

The Most Dangerous Domino

September 5th 2011

Revelation 2:1-7

There are many dangers in the Christian life that God lovingly warns us about. But there's one that acts like the proverbial "first domino to fall." When we allow this domino to fall down in our life it crashes into all the other dominos in our life and it isn't long before we have a life of "fallen dominos" because the collapse of the first has affected all the other areas of our life. This is why tonight I want to share with you about this most dangerous domino and why we need to so carefully and prayerfully guard against anything happening to it.

I am going to tell you right up front what this most dangerous domino is. Ready here it is. The most dangerous domino is the danger of leaving our first love or allowing our passion for Jesus to grow cold. When this happens we lose the relational love that first drew us to Him, it cuts us off from our spiritual life source. Motivations get mixed up, convictions become compromised, the joy of serving Jesus goes out of our heart and the power out of our lives. We become more and more vulnerable to other spiritual dangers.

That is what is happening to the church of Ephesus here in Chapter 2. Understand this was truly a great church. It was founded by the Apostle Paul and led by men like Timothy and John. If there was ever a picture of a church with a healthy start, this was it.

And yet just a few decades into its very existence, we find Jesus addressing this church in the book of Revelation. Now He has some complimentary things to say about this church but the thing that really grips our attention is the Lord's stern warning that they have lost their first love for Him. They were still doing a lot of good things but they the faith and the fervency and the overflow for the Lord was gone and had been replaced by a routine and a duty and a lethargy that was very alarming to the Lord as He could see where it was leading them.

It this happened to the church of Ephesus it could certainly happen to us. Maybe it already has. I pray not but let's look at this tonight with more than just a passing interest because this local body of believers has a lot at stake

in this matter of staying in touch and in tune with God in these closing days of time.

Now these seven church referred to in Revelation can be looked at in three different ways. What are those ways?

1. **They can be viewed Prophetically** – These churches seem to represent different stages of the church over the last 2,000 years. If this is true, then the church at Ephesus represents the time period between the *Day of Pentecost and 100 AD*. This was a time of great expansion for the early church. But, it was also a time when some began to lose their zeal and fervency.
2. **They can be viewed Practically** – These letters were sent to literal, real congregations that were actually functioning at the close of the First Century. While they were written to real churches existing in that day, they still speak to every church in existence today. God has a word for Rock Springs E. Free Church in these verses!
3. **They can be viewed Personally** – These letters speak to congregations, but we should also be mindful that the Lord has a word for the **individual** in these letters as well. He has something to say to you and to me about our relationship with Him.

My desire is to take the practical application of these letters and seek to apply them to our body of believers. I believe the Lord has something specific to say to our church from each of these letters and statements to the 7 churches but tonight we focus only on the first church mentioned.

The first of the churches that is addressed is the church located in the city of Ephesus. To understand some of the things spoken to the church, we need to examine the city. If you were going to learn something about the E.Free Church that meets in Rock Springs it would be very helpful to know something about the past and the present of Rock Springs. The same applies here. Let me share a few facts about the ancient city of Ephesus. Ephesus was important in day for several reasons.

1. **It was an important city Commercially** – Ephesus was located on the Castor River, just a few miles inland from the Aegean Sea. It was noted for its magnificent harbor, and ships came to Ephesus from all over the known world bring their goods and their wealth. It was the richest city in Asia Minor in its day.
2. **It was an important city Politically** – Because of past service to the Empire of Rome, Ephesus was granted the right to be a “**free city**”. This means that they practiced self-government. It means that they could make whatever decisions they wanted to make. It also means that Roman troops were not garrisoned there. This allowed the city to thrive.
3. **It was an important city Religiously** – Ephesus was the home of the temple of Diana, or Artemis. In its day, it was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. People came from everywhere to come to that temple. Now, Diana was the goddess of sex and fertility. She was represented by a hideous statue of a many-breasted woman. This temple was filled with hundreds of temple prostitutes and the way you worshiped Diana was to have sexual relations with a temple prostitute. The temple also served as a bank. People would bring their possessions there for safe keeping. It served as museum for fine art. Art from all over the world was housed in this ancient temple. It also served as a refuge for criminals. If a lawbreaker could get to the temple, he would be safe from prosecution.

