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# "The Oberlin Evangelist"

Publication of Oberlin College

Sermons and Lectures given in 1842

by

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President of Oberlin College

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## **GLOSSARY**

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

## **Thy Will Be Done**

Lecture I

July 20, 1842

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Mat. 6:10: "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

1. EVERY system of Theology assumes the truth of some system of Mental Philosophy, and indeed every theological opinion takes for granted, or assumes as true, some principle of Mental Philosophy. And however much any man may rail against metaphysics, still it is true that the railer himself has his system of metaphysics, by which he interprets the Bible, and in consistency with which he frames his theological opinions. It is very common, however, when any attempt is made to overthrow any theological error, or to establish any theological truth, by an appeal to our own consciousness of the laws of mind, and to the Bible as interpreted in view of these laws, for the objector to cry out vehemently against metaphysics, as if this were a conclusive objection to all such argumentation, that it is metaphysical. Now who does not know that the objector himself, in attempting to establish an opposing theory, assumes as true an opposite system of Mental Philosophy, and is no less metaphysical than his opponent, notwithstanding his violent zeal against metaphysics?

2. The fundamental point of difference between the Old and New schools in Theology, respects the freedom of the will. From this point they diverge; and when consistently carried out, the two schemes or schools differ fundamentally on most of the important questions in theology. It is in vain to attempt to cover up this fact; for any one who has not seen it to be true, is yet ignorant of the great principles and legitimate bearing of the points at issue. Few men, however, of either school, are consistent throughout, and nothing is more common than to find old school men zealously contending for doctrines that properly belong only to the scheme of the new school theologians--when it is perhaps just as common to find new school men, as they call themselves, zealously defending dogmas that properly belong to the scheme of the old school, and can, with no consistency whatever, be embraced by a new school man as truth. And thus a strange confusion and inconsistency prevails among theologians of both schools, and it is remarkable, and even wonderful, that there should be so little consistency in the theological views of so great a majority of theologians of all schools.

3. I have stated that the point of divergence between the old and new schools is the freedom or necessity of the will. Upon this point, the old school maintain that the will always is as the greatest apparent good is; or, in other words, that the mind always chooses that which appears to be upon the whole the most agreeable--and that the choice is always determined by the objective motive, or that which is presented to the mind as a reason for choice. Many of them will not say, that choice is necessitated by motive, while at the same time they maintain that motive is the cause of choice as absolutely as a physical cause produces its effect. And that the difference between the determination of choice by motive and the production of an effect by a physical cause does not lie in the nature of the connection but in the nature of the terms connected--that the certainty is just as absolute in the one case as in the other. And when they explain themselves, it is manifest and self-evident, that the necessity is just as great in the one case as in the other.

4. Those who are truly consistent old school men maintain, and ever have, since the days of Augustine, that men are wholly and naturally unable to do any thing good--that their will is necessarily determined to evil by what they call original sin, or native depravity. They maintain that moral obligation implies no power whatever to act right, or to do the will of God. With them, sin is a necessity of human nature since the fall of Adam. And free agency amounts only to the power of committing sin.

If, according to their view, the will is necessitated by motives, then it follows that all action is

necessary as opposed to free, and the doctrine of universal fatalism is true. But if the will is free, as is maintained by the new school, and all moral depravity belongs to moral action, then a system of theology directly the opposite of that of the old school, in nearly every important point, must be true.

That I may give this subject as fundamental a discussion as my time and the nature of the case admits, I will, the Lord willing, as briefly as I can, discuss the following propositions:

*I. How we know any thing.*

*II. What are the primary faculties of the human mind.*

*III. Wherein human liberty consists.*

*IV. To what acts and states of mind moral responsibility extends.*

*V. What constitutes sin.*

*VI. What constitutes holiness.*

*VII. What the will of God is.*

*VIII. How it is done in heaven.*

*IX. What is implied in the sincere offering of the petition I have chosen for a text.*

*X. That nothing short of a state of mind that can sincerely offer this petition can be virtue, or true religion.*

### **I. How we know any thing.**

- 1. Consciousness is the condition of all knowledge. I will therefore begin by giving what I suppose to be a correct definition of consciousness. Consciousness may be regarded as a power, or faculty, or an act or state of the mind. As a power or faculty, it is the capacity or ability which the mind has to recognize or know its own existence, acts, and states. As an act, or state of mind, it is the actual notice or knowledge of its own existence and states. Consciousness gives us the knowledge of our own existence. By it we certainly know that we exist. It also gives us the phenomena of our mental states and acts. It also gives us the knowledge of the liberty or necessity of our acts or states. In short, every thing that we do know is given by consciousness.
- 2. Whatever we know by consciousness we know with certainty. Consciousness gives me the fact of my existence. This is the highest evidence of the fact of my existence. It also gives me the fact of certain sensations, volitions, mental states and acts, and it gives me these with certainty. Whether there be in reality any thing without corresponding with the sensations and mental states within or not, yet the mental states themselves, as given by consciousness, are

matters of fact, of which I have absolute knowledge, by my own consciousness. When I think or reason, whether I think or reason according to truth or not, may be doubtful; but it cannot be doubtful whether I think or reason, as I am conscious of thinking and reasoning; for my thoughts and reasonings are matters of fact given me by my own consciousness, of which I am therefore absolutely certain. In short, every mental phenomenon is given by consciousness. Every act and state of mind is a reality, just as is given by consciousness. And whatever else is true or false, the phenomena of mind given by consciousness must be facts--must be incontrovertible verities--because they are perceived by the mind to be facts.

## **II. What are the primary faculties of the mind.**

Consciousness does not directly give us the faculties themselves, but the mind infers them from phenomena perceived by consciousness. Every phenomenon, act, or state of mind implies a corresponding faculty; that is, that the mind possesses the power of performing that act. In other words, it is able to act in that manner. When, therefore, consciousness gives us certain classes of actions, we affirm with intuitive certainty that the mind possesses corresponding faculties.

There are three primary or fundamental classes of actions, namely--acts or states of the Intellect--acts or states of the Sensibility--and acts or states of the Will. By this language I mean--

- 1. That men certainly possess a faculty by which they think, reason, judge, and affirm certain truths. The faculty which does these things I call Intellect, and suppose it to include Understanding, Reason, Conscience.
- 2. By the Sensibility I mean the faculty of feeling. This comprehends emotions, desires, affections, and, in short, whatever we mean by feeling.
- 3. By Will I mean, the power of choice, or ability to choose or refuse whatever is an object of choice.

Let it be understood, then, that the primary faculties, as implied in the phenomena given by consciousness are Intellect, or Intelligence, Sensibility, and Will.

## **III. Wherein human liberty consists.**

- 1. This is a fundamental inquiry. And to this question two very different answers are given by the different schools in theology. The old school give this answer--it consists in the power of doing as you will; that is, in carrying out and accomplishing the object of your volitions. With them, human liberty does not consist in an ability to choose in any direction in view of an object of choice--while they maintain that choice itself is invariably and necessarily determined by motive. But to this definition of free agency or human liberty it is justly objected that it is no liberty at all. Action is necessitated by volition or choice; and a man cannot but do as he wills or chooses. If I will to move, my muscles move of necessity, and there is no liberty between the volition and the action. The will moves the muscles, and a man cannot act against his will; for his will is the cause of his actions. This every man knows by his own consciousness, with absolute certainty. Human liberty, then, does not and cannot consist in doing as you will,

irrespective of the question how it comes to pass that we will as we do.

- 2. Human liberty does not consist in a self-determining power in the will. For the will is not an agent, but only a capacity or power of an agent. It is not the will, therefore, that determines its own choices, but it is the agent himself that wills or chooses.
- 3. It does not consist in the power to decline all choice in view of motives or objects of choice. The mind is under a necessity of choosing in some way in view of an object of choice, and a refusal to choose, could this be, would be itself a choosing not to choose.
- 4. Human liberty does not consist in the power to choose without a motive, or object of choice. The mind must necessarily have some object of choice, or it cannot choose; for choice implies that something is chosen; and therefore, to choose without a motive or object of choice is absurd.
- 5. It does not lie in the necessity of choosing what, in the judgment of the mind, is most worthy of choice. For this we have the testimony of our own consciousness, as we certainly know that very often we do not choose that which in the judgment of our mind is most worthy of choice.
- 6. Nor does it lie in the necessity of choosing that which appears the most agreeable to the mind. For, as a matter of fact, we certainly know that we often do choose that which, in no proper sense, can be called agreeable to us.
- 7. But human liberty does consist in the sovereign power of choosing in any direction, in view of any motive or object of choice. In proof of this, I observe -
  - 1. Nothing else than this can be liberty. For we are conscious that action is compelled or necessitated by choice.
  - 2. To force or necessitate volition (were this possible) is as inconsistent with liberty, as to force action against choice. If I should seize your hand and put a dagger in it, and compel you to stab a man, this action is not yours, but mine. But suppose I had power to force your will to act on your muscles, and should compel you to will to stab a man, and the muscular action and stabbing should follow of necessity, from your volitions, this action would no more properly be your own than if I forced your muscles contrary to your will.
  - 3. We just as certainly know that we are free in this sense as we know that we exist, or that we choose at all. Consciousness gives us not only our existence as a fact, our mental states and acts as facts, but it gives us absolutely the freedom or necessity of our acts. Hence of some acts and states of mind, we say with certainty I could not help it, because we are conscious of being in the most proper sense involuntary in those states of mind. Consciousness always gives us not only our acts and mental states, but also the fact of their freedom or their necessity. And every man knows, when he has chosen in any direction, in view of an object of choice, that, all the circumstances being the same, he was able to choose or might have chosen the opposite.

- 4. That this is true is manifest from the universal affirmation of praise and blame-worthiness in respect to our moral actions. No man can, by any possibility, blame or praise himself or any body else, except upon the assumption that under the circumstances he might have chosen differently.
- 5. No man can really doubt the liberty of the will in this sense, and still affirm praise or blame-worthiness of any act.
- We have seen then that liberty cannot consist in outward action for, consciousness affirms that this is directly necessitated by choice.
- 6. Liberty cannot consist in feeling or emotion, for consciousness testifies that our feelings are involuntary states of mind--that feelings are not acts or states of the will, but of the sensibility. We cannot exercise feelings and emotions directly as we do volitions or choices. If we desire to feel upon any subject, we direct our attention to a consideration of that subject, and corresponding feelings exist in the mind of course, just as naturally as we experience the sensation of vision when we direct our eyes to an object of sight. But we can never directly will emotions or feelings into existence. Nor can we suppress them when they do exist, only by diverting our attention and thoughts from the objects that produce them. Feelings then are always indirectly necessitated or promoted by choice. Human liberty then cannot consist in the feelings.

It cannot consist in acts or states of the Intelligence, or in acts or states of the Sensibility, but must consist in the sovereign power of willing or choosing in any direction, in view of an object of choice.

#### **IV. To what acts and states of mind moral responsibility extends.**

- 1. The law of God is the rule of moral action, and the measure of its claims is the measure of moral responsibility.
- 2. The law of God levels its claims to the present ability of every subject of God's moral government. Its language is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." The true meaning of this law is that every moral being shall consecrate all his powers, whatever they are, at the present moment, to the service of God. Our consciousness informs us that by willing we control the acts and states of the Intellect--that we think, reason, judge, and affirm by voluntarily controlling the attention of our mind. Consciousness also testifies that we feel by directing our attention to objects calculated to excite feeling, and that we act by willing to act. Thus by legislating over the voluntary power of the mind, the lawgiver proposes to secure the entire consecration of the whole being to the great ends of benevolence.

But the thought which I wish to impress here is, that the law levels its claims to present ability. The law does not say, love the Lord thy God with the strength you possessed when you was [sic.] a child, and serve Him only with the powers you then had, but with all the powers you at present have. If your capacity to serve God, and to promote the

great ends of benevolence, has been increased, either by the grace of God or by their diligent use and development in the exercise of your own agency, the law does not satisfy itself with claiming the measure of obedience you might have rendered before this increase of ability, but requires that all your present strength and power shall be completely and unreservedly consecrated to God. So on the other hand, if your ability has been in any way diminished, either by your own act or in any other way, the law requires of you nothing more than that whatever power is left should be consecrated unreservedly and perfectly to God. If your ability has been abridged by your own fault, you are guilty for thus abridging it, and for this you may be punished. But you cannot be held responsible for not doing what you are no longer able to do. For example, suppose it were my duty last week to visit and warn a certain sinner to flee from the wrath to come, but the man is now dead and beyond my reach. For not warning him when I had opportunity I am guilty. But I am now under no obligation to warn him, for the simple reason that I am naturally unable to do so. I may justly be punished for my former neglect, but I cannot be held responsible for not warning him at the present time. If I cut off a hand, I can no longer be required to use it, though I may be guilty for cutting it off, and held responsible for that. In such cases, God requires repentance for the act that abridged our capacity, but in no case requires that which has become naturally impossible.

When a man loses the ability to pay his debts, and that too by his own fault, he is no longer under a moral obligation to pay them any faster than he has power to do so. He may be punished for rendering himself unable, but can no more be under a moral obligation to pay them while unable, than to warn a man who is dead, to flee from the wrath to come. The reason why he is no more under moral obligation in the one case than in the other is precisely the same, namely, that he has no power to do so.

So if a man becomes deranged by his own fault, he is not a moral agent while deranged, and his great sin lies in having made himself deranged.

The spirit of the legal maxim that a man shall not take advantage of his own wrong, is that the guilt of the act which incapacitates a man for duty, is equal to the guilt of all the default of which it is the cause.

It is maintained by some that the law of God does not limit its claims to present ability, but that it requires the same degree of service now, the same amount of love and zeal, and consequent usefulness in us that it might have required had we never curtailed our ability by sinning, but on the contrary had fully developed our powers by perfect and perpetual obedience. To this I answer,

- (1.) That it must be, and so far as I know is admitted by those who hold this doctrine, that to render this degree of service is naturally impossible, in this state of existence.
- (2.) That the law might just as reasonably require that we should undo all that we have done, or make up for our default by future works of supererogation, both of which are equally impossible. If the law may require the one, notwithstanding it is naturally impossible, it may with equal propriety and justice require the other.

- (3.) If the same degree of service could be required now that might have been rendered had we never sinned, obedience to the law of God is naturally impossible in this state. But there is no reason from the Bible or philosophy to believe, that that obedience, in the case of those who have lived in sin any portion of their lives, will ever be possible. Every one understands that men know much less of God, and are therefore naturally able to love Him much less and to render Him a much less effectual service than they might have done had they always employed their powers of moral agency aright. And if any one affirms that the saint in heaven will not be correspondingly unable to render the same amount of service that he might have done had he never sinned, the burden of proof is wholly upon him who makes the affirmation.
  
- (4.) That the gospel or any thing else can so change our powers, as to make us able to perform, in any world, all that we might have done had we never sinned, is a sheer assumption.

So of our ignorance. We cannot be under obligation to do that of which we are entirely ignorant, although our ignorance is our fault. James 4:17; "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Here it is as fully implied as possible that if a man does not know to do good he is not under obligation to do it. Our obligation is first to know what duty is and then to do it. To do that of which we are entirely ignorant is naturally impossible and can no more be morally binding upon us than it is to warn a dead man. Nor does it alter the case if our ignorance is our fault. The sin lies in being ignorant, and not in omitting to do that of which we have no knowledge. Therefore the spirit of the legal maxim, "Ignorantia legis non excusat," is that the guilt of wilful ignorance is equal to all the default of which it is the cause, and not that a man can be under moral obligation to perform impossibilities.

If the law requires the same amount of love and service that we might have rendered had we acquired all the knowledge possible, I see not how any saint in heaven can ever perfectly obey, for it will always remain true that he might have known numerous truths and relations more than at any given time he will know, had he not sinned in neglecting to know the truth. So that if the law require at present, and will forever require, all of every moral being that might have been required had he never sinned, it must remain true forever, not only that every saint on earth, but for all that appears, that every saint in heaven, will forever continue to fall short of rendering the obedience the law requires, and therefore live eternally in sin.

It is not a little curious and wonderful, that the same mind, as is often the case, should maintain the doctrine of natural ability in man to do all his duty, and yet that it is the duty of every individual to render the same service to God, in kind and in degree, that might have been rendered had he never sinned, and still admit that this degree of service, in this state, is naturally impossible. I not unfrequently meet with persons who call themselves new school men, who strongly contend for the doctrine of natural ability to do all God requires, and who will insist on men's being entirely holy, and urge and command the Church to forsake all sin, and yet inconsistently and absurdly maintain that to forsake all sin, and entirely to obey the law would imply the rendering of the same degree of service that they might have rendered had they never sinned, which they themselves admit to be impossible. I had in substance, the following



conversation with a brother.

Do you believe in the doctrine of natural ability--that men are able to do all that God requires of them? Yes, he replied, and I insist as much as you do, upon their doing all their duty and being entirely holy. I asked again--Do you believe that doing their whole duty and being entirely holy implies entire obedience to the law of God? Yes, be sure I do. And you believe that men are naturally able to do this? Yes, was his reply, and I insist upon it as much as you do. I then asked, "Do you believe that the law of God levels its claims to the present ability of men, so that men are entirely able perfectly to obey? No, he replied, and I think there is your error. You so explain the law as to bring it down to the present ability of man. How else, I asked, should I do? If I insist upon man's natural ability perfectly to obey it, am I not bound so to expound it as to level its claims to their natural ability? But what do you do? Do you believe that the law of God requires of a man just that degree of love and service and efficiency that he might have rendered had he never sinned? Yes, said he, and this is the very point where we differ. I exalt the law, and maintain that God requires that every moral agent, however long he has sinned, however ignorant he may be, and how much soever he may have curtailed his natural ability by sin, should render the same degree of service he would have done had he never sinned; while you, he continued, still addressing me, so expound the law as to level its claims to the creature's present natural ability. And, my brother, I asked, which is most consistent. I so expound the law as to level its claims to the present natural ability of the subject, and then consistently urge him up to immediate and perfect obedience. You maintain that he is able perfectly to obey, but yet that the law requires that which you confess to be naturally impossible, and then absurdly call upon him to perform that which is by your own thus showing naturally impossible. Now what consistency or candor is there in your professing to believe in his natural ability to do all his duty, and then maintain that the law requires natural impossibilities, and all at the same breath denounce him for not keeping the whole law; maintaining that he is able to keep it, and yet inconsistently contending that it requires that which you confess to be naturally impossible? You are bound, as an honest man, to give up the doctrine of natural ability; to publish to the world that men are entirely unable to obey the law of God; and no longer insult their intelligence and outrage their sense of justice, by requiring them to perfectly obey it; or else so to interpret it as to bring obedience within the limit of their natural ability, and cease to denounce those as heretics who consistently and conscientiously do this. I say that you are bound to do this.

And here let me ask, if it is not a shame and a sin for persons to hold and teach the doctrine of natural ability perfectly to obey the law--that the law requires natural impossibilities--call upon men to universally and perfectly to obey the law on pain of eternal death--and accuse those of being heretics and far gone in error, who are consistent enough, while they maintain the doctrine of natural ability, to maintain also that the law levels its claims to the present ability of men, and for this reason call upon all men, every where, unreservedly and perfectly to obey it?

The very language and spirit of the law manifestly levels its claims to present human ability. The question therefore is what are men naturally able to do or avoid? Observe, the point of inquiry before us now is, to what acts and states of mind does moral responsibility extend. As I have shown that the law is the standard and that it levels its claims to present ability, the true inquiry is what acts and states of mind are possible to men, or what acts and states of mind can be avoided by them? We have

already seen that consciousness gives us the phenomena of our own minds; and that whatever we know with certainty we know through the medium of our own consciousness. It teaches us that the will is the controlling faculty of the mind--that volition necessitates outward action. Volition also necessitates thought, feeling or emotion by directing the attention of the mind to subjects of thought and to objects calculated to excite emotion. Consciousness then teaches us that whatever is possible to man he can do by willing, and any thing that does not follow the act of his will is naturally impossible to him. If he cannot do it by willing and endeavor, and by sincerely intending and aiming to do it, it is naturally impossible to him. Consequently man cannot be responsible for any thing which he cannot do or avoid, by willing and endeavoring to do or avoid it. For example: If I will to move and my muscles do not obey volition, muscular action is impossible to me. If I will to think and thought does not follow, if I will to feel and direct my attention to corresponding objects and emotion does not follow, thought and emotion at the time are impossible to me. In short, whatever does not follow volition directly or indirectly as the natural and necessary result of volition, is impossible to me. So if I will to avoid any thing whatever, and the thing follows in spite of my volition, it is unavoidable by me. If by will and endeavor I cannot avoid it, the thing is necessary in such a sense that I am not responsible for its occurrence. Man therefore is not responsible,

1. For his nature being what it is;
2. Nor for the existence of the constitutional appetites and propensities;
3. Nor for the existence of the appetites or propensities under the appropriate circumstances of our being;
4. But he is responsible for their guidance, control and subjection to the law of God so far as they are subject to the control of the will.

