

# HARVEST ROCK CHURCH

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## RETURNING TO OUR FIRST LOVE THE CHURCH THAT PLEASES GOD SERIES

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**TEXT: Revelation 2:1** “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2 ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent. 6 Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’”

**INTRO:** Ephesus was the financial center and capital city of the Roman province of Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. It was the largest city in Asia Minor with a population of 250,000 people. A seaport city on the Mediterranean Sea, it was a center for idol worship in Asia, famous for the massive temple of Diana.

Paul established a church in Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 19-20), staying there for three years (Acts 20:31; AD 53-55). It was Paul’s greatest revival in all his travels and impacted all of Asia Minor (Acts 19:26). The people responded so fervently to the gospel that the market for purchasing idols was dramatically reduced. The region turned from being worshipers of Diana to becoming worshipers of Jesus.

Acts 19:10 ...so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord... 11 God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul... 19 Many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of everyone. The price of them totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing... 26 throughout almost all of Asia, Paul has persuaded... many people...

Paul left Ephesus in AD 55, establishing Timothy as the apostle of Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). In approximately AD 65, the apostle John became the apostle in Ephesus. Mary came along with John to Ephesus, where she died and was buried.

How would you like to be part of a church that experienced revival, but the apostles over the church would be Paul, Timothy, and John the beloved!

John was later imprisoned on the island of Patmos, about 60 miles from Ephesus. John wrote Revelation in about AD 90, almost 40 years after Paul first established the church. At that time, the church of Ephesus was the largest and most influential church since the church in Jerusalem was scattered in AD 70. The center of gravity had gone from Jerusalem, to Antioch, and then to Ephesus.

### I. THE AMAZING LOVE OF GOD (REVELATION 2:1)

#### A. “The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand” (Revelation 2:1)

1. This book is all about the revelation of Jesus. The first and foremost revelation is His love for the Church (Ephesians 5:25).
2. Jesus highlighted His tender care for His leaders. “He who holds the seven stars in His right hand”: He emphasized His tender care and commitment to help the messengers (angels) or apostolic leaders over His churches.
3. I have been holding Ariela, my granddaughter, with my hands and my arms, and there is nothing but love and tenderness coming from me to my granddaughter. So, too, God loves and cares for His leaders.
4. Jesus clarified that the seven stars represented seven angels or apostles, one over each of the seven churches (Revelation 1:20). He entrusted a message to the leadership team of each church in Revelation 2-3. The “angel” (*angelos*) of the church could mean angelic being, but most scholars believe that this refers to the apostolic leader over each of the churches. I believe that God communicates with everyone (John 10:27), but He particularly communicates His heart to His apostles and prophets (Amos 3:7).
5. “The mystery of the seven stars... and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels [messengers] of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” **Revelation 1:20 “As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”**

#### **B. God’s Right Hand**

1. David associated God’s right hand with His kindness in protecting him from those who rose up against him (Psalm 17:7).
2. God’s right hand is also associated with God’s delight (Psalm 16:11).
3. God’s blessing (Psalm 18:35).
4. God’s power (Psalm 20:6).
5. The place of honor (Hebrews 1:3).

#### **C. Jesus walks among the churches.**

1. “He who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”: Jesus is deeply involved with His churches, protecting those who walk with Him as God walked with Adam in the garden of Eden.
2. When God’s servants feel inadequate in their ministry or in overcoming temptation, they can confess that Jesus holds them in His right hand and walks with them in partnership to help them (Deuteronomy 23:14).
3. **1 John 4:19 We love, because He first loved us.**

## **II. THE AFFIRMATION**

### **A. Revelation 2:2 “I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance.”**

1. Jesus affirmed their faithfulness and good qualities first. There is a principle here that before you correct anyone, encourage them first.
2. **Revelation 2:2 “I know your hard work.”** Of all the churches I visit, the Korean church is one of the hardest working churches in the world. We do have what is called the Protestant work ethic, but that doesn’t necessarily translate into fruitfulness. E.g. Knocking on every door in Pasadena.
3. **“You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars” (Revelation 2:2).** (If there were so many false apostles, then it stands to reason that there were many true apostles.)

