Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Rekindling Your Love for Christ
Scripture: Revelation 2:1-7
Code: 80-292

As we begin this new year, before we get back into our study of the gospel of Luke, which we will commence again next Sunday, along with our series on doctrine next Sunday night, I wanna talk to you just personally and pastorally a little bit. Last Sunday, I spoke on 1 Corinthians chapter 10, on the danger of spiritual privilege, from the verse, "let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." How that those who are singularly blessed can become smug about that blessing, and thinking they're firm in their stand can be headed for a serious collapse.

I wanna follow up on that same perspective today, because I feel like part of the ministry that I must discharge before the Lord, and you, is a ministry of warning about danger. Our church is not in particular danger from some dominating iniquity. It is not in particular danger from some infiltrating heresy. It is not in danger from some loss of resources financially, or human. Everything you can see on the surface looks to be good. And we would have every reason to think that we stand, and still be on the brink of a fall.

And following that idea up a little bit, we have to go to the real core of what it means to be a Christian. And I, from my perspective, believe that the church in our day is completely losing this simple perspective. I think the Christian life is essentially a simple thing to understand. It is a life of loving Jesus Christ. I know that sounds probably pretty basic, and indeed it is, but just that simple statement has been lost to us. The Christian life is best defined as an ongoing relationship of love between the believer and Christ. We don't need to talk about his love for us. That's fixed. The issue is our love for Christ.

Evangelical Christianity has all but lost this perspective on the Christian life. Most people have the idea that the Christian life is about how much God loves me and wants to fulfill my dreams and my desires and my ambitions and my goals and my objectives. And what he wants to do is make something wonderful out of me, and life me up, and elevate me, and fulfill all the hopes of my heart. It's more about God loving me so much that he wants to do all of this than it is about me loving him.

But in reality, the Christian life is about loving Christ. Is about loving him singularly. It is about loving him totally. It is about loving him sacrificially. It is about loving him obediently. It is about loving him worshipfully. It is about loving him in terms of service. It really is about loving Jesus Christ. That's what it means to be a Christian. It's that you now commit your life to loving him.

Now, if you understand the Old Testament, the great commandment was to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. This is the sum of all that God requires, and your neighbor as yourself. But it starts with loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, which is just a way of saying loving God comprehensively, totally, completely. Now if that's the sum of the law, then that has to be the sum of the relationship. That can't be altered when it comes to being a Christian. It is still the purpose of God that we would love the Lord, Jesus Christ, with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Being a Christian is about loving Christ so much that you wanna know him, so much that you wanna exalt him, so much that you wanna please him, so much that you wanna serve him, so much that you wanna be with him, so much that you wanna tell others about him. It's about this overwhelming, consuming affection for Christ. This is at the core of what it means to be a Christian.

And so, the real question to ask people, when you talk about their spiritual growth, or their spiritual condition, or where they are in terms of their life, is how much do you love Jesus Christ? How much do you love Christ? Are you growing in your love for Christ? Do you love him more now than you have in the past? Do you desire him more now than you did in the past?

Paul say that, "I may know him." He was driven to know more about Christ. To know everything he could know about Christ. To grasp every reality concerning Christ. To understand every word he said, every deed he did. To understand the fullness of his purposes, his redemption. To grasp completely the mind of Christ. To know how he thought about everything. Paul was driven to serve him, to exalt him, to honor him, to proclaim him, because he loved him. This is consistent with the Biblical definition of what it means to be a Christian. It is to love Christ. To love him as the one who first loved us and gave himself for us.

