

Remnant Life Church
February 22, 2026
The Seven Churches of Revelation
Ephesus
Revelation 2:1-7

The apostle John, the last remaining member of the original 12 disciples, has been politically exiled to the island of Patmos

- A small Greek island
- 40 miles off the western coast of what today is modern-day Turkey

While there, he has what is called an open vision

- He says in the 10th verse of the first chapter
 1. *On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet...*
 2. He then goes on to give a physical description of who was speaking and what was said
- What is the difference between a vision and an open vision?
 1. In a vision a person is shown a picture of something
 - It may take on any number different forms, it may be still or moving
 - But you are observing it
 - In both **Amos 7:1** and **8:2** the prophet is shown locusts and a basket of fruit
 - In both of these instances, God was revealing something for him to understand and then tell the people
 - But he was not interacting with it
 2. An open vision is similar in that something is being shown in a supernatural way
 - But the difference is that the one receiving the vision is involved and even active in what is happening
 - He is a participant
 - In **Acts 10:9-15** Peter has an open vision when God reveals a large white sheet to him with all kinds of unclean animals on it
 - God told him to kill and eat
 - But Peter refused since the animals were unclean
 - He entered into the vision with the opportunity to interact with what he was being shown
 - The same is true here in **Revelation 1**
 - Jesus appears to John and instructs him to write down everything he sees
 - He then turned and saw who was talking to him, fell down at his feet, and then Jesus actually touched John
 - John is interacting directly with the vision he is being shown
 - And because of that we have the letters that Jesus told John to write

The recipients of these letters were the seven churches located throughout the region of Asia Minor

- This was a region that encompassed the majority of Turkey as well as, according to many scholars, the northern half of Syria
- It was the home to over 20 prominent kingdoms and cities of the day, as well as the home of the some of the very first churches
- John is instructed to write to them with words of both correction and encouragement
- What John writes to them is as valuable to us today as it was in that day

READ - Revelation 2:1-7

The city of Ephesus was a very important one in the day of John

- The church there was founded by the Apostle Paul some 35-40 years prior to the letter written by John
1. While it was not the capitol of the region, it was the largest city with estimates of its population ranging from between 300 and 400,000 people – a huge number for that day
 - It was powerful economically
 - Situated at the mouth of the Cayster river, on the eastern most shores of the Mediterranean Sea, it was the most important seaport and trade center west of Tarsus
 - It was important culturally
 - The city had a theater that seated an estimated 25,000 people
 - The main thoroughfare, with the life of the city on either side, was 105 feet wide
 - At one end was the harbor, at the other the theatre and the way was flanked by columns 50 feet deep on either side
 - And the religions of the Roman people were on prominent display throughout the city
 - The temple of the Greek god Artemis (Diana to the Romans) was located here – one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world
 - The temple, in John's day, was supported by 127 columns each over 19 feet high
 - This was the city that two of the earliest Christians and supporters of Paul, Aquila and Pricilla, ventured in to first talk about Jesus (**Acts 18:18**)
 - Paul then followed and the first church was established with those who believed in Jesus.
 2. What must be remembered is that the introduction of Jesus and Christianity did not remove the pagan practices of the Romans or its people
 - It was filled with idol worship
 - The immoral practices it utilized occurred every day at their temples
 - Sorcery, witchcraft and false teaching were all around this new church
 - And it was taking its toll on them

So much so that John writes they had lost their first love.

What or who was their “first love?”

- It was for them, as it still is for us today, treasuring and abiding in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ
 1. What was most exciting and joyous in their early days was their freedom from the bondage of living in sin
 2. It was the joy of loving fellowship
 3. And it was the realization that they were being fulfilled in a relationship reborn with God because of Jesus
- So, what happened?
 1. God certainly did not stop loving them!
 2. The blood of Jesus was still sufficient to change their lives
 3. What brought them to the place where John tells them that they had abandoned or forsaken their first love?

To answer that question, we must first understand what this church had been dealing with and how they had responded

- Each of John’s 7 letters is nearly identical in its structure
 1. It begins by addressing the messenger (the angel) of the church
 - I believe that the angel of the church was the pastor
 - I have heard it said that the angel was a heavenly being (an angel) who had been assigned to the individual church to assist in their spiritual warfare
 - But the letters are intended to bring change to the churches
 - Because of that, I believe it makes much more sense for the pastor to receive the letter who can then lead the people to accomplish what they have been instructed to do.
 2. In each letter they are told that Jesus Christ knows or discerns who they are and where they are
 3. And each is made up of three parts with a similar closing
 - A statement about the church
 - An exhortation (this can be positive and negative)
 - And a promise
 - Each letter then concludes by utilizing the word ‘overcome’
 - Which when seen in the context of what is being written can also be read as repent
 - We read in verse 7 - *...to him who overcomes (repents) I will give the right to eat from the tree of life...*

Let me pause here for us to focus on the truth that whatever Jesus is saying to these churches, starting with Ephesus, is true for the church today.

