

# Where'd You Go?

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Revelation 2:1-7

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**Read Revelation 2:1-7**

**Pray – Title**

In the beginning God created mankind for intimate fellowship with Himself. It was far more than Him being bored, or lonely, or needing something. The Bible teaches us that **God does not need anything**. He is entirely self-sufficient and self-existent. He was before time, and could have been eternally content without ever having created anything.

But because of the **love** within God, He created mankind to know Him and have fellowship with Him.

This question that makes our title, almost echo's out of Garden of Eden. It echoes throughout the entire world, and has sounded forth into every age since the fall of mankind.

**Genesis 3:8a**

<sup>8a</sup> And they [Adam and Eve] heard the sound of the Lord God **walking in the garden** in the cool of the day...

God, who had created them and desired to have fellowship with them, came looking for them. You could aptly say, ***In pursuit of them.***

**A.W. Tozer – *Pursuit of God***

*All is of God, for as von Hugel teaches, **God is always previous**. In practice, however, (that is, where God's previous working meets man's present response) **man must pursue God**. Or, our part there must be positive reciprocation if this secret drawing of God is to eventuate in identifiable experience of the Divine. In the warm language of personal feeling this is stated in the Forty-second Psalm: "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come. and appear before God?" This is deep calling unto deep, and the longing heart will understand it.*

Makes me wonder if this was **God's time with them**. Was this an **appointment? A place and time?**

I sense that He anticipated this time with Adam and Eve...***with you as well.***

**Genesis 3:8b**

<sup>8b</sup> Adam and his wife **hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God** among the trees of the garden.

In shame, embarrassment, conviction, guilt...they hide themselves, as if that's a thing you can do. I will mention before we move any further, that you may be **hiding from God** at this very moment.

You may be ashamed and convicted about some sin, or possibly, as we'll see today, you are **just too busy**. Look at what God says to them (*and us*).

### Genesis 3:9

<sup>9</sup> Then the Lord **God called to Adam** [GOD Initiates the CALL!] and said to him, "**Where are you?**"

In other words, God says...**Where'd You Go?** The fellowship, the relationship, and the intimacy **that was once there, was gone now.**

Of course, we know that with Adam and Eve that the broken fellowship and distance from God was caused by disobedience to His direct command, or more simply...sin.

The Bible is clear, that you and I **CAN NOT** walk in disobedience while, at the same time, claiming to love God. You cannot live in unrepentant and unresisted sin **and claim love towards God.**

### John 14:15

<sup>15</sup> **"If you love Me, keep My commandments.**

### 1 John 3:4–6

<sup>4</sup> Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> And you know that **He was manifested to take away our sins**, and in Him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> **Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.**

### David Guzik

*It is very important to understand what the Bible means – and what it does not mean – when it says "**does not sin**" (in 1 Jn 3:6). According to the verb tense John uses, "**does not sin**" means does not live a life style of habitual sin...The grammar of 1 John 3:6 indicates that John is speaking of a settled, continued lifestyle of sin. John is not teaching here the possibility of sinless perfection. "The present tense in the Greek verb implied habit, continuity, unbroken sequence" (Stott).*

The terrifying truth we are about to learn from Jesus' letter to Ephesus is that though it is not possible to love God while living in unbroken, unresisted, unrepentant disobedience to Him, **it is possible** to obey God *outwardly* without any real affection for Him *inwardly*.

What God desires from you and I is an *inward affection* and *love that drives an obedient faith*.

### Matthew 22:36–38

<sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” <sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup> This is the first and great commandment.”

It was this sort of Love that Jesus was looking for from the Church at Ephesus. And it was this sort of love that Ephesus *had lost for Jesus*, as we’ll see.

### *Has your love grown cold for Jesus?*

First, Jesus is going to address His church, then He is going to make **3 observations** about their *spiritual condition*. So, we’ll only have 1 main point today with 3 sub-points.

## 1. My Beloved Ephesus

**For context’s sake**, Jesus has John write these letters to these 7 churches in Asia Minor. These 7 letters were literal letters, to actual churches right at the end of the first century.

What is unique about these letters is that they are so dynamic and so searching. They serve several purposes... Beginning with addressing these first century churches.

They also serve as an outline for the entirety of church history from the first century till now. They also give us a spiritual diagnostic of *every church* and *every believer* throughout the church age.

