

What Saith the Scripture?

<http://www.WhatSaithTheScripture.com/>

"The Oberlin Evangelist"

Publication of Oberlin College

Sermons and Lectures given in 1844

by

Charles G. Finney

President of Oberlin College

Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lecture I. Hardness of Heart

Lectures II. & III. The Eyes Opened to the Law of God- No.'s 1 & 2

Lecture IV. Christian Witnesses for God

Lecture V. Fearing the Lord and Walking in Darkness

Lecture VI. Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

GLOSSARY

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

Hardness of Heart

Lecture I

January 3, 1844

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Mark 6:52: "For they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened."

These words were spoken of the disciples. The occasion of their utterance was this--the evening of the

miraculous feeding of the five thousand, Christ walked out upon the water and met His disciples, who were crossing the sea in a boat. They were much surprised and astonished to see Him walk on the water; they had already forgotten the wonderful miracle which was performed before their eyes, but a few hours before, and being "sore amazed in themselves, beyond measure," the evangelist properly says of them, that "they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened."

Again, Mark 8:17. "And when Jesus knew it, He saith unto them--Why reason ye because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened?"

These words were addressed to the disciples, who did not understand Christ when He warned them to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." They supposed that He alluded to the fact that they had come out without bread. He, perceiving their mistake, said unto them, "Why reason ye because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your hearts hardened?" In other words, "the fact that you can so greatly mistake as to the meaning of my instruction, is sufficient proof that your hearts are very hard."

Again, Mark 16:14. "Afterward, He appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen."

Without stopping to expound this text, I shall endeavor to show,

I. What hardness of heart is.

II. The influence of hardness of heart on the states of the intelligence and sensibility, or in more common terms, upon the opinions or judgments and feelings of men.

I. What is hardness of heart?

The above, and many other texts which might be advanced, show that hardness of heart is a voluntary state of mind. If it is a voluntary state, it must be the will in a state of choice--a will committed, for the time being, to some form of selfishness. The term hardness is appropriately used, because when the heart is in this state, it is stubborn, and will not yield to the truth, and prevents the intelligence and sensibility from perceiving, and being duly impressed by the truth. But I must pass rapidly on and show,

II. The influence of hardness of heart upon the sensibility and intelligence, or upon the opinions and feelings of men.

- 1. We know by consciousness, that the heart controls the attention of the mind. In other words, the intelligence is so completely under the control of the will, that its action, or attention, is directed to whatever point the heart or will pleases.
- 2. We also know by our own consciousness, that the attention affects the sensibility. If the attention is directed to a particular object, the feelings are of necessity excited by that object. If

the attention is from any cause diverted from that object, we at once cease to feel for that object. The kind, or nature, too, of our feelings, depends on the view which the intellect takes of its object of attention. If it views it in one aspect, we are moved to certain states of feeling; and if it views it in another, we are exercised by very different feelings. The feelings then, are dependent on the perceptions of the intellect, and the intellect in turn, is controlled by the will, according as the will is more or less given up to any object, so will the attention of the intelligence be more or less directed to that object, and consequently the feelings will be more or less excited by the same object.

- 3. When the heart is hard, we do not consider the truth as we otherwise would. This must of necessity be true; for if the will is given up to the indulgence of any form of selfishness, of course it cannot pay a calm and dispassionate attention to the truth. Such a thing would be an impossibility, and could never be. Suppose for instance, that the mind is committed to money-making for selfish purposes; of course, all the feelings will drift in that direction, and it would be absurd to say, that while such is the case--while the will is committed, the intelligence can give serious and candid attention to the great truths of religion.
- 4. When the heart is hard, we do not understand truth--of course, if we do not pay attention to it, we do not understand it. Hence, in the parable of the sower, Christ represented impenitent men as "hearing the word of the kingdom, and understanding it not." The fact is, wicked men do not consider the truth, therefore they do not understand it, they do not perceive it with their intellects, therefore it does not move them, it does not take hold of their feelings, and go down to the depths of their emotions, and so rouse them to action.

I wish now to illustrate this proposition--that hardness of heart affects the opinions and feelings of men--by several familiar examples; for it seems to me that the proposition is one which needs illustration rather than proof. I say then, that the truth of the proposition is illustrated,

- (1.) By the case alluded to in the first text. Now the disciples of Christ were surrounded by many peculiar trials. As yet, the Holy Spirit had not descended upon them, they were comparatively ignorant of all truth, they were sorely tried by temptation, and their faith was very weak. Hence they had fallen into a state of hardness of heart; therefore little impression was made upon their minds by the miracle of the loaves. You well know the history of that transaction; how that, when the disciples asked Christ to send the multitudes away, in order that they might procure provisions, He refused to do it, and wrought a miracle for the feeding of the great company. But as I before said, the hearts of the disciples were so hard, that the miracle seemed to get but little hold upon them. That same night, as they were rowing hard upon the boisterous sea, Christ came to them, walking upon the water. From the evangelist, it appears that they were much surprised and sore amazed. This fact showed that the truth of His divine nature had not been fixed in their minds by the miracle, as it ought to have been. They should have remembered, that Christ would, of course, have power to walk on the water, if He possessed sufficient creative power to feed five thousand miraculously. Instead of being surprised at the event, they should have looked upon it as a thing to be expected. The fact is, their hearts were so hard, that they did not infer from the miracle, what they ought to have inferred from it,

they did not understand it as they should have understood it. So too, in the 8th chapter, 17th verse, the same truth is brought to light. Christ had warned His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. By this, He designed to put them on their guard against their peculiar doctrines, which doctrines were, as He well knew, particularly liable to prejudice their minds against the truth of His teachings. He warned them to beware of that leaven, which would diffuse a pernicious influence over all their opinions and feelings. But the disciples, misunderstanding the import of Christ's warning, in the hardness of their hearts, "reasoned among themselves," saying, "It is because we have not bread." And when Jesus knew it, He saith unto them, why reason ye because ye have no bread? Have ye your hearts yet hardened?" In other words, "have ye so mistaken the meaning of the miracle which I wrought yesterday, that ye cannot yet understand truth? Is it possible that ye have so misinterpreted my instructions that ye cannot understand the plainest truth which I make known to you? Again, in the 16th chapter, 14th verse, we have another striking instance of the effect of hardness of heart upon the perception of truth. Here we are told that Christ appeared unto the eleven, as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen." Yes, the minds of the disciples were not so fixed and grounded on the truth, but that they could even doubt the testimony of those who had actually seen their risen Lord. What must have been the state of their hearts? Alas! this is another instance of the influence of hardness of heart upon the perception of truth.

- o (2.) The case of the Jews generally, affords another striking instance of the blinding effect of hardness of heart on the intelligence. Such was the state of their hearts, that no evidence which Christ could give them could convince them of His Messiahship.
- o (3.) The case of careless sinners illustrates the same truth. Their views and feelings are a living illustration of the influence of hardness of heart on the intellect and sensibility; for mark, if their hearts were not hard, and they had the same light which they now possess, they would be full of the bitterest agony instead of coldness and indifference in respect to religious truth.
- o (4.) Cases of difficulty among brethren in the church, illustrate forcibly, the influence of hardness of heart upon the opinions and feelings of men. How many times when brethren have fallen into difficulty with each other, and have come to lay their complaints before me, as their pastor, have I thought to myself--now the only difficulty with these brethren, is, their hearts are hard. Why is it that they do not understand truth alike? Why, plainly for no other reason, than because their hearts are hard; that is, they are, for the time being, so much under the influence of selfish motives, that each looks at the object of controversy in a different light; therefore, their opinions upon the subject do really differ, and each thinks the other to be in fault. How often have I heard contending brethren, when in this state of mind, say, each of the other, "Why he is so entirely wrong, that it cannot but be, that he knows he is an arrant hypocrite, and that he lies outrageously." Now such things often arise among brethren in the church, and they may almost invariable be traced to the hardness of heart of the contending parties. The same brethren

will see the subject of controversy in the same light, if their hearts are only softened. How many cases of difficulty have I known, where nothing could convince either of the parties of his fault, and so great was the contumacious obstinacy of the disputers, that the church would be obliged to take up labor with them, and would send committee after committee to them, to endeavor to prevail on them to come to an amicable adjustment of the difficulty, but all to no purpose. Quarrel they would, in spite of all that could be done to prevent it. But when prayer, earnest, effectual prayer has been offered for these brethren, and the Spirit has descended and softened their hearts, then there has been no more difficulty between them; the one who has been to blame, confesses more than he has been charged with, and each sees the subject in dispute, in the same light as the other.

- (5.) Cases often occur in the business transactions of life, which forcibly illustrate the effect of hardness of heart upon the intelligence and sensibility. How often do men adopt and employ principles in their business matters, which they would utterly condemn, if it was not for their hardness of heart. Yes, they will do things in their business, for days, months, and even years, which they would abhor if their hearts were not hard.
- (6.) The manner in which the providences of God are regarded by the mind, illustrates the same principle. When the heart is hard, God is not seen in His providences; however striking they may be, they are looked at with a cold eye, and regarded as mere common occurrences. But if the heart is not hard, they make a deep impression of it; they are regarded as blessings sent from God. If the heart is hard, they do not inspire praise; God is not looked to and thanked as the author of them. Oftentimes, affective providences occur--friends, perhaps relatives, are torn away, but we do not observe in the subjects of the affliction, any evidence that they feel their bereavement. They do not seem to realize their loss, or if they do, it is only to murmur at the dispensation of providence. Now why is this? It is because their hearts are hard; they do not see the hand of God in the providence, as they would if their hearts were not hard.
- (7.) Of course the heart is not moved by the providence of God, to gratitude nor repentance, when the heart is hard.
- (8.) Even miracles may not produce much impression on the mind, if the heart is hard. This was the case with the Jews. They stood out against all the evidence of miracles which Christ could produce. This was especially the case with the Scribes and Pharisees, who were hard-hearted, even above the most of their nation. Consequently, the miracles of Christ made but little impression upon them; they did not fasten conviction on their unbelieving minds; and with all their weight, they could not break down their stubborn wills.
- (9.) Persons in a hard-hearted state, will justify the most palpable wrong doing, they will have some excuse for their misdeeds, their will be some reason, which in their estimation, requires them, as an act of duty, to perform the iniquitous deed. Yes, they will even imagine that they are doing God service, when in fact, they are committing the most flagrant acts of wickedness. This was the case with Saul of Tarsus. His heart was hard,

and he "verily thought he was doing God service," when he hunted the disciples from place to place, and delivered them over to judgment and death. So too, of the persecutors of the Church in every age--they have thought that they were doing God service. Yes, their hearts have been so hard, that they have really imagined that they were called and taught of God to do their work of death and blood, yea of hell. Nothing has been more common in the Church than this state of mind. How does it come that Papal Rome has been so zealous in the cause of hell, that she has been so busy in persecuting and destroying those whom she regards as heretics? It is because her heart has been hard, and she has been entirely mistaken as to the nature of her zeal, and misled as to the true means of promoting the glory of God.

- (10.) Again, look at the slave-holder. See how sanctimonious he is. Perhaps he is a Church member, and it may even be that he is a doctor of divinity, and yet he has slaves. Oh! but he does it because he considers it his duty so to do; he does it in the fear of God, and with due regard to the highest well-being of the slave. Yes, he will dare to justify himself in his hellish business, and will even call it God-service. Now how can this be? I tell you it is because his heart is hard. How do you suppose he can think as he does? How can he go to the communion table, how pray in his family while he continues in this nefarious business? I say again, it is because of the hardness of his heart. The murderers of Christ did the very same thing. When Jesus was standing before the judgment bar of Pilate, they cried out with one accord, "His blood be on us and on our children." "What" you say, "could they be guilty of so great wickedness and blasphemy?" Yes, they were so certain that Christ was an impostor, that they were ready to take the responsibility of His murder on their own shoulders. They did not hesitate to cry out "His blood be on us, and on our children." What higher evidence could they give of their deep delusion, than this? Now what was the matter with them? Why were they so perfectly besotted, so lost to all sense of right and justice? Why plainly, because they were so hard-hearted, that all the evidence of His Messiahship which Christ could give them, fell to the ground, and they pursued their course of wickedness, buried in the deepest darkness of ignorance and self-delusion.
- (11.) Persons whose hearts are hard, will often embrace the grossest errors, and be very zealous in defending them. Not a form of error has ever been preached, which has not found some zealous, and even self-denying advocates.
- (12.) Persons in this state of mind, will often mistake the most bitter, and even ferocious zeal, for true religion. This was the case with the crusaders, and with the Catholic Church in the dark ages. Now how does it happen that people can make such an egregious mistake? We often see men in such circumstances, or in such a state of mind, giving the highest evidence of sincerity; they are willing to lay down life itself, in the accomplishment of the most nefarious plans. Yes, they are ready to become martyrs; they will rush headlong to the stake in the maintenance of error, or in carrying out unholy plans, which they call the work of God. Now, I ask, how can this be? I answer, it is because their hearts are so hard that they are really deceived, and mistake for true religion, what is nothing more than bitter, ferocious zeal. I have often been struck with

the case of the "come outers," as they are called, who go about the country, railing at the law and the priesthood, and who imagine they have a perfect right to get up in churches, and disturb the congregations in their worship. Now these persons seem to be as certain that they are right, and that they are doing God service, as they would be if they should receive a distinct revelation from Heaven. How does this happen? Why manifestly, it is because of the hardness of their hearts. It is on this account, that they have fallen into so deep and strange a delusion.

- o (13.) Persons in a state of hardness of heart, often mistake the spirit of fanatical impudence for Christian faithfulness. How often do we see people going about, talking to their neighbors and others in the most outrageously impudent manner, and all under pretense of being governed by a spirit of Christian faithfulness.
- o (14.) Persons who are in this state of mind, often mistake the most shocking irreverence, for true faith and filial boldness. We often observe it in the prayers of such individuals, and in their conversations about God and holy things.
- o (15.) The entertaining of false hopes, is another manner in which the influence of hardness of heart is illustrated. People often "indulge a hope," as they call it, when the very fact that they can entertain a hope under the circumstances, shows conclusively that their hearts are very hard. Probably there is not one of you, who has not known many individuals professing Christ, whose lives have been such, that you have been struck with wonder, that they could dare to call themselves Christians. But very likely their hearts have been so hard, that they have sincerely believed themselves to be accepted of God, notwithstanding their foul deeds. This was the case with the Scribes and Pharisees who persecuted Jesus. They doubtless thought themselves to be true saints. Paul, while he was breathing the very spirit of hell, deemed himself a real servant of God. The reason why people make this mistake is, because their hearts are so hard that they are mistaken as to what Christianity is--they are utterly in the dark as to what the true spirit of religion consists in, and as to who and what Christ is.
- o (16.) The influence of hardness of heart is illustrated by the great difficulty which exists in overcoming false hopes. How remarkable it is, that the same persons to whom I have just alluded, are the most difficult persons in the world to be convinced that they are not Christians. Christ in his parable of the wise and foolish virgins, alluded to these individuals, when he said, "afterward came the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us." Yes, those very persons who are influenced by the spirit of the devil, will often imagine that they are influenced by the Spirit of Christ; and they will not give up their delusion, but will soon in blindness, and at last cry, "Lord, Lord open unto us." Yes, they will not be put down by preaching, or by anything else; until at last Christ will say unto them, "depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Think how hard their hearts must be; they will not yield their false hopes, even if an angel from heaven should warn them so to do; they will cling to them, till Christ will banish them forever, to the lake of everlasting torment.

- o (17.) The wonderful delusion of many in respect to their spiritual state, illustrates the influence of hardness of heart. But I will not dwell upon this head, but will remark--
- o (18.) The same truth is illustrated by the change of views and feelings, which every Christian has experienced, when his heart has been thoroughly subdued. How remarkable this transformation often is! When the heart is softened by the love of Christ, how differently does everything appear--how greatly are our views changed on every subject! This change extends to almost every duty, relation, and act of life. Why, let a man turn from the service of self to the service of God, from a course of sin to holiness, and he looks back on his past life with perfect horror. He sees that his past deeds have all been wrong, and he detests them as he would if they had come from the bottomless pit itself. So too, a professor of religion often passes through a course of hardness of heart, and when he comes out into the light and liberty of the gospel, how different are all his views of what he has said and done, and of the influence which he has exerted, and of the manner in which he has used the talents which God has given him.
- o (19.) The influence of hardness of heart, is seen in the different effects which the same truth produces on the mind at different times. How striking is this difference? Perhaps a truth which has been heard an hundred times without any conscious effect, comes, of a sudden, to absorb the whole soul; and why is this? It is because the heart is softened and then the intellect is placed in the attitude of attention, and the truth pours its focal blaze upon the sensibility, and warms it, and melts it, and makes it as liquid as water.
- o (20.) Another illustration of the same truth is found in the different views we take of the Bible at different times. If the heart is hard, we take but little interest in the Bible, unless we read it for the purpose of criticism, or to gather historical facts. Its truths do not strike us as being very affecting; they do not interest us sufficiently to make us wish to devour them. But let the heart be softened, and at once how changed does the Bible seem. Why, its truths strike us so powerfully, they contain so much light, and power, and love, that they seem to set us afloat, and carry us with omnipotent energy towards God, and heaven. If a man's heart becomes thoroughly softened, he becomes so enamored of his Bible, that he sits up nights to read it: he carries it with him wherever he goes, and whether he is walking or riding, or engaged in business, he is ever pondering on its sacred truths. Yes, when his heart is hard, his Bible gets no hold upon him; but when Christ comes and softens and subdues his proud spirit, then his Bible is a new book to him; at once it introduces him into a new state of being, and makes the way of holiness light and clear before him.

