

# The Church of Ephesus

by Robert B. Thompson

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*The Christian life is a fight, not a ticket, and requires hard work, perseverance, and diligence to achieve one's goals and please God.*

**Duration:** 1:17:44

**Topics:** "Church Growth", "Evangelism"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that the preaching of the word of God is not for weak individuals seeking an easy ticket to eternal assurance. Instead, it is described as a challenging and ongoing struggle against various enemies for the attainment of eternal life. The consequences of this struggle are mentioned in two chapters, which the preacher finds awe-inspiring. The sermon also discusses the importance of understanding how God works and the need for Christians to actively evangelize and minister to others. The preacher references Acts 2:39 and the practices of the church in Ephesus as examples of devotion to teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer. The sermon also touches on the influence of Nicholas of Antioch and the incorporation of non-biblical practices into Christianity.

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## Transcript

Of course, we're talking here about the rewards to the overcomer. And the interesting thing, you have to kind of stand back and look at these two chapters, chapters two and three. You have to try to place them.

You have to try to place them in terms of what it means to be a Christian. They're not dealt with too much in Christianity. In fact, I don't think I've ever heard anyone preach on Revelations two or three.

Have you, Andrew? Have you? Uh-huh. Who was it? Uh-huh. They preached on the seven churches.

Okay. Well, I don't talk too much about the seven churches. That isn't my thing.

What I talk about is what it means to us personally as a Christian. And when you start to think about it, it's very hard to place these two chapters with all their rewards and their statements in terms of what we think of as being a Christian. It's kind of like, I think very often the reward, the whole idea of the overcomer is this is for a few flakes.

You hear that? And then one of the prevailing teachings in evangelicalism is that by being a Christian, you automatically are an overcomer. You just automatically are, and doing the four steps of salvation is what it means to be an overcomer. This is a common teaching.

Of course, and it renders the two chapters incompetent, immaterial, and irrelevant. They just don't mean anything. Because once you're a Christian, that's it.

So, when you feel that they're written to the churches, it doesn't make sense to say that everyone is an overcomer by virtue of being a Christian. So those are probably the two prominent, there's three prominent attitudes toward Revelation 2 and 3. One is that you're automatically there if you have done the four steps of salvation. Two, it's something for flakes and you leave it alone because it's those wild people that never make sense.

And the third thing is to leave it alone. Just ignore it. This isn't there.

But it really is a love letter to the bride. It really is a highly significant passage of scripture. Highly significant.

And it really shows us that our viewpoint of Christianity is lacking. In that we regard being saved as kind of a ticket. In other words, you do certain things and you're saved.

But the viewpoint in Revelation 2 and 3 is that the Christian life is not a ticket, it is a fight. That's what the word overcome means. You've come against an adversary and you've conquered the adversary.

So obviously being a Christian is not the same as being an overcomer because these admonitions are written to the churches. They're saying to the churches, you have these problems and whoever in the churches overcomes them will get certain rewards. Any questions so far? Alright.

Another aspect of it is, of the overcomer, is that these probably are not rewards. We think of the rewards of the overcomer as being something that if we overcome, we will be handed these at some point in the future. Probably when the Lord comes.

Do you think of them that way? How do you view the rewards to the overcomer? When do we get them? Yeah, when do we get them? Under what circumstances do we receive them? Yes? Yes, that's probably true that the fullness of them will not be ours until the Lord comes. But they're not really like that you would get and stand in a line and someone would give you a package or a check as a reward. In fact, I don't think, we say the rewards to the overcomer but I'm not sure that the term reward is even used in these two chapters.

Because they're probably not rewards. They are competence. Competence.

They are abilities to rule with Christ. That's what they are. They're competence.

And as you gain these competences, certain things come to you. And I don't think it's by any means limited to when the Lord comes. So instead of thinking of them as rewards, which I often use the term rewards to the overcomer, but I don't think the term rewards is used, come to think of it.

I think of them also as steps to the first resurrection from the dead. Which must be attained. The resurrection when the Lord comes must be attained.

It's not the general resurrection, it's something you have to be competent. And the reason I think this is because the first competence, or the first privilege I might say, is to eat of the tree of life. And the final one at the end of Revelation 3 is what? To sit on the throne.

That's at the end of Revelation 3. So we begin in Revelation 1.7 with eating of the tree of life. Which is kind of basic. All the way to Revelation 3.22 I believe it is.

It's 21 or 22 at the end of chapter 3. Which is a competence, I wouldn't say competence, it's a consequence so unbelievably stupendous that if it wasn't in the Bible it would be just not reverent to even contemplate such a thing. To sit on the throne with Christ? To sit on the throne with Christ? I'm not sure there are five other verses in the whole Bible as spectacular as that verse at the end of chapter 3 of Revelation. To sit with Christ on his throne.

I doubt if there are five additional scriptures that are as unbelievably stupendous as that. You would never hear it preached in Christianity. Even though in Revelation, Revelation is the only book of the Bible that claims to be a direct revelation of Jesus Christ.

The only one. It's the only one that's bound with a curse. Only book.

That if you change it in any way, add to it or subtract from it, God takes away your name from the book of life. It's the only one I know, the only book of the Bible that says blessed are those who read this book. And they tell me the Greek means read orally, read it out loud.

And I've heard people say that if you listen to it on tape, it's especially inspiring. I've never heard it on tape, but they say that when it's read orally and you hear it on tape, that it's unusually inspiring. So, the book of Revelation, because it is a direct revelation from God, unlike the epistles, for example, which is a guy writing letters inspired by the Holy Spirit, but doesn't claim this, I mean, doesn't start it off by saying greetings from him who sits on the throne and from the seven spirits of God.

