

First Love Abandoned

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[0 : 0 0] Back for a short time to the chapter we have, Revelation chapter 2, which are verses we have in verses 1 down to verse 7. As we said, we're beginning this new series looking at these chapters.

We'll begin to have Ephesians, see how far we get into the church in Ephesians. We have a first time, we're back to the next week, we'll see how we get on. In the subject summary, of course, we know ourselves, if we've read Revelation, I'm sure we all have, and we've heard it preached.

If we're being very honest, and if we are honest, we're in good company. Calvin before us, Luther before us, Doc before us, but a few, Spurgeon included, all happily admitted that much of Revelation was far beyond our understanding.

Even our commentaries, those who could tackle the un commentary, and they didn't all try and comment on Revelation. Performers who did, even the church fathers, early fathers who did, are happy to say, we don't know.

We've got no idea what's going on here, the Lord knows, and that's enough for us. So as we come to Revelation, even to our section looking at the church's Revelation, there's some things which are clear, some things which are not.

[1 : 2 0] And there's some things in Revelation which I think we'll be able to ask. It's not for lack of study, that's a problem. You can study sections and we can draw allusions and draw some conclusions perhaps, but there's points that indeed in the next few weeks, in the next six, seven churches we'll look at, there are only points we have to say, humbly say, we're not quite sure what that's being said here, but we can see what it has to say to us nonetheless.

As we come to these seven churches, it's not just an easy series for us, it's actually very important. So if I actually look, the whole of this book, or the whole of this letter we should say, Rowland, at times perhaps we might forget Revelation, it was a letter.

It just sent us, Jude before it, just sent us all the pastoral epistles. John was writing Revelation as a letter. And really, this letter was in one sense a letter to these seven churches.

First and foremost, this is a letter John wrote to be shared among, to be sent to the seven churches named here. As I say, it's going throughout the weeks with the Lord's help.

But this, of course, is also a letter which was written and meant to be shared more widely. We'll see that again and again with many of the letters. Many of the letters of Scripture, of course, were written to one certain gathering, but often with the expectation that other gatherings would get copies of the letter and go out forever.

[2 : 5 6] So John writes this letter to these seven churches. And this is our theme the next few weeks, just one thing to note. For all the differences in these churches, there's obviously one simple connecting reality that we have to address.

These are seven churches which share in real persecution. Real persecution. This is a time, likely post-Nero, when the founding emperor, the emperors, we know that Nero was cruel.

It's not for us to go into the historical details, but Nero was cruel. He had skinned Christians alive and things like that. Those who followed Nero weren't much better.

They only excelled in his clarity. I was trying to do one better than him. So when John encourages these churches, he is seeking to encourage congregations who are quite literally letting a further end.

As this congregation of believers would read this letter from John, they're reading it in someone's home, perhaps, in the barn, perhaps. They're reading it knowing that if they're found to be believers of the Lord, they will be tortured.

[4 : 23] Their families will be tortured. Their ravelings are gone. Their houses will be burnt out. They will be kept. That's the reality of all of the separate churches within here. So more what we'll be delving into deep theological points and looking into the mystery or preparation, this is what I think for real people.

Real Christians like you and I, who have real bias, real fears, who faced the very real prospect, as our brother pray just now, a prospect which we don't have further understanding of, what it is about persecuted people.

A problem is right now in India. It's heavy, my own mind, personally. They've had villages burned down. They've had their hopes burned down. They've had their lives destroyed. And the truth is that the gospel is just as much for them as it is, of course, as this evening.

So that being said, we're looking this evening at the church in Ephesus. And we touched on an act there, just the early days of the church in Ephesus.

We know that Ephesus, of course, was known to be a place, quite literally, a place that was creating idols, hence the riot that we read about.

[5 : 41] Silversmiths were not as pleased, but Paul and associates were daring to say that their idols were just idols. Ephesus, a trading town, a very rich town, a very popular town, that would be the almost tourist, you could say, destination of the area, a rich place, a fancy place.

It was a trading area, almost rich, it was fun, it was loud, it was full of great, glorious pagan worship. A great place for citizens, a terrible, terrible place for Christians who loved to serve there.

So to this church, we see this letter going out. And the letter, of course, is addressed to the angel of the church, and that's a theme we see to all the churches.

I'll touch this more in later weeks, but just to say, when we see here the angel being oppressed, it is quite clear that in those circumstances, and we have to be very careful here, John uses the same word, often in different ways, even in one chapter.

