



February 6, 2022 ~ “Getting Back To Basics” ~ Revelation 2:1-7

OPEN

What does it mean to “get back to basics”? In athletics? In architecture? In our day to day lives? Our theme today is “**Getting Back To Basics**” as it relates to this adventure of following Jesus.

Today we explore the first of seven letters to churches in Asia Minor. Like Christians face today, these churches were subject to complexity and confusion. Like them, we must get back to basics in our relationship with Jesus. We must love Him as a **Person**, not as a philosophy!

Read Revelation 2:1-7. Did you notice a “*seven-beat rhythm*” in this letter? This is common to each of the seven letters argues author Michael Wilcock in *The Message of Revelation* (IVP, 1975, 37). Here is an example:

- ♪ To the Ephesians
- ♪ speaks the Holder of the seven stars
- ♪ I know certain good things about you
- ♪ but a bad thing too
- ♪ so repent
- ♪ hear what the Spirit says
- ♪ the victor shall eat of the tree of life.

This first letter was written to Ephesus, which was a coastal city near Patmos



It is believed that John was bishop in Ephesus for a time. Ephesus was known for the temple to the goddess Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And fourteen other deities are linked to pagan temples in Ephesus. It was an important city economically due to its port. It was a Roman administrative center. (*Biblical Turkey*, Mark Wilson, Zero Books, 2010) We will view **three key messages** within this letter.



DIG

[A] Commended – verses 2-3

The Victoria Cross is the highest Canadian military honor. Created in 1933, it is awarded for extraordinary valor and devotion to duty in battle. Once presented, recipients may place the initials “VC” after their name. Ephesian believers received special commendation from Jesus in their spiritual battle.

1. **Diligence** – They were commended for deeds and labor (“exhausting toil”). Many churches are industrious which can be a blessing – God uses their efforts in exciting ways to build His Kingdom. “*A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral.*” (French novelist Antoine de Saint-Exupéry quoted in *Managing Transitions* by William & Susan Bridges, De Capo, 2016, 73)
2. **Perseverance** – In verse 2 we read of their perseverance; in verse 3 of their endurance. It was wonderful that they did not grow “weary” when they faced “hardships” (v.3).
3. **Vigilance** – The Ephesians could not abide “evil people” so “examined” those claiming apostleship and “found them false” (lit. *pseudo*). I John 4:1 tells us “*My dear friends, don’t believe everything you hear. Carefully weigh and examine [“prove”] what people tell you. Not everyone who talks about God comes from God. There are a lot of lying preachers loose in the world.*” MESSAGE

In verse 6 the Ephesian believers were commended for hating the “deeds of the Nicolaitans” which we will note in a few moments. You may recall that much of the account in Acts 19 concerning the early days of the church in

Ephesus had to do with conflict with the cult of Artemis. The Gospel was hitting hard at the pagan fertility rituals, idolatry, and ritualized prostitution which made up the worship of the nature goddess Artemis. Paul talks of “fighting with beasts at Ephesus” – **see I Corinthians 15:32-34**.

[B] Cautioned – verses 4,6

But there was a problem in the Ephesus church. Jesus stated, “*I have this against you.*” Now, there appears to be but one indictment against the Ephesian believers – their loss of “first love”. However, there are **two issues** of caution to be found in this passage.

1. **Love (v.4)** – The indictment against the Ephesian Christians was forsaking of their first love. They forgot the basic matter of loving Jesus. Perhaps the geological problem of silt in the Ephesian harbor is a metaphor for the spiritual activity and doctrinal scrutiny that filled their hearts. As commendable as these may be, they choked out loving devotion to Him alone. Michael Wilcock put it this way: “*The mind of man is incurably centrifugal, forever flying off at a tangent.*” (39)
2. **Liberty (v.6)** – The Ephesians are commended (cautioned, by implication) for hating “the practices the Nicolaitans”. This part of the early Church were either overtly pagan or subtly cultic by joining emperor worship. There is scant information about this group but it is thought that it was founded by Nikolas, one of seven deacons (see Acts 6). Clement of Alexandria wrote that Nicolaitans “*abandoned themselves to pleasures like goats in a life of shameless self-indulgence.*” (**Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible**, vol. 4, Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan, 1976, 435)

What about the Church today? Are we in **love** with Jesus? Or are we in love with our spiritual activity and accomplishments. Do you remember Jesus’ words to Peter in John 21:15-17? Three times Jesus said to Peter “*do you love Me...feed/tend My lambs/sheep*”. Are we cautious with our **liberty**? Eugene Peterson (**Reversed Thunder**, Harper, 1988, 51-52) writes,

The church attracts to itself persons who like to live in the atmosphere of the holy but have little interest in being holy themselves. They find delight in working on committees and find security in ordering their lives within the reassuring traditions of the fathers. They are faithful in showing up in church on Sundays and are fortified by listening to the moral instructions of their leaders. But they have no appetited for holiness, or joy, or love. They are wholly conventional and entirely dull. The church is sought out as a sanctuary for living in pious sloth.

[C] Corrected – verse 5,7

Peterson (53) writes that the Church is where we hear what we are doing **right** or **wrong**, but also where we hear **promises**. “*To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise (“park/garden”) of God.*” (v.7b) Jewish apocalyptic writing contained this theme of a **restored Eden** = paradise.

There is significant **promise** and hope in Revelation, especially chapter 22, where we read of the “tree of life” (central to a renewed/resorted Eden) and many other indications of our heavenly home. We have the ultimate motivation to experience God’s correction.

1. **Remember** – A familiar call in Scripture to recite the goodness of God and to remember His salvation (**see Psalm 105:5**). But here the Ephesians were to recall “*the height from which you have fallen!*” (v.5)
2. **Repent** – Not a comfortable command, but necessary. This is a willful, about-face turning from sin and turning towards God.
3. **Resume** – The Ephesians were told, “*do the deeds you did at first*”. Diligence was not their specific problem. Rather, they had fallen into a “diligent distance” from sincere love for Jesus.

What is at stake? The loss of their lampstand – loss life-giving witness to the world. Remember Paul’s **plea** and **prayer** for this church to be rooted in their adoption as sons and daughters – “*eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you*” (Ephesians 1:18).

Reflect

We use familiar phrases that have their roots in Shakespeare’s plays ([READ MORE](#)). Here are some examples.

The be all and end all (*Macbeth*)
Come full circle (*King Lear*)
Bated breath (*Merchant of Venice*)
Forgone conclusion (*Othello*)
In my heart of heart (*Hamlet*)
Send him packing (*Henry IV*)

There is a far more historical and far more important phrase repeated in all seven letters, “*he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” Are we listening? The Holy Spirit is speaking to us!

In his Gospel John recorded these words of Jesus about the Spirit speaking (John 16:13-14).

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Canadian philosopher “*Marshall McLuhan made the arresting observation that nature has not equipped mankind with earlids.*” (Peterson, 49)

Have we closed our “ear-lids” to what God is saying to us?