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## Chapter 2

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# Your First Love

*But I have this against you,  
that you have left your first love.  
—Revelations 2:4*

Have you left your first love? I guess the first question needs to be: who really is *your first* love? Could it be your boyfriend, your best friend? Maybe your *first* love isn't even a person, but rather earthly possessions like that closet full of clothes or money—who or what is really *first* in your life and in your heart? Why is it important to know? Because the Scripture in Revelation says this: “But I have this *against* you, that you have left your *first love*” (Rev. 2:4). So, once again, the question is: who or what is really *first* in your life, because the Bible also says that “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:37). “For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful...” (2 Tim 3:2). “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil...” (1 Tim 6:10). “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21).

Basically, he who loves anything or anyone above the Lord is not worthy of Him and His love.

**Do you understand what the Lord is saying to all of us?** He is saying that any time we put someone or something ahead of our love for Him, or our relationship with Him, or our time with Him, we are not worthy of His love. Wow, that's something we need to sit and think about!

When you or I love someone we want to spend more than once or twice a week with this person, right? And if we are “in love” with this person, we want to spend every waking moment with them. We call them on the phone and spend every minute thinking about them or talking to them. Is this how often you think of or spend time with the Lord? If not, can you honestly say that He is really *first* in your life?

**Seek first.** God is awesome in so many ways—here is just one of His awesome promises to us. “But **seek first** His kingdom and His righteousness; and *all these things* shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). He says that we are forever blessed when we put the Lord first in our priorities—that means: first in our day and first in our heart. As if He was not enough, when we put Him first, He shows us His love by adding *all the things* that we have hoped for. That means when we go so far as to, “**Delight** yourself in the Lord” in turn “He will give you the *desires of your heart*” (Ps. 37:4). Isn't that just amazing?

**Yet, on the flip side, what happens when we put someone else ahead of the Lord?** What does He do to draw us back into a loving relationship with Him? Many married women find, like I did, that when we put our husbands first, the Lord actually took our husbands away from us! It says, “You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape...You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend” (Ps. 88:8, 18 NIV).

**He turns the heart.** Yet it isn't only married women, God wants all of us for Himself, so much so, that He lovingly turns the hearts of anyone we put ahead of Him. “The king's *heart* is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; **He turns it** wherever He wishes” (Prov. 21:1). Have you found that happening in your own life, or in other people's lives? They have lost everyone that they love until they turn their heart totally to the Lord.

God is not selfish; He does this because He knows that we were each created with emptiness in our hearts that HE ALONE can fill. This void will never be met with an earthly relationship, it can only be met, fulfilled, and overflowing when we experience a deep relationship with the One who loved us enough to die for us.

## If You Love Me

**How do we show God that we love Him?** First, as we just learned, we prove our love by putting Him first in our lives. Secondly, we show our love by obeying Him; He says, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Therefore, if you say you love the Lord, then you will naturally **obey Him**. Jesus said, “Why do you call me Lord and not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). This is what this entire book is about: It is about knowing God, and knowing what God says in His Word, which will result in living and obeying His commands.

The Bible tells us that the very first command that included a promise is found in Ephesians 6:1–3, and it says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.” You cannot say that you obey God if you are disobeying and thereby dishonoring your parents. Maybe you no longer live at home; in fact, you may be out on your own supporting yourself. Are you then exempt from this verse now? Have you outgrown it?

The truth is that you are still living under the promise! First of all, this verse is not a binding or a burdensome commandment, because the Lord is never, ever that way. Like most things, it is how you look at something that makes it burdensome. Some people believe speed limits are horrible and should be abolished. Some believe we should legalize drug use and gambling. What do you think? Chances are we would agree that these laws are there for our protection and when we choose to obey them, we are living a safe life, correct?

Now moving on to the verses in question. I will say that you should focus on the portion that tells us to **honor** our parents. No matter how old I became, as long as my parents were living, I made sure I honored them with how I spoke to them and about them. I never was disrespectful, and it in turn meant that I was blessed in so many, many ways.

Yet, let me also add this, for many of the ladies who have come to our ministry with broken marriages, unfaithful husbands, I saw that many of them could trace their problems back to how they were rebellious and disrespectful to their own parents. And countless times they ended up being forced to live with their parents again, and inevitably became thankful for it because they were able to go back and finally make things right.

Why is this important? Like any foundation, when it is poorly poured or full of cracks, the life you build on top of it is unstable. And maybe even more important was that they needed to learn obedience and honoring their parents because it in turn helped them to honor and obey God, and vice versa.

When you fail to obey and honor those in authority that you can see, you will also fail to obey and honor the One you cannot see. The truth is, by not obeying and honoring your parents, you are disobeying and dishonoring God. It's as simple as that.

This attitude follows you right into your marriage, and it is one reason why couples divorce or are miserable in their marriage. That's why in Titus 2:4-6 it tells older women, like myself, that I should “encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.”