Look to whom He addresses it:

### **Verse 1a:**

*To the angel of the church of Ephesus write*

The *angel* or lit. “messenger”, was most likely the leader, the elder, the pastor of the church. God has often addressed the leader of a group to disseminate His message to the rest, think of Moses, Joshua, the Kings, Prophets, and Apostles. To get the message out, He starts with the leader.

So, **Ephesus** is the first Church that Jesus addresses. **Ephesus** was a city known as “The light of Asia” and “The First City of Asia.” It was a strategic port city that, of the 7 churches he wrote to, was closest to Patmos, where John was writing from.

Interesting to note, that though they were considered “*The Light of Asia*” they were in danger of *losing their lampstand* according to verse 5.

Jesus desires to use **every church** and **every believer** as a light to shine out His truth and the saving message of the Gospel to the rest of the world.

#### Matthew 5:16

<sup>16</sup> **Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

The problem was, that as Ephesus drifted from *affection* for the Lord, they were drifting from *effectiveness* for the Lord too. In his letter to this same church about 30 years earlier, Paul had commanded them **walk in the light**.

#### Ephesians 5:8

<sup>8</sup> For you were once darkness, but now **you are light** in the Lord. **Walk as children of light**

Now, they were in danger of having the lights turned off. *Why?* Well, the problem was that in Ephesus, **it had become all duty**. The fire of their **devotion** and love for Christ had grown dim, and at the moment, there was only smoldering embers of love left, if any at all.

Without a consuming love for Jesus, **we may go through the motions of the Christian life**, but there will be *no light, no heat, no life*. And seeing this take place, Jesus writes a letter.

#### Verse 1b:

*‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand,  
who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:*

In each of the 7 letters Jesus describes Himself in a specific way to the specific church He is addressing. He reminds them of some of His attributes depending on the individual spiritual condition of that church.

In this unique *heading*, Jesus describes Himself in **2 ways**, and from these **2 descriptions** we get a good picture of Jesus’ relationship to His church.

**First:** Jesus says He is the One who **holds the seven stars in His right hand**. **He is the Lord of His church**. The Pastors, Elders, Deacons, and leaders *only have the authority allotted to them by Jesus in His Word*.

## Colossians 1:18

<sup>18</sup> And **He is the head of the body, the church**, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things **He may have the preeminence**.

**Preeminence: First and foremost in order, Rank, and Importance.**

It is **HIS** church. According to Acts 20:28, He ***purchased it with His own blood***. So Jesus reminds this leader that his position, calling, power, influence, authority...it's all in Jesus' ***right hand***. The hand of *strength, power, authority*.

This is good for each of us to remember...whatever authority you or I have in life, is ultimately authority under Christ. He is the One with **ALL** authority, and He is the one who gives authority.

**Second:** He says He is the One ***who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands***: Jesus is ***in the midst*** of His church. The church is indwelt by Jesus. He is present in His church both corporately and individually.

The church is the ***Property*** of Jesus – He purchased it. He redeemed it! And within the church is ***His Presence***, in that He ***dwells in the midst*** of His church and His people.

When it comes to ***Ephesus***: We read in Acts, the Epistle to the Ephesians, and church history, that this church **started out so well**.

***A solid walk with Jesus today does not guarantee one tomorrow.***

This is the first observation Jesus makes, is that they had started strong.

### My Beloved Ephesus

#### 1a. You Were Doing So Well (2-3, 6)

Jesus begins by acknowledging those good and commendable characteristics about Ephesus that were praiseworthy. I think sometimes we get the idea that because God is a just judge, that He is a harsh judge. But here we see His kindness in addressing those good things.

#### **VERSE 2a:**

***I know your works***

Jesus opens each of the 7 letters in this same way. Because Jesus' eyes of affection are on His churches and His people, He sees their every deed. He sees it all!

## Ecclesiastes 12:14

<sup>14</sup> For God will bring every work into judgment,  
Including every secret thing,  
Whether good or evil.

## Romans 14:12

<sup>12</sup> So then **each of us shall give account of himself to God.**

In light of that, Jesus brings up those good things:

### VERSE 2a:

*I know your works, your labor, your patience*

**Labor:** Toil (Making weary), Pains, Laboring to exhaustion.

**Patience:** Perseverance, Enduring, Cheerful endurance, Patient Continuance.

- Often has to do with **Patience and perseverance** while suffering.

This church has labored to the point of exhaustion and persevered through every difficulty with a cheerful endurance. ***This is a pretty amazing church! But wait...there's more...***

### VERSE 2b:

*and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;*

Jesus says that they refused to put up with the false prophets and false apostles. They examined their lives and doctrine, just like Jesus told them to and found them to phonies and liars.

