

## Revelation week 5-2:1-7 ( June 3, 2015)

### Ephesus: When love grows cold

#### I. Introduction

- a. Read
- b. The late Francis Schaeffer once observed that “the meaning of the word *Christian* has been reduced to practically nothing. ... Because the word *Christian* as a symbol has been made to mean so little, it has come to mean everything and nothing” (*The Mark of the Christian* [Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1970], 11).
- c. The term *Christian* in contemporary usage can mean anyone who is not Jewish, anyone who lives in a “Christian” nation (as opposed, for example, to a Buddhist or an Islamic one), or anyone who claims any kind of allegiance to Jesus Christ.
- d. The term *evangelical* is following the same trend toward vagueness.
- e. But though the world may be confused about what a Christian is, the Bible is clear.
  - i. Christians are those who are savingly united to God through Jesus Christ, those whom “God has chosen ... from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13; cf. Luke 18:7; Rom. 8:33; Eph. 1:4; Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1–2; 2:10).
  - ii. As a result, they have exercised saving faith in the only Savior (Acts 4:12), the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:15–18, 36; 5:24; 6:47; Rom. 1:16; 4:5;

- 10:10; 1 John 5:1), and repented of their sins (Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).
- iii. God has forgiven their sins (Acts 10:43; Eph. 1:7; 1 John 1:7, 9; Rev. 1:5), made them His children (Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 4:7; Eph. 1:5; 5:1, 8; Phil. 2:15; 1 John 3:2), and transformed them into new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17) indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; Rom. 8:4, 9, 11, 14; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6; 2 Tim. 1:14; 1 John 3:24).
  - f. Many things characterize Christians, including reverential fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1; Phil. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:17), a desire to imitate Him (Eph. 5:1; 1 John 2:6), holiness (Matt. 5:48; 2 Cor. 7:1; Titus 2:11–12; Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet. 1:15–16; 2:24; 2 Pet. 3:11), and obedience (John 10:27; 14:21; 15:14; Rom. 1:5; 16:26; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 John 3:24).
  - g. But the supreme characteristic of a Christian is love for his Lord and God.
    - i. When challenged to name the single greatest commandment of the law, Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”
    - ii. This is the great and foremost commandment” (Matt. 22:37–38).
    - iii. He challenged His disciples to make love for Him the highest priority of their lives: “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:37–38).

- iv. In John 14:21, 23 He added, “He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. ... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.” True children of God, Jesus declared, will love Him (John 8:42; cf. 1 Pet. 1:8) and be known by Him (1 Cor. 8:3). To discern Peter’s spiritual condition, Jesus asked him three times, “Do you love Me?” (John 21:15–17).
- v. Paul defined Christians as those controlled by “the love of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:14). Those who love Jesus Christ are blessed (Eph. 6:24); those who do not are cursed (1 Cor. 16:22).
- vi. While love for the Lord Jesus Christ will always be present in true Christians, it can fluctuate in its intensity.
- vii. Christians will not always love Jesus Christ with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to fail to do so is sin.
- viii. There is no better illustration in Scripture of the seriousness of allowing love for Christ to wane than this letter to the church at Ephesus.
- h. The seven churches addressed in chapters 2 and 3 were actual existing churches when John wrote.
  - i. But while not precisely duplicated, they also represent the types of churches that are generally present throughout the entire church age.

- ii. Five of the seven churches (Smyrna and Philadelphia being the exceptions) were rebuked for tolerating sin in their midst, not an uncommon occurrence in churches since.
    - iii. The problems in those five churches ranged in severity from waning love at Ephesus to total apostasy at Laodicea. Further, any church in any age could have a mixture of the sins that plagued these five churches.
  - i. Though Christ may have addressed the Ephesian church first because it was first on the postal route, it was also the most prominent church of the seven.
    - i. It was the mother church out of whose ministry the other six were founded (cf. Acts 19:10) and gave its name to the inspired letter of Ephesians penned four decades earlier by the apostle Paul.
    - j. The contents of this first letter form the pattern for the other six.
    - k. It contains seven features: the correspondent, the church, the city, the commendation, the concern, the command, and the counsel.
- II. THE CORRESPONDENT
- a. **The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, (2:1c)**
  - b. Though the writer is not named, the description makes it obvious who He is.
  - c. He is the One depicted as the glorious Lord of the church in 1:9–20, the exalted Jesus Christ.
  - d. The phrases **the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and the One who walks among the**

**seven golden lampstands** are taken from the description of Christ in John's vision (cf. 1:13, 16).

- e. In fact, Christ identifies Himself to each of the first five churches by using phrases from that vision (cf. 2:8 with 1:18; 2:12 with 1:16; 2:18 with 1:14–15; 3:1 with 1:16).
- f. That reinforces the truth that He is the author of the letters; they are His direct word, through the apostle John, to those local congregations and to churches like them in years beyond.
- g. **The seven stars** represent leaders from the seven churches. That Christ **holds them in His right hand** indicates that they are His ministers, under His power as He mediates His sovereign rule in the church through its human leaders.
- h. Christ further describes Himself as **the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands** (the seven churches; 1:20)—scrutinizing, examining, assessing, and evaluating them.
  - i. As its sovereign ruler, He has the authority to address the church.

