Ephesus: Thou Hast Left thy FIRST LOVE

Revelation 2:1-7

2-13-2022

INTRODUCTION: Verse 4

***Our "first Love" must remain first!**

Two points to remember:

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

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

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

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

II. <u>GOD'S STEPS</u> MUST BE FOLLOWED TO <u>REGAIN</u> YOUR FIRST LOVE (v. 5) (Easy steps, but serious consequences)

A. Remember

B. Repent

C. Return

CONCLUSION: Verse 7

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I. GOOD _____ CAN'T _____ YOUR FIRST LOVE (v. 1-3, 6)
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A. Ephesus was a _____ church, yet had left her first love (v. 2a)

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

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B. _____

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2-6-2022

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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 <u>others</u>)

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

"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" (αγγελοϖ) - lit. messenger (an αγγελια 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 <u>to</u> an angel, when he was writing "by means of" ( ) an angel (Rev. 1:1)? [Angels were <u>revealers</u> 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 <u>patrols</u> 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 "<u>greater</u> is He that is in you than He that is in the world."

"<u>In the midst</u>" = Christ has a <u>close relationship</u> to the churches.

"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I <u>in the midst</u> 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:

I. 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 <u>burned</u> all of their magic arts, witchcraft, and devil-worship books (Acts 19:17-20).

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

C. Ephesus was an <u>enduring</u> 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).

II. 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 <u>now</u> 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 <u>praising Him</u>.

We spent more time <u>listening to Him</u>.

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

It's not so much what we did for Christ that was different; it's <u>why</u> we did it and <u>how</u> 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!

"<u>Remove</u> thy candlestick (lampstand; lightholder)" = The judgment would be:

1) <u>Personal</u> ("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).