

Chapter 8

A Proper Love For The Lord

“... thou hast left thy first love.”

– Revelation 2:4

We began this series by saying that there must be a maintaining of a proper perspective, a proper focus, a proper objective, of doing everything for the honor and glory of God. There must be a God added membership and a God called pastorate. As long as these first things are in place then there won't be any problem, with a God added membership, a God called pastorate. There must be a maintaining of distinction. The Lord has made his churches different, with distinction, never becoming the world. We must also maintain consistency, being steadfast and unwavering in the things of the Lord.

A proper love for the Lord is the motivation, the stimulus to do these things. If we're going to be the church that people need there must be a maintaining a first love. That brings us to Revelation 2:1-4. This is part of Christ's letter to the church at Ephesus. The church at Ephesus had been in existence for about 40 years when they received this letter from the Lord. In verse 1, it says, "*Unto the angel*", or the messenger or the pastor, "*of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; 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.*" Then the whole tone of the letter changes in verse 4. "*Nevertheless*". When someone begins to commend you as Christ has done in verses 2 and 3, and then all of a sudden they say, "But", or "Nevertheless", brace yourself, the whole tone has now changed. "*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*"

The letter begins with a commendation there in verses 2 as 3. He spoke of their labor, their endurance. That's what He means by the word "*patience*" in verse 2. He spoke of their intense adherence to the truth, that is, "*thou canst not bear them which are evil*". He spoke of their ability to

discern between truth and error, between right and wrong. He says, *“thou hast tried them which say they are apostles”*. People can say anything and a church has the right to try them. They have a right to prove them. The Lord is commending them for doing that, and *“hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars”*, that is, through this process of trial, *“thou hast found them to be liars.”* He spoke of their loyalty in verse 3. In verse 6, He spoke of their hatred for error, *“But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”*

So, after approximately 40 years since their beginning, they're still walking in the truth, the gospel is still being preached from their pulpit, they are still putting a difference between truth and error, between right and wrong. They are still striving for the cause of Christ, laboring steadily in the work of the Lord. But, they were in danger because of a deficiency. Something had happened. He said in verse 4, *“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”* The Lord is telling them that even though all these other things are in place, something is wrong. Something is missing. There is a glaring deficiency and this placed them in great danger. Despite all the outward appearances, when the Lord says, *“Nevertheless”*, He says, *“Despite all the outward appearances, that does not change this deficiency. That does not change what I have against you.”* He is saying, *“These things that I have mentioned can not make up for this one deficiency, this one thing that I have against you.”*

This one thing was so serious that it endangered their very existence. Verse 5, says, *“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.”* Outwardly, everything appeared fine, but something was wrong and endangered their very existence. If your existence as a church is in danger, then you, of course, are well on your

way to ceasing to be the church that people need. This church was in danger of ceasing to be that church.

I want you to notice in Revelation 2:4, that they had done something to cause the deficiency and danger. It wasn't something that just happened. Verse 4 says, "... *thou hast ...*". They did something. There was something wrong, something missing and it was due to something that they had done. There was a deficiency that caused a conflict between them and God. "*Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee.*" That's a conflict between this church and God due to something they had done. If there is ever a conflict between God and a church, between God and an individual, it's because of something we have done, not something God has done. They were in danger of ceasing to be a church, in danger of having the "candlestick" removed, and it was all due to something that they had done. They could not blame any other church, they could not blame any other individual. This was something that they had done, this was something that they allowed to happen.

Then he says, "*thou hast left*". To leave is to part, to move away. "Thou hast left", that is, thou hast parted from, thou hast moved away, thou hast turned away, thou hast abandoned. Christ states this as a fact. That's a charge, an indictment, against the church of Ephesus. They left something that was absolutely essential. "*Thou hast left thy first love.*" He does not say that they had ceased to love Him. He says, "*Thou hast left thy first love.*" He looks at these people whom He loves, and He simply tells them, "Though you have labored much, though you have endured much, and though you are still standing for the truth, and though there are still a distinction about you, you simply do not love me the same way that you used to." This was a deficiency, and it put them in great danger of ceasing to be.

