

Lessons From the Church at Ephesus

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[0:00] Lessons from the church at Ephesus.! Lessons that grow out of the information we have in the scriptures about this church.

That's the theme of our study. We had one lesson and I think we'll possibly get through the final lesson today. Believing that lessons that come to us from the church at Ephesus are lessons that we as a church, Grace Fellowship Church, need to learn as well.

So we saw its establishment in Acts chapter 18 through 20 where it ends with Paul's farewell address to the elders that had gathered.

And as he left them and committed them to God and his grace, he left them with a warning. Do you remember what the warning was? What was it?

Savage wolves. And what did he mean by that? False teachers. Be on guard. There are false teachers. There are men out there who are in sheep's clothing that are really savage wolves.

[1:07] And they will come in and they will not spare this flock. So what a warning to this young church at Ephesus and to their leaders to keep an eye out for these men who are coming.

Paul tells them they are coming. And they will not only come from without, they will rise up from among you as well. All right. That was the first bit of information from Acts 18 to 20.

Four years later, Paul writes a letter to this church. We have it in our Bibles as the book of Ephesus. And in this book, he repeats the warning now to the whole church, not just to the elders, but to the whole church and holds out to them the dangers of being blown here and there by every wind of doctrine.

Like a feather in the wind. It has no rooting and it just goes wherever the wind goes. And he says, church, don't be like the feather in the wind, blown by every wind of doctrine.

But be sure you're rooted and anchored and growing in maturity in your knowledge of Christ and the truth as it is in Jesus. And for that end, Jesus has given shepherds and teachers to keep you from being blown about.

[2:21] The important work of pastor teachers in the church. And then, so that's the second bit of information, the church at Ephesus. And then thirdly, we looked at Paul's letter a year or two later to Timothy.

First Timothy. And why would we come to the letter of First Timothy to learn truth about Ephesus? Does anyone remember the tie between First Timothy and the church at Ephesus?

This is the hardest question yet this morning. Timothy was supposed to stay in Ephesus. That's right. First Timothy 1.3. When Paul left, he told Timothy, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer.

Nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. They promote controversies rather than God's work, which is by faith.

So, yes, we're right to think of Ephesus when we read the first epistle to Timothy. Timothy's been left there. Is he an old man or a young man?

[3:31] He's a young man. And is Ephesus a big church or a little church? It's a big church. It's an influential church. And so Timothy's timid and a bit retiring as to his personality.

And has some stomach problems, probably brought on by nerves. And Paul's writing to encourage him. He's saying it's important, Timothy. You're the man for the job there. Now, don't let anybody despise your youthfulness.

But command them and tell them to hold to the truth. And stop those who are teaching false doctrine. And then he goes on to warn him about those false doctrines.

Not only things that are out and out false, but also just diversions that pull people, pull the congregation away from the truth. He talks about myths and endless genealogies.

And we made the comment how often Satan's attack on a church is not just to get them to imbibe things that are out and out false doctrines. But just to get them pouring all their time into things that don't matter.

[4:40] Things that aren't eternal. Things that the church is not given to be pursuing. And so he says, watch out for these diversions that pull us away from the main thing.

Many of these teachers, he said, are proud. Have an unhealthy interest in controversy and quarrel. And the motivation at the bottom for many is money.

Well, those were the three run-ins with the church at Ephesus that we've looked at so far. We come to the fourth. And I ask you to turn to 1 John.

1 John. And again, now we need to ask, well, why are we coming to 1 John when we're considering the church at Ephesus? Well, the early church history associates John's epistles here with Asia Minor.

And especially Ephesus. When I say Asia Minor, you should think of the western edge of Turkey. And all those seven churches to which Jesus wrote in Revelation 2 and 3.

[5:45] Remember, one of them is Ephesus. Indeed, the chief church in that grouping of seven is Ephesus. They received the first letter and so on. Well, church history associates these three epistles of John with Asia Minor and especially Ephesus.

Now, when I say church history, now I'm a step away from Scripture, aren't I? We're dealing now with history such as that tells us that our first president was George Washington.

And tells us about Abe Lincoln. And those things aren't in our Bible. But history records them, doesn't it? And so we don't say, well, because it's not in our Bible, it can't be true. No, we understand.

