



The Church at Ephesus

UNTO the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; **2** I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: **3** And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. **4** Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. **5** Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. **6** But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. **7** He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. (Rev 2:1-7)

There are a number of ways theologians have looked at the interpretation of the events depicted in Revelation. Perhaps two that are the most common, even if directly opposed in some particulars, is the Historicist view (to include aspects of partial Preterism) and the Futurist approach to prophecy. The Historicist view is that which has been held by the Church from the time of the Reformation until very modern times, and is still common to the Reformed churches of our day such as Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches. These are primarily amillennialists or postmillennialists. The Futurist theologian interprets Revelation from the standpoint of pre-tribulation, premillennialist doctrine and attributes the work of God to periods of dispensation – that is, God does not act out His will with identical purpose and measure with all peoples and ages. I disagree with this theory. God is unchanging and constant in His Sovereign decrees. He may use different methods to awaken or to chasten His

people, but His will and Purpose remain Iron-Solid across the ages. He foreordains and predestinates His Will for us. The Futurist churches are primarily those of the charismatic, and some Baptist, persuasions (though this is a departure from traditional Baptist doctrine of centuries past).

Why is this introductory explanation important? It is because I want the readers of this study to understand my view of Scripture meaning and interpretation concerning the prophecies of Revelation (that is, historicist to include partial preterist). I believe I take the proper and true approach; however, it should be stipulated that many good ministers who hold to a contrary view are equally convinced else they would not preach otherwise. But I must travel by the Light the Lord gives me.

The Lord addresses this first commendation and warning to the government of the Church of Ephesus (He who holds the seven stars). This does not include all ministers for some do not come close to true Christian faith.

I will point out that numerology in Scripture is important for understanding. The number 'seven' represents perfection. This number opens a path of understanding of Revelation which will open more widely throughout our study. The Creation Week was Seven Days. The Rainbow reveals Seven Colors (which when combined together yields solid white); there are Seven Churches, Seven Stars, Seven Heads, Seven Horns, Seven Eyes, Seven Spirits of God, and Seven Candlesticks. In the Book of Judges, the seventh Book of the Bible (which is judgment), the people of God apostacized seven times; the people repented, and God delivered them seven times. So consider this number as we proceed.

Ephesus was a city of renowned wealth and luxury. The Temple of the sordid goddess, Diana, was there and considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul preached at Ephesus for a period of three years. (Acts 20:31) By the way, it is likely that some cultural, yet unbiblical, transfer occurred in our observance of Easter in placing the Easter Bunny and Easter eggs at the focal point in teaching our children. Diana was the goddess of fertility like unto the Babylonian Ishtar – a practice common to both the Christian religion and that of the Moslems (though the Moslems use the egg in ritual celebration of No Ruz - in Iran - which is their New Year occurring at the Spring equinox. Curiously, the Moslems also allow their children to “pass through the fire” by jumping through bonfires lit on the streets at the Easter season – perhaps another practice hailing back to God’s warning in 2 Kings 23:10. In a nutshell, Ephesus was the New York City of Asia Minor.

1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. This angel signifies, in my opinion, the under-shepherd of the Church, for Christ is forever the Shepherd of His Church. It is in the hands of Christ, and under His Authority, that the representative (and actual) ministers of His Church labor. If they lack the authority of Christ, they are false prophets. The Seven Churches represented by those Seven Candlesticks include the historical churches mentioned, but also the Church from the apostolic age until now. Christ is in the midst of that Church. It is for that reason that in the Anglican Church we do not place the minister and his pulpit at the center of the sanctuary, but rather to the side. The Lord’s Table represents the Presence of our Lord which takes center stage, for Christ is forever in the midst of His people.

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Please note the warm and commendable expressions our Lord uses in describing the testimony of the Church at Ephesus. How wonderful if these laudable

terms could describe even a tenth of our modern churches! The people of the Church at Ephesus were full of good works even in a city that was known for its opulent decadence. Perhaps they even had ministries to care for people ruined in natural catastrophes as many churches do today. These were tireless in their labors of good works, yet, there was something missing. What was it?

