

Revelation – The Church at Ephesus – Revelation 2:1-7

Review Ch. 1 (verse 19)

The Chief-Shepherd who walks among the lampstands can accurately judge the thoughts and intents

Luke 18:8 – “. . . when the Son of Man comes will He find faith on the Earth?”

1 Pet 4:17 – Judgment has begun with the House of God (church compromises and closures – tear down to build up)

Christ promised to “build His church” / “the gates of hell would not prevail (**Matthew 16:18**)”. He possesses keys of death and hell (**Rev. 1:18**) gates can never close on the one entrusted him or her

To be absent from the body (death) is to be present with the Lord (**2 Cor. 5:8**).

True church comprised of those placed into His body by Holy Spirit through new birth (**1 Cor. 12:13**)

Jesus is also **refining His church**. As Ephesians 5 details, “. . . Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word**, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Despite the spots and wrinkles Jesus is currently refining at Christ The Rock Church in De Pere, we belong to Jesus, He is both walking in our midst and is the center of our fellowship.

Today we will begin our look at Revelation chapter 2 and the first of the seven letters to the seven churches to which Jesus wrote. The seven in total are listed in chapter 1 verse 11: Ephesus, and Smyrna, and Pergamum, and Thyatira, and Sardis, and Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Those are all cities in Asia Minor, which would be modern Turkey. In fact, in that order those cities also reflect the trade route going through that region.

Why seven? Biblically speaking, seven represents fullness or completeness. These seven churches, then, are representative of every church out there.

Why these particular seven cities? At the end of the first century when John received this Revelation there were much larger churches than the seven listed in chapters 2 and 3. Perhaps the most influential at this time was in Paul's hometown of Antioch. The largest library of the known world was located in Alexandria, Egypt – along with an equally influential Christian church. There were the churches in Jerusalem and even the world's capital city – Rome. Why not letters to these churches?

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There were seven actual churches in actual cities of John's day but they are also representative of all churches throughout the history of the church age.

There is also significance in the order of these seven as they seem to reflect the historical development of the church in general over the centuries. The fact that even chapters 2 & 3 are prophetic is reflected in the fact that 4 of the seven churches in some form or fashion are still in existence when Jesus returns (see 2:25; 3:3; 3:11, and 3:20).

Four distinct levels of meaning/application

1. Local: Actual real churches in John's day with the actual problems described (Sir William Ramsey)
2. Universal (reproof, correction): “to the churches”
3. Personal (homiletic): “he that hath an ear” (do you have an ear?)
4. Prophetic: lays out church history

Seven design elements regarding each church

1. Name of the church
2. Title Jesus calls Himself
3. Commendation
4. Concern
5. Exhortation
6. Promise to the Overcomer
7. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says...”

Read the text

The highest ethic is love because “God is love”

1Jn 4:16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

1Jn 4:9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

1Jn 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1Jn 4:11 Beloved, if (since) God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

We love Him because He first loved us **1 John 4:19**

Matthew 24:12 – And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

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This happens not only in society but can happen in our spiritual lives as well. Our very relationship with God can take a backseat to our efforts being “religious”. It was the case with the church at Ephesus.

The Apostle John is on the Island of Patmos – chapter 1, verse 9 because the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus He’s there for the crime of preaching the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus, and he has been sent to a rock in the Aegean Sea that is a prison colony, in his 90s. When he gets there, the Lord gives to him the amazing visions of the book of Revelation.

The opening vision is of Christ moving in His church. In verse 12, John hears a voice, he turns around, and he looks in this vision and he sees seven golden lampstands, which verse 20 says represent the seven churches. And then there are also seven stars in the right hand of the Lord that he sees among the churches, and they are the seven messengers of those seven churches.

As we look at these seven letters from the Lord, who is described here as, in the vision, “like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.” That’s His priestly appearance. “His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow.” That is His wisdom, His glory. “His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze.” That is His omniscience. And in response to what He sees, He judges. “His voice – ” that’s His word, “ – like the sound of many waters. And in His hand He holds these seven ministers – ” these seven pastors, “ – and out of His mouth come a sharp two-edged sword to defend His church. And His face is like the sun shining in its strength.”

