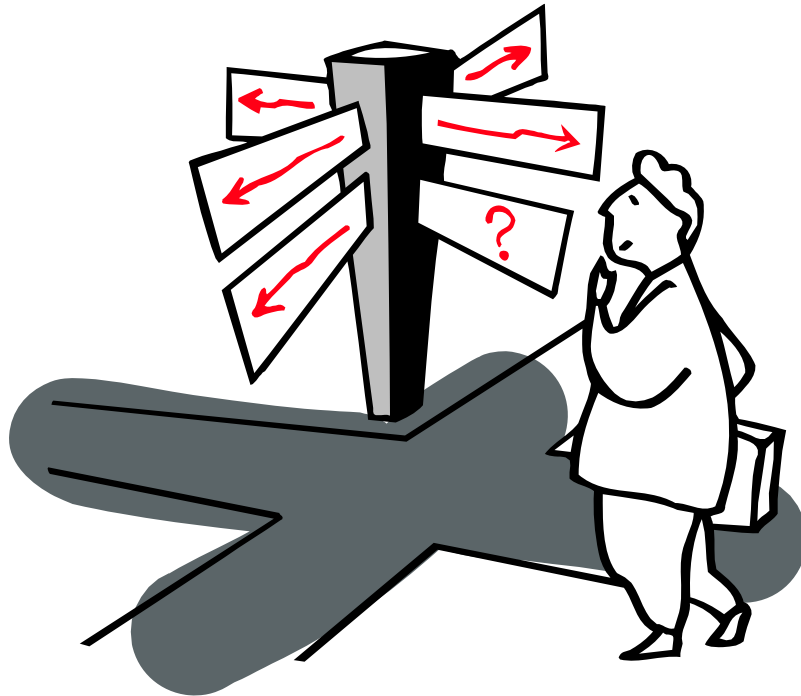


Do the Works You Did At First!!!



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Do the Works You Did At First!-Part 1

1 A multi-part teaching on the letter to the congregation in Ephesus in Revelations chapter 2.
Read Revelations chapter 1

Revelations is a book that has been the subject of countless 10's of 1000's of sermons, books, and articles every year for the last two millennia. There are 100's of symbols in the book and all are relevant to the text and to our understanding what the Lord is trying to tell us. Beyond all the symbols and meanings in Revelations, there are some basic things that the Lord is trying to tell us.

Historical Backdrop

In the first century, followers of Yeshua (Jesus) were not welcomed with open arms by the citizens of the Roman Empire, or by its government.. Roman society was cruel and hard. Life was cheap to most in the Roman Empire. The government was far more corrupt than most of us in the west are used to. Women were treated shabbily; female babies were unwelcome and were usually exposed to die. Abortions were common, marital infidelity was widespread. The list is virtually endless. Therefore, the persecution and elimination of those that followed Yeshua was just another “thing” to the Roman Government.

Yeshua's disciples, those who accepted Yeshua as Savior and Lord, were quite different from their society. In contrast to the pagan society around them, women were treated with respect and had positions of leadership within their congregation. Abortions were considered sinful. Adoptions, in contrast to Roman society, were common. Caring for widows and the sick was encouraged, even caring for those how did not accept the faith. The followers of Yeshua were so different, that their behavior became a sore point to many in the Roman Empire and resulted in persecution as well.

Why is this important?

In times of hardship, trouble and persecution, followers of Yeshua are faced with two choices. Cling closer to the Lord and to our brothers and sisters in Messiah or try to relieve the pressure by allowing compromise to creep in to our midst.

How is Yeshua portrayed in Revelations chapter 1?

The first chapter of Revelations shows Yeshua coming to Yohanan (John) in His heavenly glory. He is in the midst of the golden menorahs as well as walking in their midst. This tells us that Yeshua is not just sitting on His throne in Heaven wondering what is going on in His congregation but that He is actively involved with His people and in the congregations as well. He is wearing the Robe of a priest, indicating His position as High Priest and intercessor for His children. Yeshua is wearing a sash as an indication of royalty, His kingship. He holds the 7 stars (congregations) in his hand tells us that He is in control and the two-edged sword coming out of His mouth tells us that He is the author of our faith and His is speaking to us and we need to listen. He even tells us that He, not the Roman Empire, holds the keys of death and the grave. The entire book of Revelations shows Yeshua having the sole authority to bring History as we know it to an end.

Why is this Important?

We need to know these things before we read the letters to the seven congregations in Asia, in particular the letter to the congregation in Ephesus. Revelations chapter 1 tells us that Yeshua has something to say to each of his people and to each congregation. We, as an individual or as a congregation, have many doctrinal beliefs, but

only Yeshua and His word is the final interpreter of whether we are correct or not. We, as an individual or as a congregation, may do many things (programs) for the kingdom, but Yeshua is the final authority regarding the “state of the union” for each congregation.

Do the Works You Did At First – Part 2

2 Revelation 2:1-3

What Yeshua praised about the congregation in Ephesus.

The congregation in Ephesus was the home to Yohanan (John) in the latter part of his life. The congregation was born during the time of Paul (Sha’ul), Priscilla and Aquila. It was a major city in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, a crossroads for trade and travel and a center for Pagan worship. Towards the latter part of Paul’s ministry, he stopped at Ephesus and said his goodbyes. Paul knew that he would never see them again.

One of the warnings that Paul gave the Ephesians (Acts 20) was that after he was gone false teachers, like savage wolves, were going to come into their midst to destroy them. Even people in their midst would arise to distort the truth. Apparently, it is warning that the Ephesian congregation took seriously.

