

Is Organized Religion Drowning Your First Love?

The Holy Spirit is like a fire that burns the present hour speaking of His Word into our hearts.

Rev 2:1-5 is such a word. Verse 4 reads, "But I have something against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first."

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, this church would be thought of as a strong and even dynamic church. They had doctrinal and moral purity, labored without growing weary, the people were active in the affairs of the church, had exercised patience and perseverance etc., 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, occupy large buildings and have 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).

There are many things that will rob, steal and plunder our love and affection for the Lord Jesus. It is not just obvious sin and acts of carnality and disobedience which spoil us of the nearness of His presence, but it is the good and acceptable things, which while having their proper place in the Christian life, have a tendency to make one devoid of the real mind of Christ.

Such things as meetings, communions, baptisms, buildings, programs, doctrines, finances or other things that concern the church system, apart from the mind of Christ, will dry up the real heart of the Christian life. Often, it's these very things which rob us of the hallowing intimacy which we are to experience with God's throne of grace and seat of mercy.

Here is the question you must ask yourself in evaluating your love and devotion to God: What are you doing on the inside of you? Where or toward what are you directing your will and desire? That is what marks your life in relation to God.

"Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts" (John 5:21, TLB).

We are admonished in Scripture to guard our hearts (Prov. 4:23), to seek God with our whole heart (Ps. 119:2), to sanctify the Lord in our hearts (1 Pet. 3:15), to return to our first love (Rev 2:4-5) and to beware of being cheated in our relationship to Christ (Col. 2:8). There are a lot of things we can do in this life to gain success, wealth, prestige, a name and reputation, a church and a ministry, but there's nothing more fulfilling to the human heart than having an intimate, personal and growing relationship with the Lord Jesus.

All of us, no matter what our service to the Lord may be, must continually watch over our hearts' affections for Jesus. I read recently about a very well-known minister who has been all over the world and has personally prayed with over 2

million people to receive Jesus. His ministry is marked by great signs and wonders. He has seen the dead raised, the lame walk, the deaf hear and the blind see. Early in his life with the Lord, he had such a sweet relationship with Him that God's abiding presence was upon him day and night for a number of years.

But recently, in tears, he said that in the last few years he had gotten so busy with ministry that he had left that first love he once had for Jesus. Somewhere along the way, he had lost that passion for Him. He was still fervent about winning souls. He was still committed to the call of God on his life, yet he had been drawn away from Jesus Himself.

He hadn't realized it until a short time ago when he went to conduct some meetings in another country. There he found the Christians aglow with that abiding presence of God. Their faces shone with joy and love for the Lord. When they worshipped the Lord, this minister just wept and wept because he recognized in these people the very thing he once had but lost.

You say, "How can this happen to us?" I don't have all the answers, but I know one thing—the heart is a very vulnerable place. It needs to be guarded constantly. And the older you grow and the higher you go in your call, the more this is so. Keeping your heart is the biggest job you'll ever have in life (Prov. 4:23) – See *Purity of Heart*.

I know two things about everyone's life and future. If Jesus tarries, both of them will surely come to pass: One day you will die. And one day you will stand before God and give account of your life. You will only be known by your supreme love for Jesus.

Nothing else will matter then. Nothing else should matter now.
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