

Int'l Training for Elders and Responsible Ones (Fall 2016)

Returning to the Orthodoxy of the Church

Message Two

The Church in Ephesus

Scripture Reading: Rev. 2:1-7

Rev 2:1 To the messenger of the church in Ephesus write: These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, He who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:
Rev 2:2 I know your works and your labor and your endurance and that you cannot bear evil men; and you have tried those who call themselves apostles and are not, and have found them to be false;
Rev 2:3 And you have endurance and have borne all things because of My name and have not grown weary.
Rev 2:4 But I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love.
Rev 2:5 Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.
Rev 2:6 But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
Rev 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

I. With regard to the seven churches, which are represented by the seven lampstands, we should understand three things:

- A. These seven churches were real churches existing at that time.
- B. These seven churches represent the sevenfold history of the church.
- C. The conditions of the churches exist simultaneously in the church's sevenfold history.

II. Revelation 2 and 3 show us what we need to do to return to the orthodoxy of the church—what it is that actually pleases the Lord, what it is that the Lord condemns, and what the Lord's actual way is for the church:

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Rev 2:8 And to the messenger of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the First and the Last, who became dead and lived again:
Rev 2:9 I know your tribulation and poverty (but you are rich) and the slander from those who call themselves Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

- Rev 2:10 Do not fear the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
- Rev 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall by no means be hurt of the second death.
- Rev 2:12 And to the messenger of the church in Pergamos write: These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:
- Rev 2:13 I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name and have not denied My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.
- Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against you, that you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat idol sacrifices and to commit fornication.
- Rev 2:15 In the same way you also have some who hold in like manner the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
- Rev 2:16 Repent therefore; but if not, I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war with them with the sword of My mouth.
- Rev 2:17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and to him I will give a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows except he who receives it.
- Rev 2:18 And to the messenger of the church in Thyatira write: These things says the Son of God, He who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like shining bronze:
- Rev 2:19 I know your works and love and faith and service and your endurance and that your last works are more than the first.
- Rev 2:20 But I have something against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, she who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and leads My slaves astray to commit fornication and to eat idol sacrifices.
- Rev 2:21 And I gave her time that she might repent, and she is not willing to repent of her fornication.
- Rev 2:22 Behold, I cast her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her, into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works;
- Rev 2:23 And her children I will kill with death; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the inward parts and the hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your works.
- Rev 2:24 But I say to you-the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they Say-I put no other burden upon you;
- Rev 2:25 Nevertheless what you have hold fast until I come.
- Rev 2:26 And he who overcomes and he who keeps My works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations;
- Rev 2:27 And he will shepherd them with an iron rod, as vessels of pottery are broken in pieces, as I also have received from My Father;
- Rev 2:28 And to him I will give the morning star.
- Rev 2:29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- Rev 3:1 And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead.
- Rev 3:2 Become watchful and establish the things which remain, which were about to die; for I have found none of your works completed before My God.
- Rev 3:3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard, and keep it and repent. If therefore you will not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shall by no means know at what hour I will come upon you.
- Rev 3:4 But you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white because they are worthy.
- Rev 3:5 He who overcomes will be clothed thus, in white garments, and I shall by no means erase his

name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

- Rev 3:6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- Rev 3:7 And to the messenger of the church in Philadelphia write: These things says the Holy One, the true One, the One who has the key of David, the One who opens and no one will shut, and shuts and no one opens:
- Rev 3:8 I know your works; behold, I have put before you an opened door which no one can shut, because you have a little power and have kept My word and have not denied My name.
- Rev 3:9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, those who call themselves Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will cause them to come and fall prostrate before your feet and to know that I have loved you.
- Rev 3:10 Because you have kept the word of My endurance, I also will keep you out of the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth.
- Rev 3:11 I come quickly; hold fast what you have that no one take your crown.
- Rev 3:12 He who overcomes, him I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall by no means go out anymore, and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name.
- Rev 3:13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- Rev 3:14 And to the messenger of the church in Laodicea write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God:
- Rev 3:15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.
- Rev 3:16 So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spew you out of My mouth.
- Rev 3:17 Because you say, I am wealthy and have become rich and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,
- Rev 3:18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire that you may be rich, and white garments that you may be clothed and that the shame of your nakedness may not be manifested, and eyesalve to anoint your eyes that you may see.
- Rev 3:19 As many as I love I rebuke and discipline; be zealous therefore and repent.
- Rev 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me.
- Rev 3:21 He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne.
- Rev 3:22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

- A. If a man really wants to walk in the Lord's way, he must read Revelation 2 and 3; today the church has problems, so Revelation tells us what to do; if you do not seek the way in these two chapters, you do not know how to be a Christian.
- B. The seven epistles to the seven churches start with the Lord and end with a call to the overcomers; the overcomers are the normal and ordinary ones; those who are not abnormal during the time of abnormality are the overcomers.
- C. Today men fall, fail, and go downward continually, but the overcomers are recovered to the will of God and return to the orthodoxy of the church.

