

05. Ephesus: Where's the Love?

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Letters from Jesus

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Bible Text: Revelation 2:1-7

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I'm going to ask you to take your Bibles and turn to Revelation 2 today. I appreciate that beautiful singing. It's good to be here with God's folks. I wish sometimes these sermons weren't so personally convicting and I was kind of hoping that if we spent enough time looking at Jesus, all my problems would be fixed and nothing he said would really get to me but that is not the case.

You know, I had a couple of strange things happen to me recently. One of them was is that I got up one day last week I think it was, and got an unusual email and I thought, "Well, this is kind of strange." Of course, I'm used to getting junk mail and I do remember that there is between my house and Donald's house, there is a liquidator place, surplus place and they often send me little emails saying that they've got furniture, office furniture and stuff that they're getting rid of and I don't usually pay that much attention. They have some stuff every now and then that I'm kind of interested in and I wish I could get for my grandkids but I'm not usually that interested in it but I saw a message indicating that there was going to be a large liquidation sale and it was going to last three days long and then what caught my eye is that it was for a church. That's kind of freaky to me and basically every fixture in the church was going up for sale. Of course, two thoughts ran through my head: one, what happened to the church? That was my first question and the second was: was there anything there we might use? So I told Judy, I said, "Come on, we're going to drive over there," and we did. This is a church that back in, I don't know, since we built our house in 2003 so somewhere probably around 2004, 2005, this church that had been meeting in a pastor's home and then in a nearby school, bought some property right off of I20 for \$9.6 million, a big chunk of property. I don't know how they financed that but they had for a while about 3,000 people meeting weekly and I'm sure 3,000 people meeting weekly can probably afford the payments on \$9.6 million. Those of you who know me well know that I don't believe churches ought to go into debt. I think the borrower is servant to the lender and churches ought to serve Christ and not First National Bank but that's my conviction and I don't criticize those who don't share that conviction, it's just not mine.

But then, what boggled my mind is when I went out and read up the story about what had happened is that at some point, they managed to get up to \$31 million in debt and they had a five-year note and with a balloon payment on the end. Now, if you don't know what

a balloon payment is, it means that you pay a certain amount of fixed monthly payments and when the term of the loan is up, you have to pay everything else. Normally on big loans like that, the mortgage company will roll over the note into a new note and I think that's what the church was expecting but because of the economy and because the financial institution themselves was strapped for funds, when that day came, they said, "No, we want the rest of the funds," and the church didn't have enough money to pay off \$31 million of debt. So they came up with a plan how in six months they could pay off \$6 million. I'm impressed with that. That wasn't good enough. So long story short, the church has gone into foreclosure and the financial company was a Christian financial company and a Christian financial company is foreclosing on a church. Of course, that makes it news and it makes you wonder just how much does that glorify the Lord Jesus Christ and give credence to his cause.

Now, there are other things going on. A pastor in the midst of all of this had marital problems and was separated for a while and now they're back together and I talked to someone there at the church and they are moving to another like a movie theater facility and the pastor preaches in one room and it's rebroadcast to the other rooms so they are going to continue on and I pray that somehow or other they come through all this and find a way to give glory to the Lord but it scares me when I hear about churches closing and I always have to think, "Is there something that could happen that would cause us to close our doors?" Especially when I get in and read this letter from Jesus, I realize that that's one of the things he says will happen if we don't pay attention. He says, "I will remove the candlestick," which he explained to us at the end of chapter 1 was the church. He says, "I will remove the candlestick." So I think when he tells us that could happen if we don't pay attention, we really ought to pay attention.

Now, there are two things we're going to do. Good, I've got some young men who are going to make sure that you've got a hand-out. They'll be walking down the aisle right now and passing those out. There ought to be at least a couple for every family here so take two of those for your family and then let these gentlemen pass on because I want us to, I want you to maybe put these in the Bible and it won't be at the start of my sermon, it will be toward the end of the sermon when I get to these points but I think these would be good points for you to have.

Let's look at the background of what went on at Ephesus. We need to ask ourselves really the question: what is a church really? Now, of course, there is a seminary definition of a church that is "a local called out assembly of believers." In other words, it's a local visible body that represents the body of Christ. It's a called out assembly of believers in a certain locality but a lot of people when they think of a church they say, "Well, that's the building." We all say, "Well, I'm going to drive down to the church," don't we? We use that phrase. What we really mean is we're driving to the church building because the building is not the church but we're driving to the building where the church meets. Some people say, "Well, church really has to have a pastor," and yet I know of one church in the Amazon River basin in South America that has now been without a pastor for 24 years and there's still meeting and worshiping Jesus. So it's a good thing to have a pastor, please don't try to get rid of all of yours but I think it's not an essential thing and maybe a

better way of asking this question would be to turn the question around and say: what would cause a church to die? What would disqualify a New Testament church from being a church?

Now, I'm a firm believer that the way churches grow is they must first grow spiritually, then they grow numerically, then they grow financially. I think that's the way it ought to work. I think a lot of churches make the mistake of trying to go about this the other way. They try to raise a lot of funds so that they can build a big building so that people are attracted to a church that looks like they're doing something because a new building is going up and then while they are building the new building, then they get a man and hopefully maybe they'll teach them something. I think that's man's way but I think God's way is that you need to build depth before you build width. The deeper your message, the broader your ministry. That's God's plan and so we need to deepen our walk with Christ before God can bless us. I do think, by the way, it's time for us to start praying for some new families. We've got some people that have moved away for jobs; we've got people who are thinking about that but we need to pray for new families. I remember a number of years ago when the Thorntons had an accident and I was preaching, I guess the first Sunday after their car accident and I challenged the few group of people that were here at that time, about 20 people, I said, "Let's come up and ask God to send us ten new families." Now, I thought that was bold. I thought, "Man, boy, Robert's got a lot of faith to say something like that in public. What a stupid thing if this doesn't work." You know, it wasn't just a Sunday or two after that that 26 of you came to visit on the same Sunday and then you stayed and you told your friends about it and you brought others and a month after that we looked up and there were 21 members and 69 visitors here, something I've never seen happen in 34 years of ministry. So it was a God thing and I'm ready for another God thing. I'm ready for us to pray and ask God to send us more families to be part of our family. But I want us to first of all deepen our own walk with Christ so that what they find here will be a blessing to them. You know, a church doesn't grow by virtue of who is on the staff, God really grows a church. So what we need to do is expect everything from him and nothing from your human leaders and then you won't be disappointed.