Listen to the language of the New Testament. Here are the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:37, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." It starts out with loving Christ more than you love anybody else, even those that you most naturally love. It's about loving Christ to the point where you're willing to take up your cross. Where you're willing to lose your life. Where you're willing to hate yourself and all your dreams and ambitions, hopes, desires. It's loving Christ singularly. The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians, chapter 5 that it's the "love of Christ that constrains us," or controls us, or drives us, or motivates us. The Christian life is about a heart attitude much more than it's about theology or conduct. And that heart attitude is an attitude of love. Listen to what the apostle Paul said at the very end of the Ephesians Epistle, a verse that often gets overlooked. "Grace be with all those who love our Lord, Jesus Christ incorruptibly." How do you define a Christian? One who has an undying, incorruptible love for Jesus Christ. Paul understood that. So did Peter. Peter wrote, in 1 Peter 1:8, "And though you have not seen him, you love him." And in chapter 2, verse 7, he said, "he is precious. He was the cornerstone. The rock. He's to us, precious." John, the apostle, also understood

this, in 1 John chapter 4, in verse 16, "We have come to know and believe the love which God has for us. God is love." We know that. We know God is love. We know God loves us. We've come to believe that. But further, verse 19, "We love because he first loved us." That's why we can say, in verse 20, "I love God."

How do you define a Christian? By their love for God. By their love for the Lord, Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 16:22 looks at it from a negative side, "If any man love not Lord, Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." There are only two kinds of people in the world: the cursed and the damned, and those who love Jesus Christ.

This is the compelling reality for the Christian. It's a very simple thing to understand what it is to be a Christian. It is to love Jesus Christ. It is to love him singularly. It is to love him selflessly. It is to love him to the degree that you're willing to deny yourself, abandon everything you have, even hate yourself, you're willing to say goodbye to your family, your friends, your fortune, whatever it is, Jesus laid it all out. And the issue is to love him singularly. To love him so that you desire to obey him, to honor him, to serve him, and to proclaim him.

And that really is the question. The question is a heart question. Do you love the Lord, Jesus Christ, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength? It was he who said, "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments." It was he who said, "If you love me, you'll keep my word." It was he who said, "If you love me, you'll feed my sheep." That's the issue. That is the issue. That is the heart issue in the Christian life. It's about loving Christ.

And so, the right question, I suppose to ask all of us is, what is the condition of our love for Christ right now? In John 16:27, Jesus said, "The father himself loves you because you have loved me." That's right. You love Christ, God loves you. In fact, that's basic to experiencing God's love. Listen to John 14:21, "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me shall be loved by my father, and I will love him." Do you love Christ? Do you keep his commandments? Do you keep his word? And because you love Christ, the father loves you. This is what the Christian life is all about.

It is living the life in which you are literally attracted relentlessly to the beauty and the glory and majesty of Christ. That's why the Bible features him. That's why even the Old Testament is about him. Search the Scriptures. "They which speak of me," he said. That's why you have four gospels, not just three synaptic gospels going over the same history so that everything is confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses, and so that you have all the nuances. But so that you have a vast amount of material on Christ because of the glory of his person. People ask me all the time, what's your favorite thing to preach about? It's easy. My favorite thing to preach about is not a thing, it's a person. My favorite person to preach about is Christ, the most compelling person whose ever lived. The most magnificent. The most glorious. The most wonderful.

And why do you keep preaching? And why do you so relentlessly go through Matthew and John as we have now through Luke? Why with such care and such detail? Because every Sunday you get a glimpse of Christ. It adds to the wealth of understanding that you have to illicit that love, which is essential to Christian life. And it's not just the gospels. The rest of the New Testament defines the power of loving Christ in the Book of Acts, and begins to unfold the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ for us in the Epistles and the glory of Christ in the Book of Revelations. It's all about him. And he is so inexhaustible as to his glory that I have been preaching all my lifetime and haven't even begun to touch the fullness of the glories of Christ.

Christian life is about loving Christ. And the right question to ask yourself as you begin the New Year is what is the state of my love for Christ? And I'm not asking you about your doctrine. I'm not asking you about your Orthodoxy. I'm not asking you about your ministry or your service. I'm not asking about that. I'm asking the heart issue question that shows up on those other fronts, what is the condition of your love for Christ? And I am concerned about it. I'm concerned about it because as you go, so goes the church. So goes this church, and all the people this church influences. You say well, don't we all love Christ? Yes. We all love Christ, to some degree. But the level of that love can change.

