

• *The letter to the Ephesian church continued*

Jesus is walking among his church telling each one what they need to know. We have seen that he speaks to John with (i) a command that the letter should be written for the Ephesian church. There is (ii) a description of Jesus taken from 1:9–20, and (iii) a word of commendation.

Sections (iv) to (vii)

(iv) *A criticism – loss of first love*

(v) *Repent!*

(vi) *An appeal*

(vii) *A promise*

Now comes (iv) a word of criticism. He says, ⁴*‘But I have this against you: you have left your first love.’* There is one supreme weakness in the church at Ephesus: they have left their first love. There follows (v) an exhortation to repentance. *‘Remember therefore the height from which you have fallen, and repent, and do the works you did at first.’* Then there is (vi) an appeal that the message should be heard. ⁵*‘And if you do not repent I will come to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place.’* ⁶*‘But you do have this in your favour: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.’* ⁷*‘He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’* The glorified Lord Jesus Christ is not sweepingly condemning. He approves of the church’s resistance to ‘the Nicolaitans’ (which was a sect that was careless about godliness and defended sinful ways). But he asks them to hear what he has to say to them by the Holy Spirit. All of the letters to the churches have (vii) a promise attached to them. *‘To the person who overcomes I will give the privilege of eating from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.’*

Application for us

1. *It means that the Christian is in a battle*

Let us seek to apply the message to our own lives.

1. **It means that the Christian is in a battle;** he or she has an enemy. The very idea that we have to ‘overcome’ something, or ‘conquer’ something, implies that there is an enemy to be overcome. The ultimate enemy is Satan, but our text here mentions some ways in which he attacks us.

• *We have to overcome lovelessness*

We have to overcome **lovelessness**. The Christian can easily drift away from Christian love. One might want to ask: is the revelation thinking of love to God or love to other people? The answer is: the many aspects to Christian love are all tied together. We do not love God unless we love people. We cannot really love people unless we do so because of our love for God. Nor do we love God or people if we do not have a sense in our own hearts that we are loved by God ourselves. But loving people is where the matter becomes the most practical. It is that point that we have to focus on.

• *We have to overcome forgetfulness*

We have to overcome **forgetfulness**. ‘Remember therefore the height from which you have fallen . . .’ It is easy for us to forget what we were like when we first came to salvation. What heights of love and zeal we knew when first we came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But then we get used to Christian ways, used to churches, used to the routine of the Christian life. Soon lovelessness creeps in and we have forgotten things we knew only so well years before.

• *We have to overcome the tendency to drift*

We have to overcome the **tendency to drift**; we have to overcome impenitence. ‘Repent . . .’, says the ascended Lord Jesus Christ to his people at Ephesus.

2. *We may fail in some areas but do*

2. **We may be failing in this battle in some respects even while we are doing well in other ways.** Jesus says, ‘You have left your first

well in others

• *Resisting wickedness is a good thing, but we must be careful not to get hard of heart as we do so*

3. *The remedy is to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ afresh*

4. *A warning and a promise*

• *Warning to the church: it will cease to function if the message is ignored*

• *Promise to individuals: overcomers will eat from the tree of life*

love', but he also says, 'You do have this in your favour: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.' The church was weak in its love, firm in its hate – of the wicked ways of the Nicolaitans. Perhaps this was the problem. They were so used to hating the ways of the Nicolaitans they started hating everyone, including their fellow Christians. Resisting wickedness is a good thing, but we must be careful not to get hard of heart as we do so.

3. **The remedy is to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ afresh. First it involves hearing him.** 'He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' Are they able to hear what Jesus says to them by the Holy Spirit? Then they must admit they need to get back to where they were before. Their repentance must reach the point where they actually start doing the things they used to do in days gone by.

4. **There is a warning and a promise attached to what Jesus says.** The warning is that if they do not heed what Jesus says, he will 'remove their lampstand'. That is, the church will cease to function as a place which brightly shines out as a testimony to the power and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The warning is addressed to the church as a whole. The promise is addressed to any individual who decides to take action in his or her own life. 'To the person who overcomes I will give the privilege of eating from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.' If we conquer lovelessness, forgetfulness, carelessness in leaving aside things that we did in days gone by, then there is a blessing for us. Jesus promises to feed us from the tree of life. The language comes from Genesis 3. We remember there was a tree of life in the Garden of Eden which enabled those who ate from it to live for ever. If we overcome, if we conquer our tendency to drift, Jesus will give us life and energy in the here-and-now, and we shall be highly honoured in the world to come.



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