

Public Passion VS Private Devotion

By Francis Chan | Cornerstone Church



I wonder if the inconsistency in my walk with God has anything to do with the fact that I can lead a “successful” church in America without being in love with Jesus. I’m sure I could blame American church culture, my position, or a busy schedule for my lack of reverent intimacy. The truth, however, is that my sin and hypocrisy is a result of me.

I FORGET TO LOVE GOD

It’s not like I don’t want to. In fact, when I’m deeply in prayer, it’s clear to me that there’s no place I’d rather be. I know that I love God. When I sit and think about Him, I’m filled with intense feelings of adoration. I’m convinced that He means more to me than my wife, kids, or anyone else on the planet. I just forget to love Him.

We can argue that we’re busy doing ministry, which is how we express our love. But if that’s all God wanted, His words to the Ephesians in Revelation 2 would make no sense.

“I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostle but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.” (NIV)

God recognizes the Ephesian church for their wonderful ministry. Yet He makes it clear in the next verse that they are not loving Him. He tells them, *“You have forsaken your first love.”*

What has always surprised me about that passage is God’s threat to remove them if they don’t start loving Him again. *“If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”* God tells the hard working, sin hating, doctrine-loving, persecuted church that He doesn’t want them around unless they love Him. He’s never been interested in unloving children. His desire has always been love. It was the great command in the Old Testament and the New (Deut. 6:5, Matt. 22:37). Love was supposed to be the catalyst of all godly action.

When is the last time you came alone before your Father just to enjoy Him? If it has been a while, don’t waste your time reading this article. Get alone and adore Him. Pray that you would no longer merely love Him through your religious actions, but with the passion befitting a person in love.

When I first fell in love with my wife, I never “forgot” to call her or spend time with her. Rarely, if ever, did she get crowded out because I was so “busy.”

I FAKE PASSION WELL

Leaders make the greatest hypocrites because of their ability to persuade and deceive. Rarely is there a pastor whose character exceeds his reputation. If I were to ask those closest to you about your relationship with God, what would they say? If I were to ask God the same question, what would He say? If your family, friends, and congregation have better things to say about you than God, it’s because you give them that impression. We do this because we can. God gifted us with an ability to communicate. Too

often we use this ability not to convey who we are, but who we want others to think we are.

It's similar to the church in Sardis, to whom Jesus says, "*I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.*" (Rev. 3:1 NIV) Others believed the façade, but Jesus knew the truth. He reminded them that He knew of their spiritual deadness. The hope was that it would jolt them toward true life. God's desire for all believers, especially leaders, is "*life that is truly life.*" (1 Timothy 6:19 NIV) You've all had times, hopefully, when you experienced this "life." But when you aren't experiencing it, you fake it. Why? What's the point in faking it when you can *have* it?

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I once heard a Christian leader say, "I refuse to let my public passion exceed my private devotion." As a leader, have you made that commitment? It could make for some pretty boring sermons.

It burdens me when I think we may have missed it. I ache when I consider how we are missing out. Remember, being obsessed with Jesus is a good thing. Trading the truth for a lie doesn't benefit you or any person you are leading. This isn't coming from a writer saying, "You must repent." It's coming from a fellow sinful leader saying, "We're so stupid if we don't." You can have genuine intimacy with Almighty God today. Why not?

I FOLLOW THE PEOPLE I LEAD

It is hard to be rejected. I hated it in junior high, and I still hate it today. It didn't take long to learn how to fit in, in order to avoid the pain of rejection. That ability has stayed with me and begs me to use it. I know how to keep people from rejecting me and leaving the church. I know what words to say and which actions to take to keep people around. But when I do that, I'm no longer leading. I'm being led by the right or wrong desires of the people.

God calls us to give people what they need. Based on His word, regardless of whether they stick around. Jesus led. Few followed, but He kept leading.

Last summer I came to a shocking realization that I had to share with my wife: If Jesus had a church in Simi Valley, mine would be bigger. People would leave His church to attend mine because I call for an easier commitment. I know better how to cater to people's desires so they stick around. Jesus was never really good at that. He was the one who said, "*He who loves father or mother ... son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*" (Matt. 10:37 NIV) I'm much more popular than Jesus.

Having come to that conclusion, I came back to the church with resolve to call people to the same commitment Christ called them to. I knew that people would leave, and they have. I found comfort in that because, "*Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.*" (Luke 6:26 NIV) Over time though, the conviction can fade, and it gets tiresome seeing people leave. There is a constant pull to try to keep people around rather than truly lead the faithful who remain. When my church was started, I used to tell my wife that I didn't care if we only had ten people, as long as they *really* loved God and desired to worship Him with all of their hearts. Where is that conviction now?

I sometimes wonder what I would have done if I were the pastor of the church in Laodicea. We're all familiar with that church in Revelation 3:14-22. It's the "lukewarm" church that Jesus said He would "spit out" of His mouth. Would I have been strong enough to overcome the prevailing attitude of the entire church? Or would I have eventually been sucked into its flow and fate? I like to think I could have stood alone, but I'm not so sure.

My youth pastor had a saying that I still remember twenty-five years later, "Leaders lead." It's what we do. It's what God has called us to do. Of course there's sadness when people refuse to follow you, but it's better than the sadness that would come if you stopped leading. Paul said boldly, "*Imitate me as I imitate Christ.*" Don't be led by your people. Lead them. It's what you were made to do, equipped to do, called to do. It won't be long before we'll see that it was all worth it.

Galatians 6:9 "*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*" (NIV)

Jeremiah 1:17 "*Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be*

terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them.” (NIV)

Revelation 3:21 *“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (NIV)*

1 Timothy 6:11-12 *“But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” (NIV)*

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