It is easy to see that the city of Ephesus was a wicked, degenerate, vile place to live. A Greek philosopher named Heraclitus said, “***No one could live in Ephesus without weeping over the immorality which he must see on every side.***”

It was to this vile city that God sent the Apostle Paul, **Acts 18:19-21; 20:17-38**. Paul preached here for two years and founded this church. While Paul was there, he wrote the books of First and Second Corinthians. Timothy was the first bishop of this church, **1 Tim. 1:3**. Aquilla, Priscilla and Apollos all labored in the Ephesian church, **Acts 18**. The Apostle John also spent the last years of his life in Ephesus. It was here that he wrote the Gospel of John and his three epistles. According to tradition, Mary the mother of Jesus is

buried in Ephesus. This church was privileged to hear and know the best of the best in those early days.

This was an active church, serving in a wicked hour. But, God used them and many souls were saved. By the way, the same methods used in Ephesus will still work today, **Acts 20:17-21**. We will not reach our community by sitting still and doing nothing. We will reach Sweetwater County by going out sharing the Gospel with them!

Thirty years have passed and the Lord comes to this church to speak to them about where they are and where He wants them to be. He comes to them with a message of comfort. They are reminded in **verse 1** that He has them safely in His hand. The word “**holdeth**” speaks of “**being in absolute control**”. In a society that was out of control, they needed to know that He was in control. We need that same message today. He reminds them that He is ever with them, observing them and protecting them as they seek to serve Him.

I want you to notice that the Lord has something personal to say to each of these 7 churches that are mentioned here. He comes to this church talking about His presence among them. This was a church that desperately needed to recognize the presence of the Lord in their midst.

Jesus makes four **observations** concerning this church that I want to share with you tonight. I want to take this passage and preach on the thought: The Most Dangerous Domino: Losing Our First Love. I believe Jesus has a word for our hearts today.

I. v. 2-3, 6 **JESUS EXAMINES THEIR REPUTATION**

(III. Jesus begins His remarks to this church by talking about all that is right with this congregation. They had a lot going for them and the Lord lets them know that He has seen all the good they are doing in His Name. He comes to them with precious **words of commendation**)

A. v. 2a **He Commends Their Service** – Jesus uses three words to describe the activity of this church.

1. **Works** – This word speaks of “*that which is accomplished*”. It refers to the fact that this church has accomplished much for the glory of the Lord. They have been working and Jesus has seen it all.
2. **Labor** – This word literally means “*a beating*”. It speaks of “*intense work coupled with toil and trouble.*” It tells that this church was serving the Lord fervently. They were literally working their fingers to the bone. In other words, this was no Sunday morning only crowd. They were actively serving the Lord at great personal expense and great personal sacrifice.
3. **Patience** – This word speaks of “*steadfast endurance*”. It tells us that this church was working in spite of opposition. The people in Ephesus did not appreciate these people or their zeal for the Lord and they opposed them publicly and physically; but these people endured the opposition and the persecution and they continued to serve the Lord faithfully in spite of everything thrown against them.

If you had gone to this church on a typical Sunday you would have heard about a week filled with activity and opportunities for service. These people knew something that the modern church has forgotten.

- They knew that a church will not build itself.
- They also knew that a church cannot sustain itself.
- They knew that it takes people who will stick by the stuff!
- They also knew that it takes work to do these things!

If Jesus were to stand here in front of this congregation tonight, would He commend us for our works, or labor and our patience?

B. v. 2b, **He Commends Their Separation** – “*canst not bear them which are evil*” – These people were living a separated lifestyle. The immorality and evil that defined their world was not a part of their lives. They took a stand on the side of morality and they lived differently than the world around them.

