***"Agape" Love

RV08-01***

Please open your Bibles to the book of the Revelation, chapter 2. The local church organization at Ephesus had several very commendable qualities. These were commendable qualities by divine viewpoints standards. These were commendable qualities which were expressed by the Lord Jesus Himself. These were not simply church success stories. There are a lot of things that we think are commendable concerning local churches that are simply business successes. But here in Ephesus was a church, and it was a church that had some very fine things about it that the Lord was happy to see, and which He commended. These are based on the judgments of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we have seen was presented to this church as the one who exercised authority over that church, and authority over their pastor-teachers.

Their works of Christian service, He observed, were physically tiring, and they were persistent in the face of adversity. These people persisted in working for the Lord. These people did not mind wearing themselves out a little bit in the Lord's service. Furthermore, they did not tolerate people who were characterized by evil ways. They were separated to right living. They were not taken in by such a phrase as is common to our day of "alternative lifestyles." The phrase "alternative lifestyles" means moral evil, and moral evil in our day is being promoted and dignified under that idea that there are other ways of living, and other ways of doing things.

They say that people don't have to get married to live together. People do not have to be heterosexual if they happen to be perverts of the homosexual kind. These are just "alternative lifestyles." Well, this is nothing new. As you know, the New Testament world was shot-through with those very things. One of the great philosophers, as a matter of fact, in one of his writings, bemoaned the immorality that was to be seen everywhere in the city of Ephesus on all sides. He was just a pagan philosopher. Yet he recognized immorality, and that which was undermining the moral fiber and the strength of society. He was distressed over what he saw in Ephesus.

So these are the sort of things that are horrible to us today from a Christian frame of reference. They were equally on the scene and equally disgusting and revolting to the people in these churches in Ephesus. But they did not go along with the style of the day – that these are "alternative lifestyles."

This is one good thing we can learn – that we should not have any toleration, and we should not have any sympathy with the kinds of things that are taking place in public schools in the way of sex education (which means sex perversion education), and the kinds of things that are being put forth in public entertainment, and dignified under the concept that this is acceptable, and that is alright for us to do.

It has been a long time since we've had a president of the United States that has had to call upon people in government to stop living in sin and to get married. This is an alternative lifestyle of our day. Jesus told the people of Ephesus, "I love you for the fact that you condemn that sort of thing, and you have nothing to do with it. And you do not put a stamp of approval, or even toleration, upon people who even suggest that these alternative lifestyles are to be even considered as acceptable."

Furthermore, they tested those who claimed to be sent to them by God as teachers of the Word of God. They were not only separated to right living, but they were separated to sound doctrine. And they found these people to be liars. They were not called, and they were not presenting divine viewpoint. So they were not taken in. The Lord Jesus said, "I commend you for having the discernment to recognize true sound doctrinal teaching when you hear it.

They persevered, and they endured in God's service, we were told, because of their devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is a great thing in itself to have said about those people. In other words, they served as unto the Lord. That was a fine thing. That's the way it should be. That's the way it has to be. They did it as unto the Lord. So they took it all in stride – the good times and the bad times, because it was unto Him. So all in all, they just did not get tired of performing Holy Spirit led Christian service. They did it for Him. It was an all-around, spiritually well-functioning local church. It was one of the best of the seven that we're going to be studying.

It was preserved in moral purity. It was preserved in sound doctrine. It maintained an unwavering loyalty to Jesus Christ even under pressure. It persisted in demanding and difficult service. It did not cop out.

**A Condemnation toward the Church at Ephesus**

Having said all that, we come to verse 4, which begins with a rather sober word: "Nevertheless." This is the Greek word "alla." This is what we call a conjunction of contrasts. It is used here in opposition to the negative that you had in verse 3. Verse 3 says, "You have not fainted." In contrast to what they did not do, he says, "But." That the way you could translate this word: "But there is something that you did do; something which I'm not happy about your church; and, something that does not please Me about the Christians in the local congregations of Ephesus." We might translate this as, "On the other hand."

