

**Love for the Lord
Revelation 2:2-4**

June 24, 2018

- 2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false.
- 3 I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary.
- 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Like many other aspects of Revelation the Scripture for today may seem a little strange to us. We have several compliments and a criticism. Have you even been complimented and then challenged or criticized? Have you ever been praised and then rebuked? Or maybe received some criticism sandwiched between complements? This has probably happened to you sometime in your lifetime.

In Revelation there is a formula, a basic pattern to the letter. It is addressed to an angel in the name of city. Followed by some form of imagery of Christ. Then a complement to that particular church. Then there is a problem about them that is addressed. There is also a consequence for them if they fail to repent and a blessing if they do repent.

Our Scripture today is to the angel of the church in Ephesus. The imagery of Christ is these are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand who walks among the seven golden lamp stands. People often try to interpret this but get confused within the imagery. The point is that this is imagery of Christ and that's all we need to know. I intentionally omitted this verse from the Scripture reading today in order to reduce the chance of some people getting lost in wondering about the meaning. What is important is that this is the divine word of Christ. It is not the word of John, not the word of the angel, but the word of Christ.

The complements start off with I know your works and your toil. Now, this is a good compliment, the Lord acknowledging your hard work is something to be proud of. Then there is another compliment of having patient endurance. This is a Christian virtue. We all need to have patient endurance. The Lord keeps adding on complements. You cannot tolerate evildoers. This is another good point. It is good to make a stand against evil and it is not always easy to do. Another complement is that they tested false apostles. Personally I think the best test to questionable teaching is to use the Bible to compare the claims that people make. Those that do not abide by the scriptures are false teachers. And the final complement is that they have endured patiently and have not grown weary. This is steadfast faithfulness which is necessary for Christian faith. So, with a whole bunch of very good compliments, how can there be anything wrong? Well, there is one complaint. Notice the Lord says "I have this against you. You have abandoned the love you had at first." I want to make sure we understand the significance of this. There is criticism from the Lord to a church that is doing a lot of good. I counted five complements. I think they are doing well, and I am sure they thought that they were doing well too, and yet the Lord has something against them. Personally, I don't want the Lord to have anything against me. My goal is to be in the Lord's favor and If I'm going to miss the mark I want to miss it in the Lord's favor.

The complaint is you have abandoned the love you had at first. So, they are not as dedicated as they once were. What's wrong with that? Many people fall into this category. Many churches are in this category, in fact, way too many. I think that is because it is just so much

easier to lapse than it is to build up. There are many examples of those that have fallen away. Too many! Take your pick of all the excuses, I have heard them all. But they are all excuses and they all come from the lapsed. They don't realize and they don't care that they compound the problem instead of fixing it. Just one example that I have heard more than once is the teaching ministry. A person is not happy with the teaching ministry because there is no Sunday evening or Wednesday evening Bible study. My solution is to start it. If you see a gap that exists in ministry, and there is always a gap, you need to fill the gap. But instead of solving this unmet need you let this need become your obstacle. The Lord is calling you to fill that need. Instead, you fail to take action on a need that is important to you and the Lord. So, the complaint to the church that they are not as dedicated as they once were is a very serious complaint.

This is a hard lesson. The church in Ephesus has done good. It has worked hard for the Lord and they are patient and endure. They stand up against evil which we all know is hard to do. They reject false apostles and have not grown weary. But they have lost their passion. The result of this is that Christ threatens to blot their community out of existence! In its contemporary perspective this is a very hard lesson. Too many churches fall into this category. Probably most churches today are in this category. They are not as dedicated as they once were. I encourage you to read the Bible and ask how does this apply to me? How does this apply to my church? To our ministry? Then take action as an agent of reformation and fill in the existing gaps of ministry. Too many people have the attitude that I come to church when I feel like it, or I am spiritual but not religious, or I don't like structured religion. Too many people prefer to treat Sunday as a day of vacation without realizing or acknowledging the Sabbath significance.

Imagine that by some miracle you get to see Jesus here today. He is alive and well and right here in the church. The most famous person ever, in the history of the world is standing right here. Imagine our Lord and Savior, the Son of God, is going to be right here. And you have the once in a lifetime chance to see him, hear him, and be with him. What would you do? The answer is you would be here. There is no way you would miss the chance to see Jesus. You would drop everything else because this is the most important thing in your life. The church would be packed and people would be lined up early to get front row seats. People would be pressing all around; there would be a huge crowd. This is the most important thing in your life.

Now here is the deal. If Jesus is the most important thing in your life you would not miss the opportunity to worship and praise God. There is no way that you would miss it. There is no way that you would miss Jesus. You see, it is not anything in the church, or about the church, that causes people to be absent. What causes absenteeism is that there is some barrier to their faith. The barrier serves as an excuse such as the teaching ministry, decorations, or lack of contact. It is the responsibility of the individual to overcome the barriers to their faith.

Those that are missing are not as dedicated as they once were because the barrier serves as a wedge between them and their relationship with the Lord. They are in a broken relationship with the Lord. But you are a recipient of God's grace. You are here today because you have received God's grace and you appreciate it to the point that it is expressed through acts of worship. Our response to God's grace is thankfulness. Let us live our lives so that the love of Christ is seen in us. The Lord calls us to care for the needs of others. We are united together as one family - God's family. So, let's share together the love of Christ with those around us.