

# Finishing Well

Lesson #31

Warfare in the Apostolic Church

August 9, 2023

The Apostolic Church, renowned for the purity of its doctrine, began the year of Jesus' ascension and ended in A.D. 100, the year of the death of John, the last apostle.

The Apostolic Church had experienced a lightning growth.

At the end of the first century, there were about 6 million Christians in the known world.

Ephesus was the largest city of the Roman province of Asia. The Apostle Paul visited Ephesus on his 2<sup>nd</sup> [~49 AD; Acts 15:36-18:22] & 3<sup>rd</sup> [~AD 52; Acts 18:23-21:17] missionary journeys.

Paul wrote a letter to the church at Ephesus ~60-62 AD.

John wrote Jesus' words to the church at Ephesus ~95 AD. Revelation 2:1-7

Ephesus was a flourishing commercial and export center for Asia.

Its position made Ephesus the wealthiest and the greatest city in all Asia.

- It was the terminus for the great road from the Euphrates River.
- Ephesus was the highway to Rome.
- When the Christians were brought from Asia to be flung to the lions in the arena in Rome, Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, called Ephesus the Highway of the Martyrs.
- Because it resembled so well John Bunyan's picture in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it has been aptly called the Vanity Fair of the ancient world.

The traveler from Rome landing at Ephesus would proceed up a magnificent avenue 35' wide and lined with columns which led from the harbor to the center of the city. It boasted a major stadium, marketplace, and a theater which was built on the west slope of Mt. Pion overlooking the harbor and seated about 25,000 people.

Ephesus was a sophisticated, commercial city with running water, an underground sewage system, and a large public library with an extensive collection of writings.

It had a number of affluent homes of up to 9-10,000 square feet with multiple levels, central heating systems, sophisticated art, and rich furnishings. Imagine wide, paved streets with beautiful, sophisticated buildings, shrines, columns and arches, hundreds of businesses, and many travelers on the major trade route, of which Ephesus was a key port city with a busy harbor.

Chuck Swindoll: The city gleamed with white iridescence, as if to say to the world, "This city will shine forever." And of all the cities in the Roman Empire, Ephesus would have been one of the most difficult places in which to establish an orderly church. The city of Corinth struggled with rampant immorality, and that enemy was easy to spot.

But a church in Ephesus also had to be on guard against two insidious killers of congregations: enticing prosperity and distracting philosophy.

Ephesus was a prominent religious center: Temples were built to Claudius, Hadrian, and Severus. Ephesus was renowned for its paganism—as many as 50 different gods and goddesses were worshiped there.

The major religious attraction was the Temple of Artemis [Diana in Latin], one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was about four times the size of the Parthenon.

Pliny the elder gives the dimensions of the temple as 425' long, 220' wide, and 60' high. He notes the 127 pillars were of Parian marble, with 36 of them overlaid with gold and jewels.

Chuck Swindoll: Worship of the "earth mother" had become a huge attraction, combining tourism and sensual idolatry with such success that it fueled the city's core economy. City officials set aside one month of every year to honor the goddess with a grand celebration, during which all work ceased. The stadium hosted athletic games, the theater produced plays, the odeum held concerts, and people flocked from every corner of Asia and beyond to make offerings in the sacred grove, the mythical birthplace of Artemis. Worship of the goddess brought such enormous sums of money into the temple that it became an important banking institution, perhaps the first of its kind in Asia. Moreover, the city of Ephesus became a sanctuary for debtors, a place of refuge for anyone seeking to avoid a creditor's demands.

If the lure of money and magic didn't create enough chaos, the city of Ephesus also attracted schools of philosophy. Around 500 BC, Heraclitus, a Greek noble of Ephesus, taught that the universe operates according to a unified ordering principle, which he called the logos, that is, "the word."

Later philosophers built upon this theory, claiming that all the laws of physics, mathematics, reason, and even morality can be traced back to an impersonal divine mind. By the time of Paul, Ephesus had become a veritable cauldron of competing philosophies and a celebrated repository of texts on Greek philosophy.

Heraclitus, one of the most famous of ancient philosophers, was known as 'the weeping philosopher'. His explanation of his tears was that no one could live in Ephesus without weeping at its immorality.

This was a cesspool of iniquity filled with temple prostitutes, dancers, eunuchs, drunkenness, orgies. In the middle of this, God birthed His church. God does His greatest work in the most difficult places because He gets all the glory.

