

## FIRST LOVE...LEFT

WILLIS 1/24/10

Rev2:1-7

In this focus on saying no to the quo and breaking the cycle of complacency, it had not been my intention to speak to any other of the 7 Churches of Revelation other than the Church of Laodicea as we did last week.

- However as I continued to read and ponder the issues addressed, Holy Spirit seemed to highlight the Church at Ephesus for their issue as well as this stronghold of complacency and the status quo.

**The word Ephesus means: to let go, relax. Through the power of naming Ephesus was positioned from its inception to become complacent.** They could have just let go of a soulish labor or relaxed a practice of dead works but instead they let go of their first love.

At first glance Ephesus really does quite well in their evaluation. Jesus affirms them for their hard work and perseverance. He makes mention of their willingness to stand against evil and put to the test those who make false claims.

- **Standing against compromise was a core value of the Ephesians Church.**
- Jesus goes on to affirm them again for their persevering work and their refusal to grow weary but then He makes His appeal. Whereas Laodicea received a rebuke, Ephesus gets an appeal. As a grieving lover Jesus bares His heart to say “what happened?”
- **Whereas Laodicea’s sin seemed to be one of intention; the sin of Ephesus was one of neglect.** So rather than rebuking the Ephesians Jesus appeals to them saying, **“You have left your first love” or “you don’t have as much love as you used to.”** (cev)

Remember this is the Church that loved the Lord so much that in Acts 19 they burnt their books on magic. In Acts 20 Ephesus was the Church who wept aloud when the Apostle Paul was about to leave. Paul says in Ep1 that this Church was known for its faith and its love.

- In Ep3 Paul prays for this Church to know the breadth, the length, the height and the depth of the Love of God.
- **Love for the Ephesians Church was not just a passing persuasion, love was an often acted upon revelation that grew cold because of apparent neglect.**

So in His appeal to Ephesus Jesus seems to open the humanity of His heart as if to say as one Commentator put it, “though fully God I did not leave my humanity in the tomb. I still desire and long for your first love.”

**Though He affirms Ephesus for their toil, He longs for their love. Though their work blessed Him, only their love could satisfy Him.** As being fully God He doesn't need our love, but being fully man, He still desires our love.

- These are not the words of an impersonal judge saying "I have this against you..." These are the words of a wounded romance saying "return to the love we knew at first."
- Jesus opens His heart to mourn over the loss of shared affection and utters the cry of unrequited love. **If He was just fully God it would be enough for Him to love, but that He is fully man as well, He desires to be loved.**
- Apparently it was first love He once had at Ephesus so as a wounded lover He comes in appeal saying, "Where did you go, what happened to the love we knew at first, what happened to the passion, who extinguished the fire?"
- Could it be in all their work of perseverance the cycle of complacency set in? Or was it sometime in the transfer to the next generation that the sons and daughters focused so much on demonstration they forgot first love? Working hard; loving little.

**In His appeal to the Ephesians', we see in Christ's eyes there is no substitute for love. In His appeal we see lost love overshadows fruitful service.** Isn't it amazing to think Jesus wasn't lamenting over the loss of morality or productivity, He was lamenting over the loss of first love.

- Please note it wasn't the loss of all love that Jesus addressed, it was the loss of first love. The love Jesus was reaching for was first love, fresh love, burning love...Ephesus didn't quit loving Jesus, they quit loving Him first. They quit loving with "first love."
- **First: gr. Protos; first in time, place and importance. Before all else, best, chief, first in rank.** Protos is not a figurative first but an actual first. Protos is first in quality and first in quantity. Protos is first in attention, value and focus.
- This is why giving Jesus the first fruits of our day is of specific significance. **In rising early to spend time with Jesus, Jesus gets our first love.** In rising early Jesus gets first place, first focus, first attention...first words, first devotion, first emotion.
- In rising early we take the opportunity to love Him before we love all else. In rising early we have opportunity to give Him "no ordinary love." **In rising early we give first love not left over love or obligatory love. It is pure love, holy fire, righteous desire.**

It's not like Jesus is love deprived or in desperate need like a spurned lover. This is He who has dwelt eternally in the perfect love of Father. This is He to whom angels express their love and devotion 24/7.

- Why grieve over the lost love of man? Because He decided to. **God's love, Agape love is not a conditional love based on need. The love of Christ in an unconditional love based on decision.** Jesus doesn't grieve because of need, He grieves because of desire.

- In grace Jesus decided to love man unconditionally. So in the loss of receiving that love first and man giving that love back, Jesus grieves.

All throughout Scripture we see God making this decision to reach out and appeal to lost love of man. Look at Jer2:2 “Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem saying, thus says the Lord, I remember the devotion of your youth (first love) how as a bride you loved Me...but evil came upon you”

- Jesus speaks of this loss love through Paul to the Corinthians saying, **“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, for I betrothed you to one husband that I might present you to Christ as a pure virgin. But I am afraid lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”(2Cor11:2-3)**

So serious was this loss of love that Jesus warns Ephesus of divine excommunication. His warning was not the loss of heaven but the loss of presence, the loss of the Lampstand that defined their existence as a Church.

- **His warning was “return to your first love or I will remove your Lampstand.” The Lampstand represented their light, their fire, their Presence.** The fire, the light and the Presence is thee thing that defines us as the Church, to lose that is to lose it all.
- The lampstands of the day of course were not electric, they were fire. In this warning Jesus builds an inseparable link between love and fire. **Spiritual fire is the result of the intimate love of Christ; the intimate love of Christ is the source of all spiritual fire.**
- So to leave our first love is to lose our fire. To say no to the quo and burn with fire is to return to our first love. It is the return to focused love...passionate love. This not a common love or an unexpressed love, first love is love on fire, first love is love that burns
- Paul speaks of first love in Phil 1:9 **“This I pray that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.”** First love is love that never stops growing, first love is love that never stops expressing.
- You can’t quiet first love. You can’t keep first love dignified. First love is free and deeply expressive. First love is right out in front of God and everybody. First love is the love Jesus says we are to return to.

In v.5 Jesus gives us the answer when first love is lost. His direction is 3 fold. He says **Remember, Repent and Return.** Being that forgetfulness is the first step into lost love, remembrance is the first step out. **The love of divine desire is the first thing to remember.**

- The remembrance of His kindness and His love leads us to repentance. Repentance is the door that opens us to the restoration of first love. We turn away from cold love, unexpressed love, apathetic love...
- **Only through repentance do we return to the wonder and fulfillment of first love.**

