

## **When the Secondary Becomes the Primary**

### ***Revelation 2:1-7***

- I. Marriage, a picture of Christ and His church.
  - A. A root cause of marriage failure:
    - 1. They left their “first love”.
      - a. The secondary became the primary.
- II. The outline of Revelation: 1:19
  - A. Jesus Himself tells the apostle John to “write down...”
    - 1. “The things he *has* seen...” (1:1-18).
    - 2. “The things which are...” (Chapters 2-3).
    - 3. “The things that will be...” (Chapters 4-22).
- III. The letters to the seven churches.
  - A. The pattern.
    - 1. Commendation.
    - 2. Condemnation.
    - 3. Correction.
  - B. Jesus is at the center of the churches (2:1).
    - 1. He is present, and He is in control.
- IV. Ephesus.
  - A. Paul’s strategy—Plant churches in large metropolitan cities.
  - B. The city:
    - 1. The most important city in the Roman Empire outside of Rome.
    - 2. A major city of commerce and trade.
    - 3. An impressive amphitheater, library, and banking system.

4. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world—The temple of Dianna/Artemis—Goddess of fertility and sex.
- C. The planting of the church at Ephesus (Acts 18-19).
- V. The commendation (2:2-3).
  - A. Your good deeds/works, your toil, your perseverance.
  - B. Your right beliefs/ discernment.
    1. What could possibly be wrong with a church that does and believes the right things?
- VI. The Condemnation (2:4).
  - A. “You have left your first love.”
    1. Four thoughts:
      - a. You left your love for each other.
      - b. You left your love for God.
      - c. You left your love for the gospel.
      - d. You left your love for Jesus Christ.
  - B. Leaving something—intentional or unintentional.
    1. The Ephesus church “unintentionally” allowed the process to replace the destination.

**The Ephesian church didn’t have a head problem; they had a heart problem!**

- VII. The correction (2:5).
  - A. Remember—*Remember the miracle of the cross in your life.*
  - B. Repent—Change your mind over what you are doing, where you are going.
  - C. Do the deeds you did at first—When you first came to Christ.
- VIII. The promise—**He who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is the Paradise of God.**
  - A. Overcomer—1 John 5:4-5

## When the Secondary Becomes the Primary

### *Revelation 2:1-7*

I don't know if this happens to you... but you begin to study the Bible... you get some insight in a passage... and it sticks with you...and you think about it all week...it seems like everywhere you turn the topic shows up... every time you turn around...there it is!...you turn on the radio there it is...

A couple weeks ago I got an email from Bill Tozer that shared his thoughts about the importance of focusing on our love for Jesus Christ... being more important than the “religious things” we do... last Sunday Joseph preached on the essentialness of our loving Christ...and he compared our relation with Christ to marriage in his introduction...and then I “just happen” to be here in Revelation 2:1-7....about our essential love of Jesus Christ.

And marriage and our relationship with Jesus Christ is major idea in the New Testament... Ephesians 5 being the most profound and obvious... marriage between a man and woman is a model... a picture of the relationship of Jesus Christ and His church... His church being all believers and followers of Christ.

So beginning with this picture again... of marriage...

Commentator James Hamilton asked *What happens to people between their wedding day...so joyous...sincere, earnest...and the day of their divorce?*

What happens in what began a loving, passionate, “*you are my world...I can't live without you*” relationship to ... *I can't do this anymore... I want out.* ?

Answer?...Oh... a plethora of answers... *we drifted apart... we have different needs... we have different expectations we didn't know when we tied the knot...we have different dreams... different interests...we grew apart... we fight all the time.* ...all those are the result of a root problem...**what happened is they left their first love**...

What do I mean?... your *first* love is not talking about an order of things... 1,2,3...it is talking about supremacy of things... your “first love” is supreme...the most important relationship on earth...it is where you place your greatest affections...everything else is subordinate... your most valuable love...you base your life on it.

What happens when you leave your first love is that you've let other things into your life... into your marriage that replaces your first love...demotes what you loved most to a secondary status... and put something else in its place....and eventually...there is no place.

