

LETTERS FROM



JESUS

REVELATION 2 & 3

Letters from Jesus

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EPHUESUS

Revelation 2:1-7 – **Part One**

I. Reading Revelation

Revelation is three genres rolled into one book:
Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Letter

It leads us to *worship* and is a manual of *discipleship* – of following Jesus.

II. To the Church in Ephesus - Revelation 2:1-7

A. Each letter begins with a word about Jesus – revealing Jesus:

“These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands”

What are the stars and lampstands?

“These seven stars are the angels [or ‘messengers’] of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” (Rev 1:20b)

Jesus is not an absentee landlord, some distant, disengaged deity only casually acquainted with us. No. He “walks” among his churches. That highlights His *proximity* to us. His nearness. It shows that He really *cares* what is happening with His people.

Connecting to Life: What might change if you were aware of the actual, real presence of Christ with you through the day? Can you visualize that this week? He is *with us*. Walking *among us*.

B. Jesus’ Praise for the Church (vv.2-3; 6)

John Stott summarizes this community as being “energetic in service, patient in their suffering, orthodox in their faith.”

“They were refusing to participate in idolatrous worship... and were patiently accepting the consequences – rejection by friends, scorn of civil leaders, loss of customers, boycott by the business community.”

– Darrel Johnson





This church in Ephesus took seriously the words Paul spoke to the leaders of the church in Acts 20: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock...savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard." (Acts 20:28; 30).

Connecting to Life: Loving God and others starts with listening to God - to paying close attention to Him, and being committed to thinking rightly about life with Him.

C. The Problem, Plan and Promise

"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place." - *Revelations 2:4-5*

1. The Problem: "You have forsaken the love you had at first."

What does Jesus mean by "the love you had at first"?

What does that mean? And how did they *forsake* or *abandon* it?

It could be their:

a) Love for one another; b) Love for God; c) Love for the gospel; or d) Love for Jesus.

But as Daniel Akin rightly asks: do we need to choose? For these are all bound up in each other.

"A cooling of personal love for God inevitably results in the loss of harmonious relationships within the body of believers....[A]t Ephesus hatred of heresy and extensive involvement in the works appropriate to faith had allowed the fresh glow of love to God and one another to fade" - Robert Mounce.

2. The Plan: "Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first."

A. Remember

"Jesus does not call us to beat ourselves up over this. Nor does he call us to work ourselves up into some emotional state. He simply calls us to recognize where we are and admit it to ourselves and to Him." - Darrel Johnson

Memory also has a powerful function for re-igniting our affections too. By looking back to that time when we first fell in love, and the kinds of things that lead us to do, the ways we acted, that 'rehearsal' of the heart actually beckons us back to love.

B. Repent

A change of mind and heart, a U-Turn in the road of practices and priorities. This is a commitment to a changed way of living.

If on 'remembering' we find that, "Yes, I am in a different place now – have lost the attentiveness, the 'love' for Jesus and his people," then the move is to rearrange my priorities.

C. Re-Do

Connecting to Life: What about you? What did you 'do at first' that you need to go back to? How did you love people in the past that you haven't been practicing? How can you go back to that?

