

Restoring a Passion for Christ in the Church

by Tim Conway

The sermon emphasizes the importance of knowing God's name and trusting in Him, and highlights the significance of being honest with God in order to have a personal relationship with Him and to experience transformation.

Duration: 1:17:54

Scripture: Revelation 2:4

Topics: "First Love", "Personal Revival"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining a fervent love for Christ above all other activities and ministries. It highlights the danger of drifting from that first love, even amidst busy religious activities and responsibilities. The call to responsibility, remembrance of past intimacy with Christ, repentance for neglecting that love, and the urgent need to return to prioritize personal communion with Christ are key points of this message.

Transcript

Well, this morning, this afternoon now, I want us to think about the church that we've been considering for these months. The church at Ephesus. But, I don't want us to go to the actual Ephesian letter.

I want us to think about this church from a number of other places. Where I want to start is in the book of Revelation. Revelation 1. This church that Paul wrote to was also written to by the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's one of the churches of Asia Minor that is specifically addressed in this book we call the Revelation. You can see this in Revelation 1 v. 4. John, to the seven churches that are in Asia. And if you drop down to chapter 1 v. 10, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches.

To Ephesus. And to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea. If you go to v. 19, write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

As for the mystery, there's a mystery. A mystery in Scripture is not something that can't be known. It's something that we don't know until it's explained to us.

There's a mystery. A mystery. What mystery? Well, if you go back, you'll see in v. 12 of chapter 1, I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me and on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands.

And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire.

His feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace. And his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand, he held seven stars.

From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword." I hope you see, it would be ludicrous to think of Christ walking around with an actual sword coming out of his mouth. This is extensive symbolism. In his right hand, he held seven stars.

In v. 20, as for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands. You see, the seven stars and the seven lampstands are a mystery. They're symbolism.

It's a mystery that we by ourselves might have difficulty figuring out, and so Jesus gives us the answer. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. 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.

I know your works, your toil, 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. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My namesake, and you have not grown weary, but I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 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. Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

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. Well, we'll stop there.

Let's pray. Lord, I pray that these people, the people of God in a city called Ephesus who lived millennia ago, I pray that what was true of their life, what was true of the interaction between our Lord Jesus Christ and these brethren, Lord, may this account come alive, be fresh in our day and to our people here, I pray it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that name which is above every name, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, here we see Him.

Father, make it alive. May Your Spirit make Him alive to us. May we hear His voice today.

I pray in His name, Amen. Brethren, notice how this starts. Book of Symbolism.

With all the symbolism, there's some things that are very literal. We know that we're dealing with a church that lost its first love. That's what it's known for here.

The first of the seven churches. That church which lost its first love. Very helpful to us.

Very instructive for us. Look at this. Look at how it starts.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus. You see, that's mysterious already. Even though back in the last verse of the previous chapter, v. 20, for the mystery of the seven stars, as for the mystery, it's not even like as the mystery is explained that it explains away all mysteries.

Okay, the seven stars are seven angels. But who are the seven angels? It's like, okay, we were helped a little bit, but I don't know. There's still a whole lot of mystery here.

But here's one thing that I would have you to notice. Even though Jesus is addressing this to the angel, and we can think a little bit more about that in a moment as to what that may perhaps mean, but make no mistake about this. Look at v. 7 of chapter 2. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Now, when Christ speaks, the Spirit speaks. When it's to the angel, it's to the church which is represented by this angel, whatever that may be. Make no mistake about this.

Even though it's being addressed to the angel, it's addressed to the church. And what's addressed to the church at Ephesus is addressed to us. Why? Because all Scripture is God-breathed.

And all Scripture is profitable for you and me for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness for the man of God. Brethren, this is for us. This is for that church.

This is for our church. This is God-breathed. This is Scripture.

Whoever this angel may be. I mean, you go back to chapter 1, verse 11. Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches.

To Ephesus. You see, it's for them. Make no mistake about that.

Now notice this. There's a description to all seven of these churches before Jesus describes the church, He describes Himself. And that's essential.

Because brethren, know this, our primary need is not a knowledge of ourself. Our primary need is a knowledge of God. It is knowing the Lord.

We talked about this when we were there in the mountains of New Mexico. There in the psalm, Nellie dug it out. Psalm 9, verse 10.

Those who know Thy name. What does it say? What does it say? At least Nellie knows. Where's Nellie? What's that? They trust in Thee.

They put their trust in Him. You know His name. Brethren, there's something about knowing the Christ that we're dealing with.

We get our eyes on Him. You start looking at Christ and it starts revealing itself. It'll reveal enormous amounts about you as you look at Him, as you see the Person of Christ.

What is it that He wants us to see? Notice this, the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. Think with me. As you go through these letters, we're only going to deal with this one.

I have no intention of going to any of the other seven churches. But here's the thing, if you notice, He declares certain things about Himself to every one of these seven churches. And if you begin to read down through what He says about the churches, it seems there's a reflection in all of them as to who He describes Himself to be in the introduction to each of these seven churches.

In other words, something about what He's saying, this sword that comes out of His mouth. He says to the church where He's described that way that if they don't correct what's wrong, He's going to come after them with that sword. You see, what I'm getting at is this, Jesus is telling us something here that is very much applicable to the church who lost its first love.

