

What Saith the Scripture?

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Spiritual Delusion- No. 1

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

This passage is found in Christ's message to the church of Ephesus. In these messages, Jesus appears in unearthly majesty walking amid the golden candlesticks which represent the churches. Thus He indicated that His eye can never cease to be fastened on His professed people.

It is very noticeable in all these epistles that Christ commended wherever He honestly could. He found some things to commend in the Ephesian church. "I know thy works," said He, "and thy labor and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil, and hast tried them who say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars." They were opposed to many forms of iniquity even as you are to slavery. They pushed some useful reforms no doubt, perhaps with zeal as you do, for Christ says of them -- "Ye cannot bear them that are evil." They held fast their orthodoxy; for they tried false apostles and proved them liars. They had also "borne and had patience, and for Christ's name, had labored and had not fainted."

"Nevertheless," -- despite of so many good things, -- Jesus said, "I have this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love." The words I have here used express the true sense of the original. Christ did not mean, "I have a small somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love," but "I have this solemn charge against thee" -- viz. that thou hast left thy first love. This is precisely the sin they had committed.

Does it not strike you, my brethren, that their case was remarkably like your own? They had many good things; great reformatory zeal; had hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans which said Christ, "I also hate," -- but they had left their first love.

So, it often happens that after one's first love is gone, the heart still hates and denounces manifest, outrageous evil. We see this in many churches and in many prominent men of our age. O, if they might only take counsel from the messages of their professed Lord!

In discussing the subject involved in the text, I shall show,

- 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.*

I. What the first love of the Christian really is.

- 1. It is in one word, devotion to God. It may be illustrated in many ways. You may take, for one, the devotion of a true wife to her husband. This is God's standing illustration. You find it everywhere in the Old Testament prophets, and often in the New Testament.

What do we see in the devotion of a wife to her husband? Or of the husband to his wife?

The desire to please each other. Each is set upon promoting the other's happiness.

Or you may study the devotion of the father and the mother to their child. They live their life over in the little one. How many are living and toiling all their lives to get something for their children.

- 2. The essential element of this love to Christ is voluntary. It implies voluntary consecration, giving one's self up to the promotion of the highest good of the person loved. This good-will carries with it the affections. Such is the relation of the will to the sensibility that when the will is fixed, the sensibilities are borne along in harmony with it.

Voluntary love is in this respect entirely different from natural affection. In voluntary good-willing, the will acts first, takes the lead, and carries the sensibility after it. The affections and sensibilities do not lead the will, but follow it.

- 3. But in natural affection, this order is reversed. The natural impulses go forward and take the lead. In the conjugal relation, the taste is gratified and leads on to the devotion of the will. Hence this devotion is not obedience to the law of God -- that is, it may exist without any thought of God's law. It is often controlled by the tastes and the sensibilities only.
- 4. But in religion this order is reversed. The will is first committed. This draws after it the sensibilities. The Christian purpose has respect to God's law; conscience demands obedience; the will yields and becomes fixed in obedience to God; then and thenceforward, it carries with

itself the emotions and sensibilities. This distinction is worthy of special regard.

II. Let us next notice how true Christian love differs from the spurious.

- 1. Just as prudential marriage differs from a marriage of sincere affection. These prudential cases sometimes take place; a man marries a woman for her property, or for her talents, or for her value in the family. The woman is dependent, wants a home, so she gives her consent. There is no real love on either side, although each may suppose the other to love sincerely.
- 2. On precisely this principle some persons become religious, and with the same consequences. They think it very imprudent, not to become Christians, since they may die and go down to hell. Hence they become religious from mere prudence. Just as in a prudential marriage, the woman consents in order to provide for her own support and safety, and having got what she aimed to get, she is satisfied. Little does she care for her husband's comfort or happiness.

But if she had married from real love, she would go with her husband to prison and to death. She would be truly devoted to his interests. If he were sick, she would not eat or sleep but he would have all needful care. One of these wives makes herself her chief end; the other, her husband.

- 3. So, true Christian love makes Christ its end; the spurious makes itself its end. True love adores Christ, holds Him in highest reverence and purest affection, and the heart is so drawn out that even life is not held dear if one may only please Christ and be found in Him.

