A Church Built To Last

(Selected Scriptures)
7/5/2015

Introduction:

FBC – 40th Anniversary

Why do some churches make it and others do not?
Why do some die and close their doors and others are vibrant and growing?

A Church will last when…

I. It is Built by the Right <u>Contractor</u> (Jesus the Messiah)

(Matthew 16:18 "…I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.)

A Church will last when…

II. It is Built with the Right <u>Materials</u> (Bible Obedience)

(I Corinthians 3:12-13 - Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest…)

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III. It is Built with the Right <u>Motive</u> (Love for Christ)

(Revelation 2:4-5 I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love…. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick (lampstand = your Church, Rev.1:20) out of his place, except thou repent.)

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I. It is Built by the Right <u>Contractor</u> (Jesus the Messiah)

(Matthew 16:18 "…I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.)

A. Christ is the FOUNDATION of the Church (v. 18a)
"upon this Rock"

V. 18

"Peter (petros). . . rock (petra)" -

Petros = masculine name

Petra = feminine noun

Petros - " a detached stone or boulder (Vine, p. 302), or a stone that might be thrown or easily moved

Petra - "a mass of rock"; bed-rock; a huge foundation (upon which something may be built - Mt. 7:24, 25; 27:51, 60; Mk. 15:46; Lk. 6:48).

Jesus deliberately uses a play on words in the Greek to show that He does not mean (refer to) Peter when He uses the word "rock".

Since the name "Petros" means a piece of the rock and not the rock itself, it would make no sense for Jesus to say, "You are a piece of a rock and upon you I will build My church."

No one can build anything on a "stone," but you can build on a bedrock!

"This Rock" - Three Views

1)Peter (Roman Catholic View)

Peter could not be the first Pope for several reasons:

(1)The word pope means "father." Peter would never have violated the command of his Lord Jesus and allowed others to call him "Father." (Mt. 23:9)

(2)Popes received worship; Peter rejected it (Acts 10:26)

(3)Popes cannot be married; Peter was (Mt. 8:14)

(4)Only Peter is said to possess the keys of the kingdom (no successors are ever mentioned) (Mt. 16:19)

(5)The Catholic church was not even in existence till Constantine enforced Christianity as the state religion

(6) Peter warned against ecclesiastical leadership lording it over God's Church (I Pet. 5:3)

(7)Peter never referred to himself as a "pope" but as an "apostle" (I Pet. 1:1) and "elder" (I Pet. 5:1) and a "servant" of Jesus Christ (II Pet. 1:1).

(8)Peter blundered (cp. Mt. 16:22-23; 26:669-75; Gal. 2:11-14). The RCC says that a Pope never makes a mistake when speaking "ex cathedra," that he is the infallible teacher of doctrine.
The only infallible teacher of truth is the Holy Spirit. It is blasphemous to give such credit to a mere man.

2)Peter's Confession
(i.e. upon this solid testimony that "You are the Christ the Son of the living God")

It is true that the boulder of truth that Jesus was the "Christ" was indeed the message the Apostles preached. And it was upon this truth the Church was built.

*Peter on the Day of Pentecost preached "Christ" to Jews and the church began (Acts 2:31, 2:38, 3:18).
*Philip preached "Christ" to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5).
*Paul preached "Christ" to the Jews and Gentiles (Acts 9:20, 22; 17:3; 18:5, 28).

***3)Christ

The words "thou. . . this" show that Jesus is pointing (perhaps with His finger).

"You (pointing to Peter) are a piece of a rock, and upon this Rock (pointing to Himself), He says: I will build my Church."

The proof that Christ was referring to Himself when He used the word "rock" is because only He (not Peter nor anyone else) is called a "Rock" (petra) in the Scriptures:

I Cor. 10:4 - "And did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ."

He is the "rock of offense" (Rom. 9:33; I Pet. 2:8).

Christ (not Peter) is the foundation upon which the Church is built.

I Cor. 3:11 - "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ"

I Pet. 2:4, 6 - "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious. . . Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded."

Cp. Isaiah 8:14, 28:16; Psalm 118:22

No one is a "Rock" except "our God." SEE: Psalm 18:2, 31; 46

Cp. Psalm 28:1, 31:3, 42:9, 661:2, 62:6-7, 71:3, 78:35, 95:1, etc.

