

I was recently looking at the seven letters to the churches in the book of Revelation. In chapter two, the opening letter is to the church at Ephesus where the phrase "FIRST LOVE" is used. The context is not one of courtship or honeymoon love; rather it is the first love of when we first become a Christian. Do you remember when you first came to Christ?

The church at Ephesus would have been like a model church today. The word Ephesus means desirable and indeed, at least on the surface, it was.

Jesus first takes time to commend the Ephesian church, beginning with the fact that God knew all about the church.

Often we do things as a church and as individuals, which are not honouring to God. I sense that we never take time to contemplate the reality that God sees everything we do, whether it be good or bad. However, I am confident that if we took time to recognise this fact we would not rush into the sin that so easily besets us.

PRAISE

the Lord for:

- ★ Another fantastic Impact Africa mission trip. We were so aware of God's protection and care while away.
- ★ New ministry opportunities while in South Africa and for so many God ordained conversations and conversions
- ★ All the project funding for Impact Africa which reached our target of \$40,000.
- ★ Each of our ministry team who bring various skills and abilities to the Challenge ministry

Nonetheless, Jesus had an interesting list of commendations for the members of this church. In today's terminology they would be described as a model church; a well-programmed, biblically sound church; doctrinally they were on the ball, not tolerating sin and false doctrine; and they worked hard for Jesus.

As impressive as this list is, Ephesus had a potentially terminal spiritual illness. Having listed some ten characteristics of commendation, Jesus earmarks just one problem that threatened to undermine all that this church stood for.

In Revelation 2v4, Jesus declares the Ephesian church had left their first love. This lack of love brings into question the motivation for all that the church was doing well. Externally a church can look the part, can look the model church and yet internally not be in tune in their relationship with God.

Notice that the church had left their first love, not lost it. Leaving something infers a deliberate action. It is not an accident but rather a choice that is made, perhaps beginning with an imperceptible drift away from God's Word, prayer, witnessing and church attendance. Often this starts with a church or individual moving away from sound biblical priorities.

This letter reveals that a church or individual can be seen to be doing everything right and still leave their first love. Thus, this observed activity could be relegated to ritual instead of a spiritual reality. It can be relegated to habit instead of

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PRAYER needed for:

- ★ Impact Africa team in South Africa [29 June - 19 July]. Pray for the Lord's protection and opportunities to share the gospel with people in the daily ministry areas.
- ★ Pray for the various ministries we work with in South Africa – Multi Ministries, World Hope Prison F/ship, Cheerful Care Givers and Vanderbijil Park Baptist Church.
- ★ New children's ministry with Vanderbijil Park Baptist Church. Pray for locals and the team as they work together for the first time, and pray many children will come to know Jesus.
- ★ The staff who will run the home office while a number of us are away for three weeks.

the Christian. If we do not read the Bible daily, we will not grow spiritually and will lack faith.

Reading God's Word brings GREAT PEACE to our heart, as David beautifully says in Psalm 119v165.

Reading God's Word is how God teaches us about Himself, ourselves, the world, and Satan to mention a few.

Again, David in Psalm 119 expresses his constant desire that God would teach him. Reading the Word of God is how we LEARN THE PROMISES of God and HOW TO APPLY THEM. This is especially so when going through tough times.

Reading God's Word helps us to MEDITATE on His Word: *"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His Law He meditates days and night"* (Psalm 1v2). The Christian can only meditate on the Word that he or she has read. Meditation may involve marking, underlining, highlighting or making notes in your Bible. This meditation process can continue as we commit verses of scripture to memory. Reading the Word of God is a vital part of the process of knowing God's will for your life. Romans 12:1-2 gives us great direction on this matter.

Lastly reading God's Word gives us WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT in our daily walk. As we read the Bible, we are able to obtain the necessary wisdom and discernment required in our decision-making and choices. I firmly believe that because the Bible is not being read many Christians are making poor decisions, such as marrying a non-Christian or getting caught up with some form of immorality.

Therefore, we need to see that once we have found the Word of God we need to read it daily so it becomes an integral part of our growing, loving and serving relationship with God.

CARL CARMODY, EDITOR CHALLENGE



MY RESPONSE

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