It's not inspired. We need to be careful. We understand men's prejudices and recording history and all the rest. But we do take things at face value, don't we, in terms of historical testimony, if there's credible witnesses to things that have happened.

Well, it's in that light that we see this connection between the church at Ephesus and 1 John. The early church fathers said John was in Ephesus and was overseeing these churches and especially the church at Ephesus.

[7:03] So Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John, a personal understudy of John, became the bishop of nearby Smyrna. You'll recognize that name from Revelation 2.

He testifies. Irenaeus, who lived in Smyrna and heard the preaching of Polycarp. So one generation removed from the apostle John.

He records the apostle John's residence in Ephesus where he lived to a ripe old age and died and was buried there, probably around 100 A.D.

So that means that his banishment to the Isle of Patmos that we read of in Revelation 1 would have happened earlier, but that at the end he spends his life there in Ephesus and dies and is buried there.

So 1 John is written out of a concern for the flock, probably Ephesus, perhaps all these churches in Asia minor.

[8:12] John Stott says in his commentary on 1 John, The apostle Paul's prophecy to the Ephesian elders about savage wolves, later repeated to Timothy, has evidently come true.

Okay, so what he warned the Ephesian elders of, what he repeated in his warning to Timothy, has evidently come true. The epistle is full of warnings about false prophets that have come among them, of many deceivers leading people astray.

He even speaks of these false teachers as being under the influence of supernatural powers, hence the need to test the spirits. Chapter 4 and verse 1.

You need to test the spirits to be sure that they come from the spirit of God rather than evil spirits. That's here in this letter. Look at chapter 2 and verse 19 of 1 John.

He's speaking of these false prophets. He calls them antichrists, plural. Many antichrists have come. This is how we know it's the last hour.

[9:25] Verse 19, They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

Now let me just say, first of all, that we can't say this as to Grace Fellowship Church, that everybody that leaves us is obviously not of the Lord, or he would have stayed with us, or they would have

stayed with us.

That's not a proper application of this passage. This is an apostle of Jesus speaking, an inspired apostle of Jesus, the apostle John, to whom Jesus gave his doctrine, handed it off to them, the apostles, that they might build the church upon the foundation of Christ and his truth.

And it's John who says, they did not continue with us and our truth. And in leaving us, they showed that they didn't really belong to us.

So evidently, some of these false teachers that came into the church at Ephesus and these other churches in the area did not succeed in gathering everyone to their side, and so they split and run. [10:46] They left. Yet their ideas were still a threat, perhaps leaving some wavering in the church. And so we have this letter, a letter to warn them about some of the false teachings that have been taught in their midst.

And it's in this letter that we see the different tests given, whereby they can discern a true Christian from a false Christian, a true prophet from a false prophet, and so on.

So what kind of heresy was this? Most think that it's an early form of Gnosticism. A Gnostic Greek heresy that had infiltrated the church in this part of Asia Minor can be found in Paul's letter to the Colossians.

You read the letter to the Colossians. Again, that's a church right in this same area of Asia Minor, close to Ephesus. You can see it in his letter to Timothy. And you can see it in Christ's letters to Pergamum and Thyatira in Revelation 2.

All of these churches in close proximity to Ephesus, they're warned and they're taught against these Gnostic doctrines that had been taught in this region.

[12:01] The early church fathers, Irenaeus, Eusebius, and Polycarp, spoke of a Gnostic opponent of the Apostle John that lived at Ephesus, a man named Serinthus.

Polycarp, again, remember he was trained by the Apostle John, recounts the oft-told incident of John going into a bathhouse at Ephesus only to learn that Corinthus, this false teacher, was inside. And so John turns and ran out exclaiming, Let us fly, lest even the bathhouse fall down, because Serinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within. Well, again, that's not in the Bible, that's history. Did George Washington cut down the cherry tree? Did the Apostle John go into this bathhouse and hear that Serinthus was inside and run out and say, Oh no, God's going to strike the whole bathhouse because there's heretics in there?

We don't know. But it does point John out to be in Ephesus, and it shows that this Gnostic-like heretic, Serinthus, was there in Ephesus as well.

[13:08] And so that gives something of an understanding of the concerns John has in this epistle of 1 John. And he talks about these tests that the church is to apply to people to discern whether they're true or false.