God still expects this from all of His children. He demands that we be separate from this evil world, **2 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 5:1-8**. In our walk, our talk, our dress, our choices of entertainment, and in every area of life, we are commanded to be different from the lost world around us. That is the only way we can let the light of Christ shine, **Matt. 5:16**. *If Jesus was to speak to this church and our own hearts today, would He commend us for being a separated people?*)

C. v. 2c, 6 **He Commends Their Standards** – These people are praised because they held fast to correct doctrine. When people passed through their town claiming to be men of God, they put them to the test. They checked out their credentials and they examined their preaching. If what they said did not line up with the Word of God, they refused to hear them, or to fellowship with them, but they exposed them to be the liars they were.

They are also commended because of their stand against the “**Nicolaitans**”. No one knows for sure who these people were, but there are a couple of possibilities. The word comes from two Greek words; “**Nikao**” – “**To Conquer**” and “**Laos**” – “**The People**”.

Therefore the Nicolaitans could have been a group of church leaders who wanted to establish a hierarchy in the church. In other words, there may have been some who wanted to run the show and keep the people under their control. That crowd is still with us today! In some denominations there is a distinction between the “**clergy**” and the “**laity**”.

Another possibility is that the Nicolaitans were follows of a fellow named Nicolas who attempted to lead the people away from the Lord and into immorality. He preached a doctrine that allowed people to serve the Lord and still lead immoral lives.

Either way, what was “**deeds**” in **verse 6** has become “**doctrine**” in **verse 15**. This is the reverse of the order the bible clearly lays out. We learn doctrine and the doctrine controls our deeds. The flesh likes to do what it pleases and then devise doctrine to suit itself.

The Ephesian believers refused to allow false doctrine to exist in their fellowship. How did they do this? They placed every teaching alongside the Word of God. If it did not line up with the book, they refused to receive it!

We need that same attitude today! Not every thing that comes down the pike is from the Lord!

Sadly, too many church folks believe everything they hear. They will listen to preachers on the TV that they would not tolerate in their church. They praise men that cannot even articulate the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but who stroke their egos and feed their flesh. If someone makes them feel good, they don't care what he believes. Friends, you are headed for trouble down the line if that is your approach to preaching and preachers. We ought to be like the Berean believers who put everything they heard to the acid test. Here is what the Bible says about them: “***These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so***” Acts 17:11. ***What would Jesus say not about our opinions, but about our doctrinal standards?)***

- D. v. 3 **He Commends Their Steadfastness** – This is a church that has been carrying the load, enduring much affliction and opposition, laboring to the point of exhaustion and they have done so without any signs of weariness. They were a very steadfast congregation. And, what they did, they did for the sake of the Lord. They are a church that deserves to be commended.

On the surface, the church at Ephesus is what every church should strive to be. We should be busy for the Lord. We should flesh out the command of **1 Cor. 15:58**, “***Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.***” Does that verse describe our church? Does that verse describe your life? ***Would Jesus commend us for our steadfastness?***)

I. Jesus Examines Their Reputation

II. JESUS EXPOSES THE REALITY V 4

After offering this church some ***words of commendation***, Jesus now gives them some ***words of complaint***.

A. **His Disappointment** – While they look good on the surface, there are problems in the heart that must be dealt with. Jesus let them know that this is a personal matter. It seems that He is grieved by the problems He sees in this church.

We need to understand that Jesus sees what we do, but He also sees what we are. He is able to look beneath the surface of our lives and see the condition of our hearts. When He finds error and sin in our hearts, it grieves Him and it hinders our ability to enjoy His fellowship and His blessings. When we allow the wrong kind of things to linger in our hearts, it grieves Him, **Eph. 4:30.**)

B. **His Diagnosis** – Jesus looks at these people whom He loves and for whom He died and tells them that they simply do not love Him like they used to. He tells them that they “***have left their first love.***” They still have love, but the deep, fervent, burning love that filled them with a passion to serve Him has left their hearts. They love their church; but they do not love Him like they used to. They love their doctrine; but they have lost their passion for Jesus. They love their work; but they are not motivated in that work by a passionate love for Jesus. They are

busy, but their hearts no longer burn for Him. The flame that burned so hotly and brightly when it was first ignited is now nothing but a smoldering ember. They have lost their passion for the Son of God! They have “***left thy first love***”.

