

## **The Church of Ephesus A Call to Passionate Love**

### **Revelation 2:1-2:7**

#### **Introduction:**

A man was sitting in his psychiatrist's office complaining about an obsession that was ruining his marriage.

And he said, "Doc, its baseball. It's destroying me and my marriage. I can't eat, I can't sleep, and as soon as I close my eyes I'm out there chasing fly balls or running bases.

And Doc, when I wake up, I'm more tired than I was when I went to bed. What am I going to do?"

The Psychiatrist sat back and folded his hands and said, "First off, you have to make a conscious effort not to dream about baseball.

For example, when you close your eyes, try to imagine that you're at a party where someone is about to give you a million dollars.

And the guy jumps off the couch and screams, "Are you nuts doc? I'll miss my turn at bat!"

#### **Application:**

There are some who are very passionate - people who can't live without some kind of sports, or something that just monopolizes their lives.

In fact, 17% of the divorce petitions granted in the city of Chicago in 2005, were granted because of the husbands preoccupation with sports.

Dr. Gena James, a Pittsburg editor of professional sports wives magazine, which has 500,000 plus subscribers wrote, "The divorce rate among past and present pro athletes is 80% within the first 10 years of marriage.

But what we found that was even more disturbing that born again Christians living in the Bible belt, have an 84% divorce rate probability in the first 10 years.

Now – I'm not here criticize anyone who has been through a divorce this morning, I'm not here to make anyone feel guilty if you've been through that experience, because if you've been there, you know how terrible it is and you wouldn't wish it on anyone.

**So what is Passion? Passion is defined as: "It's an intense or overpowering emotion. It's an eager outreaching of mind toward some special object of devotion. It's an overwhelming sensual desire between a man and a woman."**

***There are many synonyms for Passion such as***

“Fervency” “Enthusiasm” “Zeal”

We Christian believers are passionate about our  
 Jobs  
 Possessions  
 Hobbies  
 Favorite Sports teams

But I ask you this morning to set the basis for this sermon: **ARE WE PASSIONATE ABOUT THAT WHICH IS MOST IMPORTANT TO GOD?**

The Bible often uses the word “**Zeal**” or “**Zealous**” instead of Passion.

IN the Book of Numbers 25:11 we read these words, this is God speaking of ***"Phinehas ...who turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My Zeal among them, so that I did not consume the Children of Israel in My Zeal."***

It was Jehu who in II Kings 10:15-17 said to his friend Jehonadab,

Jesus is described as passionate in Isaiah 59:17 where it says, ***"He put on righteousness as His breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; He put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped Himself in zeal as in a cloak."***

1 COR.14:12 says, ***"Be zealous for spiritual gifts ... for the edification of the church."***

Paul says in COL.3:23, ***"AND WHATEVER YOU DO, DO IT HEARTILY [PASSIONATELY FROM THE SOUL], AS TO THE LORD, AND NOT TO MEN."***

So think of it this way with me - I like to think of our spiritual passion as being like a fire.

As long as I pile on the wood, the wind of the Holy Spirit will fan the flames until the fire becomes so hot that even a rainstorm of adversity can't put it out!

So what's John's point here?

**I. First - WHEN WE DON'T FEED THE FIRE, IT WILL EVENTUALLY GO OUT!**

**Church, if there is something missing in your relationship and your service to God, chances are it is your passion.**

So – the question is – what are you preoccupied with?

What is it that you can't live without?

What is it that is consuming you?

What is your passion?

In John's case, his passion was to preach the Resurrected Christ, so he says in verse 1 ***“These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand, and He walks among the seven golden Lamp stands.”***

Now – it's important for us to understand the seven stars (messengers) in his right hand – It's His pastors.

Christ holds the church leaders in divine protection and under His divine control.

Let me just quickly insert here – I'm not sure if the church understands the concept of how important a position it is to be a messenger of God in His Church.

And to come against God's anointed is not a little thing to Christ Jesus.

