

Revelation 2: v. 1- 7 “The Loveless Church “Title: When love grows cold

“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ²“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. ⁴ Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ⁶ But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.””

Introduction

When you first get married it is a very exciting time. You want to be together, to please one another and communicate all your problems together.

If you are a Christian, you will want to pray together.

Being in love is a really great feeling.

When I was first married I had quite long hair and one thing I really enjoyed was having my hair washed and dried by Wendy.

However, as time goes on other things can crowd into the relationship.

Children come along with all the problems that involves and if you are not careful your relationship can suffer and your love for one another can grow cold.

It is not that you mean it to happen, but little by little you stop spending time together.

You don’t have those romantic candle lit dinners for two and quite often you don’t make the effort in your appearance like you used to.

What is the answer to a relationship that has grown cold?

The answer is to re-kindle the love flame in your heart.

1. To spend quality time with one another, - once a day.
2. To have that Romantic night away or day drip somewhere.
3. To Communicate freely on any issues.

Quality time with people develops good relationships and in the case of a couple kindles fresh love. Even if you are not married, quality time with your best friend enhances your relationship.

Sometimes our love can grow cold in any relationship and it is not always easy to re kindle that first love, but it certainly will help to try by spending more time together.

In the same way that our love can grow cold in a marriage relationship or a friendship relationship, we can also grow cold in our relationship with God.

We are going to study the passage in Rev. 2: v. 1-7 and see what God is saying here both to the historical situation at the time and to us here today as individuals as we worship at O.I.C.

We need to learn first of all about the city of Ephesus.

P.P. Ephesus - The City

Ephesus was the most important city in the province of Asia. It had a large population, about 350,000 people. (This is the size of small city in Japan)

If you visit Ephesus today you can still see the open air theatre that is described in Acts 19. The theatre could hold 25,000 people and would be almost the size of the Hanshin Tigers Baseball stadium.

Ephesus was a “Free City” which meant that although it came under the Roman Empire, it was self-governing, within limits. No Roman troops were stationed there and the city hosted athletic events which rivalled the Olympic Games.

Ephesus was in an ideal position. It was close to an important harbour and at the junction of four of the most important roads in Asia Minor.

Ephesus was most famous as the centre of worship for the goddess, Diana. Every Spring most of the residents of Ephesus went to the month long festival to worship Diana. There were Temple Prostitutes involved in their worship.

In the middle of all this idolatry, and immoral behaviour, God broke in and planted a small Church.

P.P. Ephesus the Church.

The gospel was introduced to that city by Priscilla and Aquilla.

Acts 18: 18-19

¹⁸ So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila *were* with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. ¹⁹ And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

They were joined by Apollos a good preacher and debater and together they planted a Church.

The great Apostle Paul got involved in the Church in Ephesus during his 3rd missionary journey.

He met a group of Old Testament Saints, followers of John the Baptist and after preaching the gospel to them they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus.

That encounter began Paul’s ministry in Ephesus and he stayed there for 3 yrs.

(Acts 20:31)

Paul also taught the Elders the principles of leadership.

This Church was so strong and outgoing that it made its mark in the rest of the province of Asia. (Acts 19:10)

It is probable at this time that the rest of the 7 Churches in Asia were founded.

The number of conversions posed an economic threat to the pagan craftsmen.

(Acts 19:23 – 41)

By the time that this letter was written 4 decades had passed since the Church began.

The Apostle Paul was gone, together with the first generation of believers converted under his ministry.

It was a new situation in Ephesus and it called for another letter, this time it was not from Paul but it was from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus said 4 things to the Church at Ephesus.

1. A Commendation, 2. A Command, 3. A Concern, 4. A Counsel.

Commendation - v. 2-3.

1. Jesus Commended their work - v. 2

Jesus said “I know your works” the Greek word used here indicates the knowledge of Jesus. It is not an acquired knowledge, like we obtain as humans but a complete and perfect knowledge. In the same way as Jesus knew everything that was going on in the Church in Ephesus, He knows everything that is going on in O.I.C.

We can’t hide anything from Him.

The word used here for labour denotes labour to the point of sweat and exhaustion. They were diligent workers.

There were no spectators in the Church.

There are lots of people in O.I.C. who are really labouring for the Lord.

I appreciate that and the Lord Jesus commends that too.