### III. THE CHURCH.

- a. **the church in Ephesus (2:1a)**
- b. Perhaps no church in history had as rich a heritage as the congregation at Ephesus.
  - i. The gospel was introduced to that city by Paul's close friends and partners in ministry, Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18–19).
  - ii. They were soon joined by the eloquent preacher and powerful debater Apollos (Acts 18:24–26).

- iii. Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos laid the groundwork for Paul's ministry in Ephesus.
- c. The apostle Paul stopped briefly in Ephesus near the end of his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19–21), but his real ministry in that key city took place on his third missionary journey.
  - i. Arriving in Ephesus, he first encountered a group of Old Testament saints, followers of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1–7).
  - ii. After preaching the gospel to them, he baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 19:5).
  - iii. That began Paul's work of building the church at Ephesus—a work that would last for three years (Acts 20:31).
  - iv. Later, on his way to Jerusalem near the end of his third missionary journey, he taught the elders of the Ephesian church the essential principles of church leadership (Acts 20:17–38), the gist of which he later expanded in his pastoral epistles.
  - v. Paul's protégé é Timothy served as pastor of the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3).
  - vi. Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16, 18) and Tychicus (2 Tim 4:12), two more of Paul's fellow laborers, also ministered at Ephesus.
  - vii. Finally, according to the testimony of the early church, the apostle John spent the last decades of his life at Ephesus, from which he likely wrote his three epistles in which he calls himself “the elder” (cf. 2 John 1; 3 John 1).

- viii. He was no doubt leading the Ephesian church when he was arrested and exiled to Patmos.
- d. Dramatic and remarkable events accompanied the birth of the Ephesian church.
  - i. Paul's ministry profoundly affected not only the city of Ephesus, but also the entire province of Asia (Acts 19:10).
  - ii. As previously noted, it was undoubtedly during this time that the rest of the seven churches were founded.
- e. God supernaturally affirmed Paul as His spokesman through a series of spectacular miracles (Acts 19:11–12).
  - i. Attempting to emulate Paul's success, a group of Jewish would-be exorcists were beaten and humiliated by a demon-possessed individual (Acts 19:13–16). Their debacle spread alarm and fear throughout the city, causing "the name of the Lord Jesus [to be] magnified" (Acts 19:17).
  - ii. Shocked into realizing the futility of trusting in pagan practices, "many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver" (vv. 18–19).
  - iii. That staggering sum, equivalent to 50,000 days of workers' wages, reveals the magnitude of Ephesus's involvement in the magic arts.

- f. The striking conversions of large numbers of Ephesians posed a severe economic threat to the city's pagan craftsmen.
  - i. Ephesus was the center of the worship of the goddess Artemis (known to the Romans as Diana), whose ornate temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
  - ii. At the instigation of a silversmith named Demetrius the craftsmen, who saw their lucrative business endangered, reacted violently.
  - iii. The ensuing riot threw Ephesus into chaos (Acts 19:23–41).
- g. By the time of this letter, four decades had passed since the Ephesian church's tumultuous birth.
  - i. The apostle Paul was gone, as were many of the first generation of believers converted under his ministry.
  - ii. A new situation called for another inspired letter to the Ephesians, this one from the Lord Himself, penned by the apostle John.

#### IV. THE CITY.

- a. **Ephesus (2:1b)**
- b. Although not its capital (Pergamum was the province's official capital), Ephesus was the most important city in Asia Minor. (Since the Roman governor resided there, it could be argued that Ephesus was the de facto capital.)
- c. Its population in New Testament times has been estimated at between 250,000 and 500,000 people.
  - i. The city's theater, visible today, into which the frenzied rioters dragged Paul's companions Gaius



and Aristarchus (Acts 19:29), held an estimated 25,000 people.

