

Lesson 83

Letter to the Church in Ephesus ⇒ Revelation 2:1~7

(The Loveless Church)

- **(V.1)** The first thing to note in **V.1** is that it says, **'To the angel of the Church of Ephesus write...'** It does not say *'from Ephesus,'* but *'of Ephesus (more correct should be in Ephesus).'* The Church of Jesus Christ meets in Ephesus. The Church is not from Ephesus. We are all pilgrims and strangers, and no one belongs to a particular place. The Church of Jesus Christ should not be given names such as *'such-and-such Church,'* *'Church A,'* *'Church B,'* etc. It should simply be the Church that meets in a particular city. That is how the Church of Jesus began. So why did it change?
- **'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:'**
Who's speaking? Jesus. In each letter, Jesus presents himself with characteristics similar to those with which he appeared to John in Chapter 1. The characteristic with which Jesus presents himself to a given Church has everything to do with that Church's real situation, and the same applies to us individually if we identify with that Church.
- Historically, the Church of Ephesus represents the development of Jesus's Church during the first century, from 30 to 100 CE. Interestingly, the word Ephesus can mean two opposite things: *'desired'* or *'loose'*.
- In this letter, we see the first seeds of apostasy enter the Church. Rather than being uprooted, these seeds were cared for and nurtured. They are still alive today, firmly planted and spread throughout the Church. We will see this later.
- Ephesus was the main city in the Roman province of Asia. The Temple of the Great Goddess Diana, the patron goddess of the Ephesians, was located there. Diana was different from the Roman goddess of the hunt, Diana the Huntress. The Ephesian Diana was also called Artemis. The Temple of Diana was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. When Paul began to preach against paganism in Ephesus, the Ephesians shouted, *'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!'* for two hours, and there was a great uproar in the city.

⇒ Acts 19:23~41

- The Church in Ephesus is one that we would all like to be a part of because Paul taught there for three years, and Aquila and Priscilla were members. Who else led this Church? Timothy and John. Have you ever thought about it? Who is the Pastor of your Church? The Apostle John. Who teaches Sunday school? Aquila and Priscilla?
- **(V.2); 'I know your works, your labor, your patience, 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;'**
 - **'I know your works;** Labor was a working church.
 - **'your patience;** A Church that persevered.

- **'you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not'**; If someone presented himself as an apostle, he had to pass the doctrine test. If he failed, the members cast him out!

- **(V.3); 'and you have persevered and have patience and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.'**

It shows here that the Church endured trials for the sake of Jesus' name. This description aligns with John's greeting in Chapter 1, which mentions tribulation, the kingdom, and perseverance. This Church experienced tribulation, endured trials, worked for the kingdom, and persevered. Isn't this the Church that Jesus is talking about?

- However, **V.4** introduces the first and most serious problem of the Church.

'NEVERTHELESS, I HAVE THIS AGAINST YOU, THAT YOU HAVE LEFT YOUR FIRST LOVE.'

When we read about this Church, we see that it is characterized by perseverance, hard work, and labor. It did not tolerate false apostles or false teachers. If it found liars among them, it cast them out. It endured trials through perseverance. We think, 'It endured trials?' At that time, it was not easy. Enduring trials meant more than dealing with a difficult spouse, child, parent, or school. It meant being killed in a horrible way, being stripped of one's possessions and family. The Church in Ephesus was going through this. However, **V.4** says, **'NEVERTHELESS, I HAVE THIS AGAINST YOU, THAT YOU HAVE LEFT YOUR FIRST LOVE.'**

- We may think, *'It's not that serious to abandon your first love,'* but it was a Church that worked hard and persevered. Folks! In the spiritual realm, abandoning your first love is so serious that, if we read **V.5**, we will see that God calls Ephesus a fallen church: **'Remember therefore from where you have fallen' (V.5)**. The judgment that follows shows how serious it is to abandon your first love.

- **(V.5), '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, Church, He is speaking to us. It's possible to be dedicated to the Lord's work without having the love God expects. What kind of love does God want us to have? When you truly love someone, what do you want to do? You want to be with them all the time.

- When a boy and a girl are in love and meet, they spend hours together. You ask them what they talked about, and they answer, *'Nothing.'* *'You didn't say anything? But weren't you together for so long?'*

Yes, but we're just staying together. You see, we enjoy just being together. You can't be without each other. When one of you gets home, you immediately call the other. You can't be apart. It's not about doing anything specific; it's about being together. Loving the Lord means wanting to walk with Him and do everything that pleases Him. That is loving the Lord; that is being in the first stage of love. Without this kind of love, which makes us stick to the Lord, no work is effective. In God's eyes, no work will replace the desire to be with Him. On the contrary, it will be dead, dry, and automatic work that leads nowhere.