First love, I believe, speaks of a kind of love. It's not that they had ceased to love Christ. Though this first love is to grow and intensify, there are certain characteristics about first love that we can not afford to lose. This first love, of

course, is the love that we had for Him when we first came to know Him. That love the church of Ephesus should have increased by this time.

I want to consider the characteristics of that first love. It was fervent. *"Thou hast left thy first love"*, meaning their love was no longer fervent. They still had a love, but it wasn't fervent. It wasn't intense. Did they love the truth? Yes. They stood for the truth. But, you know, a danger is that we can love the truth more than we love the Lord. That puts us in great danger. That puts us in tremendous danger. That first love is a love that flames forth, it boils over, it is a fervent love. It's a feeling, an emotion that is beyond description. They had lost that. They had left that. They no longer had that feeling. They no longer had that emotion that was beyond description.

With first love, you do everything without reservation. No questions asked. But, they had left their first love. There were now reservations. That first love is inhibited. This love they had was inhibited. That first love, of course, is personal. It's very very real. But, they had left that. It was a love that filled them with excitement. It was a love that filled them with enthusiasm. When people fall in love, there's an excitement, there's an enthusiasm. You look at a married couple, and many times though they still love one another, the excitement is gone, the enthusiasm is gone, that first love is gone. That's what happened to this church. It wasn't the same. This endangered them, just like in your marriage. If first love is not there, whether you know it or not, your marriage is in danger. If first love isn't in a church, the church is in danger. We must have this characteristic of this first love if we are going to continue to be the church that people need.

This first love has a strong drawing effect upon our hearts. It moves our hearts, it thrills our soul, it controls us. You look at someone who just falls in love and they're the absolute control of that feeling and that emotion of love. The church at Ephesus lost that. They left that.

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This first love makes us ready to do anything. It fills us with a passion. It becomes the yearning of our life. It is a love that causes us to choose the one we love over everything else. When two people first fall in love, one of the mistakes they often make is they forsake their friends. Why? Because they're too wrapped up in one another. But, that's first love. First love is willing to choose the one who is loved over everything else.

First love becomes a pursuit of your life. You're willing to move anywhere, go anywhere, do anything for first love. First love makes the one who is loved a priority. It makes that one who is loved the very purpose and the very object of your life. I believe when the Lord says, "you have left your first love", He is saying these characteristics are no longer there.

When you have a first love, there's nothing more important than that one that you love. You have eyes for no one else but that one you love. When we talk about our first love for the Lord, that simply means that nothing else is more important than the Lord. We have eyes for no one else but the Lord. It was a love that made us sensitive to Him. You know what it means if we become insensitive to the Lord's leading, and the Lord's word, and the Lord's message? It means that we've left our first love. First love made us sensitive to whatever God said, to however God led. First love will also cause you to grieve over sin. First love will vex your soul. That is, it will cause unrighteousness to vex your soul.

It was first love that made God's word so special, made His day such a delight, made the house of God so special. If these things are not special, it's because you've left your first love. Just like the church of Ephesus, you can go through the motions, but the love, the excitement, the enthusiasm, the passion, the fervency, all of those things are gone.

It was that first love that made the preaching of God's word so interesting to us. I've watched through the years, the

Lord saves someone and they're excited to hear the preaching of God's word. They can't wait. They'll sit on the end of the pew, they'll sit up toward the front. Give them some time, they'll move back, move a little further back. Now they're not sitting on the edge of the pew trying to catch every word, they're leaning back half asleep. That first love is dying. It's first love that made worship so special. It was first love that caused us to always want to dig deeper, to always want to walk a little further for the Lord, to climb a little higher, and to draw a little closer to the Lord. It was that first love that caused us to want to live for Him. We were attracted to Him. That's first love. You can hold to the truth and not be attracted to Christ. You can be more attracted to truth than you are to Jesus Christ. That, of course, places a church in great danger. It is first love that caused us to long for the Lord, that caused us to respect Him, that caused us to see His dignity.