No, Paul doesn't do that. It's a very unusual book. And it supersedes all other books of the Bible.

If there's anything that comes in conflict with it, it supersedes it. By the way, there's a fourth attitude toward it. I just remembered that a preacher said that you should not read it because it will get you confused.

And yet it's the only book that says blessed are those who read this book. So, I know men have made charts of it and they're all different because they're trying to arrange it chronologically. You have to hear from the Holy Spirit to understand Revelation.

You cannot make a diagram of it or an outline and master it. You cannot do it. It only comes through the Holy Spirit.

Okay. Now, it tells us something about the Christian life. Michelle, you can sit up closer.

You're not an ugly duckling that you have to huddle back there in the corner by yourself. It tells us something about the Christian life. We're talking, Michelle, about Revelation 2 and 3. That it's not a ticket.

It's not a ticket. It's not something that you do this and now I'm saved. The Lord said, he who endures to the end shall be saved.

So, salvation is something and eternal life is something that you have to go after every day. Lay hold on eternal life. In so doing, Paul said to Timothy, listen, you will save yourself and those who hear you.

Now, think of that. And it shows you how utterly shallow proselytizing and man-centered is our ticket that once you do this, you're saved and on your way to heaven. That's not what the Bible teaches.

It teaches that it's a discipleship. It's a pilgrimage. You have to take up your cross and follow Jesus.

You have to fight the good fight of faith. You have to lay hold on eternal life. You have to endure to the end.

I mean, it's not for sissies. It's not for weak people that want a ticket and then they have eternal assurance. It's a grim struggle against many enemies for eternal life.

And the consequences mentioned in the two chapters. It really is awesome. It really is awesome.

The things that it says, if we're saying it to the world, we can figure it out. But this is talking to the churches. Now, every time the Lord addresses one of the churches, he presents himself in a way that has meaning for that particular church.

Now, scholars have contemplated whether these seven churches are seven ages of church history. Or seven churches at that time. I have a simple viewpoint.

It is this. If the shoe fits, wear it. If it applies to you, then receive it.

And don't worry about these various theological positions. If it hits you, take it, pray about it, and get victory. It is two chapters that are talking about victory in a struggle.

He who overcomes. Never those who overcome. Never them who overcome.

Never they who overcome. Always he. Always the individual.

You cannot overcome as a group. A church cannot overcome as a group. A family cannot overcome as a group.

You must meet your maker one on one. And overcome the challenges that are put before you by his help. Now, the way Christ presents himself to each of these seven churches has meaning for the type of people that are being addressed in that church.

And this first church of Ephesus, the Lord presents himself as the words of him who holds the seven stars. Now, the seven stars are the angels of the churches. The word angel means messenger.

Taylor translates this to the pastors. To the pastor of the church of Ephesus. To the pastor of the church at Sardis.

The problem with that is there is a Greek term translated pastor. I think it's poiemo or something that means shepherd. Huh? Pmenos.

Pmenos. It means shepherd. Not messenger.

The word pastor I think is only used once in the whole New Testament as far as I know. It's in Ephesians 4. And it means shepherd. The idea of the shepherd.

This is messenger. And I doubt seriously it's talking about an elder in the church. I think it's talking about the spirit of that church.

Every church has a spirit. This church has a spirit. I think evangelicalism as a whole has a spirit and Christ is addressing it today and telling it about its problems.

It's certain that each of you has an angel. Each church has an angel. Each governmental entity such as a county or a state or a city has an angel.

A nation has an angel. We read in Daniel the prince of Persia and so on. So I would leave it as a spiritual entity.

And so Christ does not address people as a pastor would. He talks to their spirit. He talks to the spirit of the church.

That's interesting too because we like kind of human, you know, repartee and there's a place for that. But there's a place when Christ bypasses all of that and goes right to the spirit. And so he's telling us about the seven angels.

And where are these angels located? And this is very significant. It tells you right here in Revelation 2. Where are they located? In his right hand. Now the right hand in the Bible means the place of power.

Christ's right hand is the place of power. And what he is telling this church is, don't get too big for your britches. I hold you in my power.

You are not upholding me. I am upholding you. Many times we get the impression that the churches are fighting to hold up Christ.

No, no, no, no, no, no. Christ has the angels in his hand of his power. And he holds them.

We are not holding him up. He is holding us up. And that's a very important viewpoint.

You don't have to figure, if you mess around, you might hurt yourself and other people. But the church is going to prevail. Christ's church will prevail whether you and I are part of it or not.

He isn't depending on us for money or strength or talent or anything else. I hold the angels. They don't hold me.

That tells us that the church at Ephesus was getting a little too people-centered. A church has to have a strong horizontal relationship of people. There has to be love among the people.

It also must have strong vertical relationships with God. It's very easy for a large church to lose that vertical and just become a church of people. Instead of becoming the church in Ephesus, it's the church of Ephesus.

And there's a lot of that in our country where the idea is that if we all get together, we're one, somehow God served. Well, that's not true. Just because we're one doesn't mean we're one with God.

And so I think maybe Ephesus was going a little bit that way and the Lord was saying, Look, you're not holding me up. I'm God. I'm holding you up.

Okay? Because he doesn't appear to any of the other churches that way as I remember. And he walks among the seven golden lampstands. What does that tell us? What are the golden lampstands? The churches.

The lampstands in the Bible only mean Christ or his church. Nothing else. Gold in the Bible represents what? Deity.

And the churches are divine because they are the body of Christ. The church is not a social organization. It may do good.

