

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK SERIES

Ronny F. Wade, Speaker

LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF EPHEBUS

Introduction: Ephesus was located in west Asia at the mouth of the Cayster River which flowed into the Aegean Sea and was the chief city of the province. Trade from East, West, South, and North met in Ephesus making it a city of great commercial activity. Since the provincial governor resided here, it was also politically important. Ephesus was also the home of the great temple of Diana which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In 1877 J. T. Wood discovered the ruins of the temple after years of archeological research. The platform on which the temple stood was 418 by 239 feet, and the temple itself was 342 by 163 feet and had over one hundred columns supporting its roof. In addition Ephesus had a theater that could accommodate 24,500 persons. It was truly a magnificent city, wealthy and powerful, the meeting place of oriental religions and Greek culture.

The Apostle Paul would have preached here had providence allowed in the early stages of his second missionary tour Acts 16:6.

At the close of the journey on his way from Corinth to Jerusalem he did stop at Ephesus, and preached in the synagogue, promising to return Acts 18:19-20.

He later spent three years in Ephesus while on his third tour Acts 20:31; Chapter 19.

When Paul returned (Acts 19:1)

1. He finds disciples who had been baptized with John's baptism, 19:1-3.
2. He teaches them the difference between John's baptism and baptism in the name of Christ.
 - a. John's baptism conditioned on repentance alone. The baptism commanded by Christ was conditioned on both faith in Christ and repentance from sin Acts 19:4.
 - b. John's baptism was not administered in Jesus' name. Men commanded to be baptized in the name of Christ Acts 19:5.
3. As a result of this teaching these disciples were baptized into the name of Christ.

The results of Paul's preaching is seen in the results that ensued. Demetrius the silversmith testified to its power and influence when he declared that it was felt throughout almost all Asia, Acts 19:26.

The Ephesians believed and burned their books of magic and witchcraft Acts 19:18-20.

They heard the word of truth, trusted and believed. (Ephesians 1:13)

It was during this extended stay that the church was established (Acts 20:31).

According to 1 Timothy 1:3 Paul left Timothy in Ephesus on two occasions to correct false teachers. No doubt evidence of what Paul warned the Elders about in Acts 20:28.

Tradition says that John made this city his home after the death of Paul for many years.

This church is commended by the Lord for its sound faith and works, but is criticized for its waning love. That love, however, could be revived. There was hope.

Unto the angel of the church... The identity of the angel of the church is much controverted. Some believe that it is the messenger to the church, such as a minister, elder etc., some the entire eldership, some the symbolical representatives of the church, others the spirit of the church i.e. its spiritual character. It is probable that some symbolic significance should be understood rather than the identification of some particular person. Regardless of the identity of these "angels" each church addressed is to hear what the spirit saith to the churches.

It is Jesus who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. Holding the stars in his hand indicates his power to determine the destiny of each. The fact that he is in the midst of the churches affirms his presence among them.

I know thy works, and thy toil, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false.

I know, means to have full knowledge, to know perfectly. Hence the Lord knows all, nothing is hidden from him. He knows what goes on in every church. The behind the scenes events. The political posturing, the struggles for power.

Thy works---Works may be good or bad. Here in Ephesus they appear to be good.

Toil and patience---toil signifies strenuous or wearying labor. This labor is accompanied by patient steadfastness under trying circumstances.

Cannot bear evil men---that is they could not bear in their midst the company of those who were morally or ethically evil in their character. Their attitude was if a man is not transformed, then let him be transferred. What a worthy attribute. How about us today? Often churches try to shield such people.

Try those claiming to be apostles---A city such as Ephesus was bound to get its share of false teachers and men who made false claims. The test was obviously centered around miracles. Miracles were the sign of a true apostle. No false apostle could perform such acts. This is an attitude every church would do well to adopt. "Try the spirits" (1 John 4:1). Not everyone should be accepted who claims to be a follower of Christ or preacher of the gospel.

And thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary.

Another reference to patience. This refers to their ability to persevere under trials and tests. They remained firm and steadfast. Note 1Cor.16:12 and 1Cor.15:58 "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable..."

These people were not self-serving nor did they seek the praise of men. They bore their trials for "His name's sake." See Matt. 6:1-4

They did not grow weary. A trait most of us do not have. We often grow tired and are tempted to give up. Pressures and temptations of life get to us. People get old and want to retire from the Lord's work and leave it to younger men. Is there ever a time to grow weary and retire? Never!

But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love.

Seven commendations. But one thing needs to be corrected. They must revive the first love which they have left.

We must bear in mind that regardless of the good we do, or the praise and commendation we deserve, if there is fault, IT MUST BE CORRECTED.

Love was still there, but "the first love" had been lost. We are not told specifically what this "first love" is.

1. Some feel it was conjugal love like that of the newly married bride.
2. Was it the love demonstrated in the burning of the books Acts 19:19-20?
3. Was it love such as had been manifested toward Paul in their sorrow at his leaving them Acts 20:36-38
4. Was it love shown one for another in the early years of the church, spoken of in Ephesians 1:15? It may have been one or all of these.

The most probable explanation is that these people had lost the original love they had for the Lord, which is the first love of every true church. This love found its expression in all that they did.

It must be remembered that this church is in its second or third generation of existence. A dangerous time. Often the early fire of devotion, discovery, and enthusiasm begins to diminish. A warning all churches would do well to heed.

Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.

Remember...fallen. The point at which they had left their first love. If they can discover and recognize what had happened to them, they can experience this love as at the first.

There comes a time when every church should take inventory of its life, work, and practices;

1. Excitement about involvement in the Lord's work.
2. Willingness to become involved in projects for the cause of Christ.
3. Closeness as a group. Visitation, fellowship, sense of belonging.
4. Eagerness to bear one another's burdens and help others as they struggle to live for Christ.
5. Personal growth and commitment.
6. Dedication of time and talents to the work of the church.
7. Opposition to evil men, evil practices, and false teaching.

The warning: I will remove thy candlestick. "It would be removal of the lampstand, in which the church would be discontinued" Vine.

The lampstand upheld and dispensed light. but without the motivation of true love, it failed in its purpose and no longer had a right to exist. Repent or be removed. What a sentence! Are there churches today who have suffered this fate? No doubt there are.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Often difficult for us to distinguish between the people who do bad things and the bad things they do. In this case they hated the "works" of these people, not the people.

The child of God who does not hate wickedness does not love righteousness. We may boast of our love for the truth, but if we fail to hate error and evil practices, we really don't love truth.

Little is known about the Nicolaitans, their origin, peculiar doctrines, or what happened to them after the Revelation. They were probably a sect of the Gnostics. Much speculation exists, but little factual information is available. We do know they flourished at Ephesus and Pergamum.

He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

The command to hear is basic. It is personal, individual, and involves the acceptance of and compliance with that which is stated. Everyone is to hear what the Spirit said to all the churches. Christ is the speaker, the Spirit in John reveals and records the message.

Those who overcome, will be allowed to eat of the tree of life. What we lost by sin in Eden, will now be restored in Christ to him that overcomes sin. What a great incentive this is to be faithful and live for Christ.

The word Paradise is thought to be of Persian origin, denoting the parks of Persian kings and nobles. The word is found only three times in our English translations. In Luke 23:43 Jesus used it to refer to that place or realm into which He and one of the malefactors on the cross would be after death; Paul identified it as "the third heaven" unto which he was caught up 1 Cor. 12:2-4; and here the Spirit says it is the place of the tree of life, the garden of life where the redeemed will join God for ever and ever.