- However, a worker who truly walks with the Lord and is in love with Him – where the main thing is his relationship with God – does wonderful things. Whatever he does works, bears fruit, and is joyful and shining.

⇒ **Psalms 1:1~3**, *'And whatever he does shall prosper.'*

When you see one person say something one way and another person say the same thing another way, it seems to have life. What is the difference? One walks with God in intimacy, while the other only works for God. God does not want that.

- However, this letter contains the first rebuke for us. Losing our first love for God is so serious that God says, *'If you do not repent and return to your first love, I will remove your lampstand from its place.'* What does 'remove' mean? It does not mean losing salvation because God does not say that he will destroy the lampstand. What does the lampstand do? It illuminates and witnesses, and Jesus is in the midst of the lampstands. Jesus says, *'I will remove it. It will leave my presence. It will no longer have my light to reflect. It will not have the oil of the Spirit to keep it lit. I will remove the lampstand. That is what it means. The witness ends.'*
- A perfect example of what first love is, which unfortunately we see a lot around us, is when a couple who spends hours talking and can't live without each other gets married. Life goes on, and suddenly, the woman takes care of the house and children while her friends, and the husband begins to worry about work and providing for the family, which is legitimate. All of this replaces that communion, companionship, and pleasure of being together. The relationship cools and becomes automatic. Outsiders think they are an exemplary couple. I'm not talking about couples who argue openly. The woman is the perfect housewife, and the man is exemplary. Then, suddenly, the news breaks: *'So-and-so and so-and-so have separated.'* Oh, but I thought they were so close! What could have caused this? They lost their first love and didn't regret it or go back. They thought it was normal; that's just how it was. When you lose your first love in a marriage, you open the door to the demons of separation and family destruction.
- That is what John is talking about when it comes to our relationship with God. When we accept Jesus into our hearts, it's like a fire; we want to talk about him with everyone we meet. We only want to talk about Jesus. We don't want anything else. We only want to read the Bible. Suddenly, because you fall into a routine and stop studying the Bible and seeking a relationship with God, everything becomes automatic. It cools down and becomes routine. You go to Church, come back, and Sunday comes and goes. It has cooled off; it's over. Even worse, our ability to love and devote ourselves to God is diverted to the world. Suddenly, you are worse off than when you first approached God. Am I saying things you have never heard before? If not, believe it.
- It's dangerous! Losing your first love is a sign that you are losing your testimony for God.

⇒ **Acts 1:8**; *'And you shall be witnesses to Me.'*

That is why we are in this world – to be witnesses and nothing else. As Paul said in ⇒ **1 Timothy 6:8**, *'And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.'* Our mission and purpose on Earth is to follow Jesus's example. What kind of relationship did Jesus have with God? It was a complete one, and when Jesus spoke, things happened.

⇒ **John 17:20~23**; *'That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You;'*

Jesus did nothing without first spending long periods of time in prayer with the Father. What did Jesus do before choosing his twelve apostles?

⇒ **Luke 6:12~16**; *'And continued all night in prayer to God.'* Jesus looked at the people, and the Holy Spirit said: *'This one, that one.'*

- Church, that's what it's all about. Everything depends on zeal because God doesn't want things to be automatic. A life of love for God is a life of love. It warms the heart. It is a pleasant life. It is a life of adventure. It is rich, precious, and exciting. A routine life in Church is boring; it's just going through the motions. Living with God 24/7 is the greatest emotion; you never know what will happen. We plan one thing, but something else happens. Monotony has no place here.

- Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians describes the Church in Ephesus 30 years before the events recorded in the Book of Revelation. Let's see what Paul said about this Church during its early years.

⇒ **Ephesians 1:15**; *'After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,'*

- 30 years later, Jesus says: ***'NEVERTHELESS, I HAVE THIS AGAINST YOU, THAT YOU HAVE LEFT YOUR FIRST LOVE – REPENT AND RETURN.'*** When we lose the fervor of our first love, the first thing that happens is we start looking out for ourselves. When you are in love for the first time, you do everything unconditionally. But when you're no longer in that state and working for God, you begin to see your rights. When you work in love, you don't think about the rewards. Then, God uses us, and we don't even realize it. I believe that Ephesus did not repent. Today, Ephesus is in ruins. Throughout the territory where the Church was established, Islam reigns. Ephesus did not return to its first love.

