

“Ephesus: The Great Commandments Really Matter”— Revelation 2:8-11

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take your Bible or the one in the pew and meet me in Revelation 2...

At the beginning of the year we walked through a series of sermons that articulated a vision statement and saw how it is grounded in the teachings of Scripture. We saw how we, as a church, exist to glorify God through Gospel-transformed lives. That’s our purpose. Our plan for realizing this purpose involves what we call the “three GCs”—Gospel-centrality, the Great Commission, and the Great Commandments. That’s what we are about as a church. The last GC, the Great Commandments, is a summary of Jesus’ call for us to love God and love our neighbor, which is a summary of all God’s commands. Our text today gives us a stunning illustration of just how serious God takes the Great Commandments in a church and what can happen when a church doesn’t take them seriously.

We are making transition in this series as we begin now to set our attention on seven different churches in Asia Minor that Jesus provides commentary on. These churches are located in that part of the world we know as the country of Turkey. They were real churches, but as we have seen they were not the only churches that were in the region and even the cities that are addressed probably had multiple house churches present in them. So the fact that Jesus selects only the seven cities and addresses “the church” that gathers throughout them suggests that the number was chosen intentionally to convey completeness, which is often the connotations of the number seven. These letters, though addressed to specific places and real situations, have relevance for the complete church because they bring to the fore issues that all churches throughout history can relate to in various seasons of their existence. This is why we will see Jesus say again and again, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” Well, friends, we have ears and the ability to read so we must listen closely to what the Spirit may say to us through these various letters. If the shoe fits, we’ll wear it and adjust accordingly.

Before we get to the first letter, we should at least mention a couple things by way of introduction. We don’t have a lot of time this morning, but they are still worth pointing out. First of all, the second and third chapter of Revelation (where these letters are recorded) has been read by some, especially in recent years, as something of a timeline of church history. In other words, there have been interpreters (particularly on a popular level) who have argued that each of these churches represents a specific period of time in church history.

In our day, this view has been popularized by Tim LaHaye, the author of the famous *Left Behind* series. I would venture to say that there are more people in America who have read a book from that series than there are who have read the entire book of Revelation. That’s sad. But it helps explain why LaHaye’s end time positions are so popular in our setting. So, when he talks about the churches, he doesn’t deny that they were real churches that John was writing to, but he does argue that “A study of history reveals that the Church has gone through seven basic periods or stages” and that these seven churches in Revelation “represent the seven basic divisions in church history.”¹ Then he proceeds to actually date those periods. So, for example, the church of Ephesus represents the 30 to 100 A.D. The church of Pergamum describes the church from 312 to 606 A.D. Sardis gets us to the Protestant Reformation and Philadelphia to the Rapture.

