

Revelation 2:1-7

This is study #11ID 1290

Alright, let's open our bibles tonight—we've got to get going. We've got communion too it's going to be a good night. To Revelation Chapter 2 verse 1. Revelation Chapter 2 verse 1. John the apostle was in his late 90's probably 95, 96 years old and he was the last surviving apostle when on the Island of Patmos where he had been exiled by Domitian for his faith. The Lord came to him to give him a vision of Jesus Christ and the future and the finish of God's dealing with man. And we finished Chapter 1, so if you weren't with us all of the studies are available in CD and DVD form. If you missed during the week you can catch them online. But John was given a vision of Jesus in all of His glory and really we've talked a lot about that in the first 3 weeks going through the introductory chapter that the book is designed to reveal Jesus to us. Not to hide Him, reveal him. To see him as He truly is and John was told by the Lord there in verse 11 that whatever he was told and what he saw he was to write down and mail out and send forth to the 7 churches that were there in Asia. And the churches are listed there in verse 11 "write everything you see" as Jesus, we are told, walked amongst the churches which He viewed as 7 golden lampstands and He held the spiritual leaders, the 7 stars, in his hand. Chapter 1 verses 20. Tonight we begin Chapter 2 and the second section according to the Lord's outline that He gave to John. In Chapter 1 verse 19 where he said "look—write the things which you've seen, that was the vision of Jesus in all of his glory; write the things which are, Chapter 2 and 3 - the church age; and then write those things which shall be hereafter, and that'll start in Chapter 4 verse

1 where the Lord will rapture the church “come up here” He will say “and I will show you what will take place hereafter.” These 7 letters that were sent by John to these 7 churches are really Jesus’ only direct words to the church upon the earth. As the head of the body He speaks with authority and total insight. How different the church might be if we took seriously the counsel that the Lord gives to the church here. In the next 7 weeks with a couple of weeks interruption for when we are in Israel, but in the next 7 weeks we would like to look closely at what God’s will for the church is in these letters. What are His concerns for you and I, what are His expectations, His desires, what would His advice be to us as to how we would conduct ourselves in this life. In many ways the letters build one upon another because you’re given more and more information, but together they give us the complete will and the complete insight that we need to have from the Lord. The number 7 speaks of completion we went over that in Chapter 1. So we will find in these letters what God applauds, we will discover what God hates, we will learn in the church what He would like to change, and what he would like to strengthen. The directions are written to the pastors of the churches, the leadership, but because the church is composed of individuals they are written certainly to each one of us. In addition in the order that they are given to us and the types of these churches and the problems that they face, there is a good likelihood – I’ll just give it to you and you can think about it, but there seems to be an extreme likelihood to me that these churches, given in the order that they are, give us a prophetic overview or portrait of the church age as a whole. From the Ephesus Church, the Ephesian Church in the 1st century, to the Laodicea and Philadelphia Church of the 20th century, some of which is very lukewarm, others of which are very on fire as we wait upon the Lord to

take the church. And we'll try to point those out as we go. It is only there in the text, you will have to conclude for yourself whether you think that is or it isn't. It doesn't really matter to me. I just want to learn what God wants me to do today. Each of the letters is very similar in format. We will follow that format in each of those 7 weeks. We are given the destination of the letter, a description of Jesus found in Chapter 1 as Jesus introduces himself in each letter as the Lord, in glory, in charge and asking to be followed. A commendation is given to most of the churches, not all; a rebuke or exhortation comes for some; a warning and a promise follows for all. And each of the 7 letters has a main theme that is drawn from the words of Jesus to them. The Ephesian letter is very much interested in the motivation for what you do for the Lord and we're going to look at that tonight. The Smyrna letter speaks to those who are under tremendous opposition satanically for their faith. The Pergamus letter speaks clearly of religious compromise and the Lord will address that. In the Thyatira letter it is the immoral lifestyles of the folks who call themselves "the church." In Sardis it is a problem of spiritual apathy. There was a fire burning once, but it is no longer there. The Philadelphia letter speaks of the opportunities that are being lost and the Laodicea letter speaks solely to the issue in the church of material prosperity and what place does that hold in the life the believer. For those of you who desire to get into it all at once, I had a chance to write a book on these little letters a couple of years ago. We have them in the bookstore, you're welcome to and then you can charge ahead.

