



FIRST LOVE

LIVING IN THE EMBRACE OF THE FATHER AND THE SON

Note: This teaching is taken from a message that Graham Cooke delivered at a Regional event in the Southwest Coastal Region in California (USA) in July, 2011, as well as, the Friday night message at the 2012 U.S. National Conference.

Revelation 2:1-5 To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 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.

To some, this portion of scripture in Revelation could seem harsh; however, it truly is a word of encouragement to the people of God – remember where God planned for you to live and return there. You have left the place of the Beloved. Your dwelling place, your abiding place is the place of first love. Abide out of that first love space between the Father and the Son. Let all you do in life flow out of this place – a place filled with the love the Father has for the Son and the love the Son has for the Father. Daily the Holy Spirit draws you to this space, this place of perfect love. Stay there and let the love and adoration of the Godhead refresh, transform, ignite, motivate, and saturate your being.

PRIMARY MISSION

Your primary mission is to love the Lord your God with all your mind, soul, heart and strength. (Matthew 22:37-38) And your second mission is to love your neighbor as you love yourself. (Matthew 22:39)

The church of Ephesus is like many of the churches of our time. It was a good church, filled with hard working people. They cared for the poor. They watched over the widow and orphan. They did regular outreaches into their community designed to appeal to each level of society, yet, they had left the place of first love.

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They were caught up in 'doing' and not 'being'. They became trapped in performance and forgot about their placement. Marthas, not Marys. They were created to be worshippers – to love the Lord with their entire being, yet their works became their priority and in spite of all their good, unending deeds, they had left the place of first love.

FIRST LOVE

So what is first love, you might ask?

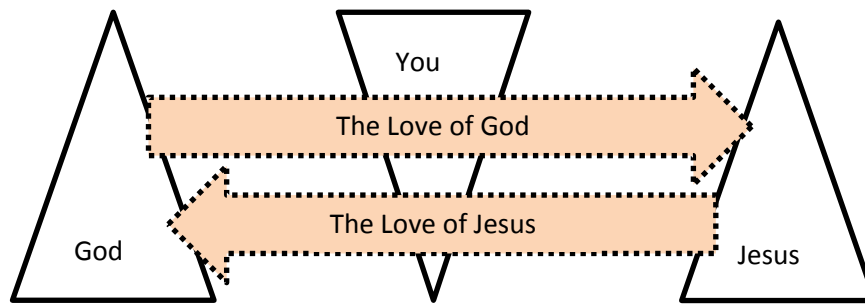
- First love is the love the Father has for the Son and the Son has for the Father stretching back to before the foundation of the world was set in place.
- In Jesus' prayer in John 17, He said, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. John 15:9 says, As the Father loved Me, and John 5:20, For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all things. The Father loves the Son unconditionally and in return, the Son loves the Father back without any reservations and the good news is, They love us with that same kind of love!
- **First love is where the Father loves Jesus in you and Jesus in you loves the Father back in return.**

The place of first love is the place where you become part of Their relationship and you love it! *Just as the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you.* John 15:9 *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.* John 15:10

- Because the Father placed us in Christ at salvation, when the Father looks at Jesus, He sees and loves us with the same love that He has for Jesus. At the same time, because we are not only in Christ, but Christ is *in us*, when Jesus looks at the Father, that love comes right out of us for the Father. It is the Father loving the Son in you and the Son in you loving the Father back. The Holy Spirit teaches you to stay in that place between the Father and the Son so that you can always hear the heartbeat of God.
- First love fills us with confidence and certainty.
- When you live in first love, you are touching glory all the time. The glory between the Father and the Son wraps itself around you and you begin to think new thoughts. You begin to see possibilities rather than impossibilities. Things like worry, fear, and anxiety become foreign to you. There is no place for those things in the Kingdom. They simply cannot exist in the space between the Father and the Son.
- First love is about being restored to the Father's passion for us.
- That passion is defined by the way the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, Heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove, landing on Jesus. The Father's voice was heard proclaiming, *This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.* (Matthew 3) Again, during the time of transfiguration, the Father's voice was heard delivering the same message, *This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. Hear Him.* (Matthew 17) The Father has always been pleased with the Son and He *placed* us in Christ where we are the recipients of that same passionate pleasure.

