

Letters to 7 Churches 02 Ephesus-Cooling Heart

by James Booker

The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining a fervent love for Christ amidst the busyness of church activities, as exemplified by the Church at Ephesus.

Duration: 49:04

Topics: "Love For God", "Spiritual Intimacy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the church of Ephesus and the importance of keeping Christ as the central focus. He highlights the commendable qualities of the church, such as their labor, patience, and discernment in testing false apostles. However, he also points out their downfall, which is the loss of love. The preacher emphasizes the need to constantly feed and nurture love in our relationship with God through daily quiet time or personal devotion. He concludes with a story of a man who lost the closeness and intimacy with his daughter because she stopped spending quality time with him, drawing a parallel to how our love for God can grow cold if we neglect to cultivate it.

Transcript

Shall we turn again, please, to Revelation, Chapter 2, the Church at Ephesus. Revelation, Chapter 2, please, and beginning at verse 2, the Lord saying and speaking to the church, I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil, and thus tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, hath found them liars, and hath borne, and hath patience, and for my name's sake hath labored, and hath not fainted. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works or else I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deed to the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. And he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Shall we just briefly pray? Our Father, again we thank Thee for Thy precious word, and as we consider this evening Thy letter to the Ephesians, and Thy concern for love, that first love, from whence they had drifted, we pray that our hearts might be challenged tonight in realizing the need of a fervent love, a love

that might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment. May we know what it is to love Thee with a full heart.

We ask these things in our Savior's precious and worthy name. Amen. Now, this morning we were noticing this particular church at Ephesus and suggesting it was a church that had drifted and was continuing to drift, but didn't realize it.

That's one of the tragedies and one of the things we need to be aware of in the Christian life. We can be drifting away from Christ, our center, in our daily life and not be conscious of it, and it's something we need to be concerned about constantly. It's a very solemn and challenging lesson that the Lord has for us here this evening concerning the church at Ephesus.

I'm reminded, in the light of the lesson that appeals to me at any rate, of the story of the gentleman who had lost his wife, and he had one daughter around eleven or twelve years of age, and he loved at the end of a day when he got through with work, got home, and they had their meal to sit down and just chat with her. She would tell him the various things that had happened to her at school through the day, and he had told her some of the happenings at work. And they just had a happy time together for a while in the evening, an hour or so.

Sometimes they'd go out for a walk together hand in hand and just walk down the street or out into the woods and talk together, and they were very, very close. However, as time went on, one particular evening he sat down expecting her to come in to join him, as she had been doing in the past, but instead she disappeared into one of the rooms, her bedroom. And when she came out some time later, he said, I've missed you.

Where have you been? And she just simply said, Well, I've been busy. So he didn't question her and just left it that way. And this went on for a week and then for two weeks and a month and on to two months.

At the end of the second month, it was his birthday, and she came in all excited on this particular evening, and after eating, she brought him a pair of slippers. And he was quite pleased, of course, with the slippers, and he said, My, I want to thank you for buying these slippers for me. And she said, Father, I didn't buy these slippers.

She says, I've been making these slippers. And a light kind of dawned in his eye, and he said, Oh, he said, That is the reason that I have missed you these last two months. You've been busy making me a pair of slippers.

And she said, That's right. Well, he said, I certainly appreciate the slippers, but he said, I've missed something far more, and that is your company, your companionship, and your fellowship. He said, I wish that you would never do that again.

You know, our Lord delights in our fellowship with himself. I think that's brought out very clearly in so many passages of Scripture, but particularly with the story of Mary and Martha. As Mary sat at his feet and just listened to his word, and Mary chose that good part, you remember, that was not going to be taken away from her, and the Lord was so delighted with one who was willing just to sit at his feet and to commune with him.

And how delighted he was. And even later on, you remember, in John chapter 12, when she anointed his head and anointed him with the ointment that she had, and there was much grumbling going on among

some of the disciples at the waist, the Lord said, Leave her alone. And how thrilled the Lord was at the communion, the fellowship, the marks of devotion that was seen by Mary and by others in the word of God.

