

Fading love for the Lord

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[0 : 00] Revelation 2, first seven verses, but I think it would be good to read the previous two verses from chapter 1.

Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now, and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this. The seven stars are the angels, some translate that as meaning the pastors, of the seven churches. And the seven lampstands are the seven churches. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write, these are the words of him. Who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men.

[1 : 10] That you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships in my name and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you've fallen.

Repent and repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

But you have this in your favor. You hate the practice of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. We are living in the age of the Holy Spirit.

[2 : 23] It's the new age that was inaugurated on the day of Pentecost. And now the Spirit of God speaks through the Word of God.

This is how people get converted. Faith comes by hearing. Hearing by the Word of God. And through the work of the Spirit. He continues to speak to individual Christians so that they might grow spiritually.

But he also speaks to churches. We learn this from this particular passage. He speaks directly to God's people as they meet together corporately.

More specifically, he speaks to those who have ears to hear. Pick up that expression. To such who have ears to hear.

God has something to say. He has many revelations to impart. We all have ears. I'm thinking of the ears of the heart and mind.

[3 : 31] The implication is that we don't all have ears to hear. The reference is to hearing readily and obediently.

There are so many people in the world who don't expect God to speak. Revelation 1 verse 3 says, Blessed are those who hear and take to heart what is written.

Likewise, you know, when you and I are speaking and someone's obviously losing interest and they're no longer listening, speaking, then we stop speaking.

We've all had that experience. We lose the attention of people. That could be the speaker's fault. It could be the listener's fault. And the more eager we are to listen, the more God will speak.

Now then, we've heard a lot about love this morning. And there are so many reasons why we should love the Lord Jesus.

[4 : 39] There's a couple of verses that come to mind. Psalm 18, the psalmist says in verse 1, I love you, Lord, because you're my strength.

Right? And then in Psalm 16 in verse 1, I love the Lord. Why? Because he has heard my voice and my supplication. And you can go through the Bible and find lots of people saying they love the Lord

because there's a particular reason for doing so.

Now then, to get into the passage, the original New Testament letter to the church of Ephesus, the book of Ephesians, is a high watermark of New Testament spirituality.

It has much to say about the great fervor of the love in that church. It was a spiritual home of some notable people.

Remember Priscilla and Aquila, a couple well-versed in the scriptures and in doctrine. They had associations there. They were associates of the apostle Paul, and like him, they were tent makers.

[5 : 52] And after hearing Apollos preach, a great character in the New Testament, Apollos also had associations with the church at Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos to one side.

They invited him possibly for supper, and he was mighty in the scriptures, the Bible says, and a man of great learning and understanding.

But there are a few gaps in his theology. And so Priscilla and Aquila took him to one side and expounded unto him the word of God more accurately.

Well, we all need that sometimes. But there were a Bible-taught people in the Ephesian church.

It was a good, it was a healthy church, as we know that. And Paul's letter to the Ephesians was not one to correct false doctrine, as was the case in some of the other churches.

[6 : 54] It was just to praise them for their faithfulness and their love. We learn more of the character of the church of Ephesus from a familiar passage in Acts chapter 20.

Luke records how the Ephesian elders were called by the apostle Paul to say a final emotional farewell to him. And we read, they fell on his neck, weeping, kissed him.

Such was the depth of their affection. Didn't get that many of my churches, but it would have been nice. They knelt down and they prayed together. And love was the dominant virtue in that church.

And as the years went by, how did the church fare? Well, here is John in the book of Revelation, exiled on the Isle of Patmos.

And he's given messages for the seven churches. Not the only churches, they were representative. From the risen Christ, he's given the messages to the churches.

[8 : 04] Now, the first one was to the church at Ephesus. Now, this was 40 years after the Acts 20 event, when they said goodbye to the apostle Paul with such affection.

Another generation had arisen in the church. It did not have the same depth of devotion. In 40 years, much had changed.

It's 43 years since I was first connected with this church. So, there's an echo going on here. An Old Testament example of change is found in the book of Judges, chapter 2, where we read, the people served the Lord.

All the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders among Joshua's company, amongst the elders that outlived Joshua, who'd seen all the great works of the Lord.

