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# "The Oberlin Evangelist"

Publication of Oberlin College

Sermons and Lectures given in 1848

by

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President of Oberlin College

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## **GLOSSARY**

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

## **Refuges of Lies**

Lecture I

September 27, 1848

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa. 28:17: "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail

shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place."

If we would understand this passage, it is important that we should consider the context attentively. This will show what class of people are referred to in the text, and what position they are supposed to occupy.

"Whom shall He teach knowledge? and whom shall He make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, and precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: for with stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to His people. To whom He said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the Lord was unto them, precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, we have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place."

The class of persons spoken of here enjoyed great religious privileges. The word of the Lord came to them, "precept upon precept," and they had most abundant means of knowing its revealed truths and enjoined duties. But they did not love these truths and would not do these duties. Consequently, restive under the unwelcome pressure of truth upon their consciences, they sought relief under some refuge of lies. It will be my present object to notice some of the many refuges of lies to which men are wont to resort when their consciences are ill at ease.

1. A selfish religion. This is one of the most common delusions among men. In this case selfishness, instead of seeking worldly good alone, elevates its aim and seeks heaven. Selfishness is usually distinguished for its grasping some earthly good, in a spirit of reckless disregard alike of others' rights and interests, and of the known will of God. But it is not the character of the good it seeks which makes it selfishness; but rather the spirit with which the good is sought.

Thus in the case of the selfish religionist, his general end is the same now as ever-- personal happiness; and the spirit in which he seeks it is the same as ever--a spirit that seeks and cares for nothing but its own individual good; but the means by which he pursues his end are changed, for now he resorts to religion as his means, while heretofore he has been content to seek it from the world, with no semblance of religion in his course. Now while his ultimate end remains the same, no change of the means for attaining it can change the mans' moral character, or the moral quality of his conduct. In this case now contemplated, the individual aims at securing an interest for himself as really and as exclusively as ever. While he was careless about religion, he sought this selfish good from the world; now he seeks it from religion: before he sought to press his fellow men and every earthly agency into his service; now he seeks to make the Almighty God his

infinite servant, and to dragoon the gospel into an instrumentality for securing his own eternal interests. This form of delusion is, as I have said, exceedingly common.

It is also very subtle, often so subtle that the deluded man is not at all aware that he has not in fact the very religion of the Bible. He might indeed see the truth if he would be faithful and honest, for it would stand out most plain and palpable to the eye of honest scrutiny. Whoever will may know as to himself whether all his religion is or is not selfish; whether or not all his seeking of heaven is a merely selfish seeking.

2. Another refuge of lies exists in a religion of impulse.

This also is a selfish religion, but of a different form from the preceding, and it manifests itself in a different way. The man of this kind of religion is governed by his sensibility, or in other words, by his feelings, and not by the law of God as revealed to his intelligence. He thinks himself very religious because he has so much feeling. He supposes himself to be very sincere, for he is conscious of having much feeling and many strong desires, and of being exercised by these feelings and desires. And as he assumes this to be religion, he infers that he has real religion, and has it in an unusual degree.

This also is a very subtle form of delusion. For it is intrinsically right that the sensibility should be affected by religious truth. That it should be, will always appear fitting and proper to the human mind. But the mistake lies in making religion consist in this, and in making this the whole of religion; whereas nothing is more demonstrable than that religion must essentially consist in the will's allegiance to truth as revealed from God to man and apprehended by his intelligence. But more of this anon. This type of delusion is subtle because the subject of it is entirely conscious of having great feeling, and of being governed by it also. If he had no feeling, or if he had but little, he would suspect himself of being deceived as to his own piety; but having much feeling, as he very well knows, he feels quite sure of possessing most extraordinary and praiseworthy piety.

Now it should be considered that true religion carries with it deep feelings; but deep feelings may exist without religion; for true religion consists in the mind's being influenced by the intelligence and not by the sensibility. Deep feeling is in the Christian's mind, but it does not govern there. True and well-instructed Christians know that the impulses of the sensibility, however strong, are not religion. They regard these impulses as accompanying, but not as constituting real piety. They know that these feelings are the natural result of certain views presented to the mind, and hence they see at once the mistake of regarding them as in themselves either the evidence or the measure of piety.

I have often been struck with developments of this delusion in seasons of revival. Persons of naturally strong feelings will often seem to act like real Christians. They do indeed feel strongly, and for a season they are governed by these feelings. But these states and exercises do not involve the action of the will, in subservience to the demands of the intelligence, and hence in regard to their moral nature they are passive and not active, and therefore not virtuous. And yet these persons in revival appear not only religious but

eminently so. But these impulses soon subside--their excitements cool off; they become no less excited on other subjects, and then they show to everyone what spirit they have. Being creatures of feeling and sensibility, they follow the current of public feeling and the popular mind as sure as the straw floats down the rippling flood. Who has not seen persons of this stamp in every community? You may always expect them to be powerfully moved in every great revival, but they will just as certainly be moved by anything else that appeals strongly to their sensibility. Indeed they are constitutionally excitable and easily moved, and have not learned the solemn duty of being governed by the will and the intelligence, but float along in the uniform practice of being governed by their feelings.

Now I am not speaking against having feeling on religious subjects, but against being governed by it. I urge that it is wrong to seek supremely to gratify these feelings, irrespective of the claims of the intelligence. This is my position.

No subject more deeply interests the sensibility than religion. None with more power breaks up the fountains of the great deep of human feeling than this. Hence persons who make their excited feelings the whole of their religion, may luxuriate in their exercise and float along upon their current, deceiving and being deceived till they die. How fatally subtle oftentimes is this delusion!

3. Another refuge of lies consists in a religion of opinion--or mere orthodoxy.

It might be supposed that in this place there would be very little danger of this form of delusion. But there is danger even among us. Some even here hold in theory the doctrine of sanctification, think much of it, glory in defending it and make it a great thing, and yet seem to be very far from embracing the doctrine in the love of it, and from imbibing the spirit of it into their hearts. Now it matters not how good or how true your orthodoxy may be; if it is only opinion and theory in your head and not love and obedience in your heart, it is nothing better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

4. Sectarian religion is another form of delusion.

But can this be found among us? Do we not all belong to one church? Can it be that we need to have sectarianism preached against here? Many even among us I fear, are in this sin who are not themselves aware of it. I fear that some who defend Oberlin, do it on sectarian grounds and in a sectarian spirit. To be sure they are not sticklish for baptism, or election, or any of the common points of sectarian controversy; but they are most zealous for Oberlin, and often may be really more zealous to make men friends of Oberlin than to make them friends of Christ.

This is a most insidious delusion, wherever it may develop itself. It is perilous out of Oberlin, and no less perilous in Oberlin. And its danger does not turn upon the question whether the points contended for are true or false. It is dangerous to contend for the best truth ever revealed from God, if your zeal for it is a selfish zeal, and if you judge yourself

a Christian because you have it.

5. Another delusion to be considered, is really a form of self-righteousness. It often manifests itself in this way. Men put external right-doing in the place of real benevolence of heart. They mean to do right towards their fellow men, but confine themselves to executive acts and overlook that in which real moral character inheres. They quite overlook the heart, and seem to forget that if there be not true love to God in all they do, nothing can be right at all. Suppose a man seeks to be honest in his business; is this all that God requires? Do we need to be told that nothing can be right even in our commercial business unless done for God, unless the motive be to glorify God--unless the great end be to honor God and do good to men? And yet a man will talk about being honest in his business, as if he might have this virtue, though he has no regard for God and no religion whatever at heart. He looks upon his own moral conduct very complacently. If a man comes into his store to trade he means to deal fairly with him. He estimates the cost of his articles--add a fair profit--takes no advantage by deceiving either as to quality or quantity. Very well; so he thinks. But suppose a man should pursue this honest course his life long; is this the whole of doing right? Is it in fact even the beginning of it? Must we not go farther back and ask--for what end is all this honesty? What does this honest man really aim at? Is it his aim to glorify God, or to benefit himself? Is all this a real love to man because God requires such love, or is it a wise and far-sighted seeking of his own personal advantages?

Said an individual very sick and apparently near death, "I have always been honest in all my dealings with men; in all this I have nothing to reproach myself with; but O, as far as my God is concerned, all is dark--I have done nothing right to my God."

Now there is embodied here one of the most common forms of delusion--one of the most common and also the most perfectly fatal. It overlooks the fact that unless the mind be consecrated to God, there can be no real honesty at all; that unless a man treat his fellow men right for God, in view of the claims of God, and as obedience to God, it is no right doing at all. For how does God require you to treat your brother man? Does He ask only that you would not cheat him in business? Does God ask nothing more than this? Does not the law of God require that you should love your neighbor as yourself? And is it not also implied that you are to love him as one of God's created children, and in the spirit as to yourself of a dutiful and affectionate son towards God? Your love to him must therefore be that of a dutiful brother in the great family of God--a brother whom God, your Father, requires you to love as yourself.

Hence the man who thinks his duty all done towards his fellow man if he has simply forborne to cheat him, is egregiously deceived. Doing duty to God is indispensable for really doing duty to man. If anyone has loved his brother man right, then has he also loved his Father, God; for there can be nothing right in this matter which does not most fully and heartily recognize this great and blessed family relation. Loving man must be done as duty to God--from love to God, and with a distinct recognition of God as the common Father of both myself and my brother.

Thus, really to love man right implies loving God also. And on the other hand a proper love to God implies loving man also. You can not be in a benevolent state of mind towards God, without being also in a benevolent state towards His creatures. The very nature of religion and love implies that if we love God we shall also love His offspring. We cannot keep the first great command without keeping the second also.

It is remarkable that you may often detect the real state of your heart towards God by observing closely your state towards man; and so on the other hand you may learn your true position towards man by noticing your position towards God. For nothing can be more certain and invariable than this law of mind, namely, that if it be really in a benevolent state, its benevolence will be exercised towards both God and man, and indeed towards all known sentient beings.

Hence when a man on his death-bed says--"I have done all my duty towards man, but alas! all is wrong in regard to my duties to God," he certainly deceives himself. There can not be such a state as that which he supposes his to be. For he certainly has not done his duty towards man if his heart has at the same time been alien and apostate from God.

6. Another refuge of lies consists in an Antinomian religion. In this, men rest in a faith which is not sanctifying. They have abandoned the idea of being saved by works, and have fallen back upon faith, but yet it is upon a faith that fails to sanctify--a faith which does not lead them to consecrate their all to God. This is an Antinomian faith--the very same of which the apostle James said, "Show me thy faith without thy works, (if thou canst) and I will show thee my faith by my works." An Antinomian faith can never bear this test; for by the very supposition it begets no good works at all.

A sister in the Church once said in a prayer meeting, "I used to dwell much upon faith, but had little regard for works. My mind was constantly ranging upon faith, faith, but it was a faith which never led me to duty--it only kept me waiting, and--idle."

Now this is a most dangerous delusion. This resting in a faith which acts only as an opiate; which gives no stimulus at all to the soul towards either love, or the labor which love begets; this must be a gross and most fatal delusion. You will see at a glance that this is not that Bible faith which worketh by love, and which in the ancient worthies "wrought righteousness, obtained promises, quenched the violence of fire, made the weak strong, and put to flight the armies of the aliens." O this do-nothing religion, which professes to live upon Christ, but does nothing that Christ commands--this is not the religion of our ancient Bible! It is the same which our Lord portrays only to condemn it; one in which men cry, "Lord, Lord," but do not the things which He says. What can be a more fatal delusion than this?

7. Universalism is another refuge of lies. This system varies in some of its minor points, but in one great leading feature it remains ever the same--it always denies the justice of endless punishment. However much the advocates of Universalism may differ from each

other in the less important points, they all agree that all men will ultimately be saved; that sin does not deserve an endless punishment; and that it would therefore be unjust in God to inflict it.

Hence, whatever modification this system may put on, it will practically make sin out to be a mere trifle. For example, they will tell you that men are fully punished for all their sin as they go along--that the evil necessarily incidental to sinning in this life is all the punishment it deserves. The slight compunction of conscience, more or less, that wicked men feel for sin, together with possibly some providential evils, is all that God can justly inflict upon them as a punishment!

Think of this! Look at it! What sort of religion is this? To say that all the punishment which sin deserves is a little compunction of conscience, and perhaps some providential trials in this life!--a little trouble which some men have as they go along in consequence of sinning! I want to know if this is not blaspheming God in the worst possible manner! It lifts up its brazen front before heaven and tells God--"Thou great Jehovah--sin against Thee is a small matter--Thy laws are a mean affair--if I trample on them and roll them in the dust, and grind my heel upon them, what is that to Thee? Who art Thou that Thou shouldst take in hand to punish such things in Thy creatures with any positive inflictions of suffering? Dost Thou not know that the sinner's troubles in this life are full as much punishment as his sin deserves?"

Now see in this what Universalism is. See how it spits at God! Hear it proclaim, "Who art Thou that sin against Thee should be a thing of any account?"

And what is this but an attempt to dethrone Jehovah? It would fain make sin the merest trifle in the universe. And shall not the hail sweep away this refuge of lies? If it does not, then God will have forgotten to sustain His own honor and His own glorious throne.

But you say that you don't deserve any other punishment than the natural compunctions of your conscience, and the attendant troubles of sinning in this life!

Indeed! all the time receiving good from the hand of God, cradled from your birth in His very arms--fed from His own table--every want supplied from His exhaustless bounty--and yet, though you scorn to remember God with gratitude, and though you trample His law in the dust, yet you don't deserve any other punishment for your sin than you get from your conscience and from providence, as you go along! O what outrageous abuse of God! And what a shameless perversion of human reason! I know not how to express the indignation I feel at such insults offered to God. O, to think how they are contemning their own most gracious Father! He is fattening them on the bounties of His providence, and yet they deserve, they say, no punishment for sin--no hell after death! What a ridiculous delusion is this! Was there ever a more striking proof afforded of the degree to which sin can stultify the human intelligence!

This doctrine of Universalism of course rejects salvation by Christ. Its advocates may

sometimes talk about being saved by Christ; but they mean nothing by it, for they hold that men are punished all they deserve in this world as they go along. Of course if punished all they deserve in this world they are not pardoned at all. But salvation by Christ is pardon; if it mean anything it must include the idea of forgiveness, or pardon, so that the sinner saved by Christ is not punished, but pardoned. But Universalism punishes the sinner all he deserves, and yet pardons him too! It makes him suffer the full and utmost penalty of God's law, and at the same time saves him by Christ., so that he shall be pardoned, and not punished at all! What superb nonsense is this!

And again, what curious ideas of law and government are these which make the penalty of sin only the slight evils endured here from an uneasy conscience, and from a disciplinary providence. Here, in this world, is the sinner's hell--here, where sinners are in the main happy in all their sins, and yet are suffering the full penalty of God's law! Ah, what notions of God's law must Universalists have!

This system strangely confounds justice with mercy. It punishes men to chasten and reform them, and this strange process is identical with forgiveness! Inflicting the penalty of law on principles of strict justice is with them the same thing as forgiveness and mercy! For here, in this world, on every sinner, precisely this development takes place--God punishes him all he deserves, in His justice; and yet pardons him most freely through Christ, in His mercy! Surely this is mixing up and confounding together justice and mercy--very much as if men had no just idea of either.

Again, Universalists confound the benevolence of God with mere good nature. God is in their view so good-natured that He will make no discrimination as to character. O He loves all men most comprehensively and altogether alike! So pure good-natured is He!

The favorite term with them to designate their opponents is "partialists," assuming that it would be partial in God to save one and not another. This can appear plausible only to the most short-sighted intelligence. For, consider--Is a ruler impartial who treats the righteous and the wicked alike? Is this impartiality? Can justice treat men of opposite character and opposite merits, just alike? There is the case of Abraham's prayer for Sodom, "O Lord," he says, "wilt Thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Would that be right? That the righteous should be treated as the wicked are--"be this far from Thee, O Lord!" "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Now here, with the best good sense and reason, Abraham assumes that God would be partial and unjust if He were to treat the righteous and the wicked all alike, and he pleads as if he felt most sure that the Judge of all the earth would do no such thing. Abraham was no Universalist.

Impartiality implies dealing with men according to their deserts. Therefore if God saves all men, be they righteous or wicked, He cannot be impartial, but must be partial.

Again, persons who hold this delusion must count Paul a madman. Hear him: "I say the



truth in Christ; I lie not; my conscience bears me witness that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart for my brethren;" and why?

He tells us, moreover, that in one city, "by the space of three years he ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears."

But why is all this? If Paul really believed that all men will certainly be saved, what is he warning them against? And why those tears, and that continual heaviness and agony of spirit? Is he warning them to flee from the wrath to come? O no--no; but he trembles lest they should not all become Universalists. He finds that some of them are skeptical upon this doctrine, and hence are afraid of being finally lost, and he cannot endure that their minds should be disturbed by such fears for the few days of the mortal life. O he is in the greatest agony lest he shall not convert all his Jewish brethren and all the Gentiles of Ephesus to the belief of universal salvation!! He is in dreadful agony of soul lest they should be troubled with fears of being lost! Alas, lest they should never become Universalists! And this is the Universalist's version of the character of the great apostle of the Gentiles!

But what does Paul say of himself? Does he tell us that in his view of the matter, Christ saves all? Aye, he says, that for himself, "he becomes all things to all men if by any means he might save some." And this is the extent of his Universalism!

Again, this doctrine represents Christ as either full of deceit or void of sense. Hear its explanation of Christ's words: Christ says, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Now look at the exposition put on this language by the Universalists. "Hell," he says, "means nothing but the grave. There is no other hell but the grave." Of course he makes Jesus Christ say this in the passage just cited--"Fear not the assassin or the executioner, who can only kill you; but I will forewarn you whom you should fear: fear him," who after you are dead can throw your soul and body into--the grave--aye, yes, fear the sexton!! Ah, consider--he has power to bury you after you are dead--I say unto you, fear him! Now if Universalism makes no other hell but the grave, then Universalism makes Christ either a consummately deceitful man, or a man sadly deficient of intellect!

I might pursue the follies and absurdities of this delusion much farther; but time forbids, and I must therefore forbear.

## REMARKS.

1. These delusions are only refuges to which people betake themselves to evade the claims of God. Who does not know this? Do men resort to these refuges for any other purpose? Does any man resort to Universalism in order to make himself more holy? Does he incline towards that doctrine because he thirsts after holiness, and longs to make himself and others more like God? Whoever say an instance of this kind?

So of all these forms of delusion. They are refuges, and nothing else. They are got up to screen the

soul from the pressure of obligation to do duty, or to avert the dreaded displeasure and wrath of God against sin.

2. A hail storm is one of the most striking emblems of the wrath of God against sin, which is ever seen in this world. Have you ever seen one? Its roar is dreadful. Rolling up its dark, heavy mass of cloud, it moves along in grand and awful majesty, as if the very ocean had burst from its bed and broken over its bounds, and were ready in an instant to dash its mountain torrents over us. I have not seen a hail storm for these many years without being reminded of this passage of Isaiah: "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place." How full of terror and sublimity is this image of Jehovah's wrath! The roaring, rushing storm of all-destructive hail! It is as if the chariots of God were coming--coming with fire and storm and terrific indignation to overwhelm the guilty sinner in ruin under the out-burstings of His wrath.

Mark also how we are taught by varied figures, that the Lord will hunt out and destroy the fleeing, hiding sinner in the day of His enkindled anger. If the sinner has built up a refuge of lies, walling it in and supporting it with toil and care, the hail shall sweep it all away. If he betakes himself to caverns or to holes of the earth, "the waters shall overflow the hiding-place"--shall search him out and engulf him in ruin even there. What the wind and storm cannot batter down the overflowing waters will search out and sweep with remorseless ruin. For him who stands up against God there shall be no escape--no remedy--no hiding-place forever!

And now let me ask--Where are your hiding-places? Are you seeking to construct them with lies, and under falsehood to hide yourselves? Or are you standing firmly and calmly on the rock of eternal truth? Seek not to avoid the point of this question. Meet it, I pray you, in candor and honesty; for the sinner's refuge is in God alone.

Before I was myself a Christian, a man once said to me, "If Universalism is true, we are all safe; if false, all who rest on it for salvation are lost. I think it will be well to be on the safe side."

True enough, thought I, the view of the Universalist, if false, is an infinite mistake; it forfeits everything. Why then should I try to be a Universalist? Besides, if the doctrine be true, it cannot make me any better. Looking round on all the Universalists I knew, I asked myself, are they really holy men? Are they made any better men by their belief in this system? Are they made more holy by its influence? I could not even pretend that they were. Of course I must infer that the system had nothing of real value to commend it.

But aside entirely from this, I do not believe that there are many men who are able to believe in Universalism. They may be able to deceive themselves so far as to hope that the system will prove true--just as many professors of religion cannot believe themselves to be Christians, but they can gather evidence perhaps to hope that they may be. But let them be summoned to die in one hour, and they would be in utter consternation! Perhaps they do not know that they are deceived, but they are very far from knowing that they are not. They content themselves to slide along, and put over their anxieties and cares about the certainty of the matter to some unknown future.

So the Universalist has no such assurance as would make him calm in death. I well recollect the case

of Dr. B., who loved to converse with me before my conversion about his favorite doctrine of universal salvation. On one occasion our conversation took a very serious turn without our being aware of it. I asked him, "Doctor, are you satisfied with Universalism as a system of religious faith?" "No," said he, "I must confess, I am not. I told Elder J. the other day (his own Universalist preacher) that I really had so many doubts that I could get no peace from the doctrine; and he told me it was just so with himself, he could get no peace of mind in the doctrine, and he did not believe that any one else could."

For myself, this shocked me beyond measure. What, indeed! a professedly gospel minister preaching what does not convince himself of its truth--what he does not believe himself!--what gives him no peace of mind! Horrible!! This put an end forever to all my desire to be a Universalist. I had no longer any desire to hide myself under such a refuge of lies.

## **The Spirit Not Striving Always**

Lecture II

October 11, 1848

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Gen. 6:3: "And the Lord said--my Spirit shall not always strive with man."

In speaking from this text, I shall pursue the following outline of thought, and attempt to show,

*I. What is implied in the assertion, My Spirit shall not always strive with man;*

*II. What is not intended by the Spirit's striving;*

*III. What is intended by it;*

*IV. How it may be known when the Spirit strives with an individual;*

*V. What is intended by his not striving always;*

*VI. Why He will not always strive; and*

*VII. Some consequences of his ceasing to strive with men.*

**I. What is implied in the assertion--"My Spirit shall not always strive with man?"**

- 1. It is implied in this assertion, that the Spirit does sometimes strive with men. It is nonsense to affirm that He will not strive always, if the fact of his striving sometimes be not implied. Beyond all question the text assumes the doctrine that God by his Spirit does strive sometimes with sinning men.
- 2. It is also implied that men resist the Spirit. For there can be no strife unless there be resistance. If sinners always yielded at once to the teachings and guidance of the Spirit, there could be no "striving" on the part of the Spirit, in the sense here implied, and it would be altogether improper to use the language here employed. In fact, the language of our text implies long-continued resistance--so long continued that God declares that the struggle shall not be kept up on his part forever.

I am well aware that sinners are prone to think that they do not resist God. They often think that they really want the Spirit of God to be with them, and to strive with them. What, indeed! Think of this! If a sinner really wanted the Spirit of God to convert or to lead him, how could he resist the Spirit? But in fact he does resist the Spirit. What Stephen affirmed of the Jews of his time, is true in general of all sinners--"Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." For if there were no resistance on the sinner's part, there could be no striving on the part of the Spirit. So that it is a mere absurdity that a sinner in a state of mind to resist the Spirit should yet sincerely desire to be led into truth and duty by the Spirit. But sinners are sometimes so deceived about themselves as to suppose that they want God to strive with them, while really they are resisting all He is doing, and are ready to resist all He will do. So blinded to their own true characters, are sinners.

## **II. But we must notice secondly, what is not intended by the Spirit's striving.**

Here the main thing to be observed is that it is not any form of physical struggling, or effort whatever. It is not any force applied to our bodies. It does not attempt to urge us literally along toward God or heaven. This is not to be thought of at all.

## **III. What then is the striving of the Spirit?**

I answer, it is an energy of God, applied to the mind of man, setting truth before his mind, debating, reasoning, convincing, and persuading. The sinner resists God's claims, cavils and argues against them; and then God by His Spirit meets the sinner and debates with him, somewhat as two men might debate and argue with each other. You are not however to understand that the Holy Ghost does this with an audible voice, to the human ear, but He speaks to the mind and to the heart. The inner ear of the soul can hear its whispers.

Our Saviour taught that when the Comforter should come, He would "reprove the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment." (John 16:7-11.) The term here rendered "reprove" refers in its proper sense to judicial proceedings. When the judge has heard all the testimony and the arguments of counsel, he sums up the whole case and lays it before the jury, bringing out all the strong points and making them bear with all their condensed and accumulated power, upon the condemnation of the criminal. This is reprovng him in the original and legitimate sense of the word used here by our Saviour. Thus the Holy Ghost reproves the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Thus does

the Spirit convince or convict the sinner by testimony, by argument, by arraying all the strong points of the case against him under circumstances of affecting solemnity and power.

#### **IV. How may it be known when the Spirit of God strives with an individual.**

- 1. Not by direct perception of his agency, through any of your physical senses; for his presence is not manifested to these organs. Not directly by our consciousness; for the only proper subjects of consciousness are the acts and states of our own minds. But we know the presence and agency of the Spirit by his works. The results He produces are the legitimate proofs of his presence. Thus a person under the Spirit's influence, finds his attention arrested to the great concerns of his soul. The solemn questions of duty and responsibility to God are continually intruding themselves upon his mind. If he is a student over his lesson, his mind is drawn away continually ere he is aware, to think of God and of the judgment to come. He turns his attention back to his books, but soon it is off again. How can he neglect these matters of infinite moment to his future well-being?

