

# Jesus and His Church (2): Ephesus

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(Revelation 2:1-7)

## I. Introduction

- A. I was a youth minister in grad school for a church where average age was 66!
  - 1. Our self-identity was the church that was RIGHT. “*Sound in the faith.*”
    - a. We published a quarterly that was focused largely on doctrinal issues.
    - b. We hosted a lectureship that exposed false doctrine and false teachers
    - c. One member was from Liberal, Kansas, and people looked at her funny!
  - 2. Each summer we went in a big trip (*ask Lynn sometime about the camp-out*)
    - a. But the trip that made the biggest impression was one we never made
      - 1) I wanted to take kids 300 miles north to St. Louis to huge youth rally
      - 2) Main speaker was a former football star turned preacher/youth leader
    - b. I went into the elders meeting with info packets with a budget/itinerary.
    - c. Preacher: “*I heard this brother may be a bit liberal.*” **Discussion over!**
  - 3. One hint of “*I heard that maybe*” was enough to shut the whole trip down!
- B. One sure way to never do anything “*unsound*” is to never do anything at all!
  - 1. Sound doctrine is important; what makes a group a church is the gosepl
    - a. But we can become frozen into inaction by “*the paralysis of analysis*”
    - b. Fear of failure drove the one talent man to do nothing (**Matt 25:25**)
    - c. Jesus says in effect, “*Don’t just stand there, do something!*” (**25:27**)
  - 2. Church can be so afraid of doing something unsound that we do nothing
  - 3. We can become so “*sound in the faith*” that we are sound asleep!
- C. We are studying “*Jesus and His Churches,*” a look at the 7 churches of Asia.
  - 1. Last week we focused on opening vision of Revelation—**glorified Christ**
    - a. Jesus is picture as majestic and powerful... and among his churches
    - b. He knows their struggles; He begins each letter, “*I know your works...*”
  - 2. First letter is to Ephesus, a church commended for being sound in the faith
    - a. They were so sound that they were sound asleep-- *left their first love*
    - b. He commends their faith, and he calls them back to a full devotion

## II. Sound in the Faith (Revelation 2:1-3)

- A. The city of Ephesus was one of the most important cities in Roman Empire
  - 1. It was capital of the Province of Asia and a center of trade and commerce
  - 2. Because this was an important crossroads city, Paul focused on Ephesus
    - a. He established a church there on his 1<sup>st</sup> missionary trip (Acts 18:19)
    - b. He stayed there for 3 years on his 3<sup>rd</sup> trip, his longest work (Acts 19:1-41)
    - c. His relationship can be seen in farewell to Ephesians elders (20:17-38)
  - 3. After Paul left, he put Timothy in charge of the church at Ephesus.
    - a. He was to “*command certain men not to teach false doctrines*” (1 Tim 1:3)
    - b. A strong tradition suggests the Apostle John lived his final days there.
- B. This church had strong tradition, and Jesus recognizes their faith
  - 1. He says that He knows “*your hard work and your perseverance*” (Rev 2:2)
    - a. Specifically, they do not tolerate “*wicked men*” or “*false apostles*”
      - 1) Some would teach, but were ignorant of what talked about (1 Tim 1:7)
      - 2) Ephesus took Timothy’s teaching to heart and refused to suffer fools.
    - b. Paul and Timothy’s work had born fruit; this was a faithful church
  - 2. Jesus knows, “*You have persevered and have endured hardships*” (2:3)
    - a. It had been more than 30 thirty years since Paul had left Ephesus
    - b. The church had endured false teachers, riots and now emperor worship
    - c. Despite the hardships, the Ephesian church was faithful to God’s truth
- C. The church at Ephesus is a great example of an established church
  - 1. They had a rich and proud history, one they remembered and recounted
    - a. They had reached a point of maturity Paul had promised (Eph 4:14)
    - b. Preacher at Ephesus has a tough job— he follows Paul & Timothy
      - 1) Later John will be a member; must be tough to preach to apostle!
      - 2) Jesus begins letter with a thumbs-up to preaching ministry! *Huge!*
  - 2. But the letters to 7 churches have a good-news-and-bad-news deal.
    - a. Letter to Smyrna has only good news; Laodicea has only bad news
    - b. The rest begin with good... and then Jesus lowers the boom on them
  - 3. It is just a bit surprising what Jesus condemns in faithful, sound Ephesus

