

Ephesus: Truth Without Love

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 January 2023

Preacher: Walt Alexander

[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Turn with me to Revelation chapter 2.! So the last book in our Bible, Revelation chapter 2. We begin reading in verse 1.

If you look there with me, Revelation chapter 2, verse 1. 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.

He says, I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. How you cannot bear with those who do evil, 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.

[1 : 30] Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, repent and do the things 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. 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 to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

May God bless hearing and the preaching of His Word. The British playwright George Bernard Shaw once said, Christianity might be a good thing if anyone ever tried it.

Mr. Shaw sarcastically exposes one of the church's most persistent problems, not living out what we proclaim to believe.

[2 : 56] Many others have gladly added their voices to Mr. Shaw over the years to point out what believers are or are not doing, to point out what the church is or is not doing.

Some have said the church is not helping out the poor enough. Others have said the church is not engaging enough. It's stale, singing old hymns.

It's not engaging enough. Others have said the church is not diverse enough. It needs to care about racial and ethnic harmony more.

Still others have said the church is not politically active enough. While their counterparts have said the church is too politically active and posing their morals on everyone else.

The list could go on and on with the things the church is or is not doing. With the list of things the church must or must not do to survive. But a church that continually tunes its ears to the ever-changing cries of those on the outside will likely be the first to die.

[4 : 02] But there is one whose voice the church must continually tune its ears. The exalted Jesus Christ.

In Revelation chapter 2 and 3, the exalted Lord, our exalted Lord Jesus Christ, speaks to the church. Now, in these days, the church is under attack.

Most likely, this revelation was written between 90 and 95 A.D. after the Lord's death. The church is suffering under the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian.

Failing to honor the emperor is a capital offense. There is widespread persecution in a way much greater than Nero 30 years prior.

Many Christians are martyred. Revelation, all throughout the Revelation, the reference to martyrs is repeated and horrific.

[5 : 02] Revelation 6, 9 gives a heartbreaking window into these martyrs saying, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth.

And so, to the exalted Lord Jesus Christ, speaks to the seven churches to fortify them to live holy lives in this age.

John records the letters. They're written to the seven churches on the west coast of what is now Turkey. The letters are not written, though, individually, like Ephesians or Galatians and circulated that way.

The letters are sent together to be read together along with the whole book of Revelation. But the letters are not just for those churches.

See, numbers are very significant in John's Revelation, and seven is the number of completion. So the idea, he's writing to the seven churches because he's writing to the total, the full, the complete number of churches everywhere and for all time.

[6 : 14] These letters are not just written for those churches in that time, but for all churches in all time. Dennis Johnson, in his wonderful commentary, says all the churches must listen to all the letters. For each message to a particular congregation is what the Spirit says to the church in general.

These seven churches of Asia Minor, that is modern-day Turkey, represent the totality of Christ's churches, scattered across the world and scattered over time.

And their problems are symptomatic of those confronting churches in all times and places. I love that phrase, scattered across the world and over time.

So these letters were written for us. Unlike the many cries these days of what the church must do and must not do, these letters are the living and active, comforting and cutting, authoritative word of God for us.

And we would do well to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. This first letter is sobering.

[7 : 25] And in a word, the warning is, a church with truth but without love will soon be dead. A church with truth but without love will soon be dead.

And I'm going to break this out. Three points. The first one is the author. I'm going to consider who the author of this letter is.

It begins by each of these letters. In fact, there's a formula to all these letters in a lot of ways, though all parts of the formula aren't in each letter. But the idea, each of the letters begin by addressing the angel of the church.

You see that in verse 1. To the angel of the church in Ephesus. Now some people say that angel is a guardian angel. You know, we have shows like Touched by an Angel or something like that.

But this would be like a guardian angel that watches over a church. Others say it's just an angel in some realm of some kind. Still others now, the most common interpretation is, this is the leading official, leading bishop of a particular church.

[8 : 28] Wherever you land on that, it doesn't really matter for the meaning of it. But it represents the church is the most important thing. Then the letter continues in this opening address, describing Jesus Christ in some way designed to help the church in a specific way.