And I wanna draw you to a Scripture that serves as a warning to us, the second chapter of Revelation. It's not about nearly loving Christ. It's about fully loving Christ. And in the second chapter of Revelation, you have a letter from the Lord, himself, to a church. The church at the city of Ephesus. You remember that in chapter 1, there is a vision of Christ, really an amazing vision of Christ. He is clothed in a robe, verse 13, "reaching to the feets. Head in his like white wool, like snow. His eyes like a flame of fire. His feet like varnished bronze, as if they were glowing in a furnace. His voice like the sound of many waters crashing against the rocks, the thunderous roar of waves. In his right hand, he has seven stars. That is, he holds the leaders of the church, the pastors of the church. And out of his mouth comes a sharp, two-edged sword to defend his church. His face is like the sun shining in the strength." I mean, this is an immensely traumatizing vision, and of course, John falls over like a dead man when he sees it. That's the first of many visions in Revelation. But it pictures Christ moving in his church, the seven golden lamp stands are the seven churches, says in verse 20. So you have a picture of Christ, in all his glory, moving in his church. You see him empowering his church. You see interceding for his church as a high priest. That's what the robe and the girdle mean. You see him purifying his church with his flaming vision and varnished bronze feet. You seem him commanding his church with his voice. You see him reflecting his glory through his church like the sun shining in it. Here is Christ moving in all his glory in the church. He is the center. He is everything in the church.

Now, out of this vision of Christ in his church comes seven letters for seven churches. Those seven churches are listed back in verse 11, with Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. Those are actual cities in Asia Minor, modern Turkey. Actual cities. And they

really are a postal route, the general postal headquarters throughout Asia Minor followed the circuit from Ephesus ending up at Laodicea. So they were in those cities where churches were founded. They were basically planted by the Ephesian church, which was the first and the strongest and the mother church planting the rest. They are actual churches, and the Lord gives to John, the apostle, on the island of Patimuswhere he was when he received the Revelation, a letter for each of these churches. And these letters are contained in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation. Seven churches, real churches, each unique with its unique characteristics and unique problems. Two of them, no set issues. Two of them were just honored churches. Five of them were seriously flawed churches. They were real churches, actual churches. They're not metaphoric or symbolic. But they do identify the kinds of churches that exist in all ages, even today. So that they stand as models or examples for churches. And therefore as warnings as well.

And the first letter goes to Ephesus, the main church, and the first church on the postal course. And it is written to the angel, or the minister. Probably on the island of Patimus there were delegates from each of these churches that had come to visit John, and each of them got a copy of the Book of Revelation to take back, with particular attention to the letter written to their church. This letter goes to whoever was the unveilas, the minister or the servant or leader of that church. The messenger is what the word really means. And tell them this, the writer is the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one that walks among the seven golden lamp stands, he says this, and that's of course Christ as I just described in chapter 1. "Christ has a message for your church," now that'll get your attention, wouldn't it? The messenger comes back and says folks, I have this wonderful book of Revelation. It tells all about what's gonna happen in the future. But right in the middle of this first opening section, chapters 1-3 being the opening, there's a letter to you from the Lord himself. He has something to say to your church. That would grab your attention. This is what he said, verse 2, "I know your deeds, and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles and they are not, and you found them to be false, and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember, therefore, from where you are fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first, or else I am coming to you and will remove your lamp stand out of its place, unless you repent. Yet this you do have that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

This first letter is addressed to a strong church. The church of Ephesus, very strong, sound in theology, earnest, zealous, busy, evangelistic. In fact, this church had a really incredible beginning, not too many years before this, and it's recorded in the 19th chapter of Acts, verse 1 says, "Paul, having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus." So God uses Paul to launch this church. Down at verse 8, it says, "And he entered the synagogue and he continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God." Can you imagine that? He had access to the synagogue because of course he was a great Jewish teacher. But he went into a