III. There are four main points in the Lord's epistle to the church in Ephesus—love, life, light, and the lampstand—2:1-7:

- Rev 2:1 To the messenger of the church in Ephesus write: These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, He who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:
- Rev 2:2 I know your works and your labor and your endurance and that you cannot bear evil men; and you have tried those who call themselves apostles and are not, and have found them to be

false;
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A. We must not leave the Lord as our first love, and we must do the first works; “but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent”—vv. 4-5:

Rev 2:4 But I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love.
 Rev 2:5 Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.

1. The leaving of the first love is the source of and main reason for the failure of the church throughout the ages.

2. Colossians tells us that our Christ must have the first place in all things; He must have the preeminence—1:18b.

Col 1:18b ...He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things;

3. To recover the first love is to consider the Lord Jesus as the first in everything; if we make Christ everything in our life, this means that we have overcome the loss of the first love—cf. Psalms 73:25.

Psa 73:25 Whom do I have in heaven but You? / And besides You there is nothing I desire on earth.

4. To overcome the loss of the first love is to be constrained by the love of Christ not merely to live for the Lord but to live to the Lord—2 Cor. 5:9, 14-15:

2 Cor 5:9 Therefore also we are determined, whether at home or abroad, to gain the honor of being well pleasing to Him.

2 Cor 5:14 For the love of Christ constrains us because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died;

2 Cor 5:15 And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised.

a. To live to the Lord means that we are determined to gain the honor of being well pleasing to Him by being absolutely under His control, direction, and governing and that we care uniquely for His aims and goals.

b. To live to the Lord means that we are under the Lord’s direction and control and that we fulfill His requirements, satisfy His desires, and complete what He intends.

5. The failure of Israel was that they forsook God, the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13), and the degradation of the church is the leaving of the first love; actually, to leave the first love is just to leave Christ, not taking Him as the first in everything.

Jer 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: / They have forsaken Me, / The fountain of living waters, / To hew out for themselves cisterns, / Broken cisterns, / Which hold no water.

6. The first love must be to have God, Christ, the Lord, our Master, as the first One in everything—in great things as well as in small things; we need to ask the Lord to forgive us for all the things in which we do not give Him the preeminence.

7. The “first works” are works that issue from the “first love”—Rev. 2:4-5:

Rev 2:4 But I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love.

Rev 2:5 Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.

a. When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), we will surely not be praised for the greatness or volume of our work; what the Lord will investigate is how much of what we do is out of our love to Him.

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad.

b. Only those works that are motivated by love are the gold, the silver, and the precious stones (1 Cor. 3:12); when the saints are filled with the first love for the Lord, everything they do originates from their love for the Lord and is a “labor of love” (1 Thes. 1:3).

1 Cor 3:12 But if anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble,

1 Thes 1:3 Remembering unceasingly your work of faith and labor of love and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father;

c. It is possible that we, like the children of Israel, may worship and serve God, but we may do it mournfully, not at all happy that we are required to do these things—Mal. 3:14.

Mal 3:14 You say, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge and have walked mournfully before Jehovah of hosts?

8. For the Lord to remove the church’s lampstand does not mean that from now on it has no more outward activities or moves; it merely means that it can no longer be God’s faithful testimony:

a. If we leave the first love to the Lord and do not repent and do the first works, it is possible that we may still be standing on the ground of locality, but we have lost the reality and testimony of the Triune God as typified by the golden lampstand.

b. The removal of the lampstand means that before God the church’s position is lost and that she has lost her testimony, the testimony of Jesus; she has lost her position and is disqualified from being the church of the Lord’s testimony anymore.

B. If we have the first love toward the Lord, we will hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which the Lord also hates—Rev. 2:4, 6:

Rev 2:4 But I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love.