So with men of every calling; the Spirit of God turns the mind, and draws it to God and the concerns of the soul. When such results take place, you may know that the Spirit of God is the cause. For who does not know that this drawing and inclining of the mind toward God is by no means natural to the human heart? When it does occur therefore, we may know that the special agency of God is in it.

Again, when a man finds himself convinced of sin, he may know that this is the Spirit's work. Now it is one thing to know one's self to be a sinner, and quite another to feel a realizing sense of it, and to have the truth take hold mightily of the deepest sensibilities of the soul. The latter sometimes takes place. You may see the man's countenance fallen, his eye downcast, his whole aspect is as if he had disgraced himself by some foul crime, or as if he had suddenly lost all the friends he ever had. I have often met with impenitent sinners who looked condemned, as if conscious guilt had taken hold of their inmost soul. They would not be aware that they were revealing in their countenances the deep workings of their hearts, but the observing eye could not help seeing it. I have also seen the same among back slidden professors,--resulting from the same cause--the Spirit of God reproving them of sin.

- 2. Sometimes this conviction is of a general and sometimes of a more special nature. It may enforce only the general impression--"I am all wrong--I am utterly odious and hateful to God--my whole heart is a sink of abomination in His sight;" or in other cases it may seize upon some particular form of sin, and hold it up before the sinner's mind, and make him see his infinite odiousness before God for this sin. It may be a sin he has never thought of before, or he may have deemed it a very light matter; but now, through the Spirit, it shall rise up before his mind in such features of ugliness and loathsomeness, that he will abhor himself. He sees sin in a perfectly new light. Many things are sins now, which he never deemed sins before.

Again, the Spirit not only convinces of the fact that such and such things are sins, but convicts the mind of the great guilt and ill-desert of sin. The sinner is made to feel that his sin deserves the direst damnation.

The case of an infidel of my acquaintance may serve to illustrate this. He had lived in succession with two pious wives; had read almost every book then extant on the inspiration of the Scriptures--had disputed, and caviled, and often thought himself to have triumphed over believers in the Bible, and in fact he was the most subtle infidel I ever saw. It was remarkable that in connection with his infidelity he had no just views of sin. He had indeed heard much about some dreadful depravity which had come down in the current of human blood from Adam, and was itself a physical thing; but as usual he had no oppressive consciousness of guilt for having his share of this original taint. His mind consequently was quite easy in respect to the guilt of his own sin.

But at length a change came over him, and his eyes were opened to see the horrible enormity of his guilt. I saw him one day so borne down with sin and shame that he could not look up. He bowed his head upon his knees, covered his face, and groaned in agony. In this state I left him and went to the prayer-meeting. Ere long he came into the meeting as he never came before. As he left the meeting he said to his wife--"You have long known me as a strong-hearted infidel; but my infidelity is all gone. I cannot tell you what has become of it--it all seems to me as the merest nonsense--I cannot conceive how I could ever have believed and defended it. I seem to myself like a man called to view some glorious and beautiful structure, in order to pass his judgment upon it; but who presumes to judge and condemn it after having caught only a dim glimpse of one obscure corner. Just so have I done in condemning the glorious Bible and the glorious government of God."

Now the secret of all this change in his mind towards the Bible lay in the change of his views as to his own sin. Before, he had not been convicted of sin at all; now he sees it in some of its true light, and really feels that he deserves the deepest hell. Of course he now sees the pertinence and beauty and glory of the gospel system. He is now in a position in which he can see clearly one of the strongest proofs of the truth of the Bible--namely, its perfect adaptation to meet the wants of a sinning race.

- 3. It is remarkable to see what power there is in conviction for sin to break up and annihilate the delusions of error. For instance, no man can once thoroughly see his own sin, and remain an Universalist, and deem it unjust for God to send him to hell. When I hear a man talking in defence of Universalism, I know he does not understand anything about sin. He has not begun to see his own guilt in its true light. It is the blindest of all mental infatuations to think that the little inconveniences of this life are all that sin deserves. Let a man once see his own guilt, and he will be amazed to think that he ever held such a notion. The Spirit of God, pouring light upon the sinner's mind, will soon use up Universalism.

I once labored in a village in the State of New York where Universalism prevailed extensively. The leading man among them had a sick wife who sympathized with him in sentiment. She being near death, I called to see her, and endeavored to expose the utter fallacy of her delusion. After I had left, her husband returned, and his wife, her eyes being now opened, cried out to him as he entered--"O my dear husband, you are in the way to hell--your Universalism will ruin your soul forever!" He was greatly enraged, and

learning that I had been talking with her, his rage was kindled against me. "Where is he now?" said he. "Gone to the meeting," was the reply. "I'll go there and shoot him," he cried; and seizing his loaded pistol, as I was informed, he started off. When he came in I was preaching, I think, from the text--"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" I knew at the time nothing about his purpose--nothing about his pistol. He listened awhile--and then all at once, in the midst of the meeting he fell back on his seat, and cried out--"O, I am sinking to hell;-- O, God, have mercy on me." Away went his Universalism in a twinkling; he sees his sin, and now he is sinking to hell. This change in him was not my work, for I could produce no such effects as these. I was indeed trying to show from my text what sinners deserve; but the Spirit of God and nothing less, could set home conviction of sin after this sort.

Again, another fruit of the Spirit is developed in the case of those persons who are conscious of great hardness and insensibility. It not unfrequently happens that men suppose themselves to be Christians because they have so much sensibility on religious subjects. To undeceive them, the Spirit directs their attention to some truth that dries up all their sensibility, and leaves their hopes stranded on the sea-beach. Now they are in great agony. "The more I hear," say they, "the less I feel. I was never in the world so far from being convicted of sin. I shall certainly go to hell. I have not a particle of feeling. I cannot feel if I die."

- 4. Now the explanation of this singular state is usually this: The Spirit of God sees their danger--sees them deceiving themselves by relying on their feelings, and therefore brings some truths before their minds which array the opposition of their hearts against God and dry up the fountains of their sensibility. Then they see how perfectly callous their hearts are toward God. This is the work of the Spirit.

Again, the Spirit convicts the soul of the guilt of unbelief. Sinners are very apt to suppose that they do believe the gospel. They confound faith with a merely intellectual assent, and so blind themselves as to suppose that they believe God in the sense of gospel faith.

- 5. But let the Spirit once reveal their own hearts to them and they will see that they do not believe in God as they believe in their fellow men, and that instead of having confidence in God and resting on his words of promise as they do on men's promises, they do not rest on God at all, but are full of anxiety lest God should fail to fulfill his own words. They see that instead of being child-like and trustful, they are full of trouble, and solicitude, and in fact of unbelief. And they see also, that this is a horribly guilty state of heart. They see the guilt of not resting in his promises--the horrible guilt of not believing with the heart every word God ever uttered.

Now this change is the work of the Spirit. Our Saviour mentions it as one of the effects wrought by the Spirit, that He shall "reprove the world of sin, because they believe not on me." And in fact we find that this is one of the characteristic works of the Spirit. In conversing recently with a man who has been for many years a professor of religion, but living in the seventh chapter to the Romans, he remarked--"I have been thinking of this truth, that God cares for me and loves me, and has through Jesus Christ offered me eternal life; and now I deserve to be damned if I do not believe." Stretching out his pale

hand, he said with great energy, "I ought to go to hell if I will not believe." Now all this is the work of the Spirit--this making a man see the guilt and hell-desert of unbelief--this making a sinner see that every thing else is only straw compared with the eternal rock of God's truth.

Again, the Spirit makes men see the danger of dying in their sins. Said a young man, "I am afraid to go to sleep at night, lest I should awake in hell." Sinners often know what this feeling is. I recollect having this thought once impressed upon my mind, and so much agonized was I, that I almost thought myself to be dying on the spot! O, I can never express the terror and the agony of my soul in that hour! Sinner, if you have these feelings, it is a solemn time with you.

- 6. Moreover, the Spirit makes sinners feel the danger of being given up of God. Often does it happen that sinners, convicted by the Spirit, are made to feel that if they are not given up already, they are in the most imminent peril of it, and must rush for the gate of life now or never. They see that they have so sinned and have done so much to provoke God to give them over, that their last hope of being accepted is fast dying away. Sinners, have any of you ever felt thus? Have you ever trembled in your very soul lest you should be given over to a reprobate mind before another Sabbath, or perhaps before another morning? If so, you may ascribe this to the Spirit of God.
- 7. Yet further; the Spirit often convicts sinners of the great blindness of their minds. It seems to them that their minds are full of solid darkness, as it were a darkness that may be felt.

Now this is really the natural state of the sinner; but he is not sensible of it until enlightened by the Spirit of God. When thus enlightened, he begins to appreciate his own exceeding great blindness. He now becomes aware that the Bible is a sealed book to him--for he finds that though he reads it, its meaning is involved in impenetrable darkness.

Have not some of you been conscious of such an experience as this? Have you not read the Bible with the distressing consciousness that your mind was by no means suitably affected by its truth--indeed, with the conviction that you did not get hold of its truth to any good purpose at all? Thus are men enlightened by the Spirit to see the real state of their case.

Again, the Spirit shows sinners their total alienation from God. I have seen sinners so strongly convicted of this, that they would say right out; "I know that I have not the least disposition to return to God--I am conscious that I don't care whether I have any religion or not."

Often have I seen professed Christians in this state, conscious that their hearts are utterly alienated from God and from all sympathy with his character or government. Their deep backslidings, or their utter want of all religion, has been so revealed to their minds by the Spirit, as to become a matter of most distinct and impressive consciousness.



- 8. Sinners thus made to see themselves by the Spirit, often find that when they pour out their words before God for prayer, their heart won't go. I once said to a sinner, "Come, now, give up your heart to God." "I will," said he; but in a moment he broke out--"My heart won't go." Have not some of you been compelled to say the same, "My heart won't go?" Then you know by experience one of the fruits of the Spirit's convicting power.

When the Spirit of God is not with men, they can dole out their long prayers before God and never think or seem to care how prayerless their hearts are all the time, and how utterly far from God. But when the Spirit sheds his light on the soul, the sinner sees how black a hypocrite he is. Oh, then he cannot pray so smoothly, so loosely, so self-complacently.

Again, the Spirit of God often convinces men that they are ashamed of Christ, and that in truth they do not wish for religion. It sometimes happens that sinners do not feel ashamed of being thought seriously disposed, until they come to be convicted. Such was the case with myself. I bought my first Bible as a law-book, and laid it by the side of my Blackstone. I studied it as I would any other law-book, my sole object being to find in it the great principles of law. Then I never once thought of being ashamed of reading it. I read it as freely and as openly as I read any other book. But as soon as I became awakened to the concerns of my soul, I put my Bible out of sight. If it were lying on my table when persons came into my office, I was careful to throw a newspaper over it. Ere long, however, the conviction that I was ashamed of God and of his word came over me with overwhelming force, and served to show me the horrible state of my mind toward God. And I suppose that the general course of my experience is by no means uncommon among impenitent sinners.

- 9. The Spirit also convicts men of worldly-mindedness. Sinners are always in this state of mind; but are often not fully aware of the fact until the Spirit of God makes them see it. I have often seen men pushing their worldly projects most intensely, but when addressed on the subject they would say, "I don't care much about the world; I am pursuing this business just now chiefly because I want to be doing something;" but when the Spirit shows them their own hearts, they are in agony lest they should never be able to break away from the dreadful power of the world upon their souls. Now they see that they have been the veriest slaves on earth--slaves to the passion for worldly good.

Again, the Holy Spirit often makes such a personal application of the truth as to fasten the impression that the preacher is personal and intends to describe the case and character of him who is the subject of his influence. The individual thus convinced of sin may think that the preacher has in some way come to a knowledge of his character, and intends to describe it. That the preacher means him, and is preaching to him. He wonders who has told the preacher so much about him. All this often takes place when the preacher perhaps does not know that such an one is in the assembly, and is altogether ignorant of his history. Thus the Holy Spirit who knows his heart and his entire history becomes very personal in the application of truth.

- 10. Have any of you this experience? Has it at present or at any other time appeared to you as if

the preacher meant you, and that he was describing your case? Then the Spirit of the living God is upon you. I have often seen individuals drop their heads under preaching almost as if they were shot through. They were perhaps unable to look up again during the whole service. Afterwards I have often heard that they thought I meant them, and that others thought so too and perhaps imagined that many eyes were turned on them, and that therefore they did not look up, when in fact neither myself nor any one in the congregation, in all probability, so much as thought of them.

Thus a bow drawn at a venture often lodges an arrow between the joints of the sinner's coat of mail. Sinner, is it so with you?

Again, the Holy Spirit often convinces sinners of the enmity of their hearts against God. Most impenitent sinners, and perhaps all deceived professors, unless convinced to the contrary by the Holy Spirit, imagine that they are on the whole friendly to God. They are far from believing that this carnal mind is enmity against God. They think they do not hate, but on the contrary, that they love God. Now this delusion must be torn away or they must be lost. To do this, the Spirit so orders it that some truths are presented which develop their real enmity against God. The moralist who has been the almost Christian, or the deceived professor, begins to cavil, to find fault, finally to rail; to oppose the preaching and the meetings and the measures and the men. The man perhaps who has a pious wife and who has thought himself and has been thought by her to be almost a Christian, begins by caviling at the truth, finds fault with the measures, and with the manners; then refuses to go to meeting, and finally forbids his wife and family going, and not infrequently his enmity of heart will boil over in a horrible manner. He perhaps has no thought that this boiling up of hell within him is occasioned by the Holy Spirit revealing to him the true state of his heart. His Christian friends also may mistake his case and be ready to conclude that something is wrong in the matter or manners or measures of the preacher that is doing this man a great injury. But beware what you say or do. In many such cases which have come under my own observation, it has turned out that the Holy Spirit was at work in those hearts, revealing to them their real enmity against God. This He does by presenting those truths in that manner and under those circumstances that produce these results. He pushes this process until He compels the soul to see that it is filled with enmity to God, and to what is right; that yet it is not man, but God to whom he is opposed; that it is not error, but truth; not the manner, but the matter; not the measures, but the God of truth which it hates.

- 11. The Spirit, moreover, often convicts sinners powerfully of the deceitfulness of their own hearts. Sometimes this conviction becomes really appalling. They see they have been deluding themselves in matters too plain to justify any mistake, and too momentous to admit of any apology for willful blindness. They are confounded with what they see in themselves.
- 12. The Spirit also not infrequently strips the sinner of his excuses, and shows him clearly their great folly and absurdity. I recollect this was one of the first things in my experience in the process of conviction. I lost all confidence in any of my excuses, for I found them to be so foolish and futile that I could not endure them. This was my state of mind before I had ever heard of the work of the Spirit, or knew at all how to judge whether my own mind was under its

influence or not. I found that whereas I had been very strong in my excuses and objections, I was now utterly weak, and it seemed to me that any child could overthrow me. In fact I did not need to be overthrown by anybody, for my excuses and cavils had sunk to nothing of themselves, and I was deeply ashamed of them. I had effectually worked myself out of all their mazes, so that they could bewilder me no longer. I have since seen multitudes in the same condition--weak as to their excuses--their old defensive armor all torn off, and their hearts laid naked to the shafts of God's truth.

Now, sinners, have any of you known what this is--to have all your excuses and apologies failing you--to feel that you have no courage and no defensible reasons for pushing forward in a course of sin? If so, then you know what it is to be under the convicting power of the Spirit.

- 13. The Spirit convicts men of the folly of seeking salvation in any other way than through Christ alone. Often, without being aware of it, a sinner will be really seeking salvation in some other way than through Christ, and he will be looking to his good deeds--to his own prayers, or the prayers of some Christian friends; but if the Spirit ever saves him, he will tear away these delusive schemes and show him the utter vanity of every other way than through Christ alone. The Spirit will show him that there is but this one way in which it is naturally possible for a sinner to be saved, and that all attempts toward any other way are forever vain and worse than worthless. All self-righteousness must be rejected entirely, and Christ be sought alone.

Have you ever been made to see this? You who are professed Christians, is this your experience?

Again, the Spirit convinces men of the great folly and madness of clinging to an unsanctifying hope. The Bible teaches that every one who has the genuine gospel hope purifies himself, even as Christ is pure. In this passage, the apostle John plainly means to affirm a universal proposition. He states a universal characteristic of the Christian hope. Whoever has a Christian hope should ask--Do I purify myself even as Christ is pure? If not, then mine is not the true gospel hope.

But yet thousands of professed Christians have a most inefficient hope. What is it? Does it really lead them to purify themselves as Christ is pure? Nothing like it. It is not a hope that they shall see Christ as He is, and be forever with Him, and altogether like Him too; but it is mainly a hope that they shall escape hell, and go as an alternative to some unknown heaven.

Such professed Christians can not but know that their experience lacks the witness of their own consciences that they are living for God and bearing His image. If such are ever saved, they must first be convinced of the folly of a hope that leaves them unsanctified.

Ye professors of religion who have lived a worldly life so long, are you not ashamed of your hope? Have you not good reason to be ashamed of a hope that has no more power than yours has had? Are there not many in this house who in the honesty of their hearts must say, "Either there is no power in the gospel, or I don't know anything about it?" For

the gospel affirms as a universal fact of all those who are not under the law but under grace, "sin shall not have dominion over you." Now will you go before God and say, "Lord, thou hast said, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you;' but, Lord, that is all false, for I believe the gospel and am under grace, but sin still has dominion over me!" No doubt in this case there is a mistake somewhere; and it becomes you to ask solemnly, Shall I charge this mistake and falsehood upon God, or shall I admit that it must be in myself alone?

The apostle Paul has said, "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Is it so to you?

He has also said, "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Do you know this by your own experience? He adds also that we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Is all this in accordance with your experience, professed Christian? Is it true that your hope makes not ashamed? Does it produce such glorious fruits unto holiness as are here described? If you were to try your experience by the word of the living God, and open your heart to be searched by the Spirit, would not you be convinced that you do not embrace the gospel in reality?

Again, the Spirit convinces men that all their goodness is selfish; and that self is the end of all their efforts, of all their prayers and religious exercises. I once spent a little time in the family of a man who was a leading member in a Presbyterian Church. He said to me, "What should you think of a man who is praying for the Spirit every day, but does not get the blessing?" I answered, "I should presume that he is praying selfishly." "But suppose," replied he, "that he is praying for the sake of promoting his own happiness?" "He may be purely selfish in that," I replied; "the devil might do as much, and would perhaps do just the same if he supposed he could make himself happier by it." I then cited the prayer of David: "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me: restore unto me the joys of thy salvation: then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." This seemed to be new doctrine to him, and he turned away--as I found afterwards, in great anger and trouble. In the first gush of feeling he prayed that God would cut him down and send him to hell, lest he should have to confess his sin and shame before all the people. He saw that in fact his past religion had been all selfish--but the dread of confessing this was at first appalling. He saw however the possibility of mistake, that his hopes had been all delusive, and that he had been working his self-deceived course fast down toward the depths of hell.

- 14. Finally, it is the Spirit's work to make self-deceived men feel that they are now having their last call from the Spirit. When this impression is made, let it by all means be heeded. It is God's own voice to the soul. Out of a great multitude of cases under my observation, in which God has distinctly made sinners feel that the present was their last call, I do not recollect one in

which it did not prove to be so. This is of a truth a solemn moment to the sinner, and ought to make the warning voice of God ring in his ear like the forewarning knell of the second death.

#### **V. What is intended by the Spirit's not striving always?**

The meaning I take to be, not that he will at some period withdraw from among mankind, but that He will withdraw from the individual in question, or perhaps as in the text from a whole generation of sinners. In its general application now, the principle seems to be that the Spirit will not follow the sinner onward down to his grave--that there will be a limit to his efforts in the case of each sinner, and that this limit is perhaps ordinarily reached a longer or a shorter time before death. At some uncertain, awful point he will reach and pass it; and it therefore becomes every sinner to understand his peril of grieving the Spirit forever away.

#### **VI. We, are next to inquire, WHY God's Spirit will not strive always.**

I answer, not because God is not compassionate, forbearing, slow to anger and great in mercy;--not because He gets out of patience and acts unreasonably--by no means; nothing of this at all. But the reasons are

- 1. Because longer striving will do the sinner no good. For by the very laws of mind, conversion must be effected through the influence of truth. But it is a known law of mind that truth once and again resisted, loses its power upon the mind that resists it. Every successive instance of resistance weakens its power. If the truth does not take hold with energy when fresh, it is not likely to do so ever after. Hence when the Spirit reveals truth to the sinner, and he hardens himself against it, and resists the Spirit, there remains little hope for him. We may expect God to give him up for lost. So the Bible teaches.
- 2. If again we ask, Why does God cease to strive with sinners? The answer may be, Because to strive longer not only does the sinner no good, but positive evil. For guilt is graduated by light. The more light the greater guilt. Hence more light revealed by the Spirit and longer striving might serve only to augment the sinner's guilt, and of course his final woe. It is better then for the sinner himself, after all hope of his repentance is gone, that the Spirit should leave him, than that his efforts should be prolonged in vain, to no other result than to increase the sinner's light and guilt, and consequently his endless curse. It is in this case a real mercy to the sinner, that God should withdraw His Spirit and let him alone.
- 3. Because sinners sin willfully when they resist the Holy Ghost. It is the very work of the Spirit to throw light before their minds. Of course in resisting the Spirit they must sin against light. Hence their dreadful guilt.

We are often greatly shocked with the bold and daring sins of men who may not after all have much illumination of the Spirit, and of course comparatively little guilt. But when God's ministers come to the souls of men with His messages of truth, and men despise or neglect them; when God's providence also enforces His truth, and still men resist, they are greatly guilty. How much more so when God comes by His Spirit, and they resist God under the blazing light of His Spirit's illuminations! How infinitely aggravated is their

guilt now!

- 4. Again, their resistance tempts the forbearance of God. Never do sinners so grievously tempt the forbearance of God as when they resist His Spirit. You may see this developed in the Jews of Stephen's time. "Ye stiff-necked," said he, "and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did so do ye." He had been following down the track of their national history, and running fearlessly across their Jewish prejudices, laboring in the deep sincerity and faithfulness of his soul, to set before them their guilt in persecuting and murdering the Son of God. And what do they do? Enraged at these rebukes, they gnashed on him with their teeth--they set upon him with the spirit of demons, and stoned him to death, although they saw the very glory of God beaming in his eye and on his countenance as if it had been an angel's. And did not this fearful deed of theirs seal up their damnation? Read the history of their nation and see. They had tempted God to the last limit of His forbearance; and now what remained for them but swift and awful judgments? The wrath of God arose against them, and there was no remedy. Their resistance of the Holy Ghost pressed the forbearance of God till it could bear no more.

It is a solemn truth that sinners tempt God's forbearance most dangerously when they resist His Spirit. Think how long some of you have resisted the Holy Spirit. The claims of God have been presented and pressed again and again, but you have as often put them away. You have said unto God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." And now have you not the utmost reason to expect that God will take you at your word?

- 5. There is a point beyond which forbearance is no virtue. This is and must be true in all governments. No government could possibly be maintained which should push the indulgence of a spirit of forbearance toward the guilty beyond all limits. There must be a point beyond which God cannot go without peril to His government; and over this point we may be assured He will never pass.

Suppose we should as often see old, gray-headed sinners converted as youthful sinners, and this should be the general course of things. Would not this work ruin to God's government--ruin even to sinners themselves? Would not sinners take encouragement from this, and hold on in their sins till their lusts were worn out, and till they themselves should rot down in their corruptions? They would say, "We shall be just as likely to be converted in our old age, putrid with long-indulged lusts, and rank with the unchecked growth of every abomination of the heart of man, as if we were to turn to God in the freshness of our youth;--so let us have the pleasures of sin first, and the unwelcomeness of religion when the world can give us no more to enjoy."

But God means to have men converted young if at all, and one reason for this is that He intends to convert the world, and therefore must have laborers trained up for the work in the morning of life. If He were to make no discrimination between the young and the aged, converting from each class alike, or chiefly from the aged, the means for converting the world must utterly fail, and in fact on such a scheme the result would be that no sinners at all would be converted. There is therefore a necessity for the general fact that

sinners must submit to God in early life.

## VII. Consequences of the Spirit's ceasing to strive with men.

- 1. One consequence will be a confirmed hardness of heart. It is inevitable that the heart will become much more hardened, and the will more fully set to do evil.
- 2. Another consequence will be a confirmed opposition to religion. This will be wont to manifest itself in dislike to every thing on the subject, often with great impatience and peevishness when pressed to attend to the subject seriously. Perhaps they will refuse to have anything said to themselves personally, so settled is their opposition to God and his claims.

You may also expect to see them opposed to revivals and to gospel ministers, and pre-eminently to those ministers who are most faithful to their souls. All those means of promoting revivals which are adapted to rouse the conscience, will be peculiarly odious to their hearts. Usually such persons become sour in their dispositions, misanthropic, haters of all Christians, delighting if they dare to retail slander and abuse against those whose piety annoys and disturbs their stupid repose in sin.

- 3. Another consequence of being forsaken of the Spirit is, that men will betake themselves to some refuge of lies, and will settle down in some form of fatal error. I have often thought it almost impossible for men to embrace fatal error heartily, unless first forsaken by the Spirit of God. From observation of numerous cases, I believe this to be the case with the great majority of Universalists. They are described by Paul. "They receive not the love of the truth that they may be saved, and for this cause God sends them strong delusion that they should believe a lie." They hate the truth--are more than willing to be deceived--are restive when pressed with gospel claims, and therefore are ready to grasp at any form of delusion which sets aside these claims and boldly asserts--"Ye shall not surely die." It has long been an impression on my mind that this is the usual course of feeling and thought which leads to Universalism. There may be exceptions; but the mass go into this delusion from the starting point of being abandoned by the Spirit. Thus abandoned, they become cross and misanthropic--they hate all Christians, and all those truths that God and his people love. This could not be the case if they had the love of God in their hearts. It could not well be the case if they were enlightened and restrained by the present agency of the divine Spirit.