This is a glorious picture of Christ. It’s so overwhelming that John falls over like a dead man. The Lord says, “Get up and write. The seven golden lampstands represent the church, the seven messengers represent the leaders of the church – the seven stars – and I’m going to give seven letters.”

The city of Ephesus: This great city was also world-famous as a religious, cultural, and economic center of the region. Ephesus had the notable temple of Diana, a fertility goddess worshiped with immoral sex. This tremendous temple to Diana in Ephesus was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was supported by 127 pillars, each pillar 60 feet tall, and it was adorned with great sculptures.

- i. “The Temple of Artemis was also a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be kept safe under the protection of deity.” (Longenecker in his commentary on Acts)
- ii. “Ephesus was a stronghold of Satan. Here many evil things both superstitious and satanic were practised. Books containing formula for sorcery and other ungodly and forbidden arts were plentiful in that city.”

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Asia Minor is pagan. They are, again, “islands in a sea of paganism.” As you read through the seven letters, you realize that they’re suffering. Back in chapter 1, verse 9, John calls himself a “fellow partaker in the tribulation.” He’s going through trouble, that’s why he’s in exile. These are churches that experience tribulation, persecution, and sometimes worldliness: false teachers, false doctrine, compromise, coldness, indifference. These are churches like churches throughout all of church history. Before Christ judges the world, however, He judges His own (1 Peter 4:17 – For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?).

Chapter 2 verse 1 – “To the angel – ” or the *aggelos*: the messenger, This **angel** may be the pastor of the church at Ephesus as most commentators reflect, or a literal angel. However, literal angels are assigned as “ministering spirits to those who are inheritors of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). Individual believers have angels assigned to them (Matt. 18:10; Acts 12:15). Angels are present in the assemblies during services (1 Cor. 11:10)are intensely interested in the process of redemption (1 Cor. 4:9; Eph. 3:10; 1 Tim. 3:16; 5:21; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 1:12). They did deliver significant “messages” in both the Old and New Testament (70th week of Daniel prophecy, Birth of Christ, etc.) (Appearance likened unto “stars” – heavenly bodies; “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven)

Angelos is used 67 other times in Revelation none of which could possibly mean “pastor”. The Greek word for “Elders” is used elsewhere in Revelation but not here.

Therefore, the natural, literal interpretation seems to indicate that true churches have individual angels assigned to them to watch over in the spiritual realm. (Ezekiel 9:6 – angels watched over the temple and the city)“ – of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this.” Who is that? That’s the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Man pictured in the vision in chapter 1. The Lord is the speaker. It is Him speaking to the church.

Chapter 1 is the **vision of Christ** working in His church. Chapter 2 begins **the word of Christ** to His church. Now, this is church in Ephesus, what is now in Turkey called Kusadasi. It contains one of the great ruins anywhere on the planet.

The church at Ephesus is spiritually strong. The church at Ephesus is founded well, taught by the best possible leaders, the best possible preachers and teachers. Let me give you a little background. Likely, it was founded by Aquila and Priscilla, who in the 18th chapter of Acts, were left there by the apostle Paul.

Later in the 18th chapter, we learn that another man came and influenced that church, and his name was Apollos. He came there from Alexandria and he was mighty in the Scriptures and the Old Testament. But he only knew the baptism of John the Baptist, so Aquila and Priscilla taught him the

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gospel of Jesus Christ. He left a group of followers of John the Baptist there, whom Paul later encountered on his third missionary journey when he came to Ephesus. He clarified the gospel for those followers of John the Baptist, baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus – that's recorded in Acts 19 – and then stayed for three years.

In fact, Acts 20 records the farewell address of Paul to the Ephesian Elders before he went to his arrest, imprisonment and eventual death in Rome.

Act 20:25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, **Act 20:27** for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. **Act 20:28** Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. **Act 20:29** I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; **Act 20:30** and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. **Act 20:31** Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. **Act 20:32** And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Ephesus was truly a beloved city not only of the Lord but of the Apostle Paul as well.