Jewish synagogue in a gentile city of Ephesus, and for three months, he preached the gospel in a Jewish synagogue persuasively. But verse 9 says, "Some were becoming hardened and disobedient, and speaking evil of the way before the multitude." The Jews began to get harder and harder, and then they began to speak evil of Paul before people who would listen, so "he withdrew from them and took away the disciples," by the way, the disciples were mentioned in verse 1 has already having been there. We don't know whether there were any converts in the synagogue. There were some disciples in verse 1 when he arrived, and there are some in verse 9. We don't know whether any came out of that synagogue, and he moved his whole operation to the "school of Tyrannus." Some man had a school, and Paul took over the place, and used it for teaching, and did it for "two years." Can you imagine these disciples under the tutelage of the apostle Paul for two years? And it was so powerful, "that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." They didn't have television. They didn't have radio. They didn't have a printed page. How in the world did everybody in Asia Minor know what was going on in the school of Tyrannus with the few disciples from the city of Ephesus? Because the power of his preaching was so great, that everybody who heard him spread the message. And what even added to that was, verse 11, "God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out." There was so much power exploding through the apostle Paul that even in his absence people were being healed and delivered from demons. You're talking about a phenomenal movement of God in the city of Ephesus. I mean, they would remember the beginning of their church like no other church would ever remember it. Unless perhaps it was that first church in Jerusalem. An explosion of miracles. Power. It was so powerful, that "some of the Jewish exorcists," you know, that made their living purporting to be able to cast out demons started using the name Jesus. They thought Jesus was the magic word. And so, these exorcists began to say, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." Starting to command the demons in the name of Jesus. And of course, the demons said, Jesus we know, Paul we know, but who are you? Well, you remember the story. The power of the gospel began to take over the city. And verse 18 says, "Many of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices." "The name of the Lord, Jesus," verse 17 says, "was being magnified." Verse 19 says, "those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them," they had a huge citywide book burning of all the magic books, "in the sight of everybody. It was up to 50,000 pieces of silver." Perhaps a drachma, 50,000 drachma would be a day's wages. That's a lot. "The word of the Lord," verse 20, "was growing mightily and prevailing." It was victorious.

And of course, a big battle ensues. And the business in town -- the big business in town was the Temple to Diana and Artemis, same god, Diana, Artemis, two names. This massive temple dominated the town, Pagan temple. And with the gospel spreading, and everybody burning their magic books and turning to Christ, the business at the temple was falling off. And they said, in verse 25, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business." And what they did was, they made little gods, and people came to the temple, bought the little gods, took them home, and kept them so that they would have a representation of the gods at home. And the business of making the

little idols began to fall off as people were coming to Christ. And verse 28 says, "People were filled with rage, they began to cry out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" It's kind of like a riot starts. "The city was filled with the confusion. They rushed with one accord into the theater, dragged Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia." They dragged them out of the theater, "And Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. They repeatedly urged him not to go to the theater", because it was a total riot. And the riot was directly a result of the powerful explosion of the gospel.

Could you imagine being part of a church plant like that? Great beginnings. Incredible power. The whole city in confusion. The whole city in chaos. The whole business of idolatry crashes. This is big stuff. Temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. We're talking about a major place. Seven wonders of the ancient world. Massive. I've walked through the streets of Ephesus, one of the best-preserved set of ruins in the Middle East. Staggering to see a tribute to idols that existed in that place. I've even been in the theater where I've actually preached Acts 19 about the riot that occurred there. The temple was massive. Scores of eunuchs, thousands of prostitutes, priestesses, unnumbered heralds, singers, people playing musical instruments, dancers, and the worship, according to historians, was a kind of hysteria where people worked themselves into frenzies of shameless sexual conduct and mutilation. And huddled in the middle of this environment was a little church. And that little church turns Ephesus upside down. Wow, what glorious beginnings. How those people's lives must have been revolutionized. What kind of joy did they experience? What kind of bliss? What kind of peace? What kind of satisfaction? What kind of fulfillment? What kind of exhilaration to be delivered from all of that?

