

INTRODUCTION

In Revelation, chapter two we find 2 Ephesians, because the apostle Paul wrote a letter around 63 A.D. to the church at Ephesus where he encouraged them that they might abound in love. About 30 years later the apostle John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote another letter to the same church at Ephesus pointing out a problem that occurred in the preceding three decades: The fact that they had lost the flame and excitement for their “first love.”

We are now in the second of three main sections in the book of the Revelation. Revelation 1:19 gives us the outline for the book. Jesus says to John, “Write the things that you have just seen.” That was the vision of John face-to-face with the majestic, glorified Christ whose face is like shining laser lights and whose voice is like mighty waters thundering waters.

Number two he said, “Write the things which are.” These seven churches we’re going to study for the next seven weeks teach us about all churches of all ages. When we talk about churches, we are also talking about individual Christians. There are some of you here tonight who are like the believers in Ephesus he is writing about. There are some of you who are like the believers in Smyrna in Pergamum in Laodicea in Sardis. So look for yourself in each one of these churches. That’s the present tense the things that are right now. That was true in 90 A.D. when John wrote this and it is true in 1993. This is the present tense we are going to be studying. Then beginning in chapter 4, verse 1 then we begin to look at the future. He said, “Write the things which shall be hereafter.” Someone asked me last night and they were asking me seriously They said, “Do you really think you are going to finish studying the book of Revelation before all these things really start happening. Who knows? Jesus Christ could come back at any moment. We’re to be faithful until then. Let’s read and see what John wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the church at Ephesus, the second epistle to the Ephesians.

Chapter 2:1: “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write.” The word angel can and does most often mean “a ministering spirit” but the word itself simply means “messenger” and in this context I believe he is writing to the human messenger—you might say the pastor, the bishop, the elder, the overseer over each church. So he writes this letter to the pastor of the church—the human messenger—who is to share it with the congregation. Who is the letter from? It’s not from John it’s from Jesus. Jesus says in verse 1, “These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.” That’s Jesus. We were introduced to him in the last chapter. The seven stars do you remember? Those represent seven angels the seven pastors of these churches. The seven golden lampstands the King James Bible says, “candlesticks” but candles were not even invented for hundreds of years later. They didn’t have wax candles with wicks in them. These were the middle Eastern type of lamps, golden lamps full of with a piece of cloth in it used as a wick, so they were called “lampstands” that’s what it is talking about.

In verse 2 Jesus says, “I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.” Now he says “all of that is wonderful and I’m proud of you for that.”

“Yet I hold this against you.” Jesus says “You have forsaken your “first love.” That’s the whole point of this message. What happens when you lose the glow for that “first love?” Jesus said, “Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you do have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” Jesus says. He didn’t say he hated the Nicolaitans by the way did you see that? He hates the *practices* of the Nicolaitans. Then he ends this letter the way all seven of them end and this is an admonition to us today and I say this to you everyone here “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” That means “Listen up! If you’ll do more than just sit there and let this sound come in your ears instead if you’ll pay attention if you’ll really put on your spiritual ears run up your spiritual antenna you’ll learn something!” This is what Jesus says “To him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.”

In almost every case in the letters Jesus sends to these seven churches, he says something good about the church and then points out something that’s wrong with the church. There’s no such thing as a “perfect church.” In each one of these seven letters, he generally talks about the good things first and then says, “But there are some problems and let’s talk about the problems” but he doesn’t say, “That’s the problem.” He says, “This is what you ought to do as a result of it.” And so the message tonight and the letter he writes to the church at Ephesus naturally falls into three sections.

