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# "The Oberlin Evangelist"

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Sermons and Lectures given in 1851

by

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## **GLOSSARY**

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

## **The Loss When a Soul is Lost**

Lecture I

July 2, 1851

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Mark 8:36, 37: "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Ours is an inquisitive world, and the present especially is an inquisitive age. Particularly is this inquisitiveness developed in perpetual inquiries upon matters of loss and gain. Almost universally this class of questions agitates the public mind often tasking its powers to the utmost. Almost the whole race seem all on fire to know how they can avoid loss and secure gain. Assuredly therefore, this being the great question which men interest themselves to ask, it cannot be out of place for God to propose such a question as the text presents, nor for His servants to take it from His lips and press it upon the attention and the consciences of His hearers.

And let me here say it must be specially proper to propose it to the young men who are seeking good, and studying questions of profit and gain. Your souls thirst for happiness. How much, then, does it become you to ask whether these questions from the lips of your Redeemer may not give you a priceless clue to the secret of all real and permanent good.

The question concisely expressed, is -- What is a fair equivalent for the soul? For what consideration could a man afford to lose his soul?

To bring the subject fully before your minds, let me

*I. Direct your attention to the worth of the soul;*

*II. To the danger of losing it;*

*III. To the conditions of saving it.*

Admitted truths:

1. Whenever ministers enter the pulpit to preach, they always take many things for granted. All do this more or less; all must do it if they would preach with any effectiveness to the heart; and it is right that they should. This is true not of the gospel minister only, but of every teacher. Every teacher assumes that his pupils exist; and that they know this truth; also that he exists himself.
2. Many other truths are assumed by the preacher. We must always begin somewhere. Generally we begin as the Bible does. The Bible assumes the truths of natural theology, and proceeds in its teachings as if all men knew at least these truths.
3. This congregation professes to be Christian, and I may therefore assume that at least nominally it is so. I shall not therefore address you as a heathen people, or as atheists, or even Universalists.
4. There are certain great truths admitted by almost all Christians; for example, that the soul is immortal. This is admitted so generally, I shall assume that you all admit it. You admit it to be true of both the righteous and the wicked. You admit that the bible teaches this, and I shall not therefore attempt to prove it.
5. It must also be admitted that from the very nature of mind, its capacities both of intellect and sensibility, will be always increasing. This increase is obviously a law of mind in this world, although

from the connection of mind with matter, old age and disease seem to form an exception. This is indeed an exception to the common law, yet one which plainly results from the influence of physical frailty, and can therefore have no existence in a state where no physical frailty is experienced. It must be admitted that the exception does not result from any law of mind, but purely from a present law of matter.

6. The common law of mental progress is exceedingly apparent. Put your eye on the new-born infant. It knows nothing. It begins with the slightest perception, it may be of some visible object, or of the taste of its food. From a starting point almost imperceptible it goes on, making its hourly accessions of knowledge and consequent expansion of powers, till, like a Newton, it can fathom the sublime problems of the great law of the physical universe.

7. It is generally admitted that the capacities of men in the future state for either happiness or misery will be full -- absolutely full. That coming state must be in respect to enjoyment, not mixed like the present, but simple; -- unalloyed bliss, or unalleviated woe. Hence the soul must actually enjoy or suffer to the utmost limit of its capacity. You all admit this; or if not all, the exceptions are few and I am not aware of any among you.

8. Let us not forget to connect with this idea of progression the idea of eternity. It is not only progress, but eternal progress. This is involved in the immortality of the soul. No doctrine is more plainly taught and more universally implied in the Bible; none is more amply confirmed by testimony drawn from the nature of the soul itself. It stands among the truths admitted by almost everyone who bears even nominally the Christian name.

Now what follow from these admitted truths?

### **I. The worth of the soul.**

- 1. If men are always to progress in knowledge and capacity, then a period will arrive in which the least intelligence will be able to say -- I know more now than all the created universe knew when I was born. This must be true. Its truth follows by necessity from the truths we have admitted.

But even this is not all. For when he has reached this point of acquisition in knowledge, he has only begun. Eternity is yet before him. The time will come when he will know ten thousand times as much as all the universe did when he was born; nay not merely ten thousand times as much, but myriads of myriads of times as much. The time will arrive in the lapse of eternal ages when, if all the present created universe were tasked to the utmost to conceive or estimate how much this one intelligence can know, they would fall entirely short of reaching the mighty conception. And even this is only a mere beginning, for this vast intelligence is not a whit nearer the terminus of his progression than when he was one day old. To be sure all the universe have kept pace with him. They have all moved along together, under a law of progress common to them all. Each one can say the same and as much as he. The attainments of each and of all will forever fall short of infinite, although they are always indefinitely increasing.

- 2. Look at the happiness of the righteous. Always increasing; evermore swelling its deep and gushing tides, with no limit to their growth and no end to their progression. Who does not know that this must be so? Look at the little infant. It seems to have but the least possible capacity, and this is developed at first only in its physical powers. All the earliest germs of sensation and emotion pertain to the body alone. The little one is hungry and cries; then is nursed and is quiet; it opens its little eye and beholds the light and is pleased; by and by it comes to know its mother's presence and to love that beaming look of fondness and those soothing tones of love. Here opens to that infant mind a new source of happiness; progress -- progress is the established law of our mental and sentient being. By and by that child late an infant, is a pupil in school and then a youth in college. On and still onward is his progress in knowledge.
- 3. Nor let us lose sight of the fact that the same law of progress obtains also in the department of the sensibility. A uniform relation is then maintained between man's intellectual and sentient faculties. Knowledge increasing gives scope for increased joys or sorrows. Thus the mind progresses through all the stages of its earthly existence, new knowledge continually opening new sources of enjoyment or suffering. Mark how much that man or woman is capable of enjoying, compared with the capacity of his or her period of infancy. Now he may be bowed down under an overwhelming weight of sorrow, or he may be lifted up in ecstasies of joy unspeakable and full of glory. And this progress, we should remark, is often made despite of very unfavorable circumstances. The law of progress acts with a positive energy that no ordinary circumstances can resist.
- 4. But let us now look into the next world -- the next state of our existence. Knowledge sustains still the same relation to the sensibility; what you know there serves no less than it did here to augment your bliss or aggravate your woe. All the powers of your being sustain the same mutual relation as ever. Just think then how vast the joys and sorrows of that coming state! Mark how they tower high above all that is experienced in this brief state! This is no poetry. It is more than poetry -- infinitely more!! It is too obviously and certainly true to admit of the least question. Its truth results from admissions you make and doctrines you hold as a Christian congregation -- admissions and doctrines common to all who are not atheists -- common to all who observe the laws of our present existence and who admit that these laws will follow our existence into our future state of being.
  - (1). Following out these admitted truths to their necessary results, we see that the time must come in the lapse of eternal ages when each saint can say -- I now enjoy more in a given time than all the saints in the universe did when I first entered heaven. For as with knowledge, so with happiness. It must of course come under the same law of progress. Its measure must sustain its established correlation to the amount of our knowledge, so that as the one stretches onward and still onward with no limit to its progress, so also does the other. As therefore the time will come when no created mind can estimate the knowledge attained by the now feeblest intelligence, so will it also come when no capacity can estimate the measure of its happiness. The Bible says, God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we are able to ask or even to think. This will have its striking fulfillment in the future heights of bliss and glory to which He will raise His redeemed people. O, who can measure these heights of bliss and glory! Yet when you have fixed your eye upon their towering loftiness at any period along the track of endless ages, you

have it to say then and there -- This man's happiness is only begun. He has only just entered upon his everlasting progress in knowledge and in bliss. And still so vast are his capacities at this remote period of his existence that if we could look into their amazing length and breadth and depth, and measure their magnitude, we should sink like dead men at the sight. See him drawing draughts of joy from God's own eternal fountains! Will he ever cease to quaff those draughts of joy? Never. Can they ever grow less? Nay; they must of necessity be forever increasing.

- o (2). Now see also the progress of the wicked. They too are moving onward. The law of progress cannot be arrested by any amount of sinning. Onward still their minds are progressing; more and more capacious for knowledge and of course for sin and suffering. And O! What then! What follows from these established laws of the human mind and of human existence? Let your reflections trace out the fearful results which accrue from these laws of eternal progression. When we get into the midst of these things, the mind becomes exhausted and overpowered; it sinks down and cries out with crushing emotion -- O what an eternity is this for the sinner, lost forever!! O look upon that sinner after he has passed along through millions of ages of his unceasing progress in knowledge and in growing capacities for sin and suffering. Hear him. He says, hell knew but little of sin and suffering when I came here, compared with what I suffer now! They all then sinned and suffered but little, even taken in the vast aggregate, compared with what I sin and suffer in my own single being now! Alas, I seem to have all hell in my own bosom! I sin and suffer enough with my vastly augmented powers to make an awful hell even if these agonies were equally distributed among myriads of my fellow beings. How awful!! Sin, misery and ruin enough to make one awful hell, locked up in the agonized bosom of a single sinner!

If this were only poetry I should be glad, but all is true, and so much more is true that no language can express it; no modes of computation and no forms of estimate can reach its appalling magnitude. So much is true that to see the thousandth part of it must set your soul all a fire!

- o (3). Take any sinner here -- any young man or woman from this congregation. Follow him onward from this hour through a life of sinning, a death of darkness and horror, and then onward still as he falls in the agonies of the second death and moves onward age after age in the unceasing progress of a human mind expanding its intelligence, learning more and more of the God the sinner hates, and only hating Him forever the more, and only making himself the more immeasurably wretched by sinning with bitterer hate, and suffering with still enlarged capacities as the eternal years roll on! O young man! you will one day be able to say -- All that hell knew of suffering before I came here is nothing compared with what I now suffer! All is nothing to the aggregate of my sins and of my sufferings. And all I now endure is only a beginning. My miseries have only begun. This soul of mine has only begun to know how to suffer the real sufferings of the damned. Its keen sensitiveness to agony has only begun to develop itself. Yet at some period in the flow of those endless years of progression in sorrow, each one will say -- If all the universe at the moment of my death, had taxed their minds to the utmost to conceive the guilt and miseries that wring my heart, they could not even have begun to reach the

appalling estimate!

Would to God this were only poetry! Alas, that it should be among the best established truths in the universe of realities! Young man, there is no axiom in mathematics more true than this. No problem you ever solved in algebra brought out its result with more certainty; no proposition of Euclid ever carried you more unerringly to its conclusion than our reasoning upon these known and changeless laws of mind in their progression onward through the endless cycles of eternity. Go onward and still onward; you must yet say -- after ever so many periods of largest conception, I have only just begun. I am only entering the vestibule of this world of woe -- only counting off the first moments as it were of the eternal cycles of my existence!

To pursue this train of thought in its details seems utterly impossible! How the mind sinks beneath the overpowering view! O, the worth of the soul, progressing forever under a law as fixed as and as enduring as Jehovah's throne! The worth of a soul that must make progress in knowledge, and consequently in its capacities for bliss and for holiness, or for sin and for woe -- who can estimate it to the last fraction! Tell me, ye young men of mathematical genius -- ye professors in this science of certainties -- ye who think you have some knowledge of fixed truths and some skill in educating them from first principles; tell me, are these things poetry? You know they are eternal truth; you know they are verities that which none in the universe can be more sure. "What, then, shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

## **II. But what must be said of the danger of losing the soul?**

- 1. This danger is exceedingly great, because men have only to neglect the soul and it is surely lost. It does not require attention and labor. You can lose your soul without the least possible effort made specially for this purpose. You need not go about to commit sin in order to ensure the ruin of your soul hopelessly and forever. You need only neglect its salvation and it is surely lost. You need only be as negligent as you have been heretofore. It is only necessary that you slide along in the same thoughtless, reckless manner as in your past days and the end will be "sudden destruction and that without remedy." As says the apostle; "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" There is none other name under heaven given among man whereby ye can be saved. And there is no salvation through this name but by a living faith which works by love and makes the heart pure from sin.
- 2. Men will lose their souls if they mistake the conditions of salvation. For these conditions require intelligent effort, and to misunderstand them makes it certain that your efforts will not be made intelligently, even if any sort of effort is made at all. There is therefore, most imminent danger in this quarter.
- Again, there is the more danger because men are so little inclined to inform themselves respecting those truths which relate to the conditions of salvation. It is a most astounding fact

that in matters so deeply interesting to everyone who is to be saved or lost, no man should incline to search after the requisite knowledge of the way to be saved.

- 3. There is also the more danger because men are surrounded with temptations to neglect the soul's salvation. It is the policy of Satan to surround men with as many temptations as possible to neglect this great subject. He gives them everything else to do; sets their wits at work to kill time and devise amusing and diverting occupations, and stave off all serious thought into some unknown future. Nothing delights or employs him more than to draw the sinner in and hold him fast in the snare of his infernal devises.

Again, there is the more ground to fear because you are in so much danger of practicing deception upon yourself, especially this deception -- that you can better attend to the saving of your soul at some other time. This is Satan's master-piece of deception. It has fixed the doom of damnation upon myriads of souls.

