

Faith that Endures, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: Faithfulness in a Fading Love

Revelation 2:1-7

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Set the scene before you touch the rebuke, because the rebuke is unintelligible without it. Ephesus was not a struggling congregation. Paul had labored there three years, warning every one of them night and day with tears (Acts 20:31). He had told their elders that wolves would come in and that men would rise from among their own number speaking twisted things (Acts 20:29-30). Forty years later, the risen Christ writes and tells them they did exactly what Paul asked. They worked. They endured. They tested men who claimed apostolic authority and exposed them as liars. They would not bear with evil. Help your class feel how good this church looked, because every commendation in verses 2 and 3 is genuine and Christ means every word of it. Then let verse 4 land the way it landed on them. The One who knew all of that had something against them, and it was not doctrine and it was not effort.

The heart of the lesson is that a church can be right and still be dying. "You have abandoned the love you had at first." That is not a complaint about enthusiasm or about how a service feels. Ephesus had not traded truth for anything; they had kept the truth and lost the Lord of the truth somewhere along the way. Their faithfulness had quietly begun running on duty rather than devotion, and Christ, who walks among the lampstands and misses nothing, saw it. The remedy He gives is threefold and it is worth writing on the board: remember, repent, do the works you did at first (Revelation 2:5). Notice that repentance here is bracketed on both sides by action. It begins in memory and it ends in obedience. Keep your class from hearing repentance as a mood. In Scripture it is always a turning that shows itself in what a person does next (Acts 26:20).

Three boundaries need a steady hand. First, verse 5 threatens to remove their lampstand, and someone will assume that is impossible for a faithful church or that being on the roll settles the matter. It does not. The Lord adds the saved to the body when they obey the gospel (Acts 2:47), and Simon was baptized, was in the church at Samaria, and was still in the bond of iniquity (Acts 8:13, 22-23). A sound congregation can contain lost people, and a lampstand can be removed. Second, do not let the class hear that love matters and doctrine does not. Christ commends their testing in verse 2 and their hatred of evil in verse 6 in the same breath as the rebuke. Third, verse 2 will raise the question of how we test teachers today, and the answer is the completed Scriptures, never a feeling or a prompting. Aim the hour at a class that leaves loving Christ, not merely agreeing with Him.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verse 1, Christ describes Himself as the One who “holds the seven stars” and “walks among the seven golden lampstands.” What does this imagery teach about Christ’s relationship to His churches?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start where John starts, because he has already told us what the images mean and the class should not have to guess. “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches” (Revelation 1:20). Whatever we make of the messengers, the lampstands are settled: they are congregations. So when Christ introduces Himself to Ephesus, He does not open with power or with judgment. He opens with proximity. He is the One who holds and the One who walks, and both verbs are present tense.

Take the two pictures separately, because they say different things. Holding is possession and security; the stars are in His right hand, which in Scripture is the hand of strength and favor. Walking is presence and inspection. A lampstand exists to give light, and the man who walks among lamps is the man who tends them, trims them, and notices which one has gone dim. Ask your class which of those two they would rather hear about first. Most of us want the holding. Ephesus needed the walking.

Now let the class feel what walking implies. He is not observing His churches from a distance and forming an opinion from the annual report. He is in the room. Everything He says in the next six verses (the toil, the endurance, the testing, the cooled love) is the report of someone who has been standing there the whole time. That is why verse 2 begins “I know your works.” He is not guessing. Ephesus had a visitor every Sunday who saw more than the visitors they were trying to impress.

Guard a boundary here while it is easy, because the class will meet it again in verse 5. The lampstands are congregations, plural, each one addressed separately, each with its own commendation and its own problem. Scripture uses “church” in only two ways: the whole body of the saved everywhere (Ephesians 5:25) and a single local congregation (1 Corinthians 1:2). Paul greets “all the churches of Christ,” plural (Romans 16:16). There is no third thing, no network of congregations under a shared human organization. Christ walks among them one lamp at a time, and He evaluates them one lamp at a time.