When the Father looks at Jesus,
He sees and loves us with the
same love that He has for Jesus.

A PICTURE OF FIRST LOVE



When you and I stay in the space made for the Beloved of God – between the Father and the Son – we will become aware of Their love surrounding us. This kind of love – first love – is the kind of love that God intends for us, as His family, to love others with.

The Father loves us in the same way He loves Jesus. Jesus loves us the same way He loves the Father. We love them in the same way and because of that, we are able to love those around us with the same kind of love – first love! So when Revelation 2 encourages us to return to our first love, it simply means for us to return to the place where we are the Beloved because we exist, live, abide in the space between the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit is constantly wooing us into the place of intimate affection found between the Father and the Son. He wants us to live out of that place so that we will demonstrate a lifestyle of rejoicing, thanksgiving, and worship. God has given us an invitation to focus on His majesty, His sovereignty, His goodness, His kindness, and His great love – to explore the height and depth of who He really is. It is our responsibility to respond to His invitation to spend time with Him. As we do, our attitudes will align with Heaven. We will see from His point of view. We will cease fault finding, grumbling, or complaining because we will be consumed with His love – He IS love!

1 John 4:8b *God is love.*

1 John 4:19 We love Him because He **first loved** us.

First love causes us to become a people who love to believe and trust the Lord. Living in the embrace of the Father and the Son causes us to become a people of certainty and security. We offer people safety because Christ in us reaches out to people and makes them feel safe.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His Son....

God's love for each of us is so great. The way we come into salvation is the same way that our salvation is sustained. We came into salvation through love – Jesus laid down His life for us – and to think that we can sustain our salvation without being filled with and surrounded by God's love is a misconception.

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As the company of Aglow has transitioned in the last few years, we find that our journey includes being restored to first love – we are emerging in our identity as the Beloved because of the increasing awareness of His great love for us. We are awakening to the truth that it is our placement in Christ and Christ’s residency in us that positions us in the place of first love. Change is all about something external happening, but transition is about something *internal* happening.

Matthew 22:37 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

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God is bringing forth fresh life within. This fresh life – this place of abiding in the awareness of first love - is causing us to arise as a trans-generational, transformational, global Kingdom community of women and men whose mindsets are not influenced by this world.

SKIT

You will need:

Four people and a narrator.

Four signs: Father, Son, Holy Spirit, The Beloved

Narrator: (You may need a microphone if your group is large. Choose one person to be the ‘Father’.) I want you to come forward and stand right here. (Place the person in front of everyone watching. Give the person the ‘Father’ sign and then turn him/her so that their side is toward the others in the room.)

(Speak over the ‘Father’.)

You are representing God today. I want you to be thinking about Jesus and the way that you love Him. Think about Him being your Beloved Son. Think about how you have always been pleased with Him. Think about how delighted you are about Him. Feel in your heart the fullness of adoration you have for your Son.

Narrator: (Call up someone to be Jesus and give him/her the ‘Son’ sign. Have the person directly face the ‘Father’.)

(Speak over the ‘Son’.)

As the Son, you absolutely love the Father. You adore Him! Everything in you wants to serve the Father – you only want to do what you see Him doing – you only want to say what you hear Him saying. You are so wrapped up in the Father and His love for you. He adores you and you KNOW it! Receive in your heart the full love of your Father which causes you to pour back love on Him.

Narrator: (Call up someone to be the Holy Spirit. Give him/her the 'Holy Spirit' sign. Have the person stand behind the Father and Son, facing the crowd through the space between them.)

(Speak over the 'Holy Spirit'.)