- 4. If I had time to enter upon these various dangers and expand them at length in view of the awfulness of losing the soul, how startling would be the fearful facts of the case! If all these countless dangers were seen in their real magnitude, and especially if they were seen in their bearings upon the loss of a soul, methinks it would rouse all mankind into excitement almost to madness in securing the salvation of their souls. How could they refrain from crying out in the very streets and within the very walls of their bedchambers -- What shall I do to be saved from such a hell? The danger is real although due sensibility to it is so rare. We have it from the lips of one that knew -- "Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be that go in thereat." And no fact is more open to observation than this. Everybody sees it; all may know it.

### **III. What are the conditions of saving the soul?**

Here let it well be considered that the conditions are none of them arbitrary. All are naturally necessary. Each one is revealed as a condition because in the nature of the case it is and must be. God requires it as a condition because He cannot save the soul without it. For example, you must be sanctified and become holy in heart and life. Why? Not because God sees fit arbitrarily to impose such a condition, but because it is impossible you should be happy without it; because it is impossible you should enjoy heaven without holiness.

So also you must be sanctified by faith in Christ, and saved in all respects by this faith, for the simple reason that no other agency can sanctify and save. There is none other name given among men whereby ye can be saved. No other Redeemer exists to be believed in; no other power but that of faith in such a Redeemer ever yet reached the heart to subdue it to submission, penitence, and love.

### **REMARKS.**

1. There is nothing more wonderful and strange than the tendency of the human mind to neglect reflection and serious thought upon the value of the soul. The entire orthodox world admit the truths upon which we started, and admit substantially those other truths which are necessarily connected with them. Now it is most astounding that these truths should be dropped out of mind -- their bearings forgotten, and all their relations be overlooked as if they had no value, as if they were indeed only

fictions and not facts. They are forgotten by parents, so that few indeed think of the bearings of these truths upon their children's well-being for eternity; they are forgotten by husbands and by wives, so that in these relations of life little is said, little felt, little done, for each other's salvation. In fact these great truths have come to be less regarded than almost anyone of the ten thousand things of this world. The least of these worldly matters is practically treated as of more value than the soul. Must there not be a strange delirium upon the human mind?

2. Nothing is so important to the Christian Church and to the world as that the Church should direct her attention to those great things till they arouse her whole soul -- till they awaken from spiritual lethargy every member of Christ's nominal church on earth. The primitive Christians of apostolic times pondered these truths until their hearts were on fire and they could not wish to do less than to lay themselves out for the salvation of the world. The same engrossing and soul-stirring attention to these great truths is needed to awaken the churches of the present day.

3. As these great truths of the soul are neglected, worldly things magnify themselves in apparent importance. If men do not dwell upon eternity, time comes to be their only reality. If they do not dwell upon the great spiritual truths that relate to the eternal world, to heaven and to hell, if they do not pour their minds out upon these truths, the trifles of time will assume the chief importance. Men will become worldly-minded. Their minds become contracted in the scope of their views to the narrow circle of their earthly relations, and they come to live as if there were no God, no heaven, no hell.

4. You may see the nature of worldly-mindedness. It is real insanity. Suppose a man to act as if he had no relations to this world. Suppose he should act as if he had no more to do with it than most men seem to have with the other world beyond this. Let him act as if he had no bodily wants -- no occasion for food or for clothing. Of course he would be regarded as a mad man; his friends, or if not they, the civil authorities would hasten to put him in a mad-house. They would sue out a commission of lunacy against him to save his property, if he had any, for the benefit of himself and his family. For precisely this is real insanity -- overlooking real facts and acting as if they did not exist.

But what shall we say of those who treat these truths of eternity as if they were not truths? Is not this also real insanity? The man knows the great facts respecting the future world. He has a book well authenticated, containing all the facts, fully revealed; he holds all the important facts with the utmost tenacity and would deem himself slandered as a heretic if you were to intimate a doubt of the soundness of his faith; in fact his orthodoxy is his pride and his glory; but yet he lives as if he did not believe a word of it! Surely this man is practically insane. You cannot but regard such a case with horror. O, you say, if he had never known these things, he would not have incurred the guilt of this dreadful insanity; but alas! he does know them all. He has them all written down; all are embraced in the standards of his faith, and he would not be supposed to doubt one word of those standards for the value of his best reputation. Then is he not insane? Alas, the world is a complete bedlam! See their manuals of doctrines; read carefully their standards and see what they believe; then see how they live -- as if there were no heaven and no hell; no atonement, no Savior; nothing but this world and its good things! And are they not madmen? Does the Bible slander them at all when it declares -- "Madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead"?

5. How must the people of other worlds look upon the men of this! Particularly, I ask, how must they

regard those who live in those portions of our world where light blazes and every eye must see it? How are they astonished in heaven to see such exhibitions of depravity on earth! How must they look on with unutterable amazement as they mark the clear and blazing light which God pours upon the realities of the eternal world, and then observe how little this light is regarded even by those who see it most and best!

6. How many are struggling to secure anything and everything else but the salvation of the soul! And yet they know that everything else gained is worse than loss if the soul is lost. What egregious folly! And what is more, think of the appalling guilt? And of the coming account to be rendered for both the guilt and the folly! God will call you all to account -- you for the property you sought to the neglect of your soul, and chose at the cost of ruining your soul; and you for the education which you valued more than the salvation of your soul. What, young man, do you propose to do with that education which you have put before your soul and sought to the neglect and ruin of your eternal being? You may enter the eternal world an educated young man -- with all your powers developed and matured so that you can take your position in that world of woe in an advanced class -- as some young men come here prepared to enter in advance as far perhaps as the junior year; so you by virtue of your education, may enter among the more advanced minds in hell, ripe for drinking deeper draughts of remorse, your intellect enlarged for broader views of your relations, and sharpened for keener impressions of your guilt! O what must it be to take your starting point in that world of agonizing thought, in advance of your age and your time, ready to start off with more rapid strides in the dread career of progression in the knowledge -- in the sinning -- and in the consequent woes of the damned! Take such a mind as Byron's. How much more is he capable of suffering in one hour on his death-bed than a mind of only ordinary capacity! Sit down by his death-bed; mark his rolling eye -- his look of agony -- the reach and grasp of his capacious soul! See how keenly he feels every sensation of remorse -- how large his scope of view as he thinks of his relations to the God he should have loved but did not, and to the world he should have blessed by his talents but only cursed by his depravity! You may have often said -- If I were only as great and as talented as Byron; if I only had his power as a poet -- his genius -- his talent -- how glorious! I could ask nothing more.

You would then be as great as Byron! But what then? Suppose you were; what would you gain? What would it profit you to gain all he ever gained of mental power, or earthly fame, and to lose your soul? O think of this; to be a Byron and to lose your soul! Would this be gain? Could you afford to devote your being to such an object, and having gained it, die and go to hell?

Or suppose you aspire to be a statesman. You climb the slow ascent of office; you rise in the confidence of your party, till step by step you ascend the tall acclivity, and see the summit of ambition only a little way before you; then down you go to hell! How much have you gained, even if you have reached the glittering summit, and then lose your soul?

7. In the eternal world there will be an entire reversal of position; the highest here are lowest there, and the lowest here are the most favored or certainly the least accursed there. The kings of the earth, highest on their thrones, will have the largest account to settle there, the heaviest responsibilities to bear and of course the most fearful doom. Here he sits in grand and lofty state; the subject must kneel before him to present even a petition; but death reverses the scene. Let this king on his throne but die in his sins; he tumbles from his rotten throne to the depths of hell! Where does he go? What is his

position among the ranks of the lost? Down, deep in the lowest depths of perdition. Here his princely steeds and out-riding footmen have him the eclat of nobility, and if he abused his dignity to the feeding of earthly pride and to the crushing of the poor, he sinks deep below those once so far beneath him. Now they mark his fall like Lucifer, son of morning. Now perhaps they hiss at him and curse him, saying, How art thou fallen from the throne of thy glory! And thou art here, down deep in the infamy of hell! Thou wretch! How they hiss at all his plagues! The very fires of hell roar and hiss at him as he sinks beneath their wild engulfing billows. So the great ones of any country who sell their souls for ambition and earthly power; what have they gained? An office -- it may be, a crown; but they have lost a soul! Alas, where are they now? The most miserably guilty and wretched among all the wretched ones of hell! Hear what they say as they do down wailing along the sides of the pit! "So much for the folly of selling my soul for a bubble of vanity! For an hour I sought and chose to be exalted; how fearfully do I sink now, and sink forever! O the contrast of earth and hell!" Hark, what do they say? The man clothed in purple and fine linen lifts up his eyes in hell being in torments; he sees Abraham afar off and Lazarus, that old ulcerated beggar, is now in his bosom; and what does he say! He cries aloud -- "Father Abraham, I pray thee send Lazarus to me; let him dip only the tip of his finger in water and put it on my tongue; I can do without my golden cup; that's gone forever now; but let Lazarus come with his finger dipped in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."

But what is the answer to this agonizing prayer? Son, thou hast had thy good things, all of them, to the last dregs; and Lazarus all his evil things; now he is comforted and thou art tormented.

Let this illustrate what I mean in speaking of the wide but righteous contrast between the state of souls in time and in eternity; the strange reversal of condition, by which the lowest here becomes highest there, and the highest here become the lowest there.

8. Men really intend to secure both this world and salvation. They never suppose it wise to lose their own soul. Nor do they think to gain anything by running the risk of losing it. Indeed, they do not mean to run any great risks -- only a little, the least they can conveniently make it, and yet gain a large measure of earthly good. But in attempting to get the world, they lose their souls. God told them they would, but they did not believe Him. Rushing on the fearful venture and assuming to be wiser than God, they grasped the world to get it first, thinking to get heaven afterwards; thus they tempted the Spirit; provoked God to forsake them; lost their day of salvation and lost all the world besides. How infinitely just and right is their reward! Why did they not believe God? Every one of them knew that being saved through Christ, he would be infinitely rich, and being lost, he would make himself infinitely poor; and yet he rushed upon the fatal venture, and went down, despite of grace, to an eternal hell!

9. What is really worth living for but to save souls? You may think it is worth living for to be a judge or a senator -- but is it? Is it, if the price must be the loss of your soul? How many of our American Presidents have died as you would wish to die? If you should live to gain the object of your ambition, what would be your chance of saving your soul? The world being what it is, and the temptations incident to office and worldly honors being as they are, how great would be your prospect of saving your souls? Would it be wise for you to run the hazard?

What else would you live for than to save souls? Would you not rather save souls than be President of this Union? "He that winneth souls is wise." "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever." Will this be the case with the ungodly Presidents who die in their sins?

What do you purpose to do, young man, or young woman, with your education? Have you any higher or nobler object to live for than to save souls? Have you any more worthy object upon which to expend the resources of a cultivated mind and the accumulated powers gained by education? Think -- what should I live for but the gems of heaven -- what but for the honor of Jesus, my Master?

They who do not practically make the salvation of souls -- their own and others, -- their chief concern, deserve not the name of rational; they are not sane. Look at their course of practical life as compared with their knowledge of facts. Are they sane, or are they deranged?

It is time for the church to give up her mind and her whole heart to this subject. It is indeed time that she should lay these great truths in all their burning power close to her heart. Alas! how is her soul palsied with the spirit of the world! Nothing can save her and restore her to spirit life until she brings her mind and heart into burning contact with these living energizing truths of eternity. The church of our times needs the apostolic spirit. She needs so deep a baptism with those fires of Holy Ghost that she can go out and set the world on fire by her zeal for the souls of men. Till then the generations of our race must go on, thronging the broad way to hell because no man cares for their souls.

## **Awaking from The Sleep of Spiritual Death**

Lecture II

September 24, 1851

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Eph. 5:14: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

This text and the subject it presents will lead me to discuss the following points, in the order stated.

*I. What is this death?*

*II. Why is it called death; who caused it, and who was the occasion of it?*

*III. The nature of the resurrection spoken of; as agencies and instruments;*

*IV. The reasons for the appeal-- "Arise from the dead."*

## I. What this death is.

- 1. This Epistle, chapter 2:1, gives us a safe and satisfactory answer. "And you hath He quickened (that is, made alive,) who were dead in trespasses and sins." This shows what sort of death is contemplated--a death in sin. The general scope of the Epistle shows that the apostle is conceiving of the state of lost sinners, fearfully depraved, as being dead; that is, he uses the term, death, by a figure of speech, to denote their terrible apathy on the subject of their guilt and danger, and their fearful condition as exposed to the curse of God. A careful attention to the scope of this epistle will show this most fully.
- 2. Let it not be understood that this death is a state of perfect unconsciousness--by no means; nor is it a state in which all power of voluntary action is destroyed or even suspended; but it is a state in which no right moral action takes place. It is death in trespasses and sins.
- 3. We may revert to Rom. 8:6, for a more specific description of this spiritual death. In this passage Paul says--"To be carnally-minded is death, but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace." The precise sense of the original is this; "The minding of the flesh is death;" the giving up of the mind to the demands of the flesh is utter ruin to the soul; because, says verse 7, "the minding of the flesh is enmity against God," and this enmity against God at once constitutes a state of spiritual death and must of course prove the eternal ruin of the soul.
- 4. Reverting again to the train of thought and illustration pursued in Paul to the Ephesians, we read;--"You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time passed ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ: (by grace are ye saved:) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,"
- 5. This death, therefore, as we see, is a death in sin--not one in which the mind is sunk into utter inactivity--not a state in which no action is possible; but simply one in which the mind acts, and the individual "walks according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air"--the same Satanic agency which energizes in all those who are disobedient to God. It is a death unto God, and to His character and claims. The dead sinner is regardless of God and of God's rightful authority as one physically dead is unconscious of what passes around him; he is borne to his grave, but he knows not by whom;--so the spiritually dead are voluntarily insensible to the great facts of the spiritual world--insensible to God, to truth, and to their own relations to both. They may be intensely alive to the things of the natural world, to everything relating to earthly pleasure; but to God and duty, they are dead.
- 6. This state, then, is called death figuratively, and yet so accurately does it describe the sinner's real case that it can scarcely be called a figure.

