

No. 10 Do Not Lose “the Love You Had at First” (Visiting speaker)

Note to speaker:

In a warm, positive tone, discuss and analyze Jesus’ sobering warning at Revelation 2:4, and remind all that Jehovah wants us to remain in his love forever. All of us need to do our very best never to allow our love for him to weaken

THE ISSUE: LOVE FOR GOD CAN BE LOST (3 min.)

Jehovah, who knows the human heart, warned repeatedly against the danger of his servants’ forgetting him and diminishing in their love for him (De 6:10-12; Jg 3:7)

This warning is timely in “the last days,” since people tend to love everything but God (2Ti 3:1, 2, 4)

Spiritually harmful plagues of the last days have caused people’s love to grow cold (Mt 24:12; *it-2* 279 ¶6)

The effect is so powerful that the majority—“the greater number”—of professed worshippers of God are affected; love for God and love for his laws have waned

Jehovah’s people are different; as a whole, we are keeping our love for him aglow

But as individuals, we cannot afford to become complacent; our faith could deteriorate, becoming shallow and unstable

Since certain Christians in the first century lost their initially fervent love for God or allowed their faith and devotion to be dampened, we need to fight such tendencies vigorously

Thus, we must heed Jesus’ pointed admonition at **Revelation 2:4** [Read]

THE CHALLENGE: AN ENVIRONMENT THAT CAN SMOTHER OUR LOVE FOR GOD (9 min.)

The Devil has carefully crafted this world to stifle our love for God and weaken our faith (Eph 2:2, 3)

We might be influenced by one or more of the following elements:

Distractions from Satan and his world (1Jo 2:15-17)

Like runners in a long race, in order to finish successfully, we have to avoid anything that would distract us, slow us down, or stop us (Heb 12:1)

Indulgence in works of the flesh (Ga 5:19-21)

Engaging in wrongdoing would weaken our spiritual condition; it can erode our conscience and can distance us from the love of God

Faults or mistakes—ours or those of others (Ro 14:13-15; 15:1)

Personal disappointments, the mistakes of others, or the failure to achieve spiritual goals or other objectives might gradually choke our love for God

Tiredness and extreme pressure (Pr 24:10; Mt 26:40, 41, 69-75)

We are constantly battling the pressures of this lawless world; this may leave us tired and discouraged

Adversities can sap our strength to the point of numbing our affection for God (Ps 143:4)

Unfulfilled expectations (Pr 13:12a)

Some who have been serving Jehovah for decades expected that the great tribulation would have come and gone by now

Such unfulfilled expectations may cause some to slack off, despite their initial zeal

The first-century congregation in Ephesus provides an instructive example of formerly zealous Christians whose love for Jehovah cooled

Let us consider how Jesus provided loving correction and encouragement in that situation

THE SETTING: WHERE LOVE FOR GOD GREW COLD (5 min.)

Ephesus was a major city in Asia Minor; it was materially prosperous and had an active cultural life

It was also a city plagued with strife, divided between an affluent elite and a disadvantaged underclass—much like our world today

The apostle Paul first visited Ephesus about 52 C.E. and devoted much time and energy to establishing and strengthening the congregation there

Ministers such as Timothy, Erastus, Onesiphorus, Tychicus, Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos were in Ephesus at one time or another (*w83* 11/1 12-15 ¶1-14)

But Ephesus was not known for being conducive to cultivating, fostering, or promoting love for Jehovah God

It was a city steeped in idolatry, magical arts, occult practices, and emperor worship

It was known as a degraded place, offering licentious entertainment; the temple of Artemis provided refuge for wrongdoers, so the city had become a center of unlawful activity and brazen conduct

THE PROBLEM: “YOU HAVE LEFT THE LOVE YOU HAD AT FIRST” (9 min.)

More than 40 years after the establishment of the congregation in Ephesus, Jesus felt the need to provide clear, strong counsel because, despite their good qualities, their love had faded (Re 2:2, 4)

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Today, Jesus also knows each congregation and its members; he has profound knowledge of the quality of our worship; he is interested in our lives and what we do

Jesus’ warning to the Ephesian congregation thus applies to us too; heeding it can prevent our spirituality from slipping into decline

[Read and analyze Revelation 2:4, 5]

“Nevertheless”: Jesus moves quickly from commendation to counsel

Our past zealous service to and love for Jehovah do not entitle us to become complacent

Thus, we “keep testing” ourselves to make sure that we are deepening our love for God (2Co 13:5)

