

What do we do when we don't love Christ like we used to? Maybe our hearts have grown cold. Or we find ourselves just going through the motions. We aren't sinning greatly. We haven't changed doctrine. But something just feels off.

This is where the church in Ephesus finds themselves. They do the right things, but they don't love Jesus like they once did. In Revelation 2:1-7 we will find why this is a problem, but more significantly what we are supposed to do about it.

Because all of us have found ourselves here at one point or another. But loving Jesus is not optional for Christians. It is not just something for the young or baby Christians. It is something we must have for our whole lives. And if we lose it, then we need to get it back. Let's take a look at how we can do that.

I. Remember Jesus holds you (v. 1)

Before we unpack that statement let us look closer at Ephesus.

This is the church who first receives the letter.

And Ephesus is a significant church.

It is the closest church to the island where John is currently in exile.

The church of Ephesus has been the recipient of Paul's ministry.

He spent three years there and you can read about it in Acts 19.

Paul later wrote them the letter Ephesians.

But the church is also significant to John.

Because Ephesus is where John has based his ministry.

And church tradition tells us that after his exile ends, he will return to the church in Ephesus to minister again.

And he will stay there until his death.

So the church has special meaning to John.

He knows the names and stories of most of the people who will read it.

You may notice the letters are all addressed to the angel.

Right away we have some of Revelation's hard to interpret problems.

Who is this angel?

The word for angel basically means messenger.
Which is why angels are most often delivering messages from God.
So, this messenger is either a human messenger or it is a spiritual being.

If it is a human messenger, then this is addressed to the leader of the church.

This is an unlikely because angel almost always means a heavenly one.

But this letter is meant to go to the human church.

It is not just for the angel, but for the people in the church.

And I think the letter especially makes sense as a pastor or elder.

I would encourage our elders to read this and imagine this is written to you as a leader of the church.

Because that would certainly change how you read it.

Or this also could be a reference to an angelic heavenly being.

It means that there are angels over the churches.

Each church located in the city has an angel who oversees them.

This sounds strange to most of us sensible modern people.

But it fits the Scriptures.

Because we know the angels work on behalf of God's people.

Daniel shows us that there are angels and demons over cities and nations.

And if they are over the kingdoms of the world, surely some would be in charge of the churches as well.

1 Corinthians also has a throwaway point.

When the apostle is speaking about head coverings, he mentions that the church needs to do so **"on account of the angels."**

Which Paul never clarifies what he means by that.

It is possible Paul knew angels are over churches and that angels are often present when we worship.

In the end, I am honestly not sure.

I think it might even be possible that both are right.

It is probably given to the angel over the churches

The idea of each church having angel seems the weirdest to me, so that probably fits the book of Revelation the best.

Now at the end of the day it might not even matter.

Because the pastor better read it and apply it.

And the whole church better apply it.

We don't want to miss the main point of Christ and what He is calling us too because we are distracted by angels.

Remember, the point of Revelation is to point us to Jesus, to obey it, and to give us hope.

Chase rabbits and weird stuff in the book, but then come back to the main things.

The primary thing the church in Ephesus needs to remember is that Christ holds them.

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

This is the description of Jesus they are reminded of.

Because the letter is not from John to the churches.

This letter is written by Jesus.

And it is written and it is the words of the Jesus John just saw at the end of chapter 1.

And one particular part of that vision is singled out.

There are to heed the words of **"him who holds the seven stars in his right hand."**

We learned last week the seven stars are the churches.

And Jesus holds them in His hand.

He is in control.

They also are to heed the words of him **"who walks among the seven golden lamp stands."**

Each of the letters is going to start with something like this.

They will be reminded of a particular part of the vision.

There will be something of Jesus that they have forgotten.

Or something about Jesus that they need to behold and to remind themselves of.

The Ephesians need to remember that God holds them.

They need to remember that Jesus walks among them and knows them.

I have a newborn in the house.

And the fun thing about newborns is that they don't know anything.

They have to learn everything there is to know about life from scratch.

And one thing they want more than anything is to be held.

They want to be held all the time.

Because they struggle to understand that if you put them down and are two feet away, that you are still close.

They can't understand when you talk to them.

So they just want reassurance that someone is holding them.

We can be like that as a people and as a church.

We can freak out and forget that Jesus is holding us.

Because it might seem like He has walked away.

Or we cannot feel His constant presence or care.

Or we look at and see calamity fall and assume Christ has failed.

So, like a child we cry and wail hoping He will come pick us up again.

I often reassure my daughter, it's okay I am here.

I am holding you.

But we need to remember and recognize.

Jesus is holding us.

He has us in His hand.

He is the one who is walking among us.

