

Articles and Sermons :: Have You Left the Love You Had at First? ... An Excellent Read

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Have You Left the Love You Had at First? by Tony Miano, at <http://www.onthebox.us/2012/02/have-you-left-love-you-had-at-first.html>

The following is the text for the sermon I will preach tomorrow at Calvary Chapel Downey. The occasion is the church's monthly men's breakfast. Lord willing, I will post the audio for the sermon later in the day, tomorrow.

Scripture Reading:

Revelation 2:1-7

Introduction:

This morning I have a very important question for each of you—a question that also serves as the title of this morning's message. Have you left the love you had at first?

To help all of us answer that question we will first determine to what "first love" Jesus is referring. The answer is what (or who) you might think, and it is also what you might not think. Once we've identified our "first love," we will look at Jesus' commands in our passage—commands we must obey if we are ever to recapture that all-important "first love." We will focus our attention this morning on Revelation 2:2-5.

But before we do, before we identify the "first love," or more literally "the love you had at first," and answer this morning's important question, let's spend a little time looking at the Church in Ephesus.

It's important to consider this. Picture any modern-day city in the world—a city known for its decadence and depravity—cities like San Francisco, New Orleans, or Rio de Janeiro, and you have the City of Ephesus two thousand years ago. In addition to all of the various lusts of the flesh, the people of Ephesus were steeped in the worship of false gods. Ephesus was a center for the most illicit forms of idolatry you can imagine.

Sadly, some of the false teaching associated with the idolatry of the day was beginning to make its way into the Church at Ephesus, through a few false teachers. Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus, in part, to restore order to the church. It was a difficult time for the young and timid Timothy, hence Paul's writing of the two letters we have in Scripture that are addressed to Timothy.

Commendations for the Church at Ephesus:

By the time of John's writing of Revelation, some thirty to forty years after the writing of Paul's letters to Timothy, the battle with false teachers, namely the Gnostics, still raged. Yet, in spite of the turmoil over teaching, Christ saw much that was good in the Church at Ephesus.

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. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. — Revelation 2:2-3

Jesus Christ, the omniscient God of the Universe, knew everything there was to know about the Church at Ephesus—just as He knows all there is to know about every local assembly within His Body, the Church. Yes, God is watching. He knew there was much to commend about the Church at Ephesus and, as the loving Lord that He is, He chose to let the Church at Ephesus know, via his letter to the church, that their good works had not gone unnoticed by Him.

Jesus commended the church for the manner in which it toiled. The Greek word, here, is "kopos," which literally means to engage in excessive labor of the type and intensity that produces grief and sorrow. The church did more than work hard in their ministry. They worked to the point of physical and emotional exhaustion.

Jesus commended the church for the way they patiently endured. The Church at Ephesus not only patiently endured the laborious task of ministry in a Christ-hating world, but they also endured the attack of the Enemy by way of false teaching outside the church, and the false teachers who, from inside and outside the church, tried to steer the church away from the truth of God's Word.

Jesus commended the church for their integrity, in that the church refused to abide evil people and evil behavior. The Church at Ephesus set themselves apart as a holy congregation, struggling to remain unstained by the world. The American Church seems to be struggling a great deal, right now, in this area.

Sadly, more and more otherwise solid teachers and shepherds are setting aside wisdom and discernment when it comes to contemporary false teachers and their unbiblical doctrines. They are literally embracing false teachers as brothers in an unbiblical attempt to establish unity with whom the Lord would have us separate, for the sake of the purity of the Church. In doing so, otherwise good pastors and teachers are allowing evil doctrines such as modalism to have an open door to the true Body of Christ. It is like they are turning a pack of elephants loose on a daycare center.

Jesus commended the Church at Ephesus much the same way the apostle Paul commended the Bereans. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. — Acts 17:10-11

According to Revelation 2:2, the Christians in Ephesus "tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false."

