



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Revelation 2:1-7

November 1, 2009
English Standard Version

“The Church of Loveless Orthodoxy”

This is the 6th sermon in the series on The Book of Revelation entitled,
“The King’s Triumphant Return.”

Revelation 2:1-7

“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. ² ‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. ⁶ Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ 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.’”

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us Your Word and making us Your people. As we start to look at the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, will You please help us. We know that there’s still a lot that we need to learn from what You say to these churches so that it can have full impact in our church. We know we’re a lot more like these churches than we want to admit. We struggle with the same sins, the same temptations, the same idols, the same issues, the same problems, the same lack of faith. God, we know that soft words produce hard people and hard words produce soft people. We want to be people who are soft and kind and loving with each other ... so bring the hard words. So Lord, teach us now ... and teach us well. Help us to

remember those things we did at first and repent because we don't love You and we don't love each other as we should. And through it all, help us to meet You in this book ... and reveal to us the Lord Jesus in His glory as we see Him in these words. Do this for each of us, this morning, in Jesus' good name, and for His great glory, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *The Church of Loudoun County*¹

As some of you know, I wrote my dissertation on "*The Preaching Practices of Evangelical Pastors in the New Churches of Loudoun County, Virginia.*" And along the way I learned a few things about the churches in our area.

Let me tell you a little of what I learned.

Loudoun County churches face a variety of challenges. The environment here is anything but friendly to a vibrant Christian faith. Many of our churches are located in self-sufficient, comfortable communities, and thus are tempted to pursue what Francis Schaeffer called a lifestyle of "**personal peace and affluence.**" These churches have learned to rely on their financial resources for security.

Other churches have suffered the **stain** of sexual scandal.

Still others have been **stigmatized** by the community for being aloof and intolerant of other viewpoints. After all, the people and politicians of Loudoun County have found it expedient to cultivate the favor of the power-brokers in the capital area, learning to show their loyalty to the system through a civil religion unencumbered by personal convictions.

Some churches are experts in doctrinal **precision**, but amid the theological wars have lost the capacity to care for hurting people. Still other churches are **unclear** about where to draw the line that defines the essentials of the Gospel as they adapt their message to the culture ... in order to fit in with non-Christians. We have some churches that are **all image and no reality**, lacking spiritual vitality despite an impressive array of activities. And there are a few struggling to hold on in the midst of a community that ignores or despises them.

These Loudoun County churches sound stereotypically 21st Century Northern Virginian, don't they? In fact, this is a sketch of the situation, strengths, and weaknesses of the seven churches in Asia Minor in the 1st Century, to which Jesus addressed His Revelation through the Apostle John.

Seven churches, **different** in so many ways from one another. Seven churches, **similar** in so many ways to the churches in which we live and serve Jesus **today**. What **one thing** do all these churches need to **fortify** them against the enemy's assaults, to make them **savvy** to his strategies, and to make them **loyal** to God and **compassionate** to their oppressors?

They need to hear Jesus' voice.

His voice comforts our weak and wounded hearts, diagnoses our diseases, shatters our dreams of an easy life in the here and now, and calls us forward to the final victory only found in His coming, looking forward to that day where we'll dwell in the New Jerusalem with Him forever. His voice addresses us today in His letters to the 7 churches, for each letter is what the Spirit says to all the churches.

Before we dive in too far in our text, let's take a quick refresher on what's going on here in The Book of Revelation. We won't really understand these letters if we forget the ...

CONTEXT: *Symbols and Sevens*²

¹ The Introduction is adapted from *Triumph of the Lamb* by Dr. Dennis Johnson, pages 65-67.

² The Context, Exposition of the text, and Application are adapted from *Triumph of the Lamb* by Dr.

Jesus Christ is the Lord of His church. He walks among the seven lampstands and holds the seven Stars in His hand. That same Jesus now comes to us with words of commendation and rebuke found in the seven letters addressed to the churches of Asia Minor. But before we go any farther, it's important to put these letters in their proper context in order to interpret them correctly.

Although a number of commentators believe these letters represent seven consecutive periods in church history — it's much better to see these churches as historical Christian congregations facing horrible persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire in addition to struggling with heretical teaching arising from within. Throughout the Book of Revelation, the number seven represents completeness and perfection. That means these letters and situations are representative of the whole of Christ's church throughout the ages.