So you look in verse 1b. He says, Now there's lots of figures already that we'll hopefully unpack in a few moments.

But the seven stars are the seven angels. So he's holding the seven stars. He's holding the seven leaders. He's holding the seven churches, keeping the churches absolutely secure in his hand.

He's also standing. The seven lampstands are the seven churches themselves. And so he's walking among the seven churches, present with them and aware of all that they're facing.

And these descriptions, full of visions though they are, come from chapter 1. Look in verse 12.

[9 : 42] This is John's initial vision that he sees. He says in verse 12, Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. And on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands.

And in the midst of the lampstand, one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs on his head were white, like white wool, like snow, just layering.

Similes, layering. He can't describe it. That's what you're supposed to do. All these lights are telling you, he can't describe, indescribable. But it's like white, like white wool, like snow.

His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.

In his right hand, he held the seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was shining like the sun in full strength.

[10:46] When I saw him, I fell on his feet as though dead, but he laid his right hand on me. Fear not. I'm the first and the last living one. I died, and behold, I am alive.

I am alive forevermore. I have the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place.

As for the mystery of the seven stars, so this is our description that's written in our text, that you saw in my right hand in the golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels. Of the seven churches, seven lampstands are the seven churches themselves.

You see it, the seven stars, the seven angels. Seven lampstands are the seven churches. You also see in verse 13, he says he's standing in the midst of the lampstands, begins.

One popular book about the church begins with a pop quiz. It says, what set of values most describes Jesus and his followers?

[11:51] The first list, and we'll do a little quiz for you. The first list is competence, power, efficiency, achievement, skills, proving oneself, result, accomplishment, resolve, objects, technology, goal-oriented, self-sufficiency, success, and competition.

The second list is love, communication, beauty, relationships, support, help, nurture, feelings, sharing, harmony, community, loving cooperation, personal expression.

The author says, over the years, I've shown this charts to hundreds of people and they all say the same thing. They all say the second list describes Jesus and his followers.

Right? That's what we would say, love and cooperation, sharing. That's what the 5,000 is all about.

The author says that he got the list from the non-religious best-selling book Men Are From Mars and Women Are From Venus.

He goes on to say the church has begun to associate Christianity with a soft set of virtues. Now that's not the point of this sermon, but I would heartily agree.

[13:14] Even more concerning, though, the church has begun to associate Jesus with a soft set of virtues. But this vision is anything but soft.

His voice is loud and heard from a way off. It's a roar of many waters. It's not the still, small voice you sing about in your worship songs.

It's more like the thunderous roar of the Niagara Falls drowning out your ability to hear anything else. This is not a tame lion. His hair is white because he's exalted in the place of highest honor, exalted above every rule and authority.

His eyes are flames of fire piercing and dividing. His feet are burnished bronze from walking through fire. When he opens his mouth, when he's speaking, a sword, a two-edged sword springs out and his face is like the blazing summer noonday sun.

Try to look at it. He's the son of man not because he was born of Mary in Bethlehem, which he was. He's the son of man because he's the Daniel 7 son of man who will reign over every kingdom and over every king forever and ever.

[14:37] He's not soft. No wonder John immediately falls on his ground and is so dead because I'm gonna die in your presence. That's what this vision tells me.

And this is the one who's speaking to the church in Ephesus. And if you hear what the Spirit is saying, this is the one who's speaking to us. He's the sovereign ruler of all.

And so we get back to our text. He's the sovereign ruler of all who holds the seven stars in His hands. He holds the church in His hands. He holds every one of us and our church in His hands. No one can snatch Him, not snatch us out of His hands. No one can overtake Him. No one is greater than Him. He's the exalted head of the church.

He stands in the midst of the church. I love this. Ephesians 1 said, He's exalted above all rule and authority and power and dominion above every name that is named not only in this age but in the age to come.

[15:39] And where is He when we see Him here? He's not on a throne. He's in the midst of the churches. All of His authority, Ephesians 1, 22 says, is bent out to care for and uphold the churches.

He's standing in the midst of the lampstands. The seven lampstands that represent the totality of all churches for all times.

