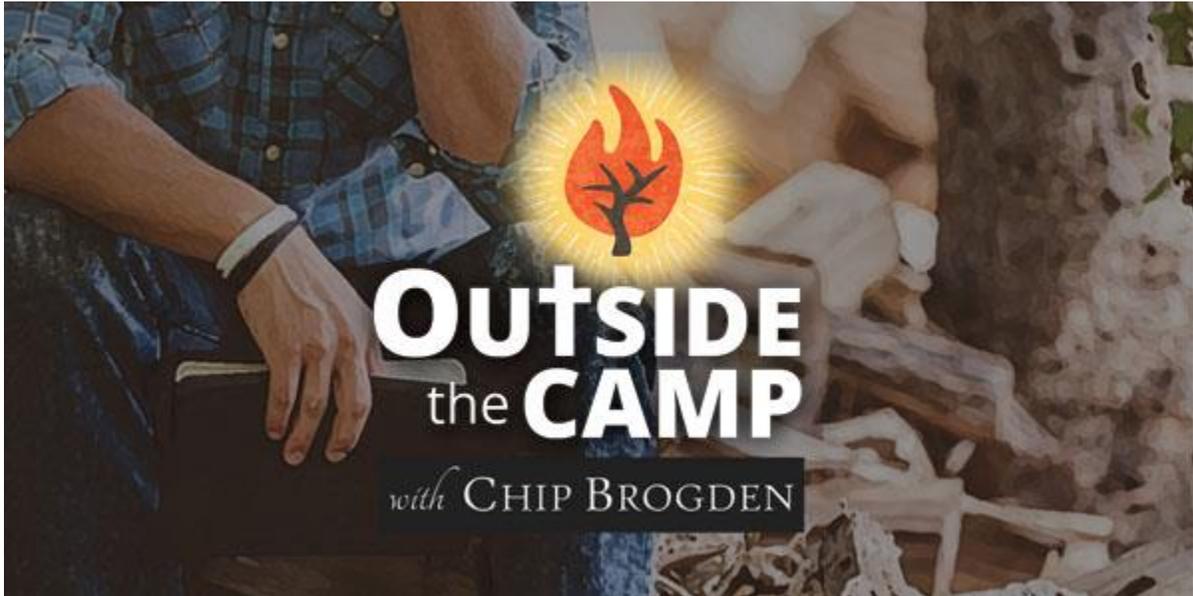


TRANSCRIPT

OUTSIDE THE CAMP WITH CHIP BROGDEN



EPISODE 4: Remember Your First Love

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ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this edition of Outside the Camp with author and teacher Chip Brogden. Helping you discover the freedom and joy of a Christ-centered faith that is based on relationship, not religion. And now, with today's message, here's Chip Brogden.

CHIP: I believe that many Christians are afflicted with a spiritual condition that prevents them from embracing the simplicity of a Christ-centered faith. Part of my mission in life is to help people discover the freedom and joy of a Christ-centered faith that is based on relationship, not religion. Ironically, the non-religious person out in the

world instantly relates to that. They get it. They see the difference between religion and relationship. They're like, "Yeah! That makes sense."

But when you talk to church folks about religion versus relationship, they look at you as if you're crazy. No one has ever helped them see that there is a difference between a church-centered faith and a Christ-centered faith. They think it's all the same thing. Where did they learn that from? Who told them – or rather, who failed to tell them – that following Jesus is not the same thing as going to church? They have been taught, preached to, indoctrinated, and in many cases, actually threatened, with the false belief that you cannot call yourself a Christian unless you go to church. It is ingrained in their consciousness. It is as part of their life as breathing.

I think this illustrates exactly what Jesus meant when He said, "You nullify the Word of God with your tradition." Church attendance is a tradition that began once Christianity became the official state religion of Rome. The early believers met in homes, they met in common areas, they prayed together, they worshipped together, they discussed the Scriptures, they ate together. Nothing wrong with that. They loved one another, and in love, they would naturally come together to share the freedom and joy of a Christ-centered faith. Awesome! I'm not against people coming together. People ask me, "Why are you so against Christians meeting together?" Who said I am? I'm not against that – it's just I don't usually see Christians coming together to celebrate the freedom and joy of a Christ-centered faith, and neither does the world. What I see, and what the world sees, is Christians coming together once, twice, or three times a week to celebrate a church-centered faith that is based on religion, based on denomination, based on their nuance of belief, sometimes even based on the personality of the pastor, preacher, prophet, Pope, or whoever is in charge.

