

Revelation Extra: The Church at Ephesus

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[0 : 00] the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your works, your toil, your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you. You have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen. Repent and do the works that you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have. You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear, what the Spirit says to the churches, to the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Can I ask you to please pray for me? Would you do that? And pray with me now, as we want God to speak to us. Amen? From this passage. Let's pray. God, that is our prayer.

[1 : 16] Father, this passage is so important for us. As a church, as followers of Jesus, let this balance us appropriately in the gospel.

We need to be convicted. I am the chief of sinners. And so come and speak in a very bold way to us.

Open our eyes to see how this relates to our life and our church, that we might be conformed to the image of Jesus. That's our prayer. In Jesus' name, God's people said, Amen.

Amen. Please be seated. He's one of the most decorated and celebrated war leaders in American history, particularly for his role in World War II.

I'm talking about General George Patton. Some of you will recognize that name. He became famous for his leadership of the U.S. Third Army in France and Germany following the Normandy invasion.

[2 : 24] If you know anything about Patton, he had a very colorful personality, to say the least, known for being very hard-nosed, very aggressive, even controversial at times.

And he really became kind of American icon after the 1970 film or documentary that was made about his life. It won seven Academy Awards featuring actor George C. Scott.

And it really illustrates the essence of who Patton was. And there's a very, very famous scene in the documentary, if you've ever watched it. And in this scene, to set it up for you, he has just finished observing a battle, observing a fight.

In fact, you still see the battlefield in the background and the smoke as it's beginning to settle. And he's having a conversation with another soldier about the details of war.

And so he's going to describe that. And then I want you to listen to something remarkably revealing that he says after that.

[3 : 30] Take a look. I love it. God help me, I do love it so. I love it more than life.

What is he talking about? What is it that he loves so much? He's not talking about freedom, though I certainly wouldn't question that at all. He's not talking about the flag, though there's no doubting his patriotism whatsoever.

But what he's talking about in that scene is war. That there's something about war that he loves. There's something about the battle. There's something about bullets flying in the smoke as it's raging. There's something about the, to quote another movie, the smell of napalm in the morning. There was something about him that just loved the fight, that loved war itself. I want you to think about that practically because that is a profound metaphor for what we're going to talk about this morning.

[4 : 36] Do you know anybody like that? And I'm not talking about actual war. I'm talking about, do you know anybody that just loves the thrill of the fight?

That friend or spouse that will argue about anything. It doesn't matter what it is. Or maybe you've got that kid like my Audrey who always has to have the last word.

It's almost not even about the candy anymore. It's just I want to be able to say something back. Or maybe it's a politician who just loves the fight, loves the political game more than actually serving the people.

Or how many of you have ever come across that Christian that loves the theological debate more than they do loving the person?

There are some people who simply love the fight. And they look at the battle and say, oh, how I love it so.

[5 : 46] That is exactly what happened to the church at Ephesus. Let me show you in the text, verse 1. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

This is the first, as we've stated, of seven letters written to seven churches on the coast of Asia Minor. Here are the seven churches that John records this for.

Now, you might say, why seven? Why these seven churches? Because historically there were certainly more than seven churches at that time. Well, if you know anything about John, he loves the number seven.

Like everything's in sevens in the book of Revelation because the number seven is the number of completion. So what you need to understand is that John is writing, recording this to a specific church.

But the number seven is important because it's a number of completion, meaning this applies to all churches, to every church.

[6 : 52] And so he starts by reminding them of the purpose for why they're even a church. Notice the three symbols here. The first is an angel. You know, the word for angel just simply means messenger.

And I think that that's really more what's at stake in the context here. Not like every church has like a guardian angel or something like that. Hey, by the way, did you know that some scholars think that this refers to the pastor of each of these churches?

Which it makes sense why one would think that. I mean, given that pastors are so angelic and all. I mean, but I don't think that's even what is at stake here.

I mean, it could be. I wouldn't fight over it. But I think it's just the idea of being a messenger. And I think that that will show itself as we go through the text. Notice the second symbol, that of stars.

That is things that reflect. Notice the third symbol, that of lampstands. Seven lampstands. Seven churches. That is the idea of shining light. You put all that together, and here's what I really think the essence is.

[7 : 53] And I'll show you throughout the rest of the text. It is a reminder to the church of Ephesus, right out of the gate, as to why a church exists in the first place. Right here.

Are you listening, Breein? We exist to be his messenger, to reflect him in the world by shining forth the light of his love.

That's our purpose. That's why we exist. That's why he's put us here. To be a messenger that reflects him by shining forth the light of his love.

A few years ago, GE, a facility in Ohio, a GE facility. They celebrated their 100th year anniversary. And when they first started the factory, they buried some light bulbs.

And then 100 years later, they dug up those light bulbs to see if they would work. And one of all of those light bulbs worked.

