



A faithful church who

12th January 2025



lost their first love

Baptism of our Lord

Main Idea:

What do you think are the real threats facing the church today?

A predominantly godless society? Other religions?

Too often we can fall into the trap of blaming the world around us, when in reality one of the biggest dangers is when the church loses its fervent love for Jesus.

We must recognise this as a 'sin' and be prepared to return to Christ being our first love.



How many of you like Kellogg's Corn Flakes?

I mean I bet there's no one here who hasn't tasted Corn Flakes?

They've been around for a long time haven't they?

Can you guess when Corn Flakes first hit the shelves in Australia?

Australia's favourite breakfast cereal was invented way back in 1894, yet it wasn't until the early 1920s that it came to Australia.

So, before Nutri-Grain, before Rice Bubbles, before Cocoa Pops – Corn Flakes was the cereal of choice.

However, over the years more breakfast cereals appeared on our supermarket shelves which threatened Corn Flakes title

as Australia's favourite cereal.

With all these other options, people became a bit bored with the old yellow flakes. No longer was it found in the front of the pantry, because other cereals had taken its place.

So, Kellogg's needed to come up with a new way to remind people of their old favourite.

In the 1990s, this was the slogan they came up with:

"Kellogg's Corn Flakes - Taste them again for the first time."

It's a great thought, isn't it.

It's a call to remember. To go back and relive the pleasure, to taste again the delightful tasty crunchy flakes.

Isn't it easy to become bored with everyday routines.

Things that were once favourites quickly become tired and dull, leaving us with a craving for something new, fresh, different and exciting.

This, we'll soon discover, can also happen in our spiritual lives.

Last week we watched as Jesus walked through the seven lampstands which represented seven specific churches scattered around Turkey.

As He examined each church, He saw that each had different dynamics at play.

Most churches had aspects He commended, but many also had characteristics which were so dangerous they threatened their existence.

We've just read Jesus' letter to the church at Ephesus. So, let's find out more about this church and what it has to do with Kellogg's cornflakes!

Point 1 | The church at Ephesus was hardworking and faithful, persevering despite difficulties and persecution.

What we notice first is that this ancient church in Ephesus was really quite commendable.

I think any one of us would love to be a member of this church.

We may even think that our church here at Southlakes is a lot like this church.

Jesus saw all their outstanding qualities.

They were a church that got things done. They had a hardworking attitude and were persevering. They faced trials and struggles and hardships; and yet didn't lose heart nor quit or give up.

But as Jesus made one of his final commendations, he used language we don't often hear in churches today.

He says, *"I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people"* (Revelation 2:2)

Or to put it another way – which makes it even more startling - Jesus was commending His church for being 'intolerant'.

Now, I'm well aware, the concept of 'tolerance' has become an extremely divisive word in our world. That's why I'm pausing to comment on it.

Tolerance is regarded by most people as one of the most important virtues a person can hold.

That's why each year there is an International Day of Tolerance which was inaugurated last year at the first 'World Tolerance Summit' in Dubai.

So why is Jesus calling His church to be 'intolerant'?

It is because tolerance can be both good and it can be bad – depending on the context it is applied to.

In general society, we need tolerance as it allows people with different religious beliefs to live together in peace and respect each other as humans.

That is why we as Christians advocate for religious tolerance, so that people are not punished or discriminated against for their religious beliefs, unless those beliefs physically harm others.

Yet tolerance of false teaching which involves accepting what is false as though it were true, is not appropriate within Christ's church.

That's why Jesus commended these faithful Christians for their *int*olerance of false teaching. He's saying they've been faithful to God's truth.

Apparently, some men had gained access to this church claiming to be 'apostles'; proposing to be teaching truth from God.

These are the ones that Jesus calls "wicked people".

Jesus is not talking about people in the general community who do things contrary to God's law. He's talking about deceptive bible teachers who are twisting God's truth and leading God's people into error.

We know this because a little further in His letter Jesus says *"you hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."*(v6)

We'll speak more about this heretical sect when we delve into the church at Pergamum.

But these Ephesian Christians had put these deceptive teachers to the test. They had confronted them and called them out.

This faithfulness to God's word made them a really powerful and steadfast church!

Point 2 | However, this faithful church had put all their attention into being faithful, their passionate love for Jesus was being neglected.

However, even with all these wonderful things going for it, the church in Ephesus received a shockingly strong word of disapproval from Jesus.

He said, *"I have this against you, that you have forsaken the love you had at first."* (v4)

What was this all-important "first love" that the Ephesian church had lost?

In answering that question, I believe that we need to go back to Acts 19 and look at the time when the good news of Jesus first came to the city of Ephesus.

It was a time when extraordinary miracles were performed through the Apostle Paul.

As the news was spreading about the miraculous things God was doing,

"they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour. ¹⁸ Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. ¹⁹ A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly." (Acts 19:17a-19).

The way they demonstrated their "first love", was an intense, all-consuming love of the Lord Jesus for His having saved them from their sin.

They loved Jesus so much they abandoned everything else they used to trust in.

No more magic arts! No more occultic practices! No more witchcraft!

From that moment on, they placed their full love and trust in Jesus and in Him alone - His saving grace, His power and His word exclusively!

However, over time, while they kept on suffering for Him; kept on working hard for Him; kept on persevering for Him ... their love for Him had started to wane.

They were doing all the right things; but in the process, they lost that intense, exclusive love for Christ that they once had.

Point 3 | We can know we've lost our first love of Jesus by examining the priority we given to spending time with Jesus.

We must continually ask ourselves, have I lost my first love for Jesus?

What are the symptoms?