Bring it home before you move on. Ask the class what changes about this Sunday if the One walking among the lampstands is actually here and actually knows. Not what changes about the singing, but what changes about them. Ephesus was doing fine by every measure a visitor could see, and He was not a visitor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- John defines the images himself: the lampstands are the churches (Revelation 1:20)
- Holding speaks of security and possession; walking speaks of presence and inspection

- Christ evaluates congregations from inside them, which is why He says “I know your works”
- Scripture uses “church” in only two senses: the saved everywhere (Ephesians 5:25) and a local congregation (1 Corinthians 1:2)
- Congregations are addressed individually, and Paul greets them in the plural (Romans 16:16)
- There is no third sense, no family or network of congregations under a shared human organization

Discussion Prompts

- Would you rather hear that Christ holds you or that Christ is watching you? Why?
- What changes about this Sunday if He is genuinely in the room?
- What does a visitor see in our congregation that Christ does not weigh at all?

Question 2

Student Question:

Verses 2–3 list several commendable qualities of the Ephesian church: hard work, patient endurance, intolerance of evil, and testing false teachers. Why does Jesus acknowledge these before addressing their failure?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class read the commendation slowly, because we tend to skim it on the way to the rebuke and that is exactly backward. “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” (Revelation 2:2-3). That is a remarkable paragraph. Toil is not ordinary work; the word means labor to the point of exhaustion. They had been at it for decades and had not quit.

Then make the point that Christ is not softening them up. This is not a technique. He commends them because it is true, and because He is the One who walks among the lampstands and therefore knows precisely what it cost them. Nothing in verse 4 cancels a word of verses 2 and 3. Help your class resist the sermon they have heard before, the one where the good things turn out not to have mattered. Christ says they mattered. He says it first, and He says it in detail.

Draw out why the order matters pastorally, because your class has people who need to learn this. A criticism from someone who has never noticed anything good in you is almost impossible to receive, and usually it should be. The Lord earns the right to say verse 4 by saying verses 2 and 3, and He does it without flattery and without exaggeration. Ask your class who in their life they can actually hear correction from, and why. It will be the person who saw the toil.

Guard the boundary in the other direction, though, and be plain about it. The order also means that the rebuke cannot be dismissed because of the commendation. Ephesus could have read

verse 2, felt good, and filed verse 4 under harshness. Every sound congregation is tempted to grade itself on the same list Christ gives here: we work, we endure, we do not tolerate error. All of that can be true, and one thing can still be wrong, and Christ says the one thing is enough to threaten the lampstand.

Bring it home simply. Ask each person to write the commendation Christ could truthfully give them, in His own style, beginning “I know.” Then ask them to sit with the possibility that He has something to add. The Ephesians would have loved verse 2 read aloud in the assembly. Verse 4 was in the same letter, read in the same hour, by the same voice.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The commendation is genuine, detailed, and unretracted; nothing in verse 4 cancels verses 2-3
- “Toil” describes labor to the point of exhaustion, sustained over decades (Revelation 2:2)
- They endured “for my name’s sake” and had not grown weary (Revelation 2:3)
- Christ commends first because He knows exactly what their faithfulness cost
- Correction is receivable from someone who has genuinely seen the good
- The commendation does not soften the rebuke; one wrong thing endangered the lampstand (Revelation 2:5)

Discussion Prompts

- Whose correction can you actually receive, and what did they see in you first?
- What could Christ truthfully commend in you, beginning with “I know”?
- Why is a church that scores well on verses 2 and 3 in special danger?

Question 3

Student Question:

In verse 2, the church “tested those who call themselves apostles and are not.” Why is doctrinal discernment important, and how does a congregation test teachings against the truth?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice first that Christ praises this, and let the class hear it in a climate that finds testing distasteful. He does not say they were harsh or unloving. He commends them for it, twice over, in verse 2 and again in verse 6. And notice how carefully they worked. They did not test claims; they tested men, one at a time, “those who call themselves apostles,” and they reached a verdict: “found them to be false.” That is not suspicion. That is patient, evidence-weighting work, and Paul had told their elders it would be necessary (Acts 20:29-30).

Then get at why it mattered so much. A false apostle is not merely a man with a wrong opinion. He is a man claiming authority he does not have, asking the church to receive his words as

Christ's. Paul's standard is absolute: "even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). John says the same to ordinary Christians: "test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Testing was never the work of specialists.

Now answer the "how," because your class will ask it. The standard is the word, and nothing else. The Bereans are the model and they gave this series its name: they "received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Notice what they did not do. They did not consult a feeling, and they did not defer to Paul's reputation. They opened the book on the apostle himself, and Luke calls that noble.

