



river west church

The Return to Love

Revelation 2:1-7

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11.28.2010

Truth and Love

What happened at the church of Ephesus is one of the all time great stories of Gospel power and transformation. The impact of the Gospel was so great in this city, it literally changed the economy there. People abandoned their idols and their occultist practices at an unbelievable rate. It changed the whole dynamic of the place. They did all this while walking a fine line. They made their presence in the culture known, enough so to be clearly identified as Christians, believing and living in a different “way” than others. Yet, they did not directly slam other peoples’ religious views. I guess you could say they disagreed in a way that was “civil”. But even more to the point, there was such a passionate love for Christ and others in the Christian community, that it became an incredible shining light for the Gospel. Many people came to faith in Christ as a result. (You can read about all this in Acts 19:23-41)

The Ephesian church was a community of truth and love. Of all the traits Jesus is looking for in His church, these two top the list and they must always go together. Truth and love were overflowing at Ephesus! But something changed and somewhere along the line this Christian community gave up on love.

Why We Give Up on Love

Jesus commends the church at Ephesus for their commitment to truth. God never pits truth and love against one another, as if holding to truth is somehow a barrier to love. In fact, in the Book of Ephesians 4:14-15, we are told to “speak the truth in love.” The ideal is 100% truth and 100% love. But at some point the church at Ephesus gave up on love. Revelation 2:4 makes it clear. It’s not just that love grew cold. That expression is too passive, like it was just something that “happened” to them. No, that’s not what happened. The passage tells us that they actually “left” the love they had at first. More literally they “abandoned” the love they once had. They walked away from it.

But why would they do this? Because living a life of love is hard. To live in love, both love toward God and love towards others, requires so much of us. It requires more than just believing the right things, or making sure other people believe the right things. It requires baring our hearts before God. It requires being patient, kind and humble with imperfect people. It’s often messy and emotional. For many people it is way easier to be doctrine detectives and truth enforcers than it is to actually live in love.

How to Hold on to Love

Thankfully, there is a way to turn things around. Ironically, the remedy is actually a matter of going back to the issue of truth. Truth applied to our own hearts at the deepest level. You see, as long as we use truth primarily as a test for others, we can remain personally unmoved by it. This was the error of the Ephesians.

If you go back and read Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, what you will see is Gospel truth applied at the most personal level. When the Ephesians experienced the fire of “first love” with Jesus, it was because they applied the truth of the Gospel to their own hearts. They saw that THEY were dead in sin. They saw that Jesus died for THEM. They were personally touched by the glory of His amazing grace. So they loved Jesus with an incredible love, and they worked at loving one another as well. Go back and spend some time in the Book of Ephesians and you will see how all this unfolds!

So what now? Remember! Remember the truth of the Gospel. Remember that YOU are a sinner saved by grace. Remember what Christ has done for YOU. The first step toward restoring the fire of Christian love is to remember and apply the Gospel to your own life first. This humbles us and reignites our love for Jesus. This gives us a heart of grace and love for others.

But there is something to DO as well. Jesus says, "repent... and DO the works you did at first" (Revelation 2:5). I have no doubt their faith and love expressed itself in heartfelt worship, prayer, communion and service. It was visible! That is why the people of Ephesus called Christians "people of the Way" (Acts 19:23). They could see that the Christian community lived out their faith in a dynamic and tangible way. It was truth and love put on display.

So here is Jesus' word to River West Church: truth and love. Fight for both. Hold tight to both. And no matter what, apply the truth of the Gospel to your own heart first. Apply it in such a way that it moves your heart. That is when the light of Christ shines brightest. And that is our calling in this dark world.