

Westboro Baptist Church

November 2, 2014

Several weeks ago, I said that I would endeavor to preach on the seven churches in Revelation two and three, the Lord willing. So, I start that today.

Rev. 2:1 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;

2 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:

3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

5 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.

6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 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.



These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. If your Bible shows the words of Christ in Red, then all of Revelation 2 and 3 are in red. Christ is speaking these words to the Apostle John after his death and resurrection, from heaven and presumably on His throne of judgment (Psalm 9:7). Christ speaks to the spiritual state of the seven churches of Asia. That is all Christ cares about. Forget everything else.

The Lord Jesus Christ lets us look behind the curtain of what is important to him. We learn "what good looks like" in a concrete and real way.

There are two distinct parts to the book of Revelation, the first three chapters, and everything else. Here is how Seiss frames these first three chapters: *Wonderful doings among the potencies of this world were about to take place. Seals were to be opened...the sun be darkened...mountains and islands moved from their places... battles were to be fought, in heaven and in earth and vials of wrath emptied...But in advance of all, and above all, the mind of the great Judge was on His little companies of believers, and to them He gave his first attention.*

Beloved, Christ walks with and amongst His churches. He is always with us, while we are with him (and keeping his commandments). *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom. 8:38-39). Christ has little interest in nations, kingdoms, and monarchs. His interest is on His loved ones. No one knows His churches like He does. His eyes are a flame of fire. They are penetrating, discerning and are perpetually on His church. He knows their labor, sufferings, patience and sins. He sees His churches as they really are and their true condition, because he is always with them. He knows them better than they know themselves. Beloved, he is a candid and careful observer. He is the “faithful and true witness” (Rev. 3:14, 19:11). He is a jealous God so He is going to accurately report exactly what their state is. He sees her beauties, even when they cannot see them. And, he sees her pot marks. His love is not blind, and he will not endure bad behavior. *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten* (Rev. 3:19).



Temple of Artemis/Diana of the Ephesians

The city of Ephesus was established by the Greeks 1,200 years before John. It was a metropolis with more than a quarter of a million people. It was the capital of the Roman province of Asia and was a major seaport, trading and banking center.

Ephesus was and is world famous for its temple of Artemis (a/k/a Diana of the Ephesians). This temple was a big deal. It was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, right up there with the pyramids of Egypt and the hanging gardens of

Babylon. It was no small feat of engineering for its day and it was made nearly entirely of marble. The city of Ephesus was given over to this pagan religion and worship to this whore. Artemis was the Greek Goddess of hunting, fruitfulness and childbirth (hence all of her breasts). Over the years Artemis fused with Diana of Roman mythology fame and they became one. She was known as the “mother of the earth” and today they call her “Mother Nature.” Yes, the genesis of Mother Nature was this pagan god and her false religious system. Paul preached against this pagan god in Acts 19. You will remember it because Demetrius the silversmith stirred up the whole city against Paul. Acts 19:25-29 *Sirs, ye know that by this craft we*



Diana of the Ephesians

have our wealth... So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, [for two hours] saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesian. It was the Vatican of its day, in terms of religious architecture and worldwide religious prominence. Paul spent time there and wrought special miracles there (Acts 19:11) and fought with beasts at Ephesus (I Cor. 15:32). *Martyrs Mirror* suggests that Timothy was the preacher at Ephesus for 15 years and that he and Philemon were stoned to death there. You know that Paul wrote a letter to the Ephesians that is in the New Testament. The Church at Ephesus was one of the beacons of the New Testament. Yet, by the time Christ is talking to John in Revelation 2 a mere 40 years has transpired and now the church at Ephesus is backslidden and in jeopardy of losing its candlestick!

This Church did not have doctrinal problems like the others in Revelation 2 and 3. Their doctrines were good, but they were missing part of the “business model” of a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ (that is a passionate and lively zeal for Christ and each other). It is not enough to just have good doctrine. Beloved, be keenly aware in your own mind of not changing Christ’s “business model” for lack of a better term. People change Christ’s business model all the time and we cannot. If a church says “God loves everyone” (everyone is going to heaven) and “Jesus came for peace on earth,” when Christ says “wide is the gate and broad is the way to destruction and many go thereat” (Mat. 7:13) and “*I come not for peace on earth but a sword,*” (Mat. 10:34) than you have changed His business model. Beware! Christ said this is the rock that I build my church upon (talking to Peter – Mt. 16:18). Peter says 1 Peter 4:1 *the righteous are scarcely saved.* That is not

God loves everyone. If your church has a good reputation in the community and is respected, and there is quiet calmness there and families stay in the Church for years and there is no controversy there, you have changed Christ's business model. Christ said the world is going to hate you, reproach you and call you evil (Luke 6:22). Paul says we are to be bold (Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27-29; 18:26; 19:8). The example of New Testament preachers are that they set the cities in an uproar everywhere they went (Acts 17:5, Acts 19:29). Christ said I come to set division - *For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three* (Luke 12:52); and *a man's foes shall be they of his own household* (Mat. 10:36). If you have peace in this earth you have changed the business model of Christ Jesus and you can expect destruction.