**The secondary has become primary...**

I counsel that if you are not moving forward in your marriage... you are moving backwards... there is no staying the same... you must be moving forward...you must be nurturing that first love...you must nurture it... intentionally... **what is true for marriage is true for the Christian life...**

We can get so busy...so distracted... doing GOOD things...church things... doing “godly” things... doing biblical things that those things...which are to be a process... can become more important than the destination...the most important thing... we get so obsessed with the process that the process becomes the destination....and the destination is lost...or it left.

Revelation 2:1-7 is a serious warning to us about the ramifications of making the secondary primary.

God handed Jesus the “revelation of Jesus Christ”... Christ gave it to an angel... a messenger to deliver it to the apostle John... Jesus tells John to *write it all down*... verse 19 of chapter 1 is John’s marching orders from Christ Himself...actually, it is a concise outline of the entire book of Revelation.

(19) **Therefore, write the things you have seen...** which is referring to everything that John just saw before verse 19... If you were with us on Easter, we looked at what John saw... a vivid glorious vision of the Son of Man Jesus Christ... he was so overwhelmed by what he saw he fell at Christ’s feet.

**Therefore, write the things which you have seen and the things which are...**which is now... the things going on right now... these things are revealed to us in chapters 2 and 3...which are the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia...

We know that the number seven is very significant in this book... the number of completion...I suggested that the seven churches represent all churches of all times in history...including our time...so... we are still, today in the *things which are*...

**Therefore, write the things which you have seen and the things which are and the things which will take place after these things...** which is what we will see in chapters 4 to the end of the book, chapter 22... I mentioned last week that the “**the things which are**”, chapters 2 and 3, may be the most important part of the entire book.

These seven letters will demand from us an evaluation of us as a church and as individual Christians...Each one of these letters is addressed to a church... the corporate gathering of the saints... but each letter ends with instructions to individuals... **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...**

So these letters are to all the churches... to all individuals who are believers in Christ. ...to you and me...It is vital that we are prepared for *those things which will take place in the future*... we need to be ready for what will take place in the future... when Christ returns as king... as judge of the universe...and judge He will!....

I should add... five of these seven churches, Jesus reveals a pattern... Jesus begins by **commending** each church... telling them what they've been doing right... then He **condemns** them for doing something wrong... then He **corrects** them, telling them how to get back on the right road...

The other two churches... Smyrna does not receive a condemnation nor correction... Jesus is pleased with Smyrna... as He is with the church at Philadelphia... and Laodicea does not receive a commendation... Jesus is thoroughly NOT pleased with Laodicea!

So Jesus Himself tells John what to write...

### Read 2:1

We don't have to guess what the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands are... we are told in verse 20 of chapter 1... the seven golden lampstands are the seven churches that will receive these letters... **the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches...**

"Angels" literally means "messengers" and in a couple places the word is used for one who delivers the gospel... a preacher or pastor... some conclude that these seven angels are the churches seven pastors...

I don't know... I'm living proof that pastors are not angels!... they could actually be angels... what's important to see is that **the One...** is Jesus Christ... and He is **in the midst of all the churches...** He is at the very center... Jesus is present with His people... Jesus is in control right now... He holds them...

He is in the midst of this church in Ephesus... It would help us to know something about Ephesus to get the picture... you might want to follow along... Acts 18

When you study the movements of the apostle Paul... you begin to see a strategy surface... Paul went to large metropolitan cities... set up a church... and from there... the church would reach out to the communities in their region... many church planters today have adopted that strategy.

We have Paul's letters to these major cities... Corinth... Thessalonica... Colossae... Phillipi... Rome and of course... Ephesus.

Ephesus... at that time was the most vibrant, important, major city in the Roman Empire outside of Rome... located on the west coast of what is known today as Turkey... then Asia Minor... it became known as "*The Supreme Metropolis of Asia*"... somewhere between 250,000 and 500,00 people lived in Ephesus...

Ephesus was a major seaport for trade... ships from Rome in route to countries in the east would stop and trade in Ephesus... until silt from the river Cayster eventually filled the bay.