Now, there is an essential quality, though, that I think is necessary for a church to remain a church and it's the quality that Jesus himself defines as essential if the Ephesians didn't want their church taken away from them. There is one sterling qualification that our church needs to have if it's to survive and it's genuine love for Christ, genuine love for one another, and genuine love for those to whom we minister and share the Gospel. You have to say genuine because people can tell when you're faking it, especially lost people. A guy comes up and he's clearly from the other side of the tracks, clearly from a whole different culture than you are and you meet him at the gun show and you're kind of, "Oh, ewww," and then later you try to witness to him, well, he knows that you are not genuine and so you need to have a genuine love and that is an essential quality.

Now, this letter to the church of Ephesus that begins Revelation chapter 2 is the first of seven letters that Jesus is dictating to the churches. Now, all of the Bible is God's word, there is not a part of it that is not God's word. Every word of it is inspired. All of

Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness but there is something a little different about the book of Revelation. The fact is, it's the one book in the Bible that promises that if you keep the words of this prophecy, you get an extra blessing. It's something special when you keep the words of the prophecy of the book of Revelation. There is an extra blessing when you memorize them. There's an extra blessing when you meditate on it. This is Jesus speaking directly, it's not just the apostles of Jesus Christ carried along by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writing inerrant and infallible words about Christ, it is Christ talking directly to us. It's kind of like if all the things that Christ said were in red letters, then this part of our Bible ought to be in red letters and bold print because he's speaking directly to us.

Now, there are seven churches mentioned and they were real churches that existed in Asia minor and some people say, "Well, it can also possibly represent seven different eras of Christianity, seven different parts of Christianity." There may be some validity to that, I don't want to throw out that idea so Ephesus, if it were to represent an age of Christianity, you've got to remember that the letters to the seven churches are written about 43 years after Paul ministered at Ephesus and so now we're in, that was in A.D. 53, now we're in A.D. 96 and the church in Ephesus has grown to have a membership of 60,000 people. You don't think about churches in Bible times having huge, being mega-churches, but there was a mega-church at Ephesus. Paul had spent several years at Ephesus and people got so saved and the city was so changed that at one point, the silversmiths incited a riot because people weren't buying the little silver icons and statues of the goddess Diana. So 60,000 people were Christians and were meeting there and when you get that big, at some point you really kind of focus a lot on organization.

I have a kind of an idea or a concept that runs around in my head when I think of church that it is both an organism and an organization. Let me tell you what I mean by that. I think a church is a living, breathing entity. I think it's fascinating that when John writes about a church, he refers to it as "the elect dear lady." In other words, he refers to the church as a lady. It's part of the bride of Christ. It's an organism. In other words, it's something that is alive and dynamic. And yet we also know that it is an organization because we know that the apostles had to appoint deacons to oversee ministry to the widows so that the pastors could focus on the ministry of the word of God and of prayer and so an organization developed in order to carry out the life purpose of the organism. But what happens very often is that churches become so organized that they forget the organism. You can probably go the opposite way too, you can have so much body life that nothing ever gets done because there's no order and purpose and direction. So there's a balance that needs to happen between the two.

Now, a little information about Ephesus. It was a major seaport. It had a harbor, you see over there kind of in that little blue circle to the left, that was where the harbor was. It's dry today; you can't sail a boat into it anymore. It was home to the temple of Artemis. Now Artemis is the Greek name for the Roman goddess Diana and that was the goddess of the moon and the goddess of sensuality. That's where her temple was. Now, in Paul's day, they didn't have some of these other temples that are on this diagram but by the time

Revelation is written, they had the temple of Hadrian and they had the temple of Domitian. They would take Caesars and they would deify them and then they'd build a temple to them so you could go and worship Domitian or go worship Hadrian or go worship some other man that proclaimed himself to be a God.

There was a population when Paul was living in Ephesus for several years of about 250,000. A pretty good-sized place. They even had a large amphitheater. The amphitheater could hold about 25,000 people at one time, kind of a diagram there on the right and a picture of some of the actual remains of that amphitheater on the left that you can still see there today. So during Paul's day there was the temple of Artemis and the amphitheater and after they built the library of Celsus which was one of the great libraries of the world, I think second only to the library in Alexandria, Egypt. And Ephesus was a very pagan place. As I said, they worshiped Diana there. The fact is, if you look at this coin, this is a picture of a coin from Ephesus and on the tail side of the coin on the right there you can see Ephesia and on the left side of the coin it says Diana and there is some little inscription or carving or something. Of course you know, coins weren't very round because they didn't have these perfect mints so they were poured and stamped manually and so you can see it. It's kind of funny how it really became the center but one day somebody is standing outside and they see this meteor streak toward the earth and it lands in Ephesus and they go out there and, of course, I'm sure when the meteor got there it was still hot and it was glowing and some brilliant person who didn't study physics and astronomy and the effect of the ionosphere on stuff falling through space says, "Oh, a goddess has come down." Don't you all do that? When you see a glowing rock laying down somewhere and you say, "Hey, a goddess came down"? Well, that's what they did. They said that that was Diana. She has come to earth. So they set up a whole temple to worship this meteor that had fallen from heaven and they started making images. Of course, at first I'm sure the images weren't that pretty because it probably looked like a meteor and then later they formed her into a woman, Diana, and made her look like some other thing.

Now Paul got to Ephesus in A.D. 53 and he started making converts. He won people to Jesus Christ and so much so that the sales of all the silver trinkets that had Diana's image on it and that the silversmiths made a living on, people quit buying them because all of a sudden in the city of 250,000, nearly a fourth of their population becomes Christian. That cut into their profit margin. They didn't like that and so people began putting pressure on the Christians in the city. Ephesus became a key launching point for the Gospel going to the Gentiles. It's really rather fitting that the letters to the seven churches start with Ephesus because it was such a key launching point. The fact is that it says in Acts 19:10 that Paul preach the Gospel so effectively it says, "that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." In other words, the Gospel spread out so much there was not a single Jew or Greek that hadn't at least heard the Gospel. Now, could you say that about Irving, Texas today? Could you say that everybody in Irving, Texas has heard the Gospel? I don't think there's a chance you could say that and be accurate about it.