"I have" is the Greek word "echo." "Echo" here means "to possess." It introduces the possession of a complaint on the part of Jesus Christ who is moving among these local churches and observing their performance. It is in the present tense, which means that Jesus has had a constant attitude of complaint relative to an issue here against them. It's not a new thing. It's been continuing for some time. It's active. It is the personal conclusion of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is a true evaluation. It's in the indicative mood which is a statement of fact about this church.

The word "somewhat" is not in the Greek. You can't cross that out in your translation. It just says, "But I have against you." The word "against" is the Greek word "kata." "Kata" here expresses a point of condemnation. "Against you" means against the local church as a whole in Ephesus. But remember that local churches are just individual Christians. So what he is actually saying is, "I have this complaint to lodge against you individual believers." So as we listen to it, just listen to it as an individual believer. Don't fall into the trap of viewing this thing as a reference to a general organization, because we often hide behind the skirts of an organization, and say, "Well, that's true of them as a whole, but it isn't true of me. But he wants us to understand that He's speaking to them as individuals.

Here is the complaint stated: "But I have against you because." The word "because" is really the Greek word, "hoti," and that means here "that." We may translate it as "that." It indicates here the reason for the rebuke. So we would translate this: "But I have against you that." Then he tells them exactly what it is that He has against them. What He has is that they have left something. The word "left" is the Greek word "aphiemi." "Aphiemi" means "to forsake" or "to abandon." It's in the aorist tense, which means that at some point in time, something happened to the church as a whole – something happened to a number of individuals within that church. It is the active voice which indicates that these Christians were responsible for what happened. There was a change that took place. They themselves were responsible. They themselves made the choice that brought about this change. It's indicative mood because he's making a statement of a fact.

**They Have Abandoned Their First Love**

"You have abandoned something." And the thing that He says they have abandoned, He calls their "first love." The word "first" is "protos," which tells us something very important. This is a word that indicates time (location). So what He is saying here is that back there at the beginning, there was something true about you which is not true now. There was something that was part of your strength as a local church which has now begun to weaken.

This book of the Revelation was written 30 years after Paul wrote, for example, the book to Ephesians. So when he uses this word "protos," he's going way back to the beginning where they had those terrific teachers like Paul and John himself. He says, "Looking back to the beginning, there was something that characterized you members at that time." That thing that characterized them as the beginning, He calls a love: "agape." This is very important. This is one of the two basic Greek words for love which is used in the New Testament. This is "agape" love. "Agape" love, as you know, is mental attitude love. Now, what in the world did they leave?

You can read commentaries after commentaries that wander far afield, usually, in terms of some emotional reaction that they have been guilty of leaving, but we have no explanation as to what they did leave. It simply says, "At the beginning you had a certain mental attitude of love which you have now departed from." And no more is told us about that. We have to go back to this word. If we're going to try to make a conclusion as to what it is that these people have abandoned that was once true of them (or at least that they had begun to abandon), we have to get it out of this word. There is no more explanation beyond that.

**Love**

So we're going to come down significantly on this word and what it means. We've gone over this before, so we'll not do this in extensive detail, except to point out to you that the word "agape" that we have here, and which is used in this text, is a word which we find used in Scripture relative to the expression of a mental conclusion; a mental esteem; and, a natural outgrowth. So we say "a mental attitude love." There is, as you know, this other Greek word "phile." "Phile," we find, is used in terms of how people feel about things. This is an expression of feeling. "Phile" is an expression of feeling, while "agape" is an expression of thinking. Therefore, there is a distinct differentiation between these two words. "Agape" is a mental attitude. "Phile" is an emotional attitude. As we've pointed out, the Bible very carefully uses these two words as per the thing that is being discussed, and as per the thing that is being said.