What is it about Christ, if you're losing your first love, that you would look at Him and recognize? You see, that's the kind of thing that's happening here. And brethren, we may not be dead like Sardis. We may not necessarily be lukewarm and be ready to be spewed out of His mouth like Laodicea.

But I can tell you this, every true Christian has known seasons where their first love has grown cold. Every one of us knows about seasons where we become lethargic, where we become somewhat calloused, where we become somewhat cool. Every one of us can relate to that.

And I would just have us to think, when those seasons come upon us where we're just not as vigorous, just not as hot as we once were, what is it that Christ is wanting us to see? Well, He wants us to see this. He wants us to see, imagine His hand, His right hand. The right hand, brethren, is the hand of prominence.

It's the hand of honor. It's the hand of protection. It's the hand of power.

What are the stars? The stars are angels. What are the angels? And I know different people say different things, but I'll tell you this, if you just simply take the book of Revelation and you take the 70 plus references to angels found in this book, you know what you find? You don't find pastors of churches, which historically there have been many who have said, oh, the angel of the church? That's the pastor. Well, look, if we want to be honest, a plurality of elders is the biblical norm for leadership in the church.

But aside from that, if you just let Revelation interpret Revelation and you look at the symbolism of angels, let me tell you what the kind of thing that you find. You find an angel binding Satan for a thousand years and throwing him into the abyss. You find an angel flying through the sky, proclaiming the gospel.

Let me ask you, during this gospel age, who proclaims the gospel? Men spread the seed. How is it an angel? Or you see this, four angels at the four corners of the earth and they're holding back the winds. Or you find this, four angels who have been prepared for a specific time.

They're released. Or this, seven angels with seven trumpets. And you know what happens every time a trumpet is blown? Some providence, some activity of God begins to happen.

Or you find seven angels with seven plagues, seven bowls that are poured out and the wrath of God comes upon the face of... The wrath of God is revealed from heaven already. You see, what we have here is angels are a picture all through revelation of the sovereign activity of Almighty God. Angels are seen doing God's will, bringing about, you may recall this, the prayers and there's incense that are being added to these prayers and they're coming forth from an angel.

He's spreading incense from a bowl upon these prayers as they rise up from the saints. Brethren, this is the picture that you have. What you have is of angels.

It's a picture of the sovereign Almighty activity of God. You have a picture of God's activities being brought forth. That's the angelic picture in the book of Revelation.

It's not pastors. What you have is seven churches who each have a star and the star is the angel. It's like God's sovereign purposes concerning the church.

And you know what? In Scripture, when angels are spoken about in God's children, they're angels. Scripture defines angels oftentimes with a possessive. We have angels.

Christ speaks that way. Could this church have an angel? Very likely. Maybe more than one.

Maybe a superior one followed by downward ranks who are there to help and to... Brethren, we have picture in Scripture where the veil is taken back and we see Michael and his angels. The archangel Michael. And there is this warfare.

And Satan and his angels. But brethren, there's all this activity that goes on and they're ministering servants. But think with me here.

These stars are in His right hand. Now, I don't know how you envision this right hand, but I see it two ways. Either like this, triumphant, or like this, holding them close to His own heart.

But I'll tell you, within that hand, it's a place of protection. What this is is a picture of the Christ who is sovereign over His church. He's got the whole angelic realm.

That which carries forth His purposes. It's in His hand. And more than that, the lampstands.

That's not hard to figure out. They're the seven churches. And He walks in the midst of those lampstands.

He's active. This is the picture. To the church that's lost its first love.

See, it's a Christ who's active and He's involved and He's protecting and He's powerful and He's moving in the midst of His church. And He's watching and He knows. He's moving about.

It's a picture of the shepherd among His sheep perhaps. But see, the lampstands, they're giving forth light. Is He not looking for any darkness that might be there? Is that not exactly what happens to the church at Ephesus? Or to any of His churches? There's two of them that nothing is found wrong with.

But with all the ones that something is found wrong with, He points it out. He's looking for the darkness. He's looking for that which dims the light.

Lampstands. Churches are lampstands. Brethren, do you recognize the implications of that for you? You are to shine.

Brethren, we are not to stay within these four walls and to keep our light here. We are to shine in the darkness of this world. You are the lights of the world.

Brethren, think with this. Think with me about this. Him who walks among the golden lampstands.

He's not... Brethren, there's imagery when He's at the right hand of the Father. And I'm not saying that's just symbolic and He's not really there. But remember, we're dealing with the God-Man.

There may be His human presence there at the right hand of God. But where is God? Where is God the Father? I mean, we have imagery here. It's like what is heaven? What is God's throne? These are places where the presence of God is manifest.

But I want you to know this. For all that Scripture says about Christ sitting, don't think of Christ as inactive. Never.

He's walking. He's moving. He's moving among the lampstands.

And what you can tell from these seven letters to these seven churches is He's looking at the condition of the lampstands. He's examining them. That's what He's doing.

He's looking. He knows. Brethren, if there's anything that's true about Christ, He is very interested in the condition of the church.

And He's looking and He's watching. You know, there may be things that are true in this church that are totally outside the sight of the elders. We don't know everything.

We don't even claim to know everything. Not close to everything. We try to stay on top of things, but there's always so many things going on.