And it's important to keep in mind the unique literary style of the book as we work our way through John's vision. Each of these visions serves as a different camera angle as the redemptive drama unfolds. Each vision focuses upon a particular aspect of the struggle between Christ and Satan during the last days, which is the entire period of time between the first and second coming of Christ.

Throughout these visions, John uses apocalyptic language in which symbols serve as word pictures of the cosmic struggle between Jesus Christ and His already defeated, but ever defiant foe, the devil. John uses symbols such as lampstands, stars and keys, as well as certain numbers, such as "seven," to point us to the realities which these symbols represent.

And in order to understand the meaning of these symbols we must look to the Old Testament from where they're drawn. In addition, we need to understand the 1st Century Roman Empire, which serves as the historical backdrop against which the struggles these symbols portray is played out. For example, in these letters to the seven churches, John will refer to the historical circumstances faced by the Christians there. But John will use these to point us beyond the 1st Century to the struggles we face today in our own age. The Christ of the seven churches of Asia Minor is the same Christ of the 21st Century.

And He still walks among the lampstands. The lampstands are symbolic of the work of God's Holy Spirit in the churches, and who reminds us of the church's function to be light-bearers to a fallen world. Where the lampstand is present, Jesus is present. And where Jesus is present, the Holy Spirit is active; bringing God's light to a world which lives in darkness.

So, with these things in mind, let's turn to our text and Christ's letter to ...

v. 1: THE CHURCH

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write."

First of all, determining who "*the angel of the church*" was is difficult to interpret. There are several options that would take too much time to go into, so we're going to stick with the most obvious one, and I think, the correct one. And that's that "*the angel of the church*" is **actually an angel**. Hard to believe, I know. Revelation refers to angels over 60 times and it

Dennis Johnson, pages 65-73; the sermon "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Part 3)*" by Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, 9/7/08; the sermon "*To The Church in Ephesus*" by Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, Christ Reformed Church, Anaheim, CA, 2002, www.christreformed.org; *Discipleship on the Edge: An Expository Journey through The Book of Revelation* by Dr. Darrell Johnson, pages 50-62; the sermon "*The Dying of the Light*" by Dr. Robert Rayburn, Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA, 9/7/08; *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* by Dr. George Caird, pages 30-31; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Book of Revelation* by Dr. Gregory Beale, pages 228-236.

never refers to a person, but always to a spiritual being who serves God ... in other words, an angel. Most likely these angels are the **heavenly guardians of the church** — which, if you think about it, is a wonderful thought. In any case, as is obvious in how each letter closes, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,*” that it is the church, the congregation that is being addressed here.

[Please Put Up The Map]

If you look at this map of Asia Minor, you can see that these churches form a semi-circle, lying along the road which a messenger would have used to deliver John’s letter to each of them. And the first church that would receive this letter was Ephesus. It was natural to begin with the church in Ephesus because Ephesus was the chief city and its church was the chief church. Ephesus was the first seaport of Asia Minor and home to the Temple to Artemis [called Diana by the Romans], one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Forty years before, in Acts 18, we see that Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos all ministered there. And as we know from Acts 19-20, the Apostle Paul had spent three years building that church. That ministry came to an end after certain Jews tried to exorcise a demon in the name of Jesus, only to have the demon-possessed man turn on them and beat them to a pulp. As a result of this incident, there were so many occultists in the area who came to faith in Jesus that it wasn’t long before those making a living selling religious trinkets associated with the worship of Artemis began to see their formerly thriving businesses dry up. And as the account goes, the local merchants and worshipers of Artemis formed a riotous mob and tried to get to Paul to harm and possibly even kill him. So Paul left.

Later Paul placed Timothy there and he had an extensive ministry guarding the gospel in that place. Paul wrote them a letter during his imprisonment in Rome, as well as two letters to Timothy. Then late in the first century the Apostle John lived in Ephesus and made it the center of his ministry. Most likely, His Gospel and Epistles were sent to this church first. No doubt there were many in the congregation that received this letter who knew John personally, some of them probably knew him very well, and perhaps a number who could remember the ministry of Paul among them. The Church at Ephesus obviously had the most successful pastoral search committee in the history of Christianity!