You absolutely love the way the Father loves the Son and the way the Son loves the Father. Their love fills you with delight and makes you happy about everything. You take great joy in drawing others into this space between the Father and Son so that they can experience the incredible love that is available to them because the Father placed them in Christ at salvation. You smile a lot. You rejoice a lot. You dance. You sing. Everyone you touch experiences joy and peace. They receive grace and favor. You love your job as you keep all God's children in the space between the Father and the Son and teach them to abide there.

Holy Spirit: (The Holy Spirit goes to the 4th person in the skit and gives him/her the sign that says 'The Beloved'. Then the Holy Spirit takes The Beloved and slowly and gently leads him/her to the space between the Father and the Son.)

(Holy Spirit speaks *slowly* over the Beloved.)

Beloved, I have drawn you here to a special place prepared for you between the Father and the Son. It is a place prepared long before the foundation of the world was set in place. It is proof that you have always been foremost in the Father's heart. This place is filled with the love the Father has for the Son and it is filled with the adoration that the Son has for the Father. Let that love begin to wrap around you like a warm, soothing, peaceful blanket of complete contentment. Let that love comfort you. Let it strengthen you. Feel the safety in it. Feel the security of knowing you are loved by God. Feel the love the Father has for the Son. It is the same love He has for you. When the Father looks at Jesus, He is loving you. And when Jesus looks at the Father, He is loving you. I want you to stay – abide - in this place.

In this place, Beloved, you will find that their love is perfect, divine, and lavish beyond your imagination. It is more than enough to fill your soul's cavernous need for love. Their love for you is as constant as an ever surging fountain. You don't always sense it because you move in and out of the awareness of Their presence. Our desire for you is that you would live from this place, a place so intimately close to Us that you are never outside the keen awareness of Our extravagant love.

In this place you can hear the heartbeat of God. You can hear the Father speaking to the Son. And you will hear the Father speaking to you. Listen. Listen. The reason the Father put you into Jesus is so you would always hear His voice – so you would always know His affection – and so you will always know that you are the Beloved. Stay. Listen. Receive. Feel the fiery love of the Father. Feel His delight. Let His favor wash over you.

End of skit. Either have a worship team playing softly and quietly or have CDs that set a quiet and gentle spirit for the truth of the skit to settle on all those who are present. A great CD is piano solo's by Klaus. The title is *Stillness*. Keep the CD or worship team available for the end of the teaching.

TO REVIEW

First love is the love that the Father has for the Son and the Son has for the Father. It was in existence before the foundations of the world. First love is the place from which life in the Spirit flows.

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To have left first love means that you have left how life in the Spirit really works. To have left first love means that you have stopped abiding – living – from the special space created for us as the Beloved of God between the Father and the Son. In that place, we are totally adored and we totally adore the Trinity. As time passes, one can get away from grace and start living in good works as a performance mindset for getting things from God. It is never what God intended for us. His ways are good and so much higher. We must continually stay in the place of first love.

Being restored to first love means that we are returning to a lifestyle where we allow ourselves to be wonderfully loved by God. We will leave behind performance and become people who respond to passion because we realize that there is something about us that our Father finds irresistible and Jesus absolutely adores. The Holy Spirit is totally committed to keeping us in that special place reserved for us between the Father and the Son.

STEPPING INTO FIRST LOVE

Today, the Church is being drawn by the Holy Spirit to fully embrace our identity as the Beloved of God where we live from the place of intimate affection between the Father and the Son. There is a place there, waiting for us and when we fully step into it and begin to live out of it, we will see the glory of the Lord for ourselves and we will extend that glory to others. We will begin to experience the grace, the blessing, the favor, the certainty, and the confidence because we know without a shadow of doubt that we are the Beloved of God, not because of our performance, but because of our placement. Of all the places He could have chosen to live, He chose to live *in us!*

All our blessing, all our favor, all our anointing flows from this place of embrace reserved for the Beloved of God. Stay in this place. Allow the Holy Spirit to keep you there. Abide. This is the place where dreams are formed and fulfilled.