But to the law and the testimony. The law of God is the rule, and by it we know to what acts and states of mind moral responsibility extends.

1. The law of God is in spirit a unit. Love, or benevolence, is the fulfilling of the whole law. This is repeatedly asserted in the Bible, that all the law is fulfilled in one word.
2. The love which constitutes obedience to the law of God is an act or state of the will, and consists in supreme, disinterested benevolence. This is all that the law requires; and man is responsible, and can be responsible only for this state of the will. If he is perfectly, and universally, and disinterestedly benevolent, he perfectly obeys the law of God. Whatever emotions, thoughts, acts, or states of mind do not follow from this state of the will, as its natural and necessary sequence, are naturally impossible to him, and therefore moral obligation cannot extend to them. Whatever thoughts, emotions, acts, or states of mind come to pass, notwithstanding this perfectly benevolent state of the will, he has no power to avoid, and therefore such acts, emotions, and states of mind, can have no moral character. To maintain the contrary of these positions, is not only to set all true philosophy aside, but is also a flat denial of the Bible itself.
3. It is abundantly taught, and again and again asserted in the Bible, that love, or

benevolence, is the fulfilling of the law--that all the law is fulfilled in one word, love. And it should ever be borne in mind, and well considered by all men, that the Bible takes the very same ground upon this subject with true philosophy. Benevolence is good-willing. It is willing the good of being for its own sake, and on account of its intrinsic value; and, consequently, it is the very nature of benevolence to will every good according to its relative value, as perceived by the mind.

4. Every mind is to be guided by its own best judgment in respect to the relative value of different interests, except where God has revealed their relative value; in which case, this revelation is to decide us. But in applying the great principle of the law of God to human conduct, we are manifestly to be guided, not by the views which God has, nor which angels have, nor which any other beings except ourselves have, of the relative value of different interests. But we must judge for ourselves, under the best light afforded us, what is the relative value of the different interests with which we are surrounded, and how the law of God requires us to demean ourselves in respect to them. And every being wills right, or just as the law of God requires him to will, when he regards and treats every interest just as its relative value, as understood by his own mind, demands. When he wills every good for its own sake, and the promotion of every interest according to its relative value in his own best judgment, he fully obeys the law of God.

5. We have seen that the will necessitates thought, action, and feeling. Therefore, moral character cannot strictly belong to thought, action, or feeling. If I will to stab a man, moral character does not attach to the dagger--to the hand that holds it--to the muscle that moves it--but to the mind in the exercise of willing. The same is true of thought or feeling. Mind is strictly responsible only for its voluntary acts. And the moral character of all acts and states of mind is found in that act of the will that produced them by a natural necessity.

6. We have seen, and know by our own consciousness, that man is free and sovereign. He is, therefore, responsible for any act or state of mind that can be produced or avoided, directly or indirectly by willing and endeavor, and for nothing more or less. For the plain reason that every thing, more or less, is naturally impossible to him. Hence, the law of God makes all virtue to consist in benevolence. And if the Bible did not represent all virtue as consisting in benevolence, a correct philosophy, as learned from our own consciousness, would compel us to reject its authority.

7. If the will, then, is conformed to the law of God nothing can be morally wrong for the time being. For whatever does not follow by natural necessity, from this state of the will, is naturally impossible to us. So, on the other hand, if the will is wrong, nothing can be morally right; for, whatever acts or states of mind result from a wrong choice, by a natural necessity, have the same character, so far as they have any character at all, with the choice that produced them. This is the philosophy of total depravity. We truly say, that if a man's heart is wrong every thing that he does is wrong. By his heart we mean his choice, intention, purpose. If his intention or choice be selfish, nothing can be morally right; because his character is as his intention is; and it is naturally impossible that the

emotions and actions which follow from a selfish intention should be morally right. If this is not true philosophy, then the doctrine of the total depravity of the unregenerate is not true.

8. The doctrine of total depravity as consisting in the selfish state of the will, and of entire holiness, as consisting in the benevolent state of the will, must stand or fall together. If any thing about a man can be sinful, while his will is in a perfectly benevolent state, it must be true that when the will is in a perfectly selfish state, some things or many things in the same mind may be at the same time truly holy. And if a man can be all the while sinning, while his heart or will is in a state of disinterested benevolence, he can all the while be partly holy, while his heart or will is unregenerate and in a state of entire selfishness. If the emotions and actions of a man whose will is in a perfectly benevolent state can be sinful, then the emotions or actions of a man who is in a perfectly selfish state can be holy. So also, if the actions and emotions which follow from a selfish state of the will must of necessity be sinful, so the actions which follow from a benevolent state of the will must in the same sense be holy.

9. Let it be remembered, therefore, that whoever maintains that present sinfulness can be predicated of a man in a perfectly benevolent state of the will, must also admit that holiness may be predicated of one in a perfectly selfish state of the will. This is the doctrine of the Bible, and the doctrine of true philosophy, that true benevolence, or the willing of every good according to its relative value, as perceived by the mind and for its own sake, is the whole of virtue. God's interest is to be willed as the supreme good, and every other interest according to its relative value, so far as we are capable of knowing. And this is holiness, and nothing else is.

## **V. What constitutes sin.**

- 1. We have seen that the primary faculties of the human mind are Intellect, Sensibility, and Will.
- 2. We have seen that the mind, in its voluntary actions, has respect to motives--that it is not compelled to choose, but that in every instance of choice it is free and sovereign.
- 3. We have seen also, that virtue and vice, or holiness and sin, lie in the choice, or voluntary actions of the mind, and not in outward actions or involuntary states of mind.
- 4. I now observe, that motives are addressed to the mind, either through the Intelligence or the Sensibility, and in no other way. By this I mean that by the use of the Intellect, or through the medium of the feelings, does the mind perceive any thing which it accounts an object of choice. The Sensibility or feelings, invite the will or mind to seek the gratification of the appetites or propensities as an end, or for the mere sake of the gratification. The Intelligence points to God, and his law, and the Reason affirms that the mind ought to obey God, rather than to seek the gratification of the Sensibility. Through the Intelligence is revealed to the mind the existence, character, and claims of God. And the law of universal benevolence is seen by the Intelligence to be obligatory. Now to will in accordance with the impressions of the Sensibility, and seek as the great end of life the gratification of the propensities, is what the Bible denominates the

"carnal mind," or "minding of the flesh." This is the very essence of sin. It is enmity against God. Let it be understood, then, that sin consists in the committal of the will, or in the devotion by the will of the whole being to self-interest or self-gratification. This choice of our own gratification as the supreme end of life is the wicked heart, and all the forms of sin are only developments, and necessary results of this supreme choice or intention of the mind. This is total moral depravity--enmity against God--entire consecration to self-gratification.

#### **VI. What holiness is.**

- 1. It is, in a word, the obedience of the will or heart to the law of God as this law lies revealed in the Intelligence. I have just said that sin consists in the supreme devotion of the will, and consequently of all the powers of the mind to self-gratification. On the contrary, holiness consists in the supreme devotion of the will, and consequently of the whole being to the glory of God, and the good of the universe. This entire consecration to the glory of God and the good of the universe is the whole of virtue in any being, and in every world.

I now come to a direct examination of the text, and inquire,

#### **VII. What the will of God is.**

- 1. The will of God is expressed in his law. He is himself in the same state of mind in which He requires all moral beings to be; that is, in a state of universal and disinterested benevolence. Holiness is a term that expresses the moral character of this state of his will or heart. Love or benevolence is the fulfilling of the law; and conformity of will in any being to the law of universal love is holiness.
- 2. We have seen that the will of God as expressed in his law, is that every interest shall be willed for its own sake and according to its relative value. This is the will of God, that moral agents should be universally and perfectly benevolent.

#### **VIII. How is the will of God done in Heaven?**

We are directed in the text to pray that the will of God may be done on earth as it is done in Heaven. In answer, then, to this inquiry, let me say,

- 1. Perfectly and universally, so far as it is known.
- 2. As they are not omniscient they must be of course continually learning new relations, and consequently their obligations must continually increase, corresponding to their increased knowledge.
- 3. The obedience of heaven, therefore, must keep pace with their increasing knowledge, and therefore its inhabitants must continually grow in holiness.

I come now to a fundamental inquiry,

#### **IX. What is implied in a sincere offering of this petition to God?**

What is the real state of mind in which an individual must be, sincerely to offer this prayer?

- 1. It implies that the petitioner has confidence in the wisdom of God. If he did not believe that God was wise he could not innocently pray that his will might be universally done.
- 2. It implies confidence in his benevolence. If God is not benevolent, we have no right to pray that his will may be universally done. And if we do not believe Him to be universally and perfectly benevolent, we have no right to offer such a petition.
- 3. It implies that the petitioner believes, that the petition is according to the will of God. In other words, that it is the will of God that his will should be done as perfectly on earth as it is done in heaven.
- 4. It implies a belief in the petitioner, that it is possible that the will of God should be done on earth as it is done in heaven. For if he does not believe it possible, he cannot sincerely pray that it may be so.
- 5. It implies the belief that grace has made provision for his doing the will of God in earth as it is done in heaven. If he does not believe that such a thing is possible or that grace has made provision for the attainment of any such state, he mocks God in making such a request. And if he does not believe it to be according to the will of God, that persons are to attain to such a state on earth, it is downright rebellion in him to ask it.
- 6. It implies a willingness that God should require of all men just what He does require, for surely if the petitioner does not heartily consent to the requirements of God, he cannot sincerely pray that He may be universally obeyed.
- 7. It implies that the petitioner is willing that God should require of him in all respects just what He does require. For how can he sincerely say thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven, unless he is willing that God should require of him just what He does require.
- 8. As we have seen that willing and doing are connected by a natural necessity, and that a man naturally and necessarily acts as he wills, the sincere offering of this petition implies that the petitioner really does the will of God so far as he knows it, as really as they do in heaven. If the will is in sincere conformity with the true spirit of the petition, every thing else that is under the control of the will must of necessity correspond with this state of the will. Consequently whenever a soul is in such a state as to offer this petition to God sincerely, he must, for the time being, be really doing the will of God, as truly, and in his measure as perfectly, as they are in heaven.
- 9. It implies that the petitioner holds himself and all that he has, as fully and sacredly and practically at the disposal of God as do the inhabitants of heaven, so far as he knows the will of God.
- 10. It implies that he actually does all in his power to promote this end, as really, so far as he

has knowledge, as they do in heaven.

- 11. It implies a state of will or heart in perfect conformity with the will of God, so far as he knows his will.
- 12. It implies the same perfection for the time being, and according to his knowledge, that is in God, and in the inhabitants of heaven. Do not start at this, for the whole of God's moral perfection lies in the benevolent state of his will. And whoever wills in perfect accordance with his will, so far as his will is known, whether on earth or in heaven, is in his measure, as really perfect as God is.
- 13. This state of mind is not a submission to the will of God as an abstraction, but is true disinterested benevolence. It is the very state of mind required by the law of God.

**X. Nothing short of a state of mind that can and does offer this petition sincerely, is true religion.**

- 1. Nothing short of this state of will or heart is conformity to the nature of things.
- 2. Every thing short of this state of the will is rebellion, and is virtually saying, "Let not the will of the Lord be universally done."
- 3. As this state of mind consists in willing every good for its own sake, and according to its relative value, nothing more or less than this state of mind can, by any possibility, be virtue.
- 4. God cannot allow any thing less than this to be virtue, nor can He require any thing more. As his will is in all things perfectly right, He can require nothing less than that every moral agent should be entirely conformed to it, so far as he knows it. He can never discharge any being from this obligation, nor accept that as obedience and call it virtue, that is not precisely according to his will. If it is not according to his will, it must be opposed to his will, and can, by no possibility, be true religion.
- 5. Coming into this state of mind is what we mean by conversion or regeneration. It is a change in the ultimate choice or intention of the mind, in other words, from selfishness, or the choice of self-gratification as the great end of life, to disinterested benevolence. This and nothing short of this, is regeneration or the new birth. It is and must be the beginning of true religion. This is holiness. It is sanctification, and the uninterrupted continuance of it is what is intended by a state of sanctification. And if, as new relations are perceived, the will comes into immediate conformity to all these new relations, and remains in this state of conformity, such a mind is in entire harmony with the will of God, and can sincerely say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."

**REMARKS.**

1. This petition in the mouth of a selfish being is hypocrisy. It must be in all cases downright hypocrisy for a selfish man to offer this petition to God.

2. This petition is hypocrisy on the lips of any one whose will is not in entire and universal harmony with the will of God so far as that will is known. If there be any thing in which the will is not entirely conformed to the known will of God, in offering this petition, the petitioner is a hypocrite, and abuses, flatters, and mocks God.

3. We see what Christ intended by the command, "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." Many persons feel shocked at the idea of any one being even for a moment without sin in this life. And to expect to be, in any proper sense, perfect in this life is with them wholly out of the question. From the manner in which they speak of the subject of perfection, it would seem Christ's command to be perfect as God is perfect is a most extravagant requisition, and something which Christ did not so much as expect would be obeyed in this world. If they are consistent also they must suppose that in requiring us to offer this petition to God, He must have intended that we should use the language of hyperbole, and not that we should seriously expect or even suppose it possible that the will of God should be done on earth by any human being as it is done in heaven. But the truth is that Christ simply intended to require men to be truly religious. We have just seen that nothing short of that state of the will that is for the time being as perfectly conformed to the will of God as is the will of the inhabitants of heaven, can by any possibility be true religion. He meant therefore merely to say, be truly religious. Be what God requires you to be. Do not rebel in any thing against the will of God, but be upright, sincere, or perfect, which is the same thing. It is therefore, as I have before said, true that every moral being that can sincerely offer this prayer is, and must be, in his measure, for the time being, so far as the state of his heart is concerned, as perfect as God.

4. In another sense, every moral being in the universe comes infinitely short of being as perfect as God is. God's knowledge is infinite, and his will is entirely conformed to his infinite knowledge. The knowledge of every other being is finite, and conformity of will to finite knowledge must of necessity fall infinitely short of conformity of will to infinite knowledge.

5. Entire conformity of heart or will to all known truth, is moral perfection, in the only sense in which a moral being is ever perfect.

In a little child who had but one ray of light and the knowledge of but one moral truth in his mind, entire conformity of heart to that truth would be in him moral perfection. Nothing less in him could be virtue, and nothing more could be required. Whether one, ten, ten thousand, or ten thousand million truths and relations are apprehended by the mind, nothing short of conformity to them all can by any possibility be virtue. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." In God nothing can be virtue short of conformity to all the truth known to Him. The same is true of the highest moral agent as well as the lowest. And nothing more or less is properly intended by moral perfection than universal conformity to all known truth.

6. Let not the distinction between perfection as a state and perfection as an act be overlooked. The thing for which we are required to pray in the text, no doubt, is a state of perfection, or of entire conformity to the will of God, and that this may be as universal on earth as it is in heaven.

7. A state of mind that can habitually offer this petition must be in entire conformity to all known



truth, or in other words it must be in that state intended by entire consecration to God.

8. If the question be asked whether a state of entire sanctification is attainable in this life, let it be answered by inquiring whether a state of mind that can sincerely and habitually offer this petition to God, is attainable?

9. The petition for pardon in the Lord's prayer, must respect past sin, and cannot respect the state of mind in which this petition can be offered sincerely. For a man cannot be sinning while he is sincerely saying, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

10. What perfect mockery it is to teach thoughtless children to say the Lord's prayer and offer this petition. And what a dreadful influence it must have upon them to teach them to offer this prayer without instructing them with reference to its meaning, and informing them of the great wickedness of insincerity.

11. How this petition sounds as it is used in the Church service and repeated by hundreds and thousands of thoughtless sinners, who neither know nor care what they say. Many offer it and mean nothing by it; and some offer the petition and leave it for others to do the will of God, considering, it would seem, that it is their part to offer the petition, and leave it for others to live according to it.

12. The request for pardon is never lawful and acceptable to God, except only when the mind is in a state in which it can sincerely offer this petition. If this petition cannot be sincerely offered, and the soul cannot sincerely say "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," it is in a state of present rebellion against God, and therefore has no right to ask for forgiveness.

13. The great mass of professors of religion have, I fear, fallen entirely short of conceiving rightly of the nature of true religion, and it is high time that the subject were thoroughly investigated, and that the Lord's prayer in its true spirit and import should be deeply pondered by the Church, and the inquiry should be raised, what is implied in the sincere offering of this prayer to God. Unless these fundamental inquiries are started and pressed, until the Church come to an intelligent understanding of them, false hopes will continue to be cherished, and thousands of professing Christians will go down to hell.

## **Danger of Delusion**

Lecture II

August 17, 1842

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Heb. 3:1: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip."

In remarking upon this text, I shall attempt to show:

*I. What constitutes true religion.*

*II. That the true idea of religion is rare.*

*III. That the existence of the true idea of what constitutes religion is indispensable to the existence of true religion in the soul.*

*IV. The great danger of losing this idea.*

*V. How to retain the true idea, and the practice of true religion.*

### **I. What constitutes true religion.**

- 1. It does not consist in any course of outward action. Outward actions, when viewed apart from the intention of the mind, can have no moral character at all. They are always necessitated by the acts of the will. Therefore religion cannot consist in mere outward actions.
- 2. Moral character does not consist in inward emotions or mere feelings, for these are involuntary states of mind, produced by directing our attention to objects that excite these feelings, by a natural necessity. So that mere feeling or emotion cannot, in itself, possess moral character.
- 3. True religion cannot consist in opinion, or in holding any system of doctrine. Our opinions are the necessary result of giving or refusing our attention to evidence, and therefore can have no moral character in themselves.
- 4. True religion does not consist in desire as distinguished from choice. Men often desire what, upon the whole, they do not choose. But desire, as distinguished from choice, can have no moral character, because, it is an involuntary state of mind.
- 5. But true religion does consist in obedience to the law of God, or in living in conformity with our nature and relations. Universal reason affirms, and no one can doubt, that men are under a moral obligation to understand, as far as possible, their nature and relations, and to conform to them.

Reason also affirms the obligation of all moral beings to exercise disinterested benevolence. By disinterested benevolence is intended the willing of the highest good of being in general, for its own sake--that every good is to be regarded, willed, and treated, according to its relative value, so far as we are able to understand its value. Disinterested

benevolence constitutes that which is required by the law of God, and is expressed in the term love. It is choice as distinguished from mere desire. It is willing, as distinguished from mere emotion or feeling. It is willing good for its own sake, as distinguished from willing the good of others for some selfish reason, that is, it is willing them good of being as an end, and not as a means of promoting our own good. It is willing universal good as opposed to willing partial good. It is willing every interest according to its relative value, because it is the willing of good for its own sake, and on account of its intrinsic value. It is synonymous with ultimate intention. By ultimate intention is intended the subjective motive of the mind, or the mind's choice of an ultimate end, to the promotion of which it devotes itself.

Let it then be understood that virtue, or true religion consists always in the supreme ultimate intention of the mind--that a man's character is as his subjective motive, or ultimate intention is. The Bible again and again affirms that all the law is fulfilled in one word, love. And this love, when the term is properly defined and understood, is synonymous with intention, or disinterested benevolence. We therefore judge rightly when we say, that a man's character is as his motive or intention is.

Lest it should be thought from what I have said, that outward action and inward feeling have no necessary connection with true religion, and that it may exist without corresponding feelings and actions, I remark, that the actions of the will, as we know by our own consciousness, necessitate outward actions. If I intend to go to a certain place as soon as I can, that intention will beget those volitions that give motion to the muscles. Therefore while the intention exists, corresponding outward actions must exist. So intentions necessitate corresponding feelings. The attention of the mind is governed by the will. If I intend to feel upon a certain subject, I direct my attention to it, and corresponding feelings are the necessary result. Therefore where intentions exist, corresponding feelings must exist. It should be observed, however, that sometimes outward actions and corresponding feelings cannot be produced by efforts of the will; for example, outward actions cannot be produced, when there is a paralysis of the nerves of voluntary motion. In such cases, the muscles will not obey volition. So where the excitability of the mind is exhausted, emotions will not be the necessary result of giving the attention of the mind to certain subjects which in other cases would produce them. But except in such cases, feeling and outward action are the certain and necessary results of intention.

Where, therefore, religion exists, it will of necessity manifest itself in corresponding outward actions and inward feelings.

## **II. The true idea of what constitutes true religion is rare.**

This is evident,

- 1. From the fact that the common notion of men seems to be that true religion consists in emotion or feeling. Consequently when they relate their religious experience, they almost universally give an account of their feelings, or emotions, and so speak of them as to show that

they suppose these to constitute religion. And nothing is more common, than to hear persons, in giving an account of what they call their religious experience, pass over entirely, and not so much as once allude to that which constitutes true religion. It is most manifest in such cases, that if they indeed have any true religion, they do not know in what it consists--that if their ultimate intention is really holy, and if they do truly intend to glorify God, and promote the highest good of being, they do not look upon this intention as constituting true religion, but suppose their religion to consist in that class of feelings which are produced by their intention.