“I hold this against you”: Jesus is not a petty faultfinder; he addresses a real and dangerous situation

The gravity of the situation is revealed by Jesus in verse 5; losing their love for God could lead to the ‘removal of their lampstand,’ likely meaning the loss of the privilege of shining the light of truth (*it-2* 198)

This was of the utmost concern to him, and it should have been the same for them

“You have left the love you had at first”: Although these Christians were still in the truth, their initial zeal and love for Jehovah and the truth had cooled

Their love had not disappeared entirely, but the ‘love they had at first’ was gone (Re 2:3)

Jehovah will not move away from us, but we might move away from him (Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17)

If we have allowed any distance or separation to grow between us and God, we need to correct matters urgently

Loss of affection for God grieves him deeply (De 4:24; Ps 78:41)

The passing of time may have dulled the Ephesian congregation’s initial zeal

Some may have forgotten the fine example of Aquila and Priscilla or the exciting preaching of Apollos;

Paul, who established the congregation, had been dead for about 30 years

However, Jesus did not excuse such a trend

Others who had been Christians as long as the Ephesians or longer had not lost their ‘first love’

The apostle John, who wrote down Jesus’ message to the Ephesians, had already been a follower of Christ for more than 20 years when Paul brought the good news to Ephesus

Those of the congregation in Philadelphia gave strong evidence that they had not lost the love they had at first (Re 3:7-11)

THE CORRECTION: BE DETERMINED TO REVERSE ANY WEAKENING OF LOVE OF GOD (9 min.)

“Remember from where you have fallen”: By comparing our current spirituality with our spirituality in the past, we can see whether there has been any decrease in our love for God (Re 2:5)

If we detect that our love has cooled, we must be determined to regain our spiritual strength

It is possible even for those with long experience as active Christians to cool off

On the outside they may still seem strong, but inside they may have lost the deep love they once had for Jehovah (1Co 10:12)

Besides remembering their own zealous past, the Ephesians needed to recall the inspired counsel in Paul’s letter to their congregation

He reminded them of what their situation had been before they became Christians, and he spoke about the organization of which they had become a part (Eph 2:12, 13; 4:4-6, 17, 18)

He mentioned Jehovah’s magnificent purpose for mankind and man’s place in that purpose (Eph 1:8-12; 2:4, 5)

He reminded them of Christian principles that would help them to be successful in the family and in the congregation (Eph 4:1-3; 5:21–6:4)

Considering Paul’s letter would help the Ephesians to refurbish their spiritual armor and fully comprehend and appreciate the truth (Eph 3:16-19; 6:13-18)

Similarly, our personal study will refresh us and enrich our understanding of many basic points, as well as help us to grasp the deeper things of God’s Word (1Co 2:10)

[Encourage audience to review later the December 2015 feature program on JW Broadcasting]

In this way, we will prevent Satan from causing us to lose our fervent love for Jehovah and his Son

THE APPEAL: FEND OFF ATTACKS AGAINST OUR LOVE FOR GOD (12 min.)

Besides living in an environment that is designed to diminish our love for God, we are all targets of specific attacks by Satan; if not careful, we can become easy prey (1Pe 5:8)

“Repent and do the deeds you did at first”: Genuine repentance requires a change of both attitude and actions (Re 2:5)

If we have lost any of our vigilance in resisting Satan’s attacks, we need to regain it

Let us focus on three serious threats as revealed in Jesus’ messages to congregations near Ephesus (*wO2* 10/1 20-22 ¶15-18)

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(1) *Apathy*: With the exception of a few individuals, the congregation in Sardis received no commendation at all. The congregation had “the name,” or the appearance, of being alive, but spiritual apathy had taken such a hold that Jesus viewed the congregation as dead (Re 3:1-3)

Similarly today, our Christian life could gradually become a mere apathetic routine that becomes more formalistic and mechanical than heartfelt and joyful

With the passing of time, the truth may cease to be fresh and exciting

As time erases the memory of what it was like to be part of Satan’s world, we may look longingly at the so-called freedom of those who do not serve Jehovah

A Christian may develop the idea that it is more reasonable to hold back somewhat in God’s service (Jer 17:9)

(2) *Immorality*: Jesus commended the congregations in Pergamum and Thyatira for their integrity, endurance, and zeal (Re 2:12, 13, 18, 19)

Yet, Jesus warned that some were being influenced by those manifesting the wicked spirit of Balaam and Jezebel, who promoted sexual immorality and acted as corrupting influences (Nu 31:16; 1Ki 16:30-33; Re 2:14, 16, 20-23)

In our day, immorality is by far the leading cause for disfellowshipping among God’s people

How important it is, therefore, that we avoid association with all individuals—inside and outside the congregation—who are a morally corrupting influence!