When we live in first love, we live in the place of goodness and the place of kindness. Pettiness is left behind. The world longs to see us living in the space between the Father and the Son. The world longs to see us living in the confidence of the Beloved on the streets, in stores, at work – everywhere we go. People long to see evidence of the Kingdom and now, living from the place of first love, we can demonstrate on earth what Heaven is really like – abundance – no sickness – joy – love – peace – dominion and so much more!

PROCLAMATION EXERCISE

Consider having materials for journaling following this exercise. Consider having a worship team quietly playing or having soft, worshipful music playing for a time of reflection. Consider handing out the declarations for attendees to use in their personal devotion times.

Let us have a time of declaration together to help us fully grasp how much God loves each of us. Do not rush through this. Allow the truth that we ARE the Beloved of God to sink into your heart.

DECLARATION:

I step out of the place where I have accepted love in measure. I step out of the place where I thought I had to perform to be loved.

I step out of the place
where I thought I had to
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Pause. Allow time for everyone to rise and physically take steps. Allow the truth of what is happening to sink in. Encourage them to actually take steps out of the place they have been as a sign they are moving to a new place.

I step into and fully embrace my place between the Father and the Son. I fully accept that I am the Beloved of God, not because of what I've done, but because of what my Father has done – He placed His Son in me and He placed me in His Son.

Father, I thank You that the passion that You have for me comes out of Your kindness towards me in Christ and that kindness began long before the Earth was formed. When You formed the Earth, You had me in mind. When Jesus went to the cross, He had me in mind. I am being restored to the place of first love.

I belong to a people group whose hearts are constantly filled, overwhelmed, encounter after encounter, and experience after experience. I experience Your tangible Presence, real love – love that is majestic, overwhelming, and overpowering. It is beyond my comprehension.

Lord Jesus, I thank You, that before the foundation of the world, You agreed to come and die so that I could be restored to first love – the love that existed before the world began. I understand that I have a part to play in the affection of the Father towards the Son and the Son towards the Father. I see that the Holy Spirit is my helper to empower me to receive love everlasting – a love that never fails - a love that makes my life inseparable from Yours - a love that binds me to everything that You are – and all that You are passionate about.

Father, I want to have a radical encounter with love – so profound, so huge, so majestic that I will be turned into different person. I want the world around me to see that love in such huge proportions that people will come and say, "Could I be loved like that, too?" I want to be Your visual aid of the affection of the Father toward the Son and the Son toward the Father.

Holy Spirit, I ask that You would draw me into that place- that You would not give up on me or any one of us in this room. Compel each of us to be loved outrageously for Jesus' sake that the world may know that God loves them because of the love which we have with You. This is our hearts desire, Father.

From this day forward I will never be the same – we will never be the same. We will grow in wisdom, stature, and favor in every area of our lives. We will shine forth with the glory of the Father that resides in the Son residing in us. With joy, we look forward to the coming journey where we will have opportunities to display Your goodness, kindness, peace, love and miracle working power to those we encounter. No one is safe from a blessing! In Jesus name, amen.

For the one overseeing this session. Ask for one or two volunteers to read their thoughts on the first question. Repeat for the 2nd question. Etc. Here are a few pointers for you as you respond to their thoughts.

1. How you perceive God is how you will receive Him. It is impossible for God to be anything but good and He wants us to view all that happens through the lens of His goodness.
2. Our relationship with God is not based on our performance. Our relationship is based on our placement – God placed us ‘in Christ’. With the same love that He has for Jesus, God loves us. Favor comes to us because of our relationship and our placement. In fact, we can walk in the same relationship with God that Jesus has with Him!
3. Because you are ‘in Christ’, all your situations are ‘in Christ’ too. When we believe that we can only be challenged by Heaven, our focus is upon majesty and not the enemy! We are learning to process everything from God’s perspective – and He has never had a bad day!
4. Living with favor means you live with limitless possibilities. All your permissions are yes. We have no excuses! We live with empowerment. All of Heaven is behind us in support.