

**Study for the Month of February 2012**

## ***The Seven Churches of Revelation***

### **THIS MONTH'S FOCUS: EPHESUS**

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#### ***Brief Introduction***

We've dealt with this topic a couple of years ago but we need to revisit it in the light of the resurgence of conflicting views proliferating in the internet and in the churches in general that are causing confusion over the nature and role of the "church," what and who the seven churches are, and thus draping a dark shroud of doubt, skepticism, and confusion over who and what the "remnant church" of prophecy is, and its most unique experience it will undergo in the closing hours of earth history before the church triumphant finally emerges.

It is only those who obtain the victory "by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony" over the beast and his image because they do not receive the beast's mark, name, or number in their foreheads or in their hands who receive the seal of the living God in their forehead that comprise the church triumphant, together with those of all ages since Adam who were "weighed in the balances of the sanctuary" during pre-advent or Investigative judgment who were determined by the books of heaven as truly prepared and worthy of eternal life.

There is the view that asserts that that book of Revelation was written for the Jews only and that the seven churches, seven seals, and seven trumpets are all yet future, grouping or interchanging them with the seven last plagues. These are products of Futurism, brainchild of Ribera, Spanish Jesuit priest to counter the work of the Protestant Reformation. It has largely succeeded and accelerated the falling away of the Protestant churches when the pioneers led by Luther passed away.

Although it is not the focus of this month's study, comment is necessary both show the reckoning point of the seven churches, and to show how grossly mistaken such views are as they do violence to a harmonious exposition of the Bible regarding the prophecies by ignoring the New Testament Scriptures account of both the words of Christ himself and that of the apostles, in the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the final rejection of the once-chosen people, *as a nation* (not as individuals) given in the 70-week prophecy of Daniel: 9:24-27 on account of their "filling up the cup of iniquity" in the events that took place during this particular prophetic period, including their national rejection of, and crucifixion of the Messiah Himself in 31 A.D. This was followed three-and-a half years later by the stoning to death of Stephen, one of the seventy disciples and the first of Christian martyr by the Sanhedrin in 34 A.D. It was at this precise point, that "the kingdom was taken away from them," according to Christ own words, "and given to a nation bearing fruit."

The Jewish dispensation having ended at the end of the 70-week prophecy (or 490 literal years), the gospel and the Messiah, having been rejected by the Jews as a nation, was then proclaimed by the *Christ's apostles and disciples* to the Gentile nations (or non-Jews), as witnesses of Christ "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts. 1: 8. This gospel commission and work took place after they received their empowerment in the promise of the infilling of Holy Spirit at the outpouring of Pentecost in the upper room *fifty* days after Christ's resurrection. This is also known as "the former rain." The coming latter rain "will be more abundant and glorious" and will close up the work of the gospel described in final stupendous global events in Revelation 18—which will be the final and fullest fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, "Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit says the Lord." Zech. 4: 6.

Of the Jewish nation, the chosen people, John wrote: "He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. But *as many* as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the man [ancestry or genealogy], but of God." John 1: 11-13, N.K.J.V. Jesus explained this so clearly to Nicodemus, an honest Pharisee in their one-on-one nighttime private interview: "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." See John chapter 3.

Apostle Paul rendered this clearly when he addressed the people of "the circumcision," the Jews, especially the troublesome Judaizers who were agitating and confusing the new Gentile converts to Christianity, requiring them to be physically circumcised or else they were not considered accepted of God. The epistle to the Galatians specifically addresses this troublesome problem. In Romans 2: 24-29 (see the whole chapter), Paul wrote:

24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you [the Judaizers], as it is written. 25 For circumcision [of the ceremonial law] is indeed profitable *if* you keep the law [moral law]; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirement of the law [the moral law of Ten Commandments], will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? 27 And will not be the *physically* uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you, who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? 28 For he is not a Jew, who is one *outwardly*, nor is that circumcision which is which is outward in the flesh 29 but is a Jew who is one *inwardly*, and *circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit*, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but from God."