So Ephesus was a religious center, a banking center, a trade center, and an occult center. If there was any city in which the church needed spiritual discernment, it was Ephesus. And they will be commended by Christ for having just that discernment. **[You Can Turn Off The Map Now, Thanks]**

So this is the church receiving the letter, written by John. But it was dictated to him, John was not ...

v. 1: THE SPEAKER

The letter begins with a reminder of the authority of the One speaking to them through the pen of John. We read, “*The words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.*”

Each of the seven letters follows a pattern; there is an obvious symmetry to them. In each case the letter begins with an address to the angel of the church that is then followed by some identification of the Lord Jesus drawn from the vision of the exalted Christ in chapter one. Here He is described as the one “*who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.*”

Jesus is the Lord of the church and He walks among His congregations with a word of

blessing and a word of warning. He's aware of their circumstances. He knows what they've had to endure. He knows the struggles they face. He also knows their sins and their failures.

And He tells them that He knows all this when He gives them ...

v. 2-3, 6: A COMMENDATION

In each letter in the next place comes a statement of what the Lord knows about that church's spiritual condition. And so Jesus says, "*I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.*"³ *I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not grown weary. ...*⁶ *Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*"

Christ, who is the first and chief pastor of the church, has an intimate knowledge of His churches. He knows their strengths and He knows their weaknesses. The church in Ephesus wasn't the only one that we know of that had been troubled by imposters: men who laid claim to some position of authority in the church in order to gain a following. The Ephesians had put the teaching and the way of life of these strangers to the test and they compared both to that of the true apostles and when these men failed the test they closed their ears to them.

The Ephesians have faithfully persevered. They haven't tolerated wicked men — probably referring to their removal of those who embraced the pagan immorality surrounding them. They tested all those who claimed to be apostles and found their claims and their teaching to be false. After carefully examining these apostolic pretenders, the Ephesians exposed their evil ways, prevented them from getting a forum in the church, and then removed them from the church.

One particular group of people they were able to defend the church against were the Nicolaitans. Jesus says, "*You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*" Later on, we'll see that this group is compared to two Old Testament figures, Balaam and Jezebel, both of whom sought to lure Israel away from the true God by tempting the people to adapt pagan practices which were subtle forms of idolatry and immorality. For those of you still having kids, don't name them Balaam, Jezebel, or Judas. Those aren't good names. And since the name *Nicolaitans* means "conquering the people" it's not clear if this is the formal name of the group or the description placed on them by Jesus. It's not a good name. And Jesus commends them for hating what this group does, which He also hates.

Are there groups out there today whom we ought to hate? Yes ... but let's be clear about this. The text doesn't say we're to hate **the people** of this group, but to "*hate **the works of the Nicolaitans.***" We're to hate what they teach, we're to hate what they're trying to do, we're to hate how they're misleading people, we're to hate their idolatry, we're to hate their immorality, we're to hate everything they're trying to accomplish ... we're just not told to hate them.

Now today, there are lots of false religions and false teachers out there.

We have **other religions** ... like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc ... and we're not supposed to accommodate their teaching. It's false.

We have **other spiritualities**, some of which are based in these other religions, some of which are just plain paganism ... like the whole New Age movement, witches, and various occult groups.

We have Christian **cult** groups, false churches that have twisted the Scriptures to create unbiblical doctrines that lead people astray ... like the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, and the Unitarians.

We have **false** teachers within Christianity, teachers who preach a health and wealth gospel, teachers who preach salvation by works, teachers who preach faith without repentance, lots of false teachers out there.

And let's not forget that we have lots of people within the church who aren't really true believers in Christ. And in their day-to-day life they don't look or act any different from the rest of the culture. Yes, they attend church, they own Bibles, they try to behave, they give money, blah, blah, blah. They profess to believe in God but they have no relationship with Jesus. And our churches, particularly in America, are full of them ... Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, and even Presbyterian ... **false believers** whom Jesus Himself doesn't recognize. And if you read Matthew 25 you can see for yourself what He has to say to them.

Anyway, Jesus commends the Ephesian church for their faithfulness, their doctrine, their purity, and their perseverance. But they have a problem in this hard-working, tireless, enduring, discerning, truth-loving, lie-hating congregation ... and so Jesus brings ...

v. 4: A REBUKE

Perhaps the most intriguing question in our text today is that posed by the statement in verse 4 that the church in Ephesus had abandoned its first love. *"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first."*

What is the **love** that the Ephesian Christians had **lost**?