Again, generally those who are left of God, come to have a seared conscience. They are distinguished by great insensibility of mind. They are of choice blind and hardened in respect to the nature and guilt of sin. Although their intelligence affirms that sin is wrong, yet they do not feel it, or care for it. They can know the truth and yet be reckless of its application to their own hearts and lives. God has left them, and of course the natural tendencies of a depraved heart are developed without restraint.

Again, this class of sinners will inevitably wax worse and worse. They become loose in habits--lax in their observance of the Sabbath--slide backwards in regard to temperance and all kindred moral subjects;--slip into some of the many forms of sin and perhaps vice and crime; if they have been conscientious against the use of tobacco, they relinquish

their conscientiousness and throw a loose rein on their lusts; in short, they are wont to wax worse and worse in every branch of morals, and often become so changed that you would hardly recognize them. It will be no strange thing if they become profane swearers--steal a little and anon a good deal; and if God does not restrain them, they go down by a short and steep descent to the depths of hell.

- 4. Another consequence of being abandoned by the Spirit will be certain damnation. There can be no mistake about this. It is just as certain as if they were already there.

This state is not always attended with apathy of feeling. There may be at times a most intense excitement of the sensibility. The Bible describes the case of some who "sin willfully after they have received a knowledge of the truth, and there remains for them only a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." Some persons of this description I have seen, and such agony and such wretchedness I pray God I may never see again. I have seen them, the very pictures of despair and horror. Their eyes fully open to see their ruined state--exclaiming, "I know I am abandoned of God forever--I have sinned away my day of hope and mercy, and I know I never shall repent--I have no heart to repent, although I know that I must, or be damned;" such language as this they utter with a settled, positive tone, and an air of agony and despair which is enough to break a heart of stone.

- 5. Another consequence often is that Christians find themselves unable to pray in faith for such sinners. There are some in almost every community for whom Christians cannot pray. It is I believe common for many Christians without being aware of each other's state, to have a similar experience. For example, several Christians are praying in secret for some one individual, and with considerable freedom up to a certain moment, and then they find that they can pray for him no longer. They chance to meet together, and one says--"I have been praying a long time with great interest for that certain impenitent sinner, but at a particular time I found myself all shut up; I could not get hold of the Lord again for him, and never have been able to since." Says another, and another--"I have felt just so myself. I did not know that any one else felt as I have, but you have described my case precisely."

Now if you will go to that sinner, he will tell you a story which will develop the whole case, and show that he came at that eventful moment to some fatal determination, grieved the Spirit, and was abandoned of God. The Spirit ceased to strive with him, and consequently ceased to elicit prayer in his behalf in the hearts of God's people.

- 6. Finally when God has ceased to strive with sinners, no means whatever, employed for the purpose, can be effectual for their salvation. If you, sinner, have passed that dreadful point, you will no more be profited by my preaching though I were to preach to you five thousand sermons; nay, you could not be profited though an angel should come and preach to you, or even Christ himself. All would be only in vain. You are left of God to fill up the measure of your iniquities.

## REMARKS.



1. Christians may understand how to account for the fact already noticed, that there are some for whom they can not pray. Even while they are walking with God, and trying to pray for particular individuals, they may find themselves utterly unable to do so; and this may be the explanation. I would not however in such a case take it for granted that all is right with myself, for perhaps it is not; but if I have the best evidence that all is right between myself and God, then I must infer that God has forsaken that sinner and does not wish me to pray any longer for him.

2. Sinners should be aware that light and guilt keep pace with each other. They are augmented and lessened together. Hence the solemn responsibility of being under the light and the strivings of the Spirit.

While enlightened and pressed to duty by the Spirit, sinners are under the most solemn circumstances that can ever occur in their whole lives. Indeed no period of the sinner's existence through its eternal duration can be so momentous as this. Yes, sinner, while the Spirit of God is pleading and striving with you, angels appreciate the solemnity of the hour--they know that the destiny of your soul is being decided for eternity. What an object of infinite interest! An immortal mind on the pivot of its eternal destiny--God debating and persuading--he resisting, and the struggle about to be broken off as hopeless forever. Suppose sinner, you could set yourself aside and could look on and be a spectator of such a scene. Were you ever in a court of justice when the question of life and death was about to be decided? The witnesses have all been heard--the counsel have been heard--it is announced that the jury are ready to deliver their verdict. Now pause and mark the scene. Note the anxiety depicted in every countenance and how eagerly and yet with what awful solemnity they wait for the decision about to be made; and with good reason--for a question of momentous interest is to be decided. But if this question, involving only the temporal life, is so momentous, how much more so is the sinner's case when the life of the soul for eternity is pending!! O how solemn while the question still pends--while the Spirit still strives, and still the sinner resists, and none can tell how soon the last moment of the Spirit's striving may come!

This ought to be the most solemn world in the universe. In other worlds, the destinies of the souls are already fixed. It is so in hell. All there is fixed and changeless forever. It is a solemn thing indeed for a sinner to go to hell, but the most solemn point in the whole duration of his existence is that one in which the decision is made.

O what a world is this! Throughout all its years and centuries we can not see one moment on whose tender point there hangs not a balancing of the question of eternal life or eternal death! And is this a place to trifle?--this a place to be mad and foolish and vain? Ah, no! it were more reasonable to trifle in any other world than in this. The awful destinies of the soul are being determined here. Heaven sees it and hell too, and all are filled with solicitude, swelling almost to agony;--but you who are the subjects of all this anxiety--you can trifle and play the fool and dance on the brink of everlasting woe. The Psalmist says--

"I heard the wretch profanely boast,

Till at thy frown he fell;

His honors in a dream were lost,

And he awoke in hell."

God represents the sinner as on a slippery steep, his feet just sliding--on the very verge of an awful chasm--God holding him up a short moment, and he trifling away even this short moment in mad folly. All hearts in heaven and in hell are beating and throbbing with intense emotion: but he can be reckless! O what madness!

If sinners duly estimated this danger of resisting the Spirit, they would be more afraid of it than of anything else whatever. They would deem no other dangers worthy of a moment's thought or care compared with this.

Again, it is a very common thing for sinners to grieve away the Spirit long before death. So I believe, although some, I am aware, are greatly opposed to this doctrine. Do you doubt it? Think of almost the whole Jewish nation in the time of the Saviour, given up to unbelief and reprobacy--abandoned of the Spirit of God; yet they sinned against far less light and of course with much less guilt than sinners now do. If God could give them up then, why may He not do so with sinners now? If He could give up the whole population of the world in Noah's time when he alone stood forth a preacher of righteousness, why may He not give up individual sinners now who are incomparably more guilty than they, because they have sinned against greater light than had ever shone then? O it is infinitely cruel to sinners themselves to conceal from them this truth. Let them know that they are in peril of grieving away the Spirit beyond recall, long before they die. This truth ought to be proclaimed over all the earth. Let its echo ring out through every valley and over every mountain-top, the world around. Let every living sinner hear it and take the timely warning!

Again, we see why so few aged sinners are converted. The fact is striking and unquestionable. Take the age of sixty, and count the number converted past that age. You will find it small indeed. Few and scattered are they, like beacons on mountain-tops, just barely enough to prevent the aged from utter despair of ever being converted. I am aware that infidels seize upon this fact to extort from it a cavil against religion, saying, "How does it happen that the aged and wise, whose minds are developed by thought and experience, and who have passed by the period of warm youthful passion, never embrace the gospel?" They would fain have it, that none but children and women become religious, and that this is to be accounted for on the ground that the Christian religion rests on its appeal to the sensibilities, and not to the intelligence. But infidels make a most egregious mistake in this inference of theirs. The fact under consideration should be referred to an entirely different class of causes. The aged are converted but rarely, because they have grieved away the Spirit--have become entangled in the mazes of some loved and soul-ruinous delusion, and hardened in sin past the moral possibility of being converted. Indeed, it would be unwise on the part of God to convert many sinners in old age;--it would be too great a temptation for human nature to bear. At all the earlier periods of life, sinners would be looking forward to old age as the time for conversion.

I have already said what I wish here to repeat--that it is an awfully interesting moment when God's Spirit strives with sinners. I have reason to know that the Spirit is striving with some of you. Even within the past week your attention has been solemnly arrested, and God has been calling upon you to repent. And now are you aware that while God is calling, you must listen--that when He speaks, you should pause and give Him your attention? Does God call you away from your lesson, and are you

replying--O, I must, I must get my lesson? Ah, your lesson! and what is your first and chief lesson? "Prepare to meet thy God." But you say, "O the bell will toll in a few minutes, and I have not got my lesson!!" Yes, sinner, soon the great bell will toll--unseen spirits will seize hold of the bell-rope and toll the dread death-knell of eternity, echoing the summons--come to judgment;--and the bell will toll, toll, TOLL! and where sinner, will you be then! Are you prepared? Have you got that one great lesson--"Prepare to meet thy God?"

In the long elapsing ages of your lost doom, you will be asked, how and why you came into this place of torment; and you will have to answer--"Oh, I was getting my lesson there in Oberlin when God came by his Spirit, and I could not stop to hear his call! So I exchanged my soul for my lesson! O what a fool was I!!"

Let me ask the people of God, should you not be awake in such an hour as this? How many sinners during the past week have besought you to pray for their perishing souls? And have you no heart to pray? How full of critical interest and peril are these passing moments? Did you ever see the magnetic needle of the compass vacillate, quiver, quiver, and finally settle down fixed to its position? So with the sinner's destiny today.

Sinners, think of your destiny, as being now about to assume its fixed position. Soon you will decide it forever and forever!

Do you say, let me first go to my room, and there I will give myself up to God? No, sinner, no! go not away hence in your sin; for now is your accepted time--now--today, after so long a time--now is the only hour of promise--now is perhaps the last hour of the Spirit's presence and grace to your soul!

## **The Excuses of Sinners Condemn God**

Lecture III

October 25, 1848

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Text.--Job 40:8: "Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?"

Although in the main, Job had spoken correctly of God, yet in his great anguish and perturbation under his sore trials, he had said some things which were hasty and abusive. For these the Lord rebuked him. This rebuke is contained in our context:

"Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said--Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct Him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it.

"Then Job answered the Lord, and said--Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea twice, but I will proceed no further.

"Then answered the Lord unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said,--Gird up thy loins now like a man; I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?"--Job 40:1-8

It is not, however, my object to discuss the original purpose and connection of these words, but rather to consider their present application to the case of sinners. In pursuing this object, I shall

*I. Show that every excuse for sin condemns god.*

*II. Consider some of these excuses in detail.*

*III. Show that excuse for sin adds insult to injury.*

### **I. Every excuse for sin condemns God. This will be apparent if we consider,**

- 1. That nothing can be sin for which there is a justifiable excuse.

This is entirely self-evident. It therefore needs neither elucidation nor proof.

- 2. If God condemns that for which there is a good excuse, He must be wrong. This also is self-evident. If God condemns what we have good reason for doing, no intelligence in the universe can justify Him.
- 3. But God does condemn all sin. He condemns it utterly, and will not allow the least apology or excuse for it. Hence, either there is no apology for it, or God is wrong.
- 4. Consequently, every excuse for sin charges blame upon God, and virtually accuses Him of tyranny. Whoever pleads an excuse for sin, therefore, charges God with blame.

### **II. We will consider some of these excuses, and see whether the principles I have laid down are not just and true.**

- 1. **INABILITY.** No excuse is more common. It is echoed and re-echoed over every Christian land, and handed down age after age, never to be forgotten. With unblushing face it is proclaimed that men can not do what God requires of them.

Let us examine this and see what it amounts to. God, it is said, requires what men cannot do. And does He know that men cannot, do it? Most certainly. Then He has no apology for requiring it, and the requisition is most unreasonable. Human reason can never justify

it. It is a natural impossibility.

But again, upon what penalty does God require what man cannot do? The threatened penalty is eternal death! Yes, eternal death, according to the views of those who plead inability as an excuse. God requires me on pain of eternal death to do that which He knows I cannot do. Truly this condemns God in the worst sense. You might just as well charge God outright with being an infinite tyrant.

Moreover, it is not for us to say whether on these conditions we shall or shall not charge God with infinite tyranny, for we cannot help it. The law of our reason demands it.

Hence, those who plant themselves upon these grounds charge God with infinite tyranny. Perhaps, sinner, you little think when you urge the excuse of inability, that you are really arraigning God on the charge of infinite tyranny. And you, Christian, who make this dogma of inability a part of your "orthodox" creed, may have little noticed its blasphemous bearings against the character of God; but your failure to notice it alters not the fact. The black charge is involved in the very doctrine of inability, and cannot be explained out of it.

I have intimated that this charge is blasphemous against God--and most truly. Far be it from God to do any such thing! Shall God require natural impossibilities, and denounce eternal death upon men for not doing what they have no natural power to do? Never! Yet good men and bad men agree together to charge God with doing this very thing, and doing it not once or twice only, but uniformly, through all ages, with all the race, from the beginning to the end of time! Horrible! Nothing in all the government of God ever so insulted and abused Jehovah! Nothing was ever more blasphemous and false! God says, "his commandments are not grievous;" but you, by this excuse of inability, proclaim that God's words are false. You declare that His commands are not only grievous, but are even naturally impossible! Hark! what does the Lord Jesus say? "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." And do you deny this? Do you rise up in the very face of His words and say--"Lord, thy yoke is so hard that no man can possibly endure it; thy burden is so heavy that no man can ever bear it?" Is not this gainsaying and blaspheming Him who can not lie?

But you take the ground that no man can obey the law of God. As the Presbyterian Confession of Faith has it, "No man is able, either by himself, or by any grace received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God; but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed." Observe, this affirms not only that no man is naturally able to keep God's commands, but also that no man is able to do it "by any grace received in this life;" thus making this declaration a libel on the gospel, as well as a palpable misrepresentation of the law, of its Author, and of man's relations to both. It is only moderate language to call this assertion from the Confession of Faith a libel. If there is a lie, either in hell or out of hell, this is a lie, or God is an infinite tyrant. If reason be allowed to speak at all, it is impossible for her to say less or otherwise than thus. And has not God constituted the reason of man for the very purpose of taking cognizance of the

rectitude of all his ways?

Let God be true though every man be proved a liar! In the present case, the remarkable fact that no man can appease his own conscience and satisfy himself that he is truly unable to keep the law, shows that man lies, not God.

- 2. A second excuse which sinners make is want of time.

Suppose I tell one of my sons--"Go, do this or that duty, on pain of being whipped to death." He replies, "Father, I can't possibly do it, for I have not time. I must be doing that other business which you told me to do; and besides, if I had nothing else to do, I could not possibly do this new business in the time you allow." Now if this statement be the truth, and I knew it when I gave him the command, then I am a tyrant. There is no evading this charge. My conduct toward my son is downright tyranny.

So if God really requires of you what you have not time to do, He is infinitely to blame. For He surely knows how little time you have, and it is undeniable that He enforces His requisitions with most terrific penalties. What! is God so reckless of justice, so regardless of the well-being of His creatures, that He can sport with red-hot thunder-bolts, and hurl them, despite of justice and right, among His unfortunate creatures? Never! NEVER! This is not true; it is only the false assumption which the sinner makes when he pleads as his excuse, that he has not time to do what God demands of him.

Let me ask you, sinner, how much time will it take you to do the first great duty which God requires--namely, give Him your heart? How long will this take? How long need you be in making up your mind to serve and love God? Do you not know that this, when done, will be done in one moment of time? And how long need you be in persuading yourself to do it?

Your meaning may be this: Lord, it takes me so long to make up my mind to serve thee, it seems as if I never should get time enough for this; even the whole of life seems almost too short for me to bring my mind to this unwelcome decision. Is this your meaning, sinner?

But let us look on all sides of the subject. Suppose I say to my son--"Do this now, my son;" and he replies, "I can't, father, for I must do that other thing you told me to do." Does God do so? No. God only requires the duty of each moment in its time. This is all. He only asks us to use faithfully just all the power He has given us--nothing more. He only requires that we do the best we can. When He prescribes the amount of love which will please Him, He does not say--Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with the powers of an angel--with the burning heart of a seraph--no, but only "with all thy heart"--this is all. An infinitely ridiculous plea is this of the sinner's, that he can not do as well as he can--cannot love God with all his own heart, and soul and mind, and strength. Thou shalt do the best that thou art able to do, says God to the sinner. Ah, says the sinner, I am not able to do that. Oh, what stupid nonsense!

You charge that God is unreasonable. The truth is, God is the most reasonable of all beings. He asks only that we should use each moment for Him, in labour or in rest, whichever is most for His glory. He only requires that with the time, talents and strength which He has given us, we should do all we can to serve Him.

Says that mother--"How can I be religious? I have to take care of all my children." Indeed! and can't you get time to serve God? What does God require of you? That you should forsake and neglect your children? No indeed; He asks you to take care of your children--good care of them; and do it all for God. He says to you--those are my children; and He puts them into your hands, saying--take care of them for me, and I will give thee wages. And now will it require more time to take care of your children for God, than to take care of them for yourself? O, but you say, I cannot be religious, for I must be up in the morning and get my breakfast. And how much longer will it take you to get your breakfast ready to please God, than to do the same to please yourself? How much longer time must you have to do your duties religiously, than to do them selfishly?

What then do you mean by this plea? The fact is, all these excuses show that the excuser is mad--not insane, but mad. For what does God require so great that you should be unable to do it for want of time? Only this, that you should do all for God. Persons who make this plea seem to have entirely overlooked the real nature of religion, and of the requisitions that God makes of them. So it is with the plea of inability. The sinner says, "I am unable." Unable to do what? Just what you can do; for God never requires anything beyond this. Unless, therefore, you assume that God requires of you more than you can do, your plea is false, and even ridiculous. If, on the other hand, you do not assume this, then your plea, if true, would not show God to be unjust.

But I was saying that in this plea of having no time to be religious, men entirely overlook or pervert the true idea of religion. The farmer pleads--"I can't be religious; I can't serve God--I must sow my wheat." Well, sow your wheat; but do it for the Lord. O but you have so much to do! Then do it all for the Lord. Another can't be religious for he must get his lesson. Well, get your lesson, but get it for the Lord, and this will be religious. The man who should neglect to sow his wheat or neglect to get his lessons because he wants to be religious, is crazy. He perverts the plainest things in the worst way. If you are to be religious, you must be industrious. The farmer must sow his wheat, and the student must get his lesson. An idle man can no more be religious than the devil can be. This notion that men can't be religious, because they have some business to do, is the merest nonsense. It utterly overlooks the great truth that God never forbids our doing the appropriate business of life, but only requires that we shall do all for Himself. If God did require us to serve Him in such a way as would compel us to neglect the practical duties of life, it would be truly a hard case. But now the whole truth is, that He requires us to do precisely these duties, and do them all honestly and faithfully for Him, and in the best possible manner. Let the farmer take care of his farm, and see that he does it well, and above all, do it for God. It is God's farm, and the heart of every farmer is God's heart, therefore let the farm be tilled for God, and the heart be devoted to Him alone.

- 3. Men plead a sinful nature for their excuse. And pray, what is this sinful nature? Do you mean

by it that every faculty and even the very essence of your constitution were poisoned and made sinful in Adam, and came down in this polluted state by inheritance to you? Do you mean that you were so born in sin that the substance of your being is all saturated with it, and so that all the faculties of your constitution are themselves sin? Do you believe this?

I admit if this were true, it would make out a hard case. A hard case indeed! Until the laws of my reason are changed, it would compel me to speak out openly and say--Lord, this is a hard case, that thou shouldst make my nature itself a sinner, and then charge the guilt of its sin upon me! I could not help saying this; the deep echoings of my inner being would proclaim it without ceasing, and the breaking of ten thousand thunderbolts over my head would not deter me from thinking and saying so. The reason God has given me would forever affirm it.

But the dogma is an utter absurdity. For, pray, what is sin? God answers--"transgression of law." And now you hold that your nature is itself a breach of the law of God--nay, that it has always been a breach of God's law, from Adam to the day of your birth; you hold that the current of this sin came down in the veins and blood of your race--and who made it so? Who created the veins and blood of man? From whose hand sprang this physical constitution and this mental constitution? Was man his own creator? Did sin do a part of the work in creating your physical and your mental constitution? Do you believe any such thing? No; you ascribe your nature and its original faculties to God, and upon Him, therefore, you charge the guilty authorship of your "sinful nature."

But how strange a thing is this! If man is in fault for his sinful nature, why not condemn man for having blue or black eyes? The fact is, sin never can consist in having a nature, nor in what nature is; but only and alone in the bad use which we make of our nature. This is all. Our Maker will never find fault with us for what He has Himself done or made; certainly not. He will not condemn us, if we will only make a right use of our powers--of our intellect, our sensibility, and our will. He never holds us responsible for our original nature. If you will observe, you will find that God has given no law prescribing what sort of nature and constitutional powers we should have. He has given no law on these points, the transgression of which, if given, might somewhat resemble the definition of sin. But now since there is no law about nature, nature cannot be a transgression.

Here let me say that if God were to make a law prescribing what nature or constitution a man must have, it could not possibly be otherwise than unjust and absurd, for the reason that man's nature is not a proper subject for legislation, precept, and penalty, inasmuch as it lies entirely without the pale of voluntary action, or of any action of man at all. And yet thousands of men have held the dogma that sin consists in great part in having a sinful nature. Yes, through long ages of past history, grave theologians have gravely taught this monstrous dogma; it has resounded from pulpits, and has been stereotyped for the press, and men have seemed to be never weary of glorifying this dogma as the surest test of sound orthodoxy! Orthodoxy!! There never was a more infamous libel on Jehovah! It would be hard to name another dogma which more violently outrages common sense. It is nonsense--absurd and utter NONSENSE! I would to God that it were not even worse



than nonsense! Think what mischief it has wrought! Think how it has scandalized the law, the government, and the character of God! Think how it has filled the mouths of sinners with excuses from the day of its birth to this hour

Now I do not mean to imply that the men who have held this dogma have intelligently insulted God with it. I do not imply that they have been aware of the impious and even blasphemous bearings of this dogma upon Jehovah;--I am happy to think that some at least have done all this mischief ignorantly. But the blunder and the mischief have been none the less for the honest ignorance in which they were done.

- 4. Sinners, in self-excuse, say they are willing to be Christians. They are willing, they say, to be sanctified. O yes, they are very willing; but there is some great difficulty lying further back or something else--perhaps they do not know just where--but it is somewhere, and it will not let them become Christians.

Now the fact is, if we are really willing, there is nothing more which we can do. Willing is all we have to do morally in the case, and all we can do. But the plea, as in the sinner's mouth, maintains that God requires of us what is naturally impossible. It assumes that God requires of us something more than right willing; and this, be it what it may, is of course, to us, an impossibility. If I will to move my muscles, and no motion follows, I have done all I can do; there is a difficulty beyond my reach, and I am in no blame for its existence, or for its impediment. Just so, if I were to will to serve God, and absolutely no effect should follow, I have done my utmost, and God never can demand anything more. In fact, to will is the very thing which God does require. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted." Do tell me, parent, if you had told your child to do anything, and you saw him exerting himself to the utmost, would you ask any thing more? If you should see a parent demanding and enforcing of a child more than he could possibly do, however willing, would you not denounce that parent as a tyrant? Certainly you would. The slave-driver, even, is not wont to beat his slave, if he sees him willing to do all he can.

This plea is utterly false, for no sinner is willing to be any better than be actually is. If the will is right, all is right; and universally the state of the will is the measure of one's moral character. Those men, therefore who plead that they are willing to be Christians while yet they remain in their sins, talk mere nonsense.

- 5. Sinners say they are waiting God's time. A lady in Philadelphia had been in great distress of mind for many years. On calling to see her, I asked, "What does God require of you? What is your case?" "Oh," said she, "God waited on me a long time before I began to seek Him at all, and now I must wait for Him as long as He did for me. So my minister tells me. You see, therefore, that I am waiting in great distress for God to receive me."

Now what is the real meaning of this? It comes to this;--God urges me to duty, but is not ready for me to do it; He tells me to come to the Gospel feast, and I am ready; but He is not ready to let me in.

Now does not this throw all the blame upon God? Could any thing do so more completely

than this does? The sinner says--"I am ready, and willing, and waiting; but God is not yet ready for me to stop sinning. His hour has not yet come."

When I first began to preach, I found this notion almost universal. Often after pressing men to duty, I have been accosted;--"What, you throw all the blame upon the sinner!" "Yes, indeed I do," would be my reply. An old lady once met me after preaching and broke out, "What! you set men to getting religion themselves! You tell them to repent themselves? You don't mean so, do you?" "Indeed I do," said I. She had been teaching for many years that the sinner's chief duty is to await God's time.

- 6. Sinners plead in excuse, that their circumstances are very peculiar. I know my duty well enough, but my circumstances are so peculiar. And does not God understand your circumstances? Nay, has not His providence been concerned in making them what they are? If so, then you are throwing blame upon God. You say--"O Lord, thou art a hard master, for thou hast never made any allowance for my circumstances."

But how much, sinner, do you really mean in making this plea? Do you mean that your circumstances are so peculiar, that God ought to excuse you from becoming religious, at least for the present? If you do not mean as much as this, why do you make your circumstances your excuse at all? If you do mean this, then you are just as much mistaken as you can be. For God requires you, despite of your circumstances, to abandon your sin. If now your circumstances are so peculiar that you cannot serve God in them, you must abandon them or lose your soul. If they are such as admit of your serving God in them, then do so at once.

But you say--"I can't get out of my circumstances." I reply, you can;--you can get out of the wickedness of them; for if it is necessary in order to serve God, you can change them; and if not, you can repent and serve God in them.

- 7. The sinner's next excuse is that his temperament is peculiar. "Oh," he says, "I am very nervous;" or "my temperament is very sluggish; I seem to have no sensibility." Now what does God require? Does He require of you another or a different sensibility from your own? Or does He require only that you should use what you have according to the law of love?

