Dear Church: Letters from Jesus (Revelation 2:1-7, Ephesus)
09/21/2025 - Andy Deane

Revelation begins with seven real letters from Jesus to seven real churches in Asia Minor. These weren't symbolic churches—they were congregations with people, problems, and potential, just like us. Each letter carried both encouragement and warning, and they were meant to be read with urgency, because when Jesus speaks to His church, He expects us to listen. The first letter is to the church in Ephesus, a strong and faithful church, but one that had drifted from the very love that once defined it.

What Does the Church at Ephesus Teach Us?

We can be faithful in the shadow of idols.
Revelation 2:1a, *To the angel of the church in Ephesus…*

- Tim Keller, "Idolatry is not just worshiping a statue; it is giving ultimate devotion to anything that isn't God."
- We don't always get to choose our cultural setting, but we can remain faithful in it.
- Blending in doesn't make a difference because it just makes us invisible. God intends we stand out from the crowd!

Jesus holds authority over His Church.
Revelation 2:1b, *…the words of him who holds the 7 stars in his right hand & walks among the 7 golden lampstands.*

- Jesus, through His Word, is the true leader of His Church.
- Jesus, through His Spirit, is present with His people.
- The centrality of Jesus must be evident in all areas of the church and our lives.

Jesus knows our faithful perseverance.
Revelation 2:2-3, *I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.*

- Jesus looked at His Church, and He knew its condition. It was no mystery to Him. That's still true for us today!
- The church at Ephesus was doing a lot of good:
    - They worked hard on good deeds towards others and continued faithfully in them.
    - They didn't tolerate wickedness in church.

      1 Corinthians 5:1-2, *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?*
    - They tested false apostles and defended sound doctrine.
    - They endured suffering and persecution on behalf of Jesus without quitting.

If we aren't growing in love we aren't growing at all.
Revelation 2:4, *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.*

- A church can be theologically right and spiritually cold! Love must be our hearts posture and motivation for all.
- Mark 12:30, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart & all your soul & all your mind & all your strength.'*
- John 13:35, *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

- 1 John 4:20, *Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.*

- CS Lewis, "It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a street because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

The way back is remember, repent, return, & regard.
Revelation 2:5-6, *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 lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

- Remember (consider your initial love of Jesus at salvation - remember how things used to be)

  Luke 15:17-19, *"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your…servants.'*

- Repent (own it, regret it, & apologize for it)

- Return (do the things you did at first that stirred your affections towards Christ & others)

- Regard (his warning for doing nothing - without love for Christ & others we lose our: witness, assurance, & joy)

The Holy Spirit wants to speak this to us today too.
Revelation 2:7a, *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

- This means this letter is for everyone who will listen.

- It's for Cornerstone too: if we lose love, we lose our light.

Those who overcome will feast in paradise with God.
Revelation 2:7b, *one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*

- Victory isn't just having sound theology. It's a love for Jesus that not only lasts, but grows.
  It's a witness that refuses to fade, even when the world pushes back!

- Francis Chan, "Our greatest fear should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don't really matter."

- The reward of true love is eternal fellowship with God, in heaven.

- The reward is a reversal of Eden's loss and sin's brokenness, today.