

# Encouragement to the Churches in Revelation, Part 1

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[0:00] That's the problem with this area up here. The musicians can't hear what's going on out there. I can't hear it. It's just kind of a big buzz going on. So, if you're good, we're good. Okay, so let me carry on. Just nervously moving forward thinking, is everything okay?

But I'm just thinking about the reality, just about caring and passing away. I'm thinking, man, the reality is Christ is coming. Christ is coming.

I look at all the trouble in the world, I think of all the crisis things that are going on in our government, around the world, and it's just disheartening. And I'm reminded, Christ is coming. And so, on one side, there's some discouragement in that sense when you're just thinking about the here and now. But it is the very thing that carries us through the difficulties to know that Christ is coming.

When we talk about the Advent season, we're talking about the anticipated arrival of Christ. And so, when we look at Christmastime and we celebrate Advent season, it's weeks building up to Christmas Day. We're looking back at what was happening before Christ came and the anticipation and the buildup to his coming.

[1:26] And now, now that Christ has come, this second coming of Christ is something that we are living in anticipation for.

We're looking forward to the coming of Christ. We're looking forward to the coming of Christ, his advent. Advent means not just his arrival or his coming, but the anticipation of his coming. It's an anticipated arrival. We're looking for Christ to come with expectation. We look to the skies thinking that Christ is on his way.

We're living our life that way. We're living our life that way. We're actually to live in that kind of anticipation that I'm not living for this world. I'm living for what's to come. I'm living for the world that's to come.

And so, we just recently read through the book of Revelation, if you were on the reading plan for the year, and we read through Revelation. And just, man, there's so much encouragement there, and there's so much that is challenging in it.

[2:32] And sometimes you read through that, and you're just like, man, I don't know what to make of some of these things. Sometimes people don't even read the book of Revelation at all because they're so scared of even the thought of what is in there.

And the reality is, it is a book about the end times. So, yeah, there is some reality to that. We were thinking, Christ is coming.

I should be anticipating this. I should be ready for this. And as you read through this, you realize that this letter is written for that exact purpose. So, turn in your Bible to Revelation chapter 2.

I'm not teaching all the way through the book of Revelation. That is quite a challenge that I don't know that I'm ready for quite yet. But as I come to chapter 2 and 3, I see a section here that I can bite off and can chew on and feel like, man, I think the Lord has got something to say in this.

That's not to say I won't teach the rest of it, because I will, but not right now. Because as I'm looking at it, I'm like, man, there is so much to study. Every time I unpack one word, it's like it's a whole sermon in itself just about.

[3:42] And so, as I came through this, I started seeing in this pattern of the message to the churches something that I thought, man, this is

speaking to me right now about the warnings to our church and to every church.

The encouragement for those that are anticipating His coming. The challenge for those that are anticipating His coming to be ready and to make way, to be ready for the coming King.

And so, as I'm reading through this, I want you to turn to chapter 2. Today, we're going to deal with one of the seven churches as we talk about preparing for His coming.

We are preparing for the coming of Christ. That should be our life. And so, here, we see this in chapter 2, beginning in verse 1. If you found your place, let's go ahead and stand, and we're going to read this together.

And here's what God says to us as His people. Let's begin in chapter 2, verse 1.

[4:59] To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, The words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

I know your works, your toil, your patience, endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, repent, and do the works you did at first.

If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have.

[6:09] You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will grant it to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Father, may you speak this morning as we prepare for your coming. I pray today, Lord, that you would just prepare our hearts, that you would just ready us.

That we see the world around us disintegrating. We see the chaos that's going on in between the nations. Yet, Lord, we know that you are still on your throne.

One day, you are going to say, Enough. You'll bring all of this to an end. One day, all of us will stand before you. We'll stand at the judgment seat of Christ and give an account for the things that are done in the body, whether good or bad.

Until then, we are to live in anticipation of your coming. We are to live in a way to prepare for that moment. So, Father, I pray today that you speak to us, that you minister to us as only you can.

[7:27] And I pray that this encouragement from your word will ignite within us a renewed passion for you, that we will glorify the name of Jesus and all that we say and do as a church and as believers individually.

We love you, Lord. We praise you. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, this letter is anticipated as a letter to the church of seven particular churches.

We know that it's a letter to all churches because included in the canon of Scripture, we recognize this as being not just in its immediate context to the recipients of the letter in that moment, but this inspiration of the Holy Spirit to an apostle is intended for us.

