

## Yes, You Can Lose Your First Love

What if I told you, yes, you can fall out of love?

When two people fall in love and decide to marry, they seldom think about falling out of love. Yet, falling out of love does happen in marriage and a host of other circumstances in life.

It happens during times of marital engagement, that happens with jobs, and careers. Yes, falling out of love does happen.

Bess Meyerson, the only Jewish Miss America, once said,

*“To fall in love is awfully simple. But to fall out of love is simply awful.”*

The worst reversal of love occurs when someone who once professed love for Jesus Christ, abandons that love and no longer loves Jesus Christ as they once did. Falling out of love does happen.

We find recorded for us in scripture an occasion when Jesus addressed this very issue. Followers of Christ fell out of love with Him and His counsel to them.

We read that account for us in Revelation chapter two. It’s a letter written by Christ through the Apostle John to believers at the city of Ephesus.

According to Dr. Charles Ryrie, noted Bible scholar, and History.com, the city of Ephesus sat on the Aegean Sea on the southwest corner of Asia, now known as Turkey. It was a prominent seaport in that day. It was second only to the city of Rome in importance in the whole Mediterranean area. It was a center for commerce, for shipping, for politics, and religion.

At one time, it was a hotbed for Christianity. In Acts 18-19, the record tells of Paul and his friends Priscilla and Aquila who founded a body of Christ in the city of Ephesus. Paul even taught there. It was a prominent city in the realm of Christianity in the first century.

Yet we read unmistakably that Ephesus doesn't exist today. It's abandoned, destroyed, overcome, and conquered by the Gauls in the second century. It never again resumed its once prominent stature, either in the city, in the region of the Mediterranean, in comparison to Rome, or in Christianity. Nobody lives there.

Now it's kind of a swamp and barren land. What happened? What happened in Ephesus?

### The Church At Ephesus

Jesus describes for us His warning to them in the first century. It’s recorded for us in Revelation chapter two. We read Christ’s letter as recorded there, penned by the Apostle John, the church leader in that day of all of the cities throughout, Southwest Asia, including the city of Ephesus.

#### Revelation of Christ

We read in Revelation chapter two, verse one, where it says:

*“And to the angel of the church at Ephesus, write these things, saith He that holds the seven stars in His right hand and Who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks...”*

What's He saying here? That’s language that we don't typically use. He repeats the description John wrote of Christ in Revelation 1.12-13, 20. Christ describes Himself as holding seven stars in His right hand.

Well, what were the stars? The stars were the church leaders among the Ephesian believers as the angels, the leaders, the pastors, church leadership in the body of Christ at Ephesus.

Then it says that He walks among the candlesticks. But what are the candlesticks? The candlesticks represented the individual bodies of Christ, the churches spread throughout Southwest Asia and in particular, the church at Ephesus.

It speaks of Christ, a revelation of Himself. In essence, He says, ‘I am the sovereign King. I hold the stars in my hand. I hold the pastors and leaders in my hand. And I walk among the churches. My presence is there.’ He fellowships with them. His presence is there with them.

Not only ‘am I present,’ but we read right away in the beginning of verse number two, it says,

*“I know...”*

Jesus wrote to them and told them that He knew what was going among the believers. He sees it. He knows, He understands. He possesses omniscience.

That's a picture of Christ. He revealed Himself to these believers in Ephesus.

### **Recognition of virtues**

And then He recognizes their virtues. They had many favorable things about them that He could say. He commented and remarked about them. We would typically say, when we read these commendations, “Wow, what a body. What a group of believers...outstanding.”

Let's read about some of these commendations that Christ gave to them. In verse 2, He says,

*“I know your works, your labors. I know them. I see what you're doing. Hard work, sweating, on my behalf. And for my name, I know your patience, your understanding. You wait, not only that, but you can't bear them, which are evil. You stand for truth and righteousness. You don't compromise with evil. And with your culture about you, you stand for the truth. You reject that, which is evil.”*

Christ observed their acts and deeds (*Strong's Concordance*). In addition, they labored with hard manual labor for Christ. (Greek scholar Mounce) Mounce further explains that these believers did not compromise, approve, or tolerate wicked men. Cheerful, hopeful constancy and endurance permeated their lives.

