

Your First Love

When the phrase ‘first love’ comes to mind, to many it would bring back memories of that certain someone they once knew, or still know, who caused within them such a feeling of desire that they were so taken over by them they seemed to focus all, if not most of, their entire being toward that particular person. But in time, if it was someone from their past, those feelings waned and eventually another ‘heartthrob’ came along to take their place. There was no longer room for anyone else, especially that certain person they once **thought** they could not live without. People can be so fickle when it comes to relationships. But should such be the case when it comes to a Christian’s faith and the zeal most have experienced when first transformed into the image of Christ (*2 Cor 3:18*)? Is the faith to be considered just another fad, that’s to be discarded as if it were the packaging of a Happy Meal? For many it seems to be. Speaking to the church at Ephesus, Jesus commented...

Rev 2:2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

- The church at Ephesus seemed to be doing everything right. They worked hard, endured patiently, did not put up with sinful behavior and understood how to test those who claimed to be apostles of Christ because over all they were ‘doctrinally’ pure. And they did all this without growing tired. They were known for having belonged to Christ. But...

Rev 2:4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first (*Gk.4413-foremost [in order of importance]: best*).

- They abandoned their ‘first, **best** love’. How was that possible? They seemed to be doing everything right! What was it that they were lacking?

1Co 13:2 And if I have **prophetic powers**, and **understand all mysteries** and **all knowledge**, and if I **have all faith**, so as to remove mountains, **but** have not love, I am nothing.

Rev 2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did **at first** (*Gk. 4413-foremost [in time]*). If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, **unless you repent**.

- What was it that they were doing when Paul first established them as a congregation of the Lord’s people that they didn’t continue to do? What was it that got the ball rolling from the very start that kept that ball from retaining the same level of motivation? There was **something** they were lacking that had Jesus proclaiming this admonition against them.

Joh 4:23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in **spirit** and **truth**, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him.

- The one (*truth*) is not effective without the other (*spirit*). No matter how doctrinally sound a congregation may be, she is barren with only truth and without spirit to back it, or vice versa.

Jas 2:26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from **works** is dead.

- Worshipping in truth, according to sound **Biblical** teaching, is commanded but so is worship according to spirit. Spirit here is not pertaining to **Holy Spirit**, although truth came through **Him**. Spirit here has to do with our mental disposition, where our minds are focused, whether on giving **God His** due or just going through the motions. And not just when assembled with the saints for worship on Sundays either. But what ‘works’ were the Ephesian brethren missing as they pertain to the faith?

1Th 1:2 We give thanks to **God** always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, **3** remembering before our **God** and **Father** your **work of faith** and **labor of love** and **steadfastness of hope** in our **Lord Jesus Christ**.

“The reference is probably to acts of duty, holiness, and benevolence, which proved that they exercised faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Works of faith are those to which faith prompts, and which show that there is faith in the heart.” Albert Barnes

“Their love of God and their fellowmen was displayed in untiring works in behalf of them. The brethren did not stop working because of the hope of heaven.”
Gary Hampton

- This does not, however, mean that one labor of love, our benevolence toward brethren or those outside, is to go unchecked.

1Ti 5:11 But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions **draw them away from Christ**, they desire to marry **12** and so incur **condemnation** for having abandoned their **former** (*Gk.4413- foremost [in order of importance]: best*) faith.

- When we might think we are doing good, we could actually be enabling a sinful lifestyle. These younger widows that **Paul** was speaking of might become attracted to a man who would steal them away from what they had felt was most important to them. It might then have caused them to stumble. We can, as the Ephesian church did, practice everything we do according to what we are commanded, but in error. As **Jesus** said...

Mat 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your **good works** and **give glory to your Father** Who is in Heaven.

- Do the things we do as a congregation bring glory to **God**? Everything we do in life is to glorify **God**. How we perform at work, how we treat others, how we show the desire to be together as **Christians** for whatever fellowship gathering possible, how we faithfully worship with the saints on the **Lord's** day, whatever we do in life is to be done, ultimately, to bring glory to the **Father**. We are the people who hold the truth that the world, not only needs to hear but, needs to see in us by our works. How can they hear it if they can't see it in our very lives. We are to know...

