

INTRODUCTION 引言

First love is more than likely the most memorable. It can be your first boyfriend or girlfriend, first pet or first house. It brings back both sweet and painful memories. Let us use car as an example. You were super excited when you owned that toy. You learned new things about the machine as you were driving it. It gave you a lot of joy, until something broke down. Perhaps you saw a warning light on the dashboard, you heard some strange noise or something just stopped working. Reality set in. You realized that love came with responsibilities. In order to keep loving your vehicle, you must invest time and money to care for it. Relationship with a person works the same way. You need to spend effort to cultivate the relationship. In Revelation 2, God alerts the church at Ephesus about its diminishing love for Him. It is a kind of “falling” in love no one likes to see! From chapter 2 to 3, God asks the apostle John to write letters to seven churches. Bible scholars have different understandings on those churches. Some say they were real churches in the first century. Those cities were located in Asia Minor, or today’s western Turkey. Others say they represent churches in different periods of time. A third interpretation is that they describe some characteristics of churches. There may not be any contradiction between the three understandings. Churches in various eras and areas share common strengths and flaws those seven congregations had. Today we will focus on the church of Ephesus. We will examine in what ways we as believers and our church are similar to that church. From that, we understand God’s expectations on us. He measures our relationship with Him not by the work we do, but by the depth of our love for Him.

EXPLANATION 解釋

1. Things Done Correctly 做得對

First, God praises the church of Ephesus for the things that were done correctly. Before we look at those items, let us go through some background information. All seven letters begin with a similar opening remarks. Each letter was addressed to the “angel” of the church. The same Greek word for “angel” can also mean “messenger.” Quite possibly, those letters were written to church leaders instead of heavenly beings. Besides the recipients, God also mentions His characteristics. In this letter, God describes Himself in verse 1: **...‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.’** What were those stars and lampstands? John tells us in the last verse of chapter 1: **...the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.** The stars were the messengers and the lampstands were the churches. God has the authority over church leaders. He also protects and cares for His churches. With all that in mind, let us look at the things that the church of Ephesus did correctly. Verses 2-3 tell us: **2 ‘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. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.’** God begins both verses by saying “I know” the noble things the church did. God knows the good works you do for Him. Perhaps no one pays attention when you pick trash up from the floor, tie shoes for little kids or

fix something broken in the church. God knows it. Not only does He remember, but He will also reward all that you do out of love for Him and His people. What were the things the church of Ephesus did correctly? First, they **strived hard**. God says He knew their works and their toils. They did not grow weary of their efforts. Second, they also **stood firm**. The word “patient” is repeated in both verses. But patient with what? A logical guess will be patience toward hardship due to their faith. At that time, Ephesus was a large Gentile and coastal city. Think of it like New York City or Los Angeles. It was an important hub for trading, military and religions. Christians there were bombarded by sensual temptations and religious oppression. The Ephesian believers stood firm when facing Satan’s enticements and attacks. Third, with regard to their faith, they **stayed pure**. Verse 2 says the believers examined the doctrines of those who claimed to be apostles, and they refuted their false beliefs. Verse 6 adds: ‘...you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.’ Bible scholars have little information about the Nicolaitans. The same title appears in 2:15. The context is about false religions. It is possible that the Nicolaitans were followers of pagan beliefs or a water-down version of Christianity. In either case, they were not true believers. Based on those three features, we can conclude that it was a good church. From that we can consider our church. You can also do a self-evaluation of your Christian life. Besides char-siu, another signature of our church is hard-working. Our pioneers spent money, time and effort to build this church. This quality of diligence is passed down. We can easily mobilize people to help cook and clean. Many young people are more eager to serve in here than to do chores at home. Like the church of Ephesus, our church also stands firm in previous storms. Those who have been around long enough can recall a few major conflicts we had in the past. By God’s grace, we overcame those tests. Moreover, we stay pure in our faith with God’s protection. We do not have many Bible scholars. But we thank God that many Bible teachers among us faithfully explain His Word. They lead us to study, know and apply the truths in daily life. A church that keeps doing those basics will be blessed by God.