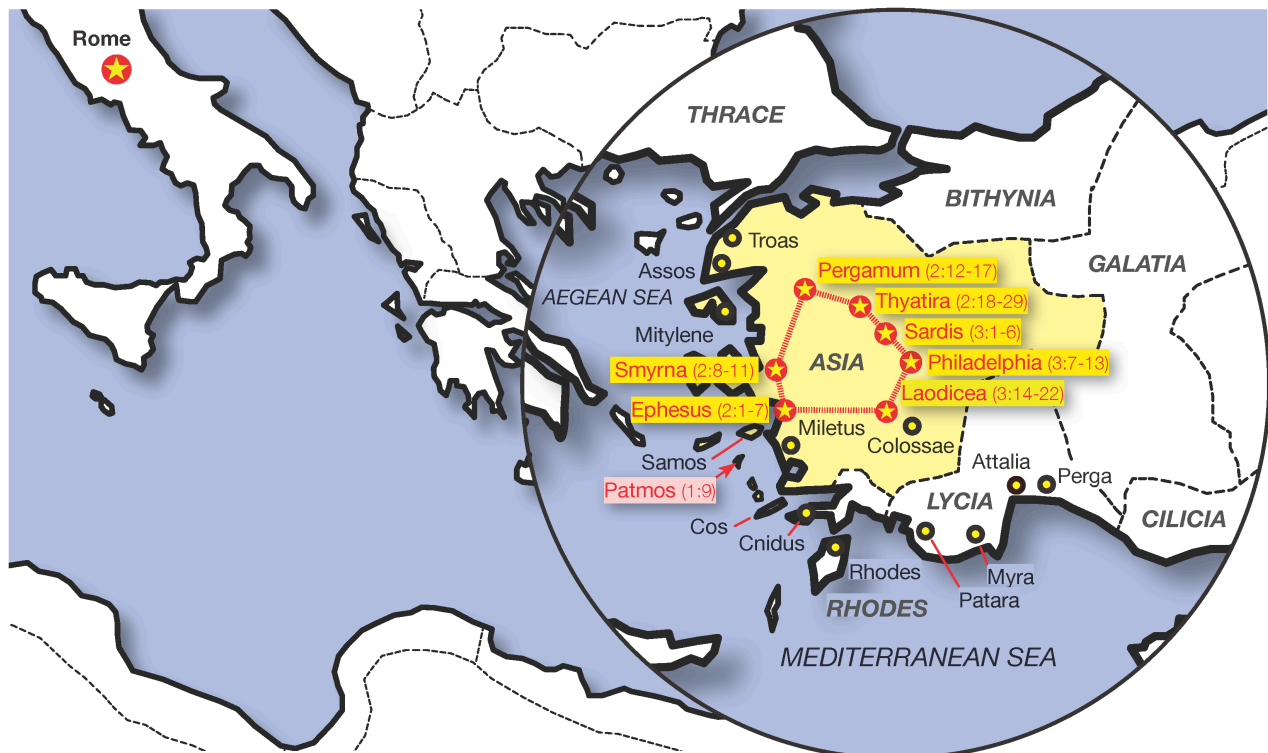
Now why do I bring this up? It's certainly not because I agree with such interpretations. I do not. And I don't know a single scholar who does. So why even mention it? Because writers like this have such a wide readership that their views have no shortage of people to champion them. But for reasons I spent time addressing in the first sermon of this series, I don't put much stock in such timelines. The dates are almost always driven by our own headlines that may or may not even register on the newsfeeds of the rest of the world. They result in interpretations that I don't think John, the original author, or his audience, these seven churches, would have recognized. And thus they make Revelation a book with meaning that cannot be unlocked until the final generations.

My own contention, as you well know, is that we must always ask the question, "What did the text mean to the original audience?" and then recognize that the meaning, which the author intended, is the same meaning the text has today (even if the application can take varying forms). So what we will do today, and every week we study the Word of God together, is try to understand what the author intended to communicate and then apply that meaning to us as individuals and as a church.

So, for example, a simpler explanation for the order of these churches is found in the geographical location of the churches. Take a look at the map on the screen.

REVELATION: ROME & THE SEVEN CHURCHES

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It appears that the churches are listed in the order that a letter carrier would have traveled with the scroll from Patmos to and through Asia Minor. Ephesus is mentioned first simply because it's the closest, a straight sail of 60 miles from Patmos where John was in exile. From there the carrier, if he had any sense,

would have logically traveled to Smyrna. Then to Pergamum and so on until he reached Laodicea. It's as simple as that. No church history degree needed.

Now there is a literary pattern that each of these seven letters follows pretty closely, but I will save that discussion for a later Sunday when we have had some time to observe it a bit more. Take a look though at the first letter, which is addressed to Ephesus in chapter 2. I'll begin reading in verse 1. This is God's Word...

