

## **KEEP YOUR LOVE HOT**

### **Revelation 2:1-7**

**By Andy Manning**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Would you like for God to use you? Are there things you would like to accomplish for God? Are there people you'd like to reach for Christ? If you want God to use you to make a difference, there is one thing you must not neglect.
2. In Revelation 2-3 we find seven letters. They are from Christ to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia (modern day Turkey). Today we are going to study Christ's letter to the Ephesians.

#### **II. TEXT: Revelation 2:1-7**

1. "Write to the angel of the church in Ephesus: Thus says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands:
  - i. Jesus is telling John to write to each church.
  - ii. The angel of the church in Ephesus is the pastor. The word "angel" does not have to mean an angelic or celestial being. It can simply be translated "messenger". The word was used to describe John the Baptist in Mk 1:2. So in this context it just means the pastor of the church in Ephesus.
  - iii. What do we know about the ancient city of Ephesus?
    1. 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in the Roman empire, with anywhere from 250,000 to 500,000 people.
    2. Main city in the province of Asia.
    3. It was a major sea port on the Mediterranean Sea.
    4. It had four major trade roads running through it, so it was known as the gateway to Asia.
    5. The people of the city were devoted worshipers of the Roman emperor, and of Diana, the chief goddess of the Greek Pantheon. Diana was a fertility goddess. Ephesus had a temple dedicated to Diana that is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Around the temple were thousands of temple prostitutes, heralds, flute players, creating what one author called "a hysterical arena of music, orgies and drunkenness."
    6. The church was started by Paul and his partners Priscilla and Aquilla on his first missionary journey. He left them in charge and moved on to start other churches. On his third missionary journey he stayed in Ephesus for about three years. Ephesus became his base of operations while he likely started the other six churches in Asia mentioned in Revelation.
    7. The church had many great leaders, including Paul, Priscilla and Aquilla, Timothy, Apollos, and even the apostle John.

8. By the time John writes this letter the church has been around for 10-20 years.
2. 2 I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. 3 I know that you have persevered and endured hardships for the sake of my name, and you have not grown weary.
  - i. Remember that this church is living in hostile territory. They are operating behind enemy lines. They are facing severe persecution. So Christ begins with some very encouraging words.
  - ii. Three Things to Remember When Facing Difficulties
    1. God has you in His hand.
    2. God is with you.
    3. God is watching you.
  - iii. From all appearances, the church in Ephesus is a strong church; a good church; a healthy church. They are commended for their...
    1. Works: They were obedient (Eph 2:8).
    2. Labor: They were diligent in ministry and service to the Lord.
    3. Endurance: They kept believing, and serving, with joy, in spite of trials.
    4. Intolerance of false teachers: Sound doctrine.
  - iv. But after commending them, He rebukes them.
3. 4 But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first.
  - i. In other words, "Your love for Christ has grown cold. The flame of your love has gone out. We're no longer close. We're no longer intimate. We have drifted apart."
  - ii. After the rebuke comes the warning.
4. 5 Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet you do have this: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.
  - i. "I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent." In other words, Christ warned them that if they did not return to their first love, He would shut down the church.
  - ii. When a church shuts down, we usually assume it is a bad thing, and we usually give the credit to the devil. But here it says that the devil is not the only one who is in the church-closing business. Sometimes Christ shuts churches down. That means that sometimes churches need to shut down. Sometimes it is a good thing when a church shuts down.

- iii. The Ephesian church was in danger of being shut down. Why? Because they had lost their first love. Not for blatant sin or disobedience. Not for false teaching. Not for laziness. Not because of persecution. Because they had lost their first love.
- iv. This passage teaches us some surprising insights about loving Christ.