2. Thing to Correct 要做對

The church of Ephesus had quite a few things that were done correctly. However, there is one thing they had to correct. God tells them in verse 4: ‘**But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.**’ The Greek word for “first” can mean first in time sequence. For example, breakfast is the first meal of the day for most people. If it is understood this way, it refers to the love they had when they were saved. But as time went by, their love gradually faded away. Alternatively, “first” can mean first in priority. For instance, your boss asks you to drop everything you are doing and work on an urgent project. If that was what God tried to convey, then the church of Ephesus did not see love as the most important. The two interpretations may not be mutually exclusive. We can think in terms of relationship between two lovers or friends. They must keep building on the first love and treat it as crucial. Otherwise, a close relationship will drift apart. The same is true for our relationship with God and with fellow believers. Also, love must be demonstrated through actions. Paul encourages the believers in Ephesians 5:1-2 – **1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.** Self-sacrifice is a true sign of love. Jesus loved us and died for us while we were still rebellious in sin. Paul asks the believers to mirror Christ’s love for them. Needless to say, love is a critical element in Christian life. Without love, we will only be repeating motions. The church of Ephesus must take actions to rekindle its first love. Look at Revelation 2:5 – ‘**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.’ There are three things they had to do. First, they must **remember**. They had to examine what went wrong. Second, they must **repent**. Admitting their faults is not enough. They must turn back to the right path. Third, they must also **repeat**. They had to do the right things they did at first. If they did not take those actions, God would remove their lampstand. We said earlier that the lampstand represents a church. By taking the lampstand away, a church will cease to exist. It is a solemn warning. A church will not be a church without God’s love and the love for God. The Bible and the world have very different definitions of love. True love must be God-focused and other-centered. Is your Christian life evident with that kind of love? Is our church saturated with the same love as well? Let us do a self-examination. Do you often compliment or complain about others? Is your focus on numbers (attendance and offering) or spiritual growth (both yourself and others)? Do you come here as a customer or a servant? Do you consider yourself a guest or a family member? Besides, how do outsiders look at our church? Do they see us as a social club or a spiritual hub? Do they feel welcome regardless of their background? Can they find genuine care and compassion here? We need to go back to our first love if we are not behaving what God calls us to be. Change begins from you. Our leaders can start new campaigns. But it will not work if each of us do not recognize the problems. You must resolve in your heart and take actions. You will never finish if you do not start now! You have to eat an elephant one bite at a time. You cannot run 5k (or 3.1 miles) if you do not start walking 5,000 steps a day. Likewise, you cannot finish reading whole the Bible if you do not read one chapter daily. You will not attend church 52 weeks a year if you do not determine to come every Friday and Sunday. You may not be able to love everyone if you do not start caring for one person each week. No matter what changes you decide to make, start small and start now. Thank God and motivate others after you reach the first goal. Then continue to build onto it.

CONCLUSION 結論

God measures our relationship with Him not by the amount of things we do, but by the depth of our love for Him. We must take the right actions with the right attitudes. Motions and emotions must go hand in hand. God wraps up this letter with a blessing in verse 7: ‘...**To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**’ The first time we read about the tree of life is in Genesis. Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat the fruits from that tree after they rebelled against God. The last appearance of the tree in the Bible is in Revelation. God’s people will enjoy its fruit in heaven. Satan and sin will be destroyed. God will make everything new. It will be like the Garden of Eden being restored. To eat from the tree of life means living with God forever. It is a promise as much as a motivation. According to the Bible, all believers will go to heaven after they leave the world. But there are still a lot of things to accomplish before we get there. There are spiritual battles to conquer. We must actively live out our first love for God. Our enemy will keep trying to steer us away from God. Our busyness in life, even busyness in church may distract us from loving Him. The first thing God wants from us is not our works, but our hearts. Our love for Him is a one-time decision, but it is also a daily and life-long commitment.

INTRODUCTION 引言

初戀很可能是最難忘的，不論是你的第一個男朋友或女朋友、第一隻寵物或第一棟房子。它帶給你甜蜜和痛苦的回憶。就以車子為例。當你擁有那個玩具時，你非常興奮。你一邊使用時，便不斷對那台機器有了新的了解。它給你很大的喜樂，直到機器故障。也許你看到儀表板上出現警告燈，你聽到一些奇怪的聲音或某些功能停止操作。你不得不面對現實。你明白愛是帶有責任的。為了繼續愛你的車子，你必須投入時間和金錢來保養它。與人的關係也是如此。你需要花心力去培養關係。在啟示錄第 2 章中，神提醒以弗所教會，它對神的愛正在逐漸減少。誰都不願意碰到這樣的情形。從第 2 章到第 3 章，神要求使徒約翰寫信給七個教會。聖經學者對這些教會有不同的理解。有人說它們是第一世紀真實的教會。那些城市位於小亞細亞，即今日的土耳其西部。其他人認為它們代表不同時期的教會。第三種解釋是它們描述教會的一些特徵。這三種理解並沒有互相矛盾。不同時代和地區的教會都有這七個教會的優點和缺點。今天我們將重點放在以弗所教會。我們會探討我們作為信徒和教會在哪些方面與該教會相似。藉此我們明白神對我們的期望。祂不是以我們所做的事情來衡量我們與祂的關係，祂是看我們對祂的愛有多深。