Now, when Joshua died, a time of spiritual decline ensued and a generation arose, we read, who did not know the Lord or the works that he'd done for Israel, and they did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the decline continued until everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes.

[9 : 25] So, you see the deterioration. What can happen in 40 years? The change at Ephesus prompted a challenge from the ascended Lord.

He does still speak to individuals. He still speaks to churches. Now, you've got to imagine Christ in the pulpit, you know, when the preacher's there because it's his duty to speak for the Lord.

Saying things to encourage, commending Westerhills and some area of the work, but pausing solemnly, perhaps, I'm not saying we should, to say to the church, I have something against you.

The Lord is here. We have his living written word, timeless in its relevance, and through the Holy Spirit, do we have ears to hear what he is saying.

The Lord first praised the Ephesian church. There's a list there. You can read it again. For its activity, for its good work, for its toil, for its patient endurance, for bearing up for his name's sake.

[10 : 43] There was further commendations for its intolerance of false doctrine. Their loyalty to the truth of the gospel was impressive. They had continued to value sound doctrine.

And the Lord expresses his appreciation for that. Holding to the truth, you know, is important to the Lord. John chapter 8 tells us if we continue in his truth, we are truly his disciples.

So, what was important to him? He's commending the church. Credit where credit is due. But, there's a but. There was also condemnation.

What is it you have against us, Lord? And his answer, well, it's a fading love. Your love has faded. You've lost the love you once had.

You've grown weary in your devotion. Verse 4. You see, truth is important. But so is love.

[11 : 53] Two things which believers are to continue in. Truth and love. Proverbs 19.22 says, what a person desires is unfailing love.

1 Corinthians 16.22 says, if anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. That's strong language. Do you love the Lord this morning?

A Christian is one who loves Jesus. Surely. The basic level. I love you, Lord, because you heard my voice and my supplication.

Now, in Solomon's day, in David's day, the most frequent statement of the liturgy in the song praise to God was in the refrain, as they gathered in assembly, his love endures forever.

Many references to the Lord's unfailing love in the liturgy. Persistence in love is valued by God's people. The love of God. Psalm 130, verse 7.

[13 : 02] With the Lord is unfailing love. He doesn't blow hot and cold. Persistence in love is valued in marriages, isn't it?

Wives and husbands can exercise their duties to one another dutifully, conscientiously. They can toil for one another, showing faithful endurance and trying circumstances, but they must be on their guard against their waning affection.

A danger faced with the passing of time is a lessening of love. That's our human nature. Love is to be regularly rekindled. I had a friend, one pastor who said he made a point of telling his wife he loves her five times a day, like the fruit, you know.

He loved her. Told her five times a day, and another pastor not to bear down says, well, I told my wife 25 years ago I loved her. Not quite the same. One of our greatest human needs is to be loved and to know that we are loved.

Ephesus was given a message basic to the other six churches. There isn't time to explain that, but let me say this. To whatever Christ says to you and me in correction, there must be a response if we're to progress.

[14 : 44] When he identifies something lacking in your life, his command is to repent. Put the matter right. Move forward. My word is not simply to condemn you, but to change you.

In Luke chapter 15, we discover the importance of repentance. That was rejoicing in the presence of the angel over what? Over one sinner who repented. That causes joy in heaven.

Verse 5 to the Ephesians. Remember from where you have fallen what you used to be. Repent. Do the first works.

And repentance comes first in preaching, whether it's to Christians or non-Christians. Peter and Paul and Jesus and John the Baptist, check it out.

Their initial message was that of repentance. The word of God must change us. Metanoia. Change of mind. Change of heart. Change of direction.

[15 : 45] Change of purpose. Now, is the spirit of God saying today, you've lost the love you had at first. It is not proved unfailing.

Do I love the Lord as I once did? He says, I have this against you. You've grown weary of loving me. Recognize this and repent.

Give more time to the Lord. Listen to him more. Speak to him more. Perform the works motivated by love that you used to. Galatians chapter 5, verse 6.

In Christ, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. The only thing that counts is faith working through love.

In verse 5 here, Revelation 2, there's a consequence, a grave consequence. Should this coldness towards him persist, I will come and I'll move your lampstand out of its place.

