

What Saith the Scripture?

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On Leaving One's First Love- No. 2

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Lecture IV
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Text.--Rev. 2:4: "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

In speaking from this text, I was to enquire --

- I. What the first love of the Christian really is;*
- II. How this may be distinguished from spurious religion;*
- III. How the true love of any Christian may be infallibly known;*
- IV. When it may truly be said that persons have left their first love;*
- V. Let us next enquire how Christians come to lose their first love;*
- VI. Show the consequences of this sin.*

Three of these points, first in order, have been already considered. We now come to the fourth.

IV. When may it truly be said that Christians have left their first love?

The state in which one has left his first love is far different, and almost the opposite of that which I have just described. If you were to recall each separate characteristic of a convert's first love, you would find the corresponding characteristics of one who has left his first love right over against them. Whereas the former did not need the constraint of law and precept to induce him to obey, but obedience was spontaneous, in the latter case obedience has ceased to be spontaneous, and the man needs to be coerced by the scourge of law and penalty to induce him to obey. When you detect this in yourself, you may know you have left your first love.

- 1. So the convert in his first love will not, and cannot neglect God. He will not neglect his worship or his fear.

But after he has left his first love, he neglects God and his worship. He naturally neglects secret prayer. He can be absent from the communion of the supper and from the worship of God in the Sabbath Congregation. When you see this neglect, whether in yourself or in another, you may safely infer that "first love" has gone.

- 2. On the same principle, one who has left his first love will neglect God's word. The soul in the fullness of its love, will not neglect the Blessed Bible. Often you will hear him cry out -- "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day." You may perhaps hear him declare that no words can express his joy in reading it. But now, alas, it lies on its shelf unread. As you pass through the room, or as you take up your daily paper or some empty tale, practically saying -- I prefer this to God's word; it might well left up its voice to rebuke and reproach you! What! is this the way you treat God as he comes before you in his revealed word?

Now when professed Christians are inclined to neglect their Bibles, and their accustomed times and places of social worship, and when they need to be preached to earnestly, and almost sternly, to bring them to even a reluctant attendance, you may know their first love is gone. The Christian in his first love cannot be induced to neglect such meetings. Sometimes he will go though very much unwell. No trifling excuses will be made for non-attendance. He will not allow the demands of business to detain him. Serving God with them is always above and more than business. Nay, business is all made subordinate to serving God, so much so that he would do no business at all if he could not honestly serve and please God in and by it.

- 3. Again, when one has left his first love, there is no spontaneous avoidance of evil habits. If he does anything in this line, it is all constrained. His heart is manifestly not set upon it, and love does not constrain him.
- 4. Again, comparing these two classes -- those in their first love, and those not in it; the former are God-minded; the latter, world-minded. The former are minded towards God, as opposed to being minded after the flesh. The latter are strongly minded towards the world. Their thoughts are engrossed with earthly things. If reformed from any vice, back he goes as the dog to his vomit. Any appetite readily enslaves him. All slavery is bad; none so bad, so tyrannous, and so debasing, as this.

The former has a universal zeal for God and his cause. The reason is, his heart is there. In the case of the latter, all zeal seems to have died out. If you ever get him to speak about religion, you will readily see that he has no heart in it.

- (1.) Again, they do not labor for souls. They do not feel any real love for the souls of men. It is plain enough that such love does not fill their hearts.
- (2.) They have no spirit of universal forgiveness. They will often say -- "It is soon enough to forgive when I see proof of repentance." And they are none too ready to see and accept

this proof.

- 5. In the exercise of first love, one cannot have animosity and ill-will. It is all gone out of sight. All enmities have ceased. Its spirit is dead.

But when first love has languished, how irritable! How uncharitable! How many bickerings! How full of heart-burnings! Where these feelings exist, you may know the heart is far from God.

He will perhaps say in self-vindication -- The man greatly abused me! Indeed! Then hear the dying Savior cry -- "Forgive, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Or think of Stephen when the hurled stones smote him down -- "Lord lay not this sin to their charge!"

- 6. Are not those cases God-like?

But he who has lost his first love has no such sympathies.

- 7. In the life of its first love, the convert has peace like a river. Not so when one has lost his first love. He knows he has no such peace. In one's first love, he is full of gratitude, love, trust in Christ. When first love is left, these first and blessed frames of soul pass away.

V. Let us next enquire how Christians come to lose their first love.

This point often seems full of wonder. They don't know how it comes to pass, and are in great confusion. They do not see the philosophy of this rapid decline and loss of first love.

- 1. It is often to be ascribed specially to the seductive arts of Satan. These are so manifold and almost universal that no Christian altogether escapes their assault. None of the children of God "are ignorant of his devices." Satan seduces God's children more artfully and with more direct purpose to draw into sin than any vile seducer who goes about to ruin the virtue of women.
- 2. Take the case of Eve as tempted by Satan. After long parley, he at length gained her attention. This was his first artful, dangerous step. Then he went on saying smooth things -- gentle insinuations against God -- seductive solicitations addressed to her love of knowledge, and her animal appetites -- until his point was gained.
- 3. This is Satan's policy. To the young man, he says -- You must go in company with the wicked. Take care not to be too particular. You want to make your mark in the world. Strike boldly, and high.

Here is a case for illustration. In 1830, a Christian lady of N.-- was very full of prayer and of the Holy Ghost. In this frame she went on well for a time, till one evening in public service, during the closing prayer as she was asking -- What can I do for Christ and his cause? the suggestion came powerfully -- Buy a lottery ticket; you may be sure of getting the highest prize, because your only object is to please God and help forward his kingdom.