### III. The Bad News: Sound Asleep (Rev 2:4-6)

- A. Jesus warns that the church Ephesus had “*forsaken your first love*” (Rev 2:4)
1. Or put another way, “*you have abandoned the love you had at first*” (ESV)
    - a. This church had an impressive history, and maybe that was a liability
    - b. These were 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Christians in a very established church
    - c. In some way, they lost touch with the love that once characterized them
  2. Jeremiah points unfaithful Israel back to “*devotion of your youth*” (Jer 2:2)
    - a. The wilderness wanderers was Israel’s honeymoon—learn devotion & trust
    - b. Jeremiah’s Israel had forgotten that devotion, and thus that trust.
    - c. So had Ephesian church; they needed to recapture their first love.
- B. So what happened at Ephesus? *Were they worn down and out by church work?*
1. No, that’s not it; Jesus says these people “*have not grown weary*” (2:3)
    - a. They are busy doing all the myriad of THINGS that makes up a church
      - 1) Classes taught, assignments made, L.S. prepared & food is cooked
      - 2) Bulletins printed, children’s church staffed and PPT slides created
    - b. They did everything that a church must do... except focus on Jesus
    - c. Paul warns of those who’ve “*lost connection with the Head*” (Col 2:19)
  2. But Ephesus was sound doctrinally; how could they NOT focus on Jesus
    - a. Sometimes our focus on being right is a focus on us, not God at all
      - 1) Joe Vitello and I had ongoing friendly debate on Macs vs Windows
      - 2) We had no stock in MS or Apple; not buddies Bill Gates/Steve Jobs
      - 3) But we did like a good argument now and then... **and being right!**
    - b. In same way, church disputes can be more about ourselves than God.
    - c. And we can have right theological positions and totally miss Jesus!
  3. Bruce Metzgar wonders if the focus on orthodoxy was part of the problem
    - a. They were so focused on error they looked at others with suspicion
      - 1) So they saw others, not with God’s love, but with doubt and distrust
      - 2) If you look hard enough for heresy in others and you will find it
    - b. Losing their first love might about not loving others like Jesus loved!
  4. Ephesus was a solid, stable mature church that needed to change everything

## IV. Conclusion

- A. John Stott uses alliteration to stress what Jesus tells Ephesus to do in **verse 5**
1. **Remember:** *“Remember the height from which you have fallen!”*
    - a. This isn’t just nostalgia, *“Remember back in the good old days when...”*
    - b. They must revision the church like it was back when they were saved.
      - 1) Back then, gospel was about grace, overcoming sin and sharing faith
      - 2) It still is! You don’t replace loving gratitude with right theology!
    - c. Ephesus needed to remember the time when church was about Christ!
  2. **Repent:** *“If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand”*
    - a. The word *“repent”* means *“to change direction.”* Pretty strong word
    - b. This isn’t small course adjustment; they need to completely turn around
    - c. Lampstand represents church; to remove lamp means remove the church
  3. **Resume:** *“Repent and do the things you did at first.”* Don’t just remember, DO!
    - a. What happens when a married falls out of love? *Give up and call lawyer?*
      - 1) We may *“fall out of love”* because we fall into ruts and bad habits.
      - 2) Love isn’t a bus that when you catch it, you can stop chasing it.
      - 3) We must continue to do the things that made us fall in love
    - b. Sappy old love songs know that’s what we’re supposed to do, right?  
*Lost in love and I don't know much, what was I thinking about, fell out of touch, but I'm back on my feet, eager to be what you wanted (Air Supply)*  
*Neal Diamond & Barbra Streisand sang that, “You don’t bring me flowers”*
    - c. So we go back and do the things we did when we fell in love with Jesus
      - 1) Remember when we tried to learn everything & read everything?
      - 2) We were there every service and focused on our church relationships
      - 3) Were involved in everything? We tried to change everything wrong?
    - d. Jesus calls us to return to faith was not a HABIT but a PASSION
- B. Where are you in your relationship with Christ? Have things gotten old?
1. Jesus warns us that getting too comfortable in that relationship is deadly
  2. When we start presuming/assuming his love, we stop living in it.
  3. May find ourselves having the right answers of faith, but none of it’s FIRE!