

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**Revelation 2:1-7**  
**“Every Church Needs A Cat-Scan”**

February 21, 2016  
(2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill  
Main Street UMC  
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646  
Church Office: 864-229-7551  
Church Website: [www.msumc1.org](http://www.msumc1.org)

**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

**IIA. REVELATION 2:1-7  
"EVERY CHURCH NEEDS A CAT-SCAN"**

Premiere City, 250,000 + Residents, 25,000 Theater, No Church Today!

Chap. 2-3 = 7 Letters, Not 7 Church Ages! **Mixed Genre**

**7/7**  
**Address**      **1) v.1a Introductory Angel Formula.**      Near-Eastern Royal Edict, Divine Prophetic Announcements  
On Oracles in Letters, 2 Chron. 21:12-15, Jer. 29, 2 Baruch 77:17-19

2:1      "To the angel (*angelos* = messenger) of **the church in Ephesus** write:      *emphasis*, 1:1, 22:6, 8, 16, Acts 18-19  
Local Prophets 22:6 //Jewish Apoc. Lit. (1 Enoch. 90:2, 4 Ezra 4:1)

**Epithet**      **2) v.1b Characterization Of Risen Lord From 1:13, 16, 20.**      Lord Jesus Speaks! **Prescript (1)**  
Prophetic "*This is what... says*" How Church Relates To Christ, Self-Identification, Authority Formula  
The words of him      Words Of Risen Christ Through Mediator! Through Spirit- v.7, By Angel, Amos 1:6  
who holds the seven stars (angels of the churches) in his right hand,      Magic, Personalized Picture, See 1:16-20  
who *walks* among the seven golden lamp stands.      Christ Is Both *Over And With*, Close, Intimately Related: Gen. 3:8  
vv.2-6 Mingles Praise/Blame

**Praise**      **3) vv.2-3 Double Praise Beginning With "I Know" (4:2 Chiasm).**      **Promulgation (2)**  
Ex. 3:7, He Know Us/ Our Various Settings **Narration (3)**

2:2      a1      **I know** your **works** (i.e. responsible Christian conduct):      Minority Religion, Ps. 139:1-4, John 21:17  
2      your toil (*kopos*) and *patient endurance*      1:9, Work + Discernment + Endurance, Exclusion Matters!  
3      and how you cannot **bear** evil men      Discern False Prophets, Accommodation, 2:6, 1:9, Eph. 4:14  
Past      b      but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not,      I John 4:1-3, Mt. 7:15ff.  
b'      and found them to be false;      2 Cor. 11:11-12, Acts 20:29-30, 1 Tim. 1:3,10-20,2 Tim. 2:17-18  
2:3      a'1      **I know** you are *enduring patiently*      What Belongs To The Apostolic Tradition? 1:9a  
Present      3      and **bearing** up for my name's sake, and      Public Witness: Not Deny Jesus  
2      you have not grown weary (*kekoprakes*).      Yet, No Idealized Portrait  
Orthodoxy Needs Ortho-praxy And Ortho-pathy

**Blame**      **4) v.4 Chastisement With Formula: "This against you", Diagnosis.**      Judge  
Too Busy With Work, Duty, Virtue, Resistance, Became Censorious  
2:4      But I have this against *you* (pl. = church),      Jer. 2:2, Hos. 2:14-16  
that you have abandoned the love you had at first. (One Another? Lord?)      Lk. 10:38-42, Mt. 24:12  
John 13:34-35, 1 Cor. 13, Love Matters

**Coming**      **5) v.5 Call To Repentance (3 Actions) & Warning Of Judgment, Therapy.**      **Disposition: Decision (4)**  
Constant Opportunity/ Challenge  
2:5      *Remember* then from what you have fallen, (1)      Recall Love, See Fallen Babylon, 18:2  
*repent* (2)      Change Thinking, Return to Love & Life  
and *do* the **works** you did at first. (3)      2:19, Do Deeds/Works Of Love For One Another  
3 Stages of Conversion/Reconversion  
If not, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place      Conditional Prophecy  
unless you repent.      Turn Around = Change Mind, Change Heart, Change Practices Or Else!  
Without Love, We Cease To Be! How To Be *In* But Not *Of* The World?