## II. I am next to inquire, Who caused this death; and what is its occasion?

The nature of the death spoken of, will readily answer both questions. By its very nature, it consists in being governed by the desires of the flesh and of the mind. It is being under the dominion of the appetites and passions. In language more strictly accurate, it consists in the mind's giving itself up to obey the demands of appetite and passion in opposition to the counter demands of reason, conscience, and God.

- 1. And now I ask, Who caused this death? If sinners are dead, who has killed them? Are they suicides, or has somebody else killed them? This is a vital question in our subject.
  - (1.) I am aware that sinners are wont to regard their depravity as their calamity and not their fault--but this point needs to be carefully considered, and thoroughly searched out. We shall have a clue to its real merits if we push the question--Who is it that has killed the sinner?
  - (2.) And yet when this question is pushed, there are some who will say--No matter who killed me if I am really dead. But this is by no means true or just. No suicide can stand up before God and claim that it matters not who caused his death; that it must be overlooked as his misfortune and not regarded as his fault.
  - (3.) Now the sinner's death is clearly proved to be a case of suicide. For, by the very nature of his death, nobody else could have caused it--no agency in the universe can be the cause of it but himself. For the cause of the death lies in his own voluntary action. He of his own free choice yields up himself to the demands of his appetites. He himself voluntarily chooses selfish good before and instead of God and of the universe, which is the very death of which we speak. In this and in this only consists his death in sin. He has made this fatal choice of pleasing self and displeasing God, not only through all the past years of his moral activity, but is making it at the present moment. In other words, he not only killed himself when he first began to act morally, but he has been repeating his suicidal acts ever since, and is repeating them even now. Now, even today, his own moral activities are altogether suicidal, so that if he had never killed himself before, the voluntary sin of this day would be the murder of his soul.
- 2. The things I now affirm follow inevitably from the very nature of moral, voluntary action. No one compels a sinner to love himself more than he loves God; no one compels him to follow his own propensities, instead of obeying the voice of his reason and his conscience. No one man ever killed another in the sense of spiritual death; no man ever did or ever can sin for another so that his sin shall be the death spiritually of his neighbor. One man may entice another to sin; may tempt him--may lead him along into sinning; this is only being the occasion; and when we ask for the occasion of the sinner's spiritual death, much may be said about the agency of others. No doubt much is to be ascribed to the influences which occasion sin; but occasion and cause are entirely distinct and should never be confounded together. The cause is the acting agent who sins; the occasion may be any influence from other agents, acting upon the sensibilities of his being, appealing to his appetites and passions, and presenting inducements to wrong moral action.

- (1.) The cause of an event or act is the efficient power which does it. It always implies the exercise of force or power, adequate to the production of the effect. Now with this meaning of the terms before our minds, we see that the only cause of sin must be the sinner's own voluntary powers of choice. No other being can compel him to sin; if the thing were possible, the sin when committed would not be his own sin, but the sin of the compelling power. Just as in physical death, you may tempt your neighbor to suicide; if in his sane mind he commits it, though under your temptation, it is suicide; he has killed himself, and however great your guilt, he is still the guilty cause of his own death. So of all temptations to sin. They are the occasion of sin, and sin never takes place without occasion. There must be something presented to the sinner's mind as an inducement which leads him to choose selfishly. All sin is choice which the sinner makes and persists in--choice of the good hoped for in disobeying God before the good promised in obeying. These temptations are various. Adam's first sin became the occasion of great sin to his race--very great sin;--of this there can be no doubt. So all the intemperance that has ever existed has made the appetite more clamorous, for by a law of our physical constitution, the habits of the parent affect his constitution, and his constitution affects that of his offspring. Thus the effects of Adam's sin have passed over upon all his race.

- (2.) Whether if Adam had not sinned, any or all of his race would have sinned, I do not know. Some men have thought themselves very wise on this subject; but the Bible states this fact, that Adam's sin has occasioned the sin of all of his race. This is all the Bible affirms on this point. It does not at all assume to show what would have been the course of things in our race if Adam had not sinned. The Bible has however taught us one other fact about sin, namely, that all sin is transgression of law, and of course it implies intelligence of law, and voluntary action in stepping over it. And indeed, our own consciousness affirms that all sin is voluntary action.

It can therefore be of no use to us to speculate upon Adam's sin, and upon what would have been, or might have been, if Adam had never sinned. It is enough to know that all sin is voluntary--that temptation can only be an occasion and never a cause; and hence that however much culpability may attach to the tempter, enough of the guilt of sin will always rest upon the sinner himself to crush him under its fearful curse.

- (3.) I repeat and wish it to be borne carefully in mind that this death is spiritual, not physical; and essentially consists in a voluntary subjection of the whole being to the demands of self-gratification. The voluntary agent gives himself up to the indulgence of self in just those respects in which God commands him to deny himself; that is, he goes into self-indulgence where the divine law commands him to please God and not self--or to benefit his neighbor instead of seeking to engross all benefit to self.
- 3. Now it is a radically essential element in this state of mind that it is voluntary. It can never be forced. It can never be the direct and proper effect of causation exercised by another being. If it were, we could not call it sin in the subject of such force. If any man could be made, despite of himself, to do acts which are in their own nature sinful, they could not be sin in him. This is too

obvious to need proof. There is therefore no such thing as forced sin--sin done by me which another being caused and compelled, despite of my resistance.

Again, the death spoken of is not what some have designated original sin. Many old divines hold that there is such a thing as original sin, which however is not transgression of law--is not voluntary action of any sort, but is a certain sinfulness in the very substance of the soul. They hold that all the faculties, parts and powers of the soul are sinful; and this sinfulness they call original sin.

This however is not God's teaching, but man's. It is taught in human creeds and catechisms; not in the Bible. When the Bible comes to speak of man's death in sin, all is made plain, as in our context, and in its parallel passages. The whole of the matter is that man of his own free will gives himself up voluntarily to self-pleasing. The Bible fastens the guilt of this state and of all its moral activities directly upon the voluntary action of the sinning agent--not upon his created powers but upon his voluntary exercise of his powers--not upon the substance of his soul as created, but upon his own responsible action after he has been created.

It is wonderful that man should have represented this death as consisting in original sin as I have described it, while the Bible so plainly describes it as a voluntary minding of the flesh,--and as a "walking after the course of this world." Everywhere the Bible fastens the guilt of sin upon man's voluntary rebellion against God's claims. "They have loved idols." "They will not frame their doings to turn unto the Lord." They say unto God,--"depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."

Again, if the Bible had taught original sin as some divines have taught it, the human intelligence could never have received it. If the Bible had affirmed that this death is not voluntary, but consists in a created nature, no man could rationally admit it. What other position could an intelligent man take under this doctrine than that which a friend of mine once took. His mind had been filled with the notion that Adam's first sin had been imputed to all his posterity and to himself among the rest; and that consequently he came into existence with a nature itself sinful; -- What could he do therefore but reject these doctrines, even though he must reject the Bible with them? He was told that this original sin, committed not by himself but by Adam, became in him a death, in producing which he had no agency, and yet was condemned for it to an eternal hell. How could his intelligence admit this! He was told that from this death in sin he must rise at once, although he had no more power to do it than he had to move a world;--what could he do with such a demand!

I found him rejecting the Bible. I asked him why he should do this? He answered me--Because I know it is not true.

But said I to him--what do you mean? He explained. "The Bible says that man came into the world, all sin--every faculty sinful--the faculties themselves actual sin; and then it holds that God commands me to come out of this state on pain of damnation, although, at the same time, He knows that I have no more power to do it than to create a world. Now

such being the teaching of the Bible, I know that the God who made my mind never made that book."

Such language will perhaps shock many of you, yet it is only the simple statement of facts. In reply, he was told that the notions he had justly deemed so absurd were not God's teachings but man's. I assured him those things were drawn from human creeds and catechisms, not from the Bible. He was confounded, and thrown at once utterly out of his position of infidelity. He saw that he had been rejecting the Bible for reasons which had no basis in the real teachings of that book. In the issue of this reaction upon his mind you will rejoice to learn that on that very day he was converted to God.

- 4. And now, beloved, if you would reach the truth on this great matter of the sinner's spiritual death, you must compare scripture with scripture. You must resort to scripture to explain itself. Pursuing this method you learn that this death is a minding of the flesh, a walking after the flesh, and consequently a self inflicted death--a death of voluntary opposition to God because it is a voluntary consecration of self to sin.

### **III. The nature of the resurrection here spoken of, may be learned from the nature of the death to which it stands opposed.**

- 1. It is arising from the state of death described. Of course the rising must correspond to the death. Since therefore the death in question consists in a voluntary devotion to sin, involving a moral stupor, and an intense dislike of God and of His claims; so the rising from such a death must be a voluntary rising of the mind to a sense of its responsibilities to God and a voluntary placing of itself under God's influence, in the attitude of obedience and submission.
- 2. As to the nature of the agency employed in this resurrection, the Bible refers much of it to the Spirit of God, and no doubt with the utmost truth. Yet this like many other truths has been woefully abused, for many, observing how much is ascribed to this agency, have maintained that this agent does all the work and man himself nothing. A writer not long since attempted to prove that the work of spiritual resurrection and regeneration is wrought of God. To this it was replied that this statement tells but half the truth; for the Bible ascribes this work to the influence of revealed truth as often and as fully as it ascribes it to the divine Spirit. The Bible also ascribes it to man, for instance to Paul, who himself says, "I have begotten you through the gospel." And finally, it ascribes the work to the sinner himself.
- 3. Now, what if I should adopt the same method of proof as the writer alluded to, and try to show that this work is done by man himself and cite my proof texts and stop there. Or suppose I labor to prove that the work is wrought by the influence of other men, by gospel ministers, for instance;--cite my proof texts and stop there; or that it is done by revealed truth;--then cite my proofs and pretend that I have exhausted the subject, and stop there. Now plainly these methods of presenting the subject all stop, having given but a part of the truth in the case. They none of them present a full view of the Bible teachings on this subject. According to the Bible, there is always a combination of agencies, the Spirit, the truth, other men, and the agent or sinner himself.

- 4. The manner in which divine and human agencies cooperate in this spiritual resurrection we may never be able fully to explain, yet there are many things in the Bible which may throw light upon it. Take the case of healing the impotent man, Acts 3. Peter fixing his eyes upon the cripple said--"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," Forthwith, the cripple begins to make effort; Peter takes him by the right hand to lift him up; his feet and ankle bones receive strength; then he, leaping up, stood, and then walked. Here was a real miracle--a supernatural exertion of physical power, yet with it, there was also an exercise of the mind and of the muscular powers of the subject. So when Christ came to the grave of Lazarus, and cried with a loud voice--"Lazarus come forth;" immediately there was motion where all was the stillness of death before. When this voice rang in his ear, he started up and came forth. These were indeed physical changes, but they may serve to illustrate the change that takes place when God says to a dead sinner, Come forth. Before this, God's servants could not get the sinner's attention. Every sense seemed locked up in the sleep of spiritual death. He heard not until God spake. When others spake to him he seemed to hear as a man will sometimes hear the cry of fire in his sleep, or the striking of a clock in his reverie, but no thorough impression is made on his mind. So in the case of the sinner; man may speak to the outward ear, but God only speaks to his mind. When the sinner hears God's voice, his ears are opened. God cries in his ear--Come forth;--then as if a peal of thunder rang in his ear, he starts up in terror and trembling. Still he sees not the bow of promise. He sees only that awful cloud of thunder and blackness. Sinking in terror, he cries out,--God has spoken to my soul and how can I rest? Then if he can only see that bow of promise, spanning the cross of Calvary, and seeming to spread its wing of love over himself, then, O then, how he leaps up from the grave of his spiritual death! He hears God saying to him, "Awake thou that sleepest;" and does he rise? Yes, at once, and without delay, he puts forth the requisite activities and comes into real life.
- 5. Of instruments, I need only say that God usually employs some third person, of which we have a beautiful description in Ezekiel 37th.; the vision of the valley of dry bones. No doubt this was intended to represent God's manner of calling men out of the death of unbelief into the spiritual life of faith. When, as is there described, God's voice, through His servants sounds all abroad, then His power is felt.

