

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

STUDY FOUR

The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

Revelation 2:1–7

No one suddenly wakes up one morning and says, “I don’t love Jesus anymore.” It doesn’t happen like that. It happens over the years, little by little, after hardship that doesn’t seem to have reason—loss of health, loss of hope, loss of a loved one. The love sometimes cools off, and that breaks Jesus’ heart.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SKILLED chefs always keep one ingredient handy: *salt*. Every recipe requires salt because it enhances the taste of the dish. Without salt, even a meal composed of the best ingredients will lack that flavorful *pop* that makes you say, “Now, *this* is wonderful!”

Yes, you can always shake some salt on your plate after the fact, but the best chefs salt their food *throughout* the process. They salt the meat before it hits the grill. They salt the boiling pasta water. They salt the vegetables sizzling in the sauté pan. They salt the sauce simmering in the pot. With a careful hand, these chefs apply salt to bring out the flavor of each ingredient and so prepare a truly delicious dish.

The salt of the Christian life is *love*.

Love is not to be an afterthought. Rather, it must saturate *everything* Christ-followers do. Love must permeate our prayer life, our study of Scripture, our gathering with fellow believers, and our interaction with the non-believing world. Without love, the Christian life is bland—just as the apostle Paul said, “If I . . . do not have love, I am nothing” (*1 Corinthians 13:2* NASB).

This *Searching the Scriptures* study sits at the table with ancient believers who had all the ingredients of a healthy Christian life . . . except for love. Jesus Himself addressed this community, and His words reveal how we can lead lives well-seasoned with love.



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Revelation 2:1–7



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The apostle John said, “God is love” (1 [John 4:8](#)). Love is at the center of God’s character—of His very being. He loves us incomprehensibly more than we could ever love someone, even

Father, thank You for loving me—even during those times when my behavior wasn’t so lovely. As I study Your Word today, remind me of this great love, and equip me to show this love to You and others. In Jesus’ loving name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the first chapter of Revelation, John draws back the curtains and introduces us to the hero of the drama: Jesus Christ. Yet the show begins, not with visions of the future but with letters to seven churches scattered across Asia Minor.

[Revelation 2–3](#) contains the letters Jesus sent to these seven churches through John’s pen. Each letter begins by addressing a specific church and by describing Jesus in colorful language, usually referencing one of John’s apocalyptic descriptions from his vision of the risen Christ in [1:12–16](#).

According to [2:1](#), which church did Jesus address *first*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:12–18](#) does His self-description match?

The city of Ephesus likely sounds familiar. In [Acts 19:8–20](#), Paul helped establish the first church in Ephesus, and a few years later, he wrote the letter to the [Ephesians](#). Take some time to peruse these portions of Scripture and record some key takeaways. If you want to go deeper, you can read about [Ephesus](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* available for free at biblegateway.com.

In [Revelation 2:2–7](#), Jesus addressed Ephesian believers to offer an honest performance review addressing both the strengths and weaknesses of the church community.

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Revelation 2:1–7



Observation: The Church in Ephesus

Each of the seven letters in [Revelation 2–3](#) follows a similar outline. After John’s lofty introduction, Jesus immediately told the church, “I know all the things you do” (Revelation 2:2). Then, He went on to *commend* their strengths, to note *concern* for their weaknesses, and to offer *correction* that would lead them back to the path of faithfulness. Keep this outline in mind as you read each letter.

These seven letters contain some of the most practical material in Revelation, but we must resist the urge to hastily jump into *application*. You can’t apply a passage of Scripture without first *interpreting* it’s meaning, and you can’t interpret without first *observing* what the passage says.¹

Commendation—Revelation 2:2–3, 6

According to [Revelation 2:2](#), what did Jesus “know” about the church in Ephesus?

According to [2:2–3](#), in what ways did these believers demonstrate their faithfulness to Christ?

What additional note of encouragement did Jesus offer in [2:6](#)? Don’t worry if you’re not exactly sure what this means. We will consider the meaning of this verse in the interpretation phase.

