

Prayer:

The book of Revelation is all about “The Revelation of Jesus Christ”. It’s all ABOUT Jesus and FROM Jesus. It’s all about things “**which must shortly take place**” (v. 1), “**for the time is near.**” (v. 3). These things are imminent; however, imminency does not mean immediacy.

The things presented are an interconnected package as one thing segues into another without disruption or interruption. The Church Age is presently at hand, but the Rapture will immediately be followed by the Tribulation Period and so forth. As this package unfolds, there will be no more “**prophetic pauses**” in the process. Thus, the entire package is imminent in the unfolding of it.

The first emphasis of the book is on the imminency of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. This is followed by a greeting of grace and peace from the Triune God of whom Christ is prominent in this context. He is presented as Lord, Savior, and coming King Who is eternal, sovereign, and Almighty.

Then John was shown a vision of the glorified Christ as being the sovereign Lord over the Church. He is presented in all His AWESOME glory with the format of being the eternal, sovereign One Who is JUDGE of the Church. It was so AWESOME that John fell at His feet as a dead man, but in keeping with grace and peace, Jesus raised Him up with the assurance that He, as the ever living One, now has the keys to Hades and Death.

Slide # 1

Revelation 1:19 – Inspired Outline

Revelation 1:19 (NKJV)

19 “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.”

- “**have seen**” – **Past (Vision of Christ) – Ch. 1**
- “**which are**” – Present (Church Age) – Ch. 2-3
- “**after this**” – Future (Post-Church Age) – Ch. 4-22
- - Scene in heaven – Ch. 4-5
- - Tribulation – Ch. 6-18
- - Second Coming – Ch. 19
- - Kingdom – Ch. 20
- - Eternal State – Ch. 21-22

Nestled in the vision of the eternal Christ is the MYSTERY of the seven stars in Christ's right hand, and the seven golden lampstands with Christ positioned right in their midst.

This mystery is revealed in 1:20, showing that these seven stars are literally the seven messengers to the seven churches, and the seven lampstands represent the seven churches. It is thought by many commentators in our circles that the seven messengers are the KEY leaders most responsible for giving God's message to the Churches.

At this point, the focus is all about the local churches. Christ is in the MIDST of these churches. This is the focal point of His activity, and at this point, the emphasis is on His evaluation of what He sees in the churches with all-seeing eyes. The KEY messengers of the Churches are particularly addressed in relation to each local church.

The last verse of chapter 1 (1:20) serves as a summary of what John saw in chapter one and a transition to chapters 2-3. In chapter 1 John saw Christ in the midst of the churches and holding the seven KEY messengers to the churches in His right hand. From this vantage point, Christ was perfectly positioned to evaluate and judge the churches, which is what chapters 2 and 3 are all about. Chapters 2 and 3 are an evaluation of these individual churches with application for all churches throughout the church age (cf. 2:7).

In view here are 7 historical churches in existence at the time John was writing. What is said to each of the churches individually has application to all churches. Note the consistent refrain in reference to each letter given to the seven churches: ***"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."***

Footnote: Some believe that these 7 churches represent a basic outline of church history that culminates in the Rapture (represented by the church at Philadelphia), which is then followed by the apostate church represented by Laodicea. However, there is nothing in the text itself to suggest that these seven churches are intended to represent 7 stages of church history.

What is in view in Revelation 2-3 is Christ's evaluation of 7 local churches. This is His role as Lord and Judge of the Church.

Slide # 2

“Before the Apocalypse presents any message of judgment on the unbelieving world, it first calls the church to repentance. Judgment must begin at the house of God.” – **Ed Hindson**

1 Peter 4:17 (NKJV)

17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

The seven letters/messages to the seven churches each form a literary unit with each being tied to the vision of Christ in chapter one.

Slide # 3

Each letter...

1. Begins with stating the addressee – the church in view.
2. Mentions and describes the speaker, Christ.
3. Notes Christ’s KNOWLEDGE of the church.
4. Has Christ’s evaluation of the church.
5. Has a commendation or condemnation from Christ.
6. Has the exhortation to listen.
7. Concludes with a promise for overcomers.

There are two churches with no words of condemnation. They are Smyrna, the suffering church; and Philadelphia, the evangelizing church. There are two churches with no words of commendation. They are Sardis, the dead church with a remnant, and Laodicea, the apostate church.