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.’² ‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.’³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.’⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.’⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.’⁶ Yet this you have: 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. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’” (Revelation 2:1-7)

That, friends, is how Jesus assesses the church at Ephesus at that moment in history. The way Jesus describes Himself is important. He is holding the seven stars and walking among the seven lampstands. We talked about those images and their significance last week. According to last verse of chapter 1, the stars represent the angels associated with these churches who represent them before God in some way. The lampstands represent the churches themselves. So Jesus holding the stars and walking among the lampstands communicates His presence, authority, and control. Because of His presence, He knows the truth about the state of the church in Ephesus. Because of His authority and control, He has every right to make the threat that He does in verse 5. He is their loving Lord, but He is not to be trifled with.

A little background on Ephesus would be helpful. Ephesus was the Roman provincial capital of Asia Minor and its estimate population was in excess of 250,000. It was known as “the metropolis of Asia.”³ The fact that it was situated on a trade route from Rome to the East and it featured a busy seaport made it a center of economic activity. All that traffic brought the city into contact with various cultures and religious persuasions. Not surprisingly, it was a very pluralistic society, a hub for all kinds of false worship and religious practice.

The worship of Roman Emperors was also a major industry in Ephesus. Augustus allowed the city to build two temples in his honor and later the city became the site where a huge temple to Emperor Domitian was constructed around 90 A.D. Domitian was likely the Emperor on the throne when Revelation was first penned. He named the city the “guardian” of the imperial cult, which centered on Roman Emperor worship, and delighted in knowing that the city boasted an impressive statue in his likeness that stood twenty-five feet tall.⁴ So when you read in Revelation 13 of an evil world ruler demanding worship, it doesn't take much imagination to know what would be in the mind of a Christian in Ephesus. They knew that experience firsthand.

The city was also the home of the temple of Artemis (also known as “Diana”), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Thousands of priests and priestesses were associated with the worship of that goddess. In fact, it was a whole industry. In Acts 19 and 20, Paul's ministry in Ephesus is summarized. On his second missionary journey he made a brief visit in Ephesus and, evidently, recognized its strategic significance because on his third missionary journey he went straight back to it and remained there for at least two-and-a-half years. During that time the Gospel spread throughout the city and many became

Christians. This created tension because so much of the city's industry was tied up in pagan worship. In Acts 19, a riot actually breaks out because of this kind of economic tension. People stopped buying silver idols and shrines to worship Artemis/Diana and the silversmiths got mad and started a riot. Christians were bad for business evidently.

Just before that there is that famous story involving the seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva. They hear about Paul casting out demons in Jesus' name and they think, "We want to cast out a demon..." So they set out to look for someone who is demon-possessed (which, by the way, I wouldn't recommend doing). Somehow they find one. They command the demon to leave "*by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims*" (19:13). But the demon's response is priceless: "*Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?*" and the possessed man turns on them and beats them naked and bloody. That's just a weird scene to me. He beats them naked. I heard another preacher make a good point one time. If you have ever seen a fight you know that there is always debate after the fight as to who won. "Well that guy threw him down hard..." "I don't know the other guy got in a good shot..." But here's the thing, if you came into the fight with a shirt and pants on...and you leave the fight with no shirt and pants on...then the general consensus is that you got owned! Just saying. No one is sitting there going, "I don't know man, I think he may have bounced back toward the end" Nope. "Where's his clothes?...Exactly." That one goes in the loss ledger. And Acts 19 says that everyone throughout Ephesus learned of this event (which I'm sure the naked guys were pretty happy about). And this actually led to more revival, where new converts gather and, before everyone, throw their magic scrolls and pagan books, worth around fifty thousand days of wages, into the fire as an act of repentance (19:17-20). So there you have it. That's the city of Ephesus. A lot of spiritual activity happening.⁵

Paul also wrote a letter to the Ephesian church that is found in the New Testament. He wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. When he departed the city, he left Timothy in charge to continue to guard the truth and equip the leaders. He wrote two letters to Timothy, which are included in the New Testament, to encourage him in that endeavor. Early church tradition suggests that the Apostle John (who also wrote Revelation) took over in Ephesus after Timothy, toward the end of the first century. It's quite possible that he wrote 1, 2, and 3 John from Ephesus to churches in the city or the surrounding area.⁶ So clearly a lot of New Testament history has points of contact with the city of Ephesus.