Thus, the Bible never says, "'Phile' your enemies," or, "Love your enemies," using the word "phile" – the word of emotional consent, because you cannot command a person to have an emotional response to another individual. You cannot legislate emotions, and certainly a person who is your enemy would be one that you would have some difficulty of having an emotional attachment toward. On the other hand, it does use the word "agape" in that verse. It says, "'Agape' your enemies," or, "Love your enemies in terms of a mental attitude." Thus, a person can be your enemy on the field of battle. And yet, while you are in the process of taking his very life, you do not have personally an attitude of mental ill will toward him: of bitterness; and, so on.

**What is Agape Love?**

So this word is the only word that could be used in that context. There is a very great distinction between these. So here's the word He uses. He says, "You have left your "agape" love, that which was characteristic of you at the beginning." What does "agape" love mean? Well, it's a mind which is free of bitterness; a mind which is free of the attitude of envy; a mind which is free of anger; a mind which is free of jealousy toward others; a mind which is free of self-pity; a mind which is not hostile toward people; a mind which is free of pride; a mind which does not have a lust for praise – commendation for what we do; a mind which is free from an attitude of contempt toward others; a mind which is free of an attitude of competition; a mind that is not possessed by grudges; a mind that is not shot-through with arrogance in its own importance; a mind that doesn't operate toward other people from a perch of superiority; and, a mind that does not desire to impose its will willy-nilly upon others. All of these things can be put together to try to give us a picture of what a mind free of ill will is all about. You can multiply this yourself. It is a mental attitude that is free of a basic ill will, jealousy, anger, indignation, bitterness attitude.

**Mature Christians**

The Ephesian Christians, we are told by this word, were becoming careless in this respect, because of specifically what they were doing. Let's go back to our fivefold structure of spiritual maturity. The spiritual maturity structure that we find built in Scripture has several facets to it. One of those facets is a relaxed mental attitude. A relaxed mental attitude is an attitude which is governed by "agape" love. A relaxed mental attitude is to be tied in to this word, "agape." So what we are being told here is that these Christians are obviously mature people. Otherwise, they could not have spotted the fake preachers coming through among them; they could not have had this determination to serve the Lord in the face of adversity; they could not have had the staying power that they did in the Lord's work; and, they could not have had the willingness to exhaust themselves and put their lives even on the line for the Lord, unless they were mature Christians.

Immature Christians are a pain in the neck. They're tiresome to be around. They're a bore. They're somebody we have to constantly carry along. They're here today and gone tomorrow. They're flighty. They're in and they're out. They're just plain tiresome. But the Christians that you want to have in combat with you, in the spiritual warfare that we're engaged in, are those who have a spiritual maturity structure that's built, and which is being maintained. You don't just build it, and then slide on from there. It has to be maintained.

So what the Lord Jesus is speaking of here is this particular facet of the spiritual maturity structure in their soul. The Lord was looking at this congregation, and looking at individuals, and while He saw that they had a spiritual maturity among them as individual believers, He saw a hairline crack beginning to develop in this particular facet. It was a crack which was beginning to deteriorate this mental attitude that had so characterized them before.

**A Relaxed Mental Attitude**

We know that this is true of them, because of the book of Ephesians, which Paul had written 30 years previous to the time that John wrote Revelation. Ephesians 1:15-16 says, "Wherefore, I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints (and the word there is 'agape'), cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." Paul, 30 years previously, looking at this congregation as a group of individuals in a local organizations functioning for the Lord, could say to them," When I look at you, I see that there is among you a strong facet of a relaxed mental attitude. I thank God for you as I think of you. I thank God for you in my prayers as I think of the evidence of the relaxed mental attitude (the agape love) that is permeating that congregation."

So they had it at one time. They had a good frame of reference of sound doctrine; they discerned the disoriented Bible teachers; they engaged in tiring service; and, they endured personal rejection, all for the sake of the Lord Jesus. That took a relaxed mental attitude to do that. Basically their failure, perhaps, stemmed in part from the fact that they were not practicing the technique of faith rest. Or perhaps it was the other way around: when their relaxed mental attitude began breaking down, then they began to be careless about the technique of faith rest. That is a whole ball game in itself that we can't go into here. You'll have to get the studies if you want to review that. But here is the concept basically that the battle is the Lord's. Therefore, you don't have to go around being the angel of vengeance of God. But you can move through life in a very relaxed way. You can move through life without an attitude of hostility and bitterness, and an attitude of imposing your will upon people in order that they will do right. You simply can leave the thing with the Lord.