And you see that even in the end of the notation to each of the churches, as this message to each of the seven churches here says something to this effect, as it does here in verse 7.

He has an ear. Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. So it's not just to the churches, but to whoever has an ear to hear what he says to the churches.

[8:59] This encouragement is not just for them. It's for you. It's for me. It's for us. For our church. Our fellowship. It will be a church.

You see it even addressed to them in the beginning in chapter 1, verse 4, where it says, this is a revelation to John, of John to the seven churches that are in Egypt.

So keep in mind that this entire letter is actually addressed to these particular seven churches. So that when it identifies the names of these seven churches, it gives us some context to understand why these seven are addressed in the vision itself.

So it's not that in this vision, only these seven churches are represented in heaven. It's just that these are the seven churches that this vision is initially applying to.

And so when he begins the letter, he tells them, this is John's revelation to the seven churches. And the message to John in verse 11, he is told to, in verse 11, to write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches.

[10:17] So the immediate context, yes, is for those particular seven churches and then to whoever has an ear to hear what God has said to the seven churches. So then he goes through and hear the first and initial message is to each of these churches individually and then the message of all that's going to come to pass in these end times.

So this message to them individually is the message of preparation for what's to come. It's the encouragement. It's letting them know that here is what's going to unfold in the end times.

And this is the message to you on how to, at least in some ways, prepare. Because I know you. I know every one of you. I'm acquainted with your ways.

I know your heart. I know your mind. The Holy Spirit sees every thought in our heart and mind. And one day, every idle word, we're going to stand at the judgment seat of Christ and give an account for.

How are we to live between them, between now and then? What are we going to do? How are we going to prepare so that we're not like those surprised at his coming?

[11:36] Number seven is also understood as a number of completion. These churches are representative of God's message to all of us as churches, as believers in those churches.

Seven churches here are in a particular region. We're getting this letter from John.

John is the author of this. It's his vision as he is exiled to the Isle of Patmos during persecution. And so as this persecution is going on, he's been exiled to the Isle of Patmos under arrest.

And he is, during this time, having this moment of God where this revelation is given. And you have to understand his perspective.

On the Isle of Patmos, he can't see these cities because they're pretty far away. I looked on the map and the cities are between 100 and 180 miles from where he is.

[12:39] So as he is on the Isle of Patmos and he is looking at the Asia Minor across the waters, he could imagine these cities because they're all isolated right there across as he's looking at Asia Minor.

He could imagine where they're at in the distance. These are churches that he's acquainted with.

The Church of Ephesus, it's understood that he ministered there personally.

We see him connected in church history in some of the earliest writings of the Church Fathers, even particularly from Irenaeus, where he was writing against heresies.

In this writing, he made an explanation of how the apostles passed on teaching and authority to others, chose as some successors, and in this he identified John as having served at Ephesus.

So keep in mind this Ephesian church that we've been talking about in the past few weeks, the emphasis of that church and the influence of that church, all the people that ministered in that church.

[13:50] The Apostle Paul ministered there, Apollos ministered there, we have great, incredible teachers there in Timothy, John, and even Mary, the mother of Jesus was said to have been with John, traveling with John, as we remember Jesus saying to John, take care of my mother, even on the cross, that we understand the emphasis of this church, even in the presence of Mary being there, Mary the mother of Jesus being there in Ephesus.

I'm an influential church. Given the proximity of Ephesus to the other cities of Pergamum and Thyatira and Smyrna and Sardis and Laodicea and Philadelphia, the distance of these some 480 miles apart, yet, because John was the Apostle, it's understood that he was in this region ministering, so he's personally acquainted with these churches.

So it's not surprising that his vision would be addressing these particular set of churches. In each of these messages to each of the churches in chapters 2 and 3, you'll get a depiction of Christ himself at the beginning, just like you did here to the angel of the church of Ephesus, right?

The words of him who holds the seven scars in his right hand. this description of Christ in each of these that in chapter 2, verse 8, the angel to the church of Smyrna, right?

The words of the first and the last who died and came to life. And in each of these you get just a little picture, a description of who Christ is. Why should you listen to his words?

[15:35] What authority does he have to encourage you to carry on and prepare yourself for the last days when Christ comes? An encouragement of who he is.

Then it follows each of these giving an observation of the fact that I know your works. I'm acquainted with you. I know your works. I know your deeds. I know who you are.