Then He says:

*“You tried those who said they are apostles and found them wanting.”*

Those were false prophets. In those days, they came saying, boasting that they were part of the apostles. Listen to what Christ said to the believers at Ephesus how they tested the false prophets, questioned them, examined them, and found them liars. The Ephesian believers rejected these false prophets: liars, untruthful, deceitful, and false. (*Strong's Concordance*)

Then we find also in verse number three of chapter two, it says these believers did not faint, didn't quit. They kept at it. They were persistent.

In verse number six, we see yet another thing for which Christ praised them. He noticed that they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. So did Christ.

Who were the Nicolaitans? According to *Vincent's Word Studies*, They were a sex cult. The Nicolaitans seduced people including believers into idolatrous pagan sex acts. Their lifestyle included sensuality and unchastity.

The Nicolaitans believed that fulness and liberty in life came through abandonment to the full range of sensual and sexual experiences. They abandoned life without reserve to fleshly lusts. They believed that satisfaction in life occurred only when you satisfied to its fullest with complete and full abandonment to sensuality and sexuality.

The believers in Ephesus rejected those deeds and had nothing to do with them.

Quite a description. Wouldn't you say a very good church? We might conclude Jesus gave them great praise.

### **Rebuke for sin**

But then He went on to say, and oh boy, here comes the other shoe.

*“Nevertheless, I have something against you.”*

Here's what Christ had against them. They didn't love Him like they once did at the beginning. We read about that in Acts chapter 18 and 19, the foundation of this congregation, this assembly of believers in Ephesus, and the great miraculous occurrences through Paul, Priscilla, and Aquilla.

Their great preaching in this congregation led to a revival that broke out. Believers included Jews and Gentiles. Miraculous demonic exorcisms occurred. The people brought pagan materials valued at over 50,000 pieces of silver to be destroyed.

How much was that value? Well, one piece of silver was equivalent of one day's wage. In our day and age, that would be somewhere around \$80 a day, times 50,000, that's \$4 million. They sacrificed these materials and destroyed them because they were contrary to their love for Christ.

That describes the passion that they had at the beginning. And Jesus said, 'You've left it. You abandoned it. You're not following it anymore.' This word "left" describes the actions of James, John, Peter, and Andrew when they left their fishing nets to follow Jesus. The Ephesians left their first love, abandoned it. (AMG Publishers)

Further, their love for Christ did not rank in first place in their lives. Their works came first, good works. And Jesus pointed out to them the very good things that they were doing: 'But that's not as important as your love for Me. That must be your first priority in your relationship with Me. You've left it. You abandoned it.'

He chastised them for their great sin. We read not only did Christ reveal Himself to them, not only did He recognize their virtues, but then He also rebuked them for their sin.

They had left their first love, no longer a passion for Christ.

### **Repentance for sin**

Then Christ gave them direction on how they could reverse the trend, how they could experience revival amongst themselves and in their own individual lives. We read His direction recorded starting in verse number five, He says,

*"Remember, you remember what it was like way back at the beginning when you first professed love for Me and how I was first in your life. Remember that?"*

First, Jesus told them that they had fallen from their first love, and that no longer described them and of their priorities in life. So, Christ command them to remember that from which they had fallen, their first love for Him.

Then secondly, He commanded them to repent because their fall was a great fall. Their fall from their first love required repentance for their fall in sin. Jesus gave an urgent appeal for the instant change of attitude and conduct. He wanted them to reverse their lives from their lack of love. (*Robertson's Word Pictures*)

And then Christ commanded them to repeat their first love. He told them to go back and make Him first again, to love Him with the passion that they expressed at the beginning, and make it a priority in their lives. Go back, repeat.

