

“I WILL REMOVE YOUR LAMPSTAND”

Bryan Matthew Dockens

To *“the church of Ephesus”* (Revelation 2:1), Jesus warned, *“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place — unless you repent”* (5). *“Or else”* is a rather intimidating ultimatum coming from the Lord who will judge all souls.

That *“or else”* is preceded by a command to *“repent and do the first works”* because *“you have fallen.”* Let the reader recall that Jesus was communicating to a church, a collective of Christians in a given locale, not just the individual disciples composing it. A church, as such, therefore, is capable of falling and of repenting. Thus, some churches are faithful and others unfaithful, sound and unsound, righteous and unrighteous, holy and wicked.

Furthermore, that *“or else”* is followed by the threat to *“remove your lampstand.”* The imagery of the lampstand is one of the very few symbols in the Revelation which has a direct analysis provided within the book. Christ explained, *“the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches”* (1:20). Moreover, the Lord is the one *“who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”* (2:1). If a church is figuratively represented as a lampstand and Jesus told the church its lampstand would be removed *“unless you repent,”* then a church that has fallen is one that Jesus is not among. He has withdrawn His approval.

The remedy Jesus prescribed this wayward church was to *“repent and do the first works.”* A church is an entity capable of performing works. Jesus told this church and six others in Asia, *“I know your works”* (2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). He judges each congregation according to the functions it undertakes and most of them dissatisfy Him. The *“first works”* that the Ephesian brethren were commanded to revert to were already acknowledged by Jesus: *“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary”* (2:2-3). He criticized the group, though, saying, *“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love”* (2:4). Whenever a church moves away from its *“first love”* and *“first works,”* it moves away from divine approval and becomes unrecognizable to the Lord.

WHAT DEFILES US?

Jacob Hudgins

The Pharisees are concerned that Jesus’ disciples are eating with *“defiled”* hands (Mark 7:2, 5) by not washing, as the tradition of the elders instructs. There are two issues here—the issue of following traditions as if they are divine and the nature of what defiles us.

The Jewish mentality (or at least its Pharisaic permutation) on defilement is well documented by Mark: *“When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches”* (Mark 7:4). They are consumed with the possibility of accidentally picking up defilement in everyday commerce. Taken to an extreme, this mindset fears the world around it because even unintentional contact has an impact on my worship and standing.

Jesus stands against this. *“There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him”* (Mark 7:15). Nothing outside us defiles us. This is not where sin and corruption occur. Mark makes clear that this even applies to food (Mark 7:19). True defilement comes from within, from my heart (Mark 7:20-23). It is not money or relationships or substances that defile. It is my desire to use those things in evil ways or toward evil ends.

No one—nothing—can make me sin. I don’t accidentally pick up sin. True, I may not realize that I sin, but the decision remains in my power. Others can influence me, but it is ultimately my choice and comes from my heart. If my heart is pure and determined to do right, no circumstance can defile me. What defiles me comes from within me.

Do I tend to blame others—or the situation—or myself—when I sin?

“A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed.”

– G. K. Chesterton

**"WHAT MUST I DO
TO BE SAVED?"**

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"THE ASSEMBLING OF
OURSELVES TOGETHER"**

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard

Belén, New Mexico

Seekers Welcome.

Members Expected.

**"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN
ANY TRESPASS...
RESTORE SUCH A ONE"**

GALATIANS 6:1

CONFESS TRESPASSES

James 5:16; 1st John 1:9

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 8:22

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

Acts 8:22

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"A WORD FITLY SPOKEN IS
LIKE APPLES OF GOLD IN
SETTINGS OF SILVER"**

PROVERBS 25:11

"When God calls us to step out of our comfort zone, He is not calling us to be comfortable in the situation. He is calling us to be comfortable in Him in spite of the situation."

– Stacy Sanchez

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

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"THEY CAUSED GREAT JOY"

Bryan Matthew Dockens

Paul and Barnabas were engaged in *"no small dissension and dispute"* (Acts 15:2) with certain Jewish Christians who were trying to impose circumcision on Gentiles in the church of Antioch (1). Because those initiating the trouble had come from Jerusalem, the Antioch brethren determined Paul and Barnabas and others ought to consult with the church in Jerusalem (3) in case the false teachers had been dispatched from that congregation. The conference they had with the apostles and elders was very effective and serves to inform Christians presently how to interpret Scripture and resolve disagreements (4-31).

Between debating the issue with the false teachers and settling the matter with the apostles and elders, Paul and Barnabas and company had to travel from Antioch to Jerusalem. *"So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren"* (3). While en route from a debate to a resolution on the same question, these men of God took time to encourage other Christians and report on the progress of the gospel.

They were not so fixated on the error needing defeat that they could not uplift their brethren, nor were they so intent on positivity that they could not oppose a dangerous falsehood. This is the balance to be had by preachers, teachers, elders, and all Christians everywhere.

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