This church maintained their doctrinal purity. They would not put up with false doctrine and false teachers. Around 40 or so years earlier, Paul had commanded *the Ephesian elders* to do this very thing:

## Acts 20:29–31

<sup>29</sup> For I know this, that after my departure **savage wolves** will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Also from among yourselves men will rise up, **speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves**. <sup>31</sup> **Therefore watch**, and remember that for three years I **did not cease to warn everyone** night and day with tears.

According to church history they took heed to this warning. Ignatius, who was a disciple of John said this in a letter to Ephesus:

### Ignatius

*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.*

Cyril Richardson – *Early Christian Fathers*

Are you *testing the doctrines* that come across your eyes, ears, screens?

### Revelation 2:6

<sup>6</sup> But this you have, **that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans**, which I also hate.

There are 2 main views on these guys that good scholars disagree on.

1. They loved power and authority and position and used those to *rule over* God's people.
2. They taught essentially that it didn't matter how you lived. Faith mattered, morality didn't.

*Jesus hates both of these false teachings.*

Then look at verse 3:

*and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.*

Jesus commended them for their unwavering *perseverance*, *patience*, and *labor*, all the while, not becoming *weary*.

Ephesus was a seemingly strong church, with sound doctrine, great discernment, perseverance, and labored for Jesus' name. Think about it, **they were doing so well...** Which brings us to the 2<sup>nd</sup> observation that Jesus makes:

### My Beloved Ephesus

#### 1b. You Left Me Behind (4)

With this entire letter moving in one direction, there is an immediate change in the direction and tone with just one word, look at verse 4: "**Nevertheless...**"

This is a word of contrast. Everything He had commended them for was in danger of being lost by **this one thing** they were missing.

They were in danger of losing all those good things, because they were missing the **most important thing**.

#### VERSE 4a:

*Nevertheless I have this against you*

This same GK word for **against** is the word used for when the religious leaders brought charges **against** Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Picture in your mind, a courtroom type of setting.

It's as though He is saying, *despite all those good things...I have this one charge against you. One crime you are guilty of.*

**VERSE 4b:**

*that you have left your first love.*

**Left:** Forsake, Lay aside, Leave, Put Away, Send Away, Abandon.

**First:** Foremost in time, place, order, or importance; best, chiefest.

This verse, and these words give us a unique window into the heart of Jesus for His church, and for every individual believer. It shows us what He desires most from you and me.

What is the motivation for ***why you do the things you do? Where might a love for Christ be found?***

**1 John 4:19**

**19 We love Him because He first loved us.**

**Charles Spurgeon**

*Our love to Jesus begins with trust. We experience his goodness, and then we love Him in return. "We love Him because He first loved us." They say that love is blind; I should think it is, from what I have seen of it in some people; but love to Christ might have ten thousand eyes, and yet be justified in loving Him. **The more you see Him, the more you know Him, the more you live with Him, the more reason will you have for loving Him.** There will never come a time in which you will have to question whether you were right to surrender your heart to Him; but even throughout the eternal ages you shall, in the felicities of His blessed company, feel that you were, in fact, more than justified in calling Him your Beloved.*

Look at what the Apostle Paul said his motivation was for living the Christian life:

**2 Corinthians 5:14–15**

**14 For the love of Christ compels us,** because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; **15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him** who died for them and rose again.

**Compel:** Lit. *To hold together*", To compress, To arrest, To Hold (like a prisoner.)

It was the love of Jesus for Paul that held him together and took him like a captive into obedience and service. ***It was not merely duty for Paul, it was devotion.***

For Paul, the love of Jesus for him *moved him*. Think of the transformation of the life of the Apostle. If we could interview Paul and ask, *"why the change Paul? What's that all about?"*

Paul would answer: *“Jesus loved me. Loves me. And Jesus will always love me. **How could I not love Him in return? How could I not live for Him?**”*

### Charles Spurgeon

*“Thou hast left thy first love.” “Is that serious?” saith one. It is the most serious ill of all; for the church is the bride of Christ, and for a bride to fail in love is to fail in all things. It is idle for the wife to say that she is obedient, and so forth: if love to her husband has evaporated, her wifely duty cannot be fulfilled, she has lost the very life and soul of the marriage state. So, my brethren, this is a most important matter, our love to Christ, because it touches the very heart of that communion with him which is the crown and essence of our spiritual life.*

Have you...have I become like Ephesus? Has our love grown cold like a dying fire, and a smoldered flame? Look at the conversation that God has with Israel in Jeremiah’s day.