Verse 1 "To the angel of the church at Ephesus write." Now we mentioned to you last time that the Greek word "angolos" is the word translated here angel, but it is usually translated messenger, so if you go to Mathew Chapter 11 verse 10 and you read

“behold I sent my messenger before your face” speaking of John the Baptist. It is the same word “angolos”. And it is here a reference to the church leadership, in other words the pastors, the overseers, the elders are to hear from the Lord and pass along to the congregation God’s Word as he delivers it to them. Ephesus was a huge city. If you spent any time Googling Ephesus you can learn a lot. It was a harbor city, it was one of the chief market places in Asia in the 1st century. There were already well over 250,000 people living in this town. That’s a huge place but the city was extremely corrupt. They were filled with idolatry, there was tremendous immorality. It was the center of the worship of the goddess Diana in Greek I think she’s known as Artemus. One of the 7 ancient wonders of the, or 7 wonders of the ancient world. She was the goddess of fertility. The worship of her included sexual perverted acts with temple prostitutes and it was what the town surrounded itself with. We have just gone through in Acts Chapter 19 on Sunday evenings, Paul’s 3 years in Ephesus and one of the comments that was made by the city clerk when the riot broke out because so many people were turning away from Diana to the Lord. He said to the rioters as he tried to calm them down “You men of Ephesus, what man is there who doesn’t know that, we are the City of the Ephesians, the temple guardian of the great goddess Diana and the image of which fell down from Zeus.” And people went “yeah everyone knows that.” Well that’s the kind of attitude that the city itself had adopted. The common of Demetrius, the silversmith, upon complaint of his lost revenue because he was an idol maker and the preaching of the cross had turned lots of people away. He gathered the union together there in Acts Chapter 19 and he said “look not only here in Ephesus but everywhere throughout Asia Paul has persuaded many people saying they’re not gods which are made with hands,

and so not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but our great goddess Diana is going to be despised as well, and her magnificence is destroyed whom all of Asia and all of the world worshipped.” Paul had made great inroads with the church into this place of tremendous idolatry. And you can read there in Acts Chapter 19, verse 19 that as the people were getting saved they turned from magic and turned from shame they burned at one book burning 50,000 pieces of silver worth of these magic books. The Church in Ephesus had been started by Paul and Aquila and Priscilla and Appollos who later came there as well when Paul returned to Ephesus on his third journey after having just stopped there at the end of his second journey he stayed there 3 years. You can get the story in Acts Chapters 19 and 20. Following him into the pastorate of this very large and growing and fruitful church was Timothy, was John the apostle the one who wrote this Book of Revelation and later on John’s disciple Polycarp as well. Now Paul had written the Ephesian letter about 35 to 40 years earlier. The Book of Ephesians that you have was written 35 to 40 years earlier by Paul from a Roman prison cell. Jesus now writes to that same church 4 decades later. So you could take those 2 letters and lay them side by side and see what the comparisons might be. The description of Jesus is given to us here. “These things sayeth He who holds the 7 stars in His right hand and who walks in the midst of the 7 golden lampstands.” This is the description the Lord gave of Himself or John wrote of what he saw in verse 13 and verse 16 of the previous chapter. Jesus walks in the midst of the fellowship of the light bearers, the saints holding the pastors themselves in His right hand. That’s the description Jesus uses to reveal himself as the one who wrote the letter. His commendation in verse 2 and 3 “I know your works and your labor, your patience, that

you can't bear those who are evil and how you have tested those who say they are apostles and they are not, they found them to be liars. And you have persevered and have patience and have labored for My namesake and have not become weary." Now it seems to me that the commendation or the applause of approval from Jesus for this church that has been around for the better part of 40 years, 50 years is long and certainly encouraging. It is one thing to hear what others say of the church, of your church, of our church. But it would be quite something else if the Lord would step in and go "here's what I think of you guys." And I'm not sure we would want to hear that but He has an opinion, trust me, about the church as a whole and the church as an individual fellowship and specifically here for the Ephesian church which makes these letters so valuable. What would Jesus write to you and to all of us if we were to be addressed? And I must tell you I think about that often, for making decisions about what we're going to do or not do, considering where we might involve ourselves. The question always becomes what would the Lord think of this, is this something that would please Him is this something that He would want. But the Lord begins by saying to them in His commendation section "I know your works." Some people actually think they can hide their behavior from God. No such luck. You can hide it from your row, you can hide it from your family, you can probably hide it from yourself, but you can't hide it from Jesus. He is intimately aware of everything you do and the reasons behind what you do as we shall see. That's God's perseverance, that's His area of expertise. He knows the heart. Now there are going to be works that you have done as a Christian that when you stand one day before the Lord you are not going to be rewarded for. You're going to think you're getting a reward, but you're not. You're

