

A LAPSE OF LOVE

Rev. 2:1-7

Ephesus was on main route from Rome to East. A populous and magnificent city. Two architectural features adorned it--Temple of Diana and Theatre.

A wealthy, cultured, corrupt community.

Church at Ephesus occupies a prominent place in N. T.

Account of its planting and progress in Acts.

Jews from there were present at Pentecost.

Paul wanted to preach there in early stages of second journey.

Made a short visit at close of that journey. He went into synagogue and spoke on the One theme.

Made favorable impression; promises to return.

Left Aquila and Priscilla there.

Apollos arrived; preached; 12 were baptized; then he left.

On third journey Paul came; preached three months in synagogue.

Gather disciples in school of Tyrannus and preached.

Remained nearly three years because of opposition and opportunities.

Later Timothy came and gave his best days there.

Paul wrote them a letter. His last lines were to Timothy--the pastor.

John, the beloved, spent his last days there.

Apollos prepared, Paul planted, Timothy cultivated, John watered, and GOD gave the increase.

In early days this church was effective because in it:--

- a. Repentance was preached and practiced.
- b. Faith in Christ was professed in public and appointed way.
- c. Members were endued with power of Holy Spirit.
- d. The preaching was of the right sort.
(a) Bold (b) Faithful (c) Reasoning (d) Persuasive.
- e. Line of demarcation drawn between church and world.
- f. Missionary spirit.
- g. Backsliders were reclaimed.
- h. Sinners were saved.

As time passed various changes came. A generation, or thirty-five (35) years later, Christ dictated our scripture lesson to John and sent it to Ephesus. In this message we note:--

I. Christ's Commendation.

He always praises the praiseworthy. Great to have such commendation. Happy those who deserve it. He commended them for:--

1. Enthusiasm toward achievement. Vs. 2a.

"I know thy works." Nothing escapes His notice-- neither good nor bad. Refers to actual service. Active, alert, and aggressive. Working church operating on regions of depravity, darkness, etc. He does not like to see a church standing still. Jesus did not commend their desires or purposes, but their achievements. Natural for Christian to work as for the sun to shine. Christian wants to do something for Jesus.

2. Steadfastness in service. Vs. 2b

"I know thy toil." Toil means hard work and vigorous action; strong effort and continuance of it. It means to labor unto weariness. Work for Christ with all might.

3. Patience in trial. vs. 2c.

"And thy patience." Power to endure and not to faint. Persistence in toil that produces work. Long-suffering in waiting for germination of seed and in endurance of fiery trials. Toiled on when had trying circumstances. This grace is always needed.

4. Intolerance of evil. vs. 2d.

"And how thou canst not bear them which are evil." Gave no place to evil. Accepted no apology for it. Could not smile upon moral wrong nor condone impurity. Guarded against intrusion of unholy and impure. Evil apologized for in our day. Some say times changed. Yes, but God hasn't changed, nor standard of right hasn't changed, nor attitude of true Christian toward evil hasn't.

5. Zeal for truth. vs. 2e.

"And thou hast tried them who say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them false." Judicious in selection of officials and teachers. Careful about what they listened to. Refused to tolerate false teachers. Men came professing to be called to preach. Tested and found to be false in their pretensions.

6. Faithfulness to duty. vs. 3.

"And thou hast steadfastness and didst bear for My name's sake, and hast not grown weary." Their fidelity had not been under easy circumstances. Persecution raged, but they maintained their works. Duty transformed into privilege. Achieved under impulse of and in power of unswerving fidelity.

7. Hostility to error. vs. 6.

"But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." Nicolaitans made provision for the lusts of the flesh. Their heresy perhaps was "conduct is immaterial if faith is right." "Grace is sufficient for salvation, and it doesn't matter much how one lives in this life." Is there anything wrong with this church? Her members were enthusiastic for achievement, steadfast in service, patient in trial, intolerant of evil, zealous for truth, faithful to duty, and hostile to error. But there was something wrong. We turn to:--

II. Christ's Complaint.

"But I have against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love."
Their first love was the love of espousal. Its elements were simplicity and purity. It was the abandonment of all for a love that had abandoned all. Christ says in effect, "there is much of excellency in you, but I miss the emotion, enthusiasm, and energy of your first love." "You used to be earnest, obedient and happy in My ways and did a lot of work but you have left your first love." This complaint needs to be repeated in every church today. Work, toil and patience are all evident. Never were you busier, but where is thy first love?

1. What was our first love?

- (1) A burning love of deep devotion. Loved God, His Word, His House, His People.
- (2) A happy love of open faith. Believed in God and people.
- (3) A Bible-reading and praying love. Used to read Bible and pray daily.
- (4) A working love. Wanted to devote life, influence and property to His cause.

2. Where have we lost it?

- (1) In the realm of business.
- (2) In company with worldly people.
- (3) In acts of thoughtlessness.
- (4) In neglecting communion with Christ.

3. What are the evidences that we have left our first love? How can we tell when love grows cold?

- (1) Less interest in spiritual things.
- (2) Less attention to private devotions.
- (3) Less serious views of sin.
- (4) Less concern about personal sins.
- (5) Lack of attendance on public worship.
- (6) Lack of interest in missionary work.
- (7) Lack of interest in the salvation of others.

4. What comes of leaving our first love?

- (1) It dishonors God. He desires our love most.
- (2) It distresses His church which has relied upon us.
- (3) It deprived us of happiness.

III. Christ's Counsel.

"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."

1. Remember.

This urges a recall of our earlier condition. He urges a comparison and a contrast of present and past estates.

2. Repent.

Turn back to attitude of simplicity and purity. Abandon everything for your first love.

3. Reproduce.

"Do the first works."

Reproduce love and works of former days. Look forward with pleasure to meetings for prayer and praise.

Our love for Him, each other, and the lost should shine in dark places of sin, and attract others to Him.