So the city was stirred up so much. There were a lot of significant Bible happenings in Ephesus. Paul did some baptizing in Ephesus. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus when he journeyed away for a brief time. He makes another brief stop in Ephesus. He sends Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia. He writes 1 Corinthians while he's in Ephesus. You may remember the sons of Sceva who wanted to see if they could do all the little tricks that the apostles seemed to do and they tried to do that, they tried to imitate Paul and instead the demons turned on them. The silversmiths inspired the riot. Paul speaks in the hall of Tyrannus. Apollos came there. He was a Hellenistic Jew. He was a Jew who spoke fluent Greek and very educated Greek and personally I think that's who wrote the book of Hebrews, just my opinion. But he came there and he was teaching and preaching because he knew the word of God and yet he didn't know all about Jesus so some good folks by the name of Priscilla and Aquila came and taught him a more excellent way and then sent Apollos on to do great ministry and he pastored some of the churches that you read about in the New Testament.

Now, it has a stellar history but if there was one thing the Ephesians had, it was what we read about in those verses of Scripture from Ephesians a while ago. Paul prays for the Ephesians to be strengthened with might by God's Spirit. By the way, take notes on this slide because if you want to know how you can pray for me or pray for your pastor, this is a really good prayer list. Pray that we be strengthened with might by God's Spirit in our inner man. I wish everybody would pray that for me. Then that we'd have a deep fellowship with Christ, not just a head knowledge or an academic knowledge but to really walk with Jesus. Then you start hearing this repeated thing, he says that you be rooted and grounded in love, might know the breadth, the depth and the height. What he means is the breadth of God's love, the depth of God's love and the height of God's love. Now, we live in a three-dimensional world. Do you all know what those three things are? The breadth of God's love is summed up in the phrase, "For God so loved the," what? "The world." The whole world. That's how wide God's love is and the depth of God's love is in the phrase, "that he gave his only Son." He gave Jesus, his only Son, to die for the likes of me. And the height of God's love is that, "whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting or eternal life." That's the height of God's love. He says that God's love is so wide, it's for the whole world; so deep that he sent his only Son so that we wouldn't have to perish; and it's so high that we can have eternal life.

Then he says that you would intimately experience the love of Christ that surpasses all other kinds of knowledge and that you be filled with the fullness of God. Now, I always have to laugh when I get to the last one. How in the world are you filled with the fullness of God? How many of you understand that God is a whole lot bigger than you are? So, if it's his fullness and crammed inside of you, how can you be filled with the fullness of God? The best illustration I can say and I'm not encouraging you to do this because I don't believe in littering but if you just imagine in your mind because if we do this we don't actually litter the seashore, but if you went in your mind and you went down to the seashore and you tossed in a Coke bottle into the ocean and it sank, that Coke bottle would be filled up to its level of fullness with the ocean and yet it would just be a fairly insignificant thing inside that ocean. To be filled with the fullness of God means that

we're so filled up with God there's not room for anything else and yet there will always be more of God that we need to know and experience.

But notice that repetition: the love, the love, the love. We read these verses so I'm not going to read them to you again in Ephesians 3, that Paul prays this love for them but somehow or other over the next 43 years they missed the message. They missed what Paul was trying to give them. They focused on dealing with life's stresses. They had a society that shunned them because they made up about one fourth of the city but the other three fourths were kind of mad at them because they ruined the economy. They had economic difficulties, people wouldn't do business with them anymore. Then there was just the business of daily life. Now, let me ask any of you, think back over the last seven days, how many of you had a really busy week but didn't actually feel like you accomplished that much? Anybody besides me? How many of you realize that it just takes a lot of time to just pay bills and read the mail and shop for groceries and deal with the kids and change diapers and you do all that and you feel like another week went by and you didn't really make a lot happen. Any of you ever get into that thing? I do. By the way, the changing diapers can be fun when you're older. I watched my wife the other day and we had all five grandkids over and we got rid of the parents. That was really cool because we got for a little while to raise five kids without parental interference. It was just so much fun. You know, but my wife, I watched her as she changed four diapers in a row and she act like she enjoyed every minute of it. So if any of you all want somebody to change your baby's diapers, bring them to Judy because...that's not the look I was expecting, honey. That wasn't the look I was thinking I was going to get from her.

So I think also the churches maybe they got to this place where they focused more on organization than on worship but 43 years after Paul had been there, Jesus has something to say to them and here are the words and follow along in your Bibles, Revelation 2,

1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

He says, "I'm going to get rid of your church."

6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

I want you to notice that he starts out here by commending, the Lord is commending the laborers. We've got two people here: the Lord and the laborers. Now, first of all, you notice how the Lord is positioned here. I just want to point out that there's a good parenting principle here and it's not really the focus of what John was saying in Revelation or what Jesus was trying to address but I think it is significant that Jesus gives commendation before he gives correction. He gives commendation before he gives critique. Now, I sometimes as a dad struggle with this concept because I see something wrong and I instantly want to correct it and yet if I was doing this biblically, if I was following the example of Jesus, before I corrected my child, I would find something to commend. I would find something to praise. Maybe in some child's youthful exuberance to have fun with his sister he hasn't remembered to take out the trash, maybe you can say, "I really appreciate how much love you have for your siblings and how much you enjoy spending time with them and I'd like for you to go back to that as soon as you take out the trash. Do you remember I asked you to do that a while ago? Okay, thank you." You see, we can give commendation first. Now be careful parents, use this wisely. If you're going to follow this and it's a good principle, make sure that you don't only commend your children when they need correction otherwise the minute you say something nice to them, they're like, "Oh no, here it comes. The criticism is on the way." Commend them every time you see them doing something wise or wonderful but when you correct them, make sure you commend them first, that lets them know that you value and treasure them as a person.

But let's look at the Lord here. He says, "He holds the messengers in His right hand." Now, the word "messengers" here is the Greek word "angelos." In English we get the word "angels" and this is the Greek word that's normally used of angels and so he could be saying, "Say to the messenger, the angel, of the church." Interestingly enough, though, in Matthew 11 and Mark 1 and Luke 4 and Luke 27, it's also used of human messengers. John the Baptist was referred to as an angelos, an angel. He was a messenger. Why? Because he was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah where it says, "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God." So there was going to come a prophet who was going to proclaim the way of the Lord and that's what John the Baptist did. So this messenger is most probably the pastor. It doesn't have to be that. The concrete meaning is that God upholds the medium for conveying his word to people.

