

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Leaving Our First Love

Defending the faith is important, but in the absence of a passion for sharing the gospel with others, it becomes a cold habit that threatens our relationship with God.

“I know your works . . . Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 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” (Rev. 2:2,4-5).

This message to the church at Ephesus is something of an enigma. In His criticism of the other churches in these chapters, Jesus spelled out the sins He found offensive, such as sexual immorality (2:14, 20), spiritual stupor (3:1), or complacency (3:15-16). But “leaving your first love” doesn’t tell us much about the nature of the problem in Ephesus. Whatever it was, it must have been serious, because Jesus threatened to “remove your lampstand” if they didn’t straighten up.

The mystery is further deepened by looking at the positive things Jesus had to say about this church. They worked hard for the Lord, especially in exposing false teachers who came their way (v. 2,3,6). Compared to some of the other churches in this review, Ephesus seems to fit an ideal definition of a “sound” church: militant for the truth,

intolerant of error. Yet that was not enough to spare them from the Lord’s wrath for having “left your first love.”

The context provides one clue that helps us reconstruct the nature of the problem. Notice that Jesus equates “your first love” with “the first works” (v. 5), implying that they were no longer doing something that was once part of their character. This was not merely an attitude problem, but a deficiency that affected their behavior, too.

The fact that this is the church at Ephesus -- whose history is well attested in Acts and several epistles -- allows us to go back and look at what these “first works” might have been. A review of Acts 19 shows a church that confronted the surrounding culture with God’s truth, thereby turning many away from sorcery (v. 19) and idolatry (v. 24-27). They had an eagerness to share the story of Christ with a world that was lost in sin. Their “first love,” in other words, was an enthusiasm for the gospel that made them tireless ambassadors for the Lord in their community. This spirit created a climate in which “the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Ac. 19:20).

This conclusion is reinforced by a closer look at the positive things Jesus said about the church at Ephesus. Their soundness was defined largely by what they were *against*, rather than what they were *for*. They were right to oppose these internal threats, but not to the neglect of pursuing an aggressive program of outreach to the world around them. It was not enough merely to oppose error within the church; they needed to return to the days when they had a fresh and exciting message to share with their neighbors.

Jesus’ critique of the church at Ephesus is a stern warning against a hazard that faces every Christian -- and every church -- who has been in the faith for a long time. Our initial enthusiasm for the Lord can cool into a mindless defense of the status quo. Instead of actively reaching out to the lost around us, we can turn inward and content ourselves with keeping the furniture neat and tidy.

That’s not what the Lord put us here to do. We need to rekindle our passion for the salvation story, and “do the first works,” lest we lose our identity as the people of God.

- David King