

## EP27: Revelation 2:1-7 (part 1)

### Lampstands & Churches

As we closed our last podcast, we touched on the fact that the seven lampstands seen in **Revelation 1:16, 20** are the seven churches. This picture symbolizes the way the churches are to be a light that shines bright, burning with the oil of the Spirit of God. In effect, the church is to be a light to the world, a witness, a city set on a hill, a lamp to give illumination to all that are in the house so people may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God.<sup>1</sup>

***Overview: Jesus's letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira. Religion is Lambasted and Faithfulness is Honored.***

Each of the 7-churches, the lampstands, were all located in one centralized geographic region which was known as Asia Minor, and today is known as Turkey. Patmos (the island where John was exiled) is located off the coast of western Turkey (all though today it belongs to Greece). We can track the order of the letters by following an ellipsis beginning with Ephesus and moving north to Smyrna, and Pergamum and then loop back down and around south and east to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.



Each of the 7-letters to the 7 churches draws from the description of the glorified Son of Man in chapter **1**, and each image is used to communicate the thrust of His message and relationship with that individual church.

We will discover that God has disdain for all the activity within the religion of Christianity that is not rooted in *agape* love, faithfulness, and an absolute dependence upon Him for everything, all the time.

As we read each letter, consider what it would be like to receive a personal evaluation from **Yahweh**, because that is what these letters are,

appraisals, judgments. We all think we want to hear from God, but if we are living in a religious bubble of delusion, **Yahweh** will pop it, and it will not be easy to hear what He has to say. Therefore, it is critical to be found, in our now, always reading, hearing (or understanding), and heeding these messages<sup>2</sup> such that this truth becomes our truth and not just something else we read in the Bible. Let us never forget that the blessing of **1:3** (*"Blessed is he who is now reading and those who are now hearing the words of the prophecy"*) is directed to those who are active in their faith, those who now and continually bet their lives on the truth—those who are *"now keeping the things which are written in it"*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **Matthew 5:14-16; Luke 8:16**

<sup>2</sup> **Revelation 1:3**

<sup>3</sup> "read", "hear", and "keep" are all rendered in the *present active participle*

Finally, it is a good bet that if we are honest with ourselves, we will see attributes of ourselves and our way of living, to some extent, in each of these 7-churches. However, we will only understand what the Spirit is now saying to the churches if we are now having ears to hear—ears that are continually tuned to Him and not to our religious fictions.

## ***The Church at Ephesus***

### **Overall Theme: God Hates Religion!**

By the way, throughout our study, I will be adjusting the text we read to match the **Code**. Sadly, the translations do not stick to the **Code** but conform their translation to their worldview of the **End Times**, their view of God, and so on. It is always better if we just let the text be as the Spirit intended it to be. We will discover that the failure to follow the **Code** leads to an errant understanding of many portions of the text, especially when it comes to personal application and to our ability to be having those ears that are now hearing what the Spirit now says to the churches.

#### ***Revelation 2:1-7***

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who is now holding the seven stars in His right hand, the One who is now walking among the seven golden lampstands, says this: “I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you now cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who are now calling themselves apostles, and they are now not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and now have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. But I now have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore, now remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I choose to now come to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent. Yet this you do now have, that you now hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also now hate. He who is now having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit now says to the churches. To him who is now overcoming, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which now is in the Paradise of God.”

### **Historical Setting.**

Ephesus was a major seaport city in Asia Minor with close to 300,000 people in its core population. The city was extremely prosperous, sophisticated, upscale, and advanced; it even had a massive amphitheater that could hold up to 25,000 people. Ephesus wealth was derived because it was a main hub for trade between Rome and the East.

Ephesus was also a very spiritual community—a magnet of all kinds of spirituality, including Christianity, witchcraft, cultic Imperial worship, and the adoration of Diana in the Temple of Artemis.

