

LOVE'S COMPLAINING

NO. 1926

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 24, 1886,
 BY C. H. SPURGEON,
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember, therefore, from where you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come to you quickly and will remove your lamp stand from its place—unless you repent.”
Revelation 2:4, 5.

IT was the work of the priest to go into the Holy Place and to trim the seven-branched lamp of gold—see how our Great High Priest walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks—His work is not occasional, but constant. Wearing robes which are at once royal and priestly, He is seen lighting the holy lamps, pouring in the sacred oil and removing impurities which would dim the light.

Hence our Lord's fitness to deal with the Churches, which are these golden lamp stands, for no one knows so much about the lamps as the person whose *constant* work it is to watch them and trim them. No one knows the Churches as Jesus does, for the care of all the Churches daily comes upon Him. He continually walks among them and holds their ministers as stars in His right hand. His eyes are perpetually upon the Churches, so that He knows their works, their sufferings and their sins—and those eyes are as flames of fire, so that He sees with a penetration, discernment and accuracy to which no other can attain. We sometimes judge the condition of religion too leniently, or else we err on the other side and judge too severely. Our eyes are dim with the world's smoke, but His eyes are as flames of fire. He sees the Churches through and through and knows their true condition much better than they know themselves. The Lord Jesus Christ is a most careful Observer of Churches and of individuals—nothing is hid from His observant eyes.

As He is the most *careful* Observer, so He is the most candid. He is always “the faithful and true Witness.” He loves much and, therefore, He never judges harshly. He loves much and, therefore, He always judges jealously. Jealousy is the sure attendant of such love as His. He will neither speak smooth words nor bitter words, but He will speak the Truth of God—the Truth in love, the Truth as He, Himself, perceives it and as He would have us perceive it. Well may He say, “He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the Churches,” since His sayings are so true, so just, so weighty!

Certainly no observer can be so *tender* as the Son of God. Those lamps are very precious to Him—it cost Him His life to light them. “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it.” Every Church is, to our Lord, a more sublime thing than a constellation in the heavens—as He is precious to His saints, so are they precious to Him. He cares little for empires, kingdoms, or republics. His heart is set on the Kingdom of Righteousness of which His Cross is the royal standard. He must reign until His foes are vanquished and this is the great thought of His mind at this present, “From this day on expecting till His enemies be made His footstool.” He ceases not to watch over His Church—His Sacrifice is ended, but not His service in caring for the golden lamps! He has completed the redemption of His bride but He continues her preservation.

I therefore feel, at this time, that we may well join in a prayer to our Lord Jesus to come into our midst and put our light in order. Oh for a visit from Him such as He paid in vision to the seven Churches of Asia! With Him is the oil to feed the living flame and He knows how to pour it in according to due measure. With Him are those golden snuffers with which to remove every superfluity of naughtiness so that our lights may so shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in Heaven! Oh for His Presence, now, to search us and to sanctify us—to cause us to shine forth to His Father's praise! We would be judged of the Lord that we may not be condemned with the world! We would pray, this morning, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there is any

wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do and we delight to have it so! We invite you, O Great High Priest, to come into this, Your sanctuary, and look to this, Your lamp, this morning!

In the text, as it is addressed to the Church at Ephesus and to us, we note three things. First, we note that *Christ perceives*—"I know your works...nevertheless I have this against you." Secondly, *Christ prescribes*—"Remember, therefore, from where you are fallen and repent," and so forth. Thirdly, *Christ persuades*—persuades with a threat—"I will remove your candlestick out of its place"—persuades, also, with a promise, "To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." If the Lord, Himself, is here at this time, our plan of discourse will be a river of life. But if He is not among us by His Holy Spirit, it will be as the dry bed of a torrent which bears the name of, "river," but lacks the living stream! We expect our Lord's Presence—He will come to the lamps which His office calls upon Him to trim—it has been His custom to be with us! Some of us have already met Him this morning and we have constrained Him to tarry with us!