#### **IV. The reasons of this command which bids the sinner arise, next require our attention.**

- 1. As this death is a voluntary suicide, men would be to blame for it even if they were unable to rise from it to life again. Yet if they lay under this absolute inability, God could not require them to rise. He might hold them guilty for the suicide, and yet not hold them guilty for not raising themselves to life again. The latter would doubtless be the case if they had no power to bring themselves to life.
- 2. But the sinner has this power. His death in sin is a voluntary state of mind, and is kept up by voluntary action. In fact so strong is God's appeal to the intelligence and conscience of the sinner, that he has to exert himself to keep himself dead. It often seems as if he would rise inspite of himself, like a cork pressed under water, struggling to reach the surface. Some of you know this in your own experience. How many of you have been almost persuaded to become Christians; the voice of God rang in your ears, and its powerful appeals to your reason and conscience pressed with mighty power upon your soul; His Spirit strove with you and you were

scarcely able to resist; almost you were persuaded to forego your sins and all their pleasures; it might be said of you -- "He is not far from the kingdom of God" -- but you did not enter. You still held on to your beloved idols, and after them you would go. In fact, it is so far from being true that men have no power to rise from spiritual death, that they can scarcely summon power enough to keep themselves from rising. They can scarcely resist the appeal which God makes to their hearts.

- 3. Every man affirms to himself that he ought to rise from this state of spiritual death - ought to be and become a Christian. His own reason affirms to him that he has no right to remain in a state of voluntary spiritual death. He knows that the only reason why he does not rise at once out of this death is his own voluntary refusal to do so. Consequently, the sinner who listens to these affirmations of his own intelligence and conscience, can have no rational peace in his sins. Much of the stupid peace which sinners do enjoy in this state, is afforded them by those perverted notions of inability to which I have alluded. By the aid of these, the conscience relieves itself of obligation and the sinner finds a torpid quiet in his sins for which the real truth affords no justification whatever.

## REMARKS.

1. Sinners are the worst of suicides. During my life I have seen but one case of physical suicide, nor would I wish to see another. I could never lose the impression of awful horror made on my mind by the spectacle. It shocked the whole community. It was indeed a most awful sight.

Yet what is physical suicide in its most awful form compared with destroying one's own soul!

There may be reasons which strongly urge a man to take his own life. There never can be any good reasons for a man's destroying his own soul. A man may labor under physical derangement, and under this influence may take utterly false views of things, which may lead him to physical suicide; but that a man should destroy his own soul -- what can be more shocking! How utterly inexcusable, especially after all God has done to save the souls of lost sinners!

2. We may see in what sense we are dependent upon God's Spirit. It is in this sense simply -- to induce him to do what he ought to do of himself. With no other light than God has given to all men in His word, they ought to see their duty, and duty being seen, they ought at once to do it. And yet they are dependent upon the light of the Spirit. Why? Because they will not admit to their own minds the light of God's word without the Spirit's extra aid, and because light seen is resisted.

Take a supposition. Suppose a man has made up his mind to commit murder. He reveals his plan to his wife. She does her utmost to dissuade him from his purpose, but in vain. He still goes on in his preparations to execute his plan. She thinks of a friend who has such influence over her husband as may avail to save him. She rushes to him for help. He is successful.

Now this is a supposable case. All this might in fact occur. But in such a case as this, you cannot but see that though this man was dependent on his friend for his salvation, yet that his very dependence was his fault. He was dependent, not in the sense that he could not forbear to commit murder, but only in the sense that he would not desist from his purpose, under any influence short of this. He would

have committed the murder but for the interposed influence of his friend.

So of the sinner. The Spirit's influence is needed only to make you do what you ought to do without it. Hence, so far from being an excuse for your inaction, it rebukes all inaction, and shows its damning guilt.

3. Hence the Spirit's influences are altogether gracious. They are in no sense a matter of merit on our part, or even of claim on the ground of our inability.

4. The gift of the Spirit being a matter of grace may be withholden or withdrawn at the divine option. You may expect the Spirit to leave you if you continue to resist and abuse His agency.

5. Death in sin no more involves an inability to become holy than death to sin does an inability to sin again. There is no proper inability in either case. The Christian dead to sin, has the power to return like the dog to his vomit; the sinner dead in sin, by an equally voluntary death, has the power to emerge from that stated death, by the voluntary efforts of his own mind.

6. Our text makes its pungent and personal appeal to sinners in their sins. Addressing you--all ye who are dead in sins, it cries--"Awake, awake, open your eyes and behold the light of truth; put forth your own agency and activity; come forth from that grave in which you have slept so long. And what do you say? Do you reply--Lord, I hear Thy voice--Lord, I come--I come to Thee? Then come forth to light and life forevermore.

But are you groping about after light? Or are you caviling and resisting? Do you talk of being so dead that you have no power at all to rise? Remember, you are your own murderer. You lie in your spiritual grave because you are resolved to have earthly and not heavenly good for your portion. And now do you want the light of God upon your sealed eyes? Open those eyes and welcome the light that shines from God upon you. Feel your responsibility and meet it as becomes an accountable, immortal mind.

## **Jesus Christ Doing Good**

Lecture III

October 8, 1851

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Acts 10:38: "Who went about doing good."

The entire verse of which the text forms a part, reads as;--"How God annointed Jesus of Nazareth

with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the devil for God was with Him."

In treating of this text and the subject it presents, I propose,

*I. To notice what is intended by the language of the text;*

*II. What is implied in the fact affirmed;*

*III. To show why Christ went about doing good.*

### **I. The intended meaning of the language is obvious.**

Jesus Christ went about promoting the well-being of men wherever He went. He did what He could wisely do for the bodies of men, healing the sick, supplying physical wants; but more especially He sought to promote the highest spiritual good of the people, teaching, warning, rebuking and entreating, as circumstances seemed to require, evermore intent upon promoting the highest human happiness by every means in His power. His history shows amply how He did this.

### **II. What is implied in His going about doing good?**

- 1. It is implied that this was His business -- the thing He had above all things else at heart. For this end He came into the world. He came to do good and not evil; to bless and not to curse; to fill the world with peace, love and happiness, so far as lay within the range of His influence. The good of man was the great object which He sought.
- 2. It is implied that Christ sought the happiness of mankind disinterestedly, in the sense that He valued their well-being, that He really loved it and enjoyed the efforts He made to promote it. He was truly and honestly benevolent. It was because He loved the happiness of men that He labored to promote it.

### **III. I am to speak of the reasons or motives of His conduct.**

- 1. These may be considered as either objective or subjective.
  - (1.) The objective embrace the external object which creates a demand for benevolent action and becomes the exciting cause of internal benevolent purpose.
  - (2.) The subjective reasons or motives are no other than the internal reasons -- the grounds of benevolent action as they existed in the mind of Jesus Christ.
- 2. Negatively, the reason why He went about doing good was not His salvation. It was in His case no part of His object to secure or even use the means to secure the salvation of His own soul. There is no intimation that this was any part of His object.

Nor was He forced into this labor by a sense of duty. He did not move under the goading of conscience, pressing Him on in an up-hill business with the perpetual appliance -- you must do this -- you must do all you can. Not so did He labor. He went forward not because commanded; not because He feared any threatening: -- not because some dreaded penalty hung in terror over his head.

- 3. It is no doubt true that Christ had respect to the fact that the law of His intelligence and the law of God also, required of Him benevolence . But mark;--it was not law merely that pressed Him up to this--not merely any external law;--I mean, external to His own mind and apart from the ruling purpose of His own will. The simple truth is, He had chosen benevolent action as the course of His life and as the law of His own voluntary existence. He determined to do this, and as I might say, He had voluntarily determined to love the doing of good to all beings, and thus had made this the governing law of His voluntary action.
- 4. Now we cannot exclude from such a state of mind the idea of duty. Every mind knows that such a state of mind is duty -- is what God requires, and what the demands of the external universe require. All moral agents, acting virtuously, act according to duty. Their inward purpose and their external acts, if virtuous, will correspond with God's rule of duty; and yet it is still true that a higher motive than a conviction of duty impels them onward. They pursue this right course of internal purpose and of external act because they have determined to be benevolent and to act benevolently, and because consequently they enjoy being benevolent, and not merely because God has formally required of them benevolence. A good man loves his neighbor as himself, and he knows this is duty and also knows that not so to love his neighbor would be wrong; but yet the internal law of doing good--made a law of his moral being by his voluntarily choosing it to be so, is the active principle from which in the last analysis his actions flow.
- 5. The benevolent mind regards the happiness of being as a great good. It seeks this good and voluntarily makes this seeking of others good the great business of its own existence. Now I have heard people say that they regarded the idea of benevolence as a pure abstraction. Let them go and talk in this strain to a mother. I wonder if the idea of benevolently seeking the good of her children, is a mere abstraction to her. Go and ask her if she really knows anything about devoting herself to her family. Tell her you believe that idea is nothing better than a respectable abstraction. Tell her it may sound well in talk and might seem somewhat noble and self-sacrificing if it were only real; but assure her that nobody can ever have the least confidence in its sincerity--that all the world knows that every man and every woman too are supremely selfish, and there is no such thing in reality as loving others as ourselves, or as devoting ourselves to others good except so far as we can see selfish good resulting for our motive and reward. Go and talk to some simple-hearted mother in this strain. Will you convince her that she knows nothing about devotion to the interests of her children?

I can understand how this subject may perplex some minds. A young man said to me today--"Does a selfish, wicked man understand what it is to be devoted to the good of others? Can he have any just idea of what this is?"

To meet this question, you may take that form of benevolence which we often see in

ungodly parents. They know what it is to have their hearts bound up in the happiness of their children. Although in this very parental affection, their minds are in a perfectly selfish state towards God, yet this devotion to the happiness of their children is a positive reality to them--none in all the world perhaps is more so. Now just enlarge this idea; suppose this devotion which even ungodly parents feel towards their children were to expand the scope and range of its regards and embrace every neighbor--friend or foe; then all the men of one's nation; and next all the human family: would not this be essentially real benevolence?

Perhaps this mode of illustration may serve to explain the point in question as well as any that I can adopt. We all understand it to be a law of our being to love our offspring. This love is as truly natural in the human mind as self-love--the desire of one's own happiness. Now we can suppose this love of offspring to be enlarged so as to embrace others as well as our own children: nay, we can suppose it to be so much enlarged as to comprehend within its scope all the human family. Suppose we could unify all beings of whom we have any knowledge--comprehending them all within the grasp of our mind and the scope of our affection as if they were all but one person; then let us love ourselves, and we should have the idea of real benevolence is not abstraction.

Benevolence an abstraction? Who can so regard it? A mere abstraction is it to promote the happiness of others! Was it so in the case of Jesus Christ? If it had been, would He have made His cradle in a manger and His death-scene on the cross, for human welfare? Or is it an abstraction in the case of those who labor and suffer for others good? If you can understand anything, you can surely understand that benevolence is no abstraction. What do you think of Jesus Christ going about doing good? Was the idea of benevolence in his mind a mere abstraction?

If we can have correct conceptions of anything, we can have of enjoyment and suffering. Understanding these things, we can also understand what is meant by putting away sorrow from all hearts, and pouring joy into the souls of all our fellow beings all around about us. What sort of a man must that be to whom this seems a very difficult thing to understand?

- 6. It is said of Christ--"Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame." Observe, He had no special regard to His own personal happiness; this was not the direct object He sought; and yet He enjoyed doing good to others. He found a happiness in blessing others, which was not the direct object of His search. His doctrine was--"It is more blessed to give, than to receive." His state of mind was such that He enjoyed conferring happiness upon others, even more than they enjoyed receiving it. It was, in His state of mind more blessed for Him to give, than for those to whom He gave it to receive.

Thus when He met the widow at Nain--saw her sorrows; came up and touched the bier, and they that bare it stood still;--when in this affecting case He called this young man to life and restored him to his mother, although she enjoyed her restored son exceedingly, and could have gone dancing home with delight, yet he enjoyed it far more than even she did. The act met the demands of His own conscience and nature. He had given His heart

up to the doing of good to others and consequently He felt more joy in doing good to others than they could in receiving it. Hence He could "endure the cross, despising the shame."

Again, there can be no doubt that Christ had a proper regard to His Father's feelings toward Him. Human fathers always enjoy seeing their children do nobly. When they send their children away on missions of love and give them the parting kiss, and their parting benediction, saying in the fullness of their souls--"God bless you and make you do good as long as you live;" and don't want to bring them back, though trials and toils betide them;--and the missionary himself says, "I know this labor I am doing will gratify my aged father and my praying mother;--I will write them all that the Lord has wrought by me, for I know they will enjoy it exceedingly;"--you all see in this case that the toiling missionary is sustained in part by the hope of enhancing the happiness of his parents by his labors; and why should not Jesus have the same interest in the joy of His Father? God always enjoys the labors of love wrought by His Son; He had them all in mind from eternity. So also did Jesus have all these things in His mind. He knew that His self-denying toils would gratify all His friends in heaven.

Ah, say the self-denying missionary, I will write back to my Christian friends. They prayed for me when I left my native land, and they have been praying for me ever since. I know they must enjoy the knowledge of what the Lord has wrought by me in answer to their prayer.

