

Where Is the Love?

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[0 : 00] If you want to follow along with me, I'm going to read Revelation chapter 2 verses 1 through 7.

! To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

[1 : 06] Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

So, love can be a very strange thing. I don't know if you've ever heard the story of a man who saw a beautiful girl and he fell in love with her immediately, but she refused his advances.

She didn't reciprocate the feelings. But he was determined. I'm going to make this woman love me. And so, back in the day before the smartphone and text messages, he, you know, you had to write letters, obviously.

You guys know that. And so, he decided, I'm going to write a letter to her every single day. And so, he did. He wrote a letter to her every single day. But still, she was having nothing of it.

So, he said, I'm going to increase my output. And so, he wrote a letter, three letters to her every day, all week long.

[2 : 24] And so, he did this over and over again to the point where he had written this one girl 700 letters. And in the end, she ended up marrying the postman.

Have you heard that one before? All right. And that has nothing to do with tonight's lesson. It's just a story about love, okay?

Jesus had a lot to say about love. For example, there was a moment in Matthew 22, 36, where the Pharisees made an attempt to trap Jesus into saying something that they could use against him.

They set the trap by asking him, if you remember, what is the greatest commandment in the law?

So, what's interesting to note here is that the rabbis had determined that there were 613 commandments contained in the Pentateuch, which is the first five books of the Bible.

Of those commands, they had determined that 400, or 200, I should say, 248 were seen as affirmative, which are do these things, do this. And then 365 of them were in the negative, don't do this.

[3 : 32] So, here's the things you should do. Here's the things that you shouldn't do. Those laws were then further divided into what they called heavy and light laws. So, for example, a heavy law would be murdering somebody.

A light law would be maybe telling a white lie or something like that. Now, here's the thing is that they would debate, because there were some of those laws that some thought were on the lighter side and some would thought were on the heavier side.

And so, they would spend a lot of time trying to determine what laws were heavy and what laws were light. So, when Jesus was being asked this question, we've got to understand that he wasn't being asked because they really wanted to know what his opinion was on these matters.

What they were wanting to do was to try and to reveal to everybody else that when it came to matters of the law, that Jesus was unorthodox and that he was a theological lightweight compared to them.

And they found out, right, over and over again that that was not the case at all. So, Jesus' response to their question was this in Matthew 22, verses 37 through 40.

[4 : 41] So, Jesus' instruction is that we are to love him above all others and that love is the surest way that a person's commitment to him.

Can be measured. Your commitment to Christ isn't measured primarily in how many Bible verses you have memorized or how great your church attendance record is, though those things are important.

Our commitment to Christ is measured by how much we love him. And that is clearly displayed in how our love for him is compared with our love for other things.

John, chapter 14, verses 21 through 23. Jesus says, Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he is the one who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

And then in verse 23, Jesus answered him, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

[6 : 08] And then in Matthew 10, verse 27, Whoever loves father or mother more than me, Jesus says, is not worthy of me. And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

I like this quote by John MacArthur. He says, Put simply, loving Christ is the defining characteristic of a Christian.

And while the genuine believer will always love the Lord, the intensity of his love can fluctuate over time. And he concludes by saying the redeemed person's love for Christ must be carefully guarded and nurtured, or it will diminish with time.

So, let me ask you, How well have you been doing with obeying the command to love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind?

You don't have to answer that question. Because I think we all know that the reality is, is that none of us is capable of obeying that commandment as we ought to all the time.

[7 : 23] Due to the effects of the fall, and the curse of sin, and the myriad amount of temptations and distractions that we encounter on an everyday basis, we fall short of expressing the single-minded, consistent, and persistent, and unwavering love to Christ and full-hearted devotion that we should have to him at all times.

There is good news, though. The good news for us is that we are in good company. I don't know that anyone in here would say that they've reached the level of spiritual maturity that the Apostle Paul did.

And yet, in Romans 7, 21-23, he makes this observation about himself. He says, So I find it to be a law that when I want to do the right, evil lies close at hand.

For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Verse 18, The willingness is present in me, he says, but the doing of the good is not. None of us has ever perfectly fulfilled this most basic first commandment for much longer than maybe a few minutes or so.