If Jesus were saying that He would build His church on (upon) Peter, then clearly Peter would have been the greatest one in the kingdom. However, even the disciples did not take this to be the point, or else they would not have disputed among themselves who would be the greatest in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-21, 24-28).

B. Christ is the BUILDER of the Church (v. 18b)
"I will build"

"I will build" - the Church is not built by man, but by Christ. We may be His tools, but He is the builder.

"And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47)

"I will [future tense] build My Church" - the Church had not been built yet; but was a work to begin in a future time from when Jesus made this statement.

The Church began at Pentecost (Acts 2), a time which Peter refers to as the "beginning" (Acts 11:15).

C. Christ is the POSSESSOR of the Church (v. 18c)
"My Church"

"My Church" - The Church belongs to Jesus Christ

--The Church is called "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:9; cp. Eph. 5)

--The Church is called: "the church of God" (Acts 20:28; I Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; II Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; I Tim. 3:5)

--The Church is called "the flock of God" (I Pet. 5:2)

This church is not "my church" or even "our church"; it is His church.

""My church" - the church (singular) is a called-out group of believers who will one day assemble in Heaven. Not the local church; but the Church in prospect is what Christ is referring to. The wider spectrum o "the church"; all true regenerate believers, all over the earth from Pentecost till the Rapture.

(this wider, general, greater body of believers is the meaning of the word eklesia in the following passages:

Mt. 16:18 - "I will build my Church"
I Cor.12:28 -"God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers..."
I Cor. 15:9 - "I persecuted the Church of God"
Gal. 1:13 - "I persecuted the Church of God"
Eph. 1:22,23"Gave Him to be head over all things to the Church"
Eph. 3:10 -"Be made known through the Church"
Eph. 3:21 - "Might be glory in the Church"

Eph. 5:23-32 - "...Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her..."
Phil. 3:6 - "Concerning zeal, persecuting the Church"
Col. 1:18 - "He is the Head of the Body, the Church..."
Col. 1:24 - "For His body's sake, which is the Church."
Heb. 12:23"To the general assembly and Churchof the firstborn (ones), which are written in Heaven..."
NOTE: The general (generic) usage of the word "Church" is often described as:
"The Church" (Eph. 3:10, 21)
"The Church of God" (I Cor. 15:9)

D. Christ is the PROTECTOR of the Church (v. 18d)
"The gates of hell shall not prevail against it"

"The gates of Hell" - a reference to where the dignitaries and rulers sat.

"The gates stood for those who held government and administered" (Vine, p. 141).

EX: the "gates" in the Old Testament were places where those in public authority and power sat (Gen. 19:1, 22:17, 24:60; Deut. 21:19, 22:15, 22:24, 25:7; Ruth 4:1, 11; Esther 4:6, 5:13; Ps. 127:5; Prov. 24:7).

The "gates of Hell" is a reference to the "principalities...powers...rulers of the darkness of this world... spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12)

I.e. it is a reference to Satan and his high-ranking powerful spirits.

Satan and his host of demons are not in Hell yet (Mt. 8:29), but are associated with "Hell" because everlasting fire was created for them (Mt. 25:41) and Satan will be trapped there forever one day (Rev. 20:10).

"Shall not prevail against it" - There is no way the hoards of hell can overcome, overpower, have strength against or gain mastery over Christ's regenerate believers!

By Christ's death, He destroyed him who had the power of death (that is, the devil) and He delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. 2:14-15).

"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them (the false prophets): because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I Jn. 4:4)

"If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31)

A Church will last when…

II. It is Built with the Right <u>Materials</u> (Bible Obedience)

(I Corinthians 3:12-13 - Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest…)

If Christ were to walk in this room today, approach you, and say, "I want you to construct a building for me. . . and I will give you all the wisdom, time, strength, and talent to do the job." --
How would you respond?

How would you build?

In verses 10-17, Paul shifts from the analogy of farmer (v. 6-8) to builder, from agriculture to architecture.

V. 9 - "Ye are God's building"

He is the owner of every Biblical assembly of believers.

Although He uses us as His tools to build with, ultimately, He is the Builder. He built this church and owns it.

Paul was not content to merely contend in life -- He wanted to win for Christ! (I Cor. 9:24-27)

There exists much apathy in Christianity today.

Paul here describes not the Great White Throne Judgment, but the Judgment Seat of Christ (the Bema seat - a reference to the place where awards were given out to the victors of ancient Olympic games).