Some argue that what is meant is that the Ephesian Christians had lost their love for Christ. **That** was their first love. They were still doing the right things but were no longer motivated by devotion to Jesus. They compare the statement here to **Jeremiah 2:2** where the Lord says to Israel, *"Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord, "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown."*

Others, however, argue that what was lost in Ephesus was brotherly love. In their zeal for doctrinal purity — a very good thing in and of itself and a zeal they are commended for twice in this letter — they had allowed a critical spirit to grow among them. This congregation has had to defend the faith over and over against all comers. And yet these doctrinal battles seem to have produced resentment and bitterness and a judgmental attitude within the church. They've become overly critical, not only questioning doctrine, but motive. They've become contentious and negative. This is what **reformed people** are often accused of ... and while it's not entirely true, it's not entirely false either. There are PCA churches that could be accurately described as judgmental and contentious. We see that problem often addressed elsewhere in the New Testament and have seen it enough ourselves to know how reasonable an interpretation that is.

In the finest commentary available on Revelation, the monumental study by Dr. Gregory Beale, he concludes that all seven letters are really about the same thing and set before us one mark of an ideal church, which is bearing witness to Christ in the pagan world around us. Therefore he argues that verse 4 refers neither to brotherly love nor to the love of Christ but to the love of the lost world and specifically to sharing the gospel and bearing witness to others which these believers loved to do when first they became followers of Christ.

He points out that the identification of Christ at the beginning of the letter is as the one who walks among the **lampstands** and that the threat, should they fail to repent, is that he would remove their **lampstand**. He is speaking to these Christians, in other words, as light-bearers. He points out that the entire thought harkens back to the Lord's remark about a lamp being put on a stand so as to give light to the house and about Christians being the light of the world.

So what's the correct interpretation? I'm not sure, nor do I think it makes much difference as all of those interpretations naturally come together in any Christian life. There is no true love of others that doesn't originate in the love of God and anyone whose heart is full of God's love will love both those **inside** the church **and** bring Christ to those **outside** the church.

Jesus said, **Luke 10:27**, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*" I think that pretty well sums it up. That's what Jesus wants. That what He wants you to do, that's what He wants me to do, that's what He wants the church to do. Whatever was the specific reference, what happened in Ephesus Jesus said would happen often, **Matthew 24:12**, "*And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.*" But Jesus, as the King and Head of the church, is also the wise counselor and shepherd of their souls. And so He doesn't leave them with a rebuke, but offers them wise ...

v. 5: COUNSEL AND WARNING

"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

Jesus is exhorting this church, pleading with this congregation, to go back and do those things they did at first. When you first become a believer in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, what were some of things you did? I don't know about all of you, but for a lot of you, you've shared that you couldn't get enough of the Scripture. You devoured your Bible, reading it over and over. Some of you couldn't wait to fellowship with other believers, pray with other believers, worship with other believers. And for a lot of you, you couldn't stop talking about Jesus. He changed your life! And now Jesus says, "*Remember therefore from where you have fallen.*" Those things aren't happening like they used to, and because of that, our love isn't all that noticeable anymore. We can critique the culture and argue the fine points of theology, but sometimes we come across as a bunch of unloving jerks. And apparently Jesus thinks that an unloving Christian is an oxymoron.

Jesus takes this loss of love so seriously, He says they have fallen so far, that He threatens drastic action — the removal of His blessing, the removal of His presence, **the removal of His lampstand** from this congregation. Remember, the lampstand is a symbol of His presence and the power of the Holy Spirit actively enabling this church to be a light to the unbelieving world around it. **And He's threatening to turn off the light!**

We'll get back to this in the application, so let's jump to the end and see ...

v. 7: THE PROMISE

Finally, each letter ends with a promise, "*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.*"

To some of the churches a specific promise is given, but to all of them a general promise of reward is given to those who overcome. John doesn't define what He means by "**conquers.**" But as we go through the book it will become clear that overcoming and conquering means remaining faithful to Christ and His cause in defiance of the opposition and the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. And the reward to be given mentioned at the end of each of the seven letters is eternal life, described in some familiar image.