And some of the greatest social benefits that have occurred in history, such as the abolition of slavery, or the Sunday school was started by a man in England because the little children were working six days a week in the woolen mills and they didn't know how to read or write. And the Sunday school was started so when these children were not working on Sunday, they could be taught to read and write. Christians have been foremost in like relieving the condition of Florence Nightingale of people injured in battle.

Today in San Diego County, some of the most outstanding charitable works are Christians. Missions. Working with the homeless.

So make no mistake, and as I said in the abolition of slavery, with Wilberforce, and then with Harriet Beecher Stowe's brother, Henry Ward Beecher, and Harriet Beecher Stowe that wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin. Christians have been at the forefront of social good. But the church itself is divine.

It's of God. It is not a social club. But it can really get that way fast if the elders don't know what they're doing.

Get that way fast. Pretty soon you have very little vertical relationship. Everything, they all love each other.

And the next thing you get into is immorality because the climate is so loving and protected that you get into real problems. Alright, now, what does it tell us when he walks among them? It tells us two things. First of all, he is God's high priest because only the high priest of Israel had access to the lampstand.

The lampstand of the tabernacle. The priest trimmed the wicks and filled it with oil once every 24 hours. It tells us he's the priest and the lampstands are the light of God.

See, the church is the lampstand of God. It's the light of God in the world. And the high priest is there to trim the wicks and to keep it full of oil.

Okay? It tells us another thing that Jesus is not just sitting up there in heaven looking down at us. He's here. He's walking among the lampstands.

It's true he's before the Father making intercession for each one of us. But he's also here checking out the light that you and I are giving, the witness of God that we are giving by what we think, say, and do. He's here to check it out.

The high priest makes sure the lamp is burning. Does all that make sense to you? That's the symbolism. Now, evidently, Ephesus was losing its testimony and he had some things to say to it.

First of all, he says, I know your deeds. Now, I want to call your careful attention to that expression because we've gone so far overboard with the grace teaching it's as though Christ doesn't care what you do. And so the first thing he says to each of these churches is, I know your deeds.

I know what you're doing. And we have such crazy unscriptural doctrines as God sees us only through Christ. He doesn't see what we're doing.

He sees us only through Christ. It's not in the Bible. In fact, it's completely antithetical to the Bible.

I know what you did today. I know it and I know it well because what you think, say, and do and are is my light to the world and my only light to the world. Think of that.

What you did today, whether it's in school, in the workplace, or at home. I was saying to Audrey on the way down, if we knew what awesome decisions are made in the kitchen, that's the way God works down home. We're expecting some big thing out here.

It's the little decisions that you make in school, in work, at home, when you're driving, that are affecting your eternal destiny because He knows your deeds. Think of it. Our God, what did Hagar say? Thou God seest me.

God, that's why you see in the Bible these things that are full of eyes. Full of eyes. It's because God sees us.

Boy, does He see us. Did I do anything for you? Alright. I want Him to see me.

Lord, what's not right, I want fixed. I mean that too and I know you do. I know you're hard work.

We're in the rest of God. That doesn't mean we don't work hard. The rest of God means we're doing His will.

It doesn't mean we don't work hard. You find that in the Song of Solomon where He went out and He's saying if you love me, feed the flock. In other words, the Lord is looking for diligent, hard working people.

He has not much patience with laziness, lack of diligence, carelessness. The Lord doesn't esteem that. He esteems hard work.

That's why in the parable of the talent, He's so severe. You wicked, lazy servant. Take His talent from Him.

Give it to the man that's got ten. He'll put it to work. He'll end up with twenty.

This other bozo is going to lay around and do nothing and waste my money. That's in Matthew 25. The Lord esteems hard work.

Whatever you do, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might. Because there's no such thing, are you listening? Remember I said ask questions if you have a question. There's no such thing, are you ready for this? As sacred work and secular work.

That's a distinction made by religion. Whatever you do, whether it's cleaning out a restroom or designing software or whatever you do, do it as unto the Lord and it's holy. It's just as sacred and holy as preaching.

Do it with your might. If it's worth doing, it's worth praying about and worth doing your best and God will reward you because he'll see that you're a diligent person. You know, there's an old saying, if you want to get something done, ask a busy person.

I mean, there's more truth than poetry in that. If you want to get something done, ask a busy person. Whatever you do.

And I personally think God looks for people. I remember Pharaoh said to Joseph, if you've got any of your men out here that are industrious, put them in charge of my cattle. It's a testimony.

When somebody hires you and they see you, you're not watching the clock but you're really doing your best. That's a testimony. That's a testimony.

Employers honor that. God knows they can't get enough people today who have integrity and will work honestly that when they do find one, they hold on to them. It's important.

And the Lord said, I know that. I know your hard work and your perseverance. In other words, even though you don't enjoy what you're doing, even though it's difficult, even though it's frustrating, you keep at it.

You keep at it. You keep praying and asking God for help. He that endures to the end shall be saved.

The kingdom and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ. If there's anything more important than patience in the kingdom, I don't know what it is. Perseverance.

Sticking with it. You can be dumb and ugly and stupid and get along great in the kingdom. The only thing that will mess you up is quitting.

You can be dumb, ugly and stupid and completely lacking in talent and make it fine with God if you don't quit. There's people who are fast but they don't last. It's this old clutch that keeps on going.

Well, Lord, I blew that one, but here I am. I'm trying again. And you don't quit for your whole life.

You end up with a crown of glory. Perseverance appears many times in the New Testament. Usually in the King James it's called patience, but the NIV likes perseverance, so it may be truer to the Greek word.