Believers will not be judged based on what they did for their salvation, but what they did with their salvation (cp. Phil. 2:12).

V. 10

"The grace of God" - Paul is quick to attribute his privileged responsibility to point men to Christ to the grace of God.

The wisdom, ability, and office of apostleship which Paul had for the ministry came to him via God's unmerited kindness and favor.

You are a humble man of God when you attribute your wisdom, talents, and position to God.

"Masterbuilder" - Greek architecton - architect, skilled craftsman.

Paul didn't design the foundation -- He simply "laid" it (MacArthur, p. 81).

"I have laid the foundation" - the foundation Paul placed down among the Corinthians was Jesus Christ (v. 11).

God used Paul to give the simple message of salvation in Christ (2:2). Since it was Paul who introduced them to Christ, he was in a sense a spiritual "father" to them (SEE: 4:15).

Paul led the Corinthians to Christ and thus was used by God's grace to get their eternal souls anchored in the bedrock foundation of Jesus Christ.

Paul did not just contribute knowledge, he contributed labor! (Morris, p. 67).

"Another buildeth thereon" - Apollos, then others would build on the work Paul had initiated. They picked up where he left off (just as I picked up where Pastor Lowery left off in terms of building upon the lives God used him to lead to Christ).

"Laid (aorist - past complete) . . . buildeth" (present - continuous)

The laying of the foundation in a person's life never needs repeating (Heb. 6:1ff); however, the building is to be continuous and repetitious all our lives.

All of us, whether we like it or not, are building something onto someone else (whether intentionally or unintentionally).

"Take heed how he buildeth" - "Seriously look at" or "pay careful attention" to how you are building the lives of others (with whom you come in contact).

*Take heed how you build others for Jesus Christ!

1. Build on the RIGHT FOUNDATION (v. 11)

You can't choose any foundation you want or like.

Salvation and Christianity are only built on the foundation of Christ (not Paul, Apollos, Peter, good works, humanism, or science).

True Bible Christianity is exclusive.

Not all roads lead to Heaven. Not all foundations are sure.

Only one road goes to Heaven (Jn. 14:16). Only one foundation is sure!

People may attempt to build other foundations, but those foundations will all crumble. On Judgment day, those foundations will be "slippery" places from which people will fall and be destroyed (Ps. 73:18; Jer. 23:12).

Jesus Christ is the bottom line of Christianity.

He is the foundation from which everything else builds.

A building is only as good as its foundation. If the foundation is "sand" [Mt. 7:26], it doesn't matter how good the building is, it will not stand when the storm comes.

EX: Many well-meaning people attempt to build Christian principles, ethics,and morals on people who are not even saved. This is like building an edifice on quicksand. Totally futile!

The foundation determines

the size of the building

the shape of the building

the strength of the building (Wiersbe)

2. Build with the BEST MATERIALS (v. 12)

"Gold" - Can be refined (Job 23:10)

"Silver" - Can be "purified" (Ps. 12:6)

"Precious stones" - Will take on a different molecular structure

"Precious stones" - costly, valuable stone like granite or marble.

However, "wood, hay, and stubble" cannot pass through fire without being totally consumed.

"Stubble" - Straw. Was often used as a building material for thatching roofs (Rienecker, p. 394). It can't handle fire at all! (nor even heavy winds - EX: "The Three Little Pigs" story)

Note the order from "gold" down to "stubble" (straw).

The elements display a:

decrease in value

increase in flammability

GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES
WOOD, HAY, STUBBLE

* Permanent

* Beautiful

* Valuable

* Hard to Obtain * Passing; Temporary

* Ordinary; Even Ugly

* Cheap

* Easy to Obtain

Chart by: Warren Wiersbe

3. Build so as to be INSPECTED and TESTED (v. 13)

When building a new house in New York, one will find that the codes and inspectors are strict.

"Every man's work" - In context the "every man" refers to believers (and all believers; none excluded).

Believers who attempt to build on the foundation of Christ (v. 10) and who themselves will be "saved" (v. 15) will have their works evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Each Christian will be judged for his own works (don't worry about others; concern yourself with your own; you will answer for yourself).

"Work" = In context, a positive deed done for Christ. All works built on Christ's foundation will be made evident.

