

The Sound Church

Rv 2:1-7

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Illustration about the *Peanuts* cartoon, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, p 113.
 - 1. Indeed, sound theology/doctrine can ease the mind! When one understands the biblical teaching concerning baptism & is baptized, his mind is going to be eased.
 - 2. But, is sound doctrine all that's important in Christianity?
 - a. Some brethren act as though if we worship scripturally, are organized scripturally, baptize for the remission of sins that God's pleased with us.
 - b. They act as though these things are the **only** things of any importance to God.
 - 1) They never speak of one's personal devotion to God.
 - 2) They never speak of one's doing good.
 - c. We need a balanced approach to Christianity—we need to encourage people to give up false doctrine & embrace the simplicity of the Gospel, but we also need to speak of one's devotion, of one's doing good.
- B. Tonight, we want to examine a congregation that really thought doctrine was all that mattered.
 - 1. The church at Ephesus became so engrossed in doctrine that Jesus had to rebuke them that others things in his will are important.
 - 2. Tonight, let's examine this text in order that we may be a balanced church.

II. THEIR GREAT WORK, vv 2-3, 6.

- A. Jesus knew their works.
 - 1. To each of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor, Jesus says, "I know your works."
 - 2. The Gr term for "know" means a perfect knowledge, a super-human knowledge.
 - 3. Jesus knew these churches' works & he knows our works.
 - a. We should not be surprised that he knows these churches' works, for "His eyes [are] like a flame of fire" (Rv 1:15)—this means that his eyes peer into men's souls.
 - b. Jesus knows our hearts, our works as individuals—he knows everything about us.
 - c. The same is true of congregations—he knows everything about this congregation & every other congregation around the world. We can hide nothing from him.
- B. The works of this church were many—they labored, they were patient and had not become weary, vv 2-3.
 - 1. We are not told what good works this congregation involved themselves in—they may have evangelized, they may have cared for the needy, they may have done any combination of many things.
 - 2. They labored—the Greek term means "exhausting labor"; this church was working to the point of exhaustion.
 - 3. They were patient & did not become weary—these people did not easily give up; they kept working when others would have quit.
 - 4. For their work, Jesus commends them.
 - a. Their labor was not in vain—Jesus knew how hard they were working & he commended them for it.
 - b. Likewise, our labor is not in vain—Jesus knows how hard we work, & he will commend us for it.
- C. This church could not bear with those who were evil, v 2.
 - 1. There were likely many evil people in Ephesus.
 - a. The Temple of Diana was located in Ephesus, and ritual prostitution and mutilation were common in the worship of Diana.

- b. Since Ephesus was a seaport town, many rogue sailors undoubtedly came & went in the city.
 - 2. This congregation took a stand against immorality; they did not turn a blind eye to the immorality of their day.
 - 3. We need to take a stand against immorality; we must not turn a blind eye to the immorality of our day.
 - a. Many may condemn us for being prejudiced, being “out-of-date,” or whatever.
 - b. But, we must condemn the sins Scripture condemns.
 - D. This church stood fast against error, vv 3, 6.
 - 1. They had tested those who claimed to be apostles & were not, v 3.
 - a. The great highway of the Roman Empire ran right through Ephesus.
 - 1) Many travelers came through the city.
 - 2) Undoubtedly, many of these false apostles were Christian travelers on the highway.
 - b. Not many years before Revelation was written, Paul warned the Ephesian elders, “I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:30).
 - 1) This prophecy came true & the Ephesian elders were apparently doing their work & exposing false teachers.
 - 2) Our elders must expose false teachers in this day.
 - a) One of the elders’ most important jobs is protecting the flock against error.
 - i. 1 Tm 5:17.
 - ii. Tit 1:5.
 - i) Titus was to appoint these elders because there were false teachers “whose mouths must be stopped” (Tit 1:10-11).
 - ii) Why tell Titus to appoint elders so that the mouths of false teachers could be stopped if that wasn’t the role of an elder?
 - b) There is a danger today of people deceiving brethren & churches—led by their elders—must take a stand against these brethren.
 - i. Many false teachers today are “sweet-talkers” who say smooth, wonderful words.
 - ii. Then, once they have their foot in the door of a congregation, they will begin subtly teaching error. Therefore, the elders in every congregation must be on their guard against such teachers.
 - c. The early church expended much energy dealing with deceivers.
 - 1) Tit 1:10.
 - 2) 1 Jn 2:26.
 - 3) Just as the early church had to expend much energy dealing with deceivers, we must expend much energy dealing with deceivers.
 - a) 2 Tm 3:13.
 - b. Make sure that you are not deceived—examine the Scriptures for yourselves, don’t ever take anyone’s word for what the Bible says.
 - 2. This congregation hated the works of the Nicolaitans, v 6.
 - a. Although many early church authors speak of the Nicolaitans, exactly what they taught is unknown.
 - b. However, Jesus later equates them with Balaam who encourage the children of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols & to commit sexual immorality (Rv 2:14). Their doctrine, thus seems to have been eating food sacrificed to idols & sexual immorality.
 - c. Jesus commended these brethren for hating this false doctrine. Why is it important to hate false doctrine?
 - 1) Jesus hates false doctrine (v 6).
 - 2) False doctrine cheats one of the prize (Col 2:8).
 - 3) We can be carried away by false doctrine (Heb 13:9).
 - 4) False doctrine is destructive (2 Pt 2:1).

