

**CHRIST Speaks to Churches**  
Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation 1-3

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**CHAPTER TWO**  
**CHRIST SPEAKS TO EPHEBUS**

Some of GOD's people seem to think in their study of the Bible that if a certain book or section of a book is prophetic, the only message they will find there has to do with facts concerning the future. Such is not the case, however, for Paul tells us in II Timothy 3:16: "**All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**" A passage of Scripture then, may be prophetic, but the message concerning the future is not all that is to be found in it.

GOD has so constructed His Word that it carries a practical aspect of truth all the way through in order that His people may be instructed and encouraged, their lives made purer, and their ministry more effective by the eternal, spiritual principles embedded in its pages. The letters to the seven churches found in the second and third chapters in the Book of the Revelation are a case in point. These may be considered from several different viewpoints.

First of all, they were local historical churches in the day when John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote the Book of the Revelation. The conditions described and the admonitions given related to those local situations toward the close of the Apostolic age.

In the second place there is also in these seven letters a survey of church history from apostolic times through to the rapture of the Church.

Thirdly, presented in these letters are standards by which churches may evaluate their true worth in the sight of GOD at any period during this church age.

Fourthly, and this is the area of emphasis which will be given in these studies, there is the personal message from CHRIST to each of GOD's children in the Church today. This includes warnings and exhortations and promises designed to make the child of GOD what he should be, both as to his personal life and to the quality of service he should render.

**"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick**

**out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:1-7).**

The Person who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks is described in Revelation 1:13 as **"one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot."** It is the Lord JESUS CHRIST Himself who first of all tells this church that He knows the quality of their service, and their obedience to the faith. Then He speaks of the one major flaw in their character: **"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."**

This is in reality a very strong statement. If you look closely at your Bible, you will see that *"somewhat"* is printed in italics, meaning that it was not in the Greek language. The emphasis is actually very strong. If He were speaking these words today we would hear them as the voice of many waters or delivered in a voice like thunder. It would be said in love, but it would be said with a firmness and vigor no one could mistake.

### **"Left" not "Lost"**

These in the Ephesian church had **"left"** their first love. They did not lose it. They abandoned it. This was a purposeful leaving of the first love on their part. This love was not lost by them, and they were not seeking it. They left it, and GOD admonished them to go right back to where they left it, for it was there they would find it. Furthermore, He called it the **"first"** love. They had left what should have been the foremost love in their lives.

That love is devotion to CHRIST. This is not merely a show of religion but a heart devotion to the Saviour, a love which has no thought for self but only for Him. This is the love which Paul says in Romans 5:5 **"is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost."** It goes far beyond filial love for which men have a natural capacity. It is not merely human friendship or liking or personal heart emotion. In fact, it is not emotion at all, but something that springs from a sense of value placed on that which one loves.

It is not a selfish desire, but a love that empties itself for the sake of the person loved. GOD so loved the world that He gave Jesus, His beloved Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but should have everlasting life.

This love is illustrated again in Philippians chapter two, beginning with verse five: **"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"** (5-8). This is the love we are speaking of, a love that comes from GOD, a love man cannot produce.

As we have already seen, it is a love that has been shed abroad in our hearts by the HOLY SPIRIT. There is no need for the Christian to ask how he may get that love, for he already has it.

This love, however, needs to be released; and according to I Thessalonians 3:12, the Lord will increase it if we desire more of it.

He will work in and through us to produce this love. As we learn to wait on Him and meditate in His precious Word, this love will grow, and its self-denying qualities will be more in evidence as the days go by. It is a quality of love difficult to analyze but wonderful in its expression, because it is the love that drew salvation's plan. It is a love with singleness of motive, and a love that sees, as only GOD can see, a value in persons who are unlovable by human standards.

**What is CHRIST to you? Merely your Saviour from sin? Is He the One who is preparing a home for you, providing a free ticket to heaven and an insurance policy against the lake of fire? Or is He more than that? Is He your all? Is He your life?**

Think of a home for a moment. What constitutes a home? What does a family mean to a person? What does a wife mean? Is she one who merely cooks and washes the clothes and keeps a tidy house? Or is she more than that? Is she not one who loves and is loved in return? Whether we live in a cottage or a mansion does not matter so much just so there is real love in the home.

What does CHRIST mean to us today? Do we have that strong, firm, intimate love for Him? Or have we left that first love? It is easy to become occupied with past accomplishments, present works, and future plans more than with CHRIST. That is what happened at Ephesus. Service displaced the Son. The works of the Christians were outstanding, and they showed remarkable patience under trial; nevertheless, their program had endangered their s p i r i t u a l power. Their Christian activity displaced their spiritual fellowship. They were very much like Martha who became so occupied with serving JESUS that she forgot the real thing, that of sitting at His feet and learning His truth.