Her first thought was -- No; that will never do for me! But the response came -- It will certainly be a prize; somebody will get the prizes; better you than any one else because you mean to do good with it.

She yielded and went immediately out from the meeting. She is now prepared to justify her purpose to buy a ticket, insisting that the suggestion came to her immediately from the Spirit. She went and bought her lottery ticket. No sooner done than Satan changed his tone, and thundered in her ear -- Now you have committed the unpardonable sin! You are forever certain of damnation! Now go and take your life. Why should you live any longer? -- That was Satan -- the arch-deceiver of souls.

- 4. Very much like this is his way of tempting businessmen. Make money whatever you do or fail to do, make money; then you can do good with it. To Christians of this generation, as to Jesus in the wilderness, Satan offers all the world if they will only bow down and do homage to him. O this is a terrible snare!
- 5. Satan tempts converts by the seductions of the flesh. To one he says -- Take tobacco; it will be good for your cold stomach, or for your teeth, or for your nerves. To others he has other forms of seduction. Everywhere he is the great Seducer.

VI. But I must hasten to speak of the consequences of losing one's first love.

- 1. Persons who have taken the first step know it. They know that their neglected Bible and closet and sanctuary could tell the story. They are brought into bondage. They lose the sense of free and open communion with God. They might know what has befallen them, even as the wife who has given her heart to another than her husband might know her guilt and shame. So the fallen Christian who serves God only because he must. Think of his case. His heart will not go forth freely and lovingly to God. He has lost the spirit of prayer. His comfort is gone. Whereas once it was the daily comfort of his soul to please God, it is so no longer. He has lost his God.
- 2. He has fallen into great doubts as to his good estate. Perhaps he never was a Christian. His hope is almost gone; he can scarcely sustain a very trembling hope. Yet he thinks a great deal about his hope. A convert in the strength of his first love makes little of hope -- thinks little about it; thinks much more of Jesus than of his hope.
- 3. He has the spirit of self-condemnation. I have seen brethren so cast down, the very lines of their face revealed self-condemnation.
- 4. His heart will not pray. It is not congenial. All is intellectual, and void of emotion. His soul is sluggish, his heart inert. This is another consequence of losing first love.
- 5. He cannot realize the truths of religion. To him, they seem only a dread theory. They have lost their hold upon his heart.

(I wonder if any of you are saying in your heart -- He is just reading off the history of my experience. Who has been telling him how I feel?)

Now all these experiences are just what a loveless wife would have as towards her husband. Take one who has once known true love, but has been seduced by some villain. What is left to her? Not her joy in wedded life -- not her peace of mind -- not one joy that a virtuous woman can prize. Where is she? Just where you are if you have left your first love towards Jesus Christ. You are the loveless wife or husband.

REMARKS.

1. Where does this sermon find you? Have you ever had this first love? In delineating the convert's first love, I have only given its general type and not its higher and more advanced manifestations. Hence if you have not had this, you must say -- I have had nothing.

Now let me ask -- As I described this first love did you say -- I know all that; I have felt it; I have loved the precious Bible; I so loved meetings for prayer that I could have stayed in the hallowed place all night; yes I have known all that.

Have you the same spirit now? Can you say, Indeed I know by my own precious experience what all that is now?

2. But some of you are not there. On the contrary you know you have lost your first love. Yet let me ask -- Have you no heart to return? Do you say -- I would fain return, but I know God will not accept me. How can he accept so vile a being as I -- and one who has dishonored him so falsely? Ah but you may have confidence if you will return, for he says, -- "Return unto me, and I will return unto you."

3. Are you still making the profession of loving Christ while yet your first love is gone? How odious must that profession be to Jesus Christ? Suppose you are a wife and your husband should run off after other lovers and scatter his ways to the ends of the earth. Then when he should hear of your grief, suppose he should come back with flattering lips and a lying tongue, but no confessions, would you not say -- Away, away with such hypocrisy and such infidelity! And will you come to God in like manner with lying lips? And can you delude yourself with the thought that you can deceive the omniscient God?

4. It is your business at once to return, but not with a proud heart. It is not our business to ask how you shall be received, but whether you can be, upon any confessions you can make and any mercy God can show. As a wife who had played the harlot should lay herself at her husband's door and humble herself greatly for her sin, making no conditions as to her being received, but be humble enough to accept any conditions gladly; so your business is to return to your Father's house and repent deeply in sackcloth and ashes there. No backslider ever returned really to God until they had this spirit -- I will go back in all my guilt and lay my bones there.

"I can but perish if I go;

I am resolved to try;

For if I stay away, I know

I must forever die."

Sinners who have never come to Christ at all must come in this same spirit. Let no such sinners be ashamed to say -- I have wronged Jesus Christ and have abused his love exceedingly. I will surely go and confess it all, though all the world revile and disown me for it. And return now, for this is your accepted time; perhaps your last time.

Can any of you say -- I have no need to return? If so I am glad for it.

5. But some of you have left your first love. And what reason did you have for it? Are you like that poor unfortunate wife who was so mistaken in her husband, whose soul is full of sorrow, who is lost for life because she did not know the man before she married him? Is that your case? And did Jesus Christ deceive you? Did he prove unfaithful in his love to you? Has he treated you so ill and abused you and wounded your feelings?

How is this?

How? Hear what the Lord says: What have I done to you that you should lose your first love to me? Have I been a wilderness to you? Has my heart been cold towards you? Wherein have I wearied you? Testify against me. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord."

Yes, come, wanderer from God, and consider your ways.

Why are you afar from God to-day?

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in

promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to

truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.