**3') v.6 Words Of Praise A Second Time, Double Use Of "Hate".**      Accommodationists  
Present      No Relativism/ Pluralism, Gnostic Sect: Separate Body & Soul, Libertine Ethic  
2:6      Yet this you have, you hate the **works** of the *Nicolaitans*, which I also hate.      // 2:14-15, 20, Is. 61:8  
False Opinions/Lifestyles Are To Be Resisted, Hate Sin/Love Sinners

**Hearing**      **6) v.7a Call To Hear (From Wisdom Tradition).**      **Corroboration (5)**  
Each Church Listened To All Seven! Heed = Bring About Obedience  
2:7      'He who has an ear, let him hear' what the Spirit says to **the churches**.      Deut. 6:4, Mk. 4:9, Mt. 11:15,13:9, Lk. 14:35  
Risen Jesus Through Spirit To Prophet To Church

**Victor**      **7) v.7b Promised Reward: Military Image, Eternal Life.**      Eschatological Rewards: See Chart  
Athletic/Military Metaphor, *Conquer* = Remain Faithful In Pressurized Culture  
To him who conquers (continually) I will grant to eat of the tree of life      End Is Return, 22:1-5, Gen. 2:8-9, Ezek. 47:12  
which is in the Paradise (LXX Eden) of God."      Artemis *Asylum* Tree! Life Is A Battle With Evil// Military

**HOW CAN WE BOTH HOLD TO THE TRUTHS OF CLASSIC FAITH AND BE CENTERED IN LOVE?**

**THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS: POSSIBLE POLARITIES**

Duty & Discipline..... Delight in God  
Doctrinal Purity..... Devotional Passion  
Tough. .... Tender  
Discernment of Truth. .... Love of God, Other People

**A Brief Treatment Of IIABC: Revelation 2:1-7**

With 2:1 we shift from introductory matters to the so-called letters to the seven churches. While each letter has elements customized to its setting, they are packaged so churches hear their letter and *overhear* the others, v.7: "...let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The first three communiques are to the major cities of Ephesus (2:1-7), Smyrna (2:8-11), and Pergamum (2:12-17), the first cities on the postal route north. The genre is a hybrid of the Imperial Edit, a Standard Epistle, and the O.T. Prophetic Oracle, and the standard form of seven parts is evidenced in the letter to Ephesus: 1) Introductory angel formula (v.1a) , 2) Description of a facet of the risen Lord (v.1b), 3) Praise beginning with *I know* (vv.2-3), 4) Chastisement formula, "But this I have against you" (v.4), 5) Call to repentance and a warning of judgment (v.5), 6) Call to hear (v.7a), 7) Customized reward promised to victors who overcome (v.7b).

Because reality is bi-level, visible and invisible, each church has an angel, and each letter is given to the seer by dictation, v.1a, "To the angel of the church in Ephesus *write*...." The words are from the Risen Lord who is omnipotent, "who holds the seven stars in his right hand," and omnipresent, "who walks among the seven golden lamp stands." Whatever happens, Jesus walks in the midst of his scattered people.

The abundant praise of vv.2-3 forms a 4:2 chiasm (a-b//b'-a'). At the center (b//b') is the testing and rejection of false apostles; in the frames (a//a') are two sets of three characteristics using several play on words: *I know // I know, patient endurance // enduring patiently, bearing up// cannot bear evil men, toil // not grown weary.*

This is a diligent, discerning body of believers who are careful about who teaches and what they offer. Quality control is high. But in the long struggle something has been lost, and that's *love for God and one another*. The holy passion of the early faith has faded. The only way to regain it is first to *remember* what it was like, to do a corporate *turn-around*, then recover the actions that kept the fires burning: praise of God and loving service of one another.

Truth is the container for love, and Ephesus is running low, and when the love goes out, so does the light (v.5b), yet their hatred of the corruption of the Nicolaitans is something the Lord shares. To compromise with the cultural ethos in idolatry and loose morals is simply another way to put the lights out. The call to hear and act is urgent (v.7a). If they strengthen the love that is weak while keeping discernment sharp, they will reap the full benefits of Paradise (v.7b). To remain faithful in a hostile culture is to keep truth and love in dynamic equivalence.

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## EVERY CHURCH NEEDS A CAT SCAN

*"But this I have against you,  
that you have abandoned the love you had at first."*

The one sure thing to kill a church.

### REVELATION 2 : 4

**A** once famous monastery fell on hard times. Its buildings were once filled with young monks and its church resounded with song, but it was now nearly deserted. People no longer came to be nourished by prayer. A handful of old monks shuffled through the cloisters and praised God with heavy hearts.