III. I am next to show how true Christians may be infallibly known.

- 1. Just as true love in the marriage relation may be known. For so far as this point is concerned it matters not which is first in time, the will, or the sensibility. It makes no difference as to the manifestations of real love, whether it began with the purpose of the will as in love to God, or with the attractions of the sensibility, as in conjugal love.

I say then that true love to Christ will bear the same characteristics, the same infallible proofs, as the true love of a husband or of a wife.

The loving wife does not need a formal code of law to induce her to do all she can to please her husband, for she has the law written on her heart, and this law of love inwardly impels her to do all the duties of her station. So the Christian does not need the impulses of law, for the law to him is not now written on stone, but on the heart of flesh. I do not mean that the law becomes part of the constitution, but that it has become seated in the heart.

Mark again, Christians who are truly in love to Christ, cannot neglect Christ. As the wife who loves her husband does not and cannot neglect him, for the reason that she is so united to him in heart; so the Christian, truly loving Christ, cannot neglect Him. Christ is in all his thoughts. Never was a bride more in the thoughts of her husband, or a husband in the thoughts of his bride.

- 2. Of course if love to Christ be true, it must be supreme. Nothing else can compare with it in strength. The Christian can by no means find it in his heart to neglect Christ. What! neglect his own Redeemer! Neglect those precious words that reveal to him his precious Savior! No more than a faithful wife can neglect a letter just received from her long absent husband. So the convert reads his Bible -- reads and loves -- reads and weeps, and still looks through his tears to read more. He finds so many loving promises, so many fond utterances of love. Never did a friend receive anything so rich and so dear from a friend as this Bible which the Christian receives from God.
- 3. Such a Christian can never neglect worship of God. His soul is full of worship. To him the very sound of prayer or praise is full of worship and of love. Never shall I forget how much, soon after my conversion, it affected me to hear the voice of prayer. It was in a barn, during a revival of religion. It seemed to me like the praises of heaven. I wept for joy. I caught some of the words. O, how precious to me was the thought -- There is a soul in communion with God! What! can a Christian in his first love neglect God? What! a convert need urging to read his Bible? Need to be urged to pray? Tell me, do you need to urge your wife to do her duty? If you do, you have lost her love. So the Christian needs no more urging. It is all in his heart without being urged. He will do all for Christ that he can. It is as spontaneous as his life.
- 4. Christians in their first love are not easily prevented from doing all they can to manifest their love in the performance of their duty to God. They will be careful to lay their plans so as to have plenty of time to spend with God. They will not embark in selfish, worldly schemes which make it necessary to turn aside from the great duties of their calling as Christians. What would you think of the wife who should have so many other things to divert her that she could not please her husband? So persons in their first love will not have separate ends to divert themselves from labor for the salvation of souls.
- 5. Again, Christians, in real love to Christ, will spontaneously avoid whatever they suppose will displease God. It is impossible while truly loving God with their heart, that they should not avoid displeasing Him. What would you think of a wife full of love to her husband, yet continually doing things to displease him? The thing is impossible, absurd!
- 6. It is no dreadful thing to the loving Christian to give up all sin. Yet sinners look on this as a dreadful thing. To bid farewell to such pleasures forever! But the young convert feels no such attractions and bonds holding him to the follies of the world. No loving, faithful wife has trouble with a heart going after other lovers. No true husband has conflicts and struggles to prevent his conjugal affections from sinful wanderings. It is no trial on either side to restrict their conjugal love to each other. They do it naturally.
- 7. The Christian's love is in a yet higher sense spontaneous in his supreme devotion to God. The very thought of displeasing God makes him tremble. The very danger makes him turn pale.
- 8. Again, first love makes it a standard principle to do the whole will of God.
- 9. The convert will study the scriptures to learn there what will please God. So the affectionate

wife or husband, parent, or child, always strives to anticipate the wants of the loved one, and do what can be done to promote his real happiness. Loving hearts make swift feet and willing hands. Whatever we see that we can do for those we love, we shall do with alacrity and with joy.