This breakdown had appeared in Ephesus. If the people saw that their effectiveness as a local church was beginning to be affected by this type of mental attitude love between themselves, and that their camaraderie as believers was being injured, they ignored it. If they saw it, they ignored it. They preferred, apparently, to indulge their indignations.

So when the relaxed mental attitude breaks down, it opens the door for many mental attitude sins. These prevent us from functioning on God's divine viewpoint, and eventually bring His discipline upon us, and if we go far enough, it just neutralizes us completely. That's what was serious about what was happening in Ephesus. Here was a functioning church; a stable church; and, a church that knew its way around, and Jesus says, "The thing I'm concerned about is that I can see that your relaxed mental attitude is breaking down, and if you don't stop it, it's going to lead to all kinds of sins, and pretty soon the whole structure of spiritual maturity that you have will break down, and the result will be that as a local church, you will be ineffective, and as individuals will be ineffective. Then I will have to take action of discipline, and if necessary, simply to remove you.

**Bitterness**

Basically, what they were revealing that was taking place was a spirit of bitterness. The Bible is very specific that that is a step toward disaster. Hebrews 12:15, for example, says, "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble you, and by it, many be defiled." The writer to Hebrews is telling us to look very diligently that we should not fail of the grace of God, which has provided us these spiritual means through the Word of God to maintain a right mental attitude, and to be careful that a root of bitterness is not permitted to develop within us. A root of bitterness destroys your relaxed mental attitude (your "agape" love). The result is that not only will you be destroyed, but you notice that he says that many will be defiled by it.

What was taking place in some of the Christians in Ephesus was beginning to affect other Christians. It's contagious. There is something about the breakdown of the relaxed mental attitude that does not only affect the individual who is guilty of it, but it begins to make other people pick up the same attitude. By the same token, when a relaxed mental attitude is maintained, and a root of bitterness is not permitted in dealings with people, it is surprising how other Christians will say, "Wait a minute." And you will notice that they back off from a harsh position (from an attitude of bitterness) because you have given them an example to follow that's better. So we can go in either direction. We can give them a bad example, or we can give him a good example. In Ephesus, it was beginning to be mostly bad.

We may add James 1:20 to that: "For the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God." A Christian who lacks a relaxed mental attitude is operating on anger, indignation, and wrath. The Bible is trying to point out to us that if you try to do the Lord's work on the basis of that kind of a spirit, you're not going to achieve God's righteousness. You may achieve some human righteousness, but that doesn't mean a hill of beans with God. The bitterness of man; the indignation; and, the wrath of man does not produce the kind of righteousness that characterizes God.

We may add Ephesians 4:15: "But speaking the truth in love may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ." Here the stress is made upon the fact that a relaxed mental attitude is very critical if you are going to be a teacher of the Word of God; if you are going to be a communicator of truth to somebody; or, if you're going to communicate doctrine. If you're going to communicate the doctrine of salvation to an unbeliever, you need a relaxed mental attitude. If you're going to explain doctrine to a believer that he needs for his own spiritual life, it has to be done in an attitude of love so that the person can grow up in all things into the image of Christ, who is the head of all things. People are not going to grow into the image of Jesus Christ if we do not speak the truth in love.

