

Revelation 2:1–7 Sermon — You Left Your First Love

Revelation 2:1–7

TEXT

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

INTRODUCTION

Before we get into Ephesus, remember where we are in Revelation. The book reveals Jesus Christ in glory, His dealings with the churches, the judgments that come upon this world, the defeat of Satan, the return and reign of Christ, the final judgment, and then the new heaven, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem.

Chapter 1 shows John on Patmos seeing the glorified Christ walking in the midst of seven golden candlesticks. Revelation 1:20 tells us those candlesticks are seven churches. Chapters 2 and 3 then contain Christ’s messages to those seven real churches—what He commends, what He rebukes, what must change, and the promises and warnings He gives.

Ephesus comes first. They are working, labouring, enduring, and standing against false doctrine. Then verse 4 says, Nevertheless. They were doing much right, but they had left their first love.

I. CHRIST KNEW WHAT THEY WERE DOING — VERSES 1-3

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;”

Christ starts by reminding the church who is speaking. He holds the seven stars and walks in the midst of the candlesticks. Revelation 1:20 tells us the candlesticks are the churches. Christ is among His churches, and He knows exactly what is happening in them.

Revelation 2:2-3 “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: **3** And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.”

Christ commends a lot here. They worked, laboured, had patience, refused evil, tested false apostles, and kept going for Christ's name without fainting.

Years earlier Paul had warned the Ephesian elders about false teachers.

Acts 20:28-31 “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. **29** For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. **30** Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. **31** Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”

Paul told them to watch, and they did. Their problem was not that they cared too much about doctrine; Christ praised their discernment. But a church can be right about false doctrine and still need correction somewhere else.

1 Thessalonians 1:3 “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;”

Work can come from faith. Labour can come from love. Patience can come from hope. Ephesus still had work, labour, and patience. The question in Revelation 2 is what had happened to the love that once characterized those works.

II. CHRIST NAMED WHAT THEY HAD LEFT — VERSES 4-5

Revelation 2:4-5 “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. **5** Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”

The KJV says they left their first love. We often say they lost it, but Christ says they left it. That means there was responsibility in the departure.

What is their first love? Love for Christ is certainly at the center of it, and the Ephesian church had also been known for love toward believers. The passage points to the former loving devotion that characterized this church and showed up in their first works.

Verse 5 says, Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen. Look back. Remember where you were. Remember what used to characterize your service.

Now notice the words in Revelation 2. Verse 2 says thy works. Verse 5 says the first works. They were still working, but Christ wanted the works that came out of that former love.

Then Christ says repent. This is a church being corrected for a church problem, not an evangelistic formula for receiving eternal life.

Ephesians 2:8-10 “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **9** Not of works, lest any man should boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Salvation is by grace through faith. Good works come after salvation, and Christ expects them. Here He tells the church to remember, repent, and do the first works.

The warning is serious. Christ says He will remove their candlestick out of his place. The candlestick represents the church, so this is a corporate warning to Ephesus, not loss of an individual believer's eternal life.

III. CHRIST TOLD THEM WHAT MUST REMAIN — VERSES 6-7

Revelation 2:6 “But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

After the rebuke, Christ commends them again. He did not want them to throw away what they were doing right.

They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, and Christ says He hated those deeds too. Scripture does not give us enough here to build an elaborate history of the Nicolaitans, but it does tell us their deeds were evil.

That also helps us understand love. Biblical love does not mean approving evil. Christ rebukes them for leaving first love and, in the same message, commends them for hating evil deeds.

Revelation 2:7 “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

The message starts with Ephesus, but it ends with the churches. We are supposed to hear it too. First John 5:4-5 grounds overcoming in faith in Jesus Christ, so Revelation 2:7 is not teaching that somebody earns eternal life by doing enough good works.

The Gospel is clear.

John 6:47 “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.”

The promise of the tree of life belongs to the overcomer. It is a future blessing in the paradise of God, and it does not turn eternal life into wages for Christian performance.

CONCLUSION

Revelation 2:4-5 “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”

Ephesus still had works, labour, patience, opposition to evil, and service for Christ’s name. But Christ knew what had changed.

Ask yourself: am I still serving Christ with the love and devotion that ought to be behind the work? Are we as a church doing the right things while drifting from the heart that once drove us to do them?

Christ gave Ephesus the answer. Remember. Repent. Do the first works.

Keep the doctrine. Keep standing against evil. Keep labouring for His name. But do not leave the love that ought to govern all of it.

Christ walks among the candlesticks. He knows His churches. He knows us. So hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, and do what Christ told Ephesus to do: remember, repent, and do the first works.

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