

“REMEMBER YOUR FIRST LOVE”

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It is a pleasure to be able to open God’s word this morning with you.

As you’ll recall, Pastor Lee has been preaching through the Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and reached the halfway point, finishing the 3rd chapter just before Christmas. Paul wrote that letter about 60 A.D., a few years after spending 3 years ministering in Ephesus.

However, Revelation 2:1-7, our text for today, *also* contains a letter addressed to the church in Ephesus. It’s a good time to look at this passage since we’re at the halfway point in Ephesians. This “other” letter to the Ephesians was dictated to the elderly apostle John by Jesus Himself, as part of the visions contained in the book of Revelation, written about 95 A.D. or so. As we’ll see, much had changed in the 30 or 35 years between the two letters to Ephesus! They had gone through several pastors, for one thing. Paul and others had established the church in Ephesus, later Timothy had served as a pastor there, and even John the Apostle ministered in Ephesus before being exiled to the island of Patmos as a form of Roman persecution. It was on the island of Patmos, near Greece, that he received these visions of Revelation from Christ.

As a part of the apocalyptic book of Revelation, the letters found in chapters 2-3 address seven churches in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) in the context of the “last days” as they encourage them to persevere until Christ’s return in the midst of fierce and unpredictable persecution from the culture at large. The first of these seven letters is to the church in Ephesus.

Now, let me read our text. **Revelation 2:1-7** —

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: ²I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. ⁴Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. ⁵Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. ⁶But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

That’s our passage for this morning. Would you please pray with me?

PRAYER

A couple of summers ago, my wife and I got the opportunity to visit New England and we were able to do some sight-seeing. Of course, Boston and the surrounding areas are rich with American history. We walked the “Freedom Trail” which takes you to all kinds of great

historical sites. One of the highlights was the “Old North Church”, where on the evening of April 18, 1775, Paul Revere told fellow Patriot, Robert Newman, to climb the steeple and display either one or two lanterns as a way of communicating how the British troops were coming to Lexington and Concord, either by land or by sea. The British came by sea, and Newman warned Paul Revere others by displaying two lamps in the steeple. Do you remember the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow? Part of that poem says:

*“He said to his friend, ‘If the British march
By land or sea from the town to-night,
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch
Of the North Church tower as a signal light, —
One if by land, and two if by sea;
And I on the opposite shore will be,
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Middlesex village and farm,
For the country folk to be up and to arm.”*

Paul Revere and others rode throughout New England, warning the Patriots of the coming British forces. And of course, what followed at the battles of Lexington and Concord ignited the American Revolution.

But what if Robert Newman forgot or was confused about how many lamps to display? What if he had mistakenly put up only one lamp instead of two? That wouldn’t have been a faithful representation of what he wanted to communicate to Paul Revere. That wouldn’t be a faithful witness to the reality of the situation. What if Robert Newman hadn’t been a faithful witness to the movements of the British troops, as he intended to be?

Sometimes that can be the case with churches: We don’t always communicate what we intend to about Christ. We’re not always a faithful witness to Him as we desire to be. Just because a church has a building, meets regularly, and does “church” things doesn’t mean that it is being a faithful witness to Christ. Sometimes what we would even call “*good churches*” don’t represent Christ all that well.

It may be the case that *our* church doesn’t always represent Christ the way we intend to, even though we probably consider ourselves a “*good church*”. We have strengths, but we also have some weaknesses...perhaps we’re missing some essential ingredient that is ***diminishing our witness because we fail to display Christ accurately***. Our text today, Revelation 2:1-7, challenges us in the area of our witness, and requires some reflection and evaluation on our part. So, let’s look into the text.

First, notice that Jesus addresses this letter “*to the angel of the church in Ephesus*”. What that means exactly is a little unclear. That could mean an actual angel, functioning as a representative of the church...maybe like a “guardian” angel over the church. Or the same Greek word could also be translated as “messenger” and be referring to the pastor of the church in Ephesus as representing the church. Either way, for our purposes, I just want to make it clear that this is addressed to the church in Ephesus as a whole, and not only to this “angel” or “messenger”.

But also take note that in verse 7 anyone who reads this letter to the church at Ephesus is encouraged to hear what the Holy Spirit says to all seven of the churches through the seven letters contained in Revelation 2-3. So, although these letters are written to specific churches in Asia Minor all those years ago, they also function as a window into the varying conditions of the church in general—in all time and in all places. They are a kind of collection of circular letters that all Christians everywhere should read in their churches. We need to listen to what the Spirit says here, because our church needs this letter as much as the church at Ephesus did back then!