He delights in our devotion to him. He delights in that close relationship with himself. This particular church at Ephesus had started out in that manner.

Now they had drifted into much activity, much service, but they had become so busy, they were not taking time out to commune with him, to fellowship with him. And I want to challenge you tonight, beloved, as I challenge my own heart, and have been challenging it this afternoon, and thinking along this line again, just how much time do you have with the Lord each day? Do you make time just to spend it alone with him, and allow the Lord to speak to your heart as you talk to him? Do you still have that experience of devotion and of love toward your Lord? This is emphasized again in verse 2, where we left off this morning. You remember, we're told here, I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience.

Now they were very active. They were very, very busy. This little expression here, thy labor, is an interesting word, so they tell us in the Greek language, and it's a word that suggests intense toil.

Labor that leads to weariness, and they were laboring, and they were very patient under trials and difficulties. Now, these things were commendable, but there was something lacking. And you recall back in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, the thing that's lacking is mentioned there.

There was a young church, the Church of Thessalonica, not very long saved, going on so well for the Lord, and enjoying their first love. And you remember when the Apostle Paul spoke about this, he says, remembering your work of faith, and your labor of love, and your patience of hope. Now, you notice the difference.

They were working, they were laboring, they were patient, but with their work there was faith. With their labor there was love, and with their patience there was hope. But if we're not careful, our work will degenerate from a work of faith to simply a work, from a labor of love simply to a labor, from a patience of hope to simply patience.

You see, work and labor and patience can be seen by those around, but the faith and the love and the hope is that hidden quality that's seen by the Lord. And how important it is to be concerned that we work through faith, that we labor out of love, and our patience and endurance is based upon the hope that is shown sure and steadfast in our Lord. This came to my heart a number of years ago, and the Lord challenged me, and I think we have to be challenged again and again about these things.

I know I do. And I recall the first few years when I was commended to the Lord's work and being involved in activities night after night and day after day, and just going on constantly for a few years until my health broke down and I was laid up in bed with a sickness. And rather strikingly as I was laying there in bed that first week, there was one verse that just seemed to come to my mind.

I had not been meditating on it before or reading the passage for some time, but that verse just came into my head rather than unusual verse to me at that time. They made me keeper of the vineyard, but my own vineyard have I not kept. In Song of Solomon chapter 1. They made me keeper of the vineyard, but my own vineyard have I not kept.

And the Lord challenged me with this particular point, that I had been busy serving the Lord and failing to keep in touch with Him. I'd become so involved in preparing for this and preparing for that, visiting this one, trying to care for somebody else, visiting the hospital and so on and so forth, that I had neglected spending time that was so necessary with the Lord Himself. Now this beloved to me is the tremendous challenge of this particular passage.

You see, it's possible to have, as these dear Christians, they were overabundant in service. They were very, very careful and very straight about their doctrine. Their life was blameless.

But they lacked love. And without love, the rest was in vain. We noticed this morning, for example, that in verse 1, He sets before them the object Himself.

And we must keep Christ the object before us constantly. We noticed in verse 2 and 3, the operation of the church, how active they were. We want to notice in verse 4, the objection He had against the church.

And notice what He says here, please. Nevertheless, He said, I see your labor, I see your patience, I see how you bear, I see how you try those that say they're apostles or not, and you find them liars. You're very, very careful if someone comes into your church, to get aside with them and find out just what they believe.

And if you detect that there is some false doctrine there, you're very careful not to accept them. And He said, I commend you for that. He said, you're correct in the manner in which you gather, nevertheless.

And you'll notice in the King James Version here, the little word somewhat is in italics. It ought not to be there. It takes away from the meaning of it.

It says, nevertheless, I have against thee. I have against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. It's no light thing, beloved, for the Lord to be against us.

We remember the Pharisees and those in the days of our Lord who were told on a number of occasions they were against Him. There was opposition. Now, the Lord looks at this dear church and He says, I'm against you.

