

The Voice of Truth # 473

The Church That Deserted Christ

With your Bibles in hand now, turn to the second chapter of Revelation. The second chapter of Revelation begins the second division of the book, which is found in Revelation 1:19. **Write the things which thou hast seen**, is the first division of the book and composes the first chapter. **Write the things which are**, is the second division of the book and contains the seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor. **Write the things which shall be hereafter**, which begins with the fourth chapter and includes the remainder of the book, that is, chapters 4 through 22. Now, if we'll keep in mind the divine division of the book as given here, by the Lord Jesus, it will help you to understand more clearly the book of Revelation. These seven letters found in the second and third chapters, which the Lord Jesus Christ gave directly to John, are love letters to his churches. Taken as a whole, they are a description of church history during the Age of Grace. But at the same time, they were seven distinct, local, New Testament churches, and the description given here of these churches was the exact condition of the churches in John's day. As we study each one of these seven letters, we will notice, the increasing imperfections of the church in its declension until the church age closes with an open apostasy as described in the letter to the church at Laodicea. We find that the church of Ephesus had deserted Christ or left their first love. In the last church, Laodicea, we find Christ on the outside of the church.

Now with your Bible in hand, Let's read that letter that Christ gave to John for the pastor of the church at Ephesus. Listen, 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, I know thy works, and thy labor, 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, and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee,

because thou has left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 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.

Isn't that a gracious letter? Now, when we come to examine these letters Christ dictated to John, we find that each one, as we said in our last message, embraces seven distinct parts. First is an address to the pastor. Second, one or more of the sublime attributes of the speaker, the Lord Jesus Christ. Third, his complete knowledge of the duties of the pastor and church. Fourth, a description of the state of the church, either a praise and promise or censure and judgment. Fifth, he always refers to his second coming. Sixth, he gives a command for the church and pastor to hear him. And seventh, he concludes with a special promise.

He opens this particular letter, as well as all others, to the angel or the pastor of the church. What he writes is not only meant for the pastor, but for the entire church. As we study these letters, we find something of the nature and responsibility of the pastor's office. Listen, the first thing I call your attention to is that it is the business of the pastor to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Therefore, the pastor is to hear for the church, receive for the church, and to answer for the church over which the Lord has made him overseer. He is the guardian, the watchman, and the under-shepherd of God's flock. Then we see it is the pastor that Christ addresses his judgments, his rebukes, his promises, his directions of how to care for his church. If you read closely the New Testament, especially Paul's letters to the churches and his general epistle, you will find that the pastor is called the bishop of the church, which means overseer. He is also called the shepherd of the church, which means that he leads and feeds the sheep. Third, he's called the elder of the church, which means he's ruler of the church, and speaks with the voice of authority. The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, now you get this statement, don't let this thing slip you. Now hold your seat just a minute. The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a democratic body ruled by the people, nor is it to be lorded over by a pastor, but the Church is a

theocracy ruled by the Holy Spirit through the pastor. God leads his church through his pastor, not through a board of deacons, or stewards, or elders, nor through a committee, or a woman, or a group of women, but through his born-again, God-called, God-commissioned, Spirit-indicted, Spirit anointed and Spirit filled pastor. That's the reason he addresses these letters to the pastor, because the church is wrapped up in the pastor and God holds him absolutely responsible for the entire church. That's the reason I've felt many times like running away.

We've come now to the letter that Christ dictated and had John to send it to the church at Ephesus. If you'll read the 18th, 19th, and 20th chapters of Acts of the Apostles, you'll find that Paul established this church at Ephesus, and under what condition he established it. You'll find here a most interesting story of the power of the preaching of the gospel, and how far-reaching it was. To the pastor at Ephesus, He introduced himself as, listen, he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. You'll notice this refers back to the vision of Christ as the judge-priest.