And in each of these churches he gives some description of what he knows, what Christ knows to be true about them. each one gives some kind of warning or promise or both.

And then to each it says to him that overcomes. Encouragement. The challenge. Christ is coming. Be prepared. You're an overcomer because of Christ in you. You are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in you. You have died to sin.

[16:38] You've identified yourself with Jesus. You've been raised from the dead and walked in a newness of life with him. Because of that he lives inside of you. He has the authority over your lives.

He gives encouragement. He knows you. He knows your weaknesses. He knows your strengths. He knows that of you individually. He knows that of us as a church. As a body. And each one ends with that encouragement.

He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Part of the message that as the church we need to continue and hope that Christ is coming.

Even as bad as things might get as persecution comes that you might be enduring. You are to be people of God who are anticipating with great joy. Great anticipation in his coming.

And it ought to drive you to obedience and repentance and to live for the glory of God. God. Our focus today is on the oldest of these churches as we know it.

[17:44] Church of Ephesus. By the time of this letter four decades have passed since the Ephesian church was born.

Apostle Paul is not with them at this point. He only spent a short time of them. But many of the first generation believers are probably gone.

They probably died. This is at a point where you would see a transition of leadership and maybe for them a renewed sense of calling in their life that they need to hear from God.

God. This church has gone through hardship and the growing persecution under the Roman emperor Davidian is spreading through Asia Minor and they need encouragement.

Notice here that it starts off in verse 1 to the angel of the church in Ephesus. Right? And you say the angel of the church. What does this mean? And there's different takes on this.

[18:52] What is implied here? Whether or not this is an actual angel representative of this particular church or if it is referenced to a pastor that is some kind of representative messenger of the church.

I lean toward it being more angelic just because it's so clear if I take the clear meaning of the text there is some angelic representation and that's not out of the scope of scripture.

We know that we're told according to scripture that there are angels watching over in some way to keep us from dashing our foot against the rock according to the psalmist.

God does use angelic beings at times. We know that there are principalities and powers that there is a spiritual realm that we can't see. the reference to messenger here the same Greek word is used for messenger and sometimes that was used of John the Baptist as messenger.

It's used in a very limited way. A messenger in a very unique time coming from God in a unique appointment by God. So I'm reluctant to make application of that just to the pastor and knowing that most if not all of the churches in the New Testament are marked by a plurality elders I would be reluctant to say just one angel is the representative because it does take away from some of that.

[20:23] And so how do you determine that? Well I think the easiest reading of the text would imply that there's angelic being at work and in some way is representative of what's going on in the churches and this message is being given as it says to the angel of the church in Ephesus write these things.

as a messenger the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

in this we see the role of the church being the right life as I mentioned a few weeks ago talking about the lampstand itself its purpose to shine light.

the gospel of Matthew Jesus says no one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel it is set on a lampstand where it gives light to all in the house just so your light must shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven and this is indication of the purpose of the lampstands given here.

Jesus said I am the light of the world whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life because Jesus is the light and Jesus is living inside of you and you are a reflection of the light you are an individual lampstand in a sense but together here he's addressing us as a church the churches and individually whoever hears God is speaking to us and encouraging us to be people that shine the light of Christ until he comes no matter the persecution no matter the difficulty no matter the hardship so the answer is how do I prepare for his coming and the answer is as it breaks down in the text four key words if you want to take notes life light labor and love life light labor and love and these form an evaluation for me for you as I look at my own life and as I look at my church put it in the form of four questions and it would start here with the key word life am I living as if Christ is the source of my life am I living in such a way that I'm living as if Christ is actually the source of my life

[23:13] John is reminding the Ephesian church that Christ is the source of their life he has given life he has given life notice he said there in the first verse he's holding the seven stars in his hand the possession of Christ Christ possesses the seven angels whether they are angels or the pastors represented he is holding them in his hand when he uses this word holds it's stronger than just in saying he had them in his hand but he holds them in his hand it's implying a holding fast to something and having full control over it Christ holds the angels Christ holds the churches he has us in his hand he has full authority and full control and he then is the source of life for the church we're the possession of Christ we belong to him we have the presence of Christ notice he says he's walking among us as churches he's ever making intercession for us according to the scripture as high priest he's inspecting he's ministering according to