And then, when Paul wasn't there anymore, they had Timothy for a pastor. And they had Aquila. And they had even Apollos, the great Old Testament teacher. And they had the best beginning imaginable, and the best leadership. And it showed. They were strong. And it says in verse 2, "I know your deeds. I know your works." I know what you do. And it's commendable. And then he kind of splits it out. What were their deeds? What did they do? Well, "your labor," or your toil, cappas, that is a strenuous labor to the point of exhaustion. I know how hard you work for the kingdom. I know you toil for Christ. I know your work is diligent, consistent.

And there are a lot of Christians who do nothing. But not in Ephesus. They worked. They worked for the kingdom. And it wasn't always easy. That's why he says, "I also know your perseverance," your hoopa monet,from words that means to remain under. Your ability to stay under pressure. Your ability to stay under distress and hardship and difficulty and keep courageously gallantly what you should. It isn't that you're just doing it because it's easy to do. It isn't that you're doing it because the skies are fair. You faithfully work to the point of exhaustion against the grain, and you stay there, and you stay under it. Perseverance.

There's something else good about this church, and you cannot endure evil men. You have a very limited tolerance for sinners. You are intolerant of sinners is what it means. Very sensitive to sin. In fact, in specific, look at verse 6, he says, "This you do have. You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans. The best we can do in reconstructing the Nicolaitans is that it is a sect attached to a man named Nicolas, and early church fathers say that Nicolas started this sect apparently within Christianity, which was given over to immoral, lewd, licentious conduct. Clement says that, "they had the morals of goats," whatever that means.

But this church didn't have any tolerance for that. They hated any kind of libertinism, any kind of doctrine that allowed for immorality to be tolerated, any kind of antinomianism. Anything that was against the law of God. Hard working, enduring, persevering, suppressing evil. I'm quite sure that hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans came down in church discipline. I'm sure they had to deal with people in their church who were sinful, and they did it according to Matthew 18, and according to the prescription that was laid out by the Lord himself, as well as the instruction of the apostle Paul in several places.

I mean, everything about this church up to this point is so good. And then he adds this, "And you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false." This church was strong doctrinally so that it had discernment. Very discerning. Worked hard, relentlessly, in serving the Lord. Endured opposition difficulty, challenges, and persevered. Suppressed evil and sin wherever they found it, and held up the truth and held everyone up to the truth. They has discernment. They recognized the false prophet. And that wasn't always easy to do, because false prophets disguise themselves, don't they? You can wish for a church like this, really. You can say this is the dream church. The dream church. And discernment is at the heart of it. Boy, it's so important to be discerning. People say to me, what's the biggest problem in the church nowadays, I say a lack of discernment. I am floored by the utter absence of discernment in the church.

Where is discernment today? It's just not there. Well, not at Ephesus. They would have seen it. They would have understood it. They would have discerned it. They held everybody up, and they measured them, put them to the test, and they had the stuff to determine who was false. In verse 3, he says again, "you have perseverance and you have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary." And this is sort of the final comment. And all of this is continuing right now. All of this commendation is going on right now. This is a church to die for, folks. If we put up - this has the basic description of the church that was looking for a pastor, and put it in the lobby of the seminary, they'd kill each other to get the phone number, right? This is the perfect church. They've got it all.

Then verse 4 comes like a bomb, "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love." You left your first love. It's all become duty. The penetrating gaze, the laser eyes. Mentioned back in chapter 1, verse 14, "eyes like a flame of fire," had penetrated through to the core of that church, and

the Lord found a fatal flaw. The hearts were growing cold. They had left their first love, first love for Christ. Oh, they were doing what they always did, because that's what you do. That's what's expected. That's what's planned. That's the way the program's laid out. That's the way people are gonna evaluate you and respect you and honor you, and they did it, and the theology was in place. But the honeymoon was over. It was like a marriage can be. Everything was there. Faithfulness was there, and duty was there, and responsibility was there. But the passion was gone. No great scandal. No great organization blunder. No loss of resources financial or human. But the heart was cold. The thrill was gone. The enthusiasm was drying out.