In the first chapter, we notice that the pastor is described as a star, which means he is God's light bearer to shine on this earth in the place of the Son of God. Therefore, the office of the pastor is to give forth heavenly illumination. May we ask ourselves a question, pastors, what degree of heavenly light is shining through our lives? If your preaching or your life does not enlighten someone, then you are not called of God to preach. You are just man-made. In the second place, we notice that these stars are in the right hand of Christ. He upholds us, directs us, and sends us to impart salvation to some lost souls. The pastor is upheld, protected, and directed by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. So much so, get it now, until you cannot separate Christ, his pastor, his message, and his ministry. They are inseparable.

Then we notice that the candlesticks or lamp holders are the churches. The church holds the light. The church is not the light. The Church is the lampstand that holds the light, and the light of the Church is Christ himself, revealed and magnified by the Holy Spirit. The Church and pastor are to depend entirely and completely upon the Holy Spirit as the divine light. We are not to be directed by any type of natural light. That is, Christ said, ye are the light of the world. That is,

we reflect the divine light. Human wisdom of any type is to be rejected. Then we notice that Christ walks in the midst of the churches. The scripture says, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Two or three, gathered, get it now, in the name of Christ, constitutes a local assembly. And the Savior's presence is in the midst of them. Christ does not look at the building, the cathedral, or the temple in which they are assembled, but at his children themselves. His eyes as a flame of fire, looks through all the disguises into the innermost recesses of the soul, and knoweth the heart, and trieth the reins of every member of that assembly. No one can deceive him, no matter what the disguise may be. Listen, this he brings out in that second verse, I know thy works. The church at Ephesus was a devoted and active church. As he walked in the midst of them, he saw their works. It was not a comfortable club where they sat up in their committee meetings and smoked their cigars or gossiped about each other or watched religious movies and TV shows on Sunday nights. It was an active congregation of the saints. It was the family of God met together for worship. He said, **I know thy labors** or, toil. The word for labor here signifies that they toiled at the cost of pain or suffering. It was not something they did that cost them nothing, for behind their works, their labors, lay toil. What they offered to their master cost them something. As someone has said, they were working at the price of toil. They did not sit down and let their pastor do all the work. The pastor did not have to drag them, nor beg the women, nor put on a picture show on Sunday night to get the young people to church. They came because they wanted to come. They were in earnest in their religion. They filled their places with heart and energy. They worked together to accomplish the same end. They were active for the gospel. and did their best to get men to embrace and share the blessedness of it.

Also, he said, I know thy patience. Patience is mentioned here twice. First in the second verse, then in the third verse. It is mentioned in connection with our service and suffering. They carried on their work without grumbling, murmuring, or complaining. There was a meekness and a willingness about their work that was wonderful. They had to bear all sorts of ill treatment, slander, and so on, on account of their faith and zeal. They did not retaliate. They were patient in bearing, patient in waiting God's time and will in all things. And for such patience,

Christ praised them and commended them. How different that is from the average church today.

The fourth commendation, Christ said, I know that thou canst not bear evil men. Wicked men infiltrated the church, but they were cast out. Men who came insinuating ill things against their pastor, they would not listen to, even those who came among them saying that God had sent them there, or if they were saved, they tried them. That is, they would listen to their testimony, and if they did not give God the glory, they would not receive them. They would prove them to be liars to the truth, and not even bid them God speed. No doubt one of the questions they would ask is, tell us how God saved you. Were you ever a lost sinner? Did God ever hold bitter things against you? Did you ever feel your need of the Lord Jesus as your substitute? They measured them by the word of God, and when they found them as false prophets, or as the scripture says here, liars, they would not receive them. You know that's commendable in any church. In other words, they practiced church discipline, which today is a thing of the past in the average church. Let a church try to practice church discipline today, and the church and pastor are both tabooed, considered crazy, and they cry the pastor down. Count him as the filth of the street. As a result, the world has overflowed the church until you can't tell the difference between the church and the world. Now, friends, that's right. I've been through that here. I know what it means to discipline a church, and I know what it means to have fellow pastors to cry me down.