He holds us and all of the churches.

Nothing can befall us that He does not see or not allow.

And this is a reminder not just that Ephesus needed, but one that we need.

Tanglewood is not our church, it is God's church.

He holds us in His hand.

We did not survive covid because I am a great pastor and helped us use technology to connect.

We survived because Christ holds us in His hand.

Our church has not been able to survive for close to 50 years because of great elders but because Christ holds us in His hand.

We have not been able to attract young families because we are so brilliant in our outreach and marketing, but because Christ holds us in His hand.

He is the one who walks among the churches.

He knows our church.

He knows our gifts and our limitations.

He knows who we are.

He holds us.

I do not know what the future holds.

I do not know what challenges or hardships we will face.

But I know that Jesus holds us.

Remembering this will help us love Christ again.

II. Return to your first love (v. 2-6).

The main thing they need to do is return to their first love.

They need to be acting like they did when they first converted.

When their hearts were first filled with the love of Christ.

When they were first convicted of their sins and gave their lives to Christ.

That joy and that behavior is what they need to recover.

First John tells them all the stuff they are doing well.

Verse 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."**

They are doing good works.

They do not just say they are Christians.

They are doing the work of faith.

They are living out their faith in their lives.

They are toiling for the faith.
They are not just doing the easy stuff.
They are doing the hard work of following Christ.
They are resisting the pull of the culture and empire.
And they are enduring patiently.
Their faith does not falter when things get hard.
They continue to follow Jesus.
They persevere in their faith.
They are not like those who grow up in the faith and then drift.

They also don't put up with sin and evil.
This might sound weird at first.
But this is not really about their attitude towards non-believers.
Jesus is not praising them for being people who cannot stand there slight of unbelievers.
It doesn't mean they avoid even talking to people who aren't Christians.
It does mean they don't put up with it in their midst.
They are not a church that will let people live however they want.
They will not turn a blind eye to sin.
If someone in the church is sleeping with his mother in law, they will not ignore it like the church in Corinth did.

And, I love this one, they test their leaders.
Just because an apostle shows up does not mean they accept them.
They still ask questions and test their doctrine.
They make sure they uphold the doctrine of the apostles.
This is amazing for an apostle himself to praise.
John, does not say he is above questioning.
He does not see his authority has something that must be accepted without question.
He would be happy to be interrogated by new Christians to see if He truly knows Jesus.
This tells us something that we should see about leadership too.
If John is not above being tested, then our leaders should not be either.

Verse 3, **"I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary."**

They are even enduring persecution well.

They do it all for the name of Christ.

And they don't give up or grow weary.

This is what any leader would want his church to look like.

They are doing everything right.

They are following all of God's commands.

But there is only one small thing they get wrong.

Verse 4, **"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first."**

They have abandoned their love for God.

They no longer have the love for God that they did first.

They are like someone who is married.

Who was head over heels for their spouse when they were young.

They were fully in the honeymoon stage and just adored them.

But the years and times have gone by.

And now they have fallen out of love.

This is the Ephesians faith.

They loved Christ once.

They were overwhelmed by His mercy.

Now they are bored by it.

They used to sing loudly and joyfully on Sunday.

Now they just offer critics on every song.

They have lost their love.

This means we can do everything right.

We can follow all of the rules.

We can apply the Bible to all our lives.

We can have the right theology.

We can believe all of the right things.

We can vote the right way.

We can read the right books.

We can avoid the people we should avoid.

We can resist the culture.

We can do all of that, but without love we are lost.

If you do the right things in the right ways but without love for God, you have missed it.

Honestly, I think this should scare some of us.

This certainly should convict many of us who have walked with Jesus for a long time.

This should make those of us who are really good at following the rules take a second look at our own hearts.

Because Ephesus is doing all the right things in all of the right ways they just don't love God like they should.

And this is important for us to see as believers.

Because you can do all of the right things and you can even do them in the right way, but you actually need to do them out of love for Jesus.

We have to do them because we love Jesus.

we cannot just follow the rules because we are trying to follow the rules.

We cannot do all that Jesus asked us to do and follow the commands with the Bible because we're just trying to earn our salvation either.

We cannot obey out of fear.

Some people follow the rules because I don't like getting in trouble.

And so there are some who approach Christianity because they're tried to avoid getting in trouble with God.

That's not the right motivation

You see it is the heart behind what we do is just as important as what we do.

If you have the right heart, then you need to have the right works.

Otherwise, you don't really have the right heart.

And if you are doing the right works, you need to be doing them with the right heart otherwise they're not the right works.

The Ephesian church in some ways is very similar to Israel at times in the Old Testament.

