

# I.

## THE NUMBING CHURCH: EPHESUS

We learn of the founding of the church at Ephesus in Acts 18:24, where a certain Jew by the name of Apollos came to Ephesus. He was eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures. Through his teaching the church began. Later the Apostle Paul came and instructed them more fully in the way of the Gospel and helped them to understand becoming a Christian also meant to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-5).

The Apostle Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years. So from Ephesus the Gospel went out. All those who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

During that time they had a riot in the town when the silversmiths became upset because Paul's teaching was eroding their business of making idols of the goddess Diana.

Paul's last meeting with Ephesian believers (Acts 20) was on his way to Jerusalem for a feast. He stopped in Troas and preached a long sermon from the beginning of the first day of the week, sun-down on the Sabbath, until morning. He went on to Miletus and sent word to the elders at Ephesus to come to Miletus for his farewell. His closing words in Acts 20:28-32 are significant and meaningful for them and for us:

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

It is important for us to see what the Apostle Paul by the Spirit anticipated. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians contains many outstanding teachings for the Christian walk. Six chapters are devoted to Paul’s concern and teaching for believers.

The conditions Paul saw as he warned the elders developed within some thirty years, as Jesus viewed the church from His position as glorified Christ. In the book of Revelation, chapters two and three, Jesus commented on the conditions of seven churches in Asia Minor. Among them was Ephesus.

The glorified Christ’s words to **THE NUMBING CHURCH** at Ephesus are recorded in **Revelation 2:1-7**.

*1. “Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven candlesticks;*

*2. I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:*

*3. And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured and hast not fainted.*

*4. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love.*

*5. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.*

*6. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.*

*7. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”*

We must now learn how the Lord of the church viewed the body of Christ. While this was given to a particular church it has wide applications even to our day. Follow me as we examine the several PARTICULARS contained in Jesus’ overview of the church at Ephesus.

The first particular is

### **HIS INTIMACY.**

He holds the seven stars in His hands. When we first are introduced to Him in the book of Revelation in chapter 1, we find Him in the midst of the golden candlesticks with seven stars in His right hand. Now, too, we see that He held the seven stars in His right hand. The definition for these stars is given in Revelation 1:20: “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.” Angels are ministering spirits. Holding them in His right hand meant He controlled them so that when He spoke for them to minister they ministered. They are ministering spirits.

We further see Him walking in the midst of the seven golden lamp stands. In the first chapter He was standing in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. His position of intimacy with the church at Ephesus was that He was walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks as though to examine the churches. The candlesticks are defined as the churches in Revelation 1:20. Walking suggests to examine. He had not abandoned His position but He was intimately associated with the churches. In Ephesus He was intimately concerned about them.

We can make a direct application to the twentieth century church and the decade of the nineties. Christ today is personally interested in the church. His intimacy means that He is walking, examining the condition of the church.

The second particular is

### **HIS PERCEPTION.**

His knowledge was incisive. Nothing escaped Him. Notice how the second verse begins, “I know thy works.” As we carefully read again what He said, we can understand that His perception was thorough, absolute. “I know thy works, and thy labour,” working for the Lord, “and thy patience,” endurance under pressure, “and how thou canst not bear them which are evil:” having a sense of purpose with God and understanding that evil and good cannot mix. “And thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not.” Apparently in the days when Jesus was speaking to the church at Ephesus there were those who claimed particular right and authority which they did not possess, “and hast found them liars.”

He went on in verse three, “And hast borne, and hast patience,” held up under pressure, “and for my name’s sake hast laboured,” motivation was to be directed to do what Jesus wanted done, “and hast not fainted.” A glowing list of activities. The church at Ephesus was to be commended. Jesus commended them for their wide activity and carefulness in the area and field of service.

There is a parallel between old Israel and the church at Ephesus. As we read the history of Israel in the Old Testament, we learn when the spirituality of the people of Israel declined, activity increased. During the reigns of certain kings the people of Israel built altars to idols on every high hill and under every green tree, the Scripture tells us. So when their spirituality declined their activity increased.

What does your church bulletin show? Do you have a long list of activities? The church does this, this, this and this. Maybe Jesus would say to you, “I see what you are doing.” But is that really the final test? The Lord has a definite, careful, revealing perception of this church, Ephesus: the numbing church. I call it the numbing church because of its third particular.

The third particular is

### **HIS PROPOSITION.**

Here are most sorrowful words: “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee,” They strike into the very heart of the Gospel. “Thou

hast left.” There is a vast difference between leaving and losing. Jesus used the word that means decisive action. “You have left, with decision, your first love.” That word, love, is used for the highest concept of love, agape. They had grown numb toward Jesus. Their hearts did not pulsate as they once had when they understood the ministry and sacrifice of Jesus.

Then He gave His purposeful proposition in verse five. “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen.” Remember, keep on remembering, keep in your mind where you once were, from whence you have fallen. There was a better, higher road, a life with more than what they were then experiencing. Remember and repent is a good combination. Remember and repent. Turn back. Recover again. Repent means do it now. It is an imperative as indeed the word remember is. The command comes from the Lord who is walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

Repent, return, recover. Do it now without delay. “And do the first works.” First love and first works are united. First works will reflect in their lives that they know who Jesus is. The proposition was do this or else. Repent or else. There were not many options, only two. If they did not repent their candlestick would be removed. It is an either/or proposition. Either they repent or their candlestick would be removed.

There were not many ways. The Lord gave only two options, repent or else. Too bad. There is no church in Ephesus today. Oh, they have built a memorial church for John the Apostle. The last time Mrs. Yoder and I were there they were working on it. But actually the body of Christ is not there. The candlestick has been removed.

I believe the Lord’s proposition is a great need we have today. Remember and repent. Return to your first love. Come back to the cross where the Savior died! Let that motivate your life and reactivate your devotion.

The future of our country lies in the attitude of its people. That is why this study of the church at Ephesus is so important. We are in a numbing period. We have left our first love. We need to remember, repent and come back to the Lord.

The Lord of the church walks among the churches today seeking to relate to them. The Lord of the church clearly perceives the activities of the church commending the good and feeling sad that the church has left her first love. The Lord of the church proposes only two options, repent or else I will remove your candlestick out of its place.

These are serious words from the Lord Jesus. His overview of the church at Ephesus certainly relates to us today. Many have left their first love. If that is you then hear the word of Jesus: “Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.”

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*This is a sample of “Repent or Else” from [heraldsofhope.org](http://heraldsofhope.org).*