He gives these two strong words: 'Or else.' Christ said that He would remove their candlestick. You remember the candlestick represented the churches, the congregations, and He's warning them. Jesus warned them that if they didn't go back, repent, remember, repeat, and renew, He would remove their congregation. It will exist no longer.

Further, the Apostle Paul on his last missionary journey uttered the same warning to the leaders from the church at Ephesus. (Acts 20.16-38) He warned of false prophets entering their fellowship and leading them astray.

We read presently that it occurred during the second century. The Gauls came in from the North and utterly destroyed the city of Ephesus. It has never again resumed its existence or prominence. It doesn't exist anymore.

It's a swamp land, nothing. There are a few pillars, a few relics of past days. Jesus fulfilled His promise and His warning to them. He gave to them a clear admonition as to why their church would fail because they emphasized good works instead of a passionate love for Christ.

### **Reward for obedience**

To those who overcometh, Christ promised a reward. To them, He said that He would give to eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God. In Revelation chapter 21 and 22, the last two chapters of this outstanding book, we read about that Paradise. That New Jerusalem is described for us in Revelation 21.

Then in chapter 22, we read that there is a throne where God sits and out from under the throne comes a

river that goes down the middle of the city. And on either side of the river, it's lined with trees.

What are those trees? The trees of life. Jesus promised the believers in Ephesus that if they overcome and obey His command to repent of their lost love and to return to that first love of Him, they would join Him in paradise, and they will eat of that tree of life lining the river flowing from the throne of God.

The overcomers would enjoy the eternal presence of the three-in-one God in the New Jerusalem, prepared for those who love God.

### **Purpose Of Christ**

Why did Jesus give this message to John for these believers in Ephesus? He wanted to remind them of Who He was, not just a person of history, but He was the sovereign authority and ruler. He was the man in charge of all things.

He wanted them to know of His presence, He was there amongst them. And He was aware of what was going on. Christ praised them for their good works, especially their reject of false prophets who attempted to pursue the heresy of the Nicolaitans.

Christ gave insight into His nature that confirmed His worthiness of their love and devotion.

Furthermore, He wanted them to renew their first love for Him. He warned them what would happen if they failed to obey His commands to remember their fall, to repent of their sin, and to return to their first love for Him.

He impressed upon them their need for spiritual revival. Their good works and practical orthodoxy did not replace their lost love for Christ. Their good works became worthless in comparison to love for Him and His priority in their lives.

Christ also wanted to give them courage and comfort and a reminder of the future because He promised to them a reward. We read that in verse number seven of this little passage of the letter to Ephesus. He said that if they obey, this is what I will do to you.

He wanted these believers, His followers in this congregation of believers, to know these truths of Christ's nature, to be reminded of them, to be encouraged, and to be comforted in the midst of their struggles.

### **Correlation To You And Me**

You might ask the question, What does that have to do with me? That was centuries ago, first century, years, thousands of years ago, what does that have to do with you and me?

Well, it has everything to do with you and me because what was true then is true now. Great similarities between our day and the day of Ephesus as recorded here in Revelation chapter two exist in great extent.

It can be described of us that we have left our first love as well. What kind of passionate love do we as professed followers of Christ have for Him? All too often, for example in our music, we sing songs of love and praise and affection for him, and we don't even mention His name. We are so ashamed of Him that we won't even mention His name and our music.

How can that ever be described as worship? It isn't. Are we so ashamed of His name that we can't even mention it in our music? Or is it to the point where we are so far greater interested in the crossover benefit of our songs that will reap us more money if we don't mention the name of Jesus? So, we leave it out, and we just refer to Christ as "him," or we hope that people will see that it's Jesus.

We avoid mentioning His name because we really don't love him. That's an example because love is shown by our acts and by what we do.

What about our sacrifice? What about the centrality of Christ in our worship? What about the centrality of Christ and the practice of our fellowship together as believers: have we like these in Ephesus come to emphasize good works greater than our passion and love for Christ? I fear that we have to a great extent.

