

7 Churches Tour – 2019 - Ephesus

Introduction

- The city of Ephesus was not the capital of the Roman province of Asia (that was Pergamum), but it was the principal port. It had a fine harbor, and it sat on a major east-west highway. Through it, cargo and people travelled between West and East, Europe and Asia.
- A commercial center, viz. the huge marketplace, and also a religious center. Artemis of the Ephesians was worshipped in a magnificent temple, known by contemporaries as one of the 7 Wonders of the World.
- The church was started by Aquila and Priscila, a dedicated lay-couple, who mentored a dynamic young preacher called Apollos (Acts 18.24-26). Paul followed, and would stay there for a total of 2-3 years, teaching daily during the hot hours of the day, 11am – 4pm, when city business slowed and the main hall was otherwise unused (Acts 19.8-10).
- As he bade farewell to the elders of Ephesus, Paul warned them against false teachers who would enter the flock and savage it (Acts 20.28-30) and those who deceive with empty words (Eph. 5.6-7).

The Message to the Church of Ephesus

- **Rev. 2.1-7.** Sailing from Patmos, the first lights that sailors would see on land would be from Ephesus on the coast. Likewise, Ephesus represents the first candlestick.
- Ephesus means “desirable,” representing the first love experience of the apostolic church. The first Christians in Ephesus would remember well their former pagan beliefs and ways, and their experience of being “dead through the trespasses and sins in which they once lived” (Eph. 2.1).
- They would also well remember their first love experience. “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints...” (Eph 1.5). Paul goes on to describe what losing their “first love” looked like in practice – Eph. 4.25-32. Lost love for God was manifest in lost love for each other.
- John includes a warning – unless they repent, Jesus will remove their lampstand. A warning to the complacent. Being a church member does not guarantee salvation, for the church itself may be fallen. Even within the church, there is no guarantee of salvation.
- Yet, this is a church that hates the works of the Nicolaitans, which are also hated by Jesus. Who were the Nicolaitans? They claimed to be Christians, but believed that faith in Jesus released them from obedience to the 10 Commandments. By the grace of Jesus, they believed themselves free from the Torah, and fell into debauchery. As a result, they lapsed into immorality, debauchery and eating food offered to idols.
- Their views mirrored those of the gnostic Christians, who taught a theory of dualism that the spirit is pure, good and divine, while the physical body is a base material and therefore evil. One could therefore dispose of one’s body at will, torture it, deny it or gratify it, all while remaining pure in spirit.
- The final words of the letter to Ephesus contain a beautiful promise and a rebuke of the Nicolaitan heresy: “To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.”
- Jesus affirms the physical act of eating and thus the physical creation as being intrinsically good – a response to the dualists who despised the physical life and creation. Jesus also affirms the “tree of life,” which means he upheld the Torah, which the Nicolaitans were denying.

Conclusion

- Let us then reflect on how Jesus is asking us to live? Eph. 4.25-5.1.