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Revelation 2:1-7

"Return To Your First Love" The Church in Ephesus

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In Revelation chapters two and three, there are seven letters that Jesus dictated through John to seven churches in Asia Minor. These were actual churches in what is now modern-day Turkey. These letters were delivered along a known "postal route" in a clockwise direction, starting at the church in Ephesus, and ending with the church in Laodicea. (See map on page 6 of this study guide.) In addition to these being actual churches, they also are historical churches that represent a "Timeline of the Church Age" in seven distinct time periods. The progressive spiritual climate of the church over the centuries is reflected in these seven letters, representing seven time periods, from the time the church was "born" in 33AD until Jesus comes again.

Near the end of the Church Age there will be two divergent streams of the Church represented by letters six and seven. The first would include those who are evangelical, faithful to God, and uphold the fundamental truth of Scripture. This is the true church, the one that will be raptured/rescued. The second would include those for whom this is nothing more than just a religion, instead of a relationship. It is known for liberal theology, abandoning the absolute truth of God's Word, being spiritually lukewarm and culturally irrelevant. This church will go through the Tribulation. These two divergent streams are seen in the Church today, so the evidence seems to suggest we're living in the time period marked by the sixth and seventh letters.

Jesus had something to say to these churches, but he also has something to say to the Church today. He ends each letter with the phrase: *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* So God is still speaking to the churches today through these letters. Each of the seven letters has similarities, which include: 1) All begin with a special title for Jesus, the author of each letter. 2) All are

addressed to the “*angel*” or pastor of each church. 3) All begin with Jesus knowing their “*works*” or “*deeds*.” 4) All contain a compliment, a complaint, or both. 5) All include an allusion to the Second Coming of Jesus. 6) All close with a special promise to the “*overcomers*.” 7) All close with the same challenge: “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says...*”

This letter is addressed to the “*angel*”¹ or pastor of the church, just like the remaining six letters. In this study we’ll learn more about the three good things he has to say about this church, as well as Jesus’ one major complaint.

Compliments To The Church In Ephesus - Diligence

1. This was a church of hard working people. ([Revelation 2:2a](#))
2. Jesus likes a hard-working church made up of people who roll up their sleeves, so to speak, and get involved where they can, to serve, to help and to give.
3. We live in such a strong consumer-oriented culture it’s hard sometimes to come to church and realize it’s not all about us; it’s about Jesus.
 - a. It’s about worshiping Jesus, loving Jesus, knowing Jesus, and sharing Jesus.

Compliments To The Church In Ephesus - Doctrine

4. They didn’t just accept any doctrine, they tested those who claimed to be apostles, and “*found them to be false.*”² ([Revelation 2:2b](#))
5. Thirty years earlier, Paul had warned this same church in [Acts 20:29-31](#), when he said, “*I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!*”
 - a. It appears that they took to heart what Paul said and were careful to preserve the truth, because some 30 years later Jesus commended them for discriminating between true apostles and false apostles, and preserving sound doctrine!

¹ The Greek word is *aggelos*, which means messenger. Usually *aggelos* refers to the supernatural beings God created, but no angel was ever given oversight of a church, so in the context of these letters it’s a likely reference to the messenger of God’s Word, or the pastor of each church.

² The KJV uses the word “*liars*.”

6. [2 Timothy 4:3-4](#) - *“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”*
7. Pastor Gary shared a current example of doctrinal error that is finding a place in churches around the country, which is found in a new book written by Pastor Rob Bell ³ titled *Love Wins: a book about heaven, hell, and the fate of every person who ever lived*.
 - a. Pastor Gary, responding to the book, said, “Though he denies being a Universalist, he espouses what amounts to Universalism, which is the basic belief that in the end, everyone will eventually turn to God, be saved, and that no one will go to hell.”
 - b. The preface includes this quote: “A staggering number of people have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better. It’s been clearly communicated to many that this belief is a central truth of the Christian faith...”
 - c. Incredibly, Bell calls this belief “misguided” and “toxic.”

Compliments To The Church In Ephesus - Discernment

8. They hated the practices of the Nicolaitans, which Jesus also hated. ([Revelation 2:6](#))
9. The best guess as to what the practices of the Nicolaitans were comes from the origin of two Greek words.
 - a. *Nikao*, means “to conquer.”
 - b. *Laios*, means “laity.”
10. The deeds of the Nicolaitans deal with the fact that they had reduced the freedom of the believer into a hierarchical system of priest and laity, where one group lorded authority over another group; where a priestly system put a man between God and man, instead of recognizing Jesus as *“the only mediator between God and man.”* ([1 Timothy 2:5](#))

³ Rob Bell is the Founding Pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Complaint Against The Church In Ephesus - Lost Love

11. Jesus commended them because they were a discerning church, a doctrinally pure church, and a hard working church; however, the Lord said of them, *"You have forsaken your first love."*
12. How is it possible to be so diligent, so doctrinally correct, and so discerning about wrong practices that they had forsaken their first love?
 - a. It's interesting to note that Jesus didn't say that they had lost their first love; he said they had *"forsaken"* it.⁴
 - b. Over time they only gave the Lord their leftover time, leftover money and leftover love.
 - c. As is always the case, Jesus hasn't gone anywhere; it's individuals and churches that have drifted away.
13. They didn't love Jesus the way they used to, and things had become mechanical as they went through the motions without emotions.
14. People in all kinds of relationships can slowly drift apart because they allow everything else to crowd in until one day they wake up and wonder, "How did we ever get this far apart?"
15. The good news is that the letter closes with these words: *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."*
([Revelation 2:7](#))

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Revelation 2:1-7](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Review and discuss the seven similarities for each of the seven churches.
4. If Jesus dictated a letter specifically to Cornerstone Chapel, what would he say?
 - a. Do you think there would be a stack of compliments or complaints or both?