- 2. It is common, and almost universal, for professors of religion to speak of it as something to be experienced by us, rather than to be done, something in which we are passive rather than active. This shows that they do not consider religion as consisting in intention; for who would speak of experiencing an intention? Does any one ever speak of experiencing a choice?
- 3. It has been a common and almost universal idea that sin and holiness can co-exist in the same mind. But if true religion or holiness consists in supreme or ultimate intention, sin can by no means co-exist with it; for certainly a moral being cannot, at the same time, have a supremely benevolent intention, and a selfish intention. If virtue consists in intention, so must sin. Sin consists universally in a supremely selfish intention, or in aiming at the gratification of self, as the supreme end of life. Selfishness then and true religion, as I have more than once said in former lectures, consist in opposite ultimate intentions, and cannot co-exist in the same mind. When therefore it is supposed that sin and holiness can co-exist in the same mind, it is manifest that the true idea of true religion is not before the mind.
- 4. The current phraseology of men shows that they suppose religion can really exist in the mind in a dormant state--that like a coal of fire covered up by ashes, it can remain smothered and inactive, and yet be true religion. It is common for all classes of persons to speak of having religion, but not in exercise--that their religion is not active--that it is not in exercise, &c. Now this phraseology shows that at the time they have not the true idea of true religion in their minds, for true religion is nothing else but action, voluntary action, choice, intention. Intention is an act of the mind, and true religion is a supreme ultimate intention, or act of the mind. To talk, then, of a religion not in exercise, a religion not active, is to talk stark nonsense. And when persons use such language, they show to a demonstration, that, at the time, they have not the true idea of religion in their minds.
- 5. It is very common to hear persons speak of religion as consisting in mere desire, in distinction from choice. Choice always controls the outward conduct. But mere desire, as distinguished from choice, never does. Many persons speak of desiring to live, and act better than they do, and speak of those desires which do not produce corresponding action, as constituting religion. Now, this is a sad and fatal mistake.
- 6. Only certain gross sins are generally regarded as being inconsistent with the existence of true holiness. It seems to be generally understood that habitual drunkenness, licentiousness, lying, theft, murder, &c., would demonstrate that a person had no true religion. But it does not seem to be at all the general opinion that one form of habitual selfishness is just as inconsistent with true religion, as another. Men may transact business on selfish principles; they may live in vanity, in

various forms of self-indulgence, and these forms of selfishness may be habitual with them, and yet they may regard themselves, and be regarded by others, as being truly religious. But this cannot be. A man can no more be truly religious, and transact business upon selfish principles, and for selfish reasons, that he could be truly religious, and be drunk every day in the week; for it makes no difference, whether he devotes himself to the promotion of self-gratification in the form of obtaining wealth, or in the form of gratifying appetite for strong drink, or in other sensual indulgences. It matters not whether a woman devotes herself to dress, or to the gratification of licentious appetites. A vain woman can no more be religious than a licentious woman. It does not seem to be understood, or hardly so much as dreamed of by the Church in general, that one form of selfishness is just as inconsistent with true religion, as another; and that no form of selfishness whatever can consist with true religion.

- 7. It often happens that nearly all the reasons urged by ministers and others to induce men to be religious, are mere appeals to their selfishness. Now this shows that often-times religious teachers themselves, have not the true idea of religion developed in their own minds. I might appeal to my readers and ask you, is it common for you to hear true religion accurately defined? Do your teachers make such discriminations as generally to develop in the minds of their congregation, the true idea of what constitutes religion? I hope in many instances they do. And yet I am sure that in many instances they do not. It is the very general fault of religious teachers that they do not succeed in developing in the minds of their hearers the true idea of religion.
- 8. What is called "revival preaching" often consists very much in appeals to the sensibility of men, while it leaves entirely out of view the idea of what constitutes true religion. In such revivals men are not made disinterestedly benevolent. It is a revival of feeling and not of true religion. There are a great many excitements, often-times, and a great many professed converts, where the plea of disinterested benevolence is not developed, and scarcely a vestige of true religion exists. Every year I live, I am more and more impressed with this, and can have no confidence in the genuineness of those revivals in which the true idea of religion is not thoroughly developed, until it carries the will, and men become truly, disinterestedly benevolent.
- 9. Sin is often denounced without telling what it is. It is almost always spoken of as something different from selfishness. And when selfishness is spoken of at all as sin, it is only spoken of as being one form of sin. It often happens, that selfishness ceases to be regarded as sin, and very little will be said of it as constituting sin at all, whereas selfishness, under its various modifications, is the whole of sin.
- 10. Were not the true idea of what constitutes true religion rare, hopes could not possibly be entertained by nor for the great mass of professing Christians. If it were generally understood that religion is nothing else than supreme benevolent intention, that necessarily begets corresponding feeling and action--were it also generally understood that one form of habitual selfishness is just as inconsistent with true religion as another, and that the habitual existence of any form of selfishness whatever, is proof conclusive, of the absence of true religion, how impossible would it be that hopes should be entertained, either by or for the scores of selfish professors, that fill our churches.

- 11. The common old school notion that sin and holiness consist in the constitutional tastes, or appetites of the mind, and lie back of voluntary intention, is a demonstration that they have not the true idea of religion. By this I do not mean that none of them can be Christians, for they have the idea of supreme benevolent intention, but they do not understand that this constitutes true religion. I trust that many of them know by their own consciousness, what true devotedness to God is, but in theorizing, they make that to constitute virtue, which does not: and hold the "taste scheme," that is, that sin and holiness instead of consisting in choice or ultimate intention, lie in the involuntary appetites and propensities.
- 12. The words that represent the Christian graces are seldom understood by those that use them; for example, the term love, as used in the law of God, is generally spoken of, as if it meant a mere emotion, or feeling of the mind. Humility is spoken of, as if it consisted in a deep sense of unworthiness, whereas it consists in no such thing. Love, as we have seen, as used in the law of God, means disinterested benevolence. If humility consisted in a sense of unworthiness, the devil might be humble, and doubtless is. Convicted sinners might also be humble, and doubtless are, if this is humility. I scarcely ever in my life, heard a minister speak of humility as if he had any definitely developed idea of what it is. Humility must consist in a willingness to be known and appreciated according to our real character. The same mistakes are made in regard to repentance and faith. Repentance is generally spoken of as if it consisted in emotions of sorrow, whereas it consists in a change of mind, choice, or ultimate intention, and is precisely synonymous with a change of heart. Faith is very commonly spoken of as consisting either in mere intellectual conviction, or in a felt assurance of the truth of a proposition, whereas it consists in an act of the will, or in confiding, or committing the whole being to the influence of truth.
- 13. The fact that the 7th chapter of Romans has been so generally understood as descriptive of the Christian warfare, is evidence conclusive, that the true idea of true religion is rare. In that chapter the Apostle is speaking of a legal experience, as contrasted with a gospel experience, of which he proceeds to speak in the 8th chapter. And the fact that the Church have so generally stopped short, and claimed the 7th chapter, as descriptive of a Christian's experience, because it was their own experience, shows to what a limited extent the real idea of true religion has been developed.

I might adduce a great many other reasons, showing that the true idea of true religion is a rare idea: but I must pass to say,

### **III. That the true idea of religion is indispensable to the existence of true religion.**

By this, as I have already intimated, I do not mean, that persons may not be religious, and yet in theory make a mistake in regard to what constitutes real religion. But I do mean,

- 1. That unintelligent action has no moral character.
- 2. That the true knowledge of God consists in having correct ideas of Him.

- 3. God cannot be truly loved, worshipped, or served, any farther than He is truly known.
- 4. True religion, as we have seen, consists in the choice of a right end.
- 5. This end must be distinctly apprehended by the mind; that is, the idea must be distinctly developed and kept in view.
- 6. If this end be lost sight of, there can be no true religion; for if the end be not in view, the intention cannot be right. And as virtue consists in intention, it is self-evident, that where the true idea or end to be aimed at is not kept in view, there can be no true religion.

#### **IV. There is great danger of losing the true idea of true religion.**

This is evident,

- 1. From the fact that the true idea of religion is so rare.
- 2. All ages and nations have manifested a tendency to lose the true idea of God and of true religion. Even the Jews, who had the living oracles of God, had, before the come of Christ, almost entirely lost the true idea of religion, and supposed it to consist in outward works.
- 3. The selfishness of mankind creates in them a strong tendency to make religion consist in some modification of selfishness, and to overlook the fact, that religion consists in disinterested benevolence.
- 4. The selfishness of men creates in them a strong tendency to misunderstand the Bible. The Bible every where promises reward to virtue, and threatens vice with endless evil. But the Bible no where makes virtue to consist in aiming at the reward as an end. It always represents virtue as consisting in disinterested benevolence. Now as mankind are selfish, they are extremely liable to make escape from the penalty of sin, and the rewards of virtue, the great and most influential reasons for their attempts to be virtuous. They set up the rewards of virtue as an end--aim at getting to heaven--and set about the service of God for the sake of reward. But this is not virtue. It is only serving for the loaves and fishes. There is not a particle of true benevolence in it. It is amazing to see to what extent men set about what they call the service of God, from purely selfish motives, and really understand the Bible as an appeal to their selfishness.
- 5. Unconverted men are universally committed to the indulgence of their feelings rather than swayed by the affirmations of their reason, and decisions of their conscience. Consequently there is a strong tendency in them to consider religion as consisting in strongly excited feelings, rather than in conformity to the law of God as revealed in the reason.
- 6. The selfishness of men with which we are perpetually surrounded, tends strongly to divert the attention from that which constitutes true religion.
- 7. Among the millions of aims and intentions which men have, but one of them is virtue or true

religion. Christ said, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to death, and many there be which go in thereat: while strait, is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it." There is great emphasis in this truth. The wide gate and broad way includes every one that is actuated by any other than a disinterestedly benevolent spirit. While the narrow way includes those only who have a single eye, and are living for one end, namely, the highest good of universal being.

- 8. In the text the Apostle says, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip." By slip, as it is rendered in the margin, is intended to leak out, to escape. Men are extremely apt to act without considering their ultimate motive, or the great and fundamental reason of their conduct, and therefore to be entirely selfish, without understanding that they are so.
- 9. Men constantly hear religion represented, in a great variety of ways, as consisting in feelings, in outward courses of conduct, and in almost every thing else, than supreme disinterestedly benevolent intention.
- 10. Men dislike to retain the true idea of religion just as they dislike to retain the true idea of God.

#### **V. How to retain the true idea and practice of true religion.**

- 1. Inquire after the fundamental reason of your conduct. Reader, do nothing, and commit yourself to no course of action, without raising the inquiry, what is the great fundamental reason by which you are actuated; and suffer not yourself to go forward without the testimony of your own consciousness, that you are disinterestedly benevolent in what you do.
- 2. Keep Christ's life and temper before you as the great exemplar, the great and powerful instrument of making you benevolent as He was. Faith in the truths of the gospel, unwavering confidence that those things recorded of Christ are true, gives the life and example of Christ the greatest power over you to make you benevolent like Himself.
- 3. Pray much in the Holy Ghost, and remember, that unless you pray in the Spirit, you are sure to let slip the true idea and practice of true religion.
- 4. In order to pray in the Holy Ghost, you must watch unto prayer. Unless you watch, you will be sure to grieve the Spirit of God away.
- 5. Be sure that you neglect no duty. Remember that neglect is just as absolutely a violation of the law of God, as any positive crime is.
- 6. Maintain a consciousness that you do every thing for the glory of God. This is perfectly practicable. A worldly man is conscious of the great end he has in view in all his ways. He knows why he labors and toils, why he refuses to make this expenditure, and why he makes that speculation.



- 7. Neither engage nor continue in any business, but for the glory of God. Unless you are conscious that it may be pursued and that you are actually pursuing it, for the glory of God, you cannot be truly religious.
- 8. Aim not merely at being useful, but at being so in the highest degree. If you are disinterestedly benevolent, it will follow, of course, that you will prefer a greater to a less good, and not satisfy yourself with doing some good, when it is in your power to do more. Therefore remember that unless in your own honest estimation, you are living so as, upon the whole, to promote the highest good you are capable of promoting, you are not in a truly religious state of mind, and if you think you are, it is because you have let slip the true idea of what constitutes true religion. Such inquiries as these should be started and honestly answered. Is my present employment one in which I can be most useful? If not, is there any opening in providence for me to change it for one in which I can be more useful? And in settling these questions, be careful that you are not influenced by any selfish considerations. So on the other hand, take an enlightened view of the subject, before you decide to change your employment, if it be one that is lawful in itself. If your employment be one that is inconsistent with the highest interests of mankind; nay, if it is not one that is useful, you are to abandon it at all events. But if it be one that is useful to men, whether you should exchange it for one that is more useful, must depend upon your qualifications, and all the circumstances of the case. If in deciding all these questions, "your eye is single, your whole body shall be full of light"; but if your eye is evil, in other words, if you are selfish, you will wander on in perpetual error. You have already lost sight of the true idea of religion, and fallen from all real virtue.
- 9. If you have not done so, make a public profession of religion. Remember that Christ expressly requires this of you, and that you cannot live in the neglect of this duty, when you have an opportunity to perform it, and still retain the idea and practice of true religion. The very neglect is itself disobedience, and is inconsistent with the existence of true religion.
- 10. In making a profession of religion, be sure that you are not selfish in joining one or another particular church or denomination. No doubt, as a matter of fact, some persons are guilty of heart apostacy in the very act of making a profession of religion--in uniting with the visible church they actually apostatize from God. Sometimes they are influenced by political motives, sometimes by pecuniary considerations, having an eye upon how their relation to such and such a congregation, will affect their business transactions. Sometimes they are influenced by fear of expense in supporting the gospel, if connected with a particular church or congregation, or, on the other hand, by the hope that in uniting with a particular denomination, their church expenses will be small. Oftentimes, in making a profession of religion, persons are influenced by a regard to the respectability of the church or denomination to which they attach themselves. And indeed there are multitudes of selfish considerations, by which you are in danger of being influenced, and by which, if you are influenced, you really apostatize from God, in the very act of making a public profession of supreme attachment to Him. One of the great reasons why many professed converts immediately backslide, after making a profession of religion, is, that in selecting the church or denomination to which they attach themselves, they were influenced by some selfish consideration, and actually lost both the idea and practice of true religion in making a public profession of it. Be sure, then, always in making a profession of religion, see to it that you are

honest, that your eye is single to the glory of God, that you aim at doing the highest good in your power.

- 11. Avoid sectarianism. Sectarianism is as far as possible from the spirit of true religion. And all the arguments by which the dividing of the Church into different denominations, and continuing them in this state, are supported, are utterly futile, as might easily be shown, were this the place for the discussion.

In recommending it to you, however; to join some church, it is of course expected that you will join some of the existing denominations. The thing intended here, is, that you avoid a sectarian spirit, that you love all Christians as such, that you have no zeal to build up a party, but that you live for the universal Church, the world, and the glory of God.

- 12. Avoid every form and also the spirit of papacy. There is an alarming tendency in the different [P]rotestant denominations to adopt and carry out the fundamental error of papacy. The grand mistake of papacy is this: It assumes that the Bible is not a sufficiently popular standard of morals for the multitude. And that therefore there must be some authoritative exposition of its meaning. It assumes that if the unlearned are allowed to form their own opinions of the meaning of the Bible, it will led to endless divisions and heresies. Consequently the Pope and the decisions of councils were set up as authoritative standards by which the Bible is to be interpreted. The next step of course was to take the Bible out of the hands of common people inasmuch as it had been assumed that they were unable to understand it, and were therefore not allowed to interpret it for themselves. Consequently any thing, with papists, is heresy, that is not consistent with this standard, and in trials for heresy papists are not allowed to appeal from those human standards to the holy scriptures, inasmuch as by the general consent of papists, those standards are an authoritative exposition of what the Bible means. This I say is the fundamental error of papacy. And as I said, there is a growing tendency among all [P]rotestant denominations to adopt and carry out this very error. For example: take the Presbyterian confession of faith. That does not in itself, assume to be an infallible standard. But Presbyterians treat it as such, speak of it as such, and in all their public acts they place it above the Bible. Especially is this tendency increasing since the great division of the Presbyterian church. The time was when multitudes of Presbyterian ministers professed nothing more than to receive the confession of faith as upon the whole a correct system of doctrine, while they did not hesitate to declare publicly and positively that there were several points in that confession, from which they dissented. But so much has been said about the "Standards" of the Church, so many accusations have been made of departure from the "Standards" and so many flat denials of this have been reiterated, that it has come now to be common to treat the confession of faith as an authoritative standard from which if men depart in any particular they are regarded as heretics.

That they give to the confession of faith all the authority which papists attach to decisions of councils and the pope, is evident from the fact that in all the trials that have been had for heresy, the accused is arraigned for dissenting from the "Standards" of the Church and from the holy scriptures. But in no instance that has come to my knowledge, have they allowed the accused to defend himself by an appeal to the scriptures which would set aside the confession of faith. For it is assumed, as far as I know, in all cases, that the

confession of faith has settled the meaning of the scriptures. And it is considered as entirely inadmissible to attempt to set aside the confession of faith by an appeal to the Bible. Indeed to such lengths has the Presbyterian church proceeded, to say nothing of other churches, that on trials for heresy, it is assumed both by the accused and the accuser, that the ultimate appeal is to the confession of faith, and consequently the accused feels himself obliged to show that his sentiments are not inconsistent with the confession of faith. Let the trials of Mr. Barnes and Mr. Beecher be looked at as illustrations of this fact. Were they allowed or did they even attempt to justify their sentiments by an appeal to the Bible, or did they defend themselves by attempting to show that what they held was consistent with the "standards?" Were they allowed to say that, whatever the confession of faith might say, such and such was the doctrine of the Bible? By no means.

The fact is that it is high time for the Church to open her eyes upon the appalling fact that the [P]rotestant denominations are assuming the truth of the fundamental error of papacy, are talking about their "Standards" and are using their spiritual guillotine wherever and whenever there is a departure from their "standards."

The next step will be to substitute their "convenient manuals of doctrine" and their human standards in the place of the Bible in such a sense as that the laity may as well be deprived of the Bible.

Not long since I received an invitation from the session of a Presbyterian church to come and preach to them upon the condition that I would preach nothing inconsistent with the Bible as interpreted by the confession of faith. I of course treated such an invitation in the manner in which I supposed I was bound to treat it. I felt shocked that matters had come to such a state in the Presbyterian church that they dared to demand of a minister that he should interpret the Bible by their confession of faith. What is this but exalting the confession of faith into the very place of the Pope?

Now beloved, if you intend to preserve the idea and practice of genuine religion, be careful that you do not either in theory or practice adopt the great error of papacy and assume that some human standard is to be regarded as an authoritative exposition of the word of God. Read your Bible. Let the opinions of good men, whether expressed in catechisms, confessions of faith, or in any other way, orally or in writing, have with you what weight they really deserve, but call no man master in your views of theology, and let inspiration alone be authoritative with you in matters of faith and practice.

- 13. Aim at nothing short of universal consecration to God. By universal consecration, I intend the devotion of your whole being and of all over which you have control to the service and glory of God. And remember that nothing short of entire consecration is true religion--that if you hold back any thing from God, you are and must be, for the time being, in a state of rebellion against Him.
- 14. If you would attain the true idea and practice of religion make every thing give place to communion with God. So arrange all your business affairs, as to have ample time for much

secret prayer and communion with God. You will never retain the spirit of true religion unless you make as real and as sacred a calculation, in all your movements, to have time for reading your Bible, secret prayer, and communion with God, as you do for taking your daily food. Men do not enter into such business transactions as to have no time to eat. They know very well that they cannot live without eating. Therefore whatever business they engage in, whatever course of life they devote themselves to, they always make calculation to take sufficient time for their meals. Now it should be universally understood that spiritual life can no more continue without regular and frequent seasons of prayer and communion with God, than natural life can continue without daily food.