Now this is not selfish; it is not being proud. It is a simple regard to the happiness of those left behind.

So with Christ. He knows that in heaven they are prepared to appreciate such tidings. There may be few on earth to appreciate them, but many in heaven. There were patriarchs and prophets -- there were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob -- there were a countless host who had been waiting long ages for this glorious consummation, and when they came to hear what Jesus was doing and suffering on earth, did it not enhance their happiness? Yea, was not the happiness of heaven increased even more than that of Jesus Christ Himself? O, what joy must have thrilled the hearts of the holy in heaven, when they were told what Jesus was doing--how He was raising the dead, healing the sick, casting out demons, preaching the gospel to the poor, saying to many a burdened soul, "thy sins are forgiven thee--go in peace;"--when these glad tidings, swifter than on telegraph wires, flashed from earth to heaven, was there no augmented joy there? When it was told them, Jesus is preaching salvation--is planting the tree of life all over the barren wastes of earth, rebuking hell, is about to set wide open the blessed gates of mercy, so that whosoever will, may enter and find life and peace--O, then was there not joy in heaven unknown before?

Hence in going about to do good to others, Christ had regard not merely to the immediate good He might do them, but also to other and higher interests. And had you been on earth to see and know those deeds of love and to enter into the sympathies of those whom He

blessed--then also, into the sympathies of His own gushing heart, O, how rich the scene for a benevolent mind to enjoy! Was it, think you, an abstraction to Him? So far from this, it stirred up all the warmest sensibilities of His being; nay more, so great was His zeal in this work that it literally ate Him up! It actually consumed the vital energies of His physical being!

## REMARKS.

1. How very simple and intelligible is the nature of true religion. Every man knows what it is to love to do good to some individual. Every person has some one or more objects of affection. Now suppose that selfishness were all put away--that we were to associate our own happiness most intimately with that of all our race, taking as much interest in each other person's well-being as in our own; could we not then understand this state of mind! This is real religion.

Devotion to other's good is a very simple thing. When our devotion to the production of happiness is not restricted to ourselves, but we labor for other's good, and love to promote the good of others not less than our own, this is an intelligible thing; and this is true benevolence--real religion.

2. You have revealed in our subject the state of mind to which the rewards of heaven are promised. These rewards by no means appeal to human selfishness; they were never intended to stimulate the selfishness of the human heart. God promises to reward those who live as He lives -- who labor for the same ends. Suppose a father should promise his estate to his children on condition they should live as they ought to. Would this mean--If you are careful and anxious to get my estate, you shall have it? No, but it would mean this; If you regard my will and happiness, and if you try in all things to do right; if you love me, and love all the family, with a single eye, and prove yourself to be in every respect a worthy son -- then you are entitled to my estate.

And would this be an appeal to their selfishness? By no means. No intelligent child could so understand it.

3. We can see to whom and to whom alone the rewards of eternal life are possible.

On this point selfish men are almost sure to mistake. They have erroneous views of what secures salvation. No man can be saved unless he enters into such sympathy with God as to find his own happiness as God finds His.

But what are these rewards of eternal life? Suppose a man makes a mistake and regards the whole matter of salvation as one of mere loss and gain, altogether a mercenary thing; is it not plain that he entirely misapprehends the subject? It were well that he should ask--What are these rewards? What were they in the case of our Lord? I answer--The joy of doing good--the joy of witnessing and enjoying the happiness of others, so that when He saw the results of His labors, they were their own reward and He could not but enjoy them.

Ere long all of us who have the Spirit of Christ and of Paul shall get home to heaven. Then we shall see Paul. Now, and of a long time past he has seen the thousands, converted under his own personal labors--the fruits of all his toils and groans and travail; he sees and has long seen their intense

happiness in God and in Christ, and he understands that these are his spiritual children, whom he has begotten in his toils and labors, and does he not enjoy their joys? While here on earth, he was always rejoicing; but O, how much more is he always rejoicing now! Now, having gone home, his works have followed him; and what are these works? The fruits of his pen and tongue--of his labors in his correspondence and in his oral preaching.

But on what conditions can these fruits of his labors make Paul happy? These are the very results for which he labored. He has been a successful man--successful in all his enterprises of labor for God and for souls. As Christ sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied, so Paul. Both are happy because they have attained the object for which they labored. The fruits are being gathered in the great storehouse of the Almighty. Age after age, they come, and though a thousand ages shall pass away, each freighted with souls saved, yet still they come. And is not this reward enough? Say, young man, is not this an ample reward for all the sacrifice and toil endured by Jesus Christ and by his servant, Paul? See the missionary who has gone to Africa. He rolls back the dark cloud of moral death that hangs over that cruelly wronged and morally neglected people. Many are they that learn of salvation from his lips and catch the new song of praise and love. By and by he gets through his work and goes home. His works do follow him. Year after year he sees them coming up to cast their crowns at Jesus' feet; and is not his an adequate reward? They had sympathized with Christ all along during their labors; they sympathize with Him not less now in these rewards of their labor. Christ enters into their joy, and they into His. And is all this benevolence an abstraction in heaven? Nay, verily; let it be anything else--but not an abstraction!

4. It is wonderful to see the astonishing blindness of mind which often exists as to real religion.

Often before my conversion did I pause and wonder what I was doing and what object I was living for. The very end of my existence seemed to be to me altogether vague and indeed unknown. I had no conception of the ends for which a Christian lives, and truly I could see no other ends of life worth living for.

I am afraid that some among you do not know at all what it is to be constrained by the love of Christ to labor and to suffer for the good of others and to be a co-laborer with Christ in the great labor of this world--the redemption of souls that else must perish.

5. Religion, to truly religious persons, is never a burden. Those who think so, know nothing yet as they need and ought to know. Of old the prophets were wont to say--"The burden of the Lord"--"The burden of the Lord;" and many seem to regard every message from the Lord as a burden, and all the work He calls upon them to do, as a burden. Young people say, We must by all means enjoy life now, and religion is utterly unsuitable to our age and to our pursuits. But how is this: Cannot the hearts of the young be warmed to love? Is it only the aged that have such hearts as love can warm and holy zeal inflame.

Yet how passing strange are the views of many as to early piety? Said a woman in Troy--"It seems a pity that my daughter should become a Christian now. She has just reached an age in which she can enjoy society, and mingle with pleasure in young company? O what a pity that all her pleasures should be spoiled!"

When I was converted, my brother had but one word to say about it--"Charles," said he "is ruined!"

So, often, people think that religion is far enough from being a present good. Yet what can be a greater good than to give one's self up to that in which we shall find most congenial, permanent and supreme satisfaction? But those who do not give up their very hearts to the joys of benevolence, do of course find it altogether an up-hill business.

6. People who are truly religious have no other joy but this. I mean, that all their joys are mingled with their religion. They can enjoy nothing without religion. They want to meet God in everything; then they enjoy it. But without God and without a benevolent heart in sympathy with God, they could not enjoy either food, or society, or study. All would lack its appropriate appeal to their sensibilities. Their hearts would refuse to go into it. They have one great object connected continually with all happiness. Their religion consists substantially in sympathy with Christ--in having the heart absorbed in the same spirit which Christ had. Now if you read Christ's history and see how great, how deep, and how all-absorbing His interest was in His work, you will also see the real heart of all His true followers.

7. This is the religion of the saints of olden ages; of prophets, of apostles, and pre-eminently of Paul. He counted all things else but dross that he might win Christ and wear Christ's Spirit.

8. Those who do not thus devote themselves to the good of others deserve no good themselves.

How plain this is! One who knows the value of others' happiness, yet cares not to promote it; none who knows the miseries of his fellow-beings yet cares not to alleviate them, what claim has he upon either God or the universe for happiness? What could he do or enjoy in heaven? If he lives only for himself, what could he do there? Just think of him, carrying all his selfishness into heaven! A man once said on the floor of Congress--"The people in the North are so selfish that if they should hear of the river of life, their first thought would be to ask if there were any mill-seats on it!" How can minds so steeped in selfishness be happy even in heaven?

9. Some live to get and not to do good, and thus fail of the great object of life. If those who are living thus are not awake to their danger, they will get into so selfish a state that they will never enjoy anything--will never get anything to enjoy. If you live to get good, and do not try to do good, it will surely be your ruin! This truth should be reiterated again and again. It must be appreciated, or men will make shipwreck of their happiness forever.

10. It sometimes happens that persons who have been active and useful before they came into this place, suspend all active labors to do good when they get here. They say--"O there are men enough here to do all the good that need be done." Soon they tell us they can find nothing either to do or enjoy. They cannot enjoy nearly so much here as they used to elsewhere. This is the inevitable result of their course of life.

Young man, have you nothing to do for the spiritual good of your room-mate? Do you know his state of mind? "O, I presume," you say, "that he is in a good state." Do you know anything about it? O, you

don't know. You have never asked him. Have you nothing to do? Look all round about and see. Will you reply, You are the minister and you can find enough to do; but what can I do? There is work for every man who will find a heart and a hand to do it.

Theological students sometimes make this great mistake. They expect to do nothing here, but put off their labors for the good of men's souls till they get through their studies and into their field. They could scarcely make a worse mistake. Thank God, all have not made it. Some have made a path-way of light all along their course. You hear of them--you see their luminous pathway; God is with them, and they labor for Him not in vain. The man who goes upon mission ground, having been useful here will be useful there. But if he has not learned to labor to effect here, he need not expect to labor successfully there.

11. The benevolent live to make others happy. In a thousand ways they show that this is the object of their lives. They love this work. They are not misanthropic, complaining, fault-finding, censorious; but joyful in their work, taking a lively interest in everybody's happiness, enjoying all the good that they see great masses moving onward in the career of social and civil progress, ideas of civil and religious liberty developing, new channels and means of usefulness laid open, seeing these omens of progress, instead of taking somber views of things, they are hopeful and happy. They see much good already done, and in all this they rejoice exceedingly. They do indeed see some eddies in the mighty current of progress, and sometimes they see back currents; but yet Christ carries on His work, and confiding in Him, they still believe in ultimate success, and still hold on their way hopeful and rejoicing. Jesus their great Captain, they know is not on earth but in heaven; yet though in heaven, He has not ceased to labor and to pray for His own cause. Indeed He is there because He can labor there to better advantage than here.

Hence all their prospects are full of hope. They lift up their eyes and see whole masses moving onward, and in this movement they cannot fail to rejoice. They are not the men to turn away from such a sight and mope along in dull and misanthropic melancholy. They do indeed see wickedness enough; but glory to God, Christ reigns, and will reign till He hath put all His foes beneath His feet. Jesus reigns and the trumpet of His gospel is being blown in all the earth.

It is astonishing to see how stupid many professed Christians can be in this matter of human progress. If they awake, they would stand on tiptoe to see the tops of the great thoughts and ideas of the present age of progress.

Young men and young women, what do you say? What are you here for, and what am I here for? For what object did your parents send you here? And what are all these teachers here for? All, to do good; surely there is no other object that deserves an hour of our time and labor. Are there those among you who do not know what this means? I am grieved and ashamed that men can live in Oberlin without having their hearts all on fire with the benevolence of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

## **The Wicked Heart Set to do Evil**

Lecture IV  
October 22, 1851

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Eccl. 8:11: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

This text manifestly assumes that the present is not a state of rewards and punishments, in which men are treated according to their character and conduct. This fact is not indeed affirmed, but it is assumed, as it is also everywhere throughout the Bible. Everybody knows that ours is not a state of present rewards and punishments; the experience and observation of every man testifies to this fact with convincing power. Hence it is entirely proper that the Bible should assume it as a known truth. Every man who reads his Bible must see that many things in it are assumed to be true, and that these are precisely those things which every man knows to be true, and which none could know more certainly if God had affirmed them on every page of the Bible. In the case of this truth, every man knows that he is not himself punished as he has deserved to be in the present life. Every man sees the same thing in the case of his neighbors. The Psalmist was so astounded by the manifest injustice of things in this world, as between the various lots of the righteous and of the wicked, that he was greatly stumbled, "until," says he, "I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end,"

It is also assumed in this passage that all men have by nature a common heart. One general fact is asserted of them all, and in this way they are assumed to have a common character. "The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." So elsewhere. "God saw that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This is the common method in which God speaks of sinners in His word. He always assumes that by nature they have the same disposition.

The text also shows what the moral type of the sinner's heart is; "fully set to do evil." But we must here pause a moment to inquire what is meant in our passage by the term "heart."

It is obvious that this term is used in the Bible in various shades of meaning; sometimes for the conscience, as in the passage which affirms, "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart," and may be expected the more to condemn us; some times the term is used for the intelligence; but here most evidently for the will, because this is the only faculty of the mind which can be said to be set -- fixed -- bent, determined upon a given course of voluntary action. The will is the faculty which fixes itself upon a chosen course; hence in our text, the will must be meant by the term heart; for otherwise no intelligible sense can be put upon the passage. But in what direction and to what object is the will of wicked men fully set? Answer, to do evil. So God's word solemnly affirms.

But, let it be said in way of explanation, this does not imply that men do evil for the sake of the evil itself; it does not imply that sinning, considered as disobedience to God, is their direct object -- no; the drunkard does not drink because it is wicked to drink, but he drinks notwithstanding it is wicked.

