

20230326 Revelation 2:1-7 The Assembly at Ephesus (The Hard-Working Loveless Church)



Last Sunday we studied Chapter 1:9-20. Chapter one was a description of things seen. Chapters two to three describes the things that are, and chapter four and beyond will describe the things that are to be. This morning we begin to examine the messages to those seven churches that were introduced in chapter one.

“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: 2 “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; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember 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. 6 But this you 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 give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” ’ (Revelation 2:1-7, NKJV).

These verses are the first of the letters to the seven churches. Last week I mentioned that as a child Sandy used to wonder why Jesus was only speaking to seven churches. There have been all kinds of theories about this. I have sort of settled in on the idea that these were indeed messages to those seven churches at that time, but they are also messages for churches throughout the church age. Lastly, I even believe it is a message to us as individual believers. The first message we’re going to come across is to be cautious and careful about being busy doing “all of the right things” because sometimes that can cause us to forget our first love. Our first love should be Jesus and Him alone.

The overall theme this morning is wrapped up in the words when Jesus says, “I have this against you, that you have left your first love.” All week long I thought about a good example of losing one’s first love. That is such an easy thing to say, but it’s hard to figure out just how that happens. On Wednesday, I was reading the highlights of the news online, and I succumbed to “click bait.” I found myself reading an article called “The

reason for Tom Brady's divorce." I'm not a big NFL fan. As a matter of fact, the only NFL player that I know of at present is Tom Brady. It caught my attention.



As I read the article, I suspected that either he or she had gotten into an affair with another person. But there was no mention of any infidelity. There was no illness. There was no death of a child or any such traumatic event that precipitated the divorce. For lack of attention to the relationship, the couple just grew apart. In an interview with People Magazine, Tom explains:

"[Gisele] didn't feel like I was doing my part for the family," Brady said during an interview with Howard Stern on his show in April 2020. "She felt like I would play football all season and she would take care of the house, and then all of a sudden when the season ended, I'd be like, 'Great, let me get into all of my other business activities. Let me get into my football training,' and she's sitting there going, 'Well when are you going to do things for the house? When are you going to take the kids to school and do that?' " Brady acknowledged that was a blind spot he needed to pay attention to, because "that was a big part of our marriage ... because she was like 'I have goals and dreams too.' " [HELLO!!!] (Pastor Faber's comment) Tom Brady was all about himself and he was feeding no energy into the relationship.



The most revealing statement about the marriage and where Brady's focus lay was when he told the co-hosts, "the only time he can find peace is when he is on the football field."<sup>1</sup>

Guys, we fall out of love with our first love when we are attracted to the wrong things and distracted from the right things. Tom Brady was distracted from the most important role in his life; being a father to his children and a husband to his wife. He found peace only in football, which is a scary thought when you're at the end of your football career. Tom Brady forgot his first love, And, he'll never get back what he has lost. That's a good picture of forgetting our first love.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://people.com/sports/all-the-things-tom-brady-discussed-in-howard-stern-interview-from-trump-  
friendship-to-marijuana/](https://people.com/sports/all-the-things-tom-brady-discussed-in-howard-stern-interview-from-trump-friendship-to-marijuana/)



around 90 AD.

The first message in chapter two is to the Church in Ephesus. We believe that John was living in Ephesus for much of his later life. Many scholars think that he moved to Ephesus with Mary the mother of Jesus, after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. He then lived there for approximately 20 years until he was exiled to Patmos



Ephesus is on the far western coast of modern-day Turkey. It was a very rich city with every single earthly distraction you can think of. Ephesus was a BIG DEAL. I have been there and my breath was taken away by the expanse of the city. It had a huge library and miles of paved streets and buildings. The ruins are like nothing I've seen anywhere else. The city amphitheater (to the left) held 25,000 spectators. It was in that arena that Paul spoke in his own defense when he was accused of being a rabble rouser. You can read about it in Acts 19:19-29. Let's now turn to our scripture for the day.

Verse 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:***

Jesus addresses the "messenger" of the church of Ephesus and gives him a message. Some guess this "messenger" might refer to the pastors and teachers of the church. It is Jesus doing the talking. The text tells us that these things are being said by "He who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who is walking amongst the seven golden lampstands." Jesus guards and protects His pastors and teachers and He walks among his Church, superintending the work of His Church.

Verses 2-3: ***<sup>2</sup> "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; ;<sup>3</sup> and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.***

He addresses the condition of the church, telling them that He is aware of their works and their toil in the Kingdom of God and their faithfulness in doing what is good. He commends their rejection of evil and how they have used good discernment to sift out

false teachers. He praises them for their persistence and their “sticktuitivity” in not growing weary.

There will always be those who come through the church and try to turn the gospel into something that it isn't. Nothing will kill a church quicker than the watering down of the gospel. I'd like to make a brief comment about “not bearing evil” (not putting up with evil). Jesus is talking here about not putting up with evil in the church. Often people will text me or write me telling me about some new horrible they've seen out in the world. I understand. The world has much evil in it. Most believers forget that we are not called to point out every wicked thing going on in the world, but we are called to look at our own spiritual condition and the condition of our church. The Apostle Paul reminds us where our focus should be.