One thing that stands out is that there are no two churches that are exactly alike. Each church has its own characteristics, its own strengths and weaknesses.

If you leave a church and want to find one exactly like it, you will be disappointed. The seven local churches addressed in Revelation 2-3 are all very distinct.

First addressed is the local church at Ephesus!

Revelation 2:1–7 (NKJV)

1 “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

The word “**angel**” literally means “**messenger**”. It can refer to angelic beings (Lk. 1:11), but it can also refer to human messengers (cf. Lk. 9:52). Because these messengers are essentially identified with the churches they represent including the need for repentance in some situations, I take it these are the KEY pastor-teacher messengers to the churches (Eph. 4:11).

Also, nowhere in the New Testament do we see angels directly communicating to the churches a direct message such as we have here. So it makes sense that these are most likely human messengers responsible for communicating to the churches. In other words, these are the KEY gifted pastor-teachers given to the church most responsible for giving God’s message to His people (cf. Eph. 4:11).

Each church is to have a plurality of elders who shepherd and have oversight over the church. But I do think there must be KEY leadership (what we call a first among equals) who serve as the KEY leaders. Essentially, all churches function this way. Peter was the KEY leader among the apostles, James was the key leader in the Jerusalem church, Timothy, as a prototype pastor, was the key leader where he served in the church, and so forth.

Therefore, I take it that these messengers represent the key messenger (Pastor-teacher) in reference to each specific church, who is the one most responsible for communicating God’s truth to the local body. The emphasis here is on the singular messenger to each church – commonly referred to as the lead pastor of the church.

This message is directed to the messenger of the church of Ephesus. The message is for the local church at Ephesus, but is directed to the messenger who would then communicate it. Appropriately, they are here called “messengers” because their primary role is to communicate Christ’s message to the church.

Ephesus was the largest city in the Roman Province of Asia with a population of about **250,000 people**. It was the largest city of the seven churches addressed. It was the capital of the Roman Province of Asia. Ephesus was a leading **commercial center**.

It boasted an amphitheater that could seat **25,000 people**. Those ruins are still in existence today in the country of Turkey and are rather well preserved.

Slide # 4



Ephesus was also a **RELIGIOUS center** revolving around the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis who was also known as the Roman goddess Diana.

Ephesus was home of the temple of Diana which was considered one of the **7 wonders** of the ancient world. This temple stood on a platform larger than 2 football fields. It was supported by 120 marble columns, each about 60 feet in height. Inside the temple stood the statue of the goddess Diana.

This image was considered sacred, but it was a grotesque many-breasted figure that supposedly fell from heaven. There were thousands of temple priests and priestesses - many who worked as temple prostitutes. Immoral activities were considered sacred as Diana was the **goddess of fertility**. A major industry was the manufacturing of miniature images of this goddess. Also, many criminals congregated there because the temple was considered a place of sanctuary. So Ephesus was a town full of **Idolatry, Immorality, and Crime**.

And yet in that context, Christ had a church!

The church at Ephesus had a rich spiritual heritage. At the close of his second missionary journey, Paul visited there briefly (Acts 18:18-19). But then on his third missionary journey, he spent 3 years there, more time than at any other place in his ministry (cf. Acts 20:31). During his time there, all in Asia “**heard the word of the Lord**” (Acts 19:10).

In addition to Paul, the church at Ephesus was ministered to by Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos, Timothy, and John. John is thought to have resided there for over 30 years and from there wrote the gospel of John as well as 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. Ephesus was a very prominent early church!

The messenger of the church of Ephesus was told to WRITE! This was a written message. And the One speaking is He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

We were introduced to this reality in chapter one, where we see it is Christ who holds these seven stars and is in the midst of seven golden lampstands. And as seen in chapter one, the seven stars are interpreted to be seven messengers, and the golden lampstands are shown to be these seven local churches.

Thus, Christ securely holds the KEY MESSENGER of each Church and has absolute sovereign control over them as they are in His right hand – representing the hand of power and sovereign care and control. This represents His Lordship authority over them as He walks in the midst of the churches. The elders are undershepherd's but we are reminded here that Christ ALONE is the Chief Shepherd, the sovereign Lord over those human messengers to the Church (1 Pet. 5:1-5).

Indeed, Christ is presented as LORD of the Church! And note it carefully: Christ as Lord of the Church is walking right in the midst of the churches! He is present! Evidently, they needed to be reminded of Christ's Lordship authority and His unseen presence - and so it is emphasized!