Was this church doing some right things? Yes! The ratio was eight good things to one bad, but the one bad thing was a deal breaker. Christ was pleased by their "works," that is their outward facing work to the world including their frequent preaching, their losing their lives and not saving them, and their outward struggles with those that would oppose them in that filthy idolatrous city. They too were fighting with the beasts at Ephesus it would seem. Spurgeon preached on this topic to his church on more than one occasion and he was discomfited over their lack of work. He says *"I know your works... Alas! Some of you cannot get as far as that. Jesus Christ can bear no witness to your works... for you have not done any. You are Christians by profession, but you are not Christians in practice... He [Christ] might say, "I know your loitering; I know your laziness; I know your shirking of the work; I know your boasting of what little you do."* Spurgeon says the church at Ephesus labored for many years; it had put out all its energies – not in some spasmodic effort, but in a continual strain, and unabated zeal for the glory of God. He says *I tremble to think how few out of this congregation could win such praise as this.* Beloved, I thankfully am not in discomfort right now regarding that matter in this church.

Christ was pleased with their labor which seems to be their inward facing activities such as exercise of church discipline and administration of the ordinances. Christ was pleased that they were patiently waiting on him, keeping his commandments and enduring reproaches, persecutions and afflictions. *Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus* (Rev. 14:12).

He was pleased they could not bear them that are evil. These churches all around us, not only bear the evil, they bear them up that do the evil by encouraging them in their evil.

The people at the church at Ephesus had an inward abhorrence and detestation for those that did evil. They could not bear communion with them and boldly and publically admonished them. The church at Ephesus could not tolerate evil people for an instant. And, they were outspoken about it, like buying billboards and websites and such. Everyone in that city and in all of Asia knew where that church stood on the evil that was being done in their day.

Beloved, that church tried Satan's forces that came to that church for the purpose of infiltrating it to spread their leprosy of filth to the saints. They tested and tried them and found them liars. How many have tried to creep in to this church unawares (Jude 4)? Those people constantly examined each person closely, observing their behavior, listening carefully to their words and evaluating and testing them to see if they were really authentic sheep or wolves in disguise.

Christ was pleased they had borne their load of denying themselves and taking up their cross daily (Luke 9:23). Think Pilgrim, in Pilgrim's Progress bearing that burden on his back that was so heavy it almost cast him to the ground.

Christ was pleased they had labored in and for His name and in His vineyard and had not fainted under the heavy weight of the cross of afflictions and persecutions. That they were not like those seeds of the sower that *when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away* (Mat. 13:6).

And lastly, *But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I (Christ) also hate*. It is almost like an "ace in the hole." According to Christ you better hate some things beloved! I do not care if it is labeled "hate speech" or not, you better hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans! That word "hate" in that verse means to pursue with hatred. You better pursue with hatred the deeds of the Nicolaitans. It's not an academic proposition, it is actual hatred. The words of Christ there mean an active hatred, right now (not in the past but currently) *which I also hate*. The church at Pergamos did not hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans and they were in trouble for it. The word "*deeds*" there is an expansive concept. It means *any product whatever, anything accomplished by hand, art, industry, or mind; an enterprise*. We are supposed to hate everything and anything remotely to do with the Nicolaitans. No good thing can come out of that mess, you are supposed to hate everything to do with the Nicolaitans.

A number of expositors say that the sin of the Nicolaitans, which Christ hated, was sexual uncleanness including fornication and adultery. It is a very broad concept. When “fornication” is mentioned in the New Testament it is the word “porneia” which means: *1) illicit sexual intercourse, 1a) adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc., 1b) sexual intercourse with close relatives; #Le 18:6-23, 1c) sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman; #Mr 10:11,12, 2) metaphorically the worship of idols 2a) of the defilement of idolatry, as incurred by eating the sacrifices offered to idols.* Beloved, God hates fags, and this verse proves it. Remember also that the island of Lesbos is right there, in close proximity to those seven Churches, which was and is world famous for lesbianism which is where we get that word from.

Another group of expositors understand the sin of the Nicolaitans to be derived by the definition of the work itself. “Niko” means *to conquer* and “laos” which means *people*. That is, *one who conquers or subdues the people*; the sin of lording it over God’s people. *Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock* (1Pet. 5:3).

Beloved, I believe the *deeds* (plural) of the Nicolaitans were both sexual uncleanness, including spiritual idolatry and lording it over the congregation of God. The Catholic monstrosity is an example how these things lay nicely over each other. They have a unique marriage of lording it over the sheep, where they say the Pope is Christ’s vicar on earth and everything he says and does is as God. God forbid! And, you have to kiss his ring and the ring of the bishops and cardinals. God forbid! Also, the laity is not encouraged to read the Word of God, but to only rely on the priests for religious instruction. They also have great spiritual idolatry with all of their vast array of idols of every form (rosary beads, Mariolatry, their cross fetish, and worshipping their so called Saints and so much more). They also have great sexual immorality in that institution with “priests rape boys,” rampant homosexuality in their clergy, the granting of “annulments” even after 20 years of marriage - that allow parishioners to divorce and remarry. God forbid! Beloved, to hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans is a sign of life in a church and to not hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans is a sign of declination in a church. If a church tolerates the deeds of the Nicolaitans they are close to forfeiting their rights to the candlestick.