And then folks will say, “But we’ve come out of church now, and we meet in homes, just like they used to do in the New Testament!” Well, maybe that’s a step in the right direction. Then again, maybe you’re just doing the same thing you’ve always done by following a church-centered faith. Oh, some call it Body Life or what have you, but it’s still a church-centered faith. It’s still based on getting together. It’s still based on meetings. You might have the meetings in your house while others have meetings in a school and others have meetings in a church building, but what difference does it make? What has changed? Only the location. It’s still a church-centered faith. It’s focused and built around the gathering, the get-together, the meeting, the service, the coming together, the fellowship, the whatever you want to call it.

I mean this is deeply, deeply ingrained in people. And I wonder if they ever stopped long enough to realize that *that* is not a Christ-centered faith. And the harder you try to defend it, the more it proves my point. You just can’t let the meeting go. You just can’t follow Jesus without having some other people to tag along with. Oh, you know – for “fellowship” and what not. I get it. I understand. Following Jesus can get pretty lonely sometimes... and especially when you stop going to church, and you have this great big empty space where church used to be. Got to fill that space up with something. Sunday morning, Sunday morning! What shall we do? Can’t go to church. Let’s find a house church! Let’s find some like-minded people to gather with!

You know, when people first come out of church, I try to get them to take a year off and just spend that time at the feet of Jesus. Stop seeking, stop striving, stop looking around for something to attend, somewhere to go, stop all that activity and just rest, relax, be with Jesus. He called those first twelve disciples of His, and in Mark it says He called them, “That they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach” (Mark 3:14). Busy, busy, busy, preaching and teaching and fellowshiping and gathering but what people overlook is that the primary reason *why* Jesus calls us to Himself, first

and foremost, is *to be with Him*. It's not to be with each other, it's not even to go out and win the world. Win them? Win them to what? How can you win the world for Jesus if you haven't even been with Jesus? What do you have to say to the world, anyway? If you will take some time and be with Him and know Him, then afterward, He might send you forth to preach. Maybe then you'll actually have something worth listening to. But the first thing is to be with Him.

So many people ask me how to get back to their first love – how to fall in love with Jesus the way they used to. It's like asking me how to fall in love with this person they think they are supposed to love but they don't even know them – like falling in love with this person you're supposed to be married to but you don't even know who they are anymore. What a question! At least you recognize something is seriously wrong with this relationship. That's the first step in the right direction.

How do you get your first love back? Well, in Revelation 2, the folks in Ephesus had the same problem. They were busy, busy, busy, getting things done, probably had a great big ministry going on with lots of activities. People think all those Christians in the New Testament were just so on fire for God, so full of Jesus, so loving and powerful, but I'm telling you they had all the same problems that you and I have. We read their stories in the New Testament and we try to go back and capture some of that early vim and vigor, some of that same power and Spirit, and we lift them up and put them on a pedestal as if they are spiritual giants. They weren't. They had problems. They were immature in a lot of ways. They had conflict. They messed up. Now, even in their failures, they had a lot more Spirit and power and fruit than we do today. But still, if you hold them up as a pattern of how we should be today then you're overlooking all the failures and mistakes they made. There is just as much to learn from their failures as from their successes.

So here is the church in Ephesus – the first one Jesus calls out in Revelation chapter 2. He says, “I know your works!” Well, Hallelujah! They had plenty of good works, lots of success, lots of doing and working for God. He said I know your works, I know your labor, I know your patience, I know how much you hate evil, and how you call out false apostles, and how you have persevered and have labored for My Name’s sake. Yep, this is the “New Testament Pattern” everyone is striving towards, right? This is the “Early Church Life” everyone is trying to recapture, right?

Only one little problem here: Jesus says, “*You don’t love Me the way you used to!*” You have left your first love. He says remember from where you have fallen. They had fallen! Do you know what happened? Do you *really* want to know what happened? They got religious. That’s right! They began living a church-centered faith instead of a Christ-centered faith. How do I know? Well, just read the description. What else defines the Christian Religion but working hard for Jesus, doing all these works in His Name, without really, truly, deeply loving Him? What were they in love with, if not Jesus? Well, they were in love with the work of the Lord. They were in love with all the things they were doing in His Name. Heck, they may have even been in love with one another, for all I know. They had a thriving fellowship there, everyone working and laboring together, calling out false apostles, fighting evil, I mean just getting things done. All well in good – in its proper place. And yet, Jesus says you have fallen. Why? Because in all this busy, busy, busy, doing, doing, doing, you lost something along the way: you lost your first love. That’s just an absolute tragedy. And there it is, right there in the New Testament! You want a New Testament pattern? Here is it right here: a church-centered faith became more important than a Christ-centered faith, Jesus got lost in the middle of all these works being done in His Name. Same pattern that has repeated itself for 2,000 years now, the same pattern we see in Churchianity today.