I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men. Now, that's important because we have so much slop in our culture. Somebody says, well, that's wrong.

And somebody else, well, you shouldn't judge. You shouldn't judge. Well, I know it's wrong to be critical of people.

I understand that. But there's a difference. Being critical of people because they irritate you personally is wrong.

But when something is obviously wicked, like in the case of Phinehas where this prince of Israel brought this Moabite girl into his tent to do something wrong, he went and killed the both of them and God was very pleased with that. He hates wickedness. Because God saw the ill of that? He saw the zeal of his wife.

How much he wanted to do right. Any indication of that in the text? The text in that instance is very clear that God said, Phinehas has turned away my wrath and there will not lack a man to stand before him. Turned away God's wrath because everybody else, they didn't know what to do and here all this adultery was going on with the Moabite women.

And nobody was doing anything. And that's the way we are, aren't we? I mean, how many times does it appear in the paper where somebody was killing somebody with a knife and there are other people standing there afraid to move? It happens all the time. And I'm not saying you should go out and get yourself killed, but I am saying that in this instance, all the Israelites were standing there weeping and

doing nothing and Phinehas said this is wrong, went and did something about it and God stopped the plague.

And it's also repeated in another part and I'm not sure where, Regina. Yes, I know, but then there's a part later whether it's in, Josh, whether it's in, it may be in Deuteronomy where it talks about the plague was stopped at Peor because of Phinehas. Yeah, God was clearly approved of that because, well, like it says here, you cannot tolerate wickedness, wicked men.

Now, our American culture places a tremendous value on tolerance. It's become one of the shibboleths of our culture, tolerance. But the Bible is not a tolerant book.

The Bible teaches us compassion. It teaches us mercy, but it does not teach us to tolerate different lifestyles. It does not teach that.

So what do we do about someone who's a homosexual? We don't attack him. We don't scorn him. We don't mock him.

It's a sin like any other sin and we don't do that in some other sin. We pray and look for ways to help. That's our job as a Christian.

But we do not say, live and let live. That's not God's way. This is okay.

Because we're going to have a nation full of wicked people and if you say anything, oh, you're not being tolerant. That's not a Bible value. Compassion is.

Mercy is. Kindness is. Helpfulness is.

I'm sure there are Christians today working in hospitals where people are dying of AIDS and they're very compassionate and that's the way a Christian should be. But not that we tolerate it. We don't ever, ever say it's right.

If we do, our light goes out. There's no testimony. There's no witness of God.

Our job is to bear witness and not to do it in a rough and insulting and scornful and violent manner, but nonetheless to stand true. God does not approve. Homosexuality, lesbianism and homosexuality are mentioned both in the Old Testament and the New.

And there are not too many sins that are described so vehemently in both Testaments. Both of them say they who do such things are worthy of death. Both of them.

Romans, the first chapter, talks about men burning their lusts one toward another. Those who do such things are worthy of death. But we do not scorn people and we do not stand over them and say you're going to hell.

We pray and do what we can to help. We show kindness, but never tolerance. Does anyone have any questions about that? Yes, Emily.

I just had a question. Something came on the news a couple of nights ago about having the Christian program where a woman was working in a clinic where they were literally, babies were being born and their organs were being used and sold. And the government was looking into this and so on.

This one Christian woman was interviewed and she was like, why are you working there? And she said that she just simply felt that she had no right to do anything about it that maybe God would want to use her there. It's a very confused attitude. Exactly.

And that's the American attitude. And when people want to do something, especially if it is rewarding financially, but yet it's wrong, they'll say well I'm doing it in the hopes that someday I may be able to do something about it. It's called keeping us all clean.

We'll have a minister in our rotary club or whatever to keep us all clean. That's an expression that's used in the world. That doesn't work.

That doesn't work. No way. You can have a barrel full of rotten apples and you can put a good apple in there and it doesn't affect the others at all.

They make it rotten. They make the others rotten. One rotten apple will spoil a barrel of good apples.

But the reverse is not true. That's a cop-out that's frequently used. We mustn't judge.

And we must be tolerant. That's an American value. It is not a Bible value.

And you notice it here. You cannot tolerate wicked men. They wouldn't tolerate it.

You're not in this camp, buddy. This is not where you belong. You're going to be in this church.

You've got to live right. We love you and we'll pray with you and be kind to you, but you're not part of us. The lines must be clear.

And I know that goes against our American values, but nonetheless, that's the way the Bible is. Yes? I read a book about a year ago. It's called The New Tolerance.

And that's what it talks about, how this new tolerance has affected the Christians in every walk of life, in the society we're facing at school, and they're falling for it, and they've let their guard down. They have to compromise. And it's called The New Tolerance.

I forgot what the authors are of that book. But very interesting. Mr. Love, I think, wrote that.

You cannot... I'm kidding, of course. You cannot save people by loving them into the kingdom. You cannot love people into the kingdom.

I saw a man lose his church trying to do that. You cannot love. People come into the kingdom only as the Holy Spirit brings them to the cross of Christ.

You cannot love them in. That kind of love is soulish. It's not of God.

Sometimes God will give us love for someone. Now, that's different. But this idea, we're going to go out and love the neighborhood into the kingdom.

No, you'll compromise if you do that. All right. Exactly.

You have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. See, and the Lord is pleased with that. And how many times do charismatic people know that the minister is a phony, is

immoral, is a money grubber, and they're afraid to say anything about it because he gets up and he's popular and everybody's saying amen.

It's wrong. When a minister's wrong, you don't listen to him. They don't listen to him.