Thirty/Thirty-five years later, in Yeshua’s short letter and warning in Revelation chapter 2 to the congregation he apparently commends them for their diligence in testing every person that came into their midst and called themselves “apostle”. If the congregation felt that the person, after a period of testing, was a liar (false) then they seemed to have no problem labeling you a false apostle. Considering the number of people in the body of Messiah that have elevated themselves to positions beyond their calling (if they even had one to begin with), I wonder how many times they labeled someone a liar.

Yeshua made it clear that He knew that they were hard workers. The Greek indicates hard work to the point of pain. He knew that they had patient endurance and suffered for the name of Yeshua. Considering the societal practices and beliefs that existed in the Roman Empire at that time, the Ephesian congregation must have gone to considerable lengths to separate themselves and keep themselves pure and holy.

In many respects, the flock in Ephesus had many admirable qualities. They obviously had a good knowledge of scripture, desired to be holy, were willing to endure suffering and persecution. They were patient and wanted to “keep on keeping on” in the faith. They had no tolerance of evil or of those who exalted themselves. They had no compunction about labeling false apostles as false.

Yet . . . Yeshua said there was a key ingredient missing in their faith. An ingredient so important that He stated that despite all of their admirable qualities they were in danger of becoming irrelevant. They were on the road to losing it all.

In part 3 we discuss the missing ingredient.

Do the Works You Did At First – Part 3

3 *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.*
Rev 2:4 (ESV)

In part 2 of this series, we discussed the positive aspects of the congregation in Ephesus. They were hard workers, persevering in the faith, willing to suffer for the name of Yeshua (Jesus), had a good command of

scripture, believed in holiness, tested leaders and was willing to label false apostles as liars. Yet Yeshua stated that they were missing something. As we will see later, it was a “something” so important that their future in the Lord’s kingdom hinged on whether they would be willing to deal with this issue.

The issue was that despite all the things they do right, they were losing their love of God and each other. Their passion towards Him and their priorities were shifting. Perhaps they were even growing cold. Many people use the phrase as “losing their first love”, but the scripture in the Greek states that the person or group has left or abandoned their first love.

Lately, when I read this scripture, I can’t help but think of the Messianic Jewish Movement. I can’t give a objective opinion but one that is likely more subjective. I have been in the Messianic movement for 28 years. I remember what the movement was like in the beginning, through its transitions all the way until now (2008). I can’t escape the possibility that the movement will be facing the same type of crisis that virtually every other move of God has, is or will face, leaving your first love.

I don’t think that people consciously leave the Lord but rather allow other things to get in the way. They focus on externals, become busy in their life or in their ministry, allow unforgiveness to creep in to their lives, sometimes just plain laziness. No matter the reason, the results remain the same. In the Lord’s eyes we are backing away from Him and moving somewhere (or to someone) else. We may think we are still accomplishing something for the Lord but in fact, we are starting to move towards doing things in our own strength. The results of that are usually burnout and bitterness.

In part 4 we discuss the remedy, repentance, and the tough choices that have to be made for us to return to our first love.

Do the Works You Did At First-Part 4

4 *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.*
Rev 2:4-5 (ESV)

How does one go about returning to their first love? It was a question that the Ephesian congregation must have asked themselves. It also must have been startling to them. Here they were, hard working, enduring persecution, studying God’s word, testing people in their faith, yet they were told by the Lord that they had abandoned their first love. The love that is most primary of all, love of God and most likely love for each other.

Yeshua gives them a few steps to take to move them back in the proper direction.

- 1) They were to remember where they used to be and then compare that to where they are now. In other words, remember the times in the past when they were more in love with the Lord, when they spent more time in intimate relations with Him. Remember when they were more willing to allow the Lord to work through them instead of them doing the work in their strength, as they seem to be doing now.
- 2) Repent! The word in Greek means to change not only your mind but also your life and then move them in a new direction. It takes a lot of humility to realize that the direction you are going is not correct. It takes humility to realize your walk with God is not in accord with the full counsel of God. Repentance requires death to self and sacrifice. It means making choices in our lives to be obedient.
- 3) *“Do the works you did at first!”* To me that may mean that at some point in the past, be it distant or recent, they were doing things correctly. What works? In many respects, we make our life hard and our walk with the Lord more complicated than it needs to be. Yeshua made it easy: *“they said to him, ‘What*

must we do, to be doing the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’” John 6:28-29 (ESV) The first work is to believe in Yeshua and out of that belief should first come a daily relationship with Him. Through that relationship, **He** (Yeshua) will empower you to do the works that He wants done.

If they (we) didn’t . . .

Yeshua told the Ephesians that if they didn’t repent - changing the direction of their lives and heart - then He would come and remove their standing before Him. They would continue to exist, maybe, as an organization but they would no longer be a congregation (menorah) before Him in heaven. Since a menorah has light, several in fact, it means that they were losing their lights, the lights that everyone sees. They were losing their effectiveness.

In conclusion

I am a person who has a strong gift for helps. I understand what the congregation in Ephesus was going through. They had the externals down, they knew the scriptures and they were zealous to be holy. They were patient, enduring suffering and persecution. They were probably so busy doing things and works that they failed to take time to be with the Lord to a greater degree than what they were doing. Yet their hearts were growing cold toward the Lord and towards each other. In time their effectiveness in the community would lessen and eventually the congregation in Ephesus would die (which, historically, it did).

As a person who is part of a congregation that is part of a movement, I must be constantly aware of what and who is my priority. The same can be said of the congregation and the movement. It is Yeshua! It is a daily walk with Him! Out of that walk with Yeshua will come the works that He desires to see in our lives.

“And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” Mark 13:37 (NKJV)