And it's interesting how the tests line up with the errors of Serinthus and the Gnostic error that was being spread among them. There was, first of all, the theological error of Christology.

Who is Jesus Christ? Who is Jesus Christ? Well, Serinthus denied the incarnation of the eternal Son of God. He cannot fathom in his mind that you can have one person who is at the same time the eternal God and finite man.

And we must say with Serinthus, it is hard to understand, isn't it? It's a mystery. But rather than bow and worship where we don't understand, Serinthus had to deny one or the other.

We can't have this. It doesn't make sense to us. And we're the judge of truth. That's the way he thought. And so he denied that Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

[14:23] He would say that the eternal Son of God, when he came down to heaven, became something less than the eternal Son of God. And that's the man, Jesus.

And then he died. And then the eternal Spirit of Christ lives on in heaven. But he's denying the reality of Christmas, what Christmas is all about, the incarnation, that the eternal God became man in the second person of the Trinity.

So what do we find in John's letter? Well, we find him warning and giving them a test. Look at chapter 4 and verse 2.

What's the test? How can we know whether a teacher, a prophet, is from the Spirit of God or the Spirit of the devil?

Well, this is how you can recognize the Spirit of God. Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

[15 : 26] But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. It's the Spirit of Antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and even now is already in the world.

So there's the theological test to meet the error of Serentis and these false teachers. And there are other texts in this letter that we could look to.

But then there was an ethical error as well. And we spoke about this briefly. There was the ethical error that was related to this whole view, the Greek view of the separation of soul and body. And it promoted immorality and loose living. It said these things don't really, it doesn't really matter, since what you do in your body does not affect your soul.

That was the error of this Gnostic-like thinking. And it was here in Asia Minor, here in Ephesus.

Christ's letters to these seven churches in Asia Minor in Revelation 2 and 3 point out this very error of those who are teaching idolatry and sexual immorality, that combination in the churches now.

[16 : 45] Okay? And in Pergamum, the nearby church of Pergamum, and in Thyatira. So John has an ethical test then. How can we know if a teacher is from God?

Not only by what they believe about Christ, but also by their morality, their ethics. Look at chapter 2, verses 3 to 6.

How do we discern? Well, we know. We know that we have come to know Him, that is, God, if we obey His commands. The man who says, I know Him, but does not do what He commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

So don't listen to Him. But if anyone obeys His word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him. Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.

So there's the second test that we'll find repeated throughout the book of 1 John. It's an ethical test. Those who claim to belong to the righteous Jesus live righteous lives, because He lives in them.

[18 : 01] And He cannot but be showing His fruits in their lives of obedience to His law. So the theological error met by the theological test.

The ethical error met by the ethical test. And again, it's not just this one passage. There's several places throughout the letter that we could look at. And then there was the social error and the social test.

These false teachers and their followers claimed to have a secret knowledge. Gnostic, gnosis is knowledge.

And they claimed to have a secret special knowledge that only they were initiated into. And they tended to look down their noses at anyone else who wasn't in on this special knowledge.

Well, how do you answer that? Well, John has a test of love, doesn't he? A social test. How do you get on with others? And it's throughout the book.

[19 : 03] You're familiar with that. But look at chapter 2 and verse 9. He says, Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. You see, the test is, what's your heart towards your brother?

Do you love your brother? You claim to be in the light. You're enlightened. You're one of the special enlightened ones. But if you don't love your brother, you're not in the light at all.

Chapter 4, verse 20 and 21. If anyone says, I love God, yet hates his brother, he's a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

So here the test is that of love. Jerome, one of the church fathers, tells a famous story of the blessed John the Evangelist, the Apostle John.

In his old, extreme old age there at Ephesus, He used to be carried into the congregation in the arms of his disciples and was unable to say anything except, Little children love one another.

[20 : 06] Little children love one another. At last, wearied that he always spoke the same words. If I start coming in and that's all I say every week, You need to put me out to pasture, right?

Something's wrong. And yet, so they asked him, Why do you always say the same thing? Because, he replied, It is the Lord's command. And if this is done, It is enough.

John understood. What is the summary of the whole law? Love one another. And if this is done, All the other commands will be kept. Because you won't murder someone you love.

You won't commit adultery with the wife of someone you love. You will not steal from someone you love. You will not lie about someone you love. You will not covet the possessions of someone you love.