He drinks for the present good it promises -- not for the sake of sinning. So of the man who tells lies. His object is not to break God's law -- but to get some good to himself by lying; yet he tells the lie notwithstanding God's prohibition. His heart may become fully set upon the practice of lying whenever it suits his convenience, and of the good he hopes thus to gain; and it is in vain that God labors by fearful prohibitions and penalties to dissuade him from his course. So of stealing, adultery, and other sins. We are not to suppose that men set their heart upon these sins out of love to pure wickedness; but they do wickedly for the sake of the good they hope to gain thereby. The licentious man would perhaps be glad if it were not wicked to gratify his passion; but wicked though it is, he sets his heart to do it. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit; why? Because they saw it was beautiful, and they were told it would make them wise; hence, for the good they hoped to gain, and despite of God's prohibition, they took and ate. I know it is sometimes said that sinners love sin for its own sake, out of a pure love of sin as sin, simply because it is disobedience to God. With a natural relish, as wolves love flesh; but this is not true -- certainly not in many cases; but the simple truth is, men do not set their hearts upon the sin for its own sake, but upon sinning for the sake of the good they hope to get from it.

Notice particularly now the language -- "heart fully set to do evil." One man is avaricious; he sets his heart upon getting rich, honestly, if he can, but rich anyway; to get money by fair means if possible, but be sure and get it. Another is ambitious. The love of reputation fills and fires his soul, and therefore, perhaps, he becomes very religious--if religion is popular, but altogether selfish, and none the less so for being so very religious.

Selfishness takes on a thousand forms and types; but each and all are sinful, for the whole mind should give itself up to serve God and to perform every duty as revealed to the reason. What did Eve do? Give herself up to gratify her propensity for knowledge, and for the good of self-indulgence. She consented to believe the lying spirit who told her it was "a tree to be desired to make one wise." This she thought must be very important. It was also, apparently, good for food, and her appetite became greatly excited; the more she looked, the more excited she became, and now what should she do? God had forbidden her to touch it: shall she obey God, or obey her own excited appetite? Despite of God's command, she ate it. Was that a sin? Many would think it a very small sin; but it was real rebellion against God, and He could not do otherwise than visit it with His terrific frown!

So everywhere, to yield to the demands of appetite and passion against God's claims, is grievous sin. All men are bound to fear and obey God, however much self-denial and sacrifice it may cost.

I said that selfishness often assumes a religious type. In the outset the mind may be powerfully affected by some of the great and stirring truths of the gospel; but it presently comes to take an entirely selfish view, caring only to escape punishment, and make religion a matter of gain. It is wonderful to see how in such cases the mind utterly misapprehends the design of the gospel, quite losing sight of the great fact that it seeks to eradicate man's selfishness, and draw out his heart into pure benevolence. Making this radical mistake, it conceives of the whole gospel system as a scheme for indulgences. You may see this exemplified in the view which some take of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, which they suppose to be reckoned to them while they are living in sin. That is, they suppose that they secure entire exemption from the penalty of violating law, and even have the honors and rewards of full obedience while yet they have all the self-indulgences of a life of sin.

Horrible! Were ever Romish indulgences worse than this?

Examine such a case thoroughly and you will see that selfishness is at the bottom of all the religion there is in it. The man was worldly before and is devout now; but devout for the same reason that he was worldly. The selfish heart forms alike the basis of each system. The same ends are sought, and sought in the same spirit; the moral character remains unchanged. He prays perhaps; but if so, he asks God to do some great things for him, to promote his own selfish purposes. He has not the remotest idea of making such a committal of himself to God's interests, and having no interests other than God's to serve at all.

To illustrate this point, let us suppose that a parent should say to his children--"I will give you my property if you will work with me, and truly identify your interests with mine; and if you are not willing to do this, I shall disinherit you." Now some of the children may take a perfectly selfish view of this offer, and may say within themselves--Now I will do just enough for father to get his money; I will make him think that I am very zealous for his interests, and I will do just enough to secure the offered rewards; but why should I do any more?

Or suppose the case of a human government which offers rewards to offenders on condition of their returning to obedience. The real spirit of the offer goes the length of asking the sincere devotion of their hearts to the best good of the government. But they may take a wholly selfish view of the case, and determine to accept the proposal only just far enough to secure the rewards, and only for the sake of the rewards. The Ruler wants and expects the actual sympathy of their hearts--their real good-will; and this being given, would love to reward them most abundantly; but how can He be satisfied with them if they are altogether selfish?

Now a man may be as selfish in praying as in stealing, and even far more wicked; for he may more grievously mock God, and more impiously attempt to bribe the Almighty to subserve his own selfish purposes. As if he supposed he could make the Searcher of hearts his own tool; he may insolently try to induce Him to play into his own hands, thus may most grievously tempt Him to His face.

But the text affirms that the heart of men is fully set in them to do evil." Perhaps some of you think otherwise; you don't believe in such depravity. O, says that fond mother, I think my daughter is friendly to religion. Do you think she is converted? O no, not converted, but I think she is friendly;--she feels favorably towards religion. Does she meet the claims of God like a friend to His government and to His reputation? I can not say about that. Ask her to repent and what does she say? She will tell you she cannot.

How striking the fact that you may go through the ranks of society and you will meet almost everywhere with this position;--the sinner says--"I cannot repent--I cannot believe." What is the matter? Where is the trouble? Go to that daughter, thought to be so friendly to religion;--she is so amiable and gentle that she can not bear to see any pain inflicted;--but mark;--present to her the claims of God and what does she say? I cannot; no I cannot obey God in one of His demands, I cannot repent of my sin she says. But what is it to repent, that this amiable lady, so friendly to religion withal, should be incapable of repenting? What is the matter: Is God so unreasonable in His demands that He imposes upon you things quite impossible for you to do? Or is it the case that you are so regardless of

His feelings and so reckless of the truth that for the sake of self-justification, you will arraign Him on the charge of the most flagrant injustice, and falsely imply that the wrong is all on His side and none on yours? Is this a very amiable trait of character in you? Is this one of your proofs that the human heart is not fully set to do evil?

You cannot repent and love God! You find it quite impossible to make up your mind to serve and please God! What is the matter? Are there no sufficient reasons apparent to your mind why you should give up your heart to God? No reasons? Heaven, earth, and hell may all combine to pour upon you their reasons for fearing and loving God, and yet you cannot! Why? Because your heart is fully set within you to do evil rather than good. You are altogether committed to the pleasing of self. Jesus may plead with you--your friends may plead; heaven and hell may lift up their united voices to plead, and every motive that can press on the heart from reason, conscience, hope and fear, angels and devils, God and man, may pass in long and flashing array before your mind--but alas, your heart is so fully set to do evil that no motive to change can move you. What is this cannot! Nothing less or more than a mighty will not!

That amiable lady insists that she is not much depraved. O no, not she. She will not steal! True, her selfishness takes on a most tender and delicate type. She has most gushing sensibilities; she cannot bear to see a kitten in distress;--but what does she care for God's rights? What for the rights of Jesus Christ? What does she care for God's feelings? What does she care for the feelings and sympathies of the crucified Son of God? Just nothing at all. What then are all her tender sensibilities worth? Doves and kittens have even more of this than she. Many tender ties has she, no doubt, but they are all under the control of a perfectly selfish heart

Mother Eve too was most amiable. Indeed she was a truly pious woman before she sinned -- and Adam no doubt thought she could be trusted everywhere; -- but mark how terribly she fell! So her daughters. Giving up their hearts to a refined selfishness, they repel God's most righteous claims, and they are fallen!

So go through all the ranks of society and you see the same thing. Go to the pirate ship, the captain armed to the teeth and the fire of hell in his eye; -- ask him to receive an offered Savior and repent of his sins, and he gives the very same answer as that amiable daughter does -- he cannot repent. His heart too is so fully set within him to do evil that he cannot get his own consent to turn from his sins to God.

O this horrible committal of the heart to do evil! It is the only reason why the Holy Ghost is needed to change the sinner's heart. But for this you would no more need the Holy Ghost than an angel of light does. O how fearfully strong is the sinner's heart against God! Just where the claims of God come in he seems to have almost an omnipotence of strength to oppose and resist! The motives of truth may roll mountain high and beat upon his iron heart, yet see how he braces up his nerves to withstand God! What can he not resist sooner than submit his will to God!

Another thing lies in this text, incidentally brought out, -- assumed but not affirmed; -- viz. that sinners are already under sentence. The text says, "Because sentence is not executed speedily," implying that sentence is already passed and only waits its appointed time for execution. You who

have attended courts of justice know that after trial and conviction next comes sentence. The culprit takes his seat in the criminal's bench. The judge arises - all is still as death; -- he reviews the case, and comes shortly to the solemn conclusion; -- you are convicted by this court of the crime alleged, and now you are to receive your sentence. Sentence is then pronounced.

After this solemn transaction, execution, is commonly deferred for a period longer or shorter according to circumstance. The object may be either to give the criminal opportunity to secure a pardon, or if there be no hope of this, at least to give him some days or weeks for serious reflection in which he may secure the peace of his soul with God. For such reasons, execution is usually delayed. But after sentence, the case is fully decided. No further doubt of guilt can interpose to affect the case; the possibility of pardon is the only remaining hope. The awful sentence seals his doom -- unless it be possible that pardon may be had, That sentence -- how it sinks into the heart of the guilty culprit! "you are now," says the judge, "remanded to the place from whence you came; there to be kept in irons, under close confinement, until the day appointed; -- then to be taken forth from your prison between the hours of ten and twelve as the case may be, and hung by the neck until you are dead. And may God have mercy on your soul!" The sentence has passed now -- the court have done their work; it only remains for the sheriff to do his as the executioner of justice -- and the fearful scene closes.

So the Bible represents the case of the sinner. He is under sentence, but his sentence is not executed speedily. Some respite is given. The arrangements of the divine government require no court, no jury; -- the law itself says -- "the soul that sinneth, it shall die;" "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all the things written in the book of the law to do them;" so that the mandate of the law involves the sentence of law on every sinner -- a sentence from which there can be no escape and no reprise except by a pardon. What a position is this for the sinner!

But next consider another strange fact. Because sentence is not executed speedily; because there is some delay of execution; -- because Mercy prevails to secure for the condemned culprit a few days' respite, so that punishment shall not tread close on the heels of crime, therefore "the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." How astounding! What a perversion and abuse of the gracious design of the King in granting a little respite from instant execution!

Let us see how it would look in the case of our friend or neighbor. He has committed a fearful crime, he is arrested, put on trial, convicted, sentenced, handed over to the sheriff to await the day and hour of his execution. The judge says -- I defer the execution that you may have opportunity to secure a pardon from the Governor. I assure you the Governor is a most compassionate man -- he loves to grant pardons; he has already pardoned thousands; if you will give up your spirit of rebellion he will most freely forgive you all; I beg of you therefore that you will do no such thing as attempt a justification; -- don't think of escaping death otherwise than by casting yourself upon his mercy; don't flatter yourself upon his mercy; don't flatter yourself that there can be any other refuge.

Now suppose this man begins--" I have done nothing --just nothing at all. I am simply a martyr to truth and justice! At all events, I have done nothing very bad--nothing that any government ought to notice. I don't believe I shall be sentenced--(the man is condemned already!) I shall live as long as the best of you. So he sets himself to making excuses. He goes to work as if he was preparing for a trial, and as if he expected to prove his innocence before the court. Nay, perhaps he even sets himself to

oppose and curse the government, railing at its laws and at its officers, deeming nothing too bad to say of them, indulging himself in the most outrageous opposition, abusing the very men whose mercy has spared his forfeited life! How would all men be shocked to see such a case--to see a man who should so outrage all propriety as to give himself up to abuse the government whose righteous laws he had just broken and then whose clemency he had most flagrantly abused! Yet this text affirms first this to be the case of the sinner, and all observation sustains it. You have seen it acted over ten thousand times; you can look back and see it in your own case. You know it is all true--fearfully, terribly true.

If it were in some striking, awful manner revealed to you this night that your soul is damned, you would be thunder-struck. You do not believe the simple declaration of Jehovah as it stands recorded on the pages of the Bible. You are continually saying to yourself--I shall not be condemned at last--I will venture along. I will dare to tempt His forbearance yet. I do not at all believe He will send me to hell. At least I will venture on a season longer and turn about by and by if I find it quite advisable--but at present why should I fear to set my heart fully in the way God has forbidden?

Where will you find a parallel to such wickedness? Only think of a state of moral hardihood that can abuse God's richest mercies--that can coolly say--God is so good that I will abuse Him all I can;--God loves me so much that I shall venture on without fear to insult Him and pervert His long-suffering to the utmost hardening of my soul in sin and rebellion!

Let each sinner observe--the day of execution is really set. God will not pass over it. When it arrives, there can be no more delay. God waits not because He is in doubt about the justice of the sentence--not because His heart misgives Him in view of its terrible execution; but only that He may use means with you and see if He cannot persuade you to embrace mercy. This is all;--this is the only reason why judgment for a long time has lingered and the sword of justice has not long since smitten you down.

