

Passion for God

By Pastor Bud Talbert
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George Campbell Morgan tells the story of the eminent English actor William Charles Macready. A preacher came to him and asked, “*What is the reason for the difference between you and me? You are appearing before crowds night after night with fiction, and the crowds come wherever you go. I am preaching the essential and unchangeable truth, and I am not getting any crowd at all.*” Macready’s answer was this: “*This is quite simple. I can tell you the difference between us. I present my fiction as though it were truth; you present your truth as though it were fiction.*” What is Morgan’s point? The preacher must have passion.

Passion. Modern society often thinks of it only as immorality. It refers, though, to any powerful emotion. It can refer to a proper love or to human anger or even to powerful suffering, such as the *passion* of Christ. In fact our English word is derived from the Latin term which means *to suffer*. It refers to boundless enthusiasm or to a person abandoned to, or consumed by, his emotion. Morgan is correct in saying that passion is an essential ingredient in Biblical preaching. However, I think the issue goes deeper than this.

Some preachers may be passionate about preaching because they are passionate about Bible study, and because they are passionate about communicating the truths they discover to others. Evangelists may be passionate about soul-winning because they love the sense of accomplishment and the recognition that comes with it. But these things are not what motivated apostolic preachers and evangelists. The apostles were passionate about their preaching, their evangelism and their church-planting because they were passionate ... about God Himself. Their service was ignited by the intensity of their devotion to God. This devotion, this love, this *passion* made them great servants, great soul-winners, great preachers, and, best of all, great Christians. I would ask all readers, do you have a passion for God?

Where does Scripture speak of this? David certainly had a passion for God. “*I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.*” (Psalm 18:1) He had a passion for Scripture as well: “*My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.*” (Psalm 119:167) Peter had a passion for the Lord: “*Lord, thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love thee.*” (John 21:17) Maybe you think of the greatest of all God’s commandments: “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*” (Matthew 22:37) There is a passion for God.

The passage I want to focus on, however, is found in Revelation 2, in Christ’s own letter to one of His churches in Asia, the church at Ephesus. He charges them with this sin: *Thou hast left thy first love*. What they had in the past Jesus calls a *first love*. What comes to your mind when you hear that expression? Two young adults in the blooming of their love.

*I climbed up the door,
And I shut the stairs.
I said my shoes,
And took off my prayers.
I shut off my bed,
And I climbed into the light,
And all because he kissed me goodnight!*

“*That,*” we say, “*is cute.*” But one’s first love for Jesus Christ is not “cute.” It is the love that we had for Him at the first. Perhaps it was when we first got saved, or maybe when we first got right with the Lord after a time of rebellion. What characterizes a *first love*? We would say, perhaps, *preoccupation*. A person like this is preoccupied with the Lord Jesus. This person reads Scripture and prays and serves and begins to develop a sense of the Lord’s constant presence with him. The Ephesian Christians were preoccupied with Christ. Look at what they did when the church was started (Acts 19:1-20). Everyone in Asia heard the gospel message from them (verse 10). They could tell which apostles were false (Revelation 2:2) because they had learned the Word of God. Also *sacrifice* marks a first love. We are willing to give up anything for Him. It was the Ephesian Christians who burned their magic books, even though the price of the sacrifice was huge. *Service* marks a first love. Notice what Jesus said these Ephesian Christians did (verse 3): “*And hast borne* (i.e. persevered through trials with a godly attitude), *and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured* (to exhaustion), *and hast not fainted.*” There is a first love.

But the Ephesian church was a “*used to be*” church. These Christians had *left* their first love. It was not happening. It had already happened. Why had they left Him in their affections? I doubt that it happened all at once. But as in many marriages it likely was a slow process of taking Christ for granted and taking His gifts and blessings for granted. They obviously became very busy serving, and perhaps allowed devotion to take a back seat to activity. Then there were the little sins of the church. These robbed the congregation of spiritual fervor. Perhaps they began to harbor resentment against the Lord because of the withdrawing of His blessing. Whatever the reason, the fact remained – they had *abandoned* their first love of Christ. They had lost their passion.

And how did Jesus Christ feel about this? He said: “*I have somewhat against you.*” He was not against *it*. He was against *them*, because of it. He said that it this was something that needed to be *repented* of (Revelation 2:5), something that needed to be *overcome* (verse 7). He warned (verse 5) that if they did not repent he would remove their *candlestick*, probably a reference to their senior pastor. How does the Lord feel about a Christian, or a group of Christians, leaving his first love? He takes it very personally. He loves us very deeply, and He is grieved and offended when we do not love Him zealously in return. And notice this: our good works do not make up for a lack of personal devotion to God. Jesus was glad that these believers hated “*the deeds of the Nicolaitans*” (verse 6), but that did not diminish His rebuke for their lack of love. Hatred of evil can never replace love for God.

What can be done to restore one’s passion for God? They need first (verse 5) to *remember* that zealous devotion they used to have. They must recall it in all its detail – the times of prayer, the love of the Word, the willing sacrifice, the devoted service. Then they had to *repent* of having fallen away from Christ - change their thinking, change their emotions, change their will. Then they needed to *return* to doing the *first works* that marked the *first love*. *Actions change feelings. Motion resulted in emotion. The ability to love is established not so much by fervent promise as often repeated deeds. “Do the first works.”*

Newspaper columnist and Minister George Crane tells of a wife who came into his office full of hatred toward her husband. “*I do not only want to get rid of him, I want to get even. Before I divorce him, I want to hurt him as much as he has me.*” Dr. Crane suggested an ingenious plan: “*Go home and act as if you really love your husband. Tell him how much he means to you. Praise him for every decent trait. Go out of your way to be as kind, considerate, and generous as possible. Spare no efforts to please him, to enjoy him. Make him believe you love him. After you’ve convinced him of your undying love and that you cannot live without him, then drop the bomb. Tell him that you’re getting a divorce. That will really hurt him.*” With revenge in her eyes, she smiled and exclaimed, “*Beautiful, beautiful! Will he ever be surprised!*” And she did it with enthusiasm – acting “as if” she really loved him. For two months she showed love, kindness, listening, giving, reinforcing, sharing. When she didn't return, Crane called. “*Are you ready now to go through with the divorce?*” “*Divorce?*” she exclaimed. “*Never! I discovered I really do love him, in spite of what he did to me.*” Her actions had changed her feelings. Motion resulted in emotion. The ability to love is established not so much by fervent promise as often repeated deeds. “*Do the first works.*”

A man who maintained his passion for God through many years of service and difficulty was Aiden Wilson Tozer. It began when as a little boy a neighbor, Mr. Holman, evidenced his passion for God when he asked little Aiden if he was converted. Then the passion of a German street preacher arrested his attention as he walked home from work. This led him to salvation, and the beginning of his own passion for God. In a small unused basement space next to the furnace, young Tozer poured out his first love to Christ. His long and useful life was dedicated to the pursuit of God. May our prayer mirror his: “*Begin in mercy a new love within me. Say to my soul, ‘Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.’ Then give me grace to rise up and follow Thee from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long.*”