Oh, touch not mine anointed. Well, their elders, when they determine that a minister of the gospel is getting the glory to himself or messing around with money or messing around with women, should put him out till he straightens up. He says an apostle, prophet or what he is.

That goes on all the time in America. People love the game because if the minister's rotten then they can live rotten lives and there's no problem. A real godly minister is a torment to people who are sinning.

You have found them false and he's commending them here. He says you have persevered. Now notice he repeats that.

Whenever the Holy Spirit repeats something like that, it's of special importance. You have persevered. You've been a struggle here and you have persevered.

How many can see how different this is from the four steps of salvation? Can you see how utterly different this is? Utterly different concept of salvation? It's not oh you're saved by grace so everything's okay. You have to persevere. The word perseverance implies what? What does the word perseverance imply? Huh? That's what it means.

But what does it imply? Difficulty, obstacles. Endurance. Well that's what it means is endurance.

But the very word endurance means you're up against something difficult. See it implies difficulty. So it's not smooth sailing.

It's not once you accept Jesus everything falls into place and you're saved by grace. It's the opposite. Straight is the gate it says which means narrow is the gate and compressed, the word means compressed is the way that leads to life.

And there's no better description of Christianity than that. You've gone through the gate, Jesus and now you're taking your way toward life and the word where it says straight is the gate, narrow is the way that way narrow means narrow in the sense of being compressed or difficult. In other words it's not just a free flow there's obstacles there.

The gate is small. The gate that leads to destruction is wide and the highway is wide and there's a lot of people on it. The way that leads to life is narrow and difficult.

It's possible through Christ and only through Christ. But there's no use going on the broad way because it's easy when the destination is torment and destruction. You know what it makes me think of? Let's say there's a family and they decided to go to a certain place and enjoy themselves.

It's the first time they've been together for a while and they're going to go have a day of just relaxing with the family and they've got a destination. So they get in the car and they're on the freeway and the traffic is great everything is going right and the car's working swell and they're going away and they come to their turn off wherever they're going to the picnic grounds or something and dad drives right past them. And the kids say, Dad you missed your turn off.

And he said, The car's running great there's hardly any traffic it's just great we're going. Great. But you missed your turn.

But that's the way we are when we say, well, you know, this way is easier there's no problems it's popular and I've got friends and everything's going great. It doesn't matter how great the journey is what matters is what? The destination. It's where you're trying to go.

And if the road is full of potholes and it's narrow and you have to wait for other people to pass you and it's uphill and everything else if it's where you want to go then you stay on it. You don't go looking for a better road if it's not going where you want to go. But a lot of people do that.

They do that. They take the easy way and Jesus said, Straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life and few people find it. So, the route to eternal life is something you pursue and that's why Paul said to Timothy evidently a bishop saved, filled with the Spirit had a hand-slate on him he said, which shows that it's not a ticket.

If anybody had it in our terms he did. Tony did. You have endured hardships for my name.

I wrote a little booklet called It's Too Hard because that's what people say to me. It's too hard. What you're saying is too hard.

Well, that isn't the issue, is it? What is the issue? What is the issue? The issue isn't if preaching is too hard. What is the issue? The only issue is is the truth. It isn't whether it's hard or not.

It's whether it's true. Does that make sense to you? It would be like a person that says, Oh, I don't want to get up this morning and it's time to go to work. It's six o'clock and I've got to get up and I don't want to.

I'll just push the hands of the clock back to three o'clock and get three more hours sleep. What's wrong with that? You've got three more hours of sleep. It's only three in the morning.

What's wrong with that? Well, your boss may not have turned his clock back. And so, the test of gospel preaching is never whether it's hard or makes you uncomfortable or brings you under conviction. The issue is, is the scriptural.

Now, if you want to please people, you'll tell them what they want to hear. But then you're a false teacher, pastor, prophet. You're a phony.

You don't love the people. That isn't love to tell them something that isn't true. It's like telling them, Oh, that's fine.

Just turn your clock back to three o'clock. Isn't it easy? Three more hours of sleep. Piece of cake.

All you've got to do is stir yourself enough to turn or unplug your electric clock or whatever you want to do. That's all. That's even easier.

Yank the plug. Go back to sleep. Make it.

Have a blast, you know. Get a life. Well, that kind of stuff is preached today.

But that guy doesn't love the people. He's lying to them. They talk about love, but he's lying to them.

He doesn't love them. The person who loves you will tell you the truth that you hate him. Right? If he really loves you, he's going to tell you the truth.

Yes? Then you do love people. Yeah, in that sense you sure do. But they don't realize it.

All right. You have endured hardships for my name. He didn't say if you had faith you wouldn't have endured hardships or you're on the wrong road.

What do you do with hardships? Endure them. You endure them. What did I tell you Sunday? What the definition of tough is.

What is it? Huh? You don't break. You can be bent, twisted, pressed, but you don't break. That's the definition of toughness.

It isn't that you know a whole bunch of swear words and you're expert at kickboxing. That is not a sign of toughness. You're black belt karate.

That's not a sign of toughness. A sign of toughness is they can't break you. So, we endure hardships, that means we are tough.

Tough in the Lord. Jesus is tough, isn't he? They tried to break him, but they got broken themselves. You have for my name not because you are a religious freak.

You didn't endure hardness because you're making a fool out of yourself with your religion. And people do do this. They have their private devotions in public and do weird and strange things because they're religious.

If you endure hardship because of that, that's your own doing. For my name. It's because I led you to a place and told you to stand.

Okay? And have not grown weary. Now, that's very important. Because that means that you stayed in the Lord's prison, you've carried your cross, but, kids, you don't let anybody know it.

