

Letter to Ephesus **Sermon - February 24, 2019**

I. Ephesus's History

Ephesus means a DESIRABLE PLACE TO LIVE. The city was founded 4,000 years ago, and it was one of the most important commercial centers in Asia Minor. Paul, on his second mission trip, visited Ephesus and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, he was able to organize a church, where many pagans accepted Christ the Lord and Saviour, and they became Christians. During his third mission trip, he spent more than three years there, weeding out the false doctrines and pagan practices. Ephesus became one of the strongest congregations in the area. About ten years after he left Ephesus, Paul wrote a letter to the congregation, which is the letter to Ephesians. He appreciated their faith and love.

In Revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ addressed a letter to the congregation in Ephesus which was read today in front of us.

II. Jesus said to them: "I know your deeds, your hard work."

The Lord indicated that He knew exactly what was going on in their congregation and He honoured the Ephesians for what they were doing right.

Our Lord Jesus Christ can see what is going on here in our congregation, and He is acknowledging our works. He knows who belongs to this congregation. He knows all of those who belong to this congregation. He knows how and why we worship Him here. He knows your faith, your love, and your intention.

Jesus Christ knows that this congregation is a church full of works and awesome members. The Lord Jesus Christ knows that we are working hard for His glory here at Calvin. He knows that we are giving ourselves for Him and for this congregation: physically, mentally, and emotionally. We are a busy church.

At this point, I want to mention that it is very important WHAT we DO, but it is far more important WHO we ARE as spiritual Christians because that would impact WHAT and HOW MUCH we do.

The church in Ephesus was a hardworking, well-organized and well-taught church. However, God shared great concern with them. Jesus says: "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil ... I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary." (Revelation 2:2-3) With other words: "I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men." They refused to tolerate those who are evil. They held to a high, holy standard of behavior and were sensitive to sinful human behaviours, and they practiced church discipline. "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love." (Revelation 2:4)

III. You have forsaken your first love.

Jesus said that the sign of Christians has to be their love. We need to have love for Christ and love for one another.

Let us do now a Reality Check, analyzing ourselves in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, based on following questions. I am reminding you that He can see exactly how we feel and what is going on in us, so we have to be transparent and honest.

- Do you love our Lord Jesus Christ with your whole soul, mind, and spirit?
- Do you love our Lord Jesus Christ as much as you used to sometimes in the past?
- Was there ever a time in your life when you loved God more than you do right now?

You will show how much you love God by the way you live your life.

The problem at Ephesus was that they did not love the Lord as much as they became Christians. They still had programs, and they were working a lot, but they lost the heart of what they were doing. Well, it is easy to lose the love after a while.

Dear beloved, we all know that being the church here at Calvin is not about coming out on Sunday mornings for 75 minutes and going away with a great feeling about us.

Once, a person as he was leaving the church said: “God, You should be thankful that You have a servant like me”.

How should we describe the FIRST LOVE? Let me give you an example. A young couple goes for a walk when suddenly she trips. He murmurs, “Careful, sweetie.” Ten years later, they walk on the same street. She trips. He rumbles, “Pick up your feet!” What changed? The first love was lost!

Dear beloved, our major characteristic as Christians has to be our love for God and each other. Jesus said: **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment” (Matt. 22:37–38).** Love has to be the highest priority in our lives. Love is not just a nice word, not just a warm feeling. Love is acceptance. I love you for who you are, how you are, no matter what. Love never says that: I would love you if ... I accept you but ...

In John 14:21, 23 Jesus said: **“He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. ... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”**

If we lose the love relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, after a short while spiritually we will go down, we will be indifferent and cold.

I will give you some examples to see how people can lose their love towards God.

1. There are so many things which are very important to us. Often these things take the first place in our hearts, and they push Jesus to the second place. This can happen anytime to all of us: to me, to you, to the most faithful Christian.

What should we do? We have to follow what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 “... seek FIRST the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

We have to promise to ourselves, and we have to train ourselves to ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS put CHRIST and His will above everything else in our lives. ALWAYS, IN EVERYTHING AND ALL THE TIME. In this way, we will not move Christ from first place into the second one.

2. Sometimes we can fall in love with ourselves, our EGO. We do not listen to Jesus but to our EGO. We might have our own fixations, and we don't want to listen to anybody but we are listening ONLY to the voice we created in our head. We forget about God and to put Him first, because we are more in love with ourselves. And this is what can damage many of us. We think that we do not have to listen to Jesus, but Jesus HAS to listen to us. Can you admit that sometimes you, too, can fall into this trap?

3. Sometimes what could happen is that we replace Jesus with our family members or friends, and they became more important than God. Jesus said: **“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” Matthew 10:37**

PLEASE love your family and your friends, and try to spend time with them as much as you can. Don't spend more time with your work than with your family and friends, because when you will be ill, WORK will not come to visit with you. LOVE your family and friends, but when God is calling you to do something urgently for Him; you should go where God is sending you. Jesus stated that if you love your family MORE than Him, then your family is in the first place and not Jesus.

Let me ask you kindly and with all respect: Is your family in first place or Jesus? Are you ready to put Jesus first? Remember that your family members and friends will stay with you until your death bed, but Jesus is the one who will take you further from there.

4. These days, parents complain that their children have their sport activities on Sunday during the church service time and they have to take them there. It is very sad that, although everybody knows that most Christians worship God on Sunday, they don't respect that, but they try to take away our children from God. At this point, it is the parents' responsibility to teach their children that God and our spiritual lives are more important than sports.

5. If you have to work on Sunday, please try to find a church where there are evening services as well and join them.

As you see, there are many things which can get in the way of our love for Christ.

May the Lord shape us and help us to love Him more than anybody or anything. Amen.