

THE FIRST LOVE
Revelation 2:1-7

Intro: In the letters to the seven churches of Asia we have our Lord's own evaluation of the work that was going on in each place. They all should be studied together because they give us the best way of checking to see if the work that we are doing is what we should be doing, and, if it is, if it is being done in a way that is pleasing to the Lord.

Almost everything that the Lord had to say about the church at Ephesus was good, with one exception. And that exception was something that probably was very difficult for the people of the church to detect until it was called to their attention. And yet it was a deficiency which threatened to destroy the whole ministry of the church.

These are days when church leaders are strong on evaluation and on planning ahead. Many try to keep up with the latest methods, and seek to gear the Lord's work to that which is going on in the world. We don't find anything like that in these seven letters. In fact, every attempt to cater to what men will like is strongly condemned. That is the reason that we need to look at our own lives and our ministry together as a church to see if we are doing what the Lord wants us to do, and doing it in the way that He wants it to be done. Our evaluation may be meaningless, but the Lord's evaluation is just exactly what we need. As we look at this passage of Scripture tonight I hope that you will be thinking about your own life and work as well as our ministry together as Trinity Bible Church.

The letter is very easily divided into its separate parts, and it follows generally the pattern in the six letters which follow. They are:

- I. Identification (Rev. 2:1, 2).
 - A. Of the church (v. 1a).
 - B. Of the Writer (v. 1b).
- II. Commendation (Rev. 2:2, 3).
- III. Admonition (Rev. 2:4).
- IV. Exhortation (Rev. 2:5).
- V. Encouragement (Rev. 2:6).
- VI. Promise (Rev. 2:7).

It is important to note that the Lord was strong on commending the church at Ephesus wherever He could. But it is also important to see that there is one statement in the letter that was strong enough to cancel out every good thing that was mentioned. That statement is in verse 6. And when we see all of the good things that the Lord mentioned we can

see how very serious the Lord's charge against the church was.

Let us look at each point briefly.

I. IDENTIFICATION (Rev. 2:1).

A. Of the church.

There is no question as to what church the Lord was describing. This letter would not fit any of the other churches. We have here a divine evaluation of that one church.

B. Of the Writer.

If you could see my notes, you would see that I have capitalized the word, Writer. And I have done that because the Writer is the Lord Jesus Christ. Two things are said about Him, and those two things are taken from the vision that the Apostle John had of the Lord which is described in chapter 1.

Two things are said about the Lord:

- 1) He was sovereign over the churches--and this included Ephesus.
- 2) The Lord was present with them, and so He could see exactly what was going on in the church of Ephesus.

It is important for all of us to remember the power of the Lord and the presence of the Lord as they relate to each of us personally, and to us as a church.

II. COMMENDATION (Rev. 2:2, 3).

Charles Simeon in his message on this letter condenses the Lord's commendation to three things:

- 1) Their unwearied labor.
- 2) Their invincible patience.
- 3) Their discriminating zeal.

From what I know of the words that our Lord used, it seems to me that Simeon was right. You will notice that there is more than one word for work in verse 2, and their work is referred to again in verse 3. They were workers, hard workers, with amazing patience, but they were careful to be working at the right things and careful that they were following the right leaders. It really was an exceptional church. They were concerned about the glory of the Lord's Name, and they had no place for anything that was not according to the light that the Lord had given to them.

However, there was something missing in their service for the Lord that apparently nobody in the church had missed. And this is brought out in:

III. THE LORD'S ADMONITION (Rev. 2:4).

To admonish a church is to reprove gently, but seriously. That is what the Lord was doing. They were serving Him, and serving Him faithfully, but something had happened to their devotion to the Lord.

Do you remember how Paul had prayed for this church? It was a Spirit-inspired prayer, and you will find it in Eph. 3:14-21. (Read.)

How quickly things can change! They were busy serving the Lord, but they had left behind their special love for Him. The word love suggests making the Lord your one choice among many options, and making Him the primary object of your love. It was not that they did not love the Lord, but they did not love Him the way they had loved Him formerly. They took time for His work, but had little time for Him. They were concerned about being right, but they were not as concerned about being holy. It was easier for them to serve the Lord than it was for them to pray. And the Lord was the One Who had noticed the difference.

We have a parallel situation in the OT which is mentioned in the prophecy of Jeremiah. (Read Jer. 2:1-13.) The situation was different in Judah in those days. It was worse. But you can see from Jer. 2 where the church at Ephesus was headed. When the Lord loses the pre-eminence place in our lives, it is only a matter of time until it is evident that we and our church is in a state of spiritual declension.

One writer (Simeon, Vol. 21, pp. 38, 39) has suggested that there are some of the Lord's people who have never experienced that first love, that special love for the Lord which many have when they are first saved. It is a time when we delight in Him. We love to spend time with Him. We love to read the Word to learn of Him. We love to pray. We are interested in living for the Lord, and serving Him, but He is before everything else!

Everyone of us needs to examine his own heart to see what place the Lord has in our lives, and whether or not we love the Lord. If so, has there ever been a time when we loved Him more than we do now.

Now look at the exhortation which followed.

IV. EXHORTATION (Rev. 2:5).

The Lord told them to do two things:

- 1) Remember.
- 2) Repent.

That word remember is an important word in Scripture, isn't it? Even tonight as we stand on the threshold of another year, let us think back and remember if even in this year our love for the Lord has undergone a change. If so, we have fallen. We are not as strong spiritually, nor as effective, if our love for the Lord is not what it used to be.

What is the remedy? REPENTANCE! "But," you might say, "I thought that repentance was only for people who needed to know the Lord as Savior, that it has to do with our acknowledgement of our sin, and our grief that we have sinned against the Lord. No, repentance is a word for us as the people of God, too. And if we do not love the Lord as we should, and even as much as we used to love Him, we are sinning. This was the first commandment in the Law, and there is nothing more important in our lives, nothing, than that we love the Lord with all of our heart, etc.

If we don't love the Lord, what happens? Does the church close? No! Do we love what we have in Christ? No! What happens in that there can be a lot of activity, and good, orthodox activity, but NO LIGHT! The light of any church, or any child of God, is measured by the love that we have for the Lord. It is good to be orthodox, but orthodoxy alone is not sufficient. It is our personal fellowship with the Lord and our devotion to Him, that gives light and blessing to the work of any church.

This is followed by:

V. THE LORD'S ENCOURAGEMENT (Rev. 2:6).

Here the Lord referred to the deeds of the Nicolaitans; in v. 15 we see their doctrine. And verse 14 seems to make the Nicolaitans as the then present-day successors of Balaam in the OT. The Ephesians did well that they hated such deeds because the Lord hated them, too. But even that was not enough.

Finally we come to:

VI. THE LORD'S PROMISE (Rev. 2:7).

Do we have ears to hear? The Lord and the Spirit were not just warning the believers at Ephesus, but it was to "the

churches"--every true church down to the present day.

Living for the Lord and serving Him in this world are a conflict in which believers show that they are believers by overcoming every obstacle that stands in the way of our being pleasing to God. We do it by His grace, but we do it. And heaven is the prize.

Concl: As we face another year, let us give our most serious attention to where we are spiritually, and just what our relationship to the Lord is. And if there are changes that need to be made, let us ask the Lord for grace to make them. Our effectiveness with the world is not only dependent upon our work, and our orthodoxy, but, most of all, upon our love for the Lord and our fellowship with Him.