- 15. Beware of conferring with flesh and blood. By this I mean, take heed that you do not give way to a spirit of self indulgence in any form; and remember that the moment the indulgence of any appetite or passion, the love of ease, reputation, or any form of self indulgence whatever comes to be consulted by you and suffered to have a controlling influence, you have already let slip, if not the true idea, yet the practice of true religion.
- 16. Beware of the influence of the customs of society and of your own habits. Examine narrowly all your own voluntary habits of eating, drinking, exercise, rest, conversation, the manner in which you spend your time, hours of rising and retiring, intercourse with friends, and in short the whole round of your habits, private, domestic, public, and see that every thing is just right.
- 17. Beware of the influence of public sentiment. With many, public sentiment is the rule rather than the law of good. Their inquiry seems to be not what will please God but what will please men. This is as far as possible from true religion.
- 18. Let the Bible be your companion and the man of your counsel. Make yourself thoroughly acquainted with the mind of the Spirit so far as possible in every passage.
- 19. Seek the most spiritual instruction within your reach. If you live in the neighborhood of different preachers, hear those who are the most spiritual, and decidedly the most evangelical. Let your reading be of a very select character. Be sure that you do not devour and swallow down the mass of the periodical literature of the day. It is as a general thing so sectarian, that it will poison you to death. Select the most spiritual memoirs, and writings of all kinds within your reach. Acquaint yourselves, as far as possible, with books on natural science. Examine works on anatomy, physiology, natural, mental, and moral philosophy, and such books as will make you thoroughly acquainted with the structure and laws of the universe; for all these things declare the wonderful works of God.
- 20. Do not shrink from reproach for Christ, and for truth's sake. A great many professors of religion seem afraid even to form an opinion, and much more, publicly to avow it, on any unpopular question. This shows that they have a supreme regard to their own reputation, that they love the praise of men more than the praise of God. It is a demonstration that they have no true religion.

- 21. Above all, learn to live by faith upon the Son of God. You will never practice any of the things I have recommended, only as you live by faith. And do not make a mistake and think you live by faith, when you do not know what faith is. To live by faith is not merely to hold the opinion that you are to be pardoned and saved through faith in Christ, but it is to repose continual and implicit confidence in Him, and to really expect him to give you continual grace and help in every time of need, and enable you to walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameless. It must be a matter of experience with you and not of opinion and profession merely. You must know what it is to be united to Him as the branch is united to the vine, and to receive constant nourishment and spiritual life from Him, as the branch does from the vine. And when you are exhorted to do any thing else, remember that you will not do it aright, only as Christ strengthens you, which strength you are to receive by faith.
- 22. Learn to walk in the Spirit. If you read the Epistles, you will find much said of walking in the Spirit. You must know what this is by your own experience, or you will not retain the true idea or practice of true religion.
- 23. Beware of declining on the one hand, into antinomianism, and doing nothing for the conversion of sinners, and on the other, of running into legality, and bustling about with a legal zeal, devoid of the peace and rest of the gospel. Keep at an equal remove from a sickly quietism, on the one hand, and of a bigoted pharisaism on the other.
- 24. Aim to be all, as a Christian, that you can be, to exert the highest and best influence upon all around you, and upon the world, that is possible. Keep the thought before you, that to be a Christian at all, your aim, end, or supreme intention must be, to devote your whole being, all that you have and are, to the glory of God and the good of the universe. By this I do not mean that you must intend to be holy, for this in reality is nonsense. You must be benevolent, instead of intending to be benevolent. You must intend good, and aim at doing good. This is holiness; and always remember that it is one thing to be holy or benevolent, and quite another to intend to be so. Almost every sinner expects and intends to be holy at some time. It will not do for you to aim to be benevolent, but you must continue to be so.
- 25. Remember that you are a witness for God, that you are a living epistle known and read of all men, that unless your life and lips bear testimony in accordance with the grace of God, you are a false witness--a perjured wretch.

## REMARKS.

1. True religion, in the lowest degree, implies living up to the best light you have. I say this is not to be looked upon as some high and rare attainment in religion, but is in fact essential to the lowest degree of true religion. He that does not habitually live up to the best light he enjoys, lives habitually in sin, and cannot be a Christian. By living up to the best light you have, is intended, that you do every thing which you acknowledge to be duty, and act up to the standard of right which you acknowledge to be your rule of duty. If you allow yourself in any omission or practice which you acknowledge to be wrong, (I mean where this is habitual with you in opposition to occasional,) you are not, and cannot be a Christian, as the Bible is true.

2. True religion of course hails every branch of reform that promises glory to God, and good to men.
3. The radical principle of all false religion, whatever be its name, is selfishness. No matter whether it be Judaism, Christianity, Mahommedanism, or by whatever name you call it, the radical principle, that which constitutes the end and aim of every false religionist, is some form of selfishness.
4. You see why it is that study, business, &c., are often a snare to the soul. It is not because persons do too much business for God, but because they do business and study for themselves.
5. The state of the world and of the Church is such, and the general strain of preaching such, that even true converts are very apt soon to let slip the true idea, and consequently to fall from the practice of true religion. They see so little of real benevolence, they hear so little about it, they witness such universal selfishness, that they soon get confused, backslidden, and fall into the snare of the devil. How striking and appropriate, then, is the admonition of the Apostle in the text, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip."

## **Ability and Inability**

Lecture III

August 31, 1842

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Texts.--Joshua 24:19: "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is a holy God."

In this discussion, I shall

*I. Point out the distinction between the different kinds of ability and inability to obey the law of God, which have been insisted on by different classes of philosophers and divines.*

*II. Show that this distinction is nonsensical.*

*III. What is intended by the language of the text and similar passages of Scripture.*

*IV. Why the Holy Spirit is employed in the production of holiness.*

**I. Distinction between the different kinds of ability and inability to obey the law of God, which have been insisted on by different classes of philosophers and divines.**

- 1. Natural ability, according to them, is to do as you will, irrespective of the question of ability to will in any direction in view of motive. In their definition of natural ability, they keep entirely out of view, the doctrine which they hold to be true, that the will is invariably and inevitably determined by motives. Some state the doctrine of natural ability, to be the possession of the faculties of a moral being, with the power to use them whenever, and as you are disposed or choose to use them, leaving out of view the how it comes to pass that we are disposed to use them.
- 2. These statements and definitions are specious. But let it be remembered, that these same philosophers hold also that choice is necessarily determined by motives. They reject the term necessity, and use the term certainty, to avoid the charge of fatalism; but so explain what they mean by certainty, as to show that necessity is really intended. They, or the leaders of their school, hold, that the connection between motive and choice is the same in kind and efficiency, as that between a physical cause and its effect. So that the difference does not consist in the kind of connection, but in the terms connected. Their proposition is, that the will always and invariably, is as the greatest apparent good is--that whatever appears to the mind to be upon the whole most agreeable, invariably determines the choice of the mind in that direction. Indeed, the leader of this school maintains, that choice is nothing else than the very state of mind referred to, that is, that a thing's appearing to be the most agreeable, and choosing that thing are identical. This, then, is the plain sentiment of this class of theologians: that whenever a thing is presented to the mind in such relations as to appear upon the whole the most agreeable, this is choice, or the determination of the will. And this is what they mean by the will's invariably being as the greatest apparent good.

Now it is very plain, that the very nature of the connection between the physical cause and its effect, is that of necessity. And if, according to them, the connection is the same in kind, between motive and choice, then choice must be determined by necessity. You may call it necessity or certainty, or what you will, the true idea and thing intended, is necessity.

- 3. Moral ability, according to them, is the presence of such motives as to determine the will by this kind of misnamed certainty.
- 4. The impossibility of executing our volitions or doing as we will, they term, natural inability. Observe, natural ability, according to them, is the power to do as you will, or to execute your volitions. Natural inability is the want of power to do as you will. If, for example, you put forth volitions to accomplish a certain object, and are unable to execute, or bring about the thing at which you aim, this is natural inability.
- 5. The absence of sufficient motives to determine the will with this kind of misnamed certainty, they call moral inability. It is called a moral inability, not because it is not a real inability, but because it is inability of will. If there are not sufficient motives to cause the proposed object of choice to appear to the mind upon the whole the most agreeable, or to be the greatest apparent good, in this case, there is a moral inability, that is, an inability to choose in that direction. Whereas, if there are sufficient motives to make the impression of the most agreeable on the mind, in this case, choice is produced, and here is a moral ability.

- 6. Another class of philosophers reject these distinctions, and deny both natural and moral ability, but maintain a gracious ability to conform to the claims of God. Their gracious ability consists in this, that through the atonement of Christ, God, by his Spirit, and gracious influences, has removed inability of every kind, and made it possible for men, through this gracious aid, to obey the law of God.

Without this aid they maintain, that fallen or sinful beings have no kind of ability to obey God. Hence consistency drives them to maintain, that but for the atonement and gracious divine influence, men after the fall, would have been under no obligation to obey God, and that those in hell, from whom the gracious influence is withdrawn, are under no such obligation. It is easy to see, also, that if consistent, they must deny that Satan has ever sinned since his fall, or can sin, unless the atonement and gracious ability extend to him.

Observe, I do not intend that all, who professedly belong to either of these schools, are consistent enough, to hold the whole of their theory, as I have stated it. But I have stated the doctrine of natural and moral ability and inability, and of gracious ability just as held by the leading minds of these different schools, if I rightly understand them, which I have taken much pains to do.

## **II. These distinctions are nonsensical.**

- 1. Their natural ability is no ability at all. Observe, their definition of natural ability is, the power to act or do as you will, leaving out of view the question whether you have power to choose in a given case, or given direction, or not. Now, every one knows, that the power to act depends on the power to choose. If a given course of conduct be proposed to me, it is naturally impossible for me to pursue it, unless I can choose to do so. But, according to them, if such motives are not presented to my mind, as to make that course appear the most agreeable, I am unable to choose to pursue it, and I am, therefore, in the highest sense, naturally unable to pursue that course. Now, who does not see, that an ability to act or do as you will, is no ability at all, unless you have ability to choose in that direction. Is not, therefore, their definition of natural ability which denies the power to choose in any direction in view of motives, nonsensical? What is it but nonsense to affirm that I am naturally able to do that which I am naturally unable to will to do? Is it not nonsense to affirm that natural ability to do a thing, consists in the power to do it, if you will, while the power to will in any direction in view of motives, is denied?
- 2. Their natural inability, so far as morality or virtue is concerned, is no inability at all. In morals, the will is the deed. The virtue or vice of any action does not lie in any outward act, but in the choice or intention of the mind. So that if the choice or intention exists, but we are really unable to execute our intention, we are as virtuous or as vicious as if we had executed it. And this is the doctrine of the Bible; "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." It should always be understood that obedience and disobedience in the eye of God consists in acts of will. If a man wills, or really intends, in accordance with the will of God, although he may be unable to do as he wills, or to accomplish the thing he intends, yet the will is taken for the deed, and he is as virtuous as if he



did accomplish it.

- 3. If men act at all, they cannot but act as they will. Will, choice, or volition, necessitates action. If I will to move my muscles, they move of necessity, if they move at all. If there be a paralysis of the nerves of voluntary motion, volition will fail to produce muscular action. So there may be an opposing force, which shall overpower my volition, and prevent its execution. But if I act at all, I act always and necessarily according to my will, and cannot by any possibility act against it.
- 4. Their moral ability, is no ability at all. For observe, that moral ability, according to them consists in the presence of such motives, as to produce choice, by necessity, or as they say, certainty, which certainty, as I have said, when explained, is nothing else than sheer necessity. There is no magic in words. To call it certainty, and then so explain the certainty, as to make it sheer and absolute necessity, is only to trifle on a momentous subject. The fact is, that their moral ability is nothing else than choice produced by necessity--motive producing choice in the same way, or by a connection the same in kind, that unites a physical cause with its effect. Now, if men are disposed to call this certainty, and tell us to remember that they mean certainty and not necessity, are we to throw away our common sense, and even our intellectual perception, of the fact, that this certainty is nothing more nor less than sheer necessity.
- 5. Their moral inability is an absolute natural inability. Observe, moral inability with them, is the absence of sufficient motives to produce choice, by this kind of misnamed certainty of which I have just been speaking. It is an inability to choose for want of sufficient motives to produce choice, or which is the same thing with them, the sense of the most agreeable. In other words, they are unable to choose for want of sufficient motives, and this is called a moral inability, because it is an inability to choose. Now, why call this a moral inability, when it is self-evident, that it is nothing else than natural inability. It is the highest, and most proper and perfect kind of inability, an inability to will, and of course, and of necessity, an inability to act, and is it not nonsensical, by introducing the word moral, to attempt to distinguish this from a natural inability.
- 6. The gracious ability of the philosophers of this school, has no grace whatever in it, because,
  - (1.) It is a first truth of reason that moral obligation implies the possession of every kind of ability which is indispensable to render the required act possible. For example, if God requires me to fly, He must furnish me wings. And this furnishing me with wings to enable me to obey the commandment to fly, is not, in view of the circumstances, a gracious ability. He is in justice bound (if He requires me to fly) to give me wings. And it is absurd and nonsensical to call this a gracious ability. Should He require me to fly without giving me wings, the requirement would be unjust, and it would impose on me no obligation. This is a first truth of reason. But if it be true, that he will be unjust to require me to fly without giving me wings, it follows, of course, that the giving of wings in reference to this commandment, would not be grace, but justice. Nor is the case at all altered if I have plucked my own wings, and thereby rendered myself unable to fly. For this He may punish me, but cannot hold me obliged to fly, until He restores my ability. So

if He requires me to raise the dead, He must give me power to do so. And unless He confer the power, the command would not be obligatory. Now, in view of the command to raise the dead it is nonsensical to call the bestowment of power sufficient to obey the command, a gracious ability, for it is not grace, but mere justice. These are first truths of reason. They need no proof, and to call for proof of truths of this class, is absurd and nonsensical.

- (2.) If men lost their ability to obey God by sin, and God should still demand service of them, He must, in the first place, in justice restore their ability. He might punish them for destroying their ability, but could not require obedience of them until their ability is restored. It would seem that this class of philosophers admit that God must in justice restore ability before he can require obedience. For they maintain that if the atonement had not been made and divine influence vouchsafed, men would not have been under obligation to obey God. And that those in hell, from whom this divine influence is withdrawn, are under no obligation to repent and love and obey God. Now how nonsensical it is to maintain that without this ability men would be under no obligation to obey God, and still call it a gracious ability. It is what justice in reality demands according to their own view. For God to claim obedience, and yet while justice demands it at his hands, they call it a gracious ability, what is this confusion of terms but nonsense. The very terms gracious ability are an absurdity, for what is grace? It is the bestowment of that which justice cannot claim. But justice does demand that a moral being should possess the requisite ability, whatever that is, to do and be what he is commanded to do and be. And the bestowment of this cannot be grace but justice.
- (3.) Where the gospel is preached and the Holy Spirit's influences are enjoyed, God may claim and does claim and ought to claim, corresponding service. But where He claims a higher service, in consequence of increased light, he does not consider the increased light in reference to the enlarged requirement grace, but justice.

By this I do not mean that the atonement and the influences of the Holy Spirit are not grace, but that they really are so, and that they are grace because men have not lost their natural ability to do their duty by sin; that, therefore, the atonement and divine influence, were not necessary to make men able to do their duty, but to induce in them a willingness to do it.

- (4.) There is no inability whatever, under the moral government of God, to obey Him perfectly. Where the mere light of nature is enjoyed men are able to walk according to it, which is all that God requires of them, and for not doing which He condemns them. This Paul argues at length in his epistle to the Romans.

All moral agents then, in all worlds, are able to obey, and consequently are bound to obey God perfectly, and perfect obedience in a heathen would be, a living up, in all respect, to the law of nature as revealed in the works and providence of God. Perfect obedience in a child, would be a living up in all respect, in heart and life, to the best light enjoyed. The same is true of men under the law, and under the gospel, of the angels in heaven, and of

all moral beings in all worlds.

### III. What is intended by the language of the text and similar passages of Scripture?

- 1. Words are signs of ideas, and are always to be understood, of course, according to the subject matter about which they are used. For example; if I say I cannot create a world, every body would understand me to mean by cannot, a natural impossibility. If I say I cannot take twenty dollars for my watch, no man in his senses would understand me to use the term cannot in the same sense in which I did before. He would understand me only as affirming that I was unwilling to sell my watch for that price. He would not so much as dream that I had not natural ability or power to consent to sell my watch for twenty dollars. Now it is very remarkable that on other subjects such language is readily understood by the common sense of men, and no where, but on religious subjects do they seem so widely to depart from common sense, in the interpretation of language, as to make cannot, when applied to acts of will, imply an inability of any kind.
- 2. With respect to the language of the text, the connection in which it stands shows the sense in which Joshua meant to be understood, when he said to the people, "ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God." Any one who will take the trouble to read, will see that nothing was farther from his intention than to affirm that there was either a natural or a moral inability in them to serve the Lord, for in the same connection he calls on them to enter into a solemn covenant to serve the Lord, to which they consented upon the spot.
- 3. The whole connection shows that they did not understand him as teaching the doctrine of an inability of any kind in them to render an acceptable service to Jehovah. Joshua merely intended, and they manifestly understood him to affirm, that they could not render an acceptable service to Jehovah unless they became holy. But their ability to become holy is as strongly as possible implied in the whole connection and transaction.
- 4. Let a similar passage in Genesis 19:22, explain this. "Haste thee, escape thither: for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither: therefore the name of the city was called Zoar." --Here Jehovah speaks of Himself in similar language. He says to Lot, "Haste thee, for I can do nothing until thou be come thither." Who can believe that He intended to affirm of Himself an inability of any kind, to destroy Sodom before Lot arrived at Zoar? He manifestly intended merely to say that his mind was made up not to destroy Sodom till Lot was safe, and that therefore, He was unwilling to rain fire and brimstone upon the devoted city until Zoar had closed its gates upon Lot.
- 5. See also John 1:12. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name." In the margin of your Bible, you will see that the word "power," is rendered right or privilege. This passage has, not unfrequently, been quoted as implying an inability in the sinner to become a Christian. But it favors no such idea. It only teaches that those who received Christ, were themselves received to the privileges of adopted sons.
- 6. See also John 6:44, 45. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw

him: and I will raise him up at the last day." "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." The 44th verse is often quoted in proof of the doctrine of natural or moral inability. But what inability is here intended? When the two verses are read together, we learn that no man is able to come to Christ unless he is enlightened or taught the way of salvation by Christ. It is certainly a plain truth that a man needs to be informed of the way of salvation by Christ in order to come to Christ. This text does not begin to teach any inability whatever, in those who have been taught, and understand the way of salvation by Jesus.

Here let me remark that so to explain these passages as to make them teach either a moral or a natural inability is to deny the freedom of the will. But that the will is free we have the testimony of our own consciousness. To come to Christ, to do our duty, in other words to be holy, consists in acts of will. Now to affirm an inability to will in any direction, in view of motives, is to affirm that as true which our consciousness teaches us to be false.

I might quote other passages that have been relied on to support the doctrine of inability, but have said enough to give the candid reader a clue to the right understanding of them all. And for the caviler I am not now writing.

#### **IV. Why the agency of the Holy Spirit is employed in inducing obedience to the moral law.**

- 1. The Bible represents Him as exerting his influence over the mind, by or through the presentation of truth to the mind. In other words, as exerting the influence of a divine moral suasion. 1 Pet. 1:22, 23: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:" "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." James 1:18: "Of his own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." John 17:17-- "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." In these and similar passages, we learn that the manner and kind of influence which He exerts, is that of persuasion and not of compulsion.
- 2. The thing which He is employed to do is not to make them able, but to induce in them a willingness, by a persuasive influence, to submit themselves to God.
- 3. With many, to deny a physical divine influence in regeneration, to deny that the Spirit of God is employed to make men able, and that He only employs his agency in persuading them to be willing, is to deny the divine agency altogether. What do they mean? I am afraid of these men. It seems as if they were determined to hide away themselves under the plea of inability, and to screen others under the same refuge of lies.

#### **REMARKS.**

1. To represent God as requiring impossibilities on pain of eternal death, is to hold up his character and government to irresistible abhorrence. Men are so constituted that, by an unalterable law of their reason, they affirm intuitively, irresistibly, and indignantly, that for any government, human or divine, to require natural or moral impossibilities is unjust and tyrannical. And until the very nature of man is

altered, this must forever be the case. It has been publicly affirmed not long since, by a Doctor of Divinity in the Presbyterian church, that moral obligation did not imply any kind of ability whatever to do our duty. Now a more shocking and revolting contradiction of reason, common sense, and the Bible, could hardly be stated in words. Such statements are in exact accordance with the spirit and policy of the devil.

2. It has always been the policy of Satan to misrepresent the character and government of God. He prevails by false hood. He sustains his dominion in this world by gross misrepresentations of the character of God. It has always been of the greatest importance to him and his cause to deceive the Church and induce the leading minds to entertain and publish to the world, views of the character and government of God which are at war with reason and the Bible. He very early succeeded in this, under the Christian dispensation. And who that is acquainted with the opinions and dogmas of the Christian fathers, does not know that they very early began to inculcate the most absurd and revolting dogmas concerning the character and government of God. One of the leading minds among them could say of a certain doctrine, "It is absurd and therefore I believe it." In every age of the Christian Church, Satan has succeeded in influencing a certain class of minds to adopt and shamelessly avow, and zealously to inculcate dogmas as the truth of God, against which the very nature of man cries out with vehement indignation. And this many of them do not pretend to deny, but on the contrary boldly affirm it, and insist that the very nature of man must therefore be changed before he can love God. Instead of representing man as needing to have the voluntary state of his mind changed in respect to God, they represent him as needing to have his very nature changed, by a creative act of physical Omnipotence. And what sentiment can please the devil better than this?