[8 : 58] I share that with you to say this. Here is the essence of what is being asked to the church of Ephesus and to the church of Berean. 100 years from now, will you still shine?

Christian, 10 years from now, will you still shine? Will you walk away from the purpose in which you were created for?

Are you going to be a church the way I have called you to be? That's what he's doing. And now that he's reminded them of their purpose, he will evaluate them based on that.

You'll notice verse 1 says, he walks among them. That is, he observes everything they do. He knows everything about them. He listens to their prayers. He listens to their singing.

He observes their sermons, the baptisms, the Lord's Supper, the attitudes they have towards one another, the condition of every heart. Listen, faith family.

[10:01] Jesus, the Lord of the church, knows everything about his church. Which is why he will then say, verse 2, look at it. I know. So now he starts the evaluation.

I know your works, your toil, your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. In other words, here is why you exist, and now let me evaluate you based on that, and here's what I would applaud you for.

Here's what I would praise you for. Here's what I would commend you about what you're doing. You are steadfast. You hold fast to the very truth of God, and you're doing this in Ephesus of all places. I'm going to try to give you some perspective here. When you think of Ephesus, you need to think of New York City, a place of multiple cultures at this time, a center of commerce, buildings that would fill the skyline.

[11:13] In fact, there was a massive temple in Ephesus, one of the seven wonders of the world, four times as big as the Parthenon. It covered the city skyline.

It was a temple dedicated to Artemis or Diana, the goddess of fertility, sexual pleasure, commerce. By the way, a little cultural note, if you have seen Wonder Woman in theaters, you have seen Artemis, Diana.

Wonder Woman was fashioned out of Greek mythology of Artemis. You are watching right before your eyes. In fact, if you see the movie, there'll be all kinds of references to Diana, or at least so I'm told.

Anyways, it's what others have told me. Anyways, the point here that's happening in the text is Jesus is saying in one of the most pagan and influential cities, you have been steadfast in the truth. You don't tolerate error. You have no room for false teaching. You can smell evil a mile away, and I applaud you for that.

[12:28] In fact, he even gives an example of it in verse 6. Yet this you have. You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Now, we don't know that much historically about the Nicolaitans, other than the fact that they built an awesome theme park at the Mall of America. Right? It's really awesome. I don't quite know if that's the same group or not, but it's close.

All right? We don't know much about them, other than the fact that they were clearly false teachers, and the Ephesians would have nothing to do with what they were saying. Now, there's a couple of implications here that we need to talk about.

Okay? Here's the first. I think these are obvious from the text. Number one, Faith family, it is right to stand against that which is not right.

That's a great place for an amen, and you missed it. It is right to stand against the things that are not right, that is, the things that are not of God. That's very obvious from the text.

[13:30] Jesus is saying, what's awesome about you, Ephesians, is you don't back down when it comes to theology. You will have no part of false teaching. And we live in a culture of tolerance, or at least so they say.

I would argue their definition of tolerance is not tolerant, but that's a whole other thing. But our culture is telling us that we have to be tolerant, and we have to remember as a church, not because I say so, but because the Bible says so, that we cannot compromise the truth of God.

And there are a lot of denominations that I would say have tried to reach the culture by compromise. Only to become the culture. And lose their witness and power of the gospel.

Now listen to me. You better listen to me, right? How you stand for Jesus is just as important as that you stand for Jesus.

And we'll deal with that in just a moment. So don't take that too far. We must stand for the things God stands for. Here's a second implication. I'm not trying to pick a fight here.

[14:40] I just think it's obvious in the text. Every word from God must be held accountable to the Word of God.

In other words, if you come to me and say, Pastor, I got a word from God. God has spoken to me. He's given me a word. Listen, I don't have to take your word for it. What I am to do is to run what you say is your word from God through the Word of God, because you may have a word, but if it's

not based on the Word, then it ain't a word from God.

That's what was happening in Ephesus. People were coming in saying, I got a word from God, and I've got this new teacher, and I've got this new teaching, and the Ephesians would say, wait a minute. Pardon us if we don't just assume you're right.

We will hold in check what you're saying with the apostolic witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must, please, Brian, we must be a discerning, steadfast, pure in doctrine, faithful to Scripture, uncompromising with the gospel church.

We must be what Paul wrote to the Ephesians in Ephesians 4, verse 13, that we would attain the unity of faith, the knowledge of the Son of God, to the mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

[16 : 35] Are you with me? Jesus is saying, Ephesus, I love that you stand firm in the truth of God. But.

But. There's a big but in verse 4. Really, really important. It's kind of like, you know, when your kids come to you and they're saying a bunch of nice things, you're like the best parent in the world and you're like, what do you want?

Now, Jesus isn't buttering them up to then lower the boom. He's being honest. And while He's being honest, He's not just going to commend them for their purity, theologically.