REMARKS.

1. Persons often attribute the blame of their wrong doing to other things and other persons besides themselves. For instance, you will hear them complaining that the Bible is a very mysterious book, written in a very mysterious manner, notwithstanding God has said of it, that it is so plainly written that "the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein." It is strange, they will say, that I cannot understand it; why did not God make it so plain that it could be easily understood? And so they shove the fault of their sinning off their shoulders, and lay it on the Bible. Their hearts being hard, they

cannot see how plainly the scriptures are revealed, especially in the doctrinal portions of them. The same is true of the manner in which the preached word is received. You will often hear people complaining of the preaching. The very preaching which at one time takes a strong hold upon them, and goes down to the very bottom of their souls, I say, this same preaching, you will hear them complaining of, at another time, "as being very dull, the same thing over and over, nothing new, out of place, &c." Now let the spirit of God come and soften their hearts, and the preaching sounds entirely new to them; it is, as it were, a divine unction to their souls every time they hear it. They will be hard to say of it, "Ah that is just what we needed--very instructive--just in the right place, and just in the right time."

2. A man may be very sincere in believing a lie, and he will be so much the more sincere as his heart is the more hard. If his heart is very hard, he will lay aside all candor and will settle down in the belief of a lie so firmly that no evidence of any truth, however palpable, will in the least, move him from his falsehood. It will not be impossible for him to believe any lie, however palpable; and he will not only believe it, but he will give himself entirely up to its control; and the harder his heart is, the more confidence will he have in it, and the fewer misgivings as to its truth.

3. When a person believes a lie, and gives himself up to its influence, however sincere may be his belief, yet he is without excuse; for he creates his delusion by his own voluntary wickedness--it is forced upon him by no one.

4. It is only when the judgments or opinions are formed in a right state of heart, that a person is justified in acting in conformity to them. Many people seem to suppose that a person is pursuing a virtuous course when he acts in conformity to his real opinions, whether they are right or wrong, provided he is only sincere. Now sincerity itself may often be an evidence of great wickedness. For a man could not be sincere in pursuing a wicked course of life, or in holding on to a wrong sentiment, if his heart was right. Therefore, a man is without excuse, who does wrong, however sincere he may be in the wrong he is doing.

5. Men are the more apt to settle down and be confident in their wrong opinions and actions, in proportion to the hardness of their hearts. Perhaps when error is first broached in their minds, they have some misgivings about receiving it, but as their hearts become more hard, they are more firmly convinced of its truth, until at last, they lay aside all doubt, and come to believe the lie most sincerely. We have a striking illustration of this truth in the case of the persecutors of Christ. Doubtless when Christ first began to preach, the Scribes and Pharisees had many more misgivings as to the truth of His doctrine, than they had at the time they put Him to death. At first they listened to Him with attention, but soon their hearts grew harder, and they waxed more bold, until at last they, with the whole Jewish nation, assumed an outrageous tone, set at naught the holy Jesus, and denied all His claims to the Messiahship.

6. We often find the greatest confidence where there is the most delusion. Of all the persons that I ever met with, or heard of, I think the "come outers," are the most self-confident. They seem to think that they "are the people, and that wisdom will die with them." Now perhaps in the whole world there are not seven men to be found, who are so entirely wrong in all their principles of action, as these very "come outers." I have often been struck too with the assurance of many of the antinomian

perfectionists. Why, you might as well call in question the fact of their existence as to deny any of their positions. If you attempt to reason with them, and lay the axe of truth to the root of the tree of their faith, they will laugh in your face, and all your arguments will fall to the ground--so blind has their delusion made them.

7. Persons often wax more confident in the belief of a lie, in proportion as the evidence of their error thickens around them. This was the case with the Jews. In proportion as Christ heaped miracle upon miracle, and appealed to His works, to scripture, and to reason, for proofs of His Messiahship, just to that degree did the Jews wax confident in the belief that He was an impostor. Yes, such was the hardness of their heart, that in spite of all the light that Christ brought to bear upon them, they became steeled, and, as it were, case hardened against the truth, until at last, they were wrapped up in a delusion as fatal as can be conceived.

8. Millions, no doubt, die with a hard heart, and a firm hope of everlasting salvation. I recollect being called in my early ministry to visit a woman who lay at the point of death. Though she had been a very abandoned woman, yet she had the idea that she was a Christian; she supposed that in her youthful days she had seen Christ in a dream, and that she gave herself to the Lord at that time. Her friends tried to convince her of her error, but all to no purpose. She insisted on declaring that she was accepted of God, and that she enjoyed religion very much. With a knowledge of this fact, I went to see her. I conversed with her sometime, endeavoring to tear her from her delusions, but all in vain; my efforts were entirely unsuccessful; at last I kneeled down and prayed, I will not say with the effectual prayer, but at any rate, the Spirit of the Lord descended, and tore the veil from the wretched woman's heart--and oh! what a wail of agony burst from her lips--so shrill and piercing was it, that it was heard even to the neighbors. And she continued shrieking and shrieking, and her last mortal breath was spent in shrieking a note of bitterest agony. But the most remarkable case of the kind that ever came under my observation, was one which occurred in the city of New York, while I was preaching there. A man by the name of S-----, came into the city, and married a lady who was one of my church members. She persuaded him to accompany her to Church. He appeared to be a serious man, and disposed to listen to the truth, and before long, he was hopefully converted, and from what little I saw of him in inquiry meetings, I thought he appeared very well. I soon lost sight of him, and would occasionally inquire of his wife how he was getting on in spiritual matters. "Well, I don't know," she would say, "he is a very mysterious man--he is so constantly engaged in writing, that I see but little of him, and therefore do not know what to think of his religion." Why, what is he writing? I asked. "Well, I hardly know," said she, "he keeps his papers so closely locked up, that I hardly ever see them, but he says that he is writing a church history." Things ran on in this way for two or three years. The man continued to profess religion, and for ought I knew, his outward walk was consistent with his profession. At last he was taken with consumption, but he did not appear to be at all alarmed, indeed he seemed to be happy at the near approach of death. Finally he inquired of his physician how long he thought he would live, and whether it was probable that he would hold out till a certain day. The physician observing his calm and happy state of mind, did not hesitate to tell him that it was not likely that he would live till the day which he named. The man seemed to be very joyful in view of the fact. He continued apparently to enjoy religion, and as the day of his death drew near, he seemed to grow more and more spiritual. His conversation soon came to savor so much of heaven, that many people visited him on purpose to enjoy it. He seemed to delight in prayer, and in singing praise to God. By the way, all this time, he was frequently asking whether it was probable that he would live to the day

which he had mentioned to his physician. At last the morning of the day arrived, and it was evident that he was just on the eve of death. He called his friends around him, requested them to sing a hymn, bade them good-bye, telling them that he hoped to meet them in heaven, and then died. Now mark, while he was lying there, yet a warm and quivering corpse, the sheriff entered the house with a warrant for his arrest on the charge of forgery. The officer brought with him the most clear and convincing proof that the charge was well founded, indeed it was soon discovered that this very man who had just left earth to go as he hoped to heaven, had been engaged for years in a system of the most daring forgeries, which extended through this country, and even through Europe. As soon as the dreadful fact was announced, the horror stricken wife went to the bed side of her dead husband, and turning down the cloth from his cold and pallid face, she cried out in unutterable anguish of spirit--"You wretch, how could you deceive me in this manner?" Think of that, you who are wives--think of looking on the marble face of your dead husband, and calling him a wretch. This was the most wonderful case of self-delusion that I ever met with, and it taught me this good lesson--to inquire frequently whether my opinions were being formed under the influence of a hard heart.

9. We see why confession always accompanies a true revival. When persons have become really converted, and their hearts have become softened, they are ready to say that they feel that they have done wrong in past time. So too, when professors of religion get their hearts softened, and receive new views of duty, they do not hesitate to make ample confession of past transgressions.

10. No one can be truly revived or converted, without feeling the spirit of confession. The heart is not really softened if the person is not willing to confess frankly all his past sins.

11. The manner of confessing often indicates the state of the heart. How often in my ministry have I wanted to say to people, whom I have heard attempting to vindicate themselves, even while they were pretending to confess, --"Your hearts are not yet softened, they must be hard else you would not attempt in this manner to vindicate yourselves."

12. People are often mistaken as to the real sources of difficulty in religious matters. They lay the blame of it to every one but themselves--they look for the cause of it everywhere else besides just where they ought to look. If religion is at a stand, they are very apt to look through community and ask, "who is in the way of the work of the Lord?" They forget that this is the question which they should ask--"Is not my heart hard--am I not indulging in wicked practices and feelings, which the hardness of my heart does not permit me to regard as wrong?"

13. It becomes each one to inquire for himself--"Is not my heart hard?" This is the duty of the minister of the gospel. He may see that religion is in a decline in his church, but before he looks around for the cause of the coldness, let him ask himself, "is not my heart hard?" Let professors of religion do this, let each one ask himself, "is not my heart hard?" Now why is it that the precious truths of the gospel do not take a deep hold of you? Why is it that your souls are not all liquid and glowing with the love of Christ? Is it not because your hearts are hard?

Beloved, shall I not ask myself, "is not my heart hard?" and will each of you ask yourself, "is my heart hard?"

The Eyes Opened to the Law of God- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures II & III

July 17, 1844

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Ps. 119: 18: "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law."

LECTURE II.

In this discourse I shall show--

I. In what sense the term law is used in the text.

II. The meaning of the request-- "open thou mine eyes."

III. What is implied in making the request.

IV. The consequences of receiving an answer to the request.

V. The condition of an answer to the request.

I. In what sense the term Law is used in the text.

The term "law" is used in various senses in the Bible. Sometimes it means that which was written on the two tables of stone; sometimes the ceremonial law given to Israel by God through Moses; sometimes the five books of Moses in distinction from the books of the prophets and the Psalms, &c.; and sometimes it means the whole revealed will of God. This last is its widest sense, and this I suppose to be the meaning in the text; to wit: the whole Old Testament Scriptures--that is, the whole revealed will of God. The prayer of the Psalmist is as if he had said--Open Thou mine eyes to behold wondrous things in the Bible.

II. The meaning of the request--"Open thou mine eyes."

- 1. It does not mean create new eyes for me. Nor,
- 2. Does the Psalmist pray for any physical operation as removing a cataract, or taking away a film from the surface of the eye; for it is not the natural eye with which we see spiritual things.

But,

- 3. The Psalmist does intend to pray for spiritual light. A man may have good eyes, bodily and mental, and yet he will perceive nothing if light be wanting. I suppose the Psalmist to pray for spiritual light, the medium of spiritual vision, by which, supplied by the in-dwelling Spirit, he may apprehend the wondrous things really revealed in the Bible. Many will inquire--What is this spiritual light? I answer, that I cannot tell what it is, any more than I can tell what natural light is. Ask me what natural light is, and I cannot tell. I can tell what philosophers speculate about it, and that is all. I know this, that in its absence I cannot see, and that in its presence I can see. So there is spiritual light. What it is I know not, but that there is such a thing I do know, (and what Christian does not know it?) Every man enlightened by the Spirit of God knows the fact full well. He may be ignorant of its nature of the manner of its operations, as we doubtless are of both natural and spiritual light, but of the fact of the existence of both we may be perfectly sure; and of the existence of spiritual light, he upon whose eyes it has shone, is as certain as any man can be of the existence of the sun in the heavens. He knows that in its presence he can discern spiritual objects, and that in its absence they are hid from his eyes. Now I say, that the Psalmist in the text, expresses his desire to have spiritual light--his desire for the Spirit to shed his light upon the Bible, without which, he could not see and apprehend the truth of the Bible, and by which, they might be made to stand forth as actual realities to his soul. I pass to show

III. What is implied in the request.

- 1. It is implied that we possess the faculties requisite for the perception of spiritual objects. The Psalmist prays for no change or new creation, and there needs no change in the nature or organization of our faculties.
- 2. That our spiritual eyes are useless without light--that they are of no avail till God opens them, or till He supplies the light by which alone we can see--that we shall not and cannot behold the wondrous things in God's law, only as the medium of vision is supplied.
- 3. That the Psalmist knew very well that there were wonderful things concealed from his spiritual eye in the absence of spiritual light. He knew some of the things contained in the Scriptures doubtless. His eyes had been opened perhaps, and more than once. Indeed, no spiritual man can read the 119 Psalm with any good degree of attention, and not feel that he who wrote it had drunk, and that deeply, into the spirit of God's holy law. Every verse almost, any every verse but two, expresses in some way his love for God's law, the importance of God's law, or the glory of God's law. And the knowledge he already had gained had ravished his heart and made him cry out more earnestly to have his eyes fully opened, that he might be able to see clearly the glories of the Scriptures. The Psalmist had without doubt been enabled to get in some degree, behind the veil of types and shadows of the Old Testament, he had taken a peep beneath the drapery, and had seen Christ revealed and the wonderful things of salvation; he had looked through and beyond the outward types and shadows and the sight had so enraptured his soul, that he prayed with agonizing earnestness and importunity--"Open mine eyes. O Lord open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." The wonders are in the Bible if we could only see them. We might be walking in the midst of the splendors of

nature, and see nothing if there were not light. What are the glories of vision to a blind man? He may encircle the globe, go over its mountains and through its valleys, cross its oceans and its continents, pass among all its beauties and its luxuriance, and yet see nothing. Without eyes they are nothing; or with eyes if there be no light, all is midnight darkness. It is so as to spiritual things. Read the Bible, pass through its paragraphs, go over its pages, and you may after all see nothing of its beauties--like a man traversing a country in a stage-coach at midnight, he can get nothing of its scenery, how picturesque so ever it may be. When men with eyes not opened in the sense of the text read the Bible, they do not see its beauties, do not behold the wondrous things which are nevertheless contained therein, and they should with all earnestness make the prayer of the Psalmist. He prayed because he felt there were things in the law of God which he had never seen.

- 4. It is implied that we need to know the wonderful things which are spoken of. It is not to be supposed that the Psalmist wished to gratify a vain curiosity. Did he utter this inspired prayer, I ask you, merely from idle curiosity? No. He needed to know, and he felt it; he perishingly needed knowledge, and he cried in view thereof, and not for his own benefit alone, but that he might teach others also, that he might declare the praises of God in the great congregation.
- 5. It is implied that none but God can open our eyes. The Psalmist knew that a mere knowledge of language, of grammar and philology could avail him nothing. He understood the language of the Scriptures well enough. He did not pray to be taught the language of the Bible, to have the ability to decipher all the philology thereof--he would not pour contempt upon these, but value them in their place. But after all, with all his knowledge of the language, he felt that not any man, not even the wisest, not an angel, could give him the light. No, none but God, none but God by the Spirit which indicted the sacred pages could open his eyes, and hence his prayer to God--"Open Thou mine eyes." It should never be forgotten that the Bible is a mere dead letter except to those to whom the Spirit makes it a personal revelation. Do you understand me? What did the Psalmist pray for? To read the Bible? He could read it. To understand the words? He could define them. To become acquainted with the literature of the Bible? No, he knew all these things well enough. What then? That God would make the Bible a special and personal revelation to him. Not through Moses and the prophets, not by having the Scriptures in his hands, but to him, for himself--not by giving light to others, but directly to him--by opening his eyes. Lord "open Thou mine eyes." People are mistaken who think that the Bible is a revelation to them in any such sense as to save their souls, except their eyes are opened by the Holy Ghost. The Psalmist himself could not see without this, and he prayed God to supply to him that light, by the aid of which he might apprehend the truths of God's word. He sees the words--he reads the sentences--but what is the meaning? What are the things said? Open my eyes that I may see them. His prayer was to God for he felt that none but God could supply his need. But I hasten to notice,

IV. The consequences of having our eyes opened in the sense of the text.

- 1. Ourselves will be revealed. We shall see our own portrait drawn in a manner that will convince us instantly that the pencil of the Omniscient has done the work. It will be as if you had been sitting in the blaze of the Omniscient eye. The clearness and exactness will be startling. You will seem never to have seen yourself before, you will be astonished at the fearful

fidelity with which every feature will be sketched. Sinner, let your eyes be opened, and you will have another view of yourself altogether. Though it never entered into your heart to sit for your portrait, yet there is drawn every lineament, there you are, your face blazing right out, staring upon you, every feature and lineament blazing from the page of inspiration. Look where you will, there you are--a vile sinner, and you will wish to flee and get away from the horrible picture of your own face.