Now get a picture here in your mind. They didn't have candlesticks yet, so the lampstand was an eastern type of lamp with a piece of cloth in it, used as a wick.

Read in v. 6 where Jesus said, ***“He hated the practices” of the Nicolaitans.***

And then He ends this letter the way all seven letters to the seven churches ends with this admonition: ***“He who has an ear, let him hear***

***what the Spirit says to the Churches, to him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the Tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”***

The word ***“Nicolaitans”*** here is translated, ***“NICO”*** means to ***“CHOP”***, or to ***divide***, and ***“LAITY”*** means people and ***together the words means “People who Chop and Divide.***

**This is what the Nicolaitans did. They were very good at dividing and causing division and dissension.**

I reminded in Proverbs 6:16-19 where it reads, ***“Thee are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush to evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up dissension among brothers.”***

So Jesus was saying the Nicolaitans were guilty of this.

And Jesus was also saying, ***“there are people in your church that have tried to polarize your church and your fellowship and you folks didn't let them do it, you stood your ground for what was right.”***

You didn't allow them to steer you into wrong doctrine. You didn't allow them to divide you because of a heart that devised evil schemes.

The Nicolaitans led a life of self-indulgence and sexual immorality.

Every church should be alarmed today! I don't mean disturbed. And I don't mean concerned.

Every church and this church should be outright alarmed!

The devil is making gigantic strides into the homes of Christian believers.

He has doubled his assault on men and women in the area of sexual temptation and sin.

It's not time to sweep it under the rug hoping no one will see it or talk about it or discover it.

This sin is upon us right now.

We hear about it all the time.

In America we worship the flesh. All we have to do is look around and we don't have to look very far.

The devil is multiplying this attack on Christians because he has access to modern technology such as cable TV PPV, movies, videos, sexually oriented advertising such as Victoria Secret.

And the devil places these kinds of sexual stimulants daily in the living rooms and bedrooms of the average Christian believer.

During this time the Nicolaitans worshipped a goddess by the name of Diana, who was supposed to bless their women and their animals, so they would produce many offspring.

So with that said, how did these Christian believers in Ephesus thrive in such a sinful setting?

Well, John tells us that they struggled, just like we do. For many of them they succumbed to the temptation and downright sinned and lost their relationship with Christ.

## **II. Secondly, Jesus admonishes them for leaving their first love. (V.2-4)**

Jesus told John to write in Revelation 2:2-3 ***"I'm proud of you because of your diligence ... I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance and the one thing I can say for you is that you are busy serving the Lord and I'm proud of you because of your doctrine."***

He sees what you do and He appreciates it!

The other compliment...Jesus sees that they recognize false teachers when they see them...

This is a church that doesn't tolerate people trying to twist Scripture...I believe that we have a church here that stands on that principle.

They don't allow people to twist the Gospel...

They stand up for the one True and Right Way...  
They stand up for the Truth.

Perhaps this is an area that the Church of today needs to work on.

So often, in our desire for a spirit of unity...  
We open the door for many different beliefs and doctrines...

We begin to think that there are many ways to God...

We hesitate to speak out against falsehood when we see it.

We hesitate to let people know when they start to allow wrong thinking to enter in to their Christianity.

We don't want to hurt anybody's feelings...

We want everyone to get along...

We want us all to agree...

But, in our desire to have unity... We must not allow false doctrine to spread through our people...

We must not allow false teachings to begin to enter into our church... and take a foothold...

Because if they do, it won't take long before the Gospel doesn't look much like the Gospel any more.

We've got to speak up when falsehood is proclaimed as truth...

We must speak up when people try to twist the Scripture to accommodate homosexuality...

We must speak up when people say its okay to commit sin...Jesus won't send anyone to hell, He's a God of love...

We must speak up when people say it doesn't matter if you follow Christ, or Allah, or Buddah, or Mohammed....there are many ways to God...

We must speak up when people say "as long as you are a good person...and a good citizen, that is what is important" No! It's not!!

We must try to set the record straight!

