

Christ, Our First Love

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 1:1-5

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I would like for you to get your Bibles and open them to the first chapter of 1 Corinthians. I am going to preach today on the subject, "Christ, Our First Love." But I am going to go verse by verse in just a little while in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians. So if you will have your Bible ready when I come to that part of the message you can follow as I preach.

Now Paul preached in Corinth about two years. The Lord told him to stay in Corinth and preach there he said, "because I have much people in this city. They will not hurt you. They will not lay hands on you. You stay there and preach because I have much people in this city."

Paul stayed there about 18 months or nearly two years. And he left Corinth and he sailed to Syria. And during his absence some bad things happened down in Corinth to the Church of Corinth. Several bad things took place there in the church. I'll give you a few of them. False teachers and preachers crept into the church with false doctrine and unscriptural practices and led the people astray.

And then the church became divided over their preachers. Some of the people said, "Well, I like Paul better than Cephas." And some said, "We like Peter than we like Paul." Some said, "We like Apollos best." And some of them said, "Well, we don't like any of them. We like Christ."

And Paul said, "Is Christ divided? Were you baptized in the name of Peter or Paul or Apollos?"

And then the church not only became divided over their preachers, but there was a misuse of gifts. Some of them had special, unusual gifts. And the just misused them. And folks began to go to court with one another. They began to sue one another. And then they went to law with each other.

And then questions arose about marriage and divorce, conflict over that. And then some people even questioned the resurrection of the dead. Paul says, "If Christ be risen how say some among you there is no resurrection?" So some of them doubted the resurrection and some had some very, very bad conduct.

And they were abusing the Lord's Table. They were making a feast out of the Lord's Table and some of them were getting drunk.

And all of these things took place in the absence of the apostle.

Now what is the solution? What did Paul do? Well, Paul by the power of the Holy Spirit wrote this book, this epistle to the Corinthian Church. He sent this epistle to them. And in this book he deals with each of these problems. He deals with them fully and completely, each of these problems. But the real solution he deals with in chapter one. Chapter one is where he deals with it and gives them the real solution. He talks about these problems on through the book, but here in chapter one he gives them the only way to deal with trial, the only way to put a church on the right course, the only way to give the frame of mind that ought to be in everybody in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is to return to their first love, the Lord Jesus Christ. Make everything for Christ's sake, everything in the name of Christ, everything for the glory of Christ. That is where it is.

You see, over in the book of Revelation chapter two and verse four the Lord said to the Church at Ephesus, he said this directly to the Church at Ephesus. He said, "I have somewhat against you." He talked about all the things they had done and all the successful things that they had enjoyed, all of the blessings that he had given. And then he said, "I have got something against you. I have somewhat against you because you left your first love. You left your first love."

And that is what leads to all these problems, to leave your first love. You become involved in all manner of works and activities and relationships and programs and socials and sports and all of these other things. And you have left your first love which is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our first love. And our relationship with him will make all other relationships right if the relationship with Christ is right.

Somebody wrote a poem years ago. Listen to it. He was grieving over his state and he said, "Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where is that soul refreshing view of the Lord Jesus and his Word? Oh, what peaceful hours I once enjoyed, how sweet the memory still, but now there is an aching void that no one can ever fill."

What is the problem? People call it backsliding. They call it all these different things, but I will tell you the problem. It is in Revelation 2:4. "I have somewhat against you. You have left your first love. That is your whole problem. You have left your first love." Christ is our first love.

He said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." You seek him first and all these other things will be added unto you.

Our Lord said this. "If any many love father and mother, husband, wife, brother sister, yea, his own life also more than me he is not worthy of me." And then he said in John 15, "I am the vine. I am the vine. You are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you the same bringeth forth much fruit. Without me you can do nothing."

You see, this is what happened. This is what happens when we get divided and when we...people misbehave and the Church has divisions and conflicts and all of these other things. We have left our first love.

“Abide in me and I in you. You will ask what you will and it shall be done. I am the vine and you are the branches. He that abideth in me continues in me and I in him. The same bringeth forth much fruit. Without me you can do nothing.”