[16 : 58] Your light will no longer shine. A loveless church will be removed. That's what he's saying. Do you sometimes look back and remember the things you used to do for the Lord?

You're in the front line. You're available. You're dependable. You're a great encouragement to others in the church. You give time. You give effort. You give energy. Without sparing, your faithfulness was greatly appreciated amongst your fellows.

Love for Christ controlled you. You're a joy to your fellow believers and a good example to follow. Is that how it used to be? There's a law of physics I seem to remember as long times as I studied physics, but apparently everything in motion is wanting to stop because of external pressures.

And so you need an inward dynamic to keep going, an inward energy, an inward power. Our hearts resist progress.

We want to slow down in serving the Lord and his people. It's a sort of spiritual deceleration. The things of this world. Now, how is that to be reversed?

[18 : 23] The Holy Spirit conveys love to our hearts when he comes to dwell within. There's no other source of agape, which is the word that refers to divine love.

Romans chapter 5, verse 5. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. He motivates us to pursue holiness and obedience, taking us beyond what we are by nature and our inclinations.

He creates an inward desire for godliness. Philippians 2, verse 13. It is God who works in you both to do and to will for his good pleasure.

So we move towards becoming what we are meant to be with the power of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is all-round likeness to Christ.

Now, you notice that very familiar verse, Galatians 5, 22, that the first grace of that fruit is the crown of all virtues.

[19 : 31] The fruit of the Spirit is love. Love poured into our hearts and minds. Love, the Bible says, is the fulfilling of the law.

It dispenses with the need for law. Galatians 5, 22, we learn that love cannot be separated from the other eight virtues, the ninefold fruit of the Spirit.

Not fruits of the Spirit, please. Be careful. Get your theology right. It's the fruit singular of the Spirit. It's a ninefold fruit. Because love actually encompasses all the other eight virtues.

Love is joyful. Love is peaceful. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is gentle. Love is good. Love is faithful. Love is self-controlled.

All embraced in love. Possessing fullness of love is to have all the graces. Think of the moral attributes of God.

[20 : 43] He's kind. He's patient. He's gentle. He's good. He's just. He's faithful. He's peaceful. But this is all summed up in three words.

God is love. It's all there. The only way to possess love is to possess God and for him to fully possess us.

The Bible says, if John, the apostle says in his letter, if anyone loves, that person is of God.

Galatians 5, 23, against love and these Christ-like virtues embraced by love, against Christ-like virtues, there is no law.

If you love God, you'll live for him. The first and greatest commandment is to love God with your whole being. The second and greatest commandment is to love others as much as you love yourself.

[21 : 51] Jesus said, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments. Your obedience is just a reflection of your love.

The old commandment is the new commandment. 2 Corinthians 5, 15, it was out of love that Christ died for us to achieve a certain result, namely, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but live for him who died for them out of love.

The practical outcome of the atonement is to love. We love him because he first loved us.

Our love for God is the result of our grateful appreciation of his love for us. The pinnacle of God's love is John 3, 16. We see it in the cross.

God so loved. There's a Dale Moody who said, oh, to preach, to exhaust in those two letters, soul. God so loved the world.

[23 : 03] He gave his only begotten Son and the reconciling work of Christ upon the cross was done out of love. Look at Calvary. That's how much God loves you and me.

1 John 4, 10. Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and gave his Son as the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Greater love has no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also love to love one another. God commends his love toward us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

He did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all and who shall separate us from a love like that? Romans 8 tells us there's nothing in heaven or hell or on earth.

Things present, past, or to come shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Jesus said, people will recognize you as my disciples and how will they do that?

[24 : 23] All people will know you are my disciples if you love one another. This is how we are identified by our enemies, by God's enemies, how these Christians love one another.

the hallmark of true followers of Christ. There's that lovely incident in John chapter 13 where Jesus knew that his time had come for him to leave the world and to return to the Father.

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. He showed them the full extent of his love, how it was persistent, how it was enduring, how it was unending love.

I have loved you with an everlasting, he proves it. He washes his disciples' feet, an act of deepest love. I've given you an example to follow. Would you do that for your fellow believer?

