



# To The Seven Churches

# Ephesus



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### Revelation 2:1-7

*When did you come to Christ? What was life like after first making your faith your own?*

The Book of Revelation is written to seven churches. These seven churches would have been the standard path you would expect a person to take who is delivering the letter to the churches. Furthermore, these churches were the main hubs of churches where information could be easily disseminated down to the smaller churches and collections of believers. As this letter was spread throughout the area, it would be read aloud for all to hear to be encouraged and supportive of one another, even during the struggle. While the issues presented in the various churches are specific to what they were facing at the time, the message begins them remains similarly relevant, even to today.

The church in Ephesus was surrounded by a pluralistic society in which many gods were given temples and places for people to worship. As a major trade center, various different religions found a home in Ephesus with no one god being elevated above the other. Then there was the issue of the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans were marked by their flagrant indulgence of the self. They would engage in adulterous worship and commonly participated in religious services to other gods. They abandoned their witness and the church in Ephesus stood out as a major opponent of the Nicolaitans. Yet, for all of the theological fervor of the church in Ephesus, they had grown increasingly cynical at the world rather than embodying what a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ looks like.

## Standing Firm For Truth

The letter to the church in Ephesus is not without its praise. The people of the church in Ephesus demonstrated a profound ability to guard and protect the faith in orthodoxy. **Orthodoxy** is defined as the right belief based on truth rather than on other factors. It comes from the Greek words ortho- meaning right

and doxa meaning thought. Thus, for a Christian to be in orthodoxy, they must adhere and conform to the truth of Christ in their thought life as presented by God Himself.

The problem of the church in Ephesus was not orthodoxy as they were firm in their understanding of the faith. They detested the Nicolaitans and would eagerly and openly enter into debate with them. They sought the task of Apologetics in offering the truth in response to the fake truth that Nicolaitans preached and are commended by God for doing so. False truth should not be permitted to persist, specifically, false truth regarding the nature of God. Any deviation from the truth leads to the death of souls and the consequences of inaction on the churches end bears cataclysmic and eternal significance.

During the last days (which we are arguably enduring now) the church must be willing to be equipped to stand up for the truth and for orthodoxy. The people of God must be trained and equipped to understand the truth of God and to communicate it to a hostile world. Religious tolerance, simply put, is not a thing a Christian should indulge in. It supports a false god and encourages others to worship someone other than the One, True King. We should support the person made in the image of God but vehemently stand against any school of thought that teaches anything contrary to the Gospel. This is done, not out of judgment, but out of love and concern for those we desire to live in eternity with.

## **First Love**

The issue that the church is reprimanded for is its lack of love. In seeking so hard to battle against the heresy of the day, they neglected the relationship with God. When they first came to an understanding of what God has done for mankind, they displayed a religious vigor and passion. The newness of coming to life defined their actions as the outpouring of the love of God impacted the pluralistic society they lived in.

Cynicism is not healthy for faith as it roots itself in despair and criticism that things will never be as they should. In reality, the

Christian knows full well that one day we will be as we should in eternity with Jesus Christ. Nor does chasing down heresy make a person an automatic Christian. It is possible to factually understand the qualities of God but still be lacking in the connection and communion between God and man. This is not to downplay proper understanding and theology (of which the church in Ephesus was commended for), but rather to remember the love we felt at the beginning. The church's role is not to be unapproachably cynical or even overly accepting of sins, but rather to display our love of God in the world for all to see.

Newly married persons have a profound love for one another that feels unbreakable. Over time, however, the love can grow cold with the mundane and be withered by the challenges that couples face. This is precisely why marriage counselors encourage couples to continue to go on dates and stir up the love for one another. Every relationship takes work, whether it be a friendship, a family, or a marriage. Furthermore, every relationship involves a certain amount of self-sacrifice. To pursue our own person wants and desires is mere **Hedonism**, standing in stark contrast to what God is seeking to accomplish in our lives. God wants all of us and in order to do so, we must die to the things our flesh desires and pursue God fully with the love we had when we first encountered God.

## Discussion Questions

1. Define the following two terms
  - Orthodoxy - \_\_\_\_\_
  - Hedonism - \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are the things that Jesus praises the church in Ephesus for? What does this reveal about the things that God values?
3. Why is it difficult to stand up for truth? How do people tend to respond when confronted with the truth of the Gospel that they are speaking or living in contradiction? Where do you see this in our current day and age?
4. How should the church respond to the attacks against orthodoxy? How do you personally tend to react against
5. What charges does Jesus bring against the church in Ephesus? What are the consequences of their refusing to return to their first love? Why do you feel these consequences are so severe?
6. How are pluralism and hedonism incompatible with displaying the love of God?
7. Do you tend to lean more towards cynicism/being overly critical or towards overly accepting of the sins of others?
8. What does it look like to pursue God with the love we had at first? How can we practically accomplish this in our daily lives?