

Reclaiming Our First Love

REVELATION 2:1-7

Introduction

1. Tonight, as we begin our lesson, I would like to share with you a piece which I downloaded from our website.
2. It includes the first three paragraphs from the section titled, "A Brief History of Our Congregation."

In 1889, Mrs. Mattie Hillman Ewin, widow of Captain W. G. Ewin, moved from Hurricane Mills to Waverly with her family, which consisted of three daughters, Susie (Claxton), Grace (Gould) and Winia (Carter).

In 1890, J. M. Martin gave a lot on Church Street where the first building stood. It was a large frame building, and much of the construction was done by volunteer labor with many of the materials donated. It was heated by two large stoves and there was a bell that rang twice before each service. For many years the bell was rung by the late W. B. Hillman, beloved by many who knew him. Mr. Hillman was a cousin of the Ewin sisters. There were no classrooms at this time. Sometime in the early 1920s two classrooms were added at the rear of the building, as well as a baptistry.

On June 22, 1890, the congregation moved into their new building with twenty-five present for the first service. The first contribution totaled \$1.50.

3. Think about Mrs. Ewin, her daughters and the others who were responsible for the church meeting here in Waverly 132 years ago.
4. What prompted them to do what they did? What was their vision for the church all those years ago?
5. Every congregation starts with a vision, a dream, which is shared with others who come along.
6. That vision may change over the years as new generations come along, but there must always be a vision, that which stands in the forefront and gives the members down through the years something for which to strive.
7. Tonight, I would like for us to look at a congregation which according to our

Lord had lost its' "first love."

8. Though this body of Christians had much to commend it, the loss of it's first love threatened its very existence.
9. The congregation to which I am referring was the church at Ephesus, one with a rich past.
10. Before we look at the letter which the apostle John was instructed by Christ to write to these Christians, I would first like to share with you its history.

I. The Church At Ephesus

A. THE CITY OF EPHEBUS

1. In the first century, Ephesus was a major city of Asia Minor.
2. It was a commercial hub with its seaport and three great trade routes converging at the city.
3. The city boasted of a theater which seated some 25,000 people.
4. Its population by Paul's day is estimated to have been around 250,000 people making it larger than our modern cities or Knoxville, Chattanooga, Clarksville or Murfreesboro.
5. The city was also a great religious center:
 - a. Temples to four Roman emperors had been there.
 - b. Ephesus was also home to one of the seven wonders of the ancient world — the Temple of Artemis — a structure 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and 60 feet tall making it four times the size of the Parthenon.
 - c. From what we read in Acts 19:35, the Ephesians considered themselves guardians "of the temple of the great Artemis and of the image which fell down from heaven."

B. CHRISTIANITY IN EPHEBUS

1. The gospel was first shared with the Ephesians by Paul when he was

heading home after his second missionary journey.

2. In Acts 18:19, Luke tells us he “entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.”
3. When they asked him to stay longer, he said he couldn’t but promised to return to them again if God willed (Acts 18:21).
4. He did however leave Priscilla and Aquila there and at some point, a man named Apollos “teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus” (Acts 18:25).
5. Because Apollos was “acquainted only with the baptism of John,” Priscilla and Aquila “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:25,26).
6. When Paul returned to the city on his third missionary journey, he remained in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31).
7. According to Luke, it was during this time that “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).
8. Near the end of Paul’s life, Timothy was ministering there as an evangelist (1 Timothy 1:3).

II. John’s Letter To The Christians In Ephesus

A. CHRIST’S COMMENDATION OF THE CHURCH

“I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.”

(Revelation 2:2–3, NASB95)

1. Christ praises the Christians in Ephesus for two things — their loyalty in practice and their loyalty in doctrine.
2. Loyalty in practice:

“I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance” (v. 2).

 - a. “Your deeds and your toil” — Ephesus was an active church.
 - b. “Perseverance”
 - 1) The Christians in Ephesus had borne patiently the hostility of a society at odds with their goals and efforts.
 - 2) During Paul’s time at Ephesus he was confronted with . . .
 - a) The disbelieving Jews who spoke out against his teachings in the synagogue forcing him to withdraw to the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9).
 - b) The seven sons of a Jewish chief priest named Sceva who attempted to use Paul’s name in the casting out of evil spirits (Acts 19:14).
 - c) The mob aroused by Demetrius, a silversmith, who made shrines to Artemis (Acts 19:23-41).
3. Loyalty in doctrine:

“You cannot tolerate evil men”

 - a. There were those who came to Ephesus claiming to be genuine apostles but the church had tested them, found them to be false and rejected them.
 - b. On his way home at the end of his third missionary journey, Paul had told the elders of the church “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29).
 - c. The Christians in Ephesus had borne much as a result of their loyalty to the name of Christ.
 - d. Yet in the midst of all this, they had not grown weary.

B. CHRIST'S CONDEMNATION OF THE CHURCH

"I have this against you, that you have left your first love"

1. Someone has said, "Every virtue carries with it the seeds of its own destruction."
2. It seems likely that in the desire for sound teaching and the resulting effort to exclude all imposters created a climate in which they were so suspicious of each other that brotherly love could no longer exist.
3. In their effort to maintain good works and pure doctrine, the church at Ephesus had lost the rich relationship of mutual love shared by those people who had just experienced the redemptive love of God.
4. Simply put, the Ephesian church had left its first love:

- a. Love of God (cf. Jeremiah 2:2)

"I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothals, your following after Me in the wilderness . . ." (Jeremiah 2:2)

- b. Love for one another (John 13:35; cf. 2 John 5)

"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

- 1) When our personal love for God begins to wain, it inevitably results in a loss of harmonious relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- 2) Brotherly love, according to Jesus, is the distinctive badge of Christian fellowship.

C. CHRIST'S EXHORTATION TO THE CHURCH

"Remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first"

1. *Remember*

- a. Christ called upon the congregation to remember the earlier days when love abounded among the members.
- b. Memory can be a powerful force in bringing about a more satisfying relationship (cf. The prodigal son, Luke 15:17-18)
- c. This first love is portrayed as the height from which the church had fallen.

2. *Repent*

- a. The Christians in Ephesus had a choice between continuing the attitude which had brought them to where they were or making a decisive break from it.
- b. Jesus calls upon them to make a clean break with their present manner of life.

3. *First deeds*

- a. The “first works” were the works which sprang from the first love.
- b. What Christ looked for in this church was an attitude toward the brethren that expressed itself in loving acts.
- c. The way to regain the warmth of affection is by doing the things which brought it about in the first place.

Conclusion

1. At the end of verse 5, Christ tells the Christians in Ephesus that if they do not “remember from where [they] have fallen, and repent and do the deeds [they] did at first,” He would come to them and remove their lampstand out of its place.
2. History indicates the church in Ephesus died sometime in the second century A.D.
3. It had been a church with such a rich history — some very prominent men spent significant time there (i.e., Paul, Apollos, Timothy, John).
4. When we stop to consider ourselves as a congregation, it is vital that we ask

the hard question: "Have we left our first love?"

5. It is vitally important that we stand for the truth, but it is equally important that we maintain our first love — love for God and one another.
6. Let's each remember what it was like when we were new Christians:
 - a. The excitement and joy we felt over our new life.
 - b. Our love for God and for one another.
7. Let's seek to bring back that spiritual fervor so that once again our candle here may burn brightly.