



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Numbers, Deuteronomy Sermon Series

Supports Session 4: Rebellion and Judgment

Sermon Title: "The Church at Ephesus" (Rev. 2:1-7)

Connection to Session 4

Today's group Bible study taught us a great deal about God's character. We learned that He is aware of our actions and is not pleased when we rebel against Him. We also learned that He is gracious in that He does not put an immediate end to us when we rebel. We saw this in an exchange between Moses and God. We will see a similar example of God being gracious and aware of rebellion as we study the church of Ephesus in the book of Revelation.

Introduction/Opening

If you have been driving long, you have experienced the check engine light. When you see it, you may feel a great sense of fear. You know whatever is causing the light, it will most likely be expensive. If you are wise, and some of us may not have been so wise, you would have chosen to respond to the light and thereby save yourselves a great deal of expense.

We will learn in today's sermon that God has a way of providing a check engine light for us too. He gives us direct warning that something is wrong, and we need to have a course correction. His warning is a sign of His grace because He is not required to give us a warning. He provided a warning to the church at Ephesus in the book of Revelation. Let's look at this warning and see what we can learn about the character and nature of God.

Outline

1. The church at Ephesus

a) What they did right (v. 2-3). This passage tells us that the church at Ephesus did things that pleased the Lord. Jesus affirmed them in two distinct manners. First, He acknowledged their hard work to further His message. It may help us to understand a few things in this affirmation. First, notice the word "works" is plural. The church was engaged in various ministries and not just one thing. Next, let's seek to understand the word "labor." When we look at the original language, we learn that this word means to work to the point of exhaustion. The church was working hard in ministry. Finally, they were enduring, which means to stand up under the weight of something, as they were serving the Lord.

A second strong point the church had was they were testing those who were teaching them. The word "testing" means to prove authenticity. This is not a belligerent attack on someone's character as Christ is not glorified in this. Instead, the church family wanted to make sure those who were proclaiming the Word of God were doing so accurately. They did not and would not stand for false teaching. We have a great deal that we can learn from the church of Ephesus in these two vital characteristics.

b) Where they struggled (v. 4). While they were doing some things correctly, Jesus loved them enough to also point out things they were doing incorrectly. Jesus told them they had abandoned their first love. The word “abandoned” shows a willing choice the people made to walk away from something or someone. Many times, we want to blame the enemy, our past, culture, etc. for our own foolish decisions. According to Jesus’s words, the church had no one to blame but themselves. They willingly chose to walk away from their first love.

It seems wise to ask ourselves what may have caused this. If we search the text, we may be able to find the answer. We know they were laboring in ministry as verse two reveals. We know Jesus said they had abandoned their first love, which is Him. Is it possible they were so busy doing the works of their own ministry that they forgot about Jesus? Is it possible that the church today could learn a lesson from the church at Ephesus? Let’s not be so busy doing things for Jesus and we forget about Jesus.

2. God’s response (v. 5)

a) He showed His grace. As we learned in our group study this morning, God is both loving and just. We saw that in the Old Testament when the children of Israel rebelled against God, and we see an example of this in the New Testament in how God responded to the church at Ephesus.

We see the love in God in that He invited the church to repent. The word “repent” has a military feel to it. If someone is marching in one direction, and then begins to march in the opposite direction, they have repented. God did not call the church to reflect upon their actions or even to feel bad about what they were doing. He wanted them to do an about face and start marching back toward Him. This command shows the gracious nature of God in that He did not bring instant judgement upon the church.

b) He showed His judgement. While God is gracious, He is also just. If the church would not have repented, He said that He would remove their lampstand from among them. This is a direct sign of coming judgement for disobedience. Once again, if we know our actions are wrong and yet continue in said actions, we have no one to blame but ourselves. God was gracious in inviting the church to repent. He was also gracious in saying that judgement would come if the church did not repent.

Conclusion

We learned in our group study this morning as well as our sermon that God is patient, loving, and just. The offer He gave the church at Ephesus is an offer He provides us today. He is not inviting us to more and more work for Him in hopes that we can earn His favor. Instead, He is inviting us to repent of thinking we can earn salvation. Instead, He wants us to turn to Him. He wants us to fall in love with Him and find Him sufficient.

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