Now, I want to tell you and I'm not trying to change any of your minds or dissuade you if you have a different belief but I know from my own experience and the experience of those who I know to be God-called preachers that there is a special call on a person's life when God calls them to be a preacher, to be a pastor. I remember I fought that call for three years. God told me to do it and I was saying, "No, that's not my plan." I had other things that I wanted to do and I had my whole life mapped out when God said, "Now, I want you to be a preacher." I'm thinking, "No, that's just not right." So for three years I fought him, three years I was miserable and I'm not proud of that. That's one of those hall of shame things but I remember when I finally surrendered to preach and had that relief and I had assurance from God that I was doing what he wanted me to do, I was sitting in a hospital waiting room one time and my brother was in intensive care and he had 106 degree fever and he was in a coma for a week and I was talking to his pastor and I just

asked him, I said, "What led you, how did you discern God's call into the ministry?" I was so surprised by his reply because he said, "Well, a bunch of my friends and I were sitting around Perkins Theological Seminary one night, the school where Perkins is located and we were sitting around and they said, 'You know, you'd make a good preacher.'" He said, "I decided then I was going to be a pastor." That wasn't my experience of a call. You know, I struggled. I'm not saying you ought to have to struggle when God calls you. If you're waiting for a call, God has already called you to do some stuff as a Christian.

So there's a balance that we need to maintain. I believe that certain men are called to be pastors. They are called to stand behind the pulpit and they are to preach and exposit the word of God. So that's not to say that a church that is just meeting in a living room and has a bunch of dad's there, it's not a valid church but I think that there's something that God wants us to have leaders that he calls to help lead us in a certain direction. But we have to be careful that we don't go too far in the other direction. Too far in the other direction is saying, "Oh, there's the clergy and the laity and the two shall never meet." No, because God has called us all to ministry. We're all in the same ministry. We're all supposed to be serving the Lord together. He just called some to special ministry and you need to pray for your pastor in that regard.

Now, he says that Jesus walks among the seven candlesticks. In other words, Jesus is involved in the ministry of his churches and, you know, what happened in the Old Testament when the glory of God left the temple? What did they say right on the door? What was the word? Ichabod. Not a Sleepy Hollow character of fiction later but it means "the glory has departed." The Hebrew word "kavod" is "glory," Ichabod means "the glory has departed." If God ever leaves us here to worship on our own, we don't have a church because if he's not here, why are we? We need to be in his presence. He walks in our midst and that ought to motivate us because right now, Jesus is looking at our hearts so you and I need to be more aware each time we come here that Jesus is present here too. We're not to come here to keep a ritual or to have a meeting of homeschooled families or to do our duty. We really are supposed to be here to meet with Jesus and if we come and we don't meet with Jesus but we've met with everybody else and we've filled our belly with food, we're not any better than the Philippians were warned about some people made their God their belly. We have to meet with Jesus.

Then he does commend them for something, he says "You're diligent in your work." Oh, I like to see hard work. I love it. I appreciate that we've got some young men, the Trudeau family are almost back there every Sunday in the kitchen working whether they are signed up or not. There are other young boys that go out it seems like every week and they are taking people's plates off the table and they are putting them in the trash and they're wiping things down even though maybe their family isn't on the list that week. I admire those young people and I admire those parents that trained them so well. I just like diligence in work. I hate to see work that needs to be done and nobody is doing anything about it. That just kind of gets on my nerves. I don't know if it does you but that kind of thing. This is what Jesus says, he says, "I know your works, your toil, your patient endurance." Now, Jesus doesn't say the same thing three times just because he's

trying to be verbose. He's got three different words here. "Works" means individual things that you do for the Lord's work. God knows every single thing you do for him even if it's insignificant. I remember the first time I went to Taiwan in 1982, out in back of the ?? Baptist Church. I had the privilege of painting kindergarten furniture and there wasn't anybody in any of the churches over here that ever knew that I did that. Nobody else probably ever cared that I painted kindergarten furniture but I promise you, God noticed it. He notices the little things. Maybe it's just painting. Maybe it's pulling weeds. Maybe it's mowing the lawn. Maybe it's picking up after somebody else even though it wasn't your Sunday to do it. But he notices every individual's work.

Then he says, "I know your toil." That means a continuing pattern of lifelong behavior. Now, this is something above and beyond the works. I mean, it's one thing if somebody cleans up one Sunday because they signed up on the list but it's another thing if you notice somebody that's doing it week after week after week as a labor of love. Some of you have been faithful Christians for a really long time. You've tithed for a really long time. You've given beyond your tithes for a really long time. You have served the Lord using your musical talents and skills for a really long time. You've witnessed when you get the chance to do that. It's not just that you peaked one day and were a really great Christian and then you coasted into eternity. You're the real deal. The toil and he commends them for that.

Then there's the patience and this word means an unswerving constancy of service. A service that doesn't give up. A service that isn't dissuaded when things are discouraging. As a young pastor, I got discouraged a lot of times. I remember getting so discouraged that I pastored one church twice, the first time I think God really wanted me there and the second time, I went back without praying and that was a really bad mistake. I was so discouraged when I got through there that I decided that the ministry and I were over and I got in my car and I drove to Addison, Texas and I started putting in applications to be a bank teller. I figured that a bank teller had to be better than being a pastor and I guess God didn't want me to be a bank teller. It's the only job I've ever applied for in my life that I wasn't offered the job. Every other job I ever applied for they said, "Oh, we'd love for you to come," but that day, there wasn't a bank in Addison that would have me and I thank God for it. God sent me to two churches that really loved me back into the ministry and I want to tell you, sometimes your pastors need you to love them into the ministry and love to keep them in the ministry and love them to stay in the ministry, that unswerving constancy.

And I wonder where on this continuum you and I would fall? Is our life characterized by doing things for the Lord's work? Are these works not periodic bursts of activity but we're constantly serving the Lord? Do we continue to do these things in spite of opposition?

Now, he says not only are you diligent in work but your despising of evil. This is another good characteristic. He says, "How you cannot bear with those who are evil." Now, I want to make a very careful distinction so I want you to listen carefully because I don't want you to go away and convey the wrong idea about what I said this morning: we need

to hate evil but love sinners. We need to hate sin but love the sinner. Jesus hated sin but he loved the sinner. We don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. Throw out the dirty bathwater but keep the baby. In other words, the point is that God loves us to have hearts that hate what breaks his own heart. He loves to see us have hearts that are broken by what breaks his heart. He loves us to have hearts that don't want to be involved in evil. It's not a matter of, "Oh, I want to do evil but I'm not going to because I know I should be a better Christian," but it's a heart that says, "I don't want that because Jesus doesn't want it."