That is a very easy thing to be negligent about, especially when we know our ground and when we know our right. It's easy for us to really get heavy-handed, and to really enjoy letting people have it right between the eyes in their error. This is the caution that Jesus says: "Speak the truth." Certainly, He did. He spoke it in such a distinctive, clear way that he enraged the religious authorities of His day such that they eventually killed Him for that very reason. Yet, Jesus said, "You people are nothing but a bunch of snakes. You're vipers." He was talking to the priests; to the rabbis; to the elders; to the scribes; and, to the leaders: "You're a bunch of snakes. That's what you are. Furthermore, you're worse than that. You're a bunch of smelly, rotten, dead bodies like a sepulchre. Oh, you look nice outside. Sure, you're whitewashed, but inside, you're putrefying stinking flesh." You say, "How could a loving person say that?" Only a human viewpoint thinks that you cannot say that. Only a human viewpoint mentality finds any problem with that kind of straight talk of reality, and having a spirit of love when it is said.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that a relaxed mental attitude and an "agape" spirit of love means that there is something lacking in manliness and womanliness – that there is something weak or effeminate. That's what enrages me so much when I see these pictures of Jesus Christ. I don't know why on earth we can't get some artists around who really produce some visualized pictures of Jesus Christ with a manly haircut instead of the sissy, girly, long hair that they give Jesus Christ, like every picture you see of Jesus Christ. All of these publishing companies do that. They're doing it again in our vacation Bible school materials. The first thing we do is we get posters that are a pain in the neck because there's Jesus with his girly hair on Him again. These idiots have never realized that there is no connection with girl's hair and love. Jesus Christ was a man of love, and a man of forceful thought. He was a strong, muscular Jew, as you will appreciate by what He went through in the crucifixion. At the very end, He could be in full command of himself. The Bible says that when He made his final declaration, He yelled it out. He had full capacity. He was no sissified character. It's a blasphemous humiliation to Jesus Christ to suggest that there is a connection between being effeminate and being loving. Why do they do that? I guess we can't expect anything better out of Christian publishers because they're operating on the profit motive, and not on the true doctrine motive (as much as they should, anyhow).

Ephesians 4:15: "We speak the truth in love," but that does not mean that we do not speak it so that people sit there grinding their teeth. When Jesus spoke to people, He wanted to see a response (a definitive reaction). Therefore, He spoke in such a way that the issues were not hidden. He did not speak in loopholes. All He could do was to look at religious leaders and call them snakes. I'd like to see course 101 in public relations that He took to learn that in. The same goes for everything else that He spoke to them. It was severe again and again, and sarcastic. This is one of the dumbest things they teach in seminary: "Don't ever use sarcasm." I have to always feel so bad for Jesus and Paul because they used it several times very effectively. But then, what did they know.

**Forgiveness**

Ephesians 4:31-32 give us some more here on this attitude of bitterness: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil-speaking be put away from you with all malice. And be kind one to another: tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you. That's the best verse of all, perhaps, to summarize the concept of a relaxed mental attitude "agape" love, which was the problem of what was breaking down in Ephesus. Here Paul is putting his finger right on the very thing: "This bitterness; this wrath; this anger; and, this clamor." All of that is the exact opposite of "agape" love. Evil speaking – put it away from you with all malice. "Instead," he says, and then he describes what is characteristic of "agape" love. "Be kind one to another." Why? "Well, because you were kind to me. You invited me over for dinner. So I'm going to invite you over for dinner. If you don't invite me again, I'm not going to invite you." That's not it. "I'm going to invite you, and if you don't respond, I'm going to invite you, and if you don't respond, I'm going to invite you until I get tired of you." "Tenderhearted" is a good word for "agape" love – just tenderhearted. There's a meanness in people who do not have a relaxed mental attitude. That's a sign that they are breaking down in this quality that was beginning to plague Ephesus.

"Forgive one another." Why? On what basis? "Well, you forgive me, and I'll forgive you." That isn't what it says. "Forgive one another as God, in the name of the Lord, and for His sake has forgiven you. How has He done that? Because you deserve to be forgiven? No. He forgave you in spite of the fact you didn't deserve to be forgiven. That's grace.

