

OUR FIRST LOVE

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In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Jesus described himself to the Ephesians as “he that holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks” (Rev 2:1). The candlesticks are the churches (Rev 1:20). Therefore, Jesus walks among the churches. He warned the church at Ephesus that they were in danger of losing their candlestick: “I have somewhat against thee, because *thou hast left thy first love*. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else *I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent*” (Rev 2:4-5). The clear connection between walking among the candlesticks and the power to remove them is a vivid demonstration of Jesus’ authority over the church. Christ built the church (Matt 16:18), he died for the church (Eph 5:25) and bought it with his own blood (Acts 20:28). He is the one and only head of the church (Eph 1:22; 5:23; Col 1:18), a lesson we must never forget. If we do not do things the Lord’s way, he will remove the congregation’s candlestick. Since leaving our first love would be a reason for losing our candlestick, it would be good to understand what that first love is.

The greatest commandment

Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind (Matt 22:37-38). Our first love is that towards God. Everything else hangs upon that (Matt 22:40). But the Lord warns us against things that can choke our love for Him and cause us to become unfruitful. God says that if any man loves the world and the things of the world, he does not have the love for the Father in him (1 John 2:15). Becoming a friend of the world causes a person to become God’s enemy (Jas 4:4). It is impossible to love and serve God and material things (mammon) at the same time (Matt 6:24). A choice must be made between the two. Jesus warns that the cares, riches and pleasures of this life can choke Christians like thorns choke a plant, and cause them to not bring fruit to perfection (Luke 8:14). That is why the soldiers of Christ must not become entangled in the affairs of this life (2 Tim 2:4). This is what led Demas astray (2 Tim 4:10).

The things of the world

It appears that the Ephesians’ love for God, their first love, was growing cold as a result of their loving the things of this world. They did not love sinful things of this world, because the Lord testified that they

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(continued)

could not bear evildoers (Rev 2:2). But even loving things that are not inherently sinful can cause us to lose our souls. For example, money is not sinful in and of itself, yet the love of money is not only wrong, it is the root of all evil (1 Tim 6:10). Food, drink and clothes are necessary for us to live, but loving and seeking after those things will choke and eventually kill a Christian's love for God (Matt 6:24-34; Luke 12:29-31). We must love God and seek His kingdom and righteousness, not love anything of this world. What a great lesson to learn and remember! The seriousness of this is illustrated in Revelation 2:5. Christ told the church at Ephesus to remember from where they had fallen, and repent, and do the first works or else he would come unto them quickly and remove their candlestick out of his place. No denomination or any other false religion has ever had a candlestick to begin with, but it is quite possible for churches of Christ to lose their candlestick. At that point, the Lord obviously no longer recognizes that group as belonging to him. God is no longer in fellowship with them (Amos 3:3; 1 John 1:5-7). We need to recognize that an unfaithful church of Christ is in the same category as every denomination and all false religions: they have no candlestick and the members of the group will be eternally lost unless they repent.

Overcoming temptation

The Lord closes the letter to the church at Ephesus with the promise in verse seven that he will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. As with all of God's promises, this one is conditional. This promise, like the other six in the letters to the churches of Asia, is only "to him that overcomes." Christians cannot continue to sin over and over again and expect to go to heaven. God is going to eternally punish those who "cannot cease from sin" (2 Pet 2:9-14). He that overcomes will inherit all things (Rev 21:7). The Bible begins with man giving in to temptation, committing sin and being denied access to the tree of life and the Garden of Eden (Gen 2-3). The Bible ends with the promise of being able to eat of the tree of life if we overcome sin and keep God's commandments (see also Rev 22:14). But it is vital that we never leave our first love, that as a congregation we keep our candlestick, and as individuals gain right to eat of the tree of life.