going to come with the wheelbarrow “I’m waiting for rewards for all the good stuff” and go home like this “oh man I don’t know, what happened right here?” You read there in Mathew Chapter 6 verse 2 “if you do a charitable deed don’t sound the trumpet before the hypocrites, or as the hypocrites I should say, in the synagogues. they can get glory from man you already have your rewards when you pray. Don’t be like the hypocrites standing on the corner praying in the streets and on the corner so every man can see them they have their reward.” And there’s going to be plenty of times when we’re going to do spiritual things with the wrong motivation that the Lord is going to just not mark down. We want to pass it off as pretty spiritual and godly and “woo, look what I’ve done” but the Lord just gonna kinda go “I’m not marking that one down.” Because He looks right past the work to the heart and when it doesn’t please him, you don’t get a check mark. We read in 1 Corinthians Chapter 3 about the bema seat where all of our works will be thrown into the fire and it says “to see what sort they are.” And if we survive the fire then we have a reward, but if they burn up in the fire there’ll be no reward, but you yourself will be saved; it has everything to do with reward for faithful service. So there’s going to be some surprises, there’s that Hebrews verse that says “there is no creature hidden from His sight” we all stand naked and open in the eyes and before the eyes of to whom we must give an account. The Lord says to the Ephesian Church “I know your works, I know what you’re doing” and this fellowship had lots of work they were constantly in outreach, and messages and meetings. I’m sure that their bulletin was filled with announcements. This was a busy fellowship, “I know your labor.” Now the word “labor” is used in verse 2 and again in verse 3 – it’s the same word, it means to work to the point of exhaustion. It doesn’t mean to put in half a day, it

means to just wear yourself out. The Ephesian church was known to the Lord not for just showing up for service but for really giving themselves over to being busy with diligence and sacrifice and tremendous amounts of involvement where people got worn out, if you will, from being laborious in the things of God. The Ephesians were not easily turned away, they were willing to sacrifice time and they were much involved, it was a busy and active and committed fellowship. If you wanted something to do if you were in the Ephesian church you'd find something to do. "What are we doing tonight?" "Oh we got 4 things going on tonight." "Oh, alright." Pick one. God knew how hard they had labored in their works. He mentions in verse 2 that He knew their patience. The word for "steadfastness" this one it means that they continued to serve the Lord even when the day-to-day pressures of life made that difficult, when the world opposed them and you can just imagine the kind of opposition you might get in Ephesus after knowing a little bit about them. But these guys were not easily turned from their purposes. They were an enduring, focused church. Great fellowship, they would attend even when it rained, they would make church even when the time change came, they would show up even if there was homework to be done, they would continue on even if it was the Book of Leviticus. "I'm going, I don't know what I'm going to get out of it, but I'm going to be there—God wrote it, it must have a purpose, I want to learn." They were steadfast in all that they did. Imagine that and compare that with western church today. The Lord goes on in his commendation and says in verse 2 "I know that you cannot bear with those that are evil", in addition to everything else that the congregation was they were intolerant of having within their midst those who lived outwardly, ungodly lifestyles who lived in sin openly and defiantly. They didn't tolerate that in their assembly. You would

not find with them what you might with churches today where compromise is the key and wink at lifestyle sins and excuse behavior and infidelity. “It doesn’t matter, we just don’t want to cause any problems, we don’t really want to say anything.” That wouldn’t happen at the Ephesian Church, they wanted to live holy lives, to the extent that everyone was willing to put the pressure on each other to do the right thing. It was a place that didn’t write things off. They were a witness without the ups and downs of inconsistency; they were serious and God applauded them openly for it when He wrote to them. “I know your works and labor and patience and your commitment to live a godly life. I know that you have tested those who who say they are apostles and they haven’t.” Besides everything else the Lord says to them the church has good discernment, especially in dealing with the itinerant preachers of the 1st century. Now we’ve talked about it in other letters, the didicky (sp?) was written in the first century as a guide to the churches on how to figure out if the guy knocking at the door was a prophet or a hustler. The dicicky (sp?) is still available. It’s not scriptural necessarily or included in the scriptures but we have plenty copies of it that circulated in the first century among the churches to try to head off some of these phonies who would come with “Well the lord sent me and the first thing you got to do is feed me and then if you could house me and do you need that bike, I could use that.” These guys that would come around and feed themselves. The Ephesians were a church where they stood firm in doctrine and in practice—they weren’t easily taken advantage of, they went forward carefully of you might want to read Third John it’s just a little bit back here in your bible. For a situation in church where there was a lot of abuse going on with these preachers that came and went, the traveling guys. We are certainly to try those who