### Jeremiah 2:2, 5, 12-13

<sup>2</sup> “Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, ‘**Thus says the Lord: “I remember you, the kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown...<sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord: “What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, have followed idols, and have become idolaters? ...<sup>12</sup> Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; Be very desolate,”** says the Lord. <sup>13</sup> “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns **that can hold no water.**

The LORD reminded Israel of their *pursuit of Him*. Their *pursuit of holiness*. Their *childlike faith*. **What about you?** Has time caused you to pull back from the pursuit?

### John MacArthur

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

They didn’t even realize they were robbing themselves of the blessing and putting their spiritual life in danger. If you’re a follower of Jesus today, you should know the blessing of being close to Him and intimate with Him and the pain of filling yourself with the things of the world. **It is miserable!**

For Israel in Jeremiah’s day, and for us now...whatever has taken the primary seat of affection in our heart, will only be a broken, leaky vessel at best.

Let me ask, **have you become like Ephesus?** Have you allowed other things, **even good things** to distract you from the **one thing** that **really matters**.

Mary and Martha.

### Luke 10:42

<sup>42</sup> But **one thing is needed**, and **Mary has chosen that good part**, which will not be taken away from her.”

That brings us to the final observation that Jesus makes:

### My Beloved Ephesus

#### 1c. You Can Come Back (5, 7)

Jesus, full of grace, full of mercy, full of compassion, invites the Ephesians to come back, look at verse 5:

### Revelation 2:5

<sup>5</sup> **Remember** therefore from where you have fallen; **repent** and **do the first works**, or else I will come to you quickly and **remove your lampstand** from its place—unless you **repent**.

**Remember:** (Pres – Act – Imp) Exercise your memory, Recollect, Rehearse, Be mindful: *Lit.* “Keep on Remembering.”

**Repent:** To think differently afterwards, Reconsider. *Change your mind.*

It’s as though Jesus says, “Go back in your minds to when you did love Me, and stay there!”

**Notice:** He tells them to do the **first works**, what is that? It’s the same word we studied early for **first love**. Jesus purposely repeats and plays on that word.

He is reminding them that the most important **work**, the preeminent **work**, is to **love God with all your...heart, soul, mind, and strength**.

### John Stott

*The work will be the same as it was during the intervening period of lovelessness, or similar. But there will be a new vigor in the doing of it, a singleness of mind and purity of motive, a new secret joyful perseverance in the face of many trials...Love will cause a transformation scene on the stage of Ephesus.*

If they don’t...the consequences are dire; they are in danger of losing their lampstand. He does not speak about losing salvation, **that’s not possible**, but the Ephesian church will fade away into spiritual obscurity and lose its light and influence for the Gospel.

**What are they to do?**

## What are WE to do?

They are commanded to **Remember, Repent,** and **Restart.**

**Remember:** To take an honest look in the spiritual mirror. Have the things of this world taken precedence over the Love you had for Christ?

**Repent:** “A change of mind that leads to a change of direction.” There is a purposeful decision to change your ways and reorient the posture of your heart to make sure that all that you do, you do in love for Christ.

**Restart:** The blessing of the Gospel and wonder of the character of God is that He offers and brand-new start, a clean slate, a new beginning.

### Lamentations 3:22–23

<sup>22</sup> *Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed,  
Because His compassions fail not.  
<sup>23</sup> **They are new every morning;**  
Great is Your faithfulness.*

***This was an invitation to return to their first love, and this is YOUR INVITATION to return you your first love.***

Before you think this invitation doesn’t apply to you, notice verse 7...

### Revelation 2:7a

<sup>7</sup> **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

This is a personalized message for every believer. It was addressed to Ephesus, but it applies to us too. Jesus had to have a similar conversation with Peter. You guys know the account well.

### John 21:15–17

<sup>15</sup> So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “**Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?**” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” ...<sup>16</sup> He said to him again a second time, “**Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?**” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” ...<sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, “**Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?**” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.”

Jesus is not demanding a **perfect love**, but He does require a **genuine love**, that prioritizes Him above all.

As I mentioned at the beginning, for some it may be a sin or sins that you have allowed in your life, where today Jesus would call upon you to love Him more than that sin. Genuine repentance would be *turning away* from sin **AND** *turning to Christ*.

For others, it may be that you're doing all the right things, plugging away, serving away, but like Martha, Jesus would say, *There is something better, don't stop those good things, but don't neglect the better thing*.