The last emphasis in the Bible and the needed continual emphasis is that the church needs to be reminded of its relationship with Jesus as Lord of the church and His intimate presence in our midst!

2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

To each individual church Christ says, “***I know your works***”. He starts there. This emphasizes His omniscience. He knows! It can be a great comfort, but it also serves as a reminder of accountability. No one is fooling Him! He knows exactly what we are doing! Absolutely nothing escapes His fiery gaze. He knows what we are going through and what we are doing.

He says to the church at Ephesus, “***I know your works, your labor, your patience.***” They were a hard-working church. Labor is an intense word meaning laboring to the point of exhaustion. And they were a church that kept on keeping on. They were patient in the sense of persevering on even though it was hard! Patience is the idea of “***endurance under trial.***” This was all commendable!

Before Christ points out their fault, He first praises them for what they are doing right.

And He commends them for testing those who claimed to be apostles and finding them to be false apostles who were LIARS. These people are said to be “**evil**” and “**liars**”. They lied about being apostles (cf. 2 Cor. 11:4, 12-15). That is really serious!

People like to put themselves UP! They like to promote self and make themselves out to be somebody important – somebody of authority! John, at this point, was the last living true apostle, and yet there were those on the scene claiming that they too were apostles. Earlier, Paul had warned the elders at Ephesus...

Slide # 5

Acts 20:29–30 (NKJV)

29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples **after themselves**.

For these people, it is all about self-promotion.

I have learned through my years in the ministry that people who are self-promoting are really serving the devil, whether they realize it or not. Oh, they make it sound good, like they are all about service, but self-promotion and Christ promotion are two entirely different things. Self-promotion and a genuine concern for the body are two different things. Watch out for self-promoting men! They are dangerous! Study self-promoting Korah in the OT (Num. 16). Study the “Many” who will say “Lord, Lord” on judgment day (Matt. 7:21-23). They all claim to be sincere and serving the Lord, but in truth, they are self-made people serving the interests of self!

To their credit, the church at Ephesus was not tolerant of this. They refused to put up with this. They put them to the TEST and found them to be LIARS.

Slide # 6

THE APOSTLES WERE SPECIAL...

1. The Church was founded upon them (Eph. 2:19-20, 3:1-6).
2. Eyewitness of the risen Lord (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1, 15:7-8; Gal. 1:11-12).
3. Personally chosen/appointed by Christ (Lk. 6:13; Acts 9:1-6, 15-16; Gal. 1:1).
4. Authenticated by unique miracles (2 Cor. 12:11-12).
5. Spoke for Christ with absolute authority (1 Cor. 14:29-33; Jude 17).
6. All N.T. truth was communicated through them (Jn. 16:13, 17:20; Heb. 2:3-4).
7. The 12 have an eternal place of special honor (Rev. 21:14).

The Bible says to “test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 Jn. 4:1; also see 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:21). We cannot be naive here. We must TEST them up against the Scriptures. This is commendable according to Christ!

Realize that there were false teachers present in the first four churches mentioned here in Revelation 2 (cf. v. 2, 6, 9, 14-15, 20). Paul earlier warned the Ephesians that even **“among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things”** and then he said, **“I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears”** (Acts 28:28-31).

False teachers are a constant danger! I am especially concerned about those who are just smart enough to know too much, who are into novel ideas that sound exciting. Sound doctrine is old stuff – not too exciting and so they want NEW stuff – new spins, new ideas. Apostles introduce NEW TRUTH – NEW REVELATION! Watch out! When it comes to theology: **“If it’s new, it’s not true; if it’s true, it’s not new.”**

We constantly have to be on guard, and the church at Ephesus was.

LIARS, as used by John, refers to those who claim to be God’s people but are not. They LIE about their relationship with God (cf. 1 Jn. 2:3-4). John says all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8).

Today, there are various false teachers coming out of the charismatic movement who call themselves APOSTLES. They are all LIARS! There are no more apostles giving forth new biblical revelation and doing sign miracles to prove it! That was unique to the 12 apostles of Christ. There are no more new apostles, and there is no more new revelation, and there are no more sign miracles! But there are plenty of LIARS on the scene!

The church at Ephesus was a doctrinally SOUND church. They stood for the uncompromised truth of Christ. And they were hardworking! And so Christ commends them, saying...

