

Revelation 2: 4 and 5 - "Leaving your first Love," Sermon # 14 in the series -"The Faithful and True Witness," Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 23rd, 2006, and again on July 10th, 2011, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

There are, within the heart of any true Christian or any true Church, some things good and some things bad. The more mature a Christian or a church is, the more that the bad things related to sin will be purged out, and the good things related to Christ's life and His grace will be seen. But there is one thing that is absolutely essential for a church to survive and go on to glorify the Lord in their service to Him, and that is love. Without love to Christ we are nothing. Without love, all that we do will be displeasing to our Master and it will put us in the position of being liable to his removing our lampstand from its place unless we repent. This is what is being said here in verses 4 and 5. How is it possible for a church to come to the place where the people can be commended for their orthodoxy, commended for their works of guarding the truth and laboring to further Christ's kingdom, not growing weary in this, and yet we find this startling statement; "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love." This is the phrase that I would like to focus on this afternoon. What does it mean for a church to have left its first love? It is described for us here in 3 ways. 1st- It is described as a fall 2nd- It is described as a sin to be repented of. And 3rd- It is described as not doing the first works. Let me see if I can open this up for you in the next few minutes.

1st- Leaving your first love is described as a fall.

Jesus says to the angel and to the church at Ephesus, "Remember from where you have fallen." Love to Christ for what He has done for us, and love to the brethren for whom Christ has died, is the most foundational and basic and most important reality in the life of any Christian or any church. And it is this that the Lord Jesus looks at in our hearts when He is evaluating us, more than anything else. When he says "I have this against you" it is not as though the Lord Jesus is bringing up this matter in order to condemn them in terms of God's justice, for as it says in Romans 8: 1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." He has this against them in terms of their poor response to what He has done for them in the past and what He was doing for them in the present in terms of His grace at work in them. They had fallen in respect to this particular grace of love. This church appears to have understood the importance of duty, but they had left off the greatest of duties, which is to love. In this regard they were walking in the flesh, and needed to receive this reproof. But Jesus is saying something more here. He is saying that the relationship of love that we have with Him is the basis of the real fulfillment of all of our duties, because it is love to God and love to

Christ that is the greatest commandment. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart..." And Jesus says, "If you love me, keep My commandments." If we are trying to do what is right and true, without love to Christ being our chief motive for what we are doing, then we have become those who have fallen from the whole purpose for which we were called to God in the first place. We were called to love Him! And if we do not have this love in exercise we are misrepresenting Him! His life is not being seen in us! Paul told the Ephesian church years before in his letter to them that "God had chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before Him in love." (Ephesians 1: 4) He prayed for them that "Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith; that they being rooted and grounded in love, might be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that they might be filled with all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3: 16-19) He pleaded with them that they might be imitators of God as dear children and walk in love, just as Christ also had loved them and given Himself for them, an offering and a sacrifice to God." This is what they had fallen from. What a fall it is when the saints forget these precious truths. It is a fall when the saints do not live their Christian life in love with Christ. It is not a fall from grace, in the sense that Paul spoke of to the Galatians, who were trusting in the ceremonies of the law to justify them. This was a fall in their mind and affections from having Christ at the center, of Christ being their reason for rejoicing, of Christ being their helper and their friend, and of Christ being the One that they prayed to and held sweet communion and fellowship with every day. Each of us should ask ourselves at this moment if this is true of us. Have we fallen from this kind of relationship with our Savior and Lord, that our Christianity has become simply a matter of holding fast doctrinal truth and of exposing men who are in error so that there is no longer any devotion to Christ Himself to be seen by Him in our lives? Then we must remember from where we have fallen. We have fallen from our first love, which love is a great love for Him.

Then 2ndly- When this church left its first love it is described for us as a sin to be repented of.

"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; and repent." When any church or individual of that church leaves off of a passionate devotion to Christ, it is seen by Him as sin which we must repent of. The question now becomes how do we repent? It was not as though the people in this church did not have love to Christ. They did, but they had left their first love. There was no fervency of spirit in their devotions and their deeds as there once had been. They needed first of all to remember, if they were to going to repent. They needed to look back and see how things once were. Turn with me to Song of Solomon 1 for a moment. In this Song we find many pictures of the love between Solomon and the Shulamite which picture very well the love of Christ for His Church and the love of the Church for