3. When good but unlearned people have listened to such distorted misrepresentations of God and his government, they have hushed down their rising indignation under the impression that it was a mystery. They have piously chided themselves for having a thought of the injustice and unreasonableness of such dogmas enter their minds. And oftentimes have they diverted their attention and found it indispensable to abstract their minds from the consideration of these dogmas, to prevent the rising remonstrances of their deepest nature, against the injustice of requiring of men natural or moral impossibilities on pain of eternal death.

4. It is remarkable to what extent unconverted but thinking men have become sceptical in view of such representations of the character of God. And ministers that maintain such sentiments are very little aware of the extent to which they preach their unconverted hearers into infidelity. Millions of souls have been ruined by the false representations of the character and government of God, which they have heard from the pulpits not only of notorious heretics, but multitudes of self-styled orthodox.

5. Since the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life has been so much and so pointedly insisted on, multitudes of ministers and others who have heretofore professed to believe and teach the doctrine of ability in every moral agent to do his whole duty, are retiring back to the ranks of those who deny the doctrine of ability. They see and acknowledge that the doctrine of entire obedience to the law of God, or in other words, of entire consecration and sanctification, is only the legitimate application of the doctrine of ability to all the conduct of Christians; that if men are able to obey God perfectly, there is no reason why they should not, nor any ground for the affirmation that they will not. But let not those brethren think to find a resting place, or an apology for sin under the doctrine of inability, for it is

abundantly easy to show that of all the absurd doctrines that ever were broached, not one is more contrary to the Bible and to common sense, and more easily refuted than the doctrine of inability.

6. From what has been said it will be seen that the dependence of sinners and of Christians upon God is of such a nature as to afford no excuse whatever for their sins. If the doctrine of inability were true, and the Spirit of God were indispensable to make them able to do their duty, then their dependence would be an apology for their sins. Or what is still more proper to say, until the divine agency was granted, they could not begin to sin, inasmuch as sin must imply the power to be holy. But if, as has been shown, the sinner is able to obey, and the whole difficulty lies in his unwillingness to do his duty, and if the Spirit is employed only as a persuasive agency to induce a willingness to comply with duty, it is abundantly plain that the sinner's dependence upon the Holy Spirit, affords him not the least shadow of excuse for ever having sinned or for ever indulging in another sin.

7. Until men are willing to confess their sins--that they are able but unwilling to obey God--until they are ingenuous enough to own that their difficulty does not lie in an inability but in a pertinacious obstinacy--until they perceive and allow that the Spirit is not needed to make them able, but only to overcome their voluntary rebellion, they have no reason to expect a divine influence, to lead them to Christ--but have every reason to fear that God will give them up to the agency of Satan, and send them strong delusion, and confirm them in the belief of inability, until they become so utterly blinded as that they cannot "deliver their souls, or say, have I not a lie in my right hand."

8. And now sinner, will you be as ingenuous and as courageous as were the Israelites when Joshua uttered the words of the text? If you read the connection you will see that they believed and avowed their belief that they could render to Jehovah an acceptable service. And when Joshua put the question plainly home to them, whether they would, that day, choose and enter upon the service of God, they rose up and signified their determination to serve Jehovah. And from the history of that generation, it is manifest that many of them, to say the least, were sincere and whole-hearted in the avowal of their purpose. Is it not time for you to decide? Will you become holy? Will you serve the Lord? Will you do it now? Answer in your inmost being, upon the spot. If you say no, or if you refuse to answer at all, remember that God may take you at your word; but if you say yes, and mean it, if you let your heart go with your words, your name shall be written in the "Lamb's book of life."

## **God Under Obligation to Do Right**

Lecture IV

September 14, 1842

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Gen. 18:25: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

In discussing this subject I will show,

*I. What is right.*

*II. What is implied in God's doing right?*

*III. That God is under a moral obligation to do right.*

*IV. That all moral beings are bound to be willing that God should do right.*

*V. What is implied in being willing that God should do right.*

*VI. That this state of mind is indispensable to salvation.*

## **I. What is right?**

Right expresses the moral quality of disinterested benevolence. Benevolence is good willing or willing the highest good of being. Disinterested benevolence is willing the good of being as an end, or for its own sake, or, in other words, on account of its intrinsic value. A thing is good, that is, naturally good, because it is valuable in itself.--Such, for instance, is happiness. Happiness is a good in itself, that is, it is valuable. Every moral being knows by his own certain knowledge, that happiness is valuable, is good. To will, therefore, the highest happiness or the highest good of being for its own sake, is benevolence. Benevolence, then, consists in willing according to the nature and relations of things. Reason universally affirms that to will thus, to will good for its own sake, to will it impartially or disinterestedly, or in other words, to will every good of every being according to its relative value, is right. Right is the term by which we express the moral quality of disinterested benevolence. The terms right, virtue, holiness, &c., express the same thing. They denote the moral quality of disinterested benevolence or of that love that constitutes obedience to the law of God. Let it be understood, then, that disinterested benevolence is always right, and that nothing else is right, and that whatever is right or virtuous, is only a modification of disinterested benevolence. Nothing is virtue or right that is not in compliance with the law of disinterested benevolence.

## **II. What is implied in God's doing right?**

Doing right in God, his nature and relations being what they are, must imply the doing of several things by Him that would not be implied in the case of any other being.

- 1. He is naturally able to do many things that no other being can do. For example: God alone possesses creative power. Benevolence in Him, therefore, implies not merely willing the good of beings already existing, but that He give existence to as many beings as He wisely can. The law of benevolence would certainly require of Him to exert his infinite attributes in the promotion of good. If He did not do so, his own conscience would condemn Him.

- 2. His nature and relations are such that benevolence in Him requires the establishment and due administration of moral government. He has created a universe of moral beings. The highest good of the universe demands that a moral government should exist. God is able to establish and administer a moral government. Doing right, therefore, in God implies the establishment and administration of a moral government over the universe.

The same is true of many other things which it is unnecessary to mention.

### **III. God is under a moral obligation to do right.**

- 1. The scriptures represent God as a moral being.
- 2. If He is a moral being, He must be the subject of moral obligation.
- 3. If He were not under a moral obligation to do right, benevolence in Him would be no virtue. Indeed there could be to Him no such thing as right and wrong, unless He were under a moral obligation to do right. Doing right in any being consists in complying with moral obligation. Right, virtue, holiness, &c., in any being, always implies moral obligation, for they are nothing else than a compliance with moral obligation. If God were not under a moral obligation, He could have no moral character. He could be neither praise nor blame-worthy. Nothing would be virtue nor praise-worthy in Him unless it sustained a relation to moral obligation.
- 4. Nothing could be wise or virtuous in God that is not demanded by the law of benevolence. If God should do any thing that was not required by the law of benevolence, it would be neither wise nor virtuous. If the creation of the universe were not required by the law of benevolence, then the act of creation was not virtuous. But it is impossible that the universe should not have been created in compliance with the law of benevolence. The evidences of a benevolent intention on the part of the Creator are so manifold in all the works of God as to render it certain that it was created in obedience to the law of benevolence, in other words, that the creation of the universe was an expression and a carrying out of the disposition of God to do good.

It is not intended that God was under an obligation to any one above Himself, for no such being existed. But his own self-existent nature is such that He is his own law-giver, and imposes obligation on Himself. His own reason eternally and intuitively affirms that He ought to be benevolent, that He ought to wield his own infinite attributes in the creation of beings and the promotion of their good. He is therefore under law to Himself, his reason and conscience always imposing moral obligation upon Himself. Compliance with this obligation in Him is virtue. A refusal would be vice.

- 5. In the text, Abraham assumes that God is under moral obligation to do right. God had informed Abraham that He was about to destroy Sodom. Abraham's reply was, "Perhaps fifty righteous persons shall be found therein. Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked. This be far from thee to destroy the righteous with the wicked. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Here Abraham plainly assumes that God was under a moral obligation to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, and that He had no right to deal with them



alike. Or in other words, Abraham assumes that it was the solemn duty of God to deal with the righteous and the wicked according to their respective characters--that to do so would be right, and that not to do so would be wrong in God.

- 6. God does not resent this assumption of Abraham, that He was under a moral obligation, but most fully acknowledges it. He did not say to Abraham, How dare you assume and insinuate that I am the subject of moral obligation--that any thing is obligatory on me--that I can be called to the discharge of duty? He gave Abraham no such reproof as this, but freely and fully admits the assumption of Abraham and proceeds to give him to understand, that the Judge of all the earth would do right, and that He knew too well what was obligatory upon Him to consent to destroy the righteous with the wicked.

Some people seem to feel shocked at the supposition that God should be under moral obligation. But they may just as well be offended with the supposition that He has moral character. If He does not owe obedience to the law of benevolence, then benevolence in Him is not right. It is no virtue. If God is above law, He is above virtue. If He is above moral obligation, He is above having moral character, and above being praise or blame-worthy for any thing. The conviction has been many a time crowded upon my mind, that the religion of a great multitude of its professors, is mere superstition. They are shocked with any rational view of God's character. They are offended with his being represented as the subject of moral obligation. They seem not to know at all why He is praiseworthy, and if their view of the subject were true, He would not be praise-worthy. Multitudes of professors seem to praise Him for doing that which they suppose Him under no moral obligation to do. But if He were under no moral obligation to do it--if the law of benevolence did not require it at his hands, it were neither wise nor virtuous in Him to do it, and therefore for doing it He would deserve no thanks.

Whenever I see persons manifest a spirit of opposition to the idea that God is under law, is the subject of moral obligation, and that virtue in Him, as in all other beings, is only a compliance with the great law of benevolence, I know that the religion of such persons must be superstition. It cannot be that they have the true knowledge of God, of his character, relations, and government, and that they either praise or respect Him for any good reason. Their worshiping Him for such reasons as are in their minds, He must consider as injurious and insulting.

- 7. The Bible every where takes it for granted that right and wrong are as applicable to God as to any other being, and that virtue in Him, as in every other being is a compliance with moral obligation.

Hence let me say again, that He is not, as we are, under obligation to one above Himself, for no such one exists. But He is under obligation to the law of benevolence as it is imposed on Him by his own reason.

Some seem to suppose that the reason why God cannot sin, is that He is above law, that his arbitrary will is law, and that whatever He wills or can will, must be right simply because his will is law. But such persons do not consider that if this theory is true, He can

no more be holy than He can sin, for if there be not some rule of conduct obligatory upon Him, He has no standard of action, nothing with which to compare his own conduct, and can in fact have no moral character. Now the reason why God cannot sin, is not because He is naturally unable to sin, nor because selfishness in Him would not be sin. But it is said He cannot sin, because He is voluntarily holy, infinitely disposed not to sin.

#### **IV. All moral beings are bound to be willing that God should do right.**

If He is under a moral obligation to do right, no one can have any right to object to his doing right, for this would be absurd. It would imply the existence of contradictory rights or obligations--that God was under a moral obligation to do that which other beings were under a moral obligation to prevent if they could. It must be that whatever the law of benevolence requires of God, whatever the highest good of being demands that He should do, all moral beings are bound to be willing that He should do.

#### **V. What is implied in being willing that God should do right?**

- 1. It implies the love of right for its own sake.
- 2. It implies a willingness that He should require of all his subjects just what He does require. He never legislates without good reason. He has no right to do so, and never does enact any laws that are not required by the highest good of being. He therefore does nothing, more nor less, than to comply with his own duty, in requiring of every moral being just what He does. To be willing, therefore, that God should do right, is to be willing that He should require just what He does in all instances, and for the very reasons for which He requires it.
- 3. It implies a willingness to do whatever He requires. He requires of every one of you just what He ought to require, and if you are willing that He should do right, you are of course willing that He should require this of you. And if you are willing that He should require it, it must be that you are willing to do it.
- 4. Outward doing is necessitated by inward willing. Therefore a willingness that God should do right, implies the actual doing of whatever He requires of you, so far as you know it.
- 5. It implies a willingness in you that all events should be disposed of according to his sovereign pleasure--that He should send the finally impenitent to hell, for this is right--that He should send your own children, if they be finally impenitent, to hell, or that He should send you to hell, if the law of benevolence requires it at his hands. If the rule of right, if the highest good of the universe demanded that you be sent to hell, it is God's duty to send you there, and you have no right to object, but are bound to consent with all your heart.
- 6. It implies in you a spirit of perfect benevolence. No man is willing that God should in all things do right, who is not disinterestedly and perfectly benevolent.
- 7. It implies in you a spirit of the same uprightness that there is in God--that you love right as He loves it--that you are actuated by the same motives that actuate Him, and that in your measure you have the same regard to right that He has. In other words, a willingness that God

should in all things do right, implies, in your measure, the same perfection of willingness that there is in God.

#### **VI. This state of mind is indispensable to salvation.**

- 1. Because nothing short of this state of mind can be virtue at all. If in any thing you are unwilling that God should do right, you are in rebellion against Him.
- 2. If in any thing you are unwilling that God should do right, it is impossible that for the time being you should have a supreme regard to what is right, or to the authority or will of God. So that there cannot possibly be any virtue or holiness in one who is unwilling that God should in all things do right.
- 3. To be willing that God should in all things do right, is essential to happiness, and therefore indispensable to salvation. God will do right whether you are willing or not. If you consent to it and are joyful in it, you can be happy under his government. But if you are unwilling, He will do his duty without asking your leave, and however much it may fret or distress you.
- 4. His doing right will extend to all beings--to every one of you as well as to every body else. And if in any thing you are crossed or offended by his doing right, there is no remedy for it, for He will do it although it may be the means of destroying you forever.
- 5. All moral beings will know that God does right--that He does universally and perfectly right, and no one can prevent it. It is self evident that no one can be happy or saved, who is not supremely pleased with his doing universally and perfectly right.

#### **REMARKS.**

1. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as a work of supererogation in God or in any other being. By a work of supererogation is intended the doing of something that one was not of right under obligation to do, something not required by law. In morals, a work of supererogation would be something not required by the law of benevolence. Now if there were any such thing as a work of supererogation in God or any other moral being, it could not be benevolence or virtue. It could not be praise-worthy. If it were not required by the law of benevolence, it could be neither wise nor good. But if required by the law of love, it is not properly speaking a work of supererogation.
2. The common notion of the imputed righteousness of Christ, by which many maintain that the saints are to be saved, is a papal superstition. It has no foundation whatever in truth. The fact is that Christ did no more than to comply with the great law of universal benevolence. Both as God and man, his obligation to be universally and perfectly benevolent was complete. He did no more than under the circumstances was his duty to do--no more than the exigencies of the government of God required--no more than to comply with the great law of universal love. Had he done any thing more or less than this, it would neither have been wise nor good.
3. Do not understand me to say that sinners would have any cause of complaint if He had not died for them. They had forfeited all claims to favor. So far as they were concerned, He might have visited

upon them the penalty of the law. But to his own nature He owed the obligation of perfect benevolence. To Himself and to the virtuous universe he was under an obligation to make a sacrifice of Himself, if by so doing he could promote a greater good than the evil He suffered.

4. If there could be such a thing as a work of supererogation, that is, doing that which the law of benevolence did not require, such a work would be sin and not holiness.

5. The spirit of the law and of the gospel is identical--both require universal and perfect benevolence.

6. There is no proper distinction between law and equity. This distinction in morals has no foundation.

7. Strictly and properly speaking there is no distinction between what is lawful and what is expedient. And when Paul says, "All things are lawful for me but all things are not expedient," we are to understand him only as speaking in a general way, and not as designing to affirm that in the most proper sense a thing might be lawful, and yet not expedient. Expediency is that which, under the circumstances, is demanded by the highest good. But this is identically the spirit of the law. A thing may be contrary to the letter of the law which is expedient. But the spirit of the law requires that every interest should be treated according to its relative value--that of two evils, one of which is unavoidable, the least shall be suffered--that of two goods, but one of which can be secured, the greatest shall be preferred. The letter of the law and real expediency may be at variance. But the spirit of the law and true expediency are always identical.

8. There is no law of right separate from the law of benevolence. Justice is only a modification of benevolence. And nothing is just or right that is not in accordance with the law of benevolence. By justice and mercy nothing more is intended than benevolence acting in different relations--the end always being the same, the promotion of the highest good.

9. God sends the wicked to hell for the same reason for which he takes the righteous to heaven, that is, in both cases He designs to promote the highest good. When sinners come into such relations that the highest good demands that He should send them to hell, He does so for that reason. And when the righteous come into such relations that the highest good demands that He should take them to heaven, He does so for that reason.

10. The Atonement and all that God does for the salvation of sinners, is done by Him in compliance with the great law of benevolence. Had it not been a compliance with duty, it would not have been virtue.

11. See from this subject what constitutes the sovereignty of God. Many persons seem to speak and think of the divine sovereignty as if it consisted in God's acting arbitrarily, without any regard to moral obligation--that in his sovereign acts He has no other reason than that so it seems good in his sight. They speak of his sovereignty as if He had no good reason for willing as He does, but that such is his pleasure, entirely irrespective of the reason why it is his pleasure. Now this is a most odious and injurious view of the character of God. God's sovereignty is and can be nothing else than benevolence acting independently. It consists in his doing his duty without asking the leave of any one. It consists in his doing right without let or hindrance from any one.

12. Those who are not pleased with the sovereignty of God when they rightly understand it, cannot be Christians. If they are not willing that God should consult his own wisdom and do what He regards to be his own duty, they are rebels and the enemies of God and of all good.

13. God will never punish the wicked to gratify any feelings of resentment, in the proper acceptation of the term. I suppose that the very nature of God demands that the finally impenitent should be punished. His reason affirms that he ought to be miserable who is wicked, and that therefore God could not consult the highest good, could not promote his own happiness, nor the happiness of holy beings, unless He acted in conformity with this affirmation of his own reason, and of the reason of every moral being, and inflicted merited punishment upon the incorrigibly wicked. If God is a moral being, as we have shown, we know from our own consciousness as moral beings, that from the laws of his very nature, his reason affirms the justice of inflicting punishment upon the wicked--that punishment and sin ought to go together, and that God cannot be satisfied with Himself, and holy beings cannot be satisfied with Him, unless He inflict punishment upon the finally impenitent. The highest good must therefore demand that He punish the wicked. This is implied in what Abraham says: "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? This be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Here it is as plainly implied as possible, that to punish the wicked is right.

14. Let it not be thought that God or any holy being has pleasure in the infliction of pain for its own sake. Misery never is and never can be regarded by a moral being as a good in itself. It can never be chosen for its own sake. It can never be chosen as an end by any moral being but only as a means of promoting the blessedness of the universe. Such is the nature of moral beings that they affirm by a law of their nature, over which they have no control, that sin deserves punishment, and that if sinners persevere in sin they must be punished. And although by a law of their own nature, they look upon misery as an evil in itself, yet under a moral government they look upon the punishment of finally impenitent sinners as a less evil than impunity in sin.

15. It should always be understood then that God punishes sinners for public reasons--the nature of moral beings being such that the realization of the idea of public justice is promotive of, and demanded by the highest happiness of the universe. For this reason and for this reason alone God punishes the finally impenitent.

16. For the same reason He forgives and saves the penitent, that is, to realize the idea of right, fitness, and public justice. Every thing considered, it is, upon the whole, best, reasonable, and right, in view of the atonement of Christ and the penitence of the sinner, that he should not suffer the penalty of the law, but that he should be forgiven and saved. Therefore in the salvation of the penitent sinner, public justice is not set aside, but in saving him, God goes upon the principle of public justice, that is, his so doing under the circumstances, is in the highest degree conducive of the public interests. Hence the Apostle John represents the salvation of the penitent as an act of justice. I John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

17. The law of right requires that God should punish the wicked as much and as long as the public good requires.

18. In a government that is to last throughout eternity, the punishment of sin must be endless, for very important and manifest reasons. There will need to be under such a government, a steady, perpetual, and eternal monument upon which the nature, the demerit, the history and the results of sin shall be recorded. Truth is the great instrument of controlling mind. Let the history of the Temperance Reformation illustrate what I mean. Under a moral government, I suppose it was impossible for God to bring about the temperance reformation, until the nature and tendencies of the use of alcohol, could in some way be known. But when its nature was developed, its tendencies perceived, and its history written in the blood of millions of souls, there were then sufficient materials on hand, with which to assail it and crowd it back--shall I say to hell from whence it came? The monster intemperance, came up upon the length and breadth of the land, clad in a mantle of light. He found his way into every habitation, and smiled, and dealt out excitement, and deceived the nations. Alcohol was every where regarded as a friend. Its presence was deemed indispensable to health and happiness. It was prescribed by the physician almost as a catholicon. It was taken even by the clergy as an auxiliary in the discharge of their holy functions. All classes of persons supposed themselves to be blessed by it. And until it had destroyed its millions, so deep were its deceptive influences, that men could not be awakened to regard it as an enemy. But now its mask is off. It is known. Its history is written in blood, and who does not know that for the use of future generations this history is an indispensable safeguard? Should the present or any future generation succeed in banishing alcohol from the world, by exhibiting in every country its true history, who does not know that except these records be preserved, and the public mind kept sufficiently awake, that the same scenes will, in future, be acted over again, and that nothing can prevent so dire a catastrophe but the keeping in perpetual memory the nature, the history, and the results of using alcohol. As moral beings, it is impossible to preserve future generations of mankind from intemperance, but by the universal presence of information upon this subject. Now for the same reason that the history of alcohol will need to be kept in perpetual memory, for the same reason will the endless history of sin, its details, and results need to be kept before the public mind. Something must be done that shall be a virtual penciling of the history of sin, in characters of light upon every part of the universe. The dealings of God with the impenitent must be such as to be the subject of eternal conversation and excitement throughout the whole universe. His dealings must be so public, and so perpetual as never to be forgotten. It must be a record that cannot but be read by every moral being. It must teach a thrilling and perpetual lesson to all moral beings in all worlds, as long as moral beings shall exist. And if at any time his public dealings with sinners should cease and fall into forgetfulness, the impression would of course be done away upon the universe. And who can say that all the horrors of another apostacy from God would not be the result?