And he said this. “If you abide not in me...” And that is what is happening here. Dwelling in Christ, abiding in Christ, loving Christ, Christ first and his glory first in all things. He said, “If you abide not in me you are cast forth as a branch withered, shrunk up, fit for the fire.”

Oh, my. Cling to your first love. That’s the solution. Go back to where you were when you fell in love with the Redeemer, back to where you were.

A young couple stands before me. I see this so often, more than I want to and more in the last few years than ever before. A young couple stands before me and they are going to be married. And they only have eyes for one another. My, they are in love. You just look at them. They don’t know anybody is in the congregation or around them. They love each other. They are together.

And they start life that way together. They build their home together. Just enjoying every nail that goes in it and every carpet that is laid down. They do it together.

Then along comes the first child. I am invited to come to the hospital to see the baby. And there is the three of them. Oh, my goodness, how happy. In love with one another, first love, first love, first child, first love, happiness abounding, happiness and everything. Love of one another together, love of family.

Then a few years pass and they establish separate careers. That is what everybody has got to have his career, you know. And the wife has her career and he husband has his career and then the children have their careers, too, now. Separate friends, separate interests. They leave their first love.

And then one day they stand before a judge separated. What happened? They left their first love. And now here they are dividing the spoils of their separate careers. What happened?

Well, you can name all the things. Somebody else is involved or this, that or the other, financial troubles and in law problems. Just name anything you want to. They got the same inlaws they had when they got married. All these things are the same, but they left their first...they stopped loving each other.

Now that is just...that is all there is to it. Christ said, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will bring forth fruit." Fruit of the Spirit: love, grace, joy, peace, long-suffering, patience, gentleness, kindness, long suffering. It is all there, but it is based on one thing, because you love each other.

He said, "As you have received Christ Jesus walk in him, continue in him."

Paul wrote to the Galatians in Galatians 4:19. This is the key. This is the key. It is Christ in you. That is the hope of glory. He wrote to the Galatian Church, he said, "My little children, I travail..." What does that word mean? As a woman giving birth to a child. That is what he is talking about. As a woman does in trying to bring forth a child. "I travail till Christ be formed in you, in you. Christ in you. That's life. That's life. Permanently. Christ in you. That is the hope of glory he said in Colossians 1:27.

Colossians 3:4, "Christ is my life."

Somebody says, "Is Christ the most important thing in your life?"

Not by any means. He is not a thing. He is not a part of my life. He is my life. Without him I have no life. If I don't abide in him, I am fit for the burning. I am a withered branch. I don't have any life.

1 John 5:11-12 says, "This is the record. You can write this down. This is the record. God has given us eternal life and this life is in his Son."

You leave your first love and you have left life, truth, peace, rest, God. He that hath the Son hath life. He that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

My friends, it is not the Church that saves. You know that. It is Christ. It is not even the cross that saves. No, sir. It is Christ.

Let others who will praise the cross of the Christ. The Christ of the cross is my theme. And while I cherish the old rugged cross, it is the Christ of the cross that redeems. It is not the cross that saved me. It is Christ who hung on that cross. It is not the mother who saves me. It is not the mother who is my mediator. It is the master, Christ. It is not the brotherhood. The brotherhood can't help me if I don't have the bridegroom. Do you see that?

If I leave the bridegroom, the brotherhood is of no use to me. It is not the rosary. It is the Redeemer. Things don't help me. The person. It is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul.

"I have somewhat against you," God said. "You have left your first love." And the mess you are in is of your own making.

You see, Christ...this hymn writer said, "Christ as our mediator stands between our souls and God. And upon both he lays his hand, upon God and me, presenting his precious blood. Christ is the rock. On him I build. He is my life, my love, my all. And his promise shall be fulfilled. He will never let me fall."

My friend, look to Christ. Continue in Christ. Cling to Christ. Learn of Christ. Don't allow anything or anyone or any circumstances or any promotion or any fluency or poverty to turn you from the simplicity, the oneness, the singleness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I quoted that verse a while ago. "As you have received him, so walk in him, so walk the rest of your life as you received Christ."