- ii. Ephesus was a free city (i.e., self-governing, within limits), and no Roman troops were garrisoned there.
- iii. The city hosted athletic events, rivaling the Olympic games.
- d. Ephesus was the primary harbor in the province of Asia. (By law incoming Roman governors had to enter Asia through Ephesus.)
- e. The city was located on the Cayster River, about three miles upriver from where it flowed into the sea.
  - i. Those disembarking at the harbor traveled along a magnificent, wide, column-lined road (the Arcadian Way) that led to the center of the city.
  - ii. In John's day silt deposited by the Cayster River was slowly filling up the harbor, forcing the city to fight to keep a channel open.
- f. That battle would ultimately be lost, and today the ruins of Ephesus are located some six miles inland from the sea.
- g. Ephesus was also strategically located at the junction of four of the most important Roman roads in Asia Minor.
  - i. That, along with its harbor, prompted the geographer Strabo (a contemporary of Christ) to describe Ephesus as the market of Asia.
- h. But Ephesus was most famous as the center of the worship of the goddess Artemis (Diana)—a point of great civic pride (Acts 19:27, 35).

- i. The temple of Artemis was Ephesus's most prominent landmark.
- ii. Because its inner shrine was supposedly impenetrable, the temple served as one of the most important banks in the Mediterranean world.
- iii. The temple and its surroundings also provided sanctuary for criminals.
- iv. Further, the sale of items used in the worship of Artemis provided an important source of income for the city (cf. Acts 19:24).
- v. Every spring a month-long festival was held in honor of the goddess, complete with athletic, dramatic, and musical events.
- i. Paul may have anticipated this annual event as a unique evangelistic opportunity and have been waiting for it when he wrote the Corinthians that he intended to remain in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8).
- j. The worship of Artemis was unspeakably vile.
  - i. Her idol was a gross, many-breasted monstrosity, popularly believed to have fallen from heaven (Acts 19:35).
  - ii. The temple was attended by numerous priests, eunuchs, and slaves.
  - iii. Thousands of priestesses, who were little more than ritual prostitutes, played a major role in the worship of Artemis.
  - iv. The temple grounds were chaotic scene, full of priests, prostitutes, bankers, criminals, musicians, dancers, and frenzied, hysterical worshipers.

- v. The philosopher Heraclitus (hair-a clite-us) was called the weeping philosopher because no one, he declared, could live in Ephesus and not weep over its immorality (see William Barclay, *The Revelation of John* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976], 1:60).
  - k. Huddled in the midst of such pagan idolatry that characterized Ephesus was a faithful group of Christians.
    - i. It was to them that Christ addressed this first of the seven letters.
- V. THE COMMENDATION.
- a. **I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. ... Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (2:2–3, 6)**
  - b. *Oida* (**know**) indicates the Lord's knowledge in each of the seven letters (cf. 2:9; 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15).
    - i. *oida* refers to complete and full knowledge.
    - ii. The Lord of the church knows everything there is to know about the church—both good and bad.
    - iii. Such perfect knowledge is evident in each letter as the Lord condemns and commends the churches.
  - c. Before rebuking them for their failings, the Lord Jesus Christ commended the Ephesians for what they were doing right.

- d. He began by acknowledging their **deeds**—a general term summarizing all that follows.
- e. Specifically, Christ first commended the Ephesian believers for their **toil**.
  - i. *Kopos* (**toil**) denotes labor to the point of sweat and exhaustion.
  - ii. It describes an all-out effort, demanding all that a person has to give—physically, mentally, and emotionally.
  - iii. The Ephesians were diligent workers for the cause of Christ.
  - iv. There was no spectator mentality; they did not want merely to be entertained.
  - v. Nor were they content to eat the fruit of others' labor, but were willing to plow, plant, and harvest their own crop.
  - vi. In the midst of the pagan darkness that surrounded them, they were aggressively evangelizing the lost, edifying the saints, and caring for those in need.
- f. **Perseverance** translates *hupomonē*, which denotes patience in trying circumstances.
  - i. *Hupomonē* does not denote a grim, fatalistic resignation, but a courageous acceptance of hardship, suffering, and loss.
  - ii. This commendation indicates that, despite their difficult circumstances, the Ephesian believers remained faithful to their Lord.
- g. Another praiseworthy aspect of the Ephesian believers was that they refused to **tolerate evil men**.