All this background helps us to understand the encouragement that Jesus gives to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2. In a city where we know at least fourteen other deities were worshiped by large numbers, it would be easy for the Christian church to compromise the truth. But that's not what happened in Ephesus. The opposite was true. Jesus says, "*I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary...you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate*" (2:2-3, 6).

I count nine things that Jesus commends them for.⁷ But if I had to boil them all down to just one or two things, I would say this church's strong suit was orthodoxy and the good works that accompany it. They know the truth. They know the Scriptures. They know the teaching of Jesus. Because of this they are able to spot false teachers, like the false apostles that are mentioned in verse 2 or the Nicolaitans mentioned in verse 6 (who we will talk more about when we get to the church at Pergamum). And, by the way, Paul warned the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20, "*I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away disciples after them*" (20:29-30). So he warned them that there were going to be wolves among the sheep in the church, who stir up trouble and lead people away and into false teaching. That can happen in any church. But the Ephesians took Paul to heart and had not tolerated or compromised with their false teaching. They had not conformed to the religious pluralism around them.

They had remained fixed on the truth, doctrinally pure, and theologically sound at great personal cost. Standing for truth is exhausting work, yet they had patiently endured the hardship that has resulted from their firmly held Christian convictions. They suffered well. They have contended for the faith as a beacon of orthodoxy in a dark world of confusion.

Now I read that and I'm thinking, "wow, let's be Ephesus! That's the kind of church we need to be." But then you keep reading... For all the positives that Jesus lists, and there are at least nine things mentioned, there is one major criticism that jeopardizes the existence of the church. We find it in verse 4—"*But I have this against you, you have abandoned the love you had at first.*" This is their fatal flaw. They hate what Jesus hates, but they don't love what Jesus loves.

What does Jesus mean? What have they forsaken? It's actually pretty ambiguous. Some commentators take this to mean that the church has abandoned their "first love," taking "first" to mean "primary." The interpretation that results is that these Christians have been neglecting true love for God. However, most scholars take this as a reference to the Ephesians' lack of love for other people. Therein lies the debate. Hardly any would question that He's talking about the Great Commandments. The question is which of the Great Commandments does He have in mind—love for God or love for others. That's not easy to settle. But let's try the shoe on both feet.

If He has in mind love for God, then it is important for us to recognize that this state is coexisting with orthodoxy. This is huge. Listen. It is absolutely possible for us to have good theology and even know the truth better than all those around us and yet exhibit a lack of love for God. You hear that? If you can't say amen, go ahead and say ouch. This is a real problem for Western evangelicals. As J. I. Packer has noted, we have a knack for sniffing out unsound doctrine from a mile away, but where is the fruit of personal experience with God among us?⁸ We can know truth and yet fail to engage lovingly with Jesus who is "the Truth."

What does a lack of loving God amid a sea of personal orthodoxy look like? Well, it can have a variety of manifestations. For some it's faithful service in a church that isn't done as unto the Lord. It's begrudging submission. You just muddle along without joy. You sing songs without affection for the One you are singing to. You may not even bother singing, because something really important is happening on Facebook right now or your neighbor needs to hear what you have to say in the middle of worship. People look at you and see someone who is steadfast in their labor, yet the Lord sees that you're just going through the motions. I've been there. We've all been there. This is a safe place, we can be honest.

How does that happen? Again, it can be different for all of us. For some it is some crisis that gets us off track. Maybe it's a broken relationship or not getting our way on something. We get angry with God, even if we don't admit it to even ourselves. For others, religion happens. When we first became a Christian we were excited about Jesus. We were reading the Word and praying and gathering with other believers. We did the things that stirred our affections for Jesus and we avoided the things that robbed our affections for Jesus.

