

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

Revelation – Chapter 2
The Church at Ephesus

Editorial Note: This is a lecture by Sidney Cox that was part of a series of lectures on the Book of the Revelation that he taught while on the theological teaching faculty at the Toccoa Falls Bible Institute during the early part of 1962. He was 75 years of age at the time.

During the latter part of his life, Sidney Cox had developed a close relationship with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (“CMA”). CMA operates as a vast network of churches, similar to a “denomination.” Toccoa Falls Bible Institute was closely affiliated with the CMA, provided support to the Institute and the Institute sent many of its graduates into ministry within CMA churches. CMA and The Salvation Army, in which Sidney Cox served as an officer for 30 years previously in his life, share a similar theology and emphasis in Christian outreach.

From 1956 – 1960, Sidney and Violet Cox lived in Miami, Florida where Sidney was on the theological teaching faculty of the Miami Bible Institute, another CMA supported institution. They moved to Toccoa Falls, Georgia in 1960, where he served on the staff at the Toccoa Falls Bible Institute from 1960 – 1962.

As a lecture, he was obviously assuming that his students had prepared for class by reading and studying the pertinent scripture and other class material. Thus, his comments were not like a sermon, but lectures to enhance the students’ theological understanding. He emphasized a detailed study of the scripture and incorporated analysis that he gained from his study of Bible commentaries and books on the related subject matter. These lectures are remarkably free of any personal opinions, personal illustrations or “sermonizing” of any kind. While at other times in his career he was very much the preacher and evangelist, in these late-in-life roles of Bible Professor, he was very much the educator.

Lastly, it might be helpful to at least comment on the historical context in which these lectures were delivered. Many biblical scholars of that day associated some of what is found in the Book of Revelation with the Catholic Church – symbols of paganism, the movement of Satan/antichrist to establish one world church, etc. Many people viewed the Catholic Church with much skepticism and fear. Further, John F. Kennedy had just been elected the first Catholic president of the United States in 1960. His election was quite controversial and many non-Catholics were concerned about Kennedy’s catholic background. Elements of these concerns and mindset are found in these lectures. In 2008, many of these fears have been discredited and some would find them to be offensive and intolerant, but they were quite prevalent and not at all unusual in 1962.

John Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. December 29, 2008.

...or two here at the beginning of the 2nd chapter. It's so familiar to us that all I'm doing here for the

moment is simply refreshing your memory, that's all. "Unto the angel of the Church at Ephesus."¹ Now here he turns his attention to the seven churches, in the midst of which you find our Lord standing. Now he turns to the first one.

Let's clear up a word there immediately. This word 'angel' does not mean, in this case, an angelic being. There was no heavenly being that was assigned down there to whom a letter could be sent as the head of the Church at Ephesus. It simply means 'the messenger' of the Church at Ephesus; the pastor of the Church at Ephesus; the responsible one in the Church at Ephesus. You will find that in almost any of your translations that give to us perhaps a little more literal meaning than the one that we have been used to. Not an angelic being; it's the minister of the church there. You will find that, for instance, you will find that in the Amplified Version; you will find it in the Williams Translation, and quite a number of them. The angel, the minister, the pastor, the authoritative one in the church to whom this letter is sent, whose responsibility it is to distribute it and get it out to the churches.

"These things saith he which holdeth the seven stars in his right hand."² Now you see at once who this one is. He isn't named. Now, who is he, "The one that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand?" Who is he? He's the Lord Jesus Christ. How do you know that? - because you find the mark of identification right in that 1st chapter. Now this is the first instance of where He appears beyond Chapter 1. And here He is, holding the seven stars in His right hand.

Now He's going to have something to say to the Church at Ephesus. What will He have to say? (Why don't you just close that door, will you?) "These things saith he which holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." Now, that's identification number two. And you don't need to wonder who it is, who is before us.

Now what is He going to say?

"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."³

Now that's the message to the Church at Ephesus.

And I want us to remember this: that in each of these seven churches we shall be looking in each one of them for four things. Now if this is not in your notes, make a note of it there. I'm not quite sure, I haven't had a chance to check these, but it's most likely in your notes. One: He speaks of the things that

1 Revelation 2:1

2 Revelation 2:1

3 Revelation 2:2-7

are right. Two: The things wrong. Three: The historical application, because you see more than just a message here. And four: The reward and the warning. Now there are four things that we shall look for in each of these letters. One, the things that are right; and the things wrong; the historical application; and the reward and the warning. Now this is the pattern that's followed all the way through.

And you will find a very important thing, a seven-fold, here it is again, emphasis on the words, "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches."⁴ Now, did you notice, if you please, that that last word is plural. So that it's quite obvious that this message was not just to the Church at Ephesus alone, but it had a message and an application for other churches as well. It brings the general aspect of the church in view. Not just the one thing.