"Where is the blessedness that once I knew when first I met the Lord?"

How did you meet him? How did you receive him? Well, I received him as my Savior. He is still my Savior. I received him as my Lord. He is still my Lord. I received him as my master. He is still my master. I received him as my life. He is still my life. I received him as my high priest. He is still my high priest. I received him as my hope and my only hope. And he is still my only hope.

The apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian Church in the second epistle expresses a great fear for these people, a great fear. Paul didn't fear many things, but this he did. He feared this. He feared a distraction from Christ. He feared a departure from Christ. He feared what our Lord said about the Church at Ephesus, "You left your first love." That is what Paul feared.

And this is what he said, 2 Corinthians 11:3. "But I fear, I fear, lest any one by any mean, as Satan beguiled Eve our mother, any one or any thing should divert you from Christ or corrupt your minds from the simplicity, from the simplicity of Jesus Christ, the all sufficiency of Jesus Christ, the oneness, the singleness of Jesus Christ, the fullness of Christ."

He is all in all. He is everything to us. He is our wisdom. He is our righteousness. He is our sanctification. He is our redemption. And to depart from Christ is our only real fear because he is all and in all. And when we leave him we have left everything when we leave Christ.

And this is why Paul wrote to this troubled church and he deals with all these problems that they have. He deals with them later. But here in this first chapter, now you get it out there, that first chapter. This first chapter is filled with the person to whom they must return, to whom they must look, to whom they must cling. They can't...they can do all these other things to straighten out these other problems, but Christ is the answer. Christ is the answer right here, right here, the glory of Jesus Christ.

And if you will go down through here the first 10 verses in chapter one and mark Jesus Christ's name and see how many times Paul mentioned there in the chapter one, 1 Corin-

thians. Before he ever deals with their problems he calls them to Christ, to Christ. Everything is in him, in him.

Now watch here. Let's go to verse one. Paul says, "I am called to be an apostle not of the Church, of Jesus Christ." We who preach, we are ambassadors of Christ. We are messengers of Christ. We are the servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are sent to declare unto you the words of God, the words of Christ. We preach not ourselves. Paul says that over in another verse. He said, "We preach not ourselves. We don't preach our denomination or ourselves or our programs. We preach Christ. We preach Christ Jesus our Lord. Ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake. But he is alpha and omega. That's beginning and end. He is the first and the last. He is the author and finisher of our faith. We are ambassadors of Christ. We preach Christ. That is what we preachers...we need to return to preaching Christ every service, every service. A sermon that doesn't exalt Christ and magnify Christ and present Christ and him crucified really ought not to have been preached. We are the apostles and ambassadors and messengers of Jesus Christ.

Look at verse two. "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth who are the sanctified in Christ Jesus." That's right. You are made holy in him. Not in your works, in your righteousness. You are holy in him. All spiritual blessings are in Christ.

Listen to Paul in Ephesians one. "God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus." That is where all the blessings are, in Christ. You are sanctified in Christ. We are justified by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. We are clothed in the righteousness of Christ Jesus. We are accepted in the beloved, Christ Jesus. We are translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his Son Christ Jesus. Of God are you in Christ Jesus who is made unto you all things.

So Paul has taken them to the real solution. It is Christ. He says, "We are servants of Christ. We are apostles of Christ. Believers are justified in Christ. They are sanctified in Christ.

And now he says in verse two. "And we all call upon the name of Christ Jesus our Lord, both your Lord and my Lord." We call on his name. That is how we are saved. Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. That is how we are saved, by calling on his name, Jehovah Jireh, Jehovah Tsidkenu, Jehovah Raphe, Jehovah my shepherd, Jehovah my banner. Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. We pray in his name. He said, "If you ask the Father anything in my name he will give it you to you. "Anything worth having, anything eternal, anything spiritual is yours in the name of Christ. We serve in his name. If you give a cup of cold water in his name you'll not lose your reward.

What we do we do for his glory. Everything is in his name. He is all.