19. Those who are not willing that God should send the wicked to hell cannot be saved. If the execution of the sentence upon the finally impenitent will make them miserable they must be miserable.

20. None are willing that God should do right who do not do right themselves. This is self evident.

21. Unless doing right is supremely pleasing to you, you cannot be saved.

22. Anxious sinners are often distressed for fear God will do right. If they remain in sin God will certainly send them to hell. This would be right. This it would be his duty to do. But this is the cause of the sinner's anxiety. He fears God will do what He ought.

23. We see what true submission is. It consists in a willingness to have God do, in all things, with us and ours, through all the universe and to all eternity, just right--to dispose of all we have and are just as the highest good of the universe shall demand.
24. What a glorious consideration it is that the Supreme, Universal Judge of all the earth will do right. He cannot be mistaken. He cannot be bribed. He cannot be deterred. He cannot be prevented. He will never change. He will never cease to be. What a glorious consideration to be under the government of such a being.
25. If his providential designs are displeasing to you, you cannot be saved. He deals with you just as He does, because it is right, because, under the circumstances, the highest good of the universe demands it. Thus He will do without asking your leave. If you are pleased with it, it is well. If you are displeased, there is no help for you.
26. God is equally good in all He does, for the best of all reasons, that He has the same ultimate reason for all He does, namely, the highest good of the universe demands it. In other words, it is right.
27. He deserves as much praise, for sending the wicked to hell, as for taking the righteous to heaven. He deserves just as much praise for what are called his judgments as for what are called his mercies, for sickness as for health, for death as for life, for hell as for heaven, for pestilence, earthquake, and tornado, under the circumstances in which they occur, as for their direct opposites under other circumstances. One law governs Him in all these things. One principle of action, one motive or intention accounts for the whole.
28. If He send any of you to hell, all heaven will be under an obligation to praise Him for it. If He send your companions or children to hell, you will be under obligation to praise Him for it. If he send your children or even yourself to hell, you will be under an eternal obligation to praise Him for it. It will always be true that He did it because it was right, because the public good demanded it, and it was therefore his duty to do it. He did it in compliance with the great law of perfect benevolence. And shall you not praise Him for being benevolent?
29. There is no good reason for being shocked at the idea, of God's being the subject of moral obligation, and acting in accordance with the dictates of law and of conscience.
30. Unless you are, according to your knowledge, as upright as God is, you are not willing He should do right, you are in rebellion against Him, and cannot be in a state of justification with God.
31. Sinners are so selfish that they would be saved at all events. Whether it would be right or wrong on the part of God to save them they neither consider nor care.
32. If God should save sinners, forgive their sins, and treat them as they desire Him to treat them, He would ruin the universe.
33. The prayers of impenitent sinners for forgiveness, are among the blackest sins in the universe.

Nothing is more common than for impenitent professors of religion, and impenitent non-professors to pray that their sins may be forgiven. But to forgive their sins while they are impenitent, would not be right but infinitely wrong on the part of God. Such prayers are a virtual asking of God to commit a great sin, to abandon the public good, to ruin the universe for their sake. Let every one of you then remember that if you pray for forgiveness, when you do not repent and forsake your sin, you are guilty of the grossest insult to God, and of the highest rebellion against Him and his government.

34. Since the Atonement and in view of the promise of God, right is consistent with, and demands your salvation if you accept of Christ. By this I do not mean that upon the principle of distributive justice you might not be justly punished. But I do mean that upon the principle of public justice, your salvation, upon these conditions, is consistent with, and demanded by the highest good.

35. Unless you comply with these conditions you must be damned, and all the holy will thank God for sending you to hell.

36. How sweet it is to think of God as the Judge of all the earth. And how deep and permanent is the consolation that in all things He will do right. Every holy being in all worlds, at all times, is ready to cry out, Let the Judge of all the earth do right. Amen and Amen.

## Ordination

Lecture V

September 28, 1842

PREACHED AT THE ORDINATION OF FOURTEEN YOUNG MEN, AUG. 22, 1842.

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Tim. 4:16: "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

In remarking upon these words I shall,

*I. Point out some of the respects in which a minister should take heed to himself.*

*II. Some of the respects in which he should take heed to the doctrine he preaches.*

*III. Show what is intended by continuing in them.*

*IV. What we are to understand by the last clause of the verse, in so doing he shall save both himself and them that hear.*



## **I. Some respects in which a minister should take heed to himself.**

- 1. He should not take heed to his own self-interest, as the great end of pursuit. If a minister gives himself up to look after his own interest instead of the interest of God, he will be worse than useless as a minister.
- 2. He should not take such heed to his reputation as to have his eye continually upon that, constantly raising the inquiry how such and such a thing will affect his reputation. With such a state of mind as this, the minister is a perfect slave to public sentiment rather than the freeman of Jesus Christ. There is scarcely a more hateful character under the sun, than a minister who is constantly taking heed to his own reputation, preparing his sermons, preaching them, and regulating all his movements with an eye to securing a reputation among men. This is a most detestable state of mind, and renders a man worse than useless.
- 3. Nor should a minister take heed to his own ease. If ministers are afraid of wearing themselves out, afraid to lay out their strength for God--if they are indolent, effeminate, and self indulgent, they are never like[ly] to be of any use to men, nor any honor to God.
- 4. Ministers should not take such heed to themselves as to indulge any form of selfishness. Selfishness is the direct opposite of holiness, and cannot co-exist in the same heart with holiness. If, therefore, a minister should not be totally depraved, he should not indulge any form of selfishness: but,
- 5. Ministers should take heed to the motives by which they are actuated in entering upon the great work of the ministry. Be careful, brethren, that you make no mistake on this point. See that your eye is single to the glory of God--that disinterested benevolence be the actuating principle of your life. Unless your eye is single, and your intention supremely and disinterestedly benevolent, you are ungodly men, and have no business in the ministry. Take heed then that you are truly converted men--not merely convicted sinners, but regenerate men, men whose hearts are right with God, and whose great motive in entering the ministry is to glorify God in the salvation of men. Remember if you are not converted men when you enter the ministry, you are almost certain to go to hell yourselves, and, so far as you have influence, to take your hearers with you. And remember too that it is altogether too common, for it to be taken for granted on all hands that ministers are really converted men, I must say, and dare not say less, that every year's experience and observation forces upon me more and more the conviction that it is becoming alarmingly common in these days of pressing so many young men into the ministry, for multitudes to enter upon that sacred office who are not truly regenerate men. We have had, in this place, instances, not a few, of your men coming to this Institution to prepare for the ministry, who have turned out to have no religion at all--have been here convicted and for the first time converted--young men who had been supposed in Churches from which they came, and by which they were recommended, not only to be truly converted men, but your men of more than common piety, and promising candidates for the Christian ministry. And but for those powerful revivals in this Institution which broke up their delusions, numbers of them would no doubt have been this day, in all their sins, engaged in the sacred office of the ministry. Take heed then to yourselves, brethren, that you know what it is to be

born of God, and that you know what it is to have an eye single to his glory in entering upon this sacred work.

- 6. Take heed that you are called of God in this work. And let me beseech you not to treat the subject of a special call to the ministry lightly, and as an antiquated notion no longer to be heeded. You are not to take it for granted that Christ has called you to the work of the ministry because He has called you into his kingdom. But let your mind be well satisfied that it is the will of God, that you should be separated to the work of the gospel ministry. You should be as well satisfied of this as you are that you are converted.

If you ask how you are to obtain this evidence, I answer from the indwelling [S]pirit of God. If you ask again whether you are to give yourself up to be directed by impulses, I answer, No. You are in nothing to be directed by impulses, but by the sober dictates of your judgments in respect to the path of duty. If God really calls you to the ministry, you will hear his voice; for if He does not call loud enough so that you can hear Him, you have no right to go. If He designs you for a minister of the gospel, He will give you such views of Himself, of the worth of souls, of the great importance of your engaging in this work; in short He will give such an inclination to your mind as to fasten the conviction upon you that it is his voice, and that He calls you to preach the gospel. Men may call you to the ministry, but consent thou not except God call thee. Too many young men already have been called of men, and what are they doing in the Church but increasing its sectarianism, and grasping after power. We want God-made ministers. Take heed then to yourselves, I beseech you, brethren. See to it that God puts you into the ministry.

- 7. Take heed that you are especially anointed by God to this great work, and do not confound a call to the ministry with the anointing to the work. Christ's disciples were called to the work long before they were specially anointed and endued with power from on high for its effectual prosecution. Remember conviction is one thing. Regeneration is still another. A call to the ministry is distinct from both. And a special anointing to the work of which I am speaking, is another, and a gift distinct, and by itself. The peace of the gospel, the rest of faith, and communion with God, are entirely distinct from that power from on high with which a minister needs to be clothed to be efficient in his work. A man may be truly pious, ardently so, and know what it is to live and walk with God, without that spirit of power which a minister needs to make his words cut like a two edged sword. Indeed the grand distinction between efficient and inefficient ministers consists more in this than in any thing and every thing else. A man may be learned and pious, and yet inefficient as a minister. He may be unlearned, in the common acceptance of the term, yet with a special anointing for the work, he may be a most efficient minister. I beseech you, then, let this be well settled in your mind, that unless you take heed to be anointed with a special anointing of the Holy Spirit to this work, you will do but little good, and that if we hear from you at all, it will be barely that you are doing pretty well, but that there is nothing special under your ministry. Brethren, you ought to have such an anointing that whenever you open your mouth to preach, the people will feel that you are sent of God. You ought to know that there is such a thing as that. If you are anointed to the work, your hearers will feel that you speak with authority and with power. And by power I do not mean vociferation and noise, but that your words will be sharp, like a two edged sword.

- 8. Take heed that you give yourselves wholly to the work. Remember if you are called to the ministry, that this is a labor by itself. And that you are not to be diverted from this work without being plainly directed by God. And here let me warn you against being lightly drawn aside to engage in agencies for benevolent societies and objects. I say lightly, because I suppose it is sometimes true that Christian ministers may be devoted to the performance of some particular branch of Christian reform. But I have long been persuaded that it is a very serious thing for a minister to leave the direct work of preaching the whole gospel, for the purpose of engaging in an agency that will confine him almost exclusively to some one department of religious truth. One of the evils of such a course is to beget in his mind a monstrous development of that particular truth. He soon loses the symmetry and proportion of a Christian man, becomes too much a man of one idea, loses sight, in a great measure, of other branches of reform, and is in danger of becoming censorious, towards all others in whose minds there is not the same monstrous development of that particular truth. This is a dangerous state of mind, exceedingly injurious to his own piety and usefulness, and dangerous to the Church of God. Such men are found not unfrequently to be loudly denunciatory in respect to all Christians and ministers who are not swallowed up, as they are, in that particular branch of reform. They go up and down through the Churches lecturing, making their particular topic a test question, and measuring every thing and every body by the importance they attach to the particular branch of reform in which they are engaged. To them it appears that no body else is doing any good--that nothing else is at the present time of much importance, and that little or nothing can be done for the salvation of the world, until that particular branch of reform is perfected. These brethren seem not at all aware of the state of mind in which they are. They seem not to consider that they have so long dwelt upon the bearings and influence of one branch of reform, that it has in their mind grown out of all proportion as compared with other branches of Christian reform. I beseech you, brethren, take heed lest you come to be among the number of those of whom I am speaking. Do not understand me as speaking against agencies or agents, for no doubt these agencies need to be prosecuted. But I would earnestly warn you against being drawn away from the whole work of the ministry to engage in them, without a manifest call from God. And if you should be called to engage in them, I beseech and warn you to be on your guard against the tendencies of which I have been speaking. Without being at all aware of it, many of the lecturers of different societies have diffused a very unhappy spirit through the Churches, and wherever they go, they seem to plant a root of bitterness, and to get up a kind of faction, and to embitter the minds of certain classes of professors of religion against the Church in general, and the ministry, and in short against all who have not a single eye to that particular department of reform.
- 9. Take heed to yourselves that you are studious men. Do not suppose that you can run about without study or reflection during the week--that you can engage in light reading and frivolous conversation, and, for any length of time, interest your people on the Sabbath. You must be deeply studious men. You must think much, think correctly, see that you are master of every subject, before you present it to your people. By this I do not intend that you should neglect pastoral visitation, and other parochial duties than preaching, but I do mean that your people will never be truly benefited by your taking so much time for visitation or other duties as to neglect thorough study. A good minister must be a student.

- 10. Take heed that you do not encumber yourselves with unnecessary cares. Take upon your hands no business or labor that shall interfere with your high calling. Many ministers, no doubt, with the sincerest intention to do good suffer many responsibilities to be thrown upon them which greatly hinder them in the main work to which they are called. They will undertake to board and prepare your men for college, or engage in society matters, and allow the lay brethren to throw upon them many things of a secular nature, to which the laymen should themselves attend, which greatly hinder them in the work of the ministry. Indeed some ministers seem to take upon them the work not only of the ministry, but also of the elders, in looking after the delinquents in the Church--of the deacons in looking after the poor--of the sexton in seeing that the bell is rung and the house in order for worship. In short, some ministers seem to be minister, and session, and deacon, and chorister, and sexton, and trustees, and almost every thing else that has any care and responsibility attached to it. In this way they wear themselves out with doing a little of every thing and yet nothing to any advantage.
- 11. Take heed that you do not encumber yourselves with an unsuitable companion for a wife. See that you do not unite yourself with a worldly woman, one who is fond of dress, or property, or worldly society. If you do, she will greatly injure your influence, if not entirely ruin it.
- 12. Take heed that you do not get an ambitious wife. If you do, she will never prevail for you in prayer. She will be constantly instituting comparisons between you and other ministers--will be envious and jealous lest other ministers should be more highly esteemed than you are--and will be a trouble to you, a disgrace to herself, and to the Church of God. If you have an occasion to employ an evangelist to labor with you, she will be right in the way. She will be on tiptoe, lest you should be thrown into the shade, and the evangelist should be exalted above you in the estimation of the people. If his labors should be blessed among your people, she will be thrown into an agony, lest it should be thought that her husband is not the great instrument of performing the work.
- 13. Take heed that you do not get a self-indulging wife, one who is afraid of self-denial, afraid of being poor, afraid to work herself or have you work hard for the good of souls. Some minister's wives are always afraid of trouble, of labor, of poverty, of care--so much afraid their husbands will over work themselves as to be always right in their way. Take heed to yourselves that you become not united to such a woman as this.
- 14. Take heed that you do not get an indiscreet wife. By indiscretion I mean imprudence. Many women as well as many men, seem to lack common sense as to what and when they should speak. Indiscretion in a minister's wife is often a source of much trouble in a congregation. Should the providence of God lead you to marry, choose a wife who is naturally discreet and heedful of the use of her tongue.
- 15. Take heed that you do not get an incompetent wife--one whose education is in any respect so defective as to be an unsuitable companion for you. By education here, I mean not only school learning, but let her be also what a wife and a housekeeper needs to be.
- 16. And above all take heed that you do not get a woman of superficial piety. The wife of a

faithful minister will naturally have great trials. In a world like this, a faithful minister must meet with great opposition. And from the Church, in its present state, he may expect opposition, as well as from the world. His wife must share it with him. Take heed then, brethren, that you obtain a wife for whom grace has done so much that she can stand the shock of opposition without being intimidated on the one hand and made angry on the other.

- 17. Take heed that you have a thorough experience of the power of the gospel in your own souls. Do not preach Christ by hearsay. Your preaching will take very much of the character of your Christian experience. If you have but very superficial experience of the grace of the gospel, you will, almost of course, preach a very superficial gospel. If you know but little of the power of Christ working in you, you will convey to your hearers but a faint impression of what the gospel really is. I have long been convinced that the grand defect of the Christian ministry in the present day, is the want of a thorough Christian experience. They judge of the power of the gospel by their own Christian experience. Their opinions and preaching manifest the most deplorable deficiency in this respect. Much that has been written and said by them of late against the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, shows that they have very little experience of the power of Christ working in them to deliver them from sin. I say it with the utmost kindness, yet for the cause of truth, and the benefit of the Church, it ought and must be said, that, the great difficulty in the way of ministers understanding, and believing the doctrine of entire sanctification lies in a defective Christian experience. When they come to be filled with the Spirit, they will soon get over their philosophical difficulties and embrace and declare the truth upon this subject as it is. But with so superficial a Christian experience, as many of them manifestly have, they will neither understand nor believe it, and should they embrace it as a matter of theory, it might only bring them into deeper condemnation, without benefiting the Church or themselves. Ministers that preach Christ from hearsay, as a mere matter of learning, without a thorough experience of the power of the cross to deliver from sin, often remind me of the seven sons of Sceva the priest, who undertook to exorcise evil spirits "in the name of Christ whom Paul preacheth." "And the evil spirit cried out, Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are ye?" "And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." So ministers are easily overcome by Satan, who know little of Christ except by hearsay. Therefore take heed to yourselves, brethren, that you have a thorough and personal acquaintance with Christ and the power of his gospel.
- 18. Take heed that you realize your dependence upon Christ. Remember that He has expressly told you, that except you abide in Him, you can do nothing, but that if you abide in Him you shall bring forth much fruit. Do not depend upon your education, upon your eloquence, or the strength of your intellect. Remember that the eloquence of an angel would not effect the conversion of a sinner nor the sanctification of a saint. And did you possess the intellectual endowments of an angel, without Christ you could do nothing. Take heed that your dependence upon Christ be not a mere matter of theory, without being realized and felt by you. Let it be with you a settled matter of fact, as much as it is that you cannot rise and fly to the clouds, that without the power of Christ dwelling in you and working through you, you will never convert a sinner nor effect the sanctification of a saint. Let this be so thoroughly settled in your mind, that you no more expect to live without Christ constantly dwelling in you, than you expect to live

without your daily food--that you make no more calculation upon neglecting Christ or upon doing any thing without Him, than you would calculate upon living without your daily food.

- 19. Take heed to yourselves that you do not neglect much secret prayer. Unless you are in the habit of coming to your people from the mount of communion, you will do them little or no good. Pray much or you will cease to pray at all. Pray honestly. Pray earnestly. Pray perseveringly. Pray in faith. Pray effectually. Pray in the Spirit. Pray without ceasing, or you will cease to pray at all.
- 20. Take diligent heed that you grieve not the Holy Spirit of God. Remember, that in every stage of your ministry you are in danger of doing this. If you grieve away the Holy Spirit, you are a withered branch, a cast away minister--laid aside as useless, and only live to swell the number of unprofitable ministers who are seeking in vain for a field of labor, and inquiring in vain for a vacant Church, and who are so manifestly without the Spirit of God, that were all the Churches in the land vacant they would still be out of employment. Were this the place, I might enumerate the many ways in which, as ministers, you are in danger of grieving the Holy Spirit of God, and coming into such an attitude that, as a minister, God must disown you. I can only mention in general this--take heed that you do not array yourselves against any branch of Christian reform. If you do the Spirit of God will leave you. It matters little with what pretense you do this, if so be that light is within your reach. If you array yourselves against the efforts of those who are endeavoring to reform the Church and the world, or stand aloof and refuse to come up to their help, you may expect the Spirit of Christ to leave you. So well is this settled in my own mind, from my observation of facts, that when I see a minister get on to the wrong side, and array himself against any branch of Christian reform, I expect of course that his ministry will be barren, and his soul in darkness whether he knows it or not, until he repents and lays his hand to the work of universal reform.
- 21. Take heed that you rule your own spirit. "He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." If a minister cannot govern his temper he is like[ly] to do very little good in the world. And it is the curse of many ministers that they give way to passion and often manifest ill temper. Take heed that in this respect you are not in fault.
- 22. Take heed to yourselves that you govern your tongue. Few things in the world do so much mischief as an unbridled tongue in the mouth of a minister.
- 23. Take heed to yourselves that you preach out of the pulpit as well as in it--that your whole demeanor out of the pulpit shows that you mean what you say when you are in the pulpit. If this be not so, though you may be called a grand preacher, you will, nevertheless, be a bad minister. It has been said of some ministers that when they were in the pulpit it seemed as if they never ought to go out, and when they were out it seemed as if they never ought to go into the pulpit.
- 24. Take heed that you be in all things an example to the flock. Do not content yourselves with preaching well, but do well whatever you do. Always be punctual to the hour and moment of your appointments. Never be late at meeting. Never be behind hand with any of your engagements. If you have a house, a garden, a barn, a fence, or whatever you have, see that it is

in order just as it ought to be.

