

[Slide 1]

## Same Things Done Differently

Today I'm starting a new sermon series entitled "We've Got Mail." We'll be looking at the second and third chapters of Revelation and studying Christ's letter to the churches of Asia Minor. Specifically, we want to hear what Christ is saying to the churches and to our church. In each letter, we find the refrain repeated seven times, "Anyone who has an ear should hear what the Spirit says to the churches." As we read through these letters, we will find a repeated pattern: Church – Christ – Commendation – Critique – Correction – Consequences – Challenge.

My message today is entitled "Same Things Done Differently" [Slide 2] Sometimes Christ will tell one of the churches to start doing something, while at other times He will tell them to stop doing something. The church at Ephesus was called to do the things that they had been doing but to do them differently.

This letter from Christ that was written to a very faithful church that nevertheless that lost their way and probably lost their passion, much like a couple I heard about. They had just celebrated their 50th anniversary. At bedtime, the wife said to the husband, "Remember you used to always before we would go to bed, you would always go get me a glass of orange juice. Would you do that tonight on our anniversary?" "You know, Honey, I remember you used to always give me a back rub. Remember how you used to do that?" "You know, Honey, one more thing. Do you remember how you used to always nibble on my ear?" All of a sudden he bolted up out of bed. She said, "Where are you going?!" He said, "I'm going to get my teeth!"

Read REVELATION 2:1-7 [Slide 3]

Christ's message to the church at Ephesus: I'm not asking you to do different things. I'm asking you to do them differently. [Slide 4]

A woman just won the lottery. She called her husband and said, "I've won the lottery. Pack your clothes." He said, "That's great! Which clothes do I pack? For the beach? For the mountains?" She said, "Pack them all. I want you out of here by 6 p.m." She decided she wanted to do different things with different people. This is not to what Christ called the Ephesian church.

Early in this church's history they had been commended for their love (Ephesians 1:15) by Paul. The apostle John also had a history with them, according to church history and tradition. We see from both Acts and Ephesians that they had both zeal and love. Two accounts regarding John affirm both of these. On the one hand, he refused to even remain in the same building as the heretic Cerinthus for fear that the roof would cave in. However, the second tradition passed down was that in every sermon he would repeat, "Little children, love one another."

Years later, John writes to them. How were they at that time? Their dedication was undiminished. Their loyalty to the truth of the gospel was unwavering. Yet something was missing, love. There was hate, directed toward the nefarious deeds of the Nicolaitans. But Christ had ask, "Where is your love?" And He warned them that regaining that their original love was crucial to their survival as a church.

How do we do the first works that Christ commands? How can we return to love?

(1) **Do them with thought**      Engage your mind [Slide 5]

A modern albeit a little unlikely example of passion, of an engaged mind are computer hackers. Computer hackers are not necessarily religious people, but they are passionate people, people who love what they do. They are people who sit in front of electronic machinery for hours or even days at a time, completely absorbed and delighted. To an outsider, they seem obsessed (and most would admit that they are), but what they are experiencing is more than an addiction; it is a love affair with what is essentially a subject of study. For these people, such active learning is what gives life itself meaning. Hacking is a blissful activity. Could this kind of learning experience be duplicated with other subjects, in other settings, with different types of people?

-Christopher Richardson, "Hacking Christianity: A Shared Works Pedagogy for the Electronic Age" (unpublished paper), 3.

Can you honestly say that, at whatever level of participation you are in here, you are engaged with that kind of passion and commitment?

I love that word: engaged. When I am engaged in something, my whole heart is in it. All of my focus is it. I lose track of time. Everyone needs something like that, a great passion for life and purpose.

It is amazing how we can do things without even thinking, thinking about why we're doing them, thinking about why we started doing them in the first place. Sometimes we get to the point to where we put it all on auto pilot, to the point where thinking about something is just too exhausting for us. I also think that sometimes we forget why we started serving the Lord in the first place. I think that is what happened to the Ephesians. They still grasped the What but they had lost sight of the Why. The "first works" that Jesus wanted included the Why. The same is true for us.

What we are going to have to do over this next year is think about what we are doing. Think like we have never thought before. Pray like we have never prayed before. Stop associating activity with accomplishment. Learn to become intentional in everything we do because time and money are scarce and we cannot afford to be haphazard in our ministry and mission.

(2) **Do them with emotion**      **Reveal your heart [Slide 6]**

We have to believe that the Ephesians had allowed the fulfillment of duty to snuff out their enthusiasm. The difficulty of the tasks, the weight of the challenges had left them empty and burned out.