claim spiritual wisdom and bring messages to us. The Ephesians had it right they watched out, they were careful, they didn't get sucked up in the latest and greatest and let's get involved in that and get in on that train. Very discerning people. The Lord said in verse 3 that they had persevered and had been patient and had labored for His namesake and they hadn't become weary. They had borne their responsibility as a church well. To persevere with patience refers to the willingness to stand when there was a cost, when persecution came, when difficulty came, when opposition came, when criticism came. They were willing to face what they would face for their faith and stand fast. You have to love this church. This is a good, faithful, strong believing fellowship, and to think even for a moment that they had existed all of these years and coming close to 40 years and they were still had this kind of reputation that's pretty good. Most churches they do well for a generation and then oftentimes they disappear and God begins a new work, but not Ephesus, they had stood fast. And we read here that they had labored for His namesake and not become weary, in other words they gave their all for Jesus, and His name to them was sufficient motivation to keep at it, even when they were weary, to not faint, they never did decide that the cost was too great, and so they quit or they burned out, or they stopped. I honestly think few churches today could measure up to this kind of accomplishment, this kind of stamina, to this kind of history and service after nearly 40 years and I think to anyone looking on who lived in the first century and went to Ephesus this was a model church. This is the kind of church you wanted to be and yet God sees everything, and He saw even beyond the things that He commended to the things that were to Him a problem. He saw more than meets the eye, He looked beyond the announcements and past the church calendar to the heart of

the church itself and what was driving the body and what He says is an eye-opening kind of an experience because verse 4 begins with the word “nevertheless”. From commendation to rebuke or to exhortation “nevertheless,” “nevertheless I have this against you, you have left your first love.” Though the Ephesian church was busier than any church in town they were driven, they were focused, they were tireless, they were consistent from God’s point of view there was a lot of motion without the proper emotion. There was a lot of movement, but no longer being driven by what used to drive them and what used to drive them was the love of God. Their devotion to Jesus. What do you suppose drives you as a Christian when it is no longer your love for the Lord? What then moves your hand and your heart, and your feet, and your time? What then moves you? For some people it’s just peer pressure “oh I’ve been there so long we all show up, that’s what we do – we have to go.” Sometimes its habit, sometimes people out of guilt just do it because “man that’s what I’ve always done. I hate to stop now I want to finish strong and so I’m going to continue to do what I do out of routine or maybe it’s just self-righteousness.” One thing for sure the machine of the church can grind on for years without a heart of love for Jesus himself. And this church was doing it, they were in all outward aspects looking like a church, healthy and strong, but the Lord saw it differently. When the love that you have for Jesus is no longer your primary motivation for worship, for church attendance, for service, for sacrifice or for your involvement then everything you may accomplish will not be applauded by the Lord or approved. It just won’t work out. It just won’t bring Him to that place of commendation. “Nevertheless I have this against you.” One debit negated all of the credits –35 or 40 years earlier when Paul wrote to the Ephesians in Chapter 3 verse 17, 18 and 19, Paul

began to talk to them about the love of God and he mentions in fact the love of God some 20 different times in this very short letter, but he writes there in Chapter 3 verse 17 "I pray that Christ may dwell in your heart by faith and you being rooted and grounded in His love may be able to comprehend with all of the saints what is the width and the depth and the length and the high and to know the love of God which passes all knowledge that you might be filled with God's fullness." To the young Ephesian Church it was loving God and God's love for them that motivated them to do everything. Forty years later it looked good on the outward it just that the engine wasn't being driven by the same fuel. There wasn't that love for the Lord. Things had changed. Now in all honesty motives and changing motives at that, I think are a problem for every Christian. If you really want to finish the race with joy and please the Lord you have to check your motives constantly because newness wears off. It just goes away, it doesn't continue at the same emotional level even that it started with. It doesn't seem to be enough, you can grow cold but if your labor for the Lord can be acceptable it's because you are continually drawn back to His love for you. I think it's a sad day when serving the Lord becomes a job or obligation or people say "I have to go I'm on the calendar" "I'm on the schedule". When you leave the love for Jesus behind. Paul when he wrote his second letter to the Corinthians and he talked about ministry said "the love of Christ compels me," in other words it is God's love for me that it gets me out of bed, my bible in hand on my knees to pray out to church to worship in fellowship because I love God. And it is the motivating factor. You could be the hardest worker and the most tireless servant and strong in faith under persecution and yet if it isn't motivated by the love of Jesus it will not only leave you empty it will leave God unimpressed and He won't be