- 2. God will be revealed. God and yourself--and this in proportion to the degree of light. If the light be obscure, you will see indistinctly--"men as trees walking"--like moon-light or star-light. In the star-light you can see the fences, the trees, and the houses; in moonlight you can distinguish more; but yet things are not clear. As the sun approaches, as it puts out the stars and makes the moon dim, as it rises more and more till it appears in perfect day, your view grown fuller and clearer till the whole landscape is bathed in a flood of light. God is revealed--Father, Son, and Holy Ghost--but especially the Son, Christ, is revealed. You will find Christ in places without number, in passages where before you never dreamed Christ was to be found. The more I read my Bible and pray the prayer of our text the more am I convinced of the spirituality of those who find Christ revealed every where in the Bible. Once I thought differently. I remember a few years ago reading Edward's Notes on the Bible, and that I thought him visionary because he found Christ hinted at so often. He saw Christ every where. I saw no such thing. So some writers will find clear proofs of the divinity of Christ, where others can see no reference thereto at all. Now the difficulty with me was, I lacked spiritual light, so that I was unable to see what was really revealed in the Bible. The Jews, the great body of them, could not see Christ in the Jewish law, they did not see the drift and bent of the Scriptures. Why not? They were carnal, sensual, they had not the Spirit. Where persons' eyes are thus opened, they will have revelations of Christ such as to surprise them exceedingly; such a fullness and glory as will astonish them greatly. O what love! And in proportion to the clearness of the light of the Spirit, you will see that the design of the Bible every where, is to reveal Christ directly or indirectly. Christ is the subject, and the end--in history, in prophecy, in poetry, the Old Testament and the New--every where, Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the sum and the substance, the beginning and the end. Let your eyes be opened, and Christ is every where--our righteousness, our wisdom, our sanctification, and our redemption.
- 3. We shall differ very much in our views from all those whose eyes have not been opened. Impenitent young men, you sympathize with each other, you are alike self-wise and vain, you meet and scoff at religion and religious men, you agree in your notion that all piety is superstition and beneath your notice. But let the Spirit open the eyes of one of your number, and how changed his tone. How he will differ from those with whom he so perfectly agreed but just now in his views of himself and of them, of his works and their works, of his relations to God and of theirs. He can no longer sympathize with them, and join their wicked scoffings--he sees with a strong light, and is astonished at their darkness and his former darkness--he shuns them as the gate of hell. Why? His eyes are opened to behold eternity, and the judgment, and his sins. He sees himself, and them, standing upon the slippery steep, and fiery billows rolling beneath, and he cries out, and flees in terror. All this may be true while he is impenitent. But suppose he is converted; then he differs from them still more. He goes farther and farther and farther from them, and as he progresses in grace, and the light of the Spirit's illumination beams stronger and

brighter upon his soul, he presses on to the perfect day, while they remain where they were or plunge into deeper darkness.

This difference in views is true moreover of the different stages of Christian experience. As a man's eyes are opened more and more, he differs more and more from those who are below him; he sees things which they cannot see, and has a clear view of what they see but dimly. His view differs from theirs, as a view in the bright noon-day differs from one at evening twilight. Their experience will differ from his, as the description of a village, or a mountain, or a landscape, seen in the evening, would differ from a description of them as seen under broad day-light. Just as far as we get our eyes open we view the Scriptures differently, as naturally as cause produces its effect. As our light increases, our views must enlarge and expand of course. We must see more and better surely, when we stand with the great sun pouring upon our heads his flood of light, than when in the dim star-light we cast our eyes abroad.

And here let me remark--it is unspeakable folly to stereotype religious opinions, as if men were of course to agree in all their views. A young convert just born into the kingdom, wishes to be admitted into the fold of the Good Shepherd. Well, the whole system of religious doctrine is read over. Do you subscribe to this? the whole of this? And then not a step farther may they go, at the peril of heresy. How strange it is that men should imagine that here can be such a thing as for Christians to be just alike in their views of religious truth. They may be alike as far as they go. They may each be correct, while one may be far in advance of his fellow. And as a new truth comes to view, it always sheds its light over all the rest, and modifies the form in which they appear. And while the Spirit continues to throw its light upon the sacred pages, we may expect to modify and enlarge, and in some degree change our view of truth. How absurd to nail down our system and say--There, never change more. I have heard persons reckon it a virtue that they had never changed their views of truth. But I ask, have such persons prayed the prayer of the Psalmist? Have their eyes been opened?

- 4. The Bible will become to us a new book. Converts say so, and with truth; but it is not true with them alone. Old men, men who have long known God, are made by their experience to say the same thing. A few years since I was laboring in a revival with an elderly minister, a man sixty years old. I shall never forget how that man would say to me time after time, with deep emotion--"I have a new Bible. How striking the promises are. It seems to me as though I had never read them before. So rich they are, so full, so precious!" Ah, yes! Nor is this a singular nor an uncommon case. In many, very many instances have persons who have long been Christians, thus found their Bible a new book, and growing fresh and new as it were every day. It has become so precious, so glorious, so sweet, they could, so to speak, devour it, as the hungry soul devours its needful food. In my own case, let me say, beloved, within the last year the Lord has given to me such views of the Bible, that I have found it difficult to realize that I had ever known before any thing thereof at all. Many a time have I cried out, as the light poured upon the truth--"Lord, I never knew this before,"--and I could scarcely for the time believe that I had ever seen the thing at all. I do not mean I had not, for I know I had before seen great beauties in the Bible, but the light was so great that the spots that before seemed bright, were now hidden in the added splendor, as stars are lost in the light of dawn. Whole trains of

passages would crowd through my mind with such glory and freshness--passages which I had preached from again and again, would come in review under a light so new and striking, and with a meaning so full, that it would seem as though I had never known anything of them before, and the thoughts would crowd, and roll, and swell like an infinite tide, till it would appear as if I could preach and preach, and never be done preaching from almost any one of them.

- 5. Persons will be astonished at their former ignorance of the Bible when God opens their eyes. They will see so much that is new where they thought they knew all before, that they will be forced to exclaim in amazement--how could I have passed these things and not see them. I have read the passages a hundred times, why have I not seen these things before? As if a person should pass through a village in the dark, not knowing it was night, but supposing it was day, and then should go through the same village in actual broad day, and see the houses, and streets, and gardens, and wonder (as he would) why he did not see the village before. Without spiritual light, persons fail to see almost every spiritual truth in the Bible. They are like persons in the dark, while yet they say "We see;" and when God does indeed open their eyes, and they really see, they are astonished above measure that they had never seen before.
- 6. Those whose eyes are opened will see a great multitude of things in the Bible which others do not see, and which they will not believe are there, even though you tell them of their existence therein. Read the Bible under the illumination of the Spirit, and you will see myriads of things, which if you tell to others, they will smile at you for a crazy man; they will declare no such things are there, and suspect you to be a little beside yourself. Well let them alone. Let them have their say. They cannot see what you have seen, till they stand in the like strong and clear light. Let two persons pass through a place one in the night, and one in the day, and let the one who passed in the dark think that it was day, and that he saw all that was to be seen. Can he convince him? Wait till he goes through in the day-time, and then talk with him.

And here let me remark, as I said a little ago of the doctrine of Christ's divinity, so it is of the doctrine of Entire Sanctification. Once I could not see that doctrine in the Bible, and now I wonder much why I did not, for now I see it every where, almost. It is true with me as a good sister said of herself--when I first heard of the doctrine of Entire Sanctification, I thought it was no where in the Bible, but now I see that it is everywhere. I can adopt that language myself. It is not strange however, that persons whose eyes are not opened cannot see that doctrine in the Bible. The Bible, much of it, is so written, and perhaps from the necessity of the case, that the soul must be in a certain state, in order to see at all what was in the mind of the Spirit. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost," says Paul. That is, no man can see Christ as He is--the Lord of our salvation--but by the light of the Holy Spirit spread upon the sacred page. It is curious to see how many notions and conceits men will have of the meaning of the Bible, or how dull of apprehension they will be, and then how clear it will seem when the Lord has opened their eyes. Before, nothing could convince them, now they need nothing to convince them. If a man should pass this meeting-house, supposing he could see when he could not, you could not convince him of its presence; but let his sight be restored or the light shine upon his eyes, and there needs no more--there it stands before his own eyes. The doctrines of Atonement, of Christ's Divinity, of Sanctification--when the light from

heaven bursts upon the page, you need no voice to tell you; all silent, you gaze upon the revealed wonders, as when from the deepest midnight the sun breaks from the darkness and the whole landscape lies before you in an ocean of glories. Now Christian friends, I mean what I say; there is a spiritual illumination, a supplying the spiritual eyes with light, in which light the mind sees with a power of demonstration, like that which attends natural vision, the spiritual truths revealed in the Bible. Before this light is supplied, the mind may doubt, and reason, and cavil, and deny; but O, when the sun rises and pours forth its glorious blaze, then everything is revealed, every cavil is hushed, every doubt forgotten, and the soul gazes in silent rapture on the wondrous scene.

- 7. Our views will become a wonder to others, and just in proportion as our eyes are opened. Our views will be reckoned peculiar. Yes indeed, peculiar light will produce peculiar views of course. As far as the Spirit gives us light and we see thereby, our views will be modified, and those who have not the same light, will think them strange, and will wonder at us. How is it, they say, that they find such and such things? We find nothing like that. The Jews think the Christian doctrine blasphemous; they cannot find our Jesus in their Old Testament Messiah. We shall surely be regarded as heretics by those who have not our light. If God gives us light, if the revelations of His word be made to our souls, and especially if we proclaim them to the world, who shall be thought heretics. Let any man push his prayer before God, "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law," and let an answer be granted, and his eyes be really unsealed, and the presbytery will begin to watch him, the whisper will begin to go around, "The brother has a good spirit, but his views are dangerous"--they must have an eye to him, a committee must be appointed, and they must confer with him to rid him of his strange and peculiar views. What is the matter? Nothing, only the Spirit sheds light upon his mind, and he has got a step or two beyond the stereotype form, that is all. He understands the Bible better than before, has a richer insight into the richness of its promises; the Spirit has anointed him for his work--that is all. And if he ventures to say meekly to his fellow-servants, "Brethren, the Lord hath shown me such things in His word," their counsel will be--our brother seems to have a sweet, heavenly spirit, but his views are peculiar and dangerous, and they must be pronounced heterodox, and he be silenced. This has always been so, and men who are led in advance of their fellow Christians, must be content to be suspected of heresy.
- 8. Those who are enlightened, will be counted mystical. The most spiritual have in all ages been reckoned mystical. There are real mystics to be sure; there are extremes and delusions, and men think they see when they do not; but that does not alter the fact that spiritual men are reckoned mystical by those who are in the dark. Why? Because the former have spiritual eyes, they have spiritual light, and they see and understand things that are entirely invisible, and a complete mystery to others.
- 9. Those who are enlightened will be considered deranged by those whose eyes are not opened. Christ was thought to be mad. Festus said to Paul, "Thou art beside thyself, much learning hath made thee mad," you have studied so hard, have gone so deeply into philosophy and theology that you are deranged. Paul indeed answered him most solemnly, "I am not mad most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." But now wherein lay the difference? Paul had met Jesus by the way and had seen a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, shining round about him. The light of God had fallen upon him, and now people thought

him mad--Festus thought him mad. And why should it not be so? It will be so. It will surely be so. When do we judge a man deranged? Suppose a man's eyes should really be opened as Elisha's were, and those of the young man who was with him, and he should behold the angel of God encamped about him, which is in fact true, or like Stephen's, so that he could look into heaven and see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, could behold the realities of the invisible world--would he not be pronounced deranged? Yes indeed. "Put a strait jacket on him--do hear him" they will cry, "he says he sees angels, and chariots, and horses all round him--he sees heaven opened! Blasphemy--away with him--stone him to death!" Why? He tells what he really sees. Let a man but speak out what he sees, and surely he must be deranged. Now men do become deranged--surely they do; they do sometimes become visionary--most certainly; but men's eyes may really be opened too, as Stephen's and Elisha's were, and then others will imagine they are deranged. Those who think so may be honest in their opinion too.

- 10. Such will almost certainly be persecuted. Why was Paul persecuted? Because his eyes had been opened to see the fullness of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, and because he was constrained by his love to preach the cross. He had been a persecutor and injurious; he had many friends; but Christ's love had ravished his soul, and he would joyfully pour out his whole being for his Master. And what did he say? Hear him. "As I came nigh to Damascus, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me, and I heard a voice saying unto me--Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" and he went on and finished the story of his conversion. They bore impatiently with this, but soon he began again--"while I prayed in the temple I was in a trance, and saw [the Lord] saying unto me, make haste and get thee out of Jerusalem," and they could bear it no longer. They gave him audience till this word, and then lifted up their voices and said--"Away with such a fellow from the earth, it is not fit that he should live." And "they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air." And why? Surely Paul was beside himself, and a horrid blasphemer, and to kill him would be to do God service. They persecuted him. Why? He could see and they were blind. And those who are thus blind often will think that they ought to do many things contrary to those who are spiritual, and whom they regard as dangerous fanatics. I am very far from believing that all persecution arises from mere malicious wickedness. Many in high places and in low, oppose and persecute because they are in the dark, and think they see, and they persecute "in all good conscience." They may be, (as indeed they are) wicked for being in the dark, but in the dark, they think their spiritual brethren are mischievous, and must be put down and put out of the church; and think to do God service when they use the excising knife. But are they innocent? With all the light around them which God has proffered and now proffers, are they innocent while they remain in the dark? I think not.
- 11. The illumination of the Spirit will make us cease from man. We shall cease to expect any such instruction from human lips as shall suffice to qualify us to be useful. Not that God may not use creatures to instruct us in a degree. He does so. But we shall cease to rest in them, and we shall go to God feeling entirely sure that from Him alone cometh our help--that He alone can supply the light by which we are to see the things which lie hid in the Word of God.
- 12. In proportion to the light we enjoy, we shall find ourselves dwelling in the spiritual instead of the natural world. Let a man see as with open vision, the realities which we all believe to

exist in the invisible world, let him apprehend them as we now do the objects of this visible scene, and with which world think you will he be most conversant? With God, heaven, Christ, and the eternal world, or this gross and earthly clod on which we tread? As the mind is opened, it dwells in and communes with the spiritual world, it loses sight of earthly objects--there is a state of mind in which persons can feel the light shining broad and deep upon the soul--God draws near--the soul withdraws from all the outward senses, and retires into its inner sanctuary--God approaches and comes into the inner-most chamber of the mind, and there is silence, far, far from all the world of sense and sight, the soul communes with the eternal God, and if all the world were to throng around and clamor for a hearing, still the soul, withdrawn far within, would heed them not, but in bliss ecstatic drink draughts of ineffable joy from the presence of infinite love, and God be all in all.

I remember well how once I read with astonishment the account of such men as Xavier, where they would have such communion with God as utterly to drive from them all thoughts of earth, and every object of sense. Xavier, you know, on a certain day, was to have a visit from a prince--the viceroy. He went to his chamber, directing his servant to call him at such a time. When the servant entered his room to call him at the hour, there was his master kneeling on the floor, his eyes upturned, and his face shining like that of an angel, wholly insensible to outward things--the servant dared not disturb him. At the end of an hour he came again, still he was so--again, there he knelt. The servant spoke, no answer--he spoke again, no reply--he shook him and succeeded in awakening him from his trance--"Is the viceroy come?" inquired he, "tell him I have a visit from the King of Kings today, and I cannot leave it"--and he sank back into insensibility, and was shut up in the presence of the Living God. Time was when I could not understand how Paul could be in such a state of mind, that, speaking as an honest man, he could not tell, as he says, whether in the body or out of the body. But now I can see how he could say so. The mind is so absorbed with spiritual views, as to be insensible to natural objects entirely. The senses are all swallowed up, laid aside. The senses you know are but the organs which the mind uses; but she can do without them; she can retire from the touch, the hearing, the sight, and in the deep sanctuary of the soul sit alone with God. And this occurs when the light of the Spirit shines broadly and fully on the mind. Speak to him he does not hear you--touch him, it does not arouse him--he is gone--gone to the spiritual world; and when he returns and his soul comes back to earth, whether I was in the body I could not tell.

You remember a case among ourselves some years ago. A beloved sister--the Spirit came upon her, and she thought she was in heaven; her heart was there, and she thought she was there; she forgot she was in the body, the glories of heaven were around her, and she literally leaped for joy. I heard of a case, I think it was in the state of New York. It was that of a deacon. He was sitting in the "deacon's seat," facing the congregation; as the minister was preaching, the Holy Ghost fell upon the deacon. He rose up unwittingly, stretched out his hands upward, his face pale and gazing as it were into heaven, and his countenance radiant as an angel's. The assembly were amazed, the Spirit of God ran like fire through the whole congregation, the arrows of conviction flew like lightning, and the whole body were convulsed with emotion, and many were broken down before the Lord.

- 13. He whose eyes are opened, will be solemn, but it will be a cheerful solemnity. It is related of Xavier, that his cheerfulness was so great, that those who were not familiar with him thought him gay. David, in his joy, danced with all his might before the ark, when he brought it up from the house of Obed-Edom. There will be nothing like levity, but a deep and solemn cheerfulness, such a cheerfulness as we may suppose God to possess--a broad, universal smile; the mind smiles in its deepest being; to the very bottom of the heart, there is one deep, broad smile--as God looks forth over His whole creation with a smiling face--the soul is cheerful, peaceful as an ocean of peace.

LECTURE III.

