PLEASANT SPRINGS CHURCH • SERMON • WHEN THE FIRE DIES OUT, PART ONE

Going Through the Motions

Remember, repeat, return — an exploration of Revelation 2:1–7

Going Through the Motions

When the Fire Dies Out, Part One — Revelation 2:1–7

Preached Sunday, October 25, 2026 by Pastor Jeremy Arnold

Revelation 2:1–7 • Psalm 34:18 • Leviticus 6:12–13 • Leviticus 9:24 • Leviticus 10:1–2 • Leviticus 24:2–4 • Revelation 2:5 • Matthew 11:28–30 • Revelation 3:20 • Matthew 28:19 • 2 Timothy 1:6 • Romans 10:17

Jesus commends the church at Ephesus for everything they are doing right — their work, their endurance, their stand against false teachers. Then He names the one thing they have lost: the love they had at first. It is possible to keep every motion and lose the fire.

THE SERMON TEXT

> **Revelation 2:1–7 (ESV)**
> "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. "'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. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'"

A QUESTION

> *What do we do when church is no longer exciting?*

- When reading the Scriptures is a chore?
- When prayer is a duty instead of a place of solace and refuge?
- When sin no longer grieves our hearts as it once did?
- When being in the presence of the Lord is no longer our greatest desire?

IDENTIFYING THE STRUGGLE

We all go through periods of spiritual dryness, but identifying the why behind it is the crucial part.

Sometimes we go through periods of physical sickness, mental stress, grief and unanswered questions, which can lead us to drifting.

Other times we allow our love and zeal to grow cold because we have been captivated by the allurement of what the world has to offer.

And sometimes our love grows cold while we are doing everything right. A church can be doctrinally sound and loveless at the same time. That was Ephesus.

If your fire is low because you are hurting, hear this first:

> **Psalm 34:18 (ESV) · Hebrew 34:19 · Septuagint 33:19**
> "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit."

The call to repent today is for love we have walked away from, not for love that is tired.

Point

Sometimes we go through the motions on the outside while drifting on the inside!

OBSERVATION

In our opening text we see the risen Christ commending the church of Ephesus for their labor, faithfulness and patience. He praises them for the things they have right! Then He lovingly spells out for them where they have erred, and gives them the remedy as to how to return to Him.

APPLICATION — RETURNING TO THE ALTAR

> **Leviticus 6:12–13 (ESV) · Hebrew & Septuagint 6:5–6**
> "The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out."

In Leviticus it was the responsibility of the priest to keep the fire of the altar burning.

> **Leviticus 9:24 (ESV)**
> "And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces."

> **Leviticus 10:1–2 (ESV)**
> "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD."

We cannot make fresh fire. Fire we make up ourselves is strange fire. Our job is to tend the fire God already lit.

Under the old covenant, the priests were commanded to keep the altar fire burning. As a picture for our lives today, this reminds us not to neglect our relationship with Christ. We must attend to the things that nourish our faith, confess our sins, pursue obedience, and continually turn our hearts toward Him.

> **Leviticus 24:2–4 (ESV)**
> “Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly. Outside the veil of the testimony, in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall arrange it from evening to morning before the LORD regularly. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. He shall arrange the lamps on the lampstand of pure gold before the LORD regularly.”

The altar is about our offering. The lamp is about our witness. Ephesus was warned about the lamp.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

- The wood had to be cut and stacked.
- The ashes had to be removed before fresh wood and sacrifices could be placed back on the altar.

Point

Before asking for revival or fresh fire, we need to ask God to show us whether we are still living on yesterday's offering, and what we have let come between us and Him.

- Do we have unconfessed sin?
- Are we harboring unforgiveness toward someone?
- Have we allowed our prayer life to be snuffed out by the demands of daily life?
- Has the pursuit of comfort and self-preservation replaced the pursuit of Christ Jesus?
- Are we more concerned with doing and being active rather than obedient?
- Have we become more focused on our appearance and reputation than on our relationship with the Father?

It's possible to do all the right things for the wrong reasons.

Grandmother would say you can make sin out of going to church. She was speaking to our motive.

RETURN TO THE FIRST WORKS

In Revelation 2:5 Jesus gives us the recipe for revival: remember, repent and return, and do the first works.