Where is the Lord? He's bending His ear to the church. He's standing with them. Not in the sense that I'll walk with you and be your God.

The same promise that we've heard again and again in the Bible. He's standing in their midst in the sense that He said, I'll be with you to keep watch. Shepherds will watch their flock by night and I'll watch mine.

I will sanctify her. I will ensure that the gates of hell will not prevail against her. I will ever live to make intercession for her.

[16:49] Why? Because I'm standing right there ready to intercede, ready to wield all authority. Couldn't I not call legions of angels, He tells Peter. So too He does for us.

But soberly, He's not just standing to guard. He's standing to inspect.

To correct. He's standing to see what's going on in this body that calls Himself by my name.

Point two, the problem. The problem. The exalted Jesus has a problem but He doesn't begin immediately addressing the problem.

He first commends this church, this church in Ephesus and He says, you have fought, you're fighting for the truth, you're fighting for the truth. Look in verse two, He says, I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance.

[18:07] I know your works, that's just a way of saying, I know your way of life, I know the way you're living. The all-knowing God and the head of the church knows exactly what is going. He has perfect knowledge and awareness and He's commending them.

George Bernard Shaw could not say the church in Ephesus wasn't doing Christianity. They were. I know your works, I know your toil and your patient endurance, that pair is very important.

On the one hand, He's saying, I know your toil, I know what you're doing. I know the way you're serving, I know what time you got up today, I know the sacrifices you're making, I know all your works very well.

So He's saying, I know what you're doing, but He also says, I know your patient endurance to say, I know what you're facing. Patient endurance is just a word to say, what you're remaining under.

I know, I know what the wind, I know the flavor, the color, the look, the feel of the wind coming at your face. I know what you're under, I know what you're up against, I know what you're having to endure.

[19:15] Jesus commends them for defending the truth as well. And if there's any church that needs to defend the truth, it's the church in Ephesus.

Ephesus is a large city, the largest in Asia Minor at that time, a quarter of a million people. Ported city for business, for the buying and selling of goods, situated at the crossing point of four trade routes.

But it's a pagan city, a deeply ungodly, an immoral city. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world is the massive temple to the Greek fertility god, Artemis.

And it's there in Ephesus. It's a city, as we see from Acts 19, filled with magicians and exorcisms, exorcists, exorcisms, filled with magic, filled with idols, a dark city enamored with spirituality.

Priscilla and Aquila most likely planted this church there in AD 51 or 52. The Apostle Paul lived there for three years afterward. The crowd started a riot because of the success of the preaching of the gospel under the Apostle Paul in Acts 19.

[20:29] You can go back and read that in the afternoon. They basically run Paul out of the town saying, great is Artemis of the Ephesians, great is Artemis of the Ephesians. The deeply ungodly city and as Paul leaves, he warns them about what they'll face.

Look in Acts 20, we have it for you. He says, I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. From your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples.

Paul's warning them not merely that they'll have to live in a dark, hostile world. He's warning them that they'll have to drive out false teachers and false teaching from within their own church, from their own selves.

And that's exactly what Jesus says they had done. 30 years later, 40 years later, Jesus says, look in verse 2, he says, I know you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested, that's what 1 John commands us to do, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

He said, you have tested the false apostles, you have tested false teaching, you've run them out of town, you even hate the Nicolaitans. In verse 6, now we're going to learn more about Nicolaitans in a few weeks so I'll spare the description of them until then.

[22 : 01] Not only that, look in verse 3, he says, I know you're enduring patiently, kind of finishing this cluster, bearing for my name's sake, and you've not grown weary. You. Can you imagine the refreshing effect of hearing these words from the exalted Lord when it seems that so much of your life and so much of your labors for Christ are unseen and unimportant?

I was riveted this week by a letter from the abolitionist Frederick Douglass to the Underground Railroad rescuer, Harriet Tubman.

Douglass was a political leader for the abolitionist cause, as you know. Harriet Tubman was an unseen hero.

He wrote her. He said, this is in 1868, he said, most of what I have done and suffered in the service of our calls has been in public.