1Ti 3:15 ... how [we] ought to behave in the household of **God**, which is the church of the living **God**, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

- If the church loses her influence (*light*) she can no longer be a guide to the lost or have a place with **Christ** (*Rev 3:21*) and needs to repent. His "**coming**" in *Rev 2:5* would be a visitation of judgment on **Ephesus** unless she rekindled, out of love for lost souls, her earlier evangelistic zeal. There are things just as important as being 'doctrinally' sound.

Mat 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the **weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness**. These you **ought** to have done, **without** neglecting the others.

- We cannot just exist as the church of **Christ** in Mt. Holly Springs. The area around us needs to know we are here and that we care for, and are serious about, the souls of all those who are lost and who need to hear the good news that can save them.

Col 4:5 Walk in wisdom toward **outsiders**, making the **best** use of the time.

- Are we making the best use of our time when it comes to those outside the congregation? We cannot be known as just another church that's doctrinally sound, benevolent during the holidays or who takes care of her own. These can be good, but there's more to it than that. Notice what **Jesus** said of the church at Laodicea.

Rev 3:15 "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit (*Gk.1692- vomit*) you out of my mouth.

*"Beneath the city of Laodicea, at Colossae, one could find nice, cold drinking water. The hot springs from Hierapolis flow over the plateau and become lukewarm by the time they spill over a cliff next to Laodicea. Such water was not good for medicine or drink, thus it was useless. The church in Laodicea was, like the water outside of the city, useless. Jesus wished they were either refreshing or aided in healing. It should be noted that some have taken the position that Jesus would rather they were unconverted sinners (*cold*) than lukewarm Christians... God abhors those who take no stand and try to deceive others, while in fact only deceiving themselves.*

Verse 16. When one gets tepid water in his mouth, he is inclined to spit it out, or more literally vomit forth. This was the Lord's reaction to a useless church."

Gary Hampton

- The church at Laodicea made **Jesus** sick. They too lost their first love if they ever had it to begin with. As **Jesus** revealed to **John** concerning them...

Rev 3:19 **Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent** (*Gk.3340- reconsider*). (*They needed to reconsider the direction they were going because it would cause them to lose their strength in the faith when persecution would come their way. Our works, then, are meant to strengthen us in the faith.*)

- There are many things that we, as the light of this world, can do. But we first need to bolster our relationships within. We need to be reliant on each other for encouragement and strength in the faith before we can display such to those outside. Following is a list

of some things we can do to that end, to kindle a zeal that would cause us to be more involved in building up each other for the work in reaching out to those outside.

Rom 12:11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the **Lord**. **12** Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

1. Pray more often.

- Our prayer lives show the level of our faith that can be evidenced in our speech and actions toward each other, whether we want to believe that or not. But **God** already sees what others might not. And to aid our prayer lives we have a prayer list that's updated weekly. How often, in the privacy of our homes or elsewhere, do we consider those listed on it? Do we even understand why each person is listed there? Do we even care?

Php 4:5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The **Lord** is at hand; **6** do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to **God**.

Col 4:2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it **with thanksgiving**. **3** At the same time, pray also for us, that **God** may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of **Christ**, on account of which I am in prison-- **4** that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

- As **Paul** wrote to the **Colossians** asking them to pray that **God** would give him more opportunities to lead others to the gospel, so we should ask likewise, that we also would be given more opportunities. But notice how often he said they were to do so with gratitude. Percentage wise, how would we rate the difference between how much we ask for, and give thanks for, when it comes to prayer? We need to...

2. Be more thankful.

- We are so blessed. Do you realize that the poverty level in this nation would be considered middle to upper class in a third world country? We have everything we need and then some. Not that we should feel guilty for having such either. We just need to be more aware of how we've been so blessed.

1Ti 6:17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on **God**, **Who** richly provides us with everything to enjoy. **18** They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, **19** thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. Thus said, we need to...