All who believe in the name of Jesus and receive Him in their heart as their Savior, become part of *spiritual* Israel, the church, the adopted sons and daughters of God for "God is no respecter of persons." To Him there is no Jew or Greek or Gentile."

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The book of **Revelation**, Greek *apokalupsis*, according to its introduction, is "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*." Some think this is John's own title to the book. If it is, it categorically denies the popular idea prevailing in Christendom that it is a "sealed book," and thus cannot be understood. But it says that a blessing is pronounced on His "servants" and those who follow Him on earth who "read" and "hear" and "keep" those "things which are written therein; for the time is at hand." This cannot be accomplished if they do not comprehend what these things are nor even guess what these are unless they read it.

**“Of Jesus Christ.”**---In Greek, as in English, this phrase may be understood as declaring the Apocalypse to be either a revelation *from* Jesus or one that *reveals Him*. The context quite clearly applies to the former—a revelation *from* Jesus. It is, at the very least, the primary meaning for it says “the revelation which God [the Father] gave unto Him [Jesus], to show unto His servants.” At the same time the truth of the second meaning—one that reveals Him—must not be overlooked, for this last book of the Bible is preeminently one that reveals Jesus in His heavenly work after His ascension, and therefore is a focus of the sanctuary message, which is a distinct part of earth’s final warning of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14. In this sense, Revelation is in fact complementary to the synoptic Gospels, which record the Jesus’ ministry and work on earth; and Revelation reveals His work in the plan of redemption since His resurrection and ascension “to the right hand of the throne of the Father.”

**“Shortly come to pass.”** – “In one way or another the thought that the various events foretold in the book Revelation were to take place in the ‘not-too-distant future, is specifically stated 7 times: ---“things which must shortly come to pass for [or, “be done’]. (chs. 1: 1; 2: 26), “the time is at hand” (ch. 1:3). And “Behold [or, “surely], I come quickly” (chs. 3: 11; 22: 7, 12, 20). Indirect references to the same idea appear in chs. 6:11; 12: 12; 17: 10. John’s personal response to these declarations of the soon accomplishment of the divine purpose was, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (ch. 2: 20). The concept of the imminence of the return of Jesus is thus both explicit and implicit throughout Revelation.

“The second advent of Christ is the sacred keynote of the Scriptures.” “It is the great climactic event of the age-long conflict between good and evil that began when Lucifer challenged the character and government of God. Statements in the Revelation and elsewhere concerning the imminence of Christ must be understood against the background of this great controversy. God might justly have annihilated Lucifer when, in stubborn, proud, blasphemous impenitence, persisted in rebellion. But divine wisdom deferred the extermination of evil until the full nature and results of sin and “the mystery of iniquity” became fully apparent to the inhabitants of the whole universe (see PP 41-43). At any one of the various critical points in the history of this world, divine justice could have proclaimed, “It is done!” and Christ might have come to inaugurate His righteous reign and everlasting kingdom of righteousness. Long ago He might have brought to fruition His plans for the redemption of this world.

“As God offered Israel [and the Jewish nation] the high privilege and precious opportunity and sacred trust to prepare the way for His eternal kingdom upon the earth, when they finally crossed the Jordan and settled in the earthly Promised Land, and again, when they returned from exile in Babylon [the subject of our seminar on Daniel], so He gave Christian Church of the apostolic times the privilege of *completing* the gospel commission. *Another* such opportunity came with the great second advent awakening of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But in each instance God’s chosen people *failed* to take advantage of the opportunity thus graciously accorded them.

“Encouraged by inspired counsel, the Advent Movement, after 1844, expected Christ to come very soon. When, toward the end of the century, Jesus had not appeared, the Advent believers were repeatedly reminded that the Lord might have come ‘ere this’ (see 6T 450; 8T 115, 116; 9T 29; DA 633, 634’ GC 458). When challenged as to why time had continued longer than her earlier testimonies seemed to indicate, Ellen G. White replied, “How is it with the testimonies of Christ and His disciples? Were they deceived..... The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. . . . It should be

remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional” (E. G. White in F.M. Wilcox’s *The Testimony of Jesus*, p. 99).