And I've received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, however, have labored in a private way. I have wrought, worked in the day, you in the night.

[23 : 15] I've had the applause of the crowd and the satisfaction that comes from being approved by the multitude while the most that you have done has been witnessed by a few trembling, scarred, foot-sore bondsmen and women whom you have let out of the house of bondage and whose heartfelt God bless you has been your only reward.

Lord, listen, the midnight sky and the silent stars have been the only witnesses of your devotion to freedom and of your heroism.

You can imagine what that meant to Harriet Tubman. Well, if you can, you can imagine what this letter meant to the church in Ephesus. Jesus, the exalted Lord says, I know.

No word communicates his understanding more provocatively than knowing in the Bible. He says, I know your works. I see your toil and your patient endurance.

I see how you've defended your faith. Jesus commends them for their discernment, for protecting and preserving the truth, for identifying and opposing false teachers. There's so much commendable in the way they're living.

[24 : 34] They live in a city where they need careful, active discernment and they have it. The reality is we live in a world not too unlike Ephesus where we cannot let our guard down.

We cannot just focus on love and kindness and good works. We can't just focus on relationships and community. We have to defend and contend for the truth. We have to hold fast to what is taught to sound doctrine and refute those who contradict it.

After he encourages them, Jesus continues and says, as it were, you fought the good fight, you fought to defend the truth, but you've lost love.

Look in verse 4. Remember who this is. But I have this against you.

Suddenly, our defender becomes the accuser to help us, to correct us, as Hebrews 12 would say, like a better than a good father.

[25 : 53] I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first, that you've abandoned the love that you had at first.

Now, Jesus warns in the Olivet, well, in the Mount of Olives, when he's talking about the end, he said in Matthew 24 that the pressures of this age will cause many, cause the love of many to grow cold.

What Jesus foretold is what is happening now in the face of opposition. Some in the love of the church in Ephesus has grown cold.

What is their first love, though? What is the love they had at first? Is it love for God? Love for others, love for the lost.

It's not immediately clear. It just says the love you had at first. Seems to me, though, that John is referring to the love for others.

[26 : 56] In one of his letters, the Apostle John wrote, and he also wrote this revelation. He says, 1 John 4, we love because he loved us. If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he's a liar.

For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God who he has not seen.

John is saying love for God and love for others are inseparably linked.

And so in one sense you could say, is he talking about love for God and love for others? Yes, because they're inseparably linked to love God is first. It's the first and greatest commandment to love your neighbor is the second.

Why? Because they're together. They have to be tied together. Love for God is proven by love for others. Love for God is demonstrated by love for others. The acid test of love for God is love for

others.

So you cannot love God without loving others. It's one of the only verses I remember from my childhood because I would fight with my brother and he'd say, if you hate me, you hate God.

[27 : 58] Yeah, I'm like, man, that makes me want to punch you in the face again. I distinctly remember running around the backyard right after I jabbed and you know, he had braces so I knew if I could get first hit in, he was going to be holding his mouth for a while and I could run.

So that was my toy because he was bigger than me, faster than me. What happened to this church? One author says, every virtue carries the seeds of its own destruction.

The church at Ephesus was wonderfully diligent. They were worldview experts. They were persistent. They knew what they believed.

They studied what they believed. They opposed those who tried to teach anything different but the heart of the faith that they were defending leaked out of their heart. Their hearts became hard.

Their hearts became callous. The brothers and sisters they used to rejoice with and the truth became the objects of their suspicion, speculation, and self-righteous anger.

[29 : 02] And if you've been in the church for any length of time, you know it doesn't happen. It doesn't take much for it to begin to leak out. In the 1600s, the Church of England issued a new prayer book for the churches in Scotland.

Now if you know anything about the history between Scotland and England, you know the Scottish do not like the English messing with their stuff and messing with their churches especially.

When one pastor began a service, so the pastor got a new prayer book, he's got to abide by the prayer book, he begins a service with a new prayer book. A lady in the church, distinguished Miss whatever, in the back, throws a stool at him.