⁴ The KJV uses the word, *"left."*

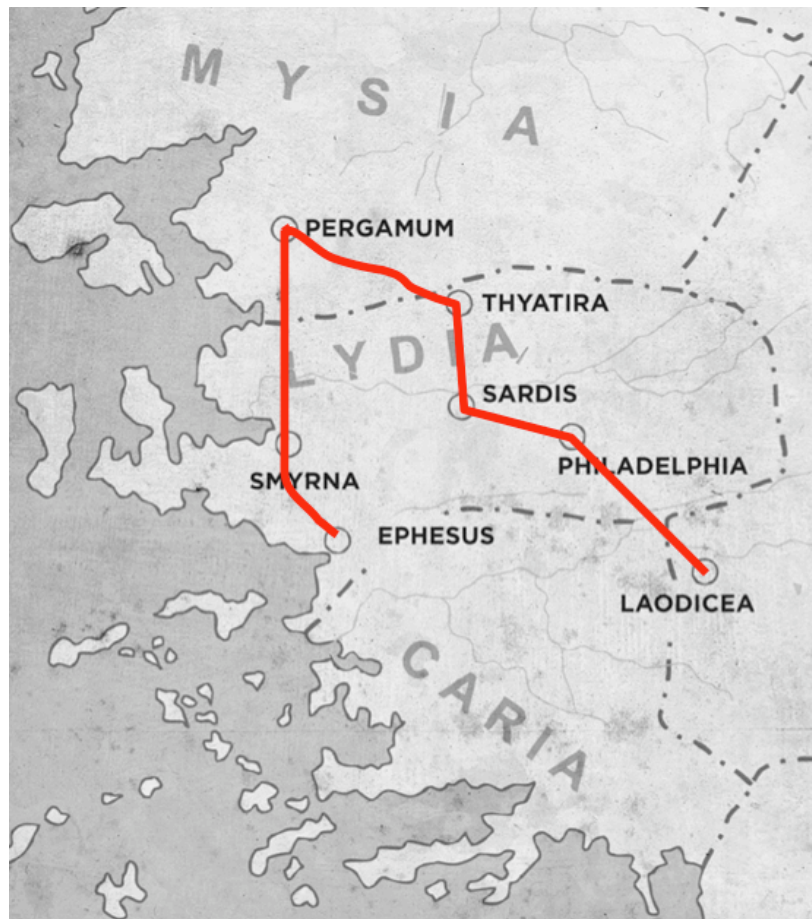
5. Do you think the Lord would say that you've been diligent in serving him and being involved in the life and ministry of your church?
 - a. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about ways the Lord has used them in ministry to the church and others.
6. Do you think the Lord would say that you'd be considered one who embraces correct doctrine or would you be someone who has more of a buffet-style doctrinal understand of God and his Word?
7. Read and discuss [2 Timothy 4:3-4](#).
8. You may want to use this link to watch an interview with Martin Bashir and Pastor Rob Bell on MSNBC. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vg-qgmJ7nzA>
 - a. Use this link to read a March 14, 2011 article in *The Christian Post*, which provides information about Pastor Mark Driscoll's ⁵ response to Bell's new book. <http://www.christianpost.com/news/mark-driscoll-responds-to-rob-bell-controversy-on-hell-49406/>
 - b. Do you think Mr. Bashir's questions helped you better understand Pastor Bell's doctrinal beliefs?
 - c. What are some of your concerns about Pastor Bell's comments?
9. Allow people in your group to share their experiences of being involved in the Catholic Church, especially regarding the role of the priest, works and tradition, versus the Bible and the Holy Spirit.
10. Do you identify with this letter?
 - a. Are you someone who has allowed all the other distractions of life and the world to push the Lord to the sidelines?
 - b. There may be someone in your group who would like to share a testimony about a time in their life when their relationship with the Lord was distant, or at best mechanical.
11. Allow time for reflection so that the people in your group can recall the time when they first fell in love with Jesus.
12. How has your relationship with the Lord grown or changed since you became a Christian?
13. How can you get that "first love" relationship back?

⁵ Use these links for Mark Driscoll's biography: <http://www.marshallchurch.org/markdriscoll> and http://assets.marshallchurch.org/files/misc/pages/pastor_mark_driscolls_biography.pdf

- a. Read and discuss **Revelation 2:5b** - “...Repent and do the things you did at first.”
- b. What would this look like in your life?
- c. What would your Bible reading/study time look like?
- d. Would your interest in sharing the things of the Lord with others increase?
- e. What would your devotional life look like?

14. Use this link to watch/listen to Keith Green’s song *Oh, Lord You’re Beautiful*.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVgPQm06g2c&feature=related>

15. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: base their life and theology on orthodox doctrine that comes from a proper understanding of the Bible; exercise discernment when it comes to testing false teachers and unscriptural teachings; understand they have a place of ministry in the church and in the world, and that they would be diligent in serving the Lord; purpose in their heart to make sure they have a real and vital relationship with the Lord.



Note: Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).