

Text: Rev 2.1-7

A couple of weeks ago, we started in on the Lord's message to the church in Ephesus in Rev 2. I felt that I was too tied to my old outline from 24 years ago so that I didn't feel free in my speaking — don't know how to explain, it but the energy just wasn't there, at least for me.

As the complaint against the church of Ephesus was that “she had lost her first love,” I don't know if it is appropriate or ironic that we are doing this message on Valentine's day. (I hadn't thought of this when arranging our schedule!)

The church in Ephesus has a lot going for it. It became an especially important church in Church History. It was only when the Muslims overran the Byzantine Empire that the church came to an end, so it lasted many years.

For all these messages, we have a similar salutation, which we should remind ourselves of each time:

“To the angel of the church ... write ...”

Most commentators believe the “angel” or “messenger” of each church was the pastor.

One aspect of John's vision of Christ in chapter 1 is included in the salutation:

Rev 2.1 ¶ ... The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

- The sustainer and inspector of the churches speaks

I. Reviewing Part One

- A. Commended for orthodox zeal (2)
- B. Commended for enduring labour (3)
- C. Commended for righteous hatred (6)

II. Considering the criticism (4-5)

- A. The heart of the matter: forsaken affection (4)
 1. The satisfaction of orthodoxy (or, “I'm religious enough”)
 - a. Ephesus was orthodox

b. Ephesus was satisfied in itself

Their thought: we are ok because we believe right — any church that emphasizes Bible teaching like we do runs this risk.

2. The decline of first love

a. Lit. “the love of thee, the first one, you have let go”

b. At this point, the church in Ephesus is close to forty years of existence (AD 95 vs. AD 55)

c. A gradual process, and seemingly a natural process

“Consider newly-married people. Their life is one continuous story of affection — delight in one another. Service is not service, but gladness, for such a bride. Two New England girls worked in a textile factory. Mary went away on a visit of several months. Returning, and meeting her friend on the street, she asked her,

“‘Maggie, are you working at the same old factory?’ ‘I’m not working at all,’ burst out Maggie: ‘I’m married!’

“Doubtless such a one was busier with her housework than ever she had been at the factory! But she toiled unconscious of work as such — it was for *him*. She parted from him with an embrace as he went to work in the morning, and she prepared the evening meal ever looking out at door or window for his coming. As he neared home, she went to meet him. All her labor was a mere circumstance, swallowed up in her devotion to her husband.

“But days, weeks, months pass, and she becomes occupied with the details of her housekeeping, of her own life. She prepares just as good meals, keeps the house in as good, perhaps even better, order; but she has gradually changed her habit of watching for her husband at night, or going eagerly to meet him. She calls ‘Goodbye’ from somewhere upstairs in the morning, instead of holding *him* fast every moment she can.”¹

¹ William R. Newell, *The Book of the Revelation* (The Scripture Press, 1935), 38–39.

Debbi's corollary: Sure, she is at a bit of a distance, but remember, he checks his e-mail before he says, "Hello!" and his first words are "Any calls? Any mail?" when he comes home!

- 1) When I say natural, I mean it is quite human for excitement and passion to ebb as time goes by
 - 2) But when orthodoxy is zealously held, orthodoxy can become a substitute for Christ
3. The early church grew into the medieval church: the age of apostles to the age of bishops

"Even in the Johannine age this was the case in the church of Ephesus, which prefigured in this respect both the light and shade of the later Eastern church. The earnest, but stiff, mechanical penitential discipline, with its four grades of penance, which had developed itself during the Dioclesian persecution, continued in force, it is true, as to the letter, and was repeatedly reaffirmed by the councils of the fourth century. But the great change of circumstances rendered the practical execution of it more and more difficult, by the very multiplication and high position, of those on whom it ought to be enforced. In that mighty revolution under Constantine the church lost her virginity, and allied herself with the mass of heathendom, which had not yet experienced an inward change. Not seldom did the emperors themselves, and other persons of authority, who ought to have led the way with a good example, render themselves, with all their zeal for theoretical orthodoxy, most worthy of suspension and excommunication by their scandalous conduct, while they were surrounded by weak or worldly bishops, who cared more for the favor of their earthly masters, than for the honor of their heavenly Lord and the dignity of the church. Even Eusebius, otherwise one of the better bishops of his time, had no word of rebuke for the gross crimes of

Constantine, but only the most extravagant eulogies for his merits.”²

a. The first love is corroded by idolizing religion

That is, the stuff of Christianity, the forms, the doctrines, the orthodoxy becomes more important than the Christ of Christianity.

b. The first love is corrupted by religionizing idols

That is, the world is sanitized, deodorized, and Christianized; worldliness brought into the church and called “liberty”

c. The first love co-opted by the imitation of Christianity (instead of the imitation of Christ)

That is, religious forms are retained, but orthodoxy and orthopraxy (the pure love of Christ) are ignored

d. Finally, religion is abandoned altogether

We are describing a continuum, a process on a downward slope, not a step-by-step trip down a staircase.

B. Help for the matter: revival (5a)

1. Remember:

“To correct any departure from God the first step is to go back to the place of departure.”³

2. Repent:

“They were to have a different attitude.”⁴

² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 357.

³ John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 57.

⁴ Walvoord, 57.

“Repentance is not mere sorrow; ... but repentance is a changed state of soul.”⁵

3. Return: do the first works

We emphasize personal discipleship; Bible reading, prayer, soulwinning, care for others – these aren’t rituals, they fire orthodoxy and serve God.

C. Haste for decision: “or else” (5b)

1. The alternative is removal of the lampstand (the church)
2. The remover is the Lord of the church

Removal can leave a shell of a church in place, but with no effective witness in a community. How many little churches have closed their doors after a long period of silence!

III. Closing consolation (6-7)

A. We briefly discussed v. 6 in the commendation last time

1. Not that the verse starts “yet”
2. “Yet” means there is hope

B. The revival decision is an individual decision (7)

1. Notice the singular pronouns
 - a. **He** who has an ear, let **him** hear
 - b. To **him** who overcome

The church is under threat, revival begins with individuals

2. Notice the prospect of revival living: eating the tree of life in the paradise of God

⁵ Newell, *Revelation*, 39.