But John uses the word, angel, and this verse here, when it addresses the churches, it's quite clear, it's the use of the word, messenger. Actually, I think it also says, it's a messenger, one saint, plus it is Jesus addressing the leader of the church.

[7 : 07] Elsewhere, of course, John uses the word, angel, to describe the angelic beings, and it's all about context, it's all about being a one-one person. This is addressed to the angel, to the messenger, in Ephesus.

It's addressed to the minister, to the end of this covenant. The end of the church of Ephesus. Right. As we look at this church, we can see just four, hopefully, four-minute-part headaches.

First of all, we see that Jesus is sovereign over his church. We then see, the church of Ephesus is quite good but sifting out false teachers.

We then see the sad declension. And finally, of time, we can see a purpose of safety. First of all, Jesus as sovereign over his church.

So as the letter goes out to Ephesians, this struggling, persecuted church, and battled church, we see Jesus being described.

[8 : 12] The angel of the church in Ephesus writes, the words of him, Jesus, who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who works among the seven golden lampstands.

As begins this letter, John is told, instructed, to assure and to remind the church just as a blessing. And this is a thing we see week by week.

Every church is reminded about who is addressing them. And next week, we'll see something more about our Savior. And this week, we see two incredible truths about who Jesus is in relation to his church.

First of all, he is the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand. To read last week, chapter 1, the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches.

Again, as we said, this term angels is messengers, which the context tells us it must be the human messengers. In other words, he who holds the seven leaders of the seven churches in his right hand.

[9 : 31] As Jesus approaches the scabbling of Christians, he is first of all addressing the poor master, the poor leader. And as we say, we might have complaints and bones and worries and stresses as we have a single sense of joy.

We have no idea what it is to be a minister. A persecuted church. Over a persecuted church. So it was probably in a general assembly in closed sessions. It's okay, it's just not sure on this, but it was on time.

And that appeared from a church in northern India. We saw it the night before. We had a master of a church who had been backed by, his family had been scoffered, himself avoided the city's harm.

The point before that, his whole life had been burnt for the dead. And he was there in front of us, gathering minister and elder. A wee man, a tiny wee guy, tell us about his story.

And we were face to face, black on a wall of a man, red saying, his church will burn down, his fire will burn up, his school, his congregation will burn up, and he was named, a man who was a person who was a minister.

[10 : 44] What if the star at the right hand of Jesus? As Jesus reassures the leaders of these churches, not when he says to them, but he is holding them in his right hand.

And literally, he has a firm grip on them. That's the one who has a firm grip of the seven stars.

But Jesus is reminding the leader in Ephesus, the marriage of Ephesus, that he has a hold of them. Yes, his job is a bit shaky. Yes, his circumstances are a bit shaky.

Yes, his congregation are often in hiding and in danger. He's losing members to the Romans that have been slaughtered left, right and centre. But he's been kept, well, perhaps not physically, his end would come to.

But he has been kept eternally. Lovingly kept eternally. Where? In the right hand of Jesus. He's been lovingly kept but in the hand of power.

[11 : 53] The right hand, of course, even in our own culture, symbolises power and strength. Jesus gently holds on with an eternally strong hand of the leader of this church.

Let's see a second encouragement, a second bit of information about who Jesus is to the church in Ephesus. He is holding the seven stars in his right hand but also he is walking among the seven golden lampstands.

The seven lampstands are the seven churches. Chapter 1, verse 13, the thing is that tells us of that again. And here is the reminder to the wider congregation.

Jesus cares to the leader of Ephesus but he also cares of the lampstand. He cares to the wider congregation. There's a lampstand, that image of light and darkness. As Ephesus stands as a lampstand in the darkness of sin, of persecution, of evil, of false gods, of worship, of pagan worship.

Jesus is saying that he walks among these seven lampstands. He is walking around them, beside them.

[13 : 18] It's the image of shepherding. It's the image of a good shepherd here really being used. Even perhaps the image of a gardener. You can see at a push that he is there looking after his trees.

He's planted them in these towns and these cities. He's planted his people there. And he's looking after them. Yes, there's strong wounds of persecution and heresy and blasphemy and sin.

But he is looking after them. He is walking alongside them, walking around them. He is looking after his people. Basically, I said, I'm standing here this evening and we gather and we worship and we know about my not-precipient.

And we think, well, how does this really begin to relate to us? In terms of our interest, no, we're not-precipient. We know ourselves quickly, things can change and our circumstances can change.

But my not-marm is one which we love when we serve in great comfort with good security with zero worry as to the government, the state.