But I'll tell you this, He knows everything. He's watching. He's concerned.

That's what we see. He's not idle. He's constant.

He's watchful. He's overseen. He's got supervision of His churches.

Oh, brethren, He cares. He cares about the condition of His churches. Now, notice this.

It's not just the person of Christ who holds the seven stars and walks among the lampstands. It's the words. And you know what's interesting about the words? They are very specific.

He does not speak in generalities. In other words, when He speaks to Philadelphia, His words are specific. When He speaks to Ephesus, His words are specific.

He doesn't find any of these churches exactly the same. And He deals with each one of them exactly where He finds them. Not just a bunch of specific instructions.

I'll tell you, there's an exact way, there's an exact condition that our church is in right now. And we could say, oh, oh, that we could hear Him speak to our church exactly. But what you have to recognize is this, He gave us seven letters to seven churches which do speak to us today.

What we need to do is be discerning. And we need to examine. We're not going to look at all seven of these.

But I know this, this first one is applicable maybe not to us as a whole church at any given time, but this is definitely applicable to us as individuals at certain times. I know that. Extremely specific.

Nothing vague. So let's look at these words. The first two here about their condition.

Look with me. Verse 2. Revelation 2. I know He knows. One of the things that I have just recently visiting with somebody at the county jail, I told them be honest with the Lord because He knows.

Brethren, it's just worse than foolishness if you're not honest before the Lord. Because He knows. You can't hide anything from Him.

But it's almost a natural response. Probably an edamic response. A natural response.

Just kind of humanly woven into us to posture ourselves. There's all sorts of situations in life where we're not transparent. All sorts of them.

Right down to just greetings. How are you? I'm doing okay. When you're rotten.

We do posture ourselves. Brethren, beware of this. We can get so almost unthinkingly disposed to just saying, oh, I'm okay.

However, when the truth is that you are, there's this posturing in the sense that we don't always want people to know exactly who we are, what we are, what's going on in our life. There's a desire to appear better than we are. And you know that can carry over very much into how we deal with the Lord.

We can find ourselves doing the same thing with the Lord. Kind of posturing. Don't do that.

Those two little words. I know. Brethren, the best way to deal with the Lord is totally open, totally transparent, everything on the table.

You know what? The psalmist says he brings this complaint to the Lord. You know what? If you're unhappy with something the Lord's done in your life, one of the best places you can be is to go to the Lord and say, Lord, I don't like what You brought into my life. You say, well, you know what? If it's true, what are you going to do? Can you hide it? I mean, look, a good way to go about that is Lord, I don't like what You're doing in my life.

Lord, I want to be humble and I want to be surrendered to Your way. And I really want to believe that this is working out for good some way. I know, Lord, if I've got a problem with what You're doing in my life, I know the problem is with me.

But nevertheless, it's true. And brethren, the best way you're ever going to deal with things with the Lord is to be honest. That's what confession is.

It's being honest. You think about all the times the different things that the psalmist would say. And brethren, some of those things you feel like, huh, we just need to be honest.

Why? Because he knows. I know. And brethren, those words right there, if they will grip you, if those words will grip you, they can transform your life.

You say, how so? Because you recognize you're never hidden. Craig was talking about two clicks on the computer. Yeah, but I'll tell you what, it's not that easy if you know that he knows.

It's not easy if you see the very face of Christ and those ever-watching eyes between you and that screen. And you hear those words in your mind. But it's like Craig was saying, if you stay away from the Word of

God, you don't come across statements like this.

You're not gripped by this. Brethren, as I was thinking about those two words, I know, you know what came to my mind? Psalm 139. I know.

Here's the psalmist again. Oh Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down.

You know my uprising. You know. There's no place that you can go that He doesn't know.

There's nothing that you can think that He doesn't know. Brethren, He knows your spiritual condition. If you've got lust, He knows.

Those things that were being talked about. If there's pride, He knows. If you're discontent, He knows.

If there's covetousness, He knows. If you're chafing at His will in your life and His providence in your life, He knows. You're unhappy about His dealings with you, He knows.

You're unhappy because you're single, He knows. You greatly desire to be married, He knows. You are married and you don't like the situation you're in, He knows.

You don't like the financial situation, He knows. You're unhappy with that car that you have or that living situation, He knows. Brethren, your work situation, whatever it is, whatever's happening, the amount of time you're spending with Him, the amount of time you're in the Word, the amount of time you're given to prayer, when the season of fasting comes on.

And brethren, this is where posturing comes out. You can posture like, yeah, I'm getting involved. This hypocrisy.

Oh, brethren, hypocrisy. How Jesus says, don't pray like the hypocrites. Don't fast like the hypocrites.

Don't love like the hypocrites. Don't give like the hypocrites. How do they give? They want to be seen.

They want to appear a way that they are not. Brethren, our Christianity, we can get so in the habit of, you know what? People want to appear spiritual. People want to be spiritual.

And so you oftentimes want to appear to be what you really want to be, but aren't. Brethren, we just need to put that off. Transparency.

Before each other, yes, but we're dealing with the Lord here. And see, the thing is, when we deal with one another, we don't know. But He knows.

How wretchedly foolish is that to go to Him and seek to be some kind of hypocrite in His sight when He knows? I know, I know, I know. That's what Christ is saying. He walks in our midst and He knows.

