

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-27-13 PM NOTES  
"THE CHURCH THAT LEFT ITS FIRST LOVE"  
REVELATION 2:1-7  
#3 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through Revelation"

**Revelation 1:19 (NKJV)** "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."

"We would rather hear about the great cataclysms of the last days than be confronted with the urgent challenge of our own present moment."

—Ray Steadman

"The temple grounds were a chaotic cacophony of priests, prostitutes, bankers, criminals, musicians, dancers, and frenzied hysterical worshippers."

—John MacArthur

I. The Speaker (v. 1)

**Revelation 1:20 (NKJV)** "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches."

**Isaiah 41:10 (NKJV)** "Fear not, for I *am* with you; be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

II. The Strengths (vv. 2-3, 6)

**Acts 20:29-31 (HCSB)** <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> And men from among yourselves will rise up with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears."

"They had all the right stuff. If you attended one of their church services, you would immediately sense that you were with God's spiritual Marines. The few, the proud, the Ephesians."

—Steven Lawson

III. The Sin (v. 4)

**Matthew 22:37-38 (NKJV)** <sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, '*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*' <sup>38</sup> This is *the* first and great commandment."

**Matthew 10:37 (NKJV)** "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

**1 Corinthians 16:22 (NKJV)** "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!"

**Ephesians 6:24 (HCSB)** "Grace be with all who have undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ."

**1 Peter 2:7a (NKJV)** "Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious..."

- Your personal devotion to Christ begins to wane
- Your Christian life begins to lack the element of the radical
- You begin to lose your spiritual sensitivity
- Your passion for ministry wanes

#### IV. The Solution (v. 5)

A. Remember (v. 5a)

B. Repent (v. 5b)

C. Repeat (v. 5c)

**Acts 2:42-47 (NKJV)** “<sup>42</sup> And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. <sup>43</sup> Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, <sup>45</sup> and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. <sup>46</sup> So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

#### V. The Success (v. 7)

**1 John 5:5 (NKJV)** “Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

**Genesis 2:9 (NKJV)** “And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

**Genesis 3:22 (NKJV)** “Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever...’”

**Revelation 22:2 (NKJV)** “In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations.”

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-27-13 PM  
 “THE CHURCH THAT LEFT ITS FIRST LOVE”  
 REVELATION 2:1-7  
 #3 in Series, “Verse by Verse through Revelation”

With this message we begin the section of Revelation described in **Revelation 1:19b (NKJV)** "...the things which are..." John is exiled, sentenced by the Roman government to hard labor on the small island penal colony called Patmos. While there, the risen glorified Lord Jesus commands John to write seven letters to seven churches. As we saw in the last message, these seven churches were both historical and representative. Seven is the number of completion, and these seven churches represent the churches of all ages. Every church today and in all church history finds commonality with one or a combination of these churches. I believe every problem a church can face is found in its root form in one of these churches. Every admonition Jesus gives to these churches is applicable to churches today – to our church. They were literal churches, but they represent all churches. I find that many people would rather skip over these seven letters to the seven churches so that they can get quickly those action packed verses that describe what is going to take place here on earth in the last days. Ray Steadman put it like this, "We would rather hear about the great cataclysms of the last days than be confronted with the urgent challenge of our own present moment." [Ray Steadman, *God's Final Word*, Page 25-26]. While prophesy is very important, nothing is more important than what we are going to learn in studying the message from our Lord to these seven churches that represent all churches.

In each of the seven letters to the seven churches we find a common pattern (with a few exceptions).

- The Speaker – Jesus identifies Himself in a way that is fitting for what each individual church is going through.
- The Strengths – With a couple of exceptions, Jesus has a word of commendation for the church.
- The Sin – With a couple of exceptions, Jesus exposes a major problem, a sin in the church that must be dealt with.
- The Solution – Jesus doesn't just tell them what is wrong; He tells them what they must do to make it right and what will happen if they don't make it right.
- The Success – Jesus closes out the letters with a promise of what the church can expect if they are obedient and thus pleasing to Him.

With a few exceptions, this will be the outline we will use as we examine what the Lord Jesus says to each of these seven churches, and with each letter we will see application to our own church and to our personal lives.