EXPLANATION 解釋

1. Things Done Correctly 做得對

首先，神稱讚以弗所教會做得對的事情。在看這些項目之前，讓我們先了解一些背景。所有七封信都以類似的開場白開頭。每封信都是寫給教會的使者的。希臘文的「天使」這個字也可以指「使者」。這些信很可能是寫給教會領袖而不是天使的。除了收信人之外，神也提到了祂的特質。在這封信中，神在第 1 節中描述了自己：...『那右手拿著七星、在七個金燈臺中間行走的，說：』那些星和燈臺是什麼？約翰在第一章最後一節告訴我們：「...那七星就是七個教會的使者，七燈臺就是七個教會。」星是指使者，燈臺是指教會。神的權柄在教會領袖之上，神也保護和關心祂的教會。了解這一切之後，讓我們看看以弗所教會做得對的地方。第 2-3 節告訴我們：2『我知道你的行為、勞碌、忍耐，也知道你不能容忍惡人。你也曾試驗那自稱為使徒卻不是使徒的，看出他們是假的來。3 你也能忍耐，曾為我的名勞苦，並不乏倦。』這兩節在原文聖經中都以「我知道」作開始。神知道你為祂所做的美事。也許沒有人注意到你撿起地上的垃圾、為小孩綁鞋帶或修理教會的東西。但是神知道。祂不只會記得，還會獎賞你因為愛神和祂的子民所做的一切。以弗所教會哪些事做對了？首先，他們**勤奮事奉**。神說祂知道他們的行為和勞碌。

他們並沒有因為勞苦而覺得疲乏。其次，他們在真理上**堅定站穩**。「忍耐」這個字在這兩節經文中都重複出現。但是他們忍耐什麼呢？一個合理的猜測是，他們因信仰所遇到的困難保持忍耐。當時，以弗所是一座外邦沿海大城市，就像今天的紐約市或洛杉磯。它是重要的貿易、軍事和宗教中心。那裡的基督徒受情慾的誘惑和宗教的迫害所威脅。以弗所信徒不但是在面對撒但的試探或攻擊時都堅定站穩。第三，他們在信仰上**保持純潔**。第 2 節說，信徒檢驗了那些自稱為使徒的人的教義，並否定了他們的錯誤信仰。第 6 節補充說：『...你恨惡尼哥拉一黨人的行為，這也是我所恨惡的。』聖經學者對尼哥拉黨的了解甚少。相同的稱呼出現在 2:15。上下文是關於假信仰。尼哥拉黨可能是異教徒，或是他們把基督信仰沖淡了。無論是哪種情況，他們都不是真正的信徒。根據這三個特徵，我們可以得出結論，那是一間不錯的教會。由此我們可以思考我們的教會。你也可以評估一下自己的屬靈生命。除了叉燒，我們教會的另一個標誌是勤勞。教會的先鋒出錢、出時間和出力來建造這間教會。這種勤勞的特質被傳承下來。我們可以輕易地動員人手幫忙做飯和打掃。許多年輕人願意在這裡服事，比起在家裡更賣力。就像以弗所教會一樣，我們的教會也曾在過去的風暴中站穩。一些長期會友可能都記得過去發生的一些嚴重衝突。靠著神的恩典，我們克服了那些考驗。此外，我們在神的保護下保持純潔的信仰。我們沒有很多聖經學者。但感謝神，我們中間有許多聖經老師忠實地解釋神的話語。他們帶領我們學習、明白和並在日常生活中應用真理。如果一所教會維續這些基本功夫，就會受到神的祝福。