He differentiates between churches. He differentiates between individuals. And I'll tell you this, even if you're in a healthy church and you yourself are unhealthy, He knows.

And you are not hiding anything, every single thing, your thought life, everything. What's done in secret. What's done behind closed doors.

He knows. And so we can come around each other and we can seek to present ourselves in a certain way. But brethren, we're never fooling Him.

And if things are healthy, well, He knows that too. I know, I know. They cut through the mirage.

I was thinking, driving up there to Cloudcroft, we were coming up out of El Paso. And you know, the mirages, it looked like there was water in the road. It was raining all in the mountains and you could see it all around us.

And the road looked wet because of the mirage. But it wasn't wet. You see, we can appear to be a certain way, but it's not really that way.

Brethren, those words cut right through that. They just cut through it. Honesty.

Brethren, honesty with the Lord. I got a leak behind my wall. I thought maybe that my children were just taking sloppy showers and water was going out on the floor and leaking down into the downstairs.

But there was a leak in the wall. And it's like several times it's been said, you know, one of the primary things here, one of the big parts of the battle was just to identify where the leak was. And that's true.

Brethren, the Lord knows where the leak is. And just identifying that leak. Just being honest.

Having that leak brought out into the open is a large part of dealing with the problem. It's the same thing in our lives. Bring it out, brethren.

Bring it out. And I'm talking about before the Lord. Yes, we can confess things one to another.

But this is Christ dealing with this church. This one truth, brethren, to know what the psalmist knew. I can go to heaven.

He's there. I can drop down into Sheol. He's there.

I can go down into the Mariana Trench. He's there. I can go to the moon.

He's there. You can't escape Him. Transforming truth.

Now what does He know about them? Look at this, Revelation 2, 2 and 3. I know your works, your toil, your patient endurance, how you cannot bear with those who are evil. Now you just think about this. This is a real church.

He knows their works. Their toil. Toil is literally a beating.

Exhausting difficulties. Trouble, burden, hardship. It means that being a Christian is not easy.

There are some days, what do they say? Like when Christianity wears glass slippers or whatever. Brethren, there are days now when it's not easy. There are circumstances and situations that you may be put in right now that it's not easy to be a Christian.

It may be your workplace, whatever. It's not easy. I know we have one young lady here who's facing difficulties in her workplace because of her Christianity.

Brethren, it wasn't easy. That's the idea. Their toil.

But here's the thing. Notice what he says. Brethren, you need to see everything that was good about this church.

Because it's very helpful in looking at what isn't right about the church. Patient endurance. You notice that? Your patient endurance.

Whatever translation you have. Something of patience or something of endurance is there. Brethren, you just think.

Go with me through the New Testament and consider the church at Ephesus. Consider what it was to be a Christian in Ephesus 2,000 years ago. You find the church at Ephesus comes up repeatedly.

I'll just give you an example. Remember when the Apostle Paul is talking to the Corinthians about the second coming. And he's talking about if the dead are not raised, we of all men are most to be pitied.

He says this, if the dead aren't raised, why did I fight with beasts at Ephesus? There's beasts at Ephesus that Paul had to fight with. You know what? If you go over to Acts 19, you know what you find there? You don't have to turn there. But you find a man, a silversmith by the name of... anybody know? That was a different one.

Anybody know the one that you find in Acts 19? Demetrius? And you know what happened? It created a great big ruckus. Why? Because so many people were being turned to Christ that their trade was being threatened. You know what they did? They were silversmiths and they made idols.

They were in the city where the great temple of Artemis or Diana, in the very shadow of this great temple of the Greco-Roman society. Brethren, you think what's behind idols. Demons are behind idols.

In fact, there was demonic activity. You will remember, this is the same city where the seven sons of one Jew named Sceva. You remember that? They tried to cast out a demon in the name of Jesus Christ and the thing jumped on them and tore their clothes off and beat them to a pulp and they ran out all beaten and naked.

That was there. You remember what else happened there? This is the place where they burned their magic books. You basically had the occult practices going on.

Brethren, this is the same city where Paul, remember when he was at Miletus in Acts 20? And he gathered all the Ephesian elders to himself. And you know what he said to them? He said, fierce wolves are going to rise up in your midst and some of them are going to come right from your ranks. Guess what? When you go over into the pastoral epistles, Paul tells Timothy there at Ephesus, you need to teach certain people to not give themselves to strange doctrine.

Brethren, that's the kind of thing that you have. Listen, he, Christ, commends these people for discovering false apostles right here in Revelation 2. That's one of the things He commends them for. You'll see it right there.

Patient endurance. How you cannot bear with those who are evil and you've tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false. And if you go down to v. 6, yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Brethren, I'll tell you this, the church at Ephesus, in danger of fierce wolves from within, perverse doctrine from within, false apostles from within, Nicolaitans from within, from without. You've got demonic activity. You've got the occult.

You've got the very temple of Diana, Demetrius, and people like this, the followers of this idolatrous religion who are openly attacking Christianity. Because I'll tell you this, when you simply attack somebody's god, that's likely going to produce vehement response. But when you start attacking somebody's wallet, that's what you had there.

That's the kind of situation. So when he says you've patiently endured, there were things that they were patiently enduring through. It's significant.

This is no little thing. And notice this, they cannot bear with the evil. Those who are evil.