Christ commended the Ephesians for doing that... and it's simple to see that He wants us to do that too. Can I get an agreement from you?

**And the third commendation, Jesus congratulates them for persevering in the face of hardship.**

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When trouble has come their way...

They haven't given up...  
They haven't grown weary...  
They haven't waffled...

They haven't decided that it just isn't worth  
it...  
They have hung in there...  
They have remained resolute...  
They have kept their determination

And today, Jesus would tell His Church...

You are doing great!

Hang in there!!

I know what you are going through...

I know that it gets tough some times.

I know that it isn't always easy... but I  
appreciate you...

I am glad that you are faithful...

I'm glad that you haven't given up when the  
going got tough...

***"I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men,  
that you have tested those who claim to be***

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***apostles but are not, and have found them  
false." V.2b***

So it was extremely important back then, as it is  
today to maintain doctrinal purity because there is  
a lot of heresy in our society today.

And Believers, believe me when I say this, it is  
seeping into the church through books, radio, TV,  
preachers and teachers like a ruptured septic tank  
seeps into well water.

I remember in our last house we lived in just down  
the road – the water in that house was absolutely  
the worst water I have ever drunk. I thought for  
sure the septic tank had seeped into it.

That's why John said, ***"Don't believe every spirit,  
but test the spirits and see whether they are of  
God, because many false prophets have gone  
out into the world."***

Jesus said that we in the church must be careful  
what we listen to –  
who we listen to –  
because what we listen to can be toxic to the  
fellowship of the body of Christ.

So be careful what you read and be careful what  
you listen – and be careful who you listen to.

Jesus then says something that most skip over,  
look at verse 3, ***"You have persevered and have***

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***endured hardships for My name, and have not grown weary.”***

Now let me say quickly, that church discipline can always be risky and must only be done as a last resort.

That is why Jesus gave us the steps to take in Matthew 18:15-17.

Where Jesus says, ***“If your brother sins against you, go and show his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens, you have won your brother over, but if he will not listen, take one of two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”***

The purpose of Church discipline should never be to punish, it is always to be offered in such a way as to restore, because, listen people we must always love the way Jesus loved.

And I can give you example after example of how Jesus restored people after they had fallen.

You can go home and read about Peter and his restoration after his fall.

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Remember when Jesus reinstated Peter after he denied Him.

**III. The problem in the Ephesus church is found in verse 4:**

***Jesus said, “I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.”***

Just possibly it wasn't that the Ephesians had stopped loving the Lord ...

Maybe it wasn't because they had stopped loving each other ...

But it's possible their love had become perhaps taken for granted...

Perhaps they had been affected by the persecutions...

Perhaps they had been affected by the labor...

It wasn't that they stopped loving the Lord...

But it just wasn't the same anymore.

This isn't anything unique just to the Ephesians... Don't we do this too?!

Do you remember when you first got married...

For some of you that was quite a while ago, and for others it wasn't so long ago, but oh boy, our love was intense - Passionate...

It was EXCITING... It was ALIVE...

HUGGING AND KISSING all the time...

Boy, do I remember those times.

Holding hands when you walked in the mall...or  
down the sidewalk

But then, kids come along...

And concerns about finances begin to weigh us  
down...

And perhaps concerns about work enter into the ...

And maybe the boss is giving us a hard time...

And we are always tired...stress does that to you...

And we get used to being with our spouse...

And perhaps we even take them for granted...

It's not that we don't love our spouse anymore...

But we really don't express our love that way any  
more...

And perhaps, in a sense, we have forsaken our  
first love with our spouse...

And we have allowed our love to become boring...

Just commonplace ... and dry...

Husband – Wife - That's not a good place to be in  
our relationship with our spouse...

If you're there – What are you going to do about it?

And you see, it's not a good place to be in our  
relationship with the Lord Jesus our Savior!