He is going to condemn them for their pride. Verse 4. But I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

This is the danger, Berean. Please, please listen. The danger is, if you're not careful, we will start to love the truth of Jesus more than we love Jesus.

[17 : 51] We will become so consumed in principles that we will forget the person and theological pride expresses itself in a lack of love for others.

That's dangerous. And listen, I told them last night, I've told almost everybody I've talked to after the services and I've said, there is no one in the room who needs this message more than me.

Because certainly in my profession, what I've been called to do, this is a danger. I so love theology. I so want to be true and faithful when I preach to the Word of God.

But we have to be careful that instead of the Word of God leading us to the person, it becomes what we love to rage and debate about.

And it happens in my life and I see it in so many Christians and I've got to be honest with you, I don't understand it. I don't understand it. How can the people who proclaim the gospel of grace lack so much of it?

[19 : 03] That doesn't make any sense to me, even in the mirror. How can churches like the church of Ephesus that were about 40 years old at this point historically become some of the most grumpy, bitter, mean-spirited people?

You want to know how? Just mess with their parking. Did he just say that? Yes, he just said that. Not because I'm trying to jab at you, but because it's applicable for us.

It just amazes me the things that people get so bitter about, so upset about. It's a problem. And I don't think people intend to do it.

That's not my experience. In fact, I said this like, I don't know, it was like two years ago, that spiritual pride is like eating at Denny's. Nobody intends to do it, it just happens.

Like, nobody has ever set out and said, I have a great idea, let's go to Denny's. And then you eat at Denny's and you're thinking, why did I eat at Denny's?

[20 : 22] Right? So, and that's what happens. You don't intend to end up here, but it just, you end up there and you didn't even know it and I'm hoping that God will awaken us from it today.

I think it goes like this, you become a Christian and you're growing and something happens, follow me, that's like a spiritual awakening in your life. You hear that speaker, you read that book, you go to that conference, you become involved in that movement, you go to that church, you come back from that trip or that camp and you saw the light when you read it.

You saw the light while you were there and now it all makes sense and now you've got it right. And so you step up your game and you start killing sin and now you understand things and on your sprint to the front line of following Jesus, you start noticing others and they're not running the way you're running and they don't know what you know.

They're not as committed as you are. They don't give as much as you give. And rather than being compassionate for them, you become frustrated with them and you end up, if you stay there long enough, theologically, spiritually, denominationally, or generationally, arrogant. And being right is now more important than being kind. And thinning the herd is more important than expanding the kingdom.

[21 : 52] And unity is great as long as you define unity by everybody else being like you. And what we never saw happening the entire time was that in our effort to be Jesus, we left our love for Him.

That's a problem. That is dangerous. That's a gospel issue. And you say, why is this a gospel issue?

Here's why. Because I want to expose what is at the core of what I just said. You ready? Your rightness has become your righteousness.

Your rightness has become your righteousness. You see, if you're right, why would you need the righteousness of another?

Functionally, and I'm not talking theologically because you've clearly got that down pat. You passed that essay on the theological survey, right? But why is it functionally anti-gospel?

[23 : 14] Because your righteous standing before God is not the victory of the cross, but your victory over others. And you say, why do you keep saying others?

Like, isn't He talking about the love you had at first? Isn't He talking about Jesus? So is it Jesus, love for Jesus, or is it love for others? Are you ready for the answer?

Yes. Because you can't separate the two. Listen to what John, same author, in 1 John 4 says.

1 John 4, verse 20 says, If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he's a liar. How's that for clear? For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

And this commandment we have from Him, from Jesus, whoever loves God must also love his brother.

[24 : 22] Right here, right here, right here. When your love for Jesus slips, your love for others slips. Can't separate it. In fact, I wish I had more time. I don't.

But I'll just say this. Dysfunctional relationships are nothing more than the inability to operate out of a divine love. That's a lot. Did you get that?

Dysfunctional relationships are nothing more than the inability to operate out of divine love. Loving Jesus and loving others cannot be separated.

When you have left your love for Him, you have left your ability to love others. So here's the flow of the text, alright? And then we'll look at verse 5 and be done.

When your rightness has become at least functionally your righteousness, you don't need Jesus anymore because you're good.

[25 : 21] And when you don't need Jesus anymore, you don't have affections for Jesus anymore. And when you don't have affection for Jesus anymore, you have no ability to love others.

Listen. And when you're not loving others, you have forgotten your purpose for being a church. Do you see? You have forgotten your purpose for being a church.

Now what do we do? What is our response? I am so glad this morning I don't have to make up the application. Because in verse 5, Jesus tells the Ephesians exactly what to do.

Look at it and we'll be finished. Verse 5. The first thing He says is remember your passion.

Remember your passion. He says, remember therefore from where you have fallen.

