

## UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God*  
**IN KING JESUS.**

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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by – Stuart H. Pouliot

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### ***First Love***

Yet I have this against you—that you no longer love Me as you did at first [first love]. (Revelation 2:4 WNT)

One of the greatest, if not *the* greatest, dangers we Christians face in our day is leaving our first love. There is potential danger when we put all our energy into some emphasis-driven ministry or cause, especially if the cause is of the world system that is crumbling. The danger is that these things slowly and subtly replace Jesus as our first love. We could be passionate about what we are doing and emphasizing, and yet, the one who should be the love of our life because He is the lover of our life is left outside of it all, standing at the door knocking. This does not mean that Jesus is absent from our thoughts, even prayers, but He becomes secondary to the emphasis, if not left out of it entirely. In particular, love for His soon appearing can get lost in the myriad of these things.

As one who often emphasizes the prophetic, especially the coming of the Lord and the consummational manifestation of His kingdom, I am constantly on guard that my heart not be moved off the ground of love. However, I find it hard to imagine one leaving first love who desires to *literally* see the Lord Jesus and to *literally* see His kingdom established among the nations, setting things right once and for all.

First, let us be abundantly clear that love starts with God. ***We love, because He first loved us*** (1 John 4:19). Within us we have what could be called *true love* because ***the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the holy spirit given to us*** (Romans 5:5). When we believed on the Lord Jesus, we received His spirit, which is the very essence of love. Thus, the spirit of the Lord and love are inseparable.

Second, there is a reason for this love; it is so that we might love with the same love that is of God, for ***God is love***. We have been joined to Jesus in a very special love relationship between the creator and His created. The love of God within our hearts speaks of our **betrothal or marriage to Another**.

So, my brethren, to you also the Law died through the incarnation of Christ, that you might be wedded to [married to, joined to, belong to] Another, namely to Him who rose from the dead in order that we might yield fruit to God. (Romans 7:4 WNT [added])

The Greek word used by Paul in this verse has a very wide application, but, in his letter to the Corinthians, he used a more direct word for *betrothal* or *marriage*, the word *harmozo*, which means "to join" and figuratively "to woo." You might notice the similarity to the English word *harmonize*. We could say that we are to be harmonized with Jesus, made one with Him into one vessel of love. *For I [Paul] am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed [harmozo] you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin* (2 Corinthians 11:2)

Third, we see the concept of first love manifested when the ancient sons of Israel were called out of Egypt in order to enter the promised land. They were betrothed to the Lord, something that the Lord Himself recounted later after they had left their first love.

"Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothals, your following after Me in the wilderness, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the LORD, the first of His harvest.'" (Jeremiah 2:2-3a NASB)

The Lord reminded ancient Jerusalem (by extension all Israel) that their fathers were betrothed to the Lord in first love (Revelation 2:4), but they strayed from this love and instead accused the Lord of injustice (Jeremiah 2:4-8). To the house of Israel and, by inference, the house of Judah, the Lord pronounced His judgment of their condition: *And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also* (Jeremiah 3:8). Also, Hosea was raised up to pronounce judgment on the house of Israel: *For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband* (Hosea 2:2). The Lord gave the house of Israel a writ of divorce for their disobedience and the breaking of the covenant that He had made with them and they had ratified with an oath of obedience (Exodus 19:5-8).

Fourth, the good news is the Lord has promised the true Israel or the spiritual house of Israel—the one into which all believers have been grafted—that He will betroth them to Himself, based on a new covenant guaranteed never to be broken because of His oath and promise alone (Hebrews 8:8-10).

"It will come about in that day," declares the LORD, "That you will call Me Ishi [my husband] and will no longer call Me Baali [my master]. ... "I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion, and I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the LORD. ... and I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, 'You are my God!'" (Hosea 2:16, 19-20, 23 NASB [added])

Fifth, if we are betrothed to Christ or, on a more personal level, Jesus, then shouldn't we be in love with Him in a very special way? Shouldn't we see ourselves as betrothed or married to Him? Paul did! Read Ephesians 5:22-32, if you have any doubts. Christ loves His body as His own, just as the first Adam loved Eve as his own body, for she came from his body. Paul spoke of it as a mystery. Is it still a mystery to us? It is no coincidence that in speaking to the seven ecclesias in *The Revelation*, Christ first exhorted the ecclesia at Ephesus that they had left their first love. It was a reminder that, like the sons of Israel that had left their first love while in the wilderness, so too had the ecclesia left her first love as she has wandered in the wilderness, awaiting the consummational arrival of the Lord. According to the Lord, this first love is recovered in the ecclesia with a Philadelphian heart.

Sixth, John reminds us that *God is love* and if we are abiding in His love, ***we ought to love one another***. We can do many things in the name of Jesus; and yet, ***if we have no love***, as Paul says, we are like ***clanging cymbals*** or ***as nothing***. ***Love never fails***, and we are to express and live out this love with and for one another who are children of God. And, as His body, this love is to be expressed to the world around us. (see I John 4:7 ff; 1 Corinthians 13)

Seventh, first love is intimately joined with ***a love for the appearing of the Lord***. As his death was imminent, Paul wrote to his beloved Timothy that a crown of righteousness awaited him on that Day, that is, the *future* Day of Christ, not only for him but for all who have a special love to see Jesus. *From this time onward there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who love the thought of His Appearing* (2 Timothy 4:8 WNT). Other translations use the phrases *to all those who wait with love for Him to appear* (GNB) and *for all who eagerly look forward to His appearing* (NLT).

If you truly love someone and you are separated from that person for a long time, don't you miss that person and long to be reunited with him or her? Doesn't your heart pine to be with the person? Aren't you consumed with a desire to be with the person? If you love someone, you want to be with that person. Love demands it, for love must be expressed!

Dear beloved, is Jesus the love of your life? Do you long to see Him? If you do, then there is a wreath (crown) of righteousness awaiting you. Paul was not alone in this matter, for, in reference to the royal law of love, James wrote that those who love Jesus will be heirs of the kingdom (James 2:5). Do you want to reign with King Jesus in His coming kingdom? If so, then love Him, long for Him, and love the thought of His appearing. Don't be like those today who are mocking with their faithlessness: *Where is the promise of His coming?* (2 Peter 3:4). Without stating so directly, many in our day are expressing the same sentiment. Let us love the Lord's appearing. Until then, let us express His love to one another and the world. Let us return to first love!