God is a God of authority. If we look at the life of Jesus, we see that His whole desire was to do the will of HIS Father. Yes, I agree, that it is easier to obey a righteous Father when you may have a father or mother or some other authority like your boss who is not *worthy* of respect—but God covers that exception with an added blessing.

Just look: He says, “For the Lord's sake, respect all human authority—Do what they tell you—not only if they are *kind* and *reasonable*, but even if they are **cruel**. For *God is pleased with you* when you do what you know is

right and patiently endure unfair treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.”

“For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in His steps” (1 Pet. 2:13, 18–21 NLT). This doesn’t sound like what you hear on television or in movies, does it? It may not even be what you hear in church and certainly it is not being spoken in women’s Bible studies. I know, I used to go to them. And, due to this being omitted since no one wants to hear it, that is why there are more divorces in the church than in the world! Reread what I just wrote because that is actually true.

Of course, it is easier to submit and honor someone who is honorable, but hopefully you are like me and you want a *greater* blessing. If you do, then God says He is *pleased* with you for doing the right thing by obeying and respecting every person in authority over you who is unfair, unreasonable and even cruel! Never forget this and instead, focus on the truth that harsh or unfair treatment actually finds FAVOR with God! Just look at it again... “But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it **this finds favor with God**” (1 Pet. 2:20).

Now if you are suffering and being used or misused and you grumble, whine and tell everyone about it, you don’t get the prize or the promise. As a matter of fact, to really draw out the pure heart the Lord wants to bless, He added more to this principle. We see it here in these two verses:

“But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:39–45). Instead, Christians are *unwilling* to do anything even close to this—sad, but also true.

Look at it again. It says it here in First Peter 3:8 “To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might *inherit a blessing*.”

It’s actually earlier in First Peter that explains that women need to submit to their own husbands, who may also be unreasonable and even rebellious to God’s Word, and obey with respect! Here read it yourself, “In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands, so that even if any of them are **disobedient** to the Word, they may be won **without a word** by the *behavior of their wives*, as they observe your chaste and *respectful* behavior” (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

Knowing that when you marry God tells you as a married woman that you must be a “respectful wife,” and that you must also do it “without a word” even when your husband is disobedient to God’s Word, makes finding the **right man** to marry even more important, doesn’t it? Whether or not the man you marry is handsome or cute will fade away with years. But a man who is after God’s own heart, who has proven his love for the Lord by obeying His commandments, is a man that you want to have in authority over you! Right?

You may not have been able to pick your father or mother, or your teacher, or your current boss, but when it is *your* choice to choose to marry, choose wisely. And in the meantime, learn to honor the unreasonable or even cruel authority over you for the greatest blessings you could ever imagine—God’s *favor* on your life!

This is what our ministry is all about. The Bible says, “An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels” (Prov. 31:10).

**Women rule over them.** On the flip side, Godly men really are looking for a woman who is seeking God, not them! Only when you chase after God will the right man pursue you and overtake you—the kind of man you will *want* to marry, the one after God’s own heart—in other words, a man who pursues God rather than pursuing the pleasures of this world!

The opposite, I am afraid, is also true. “O My people! Their oppressors are children, and **women rule over them.** O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray and confuse the direction of your paths” (Isa. 3:12). By following the ways of the world, you will be led astray and find yourself ruling over a spiritually weak man, and find that **you** are oppressed or dominated by your very own children like most Christian couples today.

Once again, when choosing a lifelong partner, choose wisely. And in the meantime, seek after God with a passion! For in doing so God **promises** that *all these things* shall be added unto you: a good, faithful and loving husband, obedient and loving children, **and** a husband who will be blessed: “He who finds a wife finds a **good thing** and obtains **favor** from the LORD” (Prov. 18:22).

## Obedience Rather Than Sacrifice

**Obedience is better than sacrifice.** “What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your *obedience* to his voice? Listen! **Obedience is better than sacrifice**, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshipping idols” (1 Sam. 15:22-23). It also says, “To do righteousness and justice is desired by the Lord rather than sacrifice” (Prov. 21:3).

**As we just read, rebellion is living dangerously!** God compares rebellion to witchcraft and when you are being stubborn, like demanding your own way, to idolatry. We will talk about obedience a bit more later on, but for now...

**Let’s talk about sacrifice.** There are many women who are involved in particular church denominations that require the women to wear head coverings, sometimes only skirts no pants, or demand that other modest clothing be worn. Unfortunately, these same women who “appear spiritual” on the outside, and who sacrifice today’s fashions, are very often *rebellious* in their hearts!

Remember, we read in First Samuel that God wants obedience, not sacrifice. That’s because God is not interested in what is on the **outside**, but what is on the *inside* of us.