- But Jesus continues: **(V.6); *'But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.'***

Does God hate? Of course he does. God hates sin. We must hate everything that God hates and love everything that God loves.

⇒ **Proverbs 8:13**; *'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil;'*

⇒ **Proverbs 9:10**; *'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;'*

Our love and hate should be guided by what God loves and hates. If God hates the practices of the Nicolaitans, then we should too.

- However, we first need to know who the *'Nicolaitans'* are. Otherwise, how can we hate their works? One interpretation is that there was a man named Nicolaus who was very worldly and entered the Church. Many followed him in his worldly practices. However, there is no concrete evidence to support this belief. Therefore, the interpretation based on the meaning of the word *'Nicolaitan'* is much more plausible.

The word *'Nicolaitan'* comes from two other words: *'Nical,'* meaning *'to conquer'* or *'to dominate,'* and *'laos,'* meaning *'people.'* Thus, it means *'to conquer the people'* or *'to dominate the people.'*

- God hates anyone who dominates others. This diabolical principle entered the Church at that time. It is another human doctrine formed in the spiritual realm of darkness by the devil and taken up by the Church: *'the doctrine of the laity and the clergy'*. Question: Who is a layman, and who is a priest, in the eyes of God?
 - ⇒ **Revelation 1:6**; *'And has made us kings and priests to His God and Father.'*
 - ⇒ **Revelation 5:10**; *'And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.'*
 - ⇒ **1 Peter 2:5**; *'Are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood,'*

All of these passages, and many others, speak of whom? They speak of those who have accepted Jesus as the Lord and Savior of their lives and have been born again. They speak of those who are part of the true Church, the Body of Christ. Hallelujah!

- We are all priests, not just the pastor. That concept comes from the Old Testament. The doctrine of clergy and laity is not biblical. In the Church, there is a diversity of gifts and ministries. Each of us has at least one gift: some have the gift of pastoring, some gift of teaching, and some gift of mercy.

⇒ **Romans 12:3~8**

The pastor is not a priest; we are all priests. There is no clergy or laity in the Church of Jesus Christ. Do you see how many misconceptions there are? Who are the Nicolaitans? They are the ones who say, 'You don't understand the Bible. We'll explain it to you.' This is domination of the people. It is the work of Nicolaitans – men who take leadership positions to dominate and manipulate God's people for political gain. Anyone who studies history knows that religion has always been used by great powers to dominate and manipulate people.

- In short, the first two seeds of apostasy against sound doctrine were not uprooted in the Church of Ephesus; rather, they were cultivated and took deep root. They spread and are still present in the Church of Jesus Christ today.

The loss of first love – the abandonment of first love! Today, the Church of Jesus is, as a whole, cold and frozen, an intellectual Church. The way doctrine is taught reaches the intellect but not the spirit or heart. The Church knows all the doctrines, knows what is right, agrees, and is critical, but does not live by its beliefs. This is due to the loss of first love. No one who has abandoned their first love can say, as Paul did, *'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.'*

The other seed was *'Nicolaitanism,'* or the domination of some over the people of God. The Church has never gotten rid of these two influences, which are still present today.
- **(V.7); 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'**

Hallelujah! Do you remember what happened to the Tree of Life at the beginning of the story? After man became sinful, God forbade him from eating the fruit of the Tree of Life. When God created man in the middle of the Garden of Eden, there were two trees: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eating the fruit of the Tree of Life was not prohibited, but eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was.

- If man had eaten the fruit of the Tree of Life, it would have been as if he were saying to God, *'I want to perpetuate the life that was breathed into me. I am in full likeness and communion with God the Creator.'* That initial state would have continued. However, man ate from the other tree, which was a test, and he failed. By eating the forbidden fruit, sin entered the human race, and God denied access to the Tree of Life. Why?

If man ate from the Tree of Life in his sinful state, he would no longer have a chance to be saved because the Tree of Life perpetuates the prevailing state of whoever eats its fruit. Therefore, God forbade it and placed a flaming sword that constantly revolves in the presence of two cherubim to guard it.

⇒ **Genesis 3:23~24**

- However, the promise made to the victor of the Church is now the return of the Tree of Life. What does this mean? For those who are completely holy and restored, eating from the Tree of Life guarantees eternal life and the perpetuation of their perfected state. This is why the Tree of Life is reserved for the victor. When raptured, the overcomer will be perfect and able to feed from the Tree of Life in God's paradise. Hallelujah!
- Let's read again ⇒ **Revelation 2:1~7; the letter to the church in Ephesus**