I. First, then, we notice that HE PERCEIVES.

Our Lord sorrowfully perceives the faults of His Church—"Nevertheless I have this against you," but *He does not so perceive those faults as to be forgetful of that which He can admire and accept*, for He begins His letter with commendations, "I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and how you cannot bear them which are evil." Do not think, my Brothers and Sisters, that our Beloved is blind to the beauties of His Church. On the contrary, He delights to observe them. He can see beauties where she, herself, cannot see them. Where we observe much to deplore, His loving eyes see much to admire. The Graces which He, Himself, creates, He can always perceive. When we, in the earnestness of self-examination, overlook them and write bitter things against ourselves, the Lord Jesus sees, even, in those bitter self-condemnations, a life and earnestness and sincerity which He loves. Our Lord has a keen eye for all that is good. When He searches our hearts, He never passes by the faintest longing, or desire, or faith, or love of any of His people. He says, "I know your works."

But this is our point at this time, that while Jesus can see all that is good, *yet in very faithfulness He sees all that is evil*. His love is not blind! He does not say, "As many as I love I commend," but, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." It is more necessary for us that we should make a discovery of our *faults* than of our virtues. So notice in this text that Christ perceives the flaw in His Church, even in the midst of her earnest service. The Church at Ephesus was full of work. "I know your works and your labor, and for My name's sake you have labored, and have not fainted." It was such a laborious Church that it pushed on and on with diligent perseverance and never seemed to flag in its Divine mission. Oh that we could say as much of all our Churches! I have lived to see many brilliant projects lighted and left to die out in smoke. I have heard of schemes which were to illuminate the world—but not a spark remains. Holy perseverance is a great desire!

In these 33 years, we thank God He has enabled us to labor and not to faint. There has been a continuance of everything attempted and no drawing back from anything. "This is the work, this is the labor," to hold out even to the end. Oh how I have dreaded lest we should have to give up any holy enterprise or cut short any gracious effort! Until now the Lord has helped us. With men and means, liberality and zeal, He has supplied us. In this case the angel of the Church has been very little of an angel from Heaven, but very much of a human angel, for in the weakness of my flesh and in the heaviness of my spirit have I pursued my calling, but I have pursued it by the help of God! By His Grace I continue to this day and this Church, with equal footsteps, is at my side—for which the whole praise is due to the Lord who faints not, neither is weary! Having put my hands to the plow, I have not looked back, but have steadily pressed forward, making straight furrows—but it has been only by the Grace of God!

Alas, under all the laboring, the Lord Jesus perceived that the Ephesians had left their first love—and this was a grievous fault. So it may be in this Church—every wheel may continue to revolve and the whole machinery of ministry may be kept going at its normal rate—and yet there may be a great secret evil which Jesus perceives that may be marring all.

But this Church at Ephesus was not only laborious, it was patient in suffering great persecution. He says of it, "I know your works and your patience, and how you have borne, and have patience, and have not fainted." Persecution upon persecution visited the faithful but they bore it all with holy courage and constancy—and continued still—

confessing their Lord. This was good and the Lord highly approved it. But yet, underneath it, He saw the tokens of decline—they had left their first love. So there may seem to be all the patient endurance and dauntless courage that there should be and yet, as a fair apple may have a worm at its core, so may it be with the Church when it looks best to the eyes of friends.

The Ephesian Church excelled in something else, namely, in its discipline, its soundness in the faith and fidelity towards heretics, for the Lord says of it, “how you cannot bear them which are evil.” They would not have it! They would not tolerate false doctrine. They would not put up with unclean living. They fought against evil not only in the common people, but in prominent individuals. “You have tried them which say they are Apostles and are not and have found them liars.” They had dealt with the great ones; they had not flinched from the unmasking of falsehood. Those who seemed to be Apostles, they had dragged to the light and discovered to be deceivers. This Church was not honeycombed with doubt. It laid no claim to breadth of thought and liberality of view. It was honest to its Lord. He says of it, “This you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.” This was grand of them—it showed a backbone of truth.

I wish some of the Churches of this age had a little of this holy decision about them, for nowadays, if a man is clever, he may preach the vilest lie that was ever vomited from the mouth of Hell and it will go down with some! He may assail every doctrine of the Gospel; he may blaspheme the Holy Trinity; he may trample on the blood of the Son of God and yet nothing shall be said about it if he is held in repute as a man of advanced thought and liberal ideas! The Church at Ephesus was not of this mind. She was strong in her convictions; she could not yield the faith nor play the traitor to her Lord. For this her Lord commended her and yet He says, “I have this against you, because you have left your first love.”

