

Rev03 – Good Church, But Where’s The Love Revelation 1:17-2:7
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Open your Bibles. Title of the message, “Jesus and His Church, Part 1.” We are going to finish Revelation 1, from verse 17 to Revelation 2:7.

We finished last message with John’s jaw dropping description of Jesus Christ. It just blows me away to see who Jesus Christ is today, what he looks like today.

That was in Rev 1:13-16 - John Saw:

Jesus **STANDING** in the Midst of the **Lampstands** (churches)

He was **CLOTHED** like a Priest, w/ a Sash of **Righteousness**

His **HAIR** was shining like perfect **Holiness**

His **EYES** were a Flame of **Fire**

His **FEET** were prepared for **JUDGMENT**

His **VOICE** was like **Niagara Falls**

In His **HAND** He held the **Messengers** of the Churches

From His **MOUTH** came the **Two-Edged sword** (His Weapon)

His **FACE** was shining like the **Sun** in its Full **Strength!**

There’s a description of Jesus Christ that John can’t fully describe, he can only say “like, like, like” because there are no words to describe who Jesus Christ is. And we said last message that if we would get the correct picture of who Jesus Christ is today, that we would be able to stand up to anything in this world, that we would not back down, not even to the media machine of our culture. That we would stand with Christ no matter what because we know *who he is*.

Knowing Jesus Christ the way he is today will radically change us, and we are going to continue to look at him how he is today. And we are going to look specifically for the next few messages at not only who Jesus Christ is but who he is in the church and what he says to the church, to us.

Let’s pray. *Heavenly Father we know that we could just breeze through your Word and we could make it superficial and temporal Lord. But it’s not. It’s deep and it’s powerful and it’s sharp and it’s a discerner of the thoughts and intents of our hearts. It’s eternal and it’s living. And we pray it would be that in our lives, Lord. We pray your Word would be all that it is in our lives today. We pray as we begin to see Jesus, you speak to the church, that we would have ears to hear what your Spirit says to us, to the church. We commit right now to hear from you. We know you’ll speak; we commit to hear, Lord. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

So the Apostle John is in shock at the revelation of who Jesus Christ really is. And with the King of Glory standing in front of him (maybe not all of his glory because it gets

bigger and bigger as we go through Revelation) the Apostle John does just what you and I would do if we saw Jesus in this glory.

Revelation 1:17(a) (esv)

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, . . .

That’s what we would do if we knew the Lord that we worship, if we understood his glory and his power and his dominion over all of creation. In this phenomenal combination of the Lord of Glory and the Friend of the Apostle John, verse 17 says Jesus laid his hand on him and said “fear not.”

Just in the gospels, a dozen times, the friends of Jesus Christ are told “Fear not.” And Jesus reaches down and touches his friend John and he says, “Fear not.” And I promise you the more you know Jesus Christ personally, the more you will hear him say to you, “Fear not.”

Listen, we don’t need to fear who Jesus Christ is today. We don’t need to fear what the end times will bring. We need to fear not being a friend of Jesus Christ in the end times, that’s what we need to fear. The end times are coming. Jesus Christ is who he is. What we need to be afraid of is not being his friend when we meet the end times. Jesus says to John, “Fear not. You don’t have any reason to fear, John. “Here’s why.

He continues in verse 17 of Revelation 1 and into verse 18.

Revelation 1:17(b)-18 (esv)

***17 . . . I am the first and the last,
18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.***

He’s giving John guaranteed assurance that he doesn’t need to fear because of who Jesus Christ is and he gives us that same assurance that we don’t need to fear because of who our Lord is. He says “I am the first and the last.” It’s kind of a reference back to verse 8, the Alpha and the Omega. It speaks of his permanent, eternal existence.

And then he says “I am the living one.” The Greek tense is present, meaning I was living, I am living, I will be living, I always have been living, I always will be living, I am *the* living one.”

But then he says “I died and behold I am alive forevermore.” Listen Jesus Christ didn’t need to die. There was nothing in the grave that he needed. There was nothing in the grave that he needed to accomplish. He died for us. He died in our place. He descended to the depths of the earth for us. When he says, “I died, and behold I am alive forevermore,” Romans Chapter 6 says that through our identification by faith in him that when he died,

we died. And when he rose, we rose. That's why he died. He says "I died and behold I am alive forevermore."

