

Our Focus is to Know How Much God Loves us!

Return to Our First Love!

By B. D. Tate

First Love: Remember this warning?

Rev. 2:4 “Nevertheless I have *this* against you, **that you have left your first love.**

5 “Remember therefore from where you have fallen;

Many of us immediately think of when we got saved and how we glowed in the experience and basked in the assurance of God’s love for us. We knew we were saved, forgiven, and loved!

We see this same experience repeated in others when they first get saved—a **glow of love**. We all know it’s going to wear off because life goes on and we must get busy responding to our salvation by doing what pleases the Lord, doing the things that mature Christians do. ***What is it that we all do?*** We get busy trying to love God back. We get busy trying to do this or that thing such as denying our self, picking our cross and following Him. We take on the burden of life in resisting temptations, avoiding evil, not loving the world and not loving family as much as God!

But what was our first love? It wasn’t our effort at all; it was God’s love for us that we embraced and walked in during that ***honeymoon stage of salvation***. Then we all began to grow up and do the things we were taught in focusing our effort on loving God back. If we love God we will keep His commandments, do the

right things, witness, be an example, go to church, pray, read the Bible, and serve others. All of this is good but if it places the burden on us to love God, instead of doing these things **because** are receiving His love, it causes ***us to leave our first love!***

If our focus is on our efforts to love God instead of staying in our ***first love*** which is to abide in the revelation of His love for us, we are missing it. Subtly but surely we cross back over from grace, receiving and abiding in His love, to the works of the flesh, or works of the law, trying to express our love for him!

We've fallen from our first love and didn't know it thinking we were doing the things that Jesus said to do. He did say we needed to keep His commandments if we love Him; however, he clarified it all by saying this is a **NEW** commandment, that we should love each other AS He has loved us! He received the love of the Father and then passed that love onto us! We have nothing to give unless we receive first His love for us and abide in it!

We have mistakenly focused on the ***first two commandments*** of the **Old Testament** thinking we were fulfilling what he said. The first commandment is "*Love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength*"; the second is, "*love your neighbor as yourself.*" Jesus said if a man keeps these two commandments He fulfills all the law and the prophets! The truth is we can't do this anymore that we can keep the law of God! What we can do is receive and accept our salvation as God's love for us being poured out into our hearts. It is God's work that we love one another with His love, not our own efforts—that always falls short. God has saved us from our lack and given us His love which is our ***first love!*** When we know how much God's loves us

we can love Him and others as we ought to. We love because He first loves us!

Joh 15:9 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; **abide in My love.**

Joh 15:10 "If you keep **My** commandments, you **will abide in My love,** just as I have kept **My** Father's commandments and **abide in His love.**

Where Our Focus Is...

This is an astounding simple statement and hard to grasp; but it is what Jesus said:

John 6: 28, 29

28 Then they said to Him, "**What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?**"

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "**This is the work of God, that you believe in Him** whom He sent."

The works of God in our life is that we would believe in Him whom He sent. I know that many of us are thinking "*Well, I do believe in him, I believe He is the Son of God, the Savior of the World that He died for my sins...*" And we do well to believe these **things but it doesn't stop there...** unfortunately we may have developed a rather **short or limited** understanding of what it means to believe in Him. We may have sold ourselves short or allowed ourselves to be robbed of all that this means. Simple to focus on but not simple to understand or grasp its depth.

We get what we believe according to the gospel. Why is it subject to us? Why doesn't God just do what He wants done in our life? God gave us dominion over our heart and authority in this earth to exercise our choices—this is predetermined by God. Even when we come to Christ all that was finished in the cross, all

that was atoned for, all that was won and accomplished in the new birth **is subject to what we believe.**

Mr 9:23 Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, **all things are possible to him who believes.**"

A Brief Explanation of Believe

First, **believe is actually a response to what God has said and done.** We believe Him. This kind of believing is faith in what God told us. This kind of believing isn't just knowledge of the truth, information ***about*** the truth, but embraced, trusted, accepted, stood upon, related to as in "I believe you!" This kind of believing ***isn't blind*** but experiences God's revelation and with it rest, joy, and peace ***resulting in knowing.*** This kind of believing isn't a ***resignation*** as in giving up, quitting, or surrendering a position, power or responsibility; it is empowering, building up, receiving assistance, having new life and vigor restored with authority and is acted upon! It believes which leads to speaking and doing...***it believes so much that it changes my mind, my attitude, and the way I make decisions—the way I live my life.***