[8 : 46] And maybe those of us who are super holy have for 30 minutes or longer. John MacArthur, again, a quote from him, he says, Our inability to fulfill God's commandment perfectly does not in any way absolve us from the duty of pursuing the standards it sets.

Greater love for Christ should still be the goal of every believing heart, and we must faithfully guard against distractions and temptations that divide our hearts and diminish our love for Christ.

To neglect this duty, he says, is to court spiritual disaster. The church in Ephesus whom the Lord addresses was a loveless church at this point.

His message to them expressed the severe danger that awaits any church whose love for the Lord has faded over time and grown cold.

Asia Minor exhibited a culture dominated. Remember, these seven churches are all in Asia Minor, and Ephesus is going to be the first letter because we're following an ancient postal route.

[9 : 52] And so Ephesus will get the letter first. But that whole region was dominated by paganism and worldliness and debauchery and mysticism and idolatry. But at the center of it all was Ephesus.

Now, Pergamum was the capital of Asia Minor, but Ephesus was truly its center. So you think like the United States of America, Washington, D.C. is our capital, but where's really the center? New York City, I would say, right? That's really where the center of what's happening in our culture is. Or maybe not. Maybe Los Angeles or something else.

Maybe it's Bartlesville, Oklahoma, but I just think... Kansas City, there you go. Ephesus was home to the primary harbor in Asia Minor.

In addition to its value as a shipping port, Ephesus also sat at the convergence of four major Roman trade routes. So this was a happening place. All these factors then contributed to this city being the center of cultural activity and entertainment for that region.

[10:58] The theater in Ephesus, and again, this is, you know, 2,000 years ago, even at that time, by their standards compared to ours, it seated 25,000 people, which is a pretty large theater.

They also had sporting events that rivaled the Olympic Games, an event that attracted many spectators throughout that region to come and watch the games, and then along with those games were many parades and ceremonies that drew a lot of people to the city.

And it's possible that Paul was referring to the Ephesian games in 1 Corinthians 6, 8, and 9 when he wrote of his plans to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost, he says, for a wide door for effective service has opened to me and there are many adversaries.

So it could be that this sudden influx of people is what he's writing about. He has this opportunity now to share the gospel with many who had not heard it before, and the games was drawing them to hear the good news preached by him.

The thing that set Ephesus apart more than anything was the temple of Artemis. Artemis of the Ephesians. Artemis, this temple, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

[12:17] It was made of marble, and it occupied a whole, a full city block. And so if you went to Ephesus, you would see this city would just dominate the landscape.

This was the big attraction there. The temple was also used for many other things besides religious ceremonies. It served as a museum.

It served as a marketplace. It was also, it functioned as a bank, and it also functioned as a sanctuary for criminals. So it doesn't seem to make sense, right?

I don't think I would want to bank at a place that's also a sanctuary for criminals, but these people were lost. But the temple, I should say, served primarily as a place of worship to Artemis, who's also known as Diana.

If you're familiar with Greek mythology, she was the goddess of the hunt and of the wildlife, and also, strangely, childbirth. How all those things fit together, I don't know. But anyhow, another strange thing about this temple was that there's a huge image of Artemis there.

[13:32] And the whole practice, what happened there, was very vile and gross and grotesque. Her idol, as a matter of fact, was a many-breasted monstrosity.

If you've seen pictures of it, it's really, it's gross looking. I mean, it's just nasty looking. But what they said, legend had it, the people would say that this idol fell from the heavens, and it landed right there in Ephesus.

And so they took much pride in the temple, and they took much pride in their idol. The temple grounds, so with all these things going on, it was a chaotic cacophony of priests and prostitutes and bankers and criminals and musicians and dancers, and all the while people were hysterically worshipping this grotesque statue.

In fact, Heraclitus, a pagan Greek philosopher who was born in Ephesus in the 5th century B.C., had this to say about his own people.

This is what he said, The Ephesians deserve to be hanged, every last one of them. Doesn't seem like he had much family that he wanted to go back and visit.

[14:47] I don't know. So, to give you the picture that these people were involved in much gross sin and just debauched worship of this grotesque God.

With so much spiritual darkness and corruption that dominated the city with all these things going on, many of us would think, Well, I don't want to go plant a church there. You know, those people are going to run us out of there.