Here is another curious fact. God has not only deferred execution, but at immense cost has provided means for the safe exercise of mercy. You know it is naturally a dangerous thing to bestow mercy--there is so much danger lest it should weaken the energy of law and encourage men to trample it down in hope of impunity. But God has provided a glorious testimony in favor of law, going to show that it is in His heart to sustain it at every sacrifice. He could not forgive sin until His injured and insulted law is honored before the universe. Having done all this in the sacrifice of His own Son on Calvary, He can forgive without fear of consequences, only provided that each candidate for pardon shall first be penitent.

Now therefore, God's heart of mercy is opened wide and no fear of evil consequences from gratuitous pardons disturbs the exercise of mercy. Before atonement, Justice stood with brandished sword, demanding vengeance on the guilty; but by and through atoning blood, God rescued His law from peril--He lifted it up from beneath the impious foot of the transgressor, and set it on high in safety and glory; and now opens wide the blessed door of mercy. Now He comes in the person of His Spirit and invited you in. He comes to your very heart and room, sinner, to offer you the freest possible pardon for all your sin. Do you hear that gentle rap at your door? "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with Me." Look at those hands. Have they not been pierced? Do you know those hands? Do you know where

they have been to be nailed through and through? Mark those locks wet with the dew. Ah, how long have they been kept without in waiting for the door to open! Who is it that comes? Is it the sheriff of justice? Has he come with his armed men to drag you away to execution? Oh no, no; but One comes with the cup of mercy in His hands; He approaches your prison-gate, His eye wet with the tear of compassion, and through the diamond of your grate He extends that cup of mercy to your parched lips. Do you see that visage, so marred more than any man's--and are you only the more fully set to do evil? Ah, young man! alas, young woman! is such your heart towards the God of mercy? Where can we find a parallel to such guilt? Can it be found anywhere else in the universe but in this crazy world?

The scenes and transactions of earth must excite a wonderful interest in heaven. Angels desire to look into these things. O how the whole universe looks on with inquisitive wonder to see what Christ has done, and how the sinners for whom He has suffered and done all, requite His amazing love! When they see you set your heart only the more fully to do evil, they stand back aghast at such unparalleled wickedness! What can be done for such sinners but leave them to the madness and doom of their choice?

God has no other alternative. If you will abuse Him, He must execute His law, and its fearful sentence of eternal death. Suppose it were a human government and a similar state of facts should occur; who does not see that government might as well abdicate at once as forbear to punish? So of God. Although He has no pleasure in the sinner's death, and although He will never slay you because He delights in it, yet how can He do otherwise that execute His law if He would sustain it? And how can He excuse Himself for any failure in sustaining it? Will you stand out against Him, and flatter yourself that He will fail of executing His awful sentence upon you? Oh, sinner, there is no possibility that you can pass the appointed time without execution. Human laws may possibly fail of execution: God's laws can fail never! And who is it that says--"their judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not?"

## **REMARKS.**

1. Let me ask professors of religion--Do you think you believe these truths? Let me suppose that here is a father and also a mother in this house, and you have a child whom you know and admit to be under sentence of death. You don't know but this is the very day and hour set for his execution. How much do you feel? Does the knowledge and belief of such facts disturb your repose? Now your theory is that the case of your children is infinitely worse than this.

A death eternal in hell you know must be far more awful than any public execution on earth. If your own son were under sentence for execution on earth, how would you feel? Professing to believe him under the far more awful sentence to hell, how do you in fact feel?

But let us spread out this case a little. Place before you that aged father and mother. Their son went years ago to sea. Of a long time they have not seen him nor even heard a word from him. How often have their troubled minds dwelt on his case! They do not know how it fares with him, but they fear the worst. They had reason to know that his principles were none too well fixed when he left home, and they are afraid he has fallen into worse and still worse society until it may be that he has become a bold transgressor. As they are talking over these things and searching from time to time all the

newspapers they can find to get, if they can, some clue to their son's history, all at once the door bell rings; a messenger comes in and hands a letter; the old father takes it, breaks the seal--reads a word and suddenly falls back in his seat, the letter drops from his hand;--Oh he can't read it! The mother wonders and inquires; she rushes forward and seizes the fallen letter;--she reads a word and her heart breaks with agony. What's the matter? Their son is sentenced to die, and he sends to see if his father and mother can come and see him before he dies. In early morning they are off. The sympathizing neighbors gather round; all are sorrowful, for it is a sad thing and they feel it keenly. The parents hasten away to the prison, and learn the details of the painful case. They see at a glance that there can be no hope of release but in a pardon. The governor lives near, they rush to his house--but sad for them--they find him stern and inexorable. With palpitating hearts and a load on their aching bosoms, they plead and plead, but all seems to be in vain. He says, Your son has been so wicked and has committed such crimes he must be hung. The good of the nation demands it and I cannot allow my sympathies to overrule my sense of justice and my convictions of the public good. But agonized parents must hold on. O what a conflict in their minds! How the case burns upon their hearts! At last the mother breaks out. Sir, are you a father? Have you a son? Yes, one son. Where is he? Gone to California. How long since you heard from him? Suppose he too should fall! Suppose you were to feel such grief's as ours, and have to mourn over a fallen son! The governor finds himself to be a father. All the latent sensibilities of the father's heart are roused within him. Calling to his private secretary, he says, make out a pardon for their son! O what a flood of emotions they pour out!

All this is very natural. No man deems this strange at all.

But right over against this, see the case of the sinner, condemned to an eternal hell. If your spiritual ears were opened, you would hear the chariot wheels rolling--the great Judge coming in His car of thunder; you would see the sword of Death gleaming in the air and ready to smite down the hardened sinner. But hear the professedly Christian father pray for his ungodly son. He thinks he ought to pray for him once or twice a day, so he begins; but ah, he has almost forgot his subject. He hardly knows or thinks what he is praying about. God says, pray for your dying son! Lift up your cries for him while yet Mercy lingers and pardon can be found. But alas! Where are the Christian parents that pray as for a sentenced and soon-to-be-executed son! They say they believe the Bible, but do they? Do they act as if they believed the half of its awful truths about sentenced sinners ready to go down to an eternal hell? Yet mark--as soon as they are spiritually awake, then how they feel! And how they act!

What ails that professor who has no spirit of prayer and no power with God? He is an infidel! What, when God says he is sentenced to die and His angel of death may come in one hour and cut him down in his guilt and sin, and send his spirit quick to hell, and yet the father or the mother have no feeling in the case? They are infidels; they do not believe what God has said.

2. Yet make another supposition. These afflicted parents have gone to the governor; they have poured out their griefs before him and have at last wrenched a pardon from his stern hands. They rush from his house towards the prison, so delighted that they scarcely touch the ground; coming near they hear songs of merriment, and they say, how our son must be agonized with company and scenes so unsuited and so uncongenial! They meet the sheriff. Who, they ask, is that who can sing so merrily in a prison? It is your own son. He has no idea of being executed; he swears he will burn down the governor's house; indeed he manifests a most determined spirit, as if his heart were fully set on evil.

Ah, say they; that is distressing; but we can subdue his wicked and proud heart. We will show him the pardon and tell him how the governor feels. We are sure this will subdue him. He cannot withstand such kindness and compassion.

They come to the door; they gain admittance and show him the pardon. They tell him how much it has cost them and how tenderly the governor feels in the case. He seizes it, tears it to pieces and tramples it under his feet! O, say they, he must be deranged! But suppose it is only depravity of the heart, and they come to see it and know that such must be the case. Alas, they cry, this is worst of all! What! not willing to be pardoned--not willing to be saved! This is worse than all the rest. Well, we must go to our desolate home. We have done with our son! We got a pardon for him with our tears, but he will not have it. There is nothing more that we can do.

They turn sadly away, not caring even to bid him farewell. They go home doubly saddened--that he should both deserve to die for his original crimes, and also for his yet greater crime of refusing the offered pardon.

The day of execution comes; the sheriff is on hand to do his duty; from the prison he takes his culprit to the place of execution; the multitude throng around and follow sadly along; suddenly a messenger rushes up to say to the criminal--You have torn in pieces one pardon--but here is yet one more; will you have this? With proud disdain he spruns even this last offer of pardon! And now were are the sympathies of all the land? Do they say, how cruel to hang a young man, and for only such a crime? Ah, no; no such thing at all. They see the need of law and justice; they know that law so outraged must be allowed to vindicate itself in the culprit's execution. And now the sheriff proclaims--"Just fifteen minutes to live;"--and even these minutes he spends in abusing the governor, and insulting the majesty of law.

The dreadful hour arrives, and its last moment--the drop falls; he trembles a minute under the grasp of Death, and all is still forever! He is gone and Law has been sustained in the fearful execution of its sentence. And all the people feel that this is righteous. They cannot possibly think otherwise. Even those aged parents have not a word of complaint to utter. They approve the governor's course; they endorse the sentence. They say, we did think he would accept the pardon! But since he would not, let him be accursed.! We love good government, we love the blessings of law and order in society more than we love iniquity and crime. He was indeed our son, but he was also the son of the devil!

3. But let us attend the execution of some of these sinners from our own congregation You are sent for to come out for execution. We see the messenger; we hear the sentence read,--we see that your fatal hour has come. Shall we turn and curse God? No, NO! We shall do no such thing. When your drop falls, and you gasp, gasp, and die--and your guilty, terror-stricken soul goes wailing down the sides of the pit, shall we go away to complain of God and of His justice? No! Why not? Because you might have had mercy, but you would not. Because God waited on you long, but you only became in heart more fully set to do evil. The universe look on and see the facts in the case; and with one voice that rings through the vast arch of heaven, they cry--"Just and righteous are Thou in all Thy ways, Thou most Holy Lord God!"

Who says, this is cruel? What! Shall the universe take up arms against Jehovah? No. When the

universe gather together around the great white throne, and the dread sentence goes forth--"Depart, accursed;" and away they move in dense and vast masses as if old ocean had begun to flow off--down, down, they sink to the depths of their dark home; but the saints with firm step yet solemn heart proclaim--"God's law is vindicated; the insulted majesty of both Law and Mercy is now upheld in honor, and all is right!"

Heaven is solemn, but joyful; saints are solemn, yet they cannot but rejoice in their own glorious Father. See the crowds and masses as they move up to heaven. They look back over the plains of Sodom and see the smoke of her burning ascend up like the smoke of a great furnace. But they pronounce it just, and have not one word of complaint to utter.

4. To the yet living sinner, I have it to say today that the hour of your execution has not yet arrived. Once more the bleeding hand offers Mercy's cup to your lips. Think a moment;--your Savior now offers you mercy. Come, O come now and accept it.

What will you say? I'll go on still in my sins? Then all we can say is that the bowels of divine love are deeply moved for you--that God has done all to save you that He wisely can do; God's people have felt a deep and agonizing interest in you and are ready now to cry, How can we give them up? But what more can we do--what more can even God do? With bleeding heart and quivering lip has Mercy followed you. Jesus Himself said--"How often would I have gathered you--O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! How often I would have saved you, but ye would not." Shall Jesus behold and weep over you, and say, "O that thou hadst known, even thou in this thy day--but now it is hidden from thine eyes." What, O dying sinner, will you say? Shall not your response be--"It is enough--I have dashed away salvation's cup long and wickedly enough--you need not say another word. O that bleeding hand! Those weeping eyes! Is it possible that I have withstood a Savior's love so long? I am ready to beg for mercy now; and I rejoice to hear that our God has a father's heart."

He knows you have sinned greatly and grievously, but O, He says--My compassions have been bleeding and gushing forth towards you these many days. Will you close in at once with terms of mercy and come to Jesus? What do you say?

Suppose an angel comes down, in robes so pure and so white; unrolls his papers, and produces a pardon in your name, sealed with Jesus' own blood. He opens the sacred book and reads the very passage which reveals the love of God, and asks you if you will believe and embrace it? What will do do?

And what shall I say to my Lord and Master? When I come to report the matter, must I bear my testimony that you would not hear? When Christ comes so near to you, and would fain draw you close to His warm heart, what will you do? Will you still repeat the fatal choice, to spurn His love and dare His injured justice?

## Repentance Before Prayer for Forgiveness

Lecture V

November 19, 1851

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Text.--Acts 8:22, 23: "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity."

These words were addressed to Simon Magus. A revival of religion was in progress in Samaria, under the labors of Peter and Philip; many were converted to God, and among them Simon Magus also professed conversion. He had been a great man in that place and had deceived many by his magic arts. Seeing the greater wonders wrought by these Christian apostles, he was struck with surprise, and his ambitious spirit caught at the idea of augmenting his own power over men by obtaining this new secret. Hence he offers the apostles money to buy this new power. Peter saw his heart at once and nobly replies--"Thy money perish with thee; thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." He then gives him directions as in our text: "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

Following the order of thought as in the text, I will

*I. Notice the principle here developed, in the light of which Peter saw this man yet in his sins;*

*II. Show what repentance is;*

*III. What is implied in repentance;*

*IV. Show why sinners are exhorted first to repent, and then to pray for pardon;*

*V. Dwell on the importance of following this example in all our dealings with men.*

### **I. Notice the principle here developed, in the light of which Peter saw this man yet in his sins.**

Peter did not profess to learn Simon Magus' character by inspiration. He had no such omniscience. Inspiration he doubtless had, but inspiration taught general truth, not individual character. Peter saw his heart to be selfish, and not at all in harmony with the gospel spirit. Simon still had his old spirit, and wanted power to give the Holy Ghost to whom he pleased for the same reason that he had before sought and valued his magic powers. Hence he offered money, as if the apostles were as sordid as himself. Peter saw that he was selfish and therefore blind, far indeed from understanding the subject of Christianity.