- 10. Look into any of the relations of life where true love exists, and there you find this devotion to the interests and well-being of the loved one. Neither wife or husband, if really loving deem any suitable service for the other a task, but rather do all they can with the utmost joy. The secret of this is that they neither of them seek their own good supremely, but each the other's good. If these things were done selfishly, it could be but a poor and sorry satisfaction. But done in love, no joy can be richer. The labors of love are always sweet. If you ask the Christian what gives him the greatest joy, he will answer -- To please God, to have the consciousness of having aimed supremely to please Him, and the divine testimony that our aims and efforts have come up in remembrance before God. Ask the living Christian what gives him the greatest sorrow? He answers, that I should grieve my Savior; that I should ever displease him.
- 11. Again, a Christian in a state of real love to God will love God's friends, even as God Himself does, and His enemies, with the same love of pity, not of complacency, that God feels towards them. He will love to pray for God's enemies.
- 12. His mind will be given to God and not to worldliness. This is true both of his voluntary, purposed control of his own thoughts, and also of the natural proclivities of his mind; for where the treasure is, there will the heart be also. He will love to converse about God and will speak not coldly but warmly, as one who loves.
- 13. He is not given to fleshly indulgences -- is not mainly asking, "What shall I eat or what shall I drink, or wherewithal shall I be clothed?"
- 14. He will have a zeal for souls, warm, spontaneous and loving.
- 15. His spirit is universally forgiving. That love for others which is often so partial and limited in its regards, he delights to extend to all. If of old he had hard feelings towards others, now all is changed. He loves everybody, and finds it easy to forgive, even as we forgive our children easily and joyfully. He cannot retain hard feelings. Parents toward their children may become hard-hearted and lose even their natural affection, but converts, in the freshness of their affection, have more than a mother's and a father's love. If you have ever felt the saint's first love, you know this. You may have had prejudice, or ill-will before, but all that is passed away now. You love to pour out your soul in confession.
- 16. The Christian's love is always charitable. It thinketh no evil -- is not suspicious, but inclines to impute good and not bad motives. It is also patient and meek under injuries; ready also to press forbearance even to the extent of long-suffering.
- 17. Such a man has no enemies. Not that others may not hate him bad enough to kill him; but he hates no one. He has no quarrel with his neighbors. If they hate and persecute him, he knows it

must be a mistake, because they misapprehend him. So completely is his selfishness subdued and supplanted by love, that he has none of the rasped feelings of wicked men.

- 18. True Christian love has great joy in God. This is a new experience -- new as the love which gave it birth. Strangers to love are stranger to real joy. They may have a low, base sort of joy in themselves, that they shall be saved, and are out of danger of perdition; but this is only a selfish joy. Self, not God, is its object.
- 19. Again, great peace is characteristic of true love to God. Their peace is like a deep flowing river. There is no state of mind in which one is so conscious of a divine flowing, a deep moving current, which no language can so fitly describe as this of scripture -- "like a river." Not like the river that dashes furiously and roars boisterously; but like the waters of Siloam that flow gently.
- 20. This experience is always new to the young convert. He knows he never realized this love and peace before.
- 21. This peace never can exist without love, nor indeed can this true love exist without producing this peace of soul. You cannot interrupt this peace if the love rules there. It is a peace and repose like that you feel in friends when you are sure you know them and may confide in them most entirely and without fear. The mind, conscious of being in sympathy with God, is of course full of peace.
- 22. Again, obedience will be universal. A soul moved by love does not find some things hard and some things easy, but finds all easy and sweet to do for God. Some persons find in their experience that they shrink from some duties, while they can perform other duties with tolerable ease. Not so the Christian whose soul is full of love.
- 23. Again, when this love is fresh, the soul is conscious of a great cleaving to Christ. No other consciousness can be more full and distinct than this that the affections are fastened on Christ. The very thought of Him, the bare mention of His name, suffices to stir up all the tenderest sensibilities of the heart.
- 24. In this state of mind, you do not easily feel the force of any temptation. No external influence is properly a temptation till its alluring influence is felt -- till it sensibly acts on our sensibilities. Mark the case of Eve. Her sensibilities were not excited instantly. They seem not to have been moved by the first suggestion. It was rather under the repeated suggestions of the serpent tempter and the combination of appeals to her various sensibilities to pleasure through the eye, the taste, and her thirst for knowledge, that she finally yielded. Under the influence of a convert's first love, it is always very hard for a temptation to reach the sensibilities, so that its influence is felt as an impulse towards sin. When the heart is left loose, floating, so to speak, at large with no object of love on which the affections are fixed, temptations come in easily and get hold readily. They find the heart unoccupied. It must be a state of fearful danger in such a world as this, to move about with a soul open to every bad influence. How different the case of those whose soul is filled already with the love of Jesus!

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)*.