

ALMOST Perfect!

Revelation 2:1-7: *Letter to the Church in Ephesus*

Thought for the Day: The Lord knows all about us—our thoughts, words, deeds, motives and intentions. Are we living daily to please Him or are we giving in to the temptation to live in conformity to the world around us?

I. **The Greeting (2:1)**

A. **The Addressee**

1 "To the angel of the church..."

- Who is the angel of the church? (Rev. 1:20). Two views:
 - 1) Angelic, spirit beings – guardians and protectors providing oversight and guidance to the churches; legal witnesses or observers of Christ’s evaluation.
 - 2) Human pastors – angels (*angelos*) = human messengers (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52).
- Pastors are the primary messengers of God’s Word to the churches and have a measure of responsibility and accountability for the spiritual condition of the churches they serve.
- “‘The messenger would have made the letter known to the congregation when he read it publicly.’ (cp. Rev. 1:3)... ‘The fact that the messengers of Revelation 2-3 seem to represent and bear responsibility for the actions of each respective church also supports the idea that they are the human leaders of the churches.’” (*Mark Hitchcock, 101 Answers, p. 74*)

...in Ephesus write:

- Ephesus – a large metropolitan city of perhaps 500,000 inhabitants. A center for both land and sea trade with three major land-trade routes passing through; a large seaport on the Aegean Sea. One of the three most influential cities in the eastern part of the Roman Empire.
- The temple of Diana, one of the ancient wonders of the world was located there. The imperial cult was prevalent. Several temples had been built for emperor worship. Ephesus was known for its immorality and idolatry!
- Why did the Lord choose these seven churches?
 - “I believe these seven churches were selected because they possessed spiritual conditions that were the most representative of what Jesus wanted to address as a whole. The Lord knew that His letters to these particular churches and the issues they faced would resonate with God’s people throughout the church age. In every age, church leaders and members have read these letters and found themselves and their churches, their successes, their failures, their triumphs, their challenges, and their comfort in them.” (*Hitchcock, 101 Answers, pp. 77-78*)
 - Every pastor and church in the world today can read these letters and find both encouragement for what they are doing right, and weaknesses that need to be confessed, confronted and corrected by God’s grace.

B. The Sender

- In each of the seven letters, the Lord identifies Himself in a distinct and different manner. Each of these identifications can be traced back to John's description of the Lord in chapter one. And, upon close examination, each description is especially relevant to the particular situation in the church that is addressed.

'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand who walks among the seven golden lampstands.'

- (Cp. 1:12-13, 16, 20). The Lord knows each pastor and church intimately. He is sovereign – He exercises absolute authority, power and control over all the pastors and churches.
- 10 specific characteristics of this church are mentioned.

II. The Commendation (2:2-3, 6)

A. They were hard working and persevering

2 "I know your works, your toil (labor to the point of exhaustion) and your patient endurance...

- They were busy, working hard, and serving the Lord.

3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

- Patient endurance = perseverance under trial and extreme hardship (persecution).
- "The Ephesian Christians faced special challenges. Because they refused to bow their knee to the goddess Diana or the images of the emperor, they found themselves maligned, slandered, boycotted, and abused... Christians in Ephesus would have been the objects of physical violence, social ostracism, and economic repression. Yet they endured. They bore up under the load. Clearly, Paul, Timothy, and John had taught Ephesus well." (*Swindol, Revelation, p. 33*)

B. They were spiritually discerning and uncompromising

...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.

- They were able to discern between those who were proclaiming and living according to the truth and those who were not.
- They knew the Scriptures! (Acts 17:11).
- They were able to use the Scriptures to determine who was teaching the truth and who was not. (Acts 20:25-32; 2 Timothy 4:1-4)

6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

- The Nicolaitans were compromising the truth of God's Word and joining in the evil practices of the culture around them, especially the sins of immorality and idolatry.
- Compromise with the world, conforming to the behaviors of the world, is not pleasing to the Lord. (Romans 12:1-2; James 4:4)
- The Lord hated the practices of the Nicolaitans, not the Nicolaitans themselves. "Love the sinner, hate the sin." The challenge is to speak and live the truth in love. (Eph. 4:25)