Second, **this kind of believing isn't based upon emotions, feelings, or the senses.** This kind of believing ***supersedes or rises*** above these things. ***The works of God for us is to believe what He has done in us:*** We believe we are born again; we believe we are children of God; we believe we are no longer under bondage to sin and the curse; we believe we are in a new position of righteousness in Christ Jesus. These are faith facts we believe and embrace as true regardless of the feelings or emotions we might have, it is based solely upon God's Word. We believe these things despite what circumstances or situations or symptoms we might be presently experiencing. ***We have fixed our eyes on the unseen truths of God's Word (The substance and evidence of things not seen) rather than upon the temporal***

fallen world around us (II Cor. 4:18). I am no longer a mere man, natural, and blinded by sin; I am a *supernatural being* and co-laborer with the Son of God.

Third, **it's not about what I've done or not done, it is based completely in what God has done in me in Jesus—it's a gift!** I am no longer under the law ***I am under and in grace.*** I am no longer under condemnation, guilt, shame, or reproach; I am under love, joy, peace, kindness, faith, accepted in the beloved and joined as one in the Lord. **I am no longer on my own carrying the burden of life, responsible but without power to change things, subject to the law, the curse, and the fall;** I am forever co-mingled in God's Spirit, I am not without God ever, and I have all that God is in me in Jesus Christ my Lord (Col. 1:27).

What does this mean to me to believe in Him?

In regards to God's love what I believe is what I get. I asked the Lord to open my eyes to understand His love better—to expand my believing. I believe God loves me. I have sung many songs, read many verses that speak to this truth; **but I do not think I know and believe it as much as I should.** I think my heart is still placing God's love in a more conditional place.

Many of us feel remorse, guilt, condemnation, shame, when we sin **and it affects the way we think God sees us.** If I'm a good boy, if I say my prayers, if I'm kind to others, if I'm being spiritually minded then I feel I'm in a better place with God's love. It is just like being a child in the home and wanting something from mom or dad but I haven't obeyed much or done what I was supposed to do. The answer might be no because I don't deserve it. ***I don't feel necessarily less loved but I don't feel especially loved either.*** It seems that precious love moments come when I've been a good boy or done something pleasing to my mom and dad.

I heard recently an answer to my prayer about God's love for me. It was in a message by a pastor of large church in Singapore. He titled his message: "Don't Boast about Your Love for God; Boast about God's Love for you." I found the emphasis interesting especially when he made this statement: **The law commands us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and body...this places a great burden on us because we don't.** When we think about our requirement to love God this way we fail and it causes us to lose confidence with God.

In other words, under grace we are not supposed to put the burden of our relationship on ourselves to love God with all our heart. I found that fascinating. My ears perked as his message turned it all around from trying to love God **to accepting, receiving, and understanding how much God loves us with all His heart, soul, and being.** The scripture teaches us this:

1Jo 4:19 We love Him **because He first loved us.**

The stress has been we need to love God, put God first, seek His face, show our love back to God...and most of us have made a good effort to do this but it has always fallen short because we know we could love God more than we do...often this position (of feeling like we don't love God enough) causes us to feel God is not happy with us and we don't deserve His blessings—or our answers to prayer.

I love the flip on this because suddenly *it's not on us to love God but to respond to His love for us!* It is the emphasis that matters. If I'm trying my best to love God I will have some results because I will at least stumble into the things of God. The best emphasis or focus for us though is that we should be seeking, pursuing, receiving, and accepting **how much God loves us!**

As I considered this message I began to re-examine passages of scripture that seemed to put the burden on us to love God!

John 14:15 "**If you love Me**, keep My commandments.

When Jesus said "If you love Me, keep my commandments" we often think of the law...however, his commandment was this, "**love one another AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.**"

John 13:34 "**A new commandment I give to you**, that you love one another; **as I have loved you**, that you also love one another.

A new commandment means something has changed!

Under the old commandment the responsibility to love God was upon us!