Let's look at these last words in verse 3. Thou hast patience, and hast borne for my name's sake, and hast not fainted. To suffer while you labor, and not grow weary, is a fine mark of vigorous life. From many angles this was a great church. No wonder the gospel was spread over Asia Minor in so short a time, and they did it under persecution, suffering, and tribulation. When Christ had ended these commendations, he registered against them a complaint in these words; Listen, listen, hold your seat. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee. Now what did he have against them? Because, **thou hast left thy first love**. Now you listen to this, will you? Let me give you a literal rendering of this verse of scripture. Quote, but I have this one charge to make against you, that you have abandoned the love that you had at first, that is, you have deserted me, your first love. Unquote.

Christ was not dealing here in the abstract, but in a positive reality. He said you have left or deserted me, your first love. The great fault Christ found with this church was the decay of their first love. That is, they were drifting from Christ himself. They were deserting the Lord Jesus. They were moving away from their simplicity in Christ. They were what you'd call good earnest Christians. There was still that outward work and activity which Christ praised, but their love for Him, Christ, was dying. All the organization of the Church was moving forward, but the great convicting power of the Holy Spirit was losing its force. They were working without faith. They were laboring without love. They had patience without hope.

Paul, in his writing to the church at Thessalonica, commended them on their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope, but they were going back. But if you'll go back and read that second verse, you'll find that Christ said, I know thy works, but faith is missing. I know thy labor, love is absent. I know thy patience, but there was no hope. Their looking for Christ's return was fading away. They were lost in their labors. When they came together for worship, they were not talking about the Lord Jesus as they once were. They had deserted Him. They had left Him for the love of the church and had substituted the church in His place.

If you'll turn then, to that letter He wrote to the church at Laodicea, you'll find these words, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. Here we see, they've left him, their first love. In the last letter, he was on the outside of the church. Now, you hold your seats just a minute; What did he tell them to do? In that fifth verse, Christ said, **Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen**. Christ calls the leaving of him, their first love, fallen. They have fallen away from Christ. They have abandoned Christ. And He calls upon them to repent. I wish I could send this message with the power of God's Holy Spirit into the heart of every one of you listeners. And it's this. Your work, your labor, your patience may stand out, but where is your first love? Christ? Do you know Christ? Are you walking with Him? Is he your love? Is he the first and last of your life?

Then Christ calls upon these saints here at Ephesus to go back, that is repent and do the first works. Now what does he mean by doing the first works? Go back to the springtime of thy love. Go back to the time when you were taken up with me. Now how were they taken up with him? Pray that the Holy Spirit will convict you

of your departure from Christ and turn you to repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as if you were never saved. Do the first works again. Humble yourselves at the feet of Christ. Or ask God to humble you, to let you see your sins, your sin nature. Climb anew to Calvary's cross and there, by faith, nail yourself anew to that cross in Christ until you see your own sin nature, your own wickedness, your vileness, your corruptness, your undone condition, as you saw it at first, as you saw it at first, that you may be humbled in the dust of repentance, crying again for mercy, at the feet of a sovereign God, that you may be clothed anew in Christ, and he become real to your heart. There is one thing the saint had better never get away from, and that is, who he is by nature, what he is by nature, and the judgment that he was under. If you do, you will abandon Christ, you'll desert Him. It is the constant revelation of our heart to ourselves by the Holy Spirit through the Word that constantly and definitely drives us anew to the Lord Jesus Christ, our first love. To see yourselves all over again as you saw yourself as a lost sinner, that you might have a fresh view of the Lord Jesus Christ, is to fall in love with him again. Now, my friends, if this does not constantly take place in the assembly, he says, I will come and remove the lampstand out of its place. In other words, I'll turn you over to the world. All divine light will be gone. No souls will ever be convicted and brought to Christ for salvation. You will have only a religious profession. And I'll turn you over to a strong delusion to believe a lie and be damned. Then you'll do nothing but drift with the world, be like the world in every respect. And that is what the average so-called church is today. They left Christ. Here's a church that deserted Christ.

My friends, I won't have time to finish that letter, but have you deserted Christ?