The account is found in the tenth chapter of Luke beginning with verse 38: **"Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her"** (vv. 38-42).

Spiritual pride will displace spiritual life. There has never been a genuine servant of GOD who departed from the faith and has gone into liberalism without first having left his private devotional life and having severed fellowship with the Lord JESUS CHRIST. Christian activity that robs one of personal fellowship, robs that one of usefulness. Thus Christian activity can become a weapon in the hand of Satan. Our service should grow out of our love; only in that way can we avoid this danger.

### **A Test of Love**

Remember our Saviour said to us, **"If ye love me, keep my commandments."** He did not say we ought to keep them, or that we should keep them, but insisted that if we really loved Him we

would keep them.

We show how little love we have for GOD when we would rather listen to what men say about GOD than listen to what GOD has to say about Himself. This was true in Israel's experience. They came to Moses and said to him in so many words, "Don't let God speak to us. You speak to us, Moses." They reasoned that if GOD spoke to them either they would have to do as He commanded or something would happen to them. But if it were a man who spoke to them, they could soon quiet their conscience with regard to what he said.

There is no escaping the fact that we show how we love Him by our respect or disrespect for what He says. Love was a compelling thing to Paul. It constrained him.

Our Saviour said, **"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."** Does such a strong Scripture passage mean anything to us? If we love Him, it will. We will search the Scriptures to see what is meant by such an unusual statement. We will find as we search that the word **"hate"** does not mean "to be angry with," but that we love our relatives less than we love CHRIST. Without Him being in first place in our hearts, we cannot be His disciples.

Many of us who talk about being His disciples and servants do not follow His teaching. It is doubtful if we even listen to Him to hear what He has to say. But when we do not, it is a sign that we do not love Him.

What hinders us from hearing? In many cases today the reason lies in the fact that we are taken up with so many things. We are more concerned about how we are going to live, what kind of car we are going to drive, where we are going to go for our recreation periods, or what we are going to choose for our meals, rather than putting CHRIST first. It is possible to become so devoted to things, and to service, and even to our convictions that we do not hear what GOD has to say to us.

We need to come back to where Samuel was when, as a boy, he said, **"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."**

### **A Striking Comparison**

There is a striking comparison between the church at Thessalonica and the church at Ephesus.

In chapter one of I Thessalonians Paul wrote that he knew of their **"work of faith"** and **"labour of love"** and **"patience of hope."** But John in writing to this church in Ephesus says of them, **"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience."** What a difference! **When the first love is gone all that is left is works, but not works of faith.** When the first love is gone labor becomes toil or drudgery. When the first love is gone there is patience but no real hope; it is just a matter of endurance. The externalities of work and labor and patience are still there, but the faith which produces works is missing. Love which motivates labor is missing so that it becomes hard toil. Hope which produces patience is gone and mere endurance remains. We ought to read the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians asking ourselves this question: "Do I still love Jesus?" The

outward appearance may say one thing, but inwardly there may be a lack of real spiritual life. There are some who have a zeal for orthodoxy which is very unorthodox. For proof of this read carefully the third chapter of Romans.

Others again may contend for the faith in such a way as to conflict with the life of faith. There may be a zeal for denunciation of sin and for the proclamation of the truth, but it is a zeal that is not motivated by love. When love is missing, it is easy for hate to take over. Remember how Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, loved GOD and GOD's people, Israel. We would do well to seek to pattern our love after his.

We read in I John 2:15 that we are to "**love not the world.**" Here again the word for love carries the meaning of putting a high value on something.

In this case we are told on what we are not to place a high value. We are not to love the things of the world. When we fully obey this Scripture, matters around us will not upset us. If we place CHRIST first, there is nothing around us that will destroy the inward serenity of our lives. If we are inclined to get upset over things or people, this standard will prove to be a good test for us. When we think people do not understand us, or if we are in the ministry and we think Christians do not appreciate our sermons, it is very possible that we have put too high a value on the wrong things instead of on CHRIST.

### **The Remedy**

Not only did our Lord tell the church at Ephesus what their basic spiritual problem was, but He also showed them how to remedy it. They had left their first love, now how could they return to it? The solution is given in these words:

**"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works"** (v. 5). The remedy presented here is threefold, and we must be careful not to let this word from GOD make no more impression on us than water running off a duck's back, for then we will be faced with real trouble indeed.

First of all, we are called on to "**remember.**"

The prodigal son had to come to the end of himself before he remembered. It was when he was sitting in the hog yard eating with the hogs, cold possibly, and ill-clad with no spot in that country to call home, he came to himself and remembered his father's house. And we know from the parable that his father was still waiting for him. The prodigal son could have remembered sooner, but he did not. Let us not wait so long that He has to bring us completely to the end of ourselves before we remember.

