

Title: First Love
Text: Revelation 2: 1-7
Date: March 31, 2013
Place: SGBC, New Jersey

Revelation 2: 1: Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; 2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. 4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 5 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 out of his place, except thou repent. 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

It has been more than forty years since Paul first preached the gospel in Ephesus. (Acts 18-20). Some of those who were young when the Lord first blessed this church with his grace are now the aged members of the church. They saw the church grow and a new generation of sons and daughters called by his grace. The gospel is still being preached in truth. But the Lord Jesus Christ says something terrible has happened without anyone noticing.

Rev 2: 4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Therefore, Christ sends this letter to be read publicly to the church. But it a letter to all the Lord's churches—this one included.

The Lord says in verse 7, **“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”** So let each of us here today, whom the Spirit of God has given ears to hear, take heed to what the Lord says.

Proposition: Believer, never leave your first love.

I. THE LORD SAYS SOMETHING GOOD

Good Works

First, the Faithful Witness says **v2: I know thy works.** Wherever God has given the gift of faith, that faith will be accompanied with good works.

James 2: 26: For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

A good work is that which is done:

- In faith and obedience to Christ--“without faith is impossible to please God”; “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”
- It springs from love to Christ—“faith which worketh by love”—good works are not motivated by constraint of men, or from legal motives—seeking rewards or for fear of punishment—“the love of Christ constraineth us.”
- It is done for his glory and gives him the glory—Paul said, “I labored—yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

Christ knew their works and commended the Ephesian brethren—for their works. They were not idle. They performed: works of obedience to God, works of charity to men and works of devotion to Christ.

Application: Brethren, good works are pleasing to our Savior.

Whole Heartedness

Secondly, he says, **v2: “and thy labour.”** The works they did they did with all their heart.

Titus 2:14: Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, ZEALOUS of good works.

Their pastors worked diligently, willingly, and the brethren did what they each could to help, with all their might, cheerfully.

Patience

Thirdly, the Lord commends them saying in v2: I know **“thy patience.”** It means they did not work in spurts but were steady in doing good works.

Application: Remember, they lived in a place much like where we live—it was a busy, prosperous, competitive place—which means they had the same daily responsibilities and struggles we have. But they patiently persevered in the cause of Christ. Many of them since Christ founded the church.

No Tolerance for the Evil

Fourthly, Christ says I know **v2: “how thou canst not bear them which are evil.”** The Ephesian brethren did not want to be around those who were evil in their doctrine or in their lives—they withdrew from such—and Christ commends them for this.

1 Corinthians 15:33: Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

Those who love the truth want to keep company with others who love the truth.

Proverbs 8:13: The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

Romans 12:9: *Let* love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

No Compromise with False Teachers

Fifthly, the Lord said, I know **“thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.”** I realize there are many who think I should not warn you so much about false preachers: those who teach the lie of free-will, who teach the lie that Christ died for all men and it is up to the sinner to make his blood effectual, who preach the lie that it is up to the believer to make himself more and more perfect by the works of his flesh. But the Ephesians proved men false and warned their brethren and the Lord commends them for doing so.

Perseverance in Suffering

Sixthly, the Lord Jesus said, **v3: I know “how thou hast borne, and hast patience, and for my sake hast labored and hast not fainted.”** “Thou hast borne” means they bore reproach and persecution for the sake of Christ, for the gospel they preached and believed and supported. Like we have discovered so often to be the case, friends, co-workers, probably some who attended the services for a long time, listened to their preachers then criticized them, criticized the brethren, criticized how they conducted their services. They reproached how they looked up to Paul who was instrumental in establishing them, reproached those who ministered the gospel to them on a weekly basis, reproached them for not serving God like their churches served God. The Ephesians bore cruel, injurious persecution—it was at Ephesus where they tried to throw Paul to the lions. The Lord Jesus commends them for bearing it patiently for his sake, for continuing to labor in the gospel for his sake and for not fainting.

Application: Can you imagine getting a letter from the Lord Jesus commending us for not fainting? You know they thought Lord it is only by your strength that we do not faint. We have not strength of ourselves.

