

## TAKING THE LEAD AS ELDERS AND RESPONSIBLE ONES

(Friday—First Morning Session)

### Message One

#### **Taking the Lead to Be Patterns and to Love the Lord with the First Love**

Scripture Reading: John 6:57; 1 Tim. 1:16; 4:12; 1 Thes. 1:5-7;  
Rev. 2:4-5; Eph. 6:24; Psa. 110:3; 22:3

#### **I. We need to take the lead to be patterns as elders and responsible ones:**

- A. The Lord Jesus was a pattern of enjoying the Father as the richest grace and the sweetest love to live because of the Father for the Father's glory—John 6:57; Isa. 7:14-15; John 5:19; 4:34; 17:4; 14:10, 24; 5:30; 7:18; Luke 22:27; Matt. 20:26-28.
- B. The Lord Jesus charged us to learn from Him, taking Him as our pattern in being constrained by the Father's will and abounding in the work of carrying out the Father's will—11:28-30; cf. Eph. 4:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:58.
- C. Paul was a pattern to the believers of living Christ for His magnification by the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ for the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 1:16; Phil. 1:19-21a.
- D. Paul charged Timothy to be a pattern to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity—1 Tim. 4:12.
- E. Paul said that we should be imitators of God, as beloved children—Eph. 5:1; Matt. 5:48.
- F. Paul said that we should be imitators of him, as he was of Christ—1 Cor. 11:1; 4:16; 1 Thes. 1:5-6; 2 Thes. 3:9; Phil. 3:17.
- G. The Thessalonians became a pattern to other believers and became imitators of the churches of God—1 Thes. 1:7; 2:14.
- H. Peter said that Christ left Himself as a model so that we may follow in His steps to become His reproduction—1 Pet. 2:21.
  - I. John said that “even as He is, so also are we in this world”; this refers to Christ who lived in this world a life of God as love and who is now our life so that we may live the same life of love in this world and be the same as He is—1 John 4:17; cf. 3:3, 7.

#### **II. To love the Lord with the first love, the best love, is to give the Lord the preeminence, the first place, in all things, being constrained by His love to regard and take Him as everything in our life—Rev. 2:4; Col. 1:18b; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Mark 12:30; Psa. 73:25-26; 80:17-19:**

- A. The beginning of love in everyone toward the Lord is a vision of His person; the leaving of the first love toward the Lord is the source of and main reason for the failure of the church throughout the ages; nothing but love can keep us in a proper relationship with the Lord—Phil. 3:8; Matt. 26:6-13; Eph. 3:16-19; 6:24; Rev. 2:4-5; cf. 3:20.
- B. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is

to repent and do the first works; the first works are works that issue from the first love—2:5; 1 Thes. 1:3; 2 Cor. 4:5:

1. In Song of Songs the Lord's banner over us is love, which means that love is our motto and that everything we do is based on our love for the Lord; the seeker in Song of Songs is also "sick with love," meaning that she is joyous in the Lord as love, to the point of exhaustion—2:4-5.
  2. God's love in Christ is a banner spreading over us, displaying, exhibiting, that we who are loved by God are always more than conquerors—Rom. 8:31-39.
  3. We have a love that conquers everything if we live in His love.
  4. If we have left our first love toward the Lord and do not repent and do the first works, we will lose the testimony of the Lord, and the lampstand will be removed from us.
- C. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to have a personal, affectionate, private, and spiritual relationship with the Lord—S. S. 1:1-4.
- D. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to live a day-by-day life of morning revival so that we may satisfy Christ by being His young men like the dew from the womb of the dawn (Psa. 110:3), so that we may have the tongue of an instructed one to know how to sustain the weary with a word (Isa. 50:4-5), and so that we may fellowship with God, seeking God's will and pleasure for His gospel service (Mark 1:35).
- E. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to live a day-by-day life of consecration, becoming today's Nazarites, who are fully separated unto God and saturated with God in order to bless the children of God by dispensing God in His Divine Trinity into them—Psa. 110:3; Num. 6:1-9, 22-27.
- F. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to live a life of prayer—1 Sam. 12:23; Matt. 6:6; 14:22-23; Dan. 6:10; 2:17-18; 1 Tim. 2:1; 2 Tim. 1:3; 1 Thes. 5:17.
- G. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to love, treasure, and muse on God's word—Psa. 119:11, 14-15, 23, 48, 72, 78, 97, 99, 111, 113, 119, 127, 140, 147-148, 159, 162-163, 165, 167.
- H. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to be governed by the direct, firsthand presence of the Lord—Exo. 33:11, 14; 13:21-22; 2 Cor. 2:10.
- I. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to love the church in the church-loving Christ—Eph. 5:25; 2 Cor. 12:15; 1 Cor. 16:24.
- J. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to love the ministry that builds up the church—2 Cor. 8:5; 1 John 1:3; Eph. 4:11-12.
- K. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to live and walk by the Spirit, to serve by the Spirit, and to minister the Spirit—Gal. 5:25; Phil. 3:3; 2 Cor. 3:6; Zech. 4:6; Judg. 9:9; cf. 1 Sam. 2:30b.
- L. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to take Him as the fountain of living waters; God's intention in His economy

is to be the fountain, the source, of living waters to dispense Himself into His chosen people for their satisfaction and enjoyment to produce the church, God's counterpart, as God's increase, God's enlargement, to be God's fullness for His expression—Jer. 2:13; John 4:14b.

- M. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to eat Him as the tree of life; eating Christ as the tree of life, that is, enjoying Christ as our life supply, should be the primary matter in the church life—Rev. 2:7.
- N. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to continually come to Him to contact Him, take Him, receive Him, taste Him, and enjoy Him—Isa. 57:20, footnote 1.
- O. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to take Him as our centrality—our holding center—and our universality—our everything; we need to take Him as the center, content, and circumference of our personal universe—Col. 1:17b, 18b.
- P. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to aspire and determine to gain the honor of pleasing Him in all things—2 Cor. 5:9; Col. 1:10; Heb. 11:5-6.
- Q. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to have a clear sky like awesome crystal with God's sapphire throne above it; this means that there is nothing between us and the Lord and that we are filled with the heavenly atmosphere, condition, and situation of His ruling presence—allowing Him to rule and reign within us—Ezek. 1:22, 26.
- R. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to hold Him as the Head, staying intimately connected to Him and enthroning Him as the ruler and decider of everything in our life—Col. 2:19.
- S. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to ask for the counsel of Jehovah in every detail of our Christian life and work—Josh. 9:14; Phil. 4:6-7.
- T. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to give the flow of life, the flow of the Lord Jesus within us, the preeminence in all that we are and do; then He is the shining One, the redeeming One, the reigning One, the flowing One, and the supplying One within us—Ezek. 47:1; Rev. 22:1-2.
- U. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to be dominated, governed, directed, led, and moved by our mingled spirit, caring for the rest in our spirit by being His captives and by praying, "Lord, make me Your captive. Never let me win. Defeat me all the time"—2 Cor. 2:13-14.
- V. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to enthrone Him with our praises; praise is the highest work carried out by God's children—Psa. 22:3; 119:164; 34:1.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**TO OVERCOME THE LEAVING OF THE FIRST LOVE**

I must testify that I love the Lord. I received the Lord sixty-seven years ago in 1925. After

all of these years, I feel that the Lord is still so intimate to me and that I am so close to Him. I do not care for any religion. I care for this dear One, this living One. Whenever I mention His name, I am happy. When we wake up in the morning, the first thing we should do is say, "O Lord Jesus. O Lord Jesus." It is better to add, "I love You." We should say, "O Lord Jesus, I love You. O Lord Jesus, I love You." How intimate, how sweet, and how affectionate this is!