At the edge of the monastery woods, an old rabbi built a little hut, and there he came from time to time to fast and pray. No one ever spoke to him, but whenever he appeared, the word was passed among them, "The rabbi walks in the woods." And as long as he was there, the monks felt sustained by his presence.

One day the abbot decided to visit the rabbi. So, after the morning Eucharist, he set out. As he approached, the abbot saw the rabbi standing in the doorway, his arms outstretched as if he'd been waiting. The two embraced like long-lost brothers. Then they stepped back and just stood there, smiling at one another.

After a while the rabbi motioned the abbot to enter. In the middle of the room was a wooden table with the Scriptures open on it. They sat for a moment, in the presence of the Book. Then the rabbi began to cry. The abbot covered his face with his hands, and— for the first time in life— cried his heart out. The two men sat like lost children, filling the hut with sobs and wetting the wood of the table with their tears.

When the sobs ended, quiet returned and the rabbi lifted his head. "You and your brothers are serving God with heavy hearts," he said, "You have come to ask a teaching of me, and I will give you a teaching, but you can only repeat it once. After that, no one must ever say it again." The rabbi looked at the abbot, "The Messiah is

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**Revelation 2:1-7..... 5**

among you." For a while, all was silent. Then the rabbi said, "Now you must go." The abbot left without a word, without looking back.

Early the next morning, the abbot called the monks together, as was their habit. He told them he had received a teaching from the rabbi who walks in the woods and that—once spoken— it was never again to be repeated, "The rabbi said the Messiah is among us." They were startled. "Is it Brother John? Or Father Matthew? Or Brother Thomas? Or, am I the one?" They were puzzled, but their lips were sealed.

The monks soon treated one another with new reverence. There was a gentle, wholehearted quality that was hard to describe but easy to notice. They lived together as men who had found something and prayed the Scriptures together as men who were looking for something. Visitors found themselves deeply moved. People were soon coming from all over to be nourished by the prayer life of the monks. Young men were again becoming part of the community. But the rabbi no longer walked in the woods; his hut had fallen to ruin.<sup>1</sup>

Like all good stories, this one is about many things, not just one. It's about the Jewish roots of the church. It's about how Christian communities, like all human institutions, wax and wane, losing energy and vision over time. It's about the power of a prophetic word to release new love. It's also about the sneaky power of sin which drives us towards the routines of doing things right instead of doing the right things. And it's about evangelism as a magnetic power of attraction when people love God and one another because the Lord Jesus is among us.

**THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS**

All of which leads us back through the years to another community, not of monks but ordinary believers living in one of the great urban centers of the first century, Ephesus. Ephesus is the first of the seven churches of Revelation to receive a cat-scan from the risen Lord. The good doctor comes in after the labs and says, "Your heart's fine, chest clear, hemoglobin OK, but if you don't lose thirty pounds and quit smoking, you're going to die sooner than necessary."

Praise and warning: that is the form of the word of the risen Lord to the church

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<sup>1</sup> Edited from William R. White, "The Rabbi's Gift," in *Stories for the Journey* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1988), 108-11.

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**Revelation 2:1-7..... 6**

at Ephesus. They were strong on doctrine, long on endurance, a great sense of spiritual discernment, keen on spotting and rooting out evil, much to brag about, but low on love, and that will put the light out quicker than anything.

Here in the United States we have a cultural history that is largely Christian. It's hard for us to imagine what was like to be among the first and second generation of believers in a large, Greco-Roman city where you were a tiny minority. Ephesus was large; estimates range from a quarter to half a million. It was a *free city*, part of the Roman Empire but largely self-ruled. It featured a large library, a 24,000 seat arena, and from ancient times was the center for the worship of the great mother goddess, whom the Greeks identified as Artemis and the Romans as Diana. Her magnificent temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was a city full of pagan magical practices, and towards the end of the first century became a center for the worship of the Emperor Domitian.<sup>2</sup> It was a happening place!<sup>3</sup>

The church in that world class city was founded by Paul forty or so years earlier; the account can be read in Acts 19 and 20 and the church's early struggles in Paul letter to them. It was a cosmopolitan seaport, a world class city that worshiped gods and goddesses, reveled in public sensuality, and was permeated by magical, occult practices. Think San Francisco, Seattle, London, Marseilles.

