



# Teaching God's Word to Train Disciples

## Fellowship BIBLE CHURCH

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When I went into the first grade, the school building that I attended was an old red brick building with huge windows. In order to motivate me to mind the teacher and do what I should do, my mother told me that she was going to be coming to the school from time to time so that she could look through those big windows and see if I was behaving. I remember glancing at those windows from time to time to see if my mother was looking in. Have you ever considered the fact that Jesus Christ himself is looking through the windows of

heaven at our church when we meet? And he is not looking simply of what we're doing outwardly he looking at what is going on within our hearts. That is really the thrust of revelation 2 and 3. Listed in those chapters are letters to seven churches that existed in Asia during John's day.

## The Seven Churches in Revelation Ephesus

Each letter has a 3-fold meaning:

1. Each letter was written to a local Church that existed at that time
2. Each of these seven Churches portrays the Church through successive stages of history.
3. Each message applies to every individual Christian. Each letter bears the words, "He that has an ear let him hear."

The letter we will study today is the message given by Jesus Christ to the church located in the city of Ephesus. Ephesus was a pagan city that was known

throughout the Roman world as the center for the worship of the goddess Artemis (also known as Diana), and the great temple of Artemis was located there. This great temple was larger than two football fields in length, and was one of the seven wonders of the world. People came from all over the world to worship at this temple.

When Paul began to evangelize in Ephesus (Acts 19), the new converts proved the reality of their faith by denouncing their former occult practices by burning the magical books that gave them spells. That cost them financially because some of the books would have probably brought some big money. It also cost them personally because some of those books were handed down as heirlooms from generation to generation. That being the case, this church was started with people who meant business with the Lord.

By the time this letter is written in Revelation, around 30 years had passed by, and it was the 2nd generation of Christians who received it. How was the church doing at this point?

### THE COMMENDATION

*Revelation 2:1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:*

The Lord sees three commendable things about this church.

## 1. They were hard workers

*Revelation 2:2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.*

These Christians were not couch potatoes. They took their faith seriously, and they put it to work. The words “hard work” means work to the place of weariness. They witnessed; they ministered to people’s needs. They were continually doing the Lord’s work. They were a lot like John Wesley. It is said that Wesley traveled 250,000 miles by horseback over 40 years of ministry. He preached more than 40,000 sermons, produced more than 400 books, and learned 10 languages. At 83 he was annoyed that he could not write more than 15 hours a day and at the age of 86 he was ashamed that he could not preach more than twice a day. He complained in his diary that there was an increasing tendency to lie in bed until 5:30 in the morning.

## 2. They were sound in doctrine (vs 2)

*2:2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.*

These were people who knew what the Bible taught and who would not tolerate error. When someone spoke, they didn’t just take what he said at face value. They examined what the speaker had said in the light of the Scriptures. An example of their defense of the faith is seen in vs 6.

*2:6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

We really don't know who the Nicolaitans were. The word means, to conquer the people. It seems to have been some kind of attempt to draw a distinction be-

tween would be called the clergy and the laity. In other words, the ministry of the church would be in the hands of an ordained clergy instead of the people. That was wrong then, and it is wrong now. The Christians at Ephesus were discerning, and they would not compromise the truth. That is an important thing for us today. You can turn on your t.v. or radio today and hear people teaching in the name of the Lord that are a thousand miles away from the truth. We need discernment, and these people had it.

## 3. They persevered through hardships (vs 3)

The U.S. Marine Corps used to have a motto, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." That’s a good way to describe this church.

*3:3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.*

It was not easy for these people of the Christians in their society. They were fiercely opposed, but they were determined to persevere. They had the spirit of John Bunyan. Probably no book has had greater influence on the Church apart from the Bible as John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress. It was written while Bunyan was a prisoner in the Bedford jail. He was preaching to a crowd outdoors when officers broke up the meeting and carried him to jail. His crime was simply preaching without a license. He spent the next 13 years in jail. When his trial came up, he was given a sentence of 3 months. After that time, he was told if he would promise never to preach again, they would release him. Bunyan replied, “If I were out of prison today, I would preach again tomorrow, so help me God!”

That’s the kind of patience and endurance we need. Up to this point, this sounds like the kind of church I would like to be a part of. It was filled with people who knew the Bible, who were willing to stand for what the Bible said and people who did not quit

when the going got tough. But--that is not the whole story.

## 2. THE PROBLEM

In spite of all the good things they were doing, there was a problem in the church that the Lord was very concerned about.

Albert Schweitzer, missionary-physician to Africa once wrote: "For the tragedy of life is not in the hurt to a man's name, or even in the fact of death itself. The tragedy of life is what dies inside a man while he lives."

For these people, the thing that had died within them was their first love of Christ.

*2: 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.*

Loving God has always been at the top of God's priority list.

*Deuteronomy 6:5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

When I first came to know the Lord, it was like I had been carrying around a heavy box on my shoulders, and suddenly the weight of that box had been removed. There was such joy in that. And then there was the joy of telling others who didn't know Christ what He had done in my life. To me, my whole world was changing, and God was at the very center of everything that I did. The problem is that sometimes, after that heavy box has been off your shoulders for a long time, you begin to forget what kind of a burden it really was. That's when the joy begins to diminish.

That was the problem with the Christians at Ephesus. They didn't have the kind of loving relationship they had previously had with the Lord. When that happened, they started doing out of duty what they had been doing out of love.

God wants us to work for Him because we love Him. Jacob in the Old Testament is a good example of that kind of love. Jacob fell in love with Rachel. As a result, he worked 7 years for her and the Bible says the seven years seemed just like a few days. Why? Because of the great love he had for her. His was a labor of love, and that's what God wants from us. He doesn't just want us to work for Him. He wants us to work for Him because we love Him.