commending you. I've seen it time and time again with folks people that once were thrilled to serve the Lord grow weary. Their experiences in ministry are no longer exciting because they've done it before because they don't have that heart for or that longing to serve the Lord they begin to lose their vision and they being to be motivated by other things and they're just difficult now to deal with, you have to remind them to go to church "you should be in church, you know you're a leader, shouldn't the leader show up for church?" "Oh, I'm there a lot" Are you? "Well, can I just come late and leave early?" You just lost your love for the Lord. Nobody should have to tell you that. No one ever has to run alongside of me and go "have an ice cream sandwich." I love ice cream sandwiches. "Eat your Brussels sprouts" now I had to be told that a lot because I hated those things, but not hot fudge sundaes you don't have to tell me, I'm eating it, thank you. I'm just afraid to ask the Lord to bless it, but I'm eating it. Nobody has to tell me to love my wife, I love my wife, you don't have to remind me of that or tell me how I should love her, I love her. But when your love for Jesus goes away and you're still church people, doing church things, man then the Lord sees it and then He's not happy and now the correction comes, check yourself. Check yourself. How vital that people that lead in the church do so out of love it's the only way that you can keep at it. It's a sad day when love has left and we're no longer serving. God wants honeymoon-kind of love. He said it to the children of Israel there in Jeremiah Chapter 2 verse 2, he said "you remember when we were in our youth and we had the love of our betrothal or of our engagement. Remember what that was like when I went after you in the wilderness and the land that wasn't sown." Israel was holiness to the Lord, it was the first fruit of all of His increase and that was how it used to be. It's like seeing folks coming into to get

married this is marriage time now so we've been doing a lot of premarital counseling. We have people do like a 5, 6 month run up to marriage counseling. So you see the people that are 18, 20, 22 23 years old "Oh!" they're just sickly almost in their behavior and you just have to put up with them. But they're in love, they're in love. A guy shows up and the girls not here and it's 2 minutes late "I better call her I hope nothing happened to her, it's been 2 minutes late, she should be right around the corner." Great. Same couple 10 years later "where's your wife?" "I don't know I haven't seen her since Thursday I'm sure she's around." It happens. But there used to be where you couldn't be out of each other's sight and you counted the minutes till you saw each other again. That's the way it was with the Lord it was honeymoon-kind of love, it was new believer kind of love. You know the new believers in our church, they're the first ones here and they take notes and they take it seriously and they want to be here and they don't care about how long the day was or how long the days going to be tomorrow "come on man, teach me". They're like vacuum cleaners they're sucking it all up "come on tell me another verse ahh, that's another verse for me right there." Then you find the professional Christians – come in late "I don't know." "Where's your bible?" "I don't know where it is alright, I don't know, I know stuff, I don't need a bible, I got stuff in my head." God wants his bride to act in love. Now I want you to notice that only Jesus could have pointed this out. We are in no position to point our fingers at anyone and go "you have a bad heart, you have a bad motivation." I can't do that, only Jesus can pull this off. He can look beyond the long hours, beyond the tireless effort, beyond the constant busyness that bring us recognition from others and He can say to us "look at the lack of love in your heart as a motivating factor." Even though the schedule is full it

would be like a wife throwing the spaghetti dinner to her husband from the kitchen door 10 feet away and she just chucks it at him and she says this to you “the food’s still getting there.” Yea it is getting there, but it’s not being served in the love that you remember it before. But the church can get really busy, we can put notches on our belt “we had 10 show up, we had 20 go out, we had 50 respond, we had 100 join us. Big deal. God’s not impressed. He looks at the heart. Why are you doing what you’re doing? That’s what the Lord would say to us tonight, why are you here? Why did you come to church? What drove you here? The Ephesians were doing plenty but found themselves rich in works and poor in love and that was what God was looking for. You can’t say “well I have to come to church I’m an usher.” Well great. “I’m an elder, I’m a board member, I’m expected to be there.” Look only you know your motive and God knows it too. Martha chose service over fellowship and she left intimacy with Jesus behind and she was pretty much put in her place when she got angry. Mary, with all her responsibility, when Jesus got to the house, dropped what she was doing and sat with Him “Lord what do you want to say to me,” stared into His face. I love it that’s what I want to hear and Martha’s doing this “Hey the chili’s not even finished over here. Tell Mary to help me” she’s going “are you crazy she’s picked the better part having fellowship, Me and her.” Martha, Martha, Martha. You’re always so busy, always so busy. Commendation was man they were busy the problem was the heart wasn’t right so here’s the exhortation: verse 5 “remember therefore from where you have fallen, repent, do the first works or else.” I don’t like “or else” when it comes from Lord, it’s the worst isn’t it? “Or else.” “Or else” you want to say “what?” “Or else I will come to you quickly and I will remove your lampstand from its place”, in other words the church will

