

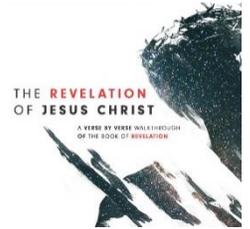
Title: Revelation, Part 5: The *Careless Church*

Speaker: Corey Brown

Passage: Rev. 2.1-7

Big idea: To Regain our first love, we need to reorient our hearts with 4 practices.

Memory verse of the month: Rev. 2:4-5 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.



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My name is Corey Brown and I am the Pastor of Worship and Young Adults.

We are in this fantastic study of Revelation, and after last week as Pastor Charles prepared us for 7 weeks of letters to specific churches, I get to start us off with the letter to the church that I believe most resembles the church in Canada today.

While all of the churches give us both encouragements and warnings for how we ought to be as local churches, this specific letter to the church at Ephesus during the first century, so this letter cannot mean to us what it did not mean for them. And this letter is crucial to understanding what it means to live in light of God's grace toward us. I've actually stolen the title for the message today from Warren Wiersbe - a theologian and biblical commentator.

Let's start by Reading Rev 2:1-7. What a letter, brief, but packed, and so significant.

Rev 2: 1 **"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. <sup>2</sup>I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false. <sup>3</sup>You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup>Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup>Consider how far you have fallen! 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. <sup>6</sup>But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup>Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**

We're going to walk through this passage one verse at a time.

**<sup>1</sup>"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**

The church of Ephesus.. what do we know about Ephesus?

- Established by Paul during Paul's first missionary journey.
- Pastored by Paul for two years & then Timothy Paul's son in the faith and apprentice, and John this same Apostle who writes Revelation late in the first century.
- And the Letter to the Ephesians by Paul is one of the absolute masterworks of the New Testament as it pertains to Gospel Orthodoxy, and Gospel Practice. The Letter to Ephesus as written about 62 AD - approximately 10 years after it was initially planted by Paul during his first missionary Journey.

It was a vibrant church in a city that was so Pagan Religion focused that the Gospel of Jesus Christ completely enveloped the Believers who came to Christ as Saviour and submitted to him as Lord.

Ephesus in this time was the city that held to a very strong dedication to the worship of the roman goddess Diana also known as Artemis, these things included pagan sexual acts, orgies, and drunkenness as acts of worship, as well as the use of witchcraft and the occult and certainly the influence of demonic activity.

Not only was Ephesus a place of deep pagan worship - it was also the capital city of the Roman empire in their Asia region (now very western turkey) and it was highly influenced to be the pinnacle in the East of what it looked like to be Roman - to hold to the worship of the Emperor as a god.

When Paul got to Ephesus and encouraged the disciples he met there, he had to take them from ground zero - and help them to understand the importance of the Gospel. So 10 years on, after establishing the Church in Ephesus, and after the time which Paul spent in Ephesus, approximately 2 years during his 2nd missionary journey, he writes a Letter, from prison in Rome to the church that is now functioning in Ephesus to solidify them in Gospel Doctrine, and Gospel Life/Culture.

### **the one who holds the seven stars, and the one who walks among the seven lampstands**

We know from last week who these stars are likely to represent - the pastors, the elders, the leaders of these churches, and the lampstands were likely the churches themselves - Ephesus, Smyrna Pergamum, and so on.

But what happens if we miss this? What if we miss who it is that is speaking here - and we relegate the biblical statement to just a mere man - after all this was John's pen to paper. But no - it is the Lord Jesus Christ himself speaking to John, telling John what to write. This is the voice of King Jesus - telling the people at the church in Ephesus, at the time of writing, 96 AD, what it meant to be faithful to him.

### **<sup>2</sup>I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.**

I know your works - well these are the works prepared in advance for them - Eph 2:10, and your perseverance which is what the people we commended for by Paul in the letter to the Ephesians in 62AD.

Jesus knows that they do not tolerate - or better - embrace evil people as their own.

Jesus knows they test those who call themselves apostles and teachers, they test them against the word, and the Gospel to ensure that they hold themselves firm against false teachers.

One word that is important here is the word labour. It really means toiling until exhaustion, and endurance, meaning, continually doing so - they were effectively in a constant state of toiling, doing good things, things that Jesus says he knows.

This word for Jesus' knowing – it isn't just an issue of his acknowledgement of their efforts, but he is aware of, and is pleased with - most of the letters in the New Testament, are specifically about continuing in the work of the Gospel with perseverance and also to be on watch and on guard for false teachers, testing and proving them.