And they also are discovering apostles who are not really apostles. You know what that means? That means that when somebody walks through the door, that means they didn't tolerate the evil. You know what that tells me? They disciplined evil.

They rebuked people that were causing division and after one or two times, they put them out of the church. They disfellowshipped. It tells me they dealt with sin in their midst.

It tells me that when teachers came along who weren't teaching the right thing, they dealt with it. They sniffed them out. They were discerning people.

So here you have, they're enduring. They're giving themselves to being followers of Christ even in a very difficult culture. Very difficult to be Christians.

And they're persevering. They're moving forth. Look at this.

It says in verse 3, I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my namesake. And what's very interesting is the enduring patiently, that's the same kind of thing that he said in verse 2. Your patient endurance. For him to say it two times.

It was true. Now brethren, what is so remarkable about this is he finds fault with them losing their first love. What I want you to recognize is this.

You can persevere. You can be patiently enduring in the midst of very difficult situations. And you can do it for His namesake.

You're honoring Him. You're thinking about Him. He's not outside of your thoughts.

It's not that they're doing it for their own sake. Notice that. You notice the words there? You notice what it says? They're bearing up for my namesake in verse 3. And you've not grown weary.

Brethren, for His sake. They're still doing it for Him. Not for somebody else.

Not for their own sake. Brethren, that ought to rock us. Because what it's saying is this, you can do things out of a desire to honor Him, out of respect for Him, thinking about Him, being conscious of Him, being conscious of His Word, wanting to be obedient to Him, but oh, if the sweetness and affection and the love are not there, and it can happen without those things being there.

This is massively instructive to us. Especially when I look around at our church and I see there's lots of activity. And I really believe that it's done with a desire to honor Christ.

But beware. Beware. And see, these people, they haven't grown weary.

What does that mean? It means they're still energetic to do things for Christ's sake. They're still speaking about Him to the dark world out there. They're still coming to the prayer meetings.

Acts 4. Good picture of the early church in a corporate prayer meeting. They're still coming together. They're still in the meetings.

Hebrews, we're not to forsake the assembling together of ourselves. They haven't done that. They're still there.

There's still fellowship going on. And they're doing these things for the sake of Christ. There's a healthiness.

They're still involved in the ministries. They're still going to the nursing home. They're still going to the college campus.

They're still doing VBS. They're still visiting the jails. Still visiting the prisons.

Still doing door-to-door ministry. They're still doing the things that they deem to be the things that honor the Lord. And they're still doing it and they're not weary.

And for all that, Christ says, there is something so wrong in your midst that I may remove your candlestick if it's not corrected. That ought to sit us on our heels, brethren. Because what it tells us is there's something even more important about the church than all those things.

As good as those are. And remember, they're a commendation. He's not saying none of these things matter.

He's commending them for all these things. These are good. These are good.

These are things that make up a strong church. Oh, brethren, you think about Nicolaitans, false apostles, perverse doctrine. In the midst of all this, and they're pressing on.

They're pressing on. Witchcraft. They're pressing on.

Demonic activity. All this idolatrous, all this Greek-Roman society and all their gods, they're pressing on. You know they had a Caesar who demanded worship.

They're pressing on. They're pressing on. But, they're pressing on.

You say, but? How can there be a but there? Isn't that a healthy church? Isn't that what we want? Don't we want a church like that? Yes, brethren, we do want a church like that. And none of that is wrong. None of that is out of place.

All of that is good. They're not fainting. They're not quitting.

We don't want to faint. Brethren, we should pray and not faint. Don't be weary in well-doing.

We have that in Scripture. We need to keep going. There's lots of churches that they begin to fall out.

They begin to fall out. They live on past victories. They live on former days.

Certain personalities were in their midst. And they may have been vessels that God used to lead the charge of the church, and now they're gone. And the church just kind of goes into this limbo and it lives on that past reputation.

Brethren, that's not the church at Ephesus. They're not doing that. They're not living on the past.

But, this is so necessary. It's so instructive. I have this against you.

That you've abandoned the love you had at first. You've left your first love. It literally reads, the love you had at first, you let go.

You let go of it. Jesus doesn't accuse them of being totally without love. But something has happened to the quality of their love.

And Jesus has taken notice. Something defective. First, something from former days.

Something that's in the past is better than what they have now. That's what's happening here. The strong and fervent affection that fueled their Christianity, there's something in the passion.

Craig was talking about the desire. Strong desire. Oftentimes, most often, used negatively in Scripture.

But brethren, I'll tell you this, there's a strong desire that Christ wants to see burning in each one of us. And you know the thing is, brethren, you almost get this feeling He's speaking to a church as a whole. It's almost like a fire.

Here we were up in those mountains and there was Zach. There was Nellie. And they started a fire just from sparks.

And they worked that fire and they worked that fire and they worked that fire. I would liken the passion that we have for Christ much like that fire. And you know, when the fire is blazing, it tends to keep everything else hot and burning.

It begins to go out in one place and the whole thing kind of... You know, we impact one another. If we are called to stir up one another to love, when any one of us begin to fade, we have such an effect on one another. The precious things of Christ, they just weren't so precious anymore.

Not so thrilling anymore. Brethren, hear me. I have this against you.