But such is the style of a multitude of excuses. One has too little excitement; another, too much; so neither can possibly repent and serve God! A woman came to me, and pleaded that she was naturally too excitable, and dared not trust herself; and therefore could not repent. Another has the opposite trouble--too sluggish--scarce ever sheds a tear--and therefore could make nothing out of religion if he should try. But does God require you to shed more tears than you are naturally able to shed? Or does He only require that you should serve Him? Certainly this is all. Serve Him with the very powers He has given you. Let your nerves be ever so excitable, come and lay those quivering sensibilities over into the hands of God--pour out that sensibility into the heart of God! This is all that He requires. I know how to sympathize with that woman, for I know much about a burning sensibility; but does God require feeling and excitement? Or only a perfect consecration of all our powers to Himself?

- 8. But, says another, my health is so poor that I can't go to meeting, and therefore can't be religious.

Well, what does God require? Does He require that you should go to all the meetings, by evening or by day, whether you have the requisite health for it or not? Infinitely far from it. If you are not able to go to meeting, yet you can give God your heart. If you can not go in bad weather, be assured that God is infinitely the most reasonable being that ever existed. He makes all due allowance for every circumstance. Does He not know all your weakness? Indeed He does. And do you suppose that He comes into your sick-room and denounces you for not being able to go to meeting, or for not attempting when unable, and for not doing all in your sickness that you might do in health? No, not He; but He comes into your sick-room as a Father. He comes to pour out the deepest compassions of His heart in pity and in love; and why should you not respond to his loving-kindness? He comes to you and says--"Give me your heart, my child." And now you reply--"I have no heart." Then He has nothing to ask of you--He thought you had; and thought, too, that He had done enough to draw your heart in love and gratitude to Himself. He asks--"What can you find in all my dealings with you that is grievous? If nothing, why do you bring forward pleas in excuse for sin that accuse and condemn God?"

- 9. Another excuse is in this form, "My heart is so hard, that I can not feel." This is very common, both among professors and non-professors. In reality it is only another form of the plea of inability. In fact, all the sinner's excuses amount only to this--"I am unable"--"I can't do what God requires." If the plea of a hard heart is any excuse at all, it must be on the ground of real inability.

But what is hardness of heart? Do you mean that you have so great apathy of the sensibility that you can not get up any emotion? Or, do you mean that you have no power to will or to act right? Now on this point, it should be considered that the emotions are altogether involuntary. They go and come according to circumstances, and therefore are never required by the law of God, and are not, properly speaking, either religion itself, or any part of it. Hence, if by a hard heart you mean a dull sensibility, you mean what has no concern with the subject. God asks you to yield your will, and consecrate your affections to Himself, and He asks this, whether you have any feeling or not.

Real hardness of heart in the Bible use of the phrase, means stubbornness of will. So in the child, a hard heart means a will set in fixed stubbornness against doing its parent's bidding. The child may have in connection with this, either much or little emotion. His sensibilities may be acute and thoroughly aroused, or they may be dormant; and yet the stubborn will may be there in either case.

Now the hardness of heart of which God complains in the sinner is precisely of this sort. The sinner cleaves to his self-indulgence, and will not relinquish it, and then complains of hardness of heart. What would you think of a child, who, when required to do a most reasonable thing, should say,--"My heart is so hard, I can't yield." "O," he says, "my will is so set to have my own way that I cannot possibly yield to my father's authority."

This complaint is extremely common. Many a sinner makes it, who has been often warned, often prayed with and wept over, who has been the subject of many convictions. And does he really mean by this plea that he finds his will so obstinate that he can not make up his mind to yield to God's claims? Does he mean this, and does he intend really to publish his own shame? Suppose you go to the devils in hell, and press on them the claims of God, and they should reply, "O, my heart is so hard, I can't"--What would be their meaning? Only this--I am so obstinate--my will is so set in sin, that I can not for a moment indulge the thought of repentance. This would be their meaning, and if the sinner tells the truth of himself, and uses language correctly, he must mean the same. But oh, how does he add insult to injury by this declaration! Suppose a child should plead this--I can not find it in my heart to love my father and my mother; my heart is so hard towards them, I never can love them; I can feel pleasure only in abusing them, and trampling down their authority;--what a plea is this? Does not this heap insult upon wrong? Or suppose a murderer arraigned before the court, and permitted before his sentence, to speak, if he had aught to say why sentence should not be passed;-- suppose he should rise and say--"May it please the court, my heart for a long time has been as hard as a millstone. I have murdered so many men, and have been in the practice so long, that I can kill a man without the least compunction of conscience. Indeed, I have such an insatiable thirst for blood that I can not help murdering whenever I have a good opportunity. In fact, my heart is so hard that I find I like this employment full as well as any other."

Well, how long will the court listen to such a plea? Hold there! hold! the judge would cry--you infamous villain, we can hear no more such pleas! Here, sheriff, bring in a gallows, and hang the man within these very walls of justice, for I will not leave the bench until I see him dead! He will murder us all here in this house if he can!"

Now what shall we think of the sinner who says the same thing! O God, he says, my heart is so hard I never can love thee. I hate thee so sincerely, I never can make up my mind to yield this heart to thee in love and willing submission.

Sinners, how many of you (in this house) have made this plea--"My heart is so hard, I can't repent. I can't love and serve God!" Go write it down; publish it to the universe--make your boast of being so hard-hearted that no claims of God can ever move you. Methinks if you were to make such a plea, you would not be half through before the whole universe would hiss you from their presence and chase you from the face of these heavens till you would cry out for some rocks or mountains to hide you from their scathing rebukes! Their voice of indignation would rise up and ring along the arch of heaven like the roar of ten thousand tornadoes, and whelm you with unutterable confusion and shame! What, do you insult and abuse the Great Jehovah? Oh! do you condemn that very God who has watched over you in unspeakable love--fanned you with his gentle zephyrs in your sickness--feasted you at his own table, and you would not thank him, or even notice his providing hand? And then when the sympathy of your Christian friends has pressed you with entreaties to repent, and they have made you a special subject of their prayers--when angels have wept over you, and unseen spirits have lifted their warning voices in your pathway to hell, you turn up your face of brass towards

Jehovah and tell Him your heart is so hard you can't repent, and don't care whether you ever do or not! You seize a spear and plunge it into the heart of the crucified One, and then cry out--"I can't be sorry, not I; my heart is hard as a stone! I don't care and I will not repent!" What a wretch you are, sinner, if this is your plea?

But what does your plea amount to? Only this--that your heart is fully set to do evil. The sacred writer has revealed your case most clearly--"Because vengeance against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." You stand before the Lord just in this daring, blasphemous attitude--fully set in your heart to do evil.

- 10. Another form of the same plea is, my heart is so wicked I can't. Some do not hesitate to avow this wickedness of heart. What do they mean by it? Do they mean that they are so hardened in sin, and so desperately wicked that they will not bow? This is the only proper sense of their language, and this is the precise truth.

Since you bring this forward, sinner, as your excuse, your object must be to charge this wickedness of heart upon God. Covertly, perhaps, but really, you imply that God is concerned in creating that wicked heart! This is it, and this is the whole of it. You would feel no interest in the excuse, and it would never escape your lips, but for this tacit implication that God is in fault for your wicked heart. This is only the plea of inability, coupled with its twin sister, original sin, coming down in the created blood and veins of the race, under the Creator's responsibility.

- 11. Another kindred plea, is--My heart is so deceitful. Suppose a man should make this excuse for deceiving his neighbour--"I can't help cheating you. I can't help lying to you and abusing you; my heart is so deceitful!" Would any man in his senses ever suppose that this could be an apology or excuse for doing wrong? Never. Of course, unless the sinner means in this plea to set forth his own guilt and condemn himself, he must intend it as some sort of justification; and if so, he must, in just so far, cast the blame upon God. And this is usually his intention. He does not mean sincerely to confess his own guilt; no, he charges the guilt of his deceitful heart upon God.
- 12. Another excuses himself by the plea, I have tried to become a Christian. I have done all I can do; I have tried often, earnestly, and long.

You have tried, then, you say, to be a Christian; what is being a Christian? Giving your heart to God. And what is giving your heart to God? Devoting your voluntary powers to Him; ceasing to live for yourself and living for God. This is being a Christian--the state you profess to have been trying to attain.

No excuse is more common than this. And what is legitimately implied in this trying to be a Christian? A willingness to do your duty is always implied; that the heart, that is, the will is right already; and the trying refers only to the outward efforts--the executive acts. For there is no sense whatever in a man's saying that he is trying to do what he has no intention or will to do. The very statement implies that his will is not only in favor but is

thoroughly committed and really in earnest to attain the end chosen.

Consequently if a man tries to be a Christian, he heart is obedient to God, and his trying must respect his outward action. These are so connected with the will that they follow by a law of necessity unless the connection is broken, and when this takes place, no sin attends our failure to secure the outward act. God does not hold us responsible.

Hence the sinner ought to mean by this plea--"I have obeyed God a long time--I have had a right heart--and I have tried sincerely to secure such external action as comports with Christian character.

Now if this be true, you have done your duty. But do you mean to affirm all this? No, you say. Then what do you mean?

Suppose I should say to my son, do this; do it my son; why have you not done it? O, he says, "father, I have tried;" but he does not mean that he has ever intended to do it--that he has ever made up his mind to obey me; he only means, "I have been willing to try--I made up my mind to try to be willing;" that is all! O he says I have brought myself to be willing to try to will to do it.

So you say--I have tried to get religion. And what is religion that you could not get it? How did you fail? You have been trying probably in this way. God has said "Give me thy heart," and you turned round and asked God to do it Himself, or perhaps you simply waited for Him to do it. He commanded you to repent, and you have tried to get Him to repent for you. He said, believe the gospel, and you have only been thinking of getting Him to believe for you. No wonder you have tried for a long time in vain. How could it be otherwise? You have not been trying to do what God commanded you to do, but to induce God to change his system of moral government and put Himself in your place to do Himself the duty He enjoins upon you. What a miserable perversion is this?

Now as to this whole plea of having tried to be a Christian, what is the use of it? You will easily see its use when you realize duly;

- o (1.) That it is utterly false when understood as you intend it.
- o (2.) That it is a foul implication of the character of God.

You say--Lord, I know I can't--I have tried all I can and I know I can not become a Christian. I am willing to get religion, but I cannot make it out.

Who then is to blame? Not yourself, according to your statement of your case. Where then is the blame? Let me ask--what would be said in the distant regions of the universe if you were believed there, when you say, I have tried with all my heart to love and serve God but I can't?

But they never can believe such a libel on their own infinite Father! Of

course they will pronounce your doom as you deserve.

- 13. Another excuses himself by the plea--it will do no good to try. And what do you mean by this? Do you mean that God will not pay well for service done Him? Or do you mean that He will not forgive you if you do repent? Do you think (as some do) that you have sinned away your day of grace?

Well, suppose you have; is this any reason why you should go on in sin? Do you not believe that God is good? O yes. And that He will forgive you if the good of the universe admits? Most certainly. Then is the impossibility of his forgiving you any reason why you should go on in sin forever, and forever rage against a God of infinite goodness? You believe Him to be compassionate and forgiving; then should you not say, I will at least stop sinning against such a God! Why not say with the man who dreamed that he was just going to hell, and as he was parting with his brother--going, as his dream had it, to heaven, he said--"I am going down to hell, but I want you to tell God from me that I am greatly obliged to Him for ten thousand mercies which I never deserved; He has never done me the least injustice--give Him my thanks for all the unmerited good He has done me." At this point he awoke, and found himself bathed in tears of repentance and gratitude to his Father in heaven. O, if men would only act as reasonably as that man dreamed, it would be noble--it would be right. If when they suppose themselves to have sinned away the day of grace, they would say, "I know God is good--I will at least send Him my thanks--he has done me no injustice;" if they would take this course they might have at least the satisfaction of feeling that it is a reasonable and a fit one in their circumstances. Sinner, will you do this?

- 14. Another, closely pressed, says, "I have offered to give my heart to Christ, but He won't receive me." "I have no evidence that He receives me or ever will." In the last inquiry meeting, a young woman told me she had offered to give her heart to the Lord, but He would not receive her. This was charging the lie directly upon Christ, for He has said--"Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." You say, I came and offered myself and He would not receive me. Jesus Christ says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man"--not if some particular, some favored one--but if any man "hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him." And yet when you offered Him your heart, did He spurn you away? Did He say--away sinner, BEGONE? No, sinner, He never did it, never. He has said He never would do it. His own words are, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." "He that seeketh, findeth: to him that knocketh it shall be opened." But you say, I have sought and I did not find. Do you mean to make out that Jesus Christ is a liar? Have you charged this upon Him to his very face? Do you make your solemn affirmation--"Lord I did seek--I laid myself at thy gate and knocked--but all in vain?" And do you mean to bring this excuse of yours as a solemn charge of falsehood against Jesus Christ and against God? This will be a serious business with you before it is done with.
- 15. But another says--"there is no salvation for me." Do you mean that Christ has made no atonement for you? But He says, He tasted death for every man. It is declared that God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whomsoever believeth on Him shall have eternal life. And now do you affirm that there is no salvation provided and possible for you?

Are you mourning all your way down to hell because you cannot possibly have salvation? When the cup of salvation is placed to your lips, do you dash it away, saying, That can not be for me? And do you know this? Can you prove it even against the word of God Himself? Stand forth then, if there be such a sinner on this footstool of God--speak it out, if you have such a charge against God, and if you can prove it true. Ah, is there no hope? none at all? Oh, the difficulty is not that there is no salvation provided for and offered to you, but that there is no heart for it. "Wherefore is there a price put into the hands of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart for it?"

- 16. But perhaps you say in excuse--"I cannot change my own heart." Can not? Suppose Adam had made this excuse when God called him to repent after his first sin. "Make you a new heart and a right spirit,"--said the Lord to him. "I can not change my own heart myself," replies Adam. Indeed, responds his Maker, how long is it since you changed your heart yourself? You changed it a few hours ago from holiness to sin, and will you tell your Creator that you can't change it from sin to holiness?

The sinner should consider that the change of heart is a voluntary thing. You must do it for yourself or it is never done. True there is a sense in which God changes the heart, but it is only this: God influences the sinner to change, and then the sinner does it. The change is the sinner's own voluntary act.

- 17. You say, again, you can't change your heart without more conviction. Do you mean by this that you have not knowledge enough of your duty and your sin? You can not say this. You do know your sin and your duty. You know you ought to consecrate yourself to God. What then do you mean? Can't you do that which you know you ought to do? Ah, there is the old lie--that shameless refuge of lies--that same foul dogma of inability. What is implied in this new form of it? This--that God is not willing to convict you enough to make it possible for you to repent. There is a work and a responsibility for God, and He will not do his work: will not bear his responsibility. Hence you, alas, have no alternative but to go down to hell. And because God will not do his part towards your salvation! Do you really believe that, sinner.
- 18. Again you say in excuse, that you must first have more of the Spirit. And yet you resist the Spirit every day. God offers you his Spirit, nay more, God bestows his Spirit; but you resist it. What then do you mean when you pretend to want more of the Spirit's influence?

The truth is, you do not want it--you only want to make it appear that God does not do his part to help you to repent, and that as you can't repent without his help, therefore the blame of your impenitence rests on God. It is only another refuge of lies--another form of the old slander upon God;--He has made me unable and won't help me out of my inability.

- 19. The sinner also excuses himself by saying--God must change my heart. But in the sense in which God requires you to do it, He cannot do it Himself. God is said to change the heart only in the sense of persuading you to do it. As in a man's change of politics--one might say--"such a man changed my heart--he brought me over," which however by no means implies that you did not change your own mind. The plain meaning is that he persuaded and you yielded.



But this plea made by the sinner as his excuse, implies that there is something more for God to do before the sinner can become religious. I have heard many professors of religion take this very ground. Yes, thousands of Christian ministers, too, have said to the sinner--"wait for God; He will change your heart in his own good time; you can't do it yourself, and all that you can do is to put yourself in the way for the Lord to change your heart. When this time comes, He will give you a new heart, while you are asleep, perhaps, in a state of unconsciousness. God acts in this matter as a sovereign, and does his own work in his own way."

So they teach--filling the mouth of the sinner with excuses and making his heart like an adamant against the real claims of God upon his conscience.

- 20. The sinner pleads, again, "I can't live a Christian life if I were to become a Christian. It is unreasonable for me to expect to succeed where I see so many fail." I recollect the case of a man who said, "It is of no use for me to repent and be a Christian, for it is altogether irrational for me to expect to do better than others have done before me." So sinners who make this excuse come forward very modestly and tell God, "I am very humble--thou seest, Lord, that I have a very low opinion of myself; I am so zealous of thine honour and so afraid that I shall bring disgrace upon thy cause; it does not seem at all best for me to think of becoming a Christian, I have such a horror of dishonoring thy name.

Yes, and what then? "Therefore, I will sin on and trample the blessed gospel under my feet. I will persecute Thee, O my God, and make war on Thy cause, for it is better by far not to profess religion than to profess and then disgrace my profession." What logic! Fair specimen of the absurdity of the sinner's excuses.

This excuse assumes that there is not grace enough provided and offered, to sustain the soul in a Christian life. The doctrine is, that it is irrational to expect that we can, by any grace received in this life, perfectly obey the law of God. There is not grace and help enough afforded by God! And this is taught as BIBLE THEOLOGY! Away with such teaching to the nether pit whence it came!

What! is God so weak that He can't hold up the soul that casts itself on Him? Or is He so parsimonious in bestowing his gracious aid that it must be expected always to fall short of meeting the wants of his dependent and depending child? So you seem to suppose. So hard to persuade the Lord to give you a particle of grace! Can't get grace enough to live a Christian life with honor! What is this but charging God of withholding sufficient grace.

But what say the word and the oath of Jehovah? We read that "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." You say, however, "If I should flee and lay hold of this hope, I should fail for want of grace. I could have no 'consolation' in reposing upon the word of Him who cannot lie. The oath of the immutable God can never suffice for me."

So you belie the word of God, and make up a miserably slim and guilty apology for your impenitence.

- 21. Another excuse claims that this is a very dark, mysterious subject. This matter of faith and regeneration--I can't understand it.

Sinner, did you ever meet the Lord with this objection, and say, "Lord thou hast required me to do things which I can't understand?" You know that you can understand well enough that you are a sinner--that Christ died for you--that you must believe on Him and break off your sins by repentance. All this is so plain that "the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein." Your plea, therefore, is as false as it is foul. It is nothing better than a base libel on God!

- 22. But you say, "I can't believe." You mean, (do you?) that you can't believe a God of infinite veracity as you can believe a fellow man? Would you imply that God asks you to believe things that are really incredible--things so revolting to reason that you cannot admit them on any testimony that even God himself can adduce?

And do you expect to make out this case against God? Do you even believe the first point in it yourself?

But you urge again that you can't realize these things. You know these things to be true, but you can't realize--you can't realize that the Bible is true--that God does offer to forgive--that salvation is actually provided and placed within your reach. What help can there be for a case like yours? What can make these truths more certain? But on your own showing, you do not want more evidence. Why not then act upon the known truth? What more can you ask?

Do you ever carry your case before God and say, "O Lord, Thou sayest that Christ died for me, but I can't realize that it is so, and therefore Lord, I can't possibly embrace Him as my Saviour?" Would this be a rational excuse?

But you also plead that you can't repent. You can't be sorry you have abused God. You can't make up your mind now to break off from all sin. If this be really so, then you cannot make up your mind to obey God, and you may as well make up your mind to go to hell! There is no alternative!

But at any rate, you can't become a Christian now. You mean to be converted some time, but you can't make up your mind to it NOW. Well, God requires it now, and of course you must yield or abide the consequences.

But do you say, You can't now? Then God is very much to blame for asking it. If however the truth be that you can, then the lie is on your side, and it is a most infamous and abusive lie against your Maker.

### **III. All excuses for sin add insult to injury.**

- 1. A plea that reflects injuriously upon the court or the lawgiver is an aggravation of the original crime. It is always so regarded in all tribunals. It must be pre-eminently so between the sinner and his infinite Lawgiver and Judge.
- 2. The same is true of any plea made in self-justification. If it be false, it is considered an aggravation of the crime charged. This is a case which sometimes happens, and whenever it does, it is deemed to add fresh insult and wrong. For a criminal to come and spread out his lie upon the records of the court--to declare what he knows to be false; nothing can prejudice his case so fearfully.

On the other hand, when a man before the court appears to be honest, and confesses his guilt, the judge, if he has any discretion in the case, puts down his sentence to the lowest point possible. But if the criminal resorts to dodging--if he equivocates and lies, then you will see the strong arm of the law come down upon him. The judge comes forth in all the thunders of judicial majesty and terror, and feels that he may not spare his victim. Why? The man has lied before the very court of justice. The man sets himself against all law, and he must be put down, or law itself is down.

- 3. It is truly abominable for the sinner to abuse God and then excuse himself for it. Ah, this is only the old way of the guilty. Adam and Eve in the garden fled and hid themselves when they heard the voice of the Lord approaching. And what had they done? The Lord calls them out and begins to search them: "Adam, what hast thou done? Has thou eaten of the forbidden tree in the centre of the garden?" Adam quailed, but fled to an excuse: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." God, he says, gave him his tempter. God, according to his excuse, had been chiefly to blame in the transaction.

Next He turns to the woman: "What is that thou hast done?" She too has an excuse: "The serpent beguiled me and I did eat." Ah, this perpetual shuffling the blame back upon God! It has been kept up through the long line of Adam's imitators down to this day. For six thousand years God has been hearing it, and still the world is spared, and the vengeance of God has not yet burst forth to smite all his guilty calumniators to hell! O! what patience in God! And who have ever abused his patience and insulted Him by their excuses more than sinners in this house?

## REMARKS.

1. No sinner under the light of the Gospel lives a single hour in sin without some excuse, either tacit or avowed, by which he justifies himself. It seems to be a law of man's intelligent nature that when accused of wrong, either by his conscience or by any other agent, he must either confess or justify. The latter is the course taken by all impenitent sinners. Hence the reason why they have so much occasion for excuses, and why they find it convenient to have so great a variety. It is remarkable with what facility they fly from one to another, as if these refuges of lies might make up in number what they lack in strength. Conscious that not one of all the multitude is valid in point of truth and right, they yet, when pressed on one, fly to another, and when driven from all in succession they are ready to come back and fight the same ground over again. It is so hard to abandon all excuses, and admit the humbling truth that they themselves are all wrong, and God all right.

Hence it becomes the great business of a gospel minister to search out and expose the sinner's excuses; to go all round and round, and, if possible, demolish the sinner's refuges of lies, and lay his heart open to the shafts of truth.

2. Excuses render repentance impossible. For excuses are justifications, and who does not know that justification is the very opposite of confession and repentance? To seek after and embrace excuses therefore, is to place one's self at the farthest possible remove from repentance.

Of course the self-accusing sinner makes it impossible for God to forgive him. He places the Deity in such a position toward himself, and I might say, places himself in such an attitude toward the government of God, that his forgiveness would be ruin to the very throne of God. What would heaven say, and hell too, and earth besides, if God were to forgive a sinner while he by his excuses is justifying himself and condemning his Maker?

3. Sinners should lay all their excuses at once before God. Surely this is most reasonable. Why not? If a man owed me, and supposed he had a reasonable excuse for not paying the debt, he should come to me and let me understand the whole case. Perhaps he will satisfy me that his views are right.

Now, sinner, have you ever done so in regard to God? Have you ever brought up one excuse before the Lord, saying, "Thou requirest me to be holy, but I can't be;" "Lord, I have a good excuse for not obeying thee?" No, sinner, you are not in the habit of doing this--probably you have not done it the first time yet in all your life. In fact, you have no particular encouragement to carry your excuses before God, for you have not one yet that you yourself believe to be good for anything except to answer the purpose of a refuge of lies. Your excuses won't stand the ordeal of your own reason and conscience. How then can you hope they will stand before the searching eye of Jehovah? The fact that you never come with your excuses to God shows that you have no confidence in them.

4. What infinite madness to rest on excuses which you dare not bring before God now! How can you stand before God in the judgment, if your excuses are so mean that you cannot seriously think of bringing one of them before God in this world? O, sinner, that coming day will be far more searching and awful than any thing you have seen yet. See that dense mass of sinners drawn up before the great white throne--far as the eye can sweep, they come surging up--a countless throng;--and now they stand, and the awful trump of God summons them forward to bring forth their excuses for sin. Ho, sinners--any one of you all--what have you to say why sentence should not be passed on you? Where are all those excuses you were once so free and bold to make? Where are they all? Why don't you make them now? Hark! God waits; he listens;--there is silence in heaven--all through the congregated throng--for half an hour--an awful silence--that may be felt; but not a word--not a moving lip among the gathered myriads of sinners there;--and now the great and dreadful Judge arises and lets loose his thunders. O, see the waves of dire damnation roll over the ocean-masses of self-condemned sinners! Did you ever see the judge rise from his bench in court to pass sentence of death on a criminal? There, see, the poor man reels--he falls prostrate, there is no longer any strength in him, for death is on him and his last hope has perished!

O, sinner, when that sentence from the dread throne shall fall on thee! Your excuses are as millstones

around your neck as you plunge along down the sides of the pit to the nethermost hell!

5. Sinners don't need their excuses. God does not ask for even one. He does not require you to justify yourself--not at all. If you needed them for your salvation I could sympathize with you, and certainly would help you all I could. But you don't need them. Your salvation does not turn on your successful self-vindication. You need not rack your brain for excuses. Better say, I don't want them--don't deserve them--have not one that is worth a straw. Better say, "I am wicked. God knows that's the truth, and it were vain for me to attempt to conceal it. I AM WICKED, and if I ever live, it must be on simple mercy!"