- i. They held to a high, holy standard of behavior and were sensitive to sin, undoubtedly following the Lord's mandate to practice church discipline (Matt. 18:15ff.).
  - ii. Four decades earlier Paul had commanded them not to "give the devil an opportunity" (Eph. 4:27), and they were still reluctant to do so.
- h. Nor was the Ephesian church lacking in spiritual discernment, since it **put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and ... found them to be false.**
  - i. The Ephesians never forgot the admonition Paul had addressed to their leaders so many years earlier:
  - ii. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert. (Acts 20:28–31)
- i. False teachers pose a constant danger to the church.
  - i. Jesus warned of "false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15).
  - ii. In his second epistle, John warned of the "many deceivers [who] have gone out into the world" (2 John 7) and cautioned believers, "If anyone

comes to you and does not bring [true biblical] teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting” (2 John 10).

- iii. Paul confronted false “apostles” in Corinth and unmasked them with this description: “Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds” (2 Cor. 11:13–15).
- j. The early church father Ignatius, writing not long after John penned the book of Revelation, also commended the Ephesians for their vigilance:
  - i. “You heed nobody beyond what he has to say truthfully about Jesus Christ. ... I have heard that some strangers came your way with a wicked teaching. But you did not let them sow it among you. You stopped up your ears to prevent admitting what they disseminated” (*Ephesians* 6.2; 9.1; cited in Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 89, 90).
- k. Through all the difficulties the Ephesians faced over forty years, through all their hard labor and patient enduring of trials, their refusal to tolerate evil, and their spiritual discernment, they maintained their **perseverance**.
- l. They **endured**, Jesus declared, for the highest of motives: **for His name’s sake**. And they had done so without having **grown weary** (cf. Gal. 6:9); they had

not yielded to disappointment, ingratitude, or criticism. They remained faithful to the Lord, loyal to His Word and to the work to which He had called them.

m. Jesus adds a final commendation in verse 6: **Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.**

- i. The **Nicolaitans**, mentioned also in the letter to Pergamum (2:12–15), cannot be positively identified.
- ii. The few references to this heresy in the writings of the church fathers link it to Nicolas, one of the seven men appointed to oversee the distribution of food in Acts 6.
- iii. Some argued that Nicolas was a false believer who became an apostate, but retained influence in the church because of his credentials.
- iv. Others suggested that the **Nicolaitans** misrepresented his teaching. Whatever its origin, Nicolaitanism led people into immorality and wickedness. The letter to Pergamum links it with Balaam's false teaching that led Israel astray. T
- v. he **deeds of the Nicolaitans** thus involved sensual temptations leading to sexual immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols (2:14) without regard for the offense of such behavior (cf. Rom. 14:1–15:3)—all in the name of Christian liberty.
- vi. It has been suggested that “the teaching of the Nicolaitans was an exaggeration of the doctrine of Christian liberty which attempted an ethical

compromise with heathenism” (Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957], 61).

- n. Unlike the church at Pergamum, the Ephesian church did not tolerate the **Nicolaitans** but hated their heretical teachings.
- o. For that the Lord Jesus Christ commended them.
  - i. Hatred was an appropriate attitude and exactly the opposite reaction to the tolerance of the Pergamum church toward the Nicolaitans (2:14–15).
  - ii. The Bible reveals that God hates impurity (Isa. 61:8; Jer. 44:4; Amos 5:21; Zech. 8:17).

## VI. THE CONCERN.

- a. **But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. (2:4)**
- b. Despite all the praiseworthy elements in the Ephesian church, the penetrating, omniscient gaze of the Lord Jesus Christ had spotted a fatal flaw.
  - i. Though they maintained their doctrinal orthodoxy and continued to serve Christ, that service had degenerated into mechanical orthodoxy.
  - ii. Though at one time they had love (Eph. 1:15; 3:17–19; 6:23), forty years later the affection of the first generation of believers had cooled.
  - iii. The current generation was maintaining the doctrine handed down to them, but they had **left their first love**.
  - iv. That love could include love for God and Christ, love for each other, and love for the lost.



- v. It is love defined as obedience (2 John 6). They had sunk to the place where they were carrying out their Christian responsibilities with diminishing love for their Lord and others.
- c. The grave danger of that situation is aptly illustrated by the disaster that ensued when Israel's love for God cooled.
  - i. Through Jeremiah, God rebuked His people for forsaking Him: "Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, "I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothals, your following after Me in the wilderness, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first of His harvest. All who ate of it became guilty; evil came upon them," declares the Lord.' "Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord, "What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me and walked after emptiness and became empty? They did not say, 'Where is the Lord who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and of deep darkness, through a land that no one crossed and where no man dwelt?' I brought you into the fruitful land to eat its fruit and its good things. But you came and defiled My land, and My inheritance you made an abomination. The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?' and those who handle the law did

not know Me; the rulers also transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that did not profit. Therefore I will yet contend with you,” declares the Lord, “And with your sons’ sons I will contend. For cross to the coastlands of Kittim and see, and send to Kedar and observe closely and see if there has been such a thing as this! Has a nation changed gods when they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be very desolate,” declares the Lord. “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jer. 2:2–13)

- d. As it had in Israel, the honeymoon had ended at Ephesus.
  - i. The loss of a vital love relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ opened the doors to spiritual apathy, indifference to others, love for the world, compromise with evil, judgment, and, ultimately, the death of the church altogether.
  - ii. Despite its outwardly robust appearance, a deadly spiritual cancer was growing at the heart of the Ephesian church.