[14 : 27] perhaps, and we're feeling maybe about not persecuting us physically. There's no danger to our lives. But still, this is encouraging for us in Telstra as we come even to think and see of how Jesus looks after his people.

This encouragement to your minister to the reminded showing that the Lord keeps the leaders and elders to. The Lord keeps those who he has set to lead us, serve his people, who it's at the place.

He keeps us in his right hand. Of course, he keeps all the people there, but just the extra reminder to the leaders of the congregation. But also, brothers and sisters in Telstra, if Jesus is more than our Lord side, our Lord stands to the Christ, if it's just to the seven churches Jesus looks after.

We are a part of Telstra. We are a part of this congregation, part of the free church. We are a part of the church. I was asked the kids, who's in charge of the church?

If that's, I hope, if that's, I don't. I'm not. I'm not in charge. No. Is any minister before after me in charge? No. Who does this church belong to? The Lord Jesus Christ.

[15 : 46] These calls are we here to further Telstra's cause, our cause, our Lord and his work in this place.

It's him who walks around, alongside, our lampstand. someone who first encourages them. He reminds them who he is.

He encourages them. You see, verses 2, verse 3, and also verse 6. He encourages them as to their good work. They are doing good work.

Verses 2, verse 3, I know your works, your toil, and your patient in jams. Now, you cannot bear with those who are evil, but I've tested those who call themselves apostles and are not a find out to be false.

And so on, also, down to verse 6. Yet this you have, you hate the works and the connections, which I also hate. He prays them for their work in sifting out false teachers.

[16 : 52] As we read in Ephesians that in Ephesus they were surrounded by false teachers, surrounded by pagans. So the church in Ephesus had a hard job to have a sift out all the time what these false teachers were saying and preaching and teaching.

And at this point about how the relations written, there were many in Ephesus and other towns who were claiming to be Christians, but whose theology was certainly not.

They covered it in 1 John or the idea of the Gnostics. That's one of tens of hundreds possibly of false teachings which had begun to arise.

So early on, so early on the second was doing his best to bring in teachings which were so close to what Jesus said but just far away enough to be so eternally, dangerously thrown.

And Jesus commends the Ephesians that despite all the persecution and sadness and worry and strain they were working hard. They were working hard to keep things going as best they could.

[18 : 04] They tested the spirits we could say for a short way of saying it. And they were works, you're tall, you're patient, you're students and I cannot bear with those who are evil and have tested those who called themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

It's easy to tell the obvious false teachings. That's obvious, that's clear, we know what's wrong and what's wrong and perhaps even easier to tell what's wrong when it comes a little bit closer.

Friends and the Mormon faith and friends in the DW faith are quite convincing, they're quite good at that job and they find very hard for it, some from work 30 plus hours a week to do what we perhaps wouldn't begin to imagine doing and they find hard for it.

But also we know it's not quite right, we know it's not what scripture says. But see, the patients have an even tougher job than that. Anyone having come face to face of those who are apostles, at least to call themselves apostles, and they're having to listen to them and to sift out what they were saying.

To compare what they were saying against what scripture was saying and to see if what they were saying was scripture or not. That means that the Ephesians knew their scripture.

[19 : 31] In order to see what was wrong against scripture, if they're supposed to know their scripture, as a reminder for us, we are, we perhaps think that we are so far away from deception that our Christians and brothers and sisters are deceived affectionately.

They fall into some strange theology very easily and you'd be surprised how quickly you can fall into strange theology. If you don't know what God's word says, if you don't know what promises God's word gives you, you are very liable to be easily swayed into very, very subtle differences but differences which will be on a very dangerous path very quickly.

The Ephesians then knew their scripture but also the Ephesians were willing, obviously, to challenge those who call themselves apostles. Think of yourselves just now.

I'll prove myself with you. If you, on Sunday, on Thursday, hear me say something that is wrong, that's clearly not right according to the Bible.

They're not something you think, in your opinion, you differ on with me, that's really bad. that, but something where you think I am wrong. I've said something clearly against scripture. Would you genuinely be willing, pragmately, perhaps gently, I hope, and would you be willing to say, for a couple of minutes, say, Donald, that wasn't right.

[21 : 02] When you said that, it wasn't quite, and I didn't think that was right for you. Would you really be willing to do that? Would I be willing to do that, to someone else? Tough question.

Imagine trying to do that to someone who was taught that person. Firstly, I've come from God, here's my miracles, here's my signs and wonders, here's my teaching. My patients, are they able to say no?

