

Greatest Danger Confronting the Church

by Russell DeLong

The sermon emphasizes the critical need for church members to rekindle their passionate love for God to combat spiritual decline.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Nehemiah 8:10, Psalm 51:10, Isaiah 62:1, Matthew 24:12, James 5:20, 1 John 1:9, 1 John 2:15, Revelation 2:4-5

Topics: "Spiritual Decay", "Repentance"

Description

Russell V. DeLong preaches about the greatest danger confronting the Church, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a passionate love for God above all else. Drawing from St. Matthew 24:12 and Revelation 2:4, he highlights the peril of losing one's first love for God, which renders all other admirable traits meaningless. DeLong urges church members to evaluate their spiritual health honestly, pointing out signs of lost love such as joylessness, lack of interest in spiritual matters, and a growing spirit of worldliness. He calls for repentance, emphasizing the need to return to God and revive the fervent love for Him to save both the Church and the nation from moral decay.

Transcript

Scripture Reading -- St. Matthew 24:3-13, Revelation 2:1-7

Are you a church member? If so, what, in your opinion, is the greatest danger confronting

the Church today? To bring the matter a little closer, what is the greatest danger facing your own denomination? And still a bit closer and more personal -- what is the greatest danger confronting you? And to apply the question to myself -- what is the greatest danger confronting Russell V. DeLong.

Such is the problem of this sermon. The answer given by Jesus is shocking, disconcerting, and startling. Let us explore it together for a few minutes.

I have selected two texts for the sermon today -- the first, the words of Jesus from the first book of the New Testament, St. Matthew 24:12: And because iniquity shall abound, the Love of many shall wax cold.

And the second, the words of God himself from the last book of the New Testament,

Revelation 2:4: Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

The first of my texts today is taken from the address of Jesus to His disciples regarding conditions as they will exist prior to His Second Coming and the end of the world. The second text was lifted from the address of God himself to the Ephesian church.

In the first century the seven churches of Asia Minor played a great part in the early propagation of the gospel. The most prominent of these was the church in the great metropolitan city of Ephesus. This organization started as the result of a Home Missionary Campaign conducted by that great evangelist, Apollos. Twelve men repented of their sins and were baptized. A short time later, the Apostle Paul himself, being in that part of the world and having heard of the revival of Apollos, went to Ephesus and used as his first text these words: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" (Acts 19:2). At the close of that sermon all twelve men received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second epoch in their Christian experience. Thus the members of the Ephesian church were converted under Apollos and sanctified under St. Paul. They had a

wonderful beginning.

The history of the Ephesian church is that of glorious conquest. One of the letters St. Paul wrote to this church has been included in the sacred canon. It is thought to be the most deeply spiritual of all the Pauline epistles. In this letter St. Paul refers to them as: (1) saints, (2) holy, (3) forgiven, (4) redeemed, (5) sealed by the Holy Spirit, and (6) fellow citizens of the household of God. It was a wonderful church. And then -- god himself adds many commendatory things to the credit of this magnificent church when He says, Item A -- "I know thy works," good. Item B -- "and thy labors," excellent. Item C -- "and thy patience," splendid. Item D -- "and thy hatred of evil," a sin-hating church. Item E -- "that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes," in other words, you are Orthodox and fundamental.

And then -- after that mountain built to their credit -- god says, "Nevertheless" in spite of

all these items to your credit -- "I have somewhat against thee." What possibly could God have against such an admirable, exemplary church? He gives the shocking answer, "Thou hast left thy first love."

Here is the startling, disconcerting news -- unless I possess that passionate love for God in my heart, all these other admirable traits are worthless. In the scales of God, my personal love for Him outweighs all that I might do for Him minus that love. In brief, if God has me, my love, He has all I can give or do. But if He does not have me -- I can't buy my way in with money or works.

Have you ever pondered on the question, "Why did God create man?" Did He want money? No. He could have created that. Did He want things? No. He could make those. The only satisfactory theodicy to me is that God wanted a free creature -- not an automaton, nor a robot, nor a machine. No, He wanted a person with the power of free choice who could choose God or Satan, right or wrong. When man chose God's companionship and "they walked together in the cool of the day," God had what he wanted -- man's love. This truth runs all through the Bible. Note the Ten Commandments -- which is the greatest? Jesus said, "Love the Lord thy God, is the first and greatest commandment." In reality, then, the man who refuses to give God his love is a greater

sinner than a liar, thief, adulterer, or Sabbath desecrater. Religion is more than what you don't do. It is a positive, affirmative giving of oneself to God.

"First love" -- an interesting figure of speech. Have you ever been in love? Do you

remember how you'd go through any adverse conditions to be with that sweetheart? Yes, you had something within that made long distances short; cold weather, warm; and difficult conditions, easy.

Church member, do you remember when you were first converted, when the love of God

was first shed abroad in your heart? Do you remember some of the effects of that initial love? (1) Joy, (2) Interest, (3) Liberality, (4) A love for everybody, (5) A love for private communion with God, and (6) A spirit of supreme sacrifice for Him. Your entire being was wrapped up in God and His will. His love completely possessed your personality.

A few years ago I became suddenly ill, was rushed to a hospital and compelled to remain there for several weeks. The first morning doctors and nurses gave me all kinds of tests -- metabolism, blood, lung, heart -- a thorough check-up.