However, the gospel thrived in this community. The gospel was first introduced to that city by Paul's close friends and partners in ministry, Priscilla and Aquila.

And they were soon joined by the eloquent preacher and powerful debater, Apollos. And so, those three laid the groundwork for Paul to eventually come in and he would minister more in Ephesus. While Paul had stopped by Ephesus briefly near the end of his second missionary journey, it was his third ministry journey where he spent a lot of time there and really helped to build up that church. [15:55] Arriving in Ephesus, the Bible says he first encountered a group who had been followers of John the Baptist. And after preaching the gospel to them, he baptized them. And that began Paul's work of building the church in Ephesus, a work which would last for three years.

He spent three years there ministering to those people. Later on, on his way to Jerusalem near the end of his third missionary journey, he taught the elders of the Ephesian church the essential principles of how to lead the church.

The gist of which he later expanded upon in his pastoral letters. Paul's protege, Timothy, served as pastor of the church at Ephesus. Many of you remember that.

And so, this church was really blessed to have many great leaders. In fact, tradition says that John, the disciple, the apostle, the one who's being inspired to write Revelation, spent a large amount of time in Ephesus ministering to those people before he was arrested and sent to the island of Patmos.

The story of the birth of the Ephesian church is remarkable. As already noted, Paul's ministry had a profound effect on the city.

[17:07] It had a profound effect not just on the city, but all of Asia Minor, as it was most likely during this time that the rest of the seven churches were founded soon after the church in Ephesus was founded.

Attempting to emulate Paul's success, if you remember in Acts chapter 19, there was a group, the seven sons of Sceva.

They were Jewish would-be exorcists, and they decided that they were going to make an attempt to do the same things that Paul had been doing. And to me, it's one of the funniest parts of the Bible. I want to read it. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims. Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this, but the evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know, Paul I have recognized, but who are you?

[18:08] And the man in whom was the evil spirit, he leaped on them, mastered them, overpowered them, so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded.

And this became known through all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, and fear fell upon all, and the name of the Lord was extolled. So have you ever heard somebody say, I'm going to beat the pants off of you?

Well, that literally happened to these misguided would-be exorcists. However, it was through that debacle, though, it was through their mistaken efforts there, and they're getting their pants beat off of them, that fear then spread throughout the city, causing the name of the Lord to be magnified.

And then we continue on in Acts 18 and 20, we see the results. That many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices, and a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.

And they counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. So a revival takes place.

[19:26] Not a revival, but I mean the gospel is unleashed in this town, and you can see that people are transformed by it, and they're taking these valuable books, and they're forsaking those magic practices, and they're throwing them into the flames because they see how worthless they are compared to what they have now received in Jesus Christ.

The conversion of so many Ephesians posed an economic threat to the city's pagan craftsmen who made their living by making and selling idols. And so if you remember the story, it continues, a silversmith named Demetrius instigated other craftsmen in the city to riot against the Christians, and the city was engulfed in chaos.

So now, at John's writing, about 40 years had passed since those events when the church was first birthed and his now being exiled on Patmos.

Paul was gone by this time. He had been martyred. He was with the Lord, as were many of the first believers who had originally made up that first congregation in Ephesus.

And so a new situation now called for a new inspired letter from the Lord. And so we'll pick it up in verse 1. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

[20 : 51] Remember, the seven stars represent the seven pastors of those churches, leaders of those churches, and the seven lampstands represent the seven churches themselves. While this letter had been hand-delivered by men from the pen of John, the Lord identifies himself as the author of it.

These are his words spoken with authority to his church. And it isn't all bad news. The Lord begins by making some commendable comments about their faith and service.

And we see in verses 2 and 3, he begins by, the Lord commends the church at Ephesus. He has some good things to say. He commends the church at Ephesus. He says, I know your work and your toil and your patient endurance and how you cannot bear with those who are evil but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake and you have not grown weary. So first of all, the Ephesian church was commended for their hard work.

They were commended for their hard work. The Lord says, I know your works and your toil. The Greek word for toil speaks of labor to the point of exhaustion.