3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

This church is commended for staying by the stuff through thick and thin. They hadn't gotten slack. They didn't quit or give up. They kept right on keeping on, and note they have labored on for Jesus! They truly were serving the cause of Christ. They had not grown weary in their service. There was no let up in their zeal!

Wow! What a great church! If you are serious about Jesus, this is the type of church you want to join! They were active, busy, doing things! They were discerning, taking strong doctrinal stands, and they were doing it for the cause of Christ. And they just kept on keeping on. What a tremendous Church!

Just ONE problem, and that was probably a problem no one would normally notice because of all the commendable things they were doing, but Christ knew. He sees and so He says...

4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Nevertheless... **Can't you feel their hearts sink?** They had a lot going for them in their tireless stands and service, yet Christ presents to them a "NEVERTHELESS"! Does Christ have a "nevertheless" for SBC?

This "nevertheless" strikes fear into my heart! We can be doing a lot of things right and still hear Christ say, "Nevertheless...".

They had a lot going for them, and yet Christ had this against them: they had LEFT their FIRST love. The word love here is "**agape**" which is the intense word for love in the New Testament! This love is other-centered. It seeks the others' highest good! It gives sacrificially. It is intense!

Notice they hadn't left love completely, but they had abandoned their FIRST love, the love they had known at the beginning. Earlier, Paul had commended them for their love (Eph. 1:15-16) and prayed that their love might continue to grow (Eph. 3:17-19; cf. 4:2, 15; 5:2; 6:24).

Scholars debate whether this “**first love**” is in relation to people or to the Lord. First and foremost, this would relate to the Lord Himself, as the first and great command is to love the Lord with all our heart. However, our love for the Lord and our love for His people are closely connected, as Jesus said, the second great commandment is similar to the first and closely connected (cf. Mt. 22:36-40). Where you find one, you find the other!

Slide # 7

1 John 4:20 (NKJV)

20 If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

Loving God and loving people go together. Where you find one you find the other. But the point here is that their FIRST love had waned!

As we go along in our Christian life, it is easy to take a loved one for granted. This often happens in marriage! There is the “honeymoon” love, but then, as time goes along, we can start to go through the motions, and that first love begins to fade.

A married couple was riding along in their pickup truck, which happened to have a bench seat. And the wife said to the husband, “*Remember when we used to sit side by side as we rode along, but now you sit over there driving and I sit over here by the window.*” The husband responded by saying, “***I didn’t move.***” Ouch!

That’s the way it is with us and God! He didn’t move! If our love has waned and we are not as close to God as we used to be – WE MOVED, not Him! Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (Ja. 4:8).

I often say to my wife, “I don’t take you for granite, (play on words) – ***I don’t take you for granite, I take you for pure gold.***” But you know we have to work at it. A good love life takes work! And so, it is in our love walk with the Lord. We have to continue to nurture it and work at it.

It is easy to become complacent – to just take God for granted! It is easy to just go through the motions, what in doing what is called “the evangelical machine”. We might be busy serving, strong in our convictions, taking strong stands, but are we motivated by love or just going through the outward motions? What really is the driving/motivating factor?

I think our love life with the Lord begins with taking time for Him, spending time in His Word, and letting Him speak to us. The most precious thing you give to someone is personal time! Good relationships involve TIME and COMMUNICATION!

Slide # 8

Deuteronomy 6:5–6 (NKJV)

5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

6 “And these words which I command you today **shall be in your heart.**”

Remember the sisters, Martha and Mary? Martha was busy, busy, busy, but Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. Martha was distracted with serving, but Mary was enthralled with Jesus and His Word. Jesus said that Mary had chosen the good part and it would not be taken from her (cf. Lk. 10:38-42).

I think our love life with the Lord is intimately tied to COMMUNICATION with God – to letting Him speak to us through His Word. It is intimately tied to us speaking to Him in prayer. God talks to us through the Word, and we talk to Him in prayer. This nurtures our love walk with the Lord. And then the overflow is that we talk to people about the Lord. What's going on in our heart is reflected in what comes out of our mouth. People who love the Lord talk about Him. They witness, they share!

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul spoke of their “***work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope***” as new believers (1:3), and then said, “***from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth...in every place.***” Our love for the Lord and our witness of Him are closely tied.