By way of introduction, I want us to learn a few things about the city of Ephesus where this first church that Jesus addresses is located. Ephesus was known as "The Supreme Metropolis of Asia". To go to first century Ephesus would be similar to going to New York City or to Los Angeles today. Ephesus was the major commerce center of Asia. Goods were shipped into Ephesus and distributed to the known world. The population of this city was estimated at 250,000 – 500,000 which was huge for a first century city. Ephesus was also a key city for the spread of Christianity. Four major highways intersected at Ephesus. Businessmen and merchants from most every important city in the Roman Empire came there. This was a strategic city in the spread of the Gospel throughout the Empire. Ephesus was also known as a culturally advanced city. They had the best of sports, the arts, and pageantry of all kinds. Sadly, Ephesus was also a center of pagan worship. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world was located in Ephesus – the Temple of Diana. The worship of the goddess Diana or Artemis (another name for her) was unspeakably vile and immoral. Thousands of Priestesses in the temple were in reality no more than prostitutes. Listen to this description of the temple of Diana: "The temple grounds were a chaotic cacophony of priests, prostitutes, bankers, criminals, musicians, dancers, and frenzied hysterical worshippers." [John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 1-11*, Page 58].

Let's spend a moment looking at the history of the church at Ephesus. No church in history has as rich a heritage as the church at Ephesus. This church was planted by the Apostle Paul along with his friends Priscilla and Aquila. It is thought that Paul spent more time with the church at Ephesus than any other church (about three years). In addition to Paul, Timothy also served as a Pastor of the church. The tradition of the early church says that this same Apostle John who wrote the book of Revelation was the Pastor at Ephesus for the last decades of his ministry before being exiled to Patmos. It would be worth your time to read about the church of Ephesus in the book of Acts (Chapters 18-20) and see how many

amazing things happened in and through this privileged church. About 40 years have now passed since this amazing church was birthed. Paul has been martyred, Timothy is gone, and John has been exiled. As Jesus dictated this letter to John, all was not well with the church at Ephesus.

## I. The Speaker (V1)

Jesus introduces Himself to this church as the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks in the midst of the seven lampstands. What does this mean? We don't have to guess the meaning. Jesus has already told us in **Revelation 1:20 (NKJV)** "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches." We saw in the last message that the word translated "angels" simply means messengers. Most Bible scholars agree that this probably refers to the preaching Elders of the churches. Notice that the preachers, the messengers, the proclaimers of the Word of God are in the right hand of the Lord Jesus. The right hand of God is symbolic of His power, authority, and protection. **Isaiah 41:10 (NKJV)** "Fear not, for I *am* with you; be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." To be in His right hand means that the messengers are protected by Him and accountable to Him. This pictures the fact that the messengers to the church had better be sure that the message they proclaim is from the Lord of the church and is not meant to gain the favor of the hearers. I am so thankful for the encouraging words some of you share and some of the kind notes I get. They are encouraging, but my main concern is that I have spoken what He asked me to say. Usually on Sunday mornings when I make the walk from the sanctuary to the "North Forty" where my truck is parked, the focus of my mind is, "Lord, was I faithful to what You gave me to say?" If I am faithful to the Word, He is my protection because I am in His hand.

What is the symbolism of Jesus walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands? The symbolism is that He is constantly aware of all that is going on in His churches. He is the Lord of the church! He is scrutinizing, examining, assessing and evaluating His churches. He is intimately involved in His churches. He is in the midst of His churches watching our actions, hearing our words and He is aware of our thoughts and motives. Never forget that Jesus is walking in the midst of His churches.

## II. The Strengths (V2-3,6)

Before the Lord of the church gives His rebuke to this church, He recognizes that there are some wonderful commendable things about this church. First, He commends them for their works ("deeds" NASB). He says "I **know** your works..." There are several Greek words translated "know". This word ("oida") refers to a complete and full knowledge. He knows all the work done in the church. Keep that in mind when you work so hard and nobody says anything or seems to notice. He One who walks in the midst of the lampstands sees and fully knows what you have done and that ought to be sufficient since He is the one we are to be doing it for. The word for "works" is a general term that covers many of the specifics we see as the verse continues. Secondly, He knows their "labor". This word is translated "toil" in the NASB. It means to labor to the point of exhaustion. There was no laziness in this church. Third, He knows their patience. That word can be translated "endurance" or "perseverance". It literally means to bear up under a load. When persecution came, they didn't let up. When the going got tough, they kept going. There was none of this committing to a ministry and then de-committing when things got a little difficult.