July 31, 1844

THE EYES OPENED TO THE LAW OF GOD--No. 2

Text.--Ps. 119: 18: "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law."

V. The conditions on which an answer to the request in the text may be expected.

- 1. We must believe that there are such wondrous things in the Bible, and that God is able and willing to reveal them to us. We must believe in the doctrine of this discourse, to wit, that without divine illumination shed on the Bible by the Spirit, we cannot understand the truths thereof, and that God can so enlighten us as really to make us behold wonderful things, new and before unknown, things hidden from those whom the Spirit does not enlighten, in short, we must believe that the Bible needs to be revealed, that it is not sufficient that these words be written down, and that we read these sentences, but that there must be a personal application and revelation to us, by the Spirit, in order to get beyond the letter which killeth, unto the Spirit which giveth life.
- 2. A sense of our great ignorance, and spiritual blindness. No man will make this petition unless he feels that he is exceedingly blind; unless he realizes that he needs the divine illumination, and how great his darkness is, and his ignorance of the spiritual truths of the gospel, he never will have the enlightening of the Spirit.
- 3. We must strongly desire this divine light. It must be the leading, controlling desire of the mind, our soul must be pressed down with our ignorance, and drawn out in mighty supplications, with strong crying and tears, that God will give us light. The Prophet says, "And ye shall seek me, and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart." There must be such a longing, the soul so set upon it, as that the soul cries out after God. We need to be much in the state of mind in which blind Bartimeus was, that most affecting case, so graphically described that you seem to see it acted before your eyes. Jesus was passing along with a great multitude around Him, it was all excitement, they came into a village, a blind man sits by the side of the way, where he has often sat before. Bartimeus sits there, as in the East is common to this day—to this day you may see poor creatures blind and lame lying by the way side, half-naked, famishing, dying, and frequently no more notice taken of them than if they were so

many beasts—there he sits to beg—he has heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and of his wonderful kindness, and his wonderful cures, and he longs to see Him. Well, Bartimeus hears the noise—he asks, What is it? "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." He is all on fire—"Jesus, JESUS, thou Son of David have mercy on me." "Hush, hush, be still, don't make such an outcry." He cried the louder, "Jesus, Jesus, O Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." He must be heard, there was a great throng and much noise and he must be heard—he was blind and he must have his sight restored. Jesus could do it and he must gain his ear—he would be heard—when they told him to be quiet he only cried the louder. But Christ heard him. Who is that? A blind man, Lord, nobody but a poor blind beggar. Bring him hither to me. And Bartimeus leaped forth, and they brought him to Jesus. What wilt thou that I should do unto thee, Lord, that I may receive my sight? And now mark, see the sweet mercy of the Savior, He restored his sight immediately.

Now you must feel as Bartimeus did, you must have the confidence that he had—for see the confidence Bartimeus had, he believed Jesus could heal him, and he wished to afford Him the opportunity. O, if he could but find Him, and when Jesus came that way how he cried out. And so you must feel as to your spiritual sight—that it must be obtained.

- 4. A willingness to encounter all the consequences. Some of the consequences I have told you already. You must be willing to encounter all the consequences, or you cannot be the subjects of the divine illumination.
- 5. We must persevere in faith and asking—for we may not be enlightened at first, any more than the Syrophenician woman was answered at first. Many mistakenly suppose that the very first exercise of faith brings, in their fulness, the blessings promised to faith. But not so. The Syrophenician woman must ask again and again. Jacob wrestled all night with the angel even till break of day. God has his reasons for delay, and they are good ones no doubt, and we should not think the answer will surely come instantly, on the exercise of faith, nor because the answer does not come immediately should we think we do not pray in faith, but we must press our suit, and hold on, and cling to the promises.
- 6. Right motives in asking. Not mere curiosity, but a desire really and truly to glorify God thereby, a desire for the light that we may walk in it, that we may glorify God and hold up the true light in our conduct, by our spirit, our manner, our preaching, our everything. If we have unholy motives in asking it, we shall not obtain the light, we may be well assured.
- 7. We must search the Scriptures, if we would expect the light of the Spirit poured upon their pages.
- 8. We must give up those pursuits, that reading, those objects, which divert our attention, and prevent us from giving our whole souls to the Bible. While our minds are drawn off from the Bible by other things, while we are interested in those authors whose spirit is as directly opposite to that of the Bible as heaven is to hell, how can we hope to have the enlightenment of the Spirit? There is a class of writings, which, in their influence, make the soul totally blind to the glories of the Scriptures—it cannot receive them in such a state of mind. If you give

yourself to search for the spirit of Byron, that spirit will come upon you with little effort on your part. It is so congenial to the heart in its selfishness and passion, it will fall upon you without being prayed for. But the Spirit of God will never enlighten you, never. I believe it to be an unalterable condition of communion with the Spirit, that the mind must be broken off from communion with such corrupt and corrupting authors. You must break loose from them, or you will never enjoy the sweet light of God's Spirit.

- 9. You must avail yourselves of all the aids within your reach, which will lead you to a right understanding of the Scriptures. I do not mean that a man may not understand the Bible, and have the spiritual illumination in the absence of commentaries and of a knowledge of the original languages; he may get a spiritual acquaintance with the Bible without these, if he give himself thereto with a right spirit, that is, if these helps are out of reach. But if a man can avail himself of the opinions of learned and godly men, he should do so; if he can gain a knowledge of the original tongues, he should do so; if in any other way he can get help from his fellow men, let him do so, remembering meanwhile, that these are by no means indispensable to such a knowledge as is necessary to usefulness and salvation, but very useful in their place, when they can be obtained, and therefore should be used with thanksgiving. If God places you out of reach of all these, then He will enlighten you without their aid, but if they are within your reach, he will not teach you independently of them, those things which are appropriately to be learned from them.
- 10. It is necessary that we become child-like in our disposition. Now God does not teach, I suppose, by miraculous interposition, properly so called, but when the mind is in a child-like state, the way is open for the Spirit to present the glorious truth, and for the mind naturally to apprehend its deep and transcendent import. The eye then is open, and ready for the light to be shed upon the objects of spiritual vision. But if the mind be committed, if there be a determination to see things just so and no otherwise, we never shall be able to see the truth as it is in Jesus. I pass to make several

REMARKS.

1. I notice the danger there is in preaching some of the spiritual truths of the Bible. Not that they tend in themselves to produce mischief, but, men being as they are, those truths will by very many, certainly be perverted. This has always been true, and it is true in respect to many doctrines. Justification by faith—salvation by grace—have they not been sadly perverted? Yet they are most precious doctrines. So the doctrine of spiritual illumination. Many will go straight into delusion under such a discourse as I have preached, or make it the occasion of confirming their minds in a previous delusion. Many will seize hold of some one or other of the consequences I have enumerated of spiritual illumination, and finding such a fact in their own case, they will conclude they are surely divinely enlightened. I said that those who are divinely illuminated will differ much in their views from others, that their views will be reckoned peculiar and wonderful, that they will be thought deranged, that they will be persecuted. Now we differ from those about us—we are counted strange and fanatical—they call us crazy or chatter-brained—we are persecuted for our opinions and conduct—therefore we are spiritually enlightened. The doctrines of spiritual religion will certainly be abused—but that is no reason why they should not be preached. They are the food of the saints—the bread of their souls—and shall it be withheld? If

others will abuse them, who can help it? They must not be withheld from the true saints who are panting after them, because some will abuse them, and so be lost thereby. It is the less of two evils to preach them for the good of the true saints, though incidental evils result to some, than to withhold them and starve the souls of the faithful and thus curse the world. I have often seen persons confirming themselves in delusion in this way. I know not how many times in reference to this very subject, when I have met with persons laboring under curious delusions, and have expostulated with them, they have quoted my own sermons and writings in support of their fantasies. They will say, you used to preach that men might be taught of God. Yes, I preach the same doctrine now. But because a man may be taught of God, does it follow that you are taught of God in your strange vagaries? Because you may have your eyes opened so as to behold wondrous things out of God's law, is it certain that your wondrous things are contained in the Bible? A certain class of minds will almost surely be deluded, and this most likely to their ruin. To such God says by the prophet, "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks which ye have kindled. This shall ye have of my hand—ye shall lie down in sorrow."

2. Many persons will be led astray in another direction by this subject. Becoming greatly wrought upon, they get a wrong idea, and seek for immense excitement. You are to seek with all earnestness, but the thing which you are to seek is not feeling, but light, substantial light shed upon the pages of the Bible.

3. Where persons give themselves up to seek states of feeling, and to be carried away by a flood of emotion, it will always react, and create abundant mischief. Men need to be baptized with the Holy Ghost, and if they give themselves to anything else, it may cause much noise and vociferation, but it will never lead them to the state in which they are "light in the Lord."

4. I understand this divine illumination to be a special gift from God—not the gift of miracles—not conversion. The Apostles had it on the day of Pentecost. It is generally included in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is given in different degrees, and at different times. Men need it again and again, and more and more of it. Persons who have been enlightened need still greater illuminations as they go forward.

5. Those whose eyes are not opened are very liable to speak "evil of things which they understand not," and thus wound their own souls and grieve the Spirit of God. It grieves me much to see persons stumbled at things, merely because they are in advance of their experience. I will mention a case. A man, an elder in the Presbyterian church, who had been such for nearly half a century, and who thought all religious excitement fanaticism, was present at a meeting during a revival in a neighboring church. The Spirit of God came down with power. The elder was much disturbed. At the close, a person in the assembly sank down to the earth, overcome with the power of conviction. The elder cried out angrily, "Get thee behind me Satan." Where is that man now? He opposes everything that is good—all reformations, all progress of good, in a most obstinate and self-willed spirit, and is left apparently to his own destruction. Many do not, I know, go so far as this; but it is astonishing to see how men will speak evil of things which they understand not. It will be well for such to read the solemn words of the Apostle Peter. "These as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speaking evil of the things they understand not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption, and shall receive the reward of their unrighteousness." It is one of the great dangers to which men are

exposed, to oppose, and reject, and speak evil of things simply because the things are beyond their own experience. They seem to think they know all that can be known, and anything else is fanaticism of course. Persons often treat as foolish, and visionary, and childish, and contemptible, the higher states of Christian experience, and only because they themselves have not advanced so far. You should be careful, brethren, lest you speak evil of and reject those very things which you must know if you are ever saved.

6. The spiritual members of the Church have always been persecuted by the body of the church. The Bible will tell you so, and all history declares the same thing. The most spiritual ministers and members have always been misunderstood and persecuted by those who are not spiritual.

7. This should not discourage you from seeking spirituality, nor from being spiritual. And, moreover, spiritual persons will neither be surprised nor offended thereby. They can understand very well why others speak evil and oppose. The spiritual man discerneth all things, but he himself is discerned by no man. The Bible teaches this, and he sees why it is so; he sees why they account him a heretic, and are afraid of him; he sees where they are, but they do not see where he is; he understands their darkness better than they understand his light.

8. The subject accounts for much of the difference of opinion as the meaning of the Bible. There always will be differences of opinion. It is absurd to think that there can be any system of opinions stereo-typed, and believed alike by the young convert and the adult Christian. What, must men have the full knowledge of the Bible when they are first converted? Are men to make no advances in knowledge of divine things? How are stewards to bring from their treasure things new and old? Then, must nothing new be brought forward? O no. You must learn nothing new—must find nothing which is not in the standards. It is to be taken for granted that a thing is wrong of course, if it is not in the standards. It is true, indeed that all will agree in certain doctrines. But it by no means follows that everyone will hold all that is taught in the Bible; neither is it true that men may not be real Christians, and yet be ignorant of many very precious truths taught in the Bible.

9. We all see why so many persons are not deeply interested in the Bible. They have not their eyes opened, have not the divine light shining upon it to make it interesting to them. They are like persons passing a most beautiful region in the dark. They see no beauty, they have no light. Without this light from God, the Bible is a sealed book, and for all spiritual matters of no benefit. And the reading of it for such a purpose, is as dull a work as one can well be engaged in. A man will read his chapter, and five minutes afterwards he knows nothing of what he read. But with the Spirit, the Bible is a world of wonders; it is a mine of gold, exhaustless; you may dig, and dig, and the deeper you do, only the richer will it become.

10. You may see the reason why ministers, and young men preparing for the ministry are so little interested in making the Bible their study. They lack the divine light that makes it all glorious within, that leads them into the depths of its hidden meaning.

11. Where men possess this divine light, you will never hear them pleading the necessity of reading other books to give the mind proper recreation. If they read other literature at all, it will be not for amusement, but for information. Such a man will not feel bound to read Shakespeare and Scott. He

will draw away from them as from an ocean of filth. I may say without extravagance, that to him whose eyes are opened, the Bible will prove a more fertile source of improvement, both moral and intellectual, a more powerful spring of mental action than all other books put together. It opens up a world of thoughts on almost every subject, it starts ten thousand trains; you tread as it were upon enchanted ground, whole masses of thought constantly rising from the bosom of the great ocean of truth; the Psalms, the Prophets, all point you to every part of the universe, the heaven, the earth, and the sea. But without the Spirit, the Bible is bereft of this power.

12. It is true, I believe, that the more of the divine illumination Christians enjoy, the less they read of any thing else than the Bible. Or if they read other things, it is because it will throw light upon, or because the spirit of the works is like the spirit of the blessed Bible. Ask the oldest saint, if he is not tired of his Bible. Tired of my Bible? My Bible? It is more and more my book every year I live. But have you not read it through and through? Yes, but it grows richer and richer every time I go through it. But do you not understand it all? Ah, I learn something continually. I learn more now at a reading than when I first began. Now I know no end to this progression in divine knowledge, for the spiritual mind. The Spirit keeps bringing up without end, new and more exquisite and glorious displays of the things of God's law. The soul drinks and drinks, and drinks again, and the ocean is never exhausted.

13. Spiritual guides whose eyes are not opened are blind leaders of the blind. I do not mean that a man must have all light in order to be a guide at all, a man may guide as far as he knows the way himself, but without enlightenment he can lead but a little way. A vast many ministers are so blind that they can lead but a little way. Many cannot even bring sinners into the kingdom, they have not knowledge enough of the way to carry a sinner into the kingdom and set him down within the gate. Others can take them through the gate, but can guide them little further. Ministers will labor in their way for years and years, and their church will make little progress or none at all. The reason is, their own eyes are not open, and what they do not know they cannot tell to others.

14. You see the importance that ministers shall insist that God shall open their eyes, to enable them to behold wondrous things out of His law. A young man who is called to preach, may urge that call before the Lord as a valid reason for the illumination of the Spirit, and he is bound to urge his call. O God, hast thou set me a watchman upon Zion's wall, and wilt thou not open my eyes. O, how blind I am! How blind the flock are! How they need enlightenment, my Father open thou mine eyes. A minister ought to press this, and insist on it, and every candidate for the ministry should press it. The Church ought to pray with earnestness that God will open the eyes of their spiritual guides. And every Christian too, ought to pray for enlightenment, that he for himself, may understand the holy word.

15. Many pray to be enlightened who will not fulfill the conditions, who will not give up their own ends, and cast away their prejudices. Of course they remain in the dark.

16. Many mistake and suppose they are enlightened when they are not. They do thus—They desire a certain thing to be true. They take the Bible and endeavor to make it support their loved doctrine, till at length they seem to see its truth written every where. By long labor the doctrine has become coupled by association with a multitude of passages. Now they are enlightened. O yes, it's as clear as day. No, but they are not enlightened. They are much mistaken. Let me give an illustration, a curious case enough. I received a book, not long since, directed to me with all gravity, as if a

revelation from heaven itself. The book is the work of some of the people called Shakers, and it claims to be a revelation from God, to the effect that Christ has come the second time, and that in the person of Ann Lee. In that book a great many passages are adduced to maintain the proposition that Christ's second advent must be in the person of a woman! And all this by the teaching of the divine Spirit! Men think they have the witness of the Holy Ghost to a thing when they have no witness of the Holy Ghost to that thing. Bro. Charles Fitch professed to have the witness of the Spirit that the second advent of Christ with the end of the world would occur in 1843. But he was mistaken, as he also is in respects to the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked. O brethren, do not mistake the persuasions of a heart set in falsehood, nor the vagaries of a fanatical brain for the teachings of the Holy Ghost.

17. Many persons do not care enough about understanding the Bible, to give themselves to pray for the light of the Spirit. They have no longing to know what is in the Bible. I know what that indifference is, and I know too what it is to cry out from the bottom of my soul, O God, open my eyes. Listen to the Psalmist. As the hart panteth after the water brooks so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God, when shall I come to appear before God! Is there any fanaticism there, my brethren? Look at that figure—the poor, tired hart, its tongue out, panting, leaping, and panting in the desert, and no water. Is there not earnestness there? So interested must you be, your heart panting after God, crying out after Him.

Brethren, there are glorious things in the Bible—wondrous things in God's law—we need the Spirit to open our eyes that we may behold them. To obtain that light we need to pray the prayer of our text—"Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Will you give yourselves to pray and seek the Lord, for the light of his Spirit to shine upon the word, to enlighten our eyes, and make us know God's holy truth?

Christian Witnesses for God

Lecture IV

August 28, 1844

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa. 42:10: "Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord."