"Every man's work" - Note: it is not people (believers) who go through the fire (not RCC Purgatory), but our works go through the fire.

It is our works not our sins that will be judged. Our sins were judged at Calvary (II Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:1).

"Shall be made manifest" - to be brought out into the open so as to be seen for what it really is.

--The secret works will be made known (Ro. 2:16)
--The motives of "why" will be evident
--The methods of "how" will be evident

Just a small box full of gold, silver, and precious stones is worth more than a barn or warehouse full of wood, hay, or stubble!

Bigness (mass and bulk) does not necessarily mean goodness or precious value (cp. DeHaan).

When someone builds a house using only the cheapest of inferior materials, that house may look good at first glance, but it will:

1) Not stand the test of close scrutiny (an expert builder could look beneath the facade and determine its real worth)

2) Not stand the test of time (it will deteriorate rapidly)

"The day" - the article points to a day which is well known (Schlatter).

"The day shall declare it" - "The day" refers to the day of Christ's coming (1:8; cp. I Th. 5:4; Heb. 10:25). The Day of the Lord, when Jesus catches His Bride away.

When He returns, He will bring His rewards with Him (Rev. 22:12 - "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be").

"Revealed by fire" (apocalupsis) - Unveiled, uncovered, opened up to plain sight.

"By fire" - The refining fire of Jesus Christ [Particularly His all-searching, penetrating eyes (Heb. 4:13), which are like blazing fire (Rev. 1:14), will see right through to the true value (quality) and motives of the works we did for others.]

Just as hot fire purges the dross out of gold and the alloys out of silver and the sediment out of stone, so the fire of Christ's judgment will test or try every work we did for Him.

ILLUS: of a fire sweeping through a building and consuming everything combustible except valuable metals (Morris, p. 68).

"The fire shall try" - Test so as to prove genuineness. What is a "genuine" work?
--A work performed by His power (Holy Spirit)
--A work performed by His rules (Biblical standard)
--A work performed for His glory (right motives)

All works done by Christ's power (Jn. 15:4-5) and for Christ's glory (I Cor. 10:31) will be rewarded (whether: witnessing, discipling, teaching, preaching, ushering, cleaning, translating, babysitting, building, visiting, leading . . .all forms of serving).

"Of what sort" = of what kind of quality

God is not merely keeping records of what we did but how and why we did it.

--Gold, silver, precious stones =Products of a mighty supernatural creative act
--Wood, hay, stubble =Products of common natural growth and development (DeHaan)

If you are not in the Word daily, you are no doubt building with the wrong materials. If you are not in prayer daily, you are no doubt building with the wrong power!

"What sort" - Quality examination. Why do we do what we do? What is our intention? Do we have interior motives (please self), exterior motives (please others), ulterior motives (get something). . . or "superior" motives (to please God)? (SEE: II Cor. 5:9-11a).

4. Build with the LONG LOOK in View (v. 14-15)

V. 14

ILLUS: How people don't build things to last.

"Abide" - To remain or survive the revealing fires. That which still exists after going through the fire will earn a reward.

"Built thereupon" - Only works built on the foundation of Christ will merit reward in Heaven.

--You may be involved in a lot of social programs, relief organizations, and humanitarian societies, etc., but your efforts will not be rewarded by God unless they were done for God's glory and His cause!

"A reward" - A reward for each and every "work" is promised (In this life, you may not get the recognition you deserve, but remember, nothing [not even a cup of cold water - Mk. 9:41] will go unnoticed by God.

ILLUS: of a old veteran missionary couple returning to America after many years serving God on the foreign field. As they left the ship, huge crowds were cheering, reporters were crowding around, etc. The couple soon learned that Teddy Roosevelt was also leaving the same ship. The woman sighed and complained of how there was no one there to welcome or cheer for them. Her husband replied, "Don't worry, dear, our recognition and reward come later-- when we reach Heaven's shore."

Rewards are often spoken of as crowns:

I Cor. 9:25 - "Incorruptible crown" - for striving lawfully

II Tim. 4:8 - "Crown of righteousness" - For those who love His appearing

Ja. 1:12 - "Crown of life" - for enduring testing out of love (cp. Rev. 2:10)

I Pet. 5:4 - "Crown of glory" - for the faithful pastor

Salvation is by grace alone, but rewards are based on our works.