And the message I believe we need to hear today from this passage is this: **CHRIST DEMANDS THAT WE REMAIN A FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THESE LAST DAYS.**

That's what we are going to focus on this morning. The message we need to hear and act on is that **CHRIST DEMANDS THAT WE REMAIN A FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THESE LAST DAYS.**

Perseverance language is *all over* this text: you have “perseverance” in verse 2, “persevered” and “endured” in verse 3, “not grown weary” at the end of verse 3, and “to him who overcomes” in verse 7. Clearly, a theme of this passage is “*perseverance*”! Jesus was commending the church in Ephesus for perseverance and calling them to remain faithful despite the persecution they faced under the sometimes violent Roman Emperor as well as the pressure from the culture at large to abandon their exclusive worship of Christ and conform to their pluralist religious practices. Compromise for acceptance in the culture around them was a constant temptation. Like the Ephesians, we face constant pressure from the world to compromise our doctrine and our values. Our culture is at least as pluralistic as the 1st century Roman empire.

And, like them, **CHRIST DEMANDS THAT WE REMAIN A FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THESE LAST DAYS!**

I see perseverance in faithful *WITNESS* as the main call to obedience in this passage because of the “lampstand” language in verses 1 and 5. In verse 1, it says, “*These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.*” If you look back to the previous verse, in 1:20 these symbols are “decoded” for us: “*The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*” So, the “lampstands” in this vision represent the churches, among which Jesus walks as He watches over, cares for, and sovereignly rules over His people.

When I read that, I thought, “What is a *lampstand*, exactly? Is that like a candlestick? Is it like the menorah that was in the Old Testament temple? Is it just the stand or does it include the lamp also? **Does it come with a clapper?** What is this thing?” It seems that the Greek word, *λυχνία*, indicates that it is just the *lampstand*, upon which lamps were placed or hung. So, when Christ calls the churches “*lampstands*”, He is not referring to the lamp or the light, only the stand the light sits on. And the function of a stand is to lift up the lamp, to display the light clearly so that all it can be seen. As Jesus said in Matthew 5, “*Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.*” So, the function of a church (as a lampstand) is to display the light!

So, the church itself in Ephesus wasn't actually the LIGHT, they were simply a lampstand that was supposed to display Jesus Christ, who is the *Light of the world!* (John 8:12) Their function was to display the light of Christ accurately—and that is what gave them their status as a lampstand. Their bearing witness to Christ was what gave them their status as a Christian church. And later, in 2:5, Jesus warns the church in Ephesus, saying “*If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*” The point is that if they are not persevering in faithfulness to Him, their right to be called a church would be stripped from them. Their witness could be damaged so much that at some point Jesus would have to simply pull the plug on their church!

Since that is the case, the message in this passage is clear: **CHRIST DEMANDS THAT WE, HIS CHURCH, REMAIN A FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THESE LAST DAYS.**

And we **are** in the “last days”! [*That’s the point of the eschatological language at the end of v. 7*]

If you’ve been to the movies lately, you might have heard about a film called “**2012**”, which capitalizes on all of the recent media attention given to the Mayan Calendar that seemingly predicts the end of the world as coming on December 21, 2012. The director of the movie also directed *Independence Day* and *The Day After Tomorrow*—It would seem he has a thing for the “last days” and the end of the world.

- But, these really **are** the “last days”...Apocalyptic events **are** coming! But it’s not because of climate change, or Mayan prophecy, or alien invasion. The end is near because Jesus Christ is at the doorstep, ready to return to judge all people and to punish sin and to culminate the salvation of all who believe in Him...and then make all things new!
- These really **are** the “last days”! The Bible defines the “last days” as the time period between the incarnation of Christ and His second coming. In relation to Salvation History, we are entering the last leg of the race...these really **are** the last days, even though sometimes it seems that Jesus is taking His time in returning. But 2 Peter chapter 3 reminds us that:
“...*With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.* ⁹*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* ¹⁰*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.*

And that is why it is SO important to **REMAIN A FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THESE LAST DAYS!** Because we **are** in the last days! Judgment is coming, and it is the witness of the Church as a lampstand that will enable people to see the light of Christ, escape the fire of judgment, and be reconciled to the Savior who died on the cross to pay the punishment for their sin. ***We ought to be concerned about our witness, because Christ is concerned about our witness!***

