

## **LeaderLesson 24:**

### **An Open Letter to My Denomination: Have We Lost Our First Love?**

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*[This LeaderLesson is by Thom Rainer, President of Lifeway Christian Resources. He shared this open letter to Southern Baptists in a recent blog post at thomrainer.com. The question he asks is from Jesus' message to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7, and we need to prayerfully answer it.]*

Dear Southern Baptists:

I could be writing to a broader audience. Perhaps I should be. And I know many outside our denomination will read this brief letter. I hope those readers will bear with me as I have a “family discussion.”

Please hear me clearly. I am not writing out of any sense of superiority. Indeed, many of you could put me to shame. But my heart is breaking with what I perceive to be a loss of passion for those who do not know Christ. Many of you have seen the numbers.\* We are reaching fewer people for the gospel today than we did decades ago when we were a much smaller group.

#### **The First Love**

Where is the passion in most of our churches to reach the lost? Where is the passion among our leaders, both in our churches and in our denomination? Jesus told those at the church at Ephesus that they had sound doctrine, that they hated evil (Revelation 2:1-7). But He also told them they had lost their first love. When we truly love Jesus with all of our hearts, we can't help but tell others about Him. We can't help but share the good news.

I thank God for our contending for the faith. I thank God for our affirmation of the total truthfulness of Scripture. I thank God for orthodoxy. But I pray that it is not becoming a dead orthodoxy—an orthodoxy that has lost its first love.

#### **The Purpose of the Letter**

The purpose of this letter is not to chastise. I am a messed up sinner who has no right to look at the splinter in the eyes of my brothers and sisters when I need to deal with the plank in my own eye. I need to fall more deeply in love with Jesus. I need to share His love as part of my very being. In His power I must do more and I must do better.

No, the purpose of this letter is simply to share a broken heart, and to express a heartfelt desire to change. I must love Jesus more deeply and tell others about Him more often. I must show Christ's love not only with my words, but with every action and interaction I have. I must be more like Him every day.

I have no proposal. I have no new programs for now. I simply have a burden.

And as a commitment to God first, but then a commitment to you, I am asking God to lead me to love Him more deeply than I ever have. I am asking God to put people in my life where I can show His love, and tell them about my Savior.

### **It Must Begin with Me**

My life's desire is to glorify God by loving Him with all my heart. And I have no right to say that unless I am so much in love with Him that I "am unable to stop speaking about what (I) have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Evangelism must be as natural to me as breathing.

Pastors, will you join me in this plea? Will you be an evangelistic example for the churches God has called you to serve? Laypersons, will you pray for evangelistic hearts in your own lives? I must make that prayer a part of my life every day.

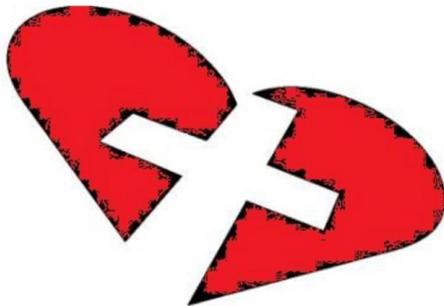
Have we lost our first love? Is that love reflected in in how we share the gospel of Christ every day?

May God break me until I am all His, telling others about His Son every day.

And may the sharing of the good news of Christ once again become the focus of all our lives in the churches of our denomination.

\*This is the web address for the numbers mentioned: <http://blog.lifeway.com/newsroom/2013/06/06/number-of-sbc-churches-increased-last-year-members-attendance-and-baptisms-declined/>

If you would like a copy of Bob Lowman's study through Revelation 2-3, *What the Spirit Says to the Churches*, please let us know. This book was published by MBA last year and is available to our churches and to others who would like this resource: 704.375.1197.



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***AND THIS IS LOVE,  
THAT WE WALK IN OBEDIENCE  
TO HIS COMMANDS. - 2 JOHN 6***

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