We shun questionable entertainment and pornography (Mt 5:28, 29)

Dwelling on immoral thoughts will weaken the conscience and sabotage our love for God

To ease pangs of conscience, a professed Christian who lives an immoral life might let his heart treacherously move him to excuse his behavior through doubt or faultfinding (w89 7/15 22)

(3) *Materialism*: The congregation in Laodicea boasted of material wealth, saying, “I am rich,” yet to Christ it was “miserable and pitiful and poor and blind and naked” (Re 3:14-17)

Today, the spirit of the world promotes greed and materialism

The world’s spirit has nurtured in many a determination to be rich (1Ti 6:9, 10)

We should ask ourselves, ‘Has my life become focused on a quest for material comforts and pleasures?’

Maintain a balanced view of money; work hard to provide necessities for yourself and your family

[*Optional interview*: (3 min.) Interview a brother and a sister who have not lost their first love but are still “thriving” and remaining “vigorous and fresh.” (Ps 92:12-14) How have they maintained their love for Jehovah and the truth? Make sure their comments are realistic and applicable to the audience]

THE ENCOURAGEMENT: LOVE FOR GOD AND THE TRUTH CAN BE REGAINED (8 min.)

[Read Revelation 2:6]

“**Still, you do have this in your favor**”: Jesus takes note of positive qualities; he does not view us as a lost cause because of weakness

[Read Revelation 2:7]

“**To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life**”: Jesus is optimistic that some will heed his admonition and gain the prize of life

He offers hope, bright prospects, and a secure future to those determined to keep their love strong

Psalm 116 reveals steps we can take to maintain or regain our love for Jehovah and the truth

The psalmist prayed fervently to Jehovah for help [Read Psalm 116:1, 2]

His appreciation for the privilege of prayer moved him to express unequivocal love for God

He reflected on how Jehovah had helped him in the past [Read Psalm 116:6-8]

He meditated on Jehovah’s goodness [Read Psalm 116:12] (w88 12/1 25-26)

The psalmist resolved to keep all the solemn promises he had made to Jehovah and to fulfill all his obligations to Him [Read Psalm 116:14] (w09 7/15 29)

Love involves action; often it is doing what Jehovah says and experiencing his loving help that is most effective in restoring our love for him

If our love has diminished, spiritual activity will help us to regain it (Ps 34:8)

This may start with taking steps to resist wrong desires or to correct wrong thinking

Each step is a victory in the fight to bring our heart fully back to Jehovah (Pr 23:26)

As our heart is won over, our desire grows to share what is in it with others (Ro 10:10)

THE PROMISE: JEHOVAH IS LOYAL TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM (5 min.)

Jehovah will always act loyally toward those who maintain their love for him (Ps 18:25)

Consider how this proved true in the case of Daniel, who faithfully served Jehovah for many decades

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(1) Jehovah listens to the petitions of those who love him, and he answers them

He provides his holy spirit to strengthen them

He may even provide physical protection at times (Da 6:10, 20-22)

It is reassuring to know that “the eyes of Jehovah are on the righteous, and his ears listen to their supplication” (1Pe 3:12)

(2) Jehovah views those who love him as precious and so provides them with spiritual guidance, insight, and support (Da 9:4, 21-23; w11 1/1 21)

In our day, he provides guidance through his Word and through loving congregation elders (Ps 119:49, 50; Isa 32:2)

(3) Jehovah knows those who love him, takes note of their righteousness, and will reward them with everlasting life, by resurrection if necessary (Da 12:13)

We can take comfort in knowing that God views faithful ones whom he has drawn as belonging to him

Being known by Jehovah is a most precious privilege that brings satisfaction now and holds out rich blessings for the future **[Read Revelation 21:4; 22:12]**

Review question: How can we successfully maintain or restore our love for Jehovah?

Answer: Revelation 2:4, 5; by resisting apathy, immorality, and materialism and by sharing fully in spiritual activities

Great benefits result from continuing to build on the foundation of the love that we had at first

Our love for God brings abundant blessings; if we were to make a list of them, it would be a very long one

Frequently meditating on our blessings will help us to apply the admonition: “Keep holding fast to what you have” (Re 3:11)

(Service talk by visiting speaker, starting September 2016. Not all cited texts need to be read or commented on, nor must every subpoint be discussed by the speaker)