

Liberty Commentary

Has the Church lost its influence?

The Pew forum on religion and public life confirms that the United States is on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country; the number of Americans who report that they are members of Protestant denominations now stands at barely 51%. Those who claim Catholicism is down to 24% while those Americans who are unaffiliated with any particular religion have seen the greatest growth in numbers.

In the book of Revelation 2:1-7 we find seven verses describing the Ephesian church. The author's description is given by saying, "who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candle sticks." The seven golden candlesticks are seven churches that Jesus has been evaluating. Jesus has been walking about in the midst of the churches evaluating them to see what these churches are like. Jesus knows exactly what we are like as a church and he knows exactly what we are like as individuals. In each one of these churches we can find application for our lives and our churches today. In verse two Jesus says, "I know your work and your labor." This is an approval. There is an approval of the Ephesian church, they have labored and stood for truth and accomplished things for Christ. Christ also says I approve because "you cannot bear them which are evil." Jesus approves of a number of things that this church is doing, but the Lord still had some things that he was not pleased with in the church at Ephesus. In verse 3-4 we find an accusation. "You have labored and you did not faint nevertheless, I have somewhat against you because you have left your first love." This does not mean they have lost their salvation. They did not **lose** their first love; they **left** their first love.

I believe the Christians first love is not reading the Bible, not soul winning, not the joy of going to church, or the joy of Christian

fellowship, but rather I believe our first love must be our love for Christ Himself from which everything we do emanates. To leave your love for Jesus Christ is to leave Christ and the intimate fellowship with Him and go off and fill our lives with the interests of this world and have other things of greater priority just like the Ephesian church had done. The result of making Christ our first love will result in reading and studying our Bibles, will result in having a desire to share our faith with others, will result in having a desire to come to Church and fellowship with other believers, but the fact is we can put on a facade and act spiritual on Sunday as we come to church and fellowship with the brethren, yet our heart can be cold and indifferent and lacking love for the Savior because we have become walking spiritual zombies that impact the lives of no one just like the church of Ephesus. Jesus accuses this Ephesian church of having left their first love even though they were standing for truth, but they were doing it out of rote repetition, just going through the spiritual motions and not motivated out of love for serving the Savior.

In the multitude of churches that I have been able to visit in my travels across the country over the past 25 years, it has been my observation that many churches are just going through the motions without a notion of what the churches true purpose is. There has only been one church that ever cared enough to ask me about my eternal destination. Most never even knew I was there. Most were so wrapped up in their programs, their activities, their agenda's, their fund raising, that they had programmed God right out of the church because they were not focused on the One who should have been the love of their life, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The appeal that Jesus gives to the church at Ephesus is to "remember (vs.5) from whence thou art fallen and repent and do the first works or I will come quickly and remove thy candlestick except thou repent." There are many churches that started out with a fervor for Christ, they taught the Word of God, they enjoyed their

Christian fellowship, they enjoyed praying together, they enjoyed reflecting upon what Christ had done for them on the cross, but now years later there is no fire in the pulpit, no vision of doing great things for God, or expecting great things from God, no interest in reaching their community or their world for Christ, they have become like the Ephesian church with no joy, no vision, no power, just dead dry orthodoxy. Jesus says you need to repent of the apathy and renew your love for Christ.

Did the Ephesian Church repent? Maybe initially they did, but ultimately and in the long run they did not. Here is the sad truth. The church of Ephesus became defunct. You can go to the country of Turkey today and there is no Christian Church or testimony in the city of Ephesus. In fact, with Turkey's 70 Million people there are very few Christians. Since the time that the Apostle Paul planted this multicultural dynamic church at Ephesus that spread the Gospel to all of Asia, 2000 years later we see that Islam dominates this entire region today (99.8 % Islam).

The candlestick was removed. They lost their testimony. They ultimately did not respond to the appeal that was given to return to their first love and we can see the results today of their failure. I believe Jesus is saying to you and to me, do not allow your love for me to grow dim and cold. You will partake of all the glory of Heaven one day and eat that delicious fruit from the tree of life. Keep warring a good warfare, keep standing for sound doctrine, continue to persevere in your faith, and keep your Love for the Savior as your number one priority, or your testimony will be removed.

Pastor, Randy Mason www.libertybaptistofmarshalltown.com
Liberty Baptist Church of Marshalltown

