

**PREFACE**

These notes are to serve as a blessing and help to those studying the word with Pastor Neil Spencer. Pastor Neil does not claim to fully agree with all the thoughts, beliefs, writings, or teachings of every named source/person in these notes. The Bible is the ultimate authority & ALL believers are to be Bereans (Acts 17.10-11).

**INTRODUCTION:****1. JESUS LOVES CHURCH**

1. I love this theme & focus as we begin our study through the book of Revelation

1. It's true — JESUS loves CHURCH — Eph 5.25 — *“For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her”*

2. This is the focus of our study of the book for Revelation for this winter/spring

3. Rev 1.19 gives us what many would call the **DIVINE OUTLINE** of the book; John is told **19** *“Write down what you have seen—both the things that are now happening and the things that will happen.*

1. CH 1 — the things you have seen — we've made it through section #1

2. CH 2-3 — the things that are — today, we start section #2

3. CH 4–22 — the things that will happen — Lord willing, we'll begin this in the Fall...

2. In chapters 1–5 we'll see Jesus' love, toughness/tenderness to the CHURCH **revealed**

**2. Revealed** — that's an important word that I want you to remember ... why?

1. Revelation simply means *“unveiling or revealing”* ... *“to uncover, to reveal, to make manifest.”*

1. It's the revelation of JESUS, and... look at v1 of chapter 1

2. **1** *This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this revelation to his servant John,*

1. KJV — of JESUS

2. Revealing of JESUS & the events that must soon take place — the content & the priority

2. The book of Revelation is given to **prepare** us, not to **scare** us.

1. God doesn't seek to **conceal** things from us, but to **reveal** them to us.

2. Prophecy isn't given to **overstimulate** our brains, but to **motivate** our hearts & hands to worship.

3. Revelation brings **sense** to the **suffering** we experience; God is not done; more is coming.

3. In Revelation, we are given a fuller/greater revelation of JESUS... that's the primary focus of Revelation!

4. This morning, we'll step into the 2nd section of the book & consider the 1st of 7 postcards/letters/msg's Jesus sends to 7 churches

5. Let's Jump in verses 1-7 of chapter 2.

**REVELATION 2.1-7 (NLT) 1** *“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands: 2* *“I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You*

*have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. 3 You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. 4 “But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first! 5 Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don’t repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches. 6 But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do. 7 “Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.*

## **SETTING // SAYING // SO WHAT:**

1. When studying Scripture, I encourage you to step into the text w/ these in mind: **Setting, Saying, So What...**
  1. **Setting** — background info, genre, pertinent content/context that illuminates the intent of the text
  2. **Saying** — what is this text saying about God + His plans/agenda?
  3. **So What** — what is my response to the setting/saying of this book... or text?
2. Let’s consider a few things about the setting before we get into the saying/so what of our text today...
3. In chapters 2/3 we see 7 letters/msg’s to 7 churches ... 4 things to take note of concerning these churches:
  1. These were 7 actual churches in modern day Turkey that existed in John’s day.
    1. John was on Patmos, one of several islands in the Aegean Sea. (Alcatraz not Tahiti/Nassau/ Maui)
    2. Patmos was located south of Ephesus, the closest city on the mainland.
    3. Ephesus was a famous city at this time... with an impressive church.
      1. Paul lived/served there for 3yrs — like a pastor there.... (Acts 19/20)
      2. Aquilla & Priscilla, with Apollos served there (Acts 18)
      3. Timothy served as the church’s pastor for a time, even John, was a pastor there.
      4. The Ephesian church had given birth to the other 6 churches.
  4. Ephesus was situated next to the main harbor and was known as “the gateway to Asia.”
  5. Ephesus was world-famous as a religious, cultural, & economic center of the region.
    1. 1 of the 7 ancient wonders of the world, temple of Diana (127 60ft tall pillars, adorned w/ sculptures) was in Ephesus; Diana was the fertility goddess worshipped with immoral sex.
    2. *“The Temple of Artemis was also a major treasury & bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, & even cities made deposits, & where their money could be kept safe under the protection of deity.”*
    3. *“Ephesus was a stronghold of Satan. Here many evil things both superstitious & satanic were practiced. Books containing formula for sorcery & other ungodly & forbidden arts were plentiful in that city.”*

