

Bible Studies for Life: June 6

Characterized by Love • Revelation 2:1-7

By Clay Anthony



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A Bible study of the book of Revelation can be daunting. There is much that our culture does not understand when attempting to grasp the imagery described in John's report of Jesus' message. Yet there is always something to learn from God's Word and when read as it should be read, Revelation has a message that is very applicable for our churches today.

This letter was not meant to confuse believers but to encourage them in their faith. The original readers of Revelation faced the same issues we presently face, and they learned the same lessons we must bring into our church settings today.

Jesus is heard by John addressing seven distinct churches and clarifying what is right and wrong in those congregations. There were commendable characteristics found within these groups as well as needed improvements.

Again, the very same can be said of our local churches today. There are some things we do well but when it comes to church life, there is always room for improvement. The first church addressed is the church at Ephesus. It was a congregation

planted by the Apostle Paul and later pastored by Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3). Jesus desires for His church to follow Him in the purest manner possible. For that to occur, this church must realize a few needed truths.

Good Works Are Good. (2:1-3). The believers at Ephesus have much going for them. We read that they are hard workers, they toil in service, and they have an overabundance of patience all the while standing against false teachers. This sounds like a church worth joining.

Note that this is not a Yelp review. The first verse identifies the one speaking as Jesus Himself. These words are powerful descriptors coming from the One that founded and gave His life for the church. There seems to be a sense of pride in the work and steadfastness of the church of Ephesus.

An illustration in modern terminology would be that these people were busy getting ready for Vacation Bible School, diligent in planning outreach events, and making sure that their teachings were in line with Scripture, and doing so does not wear them out. So far, so good for Ephesus.

Love for Christ is Fuel (2:4-6). Into this picture, insert the conjunction “but.” All is not perfect in Ephesus. As good as good works are, good works are not best works. Seems that these people had become so consumed with ticking off boxes of service that they had forgotten why they were serving and certainly Who they were serving in the first place.

Their works, while commendable, counted for naught in that they were performed for the wrong reasons. Jesus is clear that love was to be the driving force behind all actions the church would take. If not fueled by love, work can become dreaded at best and by rote at worst. Be reminded that all deeds done for the Kingdom must be driven first by love (2 Cor. 5:14).

Heaven is Our Home (2:7). How do believers in Ephesus – and present day – ensure the work rendered to the church is done

with the love Jesus requires? Just as the right reason should be at the forefront of our minds, so should our future destination. Jesus reminds the Ephesians that those who do the work of the church, with the right motivation, can be assured of the right destination.

Jesus draws the minds of believers from one bookend of His story to the other by reminding all of us that we are headed to a place that includes a new tree of life not unlike Eden itself. The Ephesians and present-day believers hold to the same promise. Good works are only best works when done in love and performed when eternity with Jesus in mind.

Live It Out. Ask within your small group: “What is our church doing?” Be it outreach or service within the family, what is your church up to? Are there teaching needs for any age? Are there physical needs for the property? Any missionary needs that you can be involved in?

Once these needs are discovered, you will be able to express service to your church in love with an eye toward the eternal promise of heaven.

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