You wash your face and comb your hair and act cheerful. Because what happens with people, when the Lord puts them in prison and they're carrying a cross, they come in and let everybody know it. And you lose your reward when you do that.

Complaining, griping about whoever it is God's using to test you, letting everybody know how rotten they are, trying to get them to take sides. You get no reward. Of course it's what the world does.

It's the malice and wickedness of the world. You anoint your head, anoint your face, put on some Juergens lotion, comb your hair, greet the world with a smile, even though it is difficult. And then God will bless you.

Then God will bless you. He's not going to bless someone that's coming around crabbing about how their husband or their wife is so mean, or the pastor is so mean, or their boss is so mean, and they're... No, you know. That's no testimony.

That's no lamp stand. That's just somebody that's not victorious. Well, you're all listening.

I suppose I'm making sense. Yet I hold this against you. Oh! Can you bear that word? That the Lord would actually hold something against you in your perfection? As many as I love, I rebuke.

We Christians are powder puffs. You know, if the Lord doesn't treat us like we're six months old, we fall apart. I've got something against you.

Well, you must be of the devil. Because I'm saved by grace, and everybody knows that. So how could you possibly have anything against me? I've got something against you.

You're not cutting a poupon. I've got something against you. I'm not pleased with this.

Okay. Then you've got to get ready for that, because as soon as you're old enough to take correction, the Lord's going to correct you. Alright.

He said, you have forsaken your first love. Now, what that means is, at one time, the Christian life to you was a romance. You loved it.

It was an adventure. You were so excited about the Lord, and all you wanted to talk about was the Lord. But what often happens is, after we're in a church for 15 years or 20 years, it becomes not a romance or an adventure, or a love story, which it should be, because Revelation 2 and 3 are letters to the bride.

It becomes a chore. And you're thinking, oh, I've got to go to church again. Oh, what a drag.

I hope I die and get out of here. I can remember when I had fun, but Christians aren't supposed to have fun. And that old sourpuss pastor, I suppose he'll be talking about sin again, instead of how to be happy in Jesus and have fun in the sun, like all the other preachers do, and let them listen to the Super Bowl during the service, and have the deacons fill up their coffee cup.

Listen. The Christian life, it's an adventure. It's a romance.

But you have to pray to enjoy it. You have to get to where you enjoy prayer. And I find this problem with people.

When you say pray, they think, oh, it's like doing your daily dozen. It's like exercising or something when you're tired. No, pray.

I've watched people, and I can tell whether people have ever entered the romance of prayer or not. Because when it's time to pray, they'll find 16 different things to do. Water the plants, whatever.

Anything except pray. That tells me they don't enjoy it. So why don't they enjoy it? Because they've never prayed enough to where they have broken through into the glory and the romance and the adventure of prayer.

They don't know it. They've never experienced it. And so consequently, it's a case of getting down on your knees, and your mind is filled with all your problems and thoughts and everything, but you looked at your watch, yes, I put in my ten minutes, and up you get.

That isn't prayer. That's religion. Prayer is a way of life, really.

That's why Paul said pray without ceasing. Well, obviously, if you want to pray without ceasing, that's a way of life. But you can't start off that way.

That's like trying to start off lifting weights and curling 300 pounds or something, is to pray without ceasing when you're a new Christian. But you can cultivate prayer and stay with it until God begins to speak to

you. And once God begins to speak to you in prayer, you get hooked on it.

And all you want to do is pray. Now, I told you how the Lord called me to preach in the Marine Corps is because I was up in the Japanese barracks, ahead of everybody else, praying by myself, before the service, before the rest of the guys came up. That's when the Lord called me to preach.

The Lord showed me the meaning of Revelation 11. When I came to the church early up in Fremont, my class was at 945 that I was supposed to teach, and I was in there before the sun was up, praying. And the Lord explained Revelation 11 to me.

We had a few incidents like that, and you keep coming back for more, I'm telling you. So, prayer gets you into the romance of the Christian life, and instead of it being an incredible bore, prayer becomes the best time. The best time.

And the time goes very quickly when you're really involved in prayer. It goes very quickly. When you're not, five minutes is like an hour.

But when you're involved in prayer, the time goes by very quickly. And I don't say every time you pray, the Lord will meet you, or you'll have a vision of heaven, or anything of the kind. But they come often enough to get you hooked.

And you're always hoping this is the time. And I'm finding as I get older, and I've been working at this thing ever since I got saved, the Lord, in His goodness, gave me a desire to pray. But now I find that almost every time I pray, the Lord will say something to me.

And I don't say, base your prayer life on that. I'm just saying I'm 74, and I've been at it over 50 years, and it is getting funner. Okay? So it's real interesting when the prayer is a dialogue rather than a monologue.

It gets more funner. So get hooked on the romance of it, and try it for yourself, and say, Lord, give me a passion to pray, and He will. He will.

And you will be one happy camper, because you're doing what you like best. That's what you call forsaking your first love, when it's no longer a kick to serve Jesus, but it becomes an endless thing with no relief, year after year, and the first thing you know, you're bitter at half the people in the church, and you know all the gossip, and the thing is just a routine that you go through. Ah, that Lord takes no pleasure in a thing like that.

What fun is there in that for the Lord? He likes to skip on the mountains of spices. He likes to dense a leopard. It's not the mundane club I belong to.

Oh, thank God. You know, people watching the clock. They'll turn and watch the clock.

I don't know why they don't watch their wristwatch, unless they're trying to tell me something. They can't hardly stand it. Well, that's probably my fault.