Later, Timothy pastored the church at Ephesus. In fact, when Paul wrote to him, he gave him instruction about how to do it. Another faithful servant named Tychicus pastored there. And, finally, the great apostle John. Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos, Paul, Timothy, Tychicus, John. It really was firmly founded on that third missionary journey of Paul when he was there for three years. It had an amazing beginning.

“God had performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul there. “Handkerchiefs or aprons were carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and evil spirits went out. Some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempting to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus saying, ‘I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.’” In other words, some of the false exorcists were trying to take advantage of Paul’s name; didn’t work. “Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, ‘I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?’ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded.”

“This became known to everyone, Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus. Fear fell on all of them, and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. Many of those who had believe kept coming, confessing, disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of

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them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.” It was an amazing beginning for a church.

When John was released from exile on Patmos he went to Ephesus, about 60 miles from that prison Island. He’s the last living apostle and the patriarch of the era in the church. Pergamos was the actual capital but Ephesus was the greatest city. It was called the “Light of Asia.” It had the **greatest harbor** in Asia Minor at the time but over the years was filled in by silt from the Cayster River.

Four great highways led into Ephesus: one came from the north from Pergamos and Smyrna; one came from the northeast from Sardis, Galatia, and Phrygia; one came from the southeast from the Euphrates by Colossi and Laodicea; and one from the Meander Valley in the North. Everything converged in Ephesus. It was called the “Market to Asia.”

Politically, it was a free city which meant Rome gave Ephesus the right of self-governing. No Roman troops were stationed there, it had its own independence. (and a sanctuary for criminals)

From a **religious** standpoint Ephesus was the center of the worship of Artemis, also called Diana. Diana, or Artemis, was the most sacred goddess in the civilized ancient Greco-Roman world and the temple to Diana was one of the Seven Wonders. It was constructed of Persian marble – 425 feet long, 260 feet wide. Rested on 130 columns standing 60 feet high: 37 columns of which were embellished with gold and jewels.

Financially it also was the bank of the Mediterranean. The big business was selling idols. The worship in the Temple of Diana was a kind of hysteria: drunkenness, sexual deviation, thousands of temple prostitutes, self-mutilation.

Huddled in the middle of this city of such sin is a group of men and women proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ. And in spite of their environment, some of the greatest victories of grace that were ever won were won in the city of Ephesus. The church flourished; the church grew. The preaching by Paul had affected both the worship and sales of idols. The continued to grow, taught by Timothy, and ultimately, by John himself.

Verse 2

Verse 2: “I know your **deeds** and your **toil (labor)** and **perseverance (patience)**, and that you **cannot tolerate evil men**, and you put to the test those who **call themselves** apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have **perseverance** and have **endured for My name’s sake**, and have **not grown weary**.”

“I know your **deeds** – ” *kopos* – labor “to the point of exhaustion. They weren’t lazy or indifferent; they were busy. They were giving everything they had – teaching, loving, giving, sharing, proclaiming the gospel, ministering to one another for the sake of Christ.

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Not only were they known for their deeds but their perseverance, **patience**, *hupomon*. It literally means “to remain under.” Same as “abide” or “remain” – *hupo*, under. This is courageous spiritual living which accepts hardship, suffering, persecution, loss. This is an attitude that will not be beaten down or extinguished: it endures. They were persistent; hard-working, relentless even in the midst of a godless culture.

Beyond that still in verse 2: “**You cannot tolerate evil men**. They were intolerant of sin. They were sensitive to the presence of evil and they took action against it. They recognized the damage that sin does to the fellowship and the testimony. They saw that sin in the church destroys both the unity and the testimony of the church. They knew that a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

One of the primary illustrations of **church disciple** is found in Matthew 18.

Go to the sinning person one-on-one.

If there is no repentance then take two or three others as witnesses.

After that the matter is publicly brought to the church.

This church worked tirelessly while under tremendous social pressure, they never gave in to a spirit of fear or defeat, and while doing all that they dealt with the evil in their midst.

On top of all that: “You **put to the test those who call themselves** apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false.”