Today you can visit the amazing ruins in Ephesus which are now six miles inland from the ocean... Ephesus was known for its massive amphitheater that seated 25000 people... one could

stand in the center of the arena and speak being heard by the entire audience... no microphones of course....perfect acoustics.

One of the largest libraries in the world was in Ephesus... it housed over 200,000 manuscripts... that was before the days of the printing press... Ephesus had a huge cultural center... there was a thriving banking industry...

What Ephesus was particularly known for was what became one of *the seven wonders of the ancient world*...it was the temple of the goddess Dianna... the great Roman goddess... or known in Greece as Artemus... the goddess of sex and fertility....a famous multi-breasted stone stature of Dianna stood at the entrance.

Ephesus was known as one of the most decadent cities in the ancient world...Ancient manuscripts that have been discovered in archaeological digs include descriptions of the activities that regularly took place in the temple that I can't read in mixed company.

Thousands of priests and priestesses served in the temple... and as many temple prostitutes... the ancient philosopher from Ephesus, Heraclitus, known as the "*Weeping Philosopher*" lamented the wretched immorality in Ephesus...He wrote:

*It's citizens were fit only to be drowned*...it is said he never smiled or laughed because he lived among such wretchedness...that's Ephesus...what a place for a church! ...let's plant a church there!

In Acts 18:18...the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey arrives at Ephesus... listen to this:

### **Read Acts 18:18-21**

Paul then leaves Ephesus and continues his missionary journey throughout Asia... while he is doing that... enter Apollos:

### **Read verse 24-25**

Apollos knew the Old Testament...the Scriptures...he knew about John the Baptist...he knew about Jesus... but he didn't know about what happened to Jesus... he didn't know about the cross...he didn't know about the resurrection...he only knew about the baptism of John which was a *baptism of repentance*... and the early ministry of Jesus.

### **Read verse 26**

Priscilla and Aquilla taught him the things of Christ he hadn't yet learned... that he went to the cross... died for our sins...rose from the dead in three days...

### **Read verses 27-28**

The church at Ephesus was birthed... the apostle Paul briefly visited Ephesus... Apollos gets educated about Jesus... In chapter 19... Paul goes back to Ephesus...

### **Read verses 8-10**

Our story in Revelation takes place about 40-50 years after this... read the rest of 19...good stuff... A church initiated by Paul...grown through the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila expanded by Apollos... Paul taught there for two years...many miracles at the hand of Paul... riots in Ephesus... but the gospel is victorious...it is certain that John was a pastor there after Paul... later...

Paul writes a letter to this new church in Ephesus while in Corinth... we know it as “*Ephesians*”...the entire book is about the church...what it is to be like... 3 chapters about the nature of the church and 3 chapters on how to walk in this messed up world...the world Ephesus is in.

He begins by addressing the church **to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus...**then he goes on and says things like...

**Be imitators of God... walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us...an offering and sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma...be strong in the Lord and in the might of His strength.**

Amazing church in a wretched world... **put on the whole armor of God so that you will be able to resist in the evil day...**Ephesus is a demonic, immoral city... but there is a church in its center... a light.

We are pretty sure it was not “A church but several house churches... perhaps 12-15 people each... large church gatherings in a building like today didn’t begin until around 300AD.w

We live in times much like that first century church in Ephesus... How long does it take for a church like Ephesus to lose its vibrancy... to be worn down from the culture around it... the temptations continuously in their faces... ???

We think Ephesians was written somewhere around 60AD... Revelation around 90-95 AD... 30-40 years later...today... that church at Ephesus is a pile of rocks in a city among ruins....what happened?

Back to Revelation 2...remember the pattern?... *Commendation...Condemnation...Correction.*

### **Commendation**

#### **Read verse 2**

Nine positive statements...connected by seven “ands”... Jesus is genuinely pleased with them in these things... Basically all nine of these positive things could be put into two categories...