And so, it is the Lord's command. And if this only is done, it is enough. So, the theme of love, the test of love, Comes hot and heavy in 1 John.

[21:16] And again, the background is this error of serinthus That caused people to get the big head And puffed up with this knowledge And to look down on their brethren. Well, as we look at the evidence here in 1 John, It appears that Ephesus was still under the attack Of these heretics and false teachers.

But they were holding firm. Indeed, many of them evidently had moved on. They're no longer with us. They've moved on. But still, their teachings were floating. And they needed to be warned against them.

Now, again, it would be helpful for us Just to remember, lest we get the big head, That we understand the doctrines of grace. And we understand this. And we understand the sovereignty of God.

And we understand so much more than other people. To remember the words of the Apostle Paul, Who made you to differ from another? And what do you have that you've not received?

Now, if you've received it, Why do you boast as if you had not received it? Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. You see, the same drum being beat.

[22:20] And if we see anything in the Bible, We know anything about who Jesus is. We ought to go down humbly. And just to confess that, yes, Flesh and blood has not revealed this to me, But my Father in heaven.

And that ought to keep us from looking down our noses And hatred. What the Bible calls hatred When we look down our noses at others. Well, there you have the third, Or the fourth source of information About Ephesus.

We come then to the Bible's last word About this church at Ephesus. And let's turn to Revelation. The book of Revelation. It's Jesus' letter to the church. We've seen Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus.

The last word we have about this church Is Jesus' own letter to them. And we'll see that in chapter 2. But we begin at the very book of Revelation. Chapter 1.

This is a book written by the Apostle John. It starts in verse 4 of chapter 1. John to the seven churches in the province of Asia. Okay, we're back in this region. And Ephesus is the primary church, But you have all these other churches in this area.

[23:31] And so, John to the seven churches in the province of Asia. So again, this is locating us in the region of Ephesus. So what, we ought to be on the alert That there's knowledge here coming That's important for our study of the church at Ephesus.

Well, that's all the introduction John needs. Just John to the churches. Why? Because again, John is in this region. He is in Ephesus. He's living there. And everybody knows who he is.

He's one of them. Well, verse 9 of chapter 1 says, I, John, your brother and companion In the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance That are ours in Jesus Was on the island of Patmos Because of the word of God And the testimony of Jesus.

It's probably a persecution that he suffered Under the Roman emperor Domitian Who reigned from 81 to 96 AD. And Patmos was one of the islands Off of the Greek homeland.

And they would send their political dissidents To these islands. And Patmos is one of these islands. And so it appears that Rome has started To take a dim view of Christians And seeing them as a challenge A political challenge Perhaps to the authority of the Caesar.

[24:53] And John is therefore spending some time On the island of Patmos. And it's here that he's remembering What he saw and heard. Verse 10 and 11.

He says, On the Lord's day I was in the spirit And I heard behind me a loud voice Like a trumpet which said, Write on a scroll what you see And send it to the seven churches To Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

So he sees these seven golden lampstands And visions. And among them someone like a son of man. And he tells us that the seven stars Are the angels, the messengers Are the seven churches And the seven lampstands Are the seven churches.

No. He's got seven letters. Who's the first letter go to? Ephesus. And again, I don't think that's Just a Perchance.

Again, it's the It's the mother church. It's the large church. The most influential church. It's the church where John Is dwelling. So here's a letter to a church That was founded 30 years earlier.

[26:06] How long has Grace Fellowship been In existence? 83. So it's like 33 years. So it's kind of close, isn't it?

33 years. Okay. So we've been in existence 33 years. What can happen to a church in 33 years? Well, let's just make the church at Ephesus the study of that.

What happened to the church at Ephesus in 30 years? We now have a letter from the Lord Jesus. How are they getting on? Well, they're facing some persecution from the Roman Empire but also some heresies within.

And here is Jesus' letter to the church at Ephesus. Look at chapter 2. 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.

I 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 that is the Lord's sent ones but are not and have found them false.

[27:15] You have persevered and have not endured hardship for my name and have not grown weary. So Jesus is walking among the golden lampstands and he comes to Ephesus and he observes the church.

And the first thing out of his mouth is praise. And notice what he's praising them for. He's praising them for three things. For their hard work. Their hard work.