- 25. Take heed to yourselves that you seek not ecclesiastical power. Be not among those who are endeavoring to concentrate ecclesiastical power, and who through the influence of Presbyteries, Synods, Associations, Consociations, Conferences, and Councils, are endeavoring to "lord it over God's heritage." Such ministers are a curse to the Church. Where do you know one of them who possesses the Holy Ghost? Not one of this class seems to be promoting the peace and purity of the Church, or the salvation of the impenitent. Now mark me, brethren, avoid this or you will grieve away the Holy Spirit. It is no doubt one of the reasons why ministers of the present day are so barren. There are so many efforts among them to grasp at ecclesiastical power. I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you keep clear of this shameful business.
- 26. Take heed to yourselves that you avoid schisms. You know, brethren, that the Church is bleeding at every pore under the influence of sectarianism, and what is most shocking and revolting is, that ministers are shamelessly apologizing for sectarianism, and even glory in promoting it. Presbyterians exhorting their people to be consistent Presbyterians, and Baptist ministers exhorting their brethren to be consistent Baptists, and Methodist ministers exhorting theirs to be consistent Methodists. Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and Papists, engaged in the same work, while comparatively little is said to induce them to be consistent Christians.
- 27. Take heed that you be not vain. Vanity is a besetting sin of many persons. And scarcely any thing is more disgusting or wicked than vanity in a minister. And it is wonderful to witness the extent to which even ministers sometimes indulge vanity. Their affected pronunciation--their mincing--their gestures--their attitudes--and the whole costume of their services and pulpit address, as well as their manners and habits out of the pulpit, testify to their insufferable vanity. Their egotism and constant efforts in seeking adulation and flattery, in angling for compliments upon their services and talents, all conspire to render them odious and ridiculous in the estimation of thinking men, and of God.
- 28. Take heed to yourselves that you be not flattered. It is the sin and curse of many churches and congregations, that they spoil their ministers by flattering them. They compliment them about their splendid sermons, their profound learning, their great eloquence, and even sometimes go so far as to compliment them on account of the elegance of their personal appearance. Ministers are often very little aware how much they are influenced by such things. I have sometimes thought it was the policy of the devil, and have not been without my fears, that it was the policy of certain leading members of churches and congregations, to tie the hands of ministers by flattering them. Every one knows how difficult it is to willingly disoblige or thoroughly to reprove or rebuke one who has been so much our friend as to often express his approbation of what we have said or done. We come insensibly to feel that the approbation of such a one is of great importance to us, and to have an eye in what we say and do to the manner in which it will affect him. Now, brethren, if you suffer yourselves to be flattered by your hearers, you will find yourselves unwilling to deal faithfully with them. They will soon come to be your dictators, and to lay down rules by which you shall preach, instead of your laying down rules by which they shall live. They will become your masters instead of your spiritual pupils.

Do not forget that you are much more in danger of being overcome by flattery, than you are of being put down by direct opposition. Flattering ministers is especially the sin of city churches.

- 29. Take heed to yourselves that you do not become enslaved by the influence of your ministerial brethren. I have, for years, beheld, with great pain, the growing influence of ministers over each other, and have often thought that I knew of no set of men so servile in this respect as ministers. They form themselves into ecclesiastical bodies, and then either flatter or brow-beat each other until one or two leading minds, in an ecclesiastical body, will lord it over all the rest, and thus there is a Pope in nearly every ecclesiastical body in the land--one, who, by flattery or abuse, or great talents, will come to have an almost unlimited influence over his ministerial brethren. Where there happen to be two or more such minds in an ecclesiastical body, it will almost infallibly work division, and the body will either be torn asunder, or live in a state of almost perpetual jangling.

Ministers will often flatter each other in such a manner as to become exceedingly afraid of displeasing each other. It is becoming common for the ministers in a city, town, or region of country, so to unite themselves together, as that one dares not adopt any measure, preach any doctrine, or pursue any course, without the consent of his brethren. And sometimes they really seem to be slaves to each other, and not to have the moral courage, to act independently upon any question of moment. Let me beseech you by the mercies of God that you avoid all such things as these.

- 30. Take heed to yourselves that you become not censorious. Censoriousness, when viewed as a state of mind, is a disposition to censure and impute blame to persons. It often manifests itself in an unwillingness to receive any such explanation of an action or course of conduct, as will show that there was no wicked intention in it. I have observed that many persons who complain much of the censoriousness of others, are themselves exceedingly censorious--will take up an evil report of a brother, and publish it, and afterwards refuse to receive and publish an explanation, being manifestly intent upon fastening blame upon one, whose conduct they have misrepresented. A censorious spirit often manifests itself also in a disposition unnecessarily to publish a brother's faults; also, in a harsh and intolerant manner of speaking of others. I beseech you to take heed to yourselves in this respect, lest you grieve the Spirit of God, and render yourselves useless as ministers.
- 31. Take heed to yourselves that you preserve a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man. If in any thing you violate your conscience, you, in that proportion, lose your confidence in God, and in yourself, cover your own face with confusion, and tie your own hands, so as to prevent your fearlessly attacking sin in high and low places.
- 32. Take heed that you cultivate a tender conscience. Your preaching will be of a very superficial character so far as reaching the hearts of men is concerned, unless you cultivate a tender conscience. If your own conscience is asleep, you will be very ignorant of your own spiritual state and of the spiritual state of those around you. You will be blind to the existence of many forms of sin, both in yourself, and in those to whom you preach. But if you cultivate and secure a tender conscience, it will render you sharp sighted in respect to sin both in yourself and others, and tend to give that searching character to your preaching, which is imperiously



demanded by the state of the Church and of the world.

- 33. Take heed that you fear not man, whose breath is in his nostrils, who, when he has killed the body, has no more that he can do. But fear God, who hath power to cast both soul and body into hell. Yea, I say unto you, fear Him. Many ministers are afraid of men, and dare not embrace nor preach the whole truth, without seeming to be at all aware of their being in this state of mind. They seem to think themselves fearless in the discharge of their duty, when, at the same time, it would throw them into a desperate agony, to know that in rebuking sin, they had offended certain men in their congregation. Insomuch that they would set about immediately qualifying, explaining away, and apologizing for what they had done until they had neutralized the truth, rather than offend man.
- 34. Take heed to yourselves that you be not rash. Some ministers are exceedingly rash and hasty in forming and expressing their views and opinions on almost every subject--are precipitate and unguarded in their measures--are stiff and stubborn in the positions they take, and can never be long employed as ministers in any one place. They will almost always leave their people in a divided state. This may be true of a minister who thoroughly does his duty, and nothing more. But it may be, and often is owing to downright rashness and indiscretion in the minister. Not long since, a young minister observed to an elderly one, that "he was determined to drive the devil out of the Church to which he was preaching." The aged man replied, "See that you do not attempt to cast out the devil through Beelzebub the prince of devils, and act yourself like the devil in banishing him from your place." Ministers should always take heed that in opposing Satan, they do not come to possess his spirit.
- 35. Take heed that you hold not the truth in unrighteousness. Remember that you do this whenever you preach what you do not practice. Remember that the "wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness." They hold the truth in unrighteousness, who know what it is, hold and admit, yet do not obey it. And no man is more guilty in doing this, and more sure to have the wrath of God revealed against him from heaven, than the minister, who preaches the gospel and does not obey it.
- 36. Take heed to yourselves that you hold your entire being in a state of entire and universal consecration to God. Remember that you are called to the work of the ministry. You are about to be set apart by the laying on of hands, and now request us to ordain you to this work in the name of Jesus Christ. And now take heed to yourselves that when we consecrate you to this work, that you consent with all your heart, and here consecrate your whole being to the work. And take heed that you do not at any time desecrate from this service, a precious moment of your existence. Remember that you are God's ministers, set apart by prayer and the laying on of hands. And what is more than all, by the Holy Ghost, to the work of the "ministry of reconciliation."

## **II. In what respects you are to take heed to the doctrine.**

- 1. Be sure you have a thoroughly developed idea of what constitutes true religion. Nothing is more common than for ministers and people to make a mistake here. It is truly astonishing to

see how almost universal the opinion seems to be, that religion consists in emotion and mere feeling, instead of consisting in disinterested good willing. Where ministers preach, and pray, and talk, as if they supposed religion to consist in mere feeling, they preach any thing but the gospel, and give any thing but a correct representation of what constitutes true religion. The thing I wish to impress upon you here, my brethren, is that you have in your own mind, a correct, and thoroughly developed idea of what true religion is, as distinguished from every thing else--that it consists in the supreme ultimate intention of the mind, and not at all in feelings or outward actions, only as these result necessarily from right intention or good willing.

- 2. Take heed that you thoroughly develop this idea in your hearers. Observe narrowly their daily walk, to see whether they are benevolent. Mark their prayers and conversation, that you may understand whether they distinguish between a religion of feeling and of outward action, and a religion of supremely disinterested benevolent intention. See whether their religion is a religion of sound principle, or consists only in the occasional effervescence of excited feeling. I am more and more astonished every year, to find how few professors understand what true religion is.
- 3. See that you do not LOSE the idea of true religion, nor suffer those to whom you preach to lose it. Remember that selfishness is so rife in this world, and there are so many forms of selfishness that look very much like benevolence, that persons are in the utmost danger of letting slip the true idea of religion.
- 4. Take heed that you understand the whole gospel. Do not confound it with the law, nor suppose that it does not embrace the law. I beseech you to understand thoroughly the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, and keep these distinct in your own minds. Understand what is intended by a religion of works, and what is intended by grace. Never confound these in your preaching or conversation. Never leave this distinction out of view; for if you do, you will promote legality on the one hand, or antinomianism on the other.
- 5. Take heed that you preach the whole doctrine of the gospel. Many ministers seem able to preach sinners under conviction, but can go no farther. They can make sinners see their sins, but cannot tell them how to get rid of them. Others still can tell sinners how they may be forgiven, but cannot tell Christians how they may be sanctified. And here let me say, brethren, that with very few exceptions, the standard of religious experience in your congregations, will not be above your own standard. Here and there the Spirit of God may lead a praying soul into regions so far above you, as to be a source of annoyance to you. You will look upon them to be verging strongly to ultraism, and to be a little inclined to derangement. But as a general thing, the members of your churches will not rise above your standard. If you are yourselves spiritual children, dwarfs, or skeletons, so they will be. You must be qualified to preach to them the higher doctrines of grace, and to preach them from your own experience, or you can do them comparatively little good.
- 6. Take heed that you live out the doctrine of Christ. Remember that the doctrine of the gospel is not taught merely in the pulpit. It is often most emphatically and impressively taught out of

the pulpit by the temper, spirit, and life of a disciple.

- 7. Take heed to the doctrine that you avoid looseness in your statements. Many persons seem to consider but very little the importance of a sound and strictly correct phraseology in stating the truths of the gospel. Loose, unguarded statements, and expressions in prayer, preaching, and conversation, will soon be instrumental in begetting in the minds of your hearers a loose indefinite and unintelligent manner of thinking, and consequently a lax manner of living. You cannot be too much on your guard in this respect. On all doctrinal questions, be sure to be strictly accurate in the use of such language, as will convey exactly the right idea of the doctrine, and then sound your hearers in every way within your power, to see whether they get the true meaning of your language. Criticise their prayers and phraseology, if you perceive it to be loose and indefinite, until you correct it. Remember that your great business is to develop correct ideas of religion in the minds of your hearers. This also is the work of the Holy Ghost, and you can be no farther a co-worker with Him, than you use "sound speech," and are correct in your statements of the doctrine of the gospel. It is amazing that many divines, who call themselves New School, after all, consent to use, and suffer their people to use Old School phraseology. They often preach, and talk, and pray, as if they supposed human nature to be in itself sinful, and regeneration to be a physical change, and wrought by a physical influence. They hold the doctrine of ability, and yet preach, talk, and pray, as if they believed in inability. Indeed, many of them seem to study to use Old School phraseology, lest they should shock the prejudices of the people, when in truth they do not mean by this phraseology what they are understood to mean, and what the language naturally imports. It is wonderful that many ministers are even contending for the use of Old School phraseology, while they reject Old School opinions. They seem to expect to correct the opinions of men, while they studiously use a phraseology, the meaning of which has become stereotyped in the minds of the people. They will find it forever impracticable to correct the opinions of the people only as they correct their phraseology. They must use different words or they will not convey different ideas.
- 8. See that you understand the true spirit and meaning of the law of God. The real intent and meaning of the law is that every interest is to be regarded and treated by every moral being according to its relative value, so far as that value can be understood by the mind. Now, brethren, remember that this is the rule and the only rule of action for moral beings. It is the sum of the law of God. It is of universal application. The rule is plain, and your business is to make an application of it, and to show how it is to be applied to every concern of life. Remember, brethren, there is a vast want of practical preaching. You may preach faith and repentance, and repentance and faith, sanctification, consecration, or whatever you choose to call it, but unless you descend in the detail, into the practical application of the law of love to all the concerns of life, you will leave your people after all to blunder on under the influence of many gross and injurious mistakes.
- 9. Take heed, that you do not leave out of view either the rule or law of love in all its detailed applications to the concerns of life on the one hand, nor on the other, the efficient influence by which obedience to this rule is to be secured. If you present Christ, and leave the law out of view, you will promote antinomianism. If you present the law and leave Christ out of view, you will promote legality. These two great truths must always be presented in such a manner, as to

keep thorough possession of the mind. The law is the rule of life, but it is weak and inefficient in itself in promoting obedience. The mind is able to apprehend and perceive the meaning, propriety, and importance of the law; but its motives are inadequate to secure in man, since the fall, the love which is required. The love of Christ, his Atonement, the divine influence of the Spirit, secured to man through the Atonement, are the great and efficient truths, that are able to secure obedience. Christ as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of the soul, must constantly be held up, as the indispensable means of securing conformity to the law of love.

- 10. See that you preach a full gospel. Do not satisfy yourselves, my brethren, with the mere conversion of sinners. Aim at the entire and universal sanctification of saints. Preach a gospel suited to this end. Show what is "the length, and breadth, and height, and depth of the love of God," and that he "is able and willing to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think." Preach not justification merely, but sanctification, in all its length and breadth.

You ought to understand, brethren, that the doctrine of justification by faith, as it is now generally held by the orthodox churches, is a modern invention, and was unknown to the ancient church. It is this, that men are justified by faith in Christ, while they are not sanctified. In other words, that faith is so substituted for holiness, that they are accounted as righteous, while in fact they are not so, but are living in the daily and hourly practice of sin.

The doctrine of the primitive Church was, that men are made righteous by faith. In other words, that they are sanctified, or made holy, by faith, and that they were justified only so far as they were made just by the grace of God through faith. Now this must be the truth. And take heed to the doctrine, brethren, that you do not convey the idea, that men are justified while living in sin.

### **III. What is intended by continuing in them.**

The Apostle says, "Take heed to thyself and to the doctrine; continue in them: for in so doing, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."

By continuing in them is meant, the continuing to take heed to yourself and your doctrine. Do not take it for granted, that if for some time, or for any length of time, God shall be with and bless you, that He will therefore always do so, whether you continue to take heed to yourself and to the doctrine, or not. Remember that if at any time, or under any pretense, you neglect to take heed to yourself and to the doctrine, to continue in them, He will cast you off. "Therefore be not high-minded, but fear."

### **IV. Show what is intended by the phrase, "In so doing, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."**

- 1. This may be understood either as a declaration or a promise. It may be regarded either as a declaration, that those who take heed to themselves and their doctrine, shall save both themselves and their hearers, or as a promise that upon this condition, such shall be the result.

- 2. The language is general and not universal. We are not to understand the Apostle as affirming strictly a universal truth, that all who hear such a minister shall be saved. Judas listened to Christ, who certainly took heed to Himself and to his doctrine, and yet he was not saved. But he lays it down as a general truth, that upon this condition ministers shall not only be saved themselves, but shall be instrumental in saving their hearers. There may be exceptions among their hearers, as there was one exception among the immediate disciples of Christ. But these shall only be exceptions to a general rule.
- 3. This passage of scripture is the faithful minister's strong hold. It is his consolation amid his trials, his strength and his support. Let him but persevere in the fulfillment of the condition, and the result is as certain as the truth of God. Here let me say, there is often a great mistake among ministers, on account of our limited views of things. Sometimes, in inculcating the truths of the gospel, it seems to us for a time, that the people are waxing worse and worse. We become greatly discouraged and are ready to abandon the field, as if the people were given up of God, when a more extended and correct view of the subject would show, that at the moment when things looked most dark and discouraging, the way is rapidly preparing for a general and glorious change among the people. Be not stumbled by appearances. Keep hold of this and kindred promises, and if the people wax rebellious and resist the truth, hold on in mighty prayer and effort, and press them still the more, and you will see the salvation of God. I have often seen great changes take place in a most wonderful manner in the midst of the most discouraging appearances, and doubt not that ministers often quit the field in despair, just at the time when mighty faith and prayer would have secured the blessing.

#### **REMARKS.**

1. Remember that you are to exercise faith in this and kindred promises--to expect the salvation of your hearers as much as your own salvation--to plead the promise of God in respect to them, as well as in respect to yourselves.
2. Always remember the condition upon which this and other promises are given. You are to believe the promise, as a universal condition, and fulfill whatever other conditions may be expressed or implied. In this case you are not only to believe the promise, but remember that you are to take heed to yourself, and to your doctrine.
3. If you neglect either condition, you will fail. If you take heed to yourself, and do not take heed to your doctrine; or if you take heed to the doctrine, and do not take heed to yourself, or should you do both these, and still disbelieve the promise, in either case, the end will fail, and the blame will be your own.
4. How much it is to the interest of any people that a minister should comply with these conditions, and how unjust the minister is to the people, as well as rebellious against God, and injurious to his own soul, if he neglect to take heed to himself and to the doctrine.
5. What an infinite blessing a true and faithful minister is to a people. From what has been said, it is plain, that as a general truth, the minister has it within his power, not only to secure his own salvation, but also the salvation of those that hear him. What a blessing, then, to any people to have a faithful

minister.

6. We see what to think of those ministers who are not instrumental in saving their people. I heard of one minister, whose preaching was so manifestly and uniformly unsuccessful in winning souls to Christ, that it is said he came to the conclusion that he was commissioned to prepare souls for hell, and not for heaven. To meet his case, this text should read, "Take heed to thyself, and to the doctrine; continue in them, for in so doing, thou shalt damn both thyself and those that hear thee."

It is not intended by what I have said, to make the impression that the most faithful ministers can save their hearers without their consent, or that God will or can convert them if they refuse to be converted. But God knows what can be accomplished by the use of moral means. And when He has promised to secure an end upon a certain condition, we may rest assured, that upon the fulfillment of that condition, He knows Himself to be able to accomplish it. Let it be then, your abiding consolation, that if you take heed to yourselves, and to your doctrine, and continue in them, you shall save both yourselves and them that hear you.

## **Wisdom Justified of Her Children**

Lecture VI

October 12, 1842

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Luke 7:35: "But wisdom is justified of all her children."

Before I enter directly upon the discussion of the text, I will remark,

1. That the dress, and manner of life of John the Baptist were manifestly typical of the state of repentance and humiliation to which he called the Jews at that particular time, and to which every soul is called before he received Christ, gospel liberty, and joy in the Holy Ghost. It had been common for the prophets of Israel, to adopt modes of life that were typical of the particular truths they were commissioned to announce.

2. Christ does not appear to have differed in his dress and dietetic habits from the mass of the people. It should be remembered, however, that among the eastern nations, modes of dress were not perpetually fluctuating as they are in the west. It is manifest that Christ was observant of the innocent civilities of life, attended marriages, and politely accepted the hospitality of all classes for the purpose of doing them good. He observed the rites of the ceremonial law, as they were typical, and that dispensation was not ended, but he paid no other regard to the superstitious traditions of the elders,

than to rebuke them, and to reject their authority.

3. John's austere habits and manner of life--his severe rebukes and denunciations, were a stumbling-block to the self-righteous Jews. Being righteous in their own eyes, and not, in their own estimation, needing repentance and humiliation, they neither understood his preaching, nor the typical design of his dress, diet, and manner of living. From all these, they concluded that he was a railer and possessed an evil spirit.