Guard the boundary here plainly and kindly, because this is where people go wrong today. There are no apostles now, and there is no new revelation to test. Miracles, prophecy, and tongues belonged to the apostolic age and confirmed the word while it was being delivered (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4); they have ceased, having served their purpose (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). God spoke finally in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2), the faith was "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), and the Scriptures make the man of God complete (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Never encourage anyone to test a teaching by whether it feels right or by waiting on an inner voice. That is not discernment; it is the thing discernment protects us from.

Bring it home concretely. Ask the class how they actually decided the last thing they believed. Was it a verse, or a voice they trusted, or a video that agreed with them already? Ephesus did this work, and it saved them. Then ask the harder question this letter forces: they got the testing right and still lost their first love. Being right is necessary. It has never been sufficient.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ commends doctrinal testing, and does so twice (Revelation 2:2, 6)
- Paul had warned the Ephesian elders that wolves and twisted teaching would come (Acts 20:29-30)
- The standard is absolute: any gospel contrary to the apostles' is accursed (Galatians 1:8)
- Testing is every Christian's work, not the specialist's (1 John 4:1)
- The Bereans tested an apostle by the Scriptures, and Luke calls it noble (Acts 17:11)
- Miracles and revelation confirmed the word in the apostolic age and have ceased (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4; 1 Corinthians 13:8-10)
- God now guides through the completed Scriptures, never through a prompting or inner voice (Hebrews 1:1-2; Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Discussion Prompts

- How did you actually decide the last thing you came to believe?
- Why is "it felt right to me" the opposite of what Ephesus was commended for?
- If we are good at testing, what does this letter warn will still be missing?

Question 4

Student Question:

Despite all their strengths, Jesus says in verse 4, "You have abandoned the love you had at first." What is this "first love," and how does a believer or a congregation lose it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Slow the class down on the verb, because it is stronger than most translations feel. "You have abandoned the love you had at first." Abandoned. Left. It is the word for walking away from something and leaving it behind. Christ does not say their love had faded, or dimmed, or gotten tired. He says they left it somewhere. And notice the tense: this is a completed thing, already done, and apparently nobody in Ephesus had noticed. That is worth sitting with. A congregation can lose the one thing Christ wants most and keep every meeting on the calendar.

Then define the love, because the class will guess and guess wrong. It is not warm feeling and it is not the emotional temperature of the assembly. Paul closed his letter to these very people with "Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible" (Ephesians 6:24). That is love for a Person. Jesus said the great commandment is to love God with all the heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37-38), and He said what it looks like: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). So first love is not the opposite of obedience. It is the reason for it.

Now show the class why "first" matters. God had said this before, through Jeremiah: "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness" (Jeremiah 2:2). Israel had not renounced God; they had cooled. First love is what a person has when Christ is still astonishing. It is the love of someone recently rescued, who cannot stop talking about it, who serves because he cannot quite believe he gets to. Ephesus still served. They had forgotten why.

Draw out how it is lost, because nobody in your class walked away on purpose. It goes exactly as it went here. The work continues and the wonder does not. The cause replaces the Christ. Guarding the truth becomes more interesting than the One the truth is about. The tasks are still done, well and on time, and one day it is duty all the way down. Ask your class whether they can name the moment their love cooled. They cannot, and that is the point. Nobody abandons a first love in an afternoon.

Bring it home gently but do not let anyone off. Ask them what they used to do for Christ that they have not done in a year, and why they stopped. Then ask the question underneath it: is Christ still astonishing to you, or have you gotten used to Him? The Ephesians would have said yes to every doctrinal question in this room and Christ still had this against them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The verb is “abandoned,” a completed act of leaving behind, not a slow fade they were aware of (Revelation 2:4)
- First love is love for a Person, the love Paul commended to these same readers (Ephesians 6:24)
- It is not the opposite of obedience; love for Christ shows itself in keeping His commandments (John 14:15)
- It is the first and great commandment, not an optional warmth (Matthew 22:37-38)
- God made the same charge to Israel, remembering “the devotion of your youth” (Jeremiah 2:2)
- Love is lost by degrees: the work continues while the wonder quietly stops

Discussion Prompts

- What did you do for Christ a year ago that you have quietly stopped doing?
- Is Christ still astonishing to you, or have you gotten used to Him?
- Why can nobody name the day their first love cooled?