Sadly, there are those, today, who tout themselves as "apostles." They claim to have new revelation from God that supersedes and contradicts His Word. They claim to be miracle workers, yet every hospital remains full. The miracles seem to be reserved only for those who pay top dollar to attend an event at an arena or stadium; or the miracles are reserved for those who give most generously to their "ministries." They claim to be prophets who, it would appear, are not required to maintain the same level of accuracy as the God-ordained prophets of old.

Jesus commended the Ephesian believers for their testing of the false prophets. Jesus has not changed. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He will no less commend His church today for testing, exposing, and confronting the false prophets of our age. And I believe the flipside is also true. Our Lord is not pleased when we do not do more to protect His Church by testing, exposing, and confronting today's false prophets who are, in every sense of the word, blasphemers of our God.

Then, in verse three, we see that Jesus once again commends the Ephesians for their patient endurance and their toil (or grief-causing labor). Typically, in ancient Jewish writing, to repeat a word, phrase, or thought is to give that which is being repeated a great deal of emphasis. So, the Ephesians' patient endurance and toil must have been extraordinary, at the time.

But this time, Jesus adds to the commendation that the Ephesians toiled and patiently endured "for name's sake." I appreciate what John Gill, the great theologian of the 18th Century, wrote concerning this verse.

And for my name's sake hast laboured: which may refer either to enduring sufferings for Christ's name's sake, for his Gospel's sake, for righteousness sake, for the sake of the elect, and for the sake of the honour, glory, and interest of Christ; or to labouring in the ministry, not for filthy lucre sake, nor for party sake, but for the honour of Christ, and the good of souls; and there never was an interval in which this was more true.

I believe, based on my study of the passage, that Gill's second suggested interpretation is likely the more accurate of the two. And I'll explain why a little later. The Church at Ephesus was to be commended not only for the positive labors through which they endured much, but also that they entered into and maintained such labor for the honor, glory, and praise of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, unfortunately, as is the case with a growing segment of the Body of Christ in America, something was missing—something important—something essential to the life, growth, and effectiveness of the Church at Ephesus.

The Ephesians Abandoned the Love They Had at First:

Jesus said the following, as written by the apostle John, in Revelation 2:4:

But I have this against you, that you abandoned the love you had at first. — Revelation 2:4

There is little debate as to what the “first love” to which Jesus is referring represents.

The fact that Jesus commended the Church at Ephesus for several godly characteristics indicates that the level of abandonment mentioned in verse four was not tantamount to apostasy. The church had not abandoned Christ altogether. Nonetheless, the rebuke is a harsh one.

What Jesus is describing, what we’re seeing in verse four, is that the believers in Ephesus had a love for Christ and a love for their Christian brethren that had and was continuing to diminish over time. The love the Ephesian believers were abandoning, the love the Ephesians were leaving behind was a love for the One who saved them from their sins and the ones with whom they enjoyed the most intimate spiritual fellowship—Jesus Christ and His Church.

And nothing has changed during the last two thousand years.

Like the American Church of today, the Church at Ephesus excelled at ministering in the name of Jesus Christ, but they found themselves too busy and weary to spend any time with or to enjoy wonderful fellowship with Jesus Christ. The Ephesian Christians were doing the right things, but they were doing them in such a way as to reveal to Christ a cold, repetitious obedience instead of a joyful, loving obedience. They became and were continuing to become redeemed creatures of habit.

I know that has been true more than once in my life.

Like growing portions of the American Church of today, the Church at Ephesus loved Jesus and loved His Church, but, over time, that love had grown cold. The Church at Ephesus, over time, replaced vibrant orthopraxy (the application of the faith), which was built upon solid biblical orthodoxy (the doctrines of their faith), with lifeless orthopraxy and orthodoxy. In other words, the Church at Ephesus was going through the right motions in the name of Jesus; but they were doing so without the zeal, the fire, the passion, and the love they once had as newborn babes in the faith—as those with the wide-eyed exuberance and joy of the Lord that so often marks the newly regenerated lives of those who are in Christ.

Their love was not gone. Their love had grown cold. Has yours?