There's something that disturbs me greatly about you. You've left your first love. Love is what it's all about, is it not? When we think of our Savior, we think of love.

Why did He come into this world to die? It was love. He loved the church and He gave Himself for it. He loved us and He gave Himself for us.

And as individuals we can say, He loved me and He gave Himself for me. Having loved His own from the world, He loved them to the uttermost. His love never failed us.

His love never grows hot and cold. There's a consistency about His love. The love that He loved us when He went to the cross is the same love, beloved, that He has toward us tonight.

What love! Now, He reminds us in the Word of God that that love, that love has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us, so that when you were saved by the grace of God, and I trust all here tonight have been saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and when you trusted the Lord as your Savior, the Holy Spirit of God not only came into your life, but with the Holy Spirit of God came a love, a new love. You never had it before. A divine love was imparted to you.

And thus the Lord said, By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that you read your Bible. Y'all know. That you gather together every Sunday, sing hymns, that you go down the street holding your Bible, and so everyone can see you carrying your Bible.

Well, that's not the point. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another, that ye love one another. There was that church at Corinth.

Filled gift. Filled with knowledge. So much gift that they were clamoring, it would appear, to be heard, to express the things that God had imparted to them.

But they had degenerated into carnality, into babyhood. They had degenerated to the point where the Lord said, through the Apostle Paul, there's one thing drastically lacking--love. Beloved, they were gathered together at the Lord's table, and they had the love feast, and as they gathered at that love feast prior to remembering the Lord, they had such bitterness in their heart toward each other that some sat there eating their lunch and not sharing it with others, and had nothing.

There were little cliques and divisions in that group, and yet they gathered together, acting as though they were one. But in reality they were not one. And the thing that was lacking in that dear assembly was love--genuine, divine love.

And the Lord looks for that in your heart and in mine. He longs to see it grow and develop into maturity. How often in the epistles Paul praises the saints for their love, and then later on he says, but he said, I'm praying that your love will grow more and more.

That you'll increase and abound in love. Do you remember how delighted the Lord was with that dear woman in Luke chapter 7, who gathered in the home of Simon, wept at the Savior's feet, wiped his feet with her hair, kissed his feet? And you remember what the Lord said about that dear woman? She loved much. How thrilled the Lord was with that woman.

She loved much. And you remember the challenge the Lord gave to Peter? I was reading that over again this afternoon, and it challenged my heart. And it seemed as though I heard the Lord saying to me, as He said to Peter in John chapter 21, Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? He didn't say, Do you believe in me? He didn't say, Are you serving me? He said to Peter, Do you love me? And how that hit into the heart of dear Peter.

Oh Lord, He said, You know all things. You know all things. Do you remember how there Peter couldn't come up to that standard and say, Lord, I haven't got that.

You're asking me if I have that agape love, that divine love. He said, Lord, I've got affection for you. I have affection for you.

Oh, the Do you love me? Do you love me, Peter? Notice what it says here, beloved. Nevertheless, I have against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Think of that word left for a moment.

It doesn't say thou hast lost thy first love. I suppose in a sense they had lost it. But it doesn't say lost here.

It says left. When we lose something, it's not necessarily because we've been negligent. It might be simply that we've misplaced it.

And we might think about it being somewhat negligent. But we don't always, when we lose something, feel in terms that we have neglected. But what they did was leave their first love.

And this word left is an interesting word and is used in other portions of Scripture. For example, do you remember when the Lord was hanging on the cross in Matthew's Gospel chapter twenty-seven and verse fifty, I believe it is. And as the Lord hung there on the cross of Calvary, it says, He yielded up the ghost.

He yielded up the ghost. And the word yielded up is the same word as left here in the Greek language. They had yielded up their first love.

It's also translated in other places, let go. To let go. When they took the animal in Mark's Gospel, the Lord asked the young colt, they let him go.

They loosed him. Same thought. Do you remember in John chapter four, the dear woman by the well? She got so occupied with the Lord, as He opened up unto her the wonderful water of life, and as she drank in the water of life and enjoyed the blessings of salvation.