When love dies, orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse, a powerless formalism. Adhesion to the Truth of God sours into bigotry when the sweetness and light of love to Jesus depart. Love Jesus and then it is well to hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, but mere hate of evil will tend to evil if love of Jesus is not there to sanctify it! I need not make a personal application, but that which is spoken to Ephesus may be spoken at this hour to ourselves. As we hope that we may appropriate the commendation, so let us see whether the expostulation may not also apply to us. “I have this against you, because you have left your first love.” Thus I have shown you that Jesus sees the evil beneath all the good—He does not ignore the good—but He will not pass over the evil.

So, next, *this evil was a very serious one*. It was love declining—“You have left your first love.” “Is that serious?” asks one. It is the most serious evil of all, for the Church is the bride of Christ and for a bride to fail in love is to fail in all things! It is idle for the wife to say that she is obedient and so forth, if love to her husband has evaporated. Her wifely duty cannot be fulfilled—she has lost the very life and soul of the marriage state. So, my Brothers and Sisters, this is a most important matter, our love to Christ, because it touches the very heart of that communion with Him which is the crown and essence of our spiritual life. As a Church we *must* love Jesus or else we have lost our reason for existence! A Church has no reason for being a Church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. Have I not often reminded you that almost any disease may be hopefully endured except disease of the heart? But when our sickness is a disease of the heart, it is full of danger and it was so in this case—“You have left your first love.” It is a disease of the heart, a central, fatal disease, unless the Great Physician shall interpose to stay its progress and to deliver us from it. Oh, in any man, in any woman, any child of God here, let alone in the Church as a whole, if there is a leaving of the first love, it is a woeful thing! Lord have mercy upon us! Christ have mercy upon us! This should be our solemn litany at once. No peril can be greater than this! Lose love, lose all! Leave our first love, we have left strength, peace, joy and holiness!

I call your attention, however, to this point, that *it was He that found it out*. “I have this against you, because you have left your first love.” Jesus Himself found it out! I do not know how it strikes you, but as I thought it over, this fact brought tears to my eyes. When I begin to leave off loving Christ, or love Him less than I did, I would like to find it out *myself* and, if I did so, there would soon be a cure for it. But for my Master to find it out, oh, it seems so hard, so sad a thing! That we should keep on growing cold, and cold, and cold and never care about it till the Beloved points it out to us! Why even the angel of the Church did not find it out—the *minister* did not know it! But He saw it who loves us so well that He delights in our love and pines when it begins to fail.

To Him we are unutterably dear. He loved us up out of the Pit into His bosom. He loved us up from the dunghill among beggars to sit at His right hand upon His Throne—and it is sorrowful that He should have to complain of our cooling love while we are utterly indifferent to the matter! Does Jesus care more about our love than we do? He loves us

better than we love ourselves! How good of Him to care one jot about our love! This is not a complaint of an enemy, but of a dear wounded Friend.

I notice that *Jesus found it out with great pain*. I can hardly conceive a greater grief to Him as the Husband of His Church than to look her in the face and say, "You have left your first love." What can she give Him but love? Will she deny Him this? A poor thing is the Church in herself—her Lord married her when she was in beggary—and if she does not give Him love, what has she to give Him? If she begins to be unfaithful in heart to Him, what is she worth? Why, an unloving wife is a foul fountain of discomfort and dishonor to her husband! O Beloved, shall it be so with you? Will you grieve Emmanuel? Will you wound your Well-Beloved? Church of God, will you grieve Him whose heart was pierced for your redemption? Brother, Sister, can you and I let Jesus find out that our love is departing, that we are ceasing to be zealous for His name? Can we wound Him so? Is not this to crucify the Lord afresh? Might He not hold up His hands, this morning, with fresh blood upon them, and say, "These are the wounds which I received in the house of my Friends. It was nothing that I died for them, but evil it is that, after having died for them, they have failed to give Me their hearts"? Jesus is not so sick of our sin as of our lukewarmness. It is a sad business to my heart. I hope it will be sad to all whom it concerns, that our Lord should be the first to spy out our declines in love.