For those of you, here, who are genuine followers of Jesus Christ—born-again children of the Most High God—I want to ask you a few important questions.

Why are you here this morning? Are you here because of your love for Christ and your love for your Christian brothers? Are you here because of your love for the unbeliever you may have brought with you this morning? Or are you simply here because this is what you do one Saturday morning each month. Are you here already thinking about the other things you have planned for the day?

How is your time in the Word of God? Are you reading it every day? Are you reading it occasionally? Are you reading it at all? Ray Comfort taught me an important lesson when he said, “No Bible, no breakfast. No read, no feed.”

If you are reading the Bible, why and how are you reading it? Are you reading it as if it were a classroom assignment or homework? Are you reading it simply because you know you should? After all, that’s what Christians do, right? They read their Bibles. Or do you read your Bible as one who is deeply in love with the Author and can not wait to share with others, believer and unbeliever alike, what God has taught you in His Word?

Are you involved in ministry of any kind? Usher? Children’s Sunday school teacher? Bible study leader? Administration? Outreach? Youth Ministry? Maintenance? Parking lot attendant? Security? Prayer ministry? Pastoral ministry?

Why? Why are you involved in ministry, today? Do you love serving the Lord and His Church as much as you once did?

Is your service an expression of your love for the Lord?

Is your service an act of worship unto the Lord?

Or has your service to the Lord become more of a vocation than a ministry?

If you are in full-time ministry, do you refer to coming to the church or office as “going to work?”

If you serve on a voluntary basis, do you now serve to justify your hobbies and interests that have nothing to do with Christ? Do you see your hobbies and interests as something you deserve, since you have given your time, talents, and resources to the church?

Speaking of church: why will you come to church, tomorrow? Before you answer the question in your mind, take a moment of pause. Before you quickly say, “to worship the Lord,” stop and think.

Will you fill a seat tomorrow morning because you want to express your love to the Lord and worship Him in spirit and in truth? Or will you come because that’s what you’ve grown accustomed to doing on Sunday morning?

How far into the pastor’s sermon will your mind begin to drift toward how you anticipate spending your Sunday afternoon—a well-deserved nap? A little “Linsanity” via the NBA? Watching the final round of this week’s PGA Tournament? The “honey-do” list?

My brothers in Christ, have you left the love you had at first? Has your love for Christ and His church grown cold, even a little? Have you become like the believers in first century Ephesus? Do you serve Christ well, but love Him less?

Be honest with yourselves. Be honest with your brothers in Christ who should be here this morning not just for themselves, but to edify you and hold you accountable, in love.

Have you left the love you had at first?

Jesus’ Three-Fold Command:

Having commended the Ephesian Church for its ongoing and tenacious work for Christ, and having chastised the same church for possessing a now-diminished love for Christ and His Church, Jesus gives the Ephesian Christians a three-fold command to right the wrong—to return to the level of love and devotion they had when Christ first saved them.

Look again at Jesus’ words in Revelation 2:5.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

The three commands in this verse are “remember,” “repent,” and “do.”

Remember

Jesus’ first command is for the Ephesians, and for those today whose love for Christ has grown cold, is to “remember therefore from where you have fallen.” The verb in this command is in the present tense. In other words, Jesus is commanding the Ephesians to keep on remembering, or to never forget.

And what is it Jesus wants them to never forget? He never wants them to forget from where they had fallen.

The phrase “you have fallen” is in the perfect tense, which means the fall about which Jesus is referring began quite some time before the command was issued. This is an old problem.

Now, it’s important to keep in mind that the apostle Paul organized the Church at Ephesus during his third missionary journey. While no one knows with absolute certainty, most agree that Paul’s third missionary journey lasted about three years and took place during the early to mid-50’s A.D.

Paul was martyred in Rome sometime around 68 A.D.