no longer be a place of light unless you repent. Now the Lord gives them His solution and for us as well in basically 3 words—remember, repent and return. Three “r” words remember from where you have fallen. If you want to be sure that your heart always stays right as far as motivation, then recall constantly how things used to be. Take a trip down “memory lane” of your spiritual life. Notice you didn’t lose your love, you left it, right? To lose it means I don’t know where it went. To leave it is a conscious choice that turns from the drive motivation within and heads in a new direction, that begins to say to itself “I’ll go to church tonight cause I don’t want people to be on my case that I wasn’t there, but I really don’t want to go.” That’s leaving your first love and when I hear people in ministry here, and it happens once in a while, complain about what’s expected of them my first response is just quit, you’re not impressing me. I don’t even keep notes. You’re not impressing your friends because all they do is hear you complain, and you’re not impressing the Lord because He doesn’t need your help. He ran the universe really well before you showed up. If you don’t want to, don’t. Just don’t! Don’t! Don’t! Do it because you love Him, and if you do it because you love Him you don’t need the applause of others or the approval of others or the recognition of others. You don’t need others to join you or to feel good about you or to agree with you, you’re just serving Him. So go do that and you can never fail, but to remember from where you have fallen you have left your first love. It is a choice it is not a consequence. People come in for counseling, marriage counseling sometimes and they’ll go “I think we’ve fallen out of love.” Really? I think you’ve abandoned it and I think that’s what the bible teaches. Jesus tells us to remember how it used to be. When did your love for Him alone stop being the reason for your involvement? When did your love for Jesus stop

being the reason you go to church or the reason you come early to find people to pray for or the reason you stay late to minister to folks that might be alone and need some encouragement. When did that stop for you? Because it doesn't stop when you get saved, new believers you can't slow down. You can only slow down older believers. "Oh I've heard that story before, oh I've read that chapter already, oh I know that verse by heart," and you hear the Lord going "yea, I just got this one problem with you, know it all, you have no love for Me." And it doesn't motivate you and drive you. Just the word remember ought to tell us it's easy to forget. It's easy to forget. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I become a sounding brass and a clanging cymbal," I'm a noise maker, but I'm not a God pleaser. God cares and you should mark this down, He cares for the "why" far more than the "what". I would honestly I think from all I understand about God's will do the wrong thing with the right heart than the right thing with the wrong heart. Now I'm not trying to do that, mind you, but if I had to choose between the two let me do the wrong thing with the heart that loves the Lord that would be far more acceptable. I remember as a young Christian, I got saved in 1973, but I drove 4 nights a week from Bellflower where I lived to sit in the front row of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, and I listened to all of the teachers, and Chuck used to teach on Sunday nights and I would be furious when he stopped at 9 o'clock on Sunday nights—he started at 7:30. It was like he was cutting us off "come on Chuck suck it up, lets go man, 10 more chapters." For some of you church attendance and involvement is no longer driven by a hunger for the Lord, it used to be, it used to be. One of the most important reasons why the Lord established Old Testament feasts was simply to remind the people of what once was. Tell this to your children, enact this thing

out, remember how we brought you out of the land, remember how he fed you in the wilderness, remember He got water out of the rocks and you could act the whole thing out and say “Oh man, God loves us” and you would go through it, like communion, why do you have communion? So that you might be reminded of where your life began. How much it cost to save you, what God was willing to pay to keep you, and that He’s coming back for you. We have these practices for only one purpose to remind us to remember to love the Lord. Note here that their current condition as a church was lower than their previous place. They had fallen from that position. When you go from “get to” and “want to” to “have to” you’ve fallen, you’ve fallen. My mother when I got saved said to me “are you on some kind of new drug?” “Mom what do you mean?” “You’re always wanting to go to church” “Oh man, the Lord’s done so much for me, I just want to learn everything that I can.” That’s what drove me, what motivated me. Remember how it used to be and if it isn’t like that or better, then repent. “Metanoya” it’s a great word, it simply means to turn around where you stand you’re going your way, turn around go God’s way, do a 180, change your mind, change your direction. Get back on track, determine that from now on you’re only going to do those things that can be motivated by the love of the Lord, or do nothing at all. And I would say to you tonight with all honesty if you’re involved in ministry here and you’re not motivated by the love of Jesus, resign. Go back and love Jesus again, then go back and serve. There’s no sense in keeping appearances up there’s no sense in proving yourself to your neighbor, you’ve just got to please the Lord. I do a lot of studies and people are very bold these days. They’ll come up and say “you know that wasn’t all that good.” Or “I don’t like your tie” – really? It’s amazing what people will get away with. But I don’t care because I

