

# First Love Again

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick  
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Today, a call to individual searching and heart renewal. Our Father sent a message to His church in Ephesus. It has help for us too. Open, please, to Revelation 2:4, 5:

I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 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 (Revelation 2:4, 5 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are to the English Standard Version).

With all the good that is happening at Ephesus, there is also a rot, a decay. Something has been abandoned.

### **Abandoning One's First Love**

I recall the first days that I walked with Jesus. Do you? Think all the way back. What was it like?

Do you remember praying, on your knees? I do. Tears flowing freely when you gave your heart to Jesus? Remember how they washed down along your nose and fell in great drops onto your bed sheets? Morning light was streaming through the window of my basement apartment. I remember.

And after? The world was brightly lit; every building seemed illumined. I sought hearts to share my joy. I belonged to Jesus, He belonged to me. (There was) spring in every step. Church was new, the hymns were new, my friends were new. My life was new. Each of us remembers something similar I suppose. But that first beginning does not—in every case—last as we would like.

For some, there was a change in the experience. Along the way, church became mundane. Issues cropped up. Unconsecrated voices began to intrude. Brothers and sisters you had thought

were seeking God chattered about disagreements between themselves and a deacon, an elder, the pastor. Someone made a remark about a suspect potluck dish. A child said something harsh to a friend's child in sabbath school. In a busy moment in the foyer the pastor misstated your name. The imperfections of people loomed like so many obese balloons. Eyes were taken off Jesus. It is always so incremental. Whatever the wedge turns out to be, Satan uses it, if we give room. First love is abandoned.

### **Remembering From Where Fallen**

To say that you have fallen is to admit that before, you had been standing in the strength of God. There is realization that early victories are now missing. You used to study your Bible and it brought you together with others. Now, perhaps you do not study so much. You read a devotional book or a list of quotes or Bible verses someone else has gleaned. You view fellow members of the congregation with critical eye. You have forgotten that God is not done with you and not with them. An experience that was soft and alive is becoming cold and hard.

You have forgotten that a sister or a brother may have the very same goals as you. The present becomes the past and out of that haze we come, pulling on our oars, proclaiming, "I follow Paul,' or 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Cephas,' or 'I follow Christ'" (1 Corinthians 1:12). The church which Jesus said the gates of hell would not prevail against (Matthew 16:18), is so busy being a divided people, that it forgets its mission, fails to consult its God-given directions, and spends its energies cluelessly.

## Doing the First Works

God wants us to examine ourselves, and see whether we are still in the faith we think we are (2 Corinthians 13:5). He counsels us to turn, and to do again the first works—the works of first love.

What are they? Revelation 2:2, 3:

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.

Ephesus was a working church. This was not an imaginary group; these were true believers living during a period of real persecution. Jesus says that He knows that they are demonstrating patient endurance. He marks them as a discerning church, able to tell the true apostle from the false.

Part of the first work of a church is in clarifying who the leaders are. What we want to do today, is to make personal application of some of the counsel that God gave to His church in Ephesus. So how would we apply this personally? We need to figure out who we are following.

The starting point is simple. Each of us is convinced that we are following God. Now, let me ask, how do you feel about your brothers and sisters in the church?

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness (1 John 2:9).

What is more important to us? Vindicating our own selves and showing that we are right? Or living out the message and being—actually being—like Jesus? We judge each other, don't we? And it is not all on one side. Sometimes those who see themselves as standing the most for love are themselves very quick to pigeonhole and to condemn. And sometimes those who have

been though to be very rigid turn out to be very gentle. It is not a matter of our inspecting books to see what is on the cover; it is a matter of subduing the false apostle who dwells inside of each one of us.

Inside of every person there is an alter-ego, a Jekyll-into-Hyde potential, and one with deadly possibility for our walk with Jesus. How is that? Very simply, Jesus is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18), He is the apostle and high priest of our faith (Hebrews 3:1). But inside of each of us, there waits a different apostle, a false one, a Barabbas, all dressed for church. Satan wants to inspire each of us to a usurpation of Jesus' role as the One sent from God to lead us, and he wants us to become our own apostle, our own leader. He wants me to disdain my brother, my sister, and in down-rating their experience with God, to up-rate my own, until I cannot hear my brother, my sister, and certainly see no insight in taking counsel from them or asking them to lead. Who is more qualified than such a deep and discerning Christian as I! See how it works?

If we are not careful, we will abandon our first love Jesus and backslide to our old flame—ourselves. Because, before we loved Jesus, and made Him first—you know it's true—we loved ourselves and made ourselves first. We are used to leading ourselves; we need to become used to being guided by Jesus. God has placed us in church capacity with each other in order that we might grow, might learn how to receive God's guidance through others besides ourselves, and so that Jesus would be first of all. God would use His church to fit us for heaven.

So how is it that we group ourselves in the church and oppose each other? If we see that negativity in ourselves, how do we overcome it? Will a Bible study solve it? Will a quotation from the Ellen White CDROM do the trick? Seventh-day Adventists, reflexively, tend to go

straight for the cognitive solution. But God has many ways of working. Christianity is for more than the head; it is also for the heart.

### **The Prayer Song**

Let me offer a suggestion for personal renewal and renewal in this church. We can call it the prayer song. It works like this. First, you think of a brother or a sister here, in the sanctuary right now, someone who you find really irritating, or, whom you especially distrust. Think of who that person is. Be honest now. Here's what you do.

You make your own arrangement here with God. Ask Him to help you. You ask God to help you to pray for that brother or that sister, every day for the rest of this month. You are not praying that God will straighten them out, or send judgment on them, or hit them up aside the head. You are praying,

God, please watch over and build this person. Watch over them for good. And please, give to me a new appreciation for this person.

That's what you pray for. Very simple. That's the first part.

Here's the second. You pick out a second person, someone in the larger community outside of the church, someone you know, someone you have never prayed for before, and pray for that person, every day, that he or she will develop an interest in the seeking out the truth of God and in finding Christ.

So, think of it this way. Suddenly, 200 people who were not being prayed for before, are now being prayed for, right here, right in the church, right in the community in which we live. Do you think that will have an effect? Do you think that something might happen that was not happening before? Do you think some hearts may be changed, including your own? Could you,

do you think, use some prayer? See, we tend to pray more readily for those we like than for those we find more difficult to appreciate. Our prayers can become self-interested. Would it not be a song of prayer if, starting today, this sabbath, all of us begin to pray this way?

### **Conclusion**

We do not interpret one another with enough generosity. Friends, the world is changing around our ears. The fragility of everything that surrounds us becomes more apparent almost by the hour. The angels who have been preventing the world from slipping into chaos seem to be loosing their grip (Revelation 7:1-3). It is as if everything is poised to let fly. Very soon, perhaps, God may open a door so that we have fresh opportunities for sharing our faith with others. But first, we have to have an experience that we are ready to share. It is time to turn, to be renewed, and to experience in our walk with Jesus first love again.

**Biographical note:** Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the [Bonners Ferry](#) and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.