“Thus it seems clear that although the fact of Christ’s second coming is not based on any conditions, the repeated statements of Scripture that the coming was imminent were *conditional on the response of the church to the challenge of finishing the work of the gospel in their generation*. The Word of God, which centuries ago declared that the day of Christ “was at hand” (Rom. 13: 12), has not failed. Jesus would have come very quickly if the church had done its appointed work. The [Christian] church had no right to expect her Lord when she had not complied with the conditions. (See *Evangelism*, pp. 694-697).

“Thus the statement of the angel [Gabriel] to John concerning the imminence of Christ’s return to end the reign of sin are to be understood as *an expression of divine will and purpose*. God has never purposed to delay the consummation of the plan of salvation, but has ever expressed His will that the return of our Lord be *not* long delayed.

“These statements are not to be understood in terms of the foreknowledge of God that there would be so long a delay, nor yet in the light of the historical perspective of what has actually taken place in the history of the world since that time. To be sure God foreknew that the coming of Christ would be delayed some two thousand years, but when He sent messages to the church by the apostles He couched those messages *in terms of His will and purpose with regard to the event*, in order to make His people conscious of the fact that, in the divine providence, no delay was necessary.

“Consequently, the seven statements of the Revelation concerning the *nearness* of Christ’s coming are to be understood in terms of *God’s will and purpose*, as promises conditionally set forth, and not as utterances based on divine foreknowledge. In this fact, doubtless, is to be found the harmony between those passages that exhort to readiness for the soon coming of Christ and those time prophecies that reveal how far ahead lay the actual day of the Lord.” (From “Commentary” on the *Exhaustive E. G. White Commentary on Revelation*, Vol. II, pp. 457, 458.

### **How long will this delay continue? Not too long anymore!**

Notice (emphasis supplied):

“For **six thousand years**, Satan’s work of rebellion has ‘made the earth to tremble. He has ‘made the world as wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof.’ [Isa. 14: 12]. And he ‘opened not the door the house of his prisoners.’ For **six thousand years** his prison house [the grave] has received God’s people, and he would have held them captive forever; but Christ has broken his bonds and set the prisoners free. . . . For **a thousand years**, Satan will wander to and fro in the desolate earth to behold the results of his rebellion against the law of God. During this time his suffering are intense.” - E. G. White, *Great Controversy*, “Desolation of the Earth” chapter, pp. 659, 660.

“Satan’s work of ruin, is forever ended. For **six thousand years** he has wrought his will, filling the earth with woe and causing grief throughout the universe. The whole creation has groaned and travailed together in pain [Rom. 8: 22]. Now God’s creatures are forever delivered from his presence and temptations. ‘The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they [the righteous] break forth into singing.’ Isa. 14: 7. “- *Ibid*, p. 673. (NOTE: there are other references elsewhere)

The “six thousand years” of the reign of sin and its woe plus the “thousand years of earth’s desolation,” or the true Biblical millennium, equals seven thousand years! God’s septenary plan of sevens is clearly here at work. From the seven-day cycle of the week established at the “creation of heaven and earth” to the whole span of the fall of man to

the establishment of His eternal kingdom of glory in the earth made new and Paradise and Eden restored, takes seven thousand years! Ah! how close we are to the end of all things! Hallelujah!

Revelation was written specifically to and for the *Christian church* of the New Testament nor to ancient Israelites or the current ethnic Jews although they, and every living person of “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” are included in its messages. The whole Old Testament, “the law and the prophets” was directed and entrusted to them as “the sacred oracles” to be shared to the world but they “made them of none effect by their traditions and the sayings of their religious leaders.

## THE SEVEN CHURCHES

There were many Christian churches raised by the apostles in Asia as they went forth preaching the gospel of a risen Savior with the power of the Holy Spirit poured out upon them at Pentecost, fifty days after Christ’s resurrection, during the first century of the Christian era. But God chose seven of them to represent the seven periods of His church during the remainder of time till the close of probation.

First, the number seven in the Bible symbolizes perfection. Second, the prophecies of Revelation are couched in symbolic language, as in “signified.” Rev. 1:\_\_\_\_. The exception is the seven last plagues that are poured out *after* the close of human probation upon all who willfully worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in their foreheads or in their hands.” The symbols are dropped only after the events given in Revelation 16.

