

## CHAPTER 1

### ARE CHRISTIANS LOSING THE RIGHT FOCUS IN THE LAST DAYS?

As we survey the spiritual scene and development among believers and church groups today, we see much emphasis on programmes, methods, activities and efforts to make the gospel more palatable and attractive to non-believers. For some groups, there is the stress on the keeping of traditions; others concentrate on the spectacular, the spiritual experiences, the emotional “highs”, the promises of success, prosperity and freedom from all that is negative in life. Then there are those who strategise on the best approach to share the gospel and to reach the world, employing management principles, planning and training know-how and the use of all that is available in science and technology.

### IS THE LORD GOD PLEASED?

Are such developments in line with the right focus for believers as we see the day of the Lord approaching? Is the Lord God pleased with what is going on among His people?

*To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:  
These are the words of him who holds the seven  
stars in his right hand and walks among the seven  
golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard  
work and your perseverance.*

*I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and not grown weary.*

*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

#### Revelation 2:1-5

It is clear that it was the Lord Jesus Himself who addressed the church in Ephesus. Although the letter was addressed specifically to the church in Ephesus at that point of time, the principles apply to all of God's people and churches for all time.

Notice that the Lord Jesus knew the state of the church in Ephesus. The believers in Ephesus were diligent. They toiled as a people of God. They also persevered and endured for the name of the Lord and did not grow weary. They had spiritual insight and were able to test the false apostles, and they would not tolerate wicked men. They could identify with the concerns of the Lord Jesus in the area of rejecting false teaching.

If we look at the list of achievements secured by the church in Ephesus then, we must acknowledge that it is rather outstanding. Not many congregations today can

boast of even a few of those achievements, not to mention the whole list. Many congregations today already fail with regard to the first item in the list; they lack diligence and refuse to work hard. It was not the case with the church in Ephesus. There are congregations today that work hard but cannot last and endure. The church in Ephesus was able to persevere and endure. Not too few congregations can be easily fooled by false apostles but the church in Ephesus was able to test the false apostles and found them to be so. The church also would not tolerate wicked men and her moral standards were commendable when compared to many other groups.

## **GOD VALUES OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM ABOVE EVERYTHING ELSE**

Yet the Lord Jesus was not pleased with the church in Ephesus although He noted all these positive points. The pronouncement from the Lord was: *“I hold this against you. You have forsaken your first love.”*

All the toil, perseverance, endurance, insight, concern for God’s name and for what is morally right may come to no avail if God’s people have forsaken their first love. And what is this first love? Is it not with reference to the relationship between God’s people and the Lord Jesus Christ, the relationship that was so refreshing, so filled with gratitude and so much alive when God’s people first come to know and to love Him? Some believers may recall how this first love awakened them to awe and wonder, adoration

and worship of God beyond their ordinary human experience and imagination.

When God's people lose this first love, when the right focus on the Lord Jesus is diminished and lost, all the positive points listed above become meaningless and displeasing to the Lord. The Lord God values our relationship with Him above everything else. If this relationship is jeopardised, nothing else can replace it. Even prayers and service can become an abomination when the heart is cold and not right with God. If we lose the right focus on the Lord Jesus, we lose this right relationship with Him. The focus on spiritual activities, strategies, programmes, vision and the like cannot replace fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ in the Christian walk.

### **WE MAY BECOME MORE INTERESTED IN GODLINESS THAN IN GOD HIMSELF**

We need to be aware of a subtle but great danger: we may actually be more interested in godliness than in God Himself. We immerse ourselves in principles of godliness, seminars, programmes and activities to pursue godliness and end up showing very little interest in God Himself. It is as if we are so familiar with the ethics and principles of marriage but fail to spend time with our spouse and to love him or her. True spirituality is *not knowing about God* but *knowing God*, and this requires not the wisdom of men but the grace of God.

We must acknowledge that the “positive characteristics” of the church in Ephesus were far more superior to the many activities we see in congregations today. Nonetheless, the church in Ephesus was told to repent. Obviously, repentance is not called for if there is no failure or sin on the part of God’s people. In this case, the failure, in God’s eyes, was deemed as significant. What about us? Are we also called to repent? Is the Lord God pleased with what is going on among God’s people today? Are we faring better than the church in Ephesus then? Can it be said that God’s people have not lost their right focus on the Lord Jesus in these last days?

### **A GOOD TREE OR A BAD TREE?**

*A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’*

Matthew 7: 18-23

In the above passage, the Lord Jesus made reference to false prophets and disclosed the point that we would recognise them by their fruit. It is sobering to note that calling the Lord Jesus ‘Lord’ and carrying out deeds like prophesying in His name, casting out demons and performing miracles in themselves do not necessarily mean that the doers of such deeds are acceptable and pleasing to God. It is not these outward deeds in themselves, impressive though they may appear to be, but the actual good fruit that the Lord seeks in His servants. For the good fruit must come from a good tree and only one who does the will of God qualifies to be a ‘good tree’. Only children of God who are in a pleasing relationship with the triune God can produce good fruit which will last.

### **ARE OUR DEEDS ACCORDING TO HIS WILL?**

And that brings us back to the question, “Have we forsaken our first love; have we lost our proper focus on Him in our lives and ministry?” Activities, programmes, strategies, even miracles and casting out of demons – all these can be carried out apart from the will of God and apart from the love for God – and this would be displeasing to the Lord God. Notice the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 7: “*I never knew you*”. At the heart of it, are all our spiritual works an outflow from our knowledge of Him and our relationship with Him? Supposedly spiritual deeds might come forth from hearts which are far from God or worse, from hearts which are essentially evil.

In these last days, are believers losing the right focus? In fact, are we losing the only proper focus? We shall look, in more detail, at what this right focus ought to be in the next chapter.

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