Now, let's have a look, if you please, and see one or two things about this.

What about this Church at Ephesus? - and this is fresh in the minds of a good many of us who have been through the Acts of the Apostles just recently and who are also at this time, at 1:00, 1:30 this afternoon, studying together the Epistle to the Ephesians. Now, let's notice one or two things about this word. First of all, the word, 'Ephesus' has a very interesting meaning to it. It means 'the desirable one, the one greatly beloved.' Now, remember if you please, that this was a church that was greatly privileged. John loved it. Paul loved it. Timothy loved it. For all of them had given of themselves to the Church at Ephesus. All we need to remind ourselves is, Paul spent more time there than anywhere else. John, according to tradition, became the Bishop of the Church at Ephesus. Timothy spent time there. It was a greatly privileged church. There isn't any doubt about that.

Now, I want you to notice, if you please, that there are two things that they hold very dear in the center of this church. One you will find in Verse 3 and the other you will discover all through the letter. One is this: His name was central. And two: The mark of this church was separation from the world. His name is central. Now, without getting out of the realm of teaching into preaching, for I don't want to do that particularly, we do remind ourselves that if any other name takes the place of His name, shadows immediately fall over a church. For instance, if the name of a denomination becomes more important than His name, then immediately the shadow comes. I don't need to mention anything further than that because we can all see immediately the danger with that one simple little suggestion there. And separation from the world. Now, I want you to notice some things that he says unto them that are good. Notice, it's amazing.

"I know thy works." Now, here was a church that was very busy. Perhaps it became too busy. We just wonder sometimes, but it was a church that was very busy. Now, I want you to notice something else about it. It was a church that was not only busy, but very patient in the midst of its busyness. Now, do you know a church like that? Now, you know lots of churches that are busy, but when you get works and patience together, how very extraordinary that is, isn't it? How very extraordinary it is if we find it in our own lives, where we work patiently. Do you know anything about that? I don't want you to look too closely at me. My face is getting redder all the time, because this is one of the things that I have a good deal of trouble with that. I don't have any trouble about working. I have a good deal of trouble about patience. Do you, do you? Do you know what it means to wait patiently? Do you? Easy enough to wait. And, in a sense, it's easy enough to be patient. I can be patient if I don't have to wait, for

4 Revelation 2:11

instance. See? Some of you fellows are going to get married one of these days, you'll know what I mean. You'll spend the rest of your time doing that. But it's easy enough to do one without the other, isn't it? I can wait impatiently, you know, calm on the outside and boiling over on the inside. You know what I mean?

But here was a church that not only worked, but worked with patience. Patience is the smooth running of the stream. You find a stream that may be smashing itself over the rocks. Oh, it's going someplace, yes. There is not much patience about it there. You see what I mean, there are a lot of lives like that. And we're like the rushing of a stream, going over the rocks. On the other hand, you can see a stream flowing along smoothly, unhindered, what power that is in it. That was the Church at Ephesus.

“I know thy works and thy labour.” Isn't it wonderful that our Lord knows these things? - knows them about your life, my dear; knows them about the things about your life that other people don't know, other people that don't know about what you did here or what you were there or something of the kind. Isn't it wonderful that He knows?

“I know thy works. I know thy patience.” Now, patience and work had become so intense that work was not sufficient. It was not a strong enough word. And when you pile work upon work upon work upon work upon work, a thing that you say then is, labor. And labor is simply that. It's work upon work upon work. That's all. And these people were so busy with their work for the Lord that labor was the only word that could describe it.

“They could not bear them that are evil.”⁵ And we don't need to fuss about that word ‘bear’ at all. It means exactly the same as it does in your life and mine. Just exactly. There may be things that come and we say, “I can't bear that.” They're doing exactly the same thing. There's something within that revolts against. Something without. And we say, “I can't bear that.” And they're meaning exactly the same thing. There were things that were cluttering around the edges of this Church at Ephesus. False teachers. There was the oppression of those who were pagans on the outside. (Audio repeats: And they're meaning exactly the same thing. There were things that were cluttering around the edges of this church at Ephesus. False teachers. There was the oppression of those who were pagans on the outside.) There was all was the sound of pagan philosophy, all the way around them. And the heart of the Church at Ephesus said, “I can't bear that.”

Now that's one of the marks of fine spiritual life - when there are certain things about the world we just can't bear them at all. It's nothing against you, that's no mark of detriment. That's a mark of honor, when you are inwardly disturbed about things that are anti-Christian. It's not a mark of detriment. The Church at Ephesus was like that. They could not bear them that are evil, and they tried them. Now you can see who it was and what it was that they were disturbed about - false teachers, because they were in the church too. Because ‘tried’ is a courtroom word. It's the word that is applied to the business of a judge. What does a judge do with a case? He tries it and pronounces sentence; weighs the evidence and pronounces sentence. The Church at Ephesus was like that. Here was a group of people who were all together out of line with the truth and their whole spiritual being revolted against it, and not only that, but they did something about it - they brought them before the church and tried them. Now, that's something that used to be in the early part of the church. It isn't seen so very frequently now. There are

5 Revelation 2:2

a lot of churches that are aware of problems within the church, but very few that have courage enough to deal with them. Very few.

