



Part 3: Hope to Overcome a Lost Love

Revelation 2:1-7

Let us never lose our love for God in all we do for God.

The crux or focal point of this passage is the striking words of verse 4, "*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.*" Just like marriage, as in our relationship with God, it is so easy to lose our love.

In your relationship with God, are you more like a lover or a roommate?

For some of you guys out there, you might be thinking, "Ahh, Adam, this lover thing with God is weird ... it is just not me ... I have never imagined myself as a bride in a wedding dress." Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, in their book "Sacred Romance" helps clarify this masculine and feminine desire as saying it is "to be in a relationship with heroic proportions." The sacred romance for all of us is a call to adventure that resonates with men, and the intimacy that connects with women. And yet we can so easily lose our love.

Let us never lose our love for God in all that we do for God.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In this vision that John is seeing on the island of Patmos, Jesus is speaking to the seven churches that were on a postal route where Ephesus was the first stop from Patmos. Several scholars say that these messages to the seven churches in many ways represent all the ways churches struggle. Ephesus was a major commercial center and tourist site because of the temple of the fertility goddess Artemis. With the leadership of Paul, Priscilla, Aquila, Timothy, and John, the church in Ephesus became one of the most influential churches in the region.

THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS AS THE GOOD ROOMMATE

The church in Ephesus was actually doing many great things. They were commended for their 1) deeds, 2) hard work, 3) perseverance, 4) intolerance of wicked men, 5) testing of false apostles, 6) endurance in hardship, 7) lack of weariness.

"They had taken seriously the apostle Paul's admonition to the church, 40 years earlier: 'Be on guard for yourselves and for the flock ... savage wolves will come in among you speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert' (Acts 20:28-31). They carefully and thoughtfully 'tested the Spirits' as John had exhorted them to do (1 John 4). They 'guarded the gospel' as Paul through Timothy had exhorted them to do (2 Tim. 1:14). They were discerning people, measuring everything they heard and read against the truth in Jesus. They would not settle for 'feel good' theologizing."
Darrell Johnson *"Discipleship on the Edge"*

And yet, even though they were doing all the right stuff, they were flawed at the core.

FLAWED AT THE CORE

Verse 4 says, *"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love."* The word forsaken comes from the Greek word, ἀφῆκες, which means neglected and abandoned. They had neglected, abandoned, and lost their first love. Their relationship with God was no longer marked by affection and intimacy but rather by duty.

Skye Jethani, in his book *"With,"* makes a very insightful observation about our typical postures with God.

"Life under, over, from, and for God each seeks to use God to achieve some other goal. God is seen as a means to an end. For example, LIFE FROM GOD uses him to supply our material desires. LIFE OVER GOD uses him as the source of principles and laws. LIFE UNDER GOD tries to manipulate God through obedience to secure blessings and avoid calamity. And LIFE FOR GOD uses him and his mission to gain a sense of direction and purpose.

But LIFE WITH GOD is different because its goal is not to use God, its goal is God. He ceases to be a device we employ or a commodity we consume. Instead, God himself becomes the focus of our desire." Skye Jethani *"With – Reimagining the way you relate to God"*

The church in Ephesus was consumed by their mission for God, and yet they lost the most important part, to be WITH God, to be "in love" with God.

There are many images and metaphors used in our relationship with God – clay and potter, sheep and shepherd, servants and master, beloved children and good heavenly father, and finally, the most intimate – lovers, as husband and wife. Ephesians 5:31-32 speaks of Jesus as the groom and the church as His bride. Jeremiah 2:2, 5 says, "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me...what fault did you find in me that you strayed so far from me?" God desires for us to experience the dance of His love that existed before time itself within the trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He desires for us to experience the sweet intimacy of Jesus' love.

HOPE TO OVERCOME A LOST LOVE

When we lose our love, there is always hope in Christ. Hope to become LOVERS again. Jesus, in this vision, calls us to three things: remember, repent, redo.

Remember – "the height from which you have fallen" – remember the love you had at first, for it has now become cold. Remembering is absolutely critical in our relationship with God. On a side note, this is why I encourage journaling. I try to journal once a week, although it does not always happen. I write down my prayers and also how I see God answering prayers. In the Old Testament, we see God's call for us to remember over and over. "Remember, I am the Lord your God who..." Absolutely critical!

Repent – remembering is the basis of repenting. Repent of a cold heart and our redirected loves: work, success, money, approval, acceptance, ministry, etc. As we repent, we turn toward things that restore intimacy with God.

Redo – it is not all about feelings. It is also love in action. Revelation 2:5, "do the things you did at first."

A practical suggestion I have recently given a friend is to start the day with fifteen minutes of silence. Not reading the Bible, not listening to worship music, but just sitting on the back deck and being quiet and experiencing God's love for you.

This is critically important for us to do because we so easily forget God's love for us. We have a form of spiritual amnesia. Illustration – movie '50 First Dates.'

Just as we see in this movie, the striking reality of the character played by Adam Sandler, making his girlfriend/wife, who is played by Drew Barrymore, fall in love with him every day, Jesus does that with us. We just need to remember that He is walking in our midst, calling us to a dance of affection and intimacy. He stands before each of us, saying, "I love you."

Discussion Questions (for small groups or the dinner table):

- As you look at Revelation 2:1-7, what struck you about God's admonition to the church in Ephesus, "Yet I hold this against you, you have forsaken your first love"?
- In your relationship with God, do you currently feel more like a lover or roommate? When have you felt closest to God or most in love with Him?
- As we continue to become more like lovers in our relationship with God, how do you need to Remember, Repent, and Redo?