But what happens? Over time that gets replaced with a list of what's right and wrong. We stop being driven by what stirs our affection for Jesus and we start being driven by an ever-increasing list of religious rules that, ironically, robs our affection for Jesus. Now, of course, the Bible does give us instructions for things to do and not do in our pursuit of holiness, but those things are given to help us tap into the way things were created to be and when we tap into that our joy increases, our affection for Jesus rise.⁹ But religion goes beyond that and leaves us with a personal list of rules that not only keep us from loving God, but also lead us to act unlovingly toward others.

Perhaps it is acting unlovingly to others that Jesus has in mind here after all. I've noticed that some of the

self-proclaimed champions of orthodoxy in our world can be very mean and unloving. Craig Keener is right, “Not all doctrines are at the heart of the gospel, not all errors are properly labeled as heresy, and not all disagreements are worth fighting about.”¹⁰ If we are not careful we can abandon that popular adage, “hate the sin and love the sinner.”¹¹ So it’s quite possible for us to act unloving toward people whose teachings we are rightly critical of. We should still seek to love and win people to the faith, even if the church has to be protected from them because they are doing harm to themselves and the people of God. This is yet another reminder of the way the Bible encourages us to balance truth and love when we interact with others. Scott Duvall is correct, “Truth without love becomes little more than a cold demonstration of power, and love without truth ceases to be genuine love; both are relational disasters.”¹²

But it’s also quite possible that we know the truth and act unlovingly toward not only those who mishandle the truth but also our brothers and sisters. This is important. I have been blessed since 2002 to pastor in some incredibly loving churches, including this one. They have had reputations for being loving. I’ve had many conversations with visitors who comment on how much love they felt from people when they visited. And as one who saw the best and the worst of these churches, I can say without reservation that they were all loving churches. Yet I can also tell you that I had conversations with people who have said to me that they didn’t feel loved by me or the people of the church. That is crushing. It hurts. It makes me sad because I don’t want people to feel an absence of love. It also saddens me because I know that these churches were filled with love for the people who made those comments. Yet we didn’t act lovingly in certain circumstances. This is true at every church. We can’t just say that we love each other. We do love each other! But that doesn’t necessarily mean that we are communicating that love effectively.

Let me tell you how this happens in a loving church—We assume too much... We love one another. We would give the shirt off of our backs for one another. When someone asks for help we go the extra mile. But sometimes things happen and we drop the ball. We don’t express love and care. We feel it, but it goes unexpressed. Usually it’s unexpressed because we assume that someone else is expressing it. We hear about someone going through a tough time, we sympathize, we pray for them, we consider calling, and then we reason, “well, I don’t want to be a bother. I bet you his Sunday School class is reaching out to him” or “so and so is close to her and probably reaching out to her.” Problem is “so-and-so” might be making the exact same assumptions about someone else who is probably reaching out. And amid this circle of caring thought, if we are not careful, no one reaches out. That happens. It’s inadvertent. And that’s why we can’t assume too much. We need to reach out to people. Sometimes God put a person on your mind so that we can reach out to them even though we are not aware that they need us. But they do. We can’t talk ourselves out of that.

But, of course, this is a two way street, isn’t it? Let me just speak from experience. There have been seasons where I have a pity party and feel like no one cares, but when I’ve given it some thought I’ve realized that maybe the reason no one has expressed care is because I have not been transparent enough to confess my struggles. In other words, when we need help we also can’t keep silent. Some of us put all this energy in projecting this image that we have it all together and then we get frustrated when people assume that we do. We don’t take the initiative to let people in on our struggle (or the extent of our struggle) and then we get upset when no one shows up to help us through it. I’m guilty of that at times. So we have to help each other. We need to be honest about our struggles with one another. We need to ask for help. And we can’t assume that people know we love them. We have to express that love in tangible ways, otherwise for all our sound teaching and faithful service we just might neglect the love for one another we had at first.