What we're saying might be amazing, I hope you've might sound good, but it's not what the Bible says, it's not what we've heard from those who come before us. It's not what we've been taught by apostles who showed our lives and their signs that they were genuine apostles.

Your teaching doesn't match their teaching, therefore, we will not listen to you. How brave and willing to stand up against false teaching and wrong teaching.

Also, we see Jesus commanding for the hard work. I know you're enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake and you have and you have not growing weary.

[22 : 10] They work hard. He places them for good deeds and all your works and all your toil and all your patient endurance. They work hard. You know, we mentioned verse 6.

He also places them for their hatred towards the work of the Nicolaitans. There's much conjecture and much ideas.

My ideas, but historically and biblically and theologically we have no idea what the Nicolaitans believed. I can't save any confidence, especially not any level of confidence in yourself and hope it.

A discussion perhaps, maybe, but, for a pulpit, the Nicolaitans are only mentioned in Scripture here. They're only very briefly mentioned in history. Now, history has existed.

It never existed, but we don't even know truly what we've taught. We can guess it was some variation of what the Nicolaitans believed that Jesus wasn't really in the flesh or something similar.

[23 : 13] But rather it was, it would be evil. And Jesus is happy to men and death as Ephesians for going against him. Oh good.

Oh well. But what's the problem? We know it's going to change very quickly. The same verses 4 to 5 is a sad declension.

But, it says a word of the living Savior, but I have this against you. You've abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you are 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. For all their theological work, for all their theological stupidity, for all of it their hard and commended labour, there was a glaring issue of the church emphasis.

They know their stuff, they're able to defend their stuff, they know their theology well, they know their history well perhaps, for all on paper, a fully functioning, well-serving church.

[24 : 39] The Lord has taken place, and the list of all this fighting and all this defence, they've lost their love.

They've completely lost their love. sought, as it were, theological perfection, which is commendable, and in doing so, they've forgotten their first calling, to love the Lord, to love his people, to love their neighbours.

Dear brothers and sisters, we know we must, as a congregation, as individuals, we must strive, indeed, publicly, we're commanded to strive, to seek to be philologically biblical, and precise, and to know what we believe, and why we believe it, we must be that way inclined.

But also, publicly, we must strive to love one and ever, and to love the people the Lord has placed our lives around us. And if we let one take precedence more than the other, we're in trouble.

If we are more love-based, if everything's excused by loving, then we become, of course, if we see what some dimensions have, where everything's okay, it's all love, then we lose sight of theology, and become some nice, our church capitals.

[26 : 14] And it goes to have a way to, if for our theology, our cold theology, and no love, then we face a warning that the Ephesian church here faced.

They had all the theology, but none of the love they once had. Once they were saved out of paganism, out of evil living, and they must have a vibrant bunch, a love-filled bunch, as they proclaimed the glorious good news of Jesus, as the years rolled on, as the persecution grew, as the danger grew, as the worry grew, as they became, perhaps, more insolated, as they became more on the defensive, the love they once had, the passion they once had, it's now gone.

And Jesus condemns them quite clearly for it. So much so that repentance is required of them.

And we don't have to go back, if we're being sadly honest, we don't have to go back to the church offices born in the Dutch 2000 and more than we.

We were ourselves of congregations and did deal of nations historically. Theologically perfect, humanly speaking, and we striving to be theoretically perfect after obtaining that.

[27 : 44] Theologically sound, biblically sound, have anything that might place all the I's, dots, and T's cross, but who lost their love.

Conligations and nominations, who lost their love. And what they place, these congregations and terminations. All God did to them what he warned, he would do with Ephesians.

What is a warning Christ gives the Ephesians if they don't begin to love once more like they once loved? Remember therefore, from where you have fallen, repent, and rework you there at first.

If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from this place unless you repent. A terrifying but real war Ephesians was.

Follow their theological work, and twirl on them. If they did not once more love the brothers, and indeed in their theological rightness, they seem to have lost their love also of their saviour.

[28 : 56] They were perhaps more happy to be wrapped, to be in their minds correct, and to be truly serving him out of love. If they do not refine that love once more, refine that through gospel purpose once more, and the Lord is telling them quite safely, he will come, and he will use their presence for the purposes.

Again, the church moments of the Lord. We impose that our congregation belongs in our and we think perhaps we will be here forever. If other was it, we'll be here to the end, if not, we won't.

And there are several reasons that are nothing to have said in what congregations must come and go. There are also several reasons which are clear.