Mark 12:30 '**And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.**' **This is the first commandment** (Jesus was quoting the Old Testament).

The major problem is that we don't do this...and in truth ***we can't do this*** anymore than we can keep the Law of Moses! In other words the old commandment of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is based upon our efforts to keep it. This placed the fulfillment on us just as keeping the law was upon us. We can't keep the law and because of this truth we are cursed:

Ga 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "**Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.**"

When Jesus gives us a new commandment He told us to love one another **AS I HAVE LOVED YOU!** This is like the verse from I John:

1Jo 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

This is placing the burden on us to receive God's love first in order to love Him and to love others. We can't love God as the commandment states from our own effort for we are devoid of love as much as we are devoid of the power to keep the law in our humanness.

The law was given to show us clearly we are not holy, we are not righteous, we are sinners and breakers of the law...yet, ultimately all the **law does is expose our heart's condition that we do not have the love of God in us!**

Follow this passage:

John 5: 38 **"But you do not have His word abiding in you,** because whom He sent, **Him you do not believe.**

39 "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they **which testify of Me.**

40 "But you are not willing to **come to Me that you may have life.**

41 "I do not receive honor from men.

42 **"But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you.**

We Are Receivers & Broadcasters Not the Source of Love!

When we become born again more than anything else we have the love of God put inside of us! Jesus said it plainly unless a man is born again he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. ***The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of love.*** Unless a man receives into his heart the love of God he has nothing to give. Jesus said that he could do nothing without the Father; neither can we love without the Father. Jesus said I am the vine you are the branches apart from Me you can do nothing (John 15). In other words, we

can't love God without the love of God in us. **We can't give what we haven't received.**

We need to grasp this misguided effort on our part to emphasize our love for God. When we do this ***we return to the old commandment status under the law.*** It is a burden we can't keep or fulfill. When we preach, teach, or exhort each other that we need to love God more that is placing our efforts back under the law again. It is amazing to me but I can see it so clearly now. I also find myself relieved of the guilt, the condemnation and shame of not loving God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.

This is Huge!

My efforts have subtly been about trying to be more faithful, more obedient, and more loving to God as Jesus said, "If you love Me keep my commandments!" What I have done is separate this from the ***true context*** and put it back under the law. The **new** commandment means that our focus on loving God no longer applies because **we are now under grace!** It is simply true because we can't do it. **It is about us abiding in His gift of love towards us!** It is about us receiving, accepting, experiencing, and abiding in His love for us!

John 15:9 "**As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.**

10 "**If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.**

What This means!

Our place and purpose now as born again children of God is to focus on His love for us! ***We can't love others until we know***

how much God loves us! *We can't love God until we know how much He loves us!*

Listen to this prayer of Paul's:

Eph. 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,
16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

17 that **Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,**

18 may **be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—**

19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, **according to the power that works in us,**

21 to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

What are the works of God? That we would believe the focus that our whole experience of life is about one thing: **it is about coming to know, believe, and experience God's love.**

What is He after? I used to say that God is after our hearts to love him with all our mind, soul, and strength. Now, I get it, it is about me understanding that God's great joy, life, and power is intimately involved with my receiving and accepting how much He loves me! **It's not about me revealing my love for Him; it's about Him revealing His love to me—that's amazing!**

I'm trying to do for Him, live for Him, please Him, do things that bring glory to Him, and as good as all of that sounds, that's missing it at the core. It's about Him trying to do for us, live with us, serve and give to us His love...He wants us to receive His love!

That's it that we'd come to know intimately how much He loves us and live in His love!

If you love someone greatly all you want to do is show them how much you do. If that person recognizes it, appreciates it, all you want to do is express it more!

God Is Energized When We Experience His Love!