[22 : 13] The kind of work that drains you not just physically but emotionally and spiritually. And for me, that's yard work. Amen? Amen? I feel that.

Whenever I do yard work, I think of the curse. You know, God pronounces the curse and out of the ground is cursed because of you and it will produce thorns and thistles. And so for me, some of my least Christian moments are when it's time to do yard work.

Why, Lord? Come now, Lord. Please. Put an end to this. But seriously, this was not a lazy church. They weren't. Nor were they indifferent to the word of God. They were obedient to it. They gave everything that they had for the cause of Christ as far as their physical exertion.

This is the type of church I was thinking, they would do great with something like Engage. I mean, they would own it and they'd go out and they'd work hard and plan and over plan and they'd do great.

[23 : 15] This is the kind of church that you would have gone to and you would have noticed that the teaching was superb in their Sunday school classes and their preaching.

This would be the church whose kids won all the Bible trivia competitions, you know, and be like, oh, that church in Ephesus, they're winning all the trophies again. They'd all be quoting scripture probably left and right to one another.

Their congregation would have been practicing all of the spiritual disciplines, their diligence and serving and being active in their church would have been so unlike any in many of the churches, I should say, many of the churches in our day today.

Modern churches are often full of spectators who aren't willing to do any kind of work. That's why you pay the pastors, right? That's what they say. So they were hard working.

The Ephesian church was commended for their perseverance. Christ also commended them for their patient endurance. The Greek word here, hypomon, literally means to remain under.

[24 : 21] It speaks of courage that is willing to accept hardship that doesn't chicken out, that's willing to suffer and even endure loss because of persecution. They weren't seeking to avoid persecution and suffering.

They eagerly persisted in the face of trials and opposition. Perseverance. Third, the Ephesian church was commended for their hatred of evil.

So they were hard working. They were known for their perseverance. They were known or they were commended for their hatred of evil. The church, Jesus says, could not bear those who are evil.

They were sensitive to evil and they were sensitive to its ranks in their church and they hated it as God hates it because they knew the damage that it could do, that sin does to the fellowship of a church and to that church's testimony to the community and to the watching world.

They understood that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. And it seems that they also were willing to practice church discipline. They were not afraid to confront evil and handle it when it, you know, popped up.

[25 : 41] Fourthly, the Ephesian church was also commended for their discernment. Jesus says, you have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false. The early church, as you read through scripture, you see that they were constantly under attack from enemies both from outside of the church and from within the church.

There were the Judaizers who sought to force Christians into practicing and following their legalistic ways. There were the Gnostics who claimed that they had a secret knowledge.

There were the antinomians and their unlicensed behavior. There were sinful indulgences. There were many false gospels and many false teachers and many heresies that abounded in that day just as there are in ours.

In his second epistle, which was likely written to Ephesus, John warned believers in 2 John 1, 7 and 10. He said, for many deceivers have gone out into the world.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting for whoever greets him takes part in his evil work.

[26 : 51] I want to read that one more time. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting for whoever greets him takes part in his evil work.

Whoever greets him takes part in his evil work. And I read that again because recently we've had a situation or there's been a situation. Any of you guys know who Francis Chan is?

In fact, I brought him up not that long ago before I found out some of these things as well. Have you ever heard of a book called Crazy Love? Okay, he authored that book. And he had some others forgotten God.

Good books. I mean, I remember reading them and, you know, being inspired by them. Good preacher. He graduated from the Master's Seminary which is John MacArthur's church.

He's gotten really popular because he's a gifted speaker. And he's been speaking at conferences with Todd White.

[27 : 59] You guys remember Todd White? From the American Gospel videos, the guy with the big, long dreadlocks and obviously is a false teacher. He was also at one of these events was captured.

He had his picture taken with Benny Hinn. You guys know Benny Hinn too, right? And so Francis Chan has since come out with a statement. He says, you know, hey, this gives me an opportunity to speak to their crowds and to give them truth or the truth.

And you read that scripture and you think, I can kind of understand where he's coming from but he doesn't realize that what he's doing is he's legitimizing their false messages.

Somebody sees Todd White with Francis Chan and all of a sudden, Todd White must be truthful. Sees a picture with Benny Hinn. Well, maybe Benny Hinn's not so bad.