And then at the end he says "I have the keys of death and Hades" which we would understand more as the grave. "I have the keys." It's a picture of authority. He is saying, listen John; you don't need to fear because of who I am and because of where I've been on your behalf. And now I have the authority of death. I have authority over death.

Hebrew 2:14-15 says (write this in the margin of your Bible)

Hebrews 2:14-15 says - through death - Jesus destroyed the one who had the power of death, that is, the devil - in order to deliver all those who were subject to its slavery.

Yeah Jesus died. But he did it in your place. And he did it so that he could conquer the one who has the power of death over you, so that you would no longer have to fear death or be a slave to it. That's what Revelation does for us. It makes us confident. It makes us sure; it makes us solid, that because of who Jesus Christ is that we win in the end, guaranteed.

If you belong to Jesus Christ, this is a picture for you. If you don't belong to Jesus Christ then you need to today. You need to today because tomorrow is guaranteed to no man. And you are living. You are fortunate enough to be living in the end times. Know Jesus and your victory is guaranteed.

Verse 19, Jesus gives John that great word "therefore." It's a wonderful word because it's like, well; it's a little bit like preaching a sermon. You just preach, and preach and preach and preach and then you say "Therefore, because of all this, because all this is true, here's what I want you to do."

Look at Revelation 1:19.

Revelation 1:19 (ESV)

19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

That is our three point outline for the entire Book of Revelation. That is everything you need to know to understand how Revelation is split up. The things that you have seen, that's all of Chapter 1. It's the glory of Jesus Christ. And first he says, "Listen. Tell them. Tell the church who I am today. Tell them what I look like today. Share my glory with them today."

And then he says write those things that are, that exist right now, and he is referencing the seven churches, the letters to the seven churches that we are going to dive into this message. And then he says "Write the things that must take place after this." He's referring to everything from Chapter 4 to the end in Chapter 22.

So Chapter 1 is what you've seen, Chapters 2 and 3 are the things that are and Chapters 4 through the end are things that must soon take place. "After this." That's a nice little outline, right?

Now listen, I think it is really important that we understand that as soon as Jesus says this to John, he gets right into talking to John about the church. In the next verse, in verse 20 of Chapter 1, Jesus introduces Chapters 2 and 3.

Revelation 1:20 (esv)

20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Now there is a neat thing about Revelation. When the Lord wants us to really understand what he is talking about, he just tells us. So we can say "I know what this means." The seven lampstands are the seven churches. Now the number seven is the number of completion or perfection, and so we know that Jesus is talking both about the seven churches that existed there in Asia around Ephesus, literally, and he's talking about the church at large, the whole church of Christ.

And then he says in a similar way, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, the messengers of the seven churches. " The word "angel" correctly translated "angel" there, but translated about six or seven times in the gospels, same word, translated messenger. So this word can be translated either way, because angels are messengers so scholars are a bit split whether Jesus is talking about actual spirit beings over churches or if he is talking about the messengers to the churches, which would be the leaders – the pastors, the prophets then, the Apostles and now the pastors, teachers to the church. And he says "I hold them in my right hand." That is an awesome thought, it is a sobering thought.

I know that there are angels that guard this church, that protect this church, but I also know that Jesus Christ has me in his hand like a stranglehold, Philippians 3 says. He's got me in a stranglehold. The picture is of authoritative control. In John 10, Jesus says as the Good Shepherd he holds us in his hand and not one that the Father gives him will he ever lose. But here, the wording is about authority and control. That is a sobering thought. It's not one that I take lightly. Jesus is in charge of this church. He put me here, and he can take me out, and he doesn't need anybody's help.

The other thing we'll see in this review of the seven churches is there is this phenomenal thing that comes kind of "alive" and that is that the seven letters to the seven churches that we are about to dive into just happen to follow church history from Pentecost to the rapture. It's really incredible, because of seven being the completion or perfection, we can look at the seven letters and what Jesus says in these seven letters to the seven

churches and we can connect these two periods of time in church history. Do you know that the church age began on the Day of Pentecost and it ends the day that you are raptured, that we as the church are raptured out of this place? We are living in the church age. And if you would say, “Oh that’s really cool. Where are we right now in the seven churches?” I would just have to tell you we are near the end of the seventh church. I’ll tell you more when we get there, it’s not really good news for the church, but it is great news for eternity. The last of the seven churches is the lukewarm church. We are *not* going to be part of the lukewarm church, and before that definition, description covers the church we are going to be out of here! And I don’t mean we are going to move, I mean we are being caught up in the clouds with our Lord.