The apostle John penned the “Book of Revelation” in or about 95-96 A.D. So, presuming these dates are accurate, a

and since Jesus said the Ephesian's love for Christ and His church began to wane long before Jesus gave the letters to the seven churches in Revelation; then it is not unreasonable to conclude that the Ephesians had maybe 10 years (give or take) of healthy, intimate fellowship with Christ and His Church before their love began to grow cold.

I find this so very interesting because this seems to have held true for the last 2,000 years. So often I hear Christians who have been believers for a decade or more wax nostalgic of their adventures and devotion as young Christians. And they do so as if they've outgrown the childlike love and zeal that marked their walk with Christ during those early years of faith.

Jesus commanded the believers in Ephesus, as means of recapturing their love for Christ and His Church, to remember and remember often who they were in Christ so many years ago. The apostle Paul encouraged his son in the faith, Timothy, to do the same thing. Turn to 1 Timothy 6:11-12.

But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Timothy was somewhat timid and discouraged. Paul wrote the letter, in part, to boost Timothy's morale and to correct his timidity. This first letter to Timothy was likely penned by Paul shortly after his release from his first imprisonment in Rome, which would put the time Timothy received the letter somewhere around 63 A.D.

By this time, the Church at Ephesus was already embroiled by conflicts with false teachers—inside and outside the church. These conflicts were of the type for which Jesus commended them in Revelation 2:4. And the timeframe of Paul's first letter to Timothy, coupled with the struggles the church was then facing, gives even more credibility that the falling Jesus references in Revelation 2:5 could have begun within ten years of the church's formation.

Paul encouraged Timothy, in 1 Timothy 6:12, to take hold, look back, remember, the day he was saved and his subsequent baptism in front of many witnesses.

It's important we keep in mind that baptism two thousand years ago was not practiced the way it is, today. There was no waiting period. There was no class to take. There was no waiting to send out invitations and to plan a church barbeque to coincide with the baptism. There was no waiting until the Smith's pool could be heated.

When you came to faith in Christ two thousand years ago you were, more often than not, baptized immediately as an outward and public profession of your repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. And two thousand years ago, as is the case in certain parts of the world, today (not America, mind you), it actually cost a person something to make a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. In the first century, making a public profession of faith in Christ could cost you your friends, your family, your home, your job, and often times your life.

Paul encouraged Timothy (and us as well), in times of timidity and discouragement, to look back to the zeal with which he not only turned to Christ, but also courageously and unashamedly testified to the free gift of salvation the Lord gave him. Paul encouraged Timothy to look back to the love he had for and the love he publicly expressed about his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul exhorted Timothy to remember these things.

And again, it was the start of the fall from their fervent love for Jesus and His Church that our Lord wanted the Ephesian believers to remember often. And if there is anyone here this morning whose love for Christ and His Church has been diminished over time, God likewise commands you to remember from whence you came.

Repent

Jesus' second command to the Ephesian Church was just one word—one very important word—repent.

The fact Jesus issued the command with just a word can be seen as Jesus issuing the command with a great deal of force and authority—tantamount to a police officer commanding a suspect to “freeze!”

The command to repent is in the aorist tense, which means it was a command to be obeyed once and for all times.

According to theologians Bratcher and Hatton, the word “repent” in Revelation 2:5 can be rendered “change your way

ays,“turn from your sins,” “turn your back on sinning,” “change your attitude,” and/or “turn back to God.”

Repentance is not merely a change of mind. It is a complete turning of one’s actions and mind, and moving in the opposite direction. Repentance is not a 90-degree turn, with an eye on two different directions—where you have been and where you hope to go. Repentance is not a 360-degree turn, moving in the opposite direction only to return to where you once were. No, repentance is a 180-degree turn. As Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:11, repentance is a fleeing from sin and, instead, pursuing Jesus Christ and Christ-like character.

Failing to love Jesus and His Church the way He and His Church ought to be loved is a sin. God commands His people to repent of sin, of missing the mark, of falling short of His glory, of violating His holy standard—His Law. He commands His people to repent of thinking, saying, doing that, which is inconsistent with His character and His Word. He commands His people to stop disobeying His commands. And what are the two greatest commands of God?