Which is just another way of saying return to the love you had at first. You see those parallel statements. You have left your love at first. Well, remember.

[26 : 21] Go back there to the love that you had at first. Right? Remember what it was like when you became a Christian.

Could we do that for just a moment? If you're here today and you've been a Christian for 6 months or 6 years or 60 years, would you just take a brief moment and remember what it was like when you became a Christian?

When you felt the weight of sin and you felt the freedom of the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Do you remember that? And man, you couldn't sing enough.

You couldn't read the Bible enough. You couldn't go to church enough. You couldn't witness enough. And it wasn't out of duty. It was out of delight. It was your joy because you loved Him.

The fire was blazing of your affections for Jesus. And somewhere along the way, the logs went out. The fire's not burning and you're bitter.

[27 : 20] You're burned out. You're bored. There's just something wrong with your affections. You've got all these verses memorized but they don't do anything for your heart.

Would you return to that passion? Would you begin to have that renewed today? Because we will be a worthless church for Jesus if we're not in love with Jesus.

Not just remember your passion but the very next word in the verse is repent. That is, repent of your pride. Repent of that doctrinal self-righteousness.

Repent of your religion. And here's the good news this morning, Faith Family, this is great news, is temporary leaving does not mean permanently lost.

Amen? Here's my point. You with me? Theological prodigals can come home. Theological prodigals can come home.

[28 : 38] The whole reason the letter is written is so that the Ephesians will renew their love for Jesus. And by the way, when I'm talking about prodigals, I'm not talking about the younger brother that ran away.

I'm talking about the older brother that never did. See, the older brother didn't run away with his feet. He ran away with his heart. Because the older brother is the only one that missed the party because of his self-righteousness.

Prodigals, can come home and be renewed in their affection for Jesus. Here's the third thing.

Remember your passion. Repent of your pride.

And then the next thing, and this is really important, he says, notice, and do the works you did at first. That is, remain theologically pure.

Keep doing what you've been doing. This is so big, and here's why. Because a lot of people want to run to the other extreme, and they're like, yeah, preach, preacher. Who cares about all that doctrine stuff?

[29 : 49] Let's all stand, grab hands, and sing kumbaya. Theology doesn't matter. Love matters. Wrong. The answer to a loveless orthodoxy is not less orthodoxy.

It's more love. Jesus is saying, keep doing what you're doing. I love that you're steadfast. I love that you're theologically pure. I don't want you to compromise that.

I just want you to restore your affections. Don't create a false dichotomy that the Bible never teaches, which is, it's either theology or love.

It's both. And we do this with churches. Let me give a little footnote, right? This is free. We've got plenty of time. Here we go. It's like, there are some churches that are really deep, and they teach. And then there are some churches that are like really shallow, and they give you life application. And I want to say, why not both? It's never about theology or love, or love and kumbaya, but who cares about all that like hard stuff of knowing something.

[30 : 58] Theology ought to be the logs of which your affections burn. The more you know about God, the more you know about the gospel ought to blaze in you affections for Jesus if you really understand your theology.

Oh, maybe that was for me. It's not either or. It's both. Remember your passion. Repent of your pride.

But remain theologically pure. Keep doing what you've been doing. Or, I will remove you.

Look at it. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent. that's what Jesus said. Which means you will still gather on weekends.

[32 : 09] You'll even come to the late hour. And you'll still go to your Bible studies and you'll still memorize your Scriptures. and you'll be completely irrelevant for my mission.

I don't know of anything in my time here that I want to say with the sincerity of what I'm about to say. Berean Baptist Church can be doctrinally right and missionally irrelevant.

We can be doctrinally right because we pride ourselves on being a gospel-centered church. Amen? And we can be right about the gospel and wrong about love.

And if we're wrong about love, we ain't right about the gospel. because no love equals no light.

We know our creeds and we vote our values. We got leather-bound Bibles and highlighters to boot.

And we make no difference whatsoever for Jesus.

[33 : 31] I want to leave you with this thought. His name was Jacob Halleck. He's a 37-year-old that wasn't feeling well and he went to the doctor.

The doctors informed him that he had a tumor growing inside his heart rapidly. Because of that, he wasn't a candidate for a transplant and so the doctor said, we're going to try something radical. We're going to take out your human heart and we're going to put in a man-made, pulseless heart. And they did. And amazingly, for six months, six months, he could sing, he could eat, he could laugh, but in six months, he died.

Why? Because brother and sister, you and I both know you can only live so long without a heart. You can operate on the outside for a while.

You're singing your songs, you're in your Bible study, you're in church every week, but if there is no heartbeat for Jesus, we will eventually die.

[35 : 09] So I ask us, when we come before Jesus Christ, this gospel we love to proclaim, can we honestly say, I love him so.

God help me, I do love him so. I love him more than life.