Listen, we need to make sure that we have ears to hear what the Spirit says in the seven letters to the seven churches because these letters are to us. *They are to us*. They are to us! Some of the most powerful, life changing messages in the New Testament are in the seven letters to the seven churches. We cannot bury them just in prophecy curiosity. They’re way, way more than that.

Listen to what John Walvoord says. John Walvoord is a phenomenal scholar and prophecy specialist whom I have had the privilege of sitting literally at his feet in prophecy seminars. He says this: ***[These seven letters] are some of the most incisive and penetrating passages in the entire New Testament relating to church doctrine and Christian living.***

These letters are some of *the most* incisive and penetrating passages in all of the New Testament about how we are called to live today. And so we’ve got to say “Okay, Lord. This is for me today. I’m not here to hear about some interesting bit of prophecy.” That will come soon enough. But now, today, we need to remember that our purpose for studying Revelation is to know Jesus better, to worship Jesus more and to proclaim his name and his imminent return, and these letters will help us do that.

No matter how soon the rest of the Book of Revelation is going to take place, no matter what the exact details are in all the prophecies of the Book of Revelation, no matter who the world players are who are depicted in the Book of Revelation we know this today, no matter all of that the letters to the seven churches are for us *now*. Today. Jesus wants to speak to you today through these letters. We need to make sure that we have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to his church so that we will be ready when he comes and so that we will not be sucked in to the church of the last days, the lukewarm church. But that we will stay vibrant and on edge and leaning forward and worshiping Christ with passion.

There is no break between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. You know the Bible wasn’t originally written in chapters. You know that. So verse 20 of Chapter 1 introduces and then Revelation Chapter 2.

John is still hyperventilating from seeing Jesus Christ. You know? He is still beside himself and Jesus says to him,

Revelation 2:1 (esv)

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: . . .

And John is saying you’re going to have to give me a second, what do you mean, write? I mean John is in the process of experiencing who Jesus Christ is and his glory and Jesus says, “Listen. I want to talk about your church.” John is like, “Are you kidding me? You want to write a letter to my church right now?” Jesus says “Yeah. I want to write a letter to your own church. ***To the Angel of the church in Ephesus write...***”

I think it is a critical lesson that Jesus so quickly, number one, says “Listen John, it kind of looks like you’ve been boiled in oil there, but I need to talk to you about the church. I know you’ve been exiled out here and you’re in a cave, and I know you have been through stuff that is unspeakable, but listen, I’m here to talk about your church.”

It’s an important lesson. The emphasis here to me is *YOUR church, John*. And so when Jesus talks to us, he says “*your church*.” Not “that church.” Let me just tell you Jesus can take care of “that church.” Jesus is in control of “that church.” Jesus can handle “that church.” The church he wants to talk to you about it “*your church*.” It’s this church. This is the church he wants to talk to us about. Right here where we are at.

Ephesus was John’s home church. Paul spent three years, recorded in Acts 18 and 19 with the great riot there in Ephesus. There is so much about Ephesus I could tell you but I cut it all out of here. But there is a lot of cool stuff about the history of Ephesus. So dig in to your study Bible or encyclopedia and read about it.

Paul was there three years. Timothy replaced Paul as the pastor in Ephesus and Timothy was there when Paul wrote 1 and 2 Timothy to him. John replaced Timothy. Coming from the leader of the Jerusalem church John the Apostle replaced Timothy as pastor there and he was arrested there in Ephesus. Ephesus was the super church. It was a super city. It’s a phenomenal, historical reading. We just don’t have time to get into it. What is important to know is Ephesus planted the six churches that make up the seven. So Ephesus is a super church and they just started planting churches all around Asia and so as the messenger goes he is going to take these letters to the seven churches.