Do you remember what she did? She left something. She left her waterpot. She abandoned it.

That's the thought. Why did she need this waterpot when she had the water of life? She abandoned it and off she went into the city. And these dear saints had become so engrossed in their work for the Lord, they had abandoned their first love.

Their first love. What is the first love? Well, this little word first, again, is an interesting word and is translated different ways in the Word of God. It's translated a number of times chief, when it speaks about the chief priest, or the chief of the city.

It's the chief love. Paul speaks about himself as the sinner, the chief of sinners, the same word. And over in Luke chapter fifteen, when the prodigal son came back, the father said, bring forth the best robe.

And the word best and the word first is the same word in the original language. They had left their chief love. They had left their first love and their best love.

What was their first and best love? It was their love for Christ. Their love for Him. Do you remember this dear church when it was formed back in the book of Acts? When the gospel was presented to them? When they turned to Christ? What a transformation took place among those dear saints.

And in the birth of their first love for Christ, you remember how we're told, and we're not going to take the time to go back to it, it says they believed and they confessed and they showed their deeds and they burned their books and they preached the Word. They gave up their livelihood. They were involved in idolatry and witchcraft and all this sort of thing.

And Christ meant so much to them. They said, He is first. Our love now is not for witchcraft, are not for fame, not for money, not for the goal of wealth.

We have a new goal, a new object, a new love. It's Christ. And they gathered all their belongings together and they burned them because Christ was all in all to them.

And they could sing in effect nothing but Christ as on we prayed. They were in the flesh of first love. And so when the apostle wrote to that dear church, it's rather interesting to notice, and I challenge you to turn

to that epistle in your own quiet time or in the time that you might have free in the next little while, few days, and notice that at least twenty times in the epistle to the Ephesians he brings out the fact of love.

He uses the word love twenty times and brings out incidents around that love many times. And he keeps stressing love. Holy without being before him in love.

He said, your love to all the faiths. He said, I want you to know the love that passeth knowledge. That Christ might be at home in your heart.

Oh, he said that you might know the joy of having Christ at home in fellowship in your life and you might constantly grow in the knowledge of the love of the Lord. And he goes on to tell them that they are to walk in love, even as Christ loved them. And the very, very last verse of the last chapter of the book of Ephesians, he closes with a thought of love.

And he wants their love to be sincere. In fact, it's been translated, their love to be undying. Don't let it die out.

That's what he's saying to them. Don't let your love die out. That's the last word he says to the saints at Ephesus when he wrote the epistle.

And now, beloved, some thirty years later, the Lord says, your love has died out. Your love has died out. You didn't heed the warning.

What's caused that? What's the reason for this? How is it that our love can grow cold so quickly? I'm sure if you search your heart tonight, beloved, you know that that's the way it is, and so often happens in our lives as believers. And it seems to me that our love dies out if we do not feed that love. By feeding that love, and as I think of our Savior, the Lord Jesus, there is a necessity in the Christian life, and this might sound very naive to you, to some of you, but to me it's very important in feeding that love is to have, whatever term you want to use, a quiet time, or whatever other term that you have in mind, but that time where you set aside each day to be with the Lord.

Do you have it? Do you make a point of having it? A time alone with Him, around His Word, on your knees, where He speaks to your heart, and you open your heart to Him, and you get to know Him more intimately, not simply as a Savior, but as a friend, as a companion, as the Lord, as the Master. And as you feed your love in that way, that love continues to burn, burn, and grow. Are you feeding that love? Are you showing that love? We're to edify one another in love.

You know how we show our love to the Lord? It's rather interesting, as you go through the Scriptures, we're rarely exhorted to love the Lord as such. Oh, there's two or three verses that sort of indicate that, and we know that we're to love Him, but when He speaks about our love for Him, He speaks of showing love for others. In other words, the degree in which we love Him, I think is seen in the degree in which we love each other.

And we demonstrate that love to each other. We're to provoke one another unto love, and the good works. And love is an active thing.