We will hear of the tree of life in Paradise again at the end of the book in the description of heaven given in chapter 22. There's an amazing irony here that shouldn't be lost to us. The temple of Artemis was built upon the site of an ancient tree-shrine. In fact, the symbol of

Artemis was the date-palm tree which was reproduced on the many of the religious trinkets sold in the city. The irony is that Jesus excels Artemis and will crush all such idols of pagan worship. In this first letter the painful memory of paradise lost in Genesis 3 is transformed into hope, as the promise points ahead to the tree of life in the New Jerusalem, bearing a different crop each month and healing the nation through its leaves.

Jesus' word of rebuke and His warning about the removal of His lampstand is not the final word to the church. He reminds them that it's not too late and that repentance is still possible. This church can still go back and do what it did at the beginning and not come under Christ's judgment. The command to repent is followed by the promise of the Gospel. He promises access to a far better tree, the tree of life which yields endless delight and eternal life.

But before we finish, we have to ask ...

APPLICATION: *What Would He Say To Us?*

In any case, given the distinct character of each of these churches we cannot help but wonder what Jesus might say to us if He wrote to the angel of Potomac Hills Presbyterian Church in Leesburg, Virginia? What do you think He would say? Would He commend us for certain aspects of our life and work as a congregation? If so for what would we be commended? Would He find something to rebuke? If so, what would He rebuke? After all, it's not as if these churches were imperfect in every way. The criticism that's contained in this letter concerns more than simple imperfection, the routine issues of every Christian life and every Christian church. It has to do with something in the life of the church so serious that, left **unaddressed** and **unrepented** of, would threaten to bring the Lord's judgment down upon it. How would the Lord Jesus Christ encourage **US** and precisely how would He call on **US** to repent? We can't help but wonder.

But you see ... that's the great significance of the fact that at the end of each letter all the readers are summoned to hear what the Holy Spirit says **to the churches**. We may not be exactly as any of these seven churches were when John wrote to them, but somewhere in the midst of all of them we'll find ourselves and the word of the exalted Christ to us as a church and a people. The Lord Christ might just as well have written these seven letters to us who form this congregation. And In fact, He did! There are unmistakable lessons for us here!

- ***First, the Lord commends hard work.***

We're not reminded often enough that a godly Christian life is hard work. Perhaps there's a fear that any emphasis on hard work, on any work at all might undermine the gospel message of salvation by grace, not as something to be earned. Paul's always saying that it is not by works but by faith that we receive and obtain peace with God and entrance into eternal life. But here the very same word "**work**" is used twice. The Lord commends this people for their **works** in verse 2, and in verse 5, urges them to once again do the **works** they did at first.

The reality is, almost everything in the Christian life is hard work if we intend to do it well. "***I know your works and your toil...***" is what Jesus literally said to the Ephesian church. What works, what toil? Well works toward God such as worship, prayer, stewardship, overcoming sin. Works toward your fellow Christians such as forgiveness, acts of kindness and generosity, practical assistance and care, sympathy, the bearing of burdens, admonishment when necessary and so on. And works toward the world, such as the love of enemies, making Christ known by word and deed, acts of charity, the telling of the truth, and so on.

Everything we're commanded to do in the law of God, every way we're to live so as to make the teaching about God our Savior attractive **requires hard work**. There isn't an easy

thing in that whole list. We are, Paul said, to be **eager** to do what is good. Surely we all ought to aspire to be described as a church and as a people that work very hard in the work of the Lord.

It is a good way to examine ourselves. We live in such a comfortable world with so many entertaining diversions. And we think that our jobs require enough work as it is. We want our Christian life, at least, to come naturally to us. But it doesn't and it never has. It's the hardest, most demanding work of all. So put the question to yourself. Am I working hard at my calling as a Christian? Am I putting consistent effort into doing what ought to be done – whether in my heart or with my life – that anyone can see that's a characteristic feature of my Christian life? For these Christians hard work was characteristic and the Lord commended them for it. He admired and loved that about them.

- ***Second, the Lord commends fidelity to the truth.***

This is what the Ephesian church is commended for not once, but twice: first in regard to the so-called apostles and second in regard to the Nicolaitans.