I. PRAISE FOR THE CHURCH

First, consider the praise for the church, because he says some good things about it. This was the church located in Ephesus. What church was it? First Baptist Church Ephesus? First Methodist Church Ephesus? Assembly of God in Ephesus? Which church was it in Ephesus? I hope you know that is something that has just taken place in the last few hundred years. As God intended it and as it was in the beginning, there was a body of Christian believers in the city of Ephesus. They didn’t all necessarily meet together in the same place but every believer in the city was considered the church in Ephesus. They didn’t have a building; they didn’t have a beautiful building with pianos and organs and carpets and television cameras. They met in homes, house to house, and then they would meet in open areas for the large gatherings. It was a family kind of atmosphere. That’s the way the churches were back then.

The city of Ephesus was one of the most important cities of the ancient world. I have studied this a great deal and I can easily say the three greatest cities of the Roman Empire were Rome, Antioch and Ephesus. It’s like New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles are the three major metropolitan areas in America. Ephesus had a problem. It was the center of a fertility type of pagan religion. It was a religion that basically worshiped sexual reproduction. Ancient man tended to worship that which they did not understand and they didn’t understand human reproduction and so they worshiped it and made a religion out of it. That’s why they prayed to Artemis (Diana), to bless their females so they would be reproductive and fruitful. They prayed to Diana that their flocks their animals would be productive and produce many offspring and they prayed to Diana that their fields their crops would be productive. They really felt like they had to give offerings and appease this god in order for their females, their flocks, and their fields to be fruitful. That was part of this religion.

Ephesus was home to one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. There was the great Pharos (lighthouse) of Alexandria, Egypt. In Cairo, Egypt, there were the pyramids. There was the 40-foot high statue of Zeus in Olympia, Greece made of ivory and gold. In Babylon, modern day Baghdad, Iraq, there were the hanging gardens—which, by the way—before Operation Desert Storm, Saddam Hussein was rebuilding because he believes he is Nebuchadnezzar reincarnated. The tomb of King Mausolus in Halicarnassus was another ancient wonder. The statue of Colossus that stands in the opening of the harbor at Rhodes and the statue of Zeus on Mt. Olympus was the other one. But the seventh—and some say the greatest—of the seven wonders of the ancient world was the temple to Artemis set across the river from the city of Ephesus. It was a massive building 425 feet long and 275 feet wide with 360 columns rising 60 feet high. It was an enormous place and there were all kinds of places for people to gather inside. It was also very mysterious, with inner sanctums and things like that. Kings from around the world donated each one of those 360 columns. Each one of those columns was ornately carved up to the height of a man and you could spend many days walking around the Temple just looking at the artwork engraved in those columns.

1. Diligence

These Christians in Ephesus lived in that kind of a setting. Yet they were a church Jesus wrote to and said, “I want to say some good things about your church. There are some things I am proud of and I want to praise you for this!” He mentions at least three things. Number one He says, “I’m proud of you because of your diligence...I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance.” He says, “The one thing I can say for you is that you are busy serving the Lord.” I’ll tell you I think Ephesians were kind of like Baptists, because they had so many things going on all the time. I think if you had gone to a worship service there, one Lord’s Day in Ephesus after the sermon somebody would have stood up and began to make announcements and they were talking about the Youth Meeting that was going to be happening after church and they would talk about the Women’s Prayer Group that would be meeting the next night the Men’s Prayer Group that would be meeting on Tuesday night they were talking about their “Outdoor Street Services” they were going to be having on Wednesday night at the steps of the Temple of Artemis. So many things were going on. That’s what this word means. He says, “I praise you. You are working hard and you are not giving up. You are hanging in there. You are keeping on keeping on”

You’ve heard the little poem before that says Mary had a little lamb / It would have been a sheep / But became a Southern Baptist / And died from lack of sleep.” Can you relate to that? If there’s one thing we are, it’s busy. We meet each other coming to meetings and going to meetings. A sort of the motto and philosophy of a lot of Baptists is, “Meet it, eat it and beat it.” That’s about what we do. And we stay busy all the time. He says “That’s good! That’s good! I think a church ought to be active.” But he says, “There’s a danger about being active if you lost your ‘first love’ if you’re doing it in the flesh.”