> **Revelation 2:5 (ESV)**
> "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

1. Remember.
"Remember therefore from where you have fallen." Remember your former love, the joy of knowing Christ, and the devotion that once shaped your life.

2. Repent.
Honestly acknowledge what has changed, confess sin where necessary, and turn back to Christ.

3. Do the works you did at first.
Reestablish the practices of faithfulness that express your love for Christ: prayer, reading and study of Scripture, forgiveness, obedience, worship and service.

Jesus did not instruct them to start a new program or meeting. He did not tell them to imitate what others were doing, or to follow another prescribed method of worship.

Point

He called them to a change of heart.

He tells them to do the first works — to pursue Christ as if in a courtship. Christ Jesus invites us in Matthew 11:29 to learn from Him, and in Revelation 3:20 He stands at the door knocking, desiring to fellowship with us.

> **Matthew 11:28–30 (ESV)**
> “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

> **Revelation 3:20 (ESV)**
> “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

- If prayer has been neglected, return to prayer.
- If the study of the Scriptures has been neglected, return to study.
- If unforgiveness has taken root, pursue forgiveness and reconciliation.
- If secret sins have been tolerated, bring them to the light and turn from them.
- If serving has been for self-gratification, shift your focus to glorifying God.
- If love for your brothers and sisters has cooled, go and make it right this week. That was Ephesus’s first work.

Point

We don’t return to Christ to earn His love. We return because He is the One we have neglected, and His grace calls us back into faithful fellowship with Him.

OUR CALLING

1. We are called into an intimate relationship with Christ Jesus.

2. We are called to make disciples — students of the Word.

> **Matthew 28:19 (ESV)**
> "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"

The enemy would love for the church to keep a full calendar of activities while the heart grows cold. The enemy doesn't always have to persuade us to abandon the truth; sometimes all he has to do is distract us from the One who is the Truth.

Jesus calls us to something deeper than programs and activities. He calls us to Himself, and to walk in His ways.

> **2 Timothy 1:6 (ESV)**
> "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands,"

Paul tells Timothy to fan into flame the gift God gave him. Timothy was not to neglect what God had entrusted to him. In the same way, we must not neglect the gifts, responsibilities and spiritual disciplines God has given us. And as we grow in Christ, we must remain rooted in His Word.

Paul told the pastor at Ephesus to keep the fire burning. About thirty years later, Jesus told the church at Ephesus it had let the fire go out. Every generation has to tend its own fire.

We sometimes hear people say that someone is too heavenly minded to be any earthly good, or that a person is too deep in the Word. But Scripture calls us to be faithful stewards of what God has entrusted to us. Paul reminds Timothy not to neglect his gift, and we too must remain faithful in our calling while growing in the knowledge of God's Word.

IN CLOSING

May we return to the altar, carry out the ashes of yesterday's sacrifice, and tend the fire God lit in our hearts. May we return to prayer, return to the Word, return to obedience, and return to the love that shaped everything we do.

Paul reminds us that faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.

> **Romans 10:17 (ESV)**
> "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

We need to remain rooted in God's Word, because it directs our hearts toward the truth and teaches us to walk faithfully with our King.

Jesus did not tell Ephesus to start another program. He told them to remember, repent and return.

> *It's possible to get so busy with the work of the Lord that our hearts drift away from the Lord. It's the Word that does the work — but we must be willing to hear it, believe it, obey it, and let it lead us back to Christ.*
>
> *And to the one who conquers, He promises to give to eat of the tree of life. In the name of Jesus, Amen. — Pastor Jeremy Arnold*

GROW FURTHER

THE CONQUERING KING, PART THIRTEEN

Faithful Until the End

Last week, the close of the last series — seven questions for anyone who wants to know whether they are abiding or drifting.

DEEP RESEARCH

Revelation 2:1–3:22

All seven messages to the churches, Ephesus first, measured against the Old Testament they draw on.

DEEP RESEARCH

Leviticus 6:8–7:38

The priests' manual: the altar fire that never goes out, fulfilled in Christ our High Priest.

DEEP RESEARCH

Leviticus 10:1–20

Nadab and Abihu and the unauthorized fire — God's holiness among those who come near Him.

> *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'"*
>
> **Revelation 2:7 (ESV)**