The Apostle Paul had told the Ephesians elders years before in **Acts 20:28-31**, “*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.*”

These believers and their elders and their pastors had taken that warning to heart. Men would come among them with claims of spiritual authority and insight and the Ephesian believers would apply the tests of orthodox teaching and faithful living and send packing anyone who didn't measure up. They got a reputation for being discerning Christians who could spot false teaching a mile away.

And our world is no different from the world faced by the Ephesian church. There are always folk urging us to be less rigid, to make less of our doctrine, to be more tolerant of other views and other ways of life. There are evangelicals nowadays who are urging such compromises. **They** would **never** say in public that they **hate** the views of the Nicolaitans, as Jesus says He did. But the Ephesians knew better and the Lord commended them for their loyalty to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. They knew what the gospel was, they knew what the Christian life was and they were determined to be loyal to both. And Jesus commends them for it.

- ***Finally, the Lord warns us to repent.***

These believers were to be commended for much. So important was what they did, so crucial to a faithful Christian testimony and to the welfare of the church that the Lord threatens the church in Pergamum with His wrath precisely for failing to do what the Ephesians did so well. Loyalty to Christ is not achieved by reaching a certain ratio of virtue to vice. It's not a numerical calculation as if hard work and fidelity to the truth make up for a lack of love. This is a very subtle temptation to which all of us are subject to from time to time and all churches all the time. We know we're failing to honor the Lord in some area of life, but we take comfort in the fact that we do better in some other area. We'd never admit this, even to ourselves, but it's as if we're counting up our merits and demerits.

But the Lord puts a shuddering stop to this comparing our strengths to our weaknesses and taking comfort from the strengths and setting them over against our weaknesses. He puts a

sudden stop to such thinking in this first letter. He commends the Ephesians. They were doing well in this way and in that, but, nevertheless, **He threatens to remove their lampstand if they don't recover a life of love.** This was a Christian church. It knew what it was supposed to do and it was doing it. Even the hardest work was being done. But devotion to the Lord, the love of others, a heart for the lost, these things were slipping from their grasp.

The main point of every one of these letters is obtaining eternal life. Revelation is all about the ultimate destiny of human beings. This is the great issue. And this letter makes the point emphatically: one does not get to eat from the tree of life who will not **work hard** at the calling of a Christian, who will not remain **faithful to the truth** as it has been revealed by Christ through His apostles, and who will not live **a life of love.**

Are we deficient in love? **Of course we are.** And the way to make up that deficiency, the way to rekindle that love, as the Lord explicitly tells us, “*repent, and do the works you did at first.*” There’s the challenge.

We have to get back to the Bible, reading it over and over. We have to get back to regular fellowship with other believers, praying often with other believers, worship that doesn’t just go through the motions. And talking about Jesus as the One who changed your life! And that will bring back the love.

I have many hopes for all of you. I want you to live happy lives. I want you enjoy your marriages and your families. I want you to have good jobs and to find yourself able to pay your way through this world and adequately provide for your loved ones. But more than this, I hope that you’ll be faithful witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ and that no one will ever doubt where you stand and to whom you’ve committed your life. I hope that hard work for the sake of Jesus and His church will be characteristic of your life. And I hope that yours will be a life of love, devoted to both God and man. And finally I want you to eat from the tree of life and to that end I hope and pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit you will overcome every obstacle that stands between you and God.

That’s a tall order. Only the King can make it happen.

But the Good News is ... **The King is coming!**

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I’ll close.

Heavenly Father, thank You for this revelation, that it unveils to us our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray, Lord, that you will help us to take seriously what is written here and let these words change our lives. Lord Jesus, I don’t want to be known as the pastor of a church filled with theologically correct, unloving jerks. Please don’t let that happen! May Your Holy Spirit have His way with us right now! Help us to remember those things we did at first and repent because we don’t love You and we don’t love each other as we should. We ask that You would do this ... in the Name of the One who walks among the lampstands, Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

This message has been lightly edited and formatted for the web page. No attempt has been made to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template. There may be slight differences with the audio version. Should there be any questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any error to be with the original speaker and should contact him directly. For full copyright,

reproduction and permissions information, please visit the PHPC Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement at www.PotomacHills.com.

1 John 3:16-18

“By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”