We heard from Romans 5. Justified by faith at peace with God. Let me tell you something. You can be justified and at peace with God and He can still have something against you.

No condemnation. We sang it. No condemnation.

Now I dread. You know, you can be in the place where God has no condemnation, no wrath towards you, and yet He can be grieved with you. That's the picture we have here.

Brethren, God can love you and not like something He sees in your life. And that's exactly what we have. Brethren, one thing we want to notice too, nothing makes up for a lack of affection to Christ.

Nothing. Christ does not excuse love going cold even if there's so much good going on in your life. You can't say, well, I've got all these things right, and so if my heart's becoming a little bit cool towards Christ, certainly He can overlook that.

Do you remember His words? Peter. Someone's like, He can overlook the sifting of Satan and being denied. But what's He affirming? Peter, do you love Me? Peter, son of John, do you love Me more than these? Peter, do you love Me? Peter, do you love Me? Brethren, that is the question.

And see, that is the primary place where we don't want any posturing, any mirage, any hypocrisy. Be honest. Where are you at? Be honest, brethren.

That's what we have before us. Brethren, this reminds me of the beginning of 1 Corinthians 13. You can speak with the tongues of men and angels.

You can have faith so as to do miraculous things. But brethren, though you are prophetic, though all these things may be true about your life, if you lack love, the first love, and primarily the love for God Himself, for the Father and for the Son, for the Spirit of God. Brethren, though all those things may be true, you're just like a clanging gong.

Brethren, what you need to recognize from this is that as Jesus is examining the church, I'll tell you this, He is not so concerned that you have your Calvinism tweaked perfectly. He is not so concerned that you understand superlapsarianism. Brethren, notice what's being said here.

That fly. I knew he was going to come up here. I tried to get him earlier.

He was coming after me in the break. Brethren, hear me. Jesus is grieved whenever there is a drifting.

And oh, how that happens. Drift. It's subtle.

It doesn't happen in one step. It doesn't happen in one day. You know what it happens by? Decisions.

Simple compromises. And suddenly, you end up somewhere. How'd I get here? How'd this happen? There was this drift in the affections of the hearts of these folks in Ephesus.

And if this tells us anything, you can be aggressive at evangelism. You can be aggressive in the prayer meetings. You can be aggressive in it all.

But Jesus is jealous for something more than that. You can be striving to get pinpoint accuracy in your doctrine. Brethren, we should.

Those things are good. And I'm not downplaying any of those things at all. They are good and they are necessary.

But I'm telling you this, that there's something Jesus wants more than all that. He wants those things. It's much like tithing.

The mint and the anise and the cumin. Those things you ought to have done, but you neglect the weightier matters. What is the weightiest matter of all? Christ.

You know what is said there in the Song of Solomon? I am my Beloved's, and it does not say, and my desire is for Him. Do you know what it says? I am my Beloved's, and His desire is for me. He is jealous for our affections.

He wants our tender affections. And more than that, brethren, He demands them. And more than that, He will even go so far as to say if I don't get them, I'm going to take this candlestick away.

Wow! This means a lot to Him. Brethren, do you hear me? This is true Christianity. If you've got some mindset about some servant, long-faced, some kind of cross-carrying drudgery, yes, He wants us to carry our cross.

And He wants us to die every day, but brethren, He doesn't want us to do it like we're some slave, like we're some mercenary, or hireling where we do everything just for the pay we get out of it. Brethren, He wants us to do it in love for Him. Brethren, have you never read His commandments are not grievous? Why are they not grievous? Because brethren, when your soul thirsts after Christ, as the deer thirsts after the water brook, when that's your desire, Christ, Christ, when can I come and appear before Christ? I want Him.

I want to walk with Him. Brethren, our love means this much to the Lord Jesus Christ. He will have our love, or He will take us out.

Wow! They were so healthy in so many ways. Brethren, let me tell you something. When the candlestick's taken out, it doesn't mean that a group of people don't continue to meet at 311 Hedges.

You do recognize that. The candlestick being taken away doesn't mean that the church ceases to have a phone number and a physical address. There's a whole lot more to what it means to having the candlestick.

It means that you are a vessel through whom Christ shines. You are one. He walks in the midst of His candlesticks.

You are a church that Christ is pleased to walk in the midst of. Manifest presence. We have the presence of Christ in a unique way.

Answering prayer. Coming upon the preaching or coming into the prayer meetings. Coming upon our times of fasting.

Coming into the midst of our fellowship. Coming into the midst of our evangelism. Brethren, allowing a baptismal tank to continue to be filled with genuine conversions.

Those kind of things. What he's saying is, I'll remove the candlestick. There may be a group of people that still meet there, but it's the way he disowns.

Brethren, there is a liberal Methodist church across the street here. There's no candlestick. They have no Gospel.

There's no reality. Good churches disappear. Churches that were once good can get to the place where they're not anymore.

That's His doing. What does He tell us to do? Brethren, just bear with me here, please. Because before we go, there's four Rs here.

The first one, responsibility. You notice this in v. 5. There is a remedy to this. Christian, take your love for Christ seriously.

What do you do? What do you do if you look at your life and you recognize there's been a drift? You recognize there's been a decline? In this area of sweet affection for Christ, you sense a real and deep need in your soul for personal revival. What do you do? What do you do if you feel like things are not the same with you and the Lord as they once were? Where do you go? Four Rs. Very quickly.