The Savior, having thus seen this with pain, now points it out. As I read this passage over to myself, I noticed that the Savior had nothing to say about the sins of the *heathen* among whom the Ephesians dwelt—they are alluded to because it must have been the heathen who persecuted the Church and caused it to endure and exhibit patience. The Savior, however, has nothing to say against the heathen and He does not say much more than a word about those who were evil. These had been cast out and He merely says, "You cannot bear them which are evil." He denounced no judgment upon the Nicolaitanes, except that He hated them and, even the apostles which were found to be liars, the Master dismisses with that word. He leaves the ungodly in their own condemnation. But what He has to say is against *His own Beloved*—"I have this against you." It seems as if the Master might pass over sin in a thousand others, but He cannot wink at failure of love in His own espoused one! "The Lord your God is a jealous God." The Savior loves, so that His love is cruel as the grave against cold-heartedness! He said of the Church of Laodicea, "I will spue you out of My mouth." This was one of His own Churches, too—and yet she made Him sick with her lukewarmness! God grant that we may not be guilty of such a crime as that!

The Savior pointed out the failure of love and when He pointed it out, *He called it by a lamentable name*. "Remember, therefore, from where you are fallen." He calls it a *fall* to leave our first love! Brothers, Sisters, this Church had not been licentious, it had not gone aside to false doctrine, it had not become idle, it had not been cowardly in the hour of persecution! But this one sin summed up the whole—she did not love Christ as she once loved Him and He calls this a fall. A fall, indeed, it is! "Oh, I thought," says one, "that if a member of the Church got *drunk*—that was a fall." That is a grievous fall, but it is also a fall if we become intoxicated with the world and lose the freshness of our devotion to Jesus. It is a fall from a high estate of fellowship to the dust of worldliness. "You are fallen." The word sounds very harshly in my ears—no, not harshly, for His love speaks it in so pathetic a manner—but it thunders deep down in my soul. I cannot bear it! It is so sadly true. "You are fallen." "Remember from where you are fallen." Indeed, O Lord, we have fallen when we have left You, our first love.

The Master evidently counts this decline of love to be a personal wrong done to Himself. "I have this against you." It is not an offense against the king, nor against the judge, but against the Lord Jesus as the Husband of the Church—an offense against the very heart of Christ, Himself. "I have this against you." He does not say, "Your neighbor has something against you; your child has something against you; your God has something against you," but, "I, I, your Hope, your Joy, your Delight, your Savior—I have this against you." The word is somewhat of an intruder here. Our translators put it in italics and well they might, for it is a bad word, since it seems to make a small thing of a very grave change. The Lord has this against us and it is no mere "something." Come, Brothers and Sisters, if we have not broken any law, nor offended in any way so as to grieve anybody else, this is sorrow enough, if our love has grown in the least degree chill towards Him, for we have done a terrible wrong to our Best Friend! This is the bitterness of our offense! Against You, You only, have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight, that I have left my first love! The Savior tells us this most lovingly. I wish I knew how to speak as tenderly as He does and yet, I feel at this moment, that I can and must be tender in this matter, for I am speaking about myself as much as about anybody else! I am grieving, grieving over some here pre-

sent, grieving for all of us, but grieving most of all for myself, that our Well-Beloved should have cause to say, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

So much for what our Lord perceives. Holy Spirit, bless it to us!

II. And now, secondly, let us note what THE SAVIOR PRESCRIBES. The Savior's prescription is couched in these three words—"Remember." "Repent." "Return."

The first word is *Remember*. "You have left your first love." Remember, then, what your first love was and compare your present condition with it. At first, nothing diverted you from your Lord. He was your life, your love, your joy. Now you look for recreation somewhere else and other charms and other beauties win your heart. Are you not ashamed of this? Once you were never wearied with hearing of Him and serving Him. Never were you overdone with Christ and His Gospel—many sermons, many Prayer Meetings, many Bible readings—and yet none too many! Now sermons are long, services are dull and you must have your jaded appetite excited with novelties. How is this? Once you were never displeased with Jesus, whatever He did with you. If you had been sick, or poor, or dying, you would still have loved and blessed His name for all things. He remembers this fondness and regrets its departure. He says to you, today, "I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, when you went after Me in the wilderness." You would have gone after your Lord anywhere in those days—across the sea, or through the fire you would have pursued Him—nothing would have been too hot or too heavy for you then! Is it so now? Remember! Remember from where you are fallen. Remember the vows, the tears, the communing, the happy raptures of those days! Remember and compare them with your present state.