In this discourse I shall show:

I. What is implied in an appeal to witness.

II. What is essential to the competency of a witness.

III. State some things that affect his credibility.

IV. God's cause must depend upon the faithfulness of his witnesses.

V. The conditions which make testimony for God available.

I. What is implied in an appeal to witness.

It is implied,

- 1. That there is some question at issue, which can be settled by an examination of facts.
- 2. That the parties, or one of them, will have an appeal to the facts in the case, to settle the question at issue.
- 3. It implies an appeal to certain persons to establish the facts, as the vouchers thereof. The parties agree to appeal to persons to determine the real facts in the case, which persons are witnesses. Now all this is true with regard to God, and His cause, in this world. He has taken issue with men. The great question is concerning His moral character and government, and He has appealed to witnesses to set forth and establish the facts. His people are those witnesses. He has called them as witnesses and cast His cause, as it were, upon their testimony. The issue is the moral character and government of God, and the appeal is to those who in this world know Him, who are best acquainted with Him, and who are therefore the most competent and credible witnesses.

II. What is essential to the competency of a witness.

But few things are required for competency.

Witnesses must be of suitable age, and have the necessary qualifications to understand the circumstances to which they testify; and they must have been so situated as to speak from personal knowledge of the things which they state, and not from report or hearsay, or conjecture. These are the principle things which go to make a person a competent witness. So God's witnesses must be able to speak from personal knowledge, it will be of no great account to tell what others know, or what you have heard reported. You must speak if you testify at all, and do any good by your testimony, from actual knowledge; you must state facts which your own eyes have seen, ears have heard, and hands have handled.

III. Mention some things that affect the credibility of a witness.

By credibility is meant the degree of credit to which a witness is entitled. It is very manifest witnesses may differ very much in the degree of credit which should be given to them. Some are entitled to the utmost confidence, and others to little or none at all. And a multitude of things must affect their credibility, must conspire to give them credibility or otherwise.

- 1. Substantial agreement with each other in the things to which they testify. If witness contradict one another on fundamental questions, they cannot be believed. But observe here, that some witnesses may be able to testify to things of which others can say nothing, and in this sense, there may be much difference in the testimony of different witnesses in the same case. One may speak of things which the other does not know. But this will not invalidate the testimony of either, provided there be no contradiction in their statements. One may see what another did not see; one may be so situated as to learn what another has no opportunity to learn. The fact that one did not see a thing is no proof against the testimony of another who did see it. But there must be no contradictory statements. One witness must not contradict another. If one swears that a man was at New York on a certain day, and at a certain hour, and another swears the same man was at Buffalo on the same day and hour, both cannot be true, and neither can be taken. There must be a mistake because the testimony is contradictory. Moreover,
- 2. The statement of a witness must be consistent with itself throughout. He must not contradict himself. If his story is contradictory, if it is not consistent throughout, if the parts do not hang together, the witness' credibility is destroyed. There must be, moreover, an agreement with statements made at other times. If at one time, he contradicts what he says at another time, you cannot generally know which is true, and the testimony cannot be received. Or if a witness' testimony is inconsistent with his practice, this in God's cause is fatal to the credibility of the witness. If he says one thing and does another, it is most fatal to his credibility, since the testimony respects his regard for God and his fellows, and since it is true that actions speak louder than words, it follows that though a man say he loves God, yet if he hate his brother, he is counted, and justly too, a liar. Again--
- 3. The spirit and bearing of a witness taken as a whole, has much to do with his credibility. Where a witness manifests great prejudice and committal to one side or the other, where a wrong spirit is cherished, where he manifests hate to one party, and interested attachment to the other, where he is uncandid, where he has not investigated the subject, has not been candid and thorough in getting at the facts, in such cases the witness is plainly entitled to little credit.
- 4. The degree of acquaintance with the matter at issue. If it is clear that he is familiar with the whole subject, that he knows the whole question, and knows it perfectly, where it is manifest that he is qualified from character and position to be a good judge, and that he is perfectly at home in the whole question, he must be reckoned a credible witness in a high degree. A witness must know what he professes to testify. Where it is plain that he does not know, that he is in doubt as to the principle points in dispute, he is entitled to, and will receive in court, very little credit.

IV. The success of every cause decided by testimony must depend on the character of the witnesses and the testimony which they give.

- 1. This is true of any cause. The case is brought--an appeal is made to facts--who are to establish those facts? The witnesses. If they do so, the cause is gained, if they fail, it is lost. And it is true also of God's cause. What is God's cause, now trying? God is endeavoring to sustain His government over men and bring them to obey Him. This can only be done by subduing their hearts. That can be affected only by the truth--that truth must be presented: and this must

be done by witnesses. An appeal must be made to the intelligence, such an appeal as to carry conviction--a course must be taken such as to bring men back to God, and to induce men readily and heartily to submit themselves to God's authority. How is this to be done? In as much as the matter is a subject for investigation and knowledge, and as the facts in the case are the criteria on which it is to turn, and as God has made an appeal to the facts and to men as the witnesses to establish the facts according to which the issue is to be decided,--as the cause rests thus--the success thereof--the question whether He shall get a verdict in His favor--whether all hearts shall be given to Him or at least, whether the universal judgment of conscience and reason shall turn for Him must depend on the ability and faithfulness of His witnesses. This is no mere speculation; it is a simple matter of fact--God's cause in the court of this world has depended and does depend on His people; the witnesses to whom He has made His appeal. Moreover, the witnesses are God's people and none others. He appeals to no others. He appeals to all His people, makes no exceptions among them, but calls every one to the stand, "ye are My witnesses," stand up before the whole world; arise in the court-room of the universe, give in your testimony on My behalf, testify what you know of Me, of My character, My government, tell what your eyes have seen, and your heart has known concerning Me and My cause. Take the stand and bear witness in this case between God and the world, and let us hear what you know of these great realities.

- 2. Inasmuch as God has thrown His cause upon an appeal to facts; He Himself perceives the issue depending upon the faithfulness of His witnesses. He has appealed Himself. He Himself has appointed His people to be His witnesses, and He sees His success in the eyes of men depending upon their testimony.

The success of God's moral government is conditional on faith. Faith depends on conviction that the things are true. But how is conviction produced? By evidence. Whence comes evidence? From witnesses. Who are the witnesses? God's real people, and the Holy Spirit giving weight to their testimony. His true children are the only competent witnesses, the only ones qualified to testify. They are of lawful age, and can speak from personal knowledge. They are the best of all witnesses, and the only competent ones. Their testimony will decide the question, and ought to decide it.

V. The conditions of the availability of the testimony of Christians for God.

- 1. They must have personal knowledge, must be personally acquainted with God, so that they can tell, not what somebody else has said, not what they have heard reported, not what they have been told, that Paul said, that Peter said, that John had heard, that such and such things were thought to be so. They must tell what they know. When they come to the stand, the judge will ask, are you acquainted with the parties? Do you know any thing of the matter at issue? What do you know of this cause now in this court, pending between God of the one party, and wicked men of the other party? "I have heard"--you begin, "I have been assured by such a one,"--But what do you know? You have heard--Where is he that told you? You have only heard --Stand aside then. Is there anybody here that knows aught of this question between these two parties? If there be, let him appear and truly give testimony concerning it.
- 2. Consistency. Consistency of statement among the several witnesses. If one swears to one

thing, and another contradicts it, unless God's witnesses agree substantially with each other, all will go to confusion and end in defeat. Consistency too, is requisite in the story of each witness throughout, and consistency of his practice with his testimony. But observe as I said before, one may testify to what others know nothing of, and yet not destroy the validity of the testimony. And moreover it requires a deep, a rich experience of divine things, a high insight into the dealings of God; a deep apprehension of God and His truth and salvation, to testify to some truths of the first importance. Superficial believers are utterly incompetent to testify in regard to some of the higher, in which yet are some of the chief positions needing to be sustained on God's part. Again,

- 3. Truthfulness is a condition of availability. If the witness is known to misrepresent or pervert or falsify, of what worth is his testimony?
- 4. The indwelling of God's Spirit, and the revealing of God to the soul by the Spirit, so as to give them personal knowledge of God, is requisite to make persons available witnesses. They can testify to no purpose unless God dwells in them, and they in God, unless so to speak, they live and move and have their being in Him, in such a sense as that they have constant communion with God, are conversing with Him day by day; unless they are thus, they cannot bring such evidence as to bear down upon the unbelief of wicked men, and drive it away from them.

VI. The responsibility of the witnesses.

- 1. Great interests are at stake. Suppose you are a witness in a case of life and death, suppose that on your single word hangs the life of a fellow-being, you would feel your real responsibility to be great. Think that upon your testimony is poised the life of a fellow-man, and how greatly would it affect you. How it would make your heart sicken and sink within you. How carefully would you weigh every word and should utter, and consider every sentence. How important that you bear just the true testimony. How great the injury you might inflict on the accused if really innocent on the one hand, or on the public weal, if the accused were really guilty on the other. But advance a step. Suppose the temporal well or ill-being of a whole town was suspended upon your word or conduct. Suppose the lives of a regiment of men were thus pending, and you were called into the presence of the generalissimo, and your testimony would determine their doom, you would approach awe-stricken, all pale and trembling, and would inwardly, and perhaps audibly, groan out, how can I stand under such a weight--bear so heavy a load. O what if by an error of my tongue, the lives of all these should be sacrificed! But farther still--let the life, not temporal, but eternal, of a soul depend upon you--nay farther still, let there be all around you those whose eternal destiny hangs upon your words and deeds, those whose unbelief or faith, whose repentance or prolonged rebellion, whose submission or obstinacy, whose holiness or sin, whose sanctification or permanent purification, or deeper and deeper plunge into filth and pollution, whose everlasting good or endless ill, hangs upon your look, upon your words, your conduct, my friends, let this be the weight laid upon you,--and O, what angel can estimate the immensity of your responsibility, can reckon up the importance of your testimony. An immortal soul is arrested by God's Spirit, and enjoined to swear allegiance to God's throne; he turns to you a professed subject of God's kingdom,--he asks, What sort of a king is God? You have no testimony to bear for your sovereign, your mouth is closed, not a

word to say--but only feeble and unintelligible, mumbling, or contradictory statements, and a practice that gives the lie direct to your words. What then? The Advocate is sad, no plea to make, His own witnesses have betrayed Him, His dependence has failed Him, and He is silent and confused. The judge charges the jury, he asks them, Have you agreed upon your verdict? They answer without leaving the jury-box. "We have," Gentlemen, what say you? worthy, or not worthy? And they answer, "Not Worthy." The Infinite God as lost His cause, it has gone by your perfidy, and the opponent makes his way from the court glad by the strength of the verdict, and the failure of the witnesses to stifle the voices disagreeable as they are, in his own breast, that say while they speak at all, false verdict! Treacherous witnesses! God is worthy! O, man be not deceived! But the case is decided against God, the soul is set, the course is taken, and it ends not till it descends down the sides of the bottomless pit. O, false witness, what hast thou done? Treacherous advocate see thy work! Faithless defender, cursed by thy memory! Soul, witness, beware, you are on the stand, a word, a look, falter, stammer, and it is gone!

- 2. Not only are great interests at stake--the world's salvation, the glory of the Infinite God among men, the honor and success of His moral government, but it is true, that you may be as fully furnished as you please, as thoroughly qualified to bear witness as you desire. Every facility is afforded, every opportunity is given for acquaintance. God has spread out all the glorious facts in the case for your full and thorough understanding. He has invited you, and He urges you, to search with the utmost diligence--He throws His kingdom open to your eye for the most familiar knowledge--He lets you study, if you will, and gives you ample time and leisure, and all needful aids to examine and learn all the great facts upon the establishment of which His cause is to command a favorable verdict--He urges you to so complete a knowledge, and so deep, so rich and exquisite an experience, in all the parts of truth, in the whole great scheme of practical godliness, that you may stand up in the presence of the court as erect as an angel, and declare as with the tongue of a silver trumpet, from your own knowledge and great experience the wonderful things on which the world's salvation is hung. If you have such advantages, such facilities, such interests at stake, if you have such facilities for securing the requisite knowledge in the case, if you must be reckoned as a witness at any rate, and so much depends on your testimony, I ask you, what should you do? Ah, an angel might tremble under such responsibility.
- 3. It is impossible for any soul to tell how much may depend upon his own testimony--his own individual witness. When the judgment sits, and all the events of the world, and their causes and effects are spread out and laid open to the eyes of men, what wonders will there be revealed, what stupendous changes will be seen to have hinged, have turned on the agency of each child of God. What wonders will there be revealed! Once more--
- 4. God Himself feels keenly alive to the result of the investigation. Never did a person commit a cause to witnesses, who was so tremblingly alive to the issue, as God is in this very question. He is not selfish--does not seek His own ends--no self-gratification moves Him--His work is not to crush and discomfit His opponents, but He is moved by love, He wishes to save His foes, to draw them over, to subdue their wills, and draw them sweetly by the power of the truth to the "wells of salvation." His whole soul is set upon this. And God is tremblingly alive to the progress of the great suit (great to us, and great in its results) now pending between Himself and

men, and in which we must testify before angels and men. He is infinitely regardful of His own reputation, because His reputation is necessary to the best good of the universe, and He is infinitely regardful of the interests at stake in the controversy. He engages in the proof with all His heart. How does a man feel when engaged in an important matter, having brought it to trial, and having called His witness to the stand--how alive to every word the witness shall say. And how grieved and indignant will he be, if a principal witness should prove careless, or ill-informed, should be inconsistent, or worse than that, wickedly perverse. Be placed yourself in such a position, the advocate of great interests, and let your witnesses fail you in the hour of trial, how would it affect you! God is really and deeply interested in the trial, He has thrown the cause on an appeal to facts, and sincerely calls on witnesses therefore, and expects of them a full knowledge, and a clear and explicit testimony, and in consequence an honorable verdict in His favor.

REMARKS.

1. The world is now, and always has been stumbled with the contradictory testimony that nominal Christians give, for they intrude their testimony, though God has not called them to testify, and does not wish their witness. He calls His own people, and none others to bear testimony; but multitudes pretend to be God's people, and perhaps sometimes think they are so, and set themselves up, and are reckoned by others as witnesses, who know nothing at all of God, and they bear false witness; for they think they know, and testify as if they do know; and by giving such testimony they overbear the true witnesses, and the minds of the jury and the by-standers are puzzled, and they are at a loss to know what to think, or else the verdict is given against God and religion.

2. The nominal Christians, mere professors, so greatly outnumber God's real people, that their witness in the minds of men generally, glad to get rid of an unwelcome subject, entirely outweighs that of the true witnesses, and the world taking the mass together say, There is nothing in religion. And if they were right in taking the mass of professors as the witnesses, they would be right in their decision. If the testimony of the great body is to be taken as the true Christian witness, what else can the decision be, what other verdict can be rendered? What in such a case must they say? Just what they do say. But observe, the evil lies herein, not that God loses His cause for lack of evidence, but that those come forward and obtrude themselves upon the stand who never have been summoned, and who know nothing at all of the matter. But I remark,

3. God will reject their testimony in the great court of equity and errors at the day of judgment, and with it both the persons who gave it, and the persons who have been blinded by it and have stumbled over it, and both classes together will be sent off to the eternal prison-house. For God has made no appeal to any such incompetent witnesses. To His true children He has appealed, and no others, and those who attend the trial should observe who are admitted and who are rejected from the stand. It is true indeed, that since multitudes press forward to bear witness, and it is not always decided on the spot who are competent, and who are incompetent, but they are allowed each to tell his story whether to the point or not, whether consistent or otherwise, there is great danger of deception, great danger of being stumbled, but it behooves by-standers to be on their guard, to be most particular whose testimony they receive, for if they carelessly rely on the testimony of a witness whom God does not call, they, and they only are responsible and must bear the consequence of their carelessness. It becomes men to understand well--what indeed they may fully understand if they will--who are true,

and who are only pretended, and self-called witnesses. For their salvation hangs on their careful discrimination.

4. As the nominal Christians are a vast majority, the true are suspected of heresy, of fanaticism, of insanity. Those who know God, are so few among the vast many, (for sure "so many can't be wrong,") that their witness is counted false. They are declared not to know, to be presuming, and over-zealous, who are in fact the only ones who do know anything as they ought to know it. It is sad to think how the truth is perverted, and pronounced false, for the hypocrisy and ignorance of professors, and carelessness of sinners.

5. How true this fact is of ministers, that even they are false witnesses of God. O, how many are crying out against the most precious truths of the Gospel, and thus leading others to doubt their truth and power.

6. The true witnesses themselves have often fallen into gross inconsistencies, and thus destroyed the weight of their own testimony, and greatly weakened the force of the testimony of others. And this is the special aim of the adversary. It is Satan's chosen policy to prevail over the real people of God, and thus to strike away at a blow what they have before done. If he can nullify the true testimony--the witness of those who do know, he is safe enough, for that of others only turns on his own account.

How often have real Christians fallen under powerful temptations, and then the force of their testimony is gone--its value is lost, it will not be believed. They have fallen, and who will credit what they said before? When a person of high religious reputation falls into sin, it emboldens scoffers to excess, and leads multitudes to turn away, and dispirits numbers of real seekers after piety. That's the way it goes--exclaims the scoffing crew. There is nothing real there--say the careless. O my God, he has fallen! Can I hope to succeed? --cries the timid inquirer. What influence does such conduct exert! When there is a traitor among the disciples, what havoc does his defection produce!