Our God, our Christ, our Lord, is not only loving but also very affectionate. He is full of affection. God has "fallen in love" with us, His chosen and redeemed people. If you say, "O Lord Jesus, I love You," right away you will fall in love with Him. Quite often I would not do some things, not merely because they are not right or because I fear God but because I love Him. I would say, "Lord Jesus, I love You, so I cannot do this." I just cannot do certain things, because I love Him.

We need to overcome the loss of the first love. The church in Ephesus was a good church. It was an orderly church and a formal church (Rev. 2:2-3). Surely we would like such a church, but such an orderly church had left the first love (v. 4). The Greek word for *first* is the same as that translated *best* in Luke 15:22. Our first love toward the Lord must be the best love for Him. When the prodigal son in Luke 15 came back home, the father told the servants to bring the *best* robe. The *best* here is the first.

Now I would like us to consider what the first love is. Many Christians think that the first love is the love with which we loved the Lord Jesus when we were saved. I would not say that this is wrong, but it is not adequate. The first love which is the best love is much more than this.

The first love is the love which is God Himself. In the Bible we are told that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). In the whole universe, only God is love. The Lord charges the husbands to love their wives. But it is impossible for the husbands to love their wives in themselves because we are not love. There is only one Person who is love—God.

God is not only the best but also the first. In the whole universe, God is first. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God..." This is the opening of the Bible. God is the beginning. God is the first. Colossians tells us that our Christ must have the first place. He must have the preeminence (1:18b). Christ must be the first. What is it to recover the first love? To recover the first love is to consider the Lord Jesus as the first in everything. If we make Christ everything in our life, that means we have overcome the loss of the first love.

We need to consider our situation. Is Christ the first in everything with us? The first item we have to overcome is the loss of Christ as the first, as the best, as the real love. The failure of Israel was that they forsook God, the fountain of living waters, and the degradation of the church is the leaving of the first love. Actually, to leave the first love is just to leave Christ, not taking Him as the first in everything.

Christ should be first not only in big things but also in small things. When the brothers buy a necktie, they should give Christ the first place. If I wore a certain kind of tie in a very worldly style, I would not be able to speak for the Lord in my ministry. Even for the sake of my conscience, I cannot wear certain styles of ties. The sisters should give Christ the first place in the way that they style their hair. If the sisters give Christ the preeminence in the way that they style their hair, this means that they are taking Him as their first love. Sisters who have a worldly hair style do not have Christ as their first love. They are not giving Him the preeminence. We should give Christ the preeminence in the way that we dress and the way that we style our hair. When we give Christ the preeminence in everything, this is to recover the loss of the first love.

Some think that the first love was our love for the Lord at the beginning of our Christian life when we were saved. But when I was saved, although I was very grateful to the Lord, I did

not have such a strong heart to love Christ as I do today. Sixty-seven years ago I was saved and I loved the Lord Jesus, but not as much as I do today. Thus, the first love must be to have God, Christ, the Lord, our Master, as the first One in everything.

At times when I am getting dressed, I talk to the Lord by saying, "Lord, do You like this shirt? Do You like this pair of shoes?" Such a talk is very intimate with the Lord as the first love. To recover the first love is to give Him the preeminence in great things as well as in small things. The husbands should give Christ the preeminence in the way that they talk to their wives. We need to ask the Lord to forgive us for all the things in which we do not give Him the preeminence.

If we love the Lord Jesus in such a way and to such an extent, we will never stay in the three "isms." We will never remain in any religion. We will love all the Christians, but we will hate any "anity." We should love all the Christians, but we should hate the religions in which they are. Because the Lord hates these "isms," we also should hate them. We should hate what the Lord hates (cf. Rev. 2:6).

The Lord said to let the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest. Then when He comes back, the first thing He will do is to send angels to bind up the tares in bundles and throw them into the lake of fire. The sons of the kingdom, the wheat, constitute the kingdom, whereas the sons of the evil one, the tares, have formed the outward appearance of the kingdom, which is today's Christendom. The Lord hates this outward appearance, so we must overcome it.