Once a congregation begins to lose its love for its people and for the place the Lord has placed it in, once a congregation becomes more of a museum than a mission session.

We're here to go out, not to kick it out. Once a congregation wants to look back more than looks forward, once a congregation looks at its own history and pride more than it does its calling and its mission.

[30 : 18] Historically, again and again, the Lord never misses and those congregations. If calls them, they diminish, they die.

The Lord removes the countessing. Why? Because God has placed us here to serve them here. And if any press the church is not serving the Lord as they shoot, he does not keep the church there just awake.

We're here to serve. It's like one of the here of diplomats who heal us as ambassadors. And if you're an ambassador station, if you've got some embassy in some foreign country, and your embassy there isn't doing any of the functions they're supposed to do, they're not sharing the good news of their leader, and they're not going out to the community to talk about how good their country is, then a country that is wasting resources by having an embassy in that place, the embassy will be removed.

It's martyrs sent somewhere else. It's a terrifying learning Ephesus received, and the sad thing is, when you go on that tour to ancient Ephesus and it stands, what do you find?

Stories and dust. Stories and dust. That church is gone. That town is gone. That whole community, that whole civilization is gone.

[31 : 53] But it's no guarantee the Lord will keep any congregation in the same place for him. For us who are here, it is our duty to learn the lessons that Ephesus perhaps doesn't quite learn.

And we'll serve him well, serve him with love. We won't compromise our theology ever. But whilst maintaining our solid biblical past theology, no muscle compromise on our life.

It's not one or never. It's both or less nothing. It's both or less destruction. The time is gone. Just a final verse of encouragement.

Heal rather more than let him heal the spirit and saves to the churches. To the one who conquer I will grant to eat to the tree of life which is the paradise of God.

And the Ephesians knew our theology, the new of eternity. But Jesus is the word of the need and the sour word. He says, yes, you've perhaps failed in some ways and perhaps been cold in some ways.

[33 : 00] Still, you're right. Still, you will conquer, you will persevere. And if all you do persevere, I will bring you home to myself.

You will find peace and glory. You will find time and eternity with God. That's our reminder to see you. After how well or how purview we serve our Savior, we give Him praise that it's not our service which gets us to glory.

It is His practice of us which ensures that for us this evening, for us this week, for us this year, that our home is with Him. Home is set, secured, purchased by Him, and gained by Him.

And one day He'll take us home to view of Himself. Until that day comes, until verse 7 comes, we live somewhere as congregation between verse 2 and verse 5 at all times.

And our prayer and our hope is we maintain that balance. Phological, biblical, striving, never perfection, never achieve it. We strive to be correct, as best we can in Biblical, must also strive on not to lose our first love for our Savior, or the charity, and the of Jesus.

[34 : 22] Very exciting. I want to care. Lord, go before us, we ask you, for the rest of this evening and the rest of this week, we thank you for the promises of your word, and the glorious truths we find in it. And I pray once more this evening, especially for we heard from the word as you go before us, once more, the warnings and the promises you gave to your people, Ephesus, of that great city and that small congregation, who did work so well, and also who grew so cold.

And we ask, Lord, you keep us revived in our love to work, keep us fresh and warm in our love for brothers and sisters, but also for unsaved in their community, the wider community here who have no gospel work.

Help us to be faithful, faithful ambassadors, faithful witnesses. Help us understand you've called us here to serve and not as it were, spiritually to sit. Help us there to go out to this place and to be vibrant, faithful witnesses.

Forgive us for times we find ourselves personally, perhaps as a congregation, find our own love going cold for you and for your mission and for your cause.

We'll value those, Lord, we ask, in these times of coldness, bring us back again and again to forgive us our sins. Let's all these things in and through Jesus' his precious name and for his event.

[35 : 47] Let's sing a conclusion, a few verses from Psalm 8. We'll sing verses 1 down to verse 4. It's the altar, Psalm 8, verses 1 to verse 4.

How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord is my name, who has thy glory far advanced above the starry frame. Psalm 8, verses 1 to 4, to God's praise.

Praise■ For the starry day It comes time from starry's love How can I spend your day For the life of the stars The soul of the night

To the day And the soul of the day I know I know I know It comes time from starry's love I know I know I know I know I know I know I know I know I know Maybe If I go And as the The Come Then We The Was In the james Tell me Again You

See June And I am so glad, O God, I am so glad.

[38 : 28] The thanks of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Father, the Father and the Father, the God of the Son, and the Father forevermore.