This is a church with discernment which came from the knowledge of the truth. You have to have the truth in order to see the error. They were taught by Aquila and Priscilla. They were taught by Apollos. They were taught by Timothy and Tychicus, Paul and John. They were a well-taught church. Their theology was so sound that they could literally measure anyone against the truth and expose error. **Act 20:27** for I did not shrink from declaring to you *the whole counsel* of God.

Satan is always trying to infiltrate churches. The Ephesian church took the warning seriously.

Apostle Paul went on to say in Acts 20:28-30, Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the *Holy Spirit has made you overseers*, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

“for I know that after my departure, grievous wolves are going to come in, not sparing the flock; and of your own selves, perverse men are going to rise up speaking twisted things in order to draw away disciples for themselves. Paul “committed them to the word of God, which is able to build you up.”

The only ones who were welcomed into that church were those who were faithful to the teaching of the Word of God.

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The the key is “for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.” They did it for Christ

Verse 3 – “and you have perseverance and have endured for my names sake, and have not grown weary.

It was the zeal and steadfastness of thee first century saints not only in Ephesus but throughout the Roman world that caused the gospel to sread throughout the known world of that day.

Romans 1:8 – First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ [a]for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the world.

1 Thess. 1:8 – For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place *the news of* your faith toward God has gone out, so that we have no need to say anything.

Verse 4 – “BUT . . . I have this against you, that you left your first love.

The word order in the Greek text is emphatic,

“your **first love** you have left”

When writing his letter to the Ephesian Christians, Paul closed his letter in **Ephesians 6:24** with these words, “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with **incorruptible** love.

Gr. – *aphtharsia: love toward Christ which is sincere and undiminishing* (same used of our resurrection bodies elsewhere – never fading/corrupted)

Ephesus was a church of **great “works”** but sometimes a focus on *working for* Jesus becomes a substitute for abiding **in** Jesus (that love relationship with Him).

The Ephesian church was a **doctrinally pure** church but sometimes a focus on *doctrinal purity* will make a congregation cold and divorced from the grace of God. We must always remember that he who has been forgiven much – loves much.

The Ephesian Christians began well but many of them now were second-generation believers. When Paul wrote them 35 years prior to Revelation he began in chapter 1 verses 15-16 by stating the he “never stopped giving thanks for them because of their faith in Christ and love (agapen) for the saints. Thirty-five years later Jesus Himself is warning them they had lost that love and they were in danger. So Jesus commands them in verse 5 . . .

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Verse 5 – Therefore, remember from where you have fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place – unless you repent.

This falling from ones “first love” was not only true of the first century church at Ephesus – it was equally true of Old Testament Israel.

Jer 2:2 “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.

Jer 2:5 Thus says the LORD: “What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?”

Back in John's First Epistle, specifically 1 John 2:7-11 he states that our love for the brethren is proof that we have fellowship with God – that we are His sons and daughters.

In 1 John 4:7-16, however, John gets down to the heart of the matter. “Love” is the very nature of God Himself. If we are united with God thru faith in Christ we then share His nature. Since God's nature is love, love is then *the test* of the reality of our spiritual life.

In Matthew 22 a Pharisee, an expert in Jewish law, asked Jesus the question “what is the greatest commandment? Jesus replied with Deuteronomy 6:5, “and he said to him, “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**”

What God most wants from us is our **love**. We often think God demands *things* from us - our money, our time, our effort, our will, our submission, and so forth - but what God really wants is our love. When we really love the LORD with all of our heart, soul, and mind, then everything else is freely given to the LORD. If we give the LORD all the rest - money, time, effort, will, and so forth - without giving Him our love, it is all wasted.

In John's gospel (ch. 4:24) He states that God is “Spirit”, in (1 John 1:5) God is “light”, and in I John 4 God is “love”. God is so vast and incomprehensible that love alone does not define God, but God certainly defines love. Since God is love and since we claim to be in a personal relationship with Him then our lives must reflect His character and nature and that means loving God and loving others.

Verse 6 says, “yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

“they hated *the deeds* (not the people themselves) of the Nicolaitans”

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Either: a relatively unknown sect (followers of a man named Nicolas, an early deacon in Antioch who formed a sect of Gnostic's after the time of Revelation), or,

If the Nicolaitanes were some unknown sect (AS MOST COMMENTATORS BELIEVE), then the reason Jesus included it in this epistle is unknown as well. Our personal bias is that every word of scripture is there by the design of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, we believe the reference here is important, understandable in it's context, and profitable for instruction to us as believer's. This statement seems to lik to the previous one in verse 2 regarding those claiming to be Apostles but are not.