*2: 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

What is this "lampstand" that we are in danger of losing? A lampstand is something that gives light so that people can see. That's what Christians and churches are to do. We are to shine the light of who God is into the lights of those who don't know Him. Jesus is saying, "if you don't return to your first love," I will take away your ability to shine. In other words, "I will take away your effectiveness in my work." Whereas you were once an inspiration to people and influenced people by your life and testimony, it will no longer be so. You may speak the same words and do the same things, but you won't have the same results.

We see that in the life of Samson. After Samson sinned and lost the power and blessings of God in his life, he went out and tried to fight the enemy just as he had done so many times before. He looked the same, but God had removed His blessings from the man, and he was defeated. That's what happened to the church at Ephesus. It continued in its determination to do God's work, but without God's blessings, it lost the fight. Eventually, it ceased to exist altogether.

**THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS TELLS US SOME SERIOUS THINGS.**

### **1. You can have a great spiritual heritage and lose your passion for God.**

You can look back on your spiritual life, as these people could, and remember great things God has done for you and through you and yet one day lose the vision and passion you once had.

### **2. You can be outwardly committed to the things of God and lose your passion for God.**

You can be doing all the right things and yet be far away from God in your heart.

### **3. You can be doctrinally correct and lose your passion for God**

I have known people who knew Scripture well versed, but who were spiritually cold.

## **THE WARNING SIGNS**

What are the indications that you are beginning to lose your first love.

### **1. When you begin neglecting the spiritual disciplines**

The term “spiritual disciplines” are such things as a daily quiet time when you are alone with God in His Word and prayer and such things as fellowshiping with other believers in church.

When we do those things from the heart, we grow closer to God. And that’s all pretty natural for a young believer. One of the first things I did as a new

Christian was to go out and buy a new Bible, and reading that Bible was like a new, exciting adventure. It has not been uncommon for me to hear people say that when they first came to know the Lord they couldn’t get enough of the Word. You just begin to drink this new life in. If you begin neglecting those things, you are on a downward slide.

### **2. When you begin being less sensitive to spiritual realities**

There was a channel on television that normally had Christian programming at night. The problem is that the channel didn’t have good reception. I remember one night watching a show on that station. At first the reception was o.k. I could see the characters and hear what they were saying. As the night went on, however, the reception steadily grew worse until finally there was nothing on that t.v. screen but white snow and static.

That’s what leaving our first love does to our ability to hear God’s voice in our hearts. When you begin losing your first love, your reception of what God is saying becomes less and less.

You have to ask yourself the question, “am I as easily moved by God’s Spirit as I used to be? Or am I becoming more and more insensitive to what He is saying.

### **3. When Serving The Lord Goes From Being A Blessing To Being A Burden**

Dr. Faulkner was the associate pastor of the church Beth and I once attended. I have heard Dr. Faulkner say, “I many times get tired in the work, but I never get tired of the work.” That is the heart of someone who is tuned in to the Lord. On the other hand, when service has been reduced to a burden that you

have to endure, it is an indication that you have left your first love. It means that you are now doing out of duty what you once did out of love.

#### **4. When you stop giving to the cause of Christ. Where a person's heart is, there is his treasure also.**

Departure from our first love is like what happens when the roots of a tree die. The leaves keep green for a while, but soon they also wither and fall. Love for Christ is the root of all devotion - once it begins to wither, it is only a matter of time until the life is left spiritually barren.

#### **THE WAY BACK (2: 5)**

If you have moved away from the Lord, how do you find your way back? The Lord gives 3 clear, specific steps to take.

##### **1. Remember**

*2:5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

An old song says, "roll back the curtains of memory now and then. Show me where you brought me from and where I could have been." We all need, from time to time, to take a little walk down memory lane. Give some time to thinking about the way things used to be when you experienced the joy of that first love. Remember what a blessing it was to be learning new things about God's Word. Do you remember how it was to really be burdened to share Christ with some one? Do you remember the joy of being with other Christians and of feeling the blessing of those

relationships? The Lord says, "Remember the height from which you have fallen."

##### **2. Repent**

*2:5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

Repentance is a sincere change of heart. It means that you recognize your sin, and you determine to do something about it.

##### **3. Repeat**

To professional basketball players, rebounding is very important. That's because the one shooting the ball doesn't always make the shot. Rebounding means you take the ball and start again. The same true in our lives. None of us always makes the shots we want to make in our lives. That's when we have to rebound. We have to get the spiritual ball and start over with it. That is what the Lord is calling us to do here. We don't have to stay the same. We can make a change if we are willing to do so.

In 1632, the favorite wife of Shah Jahan of India died. Her title was Mumtaz-i-mahal, which means "pride of the palace." He loved her so much he set 20,000 workmen to work building a tomb for her in the northern city of Agra. They labored for 21 years on the palace tomb. As work was begun on the Taj Mahal, the coffin containing the body of his beloved was placed on the spot where the temple tomb was to be constructed. Time after time it had to be moved to allow construction. Soon it got shoved aside and ignored. Shortly thereafter, building materials were scattered around it. Lost in the clutter and pushed aside, it was at some time removed with other items

considered trash. When the temple tomb was completed, the body of the one in whose name it was constructed could not be found.

Spiritually, the same thing happens in the lives of some Christians. Gradually Christ gets moved aside until at last he is lost. Then we who are the temple of the Spirit are as devoid of Him as the Taj Mahal was of the pride of the palace. When it happens we must repent and return to our first love, Jesus.

If Jesus were to personally speak to your life today, what would He say?

1. What would He commend you for?
2. What would he warn you about?
3. What would He encourage you to do?