Being a Christian is hard. Praying is hard. Teaching, witnessing, mortifying sin, maintaining unity in the body, visiting the shut-ins. All the things that the church is doing.

It's hard work. And Jesus notices everything that's done as unto him. And he says, Way to go.

You are doing well with your hard work. Maybe nobody else in the church sees but Jesus does and he praises. Secondly, their perseverance in that work. They weren't a flash in the pan and oh, they start something and then they, where'd they go?

[28:19] I don't know. They're not here anymore. They're not serving the church anymore. I don't know where they're at. That wasn't them. No, you've persevered in that work. You've persevered in your Christian life.

You had patient endurance. Not just when the work's easy, but when it gets lonely and difficult, even painful. There she is. She's doing her job. And Jesus notices it and praises her for her hard work and persevering in it.

She had not quit. She had not swerved off the right path. Jesus loves perseverance in his church. And he shouts his encouragement of praise to them. Hard work, perseverance, and thirdly, intolerance.

No, he's not shifted to his criticism. He's going to have some critical things to say. But this isn't one of them. Jesus praises them for their intolerance. Is intolerance praised today as a virtue?

That's seen as the greatest evil in our day. Unless it's intolerance against Christianity. And then it's a virtue. Well, here is the church. And what are they intolerant toward?

[29:30] What didn't they put up with? Wicked people. False teachers. Those who came among them claiming to be apostles.

Claiming, I've got truth from Jesus to give you, Church at Ephesus. And they tested them. And they put them to the test. Perhaps the very test that John had given in 1 John. And they found them not to be apostles.

And Jesus says, Way to go. You guys are doing what I told you to do. And then, he'll even return. After he gives his rebuke, he's even going to return to this very same praise. Notice it in verse 6. You have this in your favor. You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Now again, we don't usually think of hate as a virtue. But Jesus does. When the object of hate is the same as what he hates. The practices of the Nicolaitans.

[30:36] Again, here's this heretical sect. They called themselves Christians. And Jesus praises the church for hating what he hates. They seem to, again, mix immorality and idolatry.

And Jesus hates it. The truth matters to Jesus. And it must matter to his church. He praises him for it. Ephesus, you've got it right. All this warning from Paul and Timothy.

Way to go. You're doing what I told you to do. And Grace Fellowship Church, we need to take note of that. Intolerance for error that destroys the flock.

Well, Jesus doesn't have all praise. He has this one word of rebuke in verses 4 and 5 for them. Yet, I hold this against you. You have forsaken your first love.

Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent and do the deeds you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. Sobering words.

[31:43] You've forsaken your first love. The love you had at the first. Remember when Paul brought the gospel to town And you were all superstitious and fearful of the spirits And had your incantations and your idols To scare off the evil spirits.

And Paul came to town And preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. And you were set free from all those fears. Remember how you loved me then. You have now forsaken that first love.

It's the heart of a wounded lover. And here's Jesus. The bridegroom of his church. And Jesus had once delighted in their love for him.

And he now misses it. And he's telling them, Nothing you do can make up for its absence. Not all the right doctrine. Not all the hard work.

Not all that you are doing can make up. Robert Murray McShane said, There's no labor in the king's service. That will make up for the neglect of the king himself.

[32:53] And that's what Jesus is saying. There's nothing you can do for him That will make up for your neglect of him. In other words, it's possible to be doing A whole lot of things right in the church.

But without the relationship with Jesus of love. And isn't it a good thing that Jesus misses that? Aren't you glad that he's not satisfied Just with your putting out so many good deeds A week, a month.

Oh, that's all I want out of you. No, he's not satisfied. He wants our hearts. Isn't that a good thing? He wants this love relationship with us. And when it's not there, Nothing can make up for its loss.

Well, how did this happen, Ephesus? How did it happen? How does a church lose its first love?

Well, first of all, what is a church?

It's the sum total of what? Of its parts, isn't it? And its members. And so if a whole church loses its first love, It's because lots of individual people Somehow lost their first love.

[34:04] And it probably doesn't happen overnight. It probably wasn't that they were hot after Jesus one day And then, lo and behold, there was a line in the sand And everybody's hearts got real cold toward him.