## 1. Right behavior

**I know your deeds...** deeds are intentional acts... works... **I know your toil...** toil is more than working ...it's working hard... to the bone... *I commend you for this!... GOOD JOB! I know your perseverance... you are trying hard to get it done!...it's not easy here in Ephesus!... you're not straying off to the temple to indulge in your flesh... you are behaving right!...this is good!...*

### Read verse 3

*you've endured much for being one of My followers... People find out you're a follower of Me, they lay into you!.... but you keep going.... GOOD JOB!*

## 2. Right beliefs... we could say **right theology**.

*Not only are you doing good deeds... you are discerning...*it says (2) **you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you have proved them to be wrong.**

*You have a such a good foundation and understanding of truth that you can detect when a false teacher comes around... you know what is true... and you can identify what is false...* Greek scholar William Mounce wrote:

*The Ephesians had toiled to the point of exhaustion in their good deeds... and borne patiently the hostility of a society at odds with all their goals and efforts...they could not tolerate evil... Holiness and purity mattered...*

so... what's the problem? ***What could possibly be wrong with this church?***

They have the right behavior... and they have the right beliefs... they can detect what is false...every once in awhile Randy and I will get calls from people who have moved away from Moscow... or they are new to some town and are looking for a "good church" to go to... what do we try to do?

We try to help them find a church in that town that has the *right beliefs and the right behavior...* we don't want to recommend a church that teaches bad doctrine and full of strange, wacky people!....*what could be wrong with this church at Ephesus?...*

You know... these are real people listening to this letter being read...not by some complainer that can't be satisfied with anything the church does... this isn't one of those professional church complainers... speaking is the Son of God who knows our true intentions and hearts...the creator of the universe.... The creator of us... the One who died on the cross on our behalf... He has SOMETHING against this church...we should pay attention.

## Condemnation

**(4) But I have this against you...**



*Your doctrine is spot on... your lifestyle is spot on... but I have a problem with you!...this is no little issue... this isn't a little thing... this is not inconsequential...this is not something you can sweep under the rug... or put it on a scale and weigh the good vs this issue... and all your good deeds and thinking will outweigh this issue...and all is good... no!*

*I've got a big problem with you... **I HAVE THIS AGAINST YOU!**... what is it?...*

**(4) You have left your first love...***you have left your first love...* There's been a question through the ages what He means by *you have left your first love*...what is the first love?...there are four main suggestions by reputable Bible scholars...

I'll mention all four to show the scope of this problem...

**1. Their love for each other...***you've been so busy and wrapped up in your deeds and your doctrine that you have turned cold or indifferent to your fellow brothers and sisters...you are so intent on getting something done in the church that you've forgotten to love your brothers and sisters....*

**2. Their love for God...**Matthew 22:36 **Teacher which is the great commandment in the Law? And He said to him, 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your mind....**

**3. Their love for the Gospel...**

**4. Their love for Jesus Christ...** I think all of them are connected to this last one... their love for Christ...listen to the words...**I have this against you, that you have LEFT your FIRST love...**

Key words... *you have **LEFT***... note that you didn't LOSE your first love...it wasn't taken away from you... **you** LEFT it...two ways you can "leave" something... **intentional or unintentional**... either way the same results...Trying to remember a time I forgot something really important...

[A few years ago I agreed to perform a wedding for one of our young couples... it was to be a semi-formal wedding...black suits and all... in the wilderness at the foot of Mt. Baker, Washington...talk about in nature!... and away from it all!

I was in a hurry to get everything done...packed the car... it was to be a fast trip... six hour drive to the mountain... perform the wedding, come home... being summer I put on my shorts, tee shirt and flip flops to be comfortable for the long drive... I'd change when I got there...

I got there... miles and miles from any town...beautiful... the wedding was in a couple of hours... good to get there with a little breathing room concerning time...I went to grab my semi-formal black wedding and funeral suit and it wasn't there... I HAD LEFT IT IN TROY!

At least I was wearing shorts, tee shirt and flip flops!... I had left my suit... how'd that happen?... too many things got in the way of the really important thing...too many distractions...**when you unintentionally leave something... implies being distracted...**something has replaced the importance of something else!]

Another important word is “**First**”... like I said in the beginning of the message... this is not being the first in a sequence of events... 1,2,3... it is to be taken as what establishes ALL other authorities... First love means the greatest of all loves.... Greatest of all authorities in your life...whatever is FIRST in your life is the essence of who you are.