By the time the gospel was preached here, Ephesus had a population of more than 250,000 people. Ephesus was in a sense the "gates of Hell!" God opened the door for Paul into this stronghold of Satan.

Swindoll: To ensure that the church would remain morally clean, doctrinally pure, and spiritually vibrant, Paul spent more time in Ephesus than in any other Gentile city. Moreover, he nurtured the congregation from afar, sending envoys to check on its members' well-being, writing at least one letter, and—perhaps most significant of all—placing them in the hands of his beloved disciple Timothy.

Acts 19:1 Paul returned to Ephesus and found certain disciples who only knew of John the Baptist and his baptism.

Acts 19:4-5, 7-10 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. <sup>5</sup> When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>7</sup> And all the men were about twelve.

<sup>8</sup> And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took the disciples away *with him*, and had discussions daily in the school of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup> This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

"The Way" is mentioned several times in the book of Acts: [9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22] in connection with early followers of Christ. It was to take prisoner men and women who "belonged to the Way" that Saul of Tarsus went to Damascus. After Saul was converted, he became a missionary and went by the name of Paul. In Ephesus, Paul met some in the synagogue who "became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way." Paul left the synagogue and continued to preach the gospel where it would be heard rather than remain with those who denigrated the Way.

He departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

Jack Arnold: The School Of Tyrannus "The Western Manuscript adds the words, "From the fifth to the tenth hour." Paul and his disciples rented the School of Tyrannus from 11:00 o'clock in the morning to 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon. Why? In the ancient world, the working hours were from about 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Then they took a five hour break for a siesta and leisure time. Work resumed after 4:00 p.m. and continued until about 10:00 p.m. The point is that Paul and his Christian disciples gave up precious sleeping time and relaxation time to meet, study the Word and witness to anyone who wanted to hear about Jesus Christ. They were willing to sacrifice time to further the kingdom of Christ.

MacArthur agrees that "Paul did not go off duty at 4:00 p.m. but continued ministering well into the evening hours [Acts 20:31], no doubt instructing from house to house Paul maintained this grueling schedule for two years."

Miracles Glorify Christ - Acts 19:11-20 God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, <sup>12</sup> so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had the evil spirits, saying, "I order you in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches!"

<sup>14</sup> Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. <sup>15</sup> And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"<sup>16</sup> Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

When the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, attempted to cast out demons by using Paul's words and were overcome by them, the vast difference between magic and Christianity was demonstrated.

<sup>17</sup> This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. <sup>18</sup> And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. <sup>19</sup> Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.

<sup>20</sup> So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

Results: Many were saved and the gospel was heard throughout Asia. The Holy Spirit empowered the Apostles and early believers to boldly proclaim the Gospel of Christ and to undergo persecution resulting from refusal to shrink back from the truth of the Gospel.

#### Demetrius Gathers The Ephesian "Chamber Of Commerce"

The Riot at Ephesus - Acts 19:23-34 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.

The unseen cause of the riot was the satanic realm's antagonism to the prevailing of the Word [Acts 19:20]. Demons stirred up human agents to oppose the gospel, which was spreading rapidly throughout the province of Asia.

<sup>24</sup> For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. <sup>25</sup> He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade.

<sup>26</sup> Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that *they are not gods which are made with hands*. <sup>27</sup> So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

<sup>28</sup> Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" <sup>29</sup> So the whole city was filled with confusion, [population of about 250,000] and rushed into the theater [seats 25,000] with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. <sup>30</sup> And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. <sup>31</sup> Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater.

<sup>32</sup> Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

<sup>33</sup> And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people.

<sup>34</sup> But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

Consider: This was a major uprising - nearly a full-scale riot - against Christ and the Gospel. Someone finally calmed the mob down by warning them they were in danger of punishment by the Roman authorities for public disturbance. Paul's friends would not allow him into the theater for fear he would be killed. This was certainly no minor event.

Acts 20:1-3 After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had encouraged them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia. <sup>2</sup> When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. <sup>3</sup> And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.

Acts 20:15c-16 on the following day we came to Miletus. <sup>16</sup> For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to lose time in Asia; for he was hurrying, if it might be possible for him to be in Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

Paul called for the Ephesian elders to meet with him at Miletus.

Acts 20: 18b-20 You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was beneficial, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,

He told them of the prophecies concerning the danger of his returning to Jerusalem. His final words concerned the kind of ministry he had demonstrated before them as an example for them to follow.