Entrance into Heaven is not determined by our works, but the metals and honors we receive in Heaven are based on our works

Note: Even our works are the result of our allowing Christ to work through us (I Cor. 15:10 - "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."; Phil. 2:13 - "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.")

Our chief focus ought to be on laying up treasures in Heaven (Mt. 6:19-20 - "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.").

V. 15

Note, it is the believer's "work" which is burned up and not the believer.

"He shall suffer loss" - loss of reward throughout eternity.

It is never a pleasant feeling to "suffer loss."

II John 8 - "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward."

"But he himself shall be saved" - Delivered by Christ from the fire. The same fire that tested our works could have tested our souls (if our souls were not justified by God's grace).

No believer can lose his salvation, but he can lose rewards.

"Yet so as by fire" - As one who escapes through the flames without being burned.

As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego endured the fiery furnace (Dan. 3), yet had just their ropes burned, so we will endure a fire that will only burn works performed by the flesh.

"The thought here is of a person who runs through flames without being burned, but who has the smell of smoke on him -- barely escaping!" (MacArthur, p. 85).

ILLUS: the explosion and fire at Chipper's Paint Warehouse, and Vernon's escape

5. Build, Don't CORRUPT GOD'S TEMPLE! (v. 16-17)

V. 16

"Ye. . . temple" - You Christians (plural) form a temple (singular).

The Church at large is a holy shrine (holy place, sanctuary). All the company of the redeemed comprise a temple which God owns and His Spirit indwells.

He owns us individually (6:20) and indwells us individually (6:19).

That which God owns and indwells must be respected. We must take serious heed how we treat God's property and house (ie. His people)!

How you build a fellow believer ought to take on a new perspective after today.

The "Temple" spoken of here is God's local church (cp. I Tim. 3:15).

V. 17

Here a greater crime than inferior workmanship is in mind (Morris, p. 70).

(Paul is evidently referring to the corruption spread over God's work by an unsaved person.)

"Defile" - to destroy by means of corrupting (I Cor. 15:33).

Any church, pastor, layman, who corrupts God's temple of believers by either:

corrupt morals, corrupt doctrine, corrupt practice . . . is in deep trouble!

The corruption in context refers to building something on someone else that is unclean or impure.

To hammer bad building materials onto God's temple, which is founded on Christ, is to disgrace God's property.

"Him shall God destroy" - lit. him will God destroy with corruption (same word).

You corrupt God's temple and god will see to it that you are corrupted.

God intends that His temple remain "holy" (set apart from corruption).

A Church will last when…

III. It is Built with the Right <u>Motive</u> (Love for Christ)

(Revelation 2:4-5 I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love…. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick (lampstand = your Church, Rev.1:20) out of his place, except thou repent.)

If the Lord were to tell you personally that He had something against you, what would come to your mind?

If you were said to be guilty of committing the worst sin imaginable, you might think, "Who, me? Impossible!"

What is the worst sin?

To find the answer to this, we should ask ourselves, What is the greatest commandment in the Bible?

A lawyer came to Jesus one day and asked the same question. What was Christ's reply?

"Jesus saith unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."

If the greatest command is to love God, then the greatest sin would be not to love Him.

This is the indictment made against the Ephesian church - SEE verse four.

V. 4

"Left" = to let something go; to leave something; to abandon it.

The word points to a conscious departure from our first love, rather than having lost it in the shuffle.

NOTE: the personal responsibility in leaving your first love (EX: Husbands & wives say, "I can't help it, I just don't love him anymore!").

You walked away from it!

--No one took it away (can't blame others)

--A storm of life did not blow it away (can't blame circumstances)

"Your first love" -

"First" = Can refer to first in time (EX: She is the first girl I ever dated) or first in importance (priority) (EX: She is first on my list; she is tops!)

Both are true in our relationship to Christ --

1.He was the One whom we loved first, before we came to love anything else about true Christianity.

2.He was and is to be our pre-eminent Love. Our priority Love. He is the most important one we should love.

*Our "first Love" must remain first!

V. 1

"Angel" ( ) - lit. messenger (an is a message - I Jn. 3:11)

2 Views of "Angel" (messenger):

1)a supernatural messenger (an angel)
(Mt. 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19)

2)a human messenger (a pastor)

Supposed proofs for Angelic Messenger:

1.Angels interacted with the revelation to Daniel, so why not to the churches? (Dan. 8:16; 9:21)
ANSWER: God did use angels (particularly Gabriel) to reveal revelation to a prophet or specially chosen individual (Luke 1:26), but never to a local church.