You see, the Christian life is basically a love affair with the Lord Jesus Christ. Getting saved is falling in love with Him. Growing in salvation is falling deeper in love with Him. This love is the motive for all we do in His Name. Whether we sing, teach, preach, witness, give, etc, it must all flow out of an ever deepening love for the Lord Jesus. If we lose our love for Him, then our service means nothing at all, **1 Cor. 13:1-3**.

Love is supposed to grow! I mean, I love my wife more today than I ever have. I love my children more today than I did when I first saw them. I love you folks more as each day passes. Love should grow. But, I wonder if Jesus would have to say to some of us, “***You don’t love me like you used to***”? It would break our hearts if our spouse said that to us. Would it faze us if we knew the Lord felt that way?

What is this “***first love***” anyway? What makes it so special? ***First Love Is Fervent Love!*** It is ***emotional***. It moves the heart. It causes the soul to thrill. It is not cold, dead, dusty and dry. It is alive and it is vibrant. Remember when you first fell in love with your mate? Your love was fervent and emotional. It made you write mushy letters and say things you never would have said if love hadn’t short-circuited your brain. Now, can you remember when you were first saved? Can you remember how in love you were with Jesus, His House, His people, and His Word? Can you remember how you prayed, worshiped and witnessed? Remember the emotion when you thought of what He had done for you? That is first, fervent love!

It is ***extravagant***. Love will make you spend money for things you can’t afford. You ever done that? Buy that special person something you couldn’t afford, but you knew they would love? Mary and her alabaster box of ointment. Real love never draws lines! Real love will give anything at anytime for the object of that love. Can you remember when Jesus had

absolute control of your heart and you would not dare tell Him no? That is first, fervent love!

Does this describe your love for Him? Do you serve Him because you love Him, or do you do it from a sense of duty? It is possible to labor without love; but it is impossible to love without labor. You can work and not be in love with the Lord. The Elder Brother – **Luke 15:25-32**. But, you cannot be in love with the Lord and be inactive. Jacob and his service for Rachel – **Gen. 29**.

The church of Ephesus was active in the Lord's work, but they were serving out of a sense of duty and not out of a fervent love for Him. They had become like Martha, **Luke 10:38-42**. She labored, but not out of love.

What about us? Are there some that are serving because it is what people expect from them and not because they love the Lord? Love for Jesus should be at the bottom of all that we do. Whether we teach, preach, sing in the choir, clean the church, serve as a Deacon or Elder, etc, we should do it out of love for the Lord!

We can't always say that we love sinners like we should. Some are very unlovable. But if we love Him like we should, we will be able to witness to them anyway. We may not always love one what we are asked to do for Him, but if we love Him, we will gladly accept the call for His glory.

Can you honestly say that your heart is still filled with that first, fervent, emotional, extravagant love for Jesus? Or, have you left your first love? Now, stop looking at some other person and what they are doing or not doing. ***You need to read your own mail*** today and let the Lord speak to your heart.

I. Jesus Examines Their Reputation

II. Jesus Exposes Their Reality

III. v. 5 JESUS EXPLAINS THE REMEDY

Jesus has not come to hurt them; He has come to help them! He offers a ***word of commendation***, a ***word of complaint***, now He speaks a ***word of correction***. He tells them how they can fix that which is wrong in their church.

A. **He Speaks About Remembering** – Jesus calls on these people to look back. He wants them to remember that moment when they came to know Him. He wants them to reflect on what He did for them. He wants them to recall all the excitement and emotion of those early days with Him. He wants them to look back to a time when their love for Him motivated everything they did.