Remember and consider that when you were in your first love, that love was none too warm. Even then, when you did live *to* Him and *for* Him and *with* Him, you were none too holy, none too consecrated, none too zealous! If you were not too forward, then, what are you now—now that you have come down, even, from that poor attainment? Remember the past with sad forebodings of the future! If you have come down from where you were, who is to tell you where you will cease your declining? He who has sunk so far may fall much farther. Is it not so? Though you say in your heart like Hazael, "Is your servant a dog?" you may turn out worse than a dog—yes, prove yourself a very wolf! Who knows? You may even, now, be a devil! You may turn out a Judas, a son of perdition and deny your Master, selling Him for 30 pieces of silver! When a stone begins to fall, it falls with an ever-increasing rate—and when a soul begins to leave its first love, it quits it more and more, and more and more till, at last, it falls terribly. Remember!

The next word of the prescription is, "*Repent*." Repent as you did at first. The word so suitable to sinners is suitable to you, for you have grievously sinned. Repent of the wrong you have done your Lord by leaving your first love of Him. Could you have lived a seraphic life, only breathing His love, only existing for Him, you had done little enough—but to quit your first love—how grievously have you wronged Him! That love was well deserved, was it not? Why, then, have you left it? Is Jesus less fair than He was? Does He love you less than He did? Has He been less kind and tender to you than He used to be? Say, have you outgrown Him? Can you do without Him? Have you a hope of salvation apart from Him? I charge you, repent of this, your ill-doing towards One who has a greater claim upon your love than ever He had! He ought to be, today, loved *more* than you loved Him at your very best! O my Heart, is not all this most surely true? How evil you are behaving! What an ingrate you are! Repent! Repent!

Repent of much good that you have left undone through lack of love. Oh, if you had always loved your Lord at your best, what might you not have known of Him by this time! What good deeds you might have done by force of His love! How many hearts might you have won for your Lord if your own heart had been more full of love, if your own soul had been more on fire! You have lived a poor beggarly life because you have allowed such poverty of love. Repent! Repent! To my mind, as I thought over this text, the call for repentance grew louder and louder because of the occasion of its utterance. Here is the glorious Lord, coming to His Church and speaking to her angel in tones of tender kindness. He condescends to visit His people in all His Majesty and Glory, intending nothing but to manifest Himself in love to His own elect as He does not to the world.

And yet He is compelled, even then, to take to chiding and to say, "I have this against you, because you have left your first love." Here is a love-visit clouded with upbraiding—necessary upbraiding! What mischief sin has done! It is a dreadful thing that when Jesus comes to His own dear bride, He should have to speak in grief and not in joy. Must holy communion, which is the wine of Heaven, be embittered with the tonic of expostulation? I see the upper springs of nearest

fellowship, where the Waters of Life leap from their first source in the heart of God! Are not these streams most pure and precious? If a man drinks of them, he lives forever! Shall it be that even at the Fountainhead they shall be dashed with bitterness? Even when Christ communes personally with us, must He say, "I have this against you"? Break, my Heart, that it should be so! Well may we repent with a deep repentance when our most choice joys are flavored with the bitter herbs of regret, that our Beloved should have something against us!

But then He says, in effect, *Return*. The third word is this—"Repent and do the first works." Notice, that He does not say, "Repent and get back your first love." This seems rather amazing, but then love is the chief of the first works and, moreover, the first works can only come of the first love! There must be in every declining Christian a *practical repentance*. Do not be satisfied with regrets and resolves. Do the first works—do not strain after the first *emotions*—but do the first works. No renewal is so valuable as the practical cleansing of our way. If the life is made right, it will prove that the love is so. In doing the first works, you will prove that you have come back to your first love. The prescription is complete because the doing of the first works is meant to include the feeling of the first feelings, the sighing of the first sighs, the enjoying of the first joys—these are all supposed to accompany returning obedience and activity.