No one has yet received this mark because it has not yet been enforced by law. However, those who fully understand and are convicted by the Holy Spirit from the evidence of the Word of God that the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath, our Saturday, and that Sunday worship is a creation of the papal power yet persist in rejecting the truth, are grieving the Holy Spirit away and are hardening their hearts. Unless they repent and obey the truth before their probation ends at death, they will be considered as having “received the mark of the beast” when it is implemented.

The “leopard-like beast,” or as some prefer to identify as the “sea beast,” introduced in the beginning of Revelation 13, is the papacy who suffered a “deadly wound” inflicted upon the Roman Catholic church with the capture of Pope Pius VI by Napoleon’s French Republican army in February 1798, and the subsequent “healing of this wound.” This takes place with its return as the final persecuting power in union with the “image of the beast,” apostate Protestant America *when* it finally “makes void the law of God” (Ps. 119: 105) by legislation in Congress of the long-anticipated Sunday Law. This finally nullifies the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The “mark of the beast” then is this idol-sabbath *when* it is enacted and enforced by the final form of church-state union that begins in America and is adopted throughout the nations of the world. It is at this time that “the final events will be rapid ones.”

We now quote from the book *Acts of the Apostles* by Ellen G. White, chapter “The Revelation,” pp. 584-\_\_\_\_. (all emphasis supplied):

“In the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end. Here is the complement of the book of Daniel. One is a prophecy; the other a revelation. The book that was sealed is not the Revelation but that portion of the prophecy of Daniel relating to the *last days*.

The angel [Gabriel] commanded, 'But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal up the book *until* the time of the end, many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.' Dan. 12: 4, N.K.J.V. [The "time of the end" commenced in the year 1798 when Pope Pius VI was taken captive by General Berthier of Napoleon's French Republican army and taken to France where he died in captivity, ending the 1260 years of the Dark Ages].

"It was Christ who bade the apostle [John] record that which was to be opened before him, 'What you see, write in a book,' He commanded, and "send them to the seven churches which are in Asia. . .[Rev. 1: 11, 18-20 quoted].

### ***What the seven different names of the churches mean:***

"The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian era.

### ***What the number seven means and to whom and up to when do the messages apply:***

"The number seven indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages [to each of the seven churches] extend to the end of time, while the symbols used [Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea] reveal the *condition* of the church at different periods in history of the world.

### ***What does Christ walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks mean?***

"Christ is spoken of as walking in the *midst* of the golden candlesticks. Thus is symbolized His *relation to the churches*. He is in constant communication with His people. He knows their true state, He observes their order, their piety, and their devotion. Although He is High Priest and Mediator in the Sanctuary above, yet He is represented as walking up and down in the midst of His churches on the earth [through the Holy Spirit]. With untiring wakefulness and unremitting vigilance, He watches to see whether the *light* of any of His sentinels is burning dim or going out. If the candlesticks were left to mere human care, the flickering flame would languish and die; but He is the true Watchman in the Lord's house [the church], the true Warden of the temple courts. His continued care and sustaining grace are the source of life and light."

### ***What does Christ holding the seven stars mean?***

"Christ is represented as holding the seven stars in His right hand. This assures us that *no church faithful to its trust need fear* coming to naught; for not a star that has the protection of Omnipotence can be plucked out of the hand of Christ. 'These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand.' Rev. 2:1. These words are spoken to the *teachers* of the church,---those entrusted by God with weighty responsibilities. The sweet influence that are abundant in the church are bound up with *God's ministers*, who are to reveal the love of Christ.

"The stars of heaven are under His control. He fills them with light. He guides and directs their movements. If He did not do this, they would become *fallen stars*. So with His ministers. They are but instruments in His hands, and all the good they accomplish is done through His power. Through them His light is to shine forth. The Savior is to be their efficiency. If they will look to Him as He looked to the Father, they will be enabled to do His work. As they make God their dependence, He will give them His brightness to reflect to the world.