Have you seen people in love? Have you talked with them? They just can't help talking about the one they love! This is what the Lord wants from us! He wants not just our heads, not just our hands, but our HEARTS! He wants an intense love relationship. He doesn't want the honeymoon to never end!

Look at the level of commitment and service by the Ephesian church just spelled out in the previous verses. Wouldn't we say that these are some of the most committed Christians we have ever read about, and yet Christ has a PROBLEM with them regarding their LOVE LIFE!

This is scary! This shows that one can outwardly go through all the right motions and yet not be right in the heart! One can be **super active** in service, be **doctrinally sound**, be **taking right stands** for Christ and yet not have His approval. Christ here zeroes in on what is most important – their LOVE LIFE – their FIRST LOVE!

He tells them that they have left their first love, which is so serious that if not corrected will result in dire consequences.

Left means to forsake. There was no excuse for this. It was probably subtle and gradual. This, after all, was 35 years or so after Paul had been on the scene, at which time he had commended them for their love (Eph. 1:15). This church probably now had a large representation of second-generation Christians. Again, earlier they had been commended for their love (cf. Eph. 1:15), but something had happened. It happens little by little. Little by little, they moved away from their first love.

Love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5). According to 1 Corinthians 13, love is the greatest attribute of all (1 Cor. 13). Love is the distinguishing trait of Christ's followers, showing that we are truly His disciples (Jn. 13:34-35). 1 John presents love as the acid test of genuineness (cf. 1 Jn. 4:7-8).

Note that they hadn't completely abandoned all LOVE, which is the defining mark of true conversion (cf. 1 Jn. 4:7-8). But they had left their FIRST love!

Oh, they had their doctrine right, oh, they were discerning, oh, they were all about service, oh, they were keeping on keeping on, but there was something wrong in their LOVE LIFE.

They were going through all the service and doctrinal motions, but something was wrong in the heart. **Their motivation** was not out of Christian love as it had been early in the life of the church.

They had become a **Fighting Fundamentalist church!** They had lots of service activity, and yes, a clear doctrinal stand, but where was the LOVE?

Someone has said that for many Fundamentalists, there is too little FUN, too much DAM, and too little MENTAL. Sadly, that is often the case. We don't just want to be fighting fundamentalists but loving fundamentalists!

There are two things we must never let go of – love and truth. The truth must be held in love.

Ephesus was a church strong on the truth, but had let love slide! That is always a danger in a strong doctrinal church that takes strong stands. Now we don't ever want to compromise (Christ commended them for not tolerating false teachers), but we also don't want to lose the love.

Slide # 9

Ephesians 4:15 (NKJV)

15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

It happened gradually – subtly. The church at Ephesus had drifted into **LOVELESS ORTHODOXY**. Service was there, but it was COLD! Doctrine was there, but it was COLD!

Whatever we do, and however much we do, if it is not motivated by LOVE, it is for nothing.

Slide # 10

1 Corinthians 13:3 (NKJV)

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Again, this was essentially a **2nd generation** church at this point. Yes, this next generation stood for the fundamentals of the faith, but LOVE was lacking. This is a problem for churches that have been in existence for a while. My mentor, Dr. John Whitcomb, used to talk about the ***“Ecclesiastical Second Law of Thermodynamics”*** which is to say Churches and Biblically orthodox organizations tend to start out strong, but then little by little they begin to compromise. This is the consistent pattern.

A brand new church is very into people. They have to be or die. But as they get established, they can get into the **routine** of ministry and really do it without much love. It is good for us as a church to evaluate: How is our LOVE life? Are we really loving each other as we should? Do we love the lost evangelistically or are we just doing church? God help us to see where we are lacking in our love life -starting with our walk with God? Is He truly our priority? Are His people a priority?

Love for Christ is principally shown in love for others – especially His people. This was lacking at Ephesus. Oh, there was still some love there, but not like at first.

Jerome (an early Church father – c. 342-420) told of the tradition handed down concerning John the apostle in his old age at Ephesus.

The tradition said he had to be carried to the congregation in the arms of his disciples and was unable to say much of anything, but always said "***little children love one another.***" Finally, they asked him why he always says this: His reply: "***It is the Lord's command, and if this is only done, it is enough.***"

Paul, under inspiration, said:

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV)

13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

And let me state the obvious. Christ is to be our FIRST love. In leaving our first love, Christ no longer has His rightful place. He demands to be FIRST. Everything is to be outflow of this! He is to be the TOP priority! God tolerates no rivals. Any distraction, any other priority, anything that gets in the way of our devotion and affection for Christ is, in effect, to leave our first love. In our love life, Christ is always to remain FIRST!