### **<sup>3</sup>You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary.**

Jesus tells them that he knows of their perseverance and so what we know of Ephesus here is that they have faithfully served Jesus', his mission and church for about 40 years, from AD 53, to now likely 96 AD. And so, everything seems to be a gleaming success - Ephesus, in the area in which they were, pursuing the mission, remaining doctrinally faithful, and doing the things they are supposed to do, it seems as if this is the perfect church.

### **<sup>4</sup>Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.**

But... but.... but... Lord, we've done all the things you've asked us to do, we've kept false teachers at bay, we've worked hard labouring, working, and doing all the things we thought you wanted us to do. We've kept ourselves religiously pure.

One Commentator says this: What we do for the Lord is important, but so is why we do it! If we are sure to be committed to right beliefs, and right behaviors but for the wrong reasons, or worse, to do them while being double-minded, we fool ourselves of our devotion to Jesus, and are marked by hypocrisy.

Let's read this quote from *The Bible Exposition Commentary Chapter Two: Christ and the Churches, Part 1 (Revelation 2)*.

*"Though they had retained purity of doctrine and life and had maintained a high level of service, they were lacking in deep devotion to Christ. How the church today needs to heed this same warning, that orthodoxy and service are not enough. Christ wants believers' hearts as well as their hands and heads."*

Just think of it:

It is possible to serve, sacrifice, and suffer "for My name's sake" and yet not really love Jesus Christ! The Ephesian believers were so busy maintaining their separation that they were neglecting adoration. Labor is no substitute for love; neither is purity a substitute for passion. The church must have both if it is to please Him. Jesus to the world we need to be different, set apart, focused, labouring for the Lord, and pure. BUT - and oh this is so much more significant, The Reason for out doing these things.

If it is not because of our Great love of Jesus - it is just doing things. Actions fitting for reclaiming our First Love, in Tim Kellers Excellent book - *The Meaning of Marriage*, he lays out what it actually looks like to be a person who is continually being filled with the Holy Spirit.

*"This does not happen overnight, of course. It takes years of reflection. It requires disciplined prayer, Bible study and reading, innumerable conversations with friends, and dynamic corporate worship" Tim Keller*

**<sup>5</sup> Consider how far you have fallen! 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.**

Look at the Grace that Jesus extends to them. He says – if you want to make your way back - repent, believe, change, and he's actually not even asking them to do something different, he's asking them to do things they've already done - go back, and do what you did at first.

This is a warning of Grace. This is Jesus telling them - if you do this, it will go well for you If you love me first, and do not neglect the God of your salvation, you will have greater joy and be found faithful. Because the result of continuing in this - busy-work, program driven business, for the sake of doing, and not out of loving Jesus - he tells us what he will do.

Jesus will remove the lampstand. What does that mean?

Because we know the lampstand is the churches - the 7 churches that Jesus is talking about - he is not speaking of them losing their salvation, but their influence.

Jesus is basically saying here - if you don't go back to pure gospel centered Christianity, I will remove your church, I will remove your influence, I will not allow a church to be loveless of its husband and to go on saying that they are mine.

So much could be said here, but we don't have the time.

Then Jesus gives them a little encouragement he says - at least you aren't as bad as these Nicolaitans.

**<sup>6</sup> But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.**

While we don't know exactly what the Nicolaitans were doing, we do know that their practices were hated by Jesus. Apparently, these were a group of people who would try and infiltrate the church to have them accommodate both the worship of Jesus, and the worship of the emperor and other false gods.

The idea is called syncretism - the idea that mixing these practices was no issue at all - and was actually more pure doctrine. See the issues here are not so much about what we are doing but why we are doing it. It must be out of love for God, and his kingdom.

The issue for the Ephesians was not that their actions were wrong, they didn't need to change their actions, they needed to change their affections They needed to focus on what they loved - namely - Jesus himself We Don't need more

activities to help our Love for Jesus - we need a better view of Jesus - we need a better belief about Jesus, we need to be floored with who He is again.

We need to preach the Gospel.

- Created to be in relationship.
- We sinned and shattered this relationship.
- Jesus comes to live in perfect relationship to God so that he can offer us his life, died to defeat sin, satan and hell, by taking the wrath of God against our sin upon himself, out of love for his people, was buried to pay the penalty of what sin has bought us, and was risen on the third day to prove his innocence, and to defeat Death itself, and offer us life eternal)

Want a Grandeur view of Jesus.

Here is a passage to get you started:

[Colossians 1:15–20 CSB](#) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and by him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Church - we need to re-orient our hearts around some basics, in a better way.

**Big idea: To Regain our first love, we need to reorient our hearts with 4 practices.**

[1. We lose our love for Christ when the Gospel becomes an offer we accepted, and not our source of life.](#)

This is beyond just an understanding of the gospel as a message for salvation at a one-time event. No, to truly understand how we were saved, how we are being saved, and how we will ultimately be saved (from death, sin, hell, and ourselves) we need to shift our thinking from the gospel as a message only to be preached to those needing to be “converted” but to our own hearts, every... single... day.

