

Our First Love

In **Acts 19**, Paul preached in Ephesus for more than two years. He had great success, not only in Ephesus, but the surrounding region (**Acts 19:10**). However, by **Revelation 2:1-7**, the Ephesian church had a problem. They kept on working hard in the face of opposition. They refused to listen to just anyone of seeming authority. They made sure what was taught was really from God. They did not grow weary in doing good even though they had to bear with opposition. They bore up for the sake of Jesus' name. They opposed false teachers and despised the work that came from their teaching.

Yet, Jesus warned He was close to removing their lampstand. Why? They had left their first love (**Revelation 2:4**). I struggle to define exactly what that means because my idea of a strong congregation equals the rest of the letter about Ephesus. When a congregation today acts like Ephesus did, I believe they have made it. I can't fathom the problem. That in itself is a problem.

Something wasn't working. They had left their first love. Or as the ESV translates it, they had left the love they had at first. This is similar to the rebuke God gave Judah through Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 2:2-3**. There was a time when Judah followed God as a bride devoted to her husband. But their devotion changed. It moved from devotion to God, to devotion to their own acts of devotion. This is the difference between relationship and ritual. Certainly, they were going to follow the rules, but that is all. Sadly, **Jeremiah 2:4-8** demonstrated where this inevitably leads. Once religion becomes rule keeping, it will shortly become rule debating. Rule debating becomes rule discarding. The Jews moved from relationship to ritual to rebellion. The Ephesians would do the same if they did not repent.

Consider the chart which I think helps define the Ephesian struggle, contrasting personalized Christianity and a depersonalized one. The Ephesians had dedication to the law, but lacked devotion to the Lord. They no longer followed Jesus as a bride, but as a contract laborer. They had form, but no foundation.

Depersonalized Christianity is primarily concerned with rules and teaching, but surely we can see such Christianity is dead orthodoxy. Mature Christianity must have both sides of this chart. Yes, there are rules, but the rules serve the relationship. We must follow Jesus as a bride, not as a contract laborer. Let us maintain our first love.

	Depersonalized Christianity	Personalized Christianity
<i>Faith</i>	Accepting contractual propositions	Committing one's self to a person
<i>Christian Life</i>	Keeping contractual obligations	Pleasing the Lord, a Person
<i>Sin</i>	Violating a contract rule	Betraying a relationship
<i>Repentance</i>	Change based on contractual obligations	Change based on sorrow for personal betrayal
<i>Forgiveness</i>	Canceling contractual consequences	Renewing and restoring fellowship
<i>Adapted and modified from James Sire, <u>The Universe Next Door</u>, IntVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 2009, p. 135.</i>		