Now, they tried them. Look what these people were - they were apostles, said they were apostles, but are not. They were found to be liars, and these people were tried. They were brought before the church. The church dealt with this thing. It got rid of them there. Ananias and Sapphira, as an example of it there.⁶ They were not in the church at Ephesus, but they were in the Church at Jerusalem. And there they were. "And thou hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted."⁷ What a church! What a church!

And yet you find, almost immediately, something that makes you feel as if somebody's poured ice water down your back. You begin to almost shudder as you read the words, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee."⁸ What could they have against a church like that? What? What could he have against them? It looks as if there wouldn't be anything against a church like that. Nevertheless, he's got something against them. Now remember, he has said all the good things before he even suggests that there's anything that isn't good.

And don't forget this, my dear, that when the eyes of your wonderful Lord are on you, He's looking not just for the things that would cause criticism, He's far more anxious in recognizing the good things in your life, than the other kind. He always sees them first, always. Other people may see the other things first, but He sees the good things first, always. Here's the pattern of it. And it's very comforting to our hearts, isn't it, to know that we've got a Lord like that. With eyes that can see first of all, the good things in your life, and He loves them and loves you because of them, of course He does.

Now, he's got somewhat again...what is the thing that he has? They have left, not lost remember; let's get the word right; they have left their first love, not lost it, but they have left it. Now, it's possible to leave without losing. There are lots of married folks like that. They have left their first love. They haven't lost each other. They're still there. They still endure each other. There are lots of folks like that, just lots of them. And this was a church, they had left their first love.

I wonder what their first love was? What, what would you think it would be? Aha, that's it. There was a time when the eyes of the Church at Ephesus looked into the face of the Lord and said, "Thou art the all together lovely one. The Rose of Sharon. The Lily of the Valley. My Jesus, I love thee." Sure. But you know, when you love folks, you want to do something for them, don't you? That's the instinctive thing. You are never satisfied to just tell a person that you love them. You always want to do something for them. Love just must do that. And the Church at Ephesus, looking into the face of its Lord, found its hands tingling with desire to do something for Him. And you know, the more you love, the more you want to do. Of course, of course you do. And this was the case in the Church at Ephesus.

Isn't it strange that Satan would attack that church right at that point? Because it's possible to get so busy doing things for the one you love, that you haven't got time, or adequate time, to spend with the one you love. And it makes you wonder if our Lord didn't look down from glory at that Church at

6 See Acts Chapter 5

7 Revelation 2:3

8 Revelation 2:4

Ephesus and says, "I'm so glad you're doing things for me, but I wish you had time to spend with me." Did you get that? Do you see the distinction there?

Don't forget, my dear, in this busy life of ours, and we're in this circle where doing things for the Lord is constantly before us, that what we do is not nearly as important as what we are. Our Lord wants you first, and what you can do second. Now, somehow or other into the Church at Ephesus had come this problem. They had become so busy doing things for Jesus, that they had less and less time to spend with Jesus. "Thou hast left thy first love." You see. Oh yes, you like to take a rosebud to that girl of yours, sure. But if that's all you did, wouldn't be very satisfactory, would it? What she wants is you. That's it – you. Now what He wants is exactly the same.

And sometimes in our very busyness, we become so busy that we haven't got time to spend with Him. One of the things that used to break our hearts sometimes, as we would go around, and we've been spending a good many years in this job, you know. I've seen a lot of churches in that time. I was commissioned a Salvation Army officer 52 years ago this year. I've seen a lot in that time. That little lady of mine was commissioned a Salvation Army officer 50 years ago this year. Well, that's a long time. We've seen a lot of churches in that time.

One of the things that breaks our hearts is to go into a church and find them so busy, busy, busy, but with so little of the throb of love for Jesus in it. So little. We can get so busy that we haven't got time to spend with Him, and a disappointed Christ looks and says, "I wish you had a little time to spend with me." We go into a church and we find here's the program on the wall, and some denominational octopus has got its hands on this church, and there it is. And you've got something in January and something in February, and March and April and May and June and July and August and September and October and November and December. And when you get to December, you start all again, on the same old merry-go-round - same old merry-go-round.

A merry-go-round, my dear, is very busy, but it doesn't go far, does it? Have you ever noticed that? It doesn't take you far, does it? It's very busy, sure, and very loud, very noisy. But it doesn't go anywhere. And sometimes busyness is just exactly like that. And they were there, oh what a pity. What a pity. They became so busy, they lost or left their first love.