But how can we meet the demand of Christ to remain a faithful witness? What does that look like? *Revelation 2:1-7 identifies 3 essential actions we need to take to be counted as a faithful witness in these last days.*

THE FIRST ESSENTIAL ACTION we need to take is found in vv. 2-3, and v. 6

I. If we are to be counted faithful in witness, we must maintain doctrinal purity

²I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

And then down in verse 6:

⁶But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Jesus commends the church in Ephesus for its stance against heresy and false teachers who call themselves apostles. They despised the practices of the Nicolaitans, a heretical group that we don't know much about. And they stood firm against the hardships they faced, and refused to compromise even when false teachers might have offered them an easy way out by capitulating their doctrine to the culture around them. Thus, *to be counted faithful in witness, a church must maintain **DOCTRINAL PURITY**.*

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this point because, like the church at Ephesus, our church is strong in doctrinal purity. Our proximity to Trinity and the *ethos* of our church is such that we are very concerned with strong biblical teaching and orthodoxy. We have many gifted teachers and exegetes in our congregation. And that is commendable!

I don't think we struggle with doctrinal purity a whole lot. Instead, our weakness in this area may be failing to distinguish between differences in interpretation and opinion in MINOR matters, versus MAJOR doctrinal issues that could constitute heresy. Our weakness may be in not giving each other grace and room to grow in understanding as we **nitpick** each other's theology in search of something to **debate**. MAINTAINING DOCTRINAL PURITY does not condone attacking others over minor doctrinal issues. I fear that seminary students like myself are more apt to make this mistake than some of the more seasoned among us.

I don't say this with pride, but once, in one of my weaker moments, I actually called my wife a heretic when discussing something we heard in a sermon at church. That was NOT good...**And you know what? She's actually NOT a heretic!**

We need to maintain DOCTRINAL PURITY to remain faithful in our witness, but not at the expense of giving grace to each other and allowing for differences of opinion in minor doctrinal areas. We must reserve the label of "HERESY" for those beliefs that, if held, would actually keep someone from being saved. Those are doctrines like the Trinity, the divine and human nature of Christ, substitutionary atonement, and salvation by grace through faith, and not of works.

As we maintain DOCTRINAL PURITY based solely on God's word, and resist compromising to gain acceptance in the world, we remain a faithful witness to Christ and can pass on the message of the gospel to the next generation.

THE SECOND ESSENTIAL ACTION we need to take is found in v. 7

II. If we are to be counted faithful in witness, we must submit ourselves to God's word

⁷*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

When Jesus says here “*He who as an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*” He isn’t just talking about hearing God’s word. In the Bible, to “hear” often entails **submission** and **obedience**. And submission to God’s word is NOT the same as being orthodox in belief. This second action is a step beyond the doctrinal purity we just talked about. This has more to do with **moral** purity. For moral purity to become a reality, we must indeed believe rightly...but we must do more than that. We must abandon ourselves to trusting God’s word more than we trust our own abilities, minds, personalities, or faculties when it comes to living life.

Although it seems counterintuitive, it is possible to have a cold, detached, orthodoxy...where *we* become the master of the word and it is supposed to submit to us (this is especially dangerous for us seminary students); but we also need **orthopraxy**—right practice. It’s one thing to *know* God’s word (an intellectual, doctrinal purity), but another thing to *submit* our lives to His word, to TRUST His word...to let it RULE over our hearts, to come under the influence of the Lord. There is a grave temptation, especially in circles that place high value on theological studies, to let orthodoxy replace submission. And that should NEVER happen! But it does. Some of us succumb to a stone-like orthodoxy and we don’t really have any spiritual life. Christ did not come to give us orthodoxy, He came to give us life, ABUNDANT life.

And if you’re struggling with this right now...I think the action you have to take is to humble yourself. Somewhere along the line you may have come to trust in your own strength, exegetical prowess, and intellect and you’ve made yourself the master of God and His word. Whatever the cause, I know one thing: **God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.**

In humbling ourselves and submitting to God’s word, we demonstrate the LORDSHIP of Christ to a watching world. Our culture takes notice when we don’t live for ourselves, but for Christ! We actually obey His word...we avoid the stench of hypocrisy. ***We remain a faithful witness of what a Christ-follower looks like!***

When the **puritans** first began to leave England *en masse* and settle in New England, they thought that they were going to found a “pure Christian nation” that would show those backsliders in England and the rest of the watching world what a great Christian witness they were. They sought to be a nation under God, governed by His word as they submitted to it in all areas of life.