Remember the height from which you have fallen, and that height was that communion with God and Zion. They lost the fun. They just lost the fun.

It ought to be fun sometimes, or you're going to get sick of it. It isn't always fun by any means, but there ought to be some fun in it from time to time. If you're going right, there will be.

Ah, repent, which doesn't mean feel bad. It means change. You used to pray a lot? Start praying again.

You've been too busy to pray. You just got too busy to pray. Repent and do the first works.

Praise the Lord. Act like you're in love with Him. Not that you're in some grind called Christianity, which you can't hardly stand.

Love. What you're returning to is your love for Jesus. It's your love for Jesus.

Not for the church. For Jesus. Your love for Jesus.

Do you love Jesus, or are you in a religion? What's the difference? All right. Repent, and do the things you did at first. And we all know when we were a Christian, I knew with me, I memorized Scripture.

I just loved it. I just started memorizing Scripture and praying and everything, and I did a few works of repentance. Quit smoking, drinking beer and things, but that wasn't the big thing of it.

I finally had a purpose in life, and I loved it. It made sense to me. If you do not repent, if you don't change, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

What does that mean? If you lose your lampstand, what do you lose? Your testimony. Your testimony. You don't have any more testimony.

See, the lampstand is the light. It's the testimony. The light of God's presence, like the lampstand of the tabernacle.

Whether you lose your salvation or not, could be, but what it's talking about is your testimony. Remember, He's walking among the lampstands, and He said, if you don't turn around and quit this grinder in, where there's no love in it, for me and for anybody else, I'm going to remove your testimony. You won't have any testimony anymore.

You'll be dead. Churches do get dead, boy. You want to see death? Go over to Jerusalem and look at what once were fabulous churches, and now are mausoleums.

Yes? It was the light of the lampstand. It is. Well, He doesn't say He puts the lamp out.

He just says He removes it from its place. So does it so much that you lose the testimony? Well, I don't know. If you remove the lampstand, I guess the light goes with it.

I don't know. Whatever. Just pray and ask God.

I've never got anything about it, except you lose your testimony. That's all I've ever gotten from it. But you have this in your favor, and I want you to notice this, and we're getting ready now for those three phrases, Brian.

I want you to notice this. You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Now, that tells us something very important, because I think in America we have a kind of a sappy Jesus.

He didn't hate anything. That's more of that tolerance stuff. I thought Will Rogers, you don't remember him, but I thought he was a great comedian, and Will Rogers had a saying.

You know what it was? He never met a man he didn't like. And I thought, he must have had a very small circle of friends. Because I have met people I don't like, but that sounds so godly, and so typical of the yogurt that passes for American Christianity.

Never met anyone I didn't like. I tolerate everybody and everything. You're my good old buddy.

You know, Adolf Hitler. Good old buddy. A little on the wrong track, but good old man nevertheless.

I've never met anybody I didn't like. Whoa. I don't trust that.

I've met people I don't like. I'm not talking about antipathies or affinities. Now don't make me wrong.

Sometimes you meet somebody that you just have a natural antipathy toward. That's just a personality conflict. Sometimes if you make an effort to overcome that, you'll find that's a pretty nice person.

It's just that your personality and their personality were so different, you rubbed each other the wrong way. But it wasn't because you were bad or they were bad. It's just an antipathy of personality.

I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the Lord is saying there were things going on here, and I hate it. And you hate it too.

And I'm commending you for it. Now the interesting thing, and I'm going to show you, you can bring down those three, if you will Brian, those three phrases. There are three scholarly viewpoints regarding what the deeds of the Nicolaitans were.

And I'll explain them to you. But no one knows for sure. And that tells me something.

It tells me that the Lord is saying, I want you to hate what I hate, regardless of what it is. I don't want you to be a yogurt Christian. Okay? I don't want you to be that kind of a person.

I want you to have your loves and your hates, your ducks in order. And know what you love, and know what you hate. And we don't hate people per se.

That is not true. He didn't say, I hate the Nicolaitans, did he? What did he say? Their practices. See? I hate their practices.

And it's perfectly alright to hate homosexuality. God expects you to. It's abhorrent to Him.

In fact, you can feel it instinctively. At least I do. I just, I don't like it.

But the person needs to be saved. Christ died for that individual. Lesbian, homosexual, whatever they are, Christ died for that person.

But the practice is absolutely repugnant. At least the way it was described in the paper. I've never seen it before or since, but it was horrible what goes on.

Alright, the first meaning is taken directly from the Greek. Nikos, Laos or something, that means conquer the laity. And Ironsides, a Bible writer, was rather strong on this.

And there was a while when I was a young Christian, when there was a great statements against the Pope and the Catholic priesthood. I mean, man, Catholics were all babbling and everything. It was very, you

don't hear that anymore, thank God, but it used to be very strong.

And Ironsides and others taught that that that he hated was having priests and popes because they conquered the laity. Tonius, Nikos, Laos or something, that means conquer the laity. The priests and the Pope lorded it over the laity.

Ironsides and other commentators waxed strong on it. This was the meaning of the deeds of the Nicolaitans. They had priests and a Pope that conquered the laity and kept them suppressed.

All right, we're ready for the second viewpoint. Antinomianism is the viewpoint of Jameson, Fawcett and Brown which is a very famous commentator. Jameson, Fawcett and Brown.

And they do some plays on the words and somehow tie it in with Balaamism and they come up with the idea that it's talking about lawlessness, antinomianism, salvation, apart from any change in behavior. Present day evangelical preaching really is antinomianism. It's saying you're saved apart from moral change.