### III. THREE SURPRISING INSIGHTS ABOUT LOVING CHRIST

#### 1. Lost love means poor health.

- i. They had obedience, hard work, endurance, church discipline, sound doctrine, yet they were not healthy.
- ii. It is impossible to be a healthy Christian if your love has grown cold.
- iii. Why? They were missing an essential ingredient of the Christian life. Relationship.
- iv. Christianity is more than just following rules and rituals. It is more than just believing the right things. It is more than just working for God. It is a relationship with God. It is walking with God. Being intimate with God.
- v. This passage tells us that to God, intimacy with Him is just as important as obedience, sound doctrine, and service.
- vi. Who does God use for His kingdom purposes? Someone who is close to Him. Someone who loves Him.
- vii. This shouldn't surprise us. Jesus said the greatest commandment in the Bible is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk 12:29-30).
- viii. It's like a wife who shocks her husband with the news that she is unhappy and is on the verge of leaving him. Why is he shocked? Because on paper, on the surface he is the model husband. He doesn't abuse his wife. He is nice to her. He works hard and is a good provider. He takes the family to church. He doesn't sleep around. He's not a drinker or an addict. So he thinks he has checked off all the right boxes. He is pleased with himself. He thinks he is the model husband. But then his wife says, "If something doesn't change I'm leaving. There's no passion, no love, no intimacy, no oneness, no fire in our relationship. We've fallen out of love."
- ix. Jesus wants more than sound doctrine. He wants more than your obedience. He wants more than your service. He wants you. He wants to be close. He wants intimacy. He wants your love. He wants your passion. He wants a relationship.

#### 2. Lost love means less impact.

- i. Christ warned them that if they didn't change, He would remove their lampstand, or shut down their church.
- ii. In other words, if you don't rekindle your love for Christ, He will not use. He will not use you to make an impact for Christ.
- iii. Why is lost love so serious? They had obedience. They had hard work. They had sound doctrine. Why is lost love so consequential?

- iv. Love is the energy behind the Christian life. This is why it is the greatest commandment.
    - 1. Love energizes obedience. **John 14:23** “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.”
    - 2. Love energizes ethics (2 John 1:6). If you love God you will obey Him, and His primary command is to treat others with love and respect.
    - 3. Love energizes service. **1 Thessalonians 1:3** “We recall, in the presence of our God and Father, your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love.”
  - v. You can only survive lost love for so long. Eventually it will begin to affect your morality; your relationships; and your ministry. Given enough time, lost love will lead to you doing more harm than good. You will be a Christian in name only. You will be a bad advertisement for Jesus. You will be doing damage to the kingdom rather than building the kingdom. And Jesus will shut you down.
  - vi. When someone has a moral failure, or they drift into false teaching, or they burn out in ministry, those are merely symptoms of the underlying problem. They lost their first love. And instead of correcting it, instead of repenting, they keep drifting until they crashed.
  - vii. This is what Jesus meant. **John 15:5** “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.”
  - viii. If we don’t remain in Him, in a constant, close relationship, then we can do nothing. We are powerless. Lifeless. And Christ will remove our lampstand.
3. Lost love can be rekindled.
- i. This is the good news. If you recognize that you have lost your first love, then you can regain it.
  - ii. **Revelation 2:5** “Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.”
  - iii. Remember, repent, repeat. Remember -- when you were on fire for Jesus. Remember when you were close. Repent – change your mind, heart, and actions. Repeat – do the things you used to do when your love was hot.

#### IV. BIG IDEA

- 1. If you want to be used by God to make a difference, you have to remember this: Intimacy is the key to impact. The level of your intimacy will determine the level of your impact. If you want to make an impact, you must maintain intimacy. You have to stay close. You have to keep your love hot. Otherwise you will gradually become useless.
- 2. Think of it this way. In this passage Christ calls the church the candlestick, or the lampstand. You are a candlestick. Your love for Christ is the flame. You are only

useful if you keep the flame going. You can only make a spiritual impact if you keep the flame going. But if the flame goes out, then you are useless.

3. Sound doctrine is vital. Obedience is vital. Hard work is vital. But just as important, if not more so, is the relationship. Keep your love hot, or Christ will remove your lampstand.

**V. HOW TO KNOW IF YOU HAVE LOST YOUR FIRST LOVE** (Source: Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/articles/40-evidences-left-your-first-love/>)

