



Recognizing Deception

Chapter 2

Losing Our First Love

by Dene McGriff

If you are a “born again” Christian, you’re a deceitful, rotten sinner saved by His marvelous grace. I was “reborn” and given a new life (definition of a Christian – someone who receives Christ’s life into their human spirit which is made alive) when I was eleven. I’m now 65 and have had my share of ups and downs as a Christian. The Christian life has nothing to do with learning how to act, going to church or anything like that. The key is to maintain that fresh relationship with Jesus Christ that you had the moment you received him into your heart. It’s all about relationship – not religion, not works, not following rules and regulations, forms, doctrines or teachings. I tell people they had better really mean it or they will be miserable. If they don’t maintain that fresh relationship, they will not be happy.



I remember staying in a hotel in Tulsa near the hospital I worked at for a while. There was a singer who sang a song about Dorothy after OZ. It started out with “Somewhere over the rainbow...” and then she was back in Kansas, at home with auntie Em, uncle Henry and Toto. As the years went on, she got depressed because frankly you can’t compare the storm swept plains of Kansas with the wonders and excitement of OZ. In the song, poor Dorothy could never forget her great adventure as a young person and every day wished she could somehow go back to OZ. And do you know what? It is like that with many “Christians”. They ask the Lord into their heart, to forgive and cleanse them and change their lives. As the Bible says, they *begin in the spirit* but somehow continue in the flesh – acting out the role, but without the fresh relationship they once had.

So it is no accident in the letter to the seven churches in Asia, that the very first church was given one admonition:

*1 “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. **Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first*



works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

So here we have the earliest Christians, those who sat at the feet of the apostles being criticized for losing their first love. This should come as no surprise because it happens to every Christian at one time or another. [Colossians 2:6](#) says, “As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.” How does a Christian begin their relationship with the Lord Jesus? They repent and confess their need of Him and ask Him to change them and be their life. In other words, the way we began that relationship, we have to do the same thing every day in order to continue in it. [1 John 1](#) puts it in terms of walking in the light as He is in the light. Then we have fellowship with Him and with one another. That is the secret to the Christian life. Be open; let the light shine in and fellowship with Him. This is something we have to do every day or we just become pretenders, actors, hypocrites, empty shells.

You will be deceived if you lose your first love!

The church in [Ephesus](#) lost her first love. Isn't this so typical of every Christian? Like the early Christians, we were electrified by our first touch with Jesus and wanted to share the experience with everyone. But soon we got caught up in life, in church and in “acting” like a Christian (instead of being transformed by that new life within). We got caught up in a “church culture” that taught us how to act and think. We mimic others in church but lose that fresh touch – that relationship that so excited us in the beginning. This can and does happen to us all and, if we persist in this state, we lose our lampstand; lose God's presence.

If we lose our first love, we go through the motions of being a “Christian” but without life or love. We will be deceived if we don't have that fresh relationship. There is nothing harder for the “Christian” because our tendency is to become “religious” – acting like our concept or how we are taught a Christian should be but void of love and life. I'm not talking theory but experience – my experience of over 50 years! And I don't know a single “born again” Christian that hasn't had the same experience.

I suppose I'm representative of the typical bumpy road Christians take. In 1960 I went to UC Davis. I was so excited after working the summer on the staff of Forest Home Christian Conference Center – a life changing experience where I was face to face with Christian greats such as Olympian Rafer Johnson, Henrietta Mears, Bill Bright, etc. I was excited about the Lord, my new friends and sharing with others. The next summer I went back to Forest Home to the college conference. My life as a Christian was becoming routine and losing its luster. I continued to go through the motions as a student at UC Davis, active in the Baptist Church and Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship but I was becoming disillusioned with my Christian life and wondering where the Lord had gone. I kept busy with Bible Studies in the dorms, meetings and more church but there wasn't much real in my day to day life.

The summer of 1961 I went back to the college conference at Forest Home. I felt like such a failure, I went out alone into the forest and began to talk to God. I told him I was done. It was too hard. I didn't want to be a Christian. I didn't want to have anything to do with him any more. I was angry and had just had it. I wanted out. He may be real but He wasn't real to me. (no one told me I can't unenlist in His army) All of the sudden I felt enveloped by His love and presence. My mind revolted and I said, “Wait a minute! What are you doing? Didn't You hear a word I said? I just told You to go away and leave me alone. I was done. And it was as if He said to me, “Dene, this is the second time you have ever been really honest with me.” I found my first love again that day. It's not like I haven't fallen many times since, but I know that if I repent, I can find my way back. All God wants is honesty. He can handle it. He will never leave or forsake us. But it is not that easy to maintain that fresh relationship, that first love. Just like a good marriage, it requires effort.

But let's be honest. How many Christians do we know who never find their way back? A pastor who was in the first graduating class of a well-known seminary confided in a friend once that he was the only one of the first graduating class that he knew of that went on with the Lord. Short of leaving the Lord completely, Christians either go into the ministry if they are real zealous or settle into the mediocrity of a pew sitting member of good standing of a church and passively participate. But what happened to that new Christian who shared the joy of his salvation with everyone he saw? He was domesticated. He learned how to act. He lost all his old friends and became the member of the exclusive club of the righteous and holy! He learned how to go through the motions.