I love to see Christians not only doing what the Holy Spirit wants them to do but what He empowers them to do.

The Holy Spirit is in the business of putting peculiar people like us into blessed ministries that can change the lives of others.

What not purpose today to move forward in this area and get involved in what the Lord Jesus wants you to do.

I will warn you that it is not easy, its hard work, but as the scripture says, your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

It is clear here in this passage that Jesus commends hard work in the Lord.

However what I will say is that working with Jesus is not a burden.

Jesus says clearly in Matthew 11: v. 30 that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

In other words ,it is easier to serve Jesus than serve yourself or do what you want. Fully surrendering to Jesus and what He wants in our lives is a much easy journey in life.

So Jesus commended the hard work of the members of the Church in Ephesus.

2. Commended their Patience v. 2

Jesus not only commended their work, He also commended their patience.

The word here that represents patience, is a word that is used for difficult circumstances.

It is NOT the word that is used for patience with people, it is a word that indicates that despite their difficult circumstances, they remained faithful to Jesus.

That is a challenge to us here personally is, despite all you are going through remain faithful to Jesus.

3. Commended their discernment v. 2-3.

They were people who like to spiritually discern the people who came into their fellowship.

What I mean is they tested people who came along to their Church.

They did not immediately accept the testimony of people. They checked them out spiritually.

They didn't just accept people who professed to be Christian believers.

It is clear from the text that people came to their fellowship claiming to be Apostles and found them to be false. (Acts 20: 28-31)

Jesus commended them for this action.

You might find this commendation quite strange.

More than once the New Testament insists on the necessity of testing.

1 John 4: v.1-3

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

1 Thessalonians 5: v. 21

²¹ Test all things; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil.

It is not wrong to ask questions of people who wanted to be linked with or to be members of a local church.

In fact it can save a lot of problems in the future.

Also it is not wrong to check out people who profess to have a spiritual gift or a particular calling for ministry in any given area.

If people are genuine they will not mind being checked out.

If they are not genuine they will obviously object.

Many years ago a very bright professional lady came to my Church in London. She displayed a high discipline in the place of prayer. After about 6 months she requested to minister in a particular way. I requested to check out her spiritual gift. She objected strongly and left our Church.

Later I discovered that her life style had dramatically changed and then I knew that that I had made the right decision to check out both her spiritual gift and suitability for ministry.

The Church in Ephesus held to High standards of Holy behaviour.

It is the same principle with discipline in the Church.

It is never easy to discipline people within your fellowship for whatever reason, but it is always necessary & in the end true believers will always thank God for your discipline, not always at the time, but afterwards it will yield spiritual fruit.

The Concern of Jesus -v. 4-5.

1. They left their first Love

Despite all the positive aspects of the Commendation of Jesus, a flaw had been spotted that perhaps was difficult for people to notice.

It is a bit like this with our own children. We have 4 lovely children and we love very much. However nice that they appear to others, they are not perfect, we notice the flaws and have tried to help them.

In the same way, if we are a Christian, we are one of God's children and He sees all the flaws in us

The Flaw in this Church was that they had left their first love.

At one time the Ephesians' Church did have this love, but it wasn't there now, they had lost it.

The Bible doesn't tell us how they lost it, but if the rest of scripture is a guide to us, it would have been a gradual process.

Let us look at some Old Testament references to leaving your first love.

Jer2:2-13

²“Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: “I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown.

³ Israel *was* holiness to the LORD, The firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; Disaster will come upon them,” says the LORD.” ⁴ Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel. ⁵ Thus says the LORD: “What injustice have your fathers found in Me, That they have gone far from Me, Have followed idols, And have become idolaters? ⁶ Neither did they say, ‘Where *is* the LORD, Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, Through a land of

deserts and pits, Through a land of drought and the shadow of death, Through a land that no one crossed And where no one dwelt?’ ⁷ I brought you into a bountiful country, To eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land And made My heritage an abomination. ⁸ The priests did not say, ‘Where *is* the LORD?’ And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me; The prophets prophesied by Baal, And walked after *things that* do not profit. ⁹ “Therefore I will yet bring charges against you,” says the LORD, “And against your children’s children I will bring charges. ¹⁰ For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus and see, Send to Kedar and consider diligently, And see if there has been such a *thing*.