7. Many who are, perhaps, or may be supposed to be true witnesses, have very little to say. They seem to have their abode among the first principles of the doctrine of Christ; they have tapered away and dwindled down in religion; they have grown almost none at all--or perhaps grown downwards; they know little more--perhaps no more than at first. The command, "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," has by no means engaged their attention. They do not seem to know what is meant by growing in the knowledge of Christ. Many seem to stop on the threshold--they appear to know next to nothing of Christ by personal experience--they have not grown up into Him, they do not go on and increase, learning first one and then another, and another of Christ's offices and relations. Instead of gaining new knowledge every day--of being able to say, "There, I did not know that; I have learned something about God; I never thought of that before"--instead of learning something here and something there, of growing day by day in experience of the grace of Christ, they do not grow at all, but remain your babes, mere tyros in divine knowledge. And when they are called to testify, they have to say they know very little of the matter. And when a witness know but little of the case, when he stammers and hesitates, the jury get weary of hearing his pother, and the judge will say--"That man know not what he's talking of. It is not worth while to waste the time in hearing him." How remarkable it is that Christians can say so little from personal acquaintance with God. How exceedingly little they can say. Live with them for years, attend prayer and conference meeting with

them for years--and what do you hear them say? Their experience is not more than an inch long--they will tell all they ever knew in ten minutes. Long ago they were converted, now and then they have a conviction, they feel compunction and sorrow for sin, a desire to do better, faint feelings of worship and adoration arise continually. But O, they have never gone within the veil, they have tarried without in the outer courts, and the glorious inner sanctuary, which was opened by the sacrifice of the great Atonement--the sacred Holy of Holies their eyes have never looked upon--those deep and flowing springs which rise beneath the very throne, they never drank of--they never have felt flowing through their enraptured souls, that deep, broad river of peace, which pours its streams through the channels of salvation--their eyes have never been opened to behold the great things of God, and with ever new revelations, brighter and yet brighter still, to sit entranced in joy so that they can tell and tell and never be tired of telling the things which God has done for them, and the beauties which He has showed them. No, alas! their story is soon told--the same oft repeated, mournful tale, alike dishonorable to God and disgraceful to themselves.

There is a great fault in these witnesses. With every facility afforded them to make them able to bear a most impressive testimony for God and His Christ, they neglect them all, and their mouths are shut. Impressive testimony? Hear a Christian, one indeed, one in a high degree, tell his story. See the tears start, see them trickle down the cheek all over the assembly. He will make more impression than 500 unfeeling sermons. His statements, how simple! His faith, how artless! His trust, how child-like! I knew a young man, a sailor, converted on board ship. He had been brought up at sea, and was an infidel; or rather knew nothing of religion. On a voyage to China, in a most remarkable manner, he became convinced of the truth of the Bible. He became very anxious to have a Bible, and at length got one of an old sailor who had one, but cared nothing about it. The Bible was old--he covered it carefully to preserve it choice, and then he read it. But with what emotion! how his bosom swelled! how his tears flowed! It was the word of God; every word of it was true; every promise was sure. How wonderful it appeared to him--he sat and wondered, and read, and wept, and wept, and read; so happy was he, he forgot every thing but God, and Christ, and his Bible. On their voyage, the ship stopped at a port for supplies. The city was illuminated, it was a perfect blaze of light. As the ship lay at anchor, our sailor walked the deck and looked at the illuminated town, "I was so happy" said he, "with my bible and my God, I could not help exclaiming--I am happier than all of you." He said he did not once think whether he were a Christian, but his soul was all absorbed in love and joy.

After this relation, our sailor told his experience of the faithfulness of God. It appeared to him a small thing indeed that God should answer prayer--nothing remarkable or strange. God has said he would hear His people's cry, and why should He not? He said it seemed no way strange that God should change the wind and give them a favorable breeze in answer to his prayer. He would take his watch on deck, the wind would be contrary, he would pray for a fair wind, and there was never so much as a doubt but God would give him his request. He would kneel to pray, the wind would be blowing on his larboard cheek, and before he arose, often it would turn and come from the starboard. This he would do many a night. "I did not think it strange or wonderful," said he, "I supposed He answered every body's prayer just so. I never thought of doubting His faithfulness and His readiness to answer my prayer." Thus he went on through the voyage, constantly trusting, and praying, and rejoicing, and learning every day a new lesson in the unsearchable riches of the knowledge of Christ. His story, as he told it, ran through the congregation like a stream of electricity. He told a multitude of things, all tending to unfold the simple and child-like faith and joy in Christ which his soul possessed, and

which, but for the hearty simplicity, and undeniable sincerity and truthfulness on the very fact of it, would not have been believed. He was full of it; he would come to my room after I became acquainted with him, with a whole budget full which the Lord had taught him of the Bible and his own soul. I wish you could hear his testimony--it was as simple-hearted as a little child's. He did not know what spiritual pride was. He took not the least credit to himself, as though he were anything, or as though God had favored him especially, for he did not know but that every body thought, and felt, and trusted just as he did, and was answered just as he was. Now if Christians could testify as he could, they would exert a power well nigh irresistible--it would be most over-whelming. When he told his story, many things were so remarkable, I went and inquired of a friend who I knew was acquainted with the sailor, (it was the seaman's minister,) concerning the young man. "Ah," said the minister, "he is a true bill, depend upon it." And indeed, every body could see it was so, and yet it was remarkable, to hear a man relate so much about God from personal experience; for he had not learned it from man I assure you; no indeed, it was not what he had heard another say, but the Lord Himself had, at the opening of the door, come in, and they had sat down to a feast of fat things--to a banquet of love. O it was rich, delightful. I would rather hear him speak, than five hundred merely learned men, who should have no Christian experience. His very looks were preaching, and all he said was preaching of a most excellent kind, for it came direct from a heart overflowing with love, and full of the Spirit of the Lord.

8. There is there and here a most precious witness springing up in the church. God is never wholly without such witnesses. Blessed be His name! once in a while one will arise. And, glory to God! He is multiplying such through the land. Go through and visit the churches, and every now and then you will find a soul full; so heavenly, so Christ-like, so deeply in communion with God--listen to its experience, and you will seem to be fanned by the wings of angels. They are multiplying where the truth has been proclaimed in its fullness, and received in simplicity of heart. Such witnesses are bearing their testimony, and it is taking effect; and though there is much to overcome thereby, it will be overcome, as certainly as truth can affect human minds, and the Spirit can convert them.

9. Many Christians are afraid and ashamed to say much. They have feared to be reminded of their inconsistencies. And indeed it would be so. It is best that such as cannot show a consistent walk, should keep silent. The stiller they keep the better, till they come and walk with God and do His will.

10. The relations that Christians sustain to God and the world, should be with them a most powerful argument in prayer to God. I fear Christians do not enough consider this, that they may come to God and say reverently--O Lord, Thou hast required such and such a thing of me, to testify for Thee, Thou wilt call me as a witness for Thee--now Lord, make me able to testify, let me know Thee, bring me into Thy pavilion and let me be ravished with Thy love. O, teach me the hidden glories of Thy word, that I may be able to speak what I know, to testify what I have seen. Make up your mind, Christian, be single-hearted, and go to God and say--O Lord, I wish to bear emphatic testimony, so that men shall be constrained to believe--urge it on the Lord, and rely on His word, expecting to be heard. This is a most cogent argument at the throne of grace, one that will prevail with God for you.

11. God's witnesses should realize that they are watched on every hand--that they are watched for inconsistencies--that there is a continual endeavor to impeach them as witnesses, to destroy their credibility. And if any thing can be found in the least degree erroneous--that can throw any shadow of

doubt over your testimony, it will surely be taken up. Bear this in mind, and take care to live so, and speak so that they shall be compelled to say, however their hearts may writhe under it, that you are in the right.

12. There is nothing so fatal to a party in court, as the failure of its own witnesses through ignorance, or inconsistent testimony, or perfidy. Where a party's own witnesses know nothing of his case, or tell contradictions, or will not tell what they know, how can he maintain his cause? Who shall stand up for him?

13. Since God throws Himself upon our integrity, and uprightness, and candor, we should consider where we are. Consider, God casts His cause on you, Christians, "Ye are My witnesses," "Ye are Hy witnesses." How deeply should you realize your position; how you should be weighed down with the burden of your responsibility--with the importance of knowing all you may know, of testifying all you may testify, of bearing so straight forward and unassailable a testimony as to carry conviction irresistibly to all around you.

14. Christians should remember that they are always under oath. The making a profession is, so to speak, taking an oath for God. They are bearing testimony all the time, are all the time on the stand in court, before the judge, and jury, and bystanders, constantly under the eye of those who are to decide the case. This should be borne in mind. There is no discharge in this suit while life lasts.

15. Professors will of course be considered as witnesses, whether God calls them or not. Your testimony, professor, will be taken, though you be only a false one. How fearful is your position if you have made a profession of religion--the eyes of the world, of God, of all are upon you; your deposition will be written, counted upon, read in court, have its weight in settling the question in the mind of those concerned in the issue. How incalculably important for you to remember who and what you are.

Brethren, do we live, act in such a manner that those around us, by taking knowledge of us, by taking pattern of us, shall get and exhibit a true picture of religion? How solemn a question this is! What a responsibility is assumed by ministers and young men preparing for the ministry, and by all young people educating for the Christian field! What a cloud of witnesses are here! What testimony might here be given. Are you resolved, young men, young women, that nothing shall be wanting in your testimony, in your life, in your experience, that can be obtained by the utmost diligence on your part? Are you resolved? If you are, how shall we rejoice to lend you all the help possible in effecting your noble purpose, to fit you to go out and proclaim aloud your testimony. But if you are only serving yourself and the devil, if you are seeking your own, and not the things of Christ, how much will your labor and our labor be misapplied. How are we mis-employed in fitting you--for what? For what? To fight against God and good in the world, and then be food for the flames of hell! A church is a cloud of witnesses--this people is a host of witnesses. And if ever a people were looked upon as witnesses, this is the people. Your testimony, whatever it be, is going out through all the land; the church and the world are hearing it; when one of you falls, the tale is told with trumpet-tongue through America, through Europe, in the islands of the sea. The missionaries in the far off isles hear it and mourn, from the rising to the setting sun. O, brethren, how shall we give such a testimony as to be heard till holiness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea?

Fearing the Lord and Walking in Darkness

Lecture V

September 11, 1844

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa 50:10: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

In discoursing from these words I shall show:

I. What the darkness spoken of in the text is.

II. What sort of fear is here meant, "who feareth the Lord, &c."

III. What is intended by the exhortation "let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

IV. Why persons under the circumstances in the text, should "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

I. What darkness is here meant.

- 1. Not the darkness of nature, or of an unconverted state. This is evident from the fact that it is in the text itself spoken of as being consistent with obedience. "Who is he that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant?" Who does this, and yet "walketh in darkness?" It is not therefore a darkness produced by guilt and condemnation.
- 2. Nor is it the darkness of a state in which the soul is under condemnation and guilt, for the same reason as before. The prophet describes the state as that of obedience. But condemnation can come only from disobedience. It is not therefore a darkness produced by guilt and condemnation.
- 3. It is not the darkness spoken of by John, in his first epistle (Jn. 1:6.) "If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth." This is the darkness of unbelief, or of an unconverted state--the darkness of sin and disobedience; whereas the darkness which the prophet speaks of is entirely consistent with obedience, and existing at the same time with obedience and the fear of the Lord. But,

- 4. The darkness in the text does result from the absence of special divine manifestations to the soul. An illustration of the condition described by the prophet may be found in the circumstances of Job, (23:8 and onward). "Behold" says Job, "I go forward, but he is not there; and backward but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him: but he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." Observe, Job was in great darkness, he could not comprehend the dealings of God with him, he was in agony, he was struggling with his calamities; he could not find God to know the reason of the sore trials heaped upon him. Yet his obedience was constant and he held fast his integrity, and his confidence in God. He could declare he had not gone back from his commandment, and that he did esteem the words of his mouth more than his necessary food. He was in a state of obedience and integrity; yet in a state of darkness. There was an absence of the divine manifestation. He was searching after God, feeling after him on every side, looking where he worked, but no divine manifestation was vouchsafed. God hid himself in thick darkness, and Job could not find out his way. Yet Job was holding fast to his integrity and to his confidence. "When he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold," are his words. He was in a state of obedience. Now this same thing often occurs to Christians. They are often in great trials and under powerful temptations. They have, sometimes great inward struggles against temptation, and these are accompanied with great outward difficulties. And providence itself seems to be all against them. All their prospects darken, their way is shut up before them, their sky is covered with clouds, their undertakings fail, and their expectations mock them, and at the same time comes the withdrawal of the light of God's face, which before had shined upon them. They are left in darkness. This apprehension by our minds of the withholding of the special divine manifestation, the absence of divine presence, while we still hold fast to our integrity, is the darkness of the text.

II. What the "fear" of the text is.

It is not a slavish fear, nor a legal fear, for it is accompanied by obedience. But it is a filial fear--a fear to offend and displease God, proceeding from love to him, the fear of love and veneration such as affectionate children have for their beloved parents. That state of mind which good children have toward parents whom they greatly love and venerate, is which they cleave affectionately to obedience, and cannot endure the thought of offending, and bring upon themselves merited displeasure. You know how keenly good children feel the frown of a kind parent. If a cloud gathers upon his countenance, they are agonized, they cannot bear the sight, and must inquire beseechingly, "Dear Father, are you displeased with us?" They have the greatest dread of the displeasure of their parents. So the child of God, fears to offend his heavenly Father--to know above all things to sin against him. This is the "fear" of the text.

III. What is implied in the exhortation--"let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

- 1. A confidence in the goodness of God, in the goodness of his character. This is not at all strange, is it? You can conceive how such a confidence can consist with the darkness already

described. A child might be under the hidings of his father's face, in the absence of his smile, and yet be able to say "I know my father, I know there is some good reason for him to do as he does." And in it all, he might confide in his parent's goodness in general, and kindness towards him in particular.

It is well for the child to be able, when any thing mysterious in his parent's conduct takes place, thus to confide, and if the matter is for the time inexplicable, to be able to say, I have unwavering confidence,--I know he does all things well. Such a trustful spirit will sustain his soul in his obedience, and preserve that love without which obedience is no obedience. If you lose your confidence in the goodness and the holiness of God, your obedience is no longer the obedience of love.

- 2. An exhortation to confide in the wisdom of God--not only in his benevolence and truthfulness, but in his wisdom also. It is an exhortation to lay hold of the promises, to lay hold of all that is said in the Bible, of his moral character, in application to all cases wherein his conduct is to us unexplained or inexplicable, and to rest assured that in respect to what he does to us in particular, he is good and wise and that even the darkness in which we are left, is among the "all things" that work together for our own good. While we search in vain, and fail to find God--when he hides his way in a great deep, we are to trust his wisdom and love, and expect him to bring us forth at length into the light. "He knoweth the way that I take" says Job. "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

In all that God does, we are to believe that he does it for our good, as he says he does, to feel that what God does is well done, and in all places, even in the midst of the deepest darkness, to repose the soul in unwavering faith in the glorious perfection of his wisdom and power and love. But I come now to show,

IV. Why we should thus trust in the Lord. Why we should acquiesce in all God's dealings, and believe that all is for the best.