It probably happened by imperceptible degrees Like the frog in the heating up pan. And it's so slow that we don't recognize the lack of love. I'm still preaching the truth.

I'm still defending the gospel. I'm still witnessing. I'm still serving. I'm still busy at the church. And we think, we're fine with Jesus. But Jesus knows otherwise.

And so he comes complaining to the church at Ephesus. And he just shows just how important this is By saying, if you don't repent of your misplaced love, You've somehow let your love be siphoned off to other things And not me.

And if you don't repent, I'm going to remove my candlestick from Ephesus. Now that's a huge thing. In other words, that church that was planted there Through the labors and established through Paul and Timothy and John That church will no longer be a church of Jesus Christ.

[35:15] Oh, she may still hold services. She still may be open for business. But I won't be there. I will remove my candlestick. And then it will be Ichabod over the door.

The glory has departed. Because I'm not there. What a warning. What a statement of how important the love of the church is for Jesus Christ.

That if the love's not there, I won't be there. So repent. But then he also shows its importance by the promise. He not only gives the warning, but then he gives the promise.

And the promise is just as sweet as the warning is terrifying. To him who overcomes. Yes, there are love thieves to overcome. And to him who overcomes these love thieves, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, Which is in the paradise of God.

The tree of life. The symbol of eternal life. I will give eternal life to those who overcome the love thieves. And love me. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

[36:19] So what's true for Ephesus is true for all of the churches. We need the lesson of Ephesus. Let me just, in conclusion, make four lessons.

First, churches that begin well are not guaranteed to finish well. Now sometimes, Jesus' words, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it, are misused.

And if you think that that is a guarantee that Grace Fellowship Church will always be a church, You've stretched that truth beyond its bounds. Now Jesus is talking about the universal church there.

I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I will always have a church on the earth. But as for every individual local church, They may be a church in one generation and not

be a church of Jesus Christ in the next.

And there's more than one way to do that. But one way is loss of love. Loss of the truth will also get you there, by the way. Loss of discipline and other things.

[37 : 28] But that's the first lesson. It shows the importance. We need to pray for the next generation. We have them here. They're in the classes. Some of them are there being taught. Precious opportunities. Let's pray for these teachers.

Pray for our young people. They're a mission field right under our noses. As someone said, that no church is ever more than one generation away from extinction. Well, here's the threat to the church at Ephesus.

And as far as I know, there isn't a church there. That it did die. That Christ did remove his candlestick there in Turkey. Well, the second lesson. It's no small thing to keep false doctrine out of the church.

And I just trust that we've seen that as we followed the church at Ephesus and her whole instructions. Satan hates the truth of God.

He hates the gospel. He knows that the gospel will produce Christ-likeness in you. He knows that the gospel will save sinners. And he wants to see as many sinners damned as he can. And wants to see as many Christians as miserable as they can be.

[38 : 25] And so he will seek to flood the church with lies. Well, it's not easy to maintain the truth when so much is being done to tear it apart.

Third, it's not easy to keep the main thing the main thing. There's a lot of things that would spin us off to lesser things. What is the main thing? Well, I trust we agree it's the Great Commission that that's the last word to the church.

Are we busy? Are we busy making disciples? And then once we've evangelized and made them converts, do we baptize them into the church? And do we teach them to obey everything the Lord has commanded?

That's the gospel. That's the mandate that our king has left us. That's the main thing. And often there's so many other things, maybe even good in their place. But they can overcrowd.

And now suddenly the main thing is no longer there. And last lesson, love is surely one of the main things, isn't it? When the man asked Jesus, what is the greatest commandment in the law?

[39 : 30] He said, well, it is that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second greatest commandment is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commands hang all the law and the prophets.

So surely love is the main thing. And I think that this parting shot that we have at the church of Ephesus just reminds us of that. Just how main thing, mainstream for the church is love.

That Jesus demands the hearts of his church. May the Lord help us then to give him what he's so deserving of. Maybe you could think today, how is it?

How is it that we can maintain our love for Jesus? Surely, drawing near to his love for us is hinted at in John's letter.

That we love him because he first loved us. And our love is a response to his prior love. So may the Lord keep us close to the cross.

[40 : 35] Keep us remembering his giving of his body and his blood for us. And thereby have our love and flame for him. We're dismissed.