I can recollect very well the year I lived on excuses, and how long it was before I gave them up. I had never heard a minister preach on the subject. I found however by my experience, that my excuses and lies were the obstacles in the way of my conversion. As soon as I let these go utterly, I found the gate of mercy wide open. And so, sinner, would you.

6. Sinners ought to be ashamed of their excuses, and repent of them. Perhaps you have not always seen this as plainly as you may now. With the light now before you it becomes you to beware. See to it that you never make another excuse, unless you intend to abuse God in the most horrible manner. Nothing can be a more grievous abomination in the sight of God than excuses made by a sinner who knows they are utterly false and blasphemous. O you ought to repent of the insult you have already offered to God--and NOW, too, lest you find yourself thrust away from the gate of mercy.

7. You admit your obligation, and of course are estopped from making excuses. For if you have any good excuse, you are not under obligation. If any one of you has a good excuse for disobeying God, you are no longer under obligation to obey. But since you are compelled to admit obligation, you are also compelled to relinquish excuses.

8. Inasmuch as you do and must admit your obligation, then if you still plead excuses, you insult God to His face. You insult Him by charging Him with infinite tyranny.

Now, what use do you calculate to make of this sermon? Are you ready to say, "I will henceforth desist from all my excuses, now and for ever; and God shall have my whole heart?" What do you say? Will you set about to hunt up some new excuse? Do you at least say, "Let me go home first--don't press me to yield to God here on the spot;--let me go home and then I will?" Do you say this? And are you aware how tender is this moment--how critical this passing hour? Remember it is not I who press this claim upon you--but it is God. God Himself commands you to repent today--this hour. You know your duty--you know what religion is--what it is to give God your heart. And now I come to the final question--Will you do it? Will you abandon all your excuses, and fall, a self-condemned sinner, before a God of love, and yield to Him yourself--your heart, and your whole being, henceforth and for ever? WILL YOU COME?

# Conditions of Being Saved

Lecture IV

November 8, 1848

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Acts 16:30: "What must I do to be saved?"

I bring forward this subject to-day not because it is new to many in this congregation, but because it is greatly needed. I am happy to know that the great inquiry of our text is beginning to be deeply and extensively agitated in this community, and under these circumstances it is the first duty of a Christian pastor to answer it, fully and plainly.

The circumstances which gave occasion to the words of the text were briefly these. Paul and Silas had gone to Philippi to preach the Gospel. Their preaching excited great opposition and tumult; they were arrested and thrown into prison, and the jailer was charged to keep them safely. At midnight they were praying and singing praises--God came down--the earth quaked and the prison rocked--its doors burst open, and their chains fell off; the jailer sprang up affrighted, and supposing his prisoners had fled, was about to take his own life, when Paul cried out, "Do thyself no harm--we are all here." He then called for a light, and sprang in and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

This is briefly the history of our text; and I improve it now, by showing;

*I. What sinners must not do to be saved; and*

*II. What they must do.*

## **I. What sinners must not do to be saved.**

It has now come to be necessary, and very important to tell men what they must not do in order to be saved. When the gospel was first preached Satan had not introduced as many delusions to mislead men as he has now. It was then enough to give, as Paul did, the simple and direct answer, telling men only what they must at once do. But this seems to be not enough now. So many delusions and perversions have bewildered and darkened the minds of men that they need often a great deal of instruction to lead them back to those simple views of the subject which prevailed at first. Hence the importance of showing what sinners must not do, if they intend to be saved.

- 1. They must not imagine that they have nothing to do. In Paul's time nobody seems to have thought of this. Then the doctrine of Universalism was not much developed. Men had not begun to dream that they should be saved without doing anything. They had not learned that sinners have nothing to do to be saved. If this idea, so current of late, had been rife at Philippi, the

question of our text would not have been asked. No trembling sinner would have cried out, What must I do to be saved?

If men imagine they have nothing to do, they are never likely to be saved. It is not in the nature of falsehood and lies to save men's souls, and surely nothing is more false than this notion. Men know they have something to do to be saved. Why then do they pretend that all men will be saved whether they do their duty, or constantly refuse to do it? The very idea is preposterous, and is entertained only by the most palpable outrage upon common sense and an enlightened conscience.

- 2. You should not mistake what you have to do. The duty required of sinners is very simple, and would be easily understood were it not for the false ideas that prevail as to what religion is, and as to the exact things which God requires as conditions of salvation. On these points erroneous opinions prevail to a most alarming extent. Hence the danger of mistake. Beware lest you be deceived in a matter of so vital moment.
- 3. Do not say or imagine that you cannot do what God requires. On the contrary, always assume that you can. If you assume that you cannot, this very assumption will be fatal to your salvation.
- 4. Do not procrastinate. As you ever intend or hope to be saved, you must set your face like a flint against this most pernicious delusion. Probably no other mode of evading present duty has ever prevailed so extensively as this, or has destroyed so many souls. Almost all men in gospel lands intend to prepare for death--intend to repent and become religious before they die. Even Universalists expect to become religious at some time--perhaps after death--perhaps after being purified from their sins by purgatorial fires; but somehow they expect to become holy, for they know they must before they can see God and enjoy His presence. But you will observe, they put this matter of becoming holy off to the most distant time possible. Feeling a strong dislike to it now, they flatter themselves that God will take care that it shall be done up duly in the next world, howmuchsoever they may frustrate His efforts to do it in this. So long as it remains in their power to choose whether to become holy or not, they improve the time to enjoy sin; and leave it with God to make them holy in the next world--if they can't prevent it there!  
Consistency IS a jewel!

And all those who put off being religious now in the cherished delusion of becoming so in some future time, whether in this world or the next, are acting out this same inconsistency. You fondly hope that will occur which you are now doing your utmost to prevent.

So sinners by myriads press their way down to hell under this delusion. They often, when pressed with the claims of God, will even name the time when they will repent. It may be very near--perhaps as soon as they get home from the meeting, or as soon as the sermon is over; or it may be more remote, as for example, when they have finished their education, or become settled in life, or have made a little more property, or get ready to abandon some business of questionable morality;--but no matter whether the time set be near or remote, the delusion is fatal--the thought of procrastination is murder to the soul. Ah, such sinners are little aware that Satan himself has poured out his spirit upon them

and is leading them whithersoever he will. He little cares whether they put off for a longer time or a shorter. If he can persuade them to a long delay, he likes it well; if only to a short one, he feels quite sure he can renew the delay and get another extension--so it answers his purpose fully in the end.

Now mark, sinner, if you ever mean to be saved you must resist and grieve away this spirit of Satan. You must cease to procrastinate. You can never be converted so long as you operate only in the way of delaying and promising yourself that you will become religious at some future time. Did you ever bring anything to pass in your temporal business by procrastination? Did procrastination ever begin, prosecute, and accomplish any important business?

Suppose you have some business of vast consequence, involving your character, or your whole estate, or your life, to be transacted in Cleveland, but you do not know precisely how soon it must be done. It may be done with safety now, and with greater facility now than ever hereafter; but it might possibly be done although you should delay a little time, but every moment's delay involves an absolute uncertainty of your being able to do it at all. You do not know but a single hour's delay will make you too late. Now in these circumstances what would a man of sense and discretion do? Would he not be awake and up in an instant? Would he sleep on a matter of such moment, involved in such risks and uncertainties? No. You know that the risk of a hundred dollars, pending on such conditions, would stir the warm blood of any man of business, and you could not tempt him to delay an hour. O, he would say, this is the great business to which I must attend, and every thing else must give way. But suppose he should act as a sinner does about repentance, and promise himself that to-morrow will be as this day and much more abundant--and do nothing to-day, nor to-morrow, nor the next month, nor the next year--would you not think him beside himself? Would you expect his business to be done, his money to be secured, his interests to be promoted?

So the sinner accomplishes nothing but his own ruin so long as he procrastinates. Until he says--"Now is my time--to-day I will do all my duty"--he is only playing the fool and laying up his wages accordingly. O, it is infinite madness to defer a matter of such vast interest and of such perilous uncertainty!

- 5. If you would be saved you must not wait for God to do what He commands you to do.

God will surely do all that He can for your salvation. All that the nature of the case allows of his doing, he either has done or stands ready to do as soon as your position and course will allow him to do it. Long before you were born he anticipated your wants as a sinner, and began on the most liberal scale to make provision for them. He gave his Son to die for you, thus doing all that need be done by way of an atonement. Of a long time past He has been shaping his providence so as to give you the requisite knowledge of duty--has sent you his word and Spirit. Indeed He has given you the highest possible evidence that He will be energetic and prompt on His part--as one in earnest for your salvation. You know this. What sinner in this house fears lest God should be negligent on his part in the matter of his salvation? Not one. No, many of you are not a little annoyed



that God should press you so earnestly and be so energetic in the work of securing your salvation. And now can you quiet your conscience with the excuse of waiting for God to do your duty?

The fact is, there are things for you to do which God cannot do for you. Those things which he has enjoined and revealed as the conditions of your salvation, He cannot and will not do Himself. If He could have done them Himself, He would not have asked you to do them. Every sinner ought to consider this. God requires of you repentance and faith because it is naturally impossible that any one else but you should do them. They are your own personal matters--the voluntary exercises of your own mind; and no other being in heaven, earth, or hell can do these things for you in your stead. As far as substitution was naturally possible, God has introduced it, as in the case of the atonement. He has never hesitated to march up to meet and to bear all the self-denials which the work of salvation has involved.

- 6. If you mean to be saved, you must not wait for God to do anything whatever. There is nothing to be waited for. God has either done all on his part already, or if anything more remains, He is ready and waiting this moment for you to do your duty that He may impart all needful grace.
- 7. Do not flee to any refuge of lies. Lies cannot save you. It is truth--not lies, that alone can save. I have often wondered how men could suppose that Universalism could save any man.

Men must be sanctified by the truth. There is no plainer teaching in the Bible than this, and no Bible doctrine is better sustained by reason and the nature of the case.

Now does Universalism sanctify anybody? Universalists say you must be punished for your sins, and that thus they will be put away--as if the fires of purgatory would thoroughly consume all sin, and bring out the sinner pure. Is this being sanctified by the truth? You might as well hope to be saved by eating liquid fire! You might as well expect fire to purify your soul from sin in this world, as in the next! Why not?

It is amazing that men should hope to be sanctified and saved by this great error, or indeed by any error whatever. God says you must be sanctified by the truth. Suppose you could believe this delusion, would it make you holy? Do you believe that it would make you humble, heavenly-minded, sin-hating, benevolent? Can you believe any such thing? Be assured that Satan is only the father of lies, and he cannot save you--in fact, he would not if he could; he intends his lies not to save you, but to destroy your very soul, and nothing could be more adapted to its purpose. Lies are only the natural poison of the soul. You take them at your peril!

- 8. Don't seek for any self-indulgent method of salvation. The great effort among sinners has always been to be saved in some way of self-indulgence. They are slow to admit that self-denial is indispensable--that total, unqualified self-denial is the condition of being saved. I warn you against supposing that you can be saved in some easy, self-pleasing way. Men ought to know, and always assume that it is naturally indispensable for selfishness to be utterly put away and its

demands resisted and put down.

I often ask--Does the system of salvation which I preach so perfectly chime with the intuitions of my reason that I know from within myself that this gospel is the thing I need? Does it in all its parts and relations meet the demands of my intelligence? Are its requisitions obviously just and right? Do its prescribed conditions of salvation obviously befit man's moral position before God, and his moral relations to the government of God?

To these and similar questions I am constrained to answer in the affirmative. The longer I live the more fully I see that the gospel system is the only one that can alike meet the demands of the human intelligence, and supply the wants of man's sinning, depraved heart. The duties enjoined upon the sinner are just those things which I know must in the nature of the case be the conditions of salvation. Why then should any sinner think of being saved on any other conditions? Why desire it even if it were ever so practicable?

- 9. Don't imagine you will ever have a more favourable time.

Impenitent sinners are prone to imagine that just now is by no means so convenient a season as may be expected hereafter. So they put off in hope of a better time. They think perhaps that they shall have more conviction, and fewer obstacles, and less hindrances. So thought Felix. He did not intend to forego salvation, any more than you do; but he was very busy just then--had certain ends to be secured which seemed peculiarly pressing, and so he begged to be excused on the promise of very faithful attention to the subject at the expected convenient season. But did the convenient season ever come? Never. Nor does it ever come to those who in like manner resist God's solemn call, and grieve away His Spirit. Thousands are now waiting in the pains of hell who said just as he did, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." Oh, sinner, when will your convenient season come! Are you aware that no season will ever be "convenient" for you, unless God calls up your attention earnestly and solemnly to the subject? And can you expect Him to do this at the time of your choice, when you scorn his call at the time of his choice? Have you not heard Him say--"Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." O, sinner, that will be a fearful and a final doom! And the myriad voices of God's universe will say, amen!

- 10. Do not suppose that you will find another time as good, and one in which you can just as well repent as now.

Many are ready to suppose that though there may be no better time for themselves, there will at least be one as good. Vain delusion! Sinner, you already owe ten thousand talents, and will you find it just as easy to be forgiven this debt while you are showing that you don't care how much and how long you augment it? In a case like this, where everything

turns upon your securing the good will of your creditor, do you hope to gain it by positively insulting Him to his face?

Or take another view of the case. Your heart you know must one day relent for sin, or you are forever damned. You know also that each successive sin increases the hardness of your heart, and makes it a more difficult matter to repent. How, then, can you reasonably hope that a future time will be equally favourable for your repentance? When you have hardened your neck like an iron sinew, and made your heart like an adamant stone, can you hope that repentance will yet be as easy to you as ever?

You know, sinner, that God requires you to break off from your sins now. But you look up into His face and say to Him--"Lord, it is just as well to stop abusing thee at some future convenient time. Lord, if I can only be saved at last, I shall think it all my gain to go on insulting and abusing thee as long as it will possibly answer. And since thou art so very compassionate and long-suffering, I think I may venture on in sin and rebellion against thee yet these many months and years longer. Lord, don't hurry me--do let me have my way--let me abuse thee if thou pleasest, and spit in thy face--all will be just as well if I only repent in season so as finally to be saved. I know, indeed, that thou art entreating me to repent now, but I much prefer to wait a season, and it will be just as well to repent at some future time."

And now do you suppose that God will set his seal to this--that He will say--"You are right, sinner, I set my seal of approbation upon your course--it is well that you take so just views of your duty to your Maker and your Father; go on; your course will ensure your salvation." Do you expect such a response from God, as this?

- 11. If you ever expect to be saved, don't wait to see what others will do or say.

I was lately astonished to find that a young lady here under conviction was in great trouble about what a beloved brother would think of her if she should give her heart to God. She knew her duty; but he was impenitent, and how could she know what he would think if she should repent now! It amounts to this. She would come before God and say--"O thou great God, I know I ought to repent, but I can't; for I don't know as my brother will like it. I know that he too is a sinner, and must repent or lose his soul, but I am much more afraid of his frown than I am of thine, and I care more for his approbation than I do for thine, and consequently, I dare not repent till he does!" How shocking is this! Strange that on such a subject men will ever ask--"What will others say of me?" Are you amenable to God? What then have others to say about your duty to Him? God requires you and them also to repent, and why don't you do it at once?

Not long since, as I was preaching abroad, one of the principal men of the city came to the meeting for inquiry, apparently much convicted and in great distress for his soul. But being a man of high political standing, and supposing himself to be very dependent upon his friends, he insisted that he must consult them, and have a regard for their feelings in this matter. I could not possibly beat him off from this ground, although I spent three hours in the effort. He seemed almost ready to repent--I thought he certainly would; but

he slipped away, relapsed by a perpetual back-sliding, and I expect will be found at last among the lost in perdition. Would you not expect such a result if he tore himself away under such an excuse as that?

O, sinner, you must not care what others say of you--let them say what they please. Remember, the question is between your own soul and God, and "he that is wise shall be wise for himself, and he that scorneth, he alone shall bear it." You must die for yourself, and for yourself must appear before God in judgment! Go, young woman, ask your brother--"Can you answer for me when I come to the judgment? Can you pledge yourself that you can stand in my stead and answer for me there?" Now until you have reason to believe that he can, it is wise for you to disregard his opinions if they stand at all in your way. Whoever interposes any objection to your immediate repentance, fail not to ask him--Can you shield my soul in the judgment? If I can be assured that you can and will, I will make you my Saviour; but if not, then I must attend to my own salvation, and leave you to attend to yours.

I never shall forget the scene which occurred while my own mind was turning upon this great point. Seeking a retired place for prayer, I went into a deep grove, found a perfectly secluded spot behind some large logs, and knelt down. All suddenly, a leaf rustled and I sprang, for somebody must be coming and I shall be seen here at prayer. I had not been aware that I cared what others said of me, but looking back upon my exercises of mind here, I could see that I did care infinitely too much what others thought of me.

Closing my eyes again for prayer, I heard a rustling leaf again, and then the thought came over me like a wave of the sea, "I am ashamed of confessing my sin!" What! thought I, ashamed of being found speaking with God! O, how ashamed I felt of this shame! I can never describe the strong and overpowering impression which this thought made on my mind. I cried aloud at the very top of my voice, for I felt that though all the men on earth, and all the devils in hell were present to hear and see me I would not shrink and would not cease to cry unto God; for what is it to me if others see me seeking the face of my God and Saviour? I am hastening to the judgment: there I shall not be ashamed to have the Judge my friend. There I shall not be ashamed to have sought His face and His pardon here. There will be no shrinking away from the gaze of the universe. O, if sinners at the judgment could shrink away, how gladly would they; but they cannot! Nor can they stand there in each other's places to answer for each other's sins. That young woman, can she say then--O, my brother, you must answer for me; for to please you, I rejected Christ and lost my soul? That brother is himself a guilty rebel, confounded, and agonized, and quailing before the awful Judge, and how can he befriend you in such an awful hour! Fear not his displeasure now, but rather warn him while you can, to escape for his life ere the wrath of the Lord wax hot against him, and there be no remedy.

- 12. If you would be saved, you must not indulge prejudices against either God, or his ministers, or against Christians, or against any thing religious.

There are some persons of peculiar temperament who are greatly in danger of losing their souls because they are tempted to strong prejudices. Once committed either in favour of

or against any persons or things, they are exceedingly apt to become so fixed, as never more to be really honest. And when these persons or things in regard to which they become committed, are so connected with religion, that their prejudices stand arrayed against their fulfilling the great conditions of salvation, the effect can be nothing else than ruinous. For it is naturally indispensable to salvation, that you should be entirely honest. Your soul must act before God in the open sincerity of truth, or you cannot be converted.

I have known persons in revivals to remain a long time under great conviction, without submitting themselves to God, and by careful inquiry I have found them wholly hedged in by their prejudices, and yet so blind to this fact that they would not admit that they had any prejudice at all. In my observation of convicted sinners, I have found this among the most common obstacles in the way of the salvation of souls. Men become committed against religion, and remaining in this state it is naturally impossible that they should repent. God will not humour your prejudices, or lower his prescribed conditions of salvation to accommodate your feelings.

Again, you must give up all hostile feelings in cases where you have been really injured. Sometimes I have seen persons evidently shut out from the kingdom of heaven, because having been really injured, they would not forgive and forget, but maintained such a spirit of resistance and revenge, that they could not in the nature of the case, repent of the sin toward God, nor could God forgive them. Of course they lost heaven. I have heard men say--"I can not forgive--I will not forgive--I have been injured, and I never will forgive that wrong." Now mark:--you must not hold on to such feelings; if you do, you cannot be saved.

Again, you must not suffer yourself to be stumbled by the prejudices of others. I have often been struck with the state of things in families, where the parents or older persons had prejudices against the minister, and have wondered why those parents were not more wise than to lay stumbling-blocks before their children to ruin their souls. This is often the true reason why children are not converted. Their minds are turned against the gospel, by being turned against those from whom they hear it preached. I would rather have persons come into my family, and curse and swear before my children, than to have them speak against those who preach to them the gospel. Therefore I say to all parents--take care what you say, if you would not shut the gate of heaven against your children!

Again, do not allow yourself to take some fixed position, and then suffer the stand you have taken to debar you from doing any obvious duty. Persons sometimes allow themselves to be committed against taking what is called "the anxious seat;" and consequently they refuse to go forward under circumstances when it is obviously proper that they should, and where their refusal to do so, places them in an attitude unfavourable, and perhaps fatal to their conversion. Let every sinner beware of this!

Again, do not hold on to anything about which you have any doubt of its lawfulness or propriety. Cases often occur in which persons are not fully satisfied that a thing is wrong, and yet are not satisfied that it is right. Now in cases of this sort it should not be enough

to say--"such and such Christians do so;"--you ought to have better reasons than this for your course of conduct. If you ever expect to be saved, you must abandon all practices which you even suspect to be wrong. This principle seems to be involved in the passage, "He that doubteth is damned if he eat; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." To do that which is of doubtful propriety is to allow yourself to tamper with the divine authority, and cannot fail to break down in your mind that solemn dread of sinning which if you would ever be saved, you must carefully cherish.

Again, if you would be saved, do not look at professors and wait for them to become engaged as they should be in the great work of God. If they are not what they ought to be, let them alone. Let them bear their own awful responsibility. It often happens that convicted sinners compare themselves with professed Christians, and excuse themselves for delaying their duty, because professed Christians are delaying theirs. Sinners must not do this if they would ever be saved. It is very probable that you will always find guilty professors enough to stumble over into hell if you will allow yourself to do so.

But on the other hand, many professors may not be nearly so bad as you suppose, and you must not be censorious, putting the worst constructions upon their conduct. You have other work to do than this. Let them stand or fall to their own master. Unless you abandon the practice of picking flaws in the conduct of professed Christians, it is utterly impossible that you should be saved.

Again, do not depend upon professors--on their prayers or influence in any way. I have known children hang a long time upon the prayers of their parents, putting those prayers in the place of Jesus Christ, or at least in the place of their own present efforts to do their duty. Now this course pleases Satan entirely. He would ask nothing more to make sure of you. Therefore--depend on no prayers--not even those of the holiest Christians on earth. The matter of your conversion lies between yourself and God alone, as really as if you were the only sinner in all the world, or as if there were no other beings in the universe but yourself and your God.

Do not seek for any apology or excuse whatever. I dwell upon this and urge it the more because I so often find persons resting on some excuse without being themselves aware of it. In conversation with them upon their spiritual state, I see this and say, "There you are resting on that excuse." "Am I?" say they, "I did not know it."

Do not seek for stumbling-blocks. Sinners, a little disturbed in their stupidity, begin to cast about for stumbling-blocks for self-vindication. All at once they become wide awake to the faults of professors, as if they had to bear the care of all the churches. The real fact is, they are all engaged to find something to which they can take exception, so that they can thereby blunt the keen edge of truth upon their own consciences. This never helps along their own salvation.

Do not tempt the forbearance of God. If you do, you are in the utmost danger of being given over forever. Do not presume that you may go on yet longer in your sins, and still

find the gate of mercy. This presumption has paved the way for the ruin of many souls.

Do not despair of salvation and settle down in unbelief, saying, "There is no mercy for me." You must not despair in any such sense as to shut yourself out from the kingdom. You may well despair of being saved without Christ and without repentance; but you are bound to believe the gospel; and to do this is to believe the glad tidings that Jesus Christ has come to save sinners, even the chief, and that "him that cometh to Him He will in no wise cast out." You have no right to disbelieve this, and act as if there were no truth in it.

You must not wait for more conviction. Why do you need any more? You know your guilt and know your present duty. Nothing can be more preposterous therefore than to wait for more conviction. If you did not know that you are a sinner, or that you are guilty for sin, there might be some fitness in seeking for conviction of the truth on these points.

Do not wait for more or for different feelings. Sinners are often saying--"I must feel differently before I can come to Christ," or, "I must have more feeling," as if this were the great thing which God requires of them. In this they are altogether mistaken.

Do not wait to be better prepared. While you wait you are growing worse and worse, and are fast rendering your salvation impossible.

Don't wait for God to change your heart. Why should you wait for Him to do what He has commanded you to do, and waits for you to do in obedience to his command?

Don't try to recommend yourself to God by prayers or tears or by anything else whatever. Do you suppose your prayers lay God under any obligation to forgive you? Suppose you owed a man five hundred talents, and should go a hundred times a week and beg him to remit to you this debt; and then should enter your prayers in account against your creditor, as so much claim against Him. Suppose you should pursue this course till you had canceled the debt as you suppose--could you hope to prove anything by this course except that you were mad? And yet sinners seem to suppose that their many prayers and tears lay the Lord under real obligation to them to forgive them.

Never rely on anything else whatever than Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It is preposterous for you to hope as many do, to make some propitiation by your own sufferings. In my early experience, I thought I could not expect to be converted at once, but must be bowed down a long time. I said to myself--"God will not pity me till I feel worse than I do now. I can't expect Him to forgive me till I feel a greater agony of soul than this." Not even if I could have gone on augmenting my sufferings till they equalled the miseries of hell, it could not have changed God. The fact is, God does not ask of you that you should suffer. Your sufferings cannot in the nature of the case avail for atonement; why, therefore, should you attempt to thrust aside the system of God's providing, and thrust in one of your own?

There is another view of the case. The thing God demands of you is that you should bow

your stubborn will to Him. Just as a child in the attitude of disobedience, and required to submit, might fall to weeping and groaning, and to every expression of agony, and might even torture himself in hope of moving the pity of his father, but all the time refuses to submit to parental authority. He would be very glad to put his own sufferings in the place of the submission demanded. This is what the sinner is doing. He would fain put his own sufferings in the place of submission to God, and move the pity of the Lord so much that He would recede from the hard condition of repentance and submission.