As far as that prophetic timeline I was talking about, how the seven churches match the church age, the church of Ephesus is obviously first. And we see them in the timeline from Pentecost to about 100 A.D. So seventy years later and the concerns that Jesus has for the church are already in existence.

The general message of this letter is hold on to your love. Cling tightly to your love for Jesus Christ. Worship and adore him above all else. And second to that only, love one

another. Love. The message to Ephesus is be careful not to abandon the love you had at first, when Christ first filled you with his Spirit.

Revelation 2:1 (esv)

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

To every church Jesus starts with a description of himself that reminds the church of his authority and his power and his glory. And he starts Ephesus by saying, “Listen, from the one who holds the messengers in his hand, authoritatively; the one who is in your midst.” The glorified Christ is in your midst today.

He says in Revelation 2:2, he says two words I would like you to highlight, underline, tattoo on yourself somewhere, Jesus says to the church,

Revelation 2:2 (esv)

2 “I know . . .

Now that is a good place to stop, right there. Jesus Christ says to the church, “***I know...***” Every one of the churches he says at the beginning of the letter “I know.” *I know*. Remember his eyes are like a flame of fire piercing through to the very soul of what is going on. Now listen you can take that either way. You can take that as great comfort or great concern. I pray you would get to the place where it is great comfort, where you can say, “Jesus, you know.”

But he also knows those things that you are not comfortable with him knowing. But you have the choice. You can get comfortable and say Jesus I know that you know. I know that you are in my midst, and I know that you know. Thank you. Thank you. Or you can say, I repent, I repent. Either way, what you need to know is that Jesus knows, and his desire is to strengthen and encourage and save the church, individually.

Revelation 2:2 from the beginning,

Revelation 2:2 (esv) -

2 “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

Every church except one receives a commendation from Jesus Christ. Can you guess which one doesn't receive any encouragement or commendation from Christ? The last one, the lukewarm church of Laodicea. Every other church receives some encouragement, come commendation. Jesus says here to the church in Ephesus “You guys are doing all the right stuff. You're doing all the right stuff. Your effort and your endurance are excellent. You won't put up with evil.” That's a good thing. That is a

commendation from Jesus. “You Test those who call themselves Apostles and if they are off base you deal with them.” That is a commendation from Jesus Christ to the church.

Jesus continues in verse 3.

Revelation 2:3 (esv)

3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.

Now I was thinking, Lord, this sounds like how I see our church. We have endured, we do have long suffering. We have endured patiently. We are bearing up for the name of Christ, in this town and beyond. And we have not grown weary. Although we have a bit, but not weary enough to quit. Just weary until the Lord revives us. And so I see us in this description in the church of Ephesus.

When Bruce Gooch called me yesterday, who was just coming home from a three day near death hospital stay, he was sharing with me his testimony. And he is telling me how God saved his life through the prayers of his saints in this church and he says, “Dave, I was reading Revelation 2:3 and I just felt like it speaks of our church, that we are doing this.” And I agreed with him. It was just a blessing. I was grinning ear to ear saying yes Lord. It’s true, God. We can see that, we can apply that. We have done that. And we can thank God for the grace to just be standing firm and faithful in him. Amen!

And so the Holy Spirit is like blowing through the phone and Bruce is talking to me and I’m like holding the phone and I’m saying, “Wow Lord, this guy is lit up, man! It’s so good!” And I do believe that and we praise God for it.

Plus, if you’ll skip down to Revelation 2:6, Jesus adds more, as Bruce calls it, “atta-boy.”

Revelation 2:6 (esv)

6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Now, we’re not exactly sure who the Nicolaitans are, there are a couple of thoughts about who they might be, but we know this. They were an outside group that was infiltrating the church and doing damage in the church from the inside. That we know.

And I want you to know that as we’ve matured a little bit, I’m not saying we’re there by any stretch, but as we have matured a little bit and understand more of how the enemy works to take out the church from the inside, people have criticized me personally is just the way it happens. But it sounds something like this. “Hey, aren’t we Christians. Are we supposed to love and accept everybody?” Um, no. No, we love them. But does that mean we invite them in to destroy the flock? No. Does that mean we allow them to dismantle the flock so that people that God has given us to care for aren’t even attending church any longer? No. In fact, we hate that. And I am speaking on the grounds of God’s Word. I hate it when someone comes inside and dismantles the flock. That’s a wolf and I have it

on good authority right here, Revelation 2:6, that Jesus hates it too. He says, ***which I also hate***. That's a pretty strong word from the Lord of glory. Yikes! We need to be careful how we handle people who are doing damage in the church. But to stop them from damaging the church is scriptural and it's our responsibility before God. I know that's heavy, but we are getting better at it. By the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the gift of discernment, we are saying, "Yes, we get it. We get it. The enemy sent one of his own in again to take out people in the church."