What about us? You see, we do need to welcome unregenerate people. I mean, there might be people that come in this church and they're lost and they've never asked Jesus Christ to be their Lord and their Savior and they've never submitted to him. Do we still love them? Absolutely. What about backslidden, wayward Christians that they know Christ, they received Christ and yet they're not living for him? Do we still love them? Absolutely. But what happens when there's an immoral person in your church and that person is trying to detract from others and they are trying to drag others down; they are trying to get others to be immoral with them? Then the Bible has a different thing about that, doesn't it? It's got Matthew 18, "You go and talk to him privately and if that doesn't work, you take two or three with you. If that doesn't work, then you cast them out of the church and you say, 'Don't come back, we're not going to have anything to do with you.'" Why? You have to deliver them over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh and I've been involved in at least three churches in the last 34 years where things got to that point where we had to ask someone to leave because of immorality in their lives and it's not a pleasant thing to do. I would do all three again but I didn't enjoy doing that on any of those. Good question here is to ask: how bad do we hate evil? Do we hate it? Or do we make sure that we set the video recorder to capture it so we can watch it later? Do we hate it or do we sneak around trying to look at it?

Then he says that these labors are discerning of truth. Oh, that's good too. That's good too. They are discerning of truth. He says "But you have tested all of those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false." By the way, if you look at the first four letters to the churches in Revelation, you'll find out that all four of them had problems with somebody and some kind of false teaching in them. You see it in chapter 2 in verses 2 and 6 and chapter 2 and verse 9 and then in chapter 2 verses 14 to 15 and chapter 2 in verse 20, four churches all had a problem with somebody teaching them. Why do we have these problems? Because people don't get deep in God's word to begin with. I think one of the greatest things I've ever seen in all my years of ministry is what happens in Faith Bible Institute and I appreciate Linda helping to run it because it's been such a blessing to our church because you spend three years getting to know God's word. You're not going to be easily swayed. You're not going to be easily deceived. You're not going to be like somebody who is weak in doctrine and they are driven with the wind and tossed about. You'll know what the Bible says if you go through those three years and you won't be dissuaded. I think it's one of the greatest things because I've seen Baptist adults that couldn't explain the plan of salvation to you. They couldn't talk to you about the second coming of Christ and they thought that they could do anything they wanted because, after all, their sins were already forgiven so they might as well just enjoy

themselves and fill the desires of their flesh. And I've seen Christians, even good home schooled Christians, say something bad about a brother in Christ and then sit down in a pew and sing hymns. James would say, "My brethren, this ought not to be so. Can out of the same fountain come forth water that is both sweet and bitter?" We're not supposed to have a mouth that talks bad about one of our brothers in Christ and then tries to sing worship because God won't listen.

In 2 Timothy 4:3 it talks about in the last days and addresses this subject about false teachers and listen to what Paul says to Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." Another way of phrasing that is "having ears that want to be scratched." "And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." In the last days, he says, there are people who will want people to scratch their itch. I don't want to have to point out any particular preachers but, I mean, there are some preachers that promise you that if you give to their ministry and do what they tell you, that there's going to be a return on your money and Wednesday night if you were here, the pastor even talked about one church that gives a money back guarantee now if you didn't get what you wanted from God. How in the world do you do that? I'm trying to find that passage in the Bible. Then there are others that will get on Larry King, I'm thinking of a particular preacher, they get on Larry King and he refuses to say that homosexuality is wrong and he refuses to condemn any kind of sin and yet he will get up and stand before thousands and teach you how to think positively about your future life. Let me give you a little hint: if the preaching hurts, if it convicts of sin, if it points you to greater godliness, then chances are you're listening to sound doctrine. If it makes you feel better about yourself, chances are you're being led astray. You see, every time I read my Bible, I'm glad I read my Bible, I'm glad I spent time with Jesus but I usually don't feel better about myself because I see areas where I need to course correct.

Then I want to say that the laborers were discerning of truth. He says, "But this thou hast, that thou hatest, the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." Now, who are these pesky Nicolaitans and what are they doing here in Scripture? I've wondered this for a long time. I've had conjectures and theories but I think now maybe I've hit on it, did a little word study here. Literally the word "Nicolaitans" means "followers of Nicolaos." "Nico" is the word for "conquer," the Greek verb is nikao but it means "to conquer." "Laos" is the Greek word for "people," it means "the conqueror of people." This person is mentioned by several of the church fathers. Irenaeus wrote a book called "Against Heresies." Tertullian wrote a book called "Prescription Against Heretics." Two other early church fathers wrote about it as well. But Nicolaos is a Greek version of a Hebrew word. There are a lot of Hebrew words that have Greek versions. For example, you have Abaddon which means "the destroyer" in Hebrew but in Greek it's Apollyon. You have words in the Old Testament for the devil and in Greek we change the name for the word to Satan and there's these constant names that are names that get changed from Hebrew. So the Greek version of Balaam means "belang am" and it means "the destroyer of people." So Nicolaos is the Greek equivalent of "the destroyer of people."

What do you all remember about Balaam? Balaam was this prophet and Balac came and said, "I want to hire you to curse Israel," and so he takes Balaam up to the top of the mountain and they're looking out on a valley where the children of Israel are camped about and Balaam tries to curse Israel. He can't do it. God won't let a curse come out of his mouth so he tries a second time and he tries to curse again, he won't do it. The king is like, "What's the deal here?" He says, "You know King, I can't curse Israel. God won't let me do that but I'll tell you how you can destroy them." He told him, "You get the children of Israel to intermarry with your daughters. You get the sons of Israel to intermarry with your daughters and then you lead them into worshipping your gods and they'll be destroyed. They'll no longer be a problem for you." That's exactly what happened after that. That's when Israel began its downward slide into insignificance for many years and into slavery. You see, Balaam said, "Get them to compromise with the world and they'll lose their power with God."

There is a doctrine of the Nicolaitans today that says, "Oh, there were a group of Gnostics during the day that Jesus is saying these words and they said, do you know what? There is the spiritual and the physical and the two never really meet so if you are saved spiritually, that's fine. That's all you need. You've got your ticket punched to go to heaven. Now go out and enjoy life and it's okay if you're immoral, it's okay if you sleep with someone you're not married to. It's okay if you want to get drunk. It's okay if you want to do all these other things." Why? Because there is no connection between the physical and the spiritual and they led these people into immorality. Did you notice, in fact, let me point out, I'm not making this up because Jesus himself clarifies it in the next letter. Look what he says in verses 14 and 15, different church but he says, "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of," what? "Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication," in other words, to compromise morally, "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the," what? "Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." So Jesus right here puts it together for us: the doctrine of Balaam, the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, it's the same thing. It's the same thing.