If you would be saved you must not listen at all to those who pity you, and who impliedly take your part against God, and try to make you think you are not so bad as you are. I once knew a woman who after a long season of distressing conviction fell into great despair, her health sank, and she seemed about to die. All this time she found no relief, but seemed only to wax worse and worse, sinking down in stern and awful despair. Her friends instead of dealing plainly and faithfully with her, and probing her guilty heart to the bottom, had taken the course of pitying her, and almost complained of the Lord that He would not have compassion on the poor, agonized, dying woman. At length, as she seemed in the last stages of life--so weak as to be scarcely able to speak in a low voice, there happened in a minister who better understood how to deal with convicted sinners. The woman's friends cautioned him to deal very carefully with her, as she was in a dreadful state and greatly to be pitied; but he judged it best to deal with her very faithfully. As he approached her bed-side, she raised her faint voice and begged for a little water. "Unless you repent, you will soon be," said he, "where there is not a drop of water to cool your tongue." "O," she cried, "must I go down to hell?" "Yes, you must, and you will, soon, unless you repent and submit to God. Why don't you repent and submit immediately?" "O," she replied, "it is an awful thing to go to hell!" "Yes, and for that very reason Christ has provided an atonement through Jesus Christ, but you won't accept it. He brings the cup of salvation to your lips, and you thrust it away. Why will you do this? Why will you persist in being an enemy of God and scorn His offered salvation, when you might become His friend and have salvation if you would?"

This was the strain of their conversation, and its result was, that the woman saw her guilt and her duty, and turning to the Lord, found pardon and peace.

Therefore I say, if your conscience convicts you of sin, don't let anybody take your part against God. Your wound needs not a plaster, but a probe. Don't fear the probe; it is the only thing that can save you. Don't seek to hide your guilt, or veil your eyes from seeing it, nor be afraid to know the worst, for you must know the very worst, and the sooner you know it the better. I warn you, don't look after some physician to give you an opiate, for you don't need it. Shun, as you would, death itself, all those who would speak to you smooth things and prophesy deceits. They would surely ruin your soul.

Again, do not suppose that if you become a Christian, it will interfere with any of the necessary or appropriate duties of life, or with anything whatever to which you ought to attend. No; religion never interferes with any real duty. So far is this from being the case, that in fact a proper attention to your various duties is indispensable to your being



religious. You cannot serve God without.

Moreover, if you would be saved you must not give heed to anything that would hinder you. It is infinitely important that your soul should be saved. No consideration thrown in your way should be allowed to have the weight of a straw or a feather. Jesus Christ has illustrated and enforced this by several parables, especially in the one which compares the kingdom of heaven to "a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price went and sold all that he had and bought it." In another parable the kingdom of heaven is said to be "like treasure hid in a field, which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field." Thus forcibly are men taught that they must be ready to make any sacrifice whatever, which may be requisite in order to gain the kingdom of heaven.

Again, you must not seek religion selfishly. You must not make your own salvation or happiness the supreme end. Beware, for if you make this your supreme end you will get a false hope, and will probably glide along down the pathway of the hypocrite into the deepest hell.

## **II. What sinners must do to be saved.**

- 1. You must understand what you have to do. It is of the utmost importance that you should see this clearly. You need to know that you must return to God, and to understand what this means. The difficulty between yourself and God is that you have stolen yourself and run away from His service. You belong of right to God. He created you for Himself, and hence had a perfectly righteous claim to the homage of your heart, and the service of your life. But you, instead of living to meet his claims, have run away--have deserted from God's service, and have lived to please yourself. Now your duty is to return and restore yourself to God.
- 2. You must return and confess your sins to God. You must confess that you have been all wrong, and that God has been all right. Go before the Lord and lay open the depth of your guilt. Tell Him you deserve just as much damnation as He has threatened.

These confessions are naturally indispensable to your being forgiven. In accordance with this the Lord says, "If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember my covenant." Then God can forgive. But so long as you controvert this point, and will not concede that God is right, or admit that you are wrong, He can never forgive you.

You must moreover confess to man if you have injured any one. And is it not a fact that you have injured some, and perhaps many of your fellow men? Have you not slandered your neighbour and said things which you have no right to say? Have you not in some instances which you could call to mind if you would, lied to them, or about them, or covered up or perverted the truth; and have you not been willing that others should have false impressions of you or of your conduct? If so, you must renounce all such iniquity, for "he that covereth his sins shall not prosper; while he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy." And furthermore you must not only confess your sins to God and

to the men you have injured, but you must also make restitution. You have not taken the position of a penitent before God and man until you have done this also. God cannot treat you as a penitent until you have done it. I do not mean by this that God cannot forgive you until you have carried into effect your purpose of restitution by finishing the outward act, for sometimes it may demand time, and may in some cases be itself impossible to you. But the purpose must be sincere and thorough before you can be forgiven of God.

- 3. You must renounce yourself. In this is implied,
  - (1.) That you renounce your own righteousness, forever discarding the very idea of having any righteousness in yourself.
  - (2.) That you forever relinquish the idea of having done any good which ought to commend you to God, or be ever thought of as a ground of your justification.
  - (3.) That you renounce your own will, and be ever ready to say not in word only, but in heart--"Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." You must consent most heartily that God's will shall be your supreme law.
  - (4.) That you renounce your own way, and let God have his own way in everything. Never suffer yourself to fret and be rasped by anything whatever; for since God's agency extends to all events, you ought to recognize his hand in all things, and of course to fret at anything whatever is to fret against God who has at least permitted that thing to occur as it does. So long, therefore, as you suffer yourself to fret, you are not right with God. You must become before God as a little child, subdued and trustful at his feet. Let the weather be fair or foul, consent that God should have his way. Let all things go well with you, or as men call it, ill; yet let God do his pleasure, and let it be your part to submit in perfect resignation. Until you take this ground you cannot be saved.
- 4. You must come to Christ. You must accept of Christ really and fully as your Saviour. Renouncing all thought of depending on anything you have done or can do, you must accept of Christ as your atoning sacrifice, and as your ever living Mediator before God. Without the least qualification or reserve you must place yourself under his wing as your Saviour.
- 5. You must seek supremely to please Christ, and not yourself. It is naturally impossible that you should be saved until you come into this attitude of mind--until you are so well pleased with Christ in all respects as to find your pleasure in doing his. It is in the nature of things impossible that you should be happy in any other state of mind, or unhappy in this. For, his pleasure is infinitely good and right. When therefore his good pleasure becomes your good pleasure, and your will harmonizes entirely with his, then you will be happy for the same reason that He is happy, and you cannot fail of being happy any more than Jesus Christ can. And this becoming supremely happy in God's will is essentially the idea of salvation. In this state of mind you are saved. Out of it you cannot be.

It has often struck my mind with great force, that many professors of religion are deplorably and utterly mistaken on this point. Their real feeling is that Christ's service is

an iron collar, an insufferably hard yoke. Hence they labour exceedingly to throw off some of this burden. They try to make it out that Christ does not require much if any self-denial--much if any deviation from the course of worldliness and sin. O, if they could only get the standard of Christian duty quite down to a level with the fashions and customs of this world! How much easier then to live a Christian life and wear Christ's yoke!

But taking Christ's yoke as it really is, it becomes in their view an iron collar. Doing the will of Christ, instead of their own is a hard business. Now if doing Christ's will is religion, (and who can doubt it?) then they only need enough of it, and in their state of mind, they will be supremely wretched. Let me ask those who groan under the idea that they must be religious--who deem it awful hard--but they must--how much religion of this kind would it take to make hell? Surely not much! When it gives you no joy to do God's pleasure, and yet you are shut up to the doing of His pleasure as the only way to be saved, and are thereby perpetually dragooned into the doing of what you hate, as the only means of escaping hell, would not this be itself a hell? Can you not see that in this state of mind you are not saved and cannot be?

To be saved you must come into a state of mind in which you will ask no higher joy than to do God's pleasure. This alone will be forever enough to fill your cup to overflowing.

- 6. You must have all confidence in Christ, or you cannot be saved. You must absolutely believe in Him--believe all his words of promise. They were given you to be believed, and unless you believe them, they can do you no good at all. So far from helping you without you exercise[sic.] faith in them, they will only aggravate your guilt for unbelief. God would be believed when He speaks in love to lost sinners. He gave them these "exceeding great and precious promises, that they by faith in them, might escape the corruption that is in the world through lust." But thousands of professors of religion know not how to use these promises, and as to them or any profitable use they make, the promises might as well have been written on the sands of the sea.

Sinners too, will go down to hell in unbroken masses, unless they believe and take hold of God by faith in his promise. O, his awful wrath is out against them! And He says--"I would go through them, I would burn them up together; or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me." Yes, let him stir up himself and take hold of my arm, strong to save, and then he may make peace with me. Do you ask how take hold? By faith. Yes, by faith; believe his words and take hold; take hold of his strong arm and swing right out over hell, and don't be afraid any more than if there were no hell.

But you say--I do believe, and yet I am not saved. No you don't believe. A woman said to me--"I believe, I know I do, and yet here I am in my sins." No, said I, you don't. Have you as much confidence in God as you would have in me if I had promised you a dollar? Do you ever pray to God? and, if so, do you come with any such confidence as you would have if you came to me to ask for a promised dollar? Oh, until you have as much faith in God as this, aye and more--until you have more confidence in God than you would have in ten thousand men, your faith does not honour God, and you cannot hope to please

Him. You must say--"Let God be true though every man be a liar."

But you say--"O, I am a sinner, and how can I believe? I know you are a sinner, and so are all men to whom God has given these promises. "O, but I am a great sinner!" Well, "It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom," Paul says, "I am the chief" So you need not despair.

- 7. You must forsake all that you have, or you cannot be Christ's disciple. There must be absolute and total self-denial.

By this I do not mean that you are never to eat again, or never again to clothe yourself, or never more enjoy the society of your friends--no, not this; but that you should cease entirely from using any of these enjoyments selfishly. You must no longer think to own yourself--your time, your possessions, or anything you have ever called your own. All these things you must hold as God's, not yours. In this sense you are to forsake all that you have, namely, in the sense of laying all upon God's altar to be devoted supremely and only to his service. When you come back to God for pardon and salvation, come with all you have to lay all at his feet. Come with your body, to offer it as a living sacrifice upon his altar. Come with your soul and all its powers, and yield them in willing consecration to your God and Saviour. Come, bring them all along--everything, body, soul, intellect, imagination, acquirements--all, without reserve. Do you say--Must I bring them all? Yes, all--absolutely ALL; do not keep back any thing--don't sin against your own soul like Ananias and Sapphira, by keeping back a part, but renounce your own claim to everything, and recognize God's right to all. Say, Lord, these things are not mine. I had stolen them, but they were never mine. They were always thine; I'll have them no longer. Lord, these things are all thine, henceforth and forever. Now, what wilt Thou have me to do? I have no business of my own to do--I am wholly at thy disposal--Lord, what work hast thou for me to do?

In this spirit you must renounce the world, the flesh, and Satan. Your fellowship is henceforth to be with Christ, and not with those objects. You are to live for Christ, and not for the world, the flesh, or the devil.

- 8. You must believe the record God hath given of his Son. He that believes not does not receive the record--does not set to his seal that God is true. "This is the record that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." The condition of your having it is that you believe the record, and of course that you act accordingly. Suppose here is a poor man living at your next door, and the mail brings him a letter stating that a rich man has died in England, leaving him 100,000 pounds sterling, and the cashier of a neighbouring bank writes him that he has received the amount on deposit for him, and holds it subject to his order. Well, the poor man says, I can't believe the record. I can't believe there ever was any such rich man; I can't believe there is 100,000 pounds for me. So he must live and die as poor as Lazarus, because he won't believe the record.

Now, mark; this is just the case with the unbelieving sinner. God has given you eternal life, and it waits your order--but you don't get it because you will not believe, and

therefore will not make out the order, and present in due form the application.

Ah, but you say, I must have some feeling before I can believe--how can I believe till I have the feeling? So the poor man might say--How can I believe that the 100,000 pounds is mine--I have not got a farthing of it now--I am as poor as ever. Yes, you are poor because you will not believe. If you would believe, you might go and buy out every store in this country. Still you cry, I am as poor as ever. I can't believe it;--see my poor worn clothes--I was never more ragged in my life; I have not a particle of the feeling and the comforts of a rich man. So the sinner can't believe till he gets the inward experience! He must wait to have some of the feeling of a saved sinner before he can believe the record and take hold of the salvation! Preposterous enough! So the poor man must wait to get his new clothes and fine house before he can believe his documents and draw for his money. Of course he dooms himself to everlasting poverty, although mountains of gold were all his own.

Now, sinner, you must understand this. Why should you be lost when eternal life is bought and offered you by the last will and testament of the Lord Jesus Christ? Will you not believe the record and draw for the amount at once! Do for mercy's sake understand this and not lose heaven by your own folly!

I must conclude by saying, that if you would be saved you must accept a prepared salvation, one already prepared and full, and present. You must be willing to give up all your sins, and be saved from them, all, now and henceforth! Until you consent to this, you cannot be saved at all. Many would be willing to be saved in heaven, if they might hold on to some sins while on earth,--or rather they think they would like heaven on such terms. But the fact is they would as much dislike a pure heart and a holy life in heaven as they do on earth, and they deceive themselves utterly in supposing that they are ready or even willing to go to such a heaven as God has prepared for his people. No, there can be no heaven except for those who accept a salvation from all sin in this world. They must take the gospel as a system which holds no compromise with sin--which contemplates full deliverance from sin even now, and makes provision accordingly. Any other gospel is not the true one, and to accept of Christ's gospel in any other sense is not to accept it all. Its first and its last condition is sworn and eternal renunciation of all sin.

## **REMARKS.**

1. Paul did not give the same answer to this question which a consistent Universalist would give. The latter would say, You are to be saved by being first punished according to your sin. All men must expect to be punished all that their sins deserve. But Paul did not answer thus. Miserable comforter had he been if he had answered after this sort: "You must all be punished according to the letter of the law you have broken." This could scarcely have been called gospel.

Nor again did Paul give the Universalist's answer and say, "Do not concern yourself about this matter of being saved, all men are sure enough of being saved without any particular anxiety about it." Not so Paul; no; he understood and did not forbear to express the necessity of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as the condition of being saved.

2. Take care that you do not sin willfully after having understood the truth concerning the way of salvation. Your danger of this is great precisely in proportion as you see your duty clearly. The most terrible damnation must fall on the head of those who "knew their duty, but who did it not." When therefore you are told plainly and truly what your duty is, be on your guard lest you let salvation slip out of your hands. It may never come so near your reach again.

3. Do not wait, even to go home, before you obey God. Make up your mind now, at once, to close in with the offers of salvation. Why not? Are they not most reasonable?

4. Let your mind act upon this great proposal and embrace it just as you would any other important proposition. God lays the proposition before you; you hear it explained, and you understand it; now the next and only remaining step is--to embrace it with all your heart. Just as any other great question--(we may suppose it a question of life or death) might come before a community--the case be fully stated; the conditions explained, and then the issue is made. Will you subscribe? Will you engage to meet these conditions? Do you heartily embrace the proposition? Now all this would be intelligible.

Just so now in the case of the sinner. You understand the proposition. You know the conditions of salvation. You understand the contract into which you are to enter with your God and Saviour. You covenant to give your all to God--to lay yourself upon His altar to be used up there just as He pleases to use you. And now the only remaining question is--Will you consent to this at once? Will you go for full and everlasting consecration with all your heart?

5. The jailer made no excuse. When he knew his duty, in a moment he yielded. Paul told him what to do, and he did it. Possibly he might have heard something about Paul's preaching before this night; but probably not much. But now he hears for his life. How often have I been struck with this case! There was a dark-minded heathen. He had heard, we must suppose, a great deal of slang about these apostles; but notwithstanding all, he came to them for truth;--hearing, he is convinced, and being convinced, he yields at once. Paul uttered a single sentence--he received it, embraced it, and it is done.

Now you, sinner, know and admit all this truth, and yet infinitely strange as it is, you will not, in a moment believe and embrace it with all your heart. O, will not Sodom and Gomorrah rise up against you in the judgment and condemn you! That heathen jailer--how could your[sic.] bear to see him on that dread day, and stand rebuked by his example there!

6. It is remarkable that Paul said nothing about the jailer's needing any help in order to believe and repent. He did not even mention the work of the Spirit, or allude to the jailer's need of it. But it should be noticed that Paul gave the jailer just those directions which would most effectually secure the Spirit's aid and promote his action.

7. The jailer seems to have made no delay at all, waiting for no future or better time; but as soon as the conditions are before him he yields and embraces; no sooner is the proposition made than he seizes upon it in a moment.

I was once preaching in a village in New York, and there sat before me a lawyer who had been greatly offended with the gospel. But that day I noticed he sat with fixed eye and open mouth, leaned forward as if he would seize each word as it came. I was explaining and simplifying the gospel, and when I came to state just how the gospel is offered to men, he said to me afterwards--I snatched at it--I put out my hand, suiting the action to the thought, and seized it--and it became mine.

So in my own case while in the woods praying, after I had burst away from the fear of man, and began to give scope to my feelings, this passage fell upon me--"Ye shall seek for Me and find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." For the first time in the world I found that I believed a passage in the Bible. I had supposed that I believed before, but surely never before as I now did. Now, said I to myself--"This is the word of the everlasting God. My God, I take Thee at Thy word. Thou sayest I shall find Thee when I search for Thee with all my heart, and now, Lord, I do search for Thee, I know, with all my heart." And true enough, I did find the Lord. Never in all my life was I more certain of anything than I was then that I had found the Lord.

This is the very idea of His promises--they were made to be believed--to be laid hold of as God's own words, and acted upon as if they actually meant just what they say. When God says, "Look unto Me and be ye saved," He would have us look unto Him as if he really had salvation in his hands to give, and withal a heart to give it. The true spirit of faith is well expressed by the psalmist--"When Thou saidst--'Seek ye my face,' my heart replied, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." This is the way--let your heart at once respond to the blessed words of invitation and of promise.

Ah, but you say, I am not a Christian. And you never will be till you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. If you never become a Christian, the reason will be because you do not and will not believe the gospel and embrace it with all your heart.

The promises were made to be believed, and belong to any one who will believe them. They reach forth their precious words to all, and whoever will may take them as his own. Now will you believe that the Father has given you eternal life? This is the fact declared;--will you believe it?

You have now been told what you must not do and what you must do to be saved; are you prepared to act? Do you say, I am ready to renounce my own pleasure, and henceforth seek no other pleasure than to please God? Can you forego everything else for the sake of this?

Sinner, do you want to please God, or would you choose to please yourself? Are you willing now to please God and to begin by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation? Will you be as simple-hearted as the jailer was? And act as promptly?

I demand your decision now. I dare not have you go home first, lest you get to talking about something else, and let slip these words of life and this precious opportunity to grasp an offered salvation. And whom do you suppose I am now addressing? Every impenitent sinner in this house--every one. I call heaven and earth to record that I have set the gospel before you to-day. Will you take it? Is it not reasonable for you to decide at once? Are you ready now to say before high heaven and before this congregation--"I will renounce myself and yield to God"? I am the Lord's, and let all men and angels bear me witness--I am forever more the Lord's." Sinner, the infinite God waits

for your consent!

## Substitution

Lecture V

December 6, 1848

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--2 Cor. 5:21: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

The present occasion in which a large number of youth are about to unite with our church, together with the circumstance that many are still inquiring the way of salvation, seems to render the subject presented by this passage peculiarly appropriate for this day. In treating the subject here presented, I shall,

*I. Show what is intended by Christ's being "made sin for us."*

*II. Show for whom He is made sin.*

*III. Why He was made sin for us.*

*IV. What is intended by "being made the righteousness of God in Him."*

You will see at once that the subject relates to Christ as the Author and Finisher of our faith, and of course that it presents Him in His most interesting attitudes and relations to mankind.

### **I. We are first to inquire What is meant by Christ's being made sin for us?**

It is plain that the language cannot be understood literally. It cannot mean that God made Jesus Christ actually a sinner, or made Him real sin--for the latter is physically, and the former morally impossible. But the meaning is that Christ was made to stand as the representative of sin and of sinners. The apostle uses very extraordinary language, and it would seem from it that he conceived of Christ as standing before God in a sense as the embodiment or impersonation of sin. God looked upon Him in the scenes of His atoning death, as if all the sins of our race were in Him, and He were Himself the sum total of them all. Against this sin, thus embodied, or better, represented, in Christ, God revealed His high and awful displeasure, so as to show the universe how He regards sin.



The language of the apostle here is very striking. God hath made Him sin, not "to be sin," as in our translation, but better according to the original, "made Him sin for us, who knew no sin." The obvious meaning is that Christ was treated as a sinner. This was for governmental purposes, and as a governmental transaction. He stood in the place of sinners, and God dealt with Him accordingly. He consented freely to take this position, and of course was treated as if He were Himself the embodiment of all the sins of our world.

## **II. We next inquire--For whom was Christ made sin?**

The Bible gives us the only and the true answer. "He tasted death for every man." "And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." It is clear therefore that Christ stood governmentally as the representative before God of the whole race. No further governmental provision would have been needed in order to save the whole race.

Again, it should be considered that Christ was made sin in the sense explained, for man alone, and for no other beings but man. The Bible teaches that the work of Christ as a system of salvation, is restricted to our race in its application. "There is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." Between God and men, you observe; not between God and angels. So in Hebrews 2, Paul says--"For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels--or better as in the margin--He did not take hold of angels--&c., to save them, but He did take hold of the seed of Abraham." Christ made no attempt to save lost angels, but lost men He did seize hold of, to save. You observe that the apostle says--"He took hold of the seed of Abraham. From this passage itself we might naturally infer that Christ saves only the lineal descendants of Abraham, but other passages make it certain that this restricted sense cannot be the true one. The phrase must here be used of all real Christians; for "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

## **III. Our next inquiry is--Why was Christ made sin for us?**

Why was there need of any atonement? Is God so inexorable and implacable that somebody must die to appease His wrath? Would you represent God as being infinitely cruel?

Now these questions would be asked with great force, if the atonement, rightly understood, did represent God as being implacable in the sense assumed. If it were true that God's indignation against sin must be quenched in some victim's blood before He can be pacified, and this for His own sake too, because of His vengeful nature, then would the objections I have mentioned indeed lie with great force against both the atonement and God Himself. But it should be well considered that an atonement for sin by suffering was not necessary on God's account, but on account of His moral government. It was demanded of God out of regard to the intelligent minds of His universe. He must not set aside the penalty of the law against sin without an atonement, lest a false inference should be drawn, lest it should be supposed that God is reckless of sin, and can permit its commission in His kingdom with impunity. Hence divine wisdom and divine love also must provide against so ruinous an inference. Hence this awful demonstration of God's abhorrence of sin, and of His holy purpose to punish it, which was exhibited when He caused His own beloved Son to be made sin for us, and to bear our sins in His body on the tree. We see therefore that Christ's being made sin for us was a naturally necessary condition of our acceptance with God. And this results not from any want of mercy in God Himself,

but wholly from His relations to the intelligent beings who are under His moral government. God well knew that He should certainly be misunderstood if He should pardon sin without an atonement. It is in the nature of the case impossible that He should not have been. If therefore, He would forgive sin--if He would arrest the onward march of law and justice towards their dreadful execution;--if He longed to throw wide open His great heart of mercy, He must first make some terrible demonstration of His utter hostility to sin--must show that He abhorred and would surely punish it. And this was done to perfection in the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ.

Now who can not see this necessity for an atonement? Suppose some one of these United States should rebel. Would it not be a vastly dangerous thing to offer universal amnesty with no atonement? Who does not see that it would be the imperative duty of the President and the General Government to make some terrible demonstration of justice that should make every man throughout the Union quail in dread of the penalty of rebellion? Surely everyone can see that that clemency would be by no means wise which should show a general and indiscriminate mercy towards the guilty. Before any mercy could be wisely shown, such a demonstration must be made, as would make all the people of the nation feel that rebellion cannot be tolerated. And if this be true in the government of the United States, and every child can see that it is; then how much more must it be true in the great universe of God? Who can count the worlds of intelligent minds under His sway? Who can tell how far away in the realms of space they lie scattered, or how immense are the hosts that people them? But God's moral government extends over them all, and every eye of all their hosts is on Him. What infinite folly then, for God to set aside the execution of the penalty of His law in such a manner as would virtually annihilate it altogether! To do this would be to doom the intelligent universe to ruin. Who then could trust, or love, or revere their God? Alas, they have lost the evidence that He cares for the good of His creatures. They cannot trust Him to maintain His own law; there is no longer any God in the universe to be trusted, loved, and obeyed!! How frightful a result is this!

But we need not fear it. God is too wise and too good to let it occur. When He would prevent it, and yet would pardon sinful men, He made (as was indispensable,) a strong and solemn demonstration of His heart towards sin.

And who must be selected as an atoning victim for this purpose? Shall it be some mighty angel? Oh no; for what could an angel do? How could he endure the wrath of God, standing in the place of all the sin of our race? And still more, I ask, how could any angel's sufferings make such an impression upon the universe, as would sustain God's throne in proclaiming an amnesty on such grounds? No angel, then, however great or exalted could avail, and God must pass them all by, and select His own Co-equal Son! No being less glorious and less exalted than God's Eternal Son can stand forth as the representative of sin, to receive in His own person such inflictions of divine displeasure as would avail to show the universe most impressively how God regards sin. Now it shall be known throughout all worlds, as far as God Himself is known, that it is in His heart to pardon when He can, and punish when He must.

And mark, how perfectly fitted for His work, in character and relations is our great atoning sacrifice. He is a "lamb without blemish and without spot." He "knew no sin." Hence it could not be said or thought that He suffered on His own account. It would be known at once that a just God did not hide His own face from His beloved Son, for any wrong He had done. All the more impressive therefore

must this scene have been for this reason. The great inquiry must run through all the ranks and orders of created intelligences--Wherefore does the spotless Lamb of God suffer? Why does He descend so low, and assume a nature into union with His own, which ranked so infinitely beneath His? What mean these strange things? O, what impressions must have been made throughout all heaven when it was made known that the Son of God came down from the throne of the universe to a mean manger in Bethlehem, to toil and weep in the land of His chosen people, and to die an accursed death on Calvary, that He might stand before divine justice as the embodiment of all earth's sin, and pave the way thus for all earth's sinners to be forgiven! The second person of the Trinity--Himself God, assumes in union with His own, the entire nature of the sinning race, that He may thus save them and raise them to a higher rank than that from which they had fallen. What a work is this!