2.Angels do observe the conduct of believers at church gatherings (I Cor. 11:10).
ANSWER: However, nowhere in the Bible does it state that they are responsible for the conduct of believers. In Rev. 2-3, the messenger along with the people is held accountable (Messenger = singular..."I know your - singular).

3.Angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who will be heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14).
ANSWER: True, they are servants of the church, but never do they give an oral message to the church!

4.Here, the Lord Jesus addresses one angel (messenger) of the Ephesian church, whereas in Acts 20:17, Paul addressed the "elders (plural) of Ephesus."
2 POSSIBLE ANSWERS: 1) the Church met in houses and each had one pastor overseeing it. 2) The church had one senior pastor like the Jerusalem church with James.

**Proofs for a Human messenger (a pastor):

1.The word translated "angel" can also be translated messenger and refer to a human messenger.

a.John the Baptist is called a "messenger" ( )
(Mk. 1:2 - "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee").

b.John the Baptist sent "messengers" to Jesus (lk. 7:24; cp. v. 27)

c.Jesus sent "messengers" to Samaria in Lk. 9:52

d.The two spies Rahab protected were called "messengers" (James 2:25).

2.Why would John write to an angel, when he was writing "by means of" ( ) an angel (Rev. 1:1)? [Angels were revealers not recipients of revelation - Rev. 17:1; 19:10; 22:8].

3.If "messenger" meant "angel," why would Jesus need to tell one of the 7 angels that He was the one holding the 7 angels in his hand. The angel (being a spirit being functioning in the spiritual realm) would already know this.

However, if "messenger" refers to a human pastor, he (being finite and mortal) would need this revelation.

4.Since the 7 golden lampstands (1:20) refer to literal local churches, the 7 messengers (depicted by "stars") would most naturally correspond to the nature of the churches. (since churches are people, the messengers would be also)

Jesus is walking around in the midst of His churches.

"Walks" = Christ patrols His churches; He is always on guard; He protects (ILLUS: of a police officer walking his beat).

While, on the one hand, our adversary the Devil as a roaring lion "walketh about" (same Gk. word) seeing whom He may devour (I Pet. 5:8), on the other hand Jesus Christ is walking around His church -- and "greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world."

"In the midst" = Christ has a close relationship to the churches.

"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20).

He is the center or focal point of local churches (NOTE: the pre-eminence of the local church, the only divinely-appointed religious institution in the N.T.).

He that "holdeth" the seven stars = "He who has power over"; or "He who has a strong grasp on the seven stars."

This one who has such a close relationship, He who holds us in His hands (Jn. 10:27-30) must remain our first love!

Two points to remember:

1. GOOD SUBSTITUTES CAN'T REPLACE YOUR FIRST LOVE (v. 1-3, 6)
(Good virtues, but poor replacements)

A.Ephesus was a working church, yet had left her first love (v. 2a)

"I know your works" - Jesus is saying, "I know what you did. I know all the things you did in and through your church."

Nothing you do goes unnoticed!

Jesus would say to us today: "I know you worked on the church building; I know you worked in the nursery...Sunday school...Spanish ministry...bus route...cleaning up the church...as a teacher, pastor, deacon, etc."

"I know your labour (exhausting toil) and patience (endurance; ability to stick it out)" = Jesus is saying: "I know how you worked."

"I know you were tired but you still served. I know you were weary but you didn't give up. I remember the sweat drops that fell from your brow as you ministered . . . as you labored over you SS lessons, as you worked on the building, as you served meals . . .

The Ephesian church had followed Paul's example in working hard. Paul reminded them; "I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak..." (Acts 20:35)

Although Ephesus was a working church, because love was missing, her works did not meet Christ's approval. She is called on in verse 5 to do the "first works."

In contrast to the church of Thessalonica: "Ephesus had works, but not a work of faith; labor, but not labor of love; patience, but not patience of hope (I Th. 1:3).

Indeed, they had "left" the greatest of these (I Cor. 13:13). (Smith, p. 64)

Cp. Martha's work with Mary's love (Lk. 10:40-41).

B.Ephesus was a discerning church, yet had left her first love (v. 2b, 6)

"Thou canst not bear them which are evil" = You don't lift up or carry around bad (evil) people.

