

# Shadows Of Christ & His Bride

Lesson #27

Ephesus: God Desires Our Love & Fellowship

July 24, 2024

When Paul left Ephesus, the church was a growing missionary church. Thirty-odd years later Jesus Christ calls it to repentance. It was a remarkable church in need of a revival.

I KNOW THY WORKS!	Salutation	Introduce Himself	Presents the Problem
	Solution	Ear to Hear	Promise

Ephesus > The Apostolic Church	~ AD 52 - 100 AD	The Loveless Church
Ephesus = Desired One; God desires our love, our fellowship		Departed 1 <sup>st</sup> love

A Church with correct doctrine is to be commended. I John 4:1 Gal. 1:6-8

A Church without fervor is fruitless. I Cor. 13:1-3; 11:20-26

Christ's Admonition: Remember Repent Do the 1<sup>st</sup> works

Reward for Those Who Overcome: Rev. 2:7 To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Rev. 2:1 To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

- Jesus Christ is present and in control.
- This church had enjoyed some stellar leadership: Paul, Timothy & John
- You worship the Lord God: not any human leader

7 Commendations of the Church at Ephesus: Rev. 2:2-3, 6.

I know your works, your labor, your patience [steadfast endurance], and that you cannot bear [tolerate] those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars; [they are false] <sup>3</sup> and you have persevered [persisted steadfastly] and have patience and have labored [endured] for My name's sake and have not become weary.

- Serving Very BUSY doing the works of the Lord > Much activity
- Sacrificing Labor = Toil to the point of exhaustion
- Steadfast Patient = Endurance under trial > kept going when the going was tough
- Suffering Patiently bore burdens; toiled without fainting > ALL for His name's sake

Rev. 2:6 But this you have, that you hate the Deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Nicolaitans = To Conquer the People; Possibly refers to a sect who initiated "clergy" and "laity" and "lorded themselves over the church and people."

- A false division that is taught NOWHERE in the New Testament.

Deeds of the Nicolaitans: The leadership in the church [Nicolaitans] were elevating themselves above everyone else. Like all deceivers which come from the body of Christ, claimed "not that they were destroying Christianity, but they were presenting an improved and modernized version of it."

Paul had warned > False teachers will arise from the outside as well as within.

Acts 20:29-32 I know that after I am gone fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Even from among your own group men will arise, teaching perversions of the truth to draw the disciples away after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears. <sup>32</sup> And now I entrust you to God and to the message of His grace. This message is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

They followed Paul's advice and have "tried them which say they are apostles and are not."

➤ Separated Themselves From > False Doctrine; Weeded out heresy; Gatekeepers of Truth

Christ's Concern: His diagnosis is very clear as He examines the Heart. I KNOW THY WORKS!  
I Cor. 3:13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what SORT it is.

Rev. 2:4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Left = Departed from = The Greek word translated "departed from"

can be used for divorce. The imagery here is very strong.

God's Case Against Israel: Jer. 2:2, 5

Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD:

"I have fond memories of you, how devoted you were to me in your early years. I remember how you loved me like a new bride; you followed me through the wilderness, through a land that had never been planted. <sup>5</sup>This is what the LORD says:

"What fault could your ancestors have possibly found in me that they strayed so far from me? They paid allegiance to worthless idols, and so became worthless to me.

Consider: "This I have against you. You have forsaken your first love."

Devotion to Christ that often characterizes a new believer > fervent, personal, uninhibited

Consider: This busy, separated, suffering people suffered from heart trouble.

1. They LEFT or departed from their first love.

➤ The word FIRST indicates the love which has been left is a love which existed previously.

"First love" in God's eyes: The LOVE >

1. First brought you to God

2. Love you experienced when you grasped the reality of the cross.

3. It was when you realized the blood of Jesus Christ was shed for your sin.

4. You were overwhelmed with His amazing love.

5. You believed and trusted in Him, became a child of God, and experienced His forgiveness.

1. First love looks at rivers of grief & worry that arise in life & says,
  - God will carry me through.
2. First love looks at stumbling blocks & sees them as steppingstones >
  - These will prove the power of God.
3. First love cries out, "Just give us a mountain to climb. Give us a river to swim. Give us something to prove the greatness of God's love & how powerful He really is."