want to serve the Lord, I don't need to keep you happy I want to keep Him happy and I know if I teach His word He'll be happy and I know you'll be blessed. But I can't live and die by approval, I got to live and die by His approval. I want him to stand and applaud when I show up—that's my son. I don't really want to come with letters of recommendation from others "here you go Lord all these people really like me." The Lord said "I got a problem with your heart, you always did stuff so people could really like you. You've got to repent, you've got to examine your heart." And then you got to repeat or you got to return, He uses the words "go and do your first works again," do it over, do it right, walk in love. Abraham returns to the place of fellowship with God after having left it to flee to Egypt for a long time. You read there in Genesis 3 that he went on his journey from the south he came back to Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning. Between Bethel and Ai to the place of the altar which he made there at the first. You find in Genesis 13 verse 3 and 4 twice "at the beginning at the first" and here Abraham called upon the name of the Lord. He ran off to Egypt when there was a famine, he lied about his wife, he went to live back in the world but when he realized where he was he came back to the place that it all began. Jacob did the same thing – he met with God on this way out, got from God great promises, basically ignored all of them, but when push came to shove years later he came back to that place of worship at Bethel and he came back to the altar and back to the worship. You got to go do your first works again. God is not interested in quantity. I know this is all He cares about quantity, he's interested in quality. Retrace your steps back to the place where your motives please the Lord or else the church will be no more. That's horrifying to me, to continue in busyness without a love for Jesus as your motive will eventually turn

your light off completely. You'll be removed from God's plan to reach the world, you'll be removed from that place of being a light." "Well did Isaiah prophesy" Jesus quoted there in Mark Chapter 7 "these people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. In vain they worship me teaching as commandments the doctrines of men." I know what they're doing with their mouth but I also see their heart. How many churches do you suppose have been closed that were once great lights for Jesus? How many continue that are drawing close to just being shut down because the Lord's abandoned them? I don't want the Lord to abandon us, I don't want to impress people, I want to impress Jesus. He's the only one I care about as far as impressing. People tell me "you know you're rude, you're loud, you're dumb". Alright, probably so. I just want to impress Jesus, I think rude and dumb He likes in me, He'll deal with that. Now having laid into them pretty heavy I think, pretty heavy when the Lord goes "I see your heart" He immediately, and the wonderful thing is after this stern rebuke, He immediately turns to commend them for something, He doesn't want to discourage them. He says in verse 6 "this you have, you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate." The Nicolaitans come from 2 Greek words that literally read "God's over the laity that's what those 2 words mean. Nicolaitans – the word nicao is where the word "Nike" on your shoes comes from. The God who rules. There was a tremendous move in the first century amongst the churches to establish a hierarchy over the people, a priesthood if you will in the early church. To their credit the Ephesian Church hated the spiritual hierarchy idea and so does the Lord, and we should hate it too. We are all going to be one day a kingdom of priests serving in His Kingdom. But God hates it for several reasons that the bible declares, not the least of which is, we're all equal in His sight,

we're all sinners saved by grace. I might be a pastor and you may be listening to me, that doesn't make me any better than you. If I do my job the way I'm supposed to serve the Lord, and you do your place of serving then together, we're going to accomplish His will. But one position isn't greater than the other, you learn that in the world, not in the church, you certainly don't learn it in the bible, but God hates it not only because He is the only Lord but it puts people in proximity to Him that others can't find. There's an additional mediator placed between the two. Later on in verse 15 of this Chapter the Lord's going to say to the Pergamus church that they weren't quite so wise they had adopted that practice into the church entirely, and there were big shots and bishops and elders, they're supposed to be titles of job description, responsibility and not of hierarchy. Who cares, just do what the Lord's given you to do. So the Lord was blessed with them and then He ends by saying "if you have an ear let him hear what the spirit is saying to the churches to him who overcomes I will give to eat from of the tree of life which is in midst of the paradise of God." Now every one of these letters draws this individual line to you that says if you have an ear, then listen and hear and respond to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches and the word there is plural, to all of the churches. It's written to one it is meant for all. If it applies to you then respond, if it doesn't, keep reading something will cause you're the church. But notice in verse 7, here's the promise to the overcomers. Now the overcomers are not the spiritual elite in any of these letters, they are merely the saved who truly love the Lord. We read in 1 John Chapter 5 right "whatever is born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world, even your faith. Who is he who overcomes in the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." That's the overcomer the one