I've seen families like that – a young couple gets married, and they're absorbed with each other, sure, exactly so. And after a while, the boy gets so busy there, he's got to climb the ladder of fame for her sake, sure. And after a while, she's got to go and get a job for his sake. They've got to keep up with the Joneses, and they've got to do this and that and the other. And after a while, the things that used to be, are not there anymore. You see? A little old peck on the cheek when he hurries out in the morning, and she's dashing off somewhere else. And I've watched them as they get further and further and further apart. You see what I mean? You can see it everywhere. You see it in the Church at Ephesus. What a pity, because there is one thing first. Not the second things. Not activities. They are beautiful, but they're not first things. And if the activity takes the place of the adoration, what a pity. Well now, that happened, that happened, that happened.

I think maybe I've told you this story before, and when I'm going to get through with this, but I think I've told you the story before, of a very important man, a very busy man, who had a little girl. She was

7 or 8 years old. And she was his pride and joy, and when he came home from his work at night she would come in all dressed up ready for bed, and climb up onto his knee. And one of the bright hours of the day, or moments of the day, was the little while that father and his little daughter spent together. And then one day, he noticed she didn't come. And then the next day she didn't come again. And the next day, and the next day. And he was a wise father and didn't say anything about it, although he wondered and his heart was hurt. He wondered. He could hear her around the place, but she didn't come. And then one day, and it happened to be his birthday, she came bursting into his study or his room there where he was, and she had a package in her hands. And she says, "Oh Daddy, I've been making these for you. I've made them all with my own hands. I've made them all for you." When he unfastened the package, it was a pair of slippers that the little girl had been knitting for her father. Now, I don't suppose those slippers were perfect, by any means, but it wouldn't do to tell that father that, would it? You couldn't tell him that. They were just beautiful. They were just beautiful. And when he got through thanking her for them, he took her in his arms and he said, "I want you to remember this, my dear, I would rather have you than anything you can do for me. I'd rather have you than anything you can do for me."

"I'd rather have you, Church at Ephesus, than anything you can do for me."

Now, we'd better stop and look at that, hadn't we? Because it may be the explanation for something that could perhaps be even in lives as dear as yours. It could be. I don't know. There's a way back. Oh, yes there is. There's a way back. There's something that needs to be done. First of all, we must remember, and remember we don't repent until we first remember. Repent or remember, repent and return, are the three words.⁹ That's the way back. These are the words that are there. Now, they're in right order. We don't remember unless we repent. Or we don't repent unless we remember. And we don't return until we do these things. We don't come back at all. Now this is the way back.

And there is a word there that's very important. If you don't, then something may happen. And it could well be, that a Church at Ephesus would have to be classed as a castaway. "Lest having preached to others, they themselves become a castaway."¹⁰ Disqualified. It's a serious thought, isn't it? Oh yes, they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, because there was a group of people around, the Nicolaitanes. While there's a complicated explanation for it, the simple thing is that they were a group of people around who were trying to bring in to this brotherhood of the church in those days, and it was beautiful in those days, there was no sign there of clergy and laity. There was no sign there of ecclesiastical authority, not at all. It was a united brotherhood. And into that church, there were some who were coming to say that there ought to be a priest and a people, and a separation between them, and the priestly authority over the laity. And they were introducing this thought of the clergy and the laity.

Did you notice that word there in the words 'Nicolaitanes?' Now, there's a lot of other explanation for that. That's only just touching the hem of the garment. But that was the heart of it, to try to divide the Christian church into two separate groups so that we've got the spectacle that we find almost everywhere, where the pastor does the work and the people sit and listen and pay his salary, sometimes. And that's the spectacle that we've got now. You can't find a sign of it in the early church, not a sign of it. Not one bit of it in that early church. But that's the thing that is there, and we find it everywhere, the

9 Revelation 2:5

10 I Corinthians 9:27

subtle introduction of Nicolaitanism.

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life.”¹¹ Do you know who it was that first transplanted a tree? Well, I know who first planted one, of course, because there was a tree that was planted in the Garden of Eden. And then something happened in the Garden of Eden, and there was sin that came into its beauty, and when sin came in, the whole earth shuddered in the Garden of Eden. There was one tree there that God was very proud of and very particular about. He wasn't going to leave it with its roots in the soil of a fallen earth. Oh no, not at all. So God lifted the Tree of Life and planted it in the Paradise of God and He was the first one who did any tree planting or transplanting. And one of these days, my dear, you'll see it. You'll see it. But there'll be a lot of other things out of the Garden you won't see, but you'll see that.

Thanks so much for listening. You've been a nice class, bless your hearts.

(audio ends)

¹¹ Revelation 2:7