

THE ORTHODOX BUT LOVELESS CHURCH - 2

(Rev 2:5-7) 10/21/18

Grace Bible Church, Gillette, Wyoming

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I. CHRIST IN THE MIDST OF THE CHURCHES (1)

II. COMMENDABLE DEEDS AND DOCTRINES (2)

III. COMMENDABLE FAITHFULNESS (3)

IV. CRITICISM: LEFT FIRST LOVE (4)

- A. The Lord had one major criticism **against** the church in Ephesus. They had left their first love.
- B. **“Love”** (literally “the love that is **first**”) is in the emphatic position. Christ first draws their attention to their lack of love for Him.
- C. The problem was that they **“left”** their first love. The word “left” is the Greek word *aphiêmi* and literally means to send away (1Co 7:11; 1Jo 1:9). But it can also be a subtle letting go or neglecting (Mar 7:8), which is more likely the case with these Ephesian believers.
- D. The Lord did not say that they did not have any love at all for Him. Rather, they did not love Him like they used to love Him. They did not love Him with the same degree and intensity that they first had when they came to Him for salvation.
- E. It is at this point that we sadly say, that most likely, all of us do not have the love for Christ that we should. Most likely, all of us do not have the love for Christ that we did when we were first converted. If there is even the smallest degree of a lesser love for Christ, then we have left our first love. If we have left our first love in any degree, then we have sinned (Jer 2:1-3; Eze 16:8-15).
- F. Some have suggested three explanations to describe the problem at Ephesus. 1) They had moved away from their original fervor for Christ. 2) They had come to put doctrine and/or service ahead of love and devotion to Christ. 3) Their service had become mechanical rather than an outflow from a loving relationship with Christ. Of course, it is possible for all three to be the case.
- G. Christ’s Admonition to Love
 1. Do you love the Lord with all your heart (Deu 6:5; Mat 22:36-38)? Jesus identified not only the greatest commandment, but also one of His greatest desires. The Lord desires unadulterated love from every area of the believer’s life.
 2. Do you lovingly submit to Him (Eph 5:24)? In Eph 5:25b, we observe the Lord’s sacrificial love for His church by giving Himself for her. On the other hand, we see the church’s love for Christ by being subject to Him (Eph 5:24).
 3. Do you keep His Word out of a heart of love (Joh 14:15, 21)? There is a close connection between the love for the Lord and the love for the Word (Psa 119:47, 48, 97, 113, 119, 127, 132, 140, 159, 163, 165, 167). When a believer loves Christ, he also loves Christ’s Word and keeps it. When a believer loves Christ and His Word, the Lord discloses Himself so that the believer grows close to the Lord through the knowledge of Him.
 4. Do you love Christ (Joh 21:15-17)? The Lord questioned Peter about his love for the Lord. Each time the Lord asked about Peter’s sacrificial love (*agapaō*) for Him, Peter replied that he had less than sacrificial love (*phileō*) for Christ. Nevertheless, each time the Lord questioned Peter, Peter was to fulfill his love for Christ by feeding (“tend” *boskō* - *feed*) Christ’s sheep with the Word of God.
 5. Is your love for Christ undying (Eph 6:24)? The final appeal that Paul made in his epistle to the Ephesian church was, “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.” The Greek word for “incorruptible” is *aphtharsia* and depicts that which does not wane, decay, or die. Fortunately, the love that the Ephesians had for the Lord did not die, but unfortunately, it had waned and decayed.

V. CORRECTION: REMEMBER, REPENT, AND REDO (5)

A. Remember

1. The first step of returning to their first love involved remembering. **“Remember”** (*mnêmonēuō*) means to recall or bring to one’s mind. Literally, it could be translated as, “you must keep on remembering” (present active imperative).
2. What were they to remember? They were to remember from where they **have fallen**. In other words, the Ephesians needed to remember how they used to love the Lord. The perfect tense of *piptō* reflects a previous degree of love from which they have fallen and remain fallen. *Pure love resided on the cliff high above, as it were, and they had fallen deep into the valley below* (Thomas).

