



SEVEN SEARCHING LETTERS

REVELATION 1-3

Date:	11 February 2018
Services:	730, 930 Tewantin (via video), 930 Peregian
Series:	7 searching letters
Passage:	Revelation 2:1-7
Title:	To the church in Ephesus
Outline:	Authority What's good What's not Action Encouragement

Ever had a **performance review** at work?

Never feel entirely relaxed about these things... as necessary as they now seem in today's world.

Even if you think you've done a great job, there's still a little anxiety... will there be some sort of surprise sprung on me about which I have no idea...? has someone that I've put off-side, maybe made a complaint?

Typically when you go into a review you want to know that the person doing the review has the relevant

1. **authority** to do it...

Then you want to hear

2. what's **good**
3. What's **not** (if anything)

What the call to

4. **action** is

And then hopefully a word of

5. **encouragement**...

...and there friends, is the outline of these 7 letters to the churches in Rev 2-3...

With a couple of exceptions, **that** is the structure used each time...

But before we get into the detail of the first letter that was read for us, let me ask you...

...what do you think the Spirit is saying to the church today?

I heard a story of a pre-service gathering for prayer in the office – much as we do here each morning... and my friend Simon was to preach that morning... and the person leading the pre-service prayer began praying for God's blessing on the service... and when he came to praying about the sermon he said "Oh Lord – we don't want to hear from Simon this morning..." and Simon was thinking – oh this is not good... until the man went quickly on to say – "we want to hear from YOU Lord!"

Brothers and sisters... you don't want to hear from **ME** this morning – you want to hear what the **Spirit** is saying to the church... that's going to be **much more important** – much more **significant**... and what the Spirit is saying to the church is what Jesus is saying to the church – these are his words!...

...what the Spirit says to the church is not something that's going to **pop** into your **head**... what the Spirit says to the **church** is what he's going to say to **us** by his **Word**.

That is what happens.... Jesus speaks, and the **Spirit** of God works through the **word** of God to speak to us!

(That is why the first of our 7 emphases in our Vision 2020 statement is 'clear and systematic Bible teaching') //

If you were with us last week in ch 1 we heard from John who was on the island of Patmos and we heard him describe that **extraordinary** vision he had that day... a vision which was a vision of **Jesus**, standing among seven golden **lampstands**.

And the figure he saw was a **breath-taking** figure... **overwhelming** and so **powerful** was what he saw as he saw Jesus among the lampstands, that he fell down as though he was **dead**... //

...and now this Jesus he saw, speaks to the church...

As he does so, he first claims his...

1. AUTHORITY

Have a look with me at v1 – *To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.*

Very briefly... Jesus has **authority** to **speak** – because he holds the seven stars in his right hand... and walks among the seven golden lampstands

What are these? Don't have to guess – we're told at the end of ch 1 – *the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches... and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

Now 'angel' in Greek is simply 'messenger'... and I think the context here is an **earthly** messenger who has travelled to John on the isle of Patmos...

The **messenger**? – someone who brings the **message** of **God** – the **pastor** or **minister** we'd call them today!!

And if as we saw last Sunday that the number 7 symbolises **completeness** – and that the 7 churches – **are the whole church**... or **represent** the whole church... then what we are to make of these opening words is **this**:

To the **minister** of the church in **Ephesus** write : these are the words of the whom who holds the **stars** – the **messengers** – the **ministers** – in his **right hand** – and walks among the **church**.... //

I have the **privilege** of being this church's **messenger!**

I bring the **Word of God** to you – that's my **primary charge!!**

And wow – **I'm** being held in **God's right hand** – under his **authority** – but also under his **care and protection!! //**

Oh yes friends – this one – this Jesus - has the authority to undertake our **review!**

2. WHAT'S GOOD

Have a look with me at v2 *I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardship for my name, and have not grown weary.*

Wow – that's a great commendation isn't it? That must have done their hearts good!

But I want you to notice just the first two words of v2...

I know

I **know!** These words are repeated in **each** of the **letters**.

The Lord **knows** all about what's going on his church...

Have you **realised** that? – **thought** about that before?

It makes sense because he **walks** among the church – and he holds the **messengers** in his right **hand**...

It makes **sense** – because he is the **head** – and we are his **body**....

He knows all about **the persecuted 215 million persecuted Christians in the world**... all about us in **Noosa in 2018**...

he knows last year was a **tough** year for us... he knows all about **Simon** and **Ian**...

He knows all about how the church in Australia fared in the **same sex marriage** issue last year...

He knows all about our theological and ecclesiastical **differences** with many other **clergy** and **leaders** in this diocese...

"**I know**"!!... he says.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus' words to **Ephesus** here, are his words to **us** this morning.

For **you** brothers and sisters, have worked **hard** and **persevered**... many **labouring** on here against **unbelief** and **hard-heartedness**...

And you know, you're an **intolerant** bunch - **intolerant** of **immoral** people. And intolerant of **false teachers**...

In a world all on about **tolerance**... there are times when we have to be **intolerant**... we're **intolerant** of **child abusers** and **perpetrators** of **domestic violence**... we're intolerant of those who pedal **pornography**... we're intolerant of **lies** and **corruption** and **greed and gossip**... **as we should be. //**

And we're intolerant of **false teaching**... and we've sadly seen church **leaders** who are false teachers and we must name them as **false** and **warn** people against them.... False teachers will lead people **astray**, they will keep people out of **eternity**.... //

Brothers and sisters – you have a hunger for the Word of God – and you are increasingly **well-equipped** to detect **false teaching** – and you **recognise** it when you see it.

Please be **encouraged**.

This is not a church where **false teaching** is **welcome**!

And remain **alert**!