After this message I've included a long list of some indicators. Let me mention the first five:

1. You can go hours or days without really thinking about Jesus.

2. You consider other things more important than spending time with Jesus.
3. Bible reading has become a chore—something to mark off your “to do” list.
4. Spending time in prayer and listening to God is a burden rather than a delight.
5. Your worship is formal, dry, lifeless, merely going through the motions.

Let’s notice how seriously Jesus treats this matter. He calls it a sin that must be repented from. And if they don’t, Jesus threatens to come and remove this church from its place!

Before we say, ‘that will never happen to us’, let us learn from what became of the church at Ephesus. The city is now buried under what is now Selcuk, in which 99% are Muslim and is one of the most unreached places of the world.

Not only is there no church there, but there also isn’t much of anything there.

It is a bleak picture demonstrating that even though the church there once thrived, its candle has been snuffed out by the Lord of the Church.

What a danger!

Application | How can a church recover their first love for Jesus?

What then can we do? Thankfully, Jesus tells us the three things we must do. First, we are to *“Remember from where you have fallen”*. He calls us to do the hard work of thinking back and searching for that time in our life when the fervent, intense love for Him started to die down.

Second, Jesus says, we must *“Repent”*. We must consider where in our lives have other things started to take Jesus’ place.

Finally, we must do the deeds we did at first. The deeds that the Ephesians did at first were to forsake everything else and devote themselves strictly and exclusively to Jesus.

In the process He became the great love of their hearts - even at great personal cost.

Our church has a very long and historic ministry in our community.

However, are we not also in serious need of a fresh love and devotion to Jesus?

Jesus said, *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.”*

There's nothing more powerful in the world - no greater light in the darkness - than a church of people in whom Jesus dwells, and who are deeply, passionately and sacrificially in love with Jesus.

May God make us that sort of a church! May God increase our love for our Lord and Saviour.

Going deeper into what Jesus expects of his church ...



Look out for Week 2 of the “Journey through Christ’s Letters to His Church” devotional:

This week we look closely at Jesus letter to the church at Ephesus.

- We’ll explore how do we know true apostles or bible teachers from false ones?
- Do we test all religious teachings against the Scriptures, whether you hear them at church, on the radio or on TV?
- Is your love for the Lord as fervent as it was when you first became a Christian?
- Read through the 40 symptoms of having lost your first love for Jesus. Are any applicable to you?

Have I lost my first love?

Forty ways you know you've lost your first love of Jesus.

1. You can go hours or days without having more than a passing thought of Him.
2. You don't have a strong desire to spend time with Him.
3. You don't have a strong hunger for the Word; Bible reading is a "chore"—something to mark off your "to do" list.
4. Spending time in prayer is a burden/duty rather than a delight.
5. Your worship is formal, dry, lifeless, merely going through the motions.
6. Private prayer and worship are almost non-existent . . . cold and dry.
7. You are more concerned about physical health, well-being, and comfort than about the well-being and condition of your soul.
8. You crave physical food while having little appetite for spiritual food.
9. You crave human companionship more than a relationship with Christ.
10. You spend more time and effort on your physical appearance than on cultivating inner spiritual beauty to please Christ.
11. Your heart toward Christ is cold and indifferent, not tender as it once was, not easily moved by the Word, talk of spiritual things, etc.
12. Christianity is more of a checklist than a relationship with Christ.
13. You measure spirituality by performance rather than the condition of the heart.
14. Christianity is defined more what by what you "do" than who you "are" ("doing" vs. "being").
15. Your obedience and service are motivated and fuelled by expectations of others or a desire to impress others, more than by passion for Christ.
16. You are more concerned about what others think and pleasing them than about what God knows and pleasing Christ.
17. Your service for Christ and others is motivated by a sense of duty or obligation.
18. You find yourself becoming resentful over the hardships and demands of serving Christ and others.
19. You can talk with others about kids, marriage, weather, and the news but struggle to talk about the Lord and spiritual matters.
20. You have a hard time coming up with something fresh to share in a testimony service at church or when someone asks, "What's God been doing in your life?"
21. You are formal, rigid, and uptight about spiritual things rather than joyful and winsome.
22. You are critical or harsh toward those who are doctrinally off-base or living in sin.
23. You enjoy secular songs, movies, and books more than songs or reading material that point you to Christ.
24. You prefer the company of people who don't love Christ to the company and fellowship of those who do.
25. You are more interested in recreation, entertainment, and having "fun" than in cultivating intimacy with Christ through worship, prayer, the Word, and Christian fellowship.
26. You display attitudes or are involved in activities that you know are contrary to Scripture, but you continue in them anyway.
27. You justify "small" areas of disobedience or compromise.
28. You have been drawn back into sin habits that you put off when you were a young believer.
29. "Little" things that used to disturb your conscience no longer do.
30. You are slow to respond to conviction over sin—or you ignore it altogether.
31. You enjoy certain sins and want to hang onto them, making you unwilling to give them up.
32. You are not grieved by sin—it's no big deal to you.
33. You are consistently allured by certain sins.
34. You are self-righteous—more concerned about sin in others' lives than in your own.

35. You are more concerned about having the right position than the right disposition.
36. You tend to hold tightly to money and things rather than being quick to give to meet the needs of others.
37. You rarely give sacrificially to the Lord's work.
38. You rarely have a desire or burden to give when you hear of legitimate financial needs within the body, your church, or a ministry.
39. Accumulating and maintaining material "things" consumes more time and effort on your part than seeking after and cultivating spiritual riches.
40. You have broken relationships with other believers that you are unwilling or have not attempted to reconcile.