Paul tried to warn the Corinthians that they were heading in the same direction as the Ephesians. He said I'm afraid for you, that somehow, just as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3). Oh yes, it's very subtle! What could be more deceptive? What could be more seductive? You go to church, you pay your tithes, you support the pastor, you're there every time the doors are open, you attend all the functions, you invite people to go with you, and you think you're doing all these things for God. What a shock it must have been for the Ephesians to be told that all the stuff they were doing for God did not make up for the fact that they had forsaken their first love. Jesus said I'm going to take away your light because regardless of all the things you are doing *for Me*, you don't *love Me* the way you used to!

And over in Corinth, Paul is saying, "You're making it too complicated, you're getting religious, you're losing sight of the main thing, you're being led away from the simplicity of Christ!" And that's exactly what has happened with our 40,000 denominations and millions of churches and yes, even with the house church, home church, whatever you want to call it. We've turned the simplicity of Christ into the complexity of religion – where to meet, when to meet, how to meet, who to meet with. It's just one long series of meetings, meetings, and more meetings. And everyone has an opinion on how to "do it." You know what? None of it matters, it's just the same old religious junk that keeps popping up. Even the people who write books about how Christians should meet, if you actually go to their meetings, you just find the same old religious garbage. It's really ironic. Sad.

Christians have forsaken the simplicity of a Christ-centered faith and have replaced it with a church-centered faith that feeds a religious addiction, and the primary symptom of that religious addiction is what I call Chronic Meetingitus. They don't know how to function unless they have some group to be a part of, something to attend. And that's

not even the worse part. This religious addiction is highly contagious, and people affected with Chronic Meetingitus tend to think people who don't attend the meetings can't really be Christians. What a crazy, mixed-up, topsy-turvy world we live in!

Religion is an addiction and church is a drug. Church is a drug. However you define "church," however you *do* church, if *church* is the focus of your faith then your faith is focused on the wrong thing.

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How do we get over this religious addiction? How can we be cured from Chronic Meetingitus? Well, I think it's realistic to just come right out and say that some people *will never* get over it. If a drug addict sees nothing wrong with taking drugs, it's kind of hard to get them to quit. And if a religious addict sees nothing wrong with using church as a drug that leads them away from the simplicity of Christ, then they won't be convinced by me or by anyone else. I gave up trying to persuade the unpersuadable years ago.

But I say these things because they are true, and because many people listening to me already know the truth of what I speak, and God has already convicted you and pointed this out to you. Again, you can argue against it and keep right on going, or you can stop fighting God and just surrender. If you want to be set free from a church-centered faith, and you want to experience the freedom and joy of a Christ-centered faith that is based on relationship, not religion, then I will say to you the same thing that Jesus said to the Ephesians who got so religious they forgot their first love. He told them to remember the first works, go back to the beginning and do those first works again.

And you think, OK, that means I should pray and read the Bible more, right? Perhaps, but you know, you can turn praying and reading the Bible into a religious duty. That can become just another religious activity, no different than going to church and paying your tithes. It's not *what* you do, but *why* you do it, that matters. What is the first works we have to go back to in order to capture our first love?

Well, He doesn't elaborate on what those "first works" are, but He did tell them to *remember*. I think He's trying to get them to remember what it was like when they first came to Him in simplicity and child-like faith and began to follow Him, before they became infected by religion, before they started listening to every other pastor, preacher, prophet and Pope in the world who filled their heads with a lot of nonsense.

You see little clues all around of the kind of simplicity I'm talking about, the kind of "first works" He said they needed to go back to. One little clue I believe is right there, what I quoted before in Mark 3:14: "He chose twelve, that they should be with Him." To be with Jesus. Like Mary, sitting at His feet, hearing His Word. We focus on what Mary was doing – sitting at His feet, hearing His Word. But also think about what she was *not* doing. She was *not* running around trying to do stuff Martha thought she should be doing. She was *not* arguing with Martha, defending herself; she wasn't paying any attention to Martha, with her bickering and complaining and accusations. Now, eventually Martha got her act together, I don't want to make Martha out to be some bad person. But Martha represents nice folks with a religious addiction. They are busy, busy, busy, doing, doing, doing for Jesus and they don't have time to sit at His feet and hear His Word. Like the pastor who spends all week preparing his beautiful sermon on Sunday morning but he doesn't have time to just sit at the feet of Jesus. I'm telling you right now, if you're so busy you don't have time to sit at the feet of Jesus, you're too busy. Mary sat at His feet and heard His Word, and I'm sure there were 1,000 other things she could have been doing. She had to shut all that other stuff out. She had to say,

“You know what? I love Jesus more than anything else, and sitting at His feet to hear His Word is the focus of my life right now. That comes first. I’m giving Him the preeminence right now.” I’m telling you there will always be stuff to do, work that needs to get done. I’m not saying shirk your responsibilities, I’m saying, get your priorities in the right order. Seek first the Kingdom of God. Sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His Word first. Or, be like Martha, stressed out over serving too much, and end up like the Ephesians who lost their first love.