Serve one another as I have served you. What if you're not a Christian this morning? Have you ever paused to ask yourself, if I am a Christian, how do I know that I'm a Christian?

[25 : 43] Well, there's a test to apply if you want to know if you're a Christian this morning. And it's in 1 John 3, 14. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters.

This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Romans 13 says, let no debt remain outstanding in your life except the continuing debt we have to love one another.

for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. Paul, the apostle, says, I may be gifted beyond measure and he was so gifted, wasn't he, with his intellect and his ability to learn languages and teach.

But this is what he says. If I speak in the tongues of languages or the languages of men and angels but have not love, I'm a noisy gong.

[27 : 02] I'm a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, if I have faith that can move mountains but have not love, I am zero.

I am nothing. I am zilch. If I give all that I have, all my possessions, and surrender my body to the flames as a martyr, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Why did Paul write this wonderful chapter in 1 Corinthians 13? Devoted to extolling one single Christian grace. 1 Corinthians 13 has been described as the greatest, strongest, deepest thing he ever wrote.

Now was it written just as a nice reading to have at weddings? That's often how people view it. Let me tell you folks that Paul in fact was giving the Corinthian church the scolding of their lives.

the fruit of the Spirit was all too absent in the church at Corinth. He was exhorting them to grow up into spiritual maturity and be made perfect in love.

[28 : 26] It was a strong rebuke to a loveless church that boasted much in the gifts of the Spirit but had little regard for the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love. The spiritual worth of all gifts is compared with love and there really is no comparison.

What we are gifted in is up to God. You may well be far more gifted than I am. That's I don't worry about that.

Gifts are distributed according to the will of God but love is open to all of us you know. You might not be as gifted as you'd like to be but you can be loving.

That is restricted to no one. Wherever love is absent even in the exercise of gifts they are worth nothing. I didn't say that.

[29 : 37] The Holy Spirit says it. It's love that gives the believer his true value in the kingdom of God and Paul here is speaking of values maintaining in 1 Corinthians 13 that love is greater than anything you can say with the greatest oratory.

Secondly it's greater than anything you're able to do with the most skillful ability. and thirdly it's greater than anything you can give at the greatest personal cost.

All the apostles spoke with one voice in this matter. We base our lives on the apostles' doctrine. 1 Peter 4.8 Peter says above all things love each other.

Above all things. Don't lose that. There's nothing more important. Above all things love each other deeply because love covers a multitude of sins.

Ephesians 5 Paul says be imitators of God as dearly loved children so live a life of love. Luke 8 Luke 4.8 and 9 He who does not love does not know God for God is love.

[30 : 57] 1 John. Yes. So that's the value of love and let's draw to a close. Did it work?

Did the message get home? What was the epilogue of the situation in the Ephesian church? Did it repent? Did they have ears to hear what the spirit is saying?

Well it's Turkey you know it's Ephesus and Pergamum Asia Minor Turkey modern Turkey to my knowledge there's not a vibrant church in Ephesus today there's a there's a ruin it's a spiritual desert I remember in my teens someone a long time ago but it was true at the time that the person who knew Turkey said he couldn't remember meeting more than 10 Christians in the whole of Turkey there are more Christians in Edinburgh than there are in the whole of Turkey Ephesus demonstrates how a church cannot survive on its history I've known many churches in my Christian life 60 years as a Christian 63 new churches that had large congregations amazing reputations souls regularly saved good preaching generously supported missions many of those churches now they're closed they're gone they're forgotten about furniture depositories nightclub one of them the Lord gives a gracious promise if you overcome lovelessness you'll eat of the tree of life with Christ if you don't repent I will remove your lameness and you'll stop shining well we're going to in a little while sing we're going to sing a hymn that was I think he was 16 years of age when he wrote it he was 27 years of age when he died these are the words he penned when he's a young believer my Jesus I love thee I know thou art mine for thee all the pleasures of sin I resign some lovely hymns that remind us of the love of God remember Francis Ridley have a go and her great hymn of consecration take my life take my moments take my days take my feet take my voice take my lips take my silver take my gold take my intellect take my will take my heart and then and then summing it all up take my love my Lord

I pour at thy feet its treasure store take myself and I will be ever only all for thee we're going to sing it now thank you Ian Man the Man God