#### **IV. What is intended by our "being made the righteousness of God in Him."**

This also cannot be taken in its most strictly literal sense. It cannot be conceived that we should be converted into the intrinsic, essential righteousness of God. The idea of representation obtains in both clauses of our text. As Christ stood before God to represent the sins of our race, so His pardoned children stand forth to represent the righteousness of God. He stood disowned and forsaken of God, as if He were Himself our sin; we stand forgiven and accepted through Him, as if we were God's righteousness. He is treated as a sinner; we for His sake are treated as righteous. Just think of this. What an exchange! Christ was infinitely righteous, but laid aside the relations of a righteous one, and appeared for us as a sinner and was treated accordingly. We were altogether lost in sin, yet we are transferred governmentally from that position before God, and for Christ's sake are treated as if we were righteous. What a wonderful transaction is this! It were easy to show that this were the perfection of philosophy in government to make such a substitution as will save an indefinite amount of suffering, and yet secure most perfectly, regard for the law, obedience to its precepts, and confidence in the great Lawgiver.

#### **REMARKS.**

1. We see that Christ was not literally punished instead of the sinner, while yet it is true that He suffered in the sinner's stead. It is one thing to suffer for another, and quite a different thing to be punished for him. Punishment under a righteous government implies guilt, and it is precisely the execution of the penalty of law. Of course it assumes the fact of actual and criminal transgression. It is often objected to the gospel system that it is unjust, because it punishes the innocent for the sake of screening the guilty. This is a mistaken view of the subject. What Christ suffered was not in any proper sense the punishment of sin.

2. Christ suffered for us and was made sin for us by His own consent. What! It is sometimes said--does God arbitrarily inflict suffering on the innocent and let the guilty go free? No, not arbitrarily. Jesus Christ was not forced--He consented--most cheerfully consented to bear what need be borne for the sinner's ransom. The principle is the same as when a missionary sacrifices his home, his friends, and his life to do good to the lost heathen. In both cases the sacrifice is voluntary--in both it is made for others' good. Perhaps some of these dear children who are today to unite with the church may yet go to foreign lands, and sacrifice all that man holds most dear to carry the gospel to the heathen. And then shall one rise up and complain that an innocent one suffers for the guilty--that

God compels His innocent people to suffer, that the guilty may be spared and blessed? The truth is, God compels no one to do this. But He does approve the spirit of self-sacrifice for others' good, and has given us a most glorious example of it in giving up His own beloved Son. Jesus has given us a divine example in giving up Himself for suffering and death for our lost race. God knows how to reward such self-sacrifice. We shall ultimately see that whoever shall for Christ's sake lose his own life shall save it eternally.

3. Christ's sufferings were not in kind altogether like those of sinners. Not being Himself a sinner, He could not suffer what may be called the natural penalty of sin. He could not experience that state of mind which accompanies sin, the remorse, the shame, the self-condemnation, and the indescribable anguish of self-torture. These natural penalties He could not experience, nor was it at all necessary that He should. The atonement was purely a governmental expedient, demanded only for governmental purposes, and of course should be adapted only to meet those purposes. Viewed in this light it is easy to see that the specific thing needed was to reveal the heart of the great Moral Governor of the universe towards sin, and that this must be done by inflicting in some degree the governmental penalty, that is the penalty which the government had threatened and must inflict for sin.

Now it is plain from the Bible that some of the chief elements of inflicted penalty upon lost sinners are--being driven from God's presence--a consciousness that God hides His face, and expresses His withering disapprobation--a deep conviction that God has withdrawn from them and has left them to the horrors of being abandoned of God. And precisely such, so far as we can ascertain, seems to have been the character of the most awful sufferings of Jesus Christ. When on the cross, He did not cry, O, the agony of such a death--but--"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And in the dreadful agony of the garden it is plain that physical sufferings bore no part. His chief sufferings therefore throughout were mental, and so far as we can infer from His language and His circumstances, they must have resulted from the withdrawal of His Father's face, from the awful horror of that conviction, My God has forsaken Me, and from the impression of God's dread and withering frown. For Christ now stood before God as sin, and from sin God must avert His smile, and against it He must reveal His awful frown. How the Son of God, spotless in innocence, conscious of perfect rectitude, could have this awful sense of being forsaken, perhaps we may never know, unless perchance we may in the lapse of eternal ages learn it from His own lips. The fact we have no ground to call in question. Christ Himself we may suppose, understood the reason and design of His being thus forsaken of the Father, and if so, we must interpret His expression--"My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" not as an inquiry for the reason, but as an outburst of intense agony, as if His soul could scarcely endure the anguish of that strange, and dreadful frown of the Infinite God.

It seems probable that the Father intended to treat the Son when He stood governmentally as the embodiment of sin, in such a way that sinners might infer from it what their own doom must be--without mercy. There is nothing impossible or even improbable in the idea that the sufferings of Christ were substantially of the same nature as the governmental penalty due the sinner. If we suppose a being to be perfectly holy, and hence, of course, abstract the idea of his suffering the natural penalty of sin, such as remorse, shame, self-condemnation; what we have called the governmental penalty only will remain, namely; those inflictions which fall upon the sinner directly from the Lawgiver as expressions of His intense displeasure. Precisely this seems to have been the state of the suffering Son of God, when He said--"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." "My God, My God, why

hast Thou forsaken Me?"

4. We are not to suppose that in degree and amount Christ suffered the same as all the saved would else have suffered in hell. This has sometimes been asserted, but always without proof. Such a substitution of equal sufferings is by no means necessary to the value and efficacy of the atonement; there is no good reason for assuming it, and the assumption certainly detracts from the honor conferred by the atonement upon the wisdom and the love of God.

5. It is a strong objection to the idea of equal substitution of sufferings that in such a case, the atonement is no gain at all to the universe. The sinners of our race might just as well have borne the sufferings themselves, as to have Jesus Christ bear them, of the amount is in either case the same; not to urge also that it is in itself considered a relief to the mind to have the guilty suffer what they deserve, instead of having the innocent suffer it for them, provided nothing is gained on the score of amount.

But while we hold that the sufferings of Christ are not to be considered equal in amount to the suffering saved thereby from being endured, yet let it not be supposed that the sufferings of Jesus Christ were of small amount. Doubtless we are apt to estimate their amount too low. We shall estimate it higher and in all respects more correctly when we come to hear the description from Christ Himself. Who has not often thought that in heaven we shall want to hear the story from the very lips of Him who was slain? O, what a scene, to gather round the Lamb of Calvary, and hear Him describe the agonies of Gethsemane--the awful horrors--the darkness, and the being forsaken of God, which extorted those agonizing cries on Calvary!

No doubt those sufferings were exceedingly great--great beyond the comprehension of any finite mind. We shall readily see the reason why they should be, if we consider that it was the design of God in this transaction to make a deep and solemn public impression that should pervade the universe of minds and endure forever! Sin must be rebuked--terribly rebuked--rebuked in a manner worthy of God, and so rebuked, that its awful impression should continue unabated, down, along through all the cycles of eternal ages. This must be done, or God's government will be dishonored. Hence the necessity for so terrible a demonstration of God's justice.

6. We see in what sense the saints are saved by the righteousness of Christ. Much as always been said by Old School divines about imputation. I do not mean now just what they do by this term, but there is a sense in which the righteousness of Christ may be said to be imputed to us. I have already explained what this sense is. Jesus Christ was treated as if He were a sinner, that we for His sake might be treated as if we were righteous. He deserved no sufferings--we deserved them all. They were not endured for His sake, but for ours. He stood before God to be treated as sinful; we as a result, stand before God and are treated as righteous. As He represented the sins of a lost race, so we represent the righteousness of a spotless Savior.

7. Our own personal obedience has no part in the matter of our justification, not even any obedience rendered after conversion. After conversion we are pious and to some extent holy; but this is not taken into account as a ground of our justification.

(1.) Because when once condemned, no subsequent obedience can procure our

acceptance on legal grounds. It is perfectly obvious that no obedience performed after sin and condemnation, can in any way atone for the previous sin.

(2.) Our obedience is not our own in such a sense that we can be justified by it according to law. It should be considered that our obedience after conversion is not under law--that is, not a system of mere law, but is under grace--it being all performed in consequence of Christ's gracious work within, and not wrought out under purely legal influences. We are therefore not to suppose that we do not need Christ after once being converted and pardoned. No idea can be more false and ruinous than this. For the holiness of Christians after conversion is the result of Christ's Spirit working in them and is in this sense a gracious righteousness, and hence can never come into the account as if it were a legal righteousness, so as to justify men on merely legal grounds. We owe to the grace of Christ our entire salvation, and are to be rewarded, not for our own righteousness, but on the ground that we represent the righteousness of God.

8. We see how much we are indebted to Christ for our salvation. He has been set forth as a propitiation for sin, and in Him an atonement was made. He stood in our stead where we must else have stood as condemned and quailing rebels; He suffered in His own person that awful manifestation of divine displeasure which would else have been made in our destruction in order to render it possible for God to be just to His government and good to all His subjects and yet pardon sinners. Christ has done all this for us, and now does it well become us to say--in the inmost soul--

"Had I ten thousand hearts to give,

Lord, they should all be Thine."

9. We can see how great the future glory of the saints must be. We have been looking at the great agony and grief endured by Jesus Christ. Look now in the other direction at the great glory resulting from our being made the righteousness of God in Him. In the days of His flesh God made Him sin for us, laying on Him the iniquity of us all, and in those scenes of anguish making known His own utter abhorrence of sin. It now remains for God to make known to all the universe His own high sense of the value of Christ's righteousness. It remains for Him to show how perfectly pleased He is with the atonement--how delighted He is with the perfect holiness of Jesus Christ, and how fully He appreciates Christ's benevolence in sacrificing Himself for others' good. And all this is to be shown by His treatment of the saints. You will observe that the proximate end of Christ's being made sin for us, as taught in our text, is that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. In us, therefore, that is, in the redeemed from our race, must be revealed before the eyes of the universe the glorious righteousness of God as manifested in and through His Son. O what miracles of glory will be revealed there! Mark, that the saints are not merely to be brought into heaven and suffered to live there, but they are to be used there for displaying the righteousness of God and His infinite glory in the sufferings of His Son. When God saw it necessary to show forth His abhorrence of sin, then Jesus Christ stood out before the universe as if in the place of all the sin of our race, and in this position the Infinite Father withdrew the light of His face, and gave expression to His fearful wrath against sin. Then the suffering One groaned and agonized--the earth quaked--the sun forbore to shine, and nature herself by her throes of agony seemed to sympathize with the unwonted anguish of her Lord.

Thus closed the first chapter of this wondrous development. The scene of the next is laid in heaven. There must be revealed the righteousness of God. There must be unfolded His infinite goodness and love as embodied in this scheme of substitution and atonement. It now remains to show what results of unutterable glory to God in the highest accrue from this plan of redemption. And these can not be revealed in the myriad worlds of Jehovah's universe except by means of exalting redeemed sinners most gloriously before their eyes. We need not wonder therefore that it should be said--"It doth not yet appear what we shall be." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Most truly said, for it can only be in a low and groveling sense that we can be said to conceive of those glorious things prepared by God for His people. O, if some of our departed friends should appear to us in all their present glory, we might perhaps mistake them for God Himself, and be ready to fall down and worship them. You are aware that this very mistake has sometimes been made, nor is it very strange that it should be. The Bible represents the saints as then "shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." It need not surprise us that they should appear in the palaces of heaven adorned with robes of glory such as no eye of man hath seen or heart conceived. For they are gloriously exalted not to represent their own righteousness, but the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus their Lord. The glory of God and the blessedness of the universe demand that Jesus should be honored and exalted for what He has done and suffered; but the relations of His people to Himself in this work are such that He can not be exalted and honored except in connection with their exaltation. If Christ is an heir of God, they are "joint heirs with Him." If He is to be rewarded with a glorious triumph, they must join in the triumphal procession--the rescued ones--the trophies of His victory--the purchase of His blood. Behold He says, "Here am I and the children whom God hath given Me." O, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Hence the exalted honor to which they must be raised.

10. This inheritance is received by simple faith. Whoever simply believes and with the heart embraces, shall receive and enjoy it for ever.

11. It is proffered to all, and proffered now. Whoever will believe in Christ, let him come--come now, and receive the earnest of this inheritance in the present gift of the Spirit. The Spirit is given to believers now as the earnest and pledge of that glorious inheritance.

But you say--How can it be that simple faith is the only requisite to secure this inheritance? I am but too well aware that the simplicity of the way of salvation is a great stumbling-block to the world. The mass of men who hear the gospel are stumbled on this very rock, and turn aside and go about to work out some form of self-righteousness. It is too simple a thing in their esteem to have salvation for merely believing on Jesus Christ--not to say also that it is too humiliating. They do not so well like to come into such a possession without having it to say that they have paid well for it. Hence they pass over the simplicity of the gospel, and miss of heaven. Slow indeed are most men to see that it is by simple faith that we commit the soul to God, renounce self in all its forms, and cast ourselves upon the righteousness of God alone.

12. Unbelievers reject this way of salvation, and of course the unmitigated penalty of the law must fall on them. Although Christ has died for them, yet if they will not believe, they must be damned. So the Bible declares--"he that believeth not is condemned already"--"He that believeth not shall be damned." Be it so that they have been bought with blood; yet if they deny the Lord that bought them,

they are not redeemed unto salvation, but on the contrary, bring upon themselves swift and more awful destruction. In the nature of the case this must be so. A pardon proposed to the consent of the prisoner, and by him rejected, becomes no pardon at all. The prisoner's rejection of it nullifies it utterly as to its reference to himself.

It deserves special notice that the apostle represents this mode of salvation by faith in Christ as something to be submitted to by the sinner. He says that certain men "going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Now this submission to the righteousness of God implies a full and cordial assent to God's justice in punishing, and to His grace in providing a substitute. The sinner admits most fully that he is just as hopelessly lost as God represents him to be, as hell-deserving, as guilty--as mean, as unworthy--and consents to take his place before God and man accordingly. He takes this system of salvation as God proposes it; submits himself to it; gets down in the dust; brings down his high crest, and makes no words about the hardship of taking his own place as a guilty sinner saved by grace. Sinner, can you hope to be saved in any other way than this? You can not but know that this is God's way. Your own reason affirms that it is in harmony with right and with the truth in the case.

13. You may see the impressiveness and force of the question, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!" Do impenitent sinners imagine that after all God has done in the gospel scheme--He will trifle with it and set it all aside? Do you dream that the great God will treat your objections and your refusal with marked deference, and contrive for your special benefit some more acceptable plan, or will save you in particular without any Savior or any written as with a point of a diamond--"He that believeth not shall be damned." And do you hope by your objections to disannul these awful words?

Sinner, what will you do--make up your mind and answer--what? Do you say--"Well, if Christ has suffered for all my sins--it is enough; what more can I ask? If Christ's righteousness may become mine, it is enough. Why should I forfeit it and go down to hell? The gospel is good enough for me;--farewell sin--farewell vain world; I take the Bible--I take Jesus Christ--I take all His blessed gospel to my very heart!" Will you say and do this, sinner, and do it at once--do it now, in this accepted time? Then, 'tis well.

## **Pride of Heart Deceives**

Lecture VI

December 20, 1848

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Oba. 3: "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee."



The connection in which these words are found, not being important to my present purpose, I shall pass it without remark, and proceed at once to the subject it presents. It will be my aim,

*I. To notice briefly what constitutes Pride of Heart.*

*II. To show how it deceives men.*

*III. To specify some of the forms of delusion to which it leads.*

## **I. What constitutes Pride of Heart?**

Pride of heart may be defined to be a disposition of mind to exalt ourselves. It is a spirit of self-exaltation--a disposition to get out of our own place, and get above those who of right, even in our own estimation, ought to hold a place above ourselves.

## **II. How does pride of heart deceive men?**

- 1. It renders men in a great measure blind to their own faults. The man of a proud heart will not see his own faults. He has no desire to see them. He would sooner see anything else in the world than see the bad side of his own character, and of course he takes every precaution to avoid the honest view of himself. He has no intention or even desire to find his own proper level in society, but tries to deceive both himself and others. He would fain imagine that he is vastly better than he really is, and make everybody else believe it if he can. Hence he will overlook his own faults either wholly, or at least as far as he can, and would be glad to make others do the same. This is one of the workings of a proud heart.
- 2. It leads men to excuse, or at least palliate their own faults. If a proud man can no longer cover his own faults, this will be his next resort. When he cannot deny that many things in his conduct are palpably wrong objectively considered, he will yet maintain that under his very peculiar circumstance, they are nearly or quite right. They will at least admit of much palliation; so he sets himself most diligently to this labor. He will be that last man to come down to a candid and through examination of his own faults. Ah, he does not relish this honest-hearted work.
- 3. It leads men to imagine that they have virtues which they have not. This is often manifest in their egotistical manner of speaking. In their common conversation they assume that they possess virtues which nobody ever saw them exhibit, or ever dreamed of attributing to them. Whatever in their own conduct has the remotest appearance of virtue, they are sure to drag into their service to prove themselves the best of men.
- 4. It leads men to overrate the apparent virtues which they really possess. I say apparent virtues, for while a man is proud of heart, he can have no real virtue. Semblances of virtue he may have, and these his pride of heart will lead him to exaggerate as much as possible. He will be sure to give himself more credit for even these than he deserves.

- 5. It leads to an uncandid estimation of ourselves. The proud man becomes of course partial in his views of his own merits--committed to self, and incapable of taking sober views of his own real character.
- 6. Pride of heart is always prone to make self-flattering comparisons. The proud man is never slow to institute comparisons between himself and others, but will be always sure to give himself the advantage. He is always better than his neighbors. Although he may be an impenitent sinner, he is better than most professed Christians. "The pride of his heart hath deceived him."
- 7. The proud man avoids making humiliating comparisons between himself and others. If there are those with whom he cannot compare himself favorably, he turns away from them and avoids if he can, the painful self-mortification of contemplating superior excellence; or perhaps more often he will set himself to traduce their character, and will create or at least retail and aggravate slander against them until he can flatter himself that they are below him; then and then only can he feel happy to let them alone. The sight of superior excellence is annoying, not to say agonizing; so he goes about to level it down and make himself and others believe that the reputed best man is not as good as himself. It is pride of heart that begets envy, that fills society with slander and makes it so grateful to the feelings of some men to pick at the character of their more excellent neighbors. This is the reason why so many of the best men are slandered, and why so few escape its shafts.
- 8. Pride of heart induces an entirely dishonest application of truth. If the proud man sits under preaching and if what he hears applies to himself ever so fitly, he is sure not to notice at all its application to himself, but will be very prompt and active in applying it to his neighbor. See him stretch up his neck to look over the heads of the congregation; he wants to see if Mr. B. is not there--this touch in the sermon hits him so nicely. O, thinks he, how completely that point hits such a one, and such a one--so the poor fool (for none are such fools as the proud) cheats himself out of all the truth that fits his own case, and with a strange, self-deceptive politeness, serves out all the food to others and gladly starves himself. Has not his pride of heart deceived him?
- 9. Pride leads men to evade self-knowledge. How often in conversing with men have I been struck with this! You cannot make them see their own faults. They will dodge and shuffle--change the subject if they can, and look in every other direction rather than within. In courts of justice you may sometimes see a man pushed to admit a fact that incriminates himself, and you may mark his shuffling and evasion, and his skill in denying or concealing the fact that he is badly crowded; but the same thing occurs often enough out of court when the pride of a man's heart makes him hate the light and stubbornly, though often awkwardly, shut his eyes against it. You may hold up the light close to his face--he can't see. Try to open his eyes--he doesn't see anything. You may draw his character to the life--he does not recognize the likeness--because he does not wish to! What is the reason? Pride of heart. It often seems as if a proud man would sooner go to hell than open his eyes to see candidly his own faults. So terribly does pride deceive those who love to indulge it!

### **III. I am next to sketch some of its forms of delusion.**

- 1. It makes men imagine that they believe the Bible when they do not. Nothing in my own experience has ever more surprised me than the deep and strong delusion under which I labored during my early life on this point. I honestly supposed that I believed the Bible to be God's word. For a long time it had been impossible for me to evade the arguments in its favor. Indeed so thoroughly was I convinced on this point, that the first thing I did after my conversion was to make out a skeleton of an argument to prove on legal grounds the truth of the Bible--which I deemed to be unanswerable. If anybody had told me then that I did not believe the Bible, I should have felt that they slandered me most ungenerously and shamefully. But yet mine was then only a mere historical belief, and no act of the heart at all. My will did not bow to the supremacy of Bible truth. Indeed I gave it no place at all in my heart; I did not allow it to have the influence of admitted truth upon my heart or my life. Hence my notion that I believed the Bible to be true was a mere delusion.

That this sort of merely historical faith is a delusion is manifest in various ways. (1.) Whoever really believes the Bible will be strongly exercised in view of its truths. In the nature of mind it is impossible that such truths--believed, can fail to influence the mind powerfully. It is intrinsically essential to the nature of mind to be moved by the truth. Hence there never was and never can be a mind of man or angel that will be unmoved by the belief of such truth as the Bible reveals. Yet who does not know that thousands read the Bible and profess to believe it, but are not half so much interested or affected by it as they are in reading Tom Thumb. It is a fact. Many say they believe the Bible, and yet are more interested in reading the silliest story-book ever got up to amuse mere children. Do these people really believe the Bible? Oh, "the pride of their heart hath deceived them."

This delusion is also manifest, (2.) in the fact that, professing to believe the Bible, they yet take no pains to understand what it teaches.

Suppose Br. M. comes to me saying, I have something very important indeed to communicate--something you never heard of before; do you believe it to be true, Br. F? O yes, beyond all doubt, I reply. But stop; how can I quite say this without first knowing what it is. Let me know what it is and then I can better--more rationally, tell you whether I believe it.

Suppose an angel from heaven should present you a book, sealed with seven seals, saying--This is a revelation from God to you; and you believe that it really is so; would you let it lie unopened and unread? Would you let it rest a moment till you should have understood its contents! You would search after the means to understand it--would traverse this whole nation if need be, and if all this sufficed not, you would explore all Europe and even to the ends of the earth. No labor would seem to you to be labor at all in an enterprise like this.

Yet here is the Bible, with its resistless and admitted claims of being direct from God. How many tens of thousands believe it to be the word of God, yet never take pains to read it--are never upon their knees before God pleading for light to shine upon that blessed page. O this is, as Dr. Young says, one of "guilt's blunders, and the loudest laugh of hell," that men should delude themselves about their belief of the Bible. Do you

believe that this Bible is a revelation from God to your deathless soul! And then do you treat this book as if it were a silly tale? You never need ask for stronger proof of your being grossly and fatally deluded.

- 2. Men are deluded by their pride when they think they love God, yet do not love to please Him. Who does not know that it is a law of our being that we delight to please those whom we love, and always shape our conduct accordingly? Love will have a kind of omnipotent influence upon us affecting everything we do. Love has this influence in every relation of life--between husbands and wives--parents and children. Who does not know it? Who does not know that if the husband love his wife or the wife love her husband, every word and every act will show it; every word and every act will come under the influence of a desire to please, a desire to promote the real interest of the party loved? It cannot be otherwise. It is in the very nature of love to study to please, and to seek the happiness of its object. Withdraw this element from love and what is there left?

Hence it is impossible that true love to God can exist, and yet with it no desire to please Him and do His will. The heart of love will be continually raising the question--"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" "Lord, how shall I most fully please Thee?"

What then shall we think of those thousands of nominal Christians who profess to love God, and yet do nothing to please God, and everything to please themselves? Every day and hour they are doing things and indulging states of mind which they know God must abhor, and yet they flatter themselves that they love God! What delusion!

- 3. Men think they are willing to be Christians, yet do not consider what is implied in it. They satisfy themselves with the loosest notions of this subject; else how could they fail to see that they are not Christians, and really have no intention to be? For consider, what is implied in being a Christian? Nothing less than a total renunciation of all self-seeking--a hearty confession of sin--in one's inmost soul renouncing it, once for all, and forever; and a perfect consecration of ourselves to the service and pleasure of God. Of course this implies a breaking up of all our selfish associations and habits--a real change--so that it may most truly be said--"If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new."

Now it is a fact that multitudes say they are very willing to become Christians; but they never take pains to know what this means, nor would they be willing to be such Christians as Christ was.

- 4. Men, deceived by pride of heart, think they are really Christians and truly reconciled to God, while in fact they do not obey God. Are they reconciled to God? No, for if they were, they would be reconciled to His government, and would obey His laws. What does a man mean by saying that he is reconciled to God, while he is at war with His government, and trampling every hour on His laws? What does he mean when he says he is pleased with God's government and laws? He answers that he means nothing more than that he knows those laws and that government to be intrinsically right and good. He knows this, he says, and therefore thinks himself a Christian. So does the devil know this, and the devil might just as well on this ground pretend and profess to be a Christian as any man might, who does not obey God's law with all

his heart. Yes, unless a man obeys the divine law with all his heart, he has not ground whatever to think himself a friend of God. No matter as to this point how much he knows about this law--the more he knows the greater and blacker will be his guilt, if he does not obey. No matter how much his reason and conscience approve the law as very good--all the worse for his Christian hope--all the worse for the doom of his soul from a just God--if he refuse to obey a law known and acknowledge to be holy and just and good.