Question 5

Student Question:

How can hard work and doctrinal correctness become substitutes for genuine love for Christ? What does this reveal about the danger of merely going through the motions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the class see the mechanism, because it is not mysterious. Work and doctrine are visible; love is not. Work can be measured, scheduled, and praised. Doctrinal precision can be demonstrated in an argument and confirmed by winning it. Love for Christ produces no attendance figure. So the two visible things quietly take over the accounting, and the invisible thing stops being tracked by anyone except the One walking among the lampstands. Nobody decides to make the trade. The trade is simply what happens when the only things we count are the countable ones.

Then let the class feel how honest Paul was about this with these very people’s neighbors. “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge... but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-2). Notice what he grants. He does not say the knowledge is fake. He says the man is nothing. That is the arithmetic of this passage. Ephesus was not a hypocrite church. It was a real church running on the wrong fuel.

Guard both edges here, because your class will slide off one or the other. Do not let anyone conclude that doctrine is the problem and sincerity is the solution. Christ commends their doctrine in verse 2 and their moral conviction in verse 6, and He never asks them to hold the truth less firmly. And do not let anyone conclude that love is a feeling that excuses obedience.

The remedy He prescribes in verse 5 is works. The error at Ephesus was not that they had too much truth. It was that they had truth without the Person.

Now show why motions are so dangerous, because they are not neutral. Going through the motions is not the same as doing nothing; it feels like faithfulness, which is precisely what makes it undetectable. A man who stops attending knows something is wrong. A man who attends, serves, teaches, and gives, and no longer loves, has every piece of evidence on his side. That is why Christ had to tell them. They could not see it, and the people around them certainly could not.

Bring it home with a question they can actually answer. Ask them to think of one thing they will do for the Lord this week and to ask honestly why they will do it. Because someone expects it? Because it is on the list and the list is who you are now? Or because you love Him? The task will look identical to everyone watching. Christ is not watching the task.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Work and doctrine are measurable; love for Christ is not, so the countable things take over the accounting
- Knowledge and power without love leave a man “nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-2)
- Christ never asks Ephesus to hold the truth less firmly; He commends their testing and their convictions (Revelation 2:2, 6)
- Love is not a feeling that excuses obedience; the prescribed remedy is works (Revelation 2:5)
- Going through the motions is dangerous because it looks exactly like faithfulness from the outside
- Christ weighs the motive, not the appearance of the task

Discussion Prompts

- Name one thing you will do for the Lord this week. Now say honestly why.
- Which is easier for you to keep, your convictions or your affection for Christ?
- Why is drifting into motions harder to detect than dropping out entirely?

Question 6

Student Question:

In verse 5, Jesus gives three commands: “Remember...repent...do the works you did at first.” Why is remembering the starting point for repentance and renewal?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Read the whole command, because the shape of it is the lesson. “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.” Three imperatives, and the

order is deliberate. Memory, turning, action. Notice that repentance sits in the middle, bracketed on both sides by things a person actually does. Christ does not ask Ephesus for regret. He asks them to look back, turn around, and get to work.

Then draw out why memory comes first. A man cannot repent of a drift he cannot see. Ephesus felt fine; the toil was real and the doctrine was sound and there was nothing on the surface to repent of. Only memory reveals the distance. "Remember from where you have fallen" assumes there is a from, a height they once stood at, and the only way to measure a fall is against a place you used to be. This is what God did with Israel through Jeremiah, and it is what He does here. He makes them look at the honeymoon and then at the calendar.

Now be precise about repentance, because your class will soften it into feeling. Paul distinguishes them plainly: "godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Grief is not repentance; it produces it. And repentance itself has a visible shape. Paul preached that men "should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance" (Acts 26:20). A person who feels terrible and changes nothing has not repented. He has only had a bad afternoon.

Which is why the third command exists, and why your class must not skip it. "Do the works you did at first." Note that Christ does not tell them to feel their first love again. Feelings cannot be commanded and He does not try. He tells them to do the first works, and He knows something about us: devotion often follows obedience back into the room. The way back to loving Christ, on His own instruction, is to start again doing the things you did when you loved Him.