If you concentrate on your outward appearance you may be deceiving people and even yourself into thinking you’re religious, and therefore, obedient to the Lord—but He, above all, knows what is in your heart! He says, “Do not look at his appearance . . . because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the **outward appearance**, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

The Lord continually takes time to show me the *danger* of women who wear religious clothing and even women or girls who volunteer a lot for the church. Without thinking, you and I assume that they are more spiritual, when in fact, if you get to know them, you will find that many are just more “religious.” The outside is clean but the inside is corrupt. Therefore, you must be very careful that *your* outer appearance of modest clothing or no make-up or good works in your church is not covering a heart that is not right with God. Self-righteousness is an area where the enemy can easily gain access when we judge ourselves to be more righteous and judge others who may dress immodestly, wear makeup, or don’t even go to church as often as we do as the *real* sinners.

This is how Jesus explained this principle, “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:10-14).

## Obedience

**Obedience comes from the heart.** “. . . you became obedient from the *heart* to that form of teaching to which you were committed” (Rom. 6:17). Again, “. . . for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but *the Lord looks at the heart*” (1 Sam. 16:7).

**Obedience needs testing.** “Do not be surprised at the fiery trial which comes upon you for your **testing**” (1 Pet. 4:12).

**Obedience purifies your soul.** “Since you have in obedience to the Truth, **purified your souls**” (1 Pet. 1:22).

**Obedience gives testimony of Who your Father is.** “Obey My voice and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way in which I command you, that it may be well with you. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward” (Jer. 7:23-24).

**Your disobedience actually praises the wicked.** “Those who forsake the law *praise the wicked*, but those who keep the law strive with them” (Prov. 28:4).

**The prayers of the disobedient go unheard.** “He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Prov. 28:9).

## Our Example Is Jesus

**Jesus learned obedience.** “Although He was a Son, He *learned obedience* from the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

**Jesus was obedient and submissive to His authority.** “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but Thou wilt . . . My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done” (Matt. 26:39, 42).

**Jesus was obedient even unto death.** “He humbled Himself by becoming *obedient* to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8).

**We must be submissive to authority.** “For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (Rom. 13:1). “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:1–3). “Wives, be submissive to your own husbands, as unto the Lord . . . but as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their own husbands in everything” (Eph. 5:22-24).

**Self-condemned.** Unfortunately, too many Christians spend their time arguing and debating about submission for women and about obedience—which God says is to our *own* destruction. “Do not argue with people about foolish questions and about the Law. Do not spend time talking about all of your early fathers. This does not help anyone and it is of no use. Talk once or twice to a person who tries to divide people into groups against each other. If he does not stop, have nothing to do with him. You can be sure he is going the wrong way. He is sinning and he knows it” (Titus 3:9-11 NLV).

**Chase after myths.** Instead of searching for the truth, most of us want everyone to agree with our wrong plans, ideas or decisions. “For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching.

They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and **chase after myths**” (2 Tim. 4:3-4 NLT).

**Foolishness to him.** A lot of the principles in the Bible seem difficult to understand, but the only way to understand is to first obey them. “But people who aren’t spiritual can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others” (1 Cor. 2:14-15 NLT).

**Eager to obey.** Even as a mature adult there are many times I really don’t fully understand *why* the Lord is calling me to do something, but once I surrender my will and obey *willingly* the light is turned on and I understand the whys that had me confused before I obeyed. Being willing comes from the Holy Spirit that lives within you once you are a child of God “because I will put *my Spirit* in you and make you **eager to obey** my laws and teachings” (Ezek. 36:27 CEV).

**By the Spirit.** “If you are guided *by the Spirit*, you won’t obey your selfish desires” (Gal. 5:16 CEV). “Since we are living *by the Spirit*, let us *follow* the Spirit’s *leading* in *every part* of our lives” (Gal. 5:25 NLT).

**Don’t be forced to obey.** “Don’t be stupid like horses and mules that must be led with ropes to make them obey” (Ps. 32:9 CEV).

## **Delayed Obedience results in Disobedience**

**Without delay—obey.** Many times you have every intention of obeying those who have authority over you, but unfortunately you and I forget or get sidetracked. Make this your new motto: “I will hurry, without delay, to obey your commands” (Ps. 119:60). Prove yourself obedient by obeying immediately, which means putting other people’s needs ahead of your own.

**Keeping our eyes on Jesus.** And finally, remember that no matter who you are obeying, your heart should be that you are doing what is right for the sake of your relationship to the Lord. When our desire is to please Him, then we will not be disappointed if someone takes advantage of us, or fails to notice our efforts, or any number of other things that happen when we try to do what is right. “We do this by **keeping our eyes on Jesus**, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne” (Heb. 12:2 NLT).

## **May God bless You as You Pursue Your Savior!**

**Personal commitment to put the Lord first in my life:** “Based on what I have just learned in Scripture, I surrender this area of my life and begin to do everything by putting God first in my life. Through His Spirit, I will prove my love to the Lord by my obedience to His Word, and specifically, by my obedience to my parents and all authority that God has placed over me.”

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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