This was long before the church had its own buildings; instead, and for hundreds of years, we were a network of house churches scattered across the city and held together by relationships between the various cities. Ephesus was not an easy place to be a Jesus follower, to worship the one God of the Jews and maintain an ethical lifestyle. You were constantly under pressure, if not from the doctrines of the philosophers and the temptations on every corner near the public baths, then from the pervasive pressure of pagan culture to conform to its world view. To survive, a church had to have a clear identity and an intolerance for moral laxity. Such was the church at Ephesus, to such a degree they almost squeezed love out of the church. Over time a church can forget its reason for being. Every new generation must relearn the basics. Charles Williams wrote: "The whole labor of regenerating

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<sup>2</sup> Material on Ephesus summarized from Robert Mulholland, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 94.

<sup>3</sup> For an introductory article, see Mark Roberts, "Ancient Ephesus And The New Testament," [www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/ancient-ephesus](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/ancient-ephesus).

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mankind has to begin every thirty years or so."<sup>4</sup>

There is a pattern observer call *Mission Drift*; over time and with the pressures of whatever culture, a church or church extension– say an institution– tends to gradually lose clarity about why it exists and what for. Sharp edges become dull; other priorities become more central, often so slowly it escapes attention.

As an example, consider the original mission statement of a well-known elite university, and here it is: "To be plainly instructed and consider well that the main end of your life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ." Founded in 1636, this institution employed solely Christian professors, emphasized character formation above all else, and placed a strong emphasis on equipping ministers to share the good news. Every diploma read in Latin, *Christo et Ecclesiae* around the central word *Veritas*, meaning "Truth for Christ and the Church." You've heard of the school; it's Harvard.

But eighty years after its founding, a group of New England pastors sensed Harvard had already drifted. Concerned by its secularization, they approached a wealthy philanthropist who shared their concerns. This man, Elihu Yale, financed their efforts in 1718, and they called the college Yale University. Yale's motto was not just *Veritas* like Harvard, but *Lux et Veritas* (light and truth).

Today the academic excellence of both stands intact, but neither resembles the originating vision. At Harvard's 350th anniversary, Steven Muller– former president of Johns Hopkins– stated the obvious, "The bad news is the university has become godless." Larry Summers, former Harvard President, confessed, "Things divine have been central neither to my professional nor to my personal life."

Harvard's and Yale's founders were clear in their goals: academic excellence and Christian formation. Today, they do something different from their founding purpose, and what happened is called "Mission Drift."<sup>5</sup> It happens to colleges, even our own in this state. It happens to churches. It happens to marriages and businesses, to government and foundations. It happened at Ephesus, and it is happening here at

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1988), 52.

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Peter Greer, Chris Horst, *Mission Drift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker/Bethany House, 2014), 16-18.

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**Revelation 2:1-7..... 8**

Main Street. It is inevitable and inescapable because we are fallen creatures in a fallen world subject to many pressures, but it is not incurable, else why would the risen Lord send such clear communiques through his prophet John? Correction from above is a great, great mercy and a critical opportunity.

So the telegram from the risen Jesus through the prophet John to the church at Ephesus begins, "To *the angel* of the church in Ephesus write...." Who is this *angel* or *messenger* to whom the letter is addressed? In the Jewish synagogue it was customary for one man to represent the community in prayer: *the messenger of the synagogue*. He would face the ark where the Torah was kept and pray. And since the church borrowed most of its practices from the Jewish synagogue, the one named here was not a heavenly being but a human being who voiced the prayers of the people. If so, then this letter to the church at Ephesus is Christ's answer to their prayer. They have spoken to Christ through their *angelos*, their messenger, and now comes back the reply from above through John. What this means for us here at Main Street is that as we pray, we can expect to hear back. If we pray, "Lord, show us our condition," we can expect an answer, with much to praise and some items for correction.

The second item is that the letter is to the church *as a whole*. All of us live in a culture that emphasizes the individual over the group. We've almost forgotten how to be a community, to be mutually interdependent and to show concern beyond our small circle. We intuitively judge from the perspective of the self, "What did I get out of it? What did it do for me?" But there is no way to be a healthy Christian without immersion in a community that communicates grace and forms character.<sup>6</sup> Not that the *me* is unimportant, but in the church the *we* has priority. So in a sense I am not as concerned about the details of your personal spiritual growth so much as the corporate spirituality of the church because a healthy church produces robust disciples. You may see yourself as an individual coming to worship with a bunch of other spiritual lone rangers who just happen to be in the same building on Sunday morning. But God sees us as a body, as a whole, and grants the diagnosis and prescription on that basis. Thus, a praying church can expect to hear from God about the spiritual wellness and sickness of the church *as a whole*.