[Colossians 1:23 CSB](#) 23 if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and are not shifted away from the hope of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a servant of it.

Notice that word that Paul uses there, if you remain - this is so specific, you can't move from this.

Tim Keller wrote this simple tweet while writing his commentary on Galatians “We never move on from the Gospel to something more. We never can and we never need to.”

[Galatians 1:6–7 CSB](#) I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

Here is the problem - we are so quick to assume the benefits of the Gospel, but miss out on the beauty of the Gospel, it is the only thing that has the power to save. See - the first love of any of us, is to be so completely engulfed in not only the message, or the words of the Gospel, but the gratitude and worship that flows from the realities of the Gospel. We can never move on from the Gospel. when you do, religion enters in, and we miss out on the call to the relationship that Christ has bought for us. We miss out on the lifegiving reality that Jesus has done for us, what we could never do, so that we can have the life, we could never live.

## 2. We lose our Passion for Christ when worship becomes a religious activity and not a Weapon of Faith.

This flows directly from the realities of seeing the Gospel as our source of Life - when we truly walk in the truth of the Gospel each and every day, we actually worship God first - we put him first, we solidify the truth as central, and then the Enemy cannot derail us, because we are Worshipping Christ for the Most important thing in our lives And what it is that we are worshipping Christ for - his great... deep... all consuming... perfect... sacrificial love for us.

[Psalm 63:3 CSB My lips will glorify you because your faithful love is better than life.](#)

See when we have this perspective of worship, lifelong, corporate, constant worship, this is the weapon that we use to defeat the enemy - the truth of God's word on our lips, overflowing out of our hearts as we set Jesus where he rightfully should be, central on the throne.

[Psalm 150:4 CSB Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and flute.](#)

[1 Peter 1:3–5 NIV84 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade— kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.](#)

Look at this weapon, your inheritance, or the rights of the Gospel, are applied to you through faith, your love of Christ, and that is what shields you in God's power - until these end events of Revelation are completed.

## 3. We lose our Desire for Christ when Prayer becomes an obligation and not an experience of His presence.

Action can often lead to affection. The importance of this cannot be overlooked.

When you start into the practices of the Bible, in particular prayer, regular, dedicated solitary written or spoken (out loud), prayer, leads to an affection for prayer, and a greater desire for more prayer, for more of God's presence. Prayer should be not an obligatory experience or perfunctory actions just done so that we can check it off of our list of "religious activities, but the very desperate wait on God to meet with us in the fulness of his presence. When Paul talks about being "caught up in the third heaven", and as Pastor Charles spoke about last Sunday, in prayer we can become so deeply "entranced" (and I use that word very carefully), that we experience God's presence when we are committed not only to telling him what we want, but when we sit in wait, expectant of his presence among us.

But here is the reality of this situation - when our prayers become lifeless, we lose our desire to have Christ near us, we have lost our desire.

Remember those early days (if you can), or the most stimulating and expressional times of prayer in your life - where everything was about Jesus, when you wanted to seek him, you wanted to see him, you wanted to experience his nearness to you.

THIS IS the whole Purpose of Prayer, to invite God into our space, in submission and desire to see how Jesus is changing us, and will change us.

Do not let prayer become a perfunctory experience, change up the way you prayer - write it out, pray through the psalms, say to God what he has said to you - and watch how Gods presence in the person of Jesus through the work of his holy spirit. This is a struggle for many people - including myself.

## 4. We lose our Awe of Christ when the Bible becomes a textbook and not the Word of God.

When was the last time you sat reading the Bible are were completely floored at the work of Christ in the pages of Scripture.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 NIV All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Psalms 119:105 NIV Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

Hebrews 4:12 NIV For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Matthew 4:4 NIV Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Response to this is Colossians 3:16 NIV.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

It is only as we love Christ fervently that we can serve Him faithfully. Our love for Him must be pure (Eph. 6:24).  
*Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Vol. 2, p. 572). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.*

**<sup>7</sup>Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**

Look at how this passage we've been looking at ends.

If you've heard God speaking to your heart today, listen, repent, and change. If you have the spiritual ears to hear, obey the command of Christ, change your affections, because Jesus has done for us all that needs to be done in the Gospel the "to the ones who conquer the right to live eternally in the paradise of God." is not a special group of Christians that make the mark - that completely misses the point of the Gospel - that it can't be earned, it can't be done by us no - this conquering, this right to eat, this being in the paradise of God - this is the expectation for every believer, this is the sure Hope of Jesus' gospel.

What saves you is not the amount of your faith - but the object of your faith the Lord Jesus himself.