Romans 8:34 who is there to condemn to condemn Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who is at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us and here is the imagery of Christ as high priest in the temple in the holy of holies ministering in the darkness of the temple the light of the lampstand shining light in there to illuminate Christ we see a picture of what we are as the church shining light to illuminate Christ in dark places that need to be worshipped and we have him walking among us this is John's message to the seven churches you're in the middle of persecution things are very difficult things are hard and yet here's the encouragement for you you have life in Christ that he is with you he holds you in his hands you're his possession and you have his presence he's walking among you he's ministering to you he's filling you he's working among you he's ministering to you so that you can minister to others is Christ am I living in such a way to demonstrate that I really believe

Christ possesses me Christ is walking with me life am I living in such a way number two that I'm demonstrating that that I'm shining the light of Christ in my life not just living life with him as my source I'm shining that light to others nature of these lamps is to shine the light of Christ and you see this picture of the temple these these lampstands are incredible what a representation as you get the imagery of the temple because he's describing the lampstand that would be in the temple how many branches are on the lampstand and in the temple there's seven branches on it this is this is the reference to the temple lampstand in Exodus 25:31 this is when the temple is given its instruction and they're given the instruction of the lampstand that's actually to be placed in the temple for worship it is a lampstand that's to be put there that is seven branches we know it is the menorah because it's still used by

Jews in their worship today but it is seven branches representing all branches it's representing life why because Christ is our life it's adorned with knobs and flower shaped tops and on the tops of

each of those seven points is not a candle like we have heard today but it's an oil lamp sitting on the top of each of those seven places and remember in the courtyard outside the holy place of the temple everything is bronze everything inside the temple is gold everything inside the temple that's close to God that's precious on the inside is made out pure gold and so this lamp stand is literally according to Exodus 75 pounds of solid gold in today's market that's 1.4 million dollars worth of gold I mean it's a lot of gold and it is hand hammered into this shape so that it becomes this lamp stand and on the top it gives this practical function of providing actual light inside the temple it's in the holy place it's opposite the table of showbread and it's the sole source of light in the absence of windows Aaron and his sons have the job and the responsibility of keeping the lamps burning continuously and so they go in and make sure that the lamps are always burning here we have a picture that Christ is ministering among the lamp stands who is it that keeps the lamps alive who is it that keeps the lamps lit keeps the oil flowing keeps the oil burning it's

[29:20] Christ it's Christ alone keeps them burning moment by moment and the moment they stop burning for Christ they get the attention of Christ who warns them straighten up or I'll remove you as a lamp stand it's a beautiful picture and I think of us being in transition months ago and just all the craziness going on going back and forth to the hospital and all that and Carly was in the hospital trying to keep up with bills and things back home and over there and everything I think there was at one point in that that our electric bill I want to say it was our electric bill somewhere somehow we missed the electric bill in the process of traveling back and forth and so during that time I think we came back or I was back I don't remember exactly the details of it but I just remember the power going on and I'm like what in the world so what do you do when the power goes out at night you look at your name is their power out because if their power is not out and mine is out then maybe

I've got a problem right if I look out there and everybody's power is out then yeah I realize there's a bigger problem somewhere the power has been cut off because a branch maybe fell and took down a power line a transformer blue or something like that and I realized that no it's just because you didn't pay the bill shut it off no power there's no light there's no internet you can't check online you actually have to physically call them or you have to go down there and talk to somebody and then you have to pay it and then once you pay it they'll gladly turn it back on and the reality here is is that that the church is a power house for God in a sense this light is burning and Christ is the source of our life and the moment that it stops shining for Christ the reality is Jesus said I'm going to take that down

I'm the vine you're the branches life I'm the source of life for you you're the branches whoever abides in me and I in him he is that bears much fruit for apart from me you can do nothing in a moment that we as a church stop glorifying Christ by honoring his word stop making application of his word to the circumstances of our life to the trials that we face to the difficulties that we face be careful we want to stay attached to the power source the source of life the moment we start teaching in a way that strays away from God's word you see the example here of the Nicolaitans being given as somebody among the church that's teaching false teaching the moment you stray away from that you go away from the source of life you detach yourself from it be careful am I shining the light of

Christ by honoring his word in my life am I living as if Christ is the source of my life number three am I living to labor for Christ with my life am I actually serving Christ and this is the evaluation as Christ is looking at this church and examining them he knows them the word know here is a word that indicates full absolute knowledge he doesn't have to come to know he already knows he knows everything about them he knows everything about you he knows everything that you do every thought that you have every act that you do on his behalf or otherwise and he commends this about the church it's good to know that God actually does commend things right sometimes we get in our head that it's just a book of don'ts but and so

