



#1 IN THE SEVEN CHURCHES SERIES
The Church That Forgot To Love
Forest Park Church
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For 30 years, the church at Ephesus appeared to be excelling on all levels:

- they were committed to sound doctrine and guarding against false teaching,
- they sought to do good works in the community around them,
- they ferociously defended the glory of Christ's name above all other names, and
- they staunchly defended against moral compromise.

On many fronts, they appeared to be the perfect church.

Revelation 2:2-3

2

"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."

THE CITY:

3

1. The city of Ephesus was Rome's capital city in the province of Asia.

- Conquered by Rome in 190 B.C.
- Much trade.
- Place of government.

2. City of Ephesus was home to the temple of Diana/Artemis (Acts 19:34).

- One of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
- Built about 400 B.C. then rebuilt after a fire a few hundred years later.
- The statue of the goddess inside of the temple was said to have fallen from the sky.

- People came from all over the known world to worship at this temple.
- More visitors than any other ancient edifice.
- Place of harbor for criminals.

3. Jewish Influence

- The Jews who lived in Ephesus had a synagogue there.
- There were some who had settled there due to Roman persecution (Acts 18:2).
- Among them were Aquila and Priscilla.

THE CHURCH

4 1. Established 56, 57 A.D.?

We have the history of the establishment of the church in Ephesus in Acts 18:24

- Apollos taught mightily in the synagogue there.
- Aquila and Priscilla taught him the way of the Lord more perfectly.
- Gained several disciples (12 men).
- Paul came and they had not received the Holy Spirit.
- They were all baptized again with Christ's baptism.

Paul worked with the church for two years.

- Paul taught in the synagogue for three months. (Acts 19:8).
- He finally had to separate the disciples from the Jews because they would no longer give him an audience. (Acts 19:9).
- Paul taught in the school of Tyranus there for two years working with the church.
- God worked special miracles in this city (Acts 19:11).
- Some of the Jews tried to cast out demons there, but were unsuccessful (Acts 19:13-17).

This resulted in the growth of the church (vs.17).

- Those who practiced the magical arts burned their books as a sign of their repentance (Acts 19:19).

- Paul's time with the church ended there partly as the result of an uproar from the silversmith's trade (Acts 19:23-20:1).

The church had elders (Acts 20:17).

- Paul met with them one last time before his journey to Rome.
- He prophesied of wolves that would come to take over the flock (Acts 20:29).

The church of Ephesus had many admirable qualities and one tragic flaw. Christ commended them for their good works, for their perseverance, and for their church discipline that guarded against false teaching .

Verse 4 reveals where they went wrong.

5 ***"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."***

Everything about the Ephesian church looked good outwardly, but their heart wasn't in it. James said,

James 2:26

"Faith without works is dead"

Here, Jesus warns that works without love is just as problematic. The church's devotion to Christ was waning.

- The church at Ephesus relates much closer to our own hearts, lives, and minds than we might realize.
- We would be wise to follow Jesus' exhortations for how to keep our affections rightly placed on Him, so they might not drift away toward lesser things.

Christ provided a three-part solution for the church's lovelessness.

6 **I. Remember**

"Remember therefore from where you have fallen" (Revelation 2:5).

Ephesus was one of the great churches of the New Testament with much written about it.

- Paul first visited it on his second journey,
- spent 2-3 years there on his third,
- distributed handkerchiefs,
- encountered the sons of Sceva,
- saw dark arts books burned to the tune of 50,000 pieces of silver,
- saw the word of God grow mightily,
- encountered Demetrius,
- and was greatly loved by the elders, among other traits and actions of this church.

Think back to what your relationship with Christ was like when you were first saved.

- Reflect on what it felt like to trust Him with both the simplest and the greatest of your needs.
- How joyful were you? Your level of excitement and happiness in the gospel was great!
- How zealous were you? You wanted to tell everyone, and you wanted to learn it all!
- How did you read the Bible, pray, sing, and talk about the Lord? With great passion!
- How thankful were you for Him and His word? You were thankful all the time to many.
- How committed were you for what He had done for you? Nothing could deter you!

7 **II. Repent**

After remembering where you started and realizing where you are now, the next logical step is to repent. Turn away from your present course and turn toward Christ.

Revelation 2:5

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.

We focus on the form instead of the substance of our faith

We become infatuated with knowledge instead of holiness.

- Personal holiness is no longer our quest,
- we become convinced that knowledge is what makes us holy,
- thus knowledge, something we can attain for ourselves, replaces God's presence and Lordship in our life, something we cannot do for ourselves.
- What we know becomes more important than what we are.

We become comfortable with the Holy instead of being in awe of it.

- The sense of awe the Isaiah had when he was in the presence of God, is gone from us, and we become like the sons of Samuel who had lost their respect for the holiness of God.