Love is going out of our way to look out for others, to do certain kinds of deeds and have a concern and a real compassion for others. Do you have that? Or is your Christian life so revolved around yourself and your own little family that it hasn't expanded out, and that God has given you a greater love for His

people? You see, love, divine love, gives and gives. Do you remember, it was William Cooper, I believe, who said, those expressions, those words that we hear from time to time, where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and His Word? Have you come to the place in your life where other things are more important to you now than the Lord? Where your home is more important? Your business is more important? Or is the love for Christ so great that He still has the place of honor and preeminence? And Lord, You come first.

You come first. This dear church had left their first love. They'd left it.

It is said concerning Sam Hadley, who was at one time the head of the mission in New York City, that he was saved in one of the jails in that city. And for the time the Lord saved, he went on well for the Lord, but he did this, apparently, according to his biography. Once every year he made an arrangement with the authorities at the jail where he had been saved to spend a night there.

And he'd go back each year, go into that cell where he had been saved, and he spent the night thinking of what the Lord had done for him, and remind himself of the joy and the blessing of his salvation on that particular occasion. And he always left with that renewed zeal and that renewed love. Lord, what can I do for Thee? I believe the Remembrance Feast ought to have that same effect upon us when we gather in the true Spirit, guided by the Holy Spirit of God.

Because as we gather here to remember the Lord on Lord's Day morning, what is our object? Our object is to draw near and see the Savior die on the cross. Our object is to get occupied with Him and to just see a little more clearly what it meant to Him, the Holy One, to bear away our sin, so that as we see His love brought before us, we're moved. Say, Lord, You love me so.

Here am I. Fill me with Thy love. A certain preacher was going through a city or a little town in Canada. He had been driven there by one of the elders in the assembly where he was staying.

And he saw a very run-down little factory. On the top of it were the two names Head and Heart. H-A-R-T.

Head and Heart. And the preacher said to the gentleman, he said, My, he said, that building looks badly run down, and the business looks badly run down. And the gentleman that was in the car said, Well, he said, it wasn't always that way.

He said, Head and Heart were in partnership. And he said, Mr. Heart died. Ever since Mr. Heart died, he said, the business has gone down under the control of Mr. Head.

Well, you know, when the heart dies in the Christian life, the heart of love, the heart of devotion, and the head is the controlling influence, things go down. That's what was happening here. The church of Ephesus.

We need the head, but we need the heart. We need the combination. We need the truth, and we need the love.

I'm sure you can think of people, perhaps you can think of things in your own life where one was involved in a first love and then lost it, left it. You know, when you have a first love in something, it's remarkable what happens, is it not? I'm sure wives could tell us here tonight if they had the opportunity of when their husbands had that flush of first love for them. And when they used to perhaps do many things and say many things that they don't say anymore.

Say, Well, I remember those days of first love. Maybe the husband can think of the same thing as he looks back upon those early days of first love. First love has a tremendous impact on us.

I remember working with a fellow preacher, very fine brother. A number of years ago, before he was married, we traveled from place to place and he always complained about traveling. He'd say, Jim, I just don't like traveling.

It's just too tiring. Anything over 20 or 30 miles was just too much. And he used to emphasize this constantly.

And then lo and behold, he fell in love with a very fine young lady. And she lived about 100 miles away. And believe it or not, he would sleep up there for an evening and back again in the wee hours of the morning.

And he'd do this constantly during that courtship. And I said to him, Brother, what about this traveling? I thought you didn't enjoy traveling. And that smile would come over his face and he said, Well, love does many strange things.

Well, divine love does many strange things. When divine love gets ahold of your beloved, selfishness must go out the window, must go to one side. I think of a dear man who came to know Christ as his Savior and was so zealous for the Lord.

My, his zeal just put me to shame. He'd fill his pocket up with tracts and go down the street every evening after work, knock on doors, witness to people. And he was just glowing with the love of Christ.

