The Church of Ephesus

Wednesday Evening

Bible Study

Return Church

October 21, 2026

The Apostle John

- The Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation while in exile on the Isle of Patmos.
- He probably wrote it around AD 95.
- This would be 25 years after the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus and the Roman army.
- John was an old man, and the last surviving apostle.
- The first section of the book of Revelation is the letters to the 7 churches. These are written in red letters, as Jesus gave these messages to John directly.

John's greeting to the 7 Churches

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, says the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. ***Revelation 1:1-8 NKJV***

I was in the Spirit

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, and, What you see, write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. ***Revelation 1:9-11 NKJV***


modern day
TURKEY
Pergamos
Thyatira
Smyrna
Sardis
Philadelphia
Ephesus
Laodicea

John's vision of Jesus Christ

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength. ***Revelation 1:12-16 NKJV***

Jesus's instructions to John

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. 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 which you saw are the seven churches. ***Revelation 1:17-20 NKJV***

- Can you image what John thought after seeing Jesus again. Remember John once walked with Him and talked with Him for 3 ½ years.
- John was often referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

The Church of Ephesus

This is our text for this lesson

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. ***Revelation 2:1-7 NKJV***

Ephesus

- Ephesus, located in modern-day Turkey was the capital of the Roman province of Asia.
- At the time of the writing of the book of Revelation, Ephesus was one of the greatest cities in the ancient world, along with Athens, Rome and Alexandria.
- Ephesus was politically, religiously, and economically influential in the Roman Empire. Because of this, the presence of a church in the city was spiritually and culturally significant.
- It was a rich center of commerce and trade.
- The Temple of Artemis was there, one of the 7 wonders of the Ancient world. This made Ephesus a center of pagan religion.
- Paul would spend more time in the city of Ephesus than any other city during his 3 missionary journeys.

The Church at Ephesus

The New Testament features the church at Ephesus in 3 places.

1. Paul's missionary work in the city found in Acts 19.
2. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. A small book of 6 chapters, but many consider it one of Paul's greatest letters.
3. Jesus' message to the church recorded by John in the book of Revelation. (Revelation 2:1-7)

History of church of Ephesus

- Paul established this church, himself.
- When Paul left town, he put Pricilla and Aquilla, (fellow tent-makers) in as the pastors.
- The preacher Apollos also helped to build up the early believers in Ephesus.
- Paul would later, on his 3rd missionary journey, spend over 2 years there.
- Paul would write a letter to the church at Ephesus. This letter had no rebuke. It was not at all like Galatians or Corinthians. Ephesians was a letter of Christian theology and Christian living.
- Later, Timothy would come and pastor the church in Ephesus.
- Paul wrote his two letters to Timothy while Timothy was pastoring the church there.
- The Apostle John would also spend a few years there. Here John would write His gospel and his 3 epistles.
- Mary the mother of Jesus came with John. As Jesus had told John to take care of His mother.
- Let's look at Acts 19 to understand more about this church.

Paul's first visit to Ephesus

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? ***Acts 19:1 NKJV***

When they heard *this,* they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied**…..** And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God….. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. ***Acts 19:5-6,8,10 NKJV***

Great miracles

Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. ***Acts 19:11-12 NKJV***

A deliverance service gone wrong

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches. Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you? Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ***Acts 19:13-16 NKJV***

A big bon-fire

This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned

A big riot

There was also a big riot in Ephesus stirred up by Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of the goddess Diana. Paul's preaching had hurt his business greatly and also other idol makers. "So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord." **Acts 19**

Back to our text

Here are some real good things Jesus says about the Church of Ephesus.

I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. ***Revelation 2:2-3 NKJV***

Good things Jesus said about them

- **Your labor**, they worked hard for the Lord. (They shared the gospel and met peoples needs.)
- **Your patience**, they were very patient with the young Christians.
- They cannot bear those who are evil. (I know you **don't tolerate evil** people. NLT)
- You have tested **false apostles**, and found them to be liars.
- You have **persevered**. (You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. NLT)
- You have **endured hardships** for my name, and have **not grown weary**. (NIV)

Amazing

- Wow! What a compliment from Jesus Christ Himself.
- The church of Ephesus was doing some really great things.
- They sound like the perfect, healthy church. Their members are busy serving, working hard, defending the truth.
- I feel like He might say something very similar to Return Church.
- We fought for years, testing those who say they are apostles and are not. We found them to be liars.
- We separated from that and formed a new church, one that would be governed honestly, with transparency and accountability.
- We have established several outreaches. We work hard, reaching out to those in need.
- For over 11 years now, we have been faithful, serving, working, patiently enduring hardships and sufferings. **VERY GOOD!**

Hate what Jesus hates

But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ***Revelation 2:6 NKJV***

- I have not been able to find a good authority that really knows who the Nicolaitans were.
- But we do know that they were a group of people that did things that Jesus hated.
- I would assume they were sexually immoral, and probably another corrupt human institution.
- The point is that the Church of Ephesus hated their deeds.

