

Shopping for a Church in Asia
Series: Between a Rock and a Hard Place
January 31, 2021

- I. The Great American Evangelical Pasttime – **Church Shopping**
 - A. Most have done it
 - 1. Consumer oriented culture
 - 2. We have choices
 - a. Like going to the grocery store
 - b. Plenty of brands to choose from
 - 3. Why not churches?
 - B. Good reasons for doing it
 - 1. Move to town; need to find a church
 - 2. Most towns in US have lots of churches
 - a. Large or small
 - b. Doctrinally distinctive
 - (1) Baptist
 - (2) Methodist
 - (3) Roman Catholic
 - c. Distinguished by government
 - (1) Congregational
 - (2) Presbyterian
 - (3) Episcopal
 - d. Distinguished by worship style
 - (1) Pentecostal
 - (2) Charismatic
 - (3) Liturgical
 - (4) Traditional
 - (5) Contemporary
 - (6) Blended
 - e. Distinguished by location
 - C. Sometimes bad reasons for doing it
 - 1. Offended by someone in home church
 - 2. Desire a different worship style
 - 3. Don't like the sound of the new preacher's voice
 - D. In American church, our consumer culture contributes to church shopping
 - 1. Choose a church like we buy a car
 - a. Personal taste has a lot to do with it
 - E. Church shopping didn't happen at the end of the first century
 - 1. One church for every town
- II. Assume that you could shop for a church in the 1st Century
 - A. Use your imagination
 - B. Move to Western Asia
 - 1. Transferred by your company

2. Choice to settle in one of two cities, 35 miles apart
 - a. North – Smyrna
 - b. South – Ephesus
 3. Both have ports connected to the Aegean Sea
- C. As a Christian, you decide to choose which city to live in based in part on the church
1. Number of things to look for in a church
 - a. Teaching of the word
 - b. Fellowship
 - c. Size
 - d. Music program
 - e. Children’s programs
 - f. Whatever...
- D. Options for churches
1. Ephesus
 - a. Most important city in Asia
 - (1) “1st City of Asia”
 - b. Wide streets in the center of town
 - c. Excellent harbor
 - (1) Natural landing point for ships coming from and going to Rome
 - (2) Mouth of the Cayster River
 - (3) Silting in harbor caused the city to be relocated from time to time
 - d. End of a natural trade route through Asia
 - e. Cultural center
 - (1) Library
 - (2) Baths
 - (3) Theater with a capacity of 25,000
 - (4) Paved streets
 - (5) Temple dedicated to Artemis (Gk; Diana – Roman)
 - (a) One of the seven wonders of the world
 - (6) Population – more than 300,000
 - f. Religious center
 - (1) Artemis (Diana)
 - (2) Roman Emperor worship
 - (a) Three temples in addition to the Artemis temple
 - (3) Longstanding presence of Jewish community
 - g. These religious aspects would not be encouraging for a Christian
 - (1) Still, benefits of living in a vibrant, cosmopolitan community
 - h. Church at Ephesus
 - (1) By all accounts – strong church
 - (2) Celebrated history
 - (a) Founded by Priscilla and Aquila, trusted companions of Paul

- (b) Apollos was corrected by Priscilla and Aquila; went on to become one of the great preachers of his day
- (c) Paul came expressly to minister there on his 3rd missionary journey; stayed 2 years
 - i) Taught in synagogue until thrown out
 - ii) Then taught in lecture hall of Tyrannus
- (d) Paul left Timothy there as a pastor
- (e) After church was established, became the main headquarters of the apostle John
- (f) What a history!
- (3) Much that was good about the church
 - (a) Very much **Concerned about truth**
 - i) Opposed syncretism (marriage of pagan ideas with Christianity); at some cost
 - ii) Disciplined those within the fellowship who strayed from sound doctrine
 - (b) Continued to exhibit signs of life; not weary
 - (c) Must have been pretty large
 - i) Teaching adversely affected the trade of artisans who made articles to contribute to the goddess and emperor cults
 - (d) **Missionary church**
 - i) Probably planted most of the other churches in Asia
- (4) Probably had a good music program, children's programs...
 - (a) Maybe even a radio and TV ministry
 - (b) On the internet!

2. **Smyrna**

- a. Also a **Distinguished city**
 - (1) Competed for the title of "1st City of Asia" with Ephesus
 - (2) Had been destroyed at one time; rebuilt in the last 200 years
 - (a) According to a plan (one of the first planned cities)
 - (3) Known for the beauty of its public buildings
- b. Also had a harbor
 - (1) Better than Ephesus
 - (a) No problem with silting
 - (b) Protected by a large bay
 - (2) Wonderful location for trade
 - (a) **Natural trade route** through the Hermus Valley
- c. Rich agricultural area around the city
 - (1) Easy to export agricultural products
 - (a) E.g. myrrh
 - (2) Meant the city probably even smelled good
 - (a) Which is not a small thing – imagine living near a city with chemical plants or paper mills!