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. This terrible conclusion bears ramifications for God's view of Holy Matrimony which, for the Church, MUST include Christ as the Bridegroom. Suppose a man marries a beautiful and virtuous young lady who epitomizes everything a good wife should be as described in Proverbs 31:10-31. They bear a number of wonderful children, and the father provides well for them through his studied profession. The couple grow older together and are happy; yet, one unhappy day, the man's interest turn to a younger woman of his associations. He falls in love with this woman and divorces the wife of his youth? Or suppose the woman becomes enchanted with some younger fellow seeking to capitalize on the wealth her husband has accrued, and divorces him for the younger man? This is a tragic and unforgiveable sin to do so. One or the other of the aggrieved parties must live out their old age in loneliness and misery. The one has forsaken his or her first love. The Church (as the Bride of Christ) may do good works and own an excellent reputation, but may forget her First Love which is the Lord Jesus Christ, and seek another attraction in the world that is begotten of pride. Better to heed the words of Solomon: *15 Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. 16 Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. 17 Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee. 18 Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. 19 Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.* (Prov 5:15-19)

5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. You may remember the day that a sudden light of beauty and grace burst upon your soul the moment that you fully were made aware, by the Holy Ghost, of your salvation in Christ. Remember how happy were the days, and tireless your energies to do all that the Lord desired of you. You may even have felt called of the Lord to the ministry and conceived of a great plan to build a local church. You were tireless in your efforts to preach and witness to all who would hear of how the Lord had blessed you and would bless all others who felt the call of the Lord. As your plans for a building were finalized, a beautiful building began to rise of the chosen foundation. Of course, if that Foundation was any other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the building would have no meaning. As it was being completed, it became a sort of showcase church for the community. Many prominent members of the community were attracted to it and became members. But mere church membership does not constitute a church. As your church grew, other concerns rose to the surface: things such as resolving conflicts among the members over color of carpet, drapes, windows, finances, matrimonial politics, and denominational departures from biblical faith. You could not please everybody, but you certainly wanted to – everybody, that is, but the Lord who had been forgotten in the bustle of labor. This was the Church of Ephesus, too. They had forgotten their first works and First Love. At first light of realization of this fact, repentance is the only recourse.

Some of my Baptist friends who are ministers accused me of being a Roman Catholic Church because I had candles and a cross on the Altar. I explained to them in the Anglican Church we do not have an altar, for Christ died once, and for all, for us. No further sacrifice was possible. Instead, we have a Lord's Table for it is at His Table that we Commune. Furthermore, every Baptist church (to their credit) has a cross atop a steeple. Why should we not have a cross on the Lord's Table? Furthermore, we have the

Gospel and Epistle Candle on the Lord's Table. Our Lord told the churches of the apocalypse *repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.* I then tell them that we at St. Andrews STILL have our candlesticks. Of course, these are Godly men and I was simply making a point in humor.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Precisely what is meant by 'Nicolaitans' is uncertain, but be it enough to know that they were an evil lot who were apostates of the faith. Some have suggested that this group was formed by Nicolas, a deacon of Jerusalem, who associated false biblical doctrine with Balaam and Jezebel. Whatever the Lord loves, we must love. Whatever the Lord hates, we must hate since we are One with Him. Many today are changing the Word of God as well.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Believe it or not, there are many, even in churches, who have no spiritual ears to hear. It has been said that perhaps 95% of churches today would go on as they always had gone even if there were no Holy Spirit. That Tree of Life to which the astute hearer may eat is that same which was in the Garden eastward at Eden, and which died on another tree for our sins at Calvary, and which has today been removed to the Paradise of God.

The Lord is not only speaking to the specific Church at Ephesus, but to every church of every age; and, ultimately, to every Christian professor with ears to hear.