Another time, the people asked Jesus, “What works does God want us to do?” Typical religious question. What shall we do? Doing, doing, doing. Trying to appease God through activity and busy-ness. I am all about bringing forth the fruit and being a good steward and doing something. Paul said he labored more abundantly than anyone else. I work hard, and there is nothing wrong with work. But I am compelled by the love of God to do what I do. I am not working to pay God back because I can never pay Him back. I am not working to earn my salvation. I am not working out of religious duty or obligation. I work because the Father stirs me up to work, to write, to teach, to do whatever He wants me to do. It is my joy and my privilege to do so. That’s different from the religious mindset who says, “Well, tell me what we have to do to satisfy God.” You need to know that God already accepts you as you are. Now, He is working in your life to transform you from what you are into what He wants you to be, but that’s a process. You can’t work your way into spiritual growth. But the people said, “Just tell us what God wants from us. What do we need to do to do the works of God?” And Jesus said, “The work of God is this: believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:28,29). Well, that doesn’t even sound like work, does it? Believe in Him whom He sent. Sounds too easy, doesn’t it? But that is what it means to have a Christ-centered faith. My faith is not in church. My faith is not in finding like-minded people to help me along. My faith is in Christ, and I have learned that all the things I used to look for in other people I can get directly from Him.

A few years ago I wrote an article called, *Is Jesus Enough?* You can still find it on my website. Frankly, for religious folks, Jesus is *not* enough. They think they need all these other things like church, or fellowship, or meetings, or other people to encourage them, or preachers to keep them fed, or prophets to give them a word, and so on. They become attached to all these extra “things” and these “things” get in the way of the simplicity of Christ. Now that I have spent many years following Jesus outside the camp, I have learned that not only is Jesus Enough, but He is More Than Enough. He is not just sufficient, He is More Than Sufficient.

Here’s another little clue. Do you remember when Jesus was at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, and they ran out of wine? What did Mary, the mother of Jesus, say to the servants who were stressing out over the lack of wine? “Whatever He says to you, do it” (John 2:5). Whatever He says, do. You don’t need 50,000 different opinions and Bible translations and preachers to interpret *that*. Whatever He says to you, do it! Now, there’s a lot packed into that simple little instruction. But it carries the same basic idea – you have to shut your mouth, open your ears, and learn how to listen. You have to stop paying attention to what every Tom, Dick and Harry has to say about it and find out what *He* says. Then, whatever *He* says, do it.

We are educated well beyond our level of obedience. We want more words, more teachings, more prophecies, more talk and fellowship and confirmation and a thousand others things when what we really need to do is just *do* what He said to begin with that we never got around to doing. See, there is doing involved. These people who talk and philosophize and discuss and debate all their theories and doctrines and beliefs about how the world should be, but never actually do anything with all that knowledge, are the ones who concern me the most. Doing what He says to do naturally flows out of being with Him and hearing Him say something; but we’re doing what *He* says to do, not what religion tells us to do, not what our church addiction tells us, not what other people tell

us we ought to do, or even what we think we ought to do, but what *He* says to do. And if you don't know what He's saying, if you absolutely have to rely on other people to tell you what He is saying, then that's the first problem you need to deal with.

So there you have it. Without even intending to, I have given you four little clues to help you get back to the simplicity of Christ. What are they? Be with Jesus. Sit at His feet. Believe on Him. And whatever He says to you, do it. That's the simplicity of Christ. I don't know how it could be made any simpler.

Until next time, this is Chip Brogden, reminding you that THIS is the day that the Lord has made, so make it a GOOD day; and remember that GREATER is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.

ANNOUNCER: You've been listening to Outside the Camp with author and teacher Chip Brogden. We hope you enjoyed today's broadcast and found it helpful and encouraging. If you'd like to get additional teachings, audio recordings, books and other Christ-centered resources to help you grow spiritually, visit us online at ChipBrogden.com. Outside the Camp is made possible by the prayers and financial support of listeners like you. Until next time, on behalf of Chip Brogden, I'm Kathy Smith, reminding you that you can do all things through Christ Who strengthens you!