## ***The Early History of the Church since the Time of the Apostles***

### **EPHESUS**

Meaning: “First,” or “most desirable.”

#### ***Age of Apostolic Purity***

**Time Period:** the first century of the Christian church starting from Pentecost.

**Described in:** Revelation 2: 1-7.

The New Testament gives the Christian church’s *history*; therefore, the fulfillment of the prophecy is to be found in the history given. See *Testimonies* Vol. 6, pp. 422, 423.

“Early in the history of the church *the mystery of iniquity* [and “son of perdition”] foretold by Paul [2 Thess. 2: 3, 4, 7] began its baleful work; and as the false teachers concerning whom Peter had warned the believers, urged their *heresies*, many were ensnared by false doctrines. Some faltered under trial, and were tempted to give up the faith

“At the time when John was given the Revelation [around 96 A.D.], *many had lost their first love of gospel truth*. But in His mercy God did not leave the church to continue in a backslidden state. In a message of infinite tenderness He revealed His love for them, and His desire that they should make sure work for eternity. ‘Remember,’ He pleaded, ‘from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.’ Rev. 3: 20.

As early as that time, the church in general was already “losing their first love,” meaning, they were already losing sight of the fundamental principles of the gospel!

“The church was defective, and in need of stern reproof and chastisement; and John was inspired to record messages of warning and reproof and entreaty to those who, *losing sight of the fundamental principles of the gospel*, should imperil their hope of eternal salvation. But always the words of rebuke that God finds it necessary to send are spoken in tender love, and with the promise of peace to every *penitent* believer.”

“Tradition, however, indicates that John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, became the leader of this church, presumably after the breakup of the Christian headquarters at Jerusalem about A.D. 68, during the Jewish-Roman War. Thus at the time Revelation was written, Ephesus must have been one of the leading centers of Christianity [in contrast to Judaism]. Consequently it was fitting that Christ’s message by John should have been addressed to this church. In central location with respect to the Christian world as a whole makes all the more understandable the fact that its spiritual condition could well be characteristic of the whole church during the apostolic period, the era of Christian history reaching approximately to the end of the first century (C. A.D. 31-100). It was well be called the Age of Apostolic Purity, and attribute highly desirable in God’s sight.” – *Footnote Commentary, Exhaustive E.G. White on Revelation, Vol. II, p. 509,*

***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.***

#### **THEIR COMMENDATION:**

“You have testes those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them to be liars.” - “Too often, now as in former times, the church is prone to ‘bear,’ or endure, evil teachings and practices in its midst, supposedly in the name of peace.

Ministers of Christ may find it easier to remain silent concerning the *pet sins* of their congregation than to take a bold stand for the truth (cf. Isa. 30: 10; 2 Tim. 4: 3). The church at Ephesus was to be commended for making a clear distinction between truth and error, whether in doctrine or in the life, and for taking a firm stand against error.” – *Ibid*, p. 512.

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men,  
---men who will not be bought or sold;  
men who in their inmost souls are true and honest;  
men who do not fear to call sin by its right name;  
men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle is to the pole;  
men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”  
– E. G. White, *Education*, p, 57

“The church at Ephesus had diligently investigated the claims of these false apostles. Ignatius, writing early in the 2d century, speaks of the diligence of the Ephesian Christian in shunning heresy (*To the Ephesians* ix, 1). In one of his epistles John cautioned believers with respect to the coming of ‘antichrist’ and advise them to ‘try the spirits whether they are of God’ (1 John 4: 1-3). The warning given by Paul to the leaders at Ephesus many years before, that ‘grievous wolves’ would enter in among them ‘speaking perverse things’ (Acts 20: 29, 30), had been fulfilled; he had counseled the Thessalonians to ‘prove all things and to ‘hold fast that which is good’ (1 Thess. 5: 21). Peter had written at length concerning ‘false prophets’ and ‘false teachers’ (see 2 Pet. 2: 2)/ Compare 1 Tim. 1: 20; 2 Tim. 4: 14, 15. Though at first it might not be easy to recognize the subtle errors of their teachings, the teachers themselves could be known ‘by their fruits.’ (see Matt. 7: 15-20).