Now, there may also be one other meaning behind the people conquerors here and that is there is an idea that separates the clergy from the laity. I think this is one of the most destructive ideas in Christianity. I think it has been destructive that people in many churches sit there and they think that the pastor is to do all the ministry. Do you know that the Bible says about you sitting right there facing me, that God has made you kings and priests. He has made you a peculiar people. He has made you a royal priesthood. Well, royal priests are supposed to serve the Lord, not sit around and hear about him. You are called to ministry. We're in this thing together. Just because I'm standing here and you're sitting there, it doesn't mean we're different. We're in the same ministry together and we've got to remember that. But you know, I think one example where this has gone horribly wrong is the Catholic Church and it's why when you know somebody who suddenly decides to be Catholic, this blows your mind. In 1220, I think it was 1229, was the Council of Valencia where the Catholic Church clergy made it illegal for people to read the Bible. They placed it on their list of forbidden books saying, "You can't read the Bible." Why? "Because the Bible is just for the clergy. You laity don't

know how to handle it. You shouldn't be reading it because you might actually try to interpret it." God forbid. That was their idea. Then they set up this whole hierarchy. You know, you have to have priests who answer to bishops who answer to Cardinals who answer to the Pope and then they dress in the long robes and big funny, pointed hats because they want to look important. God doesn't want anything to do with that.

By the way, I'll quit ranting in just a moment but they call it Peter's Basilica because they say the Pope occupies the seat of the Apostle Peter and the church was built on him. It's too bad they never learned how to study Greek. They obviously read Latin but they never learned Greek because there was a day one day when Jesus was out in a very particular location, by the way. He was out with his disciples and there is a dry riverbed that only got filled up with water once or twice a year but when Jesus and his disciples were there, it was dry. Do you know what you find at the bottom of a dry riverbed? Rocks. Right next to Jesus is a mountain. They are at the base of the mountain standing there, a dry riverbed and he looks at a fellow by the name of Cephas whose name means "little pebble," and he says to Cephas, "Your name has been Cephas, one of these little pebbles. Today I'm going to call you Peter and you're going to be a rock." But then he points to this giant mountain next to him and he says, "Upon this rock, I'll build my church." You see why that is significant in Greek is that in Greek there are two different Greek words for "this." There is one where I could say, "This box of Kleenex," but it's really over there, right? But I'm pointing to that box of Kleenex rather than that box of Kleenex and so I say, "This box of Kleenex." But Jesus when he was talking about Peter, he didn't say, "This rock," he used another Greek word that meant, "This rock right here," pointing to himself. So you can say this one over there or you can mean this one right here and he was letting Peter know right up front, "Peter, the church isn't going to be built on you." Peter might have been surprised by that fact because Peter always had great ideas. I mean, one day he's standing out there in the middle of Matthew 17 and all of a sudden he sees Moses and Elijah on either side of Jesus and what did Peter do? He started telling people his ideas for planting the church. "Oh, let's build three tabernacles here. One for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." And all of a sudden God has to say, "Whoa, shut up. Listen to my Son." In other words, "I'm not interested in your ideas, Peter. Listen to him. Listen to my Son." Jesus very plainly said, "Upon this rock," and he used that Greek word that means "this one right here, I'll build my church." Catholics have been on the wrong rock for centuries.

By the way, if there's apostolic succession from Peter, what about the other apostles? Shouldn't they have started their own denominations too? You know? Should there be some denomination that descended from Matthew and another from another? The point is that it's all about Jesus and we're to love Jesus, not the Pope. We're to love Jesus, not the pastor. We're to love Jesus, not the TV preacher. We've got to remember that we're all part of the ministry and I'm going to stop there. That's a good place to end because I don't have to give us the rebuke today. We'll save that for next Sunday. Maybe that gives me another week to repent because I want to talk to you about what your first love means. Let me give you just one little glimpse of an idea. I'm just going to give you Scripture to read this week. Write this down: if you want to know what the first love really means, go home, sit down, put your Bible in your lap and very carefully, very slowly, very

thoughtfully read two verses of Scripture, Jeremiah 2:1-2. Go and read those two verses. Ponder them. Do you know what? I'm going to make sure those are the right verses because at my age, if I told you something without looking, I could have really...yes, that's right, I could really lead you astray. I want you to think about what those verses mean. Read them in about three or four different translations and when you come back next week, we're going to talk about what that first love means.

Let me close this way as Richard comes up to lead us in a song. The fact is, Richard, what was that last hymn we sang before the girls got up? Yes, let's sing that again. What number was that? 371. I want you to get your hymnals and open to 371 and I want you to think about the words that you're singing because there were some awesome words in that song. It's just a couple of verses but they were awesome words.

Here's what I want to encourage you to do, we haven't gotten to the rebuke yet so I can't very well say, "Repent." But I don't ever want to be a part of a church that closes its doors because it lost its first love. Maybe you'd just like to spend a few moments confessing to Jesus like I'm going to do that I was just a little too busy this week and a little too preoccupied and a little too interested in other things to really show him that he was the first love of my life and if you want to join me, please do so. Let's stand.

Hymn 371.

1

2

Background

3 **What makes a church?**

- Is it:
 - A building?
 - A pastor?
 - A group of believers meeting together?
- Maybe another way of asking the question is: “What disqualifies a New Testament church from remaining a church?”

4 **How churches must grow**

- A church must first grow spiritually, then numerically, then financially.
 - That won’t happen by virtue of who is on the staff.
 - God does it. Expect everything from him and nothing from me and you won’t be disappointed.

5 **The essential quality**

- The fact of the matter is that there is ONE necessary thing – one sterling qualification which this church must have in order to survive
 - GENUINE LOVE for Jesus Christ
 - GENUINE LOVE for one another
 - GENUINE LOVE for all those to whom we have opportunity to minister
-

6 **The letters from Jesus**

- This passage begins a series of personal letters from Jesus Christ through the hand of John the Revelator to seven churches which are in Asia.
- These letters were to seven real, existing churches.
- Some say that these seven churches also represent seven different ages or eras within Christianity.