2. Thing to Correct 要做對

以弗所教會有不少做得對的事情。然而，有一件事他們必須要做對。神在第 4 節告訴他們：『**然而有一件事我要責備你，就是你把起初的愛心離棄了。**』希臘文中「起初」(或是翻譯為「第一」) 這個字可以指時間的順序。例如，早餐是大多數人一天中的第一餐。如果這樣理解的話，就是指他們得救時的愛。但隨著時間的進展，他們的愛漸漸冷淡了。或者，「起初」可以表示優先次序。例如，你的老闆要求你放下手上的一切工作，先處理一個緊急的項目。如果這是神要傳達的意思，那麼以弗所教會並沒有把愛看為是最重要的。這兩種解釋並不互相排斥。思考一下兩個戀人或兩個朋友之間的關係。他們必須繼續建立最初的愛心，並把它視為至關重要的。否則，親近的關係便會疏遠。我們與神以及與信徒之間的關係也是如此。另外，愛必須透過行動來體現。保羅在以弗所書 5:1-2 鼓勵信徒：**1 所以，你們該效法神，好像蒙慈愛的兒女一樣。2 也要憑愛心行事，正如基督愛我們，為我們捨了自己，當作馨香的供物和祭物，獻與神。**自我犧牲是愛的真正標誌。當我們還在罪中悖逆時，耶穌就愛我們並為我們而死。保羅要求信徒效法基督對他們的愛。不用說，愛是屬靈生命中的關鍵因素。沒有愛，我們就只是在重複動作。以弗所教會必須採取行動重燃起初的愛心。請看啟示錄 2:5 — 『**所以，應當回想你是從那裡墜落的，並要悔改，行起初所行的事。你若不悔改，我就臨到你那裡，把你的燈臺從原**

處挪去。』首先，他們必須**回想**。他們必須檢查哪裡出了問題。第二，他們必須**悔改**。承認錯誤是不夠的，他們必須回到正路上。第三，他們還必須**重複**。他們必須做起初所做正確的事。如果他們不採取這些行動，神就會拿走他們的燈臺。我們前面說過，燈臺代表教會。燈臺若被拿走，教會就不再存在。這是一個嚴厲的警告。沒有神的愛和對神的愛，教會就不是教會了。聖經和世界對愛的定義截然不同。真愛必須以神為中心，並以他人為中心。你的基督徒生活是否明顯帶有這種愛？我們的教會是否也充滿了同樣的愛？讓我們來做一下自我檢查。你常常讚賞或是埋怨別人？你關注的是數字（出席人數和奉獻數字）還是靈命成長（你自己和別人）？你來這裡是當顧客還是僕人？你認為自己是客人還是家人？另外，外面的人怎樣看我們的教會？他們將我們視為社交場所還是屬靈的中心？無論他們的背景如何，他們都感到受歡迎嗎？他們能在這裡找到真正的關懷和憐憫嗎？如果我們沒有按照神呼召我們的方式行事，我們就需要回到起初的愛心。改變是從你開始。我們的領袖們可以發起新的行動。但如果不是每個人都認清這些問題，那就不會有效。你一定要下定決心，付諸行動。如果你現在不開始，你永遠不會完成！你必須一次一口地吃掉一隻大象。如果你不開始每天步行 5,000 步，你就無法跑 5 公里（或 3.1 英里）。同樣，如果你不每天讀一章聖經，你就無法讀完整本書。如果你不決定每週五和週日參加聚會，那麼你無法一年 52 週都出席。如果你不開始每週關心一個人，你不可能愛所有人。無論你決定做出什麼改變，都要從小事做起，並且從現在開始。達到第一個目標之後，你可以感謝神並鼓勵他人。然後在此基礎上繼續建造。

CONCLUSION 結論

神不是以我們所做的事情來衡量我們與祂的關係，祂是看我們對祂的愛有多深。我們必須以正確的態度做正確的事情。動作和情感必須是緊緊相連的。神在第 7 節用一個祝福來結束這封信：「『...得勝的，我必將神樂園中生命樹的果子賜給他吃。』」我們第一次讀到生命樹是在創世記中。亞當和夏娃悖逆神之後，被禁止吃那棵樹上的果子。聖經中最後一次出現那棵樹是在啟示錄中。神的子民將在天上享受它的果子。撒但和罪都會被消滅。神會讓一切都更新，這就像伊甸園被修復一樣。吃生命樹的果子意味著永遠與神同在。這是一個承諾，也是一份推動力。根據聖經，所有信徒離開世界後都會上天堂。但在我們到達那裡之前，還有許多事情需要完成。我們要在屬靈爭戰中得勝。我們必須積極活出對神起初的愛。我們的敵人會繼續試圖引誘我們遠離神。當我們為生活忙碌，甚至為教會事奉忙碌時，都可能分散我們對神的愛。神首先向我們要求的不是行為，而是我們的心。我們對祂的愛是一次性的決定，但也是每天和終生的承諾。