

Ephesians
Chapter 6:21-24
“Your First Love”

All scripture references are from the NASU unless otherwise noted

Calvary Chapel Fellowship of Enid
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This morning we close out the **Book of Ephesians** ... so would you pick it up with me in **verse 21** of **chapter 6** please ...

Verses 21-24: Paul’s benediction ... his well wishes and prayer for the church he’s ministered to throughout this letter.

In part ... to give them a heads-up that he’s sending Tichicus to minister on his behalf in person. Then ... he prays for peace, love, faith and grace on a specific group within the body at Ephesus ... **those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.**

A love not based on the events nor emotions of the day and therefore a love that won’t ebb and flow ... an incorruptible love.

Now even though this is the end of Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus ... it is not the last letter that the Ephesian church received.

So, to complete the story, would you turn with me please to **Revelation, chapter 2** ... where Jesus dictated to the Apostle John the real last letter to this church ...

1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 4 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent. ... 7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. ...

Twenty years after Paul closed out his **letter to the Ephesians** ... Jesus offers this assessment of the church.

A report card consisting of four basic components: Commendation, complaint, counsel and consequences ...

1. Commendation:

a. First, He says, in an approving tone, **I know your deeds**. Because the church had done many good things. They had accomplished much.

b. Second, He commends them for their effort in labor ... **“I know ... your toil and perseverance”** He says. So, not only had they accomplished much, but they’d exerted great effort to do it.

This church was a well-oiled machine! They probably had a building committee and a visitation committee and a church growth committee and a committee to organize the committees.

c. Third, He commends them for their intolerance of evil men. They were a church that understood the importance of purging the poison from the body.

d. Fourth, He commends them for their doctrine. They were not only intolerant of evil men, but they were strong enough in the Word of God to test the words and actions of visiting teachers and theologians against the scripture and to discern truth from heresy.

e. And fifth ... they’re commended for their staying-power. They hung tough ... even in the face of persecution. They held tenaciously to the name of Christ ... and did not grow weary.

This sounds like an absolutely rockin’ church with a very impressive list of accolades.

But, unfortunately ... we have to go on to **verse 4** ... The Complaint section ...

2. Complaint: They’d left their first love.

The word “left” is aphiemi (af-ee'-ay-mee) in the Greek and it implies an intentional departure. This wasn’t an accidental drift. They didn’t “lose” their first love ... they “left” it!

Think of the illustration in **Luke chapter 15** where the Lord shares three separate, but connected parables ... The parable of the Lost Sheep, the parable of the Lost Coin and the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In the first two, the owner searched diligently for what had been lost, but in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father simply waited.

Q. What’s the difference? – “Lost” versus “Left”! The Ephesians had left their first love.

The world doesn’t really care why you do what you do, but the Lord is far more interested in what motivates your actions than in your actions themselves. He

wants the motivation for your works to be exclusively ... love!

Q. Now, if we we're honest, many of us would think "Why is that such a big deal? Especially in a situation like the Ephesian's ... considering all the wonderful things the church had accomplished?"? Think of it this way ...

Scharry and I have been married for 36 years ... and I can honestly say that we are more in love today than we've ever been. It just keeps getting better, but what if all that changed. What if I said to her ...

"Honey, I'm just not in love with you anymore. But I care about you, so, I'm gonna give you a little money from time to time ... and you can keep the car. I don't wanna be with you, but I'll try to make sure you have the basics. So, really it shouldn't be that big of a deal."

Q. Is the cash and a car, a replacement for my love and companionship? – Well, in my case that might actually be a pretty good deal, but it's not in general. Material goods aren't going to keep her heart from being broken.

And so it was with the Ephesians ... remember, "the church" (meaning the people, not the building), is The Bride of Christ (**Revelation 19:7**) and the Ephesian Bride had walked away from her love for the Groom and tried to make up for that with works.

The third component of the Lord's assessment ... after commendation and complaint, is ...

3. Counsel: We see it in verse 5 ... **remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first** ... The three "R's" ... Remember, Repent and Repeat!

Remember from where you have fallen. It matters more to Jesus, what you do with Him than what you do for Him.

They were once His beloved bride, but they'd become more like employees. Granted, they were great employees, but the Lord has no interest in employees ... only brides. So, He says, **Remember from where you have fallen.**

Then He says ...

Repent: It wasn't enough for them to feel bad about walking away from their love for Him. His expectation was for them to walk back. To turn away from their cold indifference and mechanical service.

And His last piece of counsel is to ...

Repeat ... do the deeds you did before.

The Hebrew word “Selah” as we often see in the **Psalms** means, “a pause to contemplate God”. To breath in the Lord. It’s meant as a step of preparation for His work in the strength of His Spirit.

Because labor can be evidence of love ... it can never be a substitute for it!

Some wise person once said, “Beware of the bareness of a busy life”. The Ephesians worked hard in the name of the Lord. And not only did they have solid doctrine ... they enforced it without regard for pleasing men ... yet they’d left their first love.