Paul reminded them of the importance of persevering in what they had learned, and the necessity of exhorting the congregation to do likewise.

Acts 20:28-32 Take heed [Be on guard] therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed [to shepherd] the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 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.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians in 62 AD: Paul is in prison in Rome.

Paul underlines the consecration, the faithfulness and the perseverance of this church.

Eph. 1:1, 15-16 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

<sup>15</sup>Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup> do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

It has been 63 years since Pentecost and 35 years since Paul's departure.

Did they follow Paul's valuable counsel?

Rev. 2:1-7 Ephesus > Desired One - The Loveless Church - Apostolic Church in church history

Notice: Christ's title: Christ is present and in control.

Rev. 2:1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

- This church had enjoyed some stellar leadership > Paul, Timothy and John.  
You worship the Lord God; not the leader.

### *Commendation of the Church of Ephesus.*

7 Commendations: Rev. 2:2-3, 6 *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;*

- Followed Paul's advice & have "*tried them which say they are apostles and are not.*"

<sup>3</sup> *and you have persevered and have patience and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.*

<sup>6</sup>*But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

Note: They stood firm in their deeds and doctrine for 30 years.

Serving > Very BUSY doing the works of the Lord > Much activity

Acts 20:19 Serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

Sacrificing > Labor = Toil to the point of exhaustion; work fraught with hardship or burdens

Steadfast > Patient = Endurance under trial > kept going when the going was tough

Separated Themselves From >

- *False Doctrine:* Weeded out heresy; Gatekeepers of Truth

Paul had warned > False teachers will arise from the outside as well as within.

John had instructed them to "try the spirits." [I John 4:1-6]

II Cor. 11:1-4, 12-15 > Satan has false ministers. Be alert to detect them > Reject them

- *False Deeds:*

Nicolaitans = To Conquer the People; Possibly refers to a sect who initiated "clergy" and "laity" and "lorded themselves over the church and people.

- A false division that is taught NOWHERE in the New Testament.

1. The Nicolaitans were teaching that the body was independent of the soul. This way, according to them, it was possible to commit sin in one's body without causing harm to one's soul. This doctrine can still be found today in some Christian churches.

2. The leadership in the church (Nicolaitans) were elevating themselves above everyone else. Like all deceivers which come from the body of Christ, claimed "not that they were destroying Christianity, but they were presenting an improved and modernized version of it. Truth: ALL the body of Christ is under the authority and leadership of Jesus Christ. Suffering > Patiently bore burdens; toiled without fainting > ALL for His name's sake.

Christ's Concern: The diagnosis of Jesus is very clear as He examines the Heart.

Rev. 2:4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Devotion to Christ that often characterizes a new believer > fervent, personal, uninhibited

"First love" in God's eyes: The LOVE >

1. First brought you to God
2. Love you experienced when you saw the cross as it really was.
3. It was when you realized the blood of Jesus Christ was shed for your sin.
4. You were overwhelmed with His amazing love.
5. You believed and trusted in Him, became a child of God, and experienced His forgiveness.

First love:

1. First love looks at rivers of grief & worry that arise in life & says,
  - God will carry me through.
2. First love looks at stumbling blocks & sees them as steppingstones.
  - These will prove the power of God.
3. First love cries out, Just give me a mountain to climb. Give me a river to swim. Give me something to prove the greatness of God's love & how powerful He is."

This busy, separated, suffering people suffered from heart trouble.

1. They abandoned or LEFT their first love.

The word first indicates that the love which has been left is a love which existed previously.

2. They displayed "works, labor and patience." > NOT motivated by love for Christ.

I Thess. 1:3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Truth: What we do for the Lord is important, but WHY we do it is vital.

Consider: It is possible to serve, sacrifice and suffer for His names' sake and not TRULY love Jesus Christ.

Truth: Church of Ephesus >so BUSY (Being Under Satan's Yoke) maintaining their separation they neglected adoration. Consequently, they lost their warmth and zeal for Christ. Thus, they began to "go through the motions" of good works. What was once a love relationship cooled into mere religion. Their passion for Him became little more than cold orthodoxy.

Spurgeon: When love dies orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse, a powerless formalism.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he referenced love 20 times.

He emphasized the believers' "exalted position in Jesus Christ...in heavenly places."

