



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

"First things First"

2:4-7

First love is the passionate, romantic love of the engagement. This passionate, romantic love of the engagement, was no longer present in the church at Ephesus. If it could happen then and there, it can happen here and now.

You don't immediately recognize having left your **first love** for Jesus because you do still love Him. Since Jesus spoke to the church at Ephesus in a context of engagement we can look to marriage as an illustration. In 1975 I would drive one hundred miles a day round trip, sleeping only one or two hours a night, to be with Pam. Today I can get grouchy if she asks me to get up from the couch to get her a drink of water! I still love her; but, in that moment, I have left my first love for her.

First love for Jesus isn't just nice; it's necessary. Without it we have no witness. No love, no light.

Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

The Lord's **nevertheless** doesn't cancel out the commendation of their good works in verses two and three. The things they were doing were important and necessary. But they weren't primary.

The church was entering its second generation. The new generation of believers put their emphasis on the works rather than on the Lord Himself. It's easy to do.

Left means *to quit* or *to forsake*. It is thus a willful, conscious decision; but it seems to be one we slowly drift towards rather than suddenly choose. We slowly drift because other things compete for or interfere with love for Jesus:

1. In First Timothy 6:10 you read that *the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*. Coveting and pursuing wealth and security creep in subtly and replace our first love for Jesus.
2. In First John 2:15 you read that *if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*. There's a lot out in the world to compete with Jesus for our attention.
3. In First John 5:21 the apostle, himself a teacher for a time in Ephesus, warned us *to keep [ourselves] from idols*. Just about anything can become an idol if it occupies our attention and desire instead of Jesus.

The Lord, while on the earth, warned us to not prefer loved ones to our relationship with Him:

Matthew 10:37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

Even marriage itself, as much as God holds it sacred, can interfere with loving the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength:

1 Corinthians 7:34 ...The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world - how she may please *her* husband.

I think, too, that there is a hint in this letter that serving the Lord can itself interfere with loving Him and lead to leaving our first love. The Ephesians were fervent and zealous about their good works. I know plenty of guys who find the ministry itself to be an intoxicating mistress.

In marriage counseling it is rare that a spouse will immediately receive the accusation of leaving their first love. It's the same with churches or individual Christians. We shouldn't quickly shrug-off this word from Jesus. If the church at Ephesus could leave their first love, so can we.

Let's say we receive this word and realize we've left our first love. What should we do?

It is in our brokenness the Lord would say to us,

Revelation 2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent.

Remember... repent and do is sometimes seen as a formula for recapturing your first love. It is and it isn't. I'm seeing this a little differently than I have in the past.

It's not something you do grudgingly because you are being told you have left your first love and need to do better. I see this attitude in marriages. The husband won't admit he's blowing it but agrees to spending a little more time with the wife. It's not the time she's after; it's his heart.

Jesus' words aren't a formula that will work unless and until you realize you've left your first love. The moment your soul and spirit are receive the truth that you've left your first love, *you've regained it!*

The words are a kind of encouragement to constantly rekindle your first love day-by-day. There you are, broken by the realization you've left your first love. How did it happen? You should **remember from where you have fallen**. When you fall normally it's because you tripped over something; or you somehow stumbled. In this context

Jesus was saying you've **fallen** over something that became a stumbling block to your love for Him. Was it the love of money? A love for the world? An idol that took His place?

Having identified your point of falling, you **repent** of whatever it is that competed for your affections. It's the Greek word *metanoeson* and means *to change your mind*. When you really see the Lord you know that nothing can take His place. Whatever you have preferred to His presence in your life pales in comparison.

Now you are ready to **do the first works**. Mind you, the Ephesians were already busy doing **works** for the Lord. It wasn't that they had become pew-potatoes and needed to volunteer to usher or greet or teach Children's Church. So these **works** are something different.

First is the same word in Greek that qualified **love**. It is *protos* and one of its translations is *foremost* in importance.

What is foremost in importance? I think Jesus gave us a clue a little later in this letter to the church at Ephesus. Look at verse seven for a moment:

Revelation 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." '

Jesus looks back to the Garden of Eden with **the tree of life** in its midst. God created a universe... Then a planet... Then a garden on that planet... Just so He could enjoy fellowship with men and women. In the future, after the events of the Revelation play out, **the tree of life** will be in the New Jerusalem – the city in which we will have our mansions. The **tree of life** signifies what God desired for us all along – that we would live forever in joyful, intimate fellowship with Him.

I would say, then, that the **first**, the foremost **works** are to enjoy intimate fellowship with the Lord.

Let's go back and finish verse five:

Revelation 2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent.

We've seen previously that the **lampstand** represents the church on earth. **Remove your lampstand** means Jesus will no longer be present in the midst of your church. Without His presence there is no real light. As I said earlier, No love, no light.

Quickly is the Greek word from which we get tachometer. It doesn't mean soon; it means that once He decides to remove your **lampstand** it happens suddenly. I've seen this in marriages. A spouse, usually the wife, goes on a long time in a loveless relationship. Then, seemingly suddenly, it's over as far as she's concerned.

A church can go on for a long time without Jesus present in its midst to be its light. Don't underestimate the energy of the flesh.

Unless you repent. Whatever stumbled you before will still vie for your affections and attentions. You must go on being vigilant and protect your love with the Lord.

Revelation 2:6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

When we discussed the **Nicolaitans** we saw that, among their faults, they established a priesthood to lord over the people. An exclusive priesthood keeps Jesus at a distance from the laity. So you can see why the Lord **hates** not the doers but the **deeds**. He came; He died; He rose; in order to restore intimacy between man and God.

Jesus' statement here in verse six is in keeping with the romantic nature of this letter. Lovers grow together as one. They learn to love what each other loves, and to hate what each other hates.

Revelation 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." '

Him who overcomes is not meant to be an exclusive group of super-saints. Every believer is able to overcome the stumbling blocks that affect first love.

As we said, the promise here of **eating from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God** refocuses our hearts on where we are headed. If I am thinking about being with the Lord in eternity I will be setting my affections on things above, not on the things of the world.

This letter was written to the church at Ephesus in the first century. But when Jesus said, **he who has an ear**, He was giving it universal application to any Christian in any century.

When Jesus said hear **what the Spirit says to the churches** He was applying His words to any church in any century.

The letters have a prophetic application: These seven churches, taken in the order Jesus put them, are representative of successive periods of church history. They lay out the entire history of the church, from the first century until the Second Coming of Jesus. The church at Ephesus, for example, represents the first century church which did indeed leave its first love for Jesus.

Why would Jesus remove you from a place of witness if you leave your first love? **Because your witness is not an accurate portrayal of the relationship He desires from you and others you share with!** He desires intimate fellowship. If **you** don't have intimate fellowship with Jesus, you won't share it with others either by precept or example, and they, too, will leave their first love for Him.

You were created to have fellowship with God, and you have the opportunity of sharing with others that the way to God is open through a relationship with Jesus.

If you are sensing that you have left *your* first love, you don't begin by *serving* Him; you begin by *seeking* Him!

