

**Outline of
the Messages for the Full-time Training
in the Fall Term of 2016**

**GENERAL SUBJECT:
THE FAILURES IN THE CHURCHES,
THE DEGRADATION OF THE CHURCH, THE OVERCOMERS IN THE CHURCH,
THE RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH, AND THE STAGES OF THE CHURCH**

Message Four

The Degradation of the Church

(3)

Leaving the First Love

Scripture Reading: Rev. 2:1-5; Eph. 3:16-19; 5:2; 6:24; S. S. 7:11-12; 8:6-7

- I. “I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love”—Rev. 2:4:**
- A. Although the church in Ephesus had many virtues, it was degraded because it had left its first love—vv. 1-4.
 - B. The Greek word for *first* in verse 4 is the same word translated *best* in Luke 15:22; our first love toward the Lord must be the best love for Him.
 - C. The church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23) is a matter of life; as the new man (2:15), it is a matter of the person of Christ; and as the bride of Christ (John 3:29), it is a matter of love (Eph. 5:2, 25; 6:24):
 - 1. The first Epistle to the Ephesians tells us that for the church life we need to be strengthened into our inner man so that Christ may make His home in our hearts, that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, in order that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God—3:16-19:
 - a. Love is the very element, the inner substance, of God—1 John 4:8, 16.
 - b. The goal of the book of Ephesians is to bring us into God’s inner substance so that we may enjoy God as love and enjoy His presence in the sweetness of the divine love, and thereby love others as Christ did.
 - 2. The second epistle to the Ephesians reveals that the degradation of the church begins with leaving the first love toward the Lord—Rev. 2:4:
 - a. The church in Ephesus had good works, labored for the Lord, endured suffering, and tried the false apostles, but she had left her first love for the Lord—vv. 2-4.
 - b. We in the local churches today must be warned of the possibility of losing our first love for the Lord:
 - (1) We may work and labor for the Lord and we may be pure doctrinally and correct scripturally, yet we may not have the first love for the Lord.
 - (2) Once we have fallen from our first love, our degradation has begun.
 - D. “Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent and do the first works”—v. 5:

1. The first works are works that issue from and express the first love.
2. When we are filled with the first love for the Lord, everything we do will issue from and express our love for Him—Eph. 3:19; 4:16; 2 Cor. 5:14-15, 20.
3. We should express our love for the Lord in the place of His work; in the midst of the Lord's work, we should give Him our love—S. S. 7:11-12.

**II. Nothing but love can keep us in a proper relationship with the Lord—
Mark 12:30; 1 Cor. 2:9; S. S. 8:6-7:**

- A. "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts"—Rom. 5:5:
 1. God as love is the divine essence that has been poured out in our hearts; the pouring out of the love of God in our hearts is a matter of the essence of God.
 2. As those who have been regenerated, we have love as the nature of God's essence within us—John 1:12-13; 3:3, 5-6; 1 John 4:8, 16.
 3. Because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts, the heart of every believer is a heart of love—1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:22.
- B. It is the love in God that gives Him the yearning to unite, mingle, and incorporate with us, and it is the same love in us that gives us the yearning to unite, mingle, and incorporate with Him—1 John 4:8, 16, 19.
- C. To love the Lord Jesus is to appreciate Him, to direct our whole being toward Him, to open to Him, to enjoy Him, to give Him the first place, to be one with Him, to live Him, and to become Him—Matt. 26:6-13; 2 Cor. 3:16; Mark 12:30; Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 6:17; Phil. 1:20-21; *Hymns*, #477, stanza 2.
- D. In His love in the divine romance, the Lord Jesus is courting us; if we would keep His courting word, we need a responsive, affectionate love for Him:
 1. This kind of responsive, affectionate love is portrayed in Song of Songs, where we have a portrait of the love between the Beloved and His love—1:2-4; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; John 14:21, 23.
 2. The subject of Song of Songs is the history of love in an excellent courtship and marriage, revealing the progressive experience of an individual believer's loving relationship with Christ—1:2:
 - a. Song of Songs is a marvelous and vivid portrait, in poetic form, of the bridal love between Christ as the Bridegroom and His lovers as His bride—2:4; 6:3; 7:11-12; 8:6-7, 14.
 - b. If we truly love the Lord, we will surely have the growth and transformation of life—2 Cor. 5:14-15; 3:18.
 - c. Because the seeking one in Song of Songs loves her beloved so much, she experiences the divine dispensing, and there is a continual change in her growth in life—1:9, 15; 2:2, 14; 3:6-7; 4:7; 6:4, 10, 13.
 3. "Love is as strong as death... / Many waters cannot quench love, / Nor do floods drown it. / If a man gave all the substance of his house for love, / It would be utterly despised"—8:6-7:
 - a. The Lord's love cannot be quenched by trials nor drowned by persecutions nor replaced by any wealth—Rom. 8:35-39; 1 Cor. 13:1-3.
 - b. "Thy love is like a burning fire"; "Burn, burn, O love, within my heart, / Burn fiercely night and day, / Till all the dross of earthly loves / Is burned, and burned away"—*Hymns*, #208, stanzas 2 and 4.