Listen, man, I'm telling you right now, the enemy is playing for keeps. Alright? For the enemy, this is not just some compartment of your life that it's nice you get to take a shower and go to church once a week. No, it's eternal life and death. And the enemy wants you on the death side. And Jesus wants you on the life side. It's a battle. It's a battle to the eternal life or death.

So there is a whole bunch of good stuff going on in Ephesus. I mean it's good, good, good. They're serving faithfully, they're working hard. They're enduring hardship. They are holding on to good doctrine. I'm seeing all that and saying, "Lord, I receive that. I see that in the church Lord." They're protecting the flock from wolves; they're refusing to accept those who are damaging the church. It's all good, it's all good.

And then, Jesus says something we need to hear. We need to be very careful to hear this. We can and we have in the past at times, fallen into the same sin that Jesus nails the church of Ephesus for. Because it requires the supernatural power of God to live in this balance that we are about to see. Carefully, let's go back up to Revelation 2:4.

Revelation 2:4 (esv)

4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

When Jesus Christ has something against you, that is like worse than going to the principal's office. New King James says ***you have left your first love.***

It's not lost. You haven't lost that loving feeling. (Don't start singing.) Listen, it's not that you've lost it. You have *abandoned* it. The word is used for divorce. You have turned your back on the love you had at first. You have left your love. You have abandoned it.

"But we're doing everything right. We are holding fast. We are standing strong. We're enduring patiently. We're fighting the good fight." Yeah you are. ***BUT...*** you've left your love. You've left the love you had at first.

Now listen, the New King James and other translations that kind of come from that source, all make you feel like Jesus is talking about your love for Christ. You've left your first love. And we've heard that said so much and we kind of assume it means Jesus Christ. But the ESV and the translations that kind of follow the ESV all refer to the love

that we have for others. ***You have abandoned the love you had at first.*** Kind of inferring that it is the love of Christ that you have for others. Now here's the truth, and this is why it's so cool to read multiple translations. It can be equally and accurately translated both ways. *It can be equally and accurately interpreted as either the love you have for Christ personally or the love you have for others because of his love being poured into you.* Isn't that just "coincidental" that the Holy Spirit would write this verse so that it applies both to your vertical love of Christ and your horizontal love of each other? It's not coincidence. It's divine. You've abandoned that love you have for Christ and that love you had for others because of your love for Christ.

So the NLT helps us out. ***You don't love me or each other as you did at first!*** Do you see how it just nails it there? You're not loving me like you used to. You're not loving others like you used to. "Yeah but we're so right." Yes – you are. You are so right and you are offending people and you're running people off and you're hurting people. And you're so right. But it still hurts when you beat someone up with your "rightness."

Jesus says to the church in Ephesus, and we need to hear it here, you're doing what's right but are you doing it in love? Yes! What you're saying is the truth, but are you speaking it in love? Do you have the love for that person that Jesus has for them? Are you motivated by your love for Christ? Are you just happy to be right and you want to make sure somebody knows it? Jesus is saying, "Listen, you're acting right but your motivation has changed. Your motivation isn't love any more. It's not because of your unconditional, sacrificial agape love. It's just because you are right."

You've taken on this battle stance and listen guys, I've been guilty of that, because when it starts coming I just say Lord, I'm going to stand and continue to stand and nobody is taking me out but you, and I'll take whatever comes at me no matter what, because I am here for you and that is the only reason. And yeah, that's right. That's really right. But it comes out in this "grrrr" kind of attitude. It is ultimately pride. But it starts as a commitment to do what's right, but then it moves to self righteousness. It moves past that sacrificial love of Christ. It moves past that "I'm being compelled by the love of Christ."