A link to those who “claimed” apostolic supremacy and some type of unique or special spiritual authority. The Apostle Paul describes such people in [2 Cor. 11:13-15](#) when he states,

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. **14** No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. **15** Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

Jesus Himself warned against false christ's and false prophets in [Matthew 24:5 and 24:24](#) when He said,

“For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will mislead many people. For false christ's and false prophets will arise and will provide great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

Jesus also says here in Revelation 2:6 that He hates these “deeds of the Nicolaitanes” as well. Strong language coming from our Lord

If there is any kind of behavior our Lord would hate it would be the actions of those claiming some sort of divine authority for themselves as apostles, prophets or even as a false “pseduo-christ”.

Jesus claimed to be the Chief-Shepherd and the One who walked among the lampstands but these men invaded first-centruy churches trying to usurp God's divine authority over His churches. They claimed divine powers and even false miracle-working. This is nothing new. Satan is a counterfieter. He worked through Pharoah's magicians to counterfeit some of Moses miracle and in the Tribulation it will happen again with lying signs and wonders.

Peter describes such Nicolaitanes as “false teachers” brings “destructive heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them. They claimed special spiritual insights into the things of God even to the degree that the people must follow them in order to get to God.

Sound familiar. Throughout the centuries false churches and false leaders have arisen under the influence of Satan himself to draw people away from the truth into damnation.

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These are not just small, cult-like churches. These “conquerors over the laity” include many large, mainline denomination. Anytime any spiritual leader of church tries teaching you are “saved” through baptism they have added something to the work of Christ on the cross and therefore – committed heresy.

The Bible says the Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth so if you are following a church that tells you not to read the Bible because you can not understand it yourself – run from it because it is unbiblical. The Bible COMMANDS US to study the word (that means individually and that means you and I – not a select priesthood).

Just because a particular church or denomination has been around for hundreds of years does not make it the true church.

The Bible says that if you are 'Born Again' in Christ Jesus you are a King and a priest which represents Christ. You only need to confess your sins to One mediator, that is Jesus Christ.

Religious hierarchy existed in Jesus day through the false workings of the Pharisees and Sadducees and it still exists today just under other names.

The name itself comes from the Greek words **Nicao**: Conquerors over, **Loas**: the people (or the laity)

The deeds of these first century Nicolaitans will become ingrained doctrine in the church later in the church at Pergamou. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans

Verse 7

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

a. He who has an ear: This qualifies everyone – or at least everyone who will listen. This letter was not only written to the church at Ephesus in the Apostle John’s day. It is written to us, and to all Christians throughout the centuries.

b. Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches: Each one of these seven letters apply to all churches. We must hear what the Spirit says to the churches – not just to one church. These letters – each of them – were meant to speak to you, if you will only have an ear to hear what the Spirit says.

“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

a. Here Jesus seems to speak of overcoming of their coldness of heart and lack of love marked by leaving their first love.

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b. I will give to eat from the tree of life: The promise for these overcomers was a return to Eden, 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 though walking in Jesus' redeeming love.

c. In the midst of the Paradise of God: Originally, the word Paradise meant "a garden of delight." Eventually, it came to mean "the place where God lives." That is Paradise!

The Love Chapter

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 – Love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous; love does not brag, it is not arrogant. It does not act disgracefully, it does not seek its own *benefit*; it is not provoked, does not keep an account of a wrong *suffered*, it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth, it keeps every confidence, it believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Fruit of the Spirit is "love"

Galatians 5:22-23 – But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

The church in Ephesus lost their "first love" for God. What is the nature of your relationship with God through Christ Jesus today? Do you love Him with your whole heart, mind and strength? Are you truly "abiding in the vine"? Are you truly loving the Lord your God with ALL your heart, soul, and mind?

If not, repent of that today and return to your first love in Christ Jesus.