2. Doctrine

Number two he says, “I’m proud of you because of your doctrine.” Look at the last part of verse 2. He says, “I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to

be apostles but are not, and have found them false.” In other words he says “You don’t let just anybody come in your church and preach. You are very careful about what is taught.” It was much more important back in those days to maintain correct doctrine because they did not have the written completed New Testament as we have. You don’t know how blessed we are to be able to come here Sunday after Sunday and for me to say, “Let’s open the gospel according to Mark and let’s see what Jesus said and let’s see what Jesus did.” We can open the gospel according to John or we can open Paul’s letter to the Romans and we can read it and it’s God’s word inspired we have in our hands. They didn’t have that. Some were going around preaching and Jesus said, “I’m proud that you just don’t swallow every guy that comes speaking at your church. You test the spirits.” I don’t have to tell you there is a lot of heresy still going on out there today. You need to be careful what you hear and you need to make sure the doctrine you hear coincides with the perfect inspired word of God.

3. Discipline

Number three. He says, “I’m proud of you because of your discipline.” The word *discipline* in this sense means you do not tolerate certain kinds of people in the church. Church discipline is not practiced much anymore but it is the solemn responsibility of a church if someone in that church is continually rebellious and continually causing problems and disobeying God said it is the solemn scriptural responsibility of that church to exercise discipline, which means to take action against that person—in love—with the hope they can be restored. He says, “This is something I am praising you about. You have this in your favor. You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans.” Somebody told me one time “I thought that was vanilla, strawberry and chocolate ice cream.” The word *Nicolaitans* tells us what these people were doing. The word *laitans* or *laity* means people. The word *nico* means *to chop* or *to divide*. Jesus is saying, “There are certain people in your church that have been doing that they have been trying to divide people up into groups.” They have been divisive they have been trying to cause cliques get little groups over here and he says, “You hate that! You don’t tolerate that.” Jesus said, “I hate that practice also.” And he says, “I am proud of you for exercising discipline in that case.”

How many of you have ever been in a church that exercised discipline and removed somebody from the fellowship? That is a dangerous practice and it is a sad day when a church has to do it but there are times when a church does just that. Jesus gave the standards and the steps to take in Matthew 18. “You go to that person one on one. If they won’t receive you they won’t hear you then you take one or two witnesses with you. Then if they still won’t hear you then, you bring it before the church. Then the church should treat that person as a publican or as a sinner.” Does that mean we put a restraining order against them and say they can’t come to our church anymore? No it just means you remove them from membership in your church and then you treat them like a lost person. How do we treat lost people? We love them we pray for them we try to bring them into the church and we try to help them any way we can and lead them to Christ. The purpose of discipline is never to be punitive it is always to be restorative. We want to restore people to the fellowship. Jesus said, “I’m proud of you because you are diligent. I’m proud of you because your doctrine is pure and I’m proud of you because you are practicing discipline against people who are divisive in your church.”

II. PROBLEM IN THE CHURCH

Number two. He then jumps to the problem in the church. He says, "I hold this against you. You have forsaken (left) your 'first love.'" Let's talk just a little bit about "first love." I want you teenagers to listen because some of you are experiencing exactly that—your "first love." Girls, isn't it exciting when all of a sudden a guy shows a little interest in you? He sends you this little note that says something like this.

*I like you. Do you like me?
Even if you don't like me, I'll still like you.
Johnny*

Or you're a guy and you grow up just hating girls. But then you start looking around and they start looking a little bit better. Suddenly, they start changing and your attitude is, "When I stop hating girls, she's going to be one of the first ones I stop hating." And you fall in love! Actually that's a misnomer. You don't fall in love you fall in holes. And you don't fall out of love either you fall out of trees. So anybody who talks about falling in love or falling out of love doesn't understand love. Love is a decision.

The different kinds of love are listed in the New Testament. There is *eros*, which is romantic love. Everybody in this room can relate to what I am talking about. There is something special about that "first love." I want to give you some characteristics of a "first love" and I want you to compare it to your love for Jesus, because that's what this is talking about here. It's not talking about romantic love, but there are some comparisons we can make.

