

How Satan's Crowning Work Has Caused Many Churches to Lose Their Power

Jesus said that His Word would judge everyone who rejects Him and fails to receive His words (John 12:48). Conversely, His Spirit is like a fire that burns, speaking of His Word into our hearts.

Revelation 2:1-5 is such a relevant word. This message of returning to your first love is an end-time theme and one the church so desperately needs.

The church at Ephesus possessed some noble characteristics. Jesus commended this church for many things. By today's standards, the people of this church would be thought of as a strong and even dynamic church. They had doctrinal and moral purity, labored without growing weary, were active in the affairs of the church, had exercised patience and perseverance, and so on. But there was one thing Jesus had against them—they had forsaken their first love. Jesus called this position a fallen place, or in today's terminology, a backslidden state. What a lesson to learn that Jesus, the head of the church, does not see as man sees.

What does the Lord of glory see in today's churches? What of those who boast in great attendance, large buildings and dynamic programs for their members? Jesus does not esteem things as a man esteems them. He so often regards as least that which men esteem highly. On the other hand, those things that men often esteem lowly are so highly regarded by the master. You see, it doesn't matter what size building, attendance or organizational powers and abilities a church possesses. If first love has passed, then it is a fallen church, and one in danger of having its lampstand removed from

its place (Rev. 2:5).

The lampstand represents the church, and the stars are the angels (Rev. 1:20). Every church ordained by God has an angelic covering that symbolizes the power and anointing for that church. The lampstand being put out represents the angel leaving and being assigned elsewhere. There are churches that still exist today whose angel left 100 years ago. Sad, but true. There is no longer a covering or an anointing for that church. They lost their love for Jesus. Over a period of time, religion had hardened their human spirits and left the hidden places of their hearts untouched. Thus, intimacy with Jesus was lost, and by failing to make the adjustment the church lost her power.

Religion is the crowning work of Satan. He works to extinguish the intimacy of the Lord from our lives so that everything we produce comes out of works not born of love, but of duty. These are dead works. The spirit of religion always causes us to produce outside of the new nature, which is love. This results in a form without the power. Falling in love with Jesus and staying in love with Jesus is your sure foundation for protection against the deception of having a form without the power.

The apostle Paul's heart cry to know Jesus (Phil. 3:10) was like the loaded gun he carried in life and ministry. He called it a prize to be won. Here is a man who had experienced visions and revelations, some not to be uttered. He had come to a place of great power in ministry where handkerchiefs were taken from his body and placed on the sick and demon-possessed, and the diseases and demons left them. Angels had visited him, mighty churches were raised up by him and nearly two-thirds of the New Testament was written by him. Yet Paul's chief aim was to obtain both the prize of knowing Christ, and having a privileged seat next to Jesus for all of eternity (Rev. 3:21). Do you want that seat?

Not all saints will sit on thrones in the holy city (Rev. 20:4). That beloved city is the bride of Christ, called the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2). It is the wise virgins, the first-love lovers, who will receive that privilege. No wonder Paul was so passionately consumed with being a first-love lover of Jesus. Within the realms of that love is an eternal glory, position and ranking that shall never be taken away.

First-love lovers are those who have stayed close to the heart of Jesus, thereby keeping their vessels full of oil and their lamps burning bright (Matt. 25:1-13). Their first love produced first works that translate into gold, silver and precious stones, which are in turn used as building materials for our eternal home. The New Jerusalem is an ongoing construction project being built from the works of those who live surrendered and consecrated lives to Jesus. That is the reason for the call to the church of Ephesus to repent and return to her first love so that she might do her first works (Rev. 2:5). Are these words burning in your heart yet?

There will be sorrow and regret among many saints for the wood, hay and stubble that will be burned up at the Day of judgment. Their works, when tested by fire, will be found wanting. What would Jesus find today in many of our prominent churches and ministries across the globe if all our works were exposed? With fear and trembling we must serve the Lord. Jesus is at the door.

The mountaintop Christian life is one of first love. Anything short of that is a fallen state (Rev. 2:5). From that heightened place of first love flow all first works. This is a great position of power. It is a place of sometimes almost silly but such pure delight. This is such a lovely place to be, a place of continually beholding the face of Jesus, of seeing His glory with the eyes of your understanding and of blessed rest where nothing unnerves you.

You cannot buy this place with money. You can pursue it

without any earthly craft or ability. It is not a place exclusive to any one above another. It is purchased with your heart only. It is purchased with a spiritual hunger for living bread, and thirst like a deer that pants for the water. It is a place available to the lowest-status human being on the earth as well as the rich, who will encounter difficulty in pursuit of this prize. Can you count the cost as Paul did, count all things dung for this holy knowledge and cast aside all other pursuits? How much is it worth to follow the Lamb wherever He goes throughout eternity (Rev. 14:4)? Do you want that seat (Matt. 20:21)? Will you enter into that holy city (Rev. 21:2)?

Behold, the bridegroom cometh! Are you His bride in patient waiting? Do you long for His face? Do you wake up each day with Him on your mind? Is He your first love? If not, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works. If true repentance works its course, in the end the glory revealed shall be so much greater than any of your present sufferings.

All the love of our glorious bridegroom is backing the pen of this ready writer. May He bless these words to your ears, and multiply His grace in your life to love Him. {eoa}