Christ. The imagery at many points in this book goes far beyond that of mere earthly marital love. We need to note this because we are living in a day where many Christian teachers as they exposit this book are trying to place the primary emphasis upon the earthly and the physical relationship of marriage as they teach this book, instead of bringing out what God intends it to be; the spiritual relationship of union and communion with our Christ. There are no doubt applications in this book suitable to earthly marital love, but that is not the primary sense or application of what is here written. In Chapter 1 we see the devotion of the Church in her first love to Christ. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth- For your love is better than wine." "Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you." "Draw me away!" "We will run after you." "The king has brought me into his chambers." "We will be glad and rejoice in you." "We will remember your love more than wine." If we are going to draw forth the meaning of these words we must look beyond Solomon to the greater than Solomon who is here. Solomon was a great king, but Jesus Christ is the King of Kings. Whatever relationship that Solomon had with this Shulamite that is pictured here, we are meant by faith to apply it spiritually to ourselves and Christ or the Church and Christ. I love the small print headings that were written by some spiritually minded man that are found under the Chapter numbers of the old King James Bibles. Under Chapter 1 it says, "The church's love unto Christ." "She confesseth her deformity, and prayeth to be directed to his flock." "Christ directeth her to the shepherd's tents: and shewing his love to her, and giveth her gracious promises." "The church and Christ congratulate one another." Why is it that we do not have these kind of uninspired headings in our Bibles any more? I would suggest that it is because we do not understand very well any more the spiritual first love that the Bible and Christ Himself want us to have. The Puritan commentators are full of it. John Owen, John Bunyan, John Gill and many others have opened up the kind of first love that we should have toward our Lord Jesus Christ. When you are married you delight in marital love. You think about being kissed by your husband. We are spiritually, as Christ's Church, His bride. We pray, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." "For His love is better than wine." This is how it was when you first came to Christ for salvation. There was this tremendous first love; that He would come and kiss you with the kisses of His mouth. You "kissed the Son" and God's wrath was turned away from you. Then you wanted Him to kiss you every day with His truth and grace. But is this still the case with you? Do you pray to Him for the grace to run after Him in faith and obedience and with that love that delights more in Him than in anything else? Do you seek Him as your chief delight and purpose that you will be glad and rejoice in Him? Do you remember His love more than wine, more than all of the best earthly delights and satisfactions? This is what Christ is looking for in terms of your repentance, to return to that state of heart and mind before Him.

And then 3rdly - For a church to leave its first love is described for us here as not doing the first works.

The first love is the basis of the first works. Listen to Charles Spurgeon on this. "I need not stop to say that losing our first love may be detected in the closet as well as in the daily life; for when first love is lost, there is a want of that prayerfulness which we have. I remember the day I was baptized; I was up at three o'clock in the morning. Till six, I spent in prayer, wrestling with God. Then I had to walk some eight miles and started off and walked to the baptism. Why, prayer was a delight to me then. My duties at that time kept me occupied pretty well from five o'clock in the morning till ten at night, and I had not a moment for retirement, yet I would be up at four o'clock to pray, it was not so then, when I was in my first love. Somehow or other, I never lacked time then. If I did not get it early in the morning, I got it late at night. I was compelled to have time for prayer with God; and what prayer it was! I had no need to groan because I could not pray; for love, being fervent, I had sweet liberty at the throne of grace. But when first love departs, we begin to think that ten minutes will do for prayer, instead of an hour, and we read a verse or two in the morning, whereas we used to read a portion, but never used to go into the world without getting some marrow and fatness. Now, business has so increased, that we must get into bed as soon as we can; we have not time to pray. And then at dinner time, we used to have a little time for communion; that is dropped. And then on the Sabbath-day, we used to make it a custom to pray to God when we got home from his house, for just five minutes before dinner, so that what we heard we might profit by; that is dropped." But beloved brethren, what Spurgeon is saying is that prayer is one of the first works. Reading the Bible because it is a delight is one of the first works. This does not cease when we grow older in the Lord.

It is entirely possible that your devotion to Christ is fervent but that you are reluctant to suffer for the name of Christ. This is where the first love will be of great help to you. Listen to David Clarkson on this. "Get much love to Christ. A strong affection will carry you after Christ when you cannot follow him but under the cross, will make you follow him wherever he goes, though the way be deep, and rugged, and thorny, though it lead directly to the cross, and bring you to Mt. Calvary. Much love will make you willing, ready, resolute to suffer for Christ; and it is want of will, more than want of strength that disables us from bearing the cross. Christ does not deny strength to those who are resolutely willing to suffer for his name's sake. There is a strength in love which is too hard for death itself; love is strong as death. Much love will make you suffer much, for it is *affectus unionis*, that which makes the soul cling to Christ; and the more it is, the faster it cleaves to him, and more hardly will it part from him; no small matter will part them. A servant that has some affection to his master will suffer for him, but an affectionate wife will suffer far more for her husband, because conjugal love is stronger. If you mean to suffer much, you must learn to love much."

My dear brothers and sisters, let us close this time together by thinking of how it is that our hearts can find this first love once again so that we can do the first works once again. Turn with me to 1 John 4: 16. Here we find the answer. "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love because He first loved us." It is essential that we find what we once had when we first realized what Jesus Christ had done for us. His was a perfect love which cast out the fear and dread that He must have had as He thought about what it would take to bring us to Himself and to bring us to God. As we think about this let us believe that He will give us that love once again if we seek Him for it. This will enable us to cast out all of our fears of our own ability to do the works that will please Him. Only His grace can produce the first love and the first works. But if we remember where we have fallen and repent we will find a number of rewards which He will give. Those rewards are related to eating from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. This is what we have to look forward to if we have a sincere and fervent love for Christ. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16, verse 22 – "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." "O Lord come!" "The grace of the Lord be with you." "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus ." "Amen."