**Now – Notice this - Jesus doesn't just drop this  
explosive bombshell of criticism and then walk  
away shaking His head - leave us quivering in  
His wake...**

**He tells us how to fix the problem. Oh, folks,  
this is good! Don't you just love Jesus???**

**Aren't you glad for His patience and wonderful  
Grace?**

Jesus told the Ephesian church, "***Remember the  
height from which you have fallen! Repent and  
do the things you did at first***" Rev 2:5

Back to our illustration about the marriage...

Perhaps when the marriage gets dry...  
When our love isn't as exciting and  
passionate any more...

Maybe we need to reminisce a little bit...

Maybe we need to remember what it was  
like when we first got married...

Or even remember what it was like when we were dating...

Remember how we would hold hands in the mall or walking on the sidewalk?

Remember how you would kiss when you came to a stop light? You know we can't do that anymore – we have those things in the middle that keeps us separated.

Remember how we would write those little love notes? Or send those flowers on no special occasion.

**Well, maybe we need to do that again!**

Maybe those things are important in a relationship to maintaining an exciting a passionate level in our love!

Husbands – let me give you some advice here – get back to treating her the way you did when you dated her and watch what happens.

**And now let's relate that to our relationship with the Lord...**

**We need to remember what it was like when we first got saved...Do you remember that?**

We need to remember how we were quick to read the Bible...and not just read our chapter and quit...

But how sometimes we just couldn't seem to get enough of it!!

We just couldn't wait to come to church ... we just was hungry to hear about the Word through the preaching and teaching.

We couldn't hardly wait until the song service was over because we wanted to be in His Word.

We need to remember how we relished spending time with the Lord in prayer...

Not just "**now I lay me down to sleep**"...but a real conversation...

Stimulating...

Not just a one sided "wish list"

(Lord do this! and do this! and do this for me!)

Instead – Lord Jesus, I love you – I Praise You for what you mean to me!

We need to remember how we would be so excited about our relationship with Jesus that we would tell our friends about it ... We couldn't wait to share our faith with others.

Folks, why don't we invite friends and neighbors to His church any more? Could it be that we that we are guilty of losing our First Love?

There are so many out there this morning who slept in and never think about God and don't even know where this church is because no one has told them.

They drive past this church every day of the week and still don't know we're here.

Do you recall when we would stand up in church during testimony time and tell everybody how much we loved Jesus...

It was a passionate relationship...it was exciting....

## **REMEMBER?**

CAN YOU REMEMBER THAT?

Remembering is the first step in getting it back...

## **The second step is Repenting...**

We can do this with our spouse...

"Honey, I'm sorry I haven't been as loving as I used to be...I've just sensed that something has missing for a long time...It's me – not you.

Would you please forgive me"

**And we can do this with the Lord.**

**"Jesus...I used to be so excited about serving you...**

**But lately I've just grown weary...I know that's not a good excuse...**

**And I've been taking You for granted Jesus...I don't want it to be this way.**

**Please forgive me"**

**Here's the Warning...**

Jesus doesn't just compliment the Ephesians...and tell them where they need to improve...and tell them HOW to improve it...

**He gives them a Warning too!**

He says, ***"If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.***  
Rev 2:5 (NIV)

Believers, I can't think of anything so devastating to me then this to happen.

You see if you allow your marriage to grow stale ... it can severely damage your relationship with your spouse...so much so that that marriage might end...

**Well, there's a danger in our spiritual relationship with the Lord as well!**

He knows that if you continue to allow your relationship with Him to go on without passion... without excitement...it won't be long before you aren't reading the Bible like you should...

and it won't be long before your prayer life suffers...and you use to pray and now it's just that little prayer here and there to kind of salve your conscience.

And perhaps attending church isn't as important to you as it used to be...

And it doesn't take very long before your relationship with the Lord is just as damaged as the relationship between a man and woman who have filed for a divorce.

If you let it go very long...

If you don't heed the warnings of the Lord...

If you refuse to repent...

If you refuse to return to a loving, vital relationship with Jesus...

Well, it's ends up in a backslidden condition and sin follows...

And after sin there is judgment...