7 **The letter to Ephesus**

- The first of these seven churches is Ephesus. Ephesus represents the church at the close of the apostolic era when church organization began to supersede evangelism and missionary expansion.
- The church at Ephesus had a membership by this time of about 60,000 members.

8 **Ephesus**

- A major seaport city with a harbor
- Home to the Temple of Artemis (Greek name for Roman goddess Diana)
- Home to temples for deified Caesars

9 **Ephesus (2)**

- Population of about 250,000 when Paul preached here
- Featured a large amphitheater that could seat 25,000

10 **Pagan Ephesus**

- Ephesus was the center of worship of Artemis (Greek name) or Diana (Roman name).
 - She was the goddess of the moon and sensuality.

11 **Paul and Ephesus**

- As Paul preached in Ephesus (A.D. 53), many became converts to Christianity and forsook the worship of Diana.
- Sales of silver Diana trinkets plummeted and the economy suffered.
- Others in the city put pressure on Christians, but these Christians continued to labor for Christ faithfully.

12 **Ephesus – a launching point**

- In many ways, the Gospel to the Gentiles really got its big start at Ephesus
 - Paul remained in Ephesus for several years and preached the gospel so effectively *“that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord”* (Acts 19:10).
 - This large city was thoroughly stirred by Paul’s message (Acts 19:11–41)
 - Silversmiths created a riot because their business of making shrines of Artemis was threatened.

13 **What happened in Ephesus**

- Paul baptizes in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–7)
- Paul leaves Timothy in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3)
- Paul makes a brief stop in Ephesus (Acts 18:19–21)
- Paul sends Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia (Acts 19:21–22)
- Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (Acts 19:22, 1 Corinthians 16:8–9)

14 **What happened in Ephesus (2)**

- The sons of Sceva imitate Paul (Acts 19:11–19)
- People riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:23–41)
- Paul speaks in the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8–10)
- Apollos is instructed at Ephesus (Acts 18:24–26)

15 **The Ephesians greatest need**

- Paul prayed for the Ephesians to:
 - Be strengthened with might by God’s Spirit
 - Have a deep fellowship with Christ
 - Be rooted and grounded in LOVE
 - To know the breadth of God’s LOVE

- To know the depth of God’s LOVE
- To know the height of God’s LOVE
- To intimately experience the LOVE of Christ that surpasses all other knowledge
- To be filled with the fullness of God

16 **Ephesians 3:14-17**

- *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
- *of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,*
- *That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man;*
- *That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,*

17 **Ephesians 3:18-19**

- *May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;*
- *And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.*

18 **The Ephesians missed it**

- They focused on dealing with life’s stresses
 - A society that shunned them
 - Economic difficulties
 - The business of daily life
- They focused more on organization and activities than on worship
- Now 43 years after Paul had been at Ephesus, Jesus has something to say against them

19 **Revelation 2:1-2**

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

20 **Revelation 2:3-5**

You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

21 **Revelation 2:6-7**

But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

22 **The LORD commends the Laborers**

23 **The Lord**

- Principle: Commendation should come before correction
 - In parenting, giving commendation before correction reinforces the worth and value of the child.
- The Lord
 - He holds the messengers in His right hand
 - The word is normally used of angels.
 - But it is also used to refer to human messengers (cf. Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52).

24 **Who is this messenger?**

- Most probably the pastor, but not necessarily so.
- The concrete meaning is that God is holding and supporting His medium for conveying His Word.
 - God has a special calling for pastors and holds them in His hand to uphold them, control them, discipline them, and protect them. Pray that this hand would rest mightily upon your pastor that he would never stray from the truth.

25 **The Lord (2)**

- He walks amidst the seven candlesticks
 - In other words, the Lord is always being involved in a ministry among the churches.
 - Christ walks in our midst as a church. It should humble us to know that He is with us this morning and sees not only our service but our motivations as well.
 - It is also encouraging to know that He loves us and is constantly with us. If therefore, He be with us, what then should frighten us?

26 **Point of application**

- You and I need to be more aware each time we come here that Jesus Christ is present as well.
 - We don't come here to keep a ritual
 - We shouldn't come just to do our duty
 - You and I are here to meet with Jesus!
 - My greatest fear is that some of you come to church and you think that makes you a Christian.
 - Nothing could be further from the truth!

27 **The Laborers were diligent in work**

- ESV -- *I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance*
- "Works" = individual things that Christians do for the Lord's work.
- "Toil" or "labor" = Continuing pattern of life-long service
- "Patience" = unswerving constancy of that service

28 **The Laborers were despising of evil**

- *"..and how you cannot bear with those who are evil..."*
- God is gladdened by the hearts of those who hate evil.
 - We are not to hate those who do evil, but hate the evil itself. If we hate evil, it will not be present in our lives.
 - This church practiced church discipline and did not tolerate wicked men to be a part of their church.
 - Lord, teach us to hate what breaks your heart!

29 **The Laborers were discerning of truth**

- ESV – *"but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false."*
 - False teachers were present in each of the first four churches (cf. 2:2, 6, 9, 14–15, 20.)

30 **2 Timothy 4.3**

- *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*
 - In the last days, people will not like sound doctrine. They want preaching that will "scratch their itch" and make them feel good about themselves.
 - These people will be led astray

31 **The Laborers were discerning of truth (2)**

- 2:6 -- *But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*
- Who are the Nicolaitans?
 - "Followers of Nicolaos" (literally "conqueror of the people")
 - Mentioned by church fathers Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* and Tertullian in *Prescription against Heretics*.

32 **The doctrine of the Nicolaitans**

- Nicolaos (conqueror of the people)
 - Greek version of Balaam, from Hebrew "*Belang Am*," "Destroyer of the people."
 - Revelation abounds in such duplicate Hebrew and Greek names: as Apollyon, Abaddon: Devil, Satan. The name is symbolic.
 - These gnostic teachers taught that the material and spiritual realms are completely separate. They taught that immoral conduct does not affect the spiritual life.
 - Like Balaam, they led the people into immorality.

33 **Revelation 2:14-15**

- *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the*

doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

34 **The doctrine of the Nicolaitans (2)**

- This may also be a doctrine that promotes a false separation between clergy and laity.
 - The Council of Valencia in 1229 forbid laity from reading the Bible and placed it on the Catholic church's *Index of Forbidden Books*.
 - The Catholic church sets up an exalted clergy and ignores the fact that the Bible says we are ALL to be ministers and priests when we become Christians.