So the spirit of bitterness toward others was creeping into Ephesus, and was breaking down the relaxed mental attitude. The result of this spirit of bitterness was probably the developing (it is usually does with this) of being the agent of God's vengeance. Hebrews 10:30 reads, "For we know Him that has said, 'Vengeance belongs to Me. I will recompense,' said the Lord, and again the Lord shall judge His people." That verse is telling us to mind our own business, and let the Lord exercise the vengeance and the judgment that other Christians need. One of the sure signs of a breakdown of a person's relaxed mental attitude is that he thinks he has to start getting pushy, and start giving people what they deserve. That obviously shows that he knows nothing about grace, and that he is not possessed by "agape" love.

**Wanting to Get Even**

The spirit of wanting to get even crops up a great deal in people who, in local churches, have their old sin natures frustrated. It is part of the job of the pastor-teacher to frustrate old sin natures. When it is done effectively and properly, he will find that people grind their teeth; they rise up in indignation; and, they shove off. The spirit of wanting to get even because somebody has frustrated some lust of your old sin nature is the spirit that reflects a lack of "agape" love. A relaxed mental attitude will seek to keep the doors of fellowship and of service open, even to Christians who get spiritually disoriented. Christians who go haywire spiritually are prime targets of the vengeance for people who lack a relaxed mental attitude. And they're acting just like the Jews did, who took Jesus to Pilate because Jesus was supposedly a blasphemer and claiming to be the Son of God. So they were serving God and preserving the deity of God. And we have Christians who are doing that, who are determined that when some Christian gets spiritually oriented, they're going to chop him in pieces, and they're going to see to it that he never has another chance again to get himself squared away, and to step back in and say, "I've been out in the desert. I spent my time out there in nothingness, and I'm ready to get back, and take hold, and be part of the work that God has really called me to." Leave the door open, both for fellowship and for restoration of service.

A Christian with a relaxed mental attitude is always doing that. Whereas the harsh believer wants to give him the ax – use the machete on him, and cut him to ribbons once and for all. Here in Ephesus, though officially still standing for the faith once delivered to the saints, and though they were still very active in Christian service, this word "agape" indicates to us that they had been carelessly tolerating certain mental attitude sins in themselves. How was this evidenced? Well, it was probably evidenced by the fact that they were making snide remarks sometimes about other Christian in the church. They were speaking ill of one another. They were speaking from a position of critical superiority. So they were being nasty in what they were saying about other believers.

**Tolerance toward the Weaknesses of Others**

This was probably showing itself up in being intolerant of the weaknesses of others – Christians who were struggling to be what they should be, and cutting them out. Very often, Christians who are something less than they should be (by God's standards) are well aware of the fact that they are. And they don't need somebody to come along and be clubbing them over the head to make the point. Many of us have experienced the fact that we know when we have performed something less than our best, for one reason or another. We don't need somebody to come along and start clubbing us for the fact that we haven't been in top form. We're aware of it. What we need is some understanding, and some peace and quiet and silence, rather than somebody cutting us up over it. And here, one of the things that was probably evident in Ephesus was the spirit of intolerance toward weaknesses in others.

**Hostility**

No doubt there was some evidence of treating others with hostility. You can be hostile toward people in two ways. You can be hostile in the open way, with some open action toward them, ranging from a small thing all the way to some considerable violence. Or you can express hostility, like most Christians do, by isolating people – by freezing them out. Perhaps there was in Ephesus this revelation that their relaxed mental attitude was not functioning by the hostility that they were showing to other Christians, either overtly or by simply isolating them, because they had displeased the individual, or because in some way they had decided this person hadn't done right. They were playing the role of vengeance: "I decided that you didn't do right. Therefore, I'm going to see to it that you are treated accordingly – that you are punished. I'm going to be God's punisher for you. So I treat you in some way. Overtly I hurt you, or I treat you with silence and hostility. I freeze you out of the circle of my contacts.