Hatred of the Deeds of Antinomians

Seventhly, the Lord commended their hatred of the deeds of the Nicolaitans--**V6: “But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”** The Nicolaitans were true antinomians. We are accused of being antinomians—lawless or against the law. When you preach that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes that is what you will certainly be accused of. But these were true antinomians. When Paul wrote,

Romans 3: 8:...(as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just...6:15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

This was the kind of folks Paul was speaking of. They said since God’s elect are saved by grace and are free from the law, then nothing is off limits. In the name of Christian liberty—they 'committed fornication, adultery, had their wives in common.'

Application: True believers do not promote ungodliness. We hate our sin. It is because we are under grace that we deplore ourselves for our sin—because we know our sin is against the very God who loved us and gave himself for us. And we despise those who blaspheme our God and our gospel by saying that is what it means to “not to be under the law but under grace.” Christ hated it, the Ephesians hated it and so do we.

Now, these are seven things the Lord commended the churches at Ephesus for. And they are very commendable. This is the character you and I should always ask God’s grace for and strive to maintain.

II. SECONDLY, THE LORD SPEAKS OF SOMETHING VERY BAD—V4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

They were commended for being orthodox in doctrine and uncompromising with false apostles, for being zealous in good works, patient and persevering. “Nevertheless,” the Lord says, “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”

Not That They Had Fallen Away

It is not that they did not love the Lord at all. True love for Christ is born of God. And by God’s grace, those born of God never cease to believe God or to love Christ.

Jeremiah 32: 39: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: 40: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.

James 1:17: Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

1 Peter 1:5: Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

If one of his children suffers from this, Christ will send his gospel—like he is doing here now—and stir up love in his child. So it is not that they ceased loving Christ.

First Love

“First love” means simply “the love you had at first.” (Jer 2: 2) Now, this is for you who truly have been born of the Spirit of God. Do you remember when the Lord Jesus Christ first revealed himself in your heart? Do you remember how his love for you overcame you. After so long of the gospel being a mystery to you, you began to see and to hear the truth?

You were made to see what a sinner you are. How dead, how hateful—the wicked are like the troubled sea. How scornful you had been by all your sin and doubting and unbelief of his gospel.

Yet, he made you to see he loved you anyway—he made you to see him there on the cross—bearing all your sin in his own body on the tree. It was like he looked down at you from the cross and said, “I’m doing this for you....I’ve loved you with an everlasting love....I entered into covenant to save you before the world was made.” You just began to believe every word he spoke. And he said to you, “ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” You fell so in love with him that every word you heard him speak became so sweet to you—you would read something in scripture like,

“As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” (SOS 2: 3)

You thought yes, that is how I love Christ. Do you remember that? Your love was so warm that you confessed him publicly in baptism. You looked for a way to bring up his name in conversation with your friends so you could tell them about him. All the time you made time to get in a quiet place and read his word. You couldn’t wait to hear the gospel preached. Your heart was opened to him all the time and there was a genuine communion between you and Christ.

Illustration: Will and I at the bridge on the creek listening to sermons by the fire. We ran trotlines for a week to give a fish fry for the Lord’s people. I was working a job for me, then it became about being able to support the gospel, to order more sermons on tape.

That is this “first love” Christ is speaking about—that first love that made you surrender all to Christ! You heard this scripture,

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15 And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

And you said, “Of course! How can I from henceforth live unto myself! I must live unto him which died for me and rose again!”

Application: Now Christ says, “You have left your first love.” So have we done that? I have been asking myself this question lately. It is something I fear—I do not want to ever lose that “first love.”

III. WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT CAN HELP US KEEP THAT FIRST LOVE? THE LORD TELLS US

Remember

First, the Lord says, **v5: Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen,**

Illustration: I love to remember my “first love” for Melinda. That little girl could wrap her arms around me and we just fit. I’m a little heavier now but she still does.

Be always remembering your first love for Christ. Don't become too familiar. Don't let this time become just a routine.