Bring it home with something concrete enough to be uncomfortable. Ask each person to remember one specific thing from their first year in Christ. Not a feeling, a thing they did. The person they told. The Bible they actually read. The hours they gave away without counting. Then ask them to do that one thing this week. Christ's remedy is not complicated. It is just humbling, because it requires admitting there is a from.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The order is deliberate: remember, repent, do; repentance is bracketed by action (Revelation 2:5)
- Memory comes first because a man cannot repent of a drift he cannot see
- "From where you have fallen" assumes a height, and only memory measures the distance (Jeremiah 2:2)
- Grief is not repentance; godly grief produces it (2 Corinthians 7:10)
- Repentance is never mere feeling; it shows itself in deeds in keeping with it (Acts 26:20)
- Christ commands works, not feelings, because devotion follows obedience back
- The remedy is available to anyone willing to admit there is a "from"

Discussion Prompts

- Name one thing, not a feeling, that you did in your first year in Christ. Will you do it this week?
- Why does Christ command works rather than command us to feel love again?
- What is the difference between feeling terrible about sin and repenting of it?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus warns that He will “remove your lampstand” if the church does not repent (v. 5). What does the removal of the lampstand mean, and why is this warning so serious?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Establish what is being threatened, because the class may not realize how severe it is. The lampstand is the congregation (Revelation 1:20), and a lampstand exists for one reason: to hold up light. To remove it is not to relocate it or to discipline it. It is to end it as a light-bearing church of Christ in that city. And notice who does it. “I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.” The same One who walks among them, tending the lamps, will take one out. Ephesus is not being warned about Rome or about persecution. They are being warned about Christ.

Then let the class do the math that makes this frightening. This is the congregation Paul planted, that Timothy served, that had elders warned by an apostle in person, that had just been commended in verse 2 for doing everything a sound church is supposed to do. If any lampstand were safe, it was this one. It was not. The threat is conditional (“unless you repent”), which means it is real and also means it is escapable. Christ does not make threats He is unwilling to keep, and He does not make them without a way out.

Now guard the boundary the class most needs, and be very plain. Nobody is saved by belonging to a congregation, whatever the sign says. The Lord adds the saved to the body when they obey the gospel (Acts 2:47), and the body of Christ is composed of individual saved people, not of congregations. Paul told the Corinthians, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). A congregation is not a piece of the body; if it were, a lost man voted onto a roll would be in Christ, which is impossible. That is exactly why Ephesus is in danger. Simon believed, was baptized, was in the church at Samaria, and Peter still told him, “Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours,” for “I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:13, 22-23). A sound congregation can contain lost people, and a lampstand can be removed.

Guard the second edge as well, because it comes up whenever the first does. A local congregation is not the church established at Pentecost; it is Christians in one place, begun whenever those Christians began meeting. That is why Paul greets “all the churches of Christ” in the plural (Romans 16:16), and why Christ can remove this lamp without any harm coming to His

promise or to His body. The gates of Hades will not prevail against the church. That was never a guarantee about a building on a corner in Ephesus. Say that kindly, and let it do its work.

Bring it home where it belongs. Ask the class what would actually happen if the Lord removed our lampstand this year. Would the community notice? Would we? Ephesus' light did go out, and the city is ruins now, and nobody there is holding services. He gave them a warning and a remedy in the same sentence. The remedy was never hard. It was just humbling.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The lampstand is the congregation; removing it ends it as a light-bearing church in that place (Revelation 1:20)
- Christ Himself does the removing, and the threat is conditional and therefore escapable (Revelation 2:5)
- No one is saved by belonging to a congregation; the Lord adds the saved to the body when they obey the gospel (Acts 2:47)
- The body of Christ is composed of individual saved people, not of congregations (1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:5)
- A sound congregation can contain lost people: Simon was baptized, was in the church, and was in the bond of iniquity (Acts 8:13, 22-23)
- A local congregation is not the church established at Pentecost; Paul greets "churches of Christ" in the plural (Romans 16:16)
- Against "once saved, always saved": a commended church was warned it could be removed

Discussion Prompts

- If our lampstand were removed this year, would the community notice? Would we?
- Why does being on a roll in a sound congregation settle nothing?
- If Ephesus was not safe, what would make us safe?