Tolerance is not a virtue

- In today's culture, especially in the modern-day church world, they teach that tolerance a virtue a lot like love.
- This is very wrong, tolerance is not a virtue, it is a vice.
- In the Bible this is a very negative term where God is not tolerating sexual immorality.
- What are you going to tolerate and what are you not going to tolerate? For example: I have no tolerance for anything that will destroy my grandkids.
- Do you practice hate? Do you hate what Jesus hates?
- It is easy to preach love, let's all love what Jesus loves, but you also need to hate what Jesus hates.

Here is a list of some of the things the Lord hates?

These six *things* the Lord hates, yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness *who* speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren. ***Proverbs 6:16-19 NKJV***

God hates wickedness.

God hates sin, iniquity, transgressions.

God loves you the sinner, but He hates the sin.

The church of Ephesus

- So, we see that Ephesus did many great works for Jesus.
- They labored hard in the Lord's service. They gave their time, energy & money.
- They tried the false apostles, and found them to be liars.
- They endured hardships and patiently suffered for the Lord.
- They loved what Jesus loved and hated what He hated.
- They were an amazing Church, who obviously started out very good with a great foundation.
- It has been about 34 years since Paul wrote His letter to the Ephesians, and now John was writing a letter to the church of Ephesus.
- But now something was off. Something had gone very wrong. Even as they had done so good for several years, now, 34 years later, they were a church going in the wrong direction.
- They had allowed the most important thing to get away from them.
- They had lost their first love.

I have this against you

Nevertheless, **I have *this* against you**, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ***Revelation 2:4-5 NKJV***

- This is a great warning, directly from Jesus Himself.
- They had fallen down. They left their first love.
- He wants your heart. Not just your service, or your money.
- He wants a love relationship with you. He is the bridegroom and He wants you to be His bride.

The Bridegroom and the Bride

- In the New Testament the church is called the Bride of Christ.
- In the Old Testament the LORD often referred to Israel as His wife.
- In the book of Hosea, the prophet's wife was a prostitute, a picture of Israel's unfaithfulness to God.
- In Ezekiel, we see God's broken heart because of His unfaithful wife.
- In Jeremiah, again the heart of the Lord is literally breaking because of Israel's lack of faithfulness and loyalty.
- When we allow our love for other things to replace our love for Jesus, we are like an unfaithful bride. A cheat.

What is first love?

- It could be loving Jesus like you did when you first got saved.
- I must admit 1988 was an amazing year for me, it was my honeymoon experience between Jesus and me.
- Prayer came easy. I remember renting a hotel room for 3 hours, just so I could get away from everyone and pray. I wanted uninterrupted time with Jesus.
- Study, fasting, witnessing, I couldn’t get enough.
- I would fill my car up every Sunday to take people to church.
- I told every business relationship I had about Jesus, and every person I knew. I had a sense of urgency about soul-winning.
- I would read my Bible 3,4,5 hours a day.
- I hired a Rabbi to teach me Hebrew.
- Why? Because I was so in love with Jesus. I had seen the crucified Christ, and I realized how much He loved a sinner like me.

What is first love?

- It may be loving Jesus more than anything else. Putting Him first. First, over your money, your career, your family, your spouse, your ministry, any and everything.
- Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Make Him the top and first priority of your life.
- First love could mean that you love Jesus so much that you gladly give Him everything. Your time, your money, everything.
- First love could be simply you making Him the Lord, the boss, the governor, or the master of every area of your life.
- It’s loving Him first, above all others.

What it is not

- I do not believe that first love is simply an emotion.
- I believe love is a choice more than an emotion or a feeling.
- I would love to feel like I did in 1988, when I saw Jesus on the cross, bloodied, bruised, and beaten for me. I would love to feel His grace at that level once again. I would love to cry tears of repentance at that level again.
- But I think our relationship with the Lord is a lot like a marriage.
- We get married, have a great honeymoon, and for the next few years we can’t keep our hands off of each other.
- But as the marriage matures, it becomes a lot less about sex and a lot more about friendship, companionship, a partnership.
- You want to grow old together, because you love each other. You want to spend time with one another. Instead of a strong emotion, your love has become mature. Love is a choice, not a feeling.

They lost their first love

34 years earlier, Paul wrote this to the Ephesians.

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ***Ephesians 1:15-16 NKJV***

- Now, 34 years later, John sends the church of Ephesus this letter. What had changed.
- They lost their first love, therefore, they had stopped loving people that were difficult to love.
- Has your prayer life become a duty rather than a delight?
- Does serving Christ become more important than knowing Christ?
- Are you more in love with your ministry than you are in love with Jesus?

Uncle Ira

- I once had a great uncle named Ira Hudson.
- He would often tell us at family reunions, that he has been married for over 50 years.
- He would say that his wife would often complain that he never tells her that he loves her anymore.
- He would say, “I told you when I married you that I love you, and if I ever change my mind, I will let you know.”
- No, a marriage needs for the words, I love you, to be spoken every day.
- Jesus tells us He loves us everyday in so many different ways.
- All He wants from you is for you to love Him back.