Slide # 11

Nothing between my soul and the Savior,
So that His blessed face may be seen;
Nothing preventing the least of His favor,
Keep the way clear! Let nothing between.

Christ had ONE problem with the church at Ephesus – they had left their first love, and this was so serious that He warned...

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

Christ exhorts the church at Ephesus to remember, to repent, and to repeat! They were to remember from where they had fallen. There is a place to forget. Once sin is repented of, we then need to move on (cf. Phil. 3:13-14). But there is also a place to remember! Ephesus needed to remember from where they had fallen – that is, the place of their first love.

They needed to repent, which means to have a change of mind concerning their sin. To repent means to agree with God and line up with His truth. And note the close connection between repentance and doing the first works.

True repentance results in doing! John the Baptist called on the religious hypocrites to bring forth the fruits of repentance (Mt. 3:8). True repentance brings forth fruit. True repentance doesn't just talk about it, but rather demonstrates itself in behavior! If it doesn't affect the behavior, it isn't true repentance! It's just cheap talk!

The first works were works of love. Note, they were not called to get back to the first feelings, but back to the first works! They were to get back to the love that keeps Christ FIRST -the love that is motivated by love for Jesus! They needed to get back to where love was the motivating factor in all their service, and not just going through the outward motions. This is the MAIN thing, and the MAIN thing must always remain the MAIN thing!

It is easy to get so busy in the work of the Lord that we begin to neglect the Lord of the work. I must confess I know this struggle! The work is ever demanding. We are serious about serving, but our focus on our love relationship with the Lord must ever be FIRST and FOREMOST!

This is so serious that Christ warned the Ephesians that if they did not repent, He would come and remove their lampstand (representing their witness) out of its place. Christ is LORD of the Church!

If we are not doing what we do out of love, it all counts for nothing before Christ. That is a total waste! Only work borne out of love will be rewarded (see 1 Cor. 13). A loveless Church is a total failure! It might as well be removed. Love must ever be the driving reality! This is all important!

Yes, TRUTH! Yes, sound doctrine! Yes, an uncompromised stand, but don't lose the LOVE that loves Christ and what is His (Jn. 13:34-35).

I have known of dead FUNDAMENTALISTS who have seemingly lost their first love! It always ends badly! It happens to churches!

I knew a man who was a self-promoting "heresy hunter". He wrote reams and reams against false teachers, and a lot of it was very good! But one time, I in effect warned him about: **Where is the love?** He took offense. That ministry eventually burned out!

I remember my mentor Dr. John Whitcomb warning a conservative group who was very strong on Creationism (which was his specialty), saying, “***But are we winning anyone? Are we sharing the truth in love or are we just winning arguments?***” Certainly, we want to earnestly contend for the faith, but we don’t want to lose the love in the process!

A man with a prominent job heard a Bible teacher emphasize that love is a choice to think about the other person. He was always busy, and when he came home, instead of talking, walking, helping out, he just vegged. Under conviction, he decided that on the upcoming 2-week vacation with his wife and children, he would only think of his family. Sure enough, the first day out, she wanted to go to a museum or some such place, and he immediately responded “N.....Sure and off they went. This routine continued until the last day of their vacation. At that point, his wife said to him. “*Honey, please tell me the truth – you know the results from the doctor at my annual check up – am I dying?*” He said, “What?” She said, “The way you have been treating me – I must be dying.” He said, “Oh no honey - you are not dying – I am just starting to live.”

Agape love is Christ-centered; it is other-centered. It lives for God and others! Where there is no love, there is no light – the lamp has gone out. In that case, the entire purpose of the church has faded from the scene. Christ said all would know we are His disciples by our love (Jn. 13:34-35).

Eventually, the love-light went out at Ephesus, and the Church was completely removed. There is no church in Ephesus today!

Christ starts with commending them – that is the way of grace. He then rebukes them sharply, but now follows up with another word of commendation. This too is the way of grace. This is just **the right balance** of exhorting and rebuking. Often we need both! Christ knows exactly what is needed and administers His truth accordingly.

6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

We need to love like Christ loves and hate what He hates.