And Jesus says, ***"I will come and remove your lampstand from its place***

***"Turn back to me again and do the works as you did at first."***

Now friend, listen if you have lost sight of what Christ has done for you, or you have turned your back on God totally, **REPENT**.

In our hearts there must not be defiance, there must not be indifference, but godly sorrow over our sin that leads us to a new life in Christ.

***Jesus says, "If you don't, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches."***

**Our sorrow over our sin is the fruit of true repentance leading to living in the newness of life in Christ.**

The sorrow of true repentance is admitting that we have done wrong and we need Him to come and cleanse us from our wrong doings – our sins.

**A failure to change means that the lampstand will be removed from its place.**

The duty of the Church is to be a Light in a world that is sin stricken, and it is the Light of Jesus

We can't be built on programs here – We have to be built on the Solid Rock which is JESUS.

You know – this is the truth – when believers loose their first love in Christ, they don't share their faith any more.

Somehow all their attention is turned inwardly and they begin to be like the Nicolaitans – chopping and dividing.

That's why so many Churches today have lost the Light of Jesus because of comfortableness and taking Jesus for granted.

In other words, Jesus says, ***"This church will no longer exist"***

When Jesus has a warning for the Church...and if that warning falls on deaf ears...and if the Church is unwilling to repent and address the concerns that Jesus brings to Her attention...

Then that church/believer finds itself coming to an end...loosing that relationship with Jesus.

Jesus will hold the Church responsible for Her actions or lack of actions, as it were...and judgment will follow.

**Let me hurry to a close – Let's look at the Reward...**

But Jesus didn't just utter a harsh warning and then leave...

He also gives the Ephesian church a promised reward if they will do what He tells them to do.

He said, ***"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."*** Rev 2:7 (NIV)

If you will remember, mankind lost this right in the Garden of Eden with the sin of Adam and Eve... They were forced from the Garden so that they couldn't eat from the tree of life.

But to the Church (which is to say, us believers)

Who overcome...

To those who are victorious...

If we do what Jesus tells us to do - Jesus will allow us to finally eat from the Tree of Life...which the Scripture says is ***"in the paradise of God"...***

What a goal for every Christian believer.

If we will overcome

If we will heed the warnings...

If we will remain faithful...

If we do the things that He wants us to do...

Then the day will come when we will get to enjoy that relationship in all of its fullness...

## Conclusion

The first letter, to the Church of Ephesus... contains a powerful message for us today.

***I know what you are doing...***

***I see your work...***

***I appreciate your service for the kingdom...***

I'm glad that you speak up when people try to twist the Scripture and teach falsely...

I'm glad that you have remained faithful, in spite of persecution and hardship...

***But...you have allowed your love for Me to become habit...***

***You've been taking our relationship for granted...***

***You have forsaken that early passion and excitement that you used to have for Me.***

***You need to remember what it used to be like and repent!***

You need to do those things that you used to do... Your love for Me should be passionate...enthusiastic...exciting... filled with joy...

Jesus said, "***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches***"

Jesus is speaking to His Church in Pataskala...

He's doing it right now...this morning...

And if the Lord is speaking to you...

I invite you to come and pray....

I read the story about John Jasper, the famous African/American preacher who showed up at church one freezing cold Sunday morning, and the church had a gas furnace, with an electric blower.

To illustrate his sermon that morning, he turned off the gas but he left on the blower on so when the people got to church it was unbearably cold.

The preacher entitled his sermon, "The Blowers still blowing, but the fires gone out."

Is it possible this morning that this could be true of your spiritual relationship with Jesus?

The blower is still blowing, but there is no passion, because the fire has gone out?

**Remember!**

**Passionate love for Jesus and His church.**

Can you remember a time in your spiritual life when you were more fired up in your love for Jesus then you are right now?

There is no place to turn back now!!!

As a matter of fact, Jesus said, ***“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the service in the Kingdom of God.”***

Our focus must be on the Glory that lies ahead for His church.

What will you do?

Will be a Church that refuses to allow our Love to grow cold?