Francis Chan thinks he's all right. So just a lack of discernment. It's unfortunate and pray for Francis Chan because it's just, it's not good.

[29 : 13] It's not good. But those are the types of things that this speaks to. You know, we've got to be careful. Not that we, certainly we want to reach those, but to be associated with them in ways where it looks like we're greeting them and receiving their message sends the wrong message to the rest of the world.

In verse 6, Jesus again celebrates their discernment. He says, Yet this you do have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. The nature of the Nicolaitan heresy has been lost to history.

We don't know with exact certainty what they had been teaching and why the Lord hated their deeds so much. They will pop up again later on in Revelation and Jesus' address to the church at Pergamum, where there are some in the church were accused of holding onto their teachings, which is there linked with the idolatry of Balaam, who, if you remember, was a false prophet of the Old Testament period.

And that perhaps indicated their association with him that they were worshiping or their worship included adultery and other forms of sexual immorality.

The only other information we have about the Nicolaitans comes from the early church fathers themselves. Irenaeus said of the Nicolaitans that they lived lives of unrestrained indulgence.

[30 : 37] Clement of Alexandria said they abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats. Anybody a farmer of goats, I guess? Okay. As if, he continues, as if insulting the body and they lead a life of

self-indulgence.

How were the Ephesians able to discern when it came to identifying false teachers? Well, they were familiar with the Word of God. And so they had that going for them, that they were able to identify false teachers because they knew the real thing so well.

Finally, the Lord sums up his commendations of the Ephesians in verse 30, or verse 3, I should say. He says, I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

So they endured persecution and suffering. They guarded the purity of the church. They were vigilant in protecting the church from false teachings, and they did not grow weary in doing any of those things.

After hearing all of these good things, you'd think that this was a pretty exemplary church. From the outside, looking in at least, that is the appearance. This is a strong body of faithful believers.

[31 : 54] However, remember the eyes of the Lord as John sees them. They're a flame of fire. He's omniscient. He sees everything. Nothing escapes his penetrating, omniscient view.

And deep down below the surface, at its core, the church in Ephesus had a great spiritual flaw. So secondly, we see the Lord's condemnation against the church at Ephesus.

His condemnation. Verse 4, But I have this against you, he says, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. The church at Ephesus had lost that loving feeling, and it was gone, gone, gone.

We can have a little bit of fun on Sunday night, right? It's the righteous brothers after all. They were no longer righteous brothers. These are the jokes. These are the jokes, people.

But again, they were, their fire had burned. It had burned at one time. Over time, it had dwindled and then flickered and then finally was out.

[33 : 09] The passion of that first generation of believers had cooled, and the subsequent generations that followed in their pattern that was handed down to them followed the same example.

They cooled as well. Burning devotion had been replaced by this point by cold dutifulness. While the Ephesian Christians were strict to maintain their doctrinal orthodoxy, their service to the Lord was no longer motivated by love for Him.

At this point, they were simply going through the motions. Have you ever had a coach or somebody at work or your boss, they say, you know, it seems like you're just going through the motions.

Like, you don't want to be here. You don't truly want to be here. Your motivation isn't really where it ought to be. That was these people. The Lord had rebuked Israel on numerous occasions for being guilty of doing the very same thing.

His condemning words to His people illustrate for us the grave danger of allowing our love for the Lord to cool and fade. Case in point, Jeremiah 2, 2 through 13.

[34 : 23] It says there, Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, thus says the Lord, I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness in a land not sown.

Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of His harvest. All who ate of it incurred guilt. Disaster came upon them, declares the Lord. Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel.

Thus says the Lord, What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me and went after worldliness and became worthless?

They did not say, Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through where no man dwells?

And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and you made my heritage an abomination.

[35 : 27] The priests did not say, Where is the Lord? Those who handled the law did not know me. The shepherds transgressed against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit.

Therefore, I still contend with you, declares the Lord. And with your children's children, I will contend. For cross to the coast of Cyprus and sea were sent to Gadara and examined with care.

See if there has been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at

this.

Be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord. For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

And another passage that should remind believers of the dangers of falling into cold-hearted devotion to the Lord is from Ezekiel where there again Ezekiel condemns Israel for forsaking their relationship with the Lord.

