

Doing the First Works

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Revelation 2:1–7 (NKJV) *“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ² ‘I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. ⁴ Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ⁶ But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” ’ ’*

These words from Jesus were given to the church at Ephesus, one of the seven churches in Asia Minor mentioned in the book of Revelation. The church at Ephesus played a key role in the spread of Christianity in the Gentile world and was regarded as the gateway to Asia Minor. The church in Ephesus was planted by Priscilla and Aquila but later established by the apostle Paul on his third missionary journey where he served as its pastor for three years. It didn’t take long for the church at Ephesus to become a spiritual headquarters for the churches in Asia Minor. After Paul left, Timothy pastored the church for another year and a half in order to counter false teaching and false teachers who were attempting to infiltrate the church. In his letters to Timothy, Paul gave him strong exhortation to stand against these false teachers and their destructive doctrines so that the church could remain strong in the faith and continue to spread the Gospel in that region and beyond. Unfortunately, by the time the apostle John received the Revelation, the Ephesian church had lost its original passion. The words of Jesus to this church serve as a warning to us today.

Jesus begins His message to the church at Ephesus with a commendation. Consider the noteworthy things for which Jesus credited the church at Ephesus: 1) their works, acts, or deeds that established their reputation as a church, 2) their labor or intense effort in the midst of trouble, toil, struggle, and sorrow, 3) their patient, steadfast, and unwavering loyalty to God even in the face of great trials, 4) their intolerance for evil men—people who were morally bad and harmful in regard to their thinking, feeling, or acting, 5) their commitment to test and remove false apostles and teachers from the church, 6) their perseverance and patience under the greatest of trials, 7) their labor—reproach, suffering, and hardship—due to their identification with Christ’s Name, 8) their tireless efforts for the cause of Christ, and 9) their hatred of the work of the Nicolaitans (a false sect led by a man named Nicolas).

Based on this lengthy list of commendations, it would be easy to suppose that the church at Ephesus was a model church. We might also expect to find their church seminars promoted in the major Christian circles of that day. However, Jesus knew something about this church that had escaped everyone’s notice. This great church

looked impressive on the outside but had lost a vital ingredient that caused unseen spiritual decline. Unless this church changed, it would eventually cease to exist. What had the church lost? Jesus made it clear: “Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”

As individuals and as churches, it is common to fall into the same condition as the church in Ephesus. It is so easy to become satisfied with external accomplishments that impress us and others while failing to see how far we have drifted from the heart of God. Jesus’ words to the church at Ephesus reveal that we can be faithful in loyalty, dedicated in service, orthodox in doctrine, holy in conduct, champions in the faith, tireless in ministry, and yet be cold and indifferent toward Christ. Unfortunately, while genuine efforts for Christ are commendable, they are never to become a religious substitute for what matters most—our first love relationship with Jesus.

Maintaining our first love relationship with Jesus must be the foremost priority in life. Can you remember the time you first came to Christ? Do you remember the joy of your new faith and the gratitude you felt? Do you remember the passion that burned in your heart for Jesus? Do you remember how you hungered to be with Him in prayer and to feed upon His word? Do you remember how much you loved Him and wanted to tell others? Has something changed? Are you ritualistically going through the motions of being a Christian while growing cold and indifferent toward the Lord? Have you substituted religion for a relationship with Jesus? If so, then hear what the Lord said to the church at Ephesus.

First Jesus says to *remember*. Remember from where you have fallen. Remember when you first came to the Lord. Remember the time when there was an excitement and passion for Jesus. Remember how you wanted to obey and serve Him without being hounded by others or expecting a reward. Remember how the love of Jesus was more precious than anything else in life. Second, Jesus says to *repent*. Repentance means to change your mind and your behavior by returning to Him in true and loving devotion. Third, Jesus says to do the first works. What are the “first works”? The first works involve our works of ministering unto the Lord. Ministering unto the Lord involves spending time communing with Him in prayer and in His Word. Our efforts to minister to others on Christ’s behalf will be futile and lifeless if we fail to abide in a first love relationship with Christ.

Do you hunger for the relationship you once had with Jesus? Then don’t settle for a substitute. Put Christ back into your Christianity. Return to Jesus as your first love and start doing the first works. Renew your passion for Jesus!

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