1. "First love" is exclusive

Number one "first love" is exclusive. If you really are in love, you love that person exclusively, you want to be true to them. The spiritual application is that these folks at Ephesus used to really be in love with Jesus! They had a fiery, passionate, flaming love for Jesus and it was an exclusive love. But they lost that feeling. One of the problems we have is sometimes when you're in middle school and high school and even college you go with somebody for a while you get tired of them you break up with them and you go with somebody else you get tired of them you break up with them you go with somebody else you get tired of them you break up with them and just somewhere in the process you just kind of get married and it gets you into this mindset and into this habit and into this cycle so you get tired of this person divorce them and get somebody else. No real love is always exclusive. "I love you and nobody else." That's one definition and one characteristic of "first love."

2. "First love" is exciting

Number two "first love" is always exciting! I'm looking into the faces of some of you who have been married 40 or 50 years and I know you still feel that excitement but can you remember how

that first love was? How many of you can remember that first date? That first date is so exciting there is just something special about that first love that makes it exciting. There is nothing dull about it. Not only is it exciting when you have a first love romantically listen when you are in love with Jesus, it's the most exciting thing on earth! There are some people today who are saying, “I don't want to be a Christian because I want to have fun. I want to live an exciting life!” When you fall in love with Jesus Christ, you'll have the most exciting life of anybody on this planet. There are a lot of people out there who are looking for a thrill. You teenagers know there a lot of your friends who are looking for excitement on Friday and Saturday nights and some kind of a buzz in a six pack of embalming fluid or something they smoke or something they pop but there's always the pain of the hangover and the morning after. The good news about Jesus Christ is you can live for Jesus and there's excitement and there's no hangover! There's an excitement that continues. First love is exciting and it's exclusive.

3. “First love” is expectant

It's also always expectant, because with first love you are always looking toward the future. You're always thinking about, “What's going to happen next?” “Where can we go?” “What can we talk about?” Can you remember, guys? I know you girls don't do this but do you remember, guys when you had that first love and you were trying to call her up for a date. You know you stood in front of the mirror and practiced it. “Hello this is David. Woul...wou...would you like to go to the dance with me on Friday night?” You are so excited and so expectant about what's going to happen. The good news is once you are a Christian and you are in love with Jesus and he's your first love, you are always looking forward to what's going to be happening next. The Bible has a word for that. It is called h-o-p-e. The good news is that for a Christian tomorrow is always better than today and the next day is even better, because the Bible says, “This is the day the Lord has made. I'll rejoice and be glad in it.” The next day we live we are closer to Jesus than we are this day and that first love always has the element of looking forward expectantly. It's exclusive! It's exciting! It's expectant!

4. “First love” is expensive

I just have to throw this one in. First love is always expensive! When you are really in love, you go down there to that jewelry store, guys, and you look at that little ring that costs \$19.95 and it looks like it came out of a box of Crackerjacks then you look over there and you say, “Nah! I'm not going to spend that small amount of money. I'm going to go over here and I'm going to buy her a nice ring.” When you are really truly in love especially that first love it'll cost you? The same is true with Jesus Christ. When you are in love with him, it'll cost you. I'm not talking just financially, although that's true. It will cost you your time; it will cost you your allegiance; it will cost you your energy.