6. Ephesus was famous & central, the Roman postal circuit of that day, would travel north from Ephesus to Smyrna & Pergamos, east to Thyatira, then south to Sardis, southeast to Philadelphia, & finally to Laodicea.
  1. These are the 7 cities/churches of Revelation 2/3
  2. They were all within 50 miles of each other.
7. So, 1st thing to take note of... these are 7 actual churches/places in history...
  2. There were many other churches in this area at this time — effective church in the area of Colossae — but numbers carry significance in Scripture, 7 is the number of fullness, perfection, & completion
    1. Here's the 2nd thing we see this morning concerning the setting of our text...
    2. We have a full picture of what Jesus wants the church to know concerning His heart for them.
      1. Some say the 7 churches give a picture of the last 2k yrs of church history.
      2. That theory/perspective seems to hold true as you consider the commendations/critiques that Jesus will give & how the church has believed/behaved over the last 2k yrs.
    3. Here's the point: these letters share/show Jesus' heart... this is what HIS love looks like...
  3. These words of Jesus (commendation, critique, correction) are universal/personal.
    1. *"Nearly every challenge facing today's church are addressed in these letters to the 7 churches."*
    2. *"Every believer belongs to one of these seven churches, spiritually speaking. There is personal application for each one of us, and we must allow the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts as we examine these letters. Most of us are interested in what Revelation has to say about the future, but first, God wants to speak to us about our current relationship with Him."*
    3. May we be paying attention to what the Lord has for us in each of these...
4. The structure/format of how Jesus speaks to each church follows a similar pattern:
  1. Church—Identification the city where the church resides.
  2. Characterization — Pertinent description of Jesus to that local church/msg Jesus shared
  3. Commendation—Encouragement from Jesus to continue in what they are doing well.
  4. Critique/Complaint—He warns them about what they are doing wrong.
  5. Command—Tells the churches what they must do to get right & how to stay right spiritually.
  6. Counsel/Caution — Exhortation to all believes
  7. Comfort—Jesus offers the genuine believers words of comfort & blessing for the future.
    1. Now, in some of the msg's to the churches these elements are blurred/varied
    2. But this is also just good advice in how to navigate challenging information to anyone
      1. Staff in Destin... Neil's making a sandwich
      2. Building the sandwich (Positive + Point + Positive)

5. Four (4) Things to take note of concerning the setting of our text:
  1. 7 msg's to 7 churches who actually existed in real places
  2. These letters give clarity to the LOVE that Jesus has: commending/warning/teaching/critiquing
  3. These letters are universal/personal
  4. These letters follow a similar pattern
6. So, let's consider the 1st letter to the church in Ephesus, we'll see the pattern of communication from Jesus to this church in full display.

Ephesian Church: Calloused b/c they became Careless

1. In v1 we see PT's 1 & 2 — the **#1 CHURCH** is identified & we're given an interesting **#2 CHARACTER** description of Jesus **1** *"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands:*
  1. We've considered the culture that these Christians in Ephesus were immersed in — worldly.
  2. The NT GK word for angel simply means messenger
    1. So there are 2 schools of thought of what this means...
    2. Either there is a literal guardian angel assigned to each church, of this letter is addressed to the "messenger" or the "pastor" of the local church.
    3. This isn't a critical issue, but nowhere else in Scripture are angels seen as being in the right hand of Jesus... how do you know that 7 stars are the "messengers"
    4. Best commentary on the Bible is the Bible, **1.20** *This is the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars you saw in my right hand and the seven gold lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*
  3. Jesus is in the midst of ALL churches... and He has all of the leaders in His hands
    1. Jesus LOVES Church ... He has the stars in His hands (He's in control)
    2. He's walking among the 7 gold lampstands (He knows & He cares & He's there)
    3. *Some professing Christians claim they do not need to go to church. Simply put, you cannot say yes to Jesus and say no to the church. It was Jesus Himself who established the church ... How you treat the church is how you treat Jesus, because Jesus is the Head of the church. And if your faith doesn't take you to church, you need to seriously consider whether it will take you to heaven.*
2. V2-3, & 6 We see the **#3 COMMENDATION** that Jesus has for this church: **2** *"I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. 3* *You have patiently suffered for me without quitting... 6* *But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do.*

1. Ephesians were active, insightful, studious, hard-working, patient, fought for doctrinal purity, discerning, tenacious, knew how to endure...
  1. Who were the Nicolaitans? ... no one is 100% sure...
  2. Irenaeus (writing in the late 2nd century): *"The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence."*
  3. Nicolaitan means "to conquer the people"; could be a sect who "lorded over" the church
2. Here's what Jesus says: you guys get 4 Gold Stars: **S**ervants, **S**acrificial, **S**tedfast & stay **S**eparated
3. All admirable & good qualities.
  1. You know the story Martha & Mary
  2. Martha is doing a slow clap for the church in Ephesus
3. *V4 We see the **#4 CRITIQUE/COMPLAINT** that Jesus has for this church 4 "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!*
  1. Wow... this is a big one... why? LOVE is EVERYTHING.
  2. 1 Corinthians 13: *1 If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. 3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.*
  3. Matthew 22: 37 *Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'40 The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."*
  4. Wiersbe: *"What we do for the Lord is important, but so is why we do it! What is "first love"? It is the devotion to Christ that so often characterizes the new believer: fervent, personal, uninhibited, excited, and openly displayed. It is the "honeymoon love" of the husband and wife (Jer. 2:1-2). While it is true that mature married love deepens and grows richer, it is also true that it should never lose the excitement and wonder of those "honeymoon days." When a husband and wife begin to take each other for granted, and life becomes routine, then the marriage is in danger. Just think of it: It is possible to serve, sacrifice, and suffer "for my name's sake" and yet not really love Jesus Christ! The Ephesian believers were so busy maintaining their separation that they were neglecting adoration. Labor is no substitute for love; neither is purity a substitute for passion. The church must have both if it is to please Him."*
  5. Many of our modern English translations of this section say that the Ephesians LEFT their 1st love... not LOST their 1st love...