I love this teaching that points out the giving life of the love of God. When Jesus met the woman at the well, he was tired, hungry and thirsty...the disciples went to get food in town. While he sat on the well the woman came. After discussing with her how it is that He had water that would never fade, that she'd never thirst again, she began to respond to Him. She listened, took it in, received His words, and then ran and told others...the disciples returned with food wanting him to eat and be refreshed. He told them that He had food that they didn't know about...food is doing the will of Him who sent Him...but as it is pointed out, Jesus went from being tired, thirsty, and hungry to invigorated, joyful, filled, and fed...what fed Him? **The woman received His love!**

God is fulfilled when we receive His love; when we accept His love...and ***more importantly when we feed on His love!***

Do we really grasp how much God loves us? We try...we consider that Jesus was given for us therefore we know that anything given in exchange means it has similar value! But even then we know that Jesus' value is far greater than any one of us...God gave more it seems than was required. He over paid for us; therefore His love is for ALL of us not just one of us...however the scriptures testify this way:

Joh 16:27 "**for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed** that I came forth from God.

Abiding in the Love of the Father

As the Father loves the Son so He loves us! We can study to see how God loves Jesus and that will help us understand how much He loves us...the problem is that we are so focused on feeling under the gun to love God we can't see that is under the law. **We are under grace it is now about us seeing how much God loves us.**

Ro 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for **us all**, how shall He not with Him also **freely give us all things**? (Freely give us His Love!)

Lu 15:10 "Likewise, I say to you, **there is joy in the presence of the angels of God** over one sinner who repents." (God's joy over us!)

Eph. 3: 18 may **be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—
19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge;**

Romans 8:35 **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?**
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, **shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (The only thing that separates us from His love is not accepting it!)

Conclusion:

We are the beloved. We are the loved, the pursued, the sought...God wants our attention, our focus, our love returned by an act of our will to receive, accept, and experience His love!

We acknowledge that greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world; we acknowledge that if God be for us who can stand against us...**Yet, this has to do with His great love for us even more than how we have applied it.** The greater purpose, the greater reason, the greater riches, the greater experience is in us—**it's His love for us.** If God be for us, after us, desirous of our love, that love cannot be stood against! His love will not overpower or override our will, but when we open up, and realize that we were made to know and experience His love, nothing can stop it.

We sing about His love, His faithfulness, His goodness, His grace and forgiveness...all of this is so that we would focus on His love for us!

What is the work of God? That we would **believe in the One He sent** and Jesus said:

John 15:9 "**As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.**

10 "**If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.**

When we know we are loved and filled with His presence **life changes.** Our Faith works far better through God's love. Love is the greatest thing. Our insecurities, fears, and worries exist because we don't know how much He loves us. Perfect love casts out all fear...when we experience God's love and receive the

healing balm of that love, we'll stop being so irritated, so angered, so disappointed with life, so depressed, so fearful, and most importantly we'll be able to love others, love God, and operate in grace and faith more...

How Then Do We Experience God's Love?

Just as the Father Loved the Son so He loves us. Just as value for something is determined by what was paid for it, so we have Jesus value in the Father's eyes. For God so loved the world...that He gave...*that whosoever believes* will have eternal life! That eternal life begins and remains in the Father's love. Our focus is opening our lives up to His love. This begins in the same way that we understand anything about the born again experience, that God has put inside us, in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, His love.

By Acknowledging it!

By acknowledging everything that is good that is in us in Christ Jesus our faith becomes effective (Philemon 1:6). By acknowledging the love of God has been given to us and abides in us we are agreeing with the Word of God and standing in God's grace through faith.

Ro 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, **because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**

2Ti 1:7 **For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love** and of a sound mind.

By Thanking God for it!

When we thank God for His love abiding in us we are opening our hearts up for His love revelation within. Through thanksgiving and praise God inhabits or manifests His love in our heart. Instead of asking God to give us more of His love which stands in unbelief; we give thanks even if we don't feel it, sense it, or think we are worthy of it. We are never going to be worthy of God's love—it is a gift to be received with thanksgiving.

1Th 5:18 ...**in everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

By Speaking of His Love and Declaring Yourself the Beloved of God!

The principle is the same when we became born again we believed with our heart and confessed or agreed with our mouth that Jesus is Lord. The scripture testifies that our salvation is made real to us through the witness of the Holy Spirit by doing this (Rom. 10). Then we use it in the same way as we believe in God's beloved Love for us. Therefore from our hearts as we believe and speak in agreement with God's Word we will experience it more as the Spirit bears witness to it.

2Co 4:13 **And since we have the same spirit of faith**, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," **we also believe and therefore speak**,