Question: How Do You Leave Something As Wonderful As First Love?

Sometimes it just disappears, vanishes, goes away.

Sin works, not by taking giant steps from virtue to sin, just little steps. As sin increases in your life, the once wonderful, warm, unselfish, vibrant love in your life begins to grow cold like an ember that is all alone, no longer a part of the fire. Soon it will die.

In the book of Judges, we read of Samson, a Nazarite, who was to be separated unto God. He was anointed by God and possessed tremendous strength which was in the power of God when the Spirit came upon him.

Judges 13:5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

Adrian Rogers: Samson went from hero to zero and from victor to victim.

The Bible tells of his disobedience, defeat, disgrace and destruction.

Even though The Spirit of God was upon him, he would give way to the appetites of the flesh.

Rogers: It is amazing how a person could soar so high, yet go so low. At the beginning of Samson's life, we wouldn't have been able to tell him that he would sink to such depths.

Samson gradually started flirting with sin until little by little, evil came into his life.

Sin always starts small. No one goes roaring into sin. Samson flirted with sin; he played with sin.

Judges 16:20 we read one of the most startling verses in all the Bible.

It says that the Lord had departed from Samson, & Samson didn't realize it.

Samson had become so deeply enmeshed in sin that God couldn't stand to stay around anymore.

So God left him. Samson, once a great man of God, was so insensitive to the presence of God, that when God left, Samson didn't even realize it.

1. He Distorted His Purpose. He forgot the thing that God had called him to do.

Judges 13:5b he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

2. Samson Diluted His Power. Samson's strength wasn't in his hair but in the Holy Spirit of God, and the Spirit was gone.

3. Samson Diminished His Potential

Rogers: Are you far away from God? You were once a faithful deacon, a wonderful Sunday school teacher, a soul winner, but you have compromised and played in sin.

The power of God is gone from you, and you don't even know it.

Without the anointing power of God when the lion roars against us, we will go to battle, and we will go down. Many have begun in the Spirit and ended in the flesh.

God had brought Samson so low that finally his eyes began to open spiritually. Samson came back to God in remorse and repentance. He asked for one more chance. No matter how low we have gone or what we might have done, God is a God of mercy and forgiveness. Knowing that God will forgive us is not an encouragement to sin.

King Saul experienced a wonderful beginning as a man who loved God. But gradually, he turned his back on God, & the storm clouds began to collect. God left him. The Bible says Saul ended up slinking off to the witch of Endor, seeking help from the powers of evil because those were the forces that were now controlling his life.

Rogers: If you have begun to move away from God, then move back now. Sin that starts small goes big. You will get into a downward spiral where it may be almost impossible to get out. There are 3 people occupying your chair today: The person you are now. The person you could be for God. The person you may be if you take your eyes off God. Some people may believe that it makes no difference how they live after being justified. Rogers: There is no blacker lie that could come out of Hell than that lie. While a child of God may not lose his salvation, he has much to lose if he continues to practice sin.

Samson died young, and needlessly. He is in Heaven but think of what he should have been. When he gets to the Judgment Seat of Christ, rather than having gold, silver, and precious stones, there will be a pile of wood, hay, and stubble. I Cor. 3:11-15

Ephesus: Did they just decide one day not to love God anymore? It was a gradual thing. For a while their love for God was so great & so infectious people were drawn into their fellowship. They were known far & wide for their steadfast faithfulness, even in the face of persecution. Ponder: It isn't the giant step from virtue into sin that we need to fear. It's the little steps that ultimately lead us away from God.

Consider: Is it possible to serve, sacrifice and suffer for His names' sake and not TRULY love Jesus Christ.

1. They displayed "works, labor and patience." > NOT motivated by love for Jesus Christ.

Truth: What we do for the Lord is important, but WHY we do it is vital.

