

Revelation 2:1-7 — “Excise the cancer of loveless Christianity” **切除无爱基督信仰之毒瘤—启示录 2:1-7**

Introduction

There is a spiritual cancer that often develops slowly. Often goes unrecognized. And if left unchecked, it can kill a church.

This cancer attacks the heart of Christianity, it attacks the first and greatest commandment, it attacks love for Christ.

The Ephesian church in Revelation 2:1-7 seems to have it all. The spiritual pulse seems to be not just vital but thriving. However, the Great Physician diagnoses the malignant tumor gripping the heart of this church — they have left their first love.

Today, we will look at the **two steps to excise the cancer of loveless Christianity.**

1. Recognize that orthodoxy is not relationship (v1-4)

“The One who holds ... says this” (v. 1): Jesus is not unaware of what takes place in His church. He walks among His churches. Jesus is not out of touch with the church leaders. He holds these leaders firmly. The Lord Himself is essential to any accurate spiritual assessment. He intimately knows. Regularly, as we take our spiritual pulse, we ought to go before Him in His Word and in prayer. This regular practice increases our recognition of what He already recognizes.

“I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance” (v. 2): They worked hard, they wearied themselves with Gospel labor, and they endured in it.

“you cannot tolerate evil men...” (v. 2): The Ephesian elders heeded Paul’s warning four decades earlier in Acts 20:29–31. They rightly put them to the test those who call themselves apostles, and found them literally pseudo, liars. This church had works, they had hard outward labor, continued inward endurance, they had diligent discernment. And Christ is not done commending them.

“you have perseverance...” (v. 3): “Have” is in the present tense. They were in the continued state of having both endurance and the ability to bear up under difficulty. They never entertained the idea of giving up. They labored to the point of weariness without allowing the weariness to drive them away.

Wow, wouldn’t we love this assessment from the Lord? Not only well taught but standing firm in it! And yet, there is something slightly wrong. Something insidious within. Something undetected by the human eye. Not so with Christ! His piercing gaze cuts right to the heart (1 Sam 16:7).

“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (v. 4): In one of the greatest contrasts in the word of God, ‘but’ marks the transition from all the commendation of this church to the condemnation. Here is the cancer. Under the healthy skin of spiritual diligence, the festering mass lurks.

The grammar highlights the word ‘first.’ This spiritual sprout first grew in us from something done to us. **1 John 4:19 says, “we love because He first loved us.”** God did something for you at that moment of salvation. He acted first, because of His love you have love. Not *eros*, sexual love, or *phileo*, brotherly love, but a higher form, self-sacrificial, *agape* love.

He lived for you, so you wanted to live for Him. He suffered for you, so you wanted to suffer for Him. He died for you, so you died for Him. You said no to yourself, took up your cross, and followed after Him (Matt 16:24, Luke 9:23) because of what He did for you! You loved Him because He first loved you!

This love overflowed into your love for others as the very next verse in **1 John 4:20 states, “If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”**

The desire to love others comes from love for God comes from love from God. Do you see it? A sacred flow from God to you to others. The vine abiding in the branches, dependently drinking the nourishment desperately needed, delighting in bearing fruit. Not for pride, or self, or out of obligation, but for the One who turned your dead husk into life. Have you forgotten? Have you forsaken? Have you left?

Orthodoxy does not mean relationship.

Duty or delight?

He knows. Do you?

2. Recover your first love (v5-7)

The church is precious to Jesus. He gave Himself for her. Despite her continued wonderings, even if she hollowly says, “I don’t love you, but I will stay and do the work,” Christ does not settle. He fervently pursues her. He provides the stages needed to recover her first love.

Remembering.

“remember...” (v. 5): Literally, put it into your mind. Keep remembering from where you have fallen. Keep preaching the Gospel to yourself. The first thing the fallen believer must do is to set their gaze on their former heights.

Do you remember how God came to you? You were dead in your trespasses and sins. You had no life in yourself. You were under Satan’s domain. You were by nature children of wrath as the rest of mankind. But, in the greatest contrast in the scriptures, God (cf. Eph 2:4). Because of who He is, rich in mercy, ready to lavish every spiritual blessing upon you, ready to pluck you out of the spiritual casket, ready to breath spiritual life into your deceased lungs, ready to make you a fellow heir with Christ, ready to make you a Son in His household, ready to save you unto Himself, actually did so through His Son’s decent to this earth, in human form, and humbling Himself even to the point of death, even death on a cross, and His glorious resurrection on your behalf accomplishing the sheer power required to raise your dead soul to life to His praise who sits on the throne who will reign forever, under whom all things will be

positioned, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, to the glory of God the Father. He loved you, and thus you loved Him. Oh, do you remember? Keep on remembering.

Next, Repent.

“and repent” (v. 5): This word means a turning of mind. A turning from the forsaking sickbed of loveless Christianity to the heights of relationship with Christ. Fill your mind with what He has done and commit your life to living accordingly.

This leads into, Return.

Remember, repent, and now return.

“do the deeds...” (v. 5): Now, with rekindled love for Christ, now with your mind and life fully committed to Him, now with your mind set on the things above (Col 3), now set yourself to the plow. Remember that excitement you had to share Christ, to speak about Him, to speak to Him, to read His Word? Return to the works you did at first.

As 1 John 5:2-4 states, it is the simple belief in Jesus Christ that yields the fruit of true love. Every branch that does not bear fruit is cut off and thrown into the fire (John 15:1-8).

“or else I am coming...” (v. 5): He is on His way. Not only will He return at His second coming, but He is presently walking among us. He is always coming to His church. Are you ready? If not, now is the time to recognize it! Recognize where your loveless heart has fallen from. Recover your former position by constantly remembering, decide to repent, and return to the sweet fruit of what you did before as you love God with your all and your neighbor as yourself.

“Nicolaitans” (v. 6): Irenaeus wrote of the Nicolaitans that they “lived lives of unrestrained indulgence”. Clement of Alexandria added that the Nicolaitans “abandon themselves to pleasure like goats ... leading a life of self-indulgence”

True love does not tolerate indulgence of the flesh within or without. Do not be deceived, you will reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7-9). For those who overcome, there is far better fruit ahead.

‘He who has an ear, let him hear...’ (v. 7): Heed this! Listen and walk by His Spirit.

Now is the time to recover your first love, recognize if you have lost it, then start remembering, repent, and return. Excise the cancer of loveless Christianity; embrace the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ! Until that day, when our faith will be made sight, and we will bask in the wedding feast, married to the One we love.