**The Church at Ephesus**

***A Loveless Church***

Sunday School Lesson 1

*Lessons from the Seven Churches*

2/16/2020

**Introduction:** In our new lesson series, we are going to turn our focus to the seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation. The instruction given to these churches is the last recorded instruction from Jesus to His church. While we can infer much about the early churches from the various epistles, the book of Revelation lists out plainly some of the problems that arose in those first churches. Today, we will examine the church at Ephesus. Of all of the early churches, there is probably not a church that was as nurtured as the church at Ephesus. It first started with teachings of Apollos, who was mighty in the Scriptures. Then, Paul took several trips to Ephesus to help officially establish the church, and he spent three years there ministering to the people. Additionally, the church had Timothy as its pastor for a period of time. Paul also sent Aquila and Priscilla to help the church. This dear couple undoubtedly taught the church how to work hard for the cause of Christ. Even the apostle John, prior to writing the book of Revelation, spent several years as the pastor of the church. Needless to say, Ephesus was a well-grounded church. It was also a large and laboring church. In spite of this, the Lord had some criticism of the work there. He reproved the church because they had left their first love – God. We don’t know whether the church repented upon hearing this message, but we do know that the church dissolved when the city of Ephesus was destroyed roughly 100 years later. Let’s look at some principles to help us avoid falling prey to the same fate as the Ephesians.