Question 8

Student Question:

Verse 6 commends the Ephesians for hating "the works of the Nicolaitans." What does this tell us about the importance of maintaining both love and moral conviction?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Point at the structure first, because it is easy to miss and it changes the letter. Verse 6 comes after the warning about the lampstand. Christ has just said the most severe thing He will say, and then He circles back: "Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." He will not let them end the letter thinking their convictions were the problem. Whatever went wrong at Ephesus, their moral backbone was not it, and He says so with the warning still hanging in the air.

Then say what little we know, and say it honestly. Scripture does not define the Nicolaitans, but it gives us a strong hint. At Pergamum the same group appears next to the teaching of Balaam, which put a stumbling block before Israel, “so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality” (Revelation 2:14-15). So this looks like a compromise movement, teaching that a Christian could accommodate the pagan world around him and lose nothing. In a city built around the temple of Artemis, that offer would have been extremely attractive and extremely reasonable. Ephesus said no.

Now handle the word “hate” carefully, because your class lives in a world that hears it one way only. Christ commends hatred of works, not of people, and He grounds it in Himself: “which I also hate.” This is not contempt for the Nicolaitans. It is agreement with God about what a thing is. Scripture is not embarrassed by this: “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good” (Romans 12:9). Notice where that command sits. It is the first thing Paul says after telling us to love without hypocrisy. Real love is not neutral about what destroys the beloved.

Which sets up the boundary this whole lesson needs. Do not let the class walk out with the tidy lesson that Ephesus had truth and needed love, as though the two were on a scale and they had loaded one side. Christ does not ask them to hate the Nicolaitans’ works less. He asks them to love Him more. Truth and love are not rivals to be balanced; they are both His, and losing either one is losing Him. A church that keeps its convictions and loses its love ends up hard. A church that keeps its warmth and loses its convictions ends up empty. Ephesus was in danger of the first, and verse 6 is Christ making sure they do not correct into the second.

Bring it home in both directions, because both people are in your class. To the one with strong convictions: can you name the last time your convictions were exercised in an act of love rather than an argument? And to the one who finds all of this distasteful: what do you hate? If the answer is nothing, that is not love, and Christ is not describing you in verse 6.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ returns to commendation after the warning; their convictions were never the problem (Revelation 2:6)
- Scripture links the Nicolaitans with Balaam’s compromise: idol food and immorality (Revelation 2:14-15)
- The hatred is of works, not of persons, and it is shared with Christ Himself
- Genuine love abhors what is evil and clings to what is good (Romans 12:9)
- Truth and love are not rivals to be balanced; both belong to Christ
- Conviction without love hardens; warmth without conviction empties
- The remedy for Ephesus is to love Christ more, never to hate evil less

Discussion Prompts

- When did your convictions last show up as an act of love rather than an argument?
- What do you actually hate? What does your answer say about what you love?

- Which failure is our congregation more likely to make: hard, or empty?

Question 9

Student Question:

In verse 7, Jesus promises that “the one who conquers” will eat from the tree of life. What does it mean to conquer in this context, and how does this promise motivate endurance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Define the conquering from the letter itself, because the class will import a battlefield. Nothing in Revelation 2:1-7 involves a sword. The Ephesians’ enemies are a cooled heart, a compromise movement, and forty years of grinding faithfulness. So conquering here means what the whole letter has been asking for: remembering, repenting, doing the first works, and holding on. To the church at Smyrna, Christ makes it explicit: “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). The conqueror in Revelation is not the man who wins a fight. He is the man who does not let go.

Then notice the promise, and let the class hear the whole Bible in it. “To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” That tree has been guarded by cherubim and a flaming sword since Genesis 3:24. Access was lost at the beginning of the book, and here, in a letter to a tired congregation in Asia Minor, Christ hands out the key. At the very end John sees it again: “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life” (Revelation 22:14). What Adam lost, Christ gives, and He gives it to people who kept going.

Now guard the boundary, and let this verse do the work it is built for. “To the one who conquers” is conditional, and every one of the seven letters ends the same way. If arrival were guaranteed by a past moment, the word “conquers” would have nothing to conquer and the threat in verse 5 would be theater. Christ addresses baptized believers in a real congregation, commends their labor, warns them, and stakes the promise on their endurance. That is fatal to “once saved, always saved,” and it is fatal in the gentlest way possible, because it is not a threat. It is an invitation with a finish line in it.

