

New Vision
Seven: Letters of Revelation
Session 2: Letter to Ephesus
Revelation 2:1-7
05/12/2019

INTRODUCTION

Spend a few minutes sharing stories about what your “first love” as a child was like, or what you’re watching your own kids experience with their first loves. How young were you? What do you remember most about that person and your “relationship”? Is that person in your life today?

Revelation 2:1-7 is the call for the church to return to our “first love,” Jesus Christ. How does your relationship with Christ now compare with what it was like when you first became a Christian? What are the key differences, and what are some of the reasons you can think of for those changes?

What are some things that cause drift within the church? Within our lives?

- Familiarity (dealing with the mundane) with that causes apathy
- Entitlement that we deserve things
- Disappointment rises up
- Choosing only Good things vs Great things
- Choosing Busyness vs Discernment

The compliment section in each of the seven letters begins with “I know.” Jesus knows the facts about each of the congregations. The Christians of Ephesus were always busy. They received a triple commendation: deeds ... hard work and ... perseverance (read the description of the church in Acts 19). The apostle Paul praised the Thessalonian Christians for exactly these same virtues (1 Thess. 1:3). Deeds is the more general term. Deeds are expressed actively through hard work or passively through putting up with hardship.

UNDERSTANDING

| Have a volunteer read Revelation 2:1-3.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks ^[a]among the seven golden lampstands, says this: ² ‘**I know your deeds and your toil and ^[b]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;** ³ **and you have ^[c]perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.**

The Lord knows His churches and their pastors personally. He commended this church for its deeds, toil, and perseverance. They were working hard to minister in Jesus' name in a major seaport town. Their fellow citizens no doubt practiced the liberal lifestyles that often characterize tourist and commercial cities. That the believers cannot tolerate evil men shows the contrast of their lifestyles to the surrounding culture and their deep desire for purity. They continued to move forward for Christ and the gospel against the pressures of their culture.

Briefly look at Acts 19 and the Book of Ephesians (see specifically Eph. 1:15). What are some of the things we know about the city of Ephesus and the church there?

What good things did Jesus say characterized the church at Ephesus in his letter?

Why are each of these traits important for a church to model?

Sermon Notes

| Have a volunteer read Revelation 2:4-7.

⁴ But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the ^[d]deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. ⁶ Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 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.’

The church at Ephesus appeared strong and healthy, but it had a heart problem. They abandoned the love they had at first, meaning their love for God (see Eph. 1:15). The remedy came in three commands, recorded in verse 5. First, they were to recall how they as new believers had responded to the love of God. Remembering the beginning of a relationship often revitalizes it. Second, they were to repent. The Greek word for repent means a change of attitude. They were to change their thinking about the way they lived. Finally, they were to do the deeds they did at first. This again calls for a decisive change. Rather than existing in a dream-world of what used to be, they were to live as fervent Christians. This verse calls for a radical change of mind, heart, and life.

What was the church's main problem? How might its strengths have been the cause of its failure?

When our relationships with God and others becomes about duty, rather than love, what are some of the consequences?

How could the church restore their love for God? What do we learn from this church's example?

The message to the church of Ephesus has particular importance to the churches of today. Churches today must be theologically vigilant and devoted to holiness. All too easily they slip into the practices of the surrounding cultures and forget the love of God shown them in Christ. The letter to Ephesus stands as a continual warning against such things by reminding us to make nothing as important in our lives as loving God and loving others.

Read 1 Peter 1:2-7. How does this text help us understand the seriousness of letting our love for God diminish? What instruction does Peter give that will help us know if we have lost our first love?

Love summarizes the responsibilities one has toward God and mankind. Read Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus' Great Commandment. What makes loving God the greatest command? The Great Commandment emphasizes loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind (HCSB). What do each of those aspects of a person's being represent? What does it look like in practical terms to love God with your heart, soul, and mind?

Is your love for others characterized more by action or inaction? Which one characterizes God's love for us? Why do you think love is such a defining mark of the Christian? Do we tend to think of love as the primary mark of the Christian life? If not, what do we think of as that mark? Why? What most frequently stands in the way of you truly loving others?

In Revelation 2:7, Jesus calls us to hear and obey His warning to the church at Ephesus. What is the reward for those who hear and obey Him? How does this reward change the way you live today?

One of the continual indictments in the Scriptures is that people hear God's Word and see His guidance but disregard what He says and shows them (Isa. 6:9). This text urges Christians to use their spiritual senses lest they also become desensitized. Jesus promised a reward to those who heeded. Using the imagery of Genesis, Jesus promised nourishment that leads to perpetual life. Continuing that imagery, He explained that the tree exists in Paradise, meaning heaven. The promise is the equivalent of saying that the ones who heed will live forever in the happiness of God's presence, enjoying eternal life.

What draws us back to our first love?

- Coming back to the centrality of the gospel
- The way to return to our love comes in verse 4: Remember the grace of God in our lives; Repent from our place of drifting; and Repeat the good things we are called to do!

Sermon Notes

APPLICATION

In what ways have you lost your first love for Christ? How has that loss impacted your relationship with Him? Your other relationships? Your day-to-day life?

What changes are needed in your to help you better love Christ and others?