3. The Promise

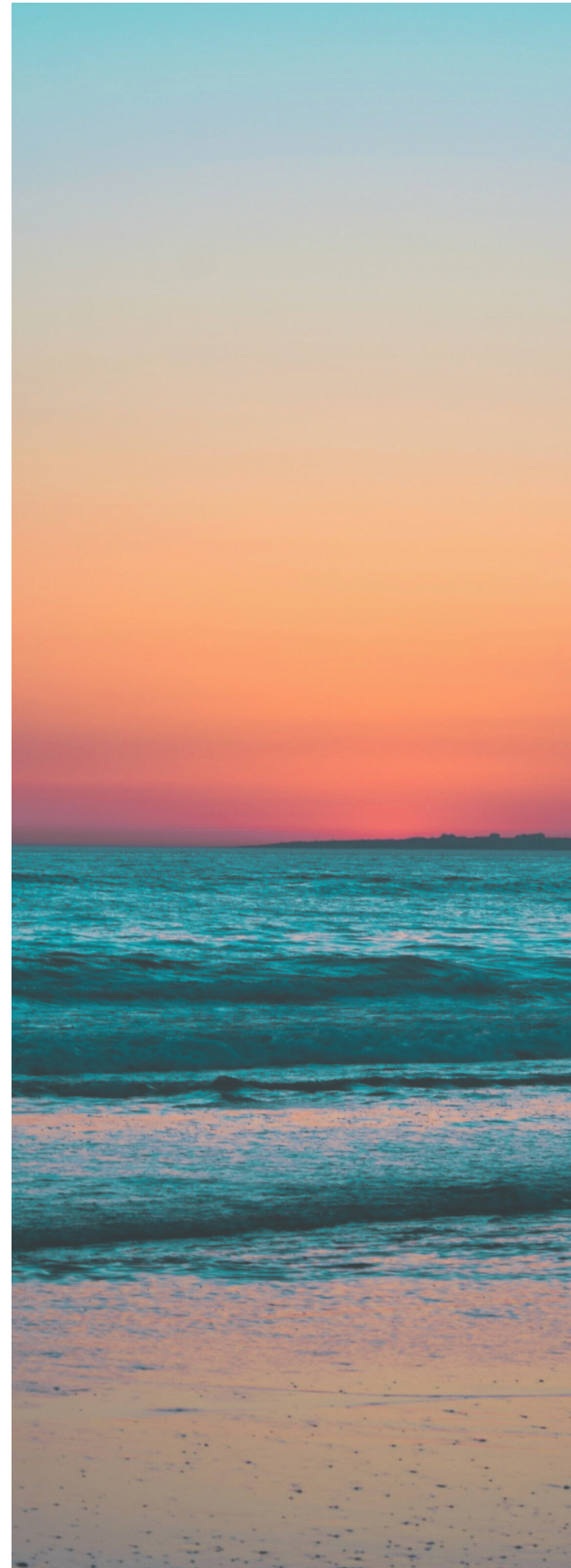
"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." - *Revelations 2:7*

To be "victorious" is to: "Trust fully in Jesus, and follow what he calls you to, even when it's costly."

The tree of life is the first scene of the Bible – in the garden of Eden.

But the way to it, is blocked through human sin. And this tree is on the final page too – in Revelation 22 – at the centre of the heavenly garden-city. And, the way, Jesus himself tells us, is now opened. How? Because Jesus himself is nailed to a tree so that we may be forgiven and be with him forever.

What are you aiming your life at? That's what has your heart. Is it Jesus – and a life of love with Him? May it be so for you, and for us as a community. We've seen the path there for those who have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying.





Life Group Discussion

Open Up

1. Do you sometimes hesitate to speak up about things you really believe out of fear that you might offend someone? Explain.

Read Revelation 2:1-7

2. What things does Jesus praise the church for? What is his concern for the community?
3. How do you think that the strengths of the church (v.2-3) might have contributed to its weaknesses (v.4)?
4. *N.T. Wright* ask the question well: "As all church workers know, a group that is rightly concerned for the truth of the gospel may forget that the very heart of the gospel is love. What can we do to help

maintain this delicate balance between truth and love in our own churches today?" Take some time to discuss this.

5. In what ways do Jesus' words of rebuke for the Ephesian church relate to your experience? Have you worked through the "plan" in the past, where you "remember, repent, and re-do"? Talk about that process.
6. How does the promise of v.6-7 encourage you?

Prayer

Take some time to pray for the community of Summit Drive. Thank God for the ways that you see our community emulating the positive commitments described in this passage. Ask God to help us be a community that is constantly assessing the "love" factor, and for the courage to live out our love for God in love for one another.