¹¹ Has a nation changed *its* gods, Which *are* not gods? But My people have changed their Glory For *what* does not profit. ¹² Be astonished, O heavens, at this, And be horribly afraid; Be very desolate,” says the LORD.

¹³ “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Ezekiel 16: 8-15

⁸ “When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time *was* the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,” says the Lord GOD. ⁹ “Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. ¹⁰ I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. ¹¹ I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. ¹² And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. ¹³ Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing *was of* fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate *pastry of* fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. ¹⁴ Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it *was* perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,” says the Lord GOD. ¹⁵ “But you trusted in

your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who *would have* it.

It is clear that once we lose our first love for God and Jesus Christ, it results in losing our love for one another and also our love for the lost.

It has been said that you can GIVE WITHOUT LOVING - But you can't LOVE WITHOUT GIVING. You can give money and time to a Christian work without a real love in your heart for God and Jesus Christ, but you can't love God and Jesus in a deep way as a Christian and not give any time or money to Christian work.

God wants our heart and everything else overflows from that.

The battle today is for our heart and affection. If our heart is not seeking Jesus and His will then it will be seeking something else and that is the thing that will draw us away from the love of Jesus in our hearts.

The devil works little by little to draw us away from loving Jesus.

Q. What is the solution if our hearts have grown cold towards Jesus?

Command - v. 5

- a) Remember!!! The great physician Jesus had a prescription to deal with the lost love. The Gr. Word means literally "keep on remembering"
Can you remember when you first became a Christian? How was your love towards Jesus? Can you remember what ministries you have been involved in in the past?
Can you remember a time when you really loved Jesus?
- b) Repent - This means to change our minds about our situation.
It has been said that repentance is the admission that the fault is ours and the feeling of sorrow for it. The hardest thing about repentance is the acceptance of personal responsibility for our failure.
We always want to blame someone else.
Once we accept personally responsibility, then Godly sorrow will follow.
You may have to say "I admit that I am not having regular devotional times with Jesus, reading the Bible and praying. or I admit that the Holy Spirit has been prompting me about something but I have not been listening?"
Repenting means to change our minds about our situation.
- c) Do the first works - What did you do in the early ministry of your Christian life? That is what you need to try and get back to. God is the God of the second chance.

There is a warning here to the Church at Ephesus, if they did not repent, God would remove their lamp stand. This is serious.

Repentance is a much better option than having our witness removed.

Yes, God does close Churches and Missionary Societies if they lose their first love and focus. He gives them plenty of opportunity to repent, but if this does not happen then God fulfils His word.

We must not let this happen here at Osaka International Church.

We must not lose our first love and our purpose of being here.!!

Counsel - v. 7

The letter closes with a great promise. This is a promise to those people who overcome.

There are two pictures presented to us in this verse.

The first picture is the "Tree of Life".

This is part of the story of the garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 2-3.

This was the tree that Adam was forbidden to eat (Gen.2: v 16,17)

This was the tree whose fruit would make Adam like God.

In Jewish thinking this tree was the tree that stood for life.
The book of proverbs clearly teaches this.

Proverbs 3: v. 18 ¹⁸ She *is* a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy *are all* who retain her.

Proverbs 11: v.30, ³⁰ The fruit of the righteous *is a* tree of life,
And he who wins souls *is* wise.

Proverbs 13:v 12. ¹² Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
But *when* the desire comes, *it is* a tree of life.

Although Adam was stopped from eating the tree of life and removed from the garden, God promises us that that if we will overcome, then we will eat from the tree of life. We will receive eternal life from Jesus. He is the great overcomer.

The second picture is “Paradise”

Originally the word paradise was a Persian word which meant pleasure garden. It was a word used to describe a thing of wonderful beauty.

In the first translation of the Bible into Greek, the word paradise was used to describe the garden of Eden. It was also in other parts of the Old Testament to describe beautiful gardens. (Isaiah 1: v.30, Jeremiah 29: v.5, Eccl. 2: v.5)

In Luke 23: v.43 Jesus said to the repentant thief “ today you will be with me in paradise.”

Paradise is certainly a wonderful place, even too beautiful and too wonderful to describe.

The main thing is to make sure that you are going there when you do.

Only Jesus can open the gates of Paradise and let you, so you need to make sure that you are trusting in Him and Him alone for your Salvation.