- 5) False doctrine will cause one to be lost (1 Tm 4:16).
3. Let us take a stand against false doctrine as did the Ephesian brethren.

III. THEIR GREAT NEGLECT, vv 4-5.

- A. As great as this congregation was in dealing with error, Jesus had a complaint—they had left their first love.
 1. Could this first love be anything other than total devotion to Jesus Christ? It is he who is to be the focal point of the Christian's love.
 - a. Jn 14:23.
 - b. Eph 6:24.
 - c. Paul commended Philemon for his "love and faith" he had toward Jesus and the saints (Phil 5).
 2. Although this congregation stood fast for the faith, they no longer loved Jesus as they ought.
 - a. They no longer loved God with their entire being (Mt 22:37)—God was no longer first in their lives.
 - b. They no longer obeyed Christ as they ought, for if we love him, we will obey him (Jn 14:23).
 - c. Their lives were no longer marked by what they should have been marked—prayer, devotion, walking with God, striving to honor him in their daily lives.
 3. This leaving their first love must have been a gradual process.
 - a. When a couple divorces & claims that they no longer love each other, they did not fall out of love over night—they gradually drifted apart from one another.
 - b. The same is true spiritually—we can gradually drift away from Christ. We say things like:
 - 1) "I'm tired. I'll pray tomorrow."
 - 2) "I'll watch this on TV, & I'll study tomorrow."
 - 3) "I don't want to get out tonight & go to Bible study. I'll get back in the groove next week."
 - 4) Before we know it, we've drifted from Christ. He is no longer first in our lives. We have left our first love.
- B. This congregation needed to remember from where they had fallen, v 5.
 1. They were to remember the joy, the bliss, that came when they were faithfully serving Jesus. They needed to remember how wonderful it was to have Jesus first in their lives, how wonderful it was when they were serving him.
 2. Memory is an important tool in restoring what once was.
 - a. If you do not remember how great it was to serve Christ in the beginning, it's hard to come back to him.
 - b. This is a common tool in counseling.
 - 1) If a couple says, "We just don't love each other anymore," counselors will often have them bring in pictures of their earliest days together.
 - 2) They begin talking about the "good ol' days" when they really loved one another. They remember what it was like to love one another & they can go back there.
 3. Do you need to remember what it was like to love Christ?
- C. This congregation needed to repent & do the first works, v 5.
 1. They needed to repent—determine they were going to do differently & carry out that decision.
 2. They were to do the works they did at first.
 - a. That's what true repentance is—deciding to do right & then carrying out that decision.
 - b. John told the Pharisees & Sadducees coming to be baptized by him, "Bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Mt 3:8)—Show you've repented in your actions.
 3. Christian, have you left your first love? Do you need to remember from where you have fallen? Do you need to repent & do the works you did at first?