Her act leads to an all-out riot. Everybody's rioting. The pastor barely makes it out alive. Well, word spreads. A fellow in a neighboring town began his service, and he opened the prayer book with two pointed revolvers at the congregation.

Yeah. Yeah. Try that shenanigans. Maybe you didn't bring two loaded.

[30 : 17] pistols this morning. But do you have the same love you had at the beginning? You have the same desire to serve, desire to scrub toilets, mop floors, whatever is needed because of your love for the brothers and sisters?

Or is that list of things you would never do growing longer every year? Do you find it easy to encourage those around you? Easy to honor, easy to rejoice, easier to comfort those around you? Surely that's not the church, not the church at large. The church is known for biting and devouring one another, gossiping and slandering one another, tearing one another down.

Are you biting and devouring? Are you critical of the brothers, of the sisters?

How about this? Have you ever seen pigs come to a trough to eat at feed time? If not, you can imagine a whole lot of pushing and shoving and snorting and consuming food without much thought for any other pigs.

[31 : 40] Well, is that the way you come to church? When did you arrive? Who have you spoken to? Where do you sit?

How many of your decisions are driven by what is easy for you and how many of your decisions are driven by love for others? Does your lack of commitment reveal less about your spirituality and more about your dislove for others?

Your lack of others? Press it further. How do you walk in and out of this room? Is your heart warm and full anticipating the people you might see navigating the morning with a Thanksgiving-like delight?

Or is it cool and calculated now? Navigating the room to avoid those you don't like and those with whom the love has grown cold.

Do you love the brothers and sisters? I do believe this church loves one another but it's not guaranteed to stay that way and I feel burdened to lay this out.

[33 : 04] I mean the danger guys the danger is not disunity it's not disunity the danger is death. Like we're not just biting and devouring is one thing that's just a horizontal consequence of not loving one another but the danger is death.

A church without love is a dead church a church that has all the truth buttoned down but does not love is a dead church. Jesus says they will know that you are Christians by your love for one another.

He doesn't say by your love for the lost your love for social causes your love for the right political man or something like that but you love for one another so do they know us by our love? If they don't how do they know that we're Christians? three the solution there is a problem but Jesus gives a breathtaking solution here after his commendation and correction Jesus gives a solution to the problem look in verse five he says remember therefore from where you have fallen repent and do the things you did at first in that one sentence the solution is contained in three commands remember repent and do remember repent and do remember I love that image remember from where you have fallen already the Lord of all grace and mercy is envisioning us graciously to receive again that which we received at the beginning remember from where you were things were not always as they were right now your heart was not always as cold as it is right now your love was not always as lost as it is right now and so he says repent repent wonderfully in the original language this is a word that is meant to be a command that is meant to be obeyed once repent turn we need a clean break right now repent you can repent this morning is there any one of the brothers or sisters that you have grown bitter towards icy and cold towards any one of the brothers and sisters that you if we're honest have begun to hate you may need to go to them this morning don't lay your gift on the altar go and re-reconcile to your brother or sister and then come back and lay your gift on the altar what a incredible command and invitation so while he says repent now once for all he says his language says don't stop remembering so repent now clean break over rear view mirror but remember but remember remember never stop don't stop remembering is what would be a better song than the 80s hit don't stop remembering the Bible encourages us to forget something and to remember other things again and again one of my favorites Ephesians 3 13 and 14 says one thing I do forgetting what lies behind straining forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus that you're commanded to remember and you always choose what you remember you may think memory just slides over your nostalgia just overtakes you that's not true biblically you can either remember the good or the bad the blessings or the hardships the joys or the sorrows the smiles or the slights the kindness or the harshness so much of your quality of life will be determined by what you choose to remember remember who you were remember do you not remember beloved who you were dead in trespasses and sins alienated from the

[37 : 51] God without God and without hope in the world remember remember what you were like those first days of faith those first days where everything is joy everything is love and life and wonder remember how lost you were how much you didn't know and how much grace you needed in a biography of the great doctor Martin Lloyd Jones the author tells the story of a man named Staffordshire Bill Staffordshire Bill is known throughout the town the town that Martin Lloyd Jones first pastored as a drunk a foul man with very few moral standards and filthy language he's sitting at the pub one night alone helpless and depressed drinking alone he overhears someone talking about a church down the street and how the preacher said no one nobody is helpless there is hope for everyone