- 1. Because this darkness is designed, on God's part, to develop and strengthen our faith. Observe, the darkness is not that of unbelief and worldly-mindedness, but it is consistent with obedience to God. In all such cases, it is designed by God for our good, we may be sure that it is designed to develop and strengthen our faith and confidence in God. He thereby gives us occasion to try the reality and genuineness of our trust and the firmness of our faith, and occasion to strengthen it by exercise, and unless we believe God, and hold fast our integrity as Job did, and say with him, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him" we defeat the great end for which these seasons are suffered to come upon us. Job's darkness was of ultimate benefit to him, and glorified God in many ways. After he had gone through the trials, and come out safe, after he had held fast to his assurance of God's love and mercy and goodness and had been confirmed in that assurance by the event, answering fully his expectation--did this not teach him to trust God in the future? Surely he could. Before, he knew God was holy and good, and now he has the additional witness of his own most solemn and protracted experience on the point, to wit, the goodness of the Most High.
- 2. We should trust thus in darkness, because such confidence is highly honorable to God, more

honorable to God than faith in other circumstances. Job's confidence, how honorable to God it was. How confounding to Satan! Satan pretended that Job served God for gain, and insinuated with a malicious impudence that if God should bring adversity upon him, Job would forsake him forthwith. "Doth Job fear God for naught? But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." And after he had failed at first, his malice and hateful suspicion are not yet silenced, he said again, "Touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." And the Lord let Satan try Job to the utmost of his malice. He let him prove Job to his hearts content. And Satan found out to his confusion, that Job was proof against all his attacks. God let Satan and the universe know most unequivocally that Job's religion did not consist in a selfish love for temporal prosperity, that the root of the matter lay deeper than this in Job, that his piety did not spring from riches, and could flourish not alone in the sun-shine. When Job maintained his integrity under the most dreadful attacks of Satan--the destruction of his worldly possessions, the ultimate death of his children, and last, the excruciating disease with which his body was smitten; when he stood firm, though his friends turned against him, and denounced him as a wicked hypocrite, when they refused to sympathize with and comfort him; when he held fast, though his own wife urged him to give up his confidence, and, his piety, and gave to him the awful advice, "Curse God and die;" when to this infamous advice, he gave the stern and impassioned rebuke, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" when Job thus clung to his trust in God, what a testimony did he give to the goodness and faithfulness of Jehovah! When did Job honor God more than here? When, if I may speak, was God so proud of him? Methinks I hear him say to Satan, "Satan, what do you think of Job now? You said that he was selfish, and that take away his wealth, he would curse me to my face. But now see! You have stripped him of his wealth in a day, have slain his children, smitten him with sore boils from head to foot, and made him a loathing to himself, his friends and even his wife turn against him--and what does he say? 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' This is what he says instead of the curse you predicted." And what does he reply to his wife? Methinks if God ever smiled in complacency, it was then, to hear Job's earnest reply, "Thou talkest as one the foolish women talketh. Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?" When persons under outward discouragements or inward trials, plunged into the darkness of a mysteriously afflictive providence, still maintain their integrity, and maintain their confidence in God, how much in so doing, do they honor him! Many seem to suppose that they honor God most when their cup runs over with praise at the revelation of himself to them, when their face glows with the glory of the divine manifestation. This is lovely, indeed, and desirable, and we ought to rejoice when God thus vouchsafes his presence in glorious beauty to the soul. But we do not so highly honor God by such rejoicing as we do when we can say, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him." When we can say, "I cannot give an account of God's dealings with me. I cannot tell why he afflicts me thus, but this I know, God is infinitely wise and supremely good, and all things, even these light afflictions, and this darkness will work together for my good, and for his glory." When we manifest this trust in God, we do honor to his faithfulness and goodness in a high degree.

- 3. Unbelief in such circumstances is highly dishonorable to God, and therefore persons when in darkness should trust in the Lord, and stay upon their God. What! Must you have all the time the favoring gales of prosperity fill your canvas, and the gay sun-shine continually dancing on

the waves beside your bark? Must you be thus, or will you be taken aback and begin to doubt whether God loves you at all? How dishonorable! Will you persist in judging the Lord by feeble sense, and still refuse to trust him for his grace? How disgraceful is such conduct towards your Almighty Sovereign and friend! But again,

- 4. Faith in such circumstances is the condition of subsequent divine manifestation. If you will read the Bible through with your eye on this point, I think you will find that faith, in the absence of divine manifestation is every where made the condition of that manifestation. Christ says, "If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him." Manifestation is conditioned upon obedience and faith in the absence thereof. These manifestations are to be obtained by us through faith in the promises while we are under the hidings of God's face, with no divine manifestation. Once more,
- 5. That faith is the most valuable, which can trust God with the least divine manifestation. Abraham is called the "father of the faithful." Why? It will be well for us to consider what there was in Abraham's faith that give to him this honorable distinction.

Observe then, that God's manifestations to him were few and far between, only at distant intervals. There is no account of God's appearing to him but a few times in all his life. The fulfillment of the promises was long delayed. God said, "Get thee out from thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee, and I will make of thee a great nation." Abraham departed forthwith and went to Canaan, trusting in the promises of God. He is promised a land, yet he never to the day of his death, inherited a foot of the soil, but was obliged to buy a portion for a burying place for his family. God told him he would make of him a great nation, yet twenty-four years after, he had no child except Ishmael. Where then was the promise? God did not come. But Abraham held fast, he hoped against hope, and believed the naked word of God. By and by, when Abraham was past age, his son was born. And then after that, God commanded him to give up his son, the child of promise, to sacrifice him, to slay him with his own hand, to offer him a burnt offering upon the mountains. What was this? It is the child upon whose life hangs the truth of God's promise, from him the "great nation" is to arise, and now he is to be slain. God has contradicted his own promise, besides the requirement is surely and absolutely wrong. It was most prodigious, Isaac must die! A human sacrifice!! By the hand of his own father! To the God of mercy, can the thing be? But in the midst of all this darkness, for a strange thing indeed had come, in the midst of this darkness without and darkness within, he held fast, he set out to Mt. Moriah, said nothing to Sarah, this her only son was to be slain, told not his servant, but in the strength of his faith in God, he went on--the stern old man! He built the altar, and laid the wood, and then, he bound Isaac, and stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. No wonder the Lord said, "Now I know that thou fearest God." No wonder God declared to him, "Surely blessing I will bless thee and multiplying I will multiply thee for thou hast obeyed my voice." No wonder Abraham is placed at the head of the whole family of the faithful ones upon the earth. His faith was in the highest degree conspicuous. Consider the little light he had, the nature of the command, and see the touching and dreadful circumstances in which he stood and his faith and obedience are wonderful indeed. Well might Paul say of him, "he staggered not through unbelief." Great grace was

upon Abraham.

Take the case of the Syrophenician woman. The circumstances were forbidding. She came and cried, "Have mercy on me O Lord thou Son of David, for my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." But to this Christ answered not a word. He did not deign to notice her it would seem. But she cried still. And then the disciples set in, and begged him to grant her request and send her away because her entreaties were annoying. But to them he says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she is not put off yet, she comes nearer, and still her cry goes up, "Lord help me!" And then he calls her a dog. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." But she was not to be shaken, she held on. Truth Lord, I do not ask the bread from the children, but "even the dogs eat the crumbs from their master's table". I ask not the bread but only a crumb. And she got her fill. How honorable to God was this, and how valuable was this her faith, it procured for her the great blessing which she asked. But,

- 6. Such faith will quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And this is a reason why we should possess it. Satan will try to overthrow our faith. When he finds God withdrawing himself, and wrapping his mantle of darkness about him and retiring into the thick darkness, he will try us with doubts and fears, and forebodings. When he finds our expectations blasted, and our plans crossed, and our comforts stricken down, he will fall into and overthrow our confidence in God's goodness and favor, if he can. But brethren, hold fast to your shield, the shield of faith, and you will quench all his fiery darts.
- 7. Such faith will procure all needed divine manifestation, all the light will be thrown upon God's dealings with us, that it is well, and best for us to have. There can be no mistake here. Just as much light and love will be manifested as it is best for us on the whole, to have revealed to us. Once more,
- 8. It is often better for our health both spiritual and bodily, to be left to exercise faith in darkness, than to have copious manifestations for a season, and then have them withdrawn, and thus be subject to an alternate excitement and depression, which would often prostrate the mental and bodily powers, and leave the soul unstrung.

Remarks.

1. The state of mind here described is entirely different from apathy or worldly-mindedness. If persons imagine themselves trusting in God, while they are worldly-minded, they are grossly deceived. This state of faith and trust is as far as possible from that, and where persons are lying in apathy let them not say, they are trusting in God, while walking in darkness, for this faith is always accompanied with obedience.

2. Sometimes a very great darkness, comes over the soul, and this immediately before a great divine manifestation.

One of Abraham's manifestations was preceded by "a horror of great darkness." This is more common than is generally supposed. Before God reveals his face in sun-shine, he is apt to withdraw it, to veil it

in a thick cloud, so as to try our faith and bring it into strong exercise, and if in this withdrawalment and darkness, our faith is strong and the mind holds on to its confidence we may expect the divine manifestation to succeed, and to be copious and refreshing to the soul.

3. It is a common but great mistake to suppose that great faith is inconsistent with great present darkness. It is indeed, with the darkness of unbelief, but not with such as Abraham had, and as Job had, and as that in the text. Or to suppose that such darkness is inconsistent with entire sanctification. The darkness of our text does not imply present unbelief, nor departure from God, and they mistake who think that it does. But because of this mistake, inquirers after light and divine manifestation, are charged often with unbelief and disobedience. When a man is under a cloud, and feeling after God, and sets his heart upon finding him, God often for wise reasons, withholds his light from the soul, hides himself, does not manifest himself. The soul prays, and prays, and prays, and in faith too, but God withholds. He is preparing him in the best manner possible, to receive the light, before he gives it. The soul prays, and struggles, and searches, and tries to lay hands upon a promise, but the divine manifestation does not come. If in such a case the individual is told that it is certainly because of unbelief in his soul, that God reveals not his glory, that it must be so, that he is all unbelief and in sin, or God would have come long ago, it will almost surely bring discouragement. How easy thus to put out the light which is leading him, and cause him to give up, and lose the end to which the spirit within him was drawing him, the great and joyful enlargement and manifestation of the divine presence.

4. Many think the darkness spoken of by John, to be all the darkness there is, that all darkness is that of unbelief, and they understand John to say, if we say we are Christ's and walk in darkness, no matter of what kind, we lie. Whereas men may be in a very high exercise of faith, and be in darkness, as they actually are when they cleave to God, as Abraham and Job did in the midst of darkness. I remark once more,

5. They are mistaken who promise instant light upon the exercise of faith. It is common to say, if you will believe, that moment you will have a flood of light poured upon you from God's throne. Now the text implies the contrary. The Bible nowhere, so far as I know, promises constant light to faith. This is a world of trial, and there are innumerable reasons why there should not be constant light and divine manifestation. Again,

6. The text contains the direction that should be given to persons in such cases. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God." When we cannot see the way that he takes, we are nevertheless to confide in his faithfulness, and rest in the immutability of his wise counsel, as upon a firm rock. Read the chapter and you will see that Isaiah had been led to this experience--into this state of mind, by God's dealings with him, and his people. It is remarkable how God qualifies his servants to speak a word in season, how he leads his children through darkness, and settles their souls upon himself, so that they may be able to "speak a word in season to them who are weary." And here we have the word, the heavenly counsel to administer to all those who thus mourn the hidings of God's face.

7. Many confound faith with divine manifestation and think there is no faith without it. They think

they have great faith when the candle of the Lord shines around them, when they stand in the sunlight of the divine glory, so that their faces shine with the reflection of that glory. Now they may have faith, of course they do have faith; but their joy, their spirit of praise and thanksgiving is not to be mistaken for faith. Directly beside the man whose face shines with glory, and who is ready to shout aloud in the excess of joy, whose eye is open, and who can look like Stephen, into heaven, and see God upon his throne and the angels around him, there may be one kneeling, a cloud around him. Feeling after God with a confidence not to be shaken though the heavens thunder and the earth quake; and this second may be no less acceptable to God--nay, he may be more acceptable than the first. When did Job honor God more than when in darkness deep as midnight, in trials without and within, he planted his foot firmly upon God's goodness--"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Never. Once more,

8. Many refuse to walk unless they can walk by sight, in the divine manifestation, constantly. They will not take a single step. They will not trust God out of their sight, and think themselves doing well to insist that God shall not let them walk by faith a single foot, but that all the time the light of his manifestation must encircle them. They believe, when everything, without and within, is light and glory, then they do well; but once withdrawn, and they have no resource but faith, then they will not trust at all. They will exclaim as Jonah did when the gourd was blasted, "I do well to be angry," as if they were not to trust God unless all is light, and God's countenance, all covered with smiles, is visible to them. But such persons are greatly deceived if they imagine they have faith, when, as a matter of fact, they dare not trust God a moment out of their sight.

9. It is not pleasant, but often very useful to walk in such darkness. Was not Job greatly benefited by the scenes through which he passed? What Christian has not been struck with the manner in which God turns for the faithful soul, afflictions into benefits? These seasons of darkness are among the afflictions which are not for the present joyous, but grievous, but which afterwards yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. Persons in this condition should not be treated harshly, and those who treat them so, who snuff at them and call them to repentance, though they may do it from a good motive, are nevertheless very much mistaken. They may have sinned in doubting his love, but it is by no means certain because they are in darkness, that they have sinned. Such persons are like the bruised reed which must not be broken, and the smoking flax, which must be fanned rather than rudely quenched; they need to be encouraged, to be told that God is doing the best he can for them and for all--that this their darkness is among the "all things" that shall work together for their good if they love God; and instead of telling them, you will have light if you believe, tell them to believe, light or dark. Point them to God's truthfulness, insist upon trust, whatever the appearance is, whatever darkness is without, and whatever trials are within--do so, and you will help them. But denounce them, take it for granted they have fallen into sin, and it may be they will really and sadly backslide, and go away from God for months and months. To do so, is worrying the sheep instead of feeding them. It is setting a cruel dog upon the already jaded creature, instead of urging her to rest safely under the care of the good shepherd, and telling her that he will protect the flock and keep the raging wolves off, that he will gently lead the flock, that he will "gather the lambs in his arm, and gently lead those that are with young," that the weak and the weary are his special care, and that no fear need be indulged in, either of his ability or disposition to keep all right and bring them safe home. His children should be assured that he hears them and will care for their good, though they cannot see him, and that the cloud that has passed over them is only to quicken their faith, and make them honor him, that he may honor them before the universe, for their strong faith in their fierce

conflicts.

10. The life of faith in opposition to a life of excitement in manifestations is a calm and steady life, and greatly desirable.

11. God is trying to develop our faith, and confirm it so that nothing that can occur in his providence however inexplicable, can stumble us. He knows the end from the beginning, and he knows that many things happen which will seem strange, and exceedingly trying. He sees many trials ahead awaiting his people, and he would prepare them for those trials that they may pass them safely. He wishes to make their ship staunch and firm, so that they may weather the storms, and escape the fury of the angry surge. He would give us strength and ballast, so that we may outride the waves, and come safely out from the war of winds and waters.

12. He is the best Christian who can trust the most perfectly in God, in the greatest outward discouragements, and inward withdrawings of God's face. He is the best Christian, and manifests the highest degree of religion in that very hour of trust, amid all possible discouragements and trials. When he can say "I know my God, I can trust him and I will, come what may," his faith is perfect. He is in the state of the highest virtue, that which is most acceptable to God.

13. Manifestations do much to develop the sensibility, and draw out the emotions, and soften and melt the soul, and they do much good if sought and used properly, but when sought as a luxury they do mischief. Faith must be drawn out and strengthened, as well as emotion quickened and deepened, and this can be done most effectually by throwing men where they can do nothing but hang on the naked promise and character of God.

14. Many persons seem unwilling to let God take any other course than to reveal his way continually; they envy those who do thus walk in the light, as though that were the only religious state, the only state in which they can do good, as comprehending the whole of religion in the heart. These ideas should be put away, for they are false and hurtful, and are a great stumbling-block to any church where they gain a foothold, they set a people drifting in one direction, after a thing which is false, they will work a monstrosity Christian character, and will tend strongly to fanaticism. Let a professor of religion run away with one idea, and push it to the last link, and he is verging to a fanatical state of mind. If he is trying to lash his feelings up to the required point, rasping them into strong excitement, creating a whirlwind of emotion, and seeking for a flood of feeling to pour forth continually, he endangers his piety, and jeopardds the soundness of his faith. There are many stages through which we are to pass. I see a man in the light of God's face--the way of God all visible to him, and rejoicing in his Lord's presence, and I rejoice, for I love to see it. I love to hear him pour out his heart, to see the strong current of emotion flowing from the depths of feeling within, and to see his face shine like the face of an angel. But if I see the same man in darkness, and hear him say, though God slay me, I will trust in him, I rejoice in that too. Instead of denouncing him as a hypocrite or an unbeliever, I would say, be of good cheer, God speed, you go on; darkness and light shall alternate with your soul--light to develop your sensibility, and darkness to exercise and confirm your faith. Keep your soul in all; they are all needful and beneficial, and in all your darkness, trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon your God. Let us not be deceived by supposing there are not many stages of experience, but rather say, I welcome them all--I love to pass through them all--I will trust under them all. I will not fear,

though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, for thy rod and thy staff, O God, shall support me. Let not Christians be afraid to pass then,--through the gate that unbars its doors, and bids us enter into joy unspeakable and full of glory. Once more,

15. Do not confound apathy and backsliding with that state of mind that trusts God in darkness. They are as much opposites as two states can be. One is a state of obedience, the other of disobedience--one of strong faith, the other of no faith at all--one of great and active love, the other of perfect stupidity and stagnation of soul like a putrid lake. In one, the soul rises above all the gusts and storms of doubt and fear into the calm blue sky of unfaltering trust; in the other, it sinks below both blue sky and howling wind, as into the death damps of the grave. Do not, I beseech you, mistake apathy for trust in God. Beloved, will you trust in God?

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Lecture VI

December 4, 1844

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Mat. 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

In several of the first verses of this chapter, Christ states the distinctive features of the Christian character, and affirms the blessedness of those who possess them. The text gives one of them: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

In this discourse I shall show--

I. What it is to be poor in spirit.

II. Why such are blessed.

I. What it is to be poor in spirit.

- 1. To have a realizing sense of our spiritual state. In this it is implied that we understand our own guilt and helplessness, and realize as a practical fact our own utter emptiness by nature of every thing good, and of any tendency to that which is good. It is one thing to hold this in theory, and another thing to be heartily sensible of the humbling fact. Most professing Christians admit in words that they are in themselves wholly helpless and destitute, but to know and feel as an abiding practical conviction that this is their true spiritual condition how few are

able!