1. THE CHURCH FORGOT THE REASON IT WAS FIGHTING SO HARD AGAINST SIN. (REV. 2:1-2A)
2. **Notice that the church couldn’t bear those who were evil (2a).** The church was in a very secular city. There’s little doubt that they were surrounded by wickedness. They had worked hard to fight against the wickedness and evil of that day. Not only that, but they were patient as well. This is likely referring to the converts that came into the church. Those Gentile converts would have likely been engaged in all types of sinful behavior before their conversion. They would need much nurturing from the church family to help them in their fight against sin. This is probably why they couldn’t stand those who were evil. There were those in the town who wanted to keep the people in their sinful ways. They wanted to keep the people worshipping the false god Diana. They likely targeted the new converts of the church and tried to lead them back into wickedness. The church had no tolerance for such evil people who try to draw men away through the lusts of the flesh. The church truly hated the sins of the flesh, and they were not afraid to speak out against sin.
3. **Notice that our hatred for evil should be a result of our love for God (Psalm 45:7, 97:10; Luke 7:47).** It is curious to think that a church which hated evil so much was lacking in a love for God. It would seem, naturally, that a hatred for evil would lend itself to loving God. However, that is not the order that we find in Scripture. It is our love for God that is guaranteed to produce a hatred for evil. The Bible never states that a hatred for evil must lead to a love of God. There are people in this world that hate all of the violence and wickedness of man. We call them “moral” people. They genuinely detest many of the vices of our day. Yet, not all of these “moral” people love God. The Jewish leaders railed against sin. I believe that there were some who genuinely had a disdain for evil. We know, though, that the Jewish leaders did not love God. The church’s hatred started as a result of their love for Christ, but they lost sight of that love somewhere along the way. They continued to fight against evil out of habit and conviction, but they must have forgotten why they hated it so much. Perhaps, they may have forgotten how much that sin had hampered their own relationship with God. They had been “righteous” for too long now to remember personally who they were before they met Christ.
4. THE CHURCH WAS MORE FOCUSED ON BEING RIGHT THAN ON HAVING A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. (REVELATION 2:2B)
5. **Notice that the church guarded the truth, and they confronted false teachers (2b).** Many of the early churches fell into false doctrine due to their quick acceptance of false teachers as genuine apostles of Jesus Christ. The church at Ephesus was not one of those churches. They were careful to try the teaching of any person that came into the church. They were serious about guarding the truth. Remember, they had been taught by some of the greatest early church leaders. This is not a church that would have been fooled easily in the matter of doctrine. The church also went a step farther in confronting those false teachers. They found them to be liars. They called them out for those lies. The church would not compromise the truth for the sake of offending these teachers.
6. **Notice that the purpose of the truth is to draw all men to Christ (Romans 2:16-29, 10:1-3).** Why do we have the truth? Is it so we can puff our chests and be prideful in our knowledge? The Jews had a knowledge of the true God. The Romans did not know the true God. The many other people and cultures living in that day had no understanding of the true God. Yet, what good did this knowledge for the Jews? They know who God was, but they sadly did not know God. This is what Paul wrote in Romans 10. He said that the Jews even had a zeal for God, but it was lacking because they did not have a real relationship with God. They knew all about Him, but they did not know Him. That was not always the case for Israel. There was a time when they truly knew God. The church at Ephesus knew God. They were believers of Jesus Christ. Yet, they had started to lose their purpose for having the truth. It wasn’t just for the purpose of defending it and proclaiming it. They had the truth to draw them closer to Christ. Otherwise, what good does the truth do for us if we don’t have a relationship with Him? A husband could know all there is to know about his wife, but would that knowledge matter if he doesn’t use that knowledge to love her?
7. THE CHURCH WAS FAITHFUL IN ENDURING FOR THE NAME OF CHRIST, BUT IT WAS OUT OF OBLIGATION RATHER THAN A RESULT OF LOVE. (REVELATION 2:3)
8. **Notice that the church had labored and suffered much for the cause of Christ, but they had refused to quit (3).** The persecution of the church was in full swing during the writing of Revelation. John wrote the book of Revelation from the isle of Patmos because he had been banished there by the Roman government. The pressure on the church at Ephesus was to give up. It was costly for them to continue working for the name of Christ. Yet, they knew that it was right to continue standing up for the Gospel message. It’s really easy to get weary in well-doing. It takes real Godly character to keep going when things are not working out as planned. For this, the church at Ephesus ought to be greatly commended. They did what probably few Christians would do today. They were willing to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ.
9. **Notice that we endure suffering because we desire to better know the One that suffered so great a price for us (2 Timothy 2:3; John 3:16; Romans 8:17; Philippians 3:10).** Again, it’s hard to believe that this church was lacking in love for God. How could they have possibly suffered affliction for Him if they did not love Him? The only reasonable conclusion is that they had suffered more out of obligation or conviction. They were soldiers for Christ. They understood when they signed up that there would be hardship. Certainly, they had a genuine love of Christ when they were saved. Yet, the years of battles had caused them to lose sight of the reason that they kept going. They were enduring because that’s what good soldiers do. While that conviction can cause a person to continue for a while, it will eventually fade and result in failure. The reason we suffer is because we love Christ. We want to fellowship with Him through suffering. That’s what Paul told the church at Philippi.
10. THE CHURCH FOUND THE LORD’S FAVOR IN THEIR SINCERITY TO KEEP THE CHURCH SEPARATED FROM THE WORLD. (REVELATION 2:5-6)
11. **Notice that the church’s stand was not the reason for the loss of love (6).** After the Lord challenges the church to repent, He further points out that the church had done something else that was commendable. They had a hatred for the deeds of the Nicolaitans. This was a group of people who tried to blend the worship of the pagan gods of Rome in with the church. They would ultimately be successful in their task several centuries later when the Roman state church was formed. Obviously, God hates the worship of other “gods.” He also tells us that the friendship of the world is enmity with God. The Nicolaitans did not believe in a need for church standards or separation. To them, everything was acceptable for the Christian. The fact that Jesus mentions this after He has reproved the church tells us that the problem with the church at Ephesus was not their stand. They did not lose their love because they were standing for right. They lost their love because they lost their focus.
12. **Notice that the church’s stand gave hope that their love could be revived (5-6).** The message to the church was not a message of destruction. To the contrary, it was a message of hope. The Lord had hope that the church would return back to its first love. Otherwise, there would have been no point in giving the warning to the church. In looking at the church, it had not compromised its beliefs. It had not given in to the world. It had not given up. It had a sincere hatred for anything that tampered with the church. This tells us that it had not totally lost its love for God. It had just left it. It had put something else in first place instead of Christ. Perhaps, the church had put the work over Christ. Perhaps, the church had placed themselves in the first spot. Whatever the case may be, the church just needed to put Christ back in the top place in their hearts and minds.