Hebrews 6:1 says ...

... let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works ...

And the phrase “dead works” there, is nekros ergon (nek-ros' er'-gon) ... literally, the works of a corpse.

Q. And how much of what a corpse does gets chalked up as good works?

But note ... throughout this ... there’s no admonition against good, hard work. There’s no admonition against being busy.

But first things must come first ... **do the deeds you did before** ... “Selah” ... pause to contemplate God ... summon His strength for the work you do.

Be a bride, not an employee!

And lastly, after commendation, complaint and counsel, the Lord concludes with ...

4. Consequences: Unless you Remember, Repent and Repeat ... **I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place ...**

It might be easy for us to dismiss the change in the way the Ephesian church was relating to the Lord. In human terms it might seem almost trivial, but to the Lord it was so serious that He flatly warns ... “Fix it or I will shut down the church.”

In **John 8:12**, Jesus said ... **I am the Light of the world** ... and what He’s saying to the church at Ephesus is that unless their love for Him got back to being more important than their works in His name ... He was leaving and, as a result, their light would go out!

He wasn't going to stick around and let the people work for Him instead of marry Him.

Q. So what did they do? – Well in the day of the Lord's writing, Ephesus was a wealthy and important, sprawling metropolis of over half a million people ... today, it's a village with no native Christian witness at all.

So, this was no idle threat ... Jesus removed His lampstand.

Conclusion: As we begin to wrap up the **Book of Ephesians**, I'd like to show you a scene from Christ's earthly ministry in **Matthew 21**.

The setting is the day after He rode into Jerusalem on the back of a colt ... four days before He went to the cross.

Look with me please at ...

18 Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry. 19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered.

Q. So, how do we prevent the mistake of the Ephesians? – What do we do if we've already left our first love? – Well this account graphically answers those questions.

When Jesus came to this tree, He expected to see young fruit, but He found none. He saw the tree from a distance and based on the way it appeared, He should have been able to find fruit on it, but He found only leaves.

Now the foliage of fig trees is exceptionally dense. It's hard to see through ... so the leaves provide a very effective cover for ... fruitlessness.

Q. In fact, remember what Adam and Eve used fig leaves for? --

"To cover their nakedness and shame", **Genesis 3:7** says.

So, this has obvious application for us, both individually and corporately. Because ... it's not that hard ... to look fruitful from a distance ... the church at Ephesus did.

May we always be content to be more fruity than leafy. I'd much rather have you look ragged and beat-up with fruit, than to look like you've got it all together, but have a bunch of barren branches disguised by religious works.

Leaves may hide fruitlessness from the eyes of man, but not from Jesus. Remember, we're His bride and that means more than a casual glance from a distance.

Jesus saw right through those leaves ... and as a result, He pulled up His lampstand and “the tree”, we’re told “withered at once”.

And **Mark’s gospel** makes a special note about that, saying ...

Mark 11:20 As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up.

It “**withered from the roots up**”!

And that’s the way it is for most of us ... it’s the hidden parts that wither first ... it’s our love for the Lord ... our quiet times with Him ... our private prayer life and devotions. Those are the things that wither first.

The leaves (the externals), are often the last to go. We continue to do the outward stuff.

And Satan loves it when we cover up. He loves it when we wear disguises. He loves it when we fake it.

God’s plan though, is that we recognize it ... confess it to Him and others and that we ask Him to change us ... doing our part along the way.

The leaves (our loveless works), will burn on the day of judgment (**1st Corinthians 3:10-15**). The Lord takes no pleasure in leaves.

Galatians 5:22 says that ... the fruit of the Spirit is ... love. Jesus came to the fig tree looking for fruit ... He came to the church at Ephesus looking for love.

Q. And Jesus comes to us ... every day ... looking ... what will He find?

Paul, remember, prayed for ... **all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love (verse 24).**

And Jesus says, **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Revelation 2:7).**

So, if you have, at least one, ear ... He’s speaking to you.

Q. And what’s He saying? – Simply this ... be the Bride ... not an employee!

Little girls dream of their day as a bride. They love to play dress-up in old wedding clothes and pretend it’s their wedding.

And **Revelation 19:7-8** talks about that for the Christian. It says that our wedding gown is made of the works that we offer in the name of Christ.

But just like the dress doesn't make a little girl a real bride ... neither will our good works in Christ's name.

Q. So what makes us a bride? – Only one thing ... saying “Yes” when the groom asks for our hand in marriage. We just need to say “Yes” to Jesus' proposal. And what a proposal it is!

As guys ... we get graded on how romantic and extravagant our proposals are ... “Will you marry me?” on the Jumbotron or I read about one guy who made an entire movie trailer to pop the question.

But Jesus showed-up every hopeful suitor of all time ... He allowed Himself to be crucified in the hope that you'd say “Yes” to His proposal!

That's a loving sacrifice ... not to make us an employee, but a bride!