We are to get back to these first works at once. Most men come to Christ with a leap and I have observed that many who come back to Him usually do so at a bound. The slow revival of one's love is almost an impossibility—as well expect the dead to rise by degrees! Love to Christ is often love at first sight—we see Him and are conquered by Him. If we grow cold, the best thing we can do is to fasten our eyes on Him till we cry, "My soul melted while my Beloved spoke." It is a happy circumstance if I can cry, "Before I was aware my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." How sweet for the Lord to put us back, again, at once, into the old place, back, again, in a moment! My prayer is that it may be so this morning with any declining one. May you so repent as not merely to feel the old feelings, but instantly to do the first works and be once more as eager, as zealous, as generous, as prayerful as you used to be! If we should again see you breaking the alabaster box, we should know that the old love had returned. May the Good Master help us to do as well as ever, yes, much better than before!

Notice, however, that this will require much of effort and warfare, for the promise which is made is "to him that overcomes." Overcoming implies conflict. Depend upon it, if you conquer a wandering heart, you will have to fight for it. "To him that overcomes," says He, "will I give to eat of the Tree of Life." You must fight your way back to the Garden of the Lord. You will have to fight against lethargy, against an evil heart of unbelief, against the benumbing influence of the world. In the name and power of Him who bids you repent, you must wrestle and struggle till you get the mastery over self and yield your whole nature to your Lord.

So I have shown you how Christ prescribes and I greatly need a few minutes for the last part, because I wish to dwell with solemn earnestness upon it. I have no desire to say a word by which I should show myself off as an orator, but I long to speak a word by which I may prove myself a true Brother pleading with you in deep sympathy, because in all the evil which I rebuke, I mourn my own personal share. Bless us, O Spirit of the Lord!

III. Now see, Brothers and Sisters, HE PERSUADES. This is the third point—the Lord Jesus persuades His erring one to repent.

First, He *persuades with a warning*—"I will come unto you." "Quickly" is not in the original—the Revised Version has left it out. Our Lord is generally very slow at the work of judgement—"I will come unto you and will remove your candlestick out of its place—unless you repent." This He must do. He cannot allow His Light to be apart from love and if the first love is gone, the Church shall be left in darkness. The Truth of God must always shine, but not always in the same place. The place must be made fit by love, or the Light shall be removed.

Our Lord means, first, I will take away the comfort of the Word. He raises up certain ministers and makes them burning and shining lights in the midst of His Church. And when the people gather together they are cheered and enlightened by their shining. A ministry blessed of the Lord is a singular comfort to the Church of God. The Lord can easily take away that light which has brought comfort to so many—He can remove the good man to another sphere, or He can call him Home to his rest. The extinguisher of death can put out the candle which now gladdens the house. The Church which has lost a ministry by which the Lord's Glory has shone forth, has lost a good deal and if this loss has been sent in chastisement for decline of love, it is all the harder to bear. I can point you to places where once was a man of God and all went well—but the people grew cold and the Lord took away their leader—and the place is now a desolation!

Those who now attend those courts and listen to a modern ministry cry out because of the famine of the Word of the Lord! O Friends, let us value the light while we have it and prove that we do so by profiting by it! But how can we profit if we leave our first love? The Lord may take away our comfort as a Church if our first zeal shall die down.

But the candlestick also symbolizes usefulness—it is that by which a Church shines. The use of a Church is to preserve the Truth, with which to illuminate the neighborhood, to illuminate the world! God can soon cut short our usefulness and He will do so if we cut short our love. If the Lord is withdrawn, we can go on with our work as we used to do, but nothing will come of it—we can go on with Sunday schools, Mission stations, daughter Churches and yet accomplish nothing! Brothers and Sisters, we can go on with the Orphanage, the College, the Colportage, the Evangelistic Society, the Book Fund—and everything else—and yet nothing will be effected if the arm of the Lord is not made bare!

He can, if He wills, even take away from the Church her very existence as a Church! Ephesus is gone—nothing but ruins can be found. Rome once held a noble Church of Christ, but has not her name become the symbol of Antichrist? The Lord can soon take away candlesticks out of their places if the Church uses her light for her own glory and is not filled with His love. God forbid that we should fall under this condemnation! Of Your mercy, O Lord, forbid it! Let it not so happen to any one of us!