If I asked you to identify this scientific principle, “A body in water is subject to an upward force equal to the weight of the water displaced,” most likely you couldn’t. This is the skeleton of Archimedes' principle, true to mathematical relationships, cold to the touch. What breathes life into this dry dictum is the legend behind it.

As the story goes, 22 centuries ago, the king of Syracuse, commissioned Archimedes to determine if a certain crown was sterling gold or a tainted alloy. As Archimedes was stepping into his bath, he conceived of submersing the crown and comparing the amount of water it displaced to that displaced by an equal weight of solid gold. Any discrepancy between the two would indicate the crown and the test weight were different densities, and the crown, therefore, at least a partial fraud. This aquatic solution provided Archimedes with both his principle and its famous expression. After his inspiration, he is said to have run from his bath naked into the streets of the city, shouting "Eureka!"

The centerpiece of this tale is not the crown or the gold or the cleverness, but Archimedes' passion. As elegant as his insight may be, it is the force of Archimedes' emotion that calls to us down the centuries. His thrill, not his intellectual dexterity, is what has given his theorem its notoriety. The real principle behind his principle is that most people will never fathom its mathematics - but his exuberance they do understand. Emotion is the messenger of love; it is the vehicle that carries every signal from one brimming heart to another.

-Thomas Lewis, M.D., et al., A General Theory of Love (New York: Random House, 2000), 35.

I don’t know how passionate you are in your service to the Lord. But He does and you do also. Nothing great has ever been accomplished without enthusiasm and passion. Life seems bent on squelching it out of us. We see it in the way children are treated. From birth, we are trying to get them to do two things, aren’t we? We want them to talk and we want them to walk. And after they do, what do we say? “You would please sit down and shut up!”

I can only hope and pray that the end of this transitional process will see resurgence of passion for the mission of God, for the advance of His kingdom, for the great Commission, for the work of the church. And it all begins with love. Love for God, love for people, and love for the truth. The church is symbolized in John’s great vision by the lampstands. It will take love to light up this community.

[Slide 6] Conclusion: Arthur Gordon's essay, *The Turn of the Tide*

Arthur Gordon tells of a time in his life when he began to feel that everything was stale and flat. His enthusiasm had all but disappeared; his writing efforts were fruitless, and the situation was getting worse day by day.

Finally, he decided to get help from a medical doctor. Observing nothing physically wrong, the doctor asked him if he would be able to follow his instructions for one day.

When Gordon replied that he could, the doctor told him to spend the following day in a place where he was the happiest as a child. He could take food, but he was not to talk to anyone or to read or write or listen to the radio. He then wrote out four prescriptions and told him to open one at nine, twelve, three, and six o'clock.

"Are you serious?" Gordon asked him.

"You won't think I'm joking when you get my bill!" was the reply.

So the next morning, Gordon went to the beach. As he opened the first prescription, he read, "Listen carefully." He thought the doctor was insane! How could he listen for three hours? Nevertheless, he had agreed to follow the doctor's order, so he listened. He heard the usual sounds of the sea and the birds. After a while, he could hear the other sounds that weren't so apparent at first. As he listened, he began to think of lessons the sea had taught him as a child—patience, respect, and an awareness of the interdependence of things. He began to listen to the sounds—and the silence—and to feel a growing peace deep within.

At noon, he opened the second slip of paper and read, "Try reaching back." "Reaching back to what?" he wondered. Perhaps to childhood, perhaps to memories of joy. He tried to remember them with exactness, and in remembering, he found a growing warmth inside.

At three o'clock, he opened the third piece of paper. Until now, the prescriptions had been easy to take, but this one was different; it said, "Examine your motives." At first he was defensive. He thought about what he wanted—success, security, recognition—and he justified them all. Yet then the thought occurred to him that those motives weren't good enough. That perhaps therein was the answer to his stagnant situation.

He considered his motives deeply and thought about past happiness, and at last, the answer came to him. In a flash of certainty, he wrote, "I saw that if one's motives are wrong, nothing can be right. It makes no difference whether you are a mail carrier, a hairdresser, an insurance salesperson, a home-maker—whatever. As long as you feel

you are serving others, you do the job well. When you are concerned only with helping yourself, you do it less well—a law as unrelenting as gravity.”

When six o'clock came, the fourth prescription didn't take long to fill. "Write your worries on the sand," it said. He knelt and wrote several words with a piece of broken shell; then he turned and walked away. He didn't look back: he knew the tide would come in!