*<sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” (1 Corinthians 5:12-13, ESV).*

We need to always be more concerned about those in the church than those outside of the church. I am not saying that we shouldn't be desirous for people in the world to come to Christ or to live in a more righteous way. But we must remember that the world is under the influence of Satan. It has been taken captive by him. Let's not be too surprised when the world acts like the world. God will judge the world, so let's leave it in His hands. Let's just keep doing the right thing, and not grow weary in doing the right thing. It sometimes helps just to think of yourself as Daniel in Babylon. Daniel didn't try to make great social reforms in Babylon. He just kept the course and didn't lose heart. *<sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:9-10, NKJV).*

Verses 4-5: *<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup> Remember 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.*

Jesus now points out their shortcomings. You have left your “first love.” This church must have been really passionate and wonderful in its day, and Jesus tells them that they have fallen down a notch. They were a hard-working bunch, but they no longer had the same passion for Christ that they had when they first believed. There is a word of caution in here concerning our “works and toil.” Sometimes we can get so distracted in “doing things for God” that our relationship with Him suffers. This is what I call the “Martha syndrome.” Mary had her eyes on Jesus, but Martha had her eye on getting

things done. Things need to get done in a church, but we shouldn't ever mistake doing those tasks with staying in a close relationship with God. It's easy to get attracted to busyness and mistake it as being something purposeful. Sometimes it's really just a bunch of time wasting.

The workers in the Church at Ephesus were no longer motivated by love. They were working solely out of duty and habit. That's a word to me and all other workers in our congregation who must remember why we work and for Whom we work. I certainly want to feed this congregation and please this congregation, but my primary motivation must be because I love Jesus so much and love what He has done for me. This holds true for the work of teachers, the directors, the audio-visual team, the deacons in their ministry, and all others who do work "for the Church." Our labors certainly are of benefit to the church body, but they must be labors of love for Christ or they have little everlasting value.

Jesus warns them to return to their first love or He will remove them from their lampstand. This is a severe word. He is not talking about taking away their salvation. He is talking about taking away their influence on the world around them. If they don't get this love thing right, there will be no influence. When the church becomes loveless, it becomes lifeless. When a church ceases to be love-filled it moves from being a ministry to being an institution that has no interest other than in perpetuating itself. The Ephesians had a busy church with a lot going on, but they had ceased loving one another and their work had become stale. And that's exactly what happened. Ephesus is now nothing but a ruin. Paul said in the Corinthian love letter, "If I have it all but don't have love it values nothing." (Pastor's paraphrase). So how do we apply this personally?

Stop and ask yourself some questions this morning: How are you loving God? And, how are you loving people? Are you doing anything of Christian service, and if so, why are you doing it? When we talk about love in the church it's sort of funny. We always look at others to see if they are acting in a loving way towards us. But what have you done to truly love God and love the people in this place? Are you letting the Holy Spirit love in and through you, or are you just motivated by your own agenda. Pastor Michael once told me that just about everyone who comes into a church, comes with an agenda. **Let's all strive to make our one and only agenda that Jesus might be lifted up, loved, honored, and worshipped in this place!**

Jesus then tells them that they must repent (change their mind and change direction) or He will take His blessing from them. If you and I are not loving like we should be loving, a change must take place. Otherwise, God will work in and through others and not us.

Verses 6-7: *<sup>6</sup> But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.<sup>7</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."*

In verse 6, after admonishing them for their lack in the love department, Jesus praises them for being unwilling to accept the deeds of the Nicolaitans. These again were those who misused the doctrine of grace outlined in Romans chapter 6. They used their freedom in Christ as an excuse to engage in sexual sin. Jesus commends them for calling out the Nicolaitans for what they were: carnal Christians, serving the flesh, and in need of repentance.

Then in verse 7, there is a final exhortation. He says that to the one who overcomes the world, it will be granted to eat of the Tree of Life which is in the Paradise of God. This a reminder of the reward that all believers will experience in knowing the Lord. We will indeed eat of the Tree of Life and we will be with Him for eternity in heaven.

That story about Tom Brady can reflect what goes on in our own Christian walk. Brady forgot his first love, finding peace only in football. I assure you that this will not end well for him. We too can easily forget OUR first love, Jesus, and when we do, we will become ineffective as Christians. This morning I'd like to challenge you (and me) to look at Jesus in a fresh way. Like the Ephesian church, we can easily fall prey to cold, mechanical observance of white-knuckled religious practices instead of a vibrant love-filled, grace-filled, faith in Jesus Christ. Like the Ephesians, if we tend to focus solely on doctrinal purity and more hard work, to the exclusion of a true love for Christ and a true love for others, our testimony will fade. We will cease to have any real influence on the world around us. As this letter shows, no amount of passion for the truth and doing the "right stuff" can replace a heart full of love for the Lord, for one's neighbor, and one's self.

My prayer is that you can leave today refreshed with a newfound desire to rekindle your first love with Jesus. If the fires of your heart have grown cold, tend that fire. Put some "wood" back on the fire. Get into the Word. Get into prayer. Get into communion with Him. Leave here desirous and willing to enter into conversation with Him through the study of His Word and through meaningful prayerful conversation. We show our love to others by spending time with them. Spend time with Jesus. That is the relationship that He wants with each of us. Take a bold step this morning back to your first love.

Let us pray.

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