3. Give more. (*time, money, etc.*)

- This is a subject (*of the Sunday evening class*) that gets a lot of preachers in trouble. "How can you say 'give more' when I'm giving all I can?" Think about this; when we buy a house it takes money, likewise with buying other things like cars, clothing, etc., but notice, as we pay those mortgage and car payments we possess a sense of ownership. Don't we? The same is true when we give of the means that **God** gave us in the first place. Not that we literally own or can run the congregation either. As **Jesus** said of the poor widow...

Mar 12:43 ..., "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. 44 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

- Those who contribute less, with respect to income percentage, have the same 'ownership' as those who contribute most toward the financial necessities of the church. And if our hearts are right, we'll be better able to understand the amount we are to give, whether financially or of our time. Our attitudes toward giving display whether we are positive or negative about the subject. And with that, along with anything in life, we need to...

4. Be more positive.

- It has been said, more often than should be, that misery loves company. Would we rather hang around someone who has something negative to say about almost everything or someone whose positive nature has a way of making the most depressing situation into a more acceptable one? People, in general, are drawn to others who are more upbeat, excited, happy and optimistic. Not to those who only want to talk about themselves or wish to portray others in a lesser light than themselves through gossip.

2Co 12:20 For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish--that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, **slander**, **gossip**, conceit, and disorder.

Col 4:6 Let your speech always be gracious (*which includes not talking negative about others*), seasoned with salt (*show some intelligence*), so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

"Coffman tells us the classical Greek writers used the word salt to describe wit used to flavor conversation."
Gary Hampton

- The way we converse shows our level of intelligence. Not that we all need to have Ph. Ds in conversation, but that at whatever level of **Bible** understanding, our words express our knowledge of the faith. Slander and gossip reveal a lack of **Biblical** knowledge which in turn reveals such an extreme lack of faith that **God** will punish those employed in it.

Php 2:14 Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of **God** without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, *Therefore, we need to...*

5. Love more.

- Each of us needs to ask ourselves, "Is there anyone, whether in the church or in the world outside, whom I wouldn't 'have preference for, wish well to or regard their welfare' or as being someone I wouldn't want what's best for, neither physically or spiritually speaking?" No? How can we prove that since that's what love requires?

Joh 13:35 **By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

1Pe 1:22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, **love one another earnestly from a pure heart**, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of **God**;

- How we are around each other shows the level of love we have for each other. And the world around us can read us like a book. But concerning the world, especially our own country, America....

Has America lost her first love?

Many will say that we are a diverse nation that honors all religions of all who've come here since the beginning as a place of refuge. They flee their home countries to be able to practice what they believe, with the blessing of this nation to protect them. Whether they are Muslim, Buddhist or other non-Christian religion. But is that really true? Or is it according to the re-writing of history by the revisionists who want to indoctrinate America into believing the founders of this nation were a bunch of rich, slave owning, bigoted deists who didn't put any stock in Christ or the Bible? And there are those who will make the charge that our laws are man-made and have nothing to do with Biblical input from either of the Testaments. But is that even true? Ultimately, if our laws protect the sinful practices of the populace and demean the righteous practices of the Godly among us, this nation is heading down a path where Almighty God will have no choice but to judge and, because of His righteous nature, have to punish. Otherwise, He will have to repent for having dealt His wrath on all those nations down throughout history that thumbed their noses at Him and went their own ways.

1Sa 15:29 ... the **Glory** of Israel will not lie or have regret, for **He** is not a man, that **He** should have regret."

Jer 10:23 I know, O **LORD**, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps. 24 Correct me, O **LORD**, but in justice; not in **Your** anger, lest **You** bring me to nothing.

- **God** used the nations surrounding Israel to punish and point them in the path they should have continued on and thus will punish any nation that's built its precepts on the moral laws found in **His** word but then later abandoned them. And this nation was established, and principled on, the laws **God** gave to **His** people throughout the **Bible**.

Rom 2:13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before **God**, but the doers of the law who will be justified. 14 For when **Gentiles**, who do not have the law (*of Moses*), by nature **do what the law requires**, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the **work of the law** is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and **their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them** 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, **God** judges the secrets of men by **Christ Jesus**.

- Laws can be either moral or immoral. And morality has to be based on some standard of ethics.