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”

Jesus answered, “The most important is this, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” — Mark 12:28-31

If your love for the Lord and His Church has waned, Jesus commands you to remember from whence you came, from where you have fallen, and to repent of the sin of letting that special, essential love for Christ and His Church grow cold.

Do

The third command Jesus gives in Revelation 2:5 is to “do.” The fact that Jesus follows the command to “repent” with the command to “do” or perform shows that repentance is more than a change of mind. Genuine repentance always brings forth works or fruit in keeping with repentance. The forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist, says as much. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of Vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” — Matthew 3:7-10

And James, the half-brother of our Lord who once denied Him only to later become a leader of the first church in Jerusalem, makes it clear to the believers dispersed throughout the known world that faith without works is dead.

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

Now, let’s be clear. The fruit we bring forth in keeping with repentance and the good works we do are not works that in any way lead to or earn salvation. The opposite is true.

Any good spiritual fruit and any works that bring honor and glory to Christ occur as a result of salvation. We can only do that which is pleasing to God because we are saved. For the Christian is saved by the grace of God alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. And the person, who is truly born-again, will bear good fruit and will do good works. The person who does not bear spiritual fruit and good works, or cares not if they do, should examine himself or herself to see if they are even in the faith (see 2 Corinthians 13:5).

And what is it that Jesus commands the Ephesians to do? He commands them to “do the works they did at first.”

The command to do what they did at first points back to the “first love” in verse four. But here’s where it gets really interesting. You see; the Ephesians’ loss of love was not only for the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. Their loss of love for Christ and His Church extended beyond Christ and His Church. Their loss of love extended to a specific kind of work and a specific group of people.

Let’s look back for a moment at verse two. Jesus commended the Ephesians for their labor within the church to maintain the purity of the church and her doctrine, for their patient endurance, for their refusal to bear with evil and those who perpetrated evil, for the way they tested false teachers and exposed them, for the way they bore the brunt of persecution because of the name of Christ, and for the way they tenaciously didn’t quit. They did not grow weary in doing what was good. These things the Ephesians had done from the beginning and continued doing.

But there is something missing from the list of positive efforts. Sadly, it is yet another reason why the American Church, by and large, resembles the Church at Ephesus, of two thousand years ago.

G.K. Beale, in his commentary on Revelation, put it well when he wrote:

Although they were ever on guard to maintain the purity of the apostolic teaching, the Ephesian Christians were not diligent in witnessing to the same faith in the outside world . . . The idea is that they no longer expressed their former zealous love for Jesus by witnessing to Him in the world.

The Ephesian Church, like so many segments of the American Church, stopped evangelizing. Their love for Christ and their love for His Church had grown cold, which was evidenced by the sad reality that they no longer had a fervent love for reaching the lost outside the church, with the gospel of Jesus Christ. They had made the slow downward slide of violating the two greatest commandments. Their diminished love for God and their love for people were evidenced by their lack of desire to tell other people about the love, forgiveness, grace, and mercy made available through the sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ—the God-Man.

Jesus gave no commendation to the Church at Ephesus for the winning of souls. He did not commend the church for its evangelistic efforts.

Maybe the following example will help drive the point home.

Earlier this week the odometer on my 2003 Toyota Corolla crossed the 200,000-mile mark. I'm the original owner. I've had the car, now, for almost ten years. The car runs well, but the paint is all scratched up. There's a big dent in the right side of the front bumper. The rubber steering wheel is starting to deteriorate. The carpets are stained. And sometimes I climb into the car wishing I had something newer. The only time I talk about my car is when I have to spend money on it to repair it, or when complaining about my long drive to the office.

Go back in time with me to the spring of 2003 when I bought my Toyota Corolla. It was a beautiful economy car—bright red, spotless interior, purred like a kitten, everything in the car was tight. Had Facebook and Twitter been popular in 2003, I would have tweeted photos of my new car. I would have told the world how thankful I was to God for providing me with new and reliable transportation.