God's always mad at us he's not always mad at us he really actually loves obedience he loves it when we obey him when we take hold of him by the power of the Holy Spirit obey him and do things in his name he actually loves that scripture gives clear indication of that I know your works I know fully your works I know the motivation for your works I know the ins and outs I know the effect this I

know that you didn't mean to do this or you didn't mean to do I know I know I know I know he uses these words deeds I know your deeds your toil this is a working church he's committing man you are a working church you are a church that is going after you are you're busy about the kingdom business toil kapos in the original language means to labor to the point of sweat and exhaustion you are not just working some of you you work with people all the time and there are people that work and there are people that work you know and if you're a boss if you're a supervisor you know the ones that really work and you love those people you want them you want them around you you want them working for you when things when there's a project to come and you know who to call that's going to get it done right that's why

[35:20] I love David and Paige right they are get it done people and so we jokingly talked about that at home because you know Ansley was on there trying to put worship songs in on pro presenter whatever it is I don't know all the software but putting the songs in and and she said songs are already popular David already put songs in the report I don't know this song what am I supposed to do and I said I'm going to tell you exactly what happened right there because I I know that David was not saying we need to sing this song so he put it in there to make sure that you're singing the song David's just trying to get things done and he saw that there wasn't one in there and so David put one in there David liked that song and so he's just going to get it done he works and Paige works and I look around this room and I could give a story of just about every one of you in the same way that it's we have a working church I mean if there's something that happens we pull together and we do it and we get it done when there's positions to build and we're clear about that

I have no doubt in my mind that we will fill those things like that and the job will get done I look at Peg I look at everyone in this room I don't want to single too many people out because they look up I'm looking in this room and thinking we have a working church that's what this was Ephesus was a church that was getting after it they're working they are not afraid to labor and toil to the point of sweat and exhaustion to work hard for Jesus and they're teaching the lost they're edifying each other to do the things that Paul taught them when he was with them I mean think of the Mary and Martha kind of serving that's going on there practical needs being met meals being made coffee being made just so that we could have fellowship together and it'd be just a good time of blessing even those little acts of a cold water in Jesus name teaching the truth of God's word to each other learning being under the ministry of the word and learning to apply those things encouraging and challenging each other in a way this toil is laboring in the kingdom not just labor or toil to use the word perseverance enduring and trying circumstances

I know that you endure you make it to the end you finish strong it's not just about starting good work anybody can start anybody inspired church it's finishing it's enduring they're in the middle of hardship he's using this word intentionally they're suffering persecution it's growing they need encouragement to continue to persevere this is their encouragement I know you guys you've persevered already you've been through hard stuff and difficulty even in the riots that broke out of the church in Ephesus that's not far from their mind even if this is the next generation they've heard stories about those days Acts chapter 17 through 19 in that area when the church is planted and the riots break out in Ephesus and this church is born under those kinds of conditions they know how to persevere circumstances people etc sometimes this word is used to emphasize enduring difficult people can I get it amen sometimes that's me you have to endure sometimes it's you sometimes it's each other but they've learned to endure they've learned to make it through persevere circumstances people etc sometimes opposition of enemy

MacArthur John MacArthur says this word is really describing in this context a courageous acceptance of hardship suffering and loss this commendation indicates that despite their difficult circumstances the Ephesian believers remain faithful to the Lord it's like we often say without a test there's no testimony tested how do you know how strong your faith is you can believe it to be strong but you know by testing hardship difficulty enduring and as you go through those things and you make it to the other side of those things that's where you see the strength of your faith that's where you test your strength and this is the message to them as you're preparing for the coming of Christ are you living as if Christ is the source of life for you are you living as if Christ is the light that shines

through you are you living to labor and expend your energy to the point of exhaustion and sweat for the kingdom that's coming and the kingdom that you're in right now and you see this even in them in this intolerance for false teaching they could not bear with men that are evil people that are evil following the example of Paul they have a high standard for morality for doctrine for teaching they're sensitive to the sin and the lives of their church members because it matters they practice church discipline obviously they didn't tolerate those in the body which indicates that there's some putting out of the body they've rejected someone out of the body and this indicates to us what we see so often in the new testament epistles of church discipline being a mark of a healthy faithful church false teaching can be to the point where you have to encourage one on one and encourage good witnesses and then bring before the church and expel somebody it's that serious and they were taking it seriously he had warned the ephesian church in ephesians chapter 4 verse 27 that you don't want to give the devil a foothold or a place to stand false teaching gives the devil a place to stand in the church how do you prepare for the coming of the