Have you lost that excitement, that zeal and that flame for that first love you had for Jesus? I know you love your church but that's not what I'm asking. I know you love coming and worshiping, that's not what I'm asking. I know you love being saved but that's not what I am asking you. I'm asking you *do you love Jesus?*

When Jesus was at the Sea of Galilee after his resurrection and Simon Peter came in, Jesus said, “Peter, do you love me more than these?” What do you think he meant by “these”? Some people say he meant, “Do you love me more than these guys love me?” Because a little bit before you know the night before Jesus was crucified Jesus said, “One of you is going to betray me. One of you is going to deny me and all of you are going to leave me.” And Simon Peter said, “Not me! These others may leave you, Jesus but I will NEVER leave you!” “I love you, Lord.” Then, Jesus after Peter denied him three times said, “Hey, Peter, do you really love me more than these?” That’s one interpretation. I think when Jesus said, “Simon Peter, do you love me more than these, he meant the boats, nets and fish, Peter’s old way of living, his secure way of living. “Peter you know you could go back and make a good living fishing but I have other things for you. The big question is, do you love me more than these?” Peter says, “Lord you know all things I love you!” Of course, you know the little interaction there. Jesus said, “Do you *agape* me?” and Simon Peter said, “Lord, you know I *phileo* you.” *Agape* is 100 percent love; *phileo*, brotherly love, is about 50 percent love. Jesus said, “Peter, do you 100 percent love me?” Peter said, “Lord, you know I 50 percent love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” “Peter, do you love me more than these? 100 percent love?” “Lord, you know I 50 percent love you *phileo*.” “Feed my sheep.” Then Jesus asked him “Wait a minute, Peter do you even 50 percent love me?” He said, “Do you even *phileo* me?” Peter said, “Lord, you know all things. You know I love you.” “FEED MY SHEEP!”

Jesus didn’t say, “Peter, do you love sheep?” He didn’t even say, “Peter, do you love feeding sheep?” He said, “Do you love me?” If you condense Christianity down to its lowest common denominator—the simplest statement—Christianity is simply loving Jesus with all your heart, your soul and your mind. You have a passionate, all-consuming love for Jesus like a first love. Do you remember when you were excited about Jesus? You loved to witness for him. You loved to serve him. You were in love with Jesus but you’ve lost the zeal of first love.

The old preacher showed up at church one cold Sunday morning and the church had a gas furnace but an electric blower. The preacher intentionally turned off the gas but he turned on the electric blower so it was blowing cold air. The people came to church that Sunday and it was real cold but they could all hear the blowers blowing and the preacher preached a whole sermon entitled, “The Blower’s Still Blowing, But The Fire’s Gone Out!” Could it be that’s true of your life? The blower’s still blowing and you’re still coming to church you’re so diligent you’re going through the motions you show up for Sunday School you show up on Sunday nights you show up on Wednesday nights you work with your Sunday School Class you work with your choir you’re still going through the motions the blower’s still blowing but there is no passionate, all-consuming love for Jesus. You’ve lost your first love.

III. PRESCRIPTION FOR THE CHURCH

1. Remember!

There’s something you can do about it. That’s the prescription he gives for the church. In 5:1 he says, “Remember.” That’s the first thing you have to do if you’re going to regain that fervent, passionate love for Jesus just remember. Can you remember a time in your life when you were

fired up in your love for Jesus? Go back in your mind's eye and remember how it used to be and you'll say, "I want it to be like that again."

I had the joy about 5 years ago of going back to the First Baptist Church of Florala, Alabama where I was saved and preaching at Homecoming. What a great joy that was. My family had moved and I had no reason to go back so I hadn't been back in years. I went to that church and before I preached that Sunday morning, I went to the back pew over on the side and I sat down about halfway down the pew and as best I could tell, I sat back down in the seat I was sitting in as a 9-year-old child when I heard my pastor talk about the crucifixion of Jesus and how I literally sat on the edge of my seat and listened to that and for the first time understood Jesus died for me. During the invitation I walked by my Mom and Dad and came down to the front. That's what I did that Sunday morning. Nobody was in that sanctuary. I was going to be preaching in about an hour. I walked down that aisle again and I sat down there on the front pew. I just remembered where I was and what was happening when I first was saved. Why don't you do that right now? Just go back in your mind's eye where you were when it was when you were saved. Just remember the love that you had in your heart there for Jesus. That's what Jesus says to do: Just remember!