They are going through the motions of doing everything that they're supposed to do correctly, but they don't love God.

So we as followers of Jesus, need to be sure that we are obeying out of love for God.

That we respond to the commands of Jesus out of love.

That we want to do what God commands us to do because we love God.

The gospel is not that we are saved because we did the right things.

We have been saved out of the grace of Jesus and out of the abundance of his love and dine in our place and giving us credit for his righteousness.

And so now we will obey and we do everything they got asked us to do just because we love him, and because we are so overwhelmed by the grace of what he has done for us.

Because he has given us such an incredible gift we want to show our gratitude through our love and through our actions.

Verse 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."**

They need to remember where they used to be.

They need to remember the Love that they had for Jesus and find that love again.

And so the way that we can do this if you find yourself convicted and thinking you know what I think that I have also forgotten my love for Jesus.

If you feel that your own heart has grown cold, the way that you come back is to remember.

Remember the way that you felt back when you first became a believer.

I can think of a particular moment in college when I was just on fire for Jesus and so consumed with a love for him and for his word that I slept with my Bible in my bed because I just wanted it to always be close to me. I'm not saying we should all sleep with our Bibles. But I do need to have that same deep love for God's Word.

Now Jesus is calling them to do is to act like they did when they were consumed with love for Jesus.

When you overwhelmed with love for Jesus, you were the honeymoon face of Christianity. What did you do? How did you act? You should do those again.

And there's the warning of what will happen if we do not return to our first love.

Those who do not, and who do not repent will lose their place.

At the very least, it seems like this is Jesus saying he will let the church and emphasis die if they let their love die.

It also seems to be saying that their salvation is in doubt.

Because I don't know how you can be a follower of Jesus and not love Jesus

If you were a Christian, you have to love Jesus.

Otherwise, I don't know what you're doing.

Those who don't love Jesus are in great spiritual danger.

I've gotta be filled with a love for him.

Verse 6, **"Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."**

We do not know much about this group.

They are some kind of cult.

Church tradition tells us they were a gnostic cult.

They believed in secret knowledge.

They were really a sex cult.

Their beliefs were an excuse to do whatever they wanted.

The church Pergamum is rebuked later in this same chapter in verse 12. People in that church are actually following the teachings of the Nicolaitans.

And it seems like the teachers have something to do with idolatry and sexual immorality.

Which fits what we know about gnosticism.

But the Ephesians hate this group!

They hate their sexual immorality.

They hate their idolatry.

They are hating all of the right things.

Which is great, but they do not have the right love.

There are those who hate the world's sexual immorality.

They hate how the world wants everyone to embrace everything they want sexually.

They may hate the godlessness of the world.

I have been surprised to see atheists and popular philosophers embrace part of the teachings of Christianity on morality because they do not like the direction of the world.

There are a lot of people who love Christianity and don't love Jesus.

There are plenty of people who love the politics of Jesus, but don't love Jesus.

There are people who love the theology of Jesus, but do not love Jesus.

There are people who love the Bible, but do not love Jesus.

There are so many people who love the trappings of Christianity and the surrounding things of Christianity, but don't actually love the Christ of Christianity.

All that is nice, but it is not worth anything without love.

You need to actually love Jesus.

Being a follower of Christ is not about opposing sexual immorality.

It is about loving and following Jesus.

That has to and must be present.

We have to do the right things, in the right ways, with the right love.

This may be where many of us fall and where I see many Christians fail today.

Because our world and especially our contemporary culture is consumed by hatred.

All of our technology and our social media feeds our hatred and tries to make us hate more and more and more.

So there are many who hate the things that God hates.

But you gotta love what God loves.

If you don't love, Jesus, it does not matter what you hate.

We gotta return to our first love and we must love Jesus.

Because the root of our faith and the heart of our faith is burst out of our love for God.

So how can we have the right love?

How can we be sure that we are loving God not just hating His enemies?

How can we not just go through the motions of our faith?

Verse 5 gives us the path forward.

"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first."

We need to remember what it was like.

We need to remember the things that we used to do.

We repent and do them again with a renewed love.

III. Respond to the gospel (v. 7).

Ultimately, we have to respond to the gospel.

There is the warning that if we do not respond, if we do not have love.

Then our salvation is in danger and our lamp stand will be removed.

But if we respond positively.

If we embrace the gospel.

Then there are incredible rewards.

Verse 7, **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."**

This is not just talking about those who have body parts.

Jesus is saying that if your spiritual ears are listening, and if you are actually paying attention to the words of Jesus and wanting to hear what Jesus has to say then listen, because this part is really important.

This is much like when I am talking to my children, and I asked them to look at me in the eyes.