[36 : 37] And he says, When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love. And I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine.

Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather.

I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head.

Thus you were adorned with gold and silver and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty.

And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty. For it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord.

[37 : 43] But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby. Your beauty became his.

Pretty hard to hear words. But as it had been in Israel, now the same thing had happened at Ephesus.

The honeymoon had ended. The loss of a vital love relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ then opened the doors to spiritual apathy in the church, indifference to others, love for the world, compromising with evil, judgment, and then ultimately the death of the church resulted altogether. Despite its outwardly robust appearance, a deadly spiritual cancer was growing in the heart of that church. So this is what the Lord commands the church to do.

The Lord's command to the church at Ephesus verses 5 and 7. What can they do? Well, he says, remember therefore from where you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent.

[38 : 59] So the great physician here issues his prescription. If they followed it, they would be cured of their problem. First, they needed to remember from where they had fallen.

Remember from where you have fallen. Spiritual decline often begins when one forgets or takes for granted the salvation that they've received from the Lord and start to think, well, of course, God would save me.

Why wouldn't He, you know? I would save me if I was God. And we begin to get a little puffed up, a little self-righteous, and so we've got to go back and remember who we were before the Lord pulled us out of the pit and darkness into the light.

Second, they needed to repent. So if they did the first thing, they would have remembered the grace that they had received from Christ and then they would have rejected the fact that they had been so apathetic towards Him.

So they needed to repent of their apathy. And then thirdly, they needed to do the deeds they did at first. They needed to do the deeds they did at first.

[40 : 18] And in demonstrating the genuineness of their repentance, they needed to follow through with doing the things that they did at first when they first were saved. they needed to recapture the richness of their Bible study, of their devotion to prayer, of their passion in worship, and their desire to make disciples.

That was gone. It had once characterized them but not anymore. You know, I wonder when people come into the church and they see God's people worshipping, what impression do they get?

You know, it sounds like these people are just singing because, you know, they're supposed to sing. But do they see us worshipping?

And I'll tell you, I don't, if you want to, if you want to raise your hand or whatever, I mean, there are like, you know, where the limits are. But I mean, we are Baptists.

But I mean, you know, you, who cares who's around you? You're not singing for them. We're singing to the Lord. You know, and we've got to remember that when we're worshipping.

[41 : 36] And you know, when people come in, I wonder what they see. If they see that, you know, these people really believe the words that they're singing and they're singing them with passion, I can tell. And you can tell.

And then you can tell other times when it's just going through motions. I think we've got to be aware of that. You know, who are we worshipping? And how we worship Him is important.

We had a student in our first youth ministry and he had Asperger's. And he would be really difficult sometimes to handle at youth group.

And then other times he would say the most profound things. Just really deep and rich things. But the one thing I always loved and appreciated about him is when we would worship, his worship was genuine and authentic and he didn't care what anybody thought he was going to worship the Lord because truly that's what he was doing.

And he didn't care what other people thought about him when he did it. And I admired that, how free he was to express his love to God and worship. And I wish that I did a better job of that.

[42 : 51] And I encourage us all when we gather together for worship to keep in mind who we are worshipping and that we're not doing this for anybody else in a way. You know what I'm saying?

Ultimately, our worship is for God. It's to God. Amen! So however we're singing, whatever instruments we're using, now I'm starting to meddle, we are going to worship God and that's what's most important.

It's not for us, it's for him. Richard Mayhew writes that Jesus' confrontation of the Ephesian church models how believers are to confront. Now here's the thing, I don't enjoy confrontation and if you do, I think there's probably something wrong with you and we probably need to have counseling, right?

Because I just don't enjoy it. And I don't know, anybody who does is usually like they're a UFC fighter or something like that. That's not me but yet we are called to confront sin especially in the church.

So how can we best do that? Well, Jesus obviously models that for us and Richard Mayhew draws attention to that. How can we confront? Well, he says, first of all, confronting was done with love, with the goal of restoration.

[44 : 05] So if I'm going to confront somebody, I'm doing it because I love that person and I don't want them to be suffering in that sin. I see that that's not good for them and I'm going to say something to them because I love them not so that I can make them feel bad about themselves, not so that I can say something so that I'll go to another church but because I want them to be restored in their relationship to God and if they're outside of the fellowship, we want to pray that eventually they would be convicted of that sin and come back to the church.