2 Corinthians 5:14, write it in your margin, Paul is talking about us being ambassadors for Christ and he says, ***For the love of Christ compels us !!*** Are we being compelled by the love of Christ or are we just standing in the battle because we are too tough to die? We have got to be compelled by the love of Christ. We've got to love him enough to love the world. And yeah, we're right, but really if we just beat someone up with it, aren't they bleeding just as bad – whether we beat them with being right or beat them with being wrong? We've got to love, man. We've got to love Jesus. We have to protect our number one priority of our love for Christ. And then we have to protect our number two priority of operating in love for one another.

It really is all about love, and we need to hear what the Spirit is saying to us. Romans 5:5 says that the love of God, the agape love of God, has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We have it. But sometimes it gets covered up. We get a thick skin. And it's this weird deal if you're in the ministry, you have to have thick skin and yet you have to have no skin. You have to have thick skin but you have to love and you can't be hurt but you have to continue to love. And you say, "Lord, it's not possible." And he says, "Exactly. It's impossible."

It's only by the supernatural baptism of the Holy Spirit, by you operating in the power of the Holy Spirit that you can have thick skin to the attacks and openness and love and concern even for those who are attacking you. It's an impossible position. And it is the one we are called to. And God says "You can't do it so I'm going to give you my power to do it."

Well, listen. It's the love of Christ that draws people. It's self-righteousness pride, that arrogant "I'm right" kind of attitude which repels people.

1 Corinthians 13. Here's how to become worthless. Who wants to know how to be absolutely worthless to God? Here's how to be worthless to God.

1 Corinthians 13:1-2 (ESV)

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Nada. Zilch. Zip. Nothing. I am worthless to God. "Yeah, but I understand the Bible." So what. "Yeah but I have faith that I can do anything." So what. You are worthless to God if you don't have his love. If you don't love him and love others with his love you are in the way. You are in the way. And God loves his flock enough to eliminate the things that are in the way.

You know I'm talking to myself, right? I could do this at home in the mirror, I already have. If it happens to be for you, then hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Hear what the Spirit says. You've got all the right stuff. Is the love of Christ flowing out of you?

How do you know if the love of Christ is flowing out of you? Galatians 5:22 and 23. That is what it looks like when the love of Christ is flowing out of you. That is the fruit of the Spirit. Check it and check your life. And you don't say, "Yeah, I know. I have all that stuff." No, you look at the people you are ministering to. Do they see that fruit in you? Or are they avoiding you when they see you at the store? You look at the people that God has put in your life and you see if you have the love of Christ flowing through you. And if you don't, Jesus is going to tell you what to do right now. If he is convicting you, like I

feel like he has convicted me, Revelation 2:5 gives us the three “R’s” to save us from this.

Revelation 2:5(a) (esv)

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do (return to) the works you did at first . . .

There they are for you.

REMEMBER – from where you have fallen.

REPENT – turn around and go back in the right direction.

RETURN – to loving Christ and loving others by the power of his Holy Spirit.

You can’t do it. But Jesus Christ will in you if you will join him, if you’ll repent and surrender and join him. The message to the church in Ephesus and the message to us today is love Jesus more and love one another more.

Here’s what Jonathan Edwards says.

Jonathan Edwards: *A Christian should at all times keep a strong guard against everything that tends to overthrow or corrupt or undermine a spirit of love.*

We have to protect this. We have to say wait a minute, wait a minute. Did I tell Jesus I love him today? Did I spend time with him? Because here’s the deal. I spend time with people I love. You spend time with the people you love. Do you love Jesus? Don’t answer my question. Tell me how much time you have spent with him. Are we loving others? Has something gotten in the way? We need to return to the way we loved at first when God first poured his Holy Spirit into us.

How not okay is it for a Christian to not be operating in the love of God? The end of verse 5 of Revelation 2 says,

Revelation 2:5(b) (esv)

5 . . . If not (if they don’t repent & return to the Love they had at first), I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Now that is pretty serious. Now there are two things that Jesus could be referring to. One, which I think would be the more merciful thing, is he would just make the church no longer exist. That church is gone. Have you ever seen a church disappear? The second thing which personally I believe is worse. Jesus says I am in the midst of the lampstands. So if I am not there, the lampstand cannot be there. And so if he says in verse 5 he is going to remove the lampstand, what if he means he is going to remove his presence from the church? Now, I have chills. What’s worse? A church that doesn’t exist, or a church that exists without the presence of Jesus Christ in it? The latter. Because that church is working for the enemy. We need Jesus Christ in the church. We need him high and lifted

up and glorified. We need his presence felt in the church. And he is saying if you don't love like you did in the beginning I'm taking off. Pretty serious.