- d. Very **Political city**
 - (1) Declared its allegiance to Rome long before Rome controlled Asia
 - (2) Were rewarded by Rome for their loyalty
 - (a) When Rome was to choose a city for a temple for emperor worship during Tiberius' reign, they chose Smyrna over Ephesus for that reason
- e. **Recreational opportunities**
 - (1) Famous for its games
 - (a) Cf Cleveland v. Columbus re: professional football
- f. **Church**
 - (1) **Small, suffering church**
 - (2) Martyrdom was not uncommon among Smyrnian Christians
 - (3) Most famous martyr was **Polycarp (d. 155)**
 - (a) Bishop of Smyrna (86 years old)
 - (b) Burned at the stake
 - (4) Reason – Jews
 - (a) Use anything to get rid of Christians
 - (b) Convince Roman authorities that the Christians wanted to destroy the emperor
 - (c) Christianity was illegal at the time; Jews likely plundered their property
 - (d) Jews even carried wood for the fire on the Sabbath for the fire that burned Polycarp
 - (5) If you were to belong to this church
 - (a) Business would have trouble
 - (b) Likely to have your property taken away
 - (c) Maybe even sent to prison
 - (d) Possibly even killed

E. Easy decision

- 1. Crazy to go to Smyrna
 - a. Like walking into a lion's den, leaning into a left hook
- 2. Ephesus looks pretty good
 - a. They've had their trials; weathered the storm
 - b. Rich apostolic history
 - c. Got their doctrine correct
 - d. Engage in church discipline
 - e. Probably even had a good nursery, music program!
- 3. Make a decision to go to Ephesus
 - a. Awakened in the middle of the night by a dream
 - b. Jesus comes to you in a dream and says, "Smyrna"
 - c. "What, Jesus, you can't be serious! This is a no-brainer"
- 4. Why?
 - a. The Ephesian church is in trouble
 - b. Trouble???

- (1) Seems to me that the Smyrna church is really in trouble
- c. No! The Smyrna church is rich, blessed!
- (1) The Ephesian church is in danger of losing its witness
 - (a) Its very existence is in peril

III. Texts:

A. **Ephesus**

- 1. **Revelation 2:1–7** (NASB95) —
 - a. 1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:
 - b. 2 ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;
 - c. 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.
 - d. 4 ‘But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.
 - e. 5 ‘Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.
 - f. 6 ‘Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
 - g. 7 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’

B. **Smyrna**

- 1. **Revelation 2:8–11** (NASB95) —
 - a. 8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:
 - b. 9 ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
 - c. 10 ‘Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.
 - d. 11 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’

IV. **Why is Ephesus in trouble?**

- A. **Revelation 2:4** (NASB95) — 4 ‘But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.
 - 1. Amazing how many things can be right in a church, and still lack love for Christ
 - a. When that love is missing, all the things that are right are wrong
 - (1) Without value; worthless

- b. **1 Corinthians 13:1–3** (NASB95) — 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.
 - (1) Ephesians know something about tongues
 - (a) Acts 19 – received HS, spoke in tongues
 - (2) Ephesians know something about prophecy, mysteries, knowledge
 - (a) Greatest teachers any church ever had
 - (3) Know something about faith
 - (a) Takes faith to be the first church in an area
 - (4) Even know some things about persecution
 - (a) Much persecution when Paul was there
 - (b) Paul talks about having to contend with “the wild beasts of Ephesus”
 - c. Without love, all is worth nothing
2. **Consequences are serious**
- a. **Revelation 2:5** (NASB95) — 5 ‘Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else **I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.**
 - b. Coming of Christ
 - (1) Wonderful object of anticipation
 - (2) But when He comes to Ephesus, it will be for judgment
 - (3) No one will long for His appearing under the current state of affairs
 - c. Remove the lampstand
 - (1) Lampstand is the church
 - (2) Jesus is going to get rid of the church!
- B. Any hope for this church?
- 1. Yes!
 - a. Not that they’ve never had love for Christ
 - b. There was a time when they really did love Christ
 - 2. **Revelation 2:5** (NASB95) — 5 ‘**Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first...**
- C. What was it like when the Ephesian church started?
- 1. What was the height from which they fell?
 - 2. How was their first love manifested?
 - 3. Ephesian church planted by Paul, Priscilla and Aquila on the 2nd missionary journey
 - a. Paul taught in the synagogue; left Priscilla and Aquila as church planters

4. 3rd missionary journey; Paul returns to Ephesus
 - a. **Acts 19:1–7** (NASB95) — 1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said to him, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” 3 And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John’s baptism.” 4 Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. 7 There were in all about twelve men.
 - (1) **Encounter with the HS**
 - (2) This encounter is essential a Pentecostal encounter
 - (a) Acts outline
 - i) Jerusalem
 - ii) Judea
 - iii) Samaria
 - iv) Ends of the earth
 - (b) Acts 2 Pentecost
 - i) Jerusalem and Judea
 - (c) Acts 8 Pentecost
 - i) Samaria
 - (d) Acts 10 Pentecost
 - i) Cornelius’ household
 - ii) Gentile God-fearers
 - iii) Used by Peter to confirm gospel to Gentiles at Council in Acts 15
 - (e) Acts 19 Pentecost
 - i) Gentiles in Asia
 - (3) Tongues and prophesying were signs to indicate that the HS was for all believers, Jew and Gentile
 - (4) One of the first things about the Ephesian church was a HS driven ministry
 - (a) Gifted ministry whose focus is a loving, mature fellowship
 - i) **Ephesians 4:7** (NASB95) — 7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.
 - ii) **Ephesians 4:11–16** (NASB95) — 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping

of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

(b) Developing character from the inside out

i) **Ephesians 5:15–21** (NASB95) — 15

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

(c) All of this motivated by the love of Christ for them

b. **Acts 19:8–10** (NASB95) — 8 And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. 9 But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