Having a Mary heart in a Martha world

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me. And Jesus answered and said to her, Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her. ***Luke 10:38-42 NKJV***

Martha had works or service, but Mary chose the thing much more important, her love relationship with Jesus.

We are working hard

- We as a church can be found working hard, serving the Lord.
- Doing outreach after outreach, reaching out to the vulnerable.
- Helping this person and that person, staying very busy. Giving our time and giving our money generously.
- But do we have no time to talk to Jesus, or listen to Him?
- Are we becoming religious instead of focusing on our relationship?
- When the bride of Christ demonstrates hard work, perseverance, no tolerance for wickedness and false teachings, and has endured hardships, but she no longer has the love she once had for her Bridegroom, this is unfaithfulness.
- This breaks His heart.
- What Jesus wants out of us is for us to simply love Him back.

He wants our hearts

Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ***Matthew 22:36-39 NKJV***

- Do we really love Him with all of our hearts?
- We can tell by looking at our relationships with others. Are we loving our neighbor as ourselves?
- This thing is all about a love relationship with God and people. Love God and love people is the summation of all of the commandments.
- You are never going to be able to love people the way that God wants you to until you are back fully in love with Jesus Christ.
- What is the solution? Jesus tells us to do 3 things.

Remember – Repent – Do your first works

Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ***Revelation 2:4-5 NKJV***

Remember:

- Think about the things you were doing when you did have that amazing passion for the Lord. (First Love)
- My mind goes back to the Spring of 1988.
- I was so grateful that He loved me and forgave me of my sins.
- I couldn’t pray enough, or study enough, or praise Him enough, or spend enough time with Him. I witnessed to everyone I came across.

Repent

- Leaving your first love is not just an emotional change.
- Jesus treats it as a spiritual condition requiring repentance.
- I think many people are blind to this condition. This is a very dangerous state of mind to be in.
- Don’t be so content with your relationship that you think because things were great several years ago that all is well today. You may need to repent. It is not enough to begin well, you must finish well.
- **Repent** means to change your mind, to turn around and go a different direction.
- Repentance is not simply feeling sorry for your sins so much that you cry. We need repentance not remorse.
- God is looking for a changed mind, a change in our behavior.

Do the first works

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, ***Revelation 2:5 NKJV***

- I once thought that blood, fire and water were the first works, but those are not works, those are gifts.
- Of course, I do recommend that if someone back-slides away from God and they come back to Jesus, that they should consider getting water baptized again.
- But this is talking about someone who is doing many things for the Lord well, but they lost their love relationship. They lost their passion for Christ. They no longer put Jesus first in every area of their life.
- Jesus says, do the first works. What is that?

Do the first works

- We know it is not remembering or repenting, because He has already told us to do that.
- We know it is not blood, fire, and water, because those are gifts.
- It cannot be works in the sense of more activity because Jesus praised the Church of Ephesus for their labor and good works.
- It was losing their first love that was the problem.
- The solution to the problem was remembering, repenting, and doing their first works. What are the first works?
- **I believe He is talking about the obedience, the prayer, the devotion, the study, the witnessing and the generosity that we had when we were first saved. (We must recapture what we once had.)**
- I believe all that comes natural, when we fall back in love with Jesus Christ.

I will remove your lampstand

or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ***Revelation 2:5 NKJV***

- Wow! What a strong warning from Jesus Himself. I cannot think of anything worse.
- I want to close this lesson with a great example of someone who loved Jesus.
- This is one of my favorite new Testament characters, because of her great love for our Lord.

Mary Magdalene

Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons; ***Luke 8:1-2 NLT***

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ***John 19:25 NKJV***

Now the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw *that* the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him. ***John 20:1-2 NKJV***

Mary Magdalene

But Mary stood outside by the tomb **weeping**, and as she wept she stooped down *and looked* into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? **She said to them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.** Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, **Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.** Jesus said to her, Mary! She turned and said to Him, Rabboni! (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and *to* My God and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* He had spoken these things to her. ***John 20:11-18 NKJV***

Mary Magdalene

- At this time, Mary didn't know He was risen from the dead.
- She was not looking for a God to bless her.
- She was not looking for a God that will answer her prayers.
- She was not looking for a God that could meet her needs or could do something for her.
- She was simply in love with Jesus.
- **She was in love with the Crucified Christ.**
- **She loved Jesus for who He is, and not for what He could do for her.**
- She just wanted to know where they had taken His bloody, broken, bruised and crucified body.
- She said, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."
- I want to love Him like Mary did. That's first love.

A story of a blind girl and an apple cart

- Is your life a witness for Jesus Christ.
- Not just your words, but your actions.
- Are you so in love with Him, that His love overflows from your heart out to others? Are you loving everybody, even difficult people?
- Would a blind person mistake you for Jesus?
- Let’s get our first love back.