This is a scary list I compiled....

I can love studying the Bible more than I love Christ

I can love preaching more than I love Jesus

I can love being in the church more than I love Christ...

I can love helping feed the poor... fight abortion... take care of widows... all those biblically mentioned activities that are “GOOD”....more than I love Christ.

I could love leading a bible study more than I love Christ...

**You have left your first love**...reveals an exchange... you do all these really good things... **now get this**... all those good things... good deeds...”righteous religious acts” right doctrine... right attitude.... Discernment... those are all a part of the process... a process that leads to the grand destination...a most intimate relationship with the Savior Jesus Christ.

What has happened is that you made the process the destination...**you love what you DO for Me... you love your right behavior... you love your doing good deeds...your theological charts MORE than you love Me!**...I’ve been pushed out... I’ve been forgotten...

*You LEFT your first love...you got distracted ... you made the secondary the primary... **The Ephesians didn’t have a head problem... they had a heart problem**... the very person who gave them a new life...eternal life... who bore their sins on a cross... who gave them the Holy Spirit who enabled them to do all those good deeds... have discernment...to understand the truth...the good doctrines of the Bible... is replaced by those very acts....you left your first love.*

*In all the really, really good stuff you are doing....where am I?*

Tough words from the Savior... but He doesn’t leave them with the condemnation... He gives them a way to correct the condemnation...

### **Correction**

He gives them a three-fold remedy to reverse the problem...this is truly grace from the Savior!... three things to get you back on track... *you’ve got good things going on... good things in you... but things are just in the wrong place...I’m there but not center...*

## Read verse 5a

**1. Remember**—*stop what ever you are doing and remember... don't keep going in the same direction... Go back... go way back... go back to when you came to Me... Recall what you WERE before I entered your life... remember who delivered you from the depths of your sin...*

*Remember the miracle of the cross in your life... remember!...remember the blood that I shed for YOU!...we get so wrapped up in our stuff that we seldom remember who we were before Christ and who we are now because of Christ... **remember from where you have fallen...** and...*

**2. Repent**—Metanoia... change your mind about how you are doing your Christian life...**repentance implies sorrow concerning an offence...**the offense is against Jesus!...you've offended Him!

Look at everything that has distracted you from your love of Jesus and repent... change your mind...change your affection... change your focus... change your priorities...

**3. Do the deeds you did at first**—what's that mean?...Related to the first one... **remember**.... I think this is telling us to look back to those days when Jesus was sweet and precious... the time you first realized what He has done for you... it's remembering... number 1...but what were the things you did then?

We all have different stories about this... but we all have this... think back to the time when all that mattered was Jesus... before you got busy in church stuff... before you got busy being a good Christian... as one said "*before you knew the difference between Habakkuk and Genesis...*

What did you **do** then?... it's like marriage... that's where we began... what were the things you did that first year you were married...the things that overshadowed all your actions was your crazy love and desire for your spouse...

After ten, twenty , thirty years of marriage... what is the song you sing?... *You Don't Bring Me Flowers Anymore?*...**Do the deeds you did at first**... after church...all you husbands need to go out and buy flowers for your wives...sorry!

This is serious!... Jesus is not saying... *Hey Ephesus church... I've noticed a few things so here's some suggestions... You guys are great, but you might want to improve on a few things*...listen to what He says:

## Read verse 5b

This is a tough thing...I think what Jesus is saying here is that if you don't repent... *if you don't change your direction...your affection...renew your love... I will "un-church" your church... I will remove the standing of your church... you will no longer be the light in the wicked city of Ephesus...*

As I said earlier... visit Ephesus today and all you will see are piles of rocks...where you should see a church.

Verse 6 Jesus gives them another commendation

**Read verse 6**

We will talk about that next week as we look at the church in Smyrna... but listen up!

**Read verse 7**

He says this at the end of each of the seven letters... what we want to know is *who is an "overcomer"*?

1<sup>st</sup> John 5:4-5

**For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world; and this is the overcoming that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

Remember that tree of life in Genesis 2?