Others perhaps showed that they were grimly determined to be so right and so consistent with doctrine. I'm sure this existed in a church that was so sound in the Word, and so devoted to the Word, and so devoted to the Lord's work. I'm sure that there were some Christians who were so determined to be so right, and to be so consistent in doctrine that they became irrational and mean toward other believers. I've already warned you that this is one of Satan's favorite tricks: to take a person's devotion to doctrine, and to cause him to become extreme in some way so that what he does with his devotion to doctrine is injure other people, and draw other people off into error or into his cause, in the process of which they destroy their own ministry and their own spiritual usefulness.

There were people in Ephesus that were so determined to be so right with doctrine that they were willing to destroy other people. Irrationality begins to take these people over. Their very devotion to doctrine causes Satan to cause them to go spiritually insane. Some of them were, therefore, beginning to create factions. They were getting people to take sides in order to impose their viewpoint. A Christian with a relaxed mental attitude on the one hand is not going to go around in the local church creating factions and divisions and saying, "Well, my friends and I have a group, and we believe this, so we are talking to this person and this person. And the Christian who has a relaxed mental attitude will not tolerate anybody talking to him in terms of a faction, or in terms of a taking of sides. You should not be willing to let your own "agape" love be threatened by either creating a faction; taking sides; or, creating sides or some position, no matter how right you think it is. Nor should you threaten your "agape" love by listening to people who are trying to get you to take a side with them, no matter how right they may be.

**The Privacy of the Priesthood**

People who do not have a relaxed mental attitude will invade the privacy of the priesthood of other people. This is what we meant by exercising vengeance – pushing themselves into the lives of other people in order to get them straightened out. In short, the people of Ephesus were failing to apply 1 Peter 5:7, which says, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." They were failing to apply Philippians 4:6-7 which says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Even for what other Christians need in the way of straightening out, let your requests be made known unto God: "And the peace of God, which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." What it's saying is that the relaxed mental attitude of God shall keep your hearts and minds. The "agape" love of God, that relaxing quality within you, will possess you and keep you and guide you.

The basic departure is naturally the thing we want to know. How does it start? How did this happen in a good church like Ephesus? I think the basic departure starts with the breakdown in failing to follow the principle of Matthew 4:4, which says, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." The breakdown in a relaxed mental attitude, as with all these other facets of the spiritual maturity structure, begins with a failure on a daily basis to feed upon the Word of God – the intake of the Word of God. How could this happen?

**Church Attendance**

Well, they felt that they were spiritually mature (no doubt – some of them), so consequently, they were informed. So they became indifferent toward attending church services. There was a time when every time the church door was open, and Bible class was conducted in the worship services, they were there. The time came when they really grew; they really developed; and, they really matured. Then they thought, "Well, I've got it made. I've been around for some time. I really do have a spiritual maturity structure. I don't have to be there in those church services so much now." That was the first step toward the breakdown of all of their maturity, and especially their mental attitude love.

I have warned Christians, and you've heard me warn Christians, that those of you who have really reached a state of some spiritual maturity are now in the maximum danger of all those among us, because you are the ones who will now be in the danger of making this assumption that you have reached a level that does not require any further action on your part – that now you can lean back and relax, and you do not have to feed upon the Word of God.

Somebody recently came to me and said, "I heard you say that, and when you said that, did that ever strike home to my heart in conviction? I had done exactly that. I looked back upon months in the past here, and I was making progress left and right, and I was listening to tapes; reading the Word; and, studying what I was hearing. I could just tell. Life was clicking for me; things were moving together; I was doing the right things because I was acting on God's principles. Then I became so successful, and things were going so good that I was stupid enough to find that I didn't have time to go to the Word anymore. I didn't have time to listen to tapes. Sometimes I was even too busy to make it to church." And he said, "I can't believe the deterioration I began to see. I didn't really know why it was. But when you said that, it really hit it home to me."

That's true. That's exactly what's going to happen. I'll tell you something. One of the sure signs of a guy who does not have a relaxed mental attitude, and whose "agape" love is breaking down is the person who will not attend church because what is being taught is something that he is already an expert on. You may find that somebody says, "Well, I don't go because I've already studied that. I don't want to attend that. I don't need to go there for that. I know all about that." You know right away that you're listening to a person that has a breakdown here.