Lord we've got to stay strong together we've got to be unified in our teaching that's why we put a doctrinal statement up before everyone to say hey there's some things we're going to hold to these things we've got to be strong in this we live in an age where we don't need any more compromise we're living in an age that's so compromised nobody knows what the church is nobody can see clearly what a believer in Christ is on the public stage if they look at our denominations and the absolute wreck that we are and they look at all of our prominent churches that we've exalted over everybody like they are some kind of celebrity status are celebrity preachers that we seem to worship from time to time I'm just telling you I want to guard against that it is the word of God that stands at the top here and we're going to follow the word of God because that's how we prepare for his coming this church is to be a light to the world and if we don't guard that then we fall for all kinds of teachings you are not to be tolerant of all kinds of teachings there's places where we have flexibility

[43:09] I'm so glad that when it describes the end times in our state of faith the 1689 confession has some latitude there because boy that's a difficult topic and as we were looking at it I was thinking man I hope this isn't limited to just one sentence I'm not sure what I think what would I do if I read through there and identify it I agree with that and so I looked at it and I'm like oh man there's latitude I don't just remind there's some things there's for sure that together as the body of Christ we're going to recognize that there is a time coming that we are to prepare for this so if you have your 1689 book of things where you have the link through the Facebook go to it read the part on last things for the judgment to come it's encouraging the Nipalaitians we don't know much about them for sure they're mentioned again in the message to the church at Pergamum but it seems to refer to a false teacher who is leading people into immorality isn't that interesting to accept immoral things and immediately what entered my mind is just what I've seen even in our

Southern Baptist Convention about this acceptance of homosexuality that after all it is just a whisper in the body and I think oh beware the relation if God whispers about homosexuality as he did in the Old Testament and brought down fire and brimstone that shows archaeological evidence that resembles a nuclear blast I'm just telling you I don't want him whispering I certainly don't want him to shout I'm going to labor for the kingdom until he comes in acts and in teaching historians look at the Nicolaitans and there's one that said the teaching of the Nicolaitans was an exaggeration of the doctrine of Christian liberty which attempted an ethical compromise with evenism isn't that how we are in our generation going to compromise with every point

I'll get as close to the line as I can possibly get I'm not going to have a hatred for sin like I see in the scripture I'm going to see how close I can get to it Irenaeus the historian that I referred to earlier talking about John said about the Nicolaitans that they lived lives of unrestrained indulgence Clements of Alexandria said they abandoned themselves to pleasure like ghosts leaving lives of self indulgence and the Ephesian church John is saying don't be taken by this and you haven't been praise the Lord you stood strong word of commendation and your discernment here and discerning this as he says I know your works your toil your patience endurance how you cannot bear those

who are evil but have tested those who call themselves apostles that are not you've tested them against what against the word against the teaching of God's word it's the standard we conform to that you've tested them you're discerning remember we talked about what it means to shine through Christ it's shining with urgency in your life and discerning according to his word to know the will of God and then to do the will of God you noticed earlier that Paul warned the Ephesians or the elders of Ephesus in Acts chapter 20 and he told them this was going to happen false teachers are coming he told them I know that after my departure he said savage wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock and from among your own selves men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them therefore be on the alert labor for this work in this don't take this lightly and for the Ephesian church you've been holding on to that praise the Lord John saved and heard what Paul said and he did it tested them spent their energy at the point of sweat and exhaustion I think we know how to work in our generation no I mean look around talk to every manager in town do any business right what's the consistent message can't find good workers nobody wants to work remember when COVID what happened like COVID comes and everybody is getting their government nanny check whatever it is and getting whatever they're handing out and to the point where nobody was working like nobody was going to work because the money they were getting from the government was better and so if you work you don't get the check so everybody goes well I'm going to take the check nobody wants to work it's crazy you see college students go through college justice or whatever and they go through four years in the most expensive countries in the nation and they come out and they are unemployed right unemployed you couldn't work at 7-11 with what you've been taught in some of these places of higher education they're unequipped they're not ready for a work environment and then when they get to one watch the videos online and memes that are created from their cry sessions as they realize they can't show up every day to this place they call work and this is the generation we live in we don't labor for things we don't work for things like generations past that we saw even in