We also need to overcome in the kind of ties we wear, in the way that we style our hair, and in all of the small things. In all things we should give the preeminence to Christ. If we do this, our Christian life will be different, and our feeling will be different. Throughout the day, we will be happy in the Lord. When we are joyful in and with the Lord, everything is pleasant. On the other hand, when we are not joyful in the Lord and with the Lord, everything is unpleasant. The enjoyment of the Lord as grace is with those who love Him (Eph. 6:24). Thus, the first thing we have to overcome is the leaving of the first love. The leaving of the first love is the source of and main reason for the failure of the church throughout the ages.

#### **TO MAINTAIN THE EATING OF CHRIST AS THE TREE OF LIFE**

In such a good, orderly, and formal church like the church in Ephesus, we need to first overcome the loss of the first love. The second thing we need is to maintain the eating of Christ as the tree of life. It is in the epistle to the Ephesians that the Lord says, "To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7).

The Lord Jesus charged us to overcome the leaving of the first love and to maintain the eating of Christ as the tree of life. If we give the preeminence to Christ in everything and enjoy Him as the tree of life every day, we will be marvelous, overcoming Christians. When we enjoy Christ as the tree of life, we have the Paradise of God. The tree of life is first seen in Genesis in the garden of Eden. That garden of Eden was the paradise of God at that time. Today our paradise is the church life.

I have been in the church life for sixty years, starting from 1932, so I have much church life experience. If you do not give the preeminence to the Lord or enjoy the Lord, even for a month, the church life may become an unpleasant place to you. Of course, you might not say this, but deep within you would think that there is not much good in the church life. Then the church is altogether no longer a paradise to you. But when you overcome the loss of the first love and maintain your eating of Christ, your enjoying of the Lord, right away the church life becomes paradise to you. Thus, our sensation and our attitude toward the church depend upon our situation. If we give the Lord the preeminence in everything and enjoy Him as the



tree of life throughout the day, right away the church, regardless of its condition, becomes paradise to us. This is why the Lord says that we have to eat the tree of life in the Paradise of God.

Of course, the Paradise of God in Revelation 2:7 actually refers to the New Jerusalem in the thousand-year kingdom. If we enjoy the Lord in this age, we will be rewarded with the eating of the tree of life, Christ Himself, in the New Jerusalem as the Paradise of God in the thousand-year kingdom. We need to continue in the enjoyment of the life supply of Christ in the present church life so that we can be rewarded with the enjoyment of Christ as the tree of life in the Paradise of God, the New Jerusalem, in the millennial kingdom. In the New Jerusalem in its freshness as the Paradise of God, we will participate in full in the enjoyment of the rich life supply of Christ as the embodiment of the processed and consummated Triune God.

#### **TO SHINE FORTH THE DIVINE LIGHT AS THE LAMPSTAND**

We need to overcome the leaving of the first love, to maintain the eating of Christ as the tree of life, and to shine forth the divine light as the lampstand (Rev. 2:5b). Love is related to life, and life is related to light. Love, life, and light are a trinity. If you make Christ the first in everything, you have love. If you have this love, you have life, and you will enjoy the Lord. If you have life, this life becomes light to you. The light of the lampstand, the church, shines forth corporately versus individualistically in the dark night of the church age.

#### **TO KEEP THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS AS THE SHINING OF THE LAMPSTAND IN THEIR LOCALITY**

If we are enjoying Christ as our love, life, and light, we will keep the testimony of Jesus as the shining of the lampstand in our locality (Rev. 12:17b). We will testify of Christ's person as God and as man and of Christ's human living, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, descension, and second appearing. The shining of the light is a testimony. In every aspect of our daily life, we should be shining forth Christ. This shining is the shining of the lampstand.

We need to remember these four words that begin with the letter "I"—love, life, light, and lampstand. These four "I" words start with love. We must give the Lord Jesus the preeminence in every way and in everything to recover the first love. Then we will enjoy Him as the tree of life, and this life right away becomes the light of life (John 8:12). Then we will be shining in our daily life and corporately as the lampstand. Otherwise, the lampstand will be removed from us individually and from the church corporately. The Lord warned the church in Ephesus to repent and recover the first love for the enjoyment of Him. Otherwise, the lampstand would be removed from them. We need love, life, light, and the lampstand. Then we will be rewarded by the Lord with what we are and live in Him.