We lose our evangelistic zeal and see the world as our enemy instead of our mission field.

- This causes us to become more concerned with the comfort of the saints than with the salvation of the lost.
- This is what causes churches to become inwardly directed instead of outwardly directed.
- When churches grow cold they are more concerned with maintaining their tradition than they are with seeing salvations and baptisms.

We become insensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and thus become dulled to the “small” sins that distract us.

- We are satisfied to live at odds with other Christians, thus bringing division into the church.

- Gossip,
- pride,
- jealously,
- bitterness,
- attitudes of spiritual one-up-man-ship,

And a host of other ungodly things, are allowed to dwell within us, because we are insensitive to how much these things displease God.

We become content with what we are instead of being driven to become more like Christ.

The passion for becoming more like Christ is diminished.

- Instead of comparing ourselves to Jesus, we begin to compare ourselves against one another,
- always reasoning within ourselves that as long as we are better than so and so, we're ok. This attitude leads to self-righteousness.
- We allow other things to sit on the throne of our lives, and relegate Christ to a lesser place of importance.
- We still give lip service to Christ as Lord, but in our hearts, other things reign.
- It may be success, it may be power, pride, prestige or pleasure, but something else sits on the throne of our lives.

We begin to love something or someone more than we love Christ.

This is the bottom line.

- We become dispassionate and cool in our relationship with Christ.

- What kind of relationship do you think Stephen, the first martyr for the faith had?
- Do you think it was a formal, ritualistic relationship, just going through the motions but lacking fervor and zeal?
- That's not the kind of relationship that causes someone to die for Jesus.
- What kind of relationship do you think Paul had with Jesus? When he was beaten and left for dead, when he was in prison and knew he was to be executed?

8 III. Repeat

The good news is that It is a choice! It is not a circumstance! It is not an accident! It is not fate! It is a choice!

- The Lord did not tell them to wait for power from on high to restore their passion once again.
- He did not tell them to get the first feelings. He did not tell them to wait for the feelings.

He told them to do the first works – the actions they had done in the beginning for the Lord.

- The feelings, if they are even necessary, will come in the doing, not the other way around.
- This is the inspired formula – which you will need often – to restore your first love of Christ.
- For example, the simplest and best way to restore a marriage is to do the first works of love.

What were your first works?

- Did you crave the Bible? How did you read? To gather jewels or to mark off a chart?
- Did you think about the text? Or did you skim read over the words to finish a chore?
- Was prayer a chore? Was prayer dry and dull? Or did you pray passion and purpose?

- Did you love to sing His praise? Hear His praise sung?
- Did you talk to others with enthusiasm and passion about Jesus Christ?
- Did you cut out anything from your life – easily – that distracted or detracted from Him?
- Did you alter priorities to make sure He was first in your life in affections and actions?
- Did you prepare, pay attention, and review to maximize response to His word

Luke 8:18

Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”

- Was the overriding goal in your life to please Him, win Him, delight in Him, and so on?

Were you so committed to Him that losing anything or everything seemed as nothing.....

Philippians 3:8-10

9

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Repeating the original good works will help you get back to the place where you began, “Do the first works” (verse 5). Return to what you did when you first became a Christian—the spiritual disciplines that kept you close to Christ and motivated you to follow Him.

1

Conclusion:

“The Greeks had a race in their Olympic games that was unique.* The winner was not the runner who finished first. It was the runner who finished with his torch still lit.”

It's one thing to finish, it's quite another to finish with your torch still lit.

This requires faithfulness, not just in action, but an intentional relationship with Christ.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Revelation 2:5

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.

Christ warned the Ephesian church of the consequences if they did not follow this three-step formula: “I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent” (verse 5). That is, the church’s influence and power would be removed. There is a price to pay for drifting away from the Lord.

- Oh, you may still have your buildings,
- you will still have your programs,
- your busy schedule and all the externals.
- You may still be able to attract new people with pretty facilities and clever how-to sermons but the power of God will be missing.
- God will take His hand off of the church and leave us to go through the motions.

What a tragic picture this paints for us:

A group of people going through the motions of Christianity, without the living God in their midst. Could there be anything more empty or sad?

What ever happened to the church at Ephesus? Today the ruins of that ancient city lie under the murk and mire of a swamp. The church at Ephesus died, and the city died around it.

He who hath ears let him hear what the Spirit said to the churches.

The truth of the matter is that a church is made up of individuals.

- The passion of the church will never be any greater than the collective passion of her members.
- If we are on fire for Christ, that passion will be reflected in our church.
- If we grow cold in our love for Jesus, that coldness will be evident in our fellowship.

This is why the message, although addressed to the church as a whole, comes down to the individual here in verse 7. ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***