So we confront because we love. Secondly, encouragement preceded correction. You see that Jesus gave them, he commended them initially.

You're doing some good things but then he brought in the condemnation afterwards so it's easier to, the condemnation, yeah. So it's easier to, I think, to hear those difficult and hard things to hear when first you've pointed out the good that you've done.

I think of the best coaches that I've had or the best bosses, the best leaders that I've ever had to follow. Usually when they say something to you it's because they want to make you better at what you're doing and so they'll say, hey, these are the things that you're doing well but there's this area here that you're really behind and so you give that encouragement first before you bring in the critique.

Thirdly, Christ openly and concisely stated the problem so he wasn't beating around the bush here. He said it as it was and he was concise in how he stated it.

[45 : 39] Fourthly, Christ told them how they could be restored as we've talked about. You know, it wasn't issuing the condemnation without giving them an opportunity of letting them know how you can be restored, how you can change.

This is what you need to do so that your lampstand isn't removed. Fifthly, Christ clearly laid out the consequences if they did not obey. But if you don't obey, if you do not follow through with these things that I've said, there are going to be consequences.

And then sixth, Christ wrote with the expectation that they would respond positively. He wrote because he was hoping that they would respond in the appropriate way.

Number four, the Lord's counsel to the church at Ephesus. Verse 7. He says, He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who conquers, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. So, he closes his message to the Ephesians with an exhortation and with a promise.

[46 : 47] First, his exhortation was that he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches and he closes out his other messages to the seven churches in the same way.

And it emphasizes the sober responsibility that believers have to heed God's voice in Scripture. And then the use of the plural noun churches signifies the universal nature of this invitation to every church, to the church.

This was a call that wasn't limited just to that group or just to that single church. It's something that applies to every church. It's a message that every church needs to hear because guess what?

There are churches like the church in Ephesus still today. And so, it's not just for them to heed but for the church to heed.

the promise are that those associated with and it's given I should say to those other six churches it's addressed to him who overcomes.

[47 : 56] To him who overcomes. That term does not refer to those who have attained a higher level of Christian life but identifies all Christians. We are overcomers.

1 John 5, 4 through 5. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world our faith.

Who is the one who overcomes the world? But he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God because he is the one who has overcome. So all true believers then are overcomers who have by God's grace and power overcome the powers of the world through faith in Jesus Christ.

Christ promises the overcomers at Ephesus that they will eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. And so this tree first appears or is first referred to in Genesis chapter 2 verse 9 where it stands in the garden of Eden.

That earthly tree if you remember was lost due to man's sin and was forbidden to be eaten of after that in chapter 3 verse 22. But the heavenly tree of life will appear later on in Revelation chapter 22 verse 2 and then verses 14 and 19 and it will last forever.

[49 : 27] The tree of life thus symbolizes eternal life and the paradise of God which is in heaven.

The example of the Ephesian church warns that doctrinal orthodoxy and outward service cannot make up for a cold loveless heart.

Now here's the thing we don't know for sure how this first church received this message. We could believe and actually there is church history we know that they must have received it well at first because the church did survive for a while longer but I will tell you this that there is no longer a church in Ephesus as a matter of fact there is no longer really in Ephesus anymore it's just an empty old relic of a town and there's different reasons for why that was but eventually possibly what happened was that this church again repeated that old cycle and their lampstand was removed. so for us in closing think about Highland Park Baptist Church and we you know as I mentioned earlier the Legacy Hall and you look at the believers who have come before many of you know them and you're still a strong core of this church but think about this church's future and the hope should be mine and yours that this church Lord willing will still be standing on that day when he returns still doing the things that we have been called to do but while orthodoxy and doctrine are great and good things they are not ultimately what we worship and we cannot become loveless and cold because we are no longer devoted to the Lord as we ought to be in his mission for us which is to go and make disciples so I encourage you again as we wrap up mission month to be involved and if you find it hard to find the motivation to be involved then I encourage you to pray because it could be that like these

Ephesian Christians you've lost that loving feeling