Mat 22:37 And He said to him, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.** 38 **This is the great and first commandment.** 39 **And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.** 40 **On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.**"

- The founders based laws according to these two precepts; love the **God of the Bible** and our fellow man. That, along with what we term as being the ‘golden rule’.

Mat 7:12 "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

- And man has the propensity to be good but so often choses the immoral route because of his desire for temporal self-satisfaction.

Rom 8:3 For **God** has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending **His** own **Son** in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, **He** condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the **righteous requirement of the law** might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the **Spirit**.

Rom 8:7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to **God**, for it does not **submit to God's law**; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please **God**.

1Ti 1:8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, 11 in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed **God** with which I have been entrusted.

- The founders of **America** believed this to the point of making laws accordingly. And they often mentioned **Jesus** by name when making proclamations to set certain days aside for fasting, repentance and prayer to **God** to keep them from **Britain's** military interference. A **Deist** would not have done that since a **Deist** feels that the Creator became indifferent to the world after **He** created it, having nothing to do with its events that would shape it. We may think that **God** doesn't answer our prayers concerning this nation, but according to **His** righteous nature **He** "sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false" (2 *Thes 2:11*) and will allow **America**, as **He** did **Israel** by **her** choice, to lose her place as the **Christian** nation she was once established as. Remember **Sodom** and **Gomorrah**? After finally asking the **Lord** if there were only ten righteous persons left in the city, it was for their sake, **Abraham** begged the **Lord** to not destroy it. **He** answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it" (*Gen 18:33*). The only reason **God** has not visited **His** righteous judgement on this country is because of the prayers of the virtuous few that live here. But once **He** deems it necessary, **God** will ultimately judge **America** if she continues her downward spiral away from **Him**.

Psa 33:10 The **LORD** brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; **He** frustrates the plans of the peoples. 11 The counsel of the **LORD** stands forever, the plans of **His** heart to all generations. 12 Blessed is the nation whose **God** is the **LORD**, the people whom **He** has chosen as **His** heritage!

Pro 14: 34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

- And **God** help future generations who may never hear of **Him** as many of us did, often from our public school teachers and from the songs we sang in music class. Teachers then practiced morals which they received from a **Biblical** understanding. And they were

not ashamed of it. As a matter of fact, immorality was something to be ashamed of and it was promoted as such. Not so today. What was once considered immoral is now to be considered a badge of honor, worn by those this nation now protects.

Isa 1:4 Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the **LORD**, they have despised the **Holy One** of **Israel**, they are utterly estranged.

- Like a divorced harlot, **God** will cast off any nation that is of a corrupt understanding when it involves morality. It has come to the point where “they [do] not know how to blush” (*Jer 6:15*). And, along with such, there’s the idea that we should allow lawlessness when it comes to ‘illegal’ immigration. Why do we make legal what was once illegal if it means introducing the further decay of our sovereignty?

Isa 1:7 Your country lies desolate; your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence foreigners devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners.

- **God** allowed **Israel** to be overcome by foreigners as punishment for turning their backs on **Him**. Are we any different?

Isa 60:12 For the nation and kingdom that will not serve **You** shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste.

- **Jerusalem** was the city that represented the **Jewish** nation as a whole. **Jesus** lamented over it because the **Jews** did not recognize **Him** as their **Messiah** and thus would suffer being judged because of it.

Luk 19:41 And when He drew near and saw the city, He wept over it, 42 saying, "**Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you (thus they were judged), because you did not know the **time of your visitation** (Gk.1984- inspection).**"

- **God** laid waste, as judgment, the city of **Jerusalem** in **70 AD** because the **Jews** failed to recognize, through stubbornness, the time prophesied concerning **Christ's** arrival. Are we any different? Will **God** not judge **America**, or us as individuals, for having given up **our** first love, our love for **Jesus** and the message of the gospel? Have we, as citizens of **Heaven** on **Earth**, given up our love for **God** and our neighbor and the zeal for evangelizing the lost? Are you lost? Do you know for sure where you're going once your soul leaves your body? You can be sure and we are here to help you to that end. You can come forward now or see me afterward if you need to have the assurance of **Heaven** as your eternal home. If you need to, please come as we sing the song of encouragement.

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