The second half of verse 1 hearkens back to John's vision of the risen Lord in chapter one. It's a reminder to the church at Ephesus that the Lord from whom they are about to hear holds them in his right hand and walks in their midst. He is

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<sup>6</sup> See James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2010).

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**Revelation 2:1-7..... 9**

transcendent, holy, and glorified, but also near. Nothing happens he does not know about, and to live in his gaze is a call to sobriety. Main Street is in the Lord's hand; he walks in our midst, gazing at us with piercing eyes that miss nothing.

In praise of the Ephesian church, the Lord says in verse 6, " Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, *which I also hate.*" Did you hear that? There are things that love must hate and resist in order to be love. There are teachings and practices Jesus hates. Why? Because they weaken and corrupt the church for which he opened his veins, and there are Nicolaitans aplenty today. If we love the truth in Jesus Christ as preserved in the doctrinal and ethical heritage of the church, then it requires us to resist, expose, challenge and hate the false alternatives that pander to the very worst in us. It's an exciting and dangerous time to be a custodian of Christian truth. So if you ask, "Pastor Phil, what do you believe about so-and-so?" my first answer is that what I believe is not the issue. Instead, let me tell you what the Scripture teaches, what the church teaches over time, why it makes sense, and how it strengthens the church; only then will I offer my insights as a minor footnote.

I do not stand here week by week to induct you into the peculiarities of my personal theology which is still under construction, but into the "faith once delivered to the saints."<sup>7</sup> It's why I stay close to Scripture. There are weeks I have trouble believing anything at all except the call to duty, and Sundays when I don't even believe my own sermons. And when I find myself in such a dark place, I'm thankful I was not ordained to preach my private pilgrimage with all its ups and downs but to declare the faith of the whole church in the face of my doubts. The faith of the church is a hiding place I trust more than I trust my own opinions. We Methodists can no longer afford warm hearts and empty heads. It's time to cut off the TV and read our Bibles, time to read ponder good Christian books, time to pray and fast, time to recover our core doctrines and the courage of Christian convictions, time to expose the false and cling to the true in our beliefs and in our behavior. And it was for just this style of faithful toughness that Jesus commended the church at Ephesus.

But the divine Cat-scan also revealed a problem. The brain of the Ephesian church, its thinking power- its grasp upon essential Christian truth, was healthy. But the heart of the church, its core of holy affections and temperaments, was in bad shape. The church was living on light with very little warmth. A necessary emphasis on the truths of the faith and boundaries of behavior had led them to neglect the heart of the faith which is love.

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<sup>7</sup> Jude 1:3.

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**Revelation 2:1-7..... 10**

Have you ever been nailed? Had the truth told to you face to face so that all escape routes and excuses were cut off. I have, and in such moments you have a choice. Either agree and begin the process of repentance and restoration, or you can escape into denial and decline. It happens in marriages. The romance is gone; we forget what it was like to be in love. Duty replaces delight; we no longer really listen to one another. We know something's missing, but don't know quite how to recover it. It happens in churches. We lose the deep passionate attraction for Jesus Christ our Savior. We tolerate rather than actively love one another. The world experiences us more as a self-serving religious club than a people full of love. So, in a few simple words Dr. Jesus cuts open the chest of the church and exposes a heart grown hard, "But this I have against you, *that you have abandoned the love you had at first.*"

Saint Augustine wrote, "One loving heart sets another on fire." Dr. Karl Menninger, renowned psychiatrist, said, "Love cures people, both the ones who give it an the ones who receive it." C.H. Dodd summed it up, "The energy of love discharges itself along lines which form a triangle, whose points are God, self, and the neighbor."<sup>8</sup> The church at Ephesus faced a choice. Would they hold to their strengths and yet risk being renewed in love?

For some the starting point will be recovering a passion for God, whereas for others the starting point will be fellow Christians or those outside the faith. But you cannot give what you do not have. All loving begins with a dawning awareness that Christ loves me. That whoever I am and whatever I have done, the children's song is true, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." And because I am loved by this one, I can risk loving others, whether or not they respond.