RRev 2:6 But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

1. The Greek word for Nicolaitan is composed of two words, one meaning “conquer” or “be victorious over” and another meaning “common people,” “secular people,” or “laity.”

2. Nicolaitans, then, must refer to a group of people who esteem themselves higher than the

common believers; this was undoubtedly the hierarchy adopted and established by Catholicism and Protestantism; the Lord hates the works, the behavior, of these Nicolaitans, and we must hate what the Lord hates.

3. In the proper church life there should be neither clergy nor laity; all the believers should be priests of God (1:6; 5:10; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9); because the mediatorial class destroys the universal priesthood in God's economy, the Lord hates it.

Rev 1:6 And made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen.

Rev 5:10 And have made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth.

1 Pet 2:5 You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Pet 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

- C. In such a good, orderly, and formal church life like the church in Ephesus, we need to maintain the eating of Christ as the tree of life—Rev. 2:7:

Rev 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

1. If we give the preeminence to Christ in everything and enjoy Him as the tree of life every day, we will be marvelous, overcoming Christians, and the church life will become a paradise to us.

2. God's original intention was that man should eat of the tree of life (Gen. 2:9, 16); because of the fall, the way to the tree of life was closed to man (3:22-24); through the redemption of Christ the way by which man could touch the tree of life, which is God Himself in Christ as life to man, was opened again (Heb. 10:19-20).

Gen 2:9 And out of the ground Jehovah God caused to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, as well as the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Gen 2:16 And Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may eat freely,

Gen 3:22 And Jehovah God said, Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever -

Gen 3:23 Then Jehovah God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to work the ground from which he was taken.

Gen 3:24 So He drove the man out, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword which turned in every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

Heb 10:19 Having therefore, brothers, boldness for entering the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus,

Heb 10:20 Which entrance He initiated for us as a new and living way through the veil, that is, His flesh,

3. But in the church's degradation, religion crept in with its knowledge to distract the believers in Christ from eating Him as the tree of life; hence, the Lord promised to grant the overcomers to eat of Himself as the tree of life in the Paradise of God (the New

Jerusalem) as a reward; this is an incentive for them to leave religion with its knowledge and return to the enjoyment of Himself.

4. This promise of the Lord restores the church to God's original intention according to His economy; what the Lord wants the overcomers to do is what the whole church should do in God's economy; because of the church's degradation, the Lord came to call the overcomers to replace the church in the accomplishing of God's economy.
 5. Eating the tree of life, that is, enjoying Christ as our life supply, should be the primary matter in the church life:
 - a. The content of the church life depends on the enjoyment of Christ; the more we enjoy Him, the richer the content will be, but to enjoy Christ requires us to love Him with the first love.
 - b. If we leave our first love toward the Lord, we will miss the enjoyment of Christ and lose the testimony of Jesus; consequently, the lampstand will be removed from us.
 - c. These three things—loving the Lord, enjoying the Lord, and being the testimony of the Lord—go together.
- D. Love is related to life, and life is related to light; love, life, and light are a trinity:
1. If we make Christ the first in everything, we will have the first love; if we have this love, we have life, and we will enjoy the Lord; if we have life, this life becomes light to us—John 1:4; Phil. 2:15-16.

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
Phil 2:15 That you may be blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world,
Phil 2:16 Holding forth the word of life, so that I may have a boast in the day of Christ that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain.
 2. The light of the lampstand, the church, shines forth corporately versus individualistically in the dark night of the church age—cf. Rev. 2:5b.

Rev 2:5b ...I ... will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.
- E. If we are enjoying Christ as our love, life, and light, we will keep the testimony of Jesus as the shining of the lampstand in our locality—cf. 12:17b.

Rev 12:17b ...who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.
- F. We need to remember these four words that begin with the letter l—love, life, light, and lampstand:
1. We must give the Lord Jesus the preeminence in every way and in everything to recover the first love.
 2. Then we will enjoy Him as the tree of life, and this life right away becomes the light of life—John 8:12.

John 8:12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
 3. Then we will be shining in our daily life and corporately as the lampstand; otherwise, the lampstand will be removed from us individually and from the church corporately.

4. If today we take Christ as the first in everything, we will have love, we will enjoy Him as life, we will shine forth with Him as light, and we will become the shining lampstand as the testimony of Jesus; this eventually will become our reward not only in this age but even more in the coming age; in the thousand-year kingdom we will enjoy Christ as our reward in the Paradise of God.