The first one is responsibility. Brethren, we Christians can get to the place where we feel like we need revival in our soul. And so we basically say, well, revival comes from God.

And so what I really need is God to visit me. You can get to the place where you say, there's going to be a rekindling in my soul. It's common for us to suppose that this must happen by some supernatural influence.

And so what do we do? Well, we sit back and we basically wait for some visitation from God to restore us to our former joy. But you know what the counsel of the Son of God is here? Not to sit and wait for a visitation of God. In fact, brethren, you know what He says? He says if there's drift, it's your fault.

He doesn't say, oh, we're just going to chalk this up to providence. We're just going to chalk this up to God's sovereignty. You know, after all, if you've fallen into a decline in a season of coldness, it must have been predestined before the foundation of the world, and so there's really nothing you can do about it.

Brethren, if you let your hyper-Calvinism drive you into that kind of thinking, you will go bad, wrong, into decline, and you will just sit there. And you'll sit there in your mire. Brethren, what Scripture says all the time to God's people is get up.

Strive. Move. See.

Rise from the dead. Go. Brethren, those are the commandments to God's people.

And the same thing is here. What does He say? Brethren, Jesus believes in human responsibility. And that's what you have here.

Second thing, remember. So you've got responsibility. That's kind of woven into the whole v. 5. And then you've got remember.

That's specifically said here. Brethren, remember. Your mind's got to be doing something.

If we want to walk right as Christians, we need to think. Memory. Think.

Think. Where have I come from? Think about my past. You see, what He wants us to do is compare where we are now to where we were once.

In other words, He recognizes this. There's a time in the past when you were doing better than than you are now. That's always the issue with spiritual decline.

Decline means you've come down. You've come off some mountain peak that you achieved. Now brethren, we heard a message last week on stability.

But we all know this. That as much as we strive for stability, as much as we strive for this even upward, you know what? There are pinnacles and there are valleys. And what He's saying is this.

You get yourself in a valley concerning your affection to Christ. Look back up on the peaks from which you came from. Remember! Remember what it was like up there.

Not only what it was like, remember what you did up there. Remember! Remember! Brethren, remember when you were up there what the priorities in your life looked like. Remember the joy in the things of the cross.

Remember the preciousness of the name of Jesus Christ. Brethren, this is one of the most blessed uses of the memory. It's the first step to return.

You recognize your responsibility. But, okay, now I recognize I'm responsible. What do I do? The first thing, remember.

That's the first step. Let your mind engage to where you came from. Think on those times.

Not just so you can wallow in your mire and feel all sorts of self-pity. The whole idea is remember where you came from so that you can get back to where you came from. That's the idea.

Remember, brethren, remember what it was like when the free and sovereign grace of God... Remember what it was like when your sins, though many, are forgiven. Brethren, remember the joy, the gladness. Remember the freedom.

Remember the preciousness. Remember when walking with Christ was so sweet, when His light shined into your darkness, chains fell off. We sang about it.

I was free. I was set free. Think about the view of the cross.

The crucified Lamb. Brethren, those days, what it was next? Repent. Repent.

And you know, this word has to do with a change of mind. I'll tell you, there are changes of minds that result in a change of conduct, a change of activity. What kind of changes of mind? Well, for one, just the change of mind about your responsibility to do something about this.

Change your mind if you become a practical hyper-Calvinist and you're just sitting there in your spiritual decline waiting for God to do something to you. Change your mind. Repent of that.

Put that away. It's not true. What Jesus is saying is there's something on your part.

There's something that needs to be done. Change of mind. Don't settle for living in the valley.

Change of mind. Don't be okay with being in a drifting state. Don't.

Run from it. The idea of repenting a change of mind, you're seeing everything in a totally different light. Brethren, one of the things you repent of is just thinking that if you have all the things that are described in the first verses here, then it's okay! Repent of that! Because if your love for Christ is not okay, then things

with you are not okay.

Don't think it's okay if your life is full of all sorts of activity, all sorts of religious activity. But Christ doesn't have that sweet place in your life that He once had. Repent of that whole mindset.

Well, I'm going to be involved in Vacation Bible School this week. I've signed up! You know what Jesus says? If you're not enjoying the sweetness of Christ and the preciousness of Christ in the mornings before VBS, so what? So what? You keep having VBS like that. You keep having outreaches like that.

You keep sending forth missionaries like that. You keep having prayer meetings like that in that state of mind. And I'm going to come along and remove your candlestick.

Because your love for Me is that precious to Me. It means that much to Me. My desire is for you.

I want your affections. This is what Jesus is saying to His church. You can hear all those wonderful teachings that come out of that letter that was written to you by the Apostle Paul, known as the letter to the Ephesians, the epistle to the Ephesians.

You can know all that wonderful high doctrine. But I want your heart in the middle of all of it. I want you walking with Me and delighting with Me.

And in all your activity, if you don't have that, brethren, priority! Priority! That's what this is all about. And what it says here is, you've got responsibility. You repent.

You remember. You repent. And then what? You return.

You go back. You do the first works. Well, wait! Aren't they doing a whole bunch of works? Aren't they not weary? And they're moving forth in all manner of works? You're exactly right.