The same Lord who knew the strengths and weaknesses of the Ephesian church knows us. There are things in our lives worthy of praise and things in need of correction. For this to become a church full of the fire of divine love means each person will have to experience God's love. Only when I am safe and secure in the love of Christ will I have much loving patience with my brothers and sisters and any interest at all in loving outsiders towards Christ. A church that forgets to love and busies itself with many other worthy things will soon lose its reason for being. Christ's threat in verse 5 to remove the lamp stand is a statement of inevitable consequences. What do you do when the light of love has burns low in a church?

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<sup>8</sup> All quotes from Albert M. Wells, *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 117-119.

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**Revelation 2:1-7..... 11**

A little girl came home from Sunday school where she learned the verse: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven." She asked her mother what it meant. Her mom said, "It means that when you are good and kind and thoughtful and obedient, you are letting Christ's light shine in your life before all who know you."

The next Sunday, the little girl got in a bit of a fracas with another student— to such an extent that the Sunday school teacher had to go find her mother to get her settled down. Her mother was concerned, "Sweetie, don't you remember about letting your light shine for the Lord before men?"

The girl blurted out, "Mom, I have blowed myself out."<sup>9</sup>

Many of us have done just that. And if it happens to enough of us, the light in the church grows dim.

The doorway back into love is repentance, a humble admission that we have strayed. Repentance is primarily an act of obedience. Notice the three action verbs in verse 5: *remember, repent, do again the things you did at first*. Remember what it was like to be in love with God and people, change your thinking, engage in acts of love that build love. Counselors say it works in marriage; when you do loving deeds, the feelings of love eventually return. Jesus said it works in the church. Don't rush out the door today. Take a few minutes to find out about others around you and offer to pray for them during the week. Invite a single person out to lunch. Love can get new traction today if you will take a simple action and change your habits.

It is not the Nicolaitans themselves that are the subject of Christ's hatred but their *works*, both in terms of what they believe and how they behave. If you tell me you believe that Jesus Christ was just a good man, just another prophet as in Islam, I will love you as a person but I will exert resistance towards your beliefs because they are wrong. Jesus Christ is God incarnate, the only Savior of the world, not one more in a long list of revealers.

If you tell me that God could not possibly consign anyone to hell, I will treat you kindly as a person but I do not want you teaching Sunday School because you don't really believe in consequences which is part of what character education is all about. Ideas have consequences; behaviors have consequences, and in the Christian scheme of things heaven and hell are ultimate consequences.

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<sup>9</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Revelation 2:1-7.

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**Revelation 2:1-7..... 12**

Life is a serious moral endeavor. Warnings of ultimate reward and punishment are scattered throughout Scripture. I may not like them or understand them all, but they cannot be ignored. And if you tell me that it doesn't matter what people believe as long as they are sincere so that all religions are the same and that all the different roads lead to the top of the same mountain, I know you are deceived and merely reflecting the intellectual currents of the culture which are sweeping you away from Christian truth. And if you tell me that people have the right to do whatever they please without permanent consequences, I will laugh because I deal with casualties.

**CONCLUSION**

The 137-mile long Atchafalaya River is a *distributary* (a new word for me!) of the Mississippi that meanders through south central Louisiana till it empties into the Gulf. As scenic, productive, and enriching as the river is, it owes all its strength— all of it— to the mighty Mississippi. That's because a *distributary* doesn't have its own direct source; it's an overflow of something else. When the Mississippi is high, the Atchafalaya is high; when the Mississippi is low, the Atchafalaya is low. What the Atchafalaya accomplishes depends wholly on something other than itself.

The church is the Atchafalaya. We are a *distributary* of the Triune God, and anything of value we accomplish is tied to our source. And if we lose connection with our first love, the Living Waters of Jesus Christ, we lose our beauty and power.<sup>10</sup>

It is not that Ephesus was a singular church or an especially wicked church. Not at all. Ephesus is not just one ancient church; it's every church. It's us here at Main Street, with me perhaps as the primary offender. But what if we responded to the divine Cat-scan and returned to God for two things: 1) to cling to the truths of this faith, and 2) to learn again the arts of Christlike love? I think the Holy Spirit might help us along! Even add some powerful gifts! This is what our world needs. And that is what we need. And this is what I need.

Do we really want to be transformed by the fiery love of God, or do we want just a weekly dose of safe, manageable Methodist religion?

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<sup>10</sup> Matt Chandler, Eric Geiger, Josh Patterson, *Creature of the Word* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2012), 6.

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