Those are the kind of things that I think about, because I think this church, if I were to have to compare it to a church in the New Testament, this church has those very characteristics that Ephesus had. I mean, you work hard, you persevere, and you have for years faithfully. You can't endure sin, and you don't. And your doctrine is strong, and you know heresy when you see it, and you're willing to expose it, and you never grow weary. You get an A for all of that, and an A for faithfulness. But the Lord can see what we can't see. He can see your heart. And I know we've been at it a long time. We're moving towards our 50th anniversary. We've outlived the life of most churches to remain vibrant and faithful and strong. I've always wondered when, or if it would crumble. I used to read things about well, when you hit year 20, it starts downhill, or when you get air conditioning, it starts downhill, or everybody's got an answer to that. Or when you get into the third generation, third generation Christians who know nothing but other Christians, and Christian schools and churches and all that, they become apathetic, indifferent, almost distant in their Christianity, and that's when it begins to crumble, and people become apathetic. Well, I don't know about all of the wins, but I do know that the warning of Scripture is that you can be doing all the right things, and believe in all of the right things, and have your heart grow cold, right?

You say well, how does the church get like that? A church gets like that when its people get like that. We're just a collection, and you're part of it. We become like that when you become like that. So the real question to ask yourself now, as you look at a new year is, what is the condition of my relationship to Christ? How would I describe my love for Christ on a 1-10 scale? Am I consumed in his glory and his honor and his word and his pleasure and his will? What is the description of my Christian life?

I don't really worry about some massive scandal striking Grace Church and bringing it down in a crash of simple corruption. I don't really worry about this church wandering off into heresy. My goodness, if I misquote a verse, somebody comes up afterwards and tells me about it. Thank you for doing it. I'm not worried about this church all of a sudden running out of human resources. Our church is growing and flourishing. We have a great history behind us. We have a great influx of new people, hundreds and hundreds of them, who came in last year all with high expectations and anticipation. We have no great fear that all of a sudden we're gonna lose our way in terms of ministry programs and what we do, and something's gonna come apart at the seams. Those aren't the things that

concern me. The things that concern me have to do with the heart. It has to do with you becoming indifferent to Christ, and therefore compromising and falling into sin, and bringing destruction into your own life and your own family, and eventually into the church. It has to do with where I can't go, what I can't see, and neither can anybody else, except the Lord.

People used to say to me in the early years when I was at Grace Church, oh, you're in the honeymoon. It'll end. And I used to end, well, what does it mean when the honeymoon ends? What is that? When the passion is gone, and the joy is gone, and the exuberance is gone, and it all just becomes duty and doctrine. Well, I've done my best to make sure that honeymoon never ends. It hasn't ended for me. I don't know whether your experience is the same or not, but if enough of you have found the end of the honeymoon, then we're in some serious trouble, because if we go down this road, the end of verse 5 says, the Lord told Ephesus, "I'm coming to you, and I'll remove your lamp stand out of its place". Literally, I'll shut you down. It's amazing to think about the Lord being an enemy of his own church, isn't it? And you know what happened? That happened to Ephesus. The Lord shut that church down. It's testimony disappeared, and there's none there even now. Oh, there were some overcomers, verse 7, who listened to what the spirit said. There were some believers there, true believers, perhaps most, and they would eat the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. They were headed for heaven. It's not that they weren't believers. I would venture to say that most of them had to be believers. They were headed for heaven, but they were still gonna lose their ministry because they lost their love.

