

First Love

In 1John Chapter 4 Verse 19 we are told that *“We love him, because he first loved us.”* This to me was a disturbing statement for many years. What kind of love is it that is merely a reciprocation of a received love? If someone says that they love you, does it mean that you some how automatically love them in return? Hardly! The eight verses preceding this speak wonderfully of God’s love for us and how we are to love Him and also love one another. Just how this builds up to the verse 19 conclusion has been somewhat illusive. However, if we look prayerfully, and with some degree of spiritual maturity into these passages, we can find what we need in order to understand how this must be so.

First we must understand that John is speaking about saved souls, to already saved souls. The “we” who love God are born-again Christians and only those who are born this way from above can really love God. While God loves the whole world, only those who are born of God are capable of God’s kind of love, and the true love of God. Twice it is stated, once in verse 8 and again in verse 16 that “God is love” In verse 16 he goes on to say that *“...he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.* In verse 15 we not only have that same fact revealed, but we are also told how, and only how, this is accomplished. *“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.”* From this we can see that it is faith in Jesus that puts God (love) in our hearts, and its because God loved us that He sent His Son Christ Jesus to be the focus of our faith, that faith through which love could enter our hearts.

Thus it could be said that only because God loved us first, could we be given the capacity of love Him. We had no real love of our own to offer. It was God’s love that flowed into us as a result of our faith in Jesus that we now have to give to God, and to others. Again, so that there is no confusion regarding the latter, John was writing to the church, that is to born-again Christians, and only to them. Therefore, only those who are born-again, that is those who have committed their lives to Jesus as the Lord and Master, have the true love of God. No other love or claim of love is a genuine love of God, absent this commitment

to Christ Jesus. God's love of the world is real and genuine, but it is for the most part, an unrequited love, because no heart, except the new heart of the born-again Christian, is capable of receiving and reflecting it back to God and to others. Thus that provocative and disturbing statement, "*We love him because he first loved us.*" is perfectly true and appropriate, as a succinct summary of what preceded it, and what genuine love is all about.

As we continue on studying God's inerrant Word, we find, in the very last of the 66 books that make up the Holy Bible, another provocative statement about "love." In the Book of Revelation Chapter 2 Verse 4, Jesus reveals to the church of Ephesus that He has something against them. It is that they have left their first love. This was a church that would have had an "A+ report card except for this one deficiency. Their doctrines were pure and true, their works were extraordinary, as were their labors and patience. They could not bear evil, and removed liars and false teachers from their midst. They labored long and hard without weakening, all for His name's sake. Yet in spite of all of these very impressive commendations that we would be ecstatic to have reported about our own church, Jesus said in effect that they would suffer some dire consequences unless they repented.

Given that all Scripture is for our learning, it is evident that there is something here of great importance that we need to know, should take seriously, and apply to our daily lives. As we read the list of commendations, that is these God honoring attributes, we cannot help but be very favorably impressed. As Christians dedicated to living Godly lives and seriously serving the Lord, this church of Ephesus would seem to have been an ideal model. Yet our Lord Christ Jesus spoke of a flaw that apparently transcended all of these attributes. They had left their first love. As they struggled and worked so mightily to serve the King, they failed to give Him what he wanted the most, their full measure of committed Love, the love that they felt toward Him when they first realized who He was and what He had done for them on the cross. Did they love Him less than they had when they first committed their lives to him? I doubt that they thought so.

After all, weren't all of these things that they were, and did powerful evidence of their on-going commitment to Him as well as their love for Him? I would have most certainly thought so, had I not considered His words more carefully. Most serious Christians today who live the "Ephesus way" consider themselves as being fully vested in living spirit-filled lives. However, Jesus wants something more, something far more important than this from His own. He wants the sustaining quality and intensity of that first love, that intense gratitude, that adoration for Him that first filled our hearts. He wants to be reverently involved in all of our thoughts and actions. He wants us to have a sustaining and acute awareness of Him as well as on-going gratitude for His gift to us, and for His being continuously in our lives. He wants this worship all day long, not just at "prayer time." And yes, at prayer times He wants what He certainly deserves, that is to be praised and worshipped with that same passion we had when we first acknowledged Him.

That is what He meant when He wrote to the Ephesian church. This is what He has the right to expect from everyone "who has ears to hear." However, not everyone has "Spirit-sensitized" ears. Only redeemed Christians have ears capable of hearing these things, in the sense of understanding, appreciating, and applying them. So this message is for you, if you are His. It is a wake up call to all of us who are saved and continue our works with gratitude, yet tend to become complacent and less considerate of what is even more important to Him. It is worship and love for Him that are even more important than the works we do, no matter how fruitful and God-honoring they may be. God wants a continuing intense gratitude from a heart that never forgets or diminishes that love and worship that the first realizations of salvation flooded the entire being.

It's our fallen nature that causes even the redeemed souls to become complacent, apathetic, presumptuous and/or lazy in our Christian walk. That is why we need on-going biblical study and fellowship with others of our faith who can keep the fire going and help us to better understand His Word. This will help to keep us on the right path, that is being "fired up" for Jesus. We should note that this "leaving" of their first love does not indicate that they lost their salvation. The first love which Jesus spoke of, if it was genuine, signified salvation, which of course can not be lost. However, their failure

to sustain that first love in all its intensity and commitment put them in danger of losing the crowns that their good works were generating. Service to the Lord under that wonderful canopy of the first love produced crowns of gold. However, absent that canopy, these could turn into hay and stubble and thus be lost in the fire of the Bema seat judgment.

Love cannot be forced, or made, or even created by God Himself. If it could be, there would have been no need to have to give man volition. That “first love” came into our hearts from God Himself as we recognized who Jesus is and what He did for us on the cross. We became His amidst a great outpouring of love when we realized that He became man so as to suffer and die for all mankind. He did this so that all who would accept Him would be spared God’s judgment of their sins. That judgment was satisfied through Him and through His suffering and death. Knowing what He wants of us through His message to the church of Ephesus, we should seek earnestly to restore that infinitely deserved first love, and keep it flowing more regularly from our hearts.

If we had it once, it should be easy to bring it back, once we have become aware of its importance. All we need to do is to return to the cross and to the empty tomb as being central in our minds and recall what we felt and knew when their full meaning entered our hearts. That precious love-filled blood that Jesus shed on the cross, and all that it means, will quickly and affectually flow to our hearts filling them again with that first love. Do it now and keep doing it whenever you find that serving the Lord, or anything else, is competing with your worshipping Him. If you don’t have time to do this right now because you are too busy baking a cake for the church’s pot luck supper, scrap the cake. He much prefers worship to the cake, and He deserves from us what He wants, not what we may chose to give Him.