So there are actually four "R's" in Jesus' counsel to the church at Ephesus.

REMEMBER from where you have fallen.

REPENT turn around and go back.

RETURN to the love you had at first.

OR I will REMOVE your lampstand.

Wow. So we have had some really good encouragement from Ephesus, right? Been then he ends with a really strong warning. "Really?" we say. "You care that much about how loving I am? Because I thought I was doing a pretty good job. And now you are saying 'so what if I don't love.'" Yeah. That is exactly what he is saying.

Skipping down to verse 7. Revelation 2:7 because we already did verse 6, it's the other 'atta-boy.'

Revelation 2:7(a) (esv)

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches . . .

If you have an open heart then receive what the Holy Spirit is saying. You're doing well but you need love. "You need to love me," Jesus says. "And you need to love others with the love that I've given you. You need to love."

Our top priority is a love relationship with Jesus Christ. Amen! Your top priority is a love relationship with Jesus Christ. Your second priority is like unto it, to love others with his love that he has poured into you. Nothing has changed since the Ten Commandments were written. They were written half about your vertical love relationship, the other half, in essence, about your horizontal love relationship. Jesus reiterates it in the gospels. And now he says it in Revelation. Love. Return to the love you had at first.

Let's look at the end of verse 7, Revelation 2.

Revelation 2:7(b) (esv)

7 . . . To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

Listen, this is a victory statement of all those who are in Christ. All those who are in Christ will conquer because Christ has already conquered. All those who are in Christ will eat of the Tree of Life which is in the paradise of God which we will read about in Revelation 22. This is for everyone who is in Christ. So listen, so don't you think that Jesus is saying, "Listen. Listen. Listen. You're a conqueror. You're going to eat of the Tree of Life with me in the paradise of God. Don't you think you ought to be loving?"

Don't you think you ought to set or reset your priorities on love for me and love for others?"

You're a conqueror. You're going to spend eternity with Christ. Love him. And let him love others through you. Amen!

I have two recommendations for you.

"The Way of Agape" by Nancy Missler

And a book all about the church of Ephesus. It's a great book called "Love or Die. Christ's Wake Up Call to The Church" by Alexander Strauch. You can find it on amazon.com.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we want to love. We want to love. We want to love you and we want to experience your love through us to others. We want to love, Lord. And God we just recognize right now that in our selves we don't love, we can't love. We recognize this morning we need you. And so all we can do, Jesus, is repent. We remember, Lord, how you filled us with your Spirit. How supernatural it was that we loved our enemies. We repent of drifting away from that. And we right now return to that love. We pray that you would fill us. That you would fill us with your Spirit, Lord. That you would save us from ourselves and from the effects of the battle in this world. Save us, God.

Right now if that's you I want to give you a chance to respond. If the Holy Spirit has convicted you, then I need to say to you, hear and receive what the Spirit says, and respond. Respond right now. If the Holy Spirit has put a picture of a person in your mind that you haven't been loving to then confess that to the Lord right now and repent of it. If your general attitude has been unloving and negative and critical, then just fall on your face before the risen Lord right now and beg him to forgive you and not take his lampstand from your life. Jesus commands you to love unconditionally and sacrificially and there are consequences if we refuse to do it. Right now, cry out to God. And finally, if you haven't been loving because you don't have the life of Christ in you, acknowledge it to him right now. Just cry out and say,

Lord, I think I am religious but I don't have your power in me. I don't have your life in me. Please Lord, save me. Please come into my life. Please be my Lord and be my Savior, forgive me for my sins and for my unloving heart. Fill me with your Spirit to overflowing, Lord. That I would love you, and that I would love those you've put in my life. Save me, Lord. Save me from my sin and from my own disasters. Thank you Jesus. Thank you Jesus for loving us and for giving us your love. It is in your name we pray, amen.