3. Spiritual decline can be a direct result from forgetting the love we had for the Lord as well as the various areas that are associated with that love. We sometimes forget our love for: communion with the Lord, extended time in His Word, extended time in prayer, worship of the Lord, other believers, church, service, and evangelism.
- B. Repent
1. Moving away from their first love toward Christ in any degree was sin. The Ephesian church needed to confess their sin and repent of it (1Jo 1:9).
 2. “**Repent**” is the Greek word *metanoēō* and means a change of mind that leads to a change of behavior. *[It] calls for a decisive change of attitude with its resultant action. It is a reversal of the status quo...* (Thomas).
- C. Redo
1. The last two steps, i.e. remembrance and repentance, lead to a changed life. However, in this case, a changed life is a change back to those **deeds** which were done at **first**.
 2. They were to put back into practice those things which they recalled about their first love and their relationship with Christ.
 3. Those things may differ from person to person, but the result of doing them again, will stimulate their first love.
 4. It is a similar principle that can be applied to marriage. The things that drew a couple closer in the beginning, are the things to be rekindled throughout their marriage.
- D. Removal
1. The believer’s first love for Christ is a serious and sober topic to the Lord. If the church in Ephesus did not repent, then the Lord would come and remove their lampstand.
 2. Here, the meaning of the Lord’s **coming** is not His second coming. Rather, it means that Christ would come and discipline them by removing their church (“**remove their lampstand**”). They would cease to be a witness for the Lord in their locale.

VI. COMMENDATION: HATRED OF THE DEEDS OF THE NICOLAITANS (6)

- A. The Lord commended the Ephesian church yet again. They hated the deeds of the **Nicolaitans**. Who were the Nicolaitans? Basically, we only know what John revealed about the Nicolaitans.
- B. However, some scholars give several possible suggestions for the identity of the Nicolaitans.
 1. Some claim they were the forerunner of the clerical hierarchy. The name Nicolas means “conquering of the people” and the meaning of Balaam means “destroyer of the people (cf. Rev 2:14).
 2. Some claim they were a sect from Gnosticism that was known for its indulgence of the flesh.
 3. Some hold to Irenaeus’ view that they were a heretical group that followed Nicolas, the ordained deacon from Act 6:5, who later became an apostate.
- C. When John wrote to the church in Pergamum, he seemed to compare the Nicolaitans with the Balaamites who set stumbling blocks before God’s people, ate things sacrificed to idols, and committed acts of adultery (Rev 2:14-15). They had departed from sound doctrine and practiced paganism and immorality. Both the Ephesians and the Lord **hated the deeds** of the Nicolaitans. When we love the Lord, we hate what He hates; the Lord hates sin and evil (Psa 97:10; Pro 8:13).
- D. The fact that nothing was written of the Nicolaitans by Paul or Peter lends itself to a later date for the writing of Revelation.

VII. CONCLUSION: EAT OF THE TREE OF LIFE (7)

- A. The conclusion ends with John’s typical admonition to **hear** what the Holy **Spirit** was saying to the **churches**. The primary message was for the Ephesian church. However, the Ephesian church’s sin, commendations, warnings, and promises can be applied to all churches of all ages.
- B. The **one who overcomes** is not someone who is successful in working their way to heaven. Nor is it someone who is on a higher level of Christianity. Rather, the “one who overcomes” refers to all true believers. If a person is a true believer (1Jo 5:5), he has already overcome sin (1Jo 2:1-2), the world (1Jo 5:4), and Satan (1Jo 2:13-14). The believer awaits the moment that he will be in Christ’s presence (1Jo 3:1-2).
- C. The future reality of the overcomer (true believer) will be fully experienced in **Paradise**. Paradise is only used three times in the NT and each time is equated with heaven and the presence of God (Luk 23:43; 2Co 12:2, 4; Rev 2:7).
- D. The **tree of life** is a symbol for eternal life. The Lord made certain that our first parents could not eat from the tree of life after they sinned (Gen 3:22). Otherwise, they would have lived forever in a sinful unredeemable condition. The curse is reversed in Paradise so that believers will have eternal life. Most likely, believers will literally be able to eat from tree of life, though they will not need to do so to sustain eternal life. The believer has eternal life because of Christ’s work on the cross.