

I. Introduction

A. Jesus, Senior Pastor

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." (Revelation 2:1)

1. *and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:19-23)*
 - a. Literal or symbolic?
 - b. Jesus holds the seven stars (spiritual, created beings) and He walks among the churches.
2. Reflection on Scripture and modern church culture and leadership
 - a. According to Scripture, Jesus is the literal head and senior/lead pastor of the universal and local church.
 - b. He is walking among the churches, including our church, giving actual instruction and direction. We are to follow Him.

B. Jake and Ephesus

II. The church in Ephesus

A. Approval

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. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not grown weary. (Revelation 2:2-3)

Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (Revelation 2:6)

1. Perseverance..
 - a. In works
 - b. In righteousness
 - c. In truth
2. Motivation: the name of Jesus and not growing weary
3. The Nicolaitans (verse 6)
 - a. Speculation (only here and in 2:15, Pergamum)
 - 1) Exaltation of clergy over laity
 - 2) Ungodly conduct/unfaithfulness in conduct
 - b. Not the focus of what Jesus is saying to the church here. Perhaps a simple encouragement to those struggling with His message that only they will understand.

B. Accusation

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. (Revelation 2:4-5)

1. Your first love

- a. Is this saying that their love for Jesus has grown cold?

Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord, "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown." (Jeremiah 2:2)

When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of My garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made My vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became Mine. (Ezekiel 16:8)

*This accusation is not primarily about a lack of love for Jesus.

- b. The context of this letter brings clarity

- 1) Verses 2-3 clearly communicate that these believers love Jesus.
- 2) They are not falling away or rethinking their loyalty to Jesus.

*This accusation is not about spiritual adultery (unlike Hosea)

2. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:9-14)

- a. Endurance and Gospel proclamation is in Jesus' view here.

- b. The persecution and deception of believers result in the love of many tapering off not because of heresy or false teachers or worldliness but a lack of desire for the Gospel permeating the whole world, every tribe and tongue.

3. This first love in view is not love or loyalty to Jesus, it is their lack of witness to the people of Ephesus (and consequentially the nations).

- a. They are unfaithful to the covenantal task, not the covenantal theology.

- b. They are not about their Father's business! They have prioritized knowledge and lost their zeal for obedience.

4. For us, when political culture begins to persecute the church (and it will happen), will our impulse be to bring them to the Lord, or will it be to get revenge/control?

- a. Acts 19:23-41 (see 28-29) When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel." (Acts 19:28-29)

- b. Cultural climate of opposition heading toward persecution in Ephesus

- c. Natural tendency to go undercover with the name and witness of Jesus - not loving those who are making life difficult

- d. *The message of Jesus to the church in Ephesus and to the church today here in America is that we are here right now to expand the Kingdom, not win arguments or make ourselves comfortable. This first love is a deep and abiding love for the people left to love into the family of God!
- 5. Consequence: removal of lampstand
 - a. The church's effective presence and witness will be removed in the world (local church)
 - b. The supernatural empowering and extension of God in his angel who is there to assist will be withdrawn. Note: not the Spirit of God in the believer, but the corporate supernatural protection and empowerment.
 - c. The church in Ephesus will cease to be a Kingdom of priests and a priestly witness there in Ephesus. Sound at all familiar?
- C. Assurance

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. (Revelation 2:7)

 - 1. The church in Ephesus is historically known for being a sending church. Epaphras, from Colossae, met Jesus there and took the Good News back home as a sent one. Jesus is calling them to reclaim this love!
 - 2. If you hear, if you persevere, if you move forward about your Father's business, then you will receive everything that your Father has prepared and promised.
 - a. Repent.
 - b. Do.

*God is not looking for a family who simply has right belief. He has called together a family who has right belief and loves to provide a pathway for others to learn to love and obey Jesus.