But, even without Facebook and Twitter, I still managed to boast about my new car. Friends, family, co-workers—they all heard about my new car. Not only did I show them the car, but I also shared with them why I thought a Toyota Corolla would be a good car for them.

Whereas I once talked often and with joy about my car, today I rarely if ever talk about my car, just hoping it gets me to and from the office, without costing me too much money.

Think about it, my friends. Think back to your very first car—whether a jalopy or brand-new. Did anyone have to pull your teeth to get you to talk about your car? Or, if you're married, how about the day you proposed to your future spouse? Did anyone have to pull your teeth to get you to talk about the wedding to come? Or how about the birth of a child? Did anyone have to beg you to share pictures of the baby? Come on! Be honest with yourself and with Christ!

We do what we care about and we talk about that which we love. We cannot honestly say that we love Jesus and love reaching the lost with the gospel if we're not doing anything about it. And to say otherwise is to argue in favor of hypocrisy, not evangelism.

Is this you, today? Has your love for Christ, love for His Church, and love for the lost who, apart from repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, will spend eternity in Hell colder than it once was? When was the last time you shared the gospel with someone and pressed the issue to the point of losing a friend because you were more concerned for the soul of the friend than the personal benefits you derive from the friendship?

Your actual love for Jesus and your actual love for His Church is measured, in part, by the time, effort, and love you put into reaching the lost with Christ's love. If you truly love Jesus you will tell others about Him—not begrudgingly, not to put a notch on your spiritual belt, not to merely check a box on your list of spiritual things to do. No. You will tell others about Jesus because you love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You will tell others about Jesus because

you love people—not simply as much as you love yourself, but because you love people more than you love yourself.

The Ephesians were engaged in the faithful study and defense of the Word of God. They were willing to toil and persevere for the name and cause of Christ. There are many churches that could say the same thing, here, in the United States. Yet many of these same churches have left their first love. Many of these same churches are no longer doing that which they likely did during the early days of the life of the church. They now love Jesus and His Church less because they no longer speak outside the four walls of the church about Jesus.

And their love for His Church is likewise diminished because they no longer care as they once did for seeing the Body of Christ built up and sustained through the conversion of lost sinners into saved saints. The concern of too many churches, today, for filling the seats and the pews is not out of a love for Christ, His Church, and the lost. Rather the motivating factor for filling the seats and the pews is to keep the lights on and the salaries paid; or to keep up with the mega-church down the street.

Of course, this sad description does not apply to all churches in America. The remnant of the Lord's Church is alive and well in America. The Bride of Christ remains beautiful and continues to prepare for the Bridegroom's return. But whether her churches number in the tens of thousands or merely in the tens, too many churches have allowed their love for Christ and His Church grow cold because of their failure and lack of desire to build the Church by reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Too many churches, today, build with brick and mortar instead of with love for people and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Exhortation: Remember, Repent, and Do!

Beloved: as the Lord commanded the Church at Ephesus to remember, repent, and to do the works they did at first; so, too, do I command you—not by my own authority, but by the authority of the Word of God. If you have left your first love; if your love for Christ and His Church is not what it once was, then you must remember, repent, and do the works you did at the first.

As Paul exhorted Timothy, as Jesus commanded the Church in Ephesus, so do I exhort and challenge you—to look back to the early days of your walk with Christ. Can you remember? Can you remember the zeal you had for sharing your newfound faith in Christ with others? Can you remember the risks you were willing to take to share the gospel with the lost? Can you remember how little you cared about what others thought of you, because you were more concerned with where people will spend eternity?

If you cannot remember those days because it was so very long ago, then your love for Christ, His Church, and the lost might be much colder than you think.

If you cannot remember those days because they never happened, then with love in my heart I encourage you to examine yourself to see if you are even in the faith. You may not be saved. You may have never come to genuine repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Oh, you may have made a profession of faith, and you may now be a well-respected member in Club American Christianity, but you may be a false convert. You may still be lost and bound for Hell. Examine yourself.