I remember speaking to him and saying, What moves you to do this so constantly? And he said, Well, the Lord's done so much for me. And he said, Out of love to him, this is the little bit I can do in return. But, beloved, he left that first love.

And he got away from the Lord. And I went to visit him about two years ago, taken him to his office and started to talk to him about the Lord. And he said, Listen.

He said, Don't talk to me along that line. He said, That's a thing of the past. I have no time now.

No time. He had left his first love. He left it.

Oh, you remember when you were first saved? Nothing was too hard for the Lord. You didn't look outside and say, Oh, there's a storm coming. We can't go to the meeting tonight.

Nothing like that. Everything was so fresh and real. The Lord's love was controlling your life.

Now, notice what the Lord says. We must hurry on to conclusion here in verse five. Notice the three little R's here.

This is the challenge He gives to the church, the opportunity He gives to them. He says, Remember, repent, and do, or return. Remember, repent, and return.

He said, Don't sit there saying to yourself, Oh, I remember when the Lord was so wonderful to me. I remember when the love of Christ so filled my heart. Don't sit there worrying about it and thinking about it and doing nothing about it.

Remember. Remember about it. Go back in your mind and remember those days when Christ filled your life.

Remember. And notice what it says again. Remember from whence thou art fallen.

My beloved, they had fallen. In the revised version it says, Remember from the heights to which thou hast fallen. They were elevated into the presence of the Lord and the joy of the Lord, but they had dropped from that fellowship and they had fallen and fallen.

Always remember from whence you've fallen. Remember the joy of your fellowship with Him. When it was just a thrill to talk to someone about the Lord.

Do you remember? Remember. And then repent. Right about face.

Turn right around and get back to that place again. Confess the thing before the Lord and say, Lord, I want that love filling my heart and soul again. Do thy first work.

And notice He speaks about first love and He says, Repent and get back and do your first works because first love results in first works. Love for Christ will motivate us to be doing things for Him as a labor of love. A labor of love.

Or else I will come unto thee quickly. Now remove thy lampstand out of its place. Except you repent.

Except it's a danger. This has nothing to do with being saved and lost again. As some would suggest.

Primarily the passage is dealing with the church at Ephesus and I want to tell you something, beloved. It wasn't long after this church, after this epistle was sent to them that the Lord stepped in and removed the lampstand out of its place. There's no testimony and there has not been for centuries a testimony for the Lord at Ephesus.

The Lord had just stepped in and removed the lampstand. They've lost their light. And there are many local churches of my knowledge, my acquaintance, and I'm sure some of yours in the early days were so vibrant for the Lord and then over a period of a few years there was a drifting, an abandonment of that first love for Christ and the testimony went down and down and down and now the doors are closed and the lampstand has been removed out of its place.

And if you apply to the individual, beloved, if we fail in our love for him and fail to be motivated by that divine love, our lampstand, our witness, our testimony will be snuffed out. And so he challenges us here by saying, he, and this is most challenging, isn't it? He, he's been talking to the church and all of a sudden he comes right down to the individual. He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

And notice he says to the churches here, in other words, this is the church of Ephesus, but whatever local church you're involved in, it's a message for you, too. This is not just for the church of Ephesus, it's for you today. He doesn't say, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the church of Ephesus.

Let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. And that is above the first love. And that is not only for, as I've already said, 600 A.D., but 1975, 76 A.D. It's for us, beloved.

And it's the Spirit of God that wants to touch your heart and touch mine and restore unto us that first love for Him. Shall we pray? Our gracious Father, we long for the controlling of Thy Holy Spirit, knowing that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and longsuffering, etc. We know it is Thy desire, our Father, that we, each one who are believers in Christ, might be controlled and motivated by love.

Thou hast gone unto Thy way, our Father. In love Thou hast given Thy Son for us. And through the Holy Spirit of God Thou hast imparted this love into our hearts.

And by the Holy Spirit of God is Thy desire that the love might abound and grow more and more. If any father here sense that they have grown cold and have left their first love, oh, may they repent, do their first works. Challenge all our hearts, we pray in our Savior's name.

Amen.

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