The Lord commended this church for their purity in both doctrine and behavior. They practiced church discipline. He said, "you cannot bear those who are evil". The word "bear" is better translated "tolerate". When a person attached themselves to the church in Ephesus and then tolerated evil in their life, the church confronted them and dealt with the evil. This church not only refused to tolerate evil; they also refused to tolerate false doctrine (V2b). These folks could smell a heretic a mile away. Some 35-40 years earlier, Paul had warned the Elders of the Ephesian church about false teachers. **Acts 20:29-31 (HCSB)** "29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 And

men from among yourselves will rise up with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them.<sup>31</sup> Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears.” That admonition from Paul had stuck, and the Ephesian church had no patience with false teachers and false doctrines. We see a specific example in verse 6. We are not sure who the Nicolaitans were, but based on ancient writing outside Scripture we are pretty sure that they were the followers of a man named Nicholaus who taught that since we are under grace, sin doesn’t matter. They excused immorality and even idolatry under the guise of being under grace. The church at Ephesus would have nothing to do with them. Jesus commended them for their doctrinal purity. In verse 3, He says that they showed no signs of letting up.

As you can see, there was much to commend in this church. Someone said this about the Ephesians: “They had all the right stuff. If you attended one of their church services, you would immediately sense that you were with God’s spiritual Marines. The few, the proud, the Ephesians.” [ Steven Lawson, *Final Call*, Page 80].

What a church! If I had moved to Ephesus at the end of that first century, after a few visits, I would have been strongly leaning toward moving my letter to this church! And yet, there was a flaw in this church. It was a flaw that evidently became a fatal flaw. The church at Ephesus later died. We don’t know that it was from the fatal flaw Jesus pointed out in verse 4, but it likely was. What was the sin that likely killed the church at Ephesus?

### III. The Sin (V4)

This church had everything but the main thing. The word “left” means to forsake or let go. Technically, they did not lose their first love; they left it, they forsook it. The Bible puts a premium on loving God. In fact, the supreme characteristic of a Christian is a life changing love for the Lord. When challenged to name the greatest commandment, Jesus said in **Matthew 22:37-38 (NKJV)**<sup>37</sup> “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*”<sup>38</sup> This is *the* first and great commandment.” Jesus is the Lord; He is God the Son and this command applies to Him as much as to the Father. Jesus told His disciples that their love for Him must exceed every other love. **Matthew 10:37 (NKJV)** “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” Those who love Him are blessed. Those who do not love Him are cursed. **1 Corinthians 16:22 (NKJV)** “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!” Those who love Him are blessed. **Ephesians 6:24 (HCSB)** “Grace be with all who have undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.” A true Christian will always love the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 16:22), but it is possible for a Christian to leave or forsake the first love. This is what had happened to the church at Ephesus.

Let’s make sure that we understand what is meant by “first love”. **1 Peter 2:7a (NKJV)** “Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious...” That word “precious” means to treasure. That first love is when He is so precious to us, we continually delight in Him, we love to meditate on Him; we delight in His Word; we can’t get enough of worshipping Him. We don’t have a quiet time as some legalistic item to check off our daily “to do list”. We delight in Him. There is an analogy in marriage. A newly wed couple can’t stand being apart. Their two lives have become one and there is deep desire to be together, to experience life together. It is not uncommon for that flame to die down because life happens. The demands on our lives pull us apart and soon, the affection, the constant thoughts of the love of our life are squelched by other things that have crowded in. Soon the couple begins to almost feel like strangers. That is what happened at Ephesus between this church and their Lord. He was no longer precious; He was a doctrine to be defended. Their ministry had become mechanical. Someone described it as Doxology (praise) that had slipped into cold orthodoxy – right belief [Steven Lawson]. “They had lots of activity for Christ, but very little intimacy with Christ. They had full heads, busy feet, but empty hearts” (Steven Lawson). We are not talking of a point in time turning away from Christ in rebellion. We are talking about a gradual coldness that develops over time.