Some of us need to remember. We have been saved so long that we have lost the thrill of those early days. Can you remember what it was like when you first came to Jesus and the weight of your sins was lifted from your heart? Can you remember when just the mention of His name brought tears to your eyes? Can you remember when your heart was tender and you felt at home in the altar talking to Him. Can you remember? Take a minute and reflect on how it used to be. Now, look at how it is. Can you honestly say that you are still head over heels in love with Jesus today?

When a saint of God falls out of love with Jesus, they are in a “***backslidden***” condition. They need a revival. The first step in revival is remembering.

B. **He Speaks About Repenting** – The word “***repent***” speaks of “***a change of mind that leads to a change of action***”. Jesus is telling these people that they need to repent of the sin of not loving Him like they should. They need to search their hearts and change their attitude toward the Lord.

The same counsel needs to be heeded by the modern church today. We have allowed everything in the world to come before the Lord. Family, fun, work, even church work has all taken His place in our hearts. We need to get back to our altars, reclaim that emotional, extravagant first love and fall head over heels in love with Jesus one more time. How long has it been since you confessed a lack of burning love for Him? How long has it been since you were open and unashamed in your expressions of love for the Master? We need to repent of our coldness and fall in love with Jesus afresh and anew.

- C. **He Speaks About Repeating** – He tells them to “***do the first works***”. They are told to start doing the things they used to do once again. That is the key for their revival and it is the key for us as well.

We need to get back to the first works; back to reading the Bible; back to praying; back to witnessing; back to testifying; back to crying; back to praising His name; we need to get back to the things that marked us when we were deeply in love with Jesus. Get before Him today and ask Him to show you the way back.

- D. **He Speaks About Removing** – If they refuse to get where they need to be, Jesus tells them that He is willing to extinguish their candle. That is just what He did at Ephesus too! They failed to heed the message and He took away their light. Now, there is no great Christian work in that city. There is nothing there but ruins and rubble.

There is a lamp in our living room that needs a new bulb. When I change it, I am going to throw the old one in the trash. Why? Uselessness breeds disaster! Uselessness serves no purpose. A light

that won't shine is not worth having around. When a church stops shining in love for Jesus; when they stop being a bright light for the Lord, He will take His power and His touch and He will put it where people will honor Him and love Him.

I do not want God to take away what we have. I do not want E. Free to become like so many other churches in our world today. But, if we fall out of love with Him and continue in that state, the day will come when He will take what we do have and He will give it to those who will use it for His glory. Mark it down! It is either ***Remember, Repent and Repeat, or it is Removal!***

I. **Jesus Examines Their Reputation**

II. **Jesus Exposes Their Reality**

III. **Jesus Explains The Remedy**

IV. v. 7 **JESUS EXPOUNDS THE REWARD**

We have heard our Lord's words of commendation, complaint and correction. In this final verse, He closes with words of consolation. There is hope.

A. **The Reward Is Available** – Jesus speaks to the “***overcomer***”. This word means “***to carry off the victory***”. He seems to be saying that there will be some in the church of Ephesus who will hear the message and heed the message. These people will seek the Lord's face, fall in love with Him again and be restored to that place of intimacy and fellowship. This reward is available to all who will seek it.

B. **The Reward Is Amazing** – Those who overcome will be able to experience something that other believers will miss out on. They will get to eat from the tree of life. When Adam sinned in Eden, he was cast out of the garden to prevent him from eating from this tree, **Gen. 3:22-24**. Those who live this life head over

heels in love with Jesus will get to taste the fruit of that tree. They, along with all other believers, have eternal life already. This is a special gift to the ones who love Him. Jesus seems to be saying that those who love Him the most now will enjoy Heaven the most then. I want all I can get both here and hereafter. How about you?

Conc: I want you to be honest with yourself and with your Lord for just a moment. Have you left your first love? Are you busy, but busy out of duty and not out of love? Can you honestly say that you are filled with fervent, emotional, extravagant love for Jesus? Or, would you have to say that your heart has gotten cold; that your zeal is not what it used to be; that you need to remember, repent and repeat the first works? If He had touched your heart, you need to deal with Him. The time is now and the place is here.