One of our missionaries, not so long ago, told me, "I attend church in the field that I'm in. The pastor, in many respects, does not know as much as I know. In most of the services, I don't really get a great deal of instruction, but I don't go to church to be instructed, in my case. I go there in order to support the instruction which is being given to others who don't know it, and who do need it. I don't need it, but that doesn't give me the ground for not attending that service just because most of what I hear said, I already know. The review helps me, and I get some new relationships. But basically, I am there not for what I can get from the service, but I am there for what I can encourage others to get from the service."

When he said that to me, I couldn't help but to think about the diagram of the spiritual maturity structure and the relaxed mental attitude, because what he was saying to me, without realizing it, was that his "agape" love structure was very firmly established and fully functioning. It is the Christian who is so arrogant, and who has a mental attitude that lacks "agape" love who thinks he does not have to come to church because he says, "I've heard that, and I already know that." Worse than that, some of you may be sitting here, and you're practicing that. You're practicing, "I know that. I've heard that. I'm aware of all that. I don't need to listen to that." You can do the same thing whether you come to church or whether you stay at home. So don't compliment yourself by saying: "I know I can't be that kind because I'm always here."

Some of these people were saying, "I'm a little tired of that heavy doctrine all the time. As a matter of fact, one of the things that was breaking down their "agape" love was their very devotion to service to the Lord. Serving the Lord had become so exciting; it had become so meaningful; and, it had become so gratifying that they stopped praying. They stopped having any personal relationship with the Lord. They stopped concentrating upon the Word of God in a very personal application to themselves. They just began to ease off from the person, and were concentrating upon the service. That's another device of the devil – to get those of you who are devoted to the exercise of your spiritual gift, and find that God is using it, and it's a satisfying service for you, that you get so caught up in it that you wake up in the morning and what is the first thing you do? "Well, I've got to do this. I want to get this done. I want to get that done. I've got to get this done for the Lord, and I've got to get that done. And later today, I'm going to do this." But stopping to pray is the last thing you do because you're so eager to serve the Lord that you don't have time for that.

That will destroy your mental attitude love. You're more eager to perform Christian service with your spiritual gifts than you are to maintain your spiritual combat readiness with Bible doctrine in your soul. When serving the Lord has to be done under combat conditions, this is one of the things you'll be tempted to do also: you're going to try harder, instead of remembering that the battle is the Lord's. And in the process of trying harder, instead of praying more, and trusting in the Lord to do the fighting, you resort to your own energies, and what you're doing is resorting back to the old sin nature, and then you're destroying your spiritual capacity.

Maybe it's because you're a star as a teacher. One of the groups of people among believers, perhaps in Ephesus, that were most in danger of having a relaxed mental attitude destroyed were those who were good teachers of the Word. It was the teachers of the Word who got carried away with their insights, and going on to greater understanding and greater fields. Some of them who were willing to be hardworking, simple teachers of the Word, standing by and maybe in a very humble and modest position, became stars. And now they wanted a wider hearing. They wanted a larger forum from which to speak. What happened was that their love for the Lord and their love for His people was set aside for their love for their ambitions; for their visions; and, for their wider outreach.

This is a curse to preachers. Preachers were always tempted about having a broader outreach and a greater space for the lord. Satan has his way of making offers that make us think like we're going to have so much greater effectiveness for the Lord; such a wider outreach; and, such a greater depth of service for Him, if only we were in some other context in some other place.

Well, I don't know exactly why. I don't know all the details. I do simply know that the Lord told the church at Ephesus, "Your first love – that which originally characterized you in strength, has now been left by you." It was left in many of these ways that we described here. What they had left was the maturity of a relaxed mental attitude, "agape" love. It was beginning to show up within the congregation in all these nasty, ugly ways.

The Lord gives some advice to a church that finds itself in that way. The Lord next takes up that advice for correction. We will go into that next time, and the consequences along with it.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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