Psalm 97:10 (NKJV)

10 You who love the LORD, hate evil! ...

It is a little unclear exactly what the deeds of the Nicolaitans were. The word “Nicolaitan” literally means “laity-conqueror”. Therefore, some believe this was a group-emphasized clerical hierarchy that lorded it over the church. They are thought to be the forerunners of a clerical priesthood in the church.

Some believe that in context they are tied to the false apostles of verse 2 and Christ is now returning to address them. It would make sense in that those claiming to be apostles would claim to have authority over the people as apostles had the highest position in the church.

This is a possible view, but seemingly we have a stronger hint in 2:14-15, where at Pergamos they are closely linked to idolatry and immorality. Some believe that this group followed Nicolaus of Antioch (one of the 7 apostolic assistants found in Acts 6:5). Supposedly, Nicolaus later apostatized.

Slide # 12

Added to Irenaeus are the testimonies of Tertullian, Hippolytus, Dorotheus of Tyre, Jerome, Augustine, Eusebius, and others. They all say this was a sect of licentious antinomian Gnostics... Eusebius adds that after the group was persecuted by John in the Apocalypse, the sect disappeared in a very short time. – **Robert Thomas**

7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” ’

This refrain of hearing what the Spirit says to the churches is repeated in each address to each separate church, showing that the intention is that there be application here for all the local churches.

Then Christ ends with an encouraging promise to those who are true believers, who are here called overcomers. To be a true believer is to be an overcomer. John the apostle, in 1 John, defines this very clearly.

Slide # 13

1 John 5:4–5 (NKJV)

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—**our faith**.

5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but **he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

The nature of a true faith is seen in Revelation 12:11...

Slide # 14

Revelation 12:11 (NKJV)

11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

They believe in Jesus as Savior, openly confess Him as Lord, and prove it by being willing to die for the cause of Christ. This defines “overcomer” in Revelation.

One of John’s favorite words for true believers is OVERCOMER. He uses the word 7 times in 1st John and 17 times in Revelation.

Christ promises: **“To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”**

The tree of life was introduced in Genesis (2:9) in the Garden of Eden, from which Adam and Eve, because of their fall, were forbidden to eat (cf. Gen. 3:22-24). Later at the very end of the Bible it reappears in the New Jerusalem in Revelation 22:1-2. Those who eat from it will never die!

This tree of life is said to be “in the midst of the Paradise of God.” The word Paradise is found three times in the NT (cf. Lk. 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7).

Paradise is actually a Persian word that describes a pleasure garden. The Septuagint uses this word to describe the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8-10). Thus, we see here that Jesus is in effect the restorer of lost Paradise (cf. Rev. 22:14).

Slide # 15

Revelation 22:14 (NASB)

14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.

The following story is adopted from Philip Svetlik...

A large navy ship sets sail. There are many sailors on board, who have a long journey ahead of them. They spend many months on the great oceans of the world. Then one day, the news reaches them that the ship is to return home port within the next few days. Many of the sailor's wives immediately make their way to the harbor. They can hardly wait to finally see their men again. Every day they go to the pier and longingly look for the ship.

And finally, the time has come: The ship appears on the horizon. A short time later, it enters the harbor. Overjoyed, the women throw their arms around their husbands' necks. What a joyful celebration! While many couples are in each other's arms, one sailor stands alone at the pier. He is looking for his wife and can't find her. Slowly he walks through the streets of the city and finally arrives at his house. He knocks at the door. After a while, he hears footsteps inside. Finally, his wife opens the door and invites him saying, "I've been busy working as I have been waiting for you here."

The women at the pier were actively waiting. They lovingly watched for their husbands daily and could hardly wait to see them again. The sailor whose wife remained at home was BUSY. She, too, knew that her husband would soon return, but she didn't take the trouble to be at the harbor. She passively thought, "If he doesn't come today, then he will come tomorrow." Her love lacked intensity!

What I would urge all my readers to do is to wait on the Lord personally. Not to know the doctrine of His coming, but to truly wait for Him daily. – ***J.N. Darby***

2 Timothy 4:8 (NKJV)

8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

It is commendable to be faithfully laboring on for the Lord. It is commendable to be discerning and take a no-compromise stand for the Lord. But don't lose your FIRST love!

Make LOVING JESUS your priority focus in all you do! (Phil. 1:21)

It's all about Jesus!