## VII. THE COMMAND.

- a. **Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. (2:5)**

- b. The Great Physician issued a prescription to the Ephesians which, if followed, would cure their spiritual malaise.
- c. First, they needed to **remember** (lit. “to keep on remembering”) **from where** they had **fallen**.
  - i. Forgetfulness is frequently the initial cause of spiritual decline, and the Ephesians needed to recognize the seriousness of such a lapse.
- d. Second, they needed to **repent** in a deliberate rejection of their sins, because to fail to love God with all one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength is sin (Matt. 22:36–38).
- e. Finally, they needed to demonstrate the genuineness of their repentance and **do the deeds** they **did at first**.
  - i. They needed to recapture the richness of Bible study, devotion to prayer, and passion for worship that had once characterized them.
- f. Richard Mayhue writes that Jesus’ confrontation of the Ephesian church models how believers are to confront:
  - i. First, confronting was done with love and with the goal of restoration (2:4–5).
  - ii. Second, encouragement preceded correction (2:2–3, 6).
  - iii. Third, Christ openly and concisely stated the problem (2:4–5).
  - iv. Fourth, He told them how to be restored (2:5): remember your past, repent of your error, return to your best.
  - v. Fifth, Christ clearly laid out the consequences if they did not obey (2:5).

- vi. Sixth, He wrote with the expectation that they would respond positively (2:7). (*What Would Jesus Say About Your Church?* [Scotland, G.B.: Christian Focus Publishers, 1995], 51)
- g. Underscoring the seriousness of the situation, Christ warns the Ephesians to take the necessary steps to recover their first love for Him.
- h. He demanded that they change or be chastened: **I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.**
- i. The **coming** to which Christ refers is not His second coming, but His coming to them in local judgment on that church.
- j. Failure to heed the warning would cause Him to **remove their lampstand** (symbolic of the church; Rev. 1:20) **out of its place.**
- k. Tragically, Christ threatened divine judgment that would bring an end to the Ephesian church.

#### VIII. THE COUNSEL

- a. **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God. (2:7)**
- b. The letter closes with an exhortation and a promise.
- c. Christ's exhortation **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches** closes each of the seven letters (cf. 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).
  - i. It emphasizes the sober responsibility believers have to heed God's voice in Scripture.

- ii. The use of the plural noun **churches** signifies the universal nature of this invitation each time that it appears.
  - iii. This call cannot be limited just to a group of overcomers in a single church; it must apply to all churches. Every church needs to hear every message.
- d. The promise, as are those associated with the other six letters (cf. 2:11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), is addressed to **him who overcomes**.
  - i. The term does not refer to those who have attained to a higher level of the Christian life, but identifies all Christians.
  - ii. The apostle John defines it that way in his first epistle: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4–5).
  - iii. All true believers are overcomers, who have by God’s grace and power overcome the damning power of the evil world system.
- e. Christ promises the overcomers at Ephesus that they will **eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God**.
- f. The **tree of life** is first referred to in Genesis 2:9, where it stands in the Garden of Eden.
  - i. That earthly tree was lost due to man’s sin and he was forbidden to eat of it (Gen. 3:22), but the heavenly tree of life (Rev. 22:2, 14, 19) will last throughout eternity.

- ii. The **tree of life** thus symbolizes eternal life.
- iii. The **Paradise of God** is heaven (cf. Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4).
- g. The example of the Ephesian church warns that doctrinal orthodoxy and outward service cannot make up for a cold heart.
- h. Believers must carefully heed Solomon's counsel: "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23).
- i. Those whose love for God has cooled would do well to heed the exhortation Hosea addressed to backsliding Israel:
  - i. Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, that we may present the fruit of our lips. Assyria will not save us, we will not ride on horses; nor will we say again, 'Our god,' to the work of our hands; for in You the orphan finds mercy." (Hos. 14:1–3)
- j. And to those who return to Him God promises, "I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely" (Hos. 14:4).

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<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 53–67.