1. You can go hours or days without having more than a passing thought of Him.
2. You don't have a strong desire to spend time with Him.
3. You don't have a strong hunger for the Word; Bible reading is a "chore"—something to mark off your "to do" list.
4. Spending time in prayer is a burden/duty rather than a delight.
5. Your worship is formal, dry, lifeless, merely going through the motions.
6. Private prayer and worship are almost non-existent . . . cold and dry.
7. You are more concerned about physical health, well-being, and comfort than about the well-being and condition of your soul.
8. You crave physical food, while having little appetite for spiritual food.
9. You crave human companionship more than a relationship with Christ.
10. You spend more time and effort on your physical appearance than on cultivating inner spiritual beauty to please Christ.
11. Your heart toward Christ is cold and indifferent; not tender as it once was, not easily moved by the Word, talk of spiritual things, etc.
12. Christianity is more of a checklist than a relationship with Christ.
13. You measure spirituality (yours/others') by performance rather than the condition of the heart.
14. Christianity is defined more what by what you "do" than who you "are" ("doing" vs. "being").
15. Your obedience and service are motivated and fueled by expectations of others or a desire to impress others, more than by passion for Christ.
16. You are more concerned about what others think and pleasing them, than about what God knows and pleasing Christ.
17. Your service for Christ and others is motivated by a sense of duty or obligation.
18. You find yourself becoming resentful over the hardships and demands of serving Christ and others.
19. You can talk with others about kids, marriage, weather, and the news, but struggle to talk about the Lord and spiritual matters.
20. You have a hard time coming up with something fresh to share in a testimony service at church or when someone asks, "What's God been doing in your life?"
21. You are formal, rigid, and uptight about spiritual things, rather than joyful and winsome.
22. You are critical or harsh toward those who are doctrinally off-base or living in sin.

23. You enjoy secular songs, movies, and books more than songs or reading material that point you to Christ.
24. You prefer the company of people who don't love Christ, to the company and fellowship of those who do.
25. You are more interested in recreation, entertainment, and having "fun" than in cultivating intimacy with Christ through worship, prayer, the Word, and Christian fellowship.
26. You display attitudes or are involved in activities that you know are contrary to Scripture, but you continue in them anyway.
27. You justify "small" areas of disobedience or compromise.
28. You have been drawn back into sin habits that you put off when you were a young believer.
29. "Little" things that used to disturb your conscience, no longer do.
30. You are slow to respond to conviction over sin—or you ignore it altogether.
31. You enjoy certain sins and want to hang onto them. You are unwilling to give them up for Christ.
32. You are not grieved by sin—it's no big deal to you.
33. You are consistently allured by certain sins.
34. You are self-righteous—more concerned about sin in others' lives than in your own.
35. You are more concerned about having the right position than the right disposition.
36. You tend to hold tightly to money and things, rather than being quick to give to meet the needs of others.
37. You rarely give sacrificially to the Lord's work.
38. You rarely have a desire or burden to give, when you hear of legitimate financial needs within the Body, your church, or a ministry.
39. Accumulating and maintaining material "things" consumes more time and effort on your part than seeking after and cultivating spiritual riches.
40. You have broken relationships with other believers that you are unwilling or have not attempted to reconcile.

## **VI. HOW TO KEEP YOUR LOVE HOT**

1. Let me give you one word: Quality.
2. The key to keeping your love hot is not just to go to church, to go to Home Group, to have a quiet time, but to do those things with quality.
3. Input determines outcome. You get out of something what you put into it.
4. The reason our love grows cold is because we are no longer practicing the spiritual disciplines with quality. We start practicing the spiritual disciplines with mindless repetition. We no longer put our hearts into them. We no longer put any effort into them. In church we are just standing there rather than singing with all our hearts. We are not bringing our bibles and taking good notes. In Home Group we just show up rather than doing the homework of filling out the discussion guide ahead of time. When we read the Bible we're not really thinking about it, we're just trying to get

through it as quickly as possible. When we pray, our prayers are brief and quick. We race through the spiritual disciplines. We are lazy with our spiritual disciplines.

5. To get back to your first love, you need to put quality back into your spiritual practices. Put your heart into worship. Put your heart into Home Group. Put your heart into your quiet time. Quality.
6. Don't just do these things as quickly as possible so you can check them off some list. Try to connect with God. Try to hear from God. Throw your heart into it.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

1. Often at Church Acadiana we do sermons about standing firm against false teaching. Many Biblical teachings are under attack today by ideas like evolution, critical race theory, homosexuality, transgenderism, abortion, prosperity gospel, socialism, etc. So we are regularly encouraging you and equipping you to stand firm in the faith; to not drift into false teaching. But there's an equally important message that we need to hear just often at Church Acadiana. Keep your love hot. Don't lose the fire. Stay close to Jesus.
2. Why? Because love fuels and energizes your entire Christian life. It fuels your obedience, your love for others, and energizes you for ministry.
3. Intimacy determines impact. If you want to make a difference for Christ, keep your love hot.