

November 25, 2012
The Church in Ephesus
Revelation 2:1-7 NLT

"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands:

2 "I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. 3 You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. 4 But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! 5 **Look** how far you have fallen from your first love! **Turn back** to me again and **work** as you did at first. If you don't, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches. 6 But there is this about you that is good: You hate the deeds of the immoral Nicolaitans, just as I do.

7 "Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Everyone who is victorious will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

The message to the church in Ephesus is not from John the Apostle, and it's not from an angel, but it is from Christ Himself. John is writing the words but they are Christ's words. Jesus has control over the church, He is the Head of the church, He is the One who holds the churches in His right hand. In v2 He says He knows all the things we do. Jesus knows each church and its situation, and wants the best for each church. Take the church seriously, God does.

Jesus begins by commending the church at Ephesus for five things:

1. Hard work (In the Greek this word is a very strong term. It means hard work to the point of sweat; hard work to the point of exhaustion)
2. Patient endurance ("patient" may not be an adequate word for the Greek word here. This is a steadfast endurance; a courageous endurance that accepts suffering and hardship).

Not only were they hard workers they were disciplined...

3. Resisting sin (didn't tolerate evil people. In v6 Jesus adds that they hate the deeds of the immoral Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans were believers who had compromised their faith in order to enjoy some of the sinful practices of Ephesian society, including idolatry and sexual immorality. Notice they hated the deeds not people. They lived in an immoral society, as we do today. They were called intolerant because they would not compromise their standards and belief.)
4. Examined those claiming to be special messengers of Christ to determine if they were false teachers / prophets (tested the teachings and character of those claiming to be apostles)
5. Patiently suffered for the sake of the Lord's name without quitting (endured without becoming weary – they were tireless workers)

These are all good things, done by good people and Christ was happy about these things, yet He was sad too. He says...

(v4-5a) But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! Look how far you have fallen from your first love!

In the midst of hard work, and an enduring good lifestyle, the Lord was saddened. Why? Because their love for Him was fading away.

They were doing good, but good efforts must come from a heart of love for the Lord our God and or neighbor as ourselves.

In our list of all the things the Lord commended the Ephesians for, there was no mention of things like faith, hope, and love. They neglected their first love.

The Lord had seen their good works, patient endurance and all the rest. Their work for the Lord had not changed. And He commends them for their work and their lifestyle. But somehow in it all their hearts had changed.

My brothers and sisters, we can be in the same danger.

Someone has said that, "In the first steps of your Christian life, you may have had enthusiasm without knowledge. Do you now have knowledge without enthusiasm? Both are necessary if we are to keep our love for God intense and untarnished."

Hebrews 10:32 NLT

Don't ever forget those early days when you first learned about Christ.

In v5 it says "Look" in other versions it says, "Remember." The first step back to God is to "Remember".

Do you remember those early days when you first learned about Christ? I do. I couldn't get enough of the Bible, I couldn't get enough time to be alone with the Lord in meditation and prayer. All I thought about was Him and served in any way He wanted me to. Every time there was something going on at the church, I was there, because He was there. He had saved me, forgave my sins, I knew I was different and I was in love with Jesus, His people, His work in the world.

If we are not careful we can be so busy serving and doing, and living, that we forget the Lord Himself. This is why Jesus cries out to them (v5b)

Turn back to me again and work as you did at first.

"Turn back! Recover your dear early love." Revelation 2:5 THE MESSAGE
Then continue the good you have been doing. Doing it because you love Me.

Remember, Repent, and do. This is the way back to the Lord.

How is it possible that we can do good things, be religious and still lose our first love? Our Love for Christ? It all begins when we neglect to come into His presence and sit at his feet. It is in His presence that we grow in our understanding of Him and His ways, and are equipped to do what He wants us to do.

That's how our lives take on the atmosphere of living moment by moment waiting and listening for His voice, being sensitive to Him, and doing what He desires.

Remember Martha and Mary?

Luke 10:38-42 (NIV)

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was **distracted** by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

It wasn't that Martha's service was wrong. Not at all. What was wrong was that Martha was "distracted" from her first love. Notice what Jesus says, "Mary has chosen what is better" – to leave the busy place and sit at the Lord's feet listening to what He says.

How can we do the Lord's work in the Lord's way? Jesus defines it in one sentence ...
Matthew 25:40

"I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!"

We serve God by serving people, with the awareness that whatever we are doing we do it unto Him. It's the attitude of the heart that's important. Our actions and service must be rooted in Him, motivated by our love for Him and done with the desire to exalt Him and Him alone.

1 Corinthians 3:13

But there is going to come a time of testing at the judgment day to see what kind of work each builder has done. Everyone's work will be put through the fire to see whether or not it keeps its value.

One day all we have done will be tested. Only what was done His way, for Him will last. It wouldn't matter what it looked like on earth, it wouldn't matter how well know it was on earth. If it was not done as unto Him, it will not stand in eternity.

When we choose to carry on without waiting before Him, waiting before the Spirit of Christ, we take the first step off the right road. We may carry on well-meaning actions, but they can be independent actions if not born out of His presence. Without spending time with the Lord our love for and intimacy with the Lord begin to face away.

Jesus said the church of Ephesus was to remember, repent, and do, then He said (v5c), "If you don't, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches."

That is, the church at Ephesus would no longer exist as a Christian congregation. There may still be an organization that would exist, but the church would lose the place it had been called to fill, unless there was a change.

I share this message with much concern, knowing how easy everything can look so good and we can seem to be on the right track, but have moved from doing what we do as unto Him, to just doing it. We can easily lose our first love and still carry on as usual doing good. I have seen this in too many churches, churches doing good but God is not there. People who live good lives, doing good things but intimacy with Christ is not there. I want better for you / us.

(Look) Remember: your first love and compare it to now

(Turn Back) Repent: if needed, turn back to a total devotion to Jesus

(Work) Do: the works you did before but coming from a heart that has been with and has been purified by Christ.