And even when they're looking at me in the eyes, I asked them are you listening to me? Do you have your listening ears on?

And so Jesus is asking if we have our ears on and if our eyes are on Him, and if we are listening and ready to hear.

And then we get the promise.

And the promise is given to the one who conquers.

This is a phrase that is repeated throughout all of the messages to the churches.

It always ends with a promise that is given to the one who conquers.

Which really means someone who has responded to the gospel.

Someone who is embracing faith in Jesus and repentance.

Someone who is following Christ.

What a great image that is of faith.

Because it's not saying, the one who repent or the one who believes or the one who endures it is the one who conquers.

Every faithful believer, every faithful lover of Jesus is a conqueror.

And that's a strange way for us to think about faith because the way that Christianity conquers and the way that Jesus conquers is not the way the world conquers.

You see the world tries to conquer through violence and power.

The world tries to conquer through influence and by gaining control.

The world tries to conquer through political means passing laws and judgments, and using whatever rules are necessary in order to bring about their desired result.

The story of Christianity is the story of how we conquer through the cross.

The gospel is the story of how Christ conquers through suffering and defeat and death.

The Christianity conquers when it looks like we have been conquered. When the apostle Paul had Stephen stoned, it looked like Paul gained a religious victory because he was getting rid of a competing religious leader.

And even though Stephen didn't have anyone respond to his sermon, even though he died, and he submitted the death willingly, he was the one who conquered.

Even though Jesus was crucified to the cross and died silent as a lamb, he conquered death.

So every single follower of Jesus who is faithful conquers.

We conquer the world when we refuse to give into a story.

We conquer the world when we die, having lived a faithful life.

We conquer when we endure suffering and even death still filled with love for Jesus.

Remember these churches the John is writing to or experiencing or about to experience even more persecution from the greatest empire of the world has ever seen.

And the way that they will conquer and defeat the empire and defeat the emperor is not through revolution or through a coup, but it is through refusing to submit and by continuing to follow Jesus.

It is through the power of the gospel.

And I think that that many times whenever the church forgets this lesson is when we fail.

This text has given us good tips and advice on what to do.

But ultimately, our love for Christ cannot return through the power of our own effort.

Only responding to the gospel can bring it back.

We cannot have our hearts rekindled through doing great works or trying harder.

It won't come back by praying a lot more.

It can only come back when we fall on our knees and repent.

When we acknowledge our weakness and sin.
And when we ask Jesus for help.
Because Jesus is the one who conquers.
And we can only conquer when we stop trying on our own and we let
Jesus do it for us.

Look at the promise again.
They will get to eat after the tree of life in the paradise of God.
When Adam and Eve were created, they were placed in paradise in the
garden of Eden.
And in that garden, there were two trees in one of the trees with the tree
of life.
And whoever it is, they got to eat from that tree would live forever.

Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden of Eden and died.
In one of the main reasons that they had to leave the garden is it so that
they wouldn't eat that tree.
Because if they ate from the tree of life, they were dead in their sins they
would be dead in their sins forever.
And God placed an angel over paradise and over the garden with a
flaming sword to keep anyone from being able to enter in because that
tree is now forbidden.

But here Jesus says come and eat.
He invites us to come and to eat to eat from the fruit
The gospel reverses the curse of sin.
Adam and Eve were kicked out of paradise, but through Jesus we get to
be invited back in.
Adam and Eve could not eat, but now we are invited to come and to take
and eat what was forbidden.
We will get to gain, and we will get to eat from the tree that provides an
immortality and eternal life, and now we can live forever and the paradise
of God.

There are some who might talk about this and wonder is this literally true or is it just a really pretty picture.

I think it's both.

I do think that those who conquer and those who love put their faith in Jesus to the very end will eat from the tree of life again in the paradise of God.

I also think this is pointing and reminding us that eternal life is available to us, and it is better than we could possibly imagine.

All of us have probably tried to close your eyes and picture with the garden of Eden looked like and what the world looked like what that tree looked like.

One day you'll get to see in one day you'll get to taste.

That the only way to receive this life is Jesus Christ.

He is the only mediator he is the only one who can let us in.

And the only way that we get in is not through our good works through faith and love of Jesus.

If you were someone who is only ever worked to never loved Jesus, I invite you come come and love your savior, put down your burdens and take up his yoke cause his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Jacob worked for seven years and didn't notice because he was so in love with Rachel.

That's part of what the yoke of Jesus is like.

It is so light because we are so filled with love.

We don't notice that all these things are supposed to be hard.

If you've been a follower of Jesus, but your love has grown cold I invite you to return and repent.

Stop doing it on your own and respond to the gospel.

And look forward to the day that all of us will get to eat from the tree of life.