It was first love that caused us to stay focused upon Him. A couple first falls in love, they lose focus on a lot of things. Their focus is on each other. That's how it is with the Lord. The reason we become so focused on other things is because we cease to be focused upon the Lord. It is a leaving of first love. It was first love that caused us to want to spend time with the Lord, to want to talk to Him, to want to listen to Him. It was that first love that could not stand the thought of being away from Him, of living without Him. It was that first love that caused us to realize that we couldn't be too holy, too consecrated, that we could not love Him enough, go far enough for Him, or do enough for Him.

This church continued to do the same things, but it wasn't the same. It wasn't the same as it once was. We have heard many say, through the years, "It's just not the same as it once was." You're right. You know why? Because people have left their first love. They have many other lovers. They continued to go through the motions, but the emotions of love, the feelings of love were gone. The Lord said, "You need to repent of this and if you don't, I'm going to remove

the candlestick.” If we're going to continue to be the church that people need, we need to guard this love for the Lord.

As a pastor, it's very easy, but also great danger, to study just for the sake of preparing a message, just for the sake of teaching a lesson. It's very easy to lose sight of who it's all about, the Lord. That is, it's very easy to leave first love.

How do we keep that love alive? First of all, we need to be aware of the thieves. The thieves of communication. You listen to most wives and their number one complaint is a lack of communication. While men and women have different ideas of communication, communication has to be kept alive. There are the thieves of communication with the Lord. There are the thieves of time with the Lord. If you do not communicate and you do not spend time with your spouse, first love dies, it disappears. I'm not saying that you don't love, but the first love, the characteristics die. That's also true with our relationship with the Lord.

Most marriages would have never taken place if people were as careless about their time together before marriage as they are after marriage. A marriage wouldn't have lasted, they wouldn't have lasted. The marriage wouldn't have taken place. This is the failure of us individually, this is also a failure of a church. We fail to spend time with the Lord. Oh we study the truth, we stand for the truth, there is a distinction, we are different, but how much communication and how much time is spent with the Lord? If there is a breakdown in communications, if there is a breakdown in time spent with the Lord, we are in danger. We are in danger of ceasing to be.

The failure to keep this first love is due to neglect. All you have to do is neglect it and it will die. It is also due to other interests. First love is only interested in one thing, the object of that love. First love in the Lord was only interested in one thing, the Lord. But other interests come in and that robs communication and time. Then there begins to be a decrease of appreciation. Listen to most wives, and

what do they say? “He doesn't appreciate me.” There is a decrease of appreciation, when first love begins to die.

This first love needs guarding because the more we love Him, the easier it is to commit to the Lord. Commitment is not a problem when there is love. Commitment is only a problem when there's selfishness. Commitment to the Lord is not a problem when we love the Lord. The more we love Him, the more surrendered we will be to Him. The problem is not a lack of surrender, the real problem is a lack of love for the Lord. If you love the Lord, you will surrender to Him. It all comes back to this failure to keep ourselves in the love of God.

The more we love Him the more willing we are to follow, obey, and put Him first. Where there is love, there is no problem putting Him first. We have to keep this love because the more we love Him the nearer I want to be with Him. If someone that loves you tells you they love you, but they do not want to spend any time with you, you have every reason to be suspicious of what they said. When a person says, “I love the Lord.”, but they don't want to spend any time with the Lord, what does that mean? They don't love the Lord. The more you love the Lord, the nearer you want to be to Him. In order for you and in order for us to be the church that people need, we need to be a people that is close to God. We need to be a people that is near to God. That's what the world needs. It needs a people that are close to God, a people that are in communications with God, a people that spends time with God. Then we'll be the church that people need.

That requires a love for the Lord. The more that we love Him, the more that we'll love His word, His day, His law, His people, and Him. The more that we love Him, the more that we'll love the lost world, and have a compassion for them, and have a desire to see them come to His saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. People need us to be in love with the Lord. The world does not need Home Baptist Church to be in love with the world. The world needs us to be in love

with the Lord. That's what they need. This must be kept in place if we're going to continue to be the church that people need. The more we love the Lord, the more we want to be in the center of His will. We can not be the church that people need if we are not in the center of God's will if we're not doing what God says. The more that we love Him, the more we want to be in the center of God's will. It's not love that rebels against the will of God. It's not love that kicks against the instruction of God. Love freely surrenders to these things.

