

## First Love (Part Two)

by Martin G. Collins

*Forerunner*, "Bible Study,"

“You have left your first love.” Christ’s rebuke in Revelation 2:4 contrasts with what Paul had written to the same Ephesian church 35 years earlier, that he never stopped giving thanks for them because of their faith in Christ and their love for the saints (Ephesians 1:15-16). At the time of Christ’s letter, most of the Ephesian Christians are second-generation believers. Still, they fight against evil, guard against false teachers, and labor with steadfast resolve to serve Christ (Revelation 2:2-3). They retain doctrinal purity, but lack deep, heartfelt devotion to Christ and to the brethren.

While the work is challenging, the church in Ephesus remains busy and by many standards can be considered successful. Christ, however, accuses them of leaving their first, God-centered love, settling instead for something less passionate and more mechanical. Many of today’s churches with their full calendars and weary workers would fit a similar description.

Along with His strong rebuke, Christ offers the Ephesians a remedy, which we will examine as we continue our study on first love.

1. What is Christ’s prescription for the Ephesians? Revelation 2:5, 7.

**Comment:** Christ follows His admonition in Revelation 2:4 with a three-part exhortation for the church at Ephesus, beginning with “remember therefore from where you have fallen” (Revelation 2:5). Christ prescribes a sincere and thorough self-examination of the Ephesians’ spiritual condition (II Corinthians 13:5; Psalm 119:59; Haggai 1:5, 7). He strongly implies their need to compare thoughtfully their current love with their former, or first, love. He implores them to recall the goodness they once experienced and to embrace again their initial, unconditional zeal that they had displayed in their early years (Matthew 3:8; Acts 4:31-33; Lamentations 3:40).

The second and third parts of the exhortation are “repent and do the first works” (Revelation 2:5). Christ wants the Ephesians to recognize and correct the error of their ways by repenting and returning to a better state of mind—a state that most newcomers to the faith experience upon their baptism and initial justification (Acts 2:41-47; Matthew 3:8; Hebrews 10:32). It is here that we receive the gifts of peace from God, which reveal His grace and provide our motivation to serve Him and man (Romans 5:1-5; II Thessalonians 3:16; Colossians 3:15).

2. How does our first love motivate our first works? Acts 2:41-47; John 12:25-26; I Corinthians 13:4-7.

**Comment:** Christ refers to our first love as *protos agape*. Such love is more than mere affection—it is an action. The good works (or first works) that a Christian performs come from a sincere and zealous desire to serve God by serving man with no thought about selfish desires for reward, recognition, or reciprocal service (Deuteronomy 6:5; Acts 2: 41-47; I Corinthians 13:4-7; Romans 13:10; Matthew 22:37-39). By eliminating these desires, a Christian allows for God’s nature, rather than his own, to motivate him, helping to ensure that the work accomplished is without pretense and pleasing to both God and the recipient (I John 4:8; Colossians 1:10; Hebrews 6:10; James 3:16-18; I Peter 1:7).

3. Why does Christ threaten to remove the Ephesian church’s lampstand? Revelation 2:5; Hebrews 10:38-39; Haggai 1:6; Luke 9:62.

**Comment:** A spiritual fall is serious if one is unable to get back up or is not motivated to do so (James 3:2; Romans 11:22; Hebrews 2:3; 6:4-6; 10:26-27). Sin will soon begin to corrupt the mind and can quickly become a way of life (Luke 11:26 Acts 7:51-53; 8:21; II Peter 2:22; Proverbs 21:16; Ephesians 4:19). Salvation is at stake (Hebrews 2:3)! At the very moment a sinner needs closeness with God, he instead can find himself opening up to the influence of Satan the Devil, which only compounds the danger (Mark 4:15; II Corinthians 11:3; I Peter 5:8). Therefore, Jesus wisely threatens the Ephesian church with the loss of a lampstand—the expulsion from the fellowship of the Body of Christ—a forceful and compelling warning to

provoke a heightened sense of urgency to remember and repent while there is still time (Isaiah 55:6; John 12:35-36; Hebrews 3:13; Ephesians 5:16).

Finally, Christ ends His admonition with the most hopeful of all promises: “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7; 21:7).