It was in Ephesus where God did all sorts of unusual miracles such that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried from Paul's body to the sick, and diseases left them, and evil spirits went out and departed.<sup>4</sup> There was this one incident where a team of 7-Jews, including a Jewish chief priest, tried to use the name of

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<sup>4</sup> ***Acts 19:11-12***

Jesus “whom Paul preaches” to cast out a demon from a man, and the demon responded: “I know Jesus, and I know Paul. But who are you?” And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and wounded.<sup>5</sup> This story spread like wildfire through the city, and we are told that a solemn fear of the Lord descended on Ephesus and the name of Jesus was greatly honored.

As a result, many who practiced the magic arts converted to Christianity. They even brought their incantation books (worth about 50,000 pieces of silver) to the public market and burned them at a public bonfire. As such, the word of the Lord grew mightily and was prevailing.<sup>6</sup>

Ephesus was also a leader in cultic Imperial worship as it was the third city in Asia to erect a magnificent temple to the emperor (the Temple of Domitian). It was erected in a great expanse, in the best and most central part of the city, opposite the Agora (the central market). Once a year, everyone was required to go to the local temple and burn incense before an idol of the emperor and declare that Caesar is lord.

And finally, the people of Ephesus could boast that it had one of the 7-wonders of the world—the temple of Artemis dedicated to the Greek god Diana (who is represented by a grotesque idol of a woman with breasts all over the front of her). Her Temple was quite impressive: 425’ x220’ (or 142 yards long and 74 yards wide) with 127 columns, each of which was over 60’ tall, 36 of which were overlaid with gold and precious jewels. This temple attracted tourists from all parts of the world (and still does).

It has been written that “it was not just a temple...it was the most beautiful structure on earth built in honor of the Greek goddess of hunting, wild nature, and fertility.” And the man who placed the temple on the 7-wonders list, Antipater of Sidon, said: “When I saw the sacred house of Artemis that towers to the clouds, the other Wonders were placed in the shade, for the Sun himself has never looked upon its equal outside Olympus.”

To give you a feel for how serious they took the business of religion in this town, there is an incident recorded in **Acts 19** which talks about a silversmith named Demetrius who had a profitable business of making and selling temple trinkets, including little idols. His profits started to shrink as people converted to Christianity. So, he stirred up the labor union (or the trade guild) to provoke a riot saying that Paul preached that gods made by hands are no gods at all. As a result, the city went into an uproar, gathered in the amphitheater, and screamed and shouted for 2 hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.” 2-hours of the same verse non-stop; how is that for some serious worship. In Ephesus, they took the business of religion, and their profit margins, quite seriously.

The Church in Ephesus was very spoiled in that they had a rich history of great teachers. Paul stayed in Ephesus for several years. Then John, Timothy, and Apollos taught there. John even returned to pastor the church upon his release from the island of Patmos. This church received an outpouring of the truth by some of the most respected Christian leaders. But their problem, as we will discover, was that they also had an unhealthy affinity for the business of religion, just like the rest of those in Ephesus. Eventually the business of Christianity, like the temple of Artemis, cast a large shadow on the heart of true Christianity.

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<sup>5</sup> **Acts 19:13-17**

<sup>6</sup> **Acts 19:18-20**

## The Letter to Ephesus

### **Revelation 2:1**

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who is now holding the seven stars in His right hand, the One who is now walking among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

It is fascinating that this letter is addressed to the angel of the church, not directly to the people of the church. Once again, the idea is that all things are initiated from the throne of God and are communicated through the agency of spiritual messengers (in this case the specific angel of the church of Ephesus), and finally come to fruition in the natural realms. This is a letter to the people of God, but it comes through the agency of God's angelic being who is seemingly responsible for oversight of this church. This will be the same dynamic for each of the remaining letters.

And since the angelic messengers are even **now being held** in His right hand of power and authority, everyone can be assured that this letter says exactly what He wants it to say and will be delivered exactly as He wants it delivered.

With this introduction, Jesus establishes His relationship to the church. He is now and continually walking among the churches;<sup>7</sup> thus, He is intimately familiar with what is happening in their city, in their community, and in their lives. He wants us to understand that He is involved, and He is not sitting back at a distance and throwing stones. This is all very personal to Him. In fact, this image of Jesus walking among the candlesticks is an allusion to an Old Testament promise: "*I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.*"<sup>8</sup> But since He walks among them (the churches), He also says: "*Since **Yahweh** your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to defeat your enemies before you, therefore, the camp must be holy (or set apart for Him), and He must not see anything indecent among you, or He will turn away.*"<sup>9</sup> This promise to His chosen people Israel is a promise made to the Israel of God (the bondservants of Jesus Christ).<sup>10</sup>

### **Revelation 2:2-3**

I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you **now** cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who are **now** calling themselves apostles, and they are **now** not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and **now** have endured for My name's sake and have not grown weary.

Jesus starts with the ominous, "*I know.*" Being in the *perfect* tense, He is making the point that He has always known their deeds, their toil and perseverance and will always know; and being rendered in the

<sup>7</sup> Rendered in the *present active participle*

<sup>8</sup> **Leviticus 26:12**

<sup>9</sup> **Deuteronomy 23:14**

<sup>10</sup> **Galatians 6:2**

*indicative* mood, we know it is a statement of fact.

### **No Reaction Just an Honest Assessment**

The “*I know*” communicates to us an extremely powerful truth! **Nothing we do surprises Him**. This letter is not a reaction to what they have done, but an assessment, so those in Ephesus might come to know what He knows and thereby be willing to be corrected by Him. This letter is intended to pop their religious bubble of delusion. Being outside of time and knowing all things, **Yahweh** never reacts to what we do, for He is **NEVER** taken off guard. Instead, He interacts with us based on His relationship with us and what He desires to accomplish in our lives. But He **NEVER** reacts to our doing things right or wrong; thus, we never have to fear Him like we have feared others who react when we disappoint them.

### **You and Your**

The first part of this letter seems as if Jesus is commending them for their aggressive defense of the truth and their abject disdain for evil men. But is He? Did you notice how many times Jesus used the words “you” and “your”?

I know **your** deeds and **your** toil and perseverance, and that **you** now cannot tolerate evil men, and **you** put to the test those who are now calling themselves apostles, and they are now not, and **you** found them to be false; and **you** have perseverance and now have endured for My name's sake and have not grown weary.

The **Code** here is noticeably clear. 6-times (which is the number of man) Jesus utilizes “you” and “your.” The point is that these are not the works of God, these are **NOT** deeds inspired by the Holy Spirit; rather, they are their works—the **works of their hands**—deeds which they do for God, but **NOT** deeds which derive from God.

Therefore, the problem is not so much that there are evil men in their midst, those who are now calling themselves apostles and are not, for they vetted these men and dealt with them accordingly. The problem at Ephesus is that they do not know **Yahweh** or His name.

We will see the use of “you” and “your” contrasted in the letter to Pergamum. In addressing those believers, God uses the phrasing, “*My name*,” “*My faith*,” “*My witness*,” and “*My faithful one*.” In so doing, He was describing the works of the Spirit which He did in-and-through those believers. Remember, **the source matters, the source is everything!**

The core issue in Ephesus is that they are clearly doing what they think God wants them to do, all in His name of course, but He is not in it. These are not His works, but the works of the “**ME**”—the works of their religious *flesh*—the **works of their hands**.

I want to note an interesting use of the *present* tense considering the “you” and “your.” Those who are now calling themselves apostles, is rendered in the *present active participle*, and they are **now**, not is rendered in the *present active indicative*! Jesus is making the point that in the church of Ephesus, as it exists today, there are those who are now calling themselves apostles despite getting exposed over-and-over-again as liars. They are **now** not.

Clearly, this begs the question, why does this keep happening? You would think that these false apostles would avoid Ephesus like the plague; after all, I am sure their reputation for defending the faith was probably well known.

## The Enemy's Tactics: Like Moths to a Flame

The enemy is at work. Since the deeds of the Ephesians are sourced in their own efforts (and not God's), the enemy keeps them in this cycle of spiritual delusion by continually sending them people who are now calling themselves apostles, so they can get busy, testing, trying, judging, and feeling good about themselves by standing for God and for the truth. It is like a moth to a flame or like flies to stink. The enemy keeps sending and they keep fighting, he keeps sending and they keep fighting, and the cycle goes on-and-on perpetually. It's an amazing self-perpetuating system.

Moreover, it is significant that "*cannot*" in "*you cannot tolerate evil men*" is rendered in the *passive* voice. Something external is causing this to happen within their soul, something is provoking the fight. Normally, the use of the *passive* indicates what God is doing in a person, but since these are unauthorized works, deeds of their religious *flesh*, it is likely this is the demonic. The demonic wants nothing more than to keep them addicted to this cycle of spiritual delusion.

Another significant indicator is that "*not grown weary*" is rendered in the *perfect* tense. This means that they decided sometime in the past that they were to be about defending the faith from imposters and they would never stop in their holy mission. They were determined to keep going regardless of the imposition, the annoyance, or the trouble that it brought into their lives. They had decided that this was Jesus' mission for them, this was their purpose in life, and they would not be deterred or grow weary.

In effect, they created for themselves a ministry, a religious cage so-to-speak, where they stay vigilant defending the faith, and the enemy stays vigilant feeding them false apostles to judge. It is a clean system where everyone is getting what they want; well, everyone except for Jesus. Those in Ephesus feel like they must be doing "the Lord's will" since they have exposed so many liars. And the demons keep those in Ephesus from even knowing that they have a problem.

## The Big But

### Revelation 2:4

But I **now** have this against you, that you have left your first love.

This comment is harrowing and should stop us in our tracks. It is my guess that they did not even pick up from the introduction that Jesus was **NOT** commending them but exposing them for all of their "you" and "your" religious obsessions. I am sure they were quite pleased with themselves until they came across this "*But*." After all, it is a big "But," huge, gigiundus.

This reminds me of the time when Jesus said that even though people call Him "*Lord*," "*Lord*" and do all sorts of amazing works in His name (casting out demons, prophesying, and performing many miracles), He will tell them to depart, for He does not know them. He will declare their religious works to be lawless, licentious, unauthorized—works stemming from the **works of their hands**, their *instinctual religious*

*wisdom*.<sup>11</sup> Believe me, they will never see it coming. Likewise, I am sure those in “Ephesus” never anticipated this kind of appraisal.

Jesus says they have left their first love (*agape*)—in other words, they have left Him, as He is *agape*.<sup>12</sup> And being rendered in the *aorist* tense, it addresses both what they have done and how they exist; and being rendered in the *indicative*, it is a statement of fact. They have unquestionably left Him. They have departed from the one who is *agape* love.

I find it interesting that this does not seem to be a statement on their relationships with one other, as it does not address their unity, love, or kindness with one another. Rather, it is a strait up statement on their relationship with Jesus. They have left Him who is *agape* love—their first love.

Jesus warned His disciples of this very situation, of people who would in effect hate others “in His name,” all the while fully convinced that they offer good and acceptable service to God. He said, “*These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me.*”<sup>13</sup> He said that in the **Last Days** (which is from the time of Jesus forward), because lawlessness (those “**You**” and “**Your**” works vs “**His**” works) would increase, such that the *agape* of many (not a few, but many) would grow cold or literally evaporate like a breath.<sup>14</sup>

Sadly, the *agape* love of the many in Ephesus evaporated.

### **1 Corinthians 13:1-3**

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have *agape*, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have *agape*, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have *agape*, it profits me nothing.

## **Fallen = Apostasy**

### **Revelation 2:5**

Therefore, **now** remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I chose to **now** come to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent.

First, they are commanded to now remember this place from which they have fallen, this place of *agape* love—this place of relationship with Jesus. And with “*fallen*” being in the *perfect active*

<sup>11</sup> **Matthew 7:21**

<sup>12</sup> **1 John 4:8, 16**

<sup>13</sup> **John 16:1-4**

<sup>14</sup> **Matthew 24:12**



*indicative*, there is no question about it, they have fallen from His love, or in effect, gone apostate, gone astray, and that is a harrowing statement of fact.

Perhaps, in deciding that they were going to be about defending the faith, they began to filter everything through the lens of their mission, purpose, and their ministry, and not through the Holy Spirit. And it's then that they, in effect, fell (indicated by the *perfect* tense).

**WHENEVER WE PLACE ANY PURPOSE, MISSION, DRIVE, GOAL, MINISTRY, OR  
ANYTHING ELSE IN FRONT OF THE LEADING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT,  
WE HAVE LEFT JESUS.**

Second, He commands them to **repent** and **do** the first works or deeds. With both "*repent*" and "*do*" being rendered in the *aorist* tense, the command is not for them to get it together in the now (which would be the *present* tense); rather, this is a command to get their life together.

### ***Repent & Do***

It is important to understand that "*repent*" does not mean to feel bad and say sorry, and then to try hard not to blow it again. Rather, "*repent*" means to literally think entirely different about a thing—to have a change of mind and heart and therefore go in a completely opposite direction. And the direction He wants them to take is based on what they did at first.

The implication is that this sort of change of direction does not happen over-night, especially since He no longer wants them to be obsessed on their deeds, but upon His deeds—what He wants to do in-and-through them.

This idea that they are to do the first works (with "*first*" – *protos* in the Greek – meaning first in time, first in place, and first in importance) is a call for them to return to that place where they first fell in love with Jesus, where they believed that they could do nothing, absolutely nothing, to save their soul and they cried out to Jesus in 100% dependence upon the work He did through His death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father.

They had taken **Step 1** of their salvation journey (they were converted by God because they had beheld the Son for who He is and honored Him and received Him. They had let *agape* love into their lives because they knew that only He was the source of life). But this is now a plea for them to live out **Step 2** and receive their salvation by choosing to bet their lives on **Yahweh** and become like a little child who depends entirely on **Yahweh** for their works (actually, for all things all the time). Jesus said that without taking both **Step 1** and **Step 2**, we will not enter the Kingdom of God. Hence, this is a reason I said that this "But" is huge or *gigiundus*.

What had gone wrong? They had stopped living by grace through faith—which is the vehicle by which God moves in and through our lives. Rather, they had become convinced that their works were in fact good and godly works—at least good enough. Yet, to live by grace through faith is that "*first work*" where we believe with our heart, mind, soul, and strength that we are needy, and He is our **only** provision. Religion deludes us to this reality, and it tempts us to move from that place of 100% dependence upon



God to a place where we ultimately confuse our works for His works.

**WE MUST NOT FORGET THAT *JUDE* AND *REVELATION* TARGETS THOSE WITHIN THE VISIBLE CHURCH WITH A MESSAGE WHICH SEPARATES THOSE WHO STAND ONLY ON THE GOODNESS OF GOD (THE BONDSERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST) FROM THOSE WHO ARE TRYING VERY HARD TO BE GOOD FOR GOD.**

The overarching theme of *Jude* and *Revelation* is addressed right up front in the first letter. Even today, there are those “*Ephesian*” type churches that fall within the mainline orthodoxy of Christian theology and are vehement in their stand for truth. But simply said, they do not know Jesus. It does not matter how much truth they know, how much they study His word, or how hard they fight on behalf of His church, even enduring persecution, nor how much they expose the lie; they simply do not know *agape* love.

Let’s stop here, and we will pick up with this issue of religious delusion in our next podcast.