“Thus it is today, for the genuine ‘fruit of the Spirit’ (see Gal. 5: 22, 23) does not grow in the lives of those who teach and practice error. The sincere Christian who is sensitive to spiritual things is promised that he can, if he will, detect the unchristian spirit and motives that actuate every teacher of error (see on 1 John 4: 1; Rev. 3: 18).

“Among the most serious heresies that threatened the church toward the close of the first century were **Docetism** and an early form of **Gnosticism**. For a discussion of these and other heresies that beset the church of apostolic times see Vol. V, pp. 912, 913; Vol. VI, pp. 52-59. More specifically, an early tradition indicates that Gnostic named Cerinthus visited Ephesus and fomented trouble for John and his congregation (see Irenaeus *Against Heresies* iii 3, 4). What was true of Ephesus during this period with respect to struggles with false prophets seems also to have been true of the church in general.’ –*E. G. White Exhaustive Commentary on Revelation*, p. 513.

#### NOTES:

**Docetism** was form of early [apostate] Christianity, developing [as early as] 70 D.D., which was most prominently espoused by the Gnostic sects. Its origin with Christianity is obscure and it has been argued that its origins were in the heterodox Judaism or Oriental and Greek philosophers. [The Sanhedrin had bribed the Roman soldiers who were the first mortal eyewitnesses of Christ’s resurrection in His glorified body to spread the false claims that His body was stolen by His disciples]. Some of the books of the New Testament condemn docetic teachings and the early creeds developed to counter docetic beliefs. First century Gnostic Christian groups developed docetic interpretations partly as a way to make Christian teachings more acceptable to pagan ways of thinking of divinity. Docetism largely died out during the first millennium A.D. (From Wikipedia)

**Gnosticism**- From *gnostikos*, “learned,” from Greek *gnosis*, knowledge. A scholarly term for a set of religious beliefs and spiritual practices common to early Christianity, Hellenistic Judaism,



Greco-Roman mystery religions, Zoroastrianism (especially Zurvanism), and Neoplatonism. A common characteristic of some of these groups was the teaching that the realization of Gnostic (esoteric or intuitive knowledge), is the way of salvation of the soul from the material world. They saw the material world as created through and intermediary being [called demiurge] rather than directly by God. In most of the systems, this demiurge was seen as imperfect, in others as evil. Different Gnostic schools sometimes identified the demiurge as Adam Kadmon, Ahriman, El, Saklas, Samael, Satan, Yaldabaoth, or Yahweh.

Jesus is identified by some Gnostic sects as an embodiment of the supreme being who became incarnate to bring *gnosis* to the earth. Others adamantly deny that the supreme being came in the flesh, claiming Jesus to be merely human who attained divinity through *gnosis* and taught His disciples to do the same. Among the Mandaeans, Jesus was considered a *msiha kdaba* or “false messiah” who perverted the teachings entrusted to Him by John the Baptist. Still other traditions identify Mani and Seth, third son of Adam and Eve, as salvific figures.” (From Wikipedia).

## THE CONDEMNATION/REBUKE OF EPHESUS

### ***4 Nevertheless I have this against you, because you have left your first love.***

“This ‘love’ probably included whole-hearted love for God and the truth, and love for one another as brethren and their fellow-men in general (see on Matt. 5: 43, 44; 22: 33-40). Perhaps the doctrinal controversies stirred up by the false teachers had given rise to factious spirit. Also, in spite of diligent efforts on the part of many to stay the tide of false teaching, a number who remained in the church were no doubt affected in greater or lesser degree by it. To the extent that error had found a lodging place in the church, to that extent was thwarted the activity of the Holy Spirit as messenger of truth (John 16: 13) whose task is to convert the principles of truth into a living force for the transformation of character (see John 16: 8-11; Gal. 5: 22, 23; Eph. 4: 30; etc.). Furthermore, as the testimony of those who had personally associated with Jesus ended, as one by one they died, and the vision of the imminence of Christ’s return (see on Rev. 1: 1) began to fade, the flame of faith and devotion burned even lower. For comment on other aspects of this departure from the pristine purity of faith and practice see Vol. IV, pp. 834, 835.” – *Ibid*, p. 515.