The next word to note is the word "**repent.**"

It means to turn back first in heart and then in purpose. We are to turn back to the love we have left. We left it somewhere, the question is where? The prodigal had left his first love at home. He went to the far country loving himself. It may take us a little time to check on our own spiritual condition, but if we are careful before GOD and honestly search our hearts, He will show us

where we left that first love. Then there follows the about face. The prodigal not only said, "**I will arise and go,**" but he got up and went home. Repentance is not something in words only, it is not merely a matter of intention - it includes action. It is not only, "**I will,**" but, "**I do.**"

We might well ask ourselves the question, Why do I serve GOD today? Some may answer, "I have been elected to my church to perform a certain service for the Lord." Another may say, "I have a certain gift and that gift is useful in the Lord's service." So far as GOD is concerned, these are not basic reasons for our serving Him. They may be incidentals along the way, but there is only one real reason for true service to GOD, one that He endorses. It is our love for Him and for a lost world, a love for souls that GOD loved and gave His Son for.

The third word is suggested by the phrase, "**And do the first works.**"

This means that something has to be repeated. The first works are the result of the first love. This love will be repeated in our hearts only as we diligently seek it. And there is only one place to find it - right here in His own love letters to us - the Bible, and by spiritual communication with Him on the basis of what He has revealed to us.

Israel's experience in connection with the manna in the wilderness illustrates this truth for us most clearly. The Israelites had to go out each morning before the sun came up and melted the manna, and gather enough for one day. In the case of the Israelites, of course, this precious food was for their physical bodies, but it has a spiritual or typical meaning for us. Each one had to gather for himself.

That is the way it is in the spiritual realm. We will not be restored to our first love by listening to better sermons, going to a better church, or determining to do better in the future. We will find it only as we get alone with GOD and confess to Him that we have left that love some place, but we want it restored again. We want to place CHRIST first in our hearts.

Be honest with GOD in this. There is nothing we can hide from Him in any case, but it is necessary for us to be honest and open before Him as we confess these matters. Then we can put ourselves at His disposal so that once again He will be able to love through us. After all, this love with which we are dealing is not a man-made love. It is not natural to man at all. It is not a love of sentiment or feeling or of mere human compassion in any form. It far transcends human love.

### **A Warning**

Following the statement of the remedy is this warning: "**Else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.**"

The coming of the Lord spoken here is not His second coming. What is meant is a personal, supervised judgment, one not left to others, but something the Lord will have to do Himself to bring the believer back to his original walk with Him.

The method He uses is to remove the lampstand. Now this lampstand is not a candle but a lamp holder. Each local church was to be a light revealer. Each congregation held up the light, which

is JESUS CHRIST. So the warning is that CHRIST is going to remove that which holds up the light unless there is repentance. He will not allow those to be light bearers who are not themselves bearing a good testimony to Him.

The HOLY SPIRIT has been sent to us in order that through us He might present CHRIST to the world. It is only the power and the life of the Spirit within us that enables us to lift up CHRIST, the Light. What is signified here, then, is that the Spirit of GOD will leave the unrepentant believers to a powerless witness for CHRIST. He will not leave them so far as salvation is concerned, but their ability to present CHRIST as He really is will be gone. The power for witnessing will be removed.

CHRIST sent the HOLY SPIRIT, and the HOLY SPIRIT endued certain men with spiritual gifts. Then these gifted men were given to the church by CHRIST. Through the Spirit, these Spirit-filled men in the church witness to the living CHRIST and in this sense are the lampstand. When the lampstand is removed, the organization as such may continue, but it will be without a life-giving testimony.

The order of that removal is seen here also.

First, the operation of the Spirit through that particular church will cease. This will also apply to the individuals in the church. The gifted men GOD has given to the church, men who remain Spirit-filled, will be removed. The organization, as we have said, will remain, but their power for witnessing will be gone. Much activity may be in evidence but no real convicting message.

At first this removal will be unnoticed by most of the persons involved. And with the active work of the HOLY SPIRIT absent from their midst the ability to discern spiritual things will also be gone. There will be no real knowledge of the fact that spiritual power has left them.

In the sight of GOD, there will be no more an assembly of believers in that place, simply a group of religious people. With the love of CHRIST gone, the light will be gone. What remains will be merely sounding brass, empty testimony, mere religion, activity of no value.

We can apply this to ourselves and to the churches with which we are affiliated. We can look around and see Christian schools and even mission societies and see how they stand in relation to this matter. Is the real witness gone? Is there a social gospel in place of the real gospel? Is it all activity with no power? Thank GOD for those in whom the true light is still shining!

This is a serious matter. We must hearken to the voice of GOD. This warning should cause us to work for the Lord in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). What a tragedy it would be to have GOD remove the lampstand from any of us, either as individuals or with regard to the organizations through which we serve!

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