who believes in Christ, First John Chapter 5, I think it's verse 4 and 5, it's in your notes, if I got it wrong, I didn't say it. Now notice here's the promise to the overcomer you're going to get to eat of the tree of life which stands in the midst of God's paradise or the paradise of God. Interesting several words because you remember when Adam and Eve fell that the Lord sent an angel to keep them when they were placed out of the garden from coming in in that fallen condition and eating of the tree of life and having to live for all of eternity in that condition. He protected them from bringing that curse upon them for all of eternity if you will. Later paradise was moved to a compartment in Hades. In fact you can read about it there in Luke 16 where the righteous believers waited upon the Lord's death and resurrection and there where the unrighteous would wait for judgment and then Jesus said to the fella on the cross "assuredly let me say this to you today surely you'll be with Me in paradise" that was the place that is was located then. Paul said later on 2 Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 4 that he was caught up in the paradise into heaven, the third heaven, where he saw things that were. He said I couldn't have words that express it wouldn't be lawful for me to utter what I'm seeing so that's our hope, the Lord's promises look you're going to eat and enjoy eternal life in heaven with Him. It went from that place of God's fellowship in the garden to the place where the righteous dead awaited the Lord to come and have fellowship and then He took them to heaven, that's our goal, isn't it? Historically or prophetically as I said when we started I think the Ephesus Church represents the early church through about 100 AD because the Ephesian Church would have been in their 3rd generation by now and the love of God amongst the people as a motivation to serve Him had begun to wane. What you want to do is ask yourself as the church what's your motivation, do people

have to get on you to get to serving or are you just waiting to just find the place that God wants to put you. A Christian who loves the Lord never needs to be reminded of anything. It's only the guy who's quit loving God who has to constantly be reminded of what he should be doing. The Holy Spirit speaks "he who has ears to hear". Have you left your first love then remember, and repent and return. I was thinking today Morningstar was born, in fact last Thursday was our 26th year anniversary, last Thursday. I didn't even notice, my wife reminded me – 26 years you can grow pretty dim pretty fast. To do the same thing for 26 years and some of you have been here since the church started you all look a lot older actually. But I don't want to stop doing it because I love the lord. I know I could make more money somewhere else, I know I could have an easier job somewhere else, I know I could, I think about that every year. I'm still thinking about that El Pollo Loco franchise – chicken. Clothes when you want. Get a Chick Fil-A – they close on Sundays I could have Sundays off. I love what I do because I know that the Lord is pleased when His word goes out. I love watching people get saved, it's just there's nothing better. You couldn't talk me out of it if you tried, but I could give you 100 reasons why I'd like to quit. Names - I'm talking names.

Shall we pray? Father we thank you tonight for this wonderful letter Lord that you have sent to the Ephesian Church so that we might be confronted in our church life and that we as a church might listen and hear what you're saying to this first generation church who grew quickly, grew strong, grew with great opposition, grew in a very difficult place and with very great wickedness around them and we can certainly see ourselves in our world like that as well. We know that we're busy, that there's something's going on

every night that the bulletin is full of what we could do and even the things we haven't involved ourselves with, there's a million other things that we might do. But Lord may we tonight become convinced that you're not interested in a lot of stuff you're interested in our hearts. When our hearts are right all the work is right. and when our hearts are wrong, it really doesn't matter how hard we work. Maybe tonight you have grown weary and cold, indifferent, ambivalent. Look the Lord wants to just bring you back to that loving relationship you once had with Him. There's no sense trying to substitute "doing" for "being". You can't say I'm going to serve the Lord because I don't want to spend time with the Lord. You can't do it, you can't work your way into a place where relationship with God doesn't matter, it's all that matters to Him. Whatever you do for the Lord He could do in an instant but He can't make you love Him. He can just tell you how much He loves you and then wait for you to respond. Maybe this next couple of weeks as we're going through these different letters and God speaks to different things maybe you can keep a little log for yourself, look at it every day. Ask the Lord to apply it to your life so that we might be a church that pleases Him, that you might be a man or woman who pleases the Lord with your heart so you don't have to read "nevertheless. This is what I have a problem with you, you've left your first love." God just wants your love. There are people I buy presents for in my family that I buy for them because they buy for me not really even happy to do it – "there you go." But others that I can't spend enough on to please them because I love them so. The same with Jesus. Love Him, and if not repent of what you're doing and go back and do it right. God will bless you. Tonight we're going to have communion; wonderful time after this sermon, we can think

about how much God loves us and may His love reduce you to love Him. God is not fooled, but He wants your love, why don't we give it to him. Start again.