Truth: Church of Ephesus >so BUSY (Being Under Satan's Yoke) maintaining their separation they neglected adoration. Consequently, they lost their warmth and zeal for Christ.

Thus, they began to "go through the motions" of good works.

- Their passion for Him became little more than mere religion and cold orthodoxy.

Labor is NO substitute for love; purity is NO substitute for passion. Need both > please Him.

Ponder: They were doing MANY good things, but they were DISTRACTED from doing their first works...their first love, and, unless they return to that first love, their church itself would be of no use to Him any longer.

During the second half of the first century, as the apostles were dying one by one, the Christians progressively lost the vision transmitted at the Day of the Pentecost. Slowly, they let the evangelical fervor of the early days cool down, that same fervor which had formerly brought about the conversion of thousands of souls day after day. Internal betrayal and spiritual battles had eroded much of their enthusiasm.

Question: How Do You Restore Your First Love?

Jesus' Exhortation: Rev. 2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen;  
repent and do the first works,

or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

1. Remember [keep on remembering] from where you have fallen.

Paul's epistle to the Ephesians: at least 20 references to love. Paul emphasized the believer's exalted position "in Christ... in the heavenly places." But the Ephesian church had fallen and was not living up to its heavenly position in Christ [Rev. 2:5).

➤ Cultivate a desire to regain the fellowship. God desires my devotion rather than doctrine. "Have/are fallen" is the perfect tense in the Greek. It looks at a completed act with existing results, a state, and not a process. We are in a fallen condition [are out of fellowship] and working in the energy of the flesh whenever we move away or cease to operate out of condition of love and devotion that stems from personal fellowship or a walk of faith with the Lord Jesus. This is a call to reflect, go back and recall and remember the past.

➤ "Remember the way it used to be in your relationship with Me."

Example: When the Prodigal Son was in the pigpen, the first step in restoration was remembering what life was like back in the father's house.

Luke 15:17-19 But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"

➤ This is a call to recognize your TRUE condition.

Truth: If I have lost the joy of the Lord,

it is because I have LEFT the position of devotion and occupation with Christ.

Solution: 2. Repent > Means to change your direction; go a different way >

Urgent appeal for instant change of attitude and conduct before it is too late.

True repentance goes far beyond sorrow.

It is a genuine change of heart and mind which results in a change in lifestyle and behavior.

When you repent: Pray: Let me see my sin as You see it. Don't deny it.

➤ Don't blame it on someone or something else. Face the reality of it.

➤ Come with no pretense before God: "God, I can't carry it.

I need your power to overcome \_\_\_\_\_ in my life. Help me to forsake it.

3. Do the First Works > "First" is próta which means "first in time, place, or rank."

Note: This is not a call to more Christian service or to renewed Christian activity!

Restore the original fellowship that was broken by MY sin and MY neglect. Restore prayer, Bible reading/study, meditate on and memorize the Word, obedient service and worship.

Consider: Being occupied with Christ and refocusing all of our life on Him, the faith rest life, reckoning on our position in Christ, etc. [Mark 3:14; 6:30-32; Ps. 119]. We never outgrow these!

John 15:4-5 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Consider: Satan does a masterful job in creating a sense of general dissatisfaction with these first works. Christians will run after almost every new, strange method or program for growth and stability. Our shortened attention spans make us easily bored with the truest excitement. Sometimes we will do almost anything except the first works.

Whitefield: Give diligent heed to the things that are spoken from the Word of God.

Warning # 1 Heb. 2:1 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

- Coming millennial glory of Christ & the believer's impending inheritance & glory in Christ's millennial kingdom

Watch Out For The Slow Drift - Ephesus had a great harbor on the Cayster River.

"The ancient city of Ephesus was once an important port on the river but over the centuries, sedimentation gradually filled in the inlet around the city.

The silting up of the port caused by the river is the main reason Ephesus fell into decline and gradually abandoned over years. The area around Ephesus and the harbor turned into a swamp. Mosquitoes increased more and more. A series of malaria epidemics decimated the population and the Ephesians abandoned the city in one hundred years."

