

November 16, 2009

Dear Brethren and Friends,

In His own “member letter,” Jesus challenged the brethren in Ephesus when He said that they had left their “first love” (Revelation 2:4).

His admonition was pointedly serious, for He continues by warning them to correct the situation they were in: “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; REPENT and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you REPENT” (Revelation 2:5).

The written words that Jesus Christ directed to the brethren in the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 have been recorded for every generation of those who have been called into the Church of God. All of us are to carefully consider each message and to see how it applies in our own circumstances.

What about our first love—do we still have that indomitable zeal for God’s Way, or have we lost it?

Is there within us a burning passion to study God’s Word—not content to just assemble and hear the messages presented to us on the Sabbaths and Holy Days, but stirred up to discover the hidden things of God that He reveals in the Bible, like the Bereans did (compare Acts 17:10-12)?

Is assembling with our brethren every time we possibly can still important, or have we found excuses to take the easy, less loving way out? Apparently, some of those in Ephesus grew weary of meeting together and lost their love in this dangerous way (compare Hebrews 10: 23-25).

If we focus on circumstantial issues that only please ourselves, we will begin to find excuses and blame others for why we can’t “be there.” In our recent Feast of Tabernacles services and assemblies in San Diego, some rightly focused on their willingness to be where God led His ministry in choosing this particular site. Their unwavering attitude was to go anywhere that was chosen in order to fulfill the command of God to keep the Feast. They fully believed that God inspired His ministry to decide on that particular Feast site and did not assume that the choice was motivated by and made because of arbitrary human “preferences.”

They—with a willing and submissive attitude—gained much from their attendance. In fact, we had one couple, who had attended many, many sites, say this was the most enjoyable Feast of Tabernacles they had ever experienced! Sadly, as this may always be the case, a very few manifested an attitude that did not reflect gratitude or appreciation for God’s involvement, and as a consequence, their Feast was not kept in the spirit of “first love”!

Consider what Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said about what was happening to the Ephesian brethren—and the application holds in our own time:

“For the time will come when they will not endure SOUND DOCTRINE, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the TRUTH, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

TRUTH and SOUND DOCTRINE are the issues of our time! The unfortunate tag of “church hoppers” now describes those who are not anchored in the very things they once had proven, and they have reverted to being lovers of themselves, “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (compare 2 Timothy 3:1-9).

Paul became a minister and then an apostle of Jesus Christ. God used him, more mightily than most of his peers, to build the Work of God (compare 1 Corinthians 15:10). By his hand, indisputable miracles took place—powerful signs from God and Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit! Yet, when the first love of that generation began to ebb, look at the consequences—as Paul sorrowfully relates:

“This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes” (2 Timothy 1:15); Paul continues, “... for Demas has forsaken me, having loved

this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia” (2 Timothy 4:10).

Contrast these statements to the earlier record of the Ephesian Church of God. In a specific meeting with some of those in Ephesus, Paul said a final farewell to those among whom he had ministered. Note the attitude when their “first love” was passionate:

“Then they wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship” (Acts 20:37-38).

Also, from Galatians 4, Paul remarks on the tremendous love and esteem that was given to him earlier as God’s minister:

“And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me” (verses 14-15).

Indeed, the love of many did suffer loss—so much so, that false ministers arose and also rejected the ordained ministry, including John, another one of Christ’s early apostles. Diotrephes is named as one who would not even allow John into the church he gained control over (compare 3 John 9).

We can, and we must, deeply consider what happened to so many of those in the early Church! You see, this, our time and generation of God’s Church, faces the SAME WARNING from Jesus Christ!

In answering what would be happening just before His return to the earth, Jesus said this: “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12).

Is that happening to you—even within the Church of God? Or do you, with a meditative spirit, examine yourself daily to keep God’s love alive within you?

Brethren, we have the matchless opportunity to know the TRUTH of God. We have been taught sound DOCTRINE. We must continue to build up these precious things through our commitment to be obedient, joyful and thankful servants of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ—to please God by showing our willingness to deeply and from the heart follow Him and REPENT when we are wrong!

God’s objective—and this most certainly involves the corrective things said to His Church in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation—is that we all attain eternal life in His Kingdom.

Finally, let’s also apply this heartfelt encouragement that is part of what is written to us from God:

“But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:9-12).

In Christ’s Service,



Dave Harris