- 2. Being poor in spirit implies that we see in its true light the tendency in us to every thing evil--that we understand that the habitudes of our minds, that our appetites and propensities, that nearly the whole power of the sensibility continually tends to selfishness.
- 3. A realizing conviction of being shut up to the grace of God for help. I know people hold in theory that salvation is all grace, and suppose themselves not to doubt it; and I know too that very many of those same people do not believe it after all: they do not conceive it so as to realize the fact. Ask them--do you expect to be saved by your own works? and they will say no, to be sure. Are you shut up to the grace of God? Yes. But to hold it as part of your creed, and to realize it as God's truth, are two vastly different things.
- 4. A conviction that we are shut up to faith in Christ as the only possible way of obtaining help. This too is held in theory, and many suppose themselves to understand it, who yet do not really apprehend it at all. And let me ask, who that has come to a realization of this fact has not been astonished to see how superficially he once held the truth on this point? Who in such a case has not been shocked to see in how loose and heartless a manner all the truths respecting the importance of man were held by him--to see that his belief was mere theory, without ever so much as reaching the heart at all? To be poor in spirit implies a right sense of the fact that we are shut up to faith in Christ as the only possible way of obtaining help in our helpless condition.
- 5. A conviction of being shut up to God for faith-- to the sovereign working of God's Holy Spirit, and the sovereign grace of God as manifested through Christ, to produce this faith. Not that it is not our own exercise; it is indeed, and from its nature must be, but we must be sensible that without the Spirit of Christ we shall no more exercise this faith, than we shall get to heaven by our own works of obedience to law. It is one thing to hold this as the doctrine of an orthodox creed, and quite another to feel it in our inmost being.

My own experience speaks strongly here. I was led to contemplate unbelief as a distinct sin, and its infinite guilt and inexcusableness. The question came--do you believe God as you believe men? Do you take His word and trust in His promise as you take the word and trust the promise of men? The answer was unavoidable--no, I do not. I do not trust God's promises as I trust man's promises. Herein was revealed and laid open to me my infinite wickedness, that I would not trust in God's promises and rest in them, even as firmly as I would trust in the word of men. I saw it now clearly. I saw the God-dishonoring, damning (for so I viewed it) the God-dishonoring, damning fact, that while I knew, and confessed, and saw clearly that God would not and could not lie, after all I did not believe fully and with all my heart. I would not take the word of the Mighty God as I would the word of frail and fallible man. And then, being led to perceive my absolute unbelief, I felt notwithstanding, that unless God pleased so to reveal Himself to me, that I could throw my soul upon Him--so to enlighten my mind and draw it to Himself by laying open before my soul His goodness and truth as to induce me to cast myself on Him by faith, I should sink. I felt that unless He would give me faith in Him, I was as certain to be damned as that I existed. Now this is what I mean by being sensible

that you are shut up to God for faith. But moreover, we must be willing thus to be shut up to God. We must not merely see the fact, but be willing to be thus. We must see that we are condemned and that justly, for not being right; and hopeless, helpless in ourselves, shut up to the sovereign love of God to work that which is well pleasing in His sight, and thus shut up to the sovereign grace of God by our voluntary wickedness.

- 6. A deep and abiding sense of the absolute need we are in of a Savior from our utter wickedness, helpless and just condemnation. The mind must perceive and feel its guilt in such a sense as to be sure that its salvation is out of the question, except Christ shall substitute His death for ours, a ransom for our souls; such a sense of our own vileness as to lay hope out of the question altogether, except through the sacrifice of Christ. O it is easy to say we are helpless and that Christ is our only hope and dependence; it is easy to recite for our creed--"I believe that salvation is through Christ alone and wholly." But how hard is it to see our vileness and guilt--our abominable filthiness, our loathsomeness, and our hopeless condemnation except Christ be applied to our souls in His offices and relations as Redeemer, Savior, Sanctifier, Teacher and King. How hard to know this as we know what we see and hear without eyes and ears.
- 7. Not only a sense of this dependence upon Christ, and helplessness out of Him is implied, but a willingness to have it so-- a willingness to cleave to Christ in all His offices and relations, a setting aside self, a self-loathing, a self renunciation in all respects, a casting away all hope in ourselves, all dependence upon ourselves, all trust in our own wisdom or righteousness, or our efforts at sanctification, and every thing else which is our own. These things are implied in poverty of spirit in the text. In short it is a correct view of our utterly helpless state, a realizing sense of that fact, and a disposition of soul corresponding to such views.

I come now to show--

II. Why those who are thus poor in spirit are blessed.

- 1. Because the kingdom of God is within them. The text says, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." They have already the first elements of the kingdom of God within them.
- 2. Because flesh and blood has never revealed this to them. Before, they might have had it as mere theory after the flesh, but if they have come to feel and realize their state in its dreadful aggravations, flesh and blood have not revealed it unto them, but God has uncovered with His own hand the deep vileness of their souls and undertaken their cure.
- 3. They have already surmounted the greatest difficulty in the way of their salvation. After Christ has provided a feasible method of salvation, so that God can be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus, the greatest difficulty is to make mankind see their need of Christ. It is a great work to make men feel themselves hopeless, to humble them, to tear away their self-dependence and self-righteousness, and the notion of resources in themselves for any thing good. God is constantly engaged in bringing about this result. When a man has come to know himself and to renounce himself in all respects as to dependence and hope, then rely upon it the greatest difficulty is over come, and the chief discipline endured.

- 4. It is the most painful part too. To slay him, to tear away the last fiber of hope in his own righteousness or efforts after righteousness, and burn in upon his soul a sense of his real abominable wickedness and hopeless ruin in himself--O this costs more trouble and patience and loathing of soul, and anguish of spirit than anything else. How many times must he be infinitely ashamed of himself--so sunk in the lowest pit of shame, as to abhor himself with unutterable loathing! How often be compelled in agony to exclaim--Infinite wretch that I was. How full of pride and of hell I was, and how little I knew it! To be mortified so many times in order to empty him of himself; he must weep, and agonize, and grieve, and despair so often; must undergo a perpetual dying--for it is indeed a perpetual dying, while passing through this process of having himself shown to himself. He sees this sin and that sin, is ashamed here and ashamed there, is mortified at every turn; he dallies with temptation, breaks his resolutions, and falls into shameful sins, and is vexed and angry at himself, and ready as it were to spit in his own face; he stumbles, and plunges, and flounders and falls, till at last all hope vanishes, and the soul lies down, weary and worn out by vain struggles, and gives up in despair. All this is painful enough; but once gone through with, the man begins to understand himself thoroughly, becomes poor in spirit, glad to renounce all self, part with his own righteousness, his own wisdom, his self-dependence, because they are nothing. When he is thus thoroughly crucified the most painful work is done. If he falls from this, then he must do his first work over; but let him keep in this state of mind, continue thus poor in spirit, and the rocks and breakers are well nigh past.
- 5. Because he has now come to be prepared for the application of the remedy for his disease. He is in an attitude in which Christ is best pleased to see him. The thing is effected for which Christ has been laboring. Heretofore Christ has been trying to crown Himself upon the mind, but self has been a constant hindrance and this Christ has been belaboring with a continual stroke. Christ would knock and knock, but to use a homely figure, the mind has been brushing up, and brushing up, and putting things to rights like an untidy housekeeper, unwilling to admit Him, and trying to put matters in a little better trim instead of letting Christ in forthwith, and saying--"Lord, thou seest what filth and rubbish are here." He is obliged to knock and keep knocking and to stand without till His head is wet with dew, and His locks are the drops of the night. The sinner is making preparations, and must become exceedingly righteous before he comes to be saved. But when Christ has convinced him of his own utter helplessness and that the more he tries to wash and cleanse his pollution, the more polluted he becomes, and that all he can do is only sinking him deeper into the horrible pit--then, then the soul is ready to receive Christ in all His offices and relations--to receive a whole Christ as presented in the gospel.
- 6. Because in a sense, such a person has already learned what the remedy is. He has learned to reject himself, and that his dependence must be utterly and forever on another than himself. He has learned how blessed it is to be nothing, to know and do nothing of himself, to be universally dependent upon Christ for every thing--for breath, for grace, for faith, for every thing; to have Christ his "all and in all."
- 7. Because they learn how blessed it is to trust Christ. They see such fullness in Christ, they do not wish any strength of their own. Their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption

are in Christ, and they need and wish for none of their own. Christ is all they need, and they need nothing in themselves. They have them all in Christ, and they are willing and glad to have them in Him.

- 8. Because they have learned how to be composed in the midst of all kinds of trials. They neither have nor seek any resort in themselves. They know in whom their strength lies, and who is their strong tower. They can depend on Christ for all, and they know He cannot fail them. But let me say,
- 9. Because they have no self interest. They have seen themselves to be perfectly destitute and worthless. They have no reputation to build up, they have no appetite that must be gratified, no passion that must be catered for, none of these to contend for or hold on to. They are emptied out, and every particle of self value is gone entirely. They labor not for themselves, but for Christ.
- 10. Because to be poor in spirit is to be rich in faith. Then poor in the proper sense, emptied of dependence upon themselves, then they are rich in faith. But I hasten to conclude with several

REMARKS.

1. It is easy to see what Paul meant when he said "When I am weak, then am I strong." Paul you know had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. He was at first very uneasy at it, and he besought the Lord thrice that it might be removed, but Christ told him His grace should be sufficient for him. As if He had said, "I shall not remove that thorn. I gave it to keep you under such a pressure of infirmity that you could never forget your dependence upon me." Paul then gloried in his infirmity. He says he gloried in infirmities and tribulations and persecutions, because they emptied him of himself, and made Christ his strength. They made him know his weakness and his strength. When he was weak in himself, he was strong in Christ. His trials kept alive a sense of his entire dependence, and thus prepared him to do all things through Christ who strengthened him.

2. To be poor in spirit, is to be in a highly spiritual state. Persons are often in a spiritual state without being aware of it. In my intercourse with Christians, I have often been struck with the sad mistake made in respect to what is a spiritual frame. Certain high wrought pleasurable emotions are often regarded as the highest spiritual states; whereas other states, which can exist only under a high degree of the Spirit's influence, are nevertheless not so regarded at all. Is this state, in which a man sees himself all empty and naught, shut up to God's goodness, shut up to God to make him as He shall please, a vessel of wrath or a vessel of mercy--sees how infinitely reasonable it is for God to deal with him thus; that it is just for God to consult wholly His own wisdom, and to consult the creature not at all, and that he lies in the hands of God as clay in the hands of the potter, for God to mold from the filthy lump a vessel of honor or dishonor as seems good in His sight; when he feels thus, and lies crucified and dead as to the least idea of self-dependence--is this a state of weak and low spirituality? Nay verily. Scarcely can there be a state of higher spiritual exercise than this. This poverty of spirit, total renunciation of self, is far enough from being a carnal state of mind.

3. This state of spiritual poverty is a very healthful state of mind. It is healthful to be laid in the dust, to be emptied, and stripped, and made naked and bare; to be laid in the dust and kept there. It is the

only state of mind that is safe. Of a man who is kept in such a state, I have great hopes.

4. Certain forms or stages of this spiritual poverty are very disheartening. Individuals, when Christ reveals to them the depth, as it were bottomlessness, of their misery, and gives no such revelation of Himself, and of His intention to do all for them as to give them a firm hope, feel greatly disheartened. There is such a sinking away from all expectation in themselves, that unless Christ gives them an indication of His love, and opens a medium of communication between Himself and them, a state of great misgiving and anxious suspense will ensue. The mind comes into a state in which it does not rebel, it does not murmur or weary itself except in this; it does not see at the time, its acceptance with God. It feels that God would be just in casting it out, and it lies there with the eye fixed on Christ, and cries, "If God does not take me up, and by His self-moved goodness sanctify and save me, I am lost to all eternity." While there is nothing in the mind upon which it can seize as a present evidence that Christ is his, this self-renunciation and self-emptying will leave the mind in a state of despondency. I do not mean of despair. I hardly know how to express it; the mind is not joyful, nor is it in that agony which is the accompaniment of clear light and desperate resistance; but it is in despondency, in a kind of mourning--and perhaps that is what is meant by the "mourning" in the next verse--"Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." The mind mourns when thus completely emptied of all self-trust, while yet it has no such hold on Christ as to feel assured of its interest in Him. It mourns for sin, for its own madness; it mourns at the thought of being separated from God, it mourns over its lost condition. It is a state of most perfect mourning. If you have experienced it, you know well the state to which I refer. If you have experienced what it is to be driven out of self, and torn away from self, and crucified to self, before you had faith to lay hold on Christ and feel yourself set upon the rock; if you have every been emptied of self, having no longer any expectation of helping yourself, no more than of creating a universe, having no more thought or intention of trying to save yourself, or of doing any thing effectual for yourself, than of walking in mid air, or than of stepping upon the boiling waves, (for if you have been in the state, you no more thought of helping yourself than of going a journey to Europe across the Atlantic on foot,) having it well settled in your mind, that you will no more succeed in doing any thing in your salvation, than you would succeed in walking from the top of a house into mid air, if you have been thus, and at the same time the offices and relations of Christ were not so revealed to you as to enable you to avail yourself of them, then you know the mourning which I mean. It is any thing but a worldly sorrow, any thing but an ungodly sorrow. It is a sorrow after a godly sort which worketh life. And remember--a man needs to be thoroughly emptied of self in order to come into the state of mourning above described. Most have so much self reliance, so much complacency in self, and know so little of themselves, that they cannot have this state. It can be produced in no other way than by showing a man his character and nothingness as they really are. But I remark

5. Such seasons as these very commonly precede and are the prelude to great spiritual enlargement. Where you witness great spiritual enlargement, inquire and you will find that in proportion as it is deep and abiding, the season of spiritual poverty was thorough and complete. If the sense of poverty be slight, the enlargement will be so, and the opposite. If the enlargement be great, the man can tell you what none but spiritual minds can tell; such experience as "none but he that feels it knows;" and the things that he will tell you will be any thing but unreasonable. He sees what common eyes never saw. He has found out what all men ought to know, but what few have seen. If his enlargement is abiding, he will have a rich history to give. He may not be communicative, but fish him out, get at the bottom of his heart, and he will drop his eyes and tell you what he found in himself, how he found

himself out, how he sank, and kept sinking from one depth to another still lower, till it was like sinking into the bottomless pit itself. He was driven from the last hold upon himself, the last link was broken, and he fell into the arms of Christ and was saved. And O, the salvation! Such a salvation is worth the having! But again,

6. Christ has no pleasure in causing this poverty of spirit only as it is the only way to get Himself before the mind. In no other way than by revealing to us by bitter experience our own weakness and sin, can He make us renounce ourselves and cast our all upon Him: and so He takes this way. And I tell you that no man can have a more important revelation from God, than this same revelation of self by the Spirit. And no man sees God in Christ, or apprehends Christ as He is for the soul, till he has seen himself--till he sees the old man and the necessity of putting on the new man.

7. These seasons of spiritual poverty are indispensable to holding on to Christ. See a young convert--young converts know little of themselves or of Christ. They run well for a time, but they must be taught more of Christ, and this they can learn only by learning more of themselves. Well, Christ begins the work in a soul. The convert was all joy, but his countenance falls. Poor child! do not scold him. He is sad; he dares hardly indulge a hope. What is the matter? He desponds. You encourage him to trust in Christ and rejoice in Him. But no, that will not serve the turn, that does not remove the load. Christ has undertaken a work with him--has set about revealing him to himself, and the work will cost the poor soul many prayers, and tears, and groans, and searchings and loathings of heart. He prayed before for sanctification and he is astonished out of measure. He receives any thing in the world but sanctification. He prayed for the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, and he verily expected some beatific sight. He thought he should see the heavens opened as Stephen did. But instead of this, what a state! he seems given over to the tender mercies of sin. Every appetite and lust is clamorous as a fiend; his passions get the mastery; he frets, and grieves, and vexes himself, and repents and sins again; he is shocked, ashamed of himself, afraid to look up, is ashamed and confounded. Poor thing! he prayed to be sanctified, and he expected Christ would smile right through the darkness, and light up his soul with unutterable joy. But no! it is all confusion and darkness. He is stumbling, and sliding, and floundering, and plunging headlong into the mire, till his own clothes abhor him, and he is brought to cry--"Lord, O Lord, have mercy on me!" He expected--O what a fairy land! and he finds--what a desert--barren, dark, full of traps, and gins, and pitfalls; as it were the very earth conspiring with all things else, to ruin him. Child be not disheartened; Christ is answering your prayer. Cold professors may discourage you, but be not discouraged; you may weep and groan, but you are going through a necessary process. To know Christ, you must know yourself; to have Christ come in, you must be emptied of yourself. How will He so this for you? If you would but let go of self--if you would but believe all that God says of you, and renounce yourself at first and at once, you might be spared many a fall; but you will not, you will believe only upon experience, and hence that experience Christ makes sure that you shall have to the full. And now, mark: whoever expects to be sanctified without a full and clear and heart-sickening revelation of his own loathsomeness, without being first shown how much he needs it, is very much mistaken. Till you have learned that, nothing you can do can avail aught; you are not prepared to receive Christ as He is offered in the gospel.

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)*.

.
End of the 1844 Collection.