What do you do? Well, three things. Verse 5, remember. Remember. What he's saying to them is hey, go back, remember, remember your Paganism. Remember how lost you were. Remember how desperate and destitute you were. Remember what it was like to worship idols. Remember the immorality that you were involved in. And remember what happened when the gospel exploded and the power of God was seen everywhere in the midst of miracles preaching of the gospel into your heart, and you were given faith to believe and repentance, and your heart was turned around, and literally replaced, and you were transformed. Remember the joy, the exhilaration, the satisfaction, the overwhelming peace. Remember. Remember what it was like to see the city completely overturned, chaos, as the gospel triumphed over idols. Spiritual defection can come from forgetting. That's what makes it hard. That's why we talk about second and third generation, they got nothing to remember. And sometimes I say to people, go ask your grandparents how it was before they came to Christ. Go ask your grandparents to tell you the story of that transformation. Find somebody that's been transformed. Hang around new Christians. Remember. Bible constantly calls for us to remember all the feasts and festivals throughout the Old Testament were designed to teach Israel to remember what God had done for them so they would never forget.

Peter said, "I write these things to put you in remembrance." Go back and remember what you felt at the beginning when you were overwhelmed with joy, you couldn't get enough Bible teaching. You couldn't get enough time alone with the Lord, couldn't get enough Christian fellowship. You couldn't

talk about Jesus to the people around you enough. You couldn't get enough of him. Remember the flashes of first love, because if you don't, you follow the path of a diminishing love. You follow it right into compromise, and then into corruption. Look at your life. Is there anything you love more than Christ? Is there anything you want more than Christ? Is there anyone that you want to serve more than Christ? Anyone you might wanna honor more than Christ? Anyone you might wanna proclaim more than Christ? If there is, you left your first love. Go back and remember how it was, or find out how it is for people transformed from a Pagan environment.

Secondly he says, "not only remember from where you have fallen," and by the way, where you have fallen indicates this is sin. Leaving your first love is sin. That's why you have fallen. It is a fall. And when you have fallen into sin, you need then to repent. He says repent there in verse 5, and he repeats it again at the end of the verse, "unless you repent, the judgment will come." The second thing is to repent. See, it is sin. Confess the sin of losing your first love, or leaving your first love. Confess the sin of your coldness. Confess the sin of the sort of routine approach to worship and everything else in your Christian life. Confess the sin of serving the Lord without exuberance, without joy. Confess the sin of only doing your duty. Confess the sin of doing what you do because you think somebody wants to see you do it, and therefore somehow will think well of you. If you love your theology more than Christ, you've left your first love. There was a time when you didn't know enough theology to love it, and you just loved him. Paul says that, "I may know him." He loved him so much he could never get enough of him.

And so, repent. And thirdly, he says, "repeat". Do the deed you did at first. Go back. When you were swept up in prayer and Bible study and fellowship and witnessing and worship, and it was all so exhilarating, pretty simple little path, remember how it was, how it is, for people transformed. And if you have fallen, repent, because it's a sin not to love him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. I don't know if you often ask for forgiveness for that sin, but you should, and so should I. And then begin to repeat the things you did at first when you were swept up in the joy of salvation.

It is a disaster, but it's a silent killer when a church leaves its first love. And the church doesn't necessarily see it. Stop loving Christ and making him the focus of everything, and you will descend in the compromise with the world, and the whole idea of loving Christ will disappear from your vocabulary. And then you'll go from compromise to corruption. In a word, you'll go from Ephesus to become a church like the one in Pergamus, to become a church like the one in Thyatira, to become a church like Sardis, which was dead. And it starts here.

We look at a new year. My prayer, my desire for all of us is that the Lord would grant us an increasing love for Christ. Let's Pray. Thank you, Father, for the power of your truth. We have nothing that we could say, no thought could ever come out of a human source that could even come close to the power of divine truth. We thank you for the letter to the church, to our church, to us, that reminds us of the fire, the flames of love for Christ. May we be a church lost in wonder love, praise, and service to

our Christ. And now, Lord, we do ask that you would grant us grace to be the people you want us to be. The spirit is shining bright in our hearts, and is the source of that love to which we must yield. Cultivate that in us that we might, instead of leaving our first love, find that first love increasing constantly into a fuller love for our Christ. In his name, we pray. Amen.

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