- This illustrates what "Little Sins" can do in our lives over days, months, years.

Pray for God to "catch the little foxes" before they completely corrupt the vineyard of our heart. [Song of Solomon 2:15] and we find ourselves far from our first love.

Spurgeon: Tiny foxes spoil the vineyards; & little sins do mischief to the tender heart.

What sin is laying down sediment in your heart and impeding the flow of the rivers of living water from your innermost being [John 7:38-39]? Sin is deceitful [Heb 3:13] and convinces us these "LITTLE" sins will never take a BIG toll on our spiritual life! Wrong!

Paul warns: Gal. 6:7-8 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. <sup>8</sup> For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption;

- "Sediment" building up in the rivers blocking the outflow from our heart!,

<sup>8b</sup>but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

- and mighty rushing rivers energized by the Spirit.

If we need additional motivation to kill the "little" sins that are laying down sediment in the rivers flowing from our heart, Heb. 12:1 adds "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing your eyes on Jesus.

Consider: Today the city of Ephesus is a heap of stones and ruin.

If I, like the church at Ephesus, lose my love and devotion for Christ, I will lose my light, no matter how doctrinally sound I may be.

Consequences: OR else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

Note: Living and working with truth alone leads to rigidity and legalism.

Ghost towns capture the imagination. As you walk the streets you can almost hear the echoes of the past, but the buildings stand empty as mute reminders of life that is gone.

With every passing season more buildings collapse, more weeds grow up, more animals take over the ruins where a thriving town once stood. A ghost town is nature's testimony that once something has been emptied, destruction & death follow, unless the void is filled.

In the parable of the empty house, Jesus tells us it is not enough for a man to be freed from the power of Satan. His life must be filled with the Spirit of God or Satan will get hold of him again. Like the ghost town, if a person is not filled with a life in Christ, he will be filled with something else, & the end result is death & decay.

Like the Ephesian church, I can easily fall prey to a cold, mechanical observance of religion. I can tend to focus solely on doctrinal purity and hard work, to the exclusion of true love for Christ.

No amount of zeal for the truth or moral rectitude can replace a heart full of love for Jesus.

What is my state? Is my experience daily becoming richer, fresher, and more quickening?

Am I daily walking more and more surely in newness of life? Abiding in Him?

Jesus said, "I am come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly."

Truth: I must regain this first love, before He entrusts His purpose to someone else.

Love is the primary fruit of the Spirit.

Consider: John's major burden in Revelation is to challenge Christians to become overcomers by laying before their gaze the magnificent future they can inherit if they are faithful to the end. John repeatedly contrasts the faithful overcomer and the unfaithful Christian.

Rev. 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who OVERCOMES [conquers] I will give or grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

Barnhouse: "Some have said that eating from the tree of life was the equivalent of receiving eternal life, but this is most evidently a false interpretation.

All believers possess eternal life at the point of believing in Christ [John 3:16]. Furthermore, eternal life, as God's gift to those who believe, is never maintained by what we do.

Compare I John 5:11-12; John 1:12; 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25, 26; 20:31; 17:3.

Note: Promise is not to the Noun > overcomer.

The promise is to the overcomer who overcomes > ACTION

J. Sidlow Baxter writes: But the promise is to those who overcome." Do all believers "overcome? The letters to the seven churches, at least, suggested otherwise to an unprejudiced reader.

Barnhouse: The context for Rev. 2:7 is the admonition in 2:5:

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.

Note: The promise is to the overcomer who is obedient and overcomes the particular problem Jesus has brought to light. He seems to speak of overcoming their coldness of heart and lack of love marked by leaving [departing from] their first love and first works.

My Belief: The Rewards View Of These Promises: Overcomer passages are promises to encourage and kindle love and obedience in view of who they are in Christ and what they possess in Him and guarantees of special blessings or rewards for faithful service and lives of faith.

God's Plan: Man is created in His image to have fellowship with God in Eden and to rule and dominion. The Tree of Life is present.

The Tree Of Life First Appeared in Genesis 2:8-9. The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD 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, and the Tree Of The Knowledge Of Good And Evil.