[49:37] America this hard work ethic where did that come from that Judeo Christian now new system of the Bible that's why America worked hard because the book had an influence in our nation it's not saying everybody was Christian but the influence of God's word has great fruit even the immigrants coming across the border right now there's a small percentage of them getting jobs why the handouts are so good I'm not against immigrants that come legally in the right ways I love that I think we should do that I think we're alike we would be alike to people in that way people don't escape from North Korea to try to come to America for no reason because we've been alike to the world we've got to remember as believers in

Christ that this thing of laboring for the kingdom is our call it is our life I've got to evaluate myself am I ready for the coming Christ am I going to be someone that is faithful what he's given me until he comes when he comes to the steward of the vineyard is he going to find me faithfully working the fields that he's given me is he going to find me busy about his business if he called me to a Christianity that does not serve Christ is not biblical Christianity not only are we to work hard at our jobs we are to do that we are to have a strong work at it as believers in Christ because God's word commands us to like Colossians 3:17 where it says whatever you do in word or deed do everything in the name of the word Jesus giving thanks to God the father through him if you're an employee somewhere that your employer ought to love you as a believer in Christ you ought to know that he can count on you you ought to be the hardest worker there we labor for

Christ but it's not just laboring at our jobs to the exclusion of the direct work of the kingdom because what we see in Paul is the example for us in Colossians 1:29 where he said for this I toil struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works in me and he's talking about his prayer line for the church and his preaching of the gospel to the church and his teaching of the word and this kingdom work this toil this struggling this energy is the call of your life Paul will Titus for the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all people training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-control upright godly lives in this present age waiting for the blessed hope the appearing of the glory of our great god and savior Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possessions who are zealous for

good works is christ the source of your life is that how you're living is christ the source of your life that shines is christ the labor that you made before that's the valuation jesus changed my life he shined the gospel in me awakened me from the dead i become a well of living water now i'm glad to be a part of a church that labors for jesus this is where the warning comes in yes it's life yes it's life yes it's life it's also love love i know that you're enduring verse 4 but i have this against you you have abandoned the love you had at first he knew they were working church they're serving they're diligent they're not tolerating sin they're practicing church discipline all the things the pieces are in place and yet their heart is not right their heart is not right you can have all that in place and still not have a heart that's right you don't love like you loved at first he said the spurgeon described this passage he said the christian life is very much like climbing a hill of ice you cannot slide up now you have to cut every step with a nice axe only with incessant labor and cutting and chipping can you make any progress if you want to know how to backslide leave off going forward cease going upward and you will go downward of necessity you can never stand still he's not saying you earned your salvation this is just all about your labor he was too clear about that the reality is it's christ's strength in you to enable you to do these things and i remember you know even working in a secular job and having a boss that would come in me and guys working together being in the shop and washing cars or whatever and then the boss comes in well for the last 30 minutes we've been sitting there joking and talking and throwing towels and whatever and then the boss walks dead and all of a sudden everybody's working right it's amazing what the presence of the boss is when you realize he's walking among you we're told in the scripture in Matthew 5 16 we're let our light shine before others so that they may see our good works and glorify our father in heaven we're reminded by Paul in Ephesians 2 10 that we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared for before him that we should walk in them and as we walk in these things it's not just about the work it's about our heart in the process he uses the word agape here as one commentator said agape this word for love that he uses here where they lost their first love agape of hers or an individual sees recognizes understands and appreciate the value of an object or person it doesn't stop there in its meaning you see you recognize you understand you appreciate the value but it causes him to behold this object or person in great esteem and awe admiration and wonder and sincere appreciation such great respect is awakened in the heart of the observer for the object or person he is beholding so much so that he is compelled to love he sees and observes and witnesses it to the point that it draws him upward to the point of awe and inspiration his love for that person or object is so strong that it can be said to be irresistible this kind of love knows no limits no boundaries and how far wide, high or deep it will go to show love to that recipient if necessary agape will even sacrifice itself for the sake of the object or person that it so deeply cherishes when he uses this word here he uses that word love and says it was your first love to even further indicate the intensity of it your first love the love you have at the first in the Greek languages because of your love the first one that you have left the first one it clarifies what type of love he's described the proton the prototype the beginning the first he uses this to remind the church at Ephesus of their esteem and awe admiration and wonder and appreciation that was awakened in their hearts for him when they received Jesus years earlier their hearts were captivated with their love for Jesus there were no limits to what they would sacrifice and surrender no boundaries in their life to their obedience they were willing to sacrifice and leave anything behind to follow him and you see it in Acts 19 verse 18 where it says that also many of these who are now believers came confessing and divulging their practices and a number of those who have practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all and they counted the value of them and found it to be 50,000 pieces of silver and they burned it their love for Jesus was so zealous at the first and now in comparison he says you have abandoned this this first love intensity of that kind of sacrificial love when he uses the word abandoned it's the same word for divorce send away free presents literally to leave standing [59:29] I remember there was a coach that I had he was kind of a typical coach if there's been coaches not all coaches do it this way but he was kind of a jerk and even in high school I just remember so vividly how much I just despised you know I just and he was talking even one afternoon to all the students and he's explaining how he dated girls when he was when he was in high school so I took a girl out one time yeah I realized right away I didn't want to be with her she talked too much so I stopped at a convenience store and I sent her in for gum and I left and I