4. Christ's preaching and manner of life were no less a stumbling block. Knowing nothing of gospel liberty, and not understanding that all things belong to God's children, and were to be wisely and temperately used by them with thanksgiving, they accused Christ of being a glutton and a wine-bibber. John's preaching and manner of life were designedly legal, in the sense that they were designed to make the Jews feel that they were in a state of condemnation, instead of being in a state of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. Christ's manner of life was a perfect specimen of gospel liberty, in opposition to the legal and conscience bound state in which the Scribes and Pharisees were, which was typified by John's habits and manner of life.

5. In the context Christ illustrates the manner in which the Jews had first treated John and afterwards Himself. "And the Lord said, whereunto shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, he hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, behold a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children." By John, He says, you were called to mourning, but you would not mourn. You resisted his rebukes and appeals, and said he had a devil. By me you are called to liberty and rejoicing, and this you reject as antinomian, and latitudinarian--accusing me of gluttony and intemperance. So that whatever is done for you, you are displeased and stumbled.

6. While the great mass of the Jews were stumbled, and would have been stumbled whatever might have been done for them, it was, nevertheless, true that the truly wise were edified, and saved.

In proceeding to the discussion of this subject, I will endeavor to show,

*I. What wisdom is, and who are wise.*

*II. That that which is wise and true will be justified and approved by the wise.*

*III. That selfish souls will stumble at what is wise and true, and why they will do so.*

## **I. What wisdom is, and who are wise.**

- 1. Wisdom consists in devoting ourselves to the promotion of the best ends, by the best means.

- 2. This is exactly synonymous with true religion. Virtue, holiness, or true religion, consists, as has often been shown in my lectures, in disinterested benevolence. Benevolence consists in good willing, choosing, or intending, or, in other words, in devoting ones self to the promotion of the highest good of being for its own sake. In other words, true religion is the devotion of ones being to the glory of God and the highest good of his kingdom. This is wisdom. Therefore all truly religious persons are wise. All else are fools in the Bible sense of the term, devoting themselves to some unreasonable end and course of life.

## **II. That which is wise and true will be justified and approved by the wise.**

- 1. All the truly wise or truly pious have one and the same end in view. It is this fact which distinguishes them as pious persons.
- 2. They will, therefore, substantially agree as to the means of promoting this end.
  - (1.) Because they all have spiritual discernment. "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man."
  - (2.) They are free from the bias of selfishness. They have no self righteous and legal prejudices to blind them on the one hand, and no idols to consult or lusts to gratify on the other. In just so far as their eye is single, they will naturally and readily apprehend the truth as it is. From the very constitution of their mind, they are the less likely to misunderstand the truth, by how much the less they are influenced by any selfish consideration. And the more likely to understand it aright, by how much the more single their eye is to the glory of God. Christ says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me, But a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of stranger." Here Christ plainly teaches that those who are truly his sheep, will not follow strangers; that is, they will not be led away into a fundamental error. The Apostle, in one of his letters, plainly teaches the impossibility of deceiving the elect.
  - (3.) The fact is, to those who are truly wise, the works, and providence, and word of God are one harmonious revelation of his natural and moral attributes. Having the same end in view that God has, they naturally, and easily understand Him. Being benevolent themselves, having their hearts set on doing the utmost good in their power, the attention of their mind being, of course, directed to that end, they are naturally struck at every turn, with the manifestation of benevolent design, that every where appears in the works, and ways and word of God. Turn their eyes where they will, their attention is immediately arrested with the fact, that God evidently has the same end in view which they have--has gone before them in laying the trains by which their benevolent plans may be carried out, and is, in innumerable ways co-operating with them in the promotion of the great end they have in view. They therefore very naturally come to an easy interpretation of the works and providence and word of God. They all speak a language which is familiar to them. It is the language of benevolence. And shall not the benevolent understand it? Does not love understand the language of love? I tell you that wisdom is justified of all her children.



- (4.) To the truly wise, the law and gospel are one consistent scheme of revelation and salvation, and not contradictory and conflicting schemes. A truly pious person will behold at a glance the wisdom and benevolence of God, in the typical manner of teaching the gospel under the old Testament dispensation. He sees at once, that through those types and shadows, a future Christ, and justification by faith in Him, were taught. Truly pious persons see no difference in the way of salvation under the two dispensations--that they only differ in this, that in the old, Christ was presented through types and prophecies as a future sacrifice, while in the new He is presented in the simple form of history, as having lived and died, and thus set aside the necessity of the typical manner of teaching the gospel. To them God is the same in both dispensations and the spirit of all that He has ever done or said is one and the same.

### **III. Selfish minds will stumble at what is wise and true; and why they will do so.**

- 1. Their state of mind, or the end for which they live, has a powerful tendency to beget misunderstanding. Being selfish, they naturally overlook the benevolence of God, as it is every where manifested in the works of creation. They have their eye upon the promotion of their own private interests, and see no benevolence in any thing that does not favor the particular end they have in view. They are often fretted with the providence of God. Like the owl in the fable, that wondered why the sun was created, with so much light that he could not see to catch a mouse, the selfish sinner looks upon every thing as very untractable, and ill-natured, that does not fall in with his peculiar ends and aims. In this state of mind, he naturally misunderstands almost every thing that God does and says. If God commands him to glorify Him, he is apt to understand God as being selfish and ambitious, just as the sinner knows himself to be. He does not understand that God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent in such a requirement. He naturally understands all God's commands, promises, and threatenings, as founded in selfishness. He knows his own to be, and therefore naturally thinks of God, as being altogether such an one as himself. Furthermore, when God promises reward to virtue, and threatens evil to vice, he understands these as appeals to his selfishness.
- 2. Just so with the providence of God. The sinner misunderstands it at every step. If it should happen to fall in with his favorite pursuits and schemes, he looks upon God as being very partial to him, and perhaps thanks God, as we often hear selfish professing Christians do, for being so much better to him, than He is to others--for being so very partial to him in a great many respect. But on the other hand, if God's providence happen not to favor his particular pursuits and schemes, he is apt to look upon God as prejudiced against them and as indulging some pique--as acting towards them upon the principle of retaliation and revenge. Being conscious, to some extent, of the principles by which they know themselves to be actuated, they very naturally attribute the same motives to God--and thus they perpetually deceive themselves in regard to the divine character. God's works, and providence, and word, are universally good. They tend to one ultimate end--the highest good of being. God aims at promoting every interest according to its relative value. He proceeds upon a vast scale of benevolence, which induces Him to cause his sun to rise, and his rain to descend, upon the evil and the good. The very fact that God is pursuing one end, and the sinner another, leads the sinner, almost continually, to misinterpret God's ways, and works, and word. The wisdom and virtue of God so conflict with

the sinner's selfishness, as to keep him in almost a continual fret.

- 3. The sinner's selfishness naturally tends to make him misunderstand the moral law, to overlook its spirituality, and to consider obedience to consist either in outward acts, or inward feelings. And seldom do sinners understand obedience to the moral law, to consist simply in universal disinterested benevolence.
- 4. The selfishness of the human heart, led the Jews to misunderstand and misinterpret the ceremonial law, and to look upon it as a religion or works. Instead of understanding it to be a system of typical instruction, by and through which the most spiritual truths were taught, their selfishness led them to regard the splendid temple and the vast round of rites and ceremonies, and costly sacrifices, as a splendid, costly, gorgeous set of rites, such as the great Mogul might institute, or some human deity might cause to be observed, in relation to himself.
- 5. Being in a selfish state of mind, and not understanding the spirit of the Old Testament, God appears to them, under that dispensation, to have been malignant, revengeful, selfish, bloody. Under the gospel, He appears to them as at the opposite extreme of selfishness, and as exhibiting such an overweening fondness for men, as to be far from exercising even needed severity. They seem unable to understand how it is, that it is the same God, and the same state of mind, that manifests itself under both dispensations. They are far enough from realizing, that the same benevolence required the exterminating wars in the days of Moses, and Joshua, and Samuel, that poured out the Savior's life's blood upon the cross, and manifested such vast forbearance in the days, and in the person of Christ. Their selfishness is such, that they do not understand how it is that benevolence manifests itself in all the variety of ways, in which God has dealt with men at different times. They do not understand that it is the same benevolence, manifesting itself in a regard to the public good, that sends sinners to hell, and takes the righteous to heaven--that it was the same spirit in Samuel, that led him to hew Agag in pieces, before the Lord, that in other circumstances, in the person of Jesus Christ, could stand in the midst of the fiery furnace of persecution, even unto death, unangered, and sweetly quiet as a lamb.
- 6. One class of selfish minds are legalists. Having been convicted of sin, their selfishness takes on that peculiar type. They are, perhaps, remarkably strict in the outward observance of the Sabbath, and the ordinances of God's house. They seem to be always dissatisfied with themselves, and with every body else--vexed and harassed with the consideration that they do not meet the demands of their own conscience. They are always confessing their heart sins, but never forsaking them. Having no faith in Christ, they know nothing of gospel liberty. Not knowing what it is to eat and drink for the glory of God, their table becomes a snare and a trap, and a stumbling-block to them, They are uncomfortable themselves, and render those around them so. Cheerfulness looks shocking to them, and appears altogether like unbecoming levity. Encouraging any of the arts, appears to them like conformity to the world, and even the temperate enjoyment of such things as are requisite to health, comfort, and usefulness, appears to them inconsistent with benevolence. They do not seem to know that all these things are parts of benevolence, but look upon them as a spirit of self-gratification, just as a man who knows nothing in his own experience, of eating from any other motives than self-gratification, would

not, of course, understand how others could do the same things only as they were influenced by the same motives.

- 7. Another class of selfish persons are antinomian perfectionists. They have so much faith, as they vainly dream, that they can violate law without sin.
- 8. A third, and much larger class, are antinomian anti-perfectionists. They expect to be saved by imputed righteousness. They are far enough from intending or expecting to be holy or sanctified, in their own persons. They disclaim all pretensions to any thing more of personal holiness, than barely enough to support a faint hope that they have been regenerated. If they have been regenerated, with them, it is clear, that they are in a state of perpetual justification, on account of their once having exercised faith in Christ. They do not pretend to obey the law of God themselves, but as they understand it, Christ obeyed it for them, and his personal obedience is imputed to them. They acknowledge the law to be obligatory upon them, indeed, but suppose themselves to be justified by the gospel, while they live in disobedience to the law. Instead of regarding the gospel, as the means of inducing entire obedience to the law, they regard it as opposed to the law, in such a sense, as really to justify one who continues to disobey the law.
- 9. The same doctrines are understood differently by different persons, according to their different states of mind. The doctrine of self-denial, is understood by some, not as the deposing of self, the enthroning of God in the heart, the devotion of the whole being to Him, and doing every thing, even eating and drinking, for his glory. But to them, the doctrine of self-denial, is a system of penance, of outward retrenchments, of bodily mortifications, a denial and trampling down, of the very nature of man. Fastings, celibacy, and multitudes of monkish tricks, seem to be indispensable to their ideas of self-denial. They do not understand that in all these things, to what extremes soever they may be carried, there is not necessarily one particle of Christian self-denial. But these are oftentimes nothing else than the manifestations of a legal spirit, as may be seen in this. They are connected with an acid and vexed state of mind, a spirit of complaining and censoriousness--a disposition to complain of every body that does not fall in with their particular views, and come up to their particular standard.
- 10. Others understand the doctrine of Christian self-denial to mean nothing more than abstinency from outward extravagance. And to abstain from extravagance with them, is to keep a little back from going beyond every body else in self-indulgence.
- 11. But another class who are wise, understand the doctrine of self-denial to be as it is, a total renunciation of selfishness in all its forms, the doing, and using, and being every thing for the glory of God. They understand the doctrine of self-denial to require them to hold every thing, even life itself, at the absolute disposal of God, in so high a sense, as not to count their own lives dear to them, if the cause of Christ demands that they should be given up--that while they thus hold their lives and their all at the disposal of God, they do not wantonly and recklessly cast their lives away as a thing of nought, but carefully preserve and enjoy their lives, while, in the Providence of God, permitted to do so. And so in regard to every thing else which they have and are. While every thing is held at God's disposal, they do not recklessly cast away and

squander, or give away, to be squandered by the improvident around them, the useful things, which God has put in their possession, but temperately and thankfully use such of them, as can conduce to their health, comfort, or usefulness, until the Providence of God shall call for the relinquishment of some or all of them; for his glory. Then they count these things not dear to them, but yield instant possession, not only without gainsaying, but with joyfulness.

- 12. To one class of selfish minds, the doctrine of Christian liberty is synonymous with the doctrine of indulgences. With them, liberty is license. The denial even of their lusts, is legality and bigotry. They have so much faith, and such Christian liberty, that they can violate the laws of their being, use with impunity the most unhealthy kind of diet, and in the most extravagant and unhealthy quantities--can use narcotic drinks, and even take opium and alcohol, as some of the good things that God has made for their enjoyment. I know a woman, who is a most pertinacious smoker of tobacco. When expostulated with for using it, she calls it her Isaac, says she once laid it upon the altar, and the Lord gave her the privilege of using it. And she imagines that her faith is such, that she can use it without sin. Paying any attention to dietetic reform, or almost any branch of reform, is to this class of persons, legality. Because they are allowed things healthful, comfortable, convenient, they rush into the extremes of self-indulgence. To this class of persons the true exhibition of the doctrine of Christian liberty, is regarded as a license to extravagance, and intemperance in almost all things.
- 13. There is another class to whom the doctrine of true Christian liberty look suspicious, and at least to border hard upon self-indulgence. Their legal spirit is grieved with it. But the wise understand, and are edified by it. To them the doctrine of Christian liberty is only that of living, eating, drinking, dressing, being, using, and enjoying all really good and useful things, for good and useful purposes, and for the glory of God. To them there is no tendency to extravagance or intemperance, or licentiousness, in this doctrine, at all.
- 14. To one class of persons, the doctrine of Christian forbearance, as taught by Christ, and illustrated by his life, is synonymous with the doctrine of ultra non-resistance, that no government, family, state, or divine, has a right to use force, for the public good. To them, force, even in the suppression of mobs, insurrections, or to prevent the most horrible crimes, is inconsistent with Christian forbearance.
- 15. To another class Christian forbearance means nothing more than that you are to appeal to the civil law, instead of the bayonet or the fist, to secure your selfish ends. While to the wise, the doctrine of Christian forbearance, is nothing more than the true application of the law of universal benevolence to human conduct. There is a considerably large class of persons, the attitude of whose minds is such, that they put such a construction upon particular precepts of Christ, as to make them flatly contrary to the spirit of the law as expounded by Himself. Christ has summed up the requirements of the moral law, and included all moral obligation in the two great precepts; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." Now, it is agreed, so far as I know, on all hands, that the true spirit and meaning of the law of God, as thus explained by Christ, is, that every interest shall be regarded and treated according to its relative value. Consequently, that a less interest should always be sacrificed to a greater--that, of two evils, the least is to be preferred, and whenever a less interest comes in

conflict with a greater, the less is to be given up, and the greater secured. This is the principle, upon which all just governments are administered. And no power in the universe can render it unlawful to inflict penalties by physical force, where the highest good demands it. But this class of persons would understand the precept, "resist not evil," to require so much, as that governments are not to suppress mobs, or rebellion, by physical force, or that evil should be resisted under any circumstances, and in cases where we have all the evidence we can have, that resistance is indispensable to the public good. Thus they array Christ against Himself, represent Him as giving such an exposition of the moral law, as to require every interest to be regarded and treated according to its relative value, and at the next breath, as saying that whatever the public good may demand, and whatever interest may demand it, evil is not to be resisted.

- 16. The doctrine of government, and of self-defense, under circumstances where the law of benevolence demands it, is to some, a license to revenge. To others, it is an antiquated relic of barbarous times--something that would do, under a former dispensation, when God was not as benevolent as He is at present, or when the severe Father, and not the benevolent Son of God, laid down rules of conduct. But with them, the present dispensation is one of an entirely different spirit, as if another God ruled the universe, and as if the present dispensation was designed to rebuke the former.

But to the wise, the doctrine of government, the infliction of penalties for the public good, of self-preservation and defense, where the law of benevolence plainly demands it, is only the true application of the law of love.

## REMARKS.

1. The truly wise may be known by the manner in which they are affected by the truth. Preach to them whatever doctrine you will, if it be true they will understand it, be edified by it, and be sure to make a wise improvement of it, self-denial, or Christian liberty, Christian forbearance, or whatever doctrine you will, it will find its counter-balance in their minds--will not carry them to extremes, but will be the instrument of their sanctification. They that are not truly wise or religious will be seen to be injuriously affected by almost every truth you preach. Either they will not be moved by it in any direction, or they will go to such extremes as to develop a monstrosity of character. Wisdom is justified of all her children. I understand this to be a universal truth. And that this is the real characteristic, not only of some of these, but of all of those who are truly wise.

2. The selfish will of course misunderstand the wise. When they pursue outwardly the same course of conduct, they will be supposed to do so from the same motives. If they eat, drink, marry, or are given in marriage, build houses, cultivate land, pursue business of any kind--if they labor or rest, journey or stay at home, walk or ride, sleep or wake, or whatever they do, which is done by those who are selfish, it will be understood by them to be done from the same motives by which they are actuated. But in this they are entirely mistaken. They give themselves credit for just as much piety, as any have or can have, who do outwardly the same things. Their mistake lies in this, that they suppose others to be actuated by the same motives with themselves.

3. None but spiritual minds understand what Christian liberty is. Paul understood what it was to be free from the restraints and constraints of the ceremonial law. And yet there was no tendency in his

mind to a lax morality. A true Christian alone understands what it is to eat and drink, to dress, to walk and ride, to wake and sleep, and live, and be, and do, all for the glory of God. He alone knows how to use the things of this world as not abusing them, and understands the secret of owning all things, and yet selfishly indulging in the use of none of them.

4. Those who have been truly convicted of sin, and have seen the spirituality of the law of God, and are truly converted, if they fall back, generally fall into a state of legality, and find themselves in grievous and iron bondage, while others who have only been excited but not truly slain by the law and converted, will, when they fall from this excitement almost always fall into latitudinarian antinomianism. This last is much the largest class of professors of religion.

5. No doctrine of the gospel can be fully preached by an enlightened and benevolent mind, without frequent and painful apprehensions of the results on certain classes. He must watch with unspeakable solicitude, the developments that are made in different minds, as an almost certain indication of whether they are converted or not.

6. Whenever the mind has fallen into a misapprehension of any doctrine, and has consequently received a wrong bias, any attempt to correct that bias by the exhibition of the truth will shock prejudice, and give pain. For example: let one who has embraced the ultra doctrine of the non-resistants listen to a correct exhibition of the rights, necessity, and duties of government, the true principle of self-defense and self-preservation, and he will feel almost as much shocked as if he should witness the fighting of a duel. So let one who has embraced the idea of the doctrine of self-denial, which has been entertained in different ages of the Church by many persons, as requiring little less than a system of mendicancy--let such a one listen to a discourse on the doctrine of Christian liberty, and he will feel almost as much shocked as if you were granting indulgences to extravagance. So let one who has imbibed wrong notions on the subject of Christian retrenchment, that it requires Christians to give up every thing but the mere necessities of life, with whom it is a violation of Christian principle to use elliptic springs upon his wagon, or a top, or boot--to build a cornice on a house--to have a button on your coat where you do not need to use it--who will not allow that any thing is due to the eye or the ear--with such an one, improvements in the arts, the cultivation of music, painting, poetry, improvements in the style of building, in orders of architecture, in short almost all improvement in the physical condition of mankind, are regarded with jealousy if not with pain. He would listen to a discourse in which a true application of the law of God should be made to all such things, with unutterable pain, principally because of the perverted state of his mind, by a false view of the subject.

7. The wise feel relieved and refreshed with truth, when mist has been thrown around any subject, by those who are in error. They may have been thrown into doubt and embarrassment for a time, but when the light comes, they will receive it, and be edified and sanctified by it.

8. Every prominent doctrine of the gospel seems to be set for the rise and falling again of many in Israel. The spirit of reform is abroad in the land. The wise are temperately but firmly pushing these reforms. The rash misunderstand them and go to extremes. The conservatives misunderstand them also, and go in an opposite direction. It is curious to see how things move forward under the government of God. The doctrines of the abolitionists, to some minds lead directly to and result in the

most ultra views of non-resistance. The doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, in some minds, leads to antinomian perfectionism. But the wise understand. "Wisdom is justified of all her children." And multitudes see no tendency in abolition principles to ultra non-resistance, nor in the doctrine of sanctification to the doctrine of antinomian perfectionism. They hold on the even tenor of their way, in pushing these wholesome reforms upon the attention and to the hearts of men. May the Lord speed them. Amen.

## 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)*.

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