1. It's something that happens over time
  2. It's a slow fade... you grow CALLOUSED b/c you naturally become CARELESS
  3. It's allowing things to fall from REVIVAL to ROUTINE to RUT...
  6. Jesus did not die for you to be RELIGIOUS about HIM, but in RELATIONSHIP with HIM.
  7. So... what to do?
  4. *V5*, we see the **#5 COMMAND** & **#6 COUNSEL/CAUTION** that Jesus gives to this church, **5** *Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.*
    1. Remember + Repent + Repeat or be Removed
    2. You see, the RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS happens to all of us "You've Lost that Loving Feeling"
      1. The nature of things is to drift, to become unaligned, to cool... to be careless... this is natural...
      2. Everything worth having in life needs nurture/care
      3. This equation is the equation that Jesus gives: Remember + Repent + Repeat
        1. Wiersbe, "Remember (literally "keep on remembering")
          1. Guzik: *When the Prodigal Son was in the pigpen, the 1st step in restoration was remembering what life was like back in his father's home (LK 15). This is always the 1st step in getting back to where we should be with the Lord.*
          2. Be reminded of how good God is... why GATHERING/GROUPING is so important
          2. Repent—change our minds—and confess our sins to the Lord (1 John 1:9).
          3. Repeat the 1st works... prayer, Bible reading & meditation, obedient service, & worship.
      4. The secret to fruitfulness in Jesus is found in simplicity & consistency
        1. Greg Laurie "The secret to the Christian life is long obedience in the same direction. If you want a relationship with God, you have to get up every day and read the Bible, be an active part of a church and you need to have a prayer life."
        2. Martin Luther: "There are two days in my calendar: This day and that Day." — I'm living today for Jesus b/c I recognize that THE day of LORD is coming.
  3. If you don't you'll be REMOVED...
    1. Damned to Hell ... NO... ... Doomed to fruitlessness & insignificance ... no place of influence
    2. If you don't LOVE me & ppl... I'm not hanging around yah... like the ppl of Israel wandering the wilderness and not taking the promise land like they were intended... you don't want that life!
5. Finally in *V7* we see this **#7 COMFORT** to all believers **7** "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

1. This word of COMFORT is to any/everyone — if you are listening ... this applies to you...
2. What does this mean... the one who overcomes?
  1. *Guzik: Jesus seems to speak of overcoming a coldness of heart and lack of love marked by leaving their first love. The promise for these overcomers was a return to Eden (the paradise of God, "the place where God lives."), a restoration, and eternal life. This was meant first in the eternal sense of making it to heaven, which was no small promise to a church threatened with the removal of Jesus' presence. It is also meant in the sense of seeing the effects of the curse rolled back in our own lives through walking in Jesus' redeeming love.*
  2. Repentance = Life... temporally & eternally

## **SO WHAT?**

1. This morning, we see a church that was impressive
  1. Active, insightful, studious, hard-working, patient, fought for doctrinal purity, discerning, tenacious, knew how to endure...
  2. **4 Gold Stars: Servants, Sacrificial, Stedfast & stay Separated**
  3. But, didn't LOVE Jesus nor LOVE ppl
    1. The Ephesian church was a *doctrinally pure* church. Sometimes a focus on *doctrinal purity* will make a congregation cold, suspicious, and intolerant of diversity. "*When love dies orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse, a powerless formalism. Adhesion to the truth sours into bigotry when the sweetness and light of love to Jesus depart.*" (Spurgeon)
    2. We are to be known by our LOVE... LOVE... for JESUS and PEOPLE
2. Be honest for a moment...
  1. Is that what we are KNOWN for?
  2. Is that what you are KNONW for? ... if not, why not?
  3. What do we need to do — Remember + Repent + Repeat or be Removed

**EXHORTATION:** This Winter/Spring, as we **GATHER** on Sundays & **GROUP** together during the week may we continue to **LEARN & LIVE** this truth that **JESUS LOVES CHURCH** ... so may be those who simply LOVE JESUS and LOVE HIS PEOPLE!