Be always remembering what it was to have the faith of a little child. Be honest with the Lord—we see here he knows our heart—so be honest with him. Nothing will make the heart grow cold like trying to impress yourself with how much you know—follow Christ like a child—read his word and ask God to open your heart, to teach like it's the first time you ever opened the book.

Mark 10:15: Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

Remember the price that was paid by Christ. If you are truly one of God's elect. Christ came down for you: down from heaven to this low place, down into the false accusations of men, down to the low place of being made sin for you, down to being forsaken of God, down to being forsaken of everyone, down to the grave. "His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:"

La 1:12 *Is it* nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted *me* in the day of his fierce anger.

1 Corinthians 6: 20: For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Repent

Secondly, the Lord says v5: **“and repent.”** Turn from whatever is taking your time and attention away from Christ. Is it the world?—the cares of this world will choke the word. Is it riches?—beware of “the deceitfulness of riches.” Is it family?—“if any man love father or mother more than me, he's not worthy of me.” It really does not matter what it is—if it is coming between you and Christ—it is something to repent from. If we are his—he will turn us. If not, gradually you will leave your first love, then you will become indifferent, then you will become presumptuous, then filled with ingratitude. The heart is deceitfully wicked. It is amazing how secure a presumptuous, ungrateful man becomes—everyone else will be at fault—but he won't.

Repent from thinking big of ourselves. Think big of Christ and little of self. Repent from being wise/self-sufficient--always remember what a poor, worthless, vain sinner we are. Repent from self-reliance and trust Christ alone for everything. Repent from taking pleasure in your strength and take pleasure in how very weak you are.

2 Corinthians 12: 9: And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10: Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Application: A gradual neglect of personal, intimate, heart communion with Christ is what we all should always watch for and repent from. Remember how Christ went away from the crowds and got alone with his Father to pray.

John 14:23: Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Application: If we are too busy—or something is too important—to walk away from—then it is the first thing we need to repent from. In fact, when that “first love” is truly first—Christ comes before everything else. We work everything else around our time with that one we love.

Illustration: John and Carly—whose the first one you think about when you wake up in the morning—that is “first love.”

Do the First Works

Thirdly, the Lord says **v5: “and do the first works;”**

Illustration: Men, what were the first works that accompanied your first love for your wives? Time revolved around her. You’d go a long way out of your way just to see her for a short time—no time was too short and all time away was too long. No expense was too great

Set your affection on things above. Remember how you used to get alone so you could read his word—do the first works. Remember how you used to ask Christ to open your heart, to teach you, to communion with you—do the first works. Remember how you used to open your heart to him in confession of your sin—do the first works. Get to the foot of the cross—reach your finger into his side and into his nail prints and believe like you did at first.

IV. ONE LAST THING—Christ gives us a word of warning—he shows us by this how serious he is about us maintaining our first love for him—Christ says that if this is not corrected, this will end in utter ruin—**v5: or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.**

Walk in the Light or Lose Your Usefulness

Those chosen of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, born of the Spirit of God shall never be lost. Christ will turn those who are his. But any believer or any church that loses their first love, will lose their light and their usefulness in the kingdom of God. This is another way of saying, “Walk in the light while you have the light.” I think the Lord adds this word about the Nicolaitans where he does in this passage because as they committed literal adultery—to leave our first love—to let something come between us and Christ is spiritual adultery. IF you really hate their works, then don’t do their works.

Feed Your Faith

But notice he also gives a promise, **v7: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”** The Lord Jesus Christ will be a 'the Tree of Life' to you now as you feed your faith and will be the tree of life in heaven. You will once again find yourself in close communion in 'the Paradise of God.' And Christ will be that peaceful place for those that love him.

Application: Someone may hear this and say, “A man can’t turn himself, except Christ turn him.” Maybe that is what Christ is doing for you right now! Are you being turned? Is your heart breaking to have your love rekindled by him?

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me....12: Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free spirit.

Psalm 80:3 Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

Lamentations 5:21 Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.

Amen!