And this may occur to us as *individuals*. You, dear Brother or Sister, if you lose your first love, may soon lose your joy, your peace, your usefulness! You who are now so bright, may grow dull. You who are now so useful, may become useless. You were once an instructor of the foolish and a teacher of babes—but if the Lord is withdrawn, you will instruct nobody, you will be in the dark yourself—alas, you may come to lose the very name of Christians, as some have done who once seemed to be burning and shining lights! They were foolish virgins and, before long, they were heard to cry, “Our lamps have gone out!” The Lord can and will take away the candlestick out of its place if we put Him out of His place by a failure in our love to Him.

How can I persuade you, then, better than with the warning words of my Master? My Beloved, I persuade you from my very soul not to encounter these dangers, not to run these terrible risks, for as you would not wish to see either the Church or yourself left without the Light of God, to pine in darkness, it is necessary that you abide in Christ and go on to love Him more and more.

The Savior holds out a promise as His other persuasive. Upon this I can only dwell for a minute. It seems a very wonderful promise to me—“To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the Tree of Life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” Observe, those who lose their first love, fall, but those who abide in love are made to stand. In contrast to the Fall which took place in the Paradise of God, we have man eating of the Tree of Life and so living forever! If we, through Grace, overcome the common tendency to decline in love, then shall we be confirmed and settled in the favor of the Lord. By eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, we fell. By eating of the fruit of a better tree we live and stand fast forever! Life proved true by love shall be nourished on the best of food—it shall be sustained by fruit from the garden of the Lord, Himself, gathered by the Savior’s own hands!

Note again, those who lose their first love wander far, they depart from God. “But,” says the Lord, “if you keep your first love you shall not wander, but you shall come into closer fellowship. I will bring you nearer to the center. I will bring you to eat of the Tree of Life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” The inner ring is for those who grow in love—the center of all joy is only to be reached by much love. We know God as we love God! We enter into His Paradise as we abide in His love. What joy is here! What a reward has love!

Then notice the mystical blessing which lies here, waiting your meditation. Do you know how we fell? The woman took of the fruit of the forbidden tree and gave to Adam, and Adam ate and fell. The reverse is the case in the promise before us—the Second Adam takes of the Divine fruit from the Tree of Promise and hands it to His spouse. She eats and lives forever! He who is the Father of the age of Grace hands down to us immortal joys which He has plucked from a tree which never withers! The reward of love is to eat the Fruit of Life. “We are getting into mysteries,” says one. Yes, I am intentionally lifting a corner of the veil and no more. I only mean to give you a glimpse at the promised gift! Into His innermost joys, our Lord will bring us if we keep up our first love and go from strength to strength in it!

Marvelous things are locked up in the cases of which Love holds the key. Sin set the angel with a flaming sword between us and the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden—but Love has quenched that sword and now the angel beckons us to come into the innermost secrets of Paradise. We shall know as we are known when we love as we are loved. We shall

live the life of God when we are wholly taken up with the love of God. The love of Jesus answered by our love to Jesus makes the sweetest music the heart can know! No joy on earth is equal to the bliss of being all taken up with love to Christ. If I had my choice of all the lives that I could live, I certainly would not choose to be an emperor, nor to be a millionaire, nor to be a philosopher, for power, wealth and knowledge bring with them sorrow and travail. But I would choose to have nothing to do but to love my Lord Jesus—nothing, I mean, but to do all things for His sake and out of love to Him. Then I know that I should be in Paradise, yes, in the midst of the Paradise of God, and I should have meat to eat which is all unknown to men of the world!

Heaven on earth is abounding love to Jesus! This is the first and last of true delight—to love Him who is the First and the Last. To love Jesus is another name for Paradise! Lord, let me know this by continual experience! “You are soaring aloft,” cries one! Yes, I admit it. Oh that I could allure you to a heavenward flight upon wings of love! There is bitterness in declining love—it is a very consumption of the soul and makes us weak, faint and low. But true love is the savor of Glory! See the heights, the glittering heights, the glorious heights, the everlasting hills to which the Lord of Life will conduct all those who are faithful to Him through the power of His Holy Spirit! See, O Love, your ultimate abode! I pray that what I have said may be blessed by the Holy Spirit to the bringing of us all nearer to the Bridegroom of our souls! Amen.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307