Christian loses his first love for God, the forsaking process begins. He shifts from his life of jubilant faith to a life of works – hewing cisterns.

Isn't that the lesson we also learn from Revelation 2:4 and 5 where the Lord upbraids the church of Ephesus even though He commends them for their patience, their labor, their hatred of evil, and for not fainting? Tenderly He rebukes this body of believers by saying, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember then from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works . . ." Why? "Else I will come unto thee quickly and remove thy candlestick out of his place." (The Fenton translation reads, "I will come and remove your lampstand from its place.) The candlestick or lampstand is that which supports the first love of the believer; it is faith.

In what manner did the church of Ephesus depart from its first love? By cistern hewing and drudging, if you please. At the first they had been so occupied with the promises and the presence of the Lord that works were merely the result of this life of faith and love. Soon the works were given first place and love second; and the lampstand was removed.

Someone, no doubt, is thinking of the verse of scripture where we are told that faith without works is dead. It is impossible to have faith without works, but one can have great and many works without any faith whatsoever. Much in Christendom is just such dead works, for it is not the work of faith or of love toward God.

Usually the tendency to fall from the first love is found among older Christians if they are not watchful and prayerful. Good works are a part of the faith life, but it is possible to become so engrossed with good works, so overworked doing good, that works crowd God out of the thinking and fellowship of the individual believer. When fellowship with God in prayer and communion are replaced by works alone, then the individual has begun to dig cisterns. No matter how beautifully these cisterns are garnished they still are artificial reservoirs that merely store water.

God's plan for the believer is that "out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." Such a life is a channel type. It is connected to a Source of Supply that is fresh and springing, else living waters could not flow through it. Our passage in Jeremiah 2 tells us that God calls Himself this Fountain of Living Water. "Without me ye can do nothing," saith our Lord.

In the third chapter of Galatians, Paul reminds the Galatians that they were falling into works. Said he, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth . . . ? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"

Perhaps the most subtle attack the enemy of souls can make upon the believer is to instill a desire for works to the exclusion of a walk of faith that emanates, moment by moment, from the Fountain of Living Waters. In such a life of utter dependence upon the Spirit of God, the flesh can find no occasion for glory. And it is so easy to attempt to gain the praise of fellowmen by one's works, and that even among Christians. It is the perfectly natural thing to do.

"Oh," you say, "We are commanded to provoke one another to good works." Yes, that is true, but good works are building with gold, silver and precious stones. These are supplied by the Great Architect Himself, and only He is able and wise enough to direct such a project for the believer.

Always! carnal Christians glory in the deeds of the flesh. They are content to dig cisterns year after year, even though the cistern walls crumble again and again, or they leak and must be repaired time after time. Falling into works is falling from grace. The carnal attitude is to do everything but believe God and His promises, which is the reason we see believers loaded down with cistern digging equipment when the Lord would have them free. Whom the Lord makes free, is free indeed! (John 8:36)

If you would be a spiritual Christian, God will arrange your life so you will have something to believe Him for as long as you live. This is how He makes you a partner in fountain life and living. Abraham was such a believer. The apostle Paul tells the Galatians that "they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."

This life of faith brings victory to him that is exercised thereby, and it becomes a source of blessing to others. Such was the faith of Abraham, and the end of blessing from his faith is not in sight yet! The promise to Abraham was, "In thee shall all nations be blessed."

Writing to the Romans Paul says, "Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." If you are counting on getting blessings by works, you are going deeper and deeper into debt every day according to this passage of scripture. You are digging cisterns, in other words. The deeper you go the darker it becomes, and the more arduous and vexatious the task.

The other route, God's route, is for you to be channeled to the Fountain Head until your life becomes the expression of the Fountain of Living Waters, a springing fountain. You will thereby become a streaming, gurgling, refreshing, living supply of water that will bless everyone your life touches.

If you have been an advocate of cistern digging, why not change to the better way? That is God's way. Join Abraham's rank. You'll be surprised how much elbow room you will have in this rank. The cistern rank is overcrowded and rewardless. There is only one definite requirement if you would walk with Abraham, and that is to take God at His Word. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Abraham staggered not at the promises of God we learn from another scripture passage.

Remember always that God does not give promises to tease and chagrin the believer. He waits to honor every promise if we will remain steadfast in the faith. That requires laying aside our cistern tools and that we constantly dwell by the Fountain of Living Waters. This is the walk of faith. Here are the promises to stand upon:

"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (John 7:38)

"For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." (Isaiah 44:3)

THE NECESSITY OF BEING CONSTANTLY RENEWED

Continual renewing is necessitated by the incessant opposition made by the indwelling flesh ever seeking to possess and direct the faculties of our soul, because the new nature received at the new birth is but a creature – entirely dependent upon its Author. It is therefore both the duty and the privilege of the believer to turn to that Author for daily quickening and energizing, begging Him to strengthen him with might by His Spirit in the inner man, pleading His promise: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31), until he is enables to say, "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord" (Micah 3:8). This renewing is the vitalizing of the soul as the dwelling place and organ of the Holy Spirit: the soul in its entirety, including all its faculties – intellectual, emotional, moral. It is also the invigorating of the graces of the new man: holy faith, reverential fear, love, hatred of sin, hope, and patience.

"In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst with strength (might) in my soul" (Psalm 138:3). That verse is the Old Testament parallel of the petition of Ephesians 3:16, and as the "strengthened with might" exactly corresponds with the two Hebrew words, so "the inner man" is defined as "my soul."

David was in sore straits – walking "in the midst of trouble," encountering the wrath of his enemies (verse 7). Conscious of his own insufficiency, he cried to the Lord, "Revive me; stretch forth thine hand." God at once responded and afforded him relief by strengthening the faculties of his soul and animating the grace of his spirit. The effect of that strengthening would be courage, fortitude, spiritual heroism. The Spirit can make the feeble mighty, the trembling brave, and the weary cheerful. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isaiah 40:29).

But we must now consider more closely the relation of this first petition to what immediately follows. The apostle yearned for an increased measure of grace to be granted the saints and for their spiritual abilities to be enlarged – not with a view to the performance of the outward acts of obedience and duty, but that the believing soul might be empowered to enjoy its spiritual portion and privileges.

He longed that Christians might be more in the habit of living by faith in Christ, so that He might be in them not by transient visits but abiding constantly in their thoughts and affections, and that thereby they would be established in joy and abounding fruitfulness. He longed that they might not only have love but be "rooted and grounded" in it, so that their communion with Christ might be a steady experience rather than an occasional luxury. But such is our native weakness in contemplating heavenly objects that without continued grace preparing us, they would be altogether beyond our reach. We need the wind of heaven to blow our barks forward.

Dependence on the Holy Spirit

"That ye may be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" is a request for the communication of energizing enablement that we may be fully absorbed with Christ. As the Christian owes his new life, or nature, to the Spirit, so by His power alone can it be vigorous and flourishing. Only by His strengthening of the heart are we delivered from being engrossed in the things around us, and our earthbound affections are drawn to things above. He it is who creates the desire for Christ, who shows us the things of Christ, who causes us to make Him the grand subject of our spiritual meditations.