After completing these examinations, the doctor said, "It is fortunate that you stopped just when you did, for if you had gone on it would have resulted in shock and premature death."

Thus it is with thousands, yea, millions, of church members -- possibly not spiritually dead, but in poor, anemic, dangerous health.

What are some of the signs or indices of lost love? Here are a few spiritual health tests.

Apply them to yourself. Be honest. Evaluate your real spiritual life accurately. You know and God knows.

Test number one -- possibly metabolism.

If you have lost joy in serving God, if you go to church out of a sense of duty, if the romance has gone, know this you have lost love out of your heart. Nehemiah said, "The joy of the Lord is my strength." When you lose joy, you lose power.

Test number two -- maybe heart.

As you analyze yourself do you find little or no interest in the church, no interest in the Sunday school or Young People's Society, no concern for spiritual awakenings? It is a

psychological fact that when you lose interest in one thing you shift to another. What is taking the place in your life of your former interest in Christ and His kingdom? Movies, dancing, society, athletics -- the world in general? Remember St. John says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Test number three -- If you have no burden for your loved ones, no tears for the lost, no concern for the salvation of men for whom Jesus died -- you have lost love out of your heart.

Test number four -- This is very subtle. If, as you analyze your consciousness, you note that there is a tendency to find fault, be critical, caustic, censorious, and sarcastic, know that the love for the family has departed. Love covers a multitude of faults.

Test number five -- Do you recall how when first converted you had power with God and influence with people? when you prayed, heaven and earth kissed each other and when you exhorted people were moved Godward? Have you lost that power?

Test number six -- If you find there is a growing spirit of worldliness -- a desire to talk like the world, act like the world, dress like the world, and be like the world -- that is a grave danger signal.

Lost love -- that is the greatest danger confronting the Church, your denomination, you and me, personally. In the rush of events, the demands of business, the attractions -- of the world, and the pull of iniquity there is the constant peril of gradually losing one's love for Christ and His kingdom.

Conditions are appalling. Leaders of all denominations, educators, statesmen, jurists, are alarmed! Something must be done! what? More education? More entertainment? No! what America needs is a return to the moral and religious principles of the founders of our nation. We can't go farther on the present road without more ruin. We must stop! We must return! We must repent!

If our nation is rescued the change must begin in the hearts of church members. Sin-loving, pleasure-mad, card-playing, drinking, Sabbath-desecrating church members will never save our civilization.

Church members who think more about pleasure than God; church women who think more of bridge parties than saving the souls of our youth; church members who attend divine worship Easter and Christmas and spend other Sundays on the golf course or elsewhere making the Sabbath a holiday rather than a holy day; church -- members who drink occasionally, smoke incessantly, and dance more often than they attend church, must repent and return to God or lose their souls.

A lukewarm, indifferent, anemic church is in a great measure to blame for our national crime wave, juvenile delinquency, and moral debauchery. When the church has more members in the movies Sunday nights than in the church Sunday mornings it is time someone stood up with prophetic earnestness and in impassioned soul and cried aloud and spared not.

Isaiah cried out: "For Zion's sake, I will not hold my peace. And for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth."

God said to the Ephesian church, "Repent, and do the first works over or I will remove thy candlestick out of its place." What does this mean -- apostate forever.

It is time we repented. It is time ministers and laymen alike came back to God. It is time, as the prophet cried out that we "humble ourselves and seek God and turn from our wicked ways." The hour has struck! It is either a return to God or a march to hell. It is either save our nation or contribute to its speedy damnation.

What is our greatest danger? That in the midst of business, rush, pleasure, iniquity, we will forget God, omit personal devotions, absent ourselves from divine worship, put something ahead of God and lose that

dynamic, passionate love of God out of our hearts and ultimately lose our souls.

With a burdened heart, a stirred soul, and an intense desire, I appeal to church members, ministry and laity alike, get on your knees, humble yourselves, let God's love come back into your life with power. Let's save America! But first let's save the Church. To do so we must save ourselves by returning to the Saviour in true repentance.

Repent and return to God. He is your greatest need. Let His love go surging through your soul again.

Fanny Crosby stated the need of thousands when she wrote:

Saviour, more than life to me,
I am clinging, clinging close to Thee;
Let Thy precious blood applied,
Keep me ever, ever near Thy side.

Chorus:

Every day, every hour,
Let me feel Thy cleansing power;
May Thy tender love to me
Bind me closer, closer, Lord, to Thee.
Yes, that's the secret -- to feel His cleansing power every day and every hour.
Let me love Thee more and more,
Till this fleeting, fleeting day is o'er;
Till my soul is lost in love,
In a brighter, brighter world above.

Prayer

Let us pray. O God, we are living in difficult days. It is a fight to keep spiritual. Appeals and allurements on every side pull us away from Thee. Pleasure-seeking and business-demands have crowded Thee out of our lives. We pray that Thou wouldst help hundreds, yea, thousands of church members who are in poor spiritual health to let the vital, vibrant blood of Christ go surging through their spiritual blood stream. We would also pray for sinning church members that they might repent as Thou didst command the members of the Ephesian church. O God, save the Church and thus enable the Church to save our nation from moral and spiritual ruin. Amen.

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