So, things that Jesus covered in this message to the believers in Ephesus correlate to our day as well. In our day, we can learn the lesson that Jesus taught to those believers, that, yes, we can fall out of love. And when we do, and when we emphasize works, instead of love for Christ, churches and Christians fail, and the professing believers and the church has failed today for the same reason.

## Implications

Therefore, what implications does this letter to Ephesus have upon you and me for our lives today and for the congregations which we attend? It has significant implications.

### Believers

First of all, for believers, you may claim that you are a follower of Christ. You would profess that you are a Christian, that you obey and follow Christ. What about your love for him? Is He first? Is He your first love? Is He your first affection? Is His glory and honor the first thing of importance in your life, or is it something else? Anything else?

Anything that might even be good, is of no value, no value. The only thing of value is love for Christ. And we prove and show our love for Christ by our obedience, by seeking after Him, desiring after Him above all things, sacrificing as the parables teach us about pearls of great price, to love him, to serve him, to obey him.

As believers, we can become entranced by what we do for Christ and forget Him. Even good works cannot replace Christ and His presence in the activities of our lives. If this developed in your life, I pray that the Holy Spirit will impress upon you your fall out of love for Christ, and lead you to remember that first love, repent of your sin, and renew your first love, love for Christ above all other suitors.

### Unbelievers

Perhaps you call yourself an unbeliever. You have rejected God, and you have no interest in following Him. You have no interest in Jesus Christ, maybe not even as a historical figure. You have no interest at all in God or His Son, Jesus Christ up until this point in your life.

Well, I want you to hear the word of the Lord to you today because you are here reading this at the appointment of God, and He wants to speak to you. Here's what He would remind you and tell you.

He would remind you that, first of all, you were born in sin. All of us are; every human ever born other than Adam and Eve. They were not born in sin. They were born perfect, created perfect by God Himself. After that, everyone was/is born in sin because of Adam and Eve's sin of disobedience as displayed in the Garden.

Therefore, you inherited from them a sinful nature, and your sinful nature dominates you. It prevents you and keeps you from ever pursuing after God. You have no interest. You're not able to, you don't want to. Your sinful nature creates a chasm between you and God which you cannot overcome, nor do you have a desire to do so.

Thus, you need divine intervention in your life to come to God as He has revealed Himself in creation, in His word, and in His Son, Jesus Christ.

God made provision for people like you and me, the provision of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to bridge the gap, to bridge the valley if you will, the chasm between you and God that exists because of your sinful nature.

Jesus bridged that gap for people like you and like me. God gave Him, Jesus became incarnate in human flesh, set aside His form with God and took the form of a servant, came and lived a sinless, Holy righteous, obedient life.

The life that He lived qualified Him for the death that He died. And the death that He died was an offering unto God on behalf of sinners, like you and me, paying the penalty that people like you and I deserve to pay.

He paid it to God, and God accepted that offering. God accepted it on behalf of people like you and me. God said for everyone who believes upon Jesus and His sacrificial offering on his/her behalf, He will accept. God will reconcile them back to Himself. God will bridge that gap through Christ. Further, He will make them children of God.

God promised to give to them and to plant in them a new life, a new power, His presence, His life, living within them, giving them the faith to believe in Christ, giving them the faith to obey and to follow Him and to experience transformation in life.

### My prayer

I pray for both of you today, first for those of you who are believers, who need to remember and repent and repeat a first love for Jesus Christ, that the Holy Spirit will work in your life, confessing and repenting, and

turning from your abandonment of your love for Christ and renewing that love once again, making it a priority in your life.

And second then for you who at this point have never trusted in Christ, I pray that the spirit of God will come to you today and regenerate you, give you God's new life within you that enables you to believe and trust upon the provision of God in Christ, on your behalf, enabling you to trust Christ and His sacrifice as for you, and to experience God's reconciling you back to Himself, giving to you new life.

Well, I pray that today, the spirit of God will bring about these transformations in your life as a believer and in your life as an unbeliever that you might from this day forward walk in newness of life. May God come and bring these blessings into your lives today is my prayer.