## **II. Hence Peter exhorted him to repent. What is repentance?**

- 1. Repentance should always be distinguished from conviction for sin. The latter is an involuntary state of mind, and of course has no virtue in it. There may be as much of it as there is in hell itself, and yet no virtue. There is awful conviction in hell; but no genuine repentance.
- 2. Neither does repentance consist merely in sorrow. Indeed this is properly and strictly no part of it, for sorrow does not belong to the thinking department of the mind, much less does it appertain to the will, and to the department of voluntary action.
- 3. Nor again is repentance the same thing as remorse. Remorse, though it amounts to the keenest and most galling self-condemnation, does not necessarily imply repentance. There may be in it no change of mind whatever.
- 4. Repentance is simply and precisely a change of mind. The original term denotes, a thinking again--a turning of the mind--as when one finds himself going wrong and turns about to pursue the opposite course. The term, when applied to evangelical repentance, means, not merely a turning of the mind, but a change of the entire purposes of action, change in the entire attitude of the will. Repentance, therefore, is not remorse, is not sorrow, not anything of this kind; but is the mind turning away from selfish attitudes to benevolent--from being selfish to being really benevolent.

## **III. What is implied in repentance?**

- 1. Conviction of sin as a wrong committed against God. Without this there can be no rational repentance.
- 2. That the sinner becomes truly honest with God. He must honestly admit the truths affirmed by his reason and pressed on his soul by his conscience. Especially must he recognize God's rights--that he himself is God's property and belongs truly to God.
- 3. That he becomes just and equitable towards men--truly an honest man. Selfishness is the greatest dishonesty in the world. No man is radically honest who is selfish, unless a man can be honest in practically denying everybody's rights but his own. No; selfishness is the perfection of dishonesty. It is absurd for a wicked man to pretend to be honest. He has not a particle of genuine honesty, more than Satan has! What is honesty? Respecting all other men's rights and especially God's rights. How false their pretensions! They respect their neighbor's rights only for their own interests--only because in some way they expect to reap good to themselves from the respect they hypocritically show to their neighbor's interests. The fact is, men are totally deceived if they think themselves honest towards men while they are not really honest towards God. The heart of honesty is not in them. If they do not love their neighbor as themselves, they are not honest. No man has a right to say practically that his rights and interests are greater than his neighbor's. The practical assumption of this is both false and dishonest.
- 4. No man is penitent who is not an honest man in the sense that he renders to God what is

God's and to man what is man's. He must begin with restoring to God his stolen self. God has created him--has kept him alive--and has redeemed him; this threefold claim God has on him; and yet he sets himself up in opposition against God and has no sympathy with God whatever. No man therefore is honest till he repents towards God. The first step is to give himself back to God, and with himself whatever remains of his time, his talents, his property and his influence. It is always implied in true repentance that you make full restoration of everything you have not squandered and so squandered as to feel it beyond your power to restore it.

- 5. Repentance implies confession of sin to God and to all those whom you have injured. Let no man think himself truly penitent until he has made confession in all things where it is due. Some sins are known only to God, and some are committed only against God. These should be confessed to God. In some excepted cases, God holds men to the duty of confessing secret sins. This however is the exception and not the rule.

I cannot enter now into those discriminations which should be made on this subject. But obviously where restitution cannot be made without confession, as for example, where character is injured, there you persist in the wrong unless you confess. You have deceived many in respect to your neighbor, to his hurt, and this wrong which you have done him, you must undo, or you cannot suppose yourself to be really penitent.

- 6. But besides confession, restitution is always implied in repentance. Each man should make it to the extent of his power. This is always implied, because the penitent man is also benevolent. He loves his neighbor as himself, and therefore like Zaccheus he hastens to restore, and thinks it no hardship even to restore four-fold.
- 7. Repentance implies the entire abandonment of all courses of life and of business which are inconsistent with Christian character. Think you that a man, really benevolent in spirit, could pursue a business adapted to ruin instead of save men? No indeed! Shall a man who loves the well-being of others as he does his own, devote himself to traffic in human flesh? No sooner than he would sell his own flesh and blood--his own person into bondage, or the bodies and souls of his own wife and children!
- 8. Repentance also implies not only an abandonment of all selfish branches of business, but of all selfish modes of transacting business, even of business in itself right. Selfish men often pursue a good business in a bad way--on most selfish principles and policy. This also repentance precludes, because repentance is a change of the heart and life from selfishness to real benevolence. It implies an abandonment of all selfishness.
- 9. Repentance implies a universal reformation of life,--a reformation extending to all forms of sin. Penitent men turn from all sin as sin--because they regard it as sin, and therefore can have no sympathy with it. All known sin therefore they at once abandon. And since to them nothing can be sin except what is known to be such, the forsaking of all known sin is really the forsaking of all sin. No man is truly penitent who allows himself to continue in some chosen sin, and who picks and chooses his indulgences. This is not repentance at all.

When I speak of abandoning sin, I do not imply that the penitent man never for even a

moment relapses into it; but I imply that he sets himself against it in real honesty and earnestness.

- 10. Finally, true repentance implies confidence in God and in Jesus Christ. If a man truly repents of sin he will of course believe on Jesus Christ.

#### **IV. What is implied in the consecutive order of duties, as enjoined by Peter--repentance before prayer for pardon?**

- 1. He assumed that Simon Magus was totally depraved--totally alienated from God, and hence unwilling to give up his sins. Hence he could not exhort him to pray for pardon while yet in his sins. Peter knew full well that Simon would spring at the idea of being forgiven before he repented; but he meant to caution him in the strongest way against such a delusion. He knew that his sin consisted in cleaving to his selfishness, and therefore told him first to give up his sins and then to ask forgiveness. Peter assumed that his unwillingness to give up his selfishness was his great sin, first of all to be repented of and put away.
- 2. He assumed that God could not forgive him until he should put away his sin. Peter knew Simon's great difficulty--knew that he held on to his course as an ambitious and selfish man; and therefore assured him that mercy could come to him only after full repentance.
- 3. Peter did not regard Simon as having any right to ask or wish for pardon until he had repented. You will observe that Peter saw Simon impenitent and selfish. Hence he assumed that he had no right to ask or expect forgiveness while in this state of mind. He did not tell him to pray for repentance, because he knew he was unwilling to repent, and therefore such a prayer would only be mocking God.

Yet many direct the sinner to pray for repentance! Ah, do you want the sinner to mock God? Peter did not direct Simon to pray for repentance, for he knew that this would be only mocking God until he should himself be willing to repent; and he could not invite him to insult Jehovah.

- 4. It is also assumed that he was abundantly able to repent. Men sometimes teach sinners to pray that God would make them able to repent, and many even imply that the sinner is trying as hard as he can to repent, and therefore needs only cry unto God to help him repent, the only difficulty is his case being that God does not give him strength enough!

"Trying to repent" always implies two things--a willingness to repent, and a want of power to do it. Trying is making an effort to accomplish that on which the mind is set, and, if unsuccessful, implies that the failure results from lack of power.

Now Peter understood this whole subject. Peter knew that this man had free will enough and ability enough to repent if he would. Therefore he directs him first to repent, and then ask pardon. Asking forgiveness before repenting would only blaspheme God, and Peter could not advise him to do that.

- 5. Peter implies that he had conviction enough, and therefore need not wait for more. Hence, he

did not tell him to wait for it, but at once to repent. This of course assumed that he had conviction enough. Many set sinners to praying for conviction just as if they needed more and desired to have it, neither of which are usually true.

- 6. Peter assumed that the sinner is without excuse for either his sin or his remaining impenitent. He insisted on repentance as the present duty of that man, which of course implies that in God's judgment it is the duty of every sinner to repent. Now it must be of the very first importance for us to know how God judges in this matter. It is a remarkable fact that both Peter and all other inspired teachers concur in representing God as requiring sinners at once to repent.

**V. It is of the utmost importance to follow this inspired example. For,**

- 1. This direction to repent before asking forgiveness, and this only, is consistent with the facts in the case.

For what are the facts? Simply these. The sinner is a free-acting, voluntary agent. In this capacity he sets himself selfishly against the demands of God's law of love. Now what shall God require him to do? Change his course to be sure--in other words repent. Nothing can be plainer than that a voluntary agent who is voluntarily doing wrong should turn about and voluntarily do right. This, and this only, is consistent with the facts and with the right of the case.

But suppose you undertake to give direction to a sinner who is still selfish, that is, devoted to self-pleasing. First of all you set him to praying. Praying for what? That God would give him the desire of his heart? Of course if he prays without first changing the purpose of his heart, he will pray for what he desires--that is, he will pray that God would grant him the selfish desires of his heart. His prayer would be--O Lord, let me have heaven without holiness: Lord, pardon my sins, and yet let me live on in sinning, for I have no heart to repent!

Now can such mocking of God be of any use? Would you suppose it probable that the Bible would give such directions to awakened sinners?

If men are really willing to repent and forsake all sin, God asks no more of them, for the willing is essentially the doing; but there can be no greater mistake in this world than to assume that sinners are willing to repent and want to repent, before they actually do it.

- 2. The usual order in which inquirers are set at work is the reverse of that enjoined in the Bible, as if the sinner was ready and God not ready, and therefore the sinner needs to use means to make God ready and to urge Him forward to do his duty.
- 3. To set the sinner to praying for repentance is to assume that he is willing to repent but cannot, and therefore needs God's power to help him.
- 4. To direct sinners otherwise than God does in the Bible is to deceive them. Thousands have been deceived thus to the ruin of their souls forever. If you set them to pray for pardon before

they repent, you leave them under the delusion that they are doing something they ought to do--are doing their duty;--whereas they are not doing their duty until they repent! What a horrible doctrine is this! Teach an impenitent sinner, still holding on to his sins, to pray for pardon! This would ruin a world of sinners. It would leave them all deceived and deluded in their sins and under God's wrath forever!

- 5. To tell the sinner to pray for the Holy Ghost is only the same thing in a slightly different form. Nothing can be more deceptive than to tell the sinner to pray for the Holy Ghost while you know he is only resisting the Holy Ghost, and while you allow him to go on, still resisting. "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost," says the word of God through one of its most faithful and truthful preachers. What does the Holy Ghost do? He takes truth and reveals it to the sinner in impressive aspects. This is his office-work as respects the sinner. As soon as the sinner yields to the truth as presented and enforced by the Holy Ghost, he is converted. Until he repents he only resists the Spirit. What avails it then to direct him to pray for the Spirit, so long as he is resisting the Spirit? What can his prayer be while pursuing this course, except mocking God? The thing he should do is not to pray for the Holy Ghost, but to yield to his influence as already exerted on his mind. The first thing and the only right thing for the awakened sinner to do in reference to the Spirit, is to yield his heart to the demands of God's revealed truth. Let him do this and he would be converted in a moment. He should be told that he does not feel his need of the Spirit, and therefore cannot pray intelligently for its greater influence on his mind. He should also be told that the only honest thing he can do in the first place is to cease to resist the Spirit.

Peter did not say to Simon--Pray for the Holy Ghost to strive with you, or to repent for you, or to make you repent, or even to help you repent; but simply, Repent yourself--repent first of all, and then ask forgiveness.

- 6. To direct a sinner yet in his sins, to pray instead of repenting, is to leave him under the impression that after he has prayed he has done his duty. You tell him to pray; he prays, and then says--now I have done my duty and why am I not converted? But if you tell him as Peter did, first to repent and then to pray--if he follows your direction he is converted, and then his prayer can be acceptable to God.

The opposite course--that is, the reverse order, which puts prayer before repentance, virtually casts the blame of continued impenitence upon God. If you direct the sinner to pray first instead of repent first, you virtually imply that the difficulty in the sinner's way is one that God must remove--that the reason why he has not repented lies in God, not in himself. If the sinner follows your direction, he prays before he repents, and then having prayed, he says, Why am I not converted and saved? I have prayed;--God does not convert me;--the blame be on God and not on me! How horrible must the influence of this course be on the sinner's mind!

- 7. No inspired writer warrants any other course than this of the text. Search the scriptures from beginning to end, you find no directions to sinners different from this. You might well wonder in amazement if you should, for to bid the sinner go and pray first before repenting overlooks the very nature of repentance and of a sinning state of mind.

- 8. Every doctrine of scripture is consistent with the course of directions given in the text and with no other course. Every doctrine of scripture shuts the sinner up to the doing of present duty. The whole Bible urges him to do present duty and if he is in unrepented sin, it tells him that his first duty is to repent. Men have struck out for themselves a strange way that they should direct sinners to do something else than repent;--but the Bible holds steadfastly to the only consistent course