It's really not the gospel. It's antinomianism. And Jameson, Fawcett and Brown waxed strong that this is what the deeds of the Nicolaitans were.

Okay? Let's look at the third scholarly point of view. They believe that the term Nicolaitanism refers to a man, a bishop of the early church by the name of Nicholas. And Nicholas sought to reconcile the churches to the community.

And this was especially important in Rome because the communities tended to be somewhat small and highly integrated so that if your church didn't accommodate its practices to the understanding of the community it brought a lot of pressure on you. It would be like going into an Indian village where they're all living together and all of a sudden you set up something that's totally different from everything the Indians did and made no attempt to explain it to them. It would give you some idea of the pressure on the early church in the Roman Empire.

Now, it's a deadly thing. It makes a lot of sense humanistically speaking. If we were going to make this church understandable to the people of Poway we would stop our banners we would have music more that they could understand we certainly would have a lot more social preaching we would not have Hebrew letters up at the entrance we would make it a point that everyone that came in would feel comfortable and would understand everything that we were doing and of course my preaching would not be like it is tonight.

It would be more along social themes maybe the particular the election or the current baseball or football games that are going on or something that the average guy can come in and understand and I might put a little trailer on it about to be saved you have to accept Jesus but I would do everything in my power so everyone coming through that door would understand exactly what we were doing and many, many churches do that and it sounds so defensible and so right and so some believe that that is what Nicolaitanism is the works of Nicholas of Antioch to reconcile the church to the Roman community make it understandable to the Romans and that probably accounts for such Christian practices that we have like Easter and Christmas and the Holy Family and other things that have entered

Christianity the idea that heaven is the goal of salvation all of these reflect the religions of the Roman Empire and they are not biblical at all so whether which one of those or a fourth is Nicolaitanism we don't

know but we do know that the Lord wants us to love what He loves and hate what He hates and that's not people that's practices and we're not tolerant of them we don't say well I'll go in and work in an abortion clinic because maybe my light will be shining but what you're really after is the money you know it's wrong get out of there because the Lord hates abortion and He wants you to hate it and not be tolerant of it tolerant of the people in the sense of showing kindness and love and mercy but certainly not of the practice of murdering people well you think the state that has

a compelling interest in its citizens would make up its mind that the growing fetus you know in reaching the state of viability the state should have a compelling interest in that thing we are an immense theoretical this way you know if you shoot somebody and kill the fetus you're guilty of murdering the fetus but on the other hand if you murder it's okay you know somewhere some jurist has got to get up and make sense out of this thing whether we've got to resurrect Oliver Wendell Holmes from the dead or whatever it takes somebody's got to come out and say for heaven's sake you know is it a person or is it garbage but you can do that without hating the person because many of these people are as helpless as the fetuses they're aborting they're so psychologically messed up and under

pressure they don't know what they're doing so we don't come down and say I hate you you aborted your child you're a murderer then they'll go jump off the bridge you've got to bring them to Christ we know that don't we so let me get back to something because it might not be clear to you you might think well what's wrong with going out and being a friend and loving the community and arranging the church so when they come in they can have maybe coffee and donuts and maybe listen and get a big screen TV so that the sport bus can check on the game many churches do this they're not speaking facetiously they do this this is a very living fact in our culture now we're getting people in if they're not in here they can't hear the gospel right? we're getting them in if they're not here they can't

hear it check so they have a strong rational arguments for what they're doing who knows someone might come in and get saved in this thing what's wrong is this this is not what the church is the church is the golden lamp stand of God it's purpose is to worship God it's purpose is to feed the saints so that they become strong so that then when they go out among people their light is shining and if that's going to be true they have to be fed they have to be rebuked they have to be taught they have to be guided and above all we must have the presence of Jesus Christ because if you mix the world into the church then the church loses its strength you remember Samson did all kinds of immoral things and it did not affect his strength until they did what? cut his hair and we say what does that

have to do? here he committed fornication with a prostitute he still keeps his strength and they cut his hair and he goes what's wrong with that? what's the big sin in cutting your hair? what was the problem? the hair represented his separation unto God and once you once you once you get a church so that it's half church and half community you will have no strength at all strength comes when the church is holy recognizes it isn't coming as a social group it's coming to worship God and so our banners don't make sound we have people in the church that think we're wasting time with the banners we should be out passing out tracks they don't understand how God works when God gets his let's finish up with Acts 2.39 then we're out of here you need to see this this verse needs to be meditated on

it isn't a cop out for lazy Christians it's vital to our understanding of how God works Acts 2.39 to the angel of the church in Ephesus I threw him a curve no, it must be 49 nine sticks in there scroll down, please there you go I was wrong on both counts the Lord added they were not evangelizing they were devoting themselves to teaching fellowship the communion service and prayer God was present they had a social

kind of communistic economy they sold their possessions in good they gave to everyone as they had need that is they ministered to the poor they met together every day they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts and the Lord added there was no compromise there with the community standards the Lord added yes, Emily the scripture in Malachi 3.18 he

just cuts it right down the middle he says, so you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked between one who serves God and one who does not absolutely and if there's anything you know what that is? that's a plumb line and if there's anything we need in America today it's a plumb line that people are not messing with and pulling off to one side so to make the building straight we need to move the building and not the plumb line so the church is a lamp stand gold, because it's divine it is not a social group it does great social works once the people are built up and go out into the world and that's what we're supposed to do this is a filling station this is a filling station and we get filled up full of God ready to go out to the school on the job, wherever we are and be

the lamp stand of God that's it make a sense? alright, shall we stand then?

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