just thought what a scoundrel I sent her away to leave her alone to leave her standing Jesus said when you depart from that intensity of love at first you have sent me away yes it's about life it's about life it's about labor it's about love how do you prepare for the coming of Christ

Colossians 1 15 he is the image of the invisible God the first born of all creation for by him all things were created in heaven and on earth visible and invisible whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities all things were created through him and for him and he is before all things and in him all things hold together and he is the head of the body of church he is the beginning the first born from the dead that in everything he might be free eminent first first in importance first in honor first in exaltation first in your heart with that kind of intensity Spurgeon when he described this passage he went on to say this

I thought I just included I wrap it up with this he said when we first loved the Savior how earnest we were there was not a single thing in the Bible that we did not think was precious there was not one command of his that we did not think to be like fine gold again how happy you used to be in the ways of God your love was of that happy character that you could sing all day long and now your religion has lost its luster the gold has become doomed you know that you know that when you come to the sacrament you know that when you come to the sacramental table you often come there without enjoying it there was a time when every bitter thing was sweet whenever you heard the word it was all precious to you again when we were in our first love what we would do for Christ and now how little we do some of the actions which we performed when we were young Christians just converted when we look back upon them they seem to be such wild tales first love when we stir up the love the love of Christ until he comes well scripture gives us encouragement Hebrews 10 24 let us consider how to stir each other up to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as the habit of some but encouraging all each one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near it is our fellowship together where we encourage one another with the word of God and encouragement in the circumstances that we find ourselves we are to stir each other up that way we're to encourage each other in 1st Thessalonians a letter that describes most of the end time passages that we love he says therefore encourage one another and build one another up just as you are doing as you contemplate the coming of Christ we're to speak with grace to one another as he said in Ephesians let no corrupt talk come out of your mouth but only such as good for building up as fits the occasion that it may take give grace to the hearer we're to teach and worship one another worship with one another

Colossians 3 16 so we're to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom singing songs and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in our hearts to God and when we do that as we serve one another we do what Galatians 6 says we're to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ and we do that out of our love for Jesus until he comes so what do you do the message to them is very simple remember do you remember first love and return remember change your direction speak to your soul preach the truth to your soul be reminded of the glory of Christ that's coming and live that way until he comes back here we head bow he who has an ear love to

[65:43] Jesus some of you may not know Christ you're here today and you know Jesus as I look around the room I see most of the things are Christians involved in Christ and they love the profession involved in baptism almost everyone in this room that's great praise the Lord as our church gets established as we proclaim Christ the first love that we have there should never be a Sunday where unbelievers are not present as we drag through and first there's not we should get time we're not reaching out to people for names for friends to proclaim Christ because that's how we're preparing to us shine a light of

Christ because we have a life on Christ brave for men and love he gives us the strength and just the power to take hold of him as he's taking hold of me and do the works in his name he gets the glory I don't personally believers here to surrender to God bring me back to the first love bring me back to where I was to begin giving me that compassion and me burn I don't run cast those things out don't let me cast you away if you stand be my first love be the passion that drives me father we come before you this morning it's time and I pray that we respond to you as you've spoken through your word you will happen here here will go back and we all remember and we repent and we return and

we see you how do you work and pray so  
Jesus day you