Allow me to share some possible indicators that you have left or are in the process of leaving your first love. These aren't meant to be a litmus test; they are simply some questions to use to examine your life.

1. Your personal devotion to Christ begins to wane. Your desire to spend time with Him in prayer and the Word decreases to the point that it is neglected or that you are just going through the motions without a heart that treasures him.
2. Your Christian life begins to lack the element of the radical. You find yourself playing it safe, staying away from things you are not comfortable with. You have ceased to put yourself into situations where you are forced to trust him as your strength to accomplish the task.
3. You begin to lose your spiritual sensitivity. Your heart becomes calloused. You find yourself letting down some fences you put up in your life to avoid sin because you did not want to disappoint the Lord Jesus who was so precious to you. You find yourself rationalizing sin. You seldom are moved during the worship time. The messages become something you endure. You have lost your spiritual sensitivity and it is because you have left your first love.
4. Your passion for ministry wanes. That which used to give you delight is now something you have to do that you wish you could get out of doing.

There are many more, but that gives you an ideal of how to examine yourself.

#### IV. The Solution (V5)

When the Lord points to the sin of His people, He tells them what to do about it. What do we do about the sin of leaving our first love? He gave them a three step process to return to their first love, but before we look at the solution Jesus gives, let me emphasize something. If a church has left its first love, there is a call for drastic action. Spiritual band-aids won't do. It's time to be drastic. Sound the alarm, fast, pray, stop everything! This is not a minor tweak! Jesus says that to fail to take the commanded action will result in Jesus coming in discipline and removing their lampstand. That means He will take away their privilege of holding forth His light in the world. They will cease being His church! They may continue to open the doors and have people show up, but Jesus won't be there. What are the three steps?

##### A. Remember (V5a)

The word "remember" is a present imperative. That means that it is a command and the present tense means to keep on remembering. He is talking about setting your mind on what it was like when your first love ruled and how you forsook that first love. Re-focus on what it was like when He was precious to you. The road back starts with remembering. Where did the flame of love for Christ start growing dim? Maybe it was a specific incidence of disobedience; maybe it was when you started working more and more hours; maybe it was when you started being consumed with a hobby. Remember!

##### B. Repent (V5b)

To repent means that you call your coldness of heart what it really is – sin, evil, disobedience to God. To repent means that you are willing to do whatever it takes to turn around. It may mean a job change, or a reorganization of how you use your time. If it was an area of disobedience, go back to where you disobeyed and obey! If it was some hobby, trash your hobby. If it was a ministry you left, go back to the ministry. Repent.

##### C. Repeat (V5c)

What are the first works? It could mean the works you were doing when you left your first love, but I think that it means the basic of the Christian walk. We have the first works detailed for us in Acts 2:42-47. They were continuing in the study of the Word, worship and especially the Lord's Supper, prayers, a giving lifestyle, fellowship, and worship with large groups and growing in small groups in the home.

#### V. The Success (V7)

The one who overcomes is a true Christian. **1 John 5:5 (NKJV)** "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" A Christian is an overcomer. The Lord is saying that the overcomers, the true believers will eat of the tree of life in Paradise. The tree of life is first referred to in Genesis 2:9 where it stands in the Garden of Eden. Those that eat of this tree live forever (Genesis

3:22). Because of sin, the way to the tree of life was blocked, but now the tree of life is in Heaven (Revelation 22:2). I believe it is a literal tree, but it symbolizes eternal life. The Paradise of God is a synonym for Heaven as it is used here. As we keep our eyes on Heaven, all of our trials here on earth are in perspective.

#### CONCLUSION

History tells us that the church at Ephesus did not repent and their lampstand was taken away. Don't allow this to happen in your life. We must not let it happen in our church. One of the things that God used to launch the Welsh revival in the first part of the twentieth century was a teenage girl who stood in a meeting and said, "I do love the Lord Jesus". She began to weep and repeated it over and over as she wept. God moved in revival that eventually swept across the whole country. May we come back to the place that our heart overflows with that first love – "I do love the Lord Jesus."