(1) **Desire to share the gospel** with as many as possible

(a) All in Asia heard the Word

- (2) Certainly Paul didn't go out and bring all those people himself
 - (a) People who heard the gospel were converted
 - i) They went out and brought others
 - ii) Who brought others...
 - (3) Certainly one of the deeds done at first is to go out and tell others
 - (a) Jesus tried to keep a lid on that
 - (b) Both those he healed went out and told others
 - (c) Many people came to Jesus through the witness of those who had been touched by Christ
 - (4) **1 Corinthians 9:16** (NASB95) — 16 ... for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.
- c. **Acts 19:18–20** (NASB95) — 18 Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. 19 And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.
- (1) **Confession and repentance**
 - (2) People had a vested interest in the pagan practices of the culture
 - (a) At great cost to themselves they confessed their sins to each other
 - (3) Why?
 - (a) They loved Christ more than the world; more than their former lives
 - (b) Received the forgiveness of Christ for their sins
 - (4) **Luke 7:36–47** (NASB95) — 36 Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, 38 and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." 41 "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other

fifty. 42 “When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?”
 43 Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have judged correctly.” 44 Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 “You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46 “You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. 47 **“For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”**

(a) He is forgiven much loves much

(5) Must be a constantly confessing and repenting people

(a) Wednesday night frequently give such an opportunity

(b) Don't take it lightly

d. **Devotion to the Word**

(1) Acts 20 – Paul meets with the Ephesian elders at Miletus on the way to conclude his third journey

(2) After he warns them of the dangers of false teachers (which they have done well in contending)

(3) **Acts 20:32** (NASB95) — 32 “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.”

(4) Cf Acts 2.42

(a) Devoted to the apostles' teaching

D. That's what the Ephesians needed to do

1. If they overcame, they would inherit the tree of life in the Paradise of God

a. Extraordinary statement

(1) Eternal life depends on their repentance!

2. You can do many right things

a. Unless you love the Savior (your first love)

b. Your works are in vain

c. You miss the goal

3. **Matthew 7:21–23** (NASB95) — 21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’

- a. Doctrinal correctness
 - b. Gifted ministry activity
 - c. All useless without love
 - E. So what about this church – TVC?
 - 1. If I had to identify one of the seven churches as most like TVC, it would probably be this one
 - 2. A number of excellent ministries
 - 3. Clear about doctrine
 - a. Concerned about false teaching
 - 4. Influential church in the denomination
 - 5. Storied history
 - 6. But do we really love Jesus?
 - a. Is our ministry and character HS driven?
 - b. Do we really desire to tell everyone about Christ?
 - c. Do we really spend time in confession and repentance?
 - (1) With each other?
 - 7. Are we devoted to the Word?
 - F. That's Ephesus
- V. Why is Smyrna so rich and blessed?
 - A. Because Christ loves the suffering church
 - 1. Both OT and NT demonstrate that God loves those who suffer
 - 2. Jesus' very ministry is directed to those who suffer
 - a. Luke 4:16–19 (NASB95) — 16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. 17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 18 “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, 19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.”
 - 3. Jesus promises blessings for those who are poor
 - a. Luke 6:20–26 (NASB95) — 20 And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 “Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. 22 “Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. 23 “Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. 24 “But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. 25 “Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who

laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. 26 “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.”

4. **Jesus promises special blessings for those who are persecuted**

- a. **Matthew 5:10–12** (NASB95) — 10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

B. What is it about suffering that creates such blessing?

1. It strips away all competitors for our affections
 - a. **1 Peter 4:1** (NASB95) — 1 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,
2. It leads us into a deeper knowledge of Christ
3. It redirects our thoughts to the magnificent riches which await us in glory
 - a. **Romans 8:18–25** (NASB95) — 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

C. Those in Smyrna are promised

1. **Crown of life**
2. **Unaffected by the second death**
3. Willingness to go through suffering for the sake of Christ as central to what it means to be a Christian

D. What difficulties are you willing to go through?

1. Physical suffering?
2. Loss of function?
3. Death? (Even martyrdom?)
4. Difficult neighbor?
5. Obnoxious boss?

6. Problems in family?
 7. Political loss
 8. Loss of spouse?
- E. If you love Christ (Ephesian issue), then you will be qualified to be a rich Christian (Smyrna condition)
1. By going through whatever suffering the Lord wants you to go through