I'll never forget that first Sunday in September, 1962 – the day before classes started in Davis. It was the day I

met my wife to be – first at church and later in the day at the Inter Varsity picnic. It was love at first sight! As Vice President of Inter Varsity, I remember giving a welcoming speech and feeling empty and phony as I gave it. I brought my friend Joe. He had been in a Bible Study I had held the year before in the dorm. Joe was asking all the right questions. He wanted to know how to become a Christian. He wanted to study the Bible again. I remember shining him on and telling him we'd get together soon. I remembered feeling empty with nothing to offer. Where was the Lord in my life? A week and a half later, Joe sat in his little pickup truck right in front of our dorm, put a shot gun to his mouth and pulled the trigger! This was the most profoundly horrible thing that had ever happened in my young life! I was so exposed as a so-called BMOC “Christian leader” on campus but my life was a sham. I had lost my “first love”. I had no reality of the Lord in my life and I knew it. I was an empty shell – just another Christian actor. I cried. I repented. I cried some more. I hit bottom and didn't know what to do. I could barely drag myself to the Baptist church or Inter Varsity. I was done, finished! I needed a miracle. I was done pretending. I don't know how I got through that year. I just buried myself in studying and dating Carole (I guess that helped)

The summer of '63 I spent at home in Palm Springs cleaning swimming pools and memorizing Scripture – a pretty wonderful time. The end of summer, I went to a Navigator conference at Hume Lake. I was beginning to question “church” but didn't know quite what I was looking for. One of the conference speakers spoke on the body of Christ and about us being a part of the body, getting our life from one another, functioning as a part of the body and the importance of everyone having a living relationship with Christ mutually encouraging one another.

The Christian life came from the Lord, the Bible, and fellow members in the body of Christ. I caught a vision and asked the Lord to show me that body. As it says in the letter to the church of Ephesus, they hated the “deeds of the [Nicolaitans](#)” (which in Greek means “subdue the laity” – in other words, the clergy-laity system). I had had it with the clergy laity system. I couldn't stand sitting in church one more day. I wanted something real in my life with the Lord and with other Christians. Otherwise, the whole thing was bogus as far as I was concerned. But where was His Body, this thing called the “church life”?

Miraculously, I met some brothers who attended meetings at a brother's house in Sacramento. The Lord heard my prayers. At the time, it was a small home fellowship but the life of the Lord was flowing among these people. I found the church life, that group of believers where everyone shares, where the presence of the Lord was so manifest – it was palpable – you could feel and touch Him in your spirit and in the brothers and sisters. The next ten or so years, I basked in His presence and in the joy of this corporate life. I had not only found Jesus again as my first love, I discovered people who wanted the same thing. Here's one example. One of the brothers and I worked in Sacramento part time (work study for those old enough to remember). One of the other student workers noticed how close we were and asked us what was different about us. We told him and he became a Christian. This happened over and over. There was no clergy, no laity. We were all just one body. It was a glorious time!

That was a grounding period in my life. It was exciting and fun but things changed and by the mid to late 70's I was relaunched back into the main stream of Christianity. I had my ups and downs, attended charismatic churches in Phoenix (Sweetwater Church of the Valley), Central Baptist in Wheaton, IL while I worked for World Relief and the National Association of Evangelicals, Food for the Hungry, a word-faith church in Minneapolis, a “latter rain” church in Hartford, a community church in Washington DC, a Vineyard in Denver, etc., etc. I experienced a lot, but never lost site of the church life. I would look at all the nice people sitting quietly in their pews and see little treasure boxes where the Lord was the treasure inside just wanting to get out but everyone seemed content with it but me. I still long for the experience and believe that one day we will have it again but more on that in a book I'm working on titled “[In Search of the Last Days Church.](#)”

I've seen a lot in the past 50 years. I was called to this “end times” ministry fifteen years ago in a miraculous meeting with God on the parkway between Hartford and NYC. The Lord has allowed me to see and experience a lot of things. I have run into Christians absolutely on fire and burning with their first love, and Pharisee-like Christians who are locked into legalism, doctrines and teachings. Over the past 15 years, I have corresponded with Christians all over the world, people with different opinions and people on the same road.



I'm not claiming to have seen it all, but I have seen quite a bit. As a young man, I wanted to go to Bible School and Seminary but the Lord led me into a secular education (11 years of it) and a secular career – international business which led me all over the world. Although I have seen and experienced a variety of churches and ministries, I have been fortunate to be “outside the box” in terms of my education and world view. And although I attended



mainline churches, my heart is with the simple church life I experienced over that 12 year period. I share my testimony so you will understand that I am not just speaking theoretically, but I came as close as one can to experiencing the “early” church as you can get in this day and age. I will be developing this theme in the book on line “[In Search of](#)

[the Last Days Church.](#)”

Returning to the subject of deception, **Christians will be deceived if they lose their first love.** If you have been with us over the years, and read some of the volumes of material, you know, we have tried our best to take a fresh look at the Bible, and at prophecy in particular. We appreciate the life, faithfulness and work of the saints down through time but we also understand the nature of the times we are living in whose principle characteristic is deception. We also understand the deception inherent in a culture so dominated by the media, of a politically correct culture of accepting everything, of years of Christian teaching much of which is flawed. Unfortunately, we have been around long enough to note that most Christians blindly accept what they are told by their “leaders” and are too lazy to dig for answers themselves.

The world system is way too distracting these days. All of the material things, like the idols of old, draw us away from our “first love.” After all, even the Lord was very clear when he said, “‘*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*’” ([Matthew 22:37-39](#)) That may not seem like asking much of us, but how many of us humans do it? Doesn’t it seem like just about everything draws us away from that first love? Everything revolves around us?

Left to our own human perspective and understanding, we will be deceived. Only God’s life and vision protects us from the deceptive wiles of the world, the flesh and the devil. We need His fresh touch, His anointing and His understanding or we will be drawn away by our own lusts and conceits. Before us, we have the greatest deception that has ever come upon the world and it would be a big mistake to underestimate it. We are all prone to wander, prone to leave the God we love so it behooves us to repent daily and maintain that fresh relationship with God and stay away from those things that distract us from our first love.

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