35 **The LORD rebukes the Laborers**

36 **You have lost your first love**

- ESV - *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.*
 - Our love for Christ should be growing in such a way that we should never be able to look back to a time when we loved Him more.
 - There is a beautiful picture of a "first love" for God in Jeremiah 2:1-2

37 **Jeremiah 2:1-2**

- *The word of the LORD came to me: "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: 'I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown.'"*
 - A honeymoon excitement
 - A wholehearted commitment
 - The bride's fearless abandon to follow the Groom even though she could not see yet how all her needs would be met.

38 **How do you know that you have left your first love?**

39 **1. Disobeying His commandments**

- Jesus said (John 14:21) -- *"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."* I
 - The evidence of our love can be seen in obedience to His commandments.
 - The loss of our love can be seen in disobedience to His commandments.

40 **2. You delight is in the wrong thing**

- Your delight in the Lord is no longer as great as your delight in someone or something else.
- Mark 12:30 -- *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."*
- ALL OUR HEART -- Our greatest desire should be for Him!

- 41 **You so not crave time with God**
- You spend time with God in the Word and in prayer
 - Mark 12:30 ALL OUR SOUL (mind, will, emotions) means that we have a mental and emotional craving to spend time with His Word so that He can feed us.
- 42 **Your leisure thoughts are not on God**
- Mark 12:30 ALL OUR MIND means our individual thoughts. What do you most naturally think about when you have free time?
 - Psalm 10:4 -- "*In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.*"
 - The proud or wicked person has no room in his leisure thoughts for God. Are you leaving less and less room for Him?
- 43 **You claim to be "only human" and give in to sin**
- Mark 12:30 ALL OUR STRENGTH. (Not ALL OUR HUMAN WEAKNESS.)
 - John 15:10 -- *If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love.*
 - John 14:15 -- *"If you love me, you will obey what I command."*
- 44 **You do not willingly and cheerfully give to God's work**
- This includes the needs of others.
 - 1 John 3:17 -- *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?*
 - We are to regularly support our church.
 - 2 Corinthians 8 – First give yourselves to the Lord and then give of the resources He entrusted to you.
 - You are giving to support the Lord's work.
- 45 **You do not treat every Christian as you would the Lord**
- Matthew 25:40 -- *The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*
 - John 13:34 -- *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. So you must love one another.*
- 46 **When you wrongly view Christ's commands**
- Many view Christ's commands as restrictions to their happiness rather than expressions of His love.
 - John 14:21 clearly shows the relationship between our love for Christ and keeping His commandments. We are to obey Him not out of compulsion but out of love.
- 47 **You strive for the world's approval instead of God's.**
- 1 John 2:15 -- *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*
 - John 15:19 -- *If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do*

not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."

48 **You fail to make Christ or His words known**

- This failure is because you fear rejection. John 15:20 – *Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*

49 **You refuse to give up an activity that offends a weaker brother.**

- Romans 14:15 -- *If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.*

50 **You become complacent to sinful conditions around you.**

- Matthew 24:12 -- *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.*

51 **You are unable to forgive another for offending you.**

- 1John 4:20 -- *If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.*

52 **Why do we lose our first love?**

53 **1. We become worldly**

- The doctrine of the Nicolaitans misled people to believe they could sin and be worldly without it affecting their relationship to Christ.
- But friendship with the world is enmity with God.

54 **2. We forget our daily need of God**

- Picture the nation of Israel during their stay in the wilderness.
 - Those who relied on their own strength instead of God's refused to go into the Promised Land. These people later took the manna for granted, grumbled, and died in the wilderness.
 - The next generation depended on God for sustenance and for salvation (the snake on the pole). These people entered the Promised Land aware of their need of God and were thus able to conquer Jericho.

55 **How do we keep our first love?**

- Fasting
 - "Turns down" the volume of our fleshly desires and gives us time and focus for the Lord
- Prayer
 - Focuses attention on the Provider instead of the Provision
- Giving sacrificially
 - This is Philippian-style partnership giving – they gave beyond their ability
 - It helps us to remember that we need God.

56 **He who has ears, let him hear!**

57 **The URGENT need of repentance**

- We'll lose the church if we do not keep the First Love.
 - The church that loses its love will lose its light.
 - The marriage that loses its first love will lose its light.
 - The Christian that loses its love will lose his/her light.
- How can we restore our First Love?

58 **Keep remembering grace**

1. Remember the heights from which you have fallen
 - Literally "keep on remembering."
 - We must keep remembering from what depths the Lord rescued us.
 - We must also keep remembering what we have lost and cultivate a desire to once again rekindle our first love – to have close intimate fellowship with the Lord.

59 **Repent and do it now!**

- Repent -- an aorist imperative that means DO IT NOW. Will you ask God to forgive you today for leaving your First Love?
- Jesus stresses the urgency of repenting now. Why is so important that we need to do it NOW?
 - Because we'll forget and grow complacent again.
 - The world will crowd out our conviction.
 - We stay the same and lose heavenly rewards.

60 **Repeat the first works**

- "Do the works you did at the first"
 - Start NOW (aorist) doing the first works.
 - Commit to Him all those things which are broken and neglected as a result of losing your first love:
 - Prayer
 - Bible reading
 - Meditation
 - Obedient service
 - Worship

61 **Jesus rewards a faithful love**

- IF you overcome, and IF you repent of the loss of your First Love. . .
 - THEN you are continually fed by the Lord.
 - He meets all your needs in order for you to grow into the image of Christ.
- Sin banned mankind from the Tree of Life.
 - But in Christ we have eternal abundant life. The problem is that most of us act like we have to get to heaven to enjoy an abundant life. (See 1 John 5:13)

- C. Have you left your first love? Are some of the evidences of this leaving present in your life?
- D. Do you realize how important it is that we repent of this leaving? If we don't we could lose our church. There may still be a building here and maybe even a meeting. But we won't have the presence of God in our midst. He will remove the candlestick.

62 **A moment of honesty**

- If we could put the last 30 days of your life on a video this afternoon and watch it, would it show that you loved Christ with complete abandon? Or would it show that you have lost your first love?
- Do you want to be daily fed by the tree of Life? Don't you want to have your inmost needs met--your emotional, spiritual, and mental needs--by a living Savior?
- Do you want to be more aware of His presence in your daily life?
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