Continue reading the **Bible** and growing in your **understanding**, so that you can tell the difference between true **Biblical** teaching and **false teaching**... //

But **well done you**...! Because in the words of v3, you have **persevered** and have endured **hardships** for the sake of **Jesus** and have **not grown weary**!

3. WHAT'S NOT

v4 – have a look with me - *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.*

Here we are alerted to the fact that it is possible to be intolerant of **ungodliness** and intolerant of **false teaching**, but to be **tolerant** of your **love** for God having **grown cold**.

So it's possible to be **morally upright** and **doctrinally correct**... but have **no love**... without which (says the Apostle Paul) we are **nothing**!

How sad is this! // Good **morals**, right **doctrine**, no **love** – either for **God** or one **another**.

A Christianity that is **external** and **cerebral**... but not **heartfelt**... without **passion**, without **emotion**.

we must take notice of the warning – we must see that it is **possible** for love to grow **cold**. /

How do we ensure it doesn't?

We make sure our Sunday services are **rich** and **real**... not **empty and formal**...

We make sure our **connect** groups are places where we truly **connect** with God and with **one another** and not just **toss around academic ideas**.

We are careful to speak to God in **private prayer** and read his **word** seeking to not just mouth **words**, but truly **engage** with him.

We make sure that we actually pour out our hearts to him... tell him what we are **thinking**...

We stop and consider how much he has **blessed** us with and we **thank** him.

We come to him in **sorrow** for **sin** and ask **forgiveness**.

We are **moved** again by his love for us in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and we say '**thank you**'. //

Brothers and sisters – **heed the warning** – may this **never** be said of **us**! //

And yet I have to ask don't I – has **your** love grown **cold**?

Are you **morally upright**, **doctrinally correct** but **emotionally bankrupt**?

... no longer feeling **moved** by God's **love** for you..

...feeling far away – **removed** – **cold** – **distant**?

Then you'll want to pay careful attention to this next point where Jesus calls them to **action**...

4. ACTION

What do you do when your love for Jesus grows **cold**? /

Look with me at v5 *Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.*

Do you remember what it was like either when you first became a follower of Jesus? ...or if you've known him all your life, do you recall a time when you were particularly **excited** to follow Jesus...

Probably during my latter years a high school was one of the times I've been most 'full on' for the Lord Jesus...

We had about 12 guys in our year at school who were Christian....

...we'd get to school early a couple of times a week to **pray**...

...we used to go around with the school video camera and do vox pops on what people thought of Christianity...

...we'd run the lunch time Christian group...

...we went on a mission among aboriginal kids in Wilcannia NSW

...those were **precious** days... //

How was it for **you** in those early years? What did you do as a **believer** then? What made those days with Jesus, **great**?

Jesus says - repent - from having forsaken your first love... **do what you did then... !**

Try to **recapture** some of that... Do what you did **then**... and the love will **follow** and **flow**... and if there is some **sin** in the road - **repent** - put it **right**!

Return to the Lord your **God!**.. for he is compassionate and gracious, and abounding in love for you. //

There's a clear **warning** here for the church who just continues on with a love-less Christianity... did you notice?

Look with me half way through v5 - *If you do **not** repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

That's **frightening** isn't it?

For the church which **forsakes** its first love - that is, it's **genuine love** for Jesus - and just goes on about all manner of things **except** Jesus... and never repents... never acts to put that right, Jesus will remove their **lampstand**... that is, he'll remove his very **presence** from them! //

The lamp at **Ephesus** was removed. // **Church** and even **city** - no longer **there**! They did **not** repent of having forsaken their first love!

And friends there are churches today all over this nation - all over the **UK** - all over the **USA** - **struggling, shrinking, closing**... being **sold**... because they have **forsaken** their first **love** and have not **repented**...

they **love** to hear what their itching ears long to hear... but they have long since stopped **listening** to **Jesus**...

they **won't** put up with sound doctrine...

they don't want to **hear** the truth or **live** by the truth...

they follow their **own** agenda which is the agenda of today's **modern world**... and **not** the agenda of the Lord **Jesus**... ///

Oh Lord, protect us at the Anglican Church of Noosa, from **ever** forsaking our first love...

...and if your love has grown **cold**? You're just going through the **motions**? You're just turning up here out of **duty** or **ritual**?... please, **please** come and talk to me... and let's work together so that you remember the height from which you have fallen and repent and do the things you did at first... //

Finally... at the end of the review... you look for some:

5. ENCOURAGEMENT

...and that is exactly what we see here and in each of the 7 letters...

Have a look with me at v7 - *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*

He's saying - listen - I, **Jesus** am speaking - the **Spirit** is speaking - if you have **ears** - make **use of them!!** //

And then there's this promise to those who overcome...

That is, to those who are **not** overcome *themselves* with the **temptations** and **pressures** of the **world**.

That is, those who **DO** hear... what the Spirit of God is saying to the churches....

I will give the right to eat from the tree of life... it's an image drawn from the last chapters of the book...

As Adam and Eve were **shut out** from the tree of life... here is a **reversal** of that... to those who **stand firm** in **Jesus**... who **overcome** their **cold hearts**... who continue to be **intolerant** of **immorality** and **false teaching**... to those who **stick** with Jesus... by his **grace** and **mercy** - there is **life!!** ///

What is Jesus saying to us?

Well done on our **hard work**, **perseverance**... our **resistance** of **evil**, our **resistance** of **false teaching**... well done on the **hardships** we've endured as we follow - because we follow - Jesus!

And // don't live with a **love-less Christianity**. **Repent** and do the things you did at **first** - anything to recapture - re-establish that **effervescent**, **enthusiastic**, **warm**, genuine love you had for Jesus at **first** (or at some point), which resulted in a life lived **radically** and **entirely** for him!! //

That's what the Spirit is saying to **you** and to **me** this morning.

If you have ears to hear, then hear!