Look at verse three. "Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ." Peace comes through Christ. Peace with God, peace. This is so im-

portant right here. Listen to me. Listen. How can a son of Adam, a sinner, have peace with God. Peace means to be reconciled. Peace means to be accepted. Peace means to be forgiven. Peace means the war is over. There is no judgment. Well, how can we have peace with God? We are not sons of peace. We are sons of Adam. How can we have peace with a holy God? How can he be reconciled? Here is the answer, Colossians 1:20. "And having made peace with God through the blood of his cross, having made peace with God through the blood of his cross." That is how it is made. By Christ, "to reconcile all things to himself."

Reconcile. You know when two people fall out and somebody hears they are back together they say, "Well, they are getting...well, they were reconciled."

What do you mean? They are friends. And that is what Christ did. We were enemies by wicked works, enemies by birth and nature. And Christ came and on the cross of Calvary God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. And that is what this is saying. Having made peace with God through the blood of his cross by Christ to reconcile all things to himself, by Christ, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven. "When I see the blood," God said, "I will pass over you."

How long has it been since you heard a message on the blood of Christ, the all sufficient blood of Christ, the effectual, saving, cleansing, sanctifying blood of Christ Jesus? without the shedding of blood there is no remission. There is no salvation. We have today a bloodless religion. It is a religion of philosophy and psychology and ideology and all of these other things. We need to get back to the simplicity of the gospel, the simplicity of Christ, the blood.

There is a trail of blood throughout the whole Bible from Genesis 3:21 when Adam and Eve stood naked before God and the first blood was shed, the first blood, the first blood shed on this earth wasn't Cain killing Abel. The first blood shed was God slew an animal and clothed Adam and Eve with the skins of that animal. And from that blood all the way through the Bible till we meet in Revelation the Lamb slain on the throne there is a trail of blood, a trail of blood. It started in the Garden and it was consummated, fulfilled and finished on the cross of Calvary.

You need to study, you need to study the simplicity of Christ, the three Rs.

"What are you talking about, preacher?"

Well, you know, education is kind of summed up the three Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic. Well, there are three Rs to the Scripture. No sermon ought to be preached that doesn't contain the three Rs. Do you know what they are? Ruined by the fall, what happened in the Garden, ruined by the fall. By one man sin entered this world and death by sin. So death passed upon all men, ruined by the fall.

Secondly is redemption, redemption by the blood, what happened on the cross. Christ by his blood cleansed us from all sin.

The third R is regeneration. What happens in a sinner's heart when the Holy Ghost takes the Word of God and gives him new life, makes him a new creature, reveals the Son of God to him and sheds abroad the love of God in his heart.

That is the three Rs: ruin, redemption and regeneration; what happened in the Garden, what happened on the cross, what happened when God saves a sinner.

Look at verse four. "I thank God," Paul said, "always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ."

What is the grace of God? It is the favor of God. Noah found favor with God. Mary found favor with God. It is the forgiveness of God. I remember this sin no more. It is the love of God, unchangeable. It is the electing grace, saving grace, daily grace, keeping grace, dying grace. It is the grace of God.

Where is it found? In Christ Jesus. It is given us by Jesus Christ. That's where it is. And you will not experience it unless you lay hold on Christ.

And verse five. "In fact in everything," Paul said, "You are enriched by the Lord Jesus Christ. You are enriched."

You know, whatever the Lord...whatever the lot of the Lord's people on this earth, whatever the lot...I know some mighty poor believers and I know some rich believers. But whatever the lot of a believer on this earth, they are really actually never poor. We may not have a large supply of material things, but we are not poor. The Word of God says, "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. He will show us the riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

I hope it is not said about you ever "I have somewhat against you. You have left your first love. You have left your first love."

Christ Jesus is our first love. You know when he said to Peter there in John 21 he said, "Do you love me?"

"Yea, Lord, thou knowest I love thee."

"Feed my sheep."

Order this tape, "Christ our First Love" and on the back of it, "Is the Bible the Word of God?"

Until next week, God bless you.