Note: The very last verse of the Paul's epistle to the people of Ephesus >

Eph. 6:24 *Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.*

Importance of loving the Lord «with an undying love».

The church of Ephesus was not EXPERIENCING its heavenly position in Christ.

Did they just decide one day not to love God anymore? It was a gradual thing.

During the second half of the first century, as the apostles were dying one by one, the Christians progressively lost the vision transmitted at the Day of the Pentecost.

Slowly, they let the evangelical fervor of the early days cool down, that same fervor which had formerly brought about the conversion of thousands of souls day after day.

Internal betrayal and spiritual battles had eroded much of their enthusiasm.

Ephesus was a major port where ships of any size could dock. Ephesus made all its money from trade. The silting of the harbor had removed the city's economic influence.

The silt built up in the harbor, which eventually reached the point where no ship could reach the city. Without ships, trade died. Without trade, the city died.

The Ephesian Christians had lost their first love by allowing the silt of spiritual indifference to accumulate over the years.

Wayne Stiles: We can wake up after a number of years and discover that our lack of passion for Jesus has gradually silted Him five miles away from our hearts.

Our hearts begin to silt when we content ourselves with maintaining a level of godliness that makes cultural Christianity our standard. Our challenge has become spiritual maintenance rather than spiritual growth. Our hearts fill with silt without our knowing it.

Edmund Burke: "Very seldom does a man take one giant step from a life of virtue & goodness into a life of sin & corruption. Usually, he begins his journey into evil by taking little steps into the shaded areas; areas tinted & colored just a bit, almost unnoticed by those around him. Until one day, hardly aware that he has made the journey, he finds himself firmly entangled in a life of sin & corruption."

We see this same kind of journey pictured repeatedly in Scripture.

1. In Judges we read of Samson whose life from birth to manhood was dedicated to God. Gradually, Samson started flirting with evil, which little by little, invaded his life.

Judges 16:20 reveals a startling verse:

The Lord had departed from Samson, and he didn't realize it.

Samson, once a great man of God, became so deeply enmeshed in sin God left him.

Insensitive to the presence of God, Samson didn't even realize it.

2. Saul, initially, loved God. Gradually, he turned his back on God. The storm clouds began to gather. Ultimately, the Spirit of God left him. Saul ended up slinking off to the witch of Endor, seeking help from the powers of evil. Those were the forces controlling his life.



Swindoll: The erosion of the love they had at the beginning didn't happen overnight. No one suddenly wakes up one morning and says, "I don't love Jesus anymore. I'm tired of Jesus and I'm finished with all this Christianity stuff." It doesn't happen like that. It happens over the years—after hardship, questions you can't get answered, trials that don't seem to have reason, loss of health, loss of hope, loss of a loved one. In the midst of the Ephesians' hard work and endurance for Jesus, their love for Him began to wane.

### Christ's Exhortation

Rev. 2:5 Remember [literally > Keep On Remembering] therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

Keep on remembering what you have lost. Cultivate a desire to regain the fellowship. God desires my devotion rather than doctrine.

Ponder: They were doing MANY good things, but they were DISTRACTED from doing their first works...their first love, and, unless they return to that first love, their church itself would become extinct...no more...of no use to Him any longer.

Repent [change your mind; confess your sin] and do the things you did at first.

Swindoll: The key is not doing more works but repenting.

It is not getting busy but getting broken.

Repeat the First Works > Restore the original fellowship that was broken by MY sin and MY neglect. Restore prayer, Bible reading/study, meditate on and memorize the Word, obedient service and worship.

Consider: Today the city of Ephesus is a heap of stones and ruin.

If I, like the church at Ephesus, lose my love and devotion for Christ, I will lose my light, no matter how doctrinally sound I may be.

Ghost towns capture the imagination. As you walk the streets you can almost hear the echoes of the past, but the buildings stand empty as mute reminders of life that is gone.

With every passing season more buildings collapse, more weeds grow up, more animals take over the ruins where a thriving town once stood. A ghost town is nature's testimony that once something has been emptied, destruction & death follow, unless the void is filled.

In the parable of the empty house, Jesus tells us it is not enough for a man to be freed from the power of Satan. His life must be filled with the Spirit of God or Satan will get hold of him again. Like the ghost town, if a person is not filled with a life in Christ, he will be filled with something else, & the end result is death & decay.

Jesus said, "I am come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly."

Rev. 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches.