

Letters from God
Keep Jesus First
Revelation 2:1-7

May 16, 2010

Dr. Steve Horn

Introduction to the Text: Today, we are embarking on a new message series called “Letters from God.” The first three chapters of the Revelation are devoted to a description of Jesus in chapter one with letters to seven different historical churches recorded in chapters 2 and 3.

What if you were to receive a letter from God? Do you think that you would consider that letter to be important? In a sense, the whole Bible is a letter from God to us. Other parts of the Bible are literally letters. Today, we begin to examine some of the Bible’s most famous letters—the seven letters in Revelation 2-3. So, we are going to call this series “Letters from God.” Every single letter has a very important application to our church and to us as individuals. Each of the letters follows this pattern: the recipients, the identification of the author (which is Jesus, Himself), the account of the church, an assessment of the church, a call to endure, and an appeal to hear what the Spirit of the Church is saying to the church.

It is important to see how the description of Jesus in chapter 1 relates to the letters in chapters 2 and 3. Jesus is assessing these churches. It matters not what we think about our church. It matters not what others think about our church. What matters is what Jesus, Himself, thinks about our church.

We need to hear these messages not just as the Church to Ephesus and the other cities referenced in these letters, we need to hear these messages as God’s Word to us—to our church. We could easily read the content of these letters as “To the angel of the church in Lafayette write...”

Let’s read the first letter.

Text: ¹ "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

"The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks among the seven gold lampstands says: ² I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. ³ You also possess endurance and have tolerated [many things] because of My name, and have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you: you have abandoned the love [you had] at first. ⁵ Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ⁶ Yet you do have this: you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

⁷ "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the victor the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Introduction: As John begins the Revelation of Jesus Christ, he first addressed seven churches in the region of Asia-Minor. These were seven historical churches of the latter part of the first century. Jesus’ observations about these churches are representative of the kinds of problems churches throughout

history have faced. We do well in heeding Jesus' message to these churches. To the Church at Ephesus, Jesus warns that even in the midst of doing many things well they have left their "first love." Verse 4 is the key verse of this text. So, what about our love relationship with Jesus—as a church and as individuals?

First Things First about Our First Love:

- (1) God will never be deceived about our love relationship with Him.
God knows all about us. He walks among His churches. We will not deceive Him. We might deceive ourselves and others, but we will not deceive Him. We might pretend that we have it all together or we might ignore the glaring areas of our own pride and disobedience, but we cannot deceive God.
- (2) Good Works cannot replace our love for Jesus.
He knows the good, but He has something to say to this church. We sometimes convince ourselves that if we are busy to doing the work of the LORD that we automatically are in love with Jesus.
- (3) Good Theology cannot replace our love for Jesus.
The same is true with our right, orthodox theology.
- (4) Godly Values cannot replace our love for Jesus.
The point is that nothing replaces our love for Jesus.

The Old Testament gives us the story of Samson. God told his parents that his hair should never be cut (a Nazirite vow). The covenant promise was that God's strength would be upon him. Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. The Philistines came to her and offered her money to discover the secret to his great strength. At first, he told her that if he would be tied up with seven bowstrings that had not been dried, he would become as any other man. She tied him up and called for the Philistines. He broke free and whipped the Philistines who had come for him. She asked again and this time he said that if he was to be tied up with new ropes, he would lose his strength. A third time he said that the strength would leave him if the seven braids of his hair would be woven into the fabric on the weaver's loom. Again, he broke free. Finally, after "she nagged him day after day and pled with him until she wore him out, he told her the whole truth." He told her that if his hair would be shaved, he would lose his strength. When he fell asleep, off came his hair. Awakening to fight off the Philistines, the Bible says, "When he awoke from his sleep, he said, 'I will escape as I did before and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the LORD had left him."

I am so afraid that the church today is in danger of not even being aware when the strength and power of the LORD has left us. We are busy, so we think we have HIS power. We believe the Bible and thus have right theology, so we assume all is well. We stand for Godly things, so we think surely we are ok. But God says perhaps to some of us, "But what about your love for me." Not your love for things, not your love for programs, not your love for busyness, not your love for the work of the church, but your love for me."

Restoring our First Love for Jesus:

- (1) Remember what it used to be like.
- (2) Repent

(3) Return

The story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 is such a good example of what this looks like.

Luke 15:17-20—“¹⁷ When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. ¹⁹ I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired hands.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

A Great Warning:

Repent or He will Remove.

What does this mean? This does not reference loss of salvation. Remember, the address is to the church. I think what this means is that the church will be removed from its place of power and influence.

Questions that Demand a Response:

So, how do we know if we have lost our first love?

- (1) Do I love anything more than Jesus?
- (2) Have I ever been more in love with Jesus?
- (3) What is the evidence in my life that I love Jesus?