Jesus says that. You know what He says here? When He says do the first works, He says you're doing a lot of things, but there's a particular category of work that specifically has to do with drawing close to Me that have slipped out of your life. You say, what's that? Brethren, you can do VBS and not know the sweetness of nearness to Christ.

Brethren, what He's saying is that when everything was fresh and you were on your honeymoon with Christ, you prioritized things in your life. You did certain things in your life that were specifically directed at being close and intimate with Him. You prioritized your time and your activities to be with Him.

You did things to encourage the freshness. You trusted Him in ways. You know what I've seen? I've seen that sometimes Christians get along to where it's almost like we justify letting those things slip.

Well, you know, I'm more mature now. I'm not so fanatical as I once was. You know, it's almost like we justify letting those things slip.

Well, we don't want to seem overzealous. We don't want to seem holier than thou. We don't want to seem legalistic.

God forbid we seem legalistic. Brethren, I'll tell you this, if you are making decisions in your life that aren't specifically spelled out in Scripture, but you are doing them because of your love for Christ and to get with Christ and to be alone with Christ and to spend time in the Word of Christ and to memorize His Word and

to let it fill your mind and to meditate on it and to be in prayer and to walk with Him and to learn songs that were fresh, the new song that you would sing about Him that filled your heart with joy. But see, we become too normalized, too stable, too calculated, too unfanatical, too predictable, too safe, too secure, too whatever.

It's almost like we justify this. Well, this is more proper. You know, what would we say if somebody went by the door dancing almost naked out there before the Lord? Ah, David, what are you doing? We'd be like, Michael, get your act together.

That's too crazy. That's too this. That's too whatever.

You see, that's the kind of thing. We become too predictable in our lives. Too safe.

Too concerned about what other people think. Let yourself go in a love for Christ. We need a bunch of radicals for Christ.

You know, I don't want to use personal examples, but brethren, you hear what I'm saying. The thing about it is, there's always a hundred voices out there to say you're acting too crazy, too fanatical, too legalistic. Do this.

Calm down. There's always voices out there that want to throw water on this. Brethren, hear me in all of this.

This is just a reminder of what really matters to the Lord Jesus Christ. Brethren, don't assess the health of this church based on how many ministries we're involved with. It's interesting, Brother John, I heard him hitting this tune numerous times before he went back to the mission field.

He said, you know what we need as far as laborers? Not people that come to the church with this extraordinary burden for missions. He said we need people who find Christ precious. That is hitting this note square in the head.

That's what matters to Christ. We can be simple. We may not be as learned.

We may not have a bunch of people with PhDs after the name or lots of money in the bank accounts. Brethren, we may not be even involved in all the things that certain people are involved with. But if Christ finds here a people, their lives are prioritized because they're fighting.

They're hungry. If you have to stop doing all the ministries and the busyness and the activity to simply spend the time with Christ to have that first love reinvigorated, then by all means, do it. I guarantee Christ would be most pleased with this church if we were doing less, but we were doing the things that brought us to really communing closely with Him on a very personal level and delighting in Him.

Brethren, I was thinking, when I was a young believer, there was a place that a friend of mine and Craig's, I think it was Rob, that found this called the Basement Bookstore or something. It was there in Kalamazoo, Michigan. It had all these reformed books.

And some guy, I think he was Netherlands Reformed just like John Seitzman came out of. His basement was basically a library of all these books for sale. And I went down in there and I'm going through all these books.

The man who lived there, he was old. He was probably in his 80's. Another white-haired old guy probably in his 80's.

They were over a couple rows, but I was looking through those library shelves. I could see them. I could hear them.

They weren't talking about the Detroit Tigers. They weren't talking about finding fault with the pastor. They were over there talking about Christ.

Here they are, they've been walking with the Lord for decades. If you know about the church they were a part of, probably not all that great a church. Very hyper-Calvinistic.

Very dead in many ways, un-evangelistic. Here's these two old-timers. And they're just talking about the glories and the beauty of Christ.

And they're so lit up. And I'm watching them through there. I guarantee you, brethren, that's what Christ wants with us.

Where there is still such a freshness of the things of Christ, and they excite our souls, and there's a delight. Brethren, don't you want that? This is what Christ is looking for in His people. This is true Christianity.

This is the main thing. This more than anything else. Brethren, fight! Fight! Fight! Fight! Responsibility.

Remember! Repent! Return. Go back. Go back.

Fight for your love for Christ. It matters that much to Him. I am My Beloved's and His desire is for me.

That's His desire. Will God help us, brethren? Father, we pray, we know it's our desire. Lord, we know also without Christ we can do nothing.

We know that in all of these things, we need Your help. And Lord, we know our givenness to drift. And we need You.

Lord, have mercy upon us, O Lord, for we are weak and we are disposed, prone to wander. Lord, we feel it. We do feel it, Lord.

Help, O God, our weak endeavor. Don't let us go. Draw us and we will run after Thee.

Help my brothers and sisters to be responsible, to make the right decisions, to prioritize their lives right. Give priority, priority. Those times in the Word, those times in prayer, those times in fasting, those times deliberately set aside specifically to walk with You and talk with You and commune with You and to love You and to be loved by You and to know You and to know You deeply and know You intimately.

And may there be a freshness breathed into it all by the very Spirit who has come to exalt You. May He exalt You in our lives in this way. We pray it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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