

GETTING BACK TO OUR FIRST LOVE

By Nancy Arant Williams

If you're like me, you have an overwhelming feeling that time is drawing to a close, that soon nothing will be as it has been. And that means you and I have to prepare for the soon coming of Jesus Christ.

He's been pressing several truths on my heart lately, the most important is this—we have no clue how far we have strayed from our first love.

In New Testament times, before the advent of easy communication, the churches named in Revelation were judged for their sin, all of which were expressed in these words. "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write... I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles and...are not, and you found them to be false, and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. *But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.* Remember therefore from where you have fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at first, or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent."

Now what did He mean when He said they had lost their first love?

Think back to your personal conversion experience with me, and examine the concept of your first love. One can't help but compare this to a romantic attraction, which is exactly what the Lord intends.

He woos us like the Bridegroom He is, serenading us, promising to complete us and make us into the Bride He desires. He commits Himself to us, promising to be our El Shaddai, the One who supplies our deepest longings.

He knows us intimately because He made us, knew us from before the foundations of the earth as it proclaims so beautifully in Psalm 139. And not only that, but He desires fellowship with us, just as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden. When they sinned, He loved them enough to cover their sin and restore the fellowship He so longed to have with them. And He's done the same for us by sending Jesus to die on the cross.

When you and I received Jesus as Savior, we fell passionately in love with the lover of our souls, the One Who bears our burdens, listens to us with undivided attention, yearning to bring us to fullness in Him.

But after a time, it's easy for us to take that for granted, to forget what we've been saved from.

Consider this. When you're talking to someone close to you, sharing your heart, and they let their eyes wander, letting their attention flit from you to everything around them, how does it make you feel?

I've just recently been thinking about this, and there's one person in my life, to whom I'm close, who does this constantly, making me question our closeness. It makes me hesitate to share with her, because she isn't connected with me when

I'm speaking. So do you know what I do? I change the subject, so that once again we're focusing on her. At which time, of course, she engages.

When we do that with God, how do you suppose it makes Him feel? Such behavior only shows our self-serving agenda, our lack of commitment and our immaturity as believers. Total commitment to God requires that we focus on Him, and not on ourselves or on the distractions that tickle our senses. The key word here is *engage*.

What happens when you and I begin to read our Bibles and pray? Do we fully engage in communion with the Most High God? Do we realize the privilege we have of engaging the attention of the King of Kings Himself? Or do we let our minds and eyes wander, thinking of things that revolve around us, thereby playing right into the hands of the devil, who wants to keep us distracted and useless?

The scripture, thousands of years ago, said the fields were white unto harvest. If it was true then, it can only be more true now, as time draws to a close.

And the important thing is this. To be useful, we have to get back to our first love. We have to fall in love all over again with the lover of our souls. If we do not, we have nothing to offer a lost and dying world. Absolutely nothing. We will be, as scripture says, as sounding brass and tickling cymbal.

You and I will have something to offer only when we sell out, hook, line and sinker to Jesus Christ, and stop walking the fence between the world and the Lord.

The time has come when we must choose which way we will go, because shortly, I believe, we will be forced to choose, by circumstances, on which side of the fence we will stand, and it won't be easy to choose the narrow way under pressure.

If you and I haven't decided by then, we will simply be pushed off the fence, right into the world's camp, of no use whatever to the Kingdom of God.

You and I must, right now, choose to walk in holiness and righteousness, unwavering and undaunted by distractions and selfishness. Everything else is dross and will burn.

We must press into Christ, yearning for His vision, seeking His heart, and listening earnestly for His voice. If we fail to do this, we will follow another gospel, the wide way that scripture says leads to destruction.

And lest we think we will not be called into account for failing to choose the narrow way, we have only to recall the words to the church of Ephesus, who, from its description, was *doing nearly everything else right. Which means that all those wonderful works meant nothing compared to the fact that they were no longer clinging to their first love.* God even would be removed if they failed to return to their first love. Their usefulness to Him would end. Their light would be extinguished.

For years, you and I have watched the other gospel, man-pleasing gospels that have little to do with the real thing. We have heard the words 'peace, peace' and the promises of wealth and prosperity when God says the opposite is on the horizon.

So who needs a revival? You and I do. In no uncertain terms, we need to fall head over heels in love with Jesus Christ, repenting, asking for personal revival, purity and a heart to please Him. When those things are in order, we will finally be in a place to be used in the way He intends. And I truly believe that just as it says in I Cor. 2:9 "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those that love Him."

When we stop playing games at the foot of the cross, and get serious about the things of God, our focus will be on Him. At that point, He will prove Himself faithful as our Provider, Protector, Healer, Sanctifier, Victory, Peace, Shepherd and our Righteousness, as is apparent from the names of God listed in scripture.

Until that time we choose Him, according to His rules, He is obligated to do be none of those things for us. And make no mistake about it, the day of grace will shortly end.

So, the question, at this juncture is, what decision will we make?

Matthew 25:31-41 says this: "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come you who are blessed of My father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you invited Me in; naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me. I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him saying, Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You or thirsty and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger and invite You in, or naked and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You? And the King will answer and say to them, Truly, I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

The thing is, anyone can serve and give to others. Hollywood does it all the time, obviously without a single thought toward God. God knows our hearts when we serve others, and in the love chapter, I Cor. 13, it's clear that doing these things, without a heart committed to God, is as good as worthless.

So this brings us full circle once again, to the place where we are at a crossroads, forced to decide. Whom will we serve?

If we choose to serve Jesus, it must be with our whole hearts, in repentance, with teachable spirits and our complete and undivided attention. We must be willing to take His correction, be ready to speak in season and out of season, intimately acquainted with His voice, so we can clearly hear Him speak to us. I'm convinced that if we don't quickly become obedient to His voice, we will be swept away by the great deception that will overtake even the elect.

At that point, the elect will believe, to their detriment, that anything goes, that impurity and pride are not sin, and they will be cast away along with the goats, no longer able to distinguish truth from falsehood.

So here's the challenge--let's cast down every idol, cast out every foe, press in with our whole hearts, yearning to know God, listening to His voice, asking what He would have us do next. And without fail, He will open the way to us, His chosen people. At that point, you and I will be awed and amazed by how He uses us, in ways we can't even imagine.

How much better could it get than to be a useful tool in the hand of the Master Designer, the Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords? I can think of none.

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