The Christians in Ephesus displayed active energy, patient endurance, and doctrinal discernment. We could use more churches like that!

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

Revelation 2:1–7

Concern—Revelation 2:4

According to [Revelation 2:4](#), what was Jesus' central "complaint against" the church in Ephesus?

Correction—Revelation 2:5, 7

According to [Revelation 2:5](#), what correction did Jesus offer? What did He say would happen if the church didn't heed His words?

According to [2:7](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who "listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying"? What kind of victory would they obtain?

The church in Ephesus was doing all the right things—working hard, persevering under difficult circumstances, teaching the truth. Yet these efforts lacked a love for God and love for others. Because they left out this essential ingredient, their spiritual health was at great risk.



Interpretation: The Necessity of Love

Jesus' core message to the church in Ephesus was a call to repentance. The Greek term for "repentance" refers to a person changing his or her mind, and the corresponding Hebrew term describes someone turning around.

The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

Revelation 2:1–7

In what way did Jesus call the people of the Ephesian church to change their minds and to turn around? How is Jesus' message instructive for Christians today who seek to lead a life characterized by repentance?

Why is love the essential ingredient of the Christian life? In what ways did Jesus demonstrate the love that is so central to God's character?

In [Revelation 2:6](#), Jesus made the interesting comment that the Ephesians hated “the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans.” Who were the Nicolaitans? What made their behavior so abhorrent? To answer these questions, consult a Bible-study tool, like Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.² For a free resource, look at [Constable's Notes](#) available at netbible.org.

It is never too late to start doing what is right. That'll save you from more heartaches than you can name. Now is the time to turn. Now is the time to remember. Now is the time to do what you once did. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Liturgies of Love

On the wheel of God's character, love is the hub where the spokes of His other attributes connect. God, therefore, wants His people to be characterized by love as well.

The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

Revelation 2:1–7

The law of Moses contains a summons called the *Shema* (a Hebrew word meaning “hear” or “listen”). The *Shema* represents the heart of Jewish belief, and faithful Israelites would recite these words twice daily. The *Shema* is recorded in [Deuteronomy 6:4–9](#). Read it aloud as the ancient Israelites once did. What is the central command of the *Shema* ([6:5](#))?

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He reiterated these words when a teacher of the law asked Him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” ([Mark 12:28](#)). According to [Mark 12:29–30](#), what did Jesus consider the most important commandment? According to [12:31](#), what other commandment did Jesus discuss? Note how Jesus compares these two commandments.

To be a person of Christ is to be a person of love. Anyone who lacks a heart of love hasn’t truly experienced the love God offers His children. This is why the apostle John said, “We love each other because he loved us first” ([1 John 4:19](#)). In application, we will consider how we can extend to others the love God has given to us.



Application: A Well-Seasoned Life of Love

Based on Jesus’ letter to the church in Ephesus, Pastor Chuck developed four points of application:

- *Jesus knows us completely.* Don’t bother trying to hide your sin.
- *Jesus loves us unconditionally.* You can neither earn it nor lose it.
- *Jesus rewards us abundantly.* Your faith will draw you ever closer to Him.
- *Jesus calls us tenderly.* Listen to His voice and run to His embrace.

The Church with Everything but the Greatest Thing

Revelation 2:1–7

In the space below, reflect on the ways you have experienced the unconditional love of Jesus.

In what ways can you more deeply saturate every aspect of your Christian life in love—to show God that you love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Write down some practical steps below.

Could your life use a little more of the seasoning of love? God is like a chef who is ready to highlight the flavors and aromas of your personality with the salt of Christlike love. We simply need to receive it. When we do, He will look at our loving lives and say, “Now, this is wonderful!”



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I confess that at times I have not loved You or others as You have called me to. Help me in my journey of repentance. I want to show love the way You love me in Christ—unconditionally. Thank You for loving for me and caring for me throughout my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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Study 4 • Page 7

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