

# Revelation 2:1-7 • The Church at Ephesus

## Introduction

The seven churches represent at least four different things:

- Seven literal churches which existed at the time Revelation was given;
- Seven types of churches which can exist at any time in history;
- Seven types of churches which will exist in the Last Days;
- Seven types of individual believers.

Additionally, this writer believes as many do that each church represents a 5<sup>th</sup> aspect of a sequential, overlapping period of history when the corresponding church characterizes its overall condition for that time.

This is provided in much more detail in Jacob Prasch's book, "The Dilemma of Laodicea", which says of the age of Ephesus that it characterizes the "Apostolic Church" of the 1<sup>st</sup> through early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries, overlapping into the "Pre-Nicean Church". Ephesus corresponds to a time when the Church is transitioning from its original founders and their enthusiasm of the Gospel to the next period to come when the Church is no longer tolerated but outright hunted and persecuted to death. All of these churches existed and were present, but the main environment was dominated by what is written about Ephesus.

<sup>1</sup>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:

<sup>2</sup>I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; <sup>3</sup>and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

<sup>4</sup>But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup>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 will remove your lampstand out of its place— unless you repent. <sup>6</sup>Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

<sup>7</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.

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### Read verse 1

**Q: What appears to be the main issue at Ephesus?**

A: Operating more out of a sense of duty than love.

**Q: How does the meaning of "Ephesus" correspond to the spiritual condition of this church?**

A: "Ephesus" means "desirable" or "beloved". The primary issue of concern with this church is "you have left your first love". (Rev. 2:4)

**Q: What do the "seven stars" and "seven golden lampstands" represent?**

As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Revelation 1:20

**Q: Who are these "seven angels" ("stars")? What is their role?**

A: The underlying Greek word for "angels" literally means "messengers".

**Point:** In the New Testament, the English word is adopted directly from this Greek word, "angelos". When the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek, they preferred to translate it as "messenger". In other words, it is used for **either** a human or

angelic messenger. It is most likely that the usage here refers to the pastors of each of these churches rather than a divine assignment of heavenly beings.

**Q: How do we know for sure that in this case it is referring to earthly leadership?**

A: Each letter begins, "To the angel of the church in \_\_\_\_\_ write..." The content is concerned with the condition of the church overseen by its earthly messengers.

**Application:** Christ is unceasingly **attentive** to each fellowship's **leaders** and their **congregations**.

### Read verses 2-3

**Q: What is the "good news"?**

A: "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance..." (v.2)

**Q: How were these qualities specifically carried out in the course of their ministry?**

- "...you cannot tolerate evil men..."
- "...you put to test those who call themselves apostles..."
- "...you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake..."
- "...you...have not grown weary".

**Application:** This is an example of exercising discernment of the spiritual and perseverance of the physical.

**Q: If we are to love everyone, then how can we not "tolerate" someone?**

A: When it comes to deception, Christians are supposed to test for the truth and take an uncompromising stand to identify and separate from the false and counterfeit; tolerance is not an option in this case because it is the wrong biblical course of action leading to the worst possible consequences.

**Q: Is the issue of someone claiming the title and position of "apostle" the same today as it was back then?**

A: At that time the only original Apostle still alive was John. Many would come claiming to literally be one of the originals as resurrected or sent back..

**Q: How could they get away with this?**

A: Although Jesus reappeared after the Resurrection, He was not always immediately recognized physically, so that might have been used by counterfeits of the day. At that time there was still the opportunity to literally claim coming and appearing as Christ or an Apostle in a way which cannot be duplicated in modern times, although many have tried and keep on trying. Also keep in mind that the Early Church believed Christ would return in the lifetime of the Apostles.

**Application:** Ephesus was properly dealing with **false** leadership attempting to gain entrance by attempting to **counterfeit** authentic leaders.

### Read verses 4-6

**Q: Who are the Nicolaitans?**

A: Their name appears to combine "nico"— "suppression of the people", and "laitan"— "rulers of the laity". This describes a kind of self-appointed clergy class attempting to rule over everyone else.

**Point:** Ephesus was not only dealing with false leadership attempting to gain entrance by claiming to be an apostle, but attempts to corrupt from within by the Nicolaitans.

**Q: What was the Nicolaitans' specific teaching?**

A: When they are mentioned again in the letter to Pergamum, it stipulates they were directly associated with the teachings of Balak as a "stumbling block... to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality". (Rev. 2:14-15)

<sup>2</sup>I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; <sup>3</sup>and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary

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**Observation:** This is a specific Early Church problem which is mentioned both by Peter (2 Pe. 2:15) and Jude (Jude 15). These two issues were the heart of what the council in Jerusalem ruled as being most important for Gentile believers to avoid (Acts 15), so it is not surprising that this was a palpable challenge to the Ephesians' faith.

**Application:** This combination has taken various forms during the history of the Church and persists even now. It is most evident when a false teacher or false movement integrates lust and fleshly desires into their doctrine and practices.

**Q: What is the theme for Ephesus as provided in the text?**

- "I know your **deeds**..." (v.4)
- "...do the **deeds** you did at first..." (v.5)
- "...you hate the **deeds** of the Nicolaitans..." (v.6)

"For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

Matthew 7:2

**Q: What is the biblical definition of "deeds"?**

A: The underlying term "egron" is translated "deeds" when it appears in Revelation some 16 times in 15 verses. (Rev. 2:2, 5, 6, 19, 22, 23, 26; 3:1, 2, 8, 15: 14:13; 16:11; 18:6; 20:12, 13) It is used 12 times alone in the letters to the seven churches. It conveys the idea of the result or object of employment, making, or working.

**Q: How is the issue of "deeds" connected to the issue of the Ephesians' love?**

A: It's actually a separate but related issue. Jesus is basically saying, "You're not slack in your work, but you're no longer doing it like when you were motivated by love and not duty".

**Observation:** Ever notice the difference in the person for whom something is a job vs. the one who considers it a calling?

**Q: But isn't doing good deeds enough?**

A: It is seen as so serious that Christ calls for repentance, a return to deeds done out of love, and if uncorrected, "I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place".

**Point:** The condition of the heart is always given the priority, even when it comes to things we would normally categorize as "good".

**Application:** Ephesus was handling many things well **technically** on the larger issues, but ultimately failing **spiritually** on the **personal** level.

**Read verse 7**

**Q: What is the promise to all believers provided by Christ to all overcomers?**

A: "...I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God." (v.7)

**Q: How does this specifically relate to this particular church?**

A: It is the best possible outcome if their fall and potential removal is remedied.

**Application:** The real goal is to **enjoy** the Kingdom of God, not merely **work** for it.

<sup>7</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God

## **Overall Application**

Christ is constantly watching over not just the **individual** members of the Church, but its **individual** fellowships; what and how we do and say **matters** to Him. True Christianity is not a **job** but a **relationship**.

- *Will the sins of the Church in the West be overlooked because they still fund missions programs and provide assistance to the needy? What about its support of various charities?*
- *What form have Nicolaitans taken in our time? What might be examples of this behavior? What is the biblical model of leadership?*
- *How do you compare yourself today to when you first became saved in Christ? Is your personal love of Him growing or has it become more routine and derived from a sense of duty?*
- *What is it for which you should repent in order to return to your first love?*