

"A Call to Return to Our First Love"

Revelation 2:1-7

Intro:

The Book of Revelation is often seen as a mysterious, apocalyptic work, but it begins with something profoundly personal. Before any prophecies or apocalyptic visions, Christ speaks to the seven churches in Asia Minor, delivering messages that are not only for them but for all churches throughout time. In Revelation 2:1-7, we find the letter to the church in Ephesus. It's a message for the church that is both encouraging and convicting—a call to return to what truly matters.

1. The Commendation: A Church of Works and Endurance (v. 2-3)

Christ begins by affirming the Ephesian church for its strengths:

- **"I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance."**
- The Ephesian believers were not idle. They were engaged in the work of the kingdom, striving to live out the gospel in a world that was often hostile to the message of Christ. They endured hardship and persecution, and in this, they demonstrated great resilience.

Cross-reference:

- **1 Corinthians 15:58** – *"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."*
- **Galatians 6:9** – *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."*
- **"You have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false."**

The church in Ephesus was discerning. They did not allow false teachings to infiltrate their midst. They tested the spirits, held fast to the truth, and rejected error. This was a church committed to doctrinal purity and spiritual vigilance.

Cross-reference:

- **1 John 4:1** – *"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."*
- **Acts 20:29-31** – *"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."*
- **"You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary."**
- Their persistence in the face of trials and their steadfastness in serving Christ were to be commended. Ephesus was a church that had been faithful in many ways.
- **Cross-reference:**
- **Romans 5:3-4** – *"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."*
- **2 Thessalonians 1:4-5** – *"Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring."*

Yet, despite all these positive qualities, Christ has something more to say.

2. The Reproof: A Lost Love (v. 4-5)

After the commendation, Christ turns to the heart of the matter: the Ephesian church had lost something—**their first love**.

- **"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first."**
- Jesus acknowledges the hard work, the perseverance, the doctrinal purity, but He also points out a critical flaw: the Ephesian church had lost their passion for Him. Their love for Christ, the very foundation of their faith, had grown cold. Perhaps the zeal that once characterized their relationship with Jesus had been replaced

by routine, duty, or intellectual assent. They were doing all the right things, but their hearts were no longer burning with the love they once had for Jesus.

Cross-reference:

- **Matthew 22:37-38** – *"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.'"*
- **Luke 10:27** – *"He answered: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself.'"*
- **"Consider how far you have fallen!"** Jesus calls them to reflect on their condition. This isn't just a small drift; it's a **falling away**. What had once been vibrant and filled with devotion had become mechanical. There was a distance between the Ephesians and their Savior. They needed to remember the joy and intimacy of their first love.

Cross-reference:

- **Jeremiah 2:2** – *"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 wilderness, through a land not sown.'"*
- **Hosea 2:7** – *"She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.'"*
- **"Repent and do the things you did at first."**

Repentance is required. They must turn back to Christ, return to the heart of their relationship with Him. It's not about doing more things for God but about returning to the deep, passionate love that motivated their initial obedience. The answer is not merely to work harder but to **rekindle** that love and devotion for Jesus.

Cross-reference:

- **Luke 15:18-19** – *"I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you."*

- **Acts 3:19** – *"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."*

3. The Warning: A Serious Consequence (v. 5)

Jesus gives a stern warning to the Ephesian church:

- **"If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."**
- The lampstand represents the church. To remove it means that the church's witness will be taken away. Their influence, their light in the world, will be extinguished. This is a serious consequence. Without a love for Christ at the center, the church risks losing its ability to fulfill its mission in the world.

Illustration: Marriage can't work if you are only playing the part.

Cross-reference:

- **Matthew 5:14-16** – *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house."*
- **John 15:6** – *"If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."*

Jesus is reminding us that love for Him is not optional—it is essential. A church or believer can continue with good works, sound doctrine, and outward appearances, but if love for Christ is not central, all of that is meaningless. It is Christ Himself who must be the center of all that we do.

4. The Encouragement: The Promise to the Overcomer (v. 7)

Finally, Jesus offers a beautiful promise to those who overcome:

- **"To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."** To those who return to their first love, who repent and rekindle their devotion, Jesus promises eternal life with Him in

paradise. The **tree of life** symbolizes eternal life and fellowship with God. It is a promise that the ultimate reward for the believer is to be in the presence of God, restored to the intimate communion with Him that was lost in Eden.

Cross-reference:

- **Genesis 2:9** – *"The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."*
- **Revelation 22:14** – *"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city."*

Conclusion: A Call to Rekindle Our First Love

As we reflect on this message to the church in Ephesus, we must ask ourselves: **Has our love for Christ grown cold?** Do we still have the passion and fervor that once characterized our relationship with Him, or have we become distracted by the busyness of life and the demands of duty?

Jesus is calling us to remember our first love—to return to the joy, the awe, and the wonder of knowing Him. It is not enough to just work for God; we must **