Gen. 2:15-17 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Gen. 3:6 Adam and Eve both ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil.

- They chose Knowledge of Good & Evil over Life. What was result of the choice?

Gen. 3:22-24 Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"— therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to Guard THE WAY To The Tree Of Life.



The tree of Life DISAPPEARED on the earth until Revelation 2:7 in His Kingdom.

Result of Fall: Man sinned and was no longer in a position to rule and have dominion.

He has been cast out of God's paradise and does not enjoy the fellowship he had with God before the fall. There is a curse on the earth.

Gen. 5:3 And Adam lived an 130 years, and begat a son in his own likeness, and after his image.

Believers in Ephesus chose knowledge over life. They were strong on doctrine, weeded out heresy and gatekeepers of truth, but they left their first love. They abandoned the love relationship with Jesus Christ which is the KEY to their spiritual growth & maturity.

God's purpose for born again believers NOW is to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit + Word of God. God's purpose is for believers to be joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, to rule and reign with Him in His coming Millennial Kingdom.

The Tree Of Life shows up again when Jesus Christ sets up His Millennial Kingdom.

The earth is refreshed like the Garden of Eden and He is physically with us.

His likeness that we lost; ability to rule & have dominion that we lost; being in the Paradise of God that we lost; His physical presence among us that we lost; the fellowship we lost >

Tree of Life shows up as those who overcome are in His image and in a position to rule and co-reign as joint heirs with Christ.

The tree of life represents an eternal, life-giving relationship with God, one that the first Adam forfeited access to with his disobedience

Consider: Because God Will Grant Or Give Them The Right To Eat Of The Tree Of Life, it seems to be conditional upon our works and obedience to His commandments.

Dillow: Phrase "Tree of Life" references in OT are in Proverbs.

Prov. 11:30 Fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.

Prov. 13:12 A desire fulfilled is like a tree of life.

Prov. 15:4 A gentle tongue is like a tree of life.

Prov. 3:18 Wisdom is a tree of life.

These suggest a quality of life - rich fellowship with God. This fits well with the context in Revelation. Justification comes to all without cost, but the "tree of life" is presented as a conditionally earned and merited reward to those who overcome.

The tree of life, then, must offer some kind of superlative experience and blessing though the details are simply not explained to us.

Rev. 21:6 I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. [freely]

Belief #2: The rewards offered come to the one who overcomes. It costs him.

Rev. 21:7 He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

Consider: This outcome costs and involves a life of discipleship.

- All believers are children of God.                      tekna = children
- My son = in the Greek                                              huioi = mature son

Note: We arrive at the state of full sonship by a life of obedience and faithfulness.

Notice: It seems the ones who have received the free gift without cost in verse 6 have in addition, persevered faithfully and overcome. They are the ones who will inherit.

"Eating of the tree of life is a reward that shall be given to the one who overcomes in addition to his salvation. His works, built upon the foundation that is Christ Jesus, abides the test of the Lord's appearing, and he receives over and above his entrance into eternal life."

Consider My Belief: I believe the admonition to Ephesus is the first step in our journey to spiritual maturity. If I do not repent and do the first works, I will not progress in my spiritual growth. Therefore, the remaining promises to those who overcome will not be for me. I will NOT lose my justification, but I will arrive at the Judgment Seat of Christ as the person in I Cor. 3:15: He himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

Because I failed to repent of departing from my first love and walked through life devoid of hearing my Shepherd's voice, I did not produce any spiritual maturity worthy of reward. I will have an entrance into His Kingdom, but I will forfeit so much.

Nelson Study Bible: Eating of the tree of life is a promise of special intimacy with the Lord, a promise of renewing the fellowship enjoyed before the fall.

Man was cast out of God's Garden of Paradise.

The privileged access once denied Adam will be enjoyed by the one who overcomes.

Thess. 2:12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory.

Rev. 22:12-14 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. <sup>13</sup> I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

Will I receive this promise to the one who overcomes?

The King is coming for a Bride who has made herself ready and is watching for His return.