2. Repent!

The second thing he says to do is repent. Repentance is not just for non-Christians. It means to change direction. He says, "You're still faithful in church. You're still being diligent! Your doctrine is straight." Your doctrine can be as straight as a gun barrel and just as empty and cold as a gun barrel too. Jesus says, "But you're going in the wrong direction. You're sliding away in your love for me. You're getting colder, and colder, and colder." Repent means you turn around and say, "Lord, I want to get back close to the fire again. I want to have a burning, consuming, passionate love for you!"

3. Repeat!

The final thing he says there and this is, "This is how you can regain that love. Do the things you did at first." Isn't that simple? What does that mean? Repeat. What were basic things were you were doing when you first fell in love with Jesus? Do you remember how you were excited about sharing the gospel with other people? Go back and start doing it again. I can honestly remember that when I became a Christian even though I was only in the third grade there was a young guy in my class his name was Greg Cox. Greg went to Sunday School with me he was in my class at school with me but he wasn't a Christian. I can remember after I was saved I talked to Greg in Sunday School and said, "Greg, listen. I got saved and I want you to be saved." I can remember standing beside Greg in the church and the invitation would be given and I'd say to him, "Listen don't you want to go to Jesus?. Don't you want to be saved?" That's just a simple thing I was doing when I was 9 years old but that's a good thing for me to repeat and keep on doing it. It's a good thing for all of us to repeat. Do you remember how you wanted to study the word? You had a hunger for it. How you wanted to pray? Just go back and repeat.

Jesus said, "Listen. You have a problem! Your problem is you have left that first love. Go back and get it. Remember how it was. Repent and begin to repeat, because if you don't do it I'm

going to come and I'm going to remove your lampstand." What does that mean? That you're going to lose your salvation? No. Did he say to this church, "I'm going to remove you from Ephesus?" No. He says, "I'm going to take your lampstand and I'm just going to remove it." What that means is your influence and your blessing and your impact is going to be removed. I have seen it happen and so have you. Christians who at one time were so fired up for Jesus, faithfully serving but they drifted away from God. They didn't lose their salvation but they lost their effectiveness and they lost their blessing and it was as if God took that Christian and set him up on a shelf and said, "I can't use you anymore!" For years and years some Christians have been up on a shelf, ineffective because God removed them from the lampstand. What do you do with a burned-out light bulb? You remove it and throw it away. Jesus said, "You'd better remember! You'd better repent! You'd better repeat! Or I'm going to remove you from your effectiveness." It's a dangerous thing. What a sad, tragic thing it is to see a Christian who has been set aside.

But there is good news. He says if you'll overcome the tendency to backslide and slip away and lose your first love, "I'm going to give you a right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God." Do you remember the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden? It was not the tree of knowledge of good and evil it was the tree of life. He said, "Come on you can eat from that. You can eat all you want to of it." That was the good tree. But do you remember what happened when sin entered the human race? God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden and the Bible says he posted two military cherubim there with flaming swords to guard the way to the tree of life. Ever since Genesis, chapter 3, man has been exiled and banned from the tree of life. But we're going to see it. It's going to be glorious when we get to chapters 20 and 21 of Revelation. We're going to see that in heaven there is going to be the tree of life and Jesus is going to say, "Come on! Welcome back to the tree of life." So recapture that fervent love for Jesus. You see if you do that, you'll be eating from the tree of life!

OUTLINE

This begins the second section of the book describing the seven churches.

I. PRAISE FOR THE CHURCH (v. 2-3)

1. Diligence
2. Doctrine
3. Discipline

II. PROBLEM IN THE CHURCH: They had left their first love (v. 4)

"First love" is:

1. Exclusive—no one else
2. Exciting—thinks about often
3. Expectant—expecting the best
4. Expensive—it will cost you!

III. PRESCRIPTION FOR THE CHURCH (vs. 5)

1. Remember!
2. Repent!
3. Repeat!



DISCLAIMER: These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes