But what if these things are not true of us? What if we find we are lacking in our commitment to God's truth, or in our love for our neighbor? What then?

Jesus shows His great love and grace to us in this letter by calling all who fall short to repentance. Revelation 2:5,7 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.... He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

God's call to repentance is a great act of love, for it is always the call to the good and to life. And repentance is a great act of love, for Jesus gave His life on the tree on Calvary so that we could repent and be forgiven and given new life.

What does repentance look like?

If you find you have strayed from commitment to the truth of God's Word because you have allowed false teachers to lead you astray, repentance looks like accepting God's Word for what it is: the truth, which stands in authority over us, and is our rule for all of faith and life.

If you find your love has grown cold, remember from where you have fallen. Remember how your heart was moved when you were first forgiven of your sins, how Jesus was your joy and delight for He gave His life for you. Remember how He brought you from death to life, from death to darkness, from sin's slave to a child of the King. Remember!

And do. Do the works you did at first – toward God, and toward others. Remembering and doing go hand in hand to stir our love. Don't wait for the feelings, remember and act in faith; and God will restore your love, for that is His doing.

This is the gift of repentance Jesus is calling us to: find life in submission to His word, and return to love as you remember and respond. This is true life! To know God in truth, and love Him entirely! Repentance is the gift He is calling you to, without which He will "remove our lampstand from us." We will stop being His church at all if we do not repent when it is needed. And why would you ever want to live with only one or the other anyway? Heartless orthodoxy is

crushing and dead; truthless wandering is empty and dead. Jesus wants all of us – head and heart.

His call is clear: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” This could also be translated like this: “He who has a willing ear, let him respond to what the Spirit says to the churches.”