William Bradford, the first governor of Massachusetts, gave a rousing sermon to his people just before his group of Puritans got off the boat in the New World in 1630. In that sermon, he said to his people, “**For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.** We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of

the ways of God, and all professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us..."

Long past are the days of that Puritan ideology of our entire nation submitting to the word of God. That's not to say that the Puritans were a perfect group or that the early days in America were automatically the most godly era in our history. But as the colonies and later the United States of America moved away from submitting to God's word, the world WAS watching. And God's reputation was hurt as our allegedly "Christian" nation has moved away from wanting anything to do with God's word, let alone be submissive to it. **Our country long ago lost its witness for Christ...and in some ways that's okay. Being a lampstand, a witness for Christ, is not the job of any one nation...IT IS THE JOB OF HIS CHURCH. But will the same thing happen within the church in America? Within OUR CHURCH? Or will we submit to God's word in all things?**

FINALLY, THE THIRD ESSENTIAL ACTION we need to take is found in vv. 4-5

III. *If we are to be counted faithful in witness, we must cling to our first love*

⁴Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. ⁵Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Jesus charged the church in Ephesus with "forsaking" its "first love". Their "first love" is not only their love for Christ as a first priority, but also the love that they had at first when they first came to Christ. In Ephesians 1:15 Paul says that the Ephesians were known for their love for all the saints. LOVE USED TO CHARACTERIZE THIS CHURCH. But, it faded away.

The Greek word translated "forsaken" in v. 4 is pretty strong, and even is used of divorce at times. It could also be translated "abandoned" or "sent away". The Ephesians' relationship with Christ was becoming like a marriage that used to be filled with tenderness and joy, but each year the love was diminishing. Clearly, this was a **serious** spiritual problem.

My wife recently saw a television show where a journalist infiltrated a polygamous community, and was able to interview the women about why they stay in these relationships when they have to share the love of their husband with several other women. **One of the wives responded with something like, "It's not about love. There is no love. I stay married to my husband because we're both committed to the same religion and lifestyle."** Likewise, the Ephesian church seemed to be committed to religion and a certain lifestyle, but no longer to loving God with all of their heart!

This is the only criticism Jesus levels against the church at Ephesus, but IT IS A GRAVE CHARGE. In fact, it is for this reason alone that the Lord threatened to "remove" their lampstand—a lack of love in a church is so devastating that it threatens its very existence as a community able to witness to Christ. None of the other seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3 contain such a warning, because Ephesus was the only church that had "forsaken" its first love.

I can't imagine what it would be like to be forsaken by my first love. I am in a unique position in that my wife is my first love. We met in preschool when we were three years old, grew up together, and liked each other all while growing up. She even has diary entries about me from the time she was 8 years old. If I kept a diary, I'm sure I'd have the same.

She is the only one I ever dated, the only woman I've ever loved. We started dating when we were sixteen and we've been together for almost 12 years now, 6 of those as husband and wife. And I can't imagine how difficult it would be if she were to abandon me. I'd be devastated.

If that is true at a human level, imagine the pain we cause God when we don't place loving Him as our highest priority. Imagine how difficult it must be for Him to watch his creatures place other things above Him, to love something else more than Him, to watch those who He has died for reject Him or those who He has saved turn a blind eye to the people in need of love around them. Now, imagine how much love and grace God gives us to continually call us back to Him...to invite us to repent yet again when we still don't deserve it. To give us another chance at love in His own gracious way. [**“repent” 2x in v.5**]

Love is such an important ingredient to being the Church of Christ, that without it a church will cease to be a church. They will lose their privilege of functioning as a display for the light of Christ. **GOD IS LOVE** (1 John 4:8 – “*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*”), so how can a church remain a faithful witness when it does not know love?

The Ephesian church, over about a 35 year period, carried on a pretty good performance as one of the most prominent churches in the Roman Empire, all while drifting away from their love for Christ and His people. **They were good “workers” but not good “lovers”. They were a good “Martha” church, but not a good “Mary” church (Luke 10:38-42).** They were commended for their doctrinal purity and watchfulness in guarding the truth of the gospel, but they FORGOT THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL.

And I think it is a problem that is common in our day, maybe even for our church. I don't want to accuse our church of being loveless, in fact, I KNOW THAT IT IS NOT. ***We are not the church at Ephesus.*** We have a measure of love. But are we stronger in doctrinal purity than love?