Staffordshire Bill immediately sobered up began to wonder if there was hope for him too he set off to go to church the next week but he got too scared yeah I don't know everybody doesn't want to see me in there you know they know me they've heard my foul they want to see me in there and he set off to go the second week but they were already singing I'm not going to walk in there late definitely not you know I don't want to be seen late he sets off to go to the third week and he's lingering outside kicking the rocks like men often do and someone from the guest team says give it up for the guest team are you coming in Bill you can sit with me that night Staffordshire Bill passed from condemnation to life the old passed away all things in Bill's life became new he's passing by walking out of the chapel with one member of the church when someone introduced him he said Miss Jones that's Marloy Jones wife Mr. Jones Miss Jones this is Staffordshire Bill suddenly everyone said Bill's face had an agonizing look on his face as if he had just been punched in the stomach and he said oh no oh no that's a bad old name for a bad old man I am William Young William Thomas I am William Thomas and that name is not the name you'll call me by and Bill was never the same Miss Jones said his old battered face you ever seen somebody with an old battered face beat up from night after night of drinking yourself silly said his old battered face radiated he's no longer at the pub he was at church every time the doors were open Bill was never the same you know why he never forgot who he was so have you forgotten man so much in our life falls out of place when we forgot who we were we come to offer you not a list of things to do not a list of things

to check into your life not things to help the family get more well rounded we offer you new life through

Jesus Christ the transformation is from the bottom up so much that Jesus says it's like being born again if you come unto Jesus Christ you believe in him God says today could be the day where you go from Staffordshire Bill to William Smith God gives his spirit so that he might change it so don't stop remembering and as you do do the works you did at the beginning keep doing those things I love this it's an invitation to start over that might be the invitation you need today to work so overly Jesus warns that if you don't do these things I'm going to come verse five and remove your lampstand from its place I'm going to close the church that's not a reference to his final return that's a reference to what he does now in time when churches fail to love because without love the congregation ceases to be a church so church with truth but without love will soon be dead now each of these letters ends with a statement and a promise says he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the church that's just a statement saying all those who hear will turn and love and all those who don't will prove they never had ears to hear but then he has a promise to the one who conquers

I will grant to eat the tree of life which is in the paradise of God interestingly it's not persecution or tribulation this church must overcome it's its own failure to love receive the tree of life now the tree of life points us back to the garden right where we kicked out of the garden and the tree of life was guarded from henceforth The tree of life but to the people in Ephesus this had a unique meaning because in Ephesus the Greek temple of Artemis was built on the shrine of an ancient tree temple! [44 : 39] And the image of a tree symbolized the Greek goddess itself and so this tree though is far better that's what Jesus is saying he's saying if you do not love you will die I will make sure this church dies but if you conquer you will eat from the tree of everlasting!

life indeed what he said in John 10 I came to give you life and life abundantly I am the way the truth and life no one comes to the father except through me and so to all who conquer not perfectly but in faith by the power of the spirit will eat again and this time the eating won't lead to condemnation but to everlasting life may God help us father in heaven cast ourselves on to you confess our need offer ourselves to you sincerely and completely God we pray I pray we we we recited there's so much unity we share one Lord one faith one baptism one God and father of all who's over all and in all and through all one hope that belongs to our call and yet

God we're aware of how easily a church can divide even by defending the truth but not clinging to love father we don't want just the stories of a church that loves one another we want the reality we know that love is patient and kind love does not envy or boast is not arrogant and rude it does not insist on its own way it is not irritable or resentful bears all things believes all things hopes all things love never dies what we need you to do in the midst of our church is not something we can do in our own strength we need you to preserve us keep us the light of your countenance upon us guide us in the way

Lord thank you for the invitation to repent if we have work to do with you Lord I pray that we wouldn't leave before it's done in Jesus name Amen You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee For more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at Trinity Grace Athens dot com to