The only banner we must lift up is holiness, righteousness and truth!

--There is nothing worse than for Christians (EX: Billy Graham) to hold up men who are wicked pagans.

We don't hold up false religion (heresy) or new evangelicalism (compromise). We do not seek to join hands with Catholics or protestants (who follow the traditions of men). We cannot condone any part of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, moonies, Christian Science, or other cults. We want nothing to do with those who are corrupting the Word of God (feminist translation), etc.

--As a church, we don't tolerate sinful practices on the part of our members.

--We practice church discipline (Mt. 18).

--We believe in moral, personal, and ecclesiastical separation (and we must! Ii Cor. 6:14-18; Gal. 1:6-9; Eph. 5:11-12; Ii Th. 3:6; I Tim. 6:3-5; II Jn. 9-11).

BUT, we must never abandon our first love.

If we think Christ is happy with us only because we are separatists, we are wrong!

"Tried them" - lit. you thoroughly examined or tested them to see if they were genuine.

They knew the Scriptures. They had their spiritual senses exercised to discern good from evil (Heb. 5:14).

They knew there would be false teachers who appeared to be godly, as Paul warned about in Ii Cor. 11:13-14 - "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."

The Ephesian church definitely took to heart Paul's admonition to their pastors ("elders" - Acts 20:17), when he warned them about false teachers (wolves) that would spring up around them (SEE Acts 20:28-31).

They did not believe every spirit, but tried the spirits to see whether they were of God, having known that many false prophets had gone out into the world (I Jn. 4:1).

They were not children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men. They knew there were those who in cunning craftiness, were waiting for the chance to deceive (Eph. 4:14).

V. 6

Who are the "Nicolaitanes?" Whoever they are, it is clear that Christ hates their "deeds" (actions) and their "doctrine" ("teaching" - 2:15).

NOTE: Whenever there is corrupt teaching, there will also be corrupt behavior, and vice-versa.

Two Views:

1.Followers of a man named Nicolas, who had a religion, but lived anyway they wanted.

2.Others derive their description from the name ("Nikao" = to conquer; laos = the people, the laymen), point to a clerical hierarchy (EX: RCC).

We are to hate what Christ hates.

Ps. 97:10, "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil."

It is impossible to love Him without hating what He hates (evil); but it is possible to hate what He hates and yet not love Him.

*These believers overcame (were victorious over) heathen religions -

Ephesus was headquarters for the idolatrous Diana worship (Acts 19:27). The temple of the "great" goddess Diana was located here and was one of the seven wonders of the world.

Small silver shrines (niches) with a figure of Diana int he middle were manufactured by the thousands and sold to worshippers (Acts 19:24ff) (EX: RCC - amulettes of saints).

*These believers when first converted burned all of their magic arts, witchcraft, and devil-worship books (Acts 19:17-20).

Right from the start, they were Biblical separatists! Yet this is not enough! We must separate from apostasy! But never must our love be separated from Christ!

C.Ephesus was an enduring church, yet had left her first love (v. 3)

V. 3

"Borne" = While they did not bear them that were evil (v. 2), they no doubt did bear reproach for Christ (I Tim. 4:10; Heb. 13:13f). They no doubt did bear (carry) each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2).

--They had the fruit of love, but not love itself.

"Patience" = endurance, an ability to remain under pressure without giving in or giving up. They refused to quit.

"Laboured" = worked to the point of exhaustion, yet they did not faint with exhausting.

They were a "hard-nosed" people who like soldiers did their duty and even did it for the sake of Christ's name, yet did not love Him like they should have.

Beware: Don't let a love for the cause replace your love for Christ!

It's easy for many churches to fight for the cause of fundamentalism, America, separation, family, etc., but we must fight because we love Christ! (All other motives are inferior).

V. 4

How do I know I have left my first love?

1.When you serve but don't find joy in it.

2.When you teach, but are cold and uncompassionate.

3.When you work at church for the applause or recognition of men

4.When you take a stand for Christ, but do so with bitterness and a "holier than thou" attitude toward everyone else.

Why do Christians leave their first love?

1.Other things look more appealing.

2.We take it for granted (thinking: "it will still be there when I come back").

3.We neglect it and don't nurture it and thereby forget about it (therefore, God calls on us to remember - v. 5).