Yet how many there are who claim to be Christians, but nevertheless live in sin, and plead for Christians living in sin, and would be very indignant if anyone should urge them to cease from all sin! They would perhaps think it an insult to their orthodoxy, or that at least there is some plot to ensnare them into a fatal heresy. What do I hear you say about your Christian experience? "O, I don't profess to be perfect--I sin and repent all the time." Oh, there is your mistake utterly. You don't repent. Indeed you don't repent if you sin all the time. The first part of what you say is probably true--but if so, the last part is of course false--utterly false. Consider for a moment. What is repentance? Many who say this don't know, or at least don't consider at all what it is. If they did, they certainly would not utter such an absurdity as to say that they sin and repent all the time. What is repentance? It is turning heartily and wholly away from sin. And how does this coincide with sinning all the time? What would you think of a man who claims to be all the time sober, and yet all the time drunk; or more precisely thus--all the time drinking, and yet all the time abstaining most sincerely and heartily from drinking--always drinking, and always reformed? All the time murder and love together in his heart--obeying God and yet disobeying, all the time, and simultaneously! Any man must be badly deluded who can believe this.

- 5. Unregenerate men deceive themselves in supposing that they are as good as Christians. They say--We give as much to support the gospel, we are just as kind to the poor, as ready and active in every good work, and as strong in all the reforms of the age as the best of them; why then are we not as good of Christians as they, and sometimes even better?

Laboring many years since in Rome, I found there a man living in the practice of great external morality. Nothing was more common than for impenitent sinners to make comparisons between him and professed Christians, and to maintain that he was a better Christian than most of them. How did they judge? They said--Mr. B. gives as much as any of them--attends meetings as much--is as regular in all good things, and Mr. B. is the man for us. No man sets a better example than he; he is our model and pattern. If he is not good enough to go to heaven, who is and who can be? But he makes no profession of religion; so we think we shall get along as well without religion as with it.

The revival went on, but long before it closed, Mr. B. found that he was far enough from being as good as any Christian in the place. He came to see that his heart was full of all uncleanness--that he was proud of his reputation, and utterly far away from God in every possible respect.

But let us sift this subject more thoroughly. Take the case of the moral man. He is externally a well-behaved man, perhaps in this respect, even faultless. Well, what of this?

Is it therefore certain that he is intrinsically a good man? Can you infer from his external conduct that his heart is right before God? It is indeed true in general that we are to judge men by their fruits; yet who does not know that we can not always judge correctly of the heart from the mere outside of a man? We can judge of his heart no farther than we can understand his motives and intentions.

Now in these respects, the best moralist, being unregenerate, is precisely opposite in character to the lowest Christian. See them walk to the house of God in company; take together the attitude of worshippers; alike each pays his proportion of the expenses, and each sustains all gospel institutions by his example. And yet if you could look into their hearts you would see that one does all this to be seen of men--the other to be seen of God; the one really worships at the shrine of fashion and respectability--the other at the shrine of his Maker. Can there be a wider contrast than this?

Again, suppose two men--the best impenitent moralist and the lowest Christian, meet on mutual business. The points involved are exceedingly perplexing, intricate, trying; both become very excited and both speak very unadvisedly. Both sin against God and against each other. Consequently, up to this point, you see no difference in their development of character. But now they part, and the Christian threads his solitary way towards his home. His mind is ill at ease. He thinks no longer of the great abuse he has received, but only of his own great sin. O, how this burns on his conscience and his heart! How can I live, he cries, for I have sinned against God and I have scandalized His name before the wicked. He seeks some solitude, that if possible he may find God. If you could follow him with velvet step you might hear him pouring out before God his confessions and imploring forgiveness. You might see his bitter tears--you might hear his groans of sorrow. He pours out the anguish of his heart as if it were an ocean of grief. Alas! he has sinned against God and brought disgrace on the loved and honored name of Jesus!

But in all this, you hear not a word about the abuse he has received--not one word. If however you track the other man away from this scene of common, mutual wrong, what will you see? He turns aside into the next shop--draws around himself a cluster of associates--proclaims with trumpet-tongue how he has seen a Christian falling into ill-temper, and seeks to hide his own wrong in the clamor he gets up over his erring friend. Not a word has he to say before either God or man, of his own wrong. Not a word has the Christian neighbor to say of the wrong of the moralist. The one confesses; the other has no confession to make. Can there be a broader distinction than this?

You may recollect a case, sketched in some of the Sabbath School books, of a Dr. Hopkins who was a very pious man, but who had a very wicked brother-in-law -- a man who had long cherished a malign spirit towards Dr. H., for he could not bear his piety, and therefore wanted to ensnare him into sin. A case of very difficult business occurred between them. The brother-in-law abused Dr. H. most shamefully in his own house, and ultimately got him angry. They parted, each to their homes--the wicked man to glory over the Dr.'s sin, and taunt his pious wife, saying--"There is the man you glory in as being a good Christian. He got angry with me today. I've got him down and got my foot on him,

and I'll hold him there. He will not hear the last of this for many a day."

But where is the Doctor? Gone home, but not to rest. All night he walks the room in agony--his only meat is tears--his heart is bursting with sorrow and grief. With morning light he hastens to that brother-in-law, and pours out his confessions before him--his heart smitten and broken as a bruised reed. It is said that the wicked man was first confounded, then melted. "Now," said he, "I know there is truth in religion. I never believed it before; now I see it and know it." Oh, those confessions were like arrows dipped in blood to the heart of that wicked brother-in-law, and through the blessing of God they resulted in his hopeful repentance.

Another precious fact is recorded, namely, that thirty years after this event, Dr. H. said to a friend--"I have never known the emotion of anger since that night of agony." So thoroughly did he renounce that sin--so intense were his convictions then--so earnestly and effectually did he bathe his soul in the blood of sprinkling, that the sin was slain, to live no more.

Here now were two men who quarreled and seemed alike in it; but say--were they really alike in character? Who does not see that they were as unlike as heaven and hell?

When sinners have the conceit that they are really as good as Christians, because their conduct is as fair externally, they overlook the fact that moral character belongs to the intention. They differ entirely from Christians, as appears from their opposite motives, and from the fact that one is impenitent and the other penitent. They also differ fundamentally in their dependence for salvation. The Christian trusts in Christ alone; the sinner not in Christ but in some form of self-righteousness. It always is and must be essential to the state of an unbelieving sinner, that he does not submit himself to the righteousness of Christ, but goes about to establish some form of righteousness of his own. Go, visit and compare the death-bed experience of the impenitent moralist, and of the Christian. Their lives may have been externally not greatly unlike, for both have sinned, and both have done many things externally proper and right. But try them on their death-beds. Visit the sinner. "You seem to be very sick." "Yes, I am." "Do you expect to recover?" "O, I don't know. I am very sick." "Are you willing to die?" "I can hardly say I am; yet if God thinks it best I suppose I must submit. I believe God is just; He will do me no injustice." "What do you think of your past life?" "O, I have always meant to be an honest man. I have not been as bad a man as many have supposed. I can't bear to think that God will send me to hell, for He knows that I have done about as well as I could."

You see, my hearer, that this man has been pretty good, pretty good in everything, and he looks to God's justice, not to His mercy, as his ground of hope. His own righteousness is his ultimate ground of reliance.

But let us go into another sick-chamber. Here lies a Christian, near his end. "How do you do, brother? You seem to be very low; do you expect to recover?" "No, not at all." "Well, you have been a very good man." (Mark, he turns his face away ashamed and troubled.)

"I have no goodness at all to speak of before God or man. There is no ground for me to hope in that direction. If God were to lay righteousness to the line, I could not stand a moment before Him. If however I may be made the representative of Christ's righteousness, I may be saved. All my hope is in Christ. I never look elsewhere than to Him alone. I am a great sinner and deserve the deepest hell." "What, sir, have you been a hypocrite?" "O, no sir, but before I was converted, and often since, I have greatly dishonored God, and have utterly forfeited all claim to salvation on the ground of my own merits." "Well, brother, are you afraid to die?" "No, not in the least; I see no reason to fear. I believe that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost, and I have cast my naked soul on Him alone."

Now you can not but notice the great contrast between these two men whose dying experience we have just been contemplating. The moralist passes into an atmosphere of clouds and darkness. Despite of all his delusions and of all the false quiet they can give him, his soul is full of trouble and can find no rest.

But mark the Christian--his soul is in peace. It rests not on his own righteousness--he makes no account of his good works. My hope, he says, is in Christ alone. But his countenance is placid as a summer's sunset. His heart rests on the everlasting promises. It is enough for him that God is faithful and that Jesus is near--inexpressibly near to his soul.

Another development of self-deception occurs in the case of professors of religion. They deceive themselves by comparing themselves with other professors, and assuming that it is right for themselves to do whatever they see other professors do. Now as to this, it is in the first place an utter mistake to set up any other standard of Christian duty than the life and example of Jesus Christ. This, and only this, is the Christian's model. If the spirit of religion reign in his heart, he will naturally enquire--not whether some other professor of religion does so, but whether Jesus Christ, in these circumstances, would do so. For his object is not to please this deacon, or that minister, but his own blessed Lord and Savior. Of course he can not make so great a mistake as to pattern after some deacon or some professed Christian of his own choice, and not after Christ.

In the second place, this practice of making some other professor of religion your model, is delusive and untrustworthy, because what may be admissible for him, may be utterly wrong for you. He may have so much less light than you that God may wink at his ignorance, but condemn you for sinning against actual knowledge of your duty. A few days since I said to a young man who was about leaving this place--"You will find different habits abroad from what you have been accustomed to here. You will doubtless find many Christian people using tea, coffee, tobacco and perhaps wine; and if you allow yourself to argue that you may rightly use these articles because other Christians do, you will be grievously ensnared, and may ruin your soul. They may have so little light on the subject that possibly it may not be wrong for them to use these articles; but you know better than to use them, and you can not hope that God will excuse your sin in the case on the ground that you had not light enough to create moral obligation. And surely it were of



no avail for you to flatter yourself that with all the light you have, you can be allowed to do wrong because others do the same things under circumstances which make their sin much less than yours, or even as the case may be, which remove all guilt from their conduct."

- 6. Some persons deceive themselves by mistaking the excitement and play upon their sensibilities for real religion. Some persons, for example, are so constituted physiologically, that under the stimulus of ardent spirits they become exceedingly pious, and can sing and talk religiously, so that you might be tempted to think them the greatest saints.

In my early life I boarded with a family in which the father would sometimes come home at night half drunk, and then be so good-natured, and read his Bible, and weep and pray, as full of religious feeling apparently as any man could be. I looked on and marveled; but I could not be long in solving the mystery. But suppose I had argued from this that it is good for a man to get half drunk, because it makes him so beautifully pious. Suppose I were to argue in maintaining it that I had seen its fruits with my own eyes. Fortunately the common sense of mankind has taught them that the spirit from above and the spirit from below are not at all akin to each other. Yet one might just as well plead for an alcohol religion--one which manifests itself in soft and tender developments of the sensibility--as for any other type of mere sentimentalism--as for any religion which lives only in an excited sensibility. Good music may sometimes answer the same purposes of excitement as alcohol, and may be equally deceptive. If it acts only upon the sensibility, leaving the heart untouched, its results can be in the end no more converting, and are no better proof of real piety than the similar results of ardent spirits.

Let me say further that this type of apparent piety is exceedingly deceitful, for the reason that often it seems to carry not the sensibility only, but even the will. The whole heart seems to be melted--the whole man changed and everything borne along so sweetly in the spring-tide of religious emotions. If you were to see this man of alcohol in some of his pious moods, you would be astonished at such developments. If you only keep a little distance from him so as not to smell his breath, you would think him very spiritual--as indeed, (in a peculiar sense,) he is.

Now let it be remembered, this man's religion is just as good before God as any other type of pseudo-religious excitement which only plays upon the sensibilities, but touches not the heart.

- 7. Over against this is another form of delusion in which men have no other religious impulses except the hard driving and goading of their conscience. No love, no faith, no sweet drawing towards God, no cordial trust in a divine Father and a sympathizing Savior; nothing but compunction, goading, coercion, under the lash of conscience. They live in a strait jacket--grind like the blind Sampson in the mill, and wear out life in agony. A minister once said to me--"I think I must have mistaken my calling. It seems as if I had preached all I ever had to preach, and emptied it all out. You can not think how much hard labor it costs me to work out my two sermons a week. I don't see as I have any heart for the work, and you may judge that I don't have a very pleasant life of it."

For myself I thought so indeed. If a man has no more gospel in him than this, and finds it such enormous labor to grind out enough for a sermon in four or five days' labor, he has probably mistaken his calling. Above all, if he has no heart for the work, or in it either, he might better try some other business.

Emphatically and characteristically is it true of these self-deceived men, that religion is not their theme. This is not the subject upon which they love to converse. They can talk freely and abundantly on other subjects, but on this one subject of religion their hearts are not interested, and of course their words cannot flow out from the fullness of their hearts. If they should get to heaven, unchanged, how could they live there unless they might have up there their favorite topics? How could they endure to stay where "Holiness to the Lord," is blazing in light and fire all around?

But they expect to go to heaven? Let us see. Suppose they get in. What do they say? Hear them talk: What's the price of wheat? Now for great bargains. What news from the polls? How goes the election? But these men would think you had lost all your Christian charity, if you should intimate that they are not on the way to heaven.

Now let it be known forever, all real Christians have the spirit of religion in their hearts--their souls are full of it. Worldly men are full of the world, and no wonder that it boils over and flows out incessantly. Christ says--"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks;" and who does not know that this is profoundly philosophical? Of course this principle will be developed in the Christian. The Spirit of Christ has taken possession of his soul, and now, how can it help gushing out in rich overflowings of love, meekness, faith and humility? Mark me now--as God is true--if this is not your character--if love does not reign in your heart, and fill your soul, so that religion must be your theme--nearer and dearer to your heart than all things else--if this be not the case with you, you are a hypocrite, and when your death-knell tolls, you are damned! Mark what I say!

- 8. Many think themselves Christians, although conscious that they have no peace of mind. What but a desperately wicked and deceitful heart can cherish such a hope? For what is religion? "Not meat and drink" surely; "but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." What says the Bible? That "Wisdom's ways are pleasantness and all her paths peace." "Come unto Me all ye that labor, and ye shall find rest for your souls." "His commandments are not grievous."

Now look around you and mark those professed Christians whose religion involves no peace of mind. You see them all afloat--drifted and driven by all those impulses which agitate other minds. Where is their religion? Do they know anything about peace with God and joy in the Holy Ghost? Do they withdraw from the agitations of worldliness and selfishness, and find repose as on the bosom of their Savior? Have they such faith that they can glory in tribulation, and does their tribulation work for them experience, and experience hope; and is their hope one that does not make ashamed? Is this their experience? If so, then 'tis well; but how can men who go on year after year without peace of mind and without trust in God, flatter themselves that they are real Christians?

- 9. Many think they are accepted of God although aware that they are indulging in sin. This delusion is more common than any other I have mentioned, and becomes so for the reason that even the church have lost sight of the fact that Christians can and do live without sin. Strange to tell, multitudes of professed Christians--with ample access to the Bible--do hold that all men are to be expected to live in sin, notwithstanding all the gospel can do in this world to deliver them from its power.

Under this view, it is no wonder such results should follow. They expect, they say, to be saved through the imputed righteousness of Christ, and they hold that this will avail for them without any righteousness of their own. But let us reason a moment about this. I admit most fully that men are to be justified by Christ alone, and on the condition of personal faith in Him; but mark, not without personal holiness. Here lies the fundamental error of those who think to get to heaven without being free from sin; they assume that saving faith in Christ does not involve personal holiness. No mistake can be greater than this! The Bible says, "faith works by love." It declares "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Of course there can be no such faith as this while the soul is in the bondage of sin.

A certain Doctor of Divinity not long since, in opposing the doctrine of sanctification, insisted that holiness is in no sense and in no degree a condition of salvation, and that the condition is nothing but faith. Faith, he holds, can exist, pure and acceptable to God, ensuring the salvation of the believer, and all without holiness. Monstrous absurdity! What! teach that a man can have saving faith without being turned from sin, without forsaking all or even any of his iniquities! Horrible! HORRIBLE! There never was a worse error taught by men or devils! I would as soon rebuke a man for this as for downright atheism. There is not a truth in the moral universe more palpable and certain than that saving faith must imply holiness. The faith that justifies must also sanctify. If not, it were easy to show that God has made a grievous and fatal mistake in the conditions of salvation! What! has God contrived a system for justifying sinners IN THEIR SINS?

- 10. Multitudes suppose themselves converted who have never been even convicted. I have often fallen in with a certain man who has been instrumental in convicting many sinners, and probably of converting some, but who could give no account whatever of the spirituality of God's law and of what sin is. Not less than a dozen times in a single week has he asked me what benevolence is. He could not retain the idea of what constituted true religion. "What is it," he would say, "How did you define disinterested benevolence?"

Now it is no wonder that he could not develop the true idea of sin and impress it on the minds of others. He did not seem to have himself the very first idea of what sin is. It is therefore natural that under his instructions many should suppose themselves converted who were not even convicted. They had not felt deep and pungent conviction for sin, and therefore it was not naturally possible that they should repent and put it away. Nothing can be more philosophical than this--that men must know the truth, and the truth must make them free.

- 11. Many fall into the error of mistaking conviction for conversion. The great distress of conviction passes away; the ease and peace that follow give birth to the hope that they are converted. There is indeed a change, and they flatter themselves it is from sin to grace. They have been alarmed and the alarm has subsided, but they have not received Christ at all.

Now I want you to apprehend this. Many get a hope, but do not get Christ. They get a different state of mind, but not a Christian state. They have no other faith than they had before. They are not conscious of having cast off their own righteousness and put on Christ's. They have not renounced sin and self and gone over to the new covenant.

How is it with you? Do you know how you came by your hope? And what it is to go over from the law as a ground of salvation, to the gospel--to abandon the old way of self-righteousness, and trust in the righteousness of Christ alone? Have you begun really to drink of Christ's fullness--to know the depths of that fountain of living waters--to have it in your very soul, a well of living water, springing up to everlasting life, bubbling up and pouring forth as if really an exhaustless fountain were in your very soul? You know we read of such things in the Bible. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." "And this Christ said of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive."

Have you received it? If not, then there must be a mistake about your having believed with saving faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Rely upon it, if a man has this faith in Christ, the living waters from his full soul will flow out, and there will be a green spot around him, however barren the region round about may be. Religion will be his theme. He can not live without manifesting forth that Christ who lives and reigns within him.

How is it with you in this respect? Do your spirit and life bear witness that you have this faith in Jesus Christ, and this indwelling Spirit of Christ in your soul?

- 12. Many confound resolutions to do what they think right, with real religion. Now it should be considered that mere resolutions are purely legal, and differ fundamentally from the religion of love. Suppose, for illustration, that the wife should say, "I must do just right towards my husband--precisely right in everything;"--and she screws herself up by dint of resolutions to do every thing that is right--and this is all. Would you suppose this to be love--the whole of the love which befits the relation of a wife to her husband?

I saw a lady in Boston who manifested the greatest anxiety lest some word or thought should be wrong. Indeed she seemed to be in agony lest she should infringe upon some principles of duty towards God or man. I noticed her great legality. I said to her, "Sister, I see you seem to be in great distress lest you should not please your Savior--you seem to be in agony about it all the time; now tell me--Have you the same sort of distress and agony lest you should not please your husband?" "O no," said she. "Why not?" "Because," said she, "It is natural for me to please my husband, and I know that I do. I love to please him and it does not seem to cost me any effort." "Why then," said I, "should it not be so towards Christ? Why not make His service a sweet labor of love? Why act as if nothing but the pricks of conscience can keep you in the path of obedience?"

Why not yield up your soul to all the impulses of pure love, and let it reign, strong, sweet, attractive, all-controlling? This would make your religious duties a paradise."

- 13. Many have made up their minds to serve God, as they suppose, and this is the form of their religion and the whole of it. Now it is plain that if they have not formed the right conception of what this service is, it may be the case and probably is, that they have no religion at all.

Let us illustrate this in reference to one vital point. Suppose a wife should make up her mind to serve her husband. By this she understands that she shall do all the things externally which he requires. She is going to be his real servant and evermore do all his bidding. But unfortunately in her estimate of duties, the element of love has entirely dropped out, and she takes no notice of this whatever. She means to be faithful in all her domestic duties--she will keep his house and his clothes in first rate order and will leave no external duty neglected--but all may be as heartless as if it were done by a steam engine. Now although such duty, so performed, might be enduring in an employed domestic, yet who could endure it in a wife? What husband would not say--"You are the chosen companion of my life--the chosen object of my love, and when I vowed my conjugal affections to you, I flattered myself the vow was really reciprocated. I do not want your tasks--I want your heart."

And is it strange that God also should ask for the heart? Has He not given us His, in such forms as most impressively demand the reciprocal devotion of ours?

But let us see what this man proposes to do who has made up his mind to serve God. First, he is going to pray--pray to be forgiven. Wonderful service this, if rendered as come profitable work for the Lord--with no brokenness, or affection of heart in it! Just as if I should go to a man fifty times a day or twice a day and ask him to cancel my debt to him; and should enter my charge in account for each prayer, paying off my debt--in praying!

What else? Well, he will go to church. O, what service is this, of mocking insult to God, if no heart is in it! In truth no matter what the outside service may be, it is an odious abomination to God, unless the deep outgoings of the heart are with it. You might circumnavigate the globe with your zeal, or give your flesh to a martyr's flame, yet all would be less in Gods' esteem, no heart being in it--than the little tear of penitence and affection which quivers in the dying eye of a saint who can not raise his finger in any act of outward service for God. Aye, it is the love lying deep in the heart, which catches the eye of the great God. And for you to talk about serving Him without love is supreme nonsense.

- 14. Many deceive themselves by supposing that selfish regrets and sorrow are real repentance. That sorrow and regret are always selfish, which leave sin still in existence--which can be felt and sin still be indulged. Nothing can be plainer than this. You would all judge thus in the case of your child who should regret and sorrow bitterly about his crime and its consequences, if he still kept up the practice of the crime. You could not have any confidence in his tears, if you knew they only covered the purpose to steal or lie as soon as your back is turned. You would know what account to make of such tears.

Let those professors who can weep and pray about their sin, yet never give it up, but hold on in sinning, look into this mirror and behold their own hearts.

- 15. Many deceive themselves by a faith which abolishes instead of establishing the law. Obviously such faith never can answer under the government of a righteous God.
- 16. Many suppose that God justifies and accepts them while they really condemn themselves. They seem to think that God approves of them and of their moral state while deep in their minds there is self-condemnation. Now the Bible says that if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things, and of course condemns us. No delusion can be greater than this. Strange notions must he have of the purity of God and the strictness of His law, if he supposes that his own conscience is more strict than God is. He sees that he himself must condemn such a state as his own; but he flatters himself that God is not so particular about little sins as his own conscience is! O, what a delusion!

### **REMARKS.**

1. These delusions are all voluntary. Men need not be deceived by their pride of heart, and would not be if they were not quite willing to have it so.
2. God will by and by tear the mask away and reveal our real character to all the universe. He is now employing various means in His providence and through His grace to undeceive men; but if all these means fail, ere long He will send His hail to sweep away all refuges of lies forever. Then and thenceforward, "he that is filthy shall be filthy still," forever hopeless of moral cleansing.
3. All these delusions are based upon dishonesty of mind. Where there is real honesty, carried out in faithful performance of known duty, and humble trust in divine guidance, there is no danger of being deluded.
4. We see the great folly of those who imagine that if they are only sincere, they shall be saved. What do they mean by sincerity? This; namely, that they really believe what they profess. But may not men really believe a lie? Is it not said of some that because they "do not love the truth, God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness?" The fatal mistake made by those who think that all sincere men will be saved, is this: they overlook the fact that men may be sincerely wicked, and, becoming sincerely wicked, they may bring themselves to believe a lie sincerely, and God may judicially leave them to the natural influence of a wicked heart upon the mind's apprehension of truth.
5. Many cry "peace, peace, when there is no peace." I often wonder how it happens that when they go alone and fall down before God to pray, it does not strike them at once that they are shut out, and have no communion with God at all. Why do they not see that they have made a fatal mistake in supposing that they have any spiritual access to God, and real communion of soul with Him?
6. Many love to have their hurt healed slightly. They cannot bear to have their wound thoroughly probed. Hence instead of throwing their naked bosom open to the probe of truth, and crying--God of mercy, let this search me, and let it go to the bottom of all the hidden evils of my heart--they wrap

themselves all about with mufflers of self-righteousness, and then they will sit and writhe and dodge through fear that some word of truth will make unwelcome revelations of self to their own view. O, what will they say when God shall come down in the cool of the day, and talk with them face to face about this!

7. Some seem determined never to know themselves. They will evade self-knowledge, press it upon their attention as you may. You may try to seize them to hold the mirror before their eyes; they will shut their eyes or turn their heads round--you cannot make them look into any moral self-revealer. I have known cases in which a man's friends have tried to seize him, and hold him still long enough to get the truth before his eyes, but they might as well have tried to grasp the North wind.

8. Pride of heart is one of the most disgusting as well as most dangerous of all forms of sin. A proud man is perpetually exposed to deceive himself in everything. There he stands on top of a precipice; sheets of lightning blaze around his head, and dark waves of damnation roll beneath his feet. What is he doing there? Ah, me! dancing! dancing giddily as if he never had the first idea of danger in his mind.

"I heard the wretch profanely boast,

Till at Thy frown he fell;

His honors in a dream were lost,

And he awoke in hell."

O, let us put all these delusions away. Go to your closet. Search your inmost heart; tear away every delusion--cry out, O, my God, bring in a light! Let me see myself! O for a light--A LIGHT; let me know my own heart to the bottom. O, search and find out where you are, before an arrow smite you!

Hark? has it struck him? Is he dead? Yes, dead; and from my knowledge of him, I fear he has gone down to hell! Religion never was his theme. He did not love God's most searching truth. He never loved to examine his own heart. I think without a doubt, he is afar down in the depths of hell.

## 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 1848 Collection.**