

**Outline of
the Messages for the Full-time Training
in the Fall Term of 2016**

**GENERAL SUBJECT:
THE FAILURES IN THE CHURCHES,
THE DEGRADATION OF THE CHURCH, THE OVERCOMERS IN THE CHURCH,
THE RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH, AND THE STAGES OF THE CHURCH**

Message Twelve

The Stages of the Church

(1)

The Church in Ephesus

Scripture Reading: Rev. 2:1-7

- I. With regard to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, which are represented by the seven lampstands, we should understand three things:**
- A. These seven churches were real churches existing at that time.
 - B. These seven churches represent the sevenfold history of the church (see footnote 1 on Revelation 2:1).
 - C. The conditions of the churches exist simultaneously in the church's sevenfold history.
- II. Revelation 2 and 3 show us what we need to do to return to the orthodoxy of the church—what it is that actually pleases the Lord, what it is that the Lord condemns, and what the Lord's actual way is for the church:**
- A. If a man really wants to walk in the Lord's way, he must read Revelation 2 and 3; today the church has problems, so Revelation tells us what to do; if you do not seek the way in these two chapters, you do not know how to be a Christian.
 - B. The seven epistles to the seven churches start with the Lord and end with a call to the overcomers; the overcomers are the normal and ordinary ones; those who are not abnormal during the time of abnormality are the overcomers.
 - C. Today men fall, fail, and go downward continually, but the overcomers are recovered to the will of God and return to the orthodoxy of the church.
- III. There are four main points in the Lord's epistle to the church in Ephesus—love, life, light, and the lampstand—2:1-7:**
- A. We must not leave the Lord as our first love, and we must do the first works; "but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent"—vv. 4-5:
 - 1. The leaving of the first love is the source of and main reason for the failure of the church throughout the ages.
 - 2. Colossians tells us that our Christ must have the first place in all things; He must have the preeminence—1:18b.
 - 3. To recover the first love is to consider the Lord Jesus as the first in everything; if we make Christ everything in our life, this means that we have overcome the loss of the first love—cf. Psa. 73:25.

4. To overcome the loss of the first love is to be constrained by the love of Christ not merely to live for the Lord but to live to the Lord—2 Cor. 5:9, 14-15:
 - a. To live to the Lord means that we are determined to gain the honor of being well pleasing to Him by being absolutely under His control, direction, and governing and that we care uniquely for His aims and goals.
 - b. To live to the Lord means that we are under the Lord's direction and control and that we fulfill His requirements, satisfy His desires, and complete what He intends.
5. The failure of Israel was that they forsook God, the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13), and the degradation of the church is the leaving of the first love; actually, to leave the first love is just to leave Christ, not taking Him as the first in everything.
6. The first love must be to have God, Christ, the Lord, our Master, as the first One in everything—in great things as well as in small things; we need to ask the Lord to forgive us for all the things in which we do not give Him the preeminence.
7. The “first works” are works that issue from the “first love”—Rev. 2:4-5:
 - a. When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), we will surely not be praised for the greatness or volume of our work; what the Lord will investigate is how much of what we do is out of our love to Him.
 - b. Only those works that are motivated by love are the gold, the silver, and the precious stones (1 Cor. 3:12); when the saints are filled with the first love for the Lord, everything they do originates from their love for the Lord and is a “labor of love” (1 Thes. 1:3).
 - c. It is possible that we, like the children of Israel, may worship and serve God, but we may do it mournfully, not at all happy that we are required to do these things—Mal. 3:14.
8. For the Lord to remove the church's lampstand does not mean that from now on it has no more outward activities or moves; it merely means that it can no longer be God's faithful testimony:
 - a. If we leave the first love to the Lord and do not repent and do the first works, it is possible that we may still be standing on the ground of locality, but we have lost the reality and testimony of the Triune God as typified by the golden lampstand.
 - b. The removal of the lampstand means that before God the church's position is lost and that she has lost her testimony, the testimony of Jesus; she has lost her position and is disqualified from being the church of the Lord's testimony anymore.
- B. If we have the first love toward the Lord, we will hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which the Lord also hates—Rev. 2:4, 6:
 1. The Greek word for *Nicolaitan* is composed of two words, one meaning “conquer” or “be victorious over” and another meaning “common people,” “secular people,” or “laity.”
 2. *Nicolaitans*, then, must refer to a group of people who esteem themselves higher than the common believers; this was undoubtedly the hierarchy adopted and established by Catholicism and Protestantism; the Lord hates the works, the behavior, of these Nicolaitans, and we must hate what the Lord hates.
 3. In the proper church life there should be neither clergy nor laity; all the believers should be priests of God (1:6; 5:10; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9); because the mediatorial class destroys the universal priesthood in God's economy, the Lord hates it.
- C. In such a good, orderly, and formal church life like the church in Ephesus, we need to maintain the eating of Christ as the tree of life—Rev. 2:7:

1. If we give the preeminence to Christ in everything and enjoy Him as the tree of life every day, we will be marvelous, overcoming Christians, and the church life will become a paradise to us.
 2. God's original intention was that man should eat of the tree of life (Gen. 2:9, 16); because of the fall, the way to the tree of life was closed to man (3:22-24); through the redemption of Christ the way by which man could touch the tree of life, which is God Himself in Christ as life to man, was opened again (Heb. 10:19-20).
 3. But in the church's degradation, religion crept in with its knowledge to distract the believers in Christ from eating Him as the tree of life; hence, the Lord promised to grant the overcomers to eat of Himself as the tree of life in the Paradise of God (the New Jerusalem) as a reward; this is an incentive for them to leave religion with its knowledge and return to the enjoyment of Himself.
 4. This promise of the Lord restores the church to God's original intention according to His economy; what the Lord wants the overcomers to do is what the whole church should do in God's economy; because of the church's degradation, the Lord came to call the overcomers to replace the church in the accomplishing of God's economy.
 5. Eating the tree of life, that is, enjoying Christ as our life supply, should be the primary matter in the church life:
 - a. The content of the church life depends on the enjoyment of Christ; the more we enjoy Him, the richer the content will be, but to enjoy Christ requires us to love Him with the first love.
 - b. If we leave our first love toward the Lord, we will miss the enjoyment of Christ and lose the testimony of Jesus; consequently, the lampstand will be removed from us.
 - c. These three things—loving the Lord, enjoying the Lord, and being the testimony of the Lord—go together.
- D. Love is related to life, and life is related to light; love, life, and light are a trinity:
1. If we make Christ the first in everything, we will have the first love; if we have this love, we have life, and we will enjoy the Lord; if we have life, this life becomes light to us—John 1:4; Phil. 2:15-16.
 2. The light of the lampstand, the church, shines forth corporately versus individualistically in the dark night of the church age—cf. Rev. 2:5b.
- E. If we are enjoying Christ as our love, life, and light, we will keep the testimony of Jesus as the shining of the lampstand in our locality—cf. 12:17b.
- F. We need to remember these four words that begin with the letter *l*—*love, life, light, and lampstand*:
1. We must give the Lord Jesus the preeminence in every way and in everything to recover the first love.
 2. Then we will enjoy Him as the tree of life, and this life right away becomes the light of life—John 8:12.
 3. Then we will be shining in our daily life and corporately as the lampstand; otherwise, the lampstand will be removed from us individually and from the church corporately.
 4. If today we take Christ as the first in everything, we will have love, we will enjoy Him as life, we will shine forth with Him as light, and we will become the shining lampstand as the testimony of Jesus; this eventually will become our reward not only in this age but even more in the coming age; in the thousand-year kingdom we will enjoy Christ as our reward in the Paradise of God.