Guard the other edge too, because someone will hear works-earning. The tree is not wages. Christ says “I will grant to eat,” and granting is a gift; the paradise is God’s, the tree is God’s, and nobody conquers his way in on merit. The Christian genuinely cooperates in a work that is God’s from beginning to end. Endurance is not how we buy the tree. It is how we stay where the tree is being given.

Bring it home by asking what the promise is doing here at all. Christ does not motivate Ephesus with shame, and He has just used the strongest warning in the letter. He ends with a tree. Ask the class what they are actually enduring for. If the answer is a reputation, or a habit, or the

approval of people who will not be at the judgment, the fuel will run out. Ephesus proved that. The people who endure to the end are the people who want what is at the end.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Conquering in this letter means remembering, repenting, doing the first works, and not letting go
- Christ defines it for Smyrna as faithfulness unto death (Revelation 2:10)
- The tree of life was guarded and lost in Eden and is restored in Christ (Genesis 3:24; Revelation 22:14)
- The promise is conditional in all seven letters: “to the one who conquers”
- Against “once saved, always saved”: the promise is staked on endurance, and the lampstand could be removed (Revelation 2:5)
- The tree is granted, not earned; the Christian cooperates in a work that is God’s
- Endurance requires wanting what is at the end, not merely keeping a habit

Discussion Prompts

- What are you actually enduring for? Will that fuel last?
- If a past moment guaranteed arrival, what would “the one who conquers” mean?
- Why does Christ end the harshest letter with a promise rather than a threat?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking at Revelation 2:1–7 as a whole, what does this letter teach about the relationship between truth, love, and enduring faithfulness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Have the class assemble the letter, because the shape is the argument. He walks among them. He knows their works, their toil, their endurance, their testing, and He commends all of it. He has one thing against them: they left their first love. He tells them to remember, repent, and do the first works, or the lamp goes out. He reminds them that their convictions were right. He promises the tree of life to the one who conquers. Notice what is never withdrawn and what is never negotiable. The truth stands the whole way through, and it is not enough by itself.

Then state the relationship plainly, because your class will want a formula and this letter gives them a better thing. Truth without love does not become a lesser kind of faithfulness; it becomes a lamp about to be removed. And love without truth is not what Christ offers as the alternative, because He commends their testing in the same letter. The two are not weights on a scale. They are both simply Christ. To keep His truth and lose your love for Him is to have His words and not have Him, which is exactly the position Ephesus was in and exactly why He wrote.

Now connect it to the series, because this is why the lesson is here. Endurance is the theme, and Ephesus is the warning that endurance alone will not do it. Verse 3 says outright: they endured patiently and had not grown weary. They lasted forty years and were still in danger. Help the class see that the question is never only whether we will still be here in ten years. Plenty of people last. The question is what will be left of us when we do.

Guard the last boundary before you land it. Do not let anyone leave concluding that our sound teaching, our order, or our membership is what secures us. The Lord adds the saved to the body when they obey the gospel (Acts 2:47), and the body is made of individual saved people. Everything Ephesus had, we can have, and Christ can still have something against us. He is not grading the congregation on the things visitors can see. He is walking among the lampstands, and He is looking for love that shows itself in obedience (John 14:15).

Bring it home and do not rush the last minute. Ask the class two questions and let the silence sit. First: if Christ wrote our congregation a letter this week, what would He commend, honestly and in detail? Second, and this is the one: what would He have against us? Then remember what He gave Ephesus in the same breath as the warning. Remember. Repent. Do the first works. It is not a hard road back. It never was.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The letter never withdraws the commendation and never softens the truth (Revelation 2:2-3, 6)
- Truth without love is not lesser faithfulness; it is a lamp under a warning (Revelation 2:4-5)
- Truth and love are not a balance to strike; both are Christ Himself
- Endurance alone is insufficient: they endured, did not grow weary, and were still in danger (Revelation 2:3)
- Neither sound teaching nor membership secures anyone; the Lord adds the saved to the body (Acts 2:47)
- Love for Christ shows itself in obedience, which is why the remedy is works (John 14:15; Revelation 2:5)
- The road back is remembering, repenting, and doing the first works

Discussion Prompts

- If Christ wrote our congregation a letter this week, what would He commend, in detail?
- What would He have against us? Who would say it out loud?
- Plenty of people last. What will be left of you when you do?