2. GOD'S STEPS MUST BE FOLLOWED TO REGAIN YOUR FIRST LOVE
(v. 5)
(Easy steps, but serious consequences)

3 Steps to regaining your first love:

1.Remember

2.Repent

3.Return

A.Remember

"Remember" = call back to memory the height from which you have fallen.

Many new converts are standing on higher ground than those who have been saved for years. Why? They are deeply in love with their groom - Jesus Christ!

"Fallen" = the picture is of someone who is down at the base of a mountain looking up to the point he once was at.

SEE I Jn. 4:19

If it is true that we "love Him because He first loved us," it is imperative that we really know how much He loved and loves us so that we will love Him more.

God's love for us was unconditional (the verse does not say, "He loved us because we first loved Him.").

Our love for God, however, is conditional. It is conditioned by our knowing His love for us.

No one loves God (in the true sense) who has not first experienced His love. The times we love God are the times when we see clearly His love for us.

In order for us to truly love God, we must know (be assured of) His love for us.

Why did you leave your "first love"?

ANSWER: You failed to remember v. 5). You lost sight of Christ's gracious love for you:

1.We lose sight of the cross (when first saved, this is all we thought about) HYMN - "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross."

2.We forget what wretched sinners we were when God's unconditional love found us. (we start thinking about how "great" we are) Is. 51:1 - "Look unto the rock...pit." I Tim. 1:15 - "...chief of sinners."

3.We doubt His wonders love for us now that we are saved.

Of all the disciples, John seemed to love Jesus the most; the reason most likely is the fact that John was deeply aware of how much Jesus loved him (Jn. 12:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20).

B.Repent

"Repent" = whereas the remembering is to be a continual attitude (present tense), the repenting is to be a decisive change of mind (aorist tense) (a once and for all decision to make clean break from the rut you are in).

C.Return

"Do" - begin doing what you did at first! (when we first "fell in love" ILLUS: dating and newlyweds).

What did you do at first?

We spent more time praising Him.

We spent more time listening to Him.

We spent more time ministering for Him, not for selfish advantage or to please others.

It's not so much what we did for Christ that was different; it's why we did it and how we did it.

The imperatives in this verse are a blessing! Why? Because they show that regaining lost ground in our love for Christ is possible. However, the point at the end of the verse is this -- Do it quickly! Don't wait! Don't put it off, or else!

NOTE: A church may be working and discerning and enduring and yet if it is missing the essential virtue of love (cp. I Cor. 13:1-3), the Lord cannot use it!

"Remove thy candlestick (lampstand; lightholder)" = The judgment would be:

1)Personal ("I will come; Jesus has full authority over every church)

2)Sudden ("quickly" [word not in early mss])

and

3)Severe ("remove thy candlestick" - jesus is saying, I will remove your influence in the location you are at; your evangelistic efforts will be zero. Your witness will be ineffective.)

The Lord wants to shine out through every Bible-preaching church, but He does not have to. He can't shine out of a loveless church - "By this shall all men know . . . if ye have love . . ." He can't shine out of people who do not glow with the One they supposedly love.

Churches that do not have a real love for Christ always die! A dead church is a loveless church!

The church may preach sound doctrine, be busy doing things, having church programs and activities, etc., yet still be without that necessary virtue that gives it real life!

CONCLUSION: Verse 7

"Churches" (Plural) - this shows that even though John originally wrote to the church (singular) at Ephesus (2:1) in his day, this passage applies to our church and every one of Christ's churches.

What did the church at Ephesus have to overcome? ANSWER: her lovelessness.

While the church as a whole had "left their first love," no doubt there were unbelievers that had crept in who did not have any love!

Love is a distinguishing mark of a Christian; it is an evidence of true Christianity.

I Jn. 4:7 - "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."

I Cor. 16:22 - "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha."

Those who have love for Christ will be with Christ throughout eternity (the New Jerusalem) and will have the right to eat of "the tree of life."

Paradise = a Persian word meaning a park or enclosed garden.

Three paradises are spoken of in the Bible:

1.The Garden of Eden (where tree of life was) (Gen. 2:8, 23 - LXX)

2.The abode of the souls in Heaven (Lk. 23:43 - thief; II Cor. 12:4 - Paul)

3.The eternal paradise (in New Jerusalem) (Gen. 22:2).