

REVELATION: HELP FOR LIVING, HOPE FOR LEAVING

Sermon no. 2

THE CHURCH WHO LOST ITS WAY

Revelation 2:1-7

This "series within the series" is about Letters to Seven Churches of John's time, which hold lessons for the churches of our time. After receiving a foundational revelation about Christ Himself in chapter 1, the Lord Jesus now mandates John to send these messages to the churches mentioned in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. While talking about future events is exciting, the Lord is telling us to look at what's presently happening inside us. Jesus wants us to do an Executive Check Up for the church. And you'll find out: as the members go, the church goes.

The first church is probably mentioned intentionally – the famous Ephesian church. The very same church founded over 40 years earlier by Paul, pastored by Timothy, and John himself. The same church for which Paul wrote "the epistle to the Ephesians." This is a well-commended church, particularly for its soundness of doctrine and diligence in ministry. Yet they had one shortcoming that in Christ's righteous view negated everything they were doing "right". Look at how Christ sees it:

1. The CREDIBILITY of Christ (vv.1-3, 6)

- He holds every messenger (stars) in his hand and walks among the churches (lampstands, Rev. 1:20)
 - He knows everything that can be known about any church – I know your deeds:
 - A church with diligent service:
"... your hard work and perseverance... endured hardships for my Name and have not grown weary"
 - A church with doctrinal soundness:
"you cannot tolerate wicked men, you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false"
- "You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." (v. 6)*

2. The CONDEMNATION of Christ (v.4)

- *"I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love"*
- This is literally: *"Your first love you have left."* They didn't lose it – they left it.
- Diligent service without love for God or people destroys by **deception** – people will think that Christianity is a performance rather than a relationship then burn themselves out trying to please a God whose "demands" they cannot meet.
- Doctrinal soundness without love for God or people destroys by **division** – people in church will fight among themselves, and people outside will never join, seeing it as a bunch of "holier-than-thou" people.

The Pharisees are the greatest example of doctrinal vigilance from a loveless heart. And Jesus reserved the harshest words he ever said for them.

3. The COUNSEL of Christ (vv. 5-7)

• **The Road to Recovery:**

1) **Remember** how you started.

2) **Repent** of what you are doing – programs without passion, and truth without love. Diligence and doctrinal purity matter to God, but they matter only as expressions of love for God. When there is no more love, they lose their value.

3) **Repeat** what you did before: Prayer? Personal worship time? Talking about God? Realize that "why" matters more than "what."

• **The Result of Repentance:**

◦ The church retains God's blessings on its ministry and existence (v. 5).

◦ We prove our salvation by our obedience, and reap its eternal rewards (v. 7).

Final Thoughts:

Somewhere along its spiritual journey, the Ephesian church lost its way. Without a sincere love for God, we can also start so well, and end so wrong.

The church that loses its love will soon lose its light, no matter how doctrinally sound it may be. The glorious city of Ephesus is today a heap of stones and no light is shining there.

God wants the worship from our hearts, before the works of our hands. Remember Ephesus, and keep the flame burning.