For my Christian brethren gathered here: remember from where you have fallen! Get back to that place, for the love and glory of Christ! Get back to the place you once were—the place where nothing but the Lord calling you home could stop you from sharing the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ with those who need to hear it most. Get back to that place where your love for Christ and His Church found its greatest expression—evangelism.

As Paul exhorted Timothy to flee from sin, and as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ commanded the Ephesians to repent of their diminished love for Him; so, too, do I call you to repent—not by my authority, but by the authority of the Word of God.

Don't simply change your mind about reaching the lost with the gospel. Thinking about it and then doing nothing about it is not repentance. Repent of your diminished love for Jesus and His Church by re-engaging in the God-ordained, God-glorifying work of evangelism.

That's right. Do the works you did at first. Continue to study and defend the Word of God. Continue to labor hard for the glory of Christ. Continue to test every teacher and expose those who are false and blasphemers of Almighty God. Con

tinue to bear up under the wait of every trial for the sake of the Name that is above every name. For “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). And may every effort be fueled and motivated by a renewed love for Jesus Christ and His Church!

But doing these noble works, as essential and God-glorifying as they are, will be rendered incomplete if you are not actively engaged in reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Love Jesus, His Church, and the lost so much that the gates of Hell will not prevail against any of your efforts to herald the gospel!

A Warning:

We will close with this. In the second half of verse five, we read: “If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.”

Again, nowhere in this passage does Jesus talk about the Ephesians losing their salvation if they do not obey these commands. In fact, Jesus affirmed the genuineness and assurance of their faith in verse two by commending them. Had the Ephesian believers been apostate, false converts he never would have commended them for anything.

Remember, this passage is Revelation 2 is not about gaining or keeping salvation.

However, Jesus does make it very clear that there will be serious consequences if they do not repent. He would remove their lampstand. In other words, if the Church at Ephesus did not obey Jesus’ commands to remember, repent, and do the work they did at first, they would cease to be a light in the world, for the glory of Christ. He would remove the church from the churches that faithfully represent Christ in the world. They would continue on in dead orthodoxy until the church, as an organized body of believers, would fade out of existence. Sadly, that’s exactly what happened to the Church at Ephesus.

And just as sadly, this is happening to churches around America. They are fading from existence because they have allowed their love for Christ and His body to diminish, which resulted in a diminished love for the lost. As their love for Christ has grown cold, so has their love for His gospel. And as their love for the gospel has grown cold, so has their love for bringing His gospel to a lost and dying world. Many American churches, today, have either had their lampstand removed, or soon will.

My brethren, don’t let it happen here. May the lampstand of Christ be firmly rooted here, and may the light of Christ shine bright as His church, here, in this community fulfills the two greatest commandments, by fulfilling the Great Commission.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age.” — Matthew 28:18-20

My beloved brethren: remember, repent, and do the work.

Remember how hot your love for Christ and His Church burned during the early days of your faith in Christ. And remember with what love for Christ and zeal for His Church you shared the gospel with the lost.

Repent. Repent of a love grown cold. Repent of failing to love the lost—whether friend, neighbor, co-worker, family member, or stranger on the street. Repent of not glorifying Christ in your life by allowing your gospel light to be hidden under a basket. Repent of not loving the lost enough to be willing to lay down your very life so that others might be saved.

And do the work. Proclaim the gospel. As Jesus exhorted His apostles, so I exhort you.

So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in Hell. — Matthew 10:26-28

May the words of Christ in Revelation 2:2-5 continually sound in your heart and mind until you obey. And may they continue to sound in your heart and mind, once you have obeyed, serving as a constant reminder of what Christ commands of you. Remember! Repent! Do the work!

Re: Have You Left the Love You Had at First? ... An Excellent Read, on: 2012/2/19 11:47

Downloading Tony's message now.

<http://www.archive.org/details/HaveYouLeftTheLoveYouHadAtFirsthq>

Thank you, Alaina.