The more we love the Lord, the more we desire to be linked with Him. The more we desire to be linked with Him the less we are linked with the world. The more we love the Lord, the more we desire to be bound with Him, and intertwined, and weaved with Him. The world today does not need Home Baptist Church to be linked with the world. The world today needs Home Baptist Church to be linked with the Lord. That's why this love must continue if we're going to continue to be the church that people need.

The more that we love the Lord, the more we want Him to have everything. The more willing we are to give up our stature, our rank, our importance, our honors, our self reliance, our plans, and our ways. The world does not need for you and I to be a people who refuses to let go of our own ways. The world needs us to be a people who are willing to surrender to God's ways. That takes love for the Lord. The more we love the Lord the more willing we are to stoop and forget about self and to think nothing of it.

The more we love the Lord, the more we simply wish that we just had more to give. We simply wish we had more time to give, we had more of ourselves to give to the Lord. It's not love that holds back from the Lord. First love does not do that.

The more that we love the Lord the more He becomes a priority to us. People struggle with priorities. The reason they struggle with priorities goes back to love. It all goes back to love. *"Thou hast left thy first love."* The more we

love the Lord, the more meaningful our lives become. The more we love the Lord, the more He controls and dominates what we do, the more He is in the center of our interests, and the more we seek Him. The world doesn't need us to be seeking the things of the world. The world needs us to be seeking the things of the Lord. This goes back to first love. If He is first love, then He becomes our law, He becomes our pattern. Oh we desperately need to stay in love with the Lord.

You go into a restaurant, and look around at the couples that are sitting at tables, and you can almost tell by watching them how long they have been married. That's true. If they just met, they're talking non stop. If they've been married for some time, they're not saying a word. That happens. It happens with the Lord also, it happens on that spiritual realm. We're not saying that you fall out of love with a person or that you don't love the Lord. But, there are certain characteristics about first love and that's what keeps it going.

The more that we love the Lord, the more enabled we are to endure. You can endure just about anything for love. If you love somebody you can endure. The other night I walked through Jo Ann Fabrics. Now you want to talk about endurance. That's love. But, you know I thought about that, when we were dating, it didn't bother me to walk through Jo Ann Fabrics. Now I say, you go there, I'm going over here. First love. We must not let it escape, we must not leave first love.

The more we love the Lord, the better outlook and attitude we have on life, also. A lot of the Lord's people have a terrible outlook and a terrible attitude. It all goes back to a lack of this first love. The more that we love the Lord is what makes service a joy. This church of Ephesus, they continued to serve the Lord, but they weren't happy, they weren't enthused, they weren't excited. What brings the happiness of serving and laboring is you do it out of love.

When you serve the Lord out of love, His commandments are not grievous. It concerns me when people are always talking about how hard it is to serve the Lord, how difficult it is. If you love the Lord, His commandments are not grievous. Where there's love, the difficulty disappears. You're willing to get through the difficulty. If we're going to continue to be the church that people need, we must love the Lord.

We must love the Lord. We must have this first love, these characteristics of first love. Then truth takes on an entirely different meaning. As I get older, I can truthfully say, this world means less and less and less all the time. For the most part, (there are always exceptions), the world is everything. As you get older and you've experienced some things, you've learned some things, and you start to learn what's important. You can even talk to lost people, and when they're dying, they have a whole different perspective on what matters. I've never stood by the bedside of one who is dying and they were worried about what they were missing on television. It's never happened and I don't expect it ever to happen. You know what? It doesn't matter what is on television. It doesn't even matter what their favorite sports team is doing. It doesn't matter any more. Priorities begin to get in order. You know what becomes very important on death beds? Family. It becomes very important. "Oh I wish ... ", I've never heard anybody say, "Oh I sure wish I'd have spent more time fishing. I sure wish I'd have spent more time playing ball." I have heard them say, "I wish I'd have spent more time with my kids, I wish I'd have spent more time with my wife", or, "my husband."

First love. Don't leave it. If you do, it will fill your life with regrets. As a church, it will give us many regrets if we leave this first love. We've got to fall in love with the Lord, and we've got to stay in love with the Lord.