“The True Witness [Holy Spirit] addresses the church of Ephesus saying, [Rev. 2: 4, 5 quoted]. At the first experience of the church of Ephesus was marked with childlike simplicity and fervor. A lively, earnest, heartfelt love for Christ was expressed. The believers rejoiced in the love of God because Christ was in their hearts as an abiding presence. The praise of God was in their lips, and their attitude of thanksgiving was in accord with the thanksgiving of the heavenly family [the angels].

“The world took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. Sinful men, repentant, pardoned, cleansed, and sanctified, were brought into partnership with God *through* His Son. The believers sought earnestly to receive and obey every word of God. Filled with love for their Redeemer, they sought as their highest aim to win souls to Him. They did not think of hoarding the precious treasure of the grace of Christ. They felt the importance of their calling, and weighted with the message, Peace on earth, goodwill to men, they burned with desire to carry the glad tidings to earth’s remotest bounds.

“The members of the church were united in sentiment and action. Love for Christ was the golden chain that bound them together. They followed on to know the Lord more and still more perfectly, and brightness and comfort and peace were revealed in their lives. They visited the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and kept themselves

unspotted from the world [James 1: 27]. A failure to do this would, in their view, have been a contradiction of their profession and a denial of their Redeemer.

“In every city the work was carried forward. Souls were converted, and in their turn felt that they must tell of the inestimable treasure. They would not rest till the beams of light which had illumined their minds were shining upon others. Multitudes of unbelievers were made acquainted with the reason of the Christian’s hope. Warm, inspired, personal appeals were made to the sinful and erring, to the outcast, and to those who, while professing to know the truth, were lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” - Vol. 6 *Testimonies*, pp. 421- 423.

### **What does it mean to “lose the first love”? How does it take place?**

“But after a time the zeal of the believers, their love for God and for one another, began to wane. Coldness crept into the church. Differences sprang up, and the eyes of many were turned from beholding Jesus as the Author and Finisher of their faith. The masses that might have been convicted and converted by a faithful practice of the truth, were left unwarned. Then it was that the message was addressed to the Ephesian church by the True Witness.

“Their lack of interest in the salvation of souls showed that *they had lost their first love*; for none can love God with the whole heart, mind, soul, and strength without loving those for whom Christ has died. God called upon them to repent and do the first works else the candlestick would be removed out of its place.”- *Ibid*.

“The church was defective and in need of reproof and chastisement, and John was inspired to record messages of warning and reproof and entreaty to those who, losing sight of the fundamental principles of the gospel, should imperil their hopes of salvation. But always the words of rebuke that God finds it necessary to send are spoken with tender love and with the promise of peace to every penitent believer. ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock.’ The Lord declares, “If any man hear My voice, and open the door. I will come into him, and he with Me.’ Rev. 3: 20.”- *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 587.

“Let my brethren be very careful how they present the subject of faith and works before the people, lest minds become confused. The people need to be urged in diligence to good works. They should be shown how to be successful, how to be purified, and their offerings may be fragrant before God. It is by virtue of the blood of Christ. Messages of a decided character must be borne before the people. Men must go forth reproofing, rebuking every manner of evil.

“If there is given to the angel of any church a commission like unto that given to the angel of the church of Ephesus, let the message be heard through human agents rebuking carelessness, backsliding, and sin, that the people may be brought to repentance and confession of sin. Never seek to cover sin; for in the message of rebuke, Christ is to be proclaimed as the first and last, He who is all and in all to the soul. 1 SM 379-80.

### **Lesson/Warning for Today**

“Is not this experience of the Ephesian church repeated in the experience of the church of this generation? How is the church of today, that has received a knowledge of the truth of God, using this knowledge? When its members first saw God’s unspeakable mercy for the fallen race, they could not keep silent. They were filled with longing to cooperate with God in giving to others the blessings they had received. As they imparted, they were continually receiving. They grew in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. **How is it today?**”- Vol. 6 *Testimonies*, pp. 421-423.