One of the crop-headed writers for the Christian Post wrote once to the effect: *you see, God doesn’t hate people, because it said Christ just hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans and*

not them. If that is the only thing you see there, you are in trouble. We must hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans!

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. The word “somewhat” is interpolated. It gives a connotation that it is not that bad. A better translation is **this**. *Nevertheless I have **this** against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*

What was the “first love” that they had left? Some say it was their love for Christ and some say it was their love for one another. Beloved, there is no doubt in my mind that it was both. Look at how Paul opens the book of Ephesians - 1:1;15 *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus... 15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints.* When the church at Ephesus was started, Paul, who was scattered abroad, heard two things about them: 1) their great faith and love in Christ and 2) their great love and affection for each other and for all the saints of God. Their passion, warmth and love for Christ and his people had given way to a lifeless pursuit of orthodoxy, a hapless exercise of religion and a “going through the motions.” The Lord Jesus Christ is not interested in a loveless marriage. Beloved that is not like the *house of Stephanas that have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints* (1 Cor. 16:15). In 1 Cor. 13:2 Paul says that without charity (love) he is nothing. When that Church was formed they were all of one accord and one heart toward Christ and each other. But the ravages of time and the pursuit of worldly things will dim your love to Christ and one another. Listen to what Christ warns of: *And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold* (Mt. 24:10-12).

Contentions and divisions and pride had developed between the members which weakened their love and made it grow cold for and toward one another and for Christ. It was eating that church up from the inside out, which is just what Paul warned the church at Corinth about (1 Cor. 11:18). And remember, what ye do unto the least of these of God’s elect you do unto Christ (Mat. 25:35-46). They had “love decay” and “love slothfulness” in their midst. It happens here a little and there a little. Their love was in a state of decline. Do not forget Satan’s role in this war. Satan has his devices to destroy the saints, just like Balaam had his device to entrap and ensnare the Israelites by sexual

and spiritual fornication. One great device that Satan uses to destroy the saints is to manipulate and play them off against each other. First, to be cold to one another, then to divide, then to be bitter and jealous of one another, then to bite and devour one another (Gal. 5:15). Thomas Brooks says: *Our own woeful experiences are too great a proof of this.* We must not be as the Israelites striving with one another before Moses.

Beloved, we must continue to draw close to one another and look for daily opportunities to love one another. And, we are directed to do so much the more as the day of the Lord approaches. *And let us consider one another* (our tempers, outward condition, physical state and all as having an equal right to Christ's blood and glory), *to provoke unto love* (brotherly love, affection, good will, benevolence) *and to good works* (works that are kindly, tender and encouraging to one another and works which support the truth of God and his glory in the earth in preaching, showing faith to God, praying and giving thanks): *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another* (exhort: comfort, instruction, admonish, entreat, beseech, beg, encourage, strengthen - the thought is that it is done in a "nurturing" manner) *and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching* (Heb. 10:24-25). ...AND SO MUCH MORE AS YE SEE THE DAY APPROACHING. And their last works to be more than the first (Rev. 2:19).

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-13). Remember beloved we are instructed to greet one another with an holy kiss – a kiss of love, encouragement and outward showing of our affection to one another, to remind us how much we love each other.

Ro 16:16 *Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.*

1Co 16:20 *All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss.*

2Co 13:12 *Greet one another with an holy kiss.*

1Th 5:26 *Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.*

In other countries you see this a lot as a custom. Not so much here in the U.S. and particularly with Ebola! But it is the sentiment that is important. It is a mutual and outward showing of love, such as when we hug one another.

Yes, the church at Ephesus, still opposed doctrinal error, but, is that enough? Christ says No! Their love was not forsaken completely, but it was not fervent anymore. Remember, the Lord cast His love upon her and married her when she was beggarly, so it seems monstrously disloyal for her to lose interest in Him. Is He less fair than He was? Is he less of a Savior than he was? Is He less kind and tender than He used to be? Is His grievous torture and sacrifice for “His love” any less than it was when we first believed? When we are first saved we are willing to do anything for the love of Christ. It is *a treasure hid in a field and we go and selleth all that we have and buy that field* (Mat. 13:44). It is *a pearl of great price where we will go and sell all that we have to get it* (Mat. 13:46). That is the fervor we must always have. We must never grow thankless for the love of Christ. We must always be thankful for that which we have! *Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name* (Ps. 100:4). *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened* (Rom. 1:21). *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful* (Col. 3:15).

It would seem to be a very sad thing for a husband to realize that his wife no longer fervently loved him, after he had suffered greatly for her, and the only thing he could look forward to is a love that would grow colder and colder. It grieves the Bridegroom when “His love” is not madly and deeply in love and devoted to Him. If it’s not madly and deeply (for Him and for your fellow elect) it does not count. If Christ gave His life for His bride isn’t He entitled to that? We must always examine ourselves to make sure we have a fervent love for our savior and look for the opportunity to bow down and throw our crown to Him (Rev. 4:10).

I love you all. Amen.