In the Bible, the principle is that our reward is always what we are. What we are will become our reward. If we love others, our loving others will be a reward to us. If we honor our parents, our honor to them will be a reward to us. If we do not live Christ and behave in Christ in the church life, there will be nothing as a reward to us in the church life. Instead, because we do not live Christ, we may feel bitter toward the elders and toward all the saints. If we live Christ and behave in Christ, this living, this behaving, will become our reward. Then we will be happy in the church life. If today we take Christ as the first in everything, we will have love, we will enjoy Him as life, we will shine forth with Him as light, and we will become the shining lampstand as the testimony of Jesus. This eventually will become our reward not only in this age but even more in the coming age. In the thousand-year kingdom we will enjoy Christ as our reward in the Paradise of God. (*The Overcomers*, pp. 30-36)

## LOVING THE LORD

For the God-ordained way, the biblical way, the new way, we all need, first of all, to love the Lord. In John 21 the Lord asked Peter if he loved Him. Peter told the Lord, “You know that I love You.” Then the Lord answered, “Feed My lambs,” and “Feed My sheep” (vv. 15, 17). To speak is not only to edify or to teach but also to feed the lambs and to feed the sheep. If we are going to feed the Lord’s sheep, we have to speak. Without speaking, how could we feed any Christian? For us to feed the Lord’s sheep, we must love Him. We should tell the Lord, “Lord, I love You, so I like to speak You forth to others.” The more that we love Him, the more we are qualified, equipped, and even perfected to speak.

According to the Scriptures, the sisters are weaker vessels according to their nature by birth (1 Pet. 3:7). This is according to God’s creation. But as long as the sisters love Him, they will speak. I was born in Christianity, and I was raised there for nineteen years without receiving the Lord as my Savior. But one day a young lady came to my hometown. I was nineteen years old, and she was twenty-five. That was over sixty years ago in conservative mainland China. For a young lady to speak to a thousand people was a very unique and unusual event. Although I had been to Christian meetings quite often, I went to this meeting full of curiosity to see this young lady speak. In my whole life, even up to today, I never heard a person speaking with that much authority. She was a young girl standing on the platform in a meeting place that was filled with about one thousand people. As I listened to her, all my curiosity was taken away. Every word that she spoke caught me, and I was fully convinced. I was a young man raised up in Christianity, but that day I was convinced and caught by the Lord. After the meeting as I was walking home, I prayed and gave my entire life to the Lord.

That young lady, who was only twenty-five years old, loved the Lord to the uttermost. That was her motive. Her love for the Lord was the factor, the element, and the very basic essence of her being powerful. The message she released was from the book of Exodus. She told the audience that Egypt typified the world and that all the worldly people were under the tyranny of Satan just as the children of Israel were under the tyranny of Pharaoh. She said that we had to be delivered out of this tyranny and that this was our exodus. When I heard this near the beginning of her message, I said to myself that I would not be under Satan’s tyranny any more. Because this young sister loved the Lord to the uttermost, she had the Lord’s authority, and the impact was in her gospel preaching.

If we love the Lord, we surely will be filled with Him. Whatever fills us within will come out of us. The overflow comes from the infilling. When we love the Lord, He will fill us. From that day in 1925 when I gave my life to the Lord, I loved to study the Bible and to talk to people about Jesus. Because I was filled with the Lord Jesus, I wanted to speak the Lord Jesus. If we are filled with the Lord Jesus, we surely will have something to pour out. If the sisters love the Lord, they will not be able to restrain themselves from speaking forth the Lord. When we love the Lord to the uttermost, we must speak. We must release the One who has filled us within. (*Speaking Christ for the Building Up of the Body of Christ*, pp. 33-34)