- When we started RLC nearly 14 years ago, returning to our first love was at the center of our mandate
 1. What does that look like?
 2. What it does not rely on is looking or being busy

3. It relies on seeking the presence of God in everything that we do – no matter now much or how that little is
- It is evident that what John wrote for those churches in that time remains relevant and applicable for us today

John begins his address to this church, at Jesus' instruction, by commending them for what they have done up to that point

- **Vs 2a** – *I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance.*
 1. Why did the Ephesians have to work hard and persevere?
 - Because of what surrounded them
 - Not only idol worship but the manufacturing of idols was a thriving business in the city
 - I can visualize the pastor of the church constantly having to turn the salesmen of the day away
 - Magic, spells, and incantations were all represented by the thriving economy of the city
 - We get a sense of how much resistance the church would have been facing by what we read happened to Paul
 - In **Acts 19** we learn that the silversmiths of the city, those who manufactured the idols, became concerned at the influence Paul was having that would undermine the temple of Artemis and impact their business
 - So much so that one of them, a man by the name of Demetirus, stirred up a riot against Paul (**Acts 19:17**)
 - So the church had to be brave in the face of aggressive opposition
 - But there was an even greater threat they were facing that is much of what we are in the midst of today – the twisted teaching of false truth
- **Vs 2b-3** - *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.*
 1. Even in the early church there was the need to be cautious of who they were listening to
 - There will always be those who say they come in truth but their intention is to lie and deceive
 - There are many of those with us today. Famous, successful (by the world's standards...)
 - Again, John speaks of enduring the hardships of remaining steadfast in the truth
 2. But there was one in particular that is mentioned
 - In **vs 6** we read – *But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate*
 - Who were they?
 - This is not an easy question to answer since the only references we have of them in the Bible is this verse and then again verse **15** in the letter to the church of Pergamum

- We have to turn to the writing of an early-church father, Hippolytus, to get more information
 - He identifies them as an early sect who held to the teaching of Balaam
 - They were idol worshippers
 - And practiced all types of immorality and demonic incantations leading to sin
- The name Balaam is found in the Bible as well as extra-biblical historical writings
 - Philo, a first-century Jewish writer calls Balaam a great sorcerer
 - We read in **Jude 11** that he is described as a false prophet
 - We read specifically in **Numbers 31:16** - ... *the ones who followed Balaam's advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the LORD in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the LORD's people.*
- And so we see why it was so important that the church in Ephesus stood firm against the teachings of the Nicolaitans, the followers of Balaam
 - It was this sorcerer and false prophet who became a symbol of false teaching in the letters to the 7 churches
 - So too we must be on guard against the false teaching of this time found most strongly in a growing willingness to compromise the whole truth of the Scripture
- Let's look at what the problem at Ephesus is
 1. **Vv 4-5** – *Yet I have this against you: you have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which 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.*
 2. Jesus is telling them several things here and they are important for every God-fearing church around the world
 - First, he reminds them of how far they have fallen
 - The church started out with its focus on the right things
 - An intimate personal relationship and devotion to God
 - And Jesus tells them to do the things they did at first
 - That is why we do what we do here every Sunday morning
 - We worship God in the singing of songs
 - We worship Him with prayer; often several times throughout the service
 - We worship Him in the study and understanding of His word
 - And we worship Him in our time of fellowship and expressions of love for one another
 - That is what the church in Ephesus was doing
 - But at some point, something else became more important
 - As I have said to you many times no ministry that has fallen apart or been disgraced started off that way

- It happened gradually over time
 - Many times, in a way that was hard to detect
 - Jim and Tammy
 - And this is why Jesus is having John write these things so that could be made aware of them and repent
 - And what was the consequence if they refused to do it?
 - In the second half of verse 5 he writes this...*If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place*
 - IOW, the church would be removed
 - And if not physically, certainly God's presence and blessing would no longer be present effectively ending its ministry
3. Isn't this a little bit harsh for a church that was and is doing so much good?
- Therein lies the problem for every church if we are not careful
 - We become so busy doing all the right things, that we can lose the objectivity to know if what we are doing is being done with the right motivation and heart
 - And what often happens is we set our minds and hearts so intently on doing for the kingdom without realizing that our focus is wrong
 - And this is not only is a cautionary word for the church but for every Christian as well
 - How busy have you become in your life?
 - So much so that the truly important things are being neglected?
 - Focus on your first love, Jesus Christ, and I promise that your life will come into right order
- The fact is, we do not know precisely why the church of Ephesus lost its first love
 1. They may become comfortable and complacent, letting their guard down, permitting compromise to exist
 2. This was 40 years after the church began so well
 - It was the second generation of believers
 - Perhaps they had not held as tightly to the early teachings of Paul and Timothy
 3. It might have even been spiritual pride
 - They had done so well for so long
 - Perhaps they felt they had outgrown the need for God's grace
 - Maybe they felt they were beyond the fundamental truth and wanted to move toward the "deeper" theological truths that often lead to self-reliance and spiritual pride
 - Whatever the reason, they had left agape – the perfect love of God
 1. Their love had begun to spoil, and God was providing for them a warning with a stern consequence
- Every church must guard itself against the loss of its first love

- The works of the church, which appear to be right in all that they accomplish, will secretly steal the church's heart
- And in its place will be a starchy, high-cholesterol diet of activity and church work that will never nourish the human soul
- Only the presence and adoration of Jesus Christ will keep the church, this church, free from abandoning what must be at the core of every body of believers
- And, at the core of every believer's life so that we may demonstrate that same love given to us to every person we encounter
- To His glory and honor!