When I look at my own life and priorities, I have to wonder where LOVE ranks. I think we all need to take a serious and sober evaluation of our personal and corporate life and see if Christ is our first love, and if we love other believers with corresponding love, and if we love those outside of the church! My guess is that we can improve in this area.

The Great Commandment in Mark 12:28-31 is our benchmark...**and we have to remember that loving God can't be separated from our love for people.** In fact, it is in our love for people—even people who are hard to love—that our love for God is made evident.

Do we:

‘Love the Lord your God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength?’

Do we:

'Love our neighbor as ourself?' There is no commandment greater than these.'

What kind of love do these verses speak of? (1 Corinthians 13)

Love that is ...patient, love that is kind. Love that does not envy, Love that does not boast, Love that is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸Love never fails.

So, how do we measure up?

Are we concerned first and foremost in our lives with loving God? Do we care about others as much as ourselves? Do we carry one another's burdens? Do we pray for each other? Do we meet the needs of those who can't meet their own? Does our church feel like a loving family instead of a group of people we stand next to every week?

I think about our church's commitment to compassion ministries...which I think is a GREAT thing! We should be doing that. But I wonder how much of it is motivated by our love for Christ and others. I know when Jared asks for volunteers to help deliver furniture to those in need, MY first reaction isn't, **"Wow! What a privilege and opportunity to show Christ's love!"** Honestly, my first reaction has been...**"I don't know if I can spare a Saturday to skip homework and do that". That's a lack of love...but HEY, I've always got my sound doctrine/orthodoxy!**

I really want to challenge us to evaluate ourselves and our church. So, what if we have measured ourselves and realize we're lacking. What if we have drifted away from our first love? How can we find our way back?

The text gives us two commands. The first command:

1. **Remember** our past and our position (v. 5 – *"Remember the height from which you have fallen!"*)

We can look back to the past at brighter days, when our love was strong, and build up a desire to see things restored to the way they used to be. Just read the book of Ephesians and you'll see that they used to be characterized by love for one another (Ephesians 1:15). As we look back, we may be shocked to realize how far we have drifted over time and be motivated to close the gap. This might be individually, where we remember our zeal for the Lord when we first came to Christ, or it may be a corporate exercise, where we remind each other of the love we used to share and have moved away from. Remembering our past can bring godly sorrow and motivation for change!

But more importantly, we can REMEMBER our POSITION as God's "beloved". We must never forget the biblical truth of 1 John 4:19: "We love, because He first loved us."

For the Ephesians, to “remember their position” they would also have to “remember their past”—to the letter they had received from the Apostle Paul. The book of Ephesians is a great place for us to turn when we realize we have forsaken our first love. The book is so rich with reminders of the love God has toward us. Pastor Lee has done a great job of preaching Ephesians, but we need to return to those kinds of texts again and again so that we can “**grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ**”.

We need to return to passages like Ephesians 1:3-7 to have our love rekindled as we remember what God has done for us:

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace”.

We can return again and again to passages like the beginning of Ephesians 2:

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

It is in the gospel that we see and experience God’s love for us by faith, and when we truly remember our position as God’s beloved, we cannot help but be swept up into loving Him in return, and loving those made in His image.

The second command in the text that can help us return to our first love:

2. **Repent** of our misplaced loves/priorities and **do** the “things we did at first”

There is nothing fancy here. All repentance takes is a change of mind and a change of direction, acknowledging before God our sin of forsaking our first love, and **humbly praying** for His empowerment through the Holy Spirit, that we might be able to do the “things we did at first”—that we might get our priorities straight and return to the love we once had. **After all, LOVE is the first fruit of the Spirit!** We cannot manufacture it on our own, though we must seek it with all the strength that God provides and through the means of His word as we remember our position as God’s beloved. We need to pray for the Spirit to move in our hearts and in our church...to move us to love God with all of our being and our neighbor as ourselves. That is surely a prayer God wants to answer.

As we remember our past and our position as God's beloved...as we repent and return to our first love, the world is watching. **They will know we are Christians by our love (John 13:34-35). And they will see the Light of the world, our loving Savior Jesus Christ, when we remain a faithful witness to Him, functioning as a lampstand that lifts Him up for all to see!**

*Yes, we need to be doctrinally pure.
Yes, we need to submit ourselves to God's word.
But most of all, we need to be cling to our first love.*

If we do those things, we lay a solid foundation for remaining a faithful witness in these last days!

CLOSING PRAYER

BENEDICTION:

May God grant you strength...to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God—and grow in your love for Him and others! Amen.

Go in peace.