

Theme: The church must test all teaching and reject false teachers, but it must also remain fervent in love for God and people.

I. Intro - Jesus Speaks To His Church

- A. Much confusion and speculation about Revelation
- B. Also true of these 7 letters - 'angel', church ages, etc.
- C. They are real letters to real churches with real problems
- D. But all have the same basic format for the letter
- E. He also says hear what the Spirit says to the **churches**
- F. See what it meant to them, and then how it applies to us

II. Jesus Speaks To His Church In Ephesus

A. The church in Ephesus

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: Revelation 2:1

- 1. Ephesus is the closest city to Patmos (map)
- 2. The most important city in province of Asia
 - a. 4th largest city in the world at the time - 250,000
 - b. Economic center, Roman proconsul of Asia resides
 - c. Key religious place - temple keeper of Artemis
 - d. Temple of Artemis - 7 wonders of ancient world
- 3. Also a large, important church in NT and after

B. Jesus the Sovereign God speaks to His Church

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: ²I know . Revelation 2:1–2

- 1. Him who holds & walks - total Sovereignty
 - a. Revelation 1:12-20 - awesome appearance of Jesus
 - b. Holds the stars/angels in His hands - sovereign
 - c. Walks among the lampstand/churches - close to them & Sovereign over them
- 2. These are the words - the speech of the King
 - a. Same Greek phrase often used in OT for “Thus says the Lord”
 - b. Same phrase used by Cyrus to send exiles home
 - c. Speech of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords
 - d. Already hinting that Jesus is Lord - not Caesar!
- 3. “I know”
 - a. I know - begins message to each of the 7 churches
 - b. Only occurs 3 times in the rest of Revelation!
 - c. The Sovereign One sees and knows all
 - d. This is a word of comfort - and also of warning
 - e. What follows is the unerring assessment of Jesus - The Risen, Exalted, Sovereign, All Knowing Lord of All!

C. The messages spoken to these churches is not a human message, but the unerring message of God to His people - and He still speaks them to us today

III. Jesus' Praise For the Church of Ephesus

A. A word of praise and commendation for works

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. ³ You have **persevered** and have **endured** hardships for my name, and have not **grown weary**. Revelation 2:2–3

1. Three work words - deeds, hard work, perseverance
2. Increasingly stress toil, labor, difficulty of their works
3. A wordplay in v3 to commend again
 - a. **Perseverance** in v3 same word as in v1
 - b. **Endured** in v3 same word as **tolerate** in v2
 - c. **Grown weary** in v3 verbal form of **hard work** in v1
 - d. Jesus commends the Ephesian church because they had worked hard, endured rather than tolerate evil, and had not grown weary from hard toil.
4. A church is commended by God when their faith produces works, when they endure in refusing to tolerate evil and do not grow weary from hard toil.

B. Specific work - testing and rejecting false teachers

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...** But you have this in your favor: **You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate**. Revelation 2:2,6

1. "I know" is not really repeated in the Greek - NIV making shorter sentences
2. Jesus is specifying particular work mainly in view

3. The Ephesians have tested those claiming to be apostles, and found them and their teachings false
4. Included the Nicolaitans - we will cover in future
5. This is always a major challenge for a church, but was especially so for the church in Ephesus

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Acts 20:29–31

 - a. Paul had warned them this would be a problem
 - b. His warning had come true - and they had followed his command!
 - c. The Ephesians had tested false teachers and refused them, and they had endured in this hard work
 - d. We know they continued in this into the 2nd century because Ignatius commends them for refusing to give a home to any heresy (Ignatius, Ephesians 6,9)
6. Every church and believer must do the hard work of testing the teachings and ideas that come to them, whether from inside our outside the church
7. For the Ephesians this probably involved teachings saying they could join in pagan sacrifices and worship rites - & refusing to do so cost them dearly
8. In every age false teachers will tell us we can conform to the spirit of our age, but we must do the hard work of discerning truth and error, and be willing to endure even when we suffer for refusing to compromise

IV. Jesus' Rebuke To the Church In Ephesus

A. Jesus' rebuke - **you have forsaken** your first love

Yet I hold this against you: **You have forsaken your first love**. Revelation 2:4

1. After great praise - BUT I have this against you
2. You have forsaken/abandoned your first love
 - a. Forsaken is strong word - used for divorce!
 - b. This is a very strong rebuke from Jesus

B. Jesus' rebuke - you have forsaken **your first love**

1. Your first love - for me
 - a. Our love for Christ is the foundation of all other loves
 - b. It is possible to be zealous and hot for the truth of God while growing lax and lukewarm in our love for God Himself.
 - c. Passion for God's truth can never replace passion for God Himself
2. Your first love - for brothers and sisters
 - a. Our love for God and His truth must always produce love for brothers and sisters in Christ
 - b. It often happens that those most zealous for doctrinal purity grow cold in their love for brothers and sisters in Christ
3. Your first love - for the lost
 - a. Our love for God and His truth must always produce love for those separated from God and trapped in error and sin

- b. It is possible to be so vigilant to protect ourselves from the errors of the world that we isolate ourselves and lose our love for those who are lost, hurting, and trapped by Satan and his lies

4. We must be wary of being zealous & hot for the truth of God while growing lax & lukewarm in our love for God and the people around us.
5. The same Jesus Who said "If you love me you will keep my commands" also said "A new command I give you - love one another... all men will know you are my disciples if you love one another."

C. The way back to our first love

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... He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. Revelation 2:5,7

1. Step 1 - **remember from where you have fallen**
 - a. The way forward begins by looking back and remembering our first love
 - b. This is true in all forms of love - we must look back and remember the good to correct what has gone wrong
 - c. We often look back and remember past offense and problems, but to return to first love we must look back and remember the good
2. Step 2 - **repent**
 - a. When our love has grown cold, we must repent - purposefully choose to change our way of thinking and the corresponding actions
 - b. Without true repentance we will never return to first love

3. Step 3 - **do the deeds of love**
 - a. When we sense our love for God or another has grown cold, we often want the feeling to return before we do the deeds of love - but this is backwards!
 - b. The way back to a passionate love is found in doing the deeds of love, The feelings do not produce and sustain the practices; the practices feed and sustain the feelings.
4. Step 4 - look to the future
 - a. At the end of v5 Jesus reminds them of the consequence of not repenting - they will cease to be a real church
 - b. This is about a church, not individual losing salvation
 - c. There are real consequences when we do not restore real love and passion for God and others, and no amount of past glory can make up for that
 - d. In v7, Jesus reminds them of the great reward that awaits His people - full restoration to paradise!

V. Applying the Word

- A. A word of commendation to BRCC
 1. BRCC has long labored for doctrinal clarity & purity
 2. BRCC has long shown love for God and people
 3. Love for God & truth has prompted deeds of love
- B. Has my love for God or people grown cold?
 1. This is an ever present danger for every one of us
 2. Do I love God passionately - or just go through the motions?

3. Do I love people as I ought - spouse, fellow believers, the lost?
4. If love has grown cold - remember, repent, do the deeds, look to the future!

Ephesus - The Loveless Church

Revelation 2:1-7

February 29, 2017

Prayer

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

Teaching keywords: sovereignty of God; false teaching and heresy; love; encouragement; Deity of Christ; endurance; confession and repentance

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13

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