4. **“Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (Revelation 2:6).** “You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans”: Among the early church fathers this was a reference to followers of Nicolas, a deacon in Jerusalem who fell into error (Acts 6:5). In the second century, Irenaeus taught that the Nicolaitans were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh, especially with immorality. This same distortion of “hyper-grace” is common today. “Certain men have crept in unnoticed... who turn the grace of God into lewdness” (Jude 4).
5. Another view of the Nicolaitans is that it is a transliteration of two Greek words: *nico* (to rule) and *laos* (the people), thus, “one who rules the laity.” This view refers to church systems that inappropriately control people.

### III. THE ADMONITION

#### A. Revelation 1:4 **“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”**

1. Jesus corrected them for neglecting their devotion to loving Him that initially was so prominent in the great revival of Acts 19.
2. This is the greatest sin in the Church today. We know it is a sin because He calls them to repent.
3. Service and doctrinal purity are very important, but they can never replace our love for and intimacy with Jesus. It takes time to cultivate deep and consistent love for Jesus. It requires developing a heart focus that connects with Him.
4. **Revelation 3:19 “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent.”**
5. **Hebrews 12:6 “FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES...”**
- B. The command to love God with all of our heart is the first and great commandment.
  1. **Matthew 22:35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ 38 This is the great and foremost commandment.”**
  2. God’s primary assignment in our life is to grow in love for Him. Ministry that does not flow from a foundation of intimacy with Jesus will always lead to: **The Three “B’s”:** being Bitter, Burned out, and Bored.

### IV. THE ADVICE

#### A. REMEMBER (Revelation 2:5a)

1. **“Remember from where you have fallen”:** They were to recall how they used to love and spend time with Jesus. We are to recall His goodness and our past devotion for Him. They left their first love, but not their hatred for evil. Do you remember when you felt the joy of abandonment to Jesus when you first heard the call to extravagant devotion? The Spirit will help us to return to the freshness of our first love.

#### B. REPENT (Revelation 2:5b)

1. By calling them to repent of this neglect, He was identifying it as sin, not just weakness.
2. It begins by changing the way you think. In this case, it is changing your life vision, priorities, and lifestyle choices (the way you spend time and money) to pursue loving Jesus as the primary dream of your heart.

#### C. REDO (Revelation 2:5c)

1. **“...and redo the deeds you did at first.”**
2. They were to do the works or actions they did at first when their devotion to Jesus was fresh and strong. Mary “chose” the good part. We must choose it. It was sustained throughout her life. “One thing is needed, and Mary has chosen the good part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).
3. Cultivating a responsive heart of love to Jesus takes time and effort. It is something that we must do deliberately. Love does not automatically grow. Rather, it automatically diminishes unless we intentionally cultivate a responsive heart.
4. Sustaining a fresh walk with God through decades is the definition of living radically before God. We are not radical because we do something unusual for a few weeks or months.
5. “I will remove your lampstand”: God’s grace shone as a bright light from Ephesus into all of Asia. Being a “lampstand ministry” speaks of a ministry with far-reaching influence on other ministries. To have their “lampstand removed” was to lose the grace to influence others in a significant way. Jesus would remove their lampstand so that their error would not be imparted to other ministries who assumed the “mega-church in Ephesus” had a good foundation and was doing things rightly.
6. “I will come to you quickly”: This is a reference to Jesus’ coming to discipline them, to correct them, not a reference to His second coming. This church no longer existed after the fourth century.

## V. THE AWARD

### A. **Revelation 2:7b “To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.”**

1. This is an interesting promise or reward, which is eternal life. What this implies is that if you overcome losing your first love, you will have eternal life. If you don’t, you will be eternally separated. It implies that losing your first love is the beginning of the slippery slope of losing your salvation.
2. “God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden [of Eden]” (Genesis 2:9). “In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits... Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life...” (Revelation 22:2, 14).