Which kind of love the Ephesian Christians were neglecting—either the love for God or love for others—is hard to say with certainty. But if you remember the sermons in January on the Great Commandments, I labored to show you that love for God and love for neighbor are connected. When we don’t do one,

sooner or later we will fail in the other. A failure in one may evidence a failure in the other. So it's quite possible that both are in view when Jesus says they are guilty of abandoning the love they had at first.

And if you have ever doubted how important the Great Commandments are to the life of a church, then you need to look at verse 5. Jesus threatens, "*I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*" Despite all the positives that are mentioned, the one negative threatens the existence of the church. That's a jaw-dropping statement. We can do all of that right and Jesus still be furious enough to remove our church. What does that mean? It means, in the words of Craig Keener, that we "will cease to exist as a church—whatever else, if anything, [we] may continue to be."¹³ In the words of James Hamilton, "this is nothing less than a promise to un-church the church."¹⁴ People may still gather. The sign may still say church. The ministers may still minister. The congregation may still congregate. But there comes a point when a church is no longer a church. And evidently forsaking the Great Commandments puts you on the wrong side of that line.

But there is hope. Jesus gives them a solution. He tells them to do three things in verse 5—Remember, repent, and reengage. His exact words are "*Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.*" Remember, repent, and reengage. And that's the right order. If we struggle with loving God and others, then the first step in rekindling that love is to remember the time when we experienced it and the things that we were doing that stirred our affections for God and others. I love the way Hamilton puts it,

"If you look at your frustrating spouse and see the bride or groom of the wedding day, if you look at your 'brats' and see the newborn babe, if you look at your ill or afflicted loved one and see someone you have loved, someone you will miss when he or she is gone, if you look at your needy church and see those for whom Christ died, first love will awaken in your heart."¹⁵

Any season we can remember of truly loving deeds that pleased the Lord was a season when we were doing those deeds *to honor Him*. The loving deeds that honor Him are those done out of gratitude for the love we have received from Him. So when we remember those good times we will have to remember the Gospel that produced them. And when we remember the Gospel, we will remember that God's love was shown to us by sending His Son to live the life we should have lived and die the death we deserved to die. Yet because He died willingly in our place and rose from the dead, we have been set free from sin and given eternal life by grace, through faith in Jesus. Simply by believing in Jesus and trusting in Him alone to save us we have been freely given salvation and new life. God has shown us love, when we deserved hate. Grace, when we deserved condemnation. Mercy, when we deserved wrath. All because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the greatest demonstration of love in human history.

When we remember this regularly, it will stir in us affections for Christ and others and this will give fuel to our repentance. Repentance is turning away from what is wrong. But when you turn away from what is wrong you have to turn to the Lord. In this case, we are turning away from a lack of love for God and turning back to God to love Him out of intense, Gospel-prompted gratitude. We are turning from our failure to love others to tangibly expressions of Gospel-inspired love. We are reengaging in what we did when we first believed. Remember, repent, and reengage. That's the solution. Remembering the Gospel, which facilitates our repentance, and stirs in us a joyful desire to reengage in the things that please the Lord. It's the same thing we looked at a few weeks ago when we considered the Great Commandments.

Who needs to hear that you love them today? Who comes to mind? How can you express love toward those people in a tangible way today? Don't assume someone else will. How will you do it? As we take the Lord's Supper in a moment and you remember the love of God for us and it stirs in you affection for God, consider ways that you can show God's love to other people today. Make a call. Give a hug. Pick up a box. Cook a meal. Invite someone over. Take someone to lunch. Say the words, "I love you. How

can I support you?" Consider ways that you can lay down your life for others, as Jesus has laid down His life for you.

To the overcomers, Jesus says in verse 7, "*I will grant the right to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*" This is the hope of eternal life. It's the hope of regaining what was lost in the garden. Remembering this will help drive our repentance and reengagement too. But it's worth asking, how is it that we emerge as conquerors? How do we overcome? How do we experience victory over that evil one who seeks to cause us to stumble? The same way they did. According to Revelation 12:11, they conquer "*by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.*" That's how we overcome—by the blood of the Lamb. That's what we must remember now as we share the Lord's Supper together—the priceless blood of the Lamb. That's what makes all the difference in our life—The blood of the Lamb, which washes our robes of sin white as snow (Rev. 7:14).

The Lord's Supper is an act of remembrance of what it cost Christ so that we might be saved through faith. We remember His body broken like bread and His blood spilled out like wine. That's what the elements that will be distributed in a moment represent. That's what they are supposed to remind us of.

This is an ordinance for believers. You don't have to be a member of our church, but you need to be a member of the body of Christ, the Church. You are a member of that body of Christ if you have turned from your sin and put your faith in Jesus alone to save you and ceased from your labors to save yourself. If that's you, we invite you to participate. If that's not you at this moment, you can just pass the plate down the pew. No one will judge. Please know that we are glad you are here and this is a safe place for you to come to learn more about Jesus. He loves you. And we do too.

When the plates are passed around, individually you can take the cups (which are stacked on top of each other) as a reminder of Christ's initiative to save you individually and your personal faith in Jesus. Hold on to those cups though until the whole church is served and we will eat and drink together as one, as a reminder of how God has saved us to be a part of His corporate body.

Bow your heads with me and let's pray...

¹ Though I don't recommend his book, if you are wanting to hear his position on such things you can see Tim Lahaye, *Revelation: Illustrated and Made Plain* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 16.

² This image comes from: <http://visualunit.me/tag/revelation/>.

³ John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 21.

⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 105-106; J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation* (TTCS; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 40-41.

⁵ The preacher was Matt Chandler in a sermon called "Stirring Your Affections for Jesus," preached on February 4, 2009. As of the date of the present sermon, Chandler's sermon could be found at: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/stirring-your-affections-for-jesus>.

⁶ Stott, 22.

⁷ See James M. Hamilton Jr., *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches* (Preaching the Word; Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 66.

⁸ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 25.

⁹ Chandler, "Stirring Your Affections for Jesus."

¹⁰ Keener, 112.

¹¹ Keener (112 n. 32) points to a number of helpful resources that you might find helpful on this front and I will now reproduce: Darrell L. Bock, "Arrogance Is Not a Family Value," *CT* (Nov. 9, 1992), 10; Charles Colson, "Wanted: Christians Who Love," *CT* (Oct. 2, 1995), 112. Stanton L. Jones, "The Loving Opposition," *CT* (July 19, 1993), 22; Thomas Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995); Mindy Michels and Jenell Williams, "'Finding Common Ground': Anti-Gay Violence in Public Discourse," *The Graduate Review* (American University, 1996), 18-27.

¹² J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation* (TTCS; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 43.

¹³ Keener, 107. Robert H. Mounce states the principle like this, "Without love the congregation ceases to be a church." Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*. Rev. ed. (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 70. John Stott also warns, "No church has a secure and permanent place in the world. It is continuously on trial. If we can judge from the letter which bishop Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the Ephesian church at the beginning of the second century, it rallied after Christ's appeal. For Ignatius described it in glowing terms. But later it lapsed again, and by the Middle Ages its Christian testimony had been obliterated. A traveler visiting the village 'found only three Christians there', wrote Archbishop Trent, 'and these sunken in such ignorance and apathy as scarcely to have heard the names of St Paul or St John. Christ's warning to Ephesus is just as appropriate to us today. Our own church's light will be extinguished if we stubbornly persevere in our refusal to love Christ. The church has no light without love. Only when its love burns can its light shine. Many churches today have ceased truly to exist. Their buildings may remain intact, their ministers minister and their congregations congregate, but their lampstand has been removed. The church is plunged in darkness. No glimmer of light radiates from it. It has no light, because it has no love. Let us heed this warning before it is too late." Stott, 31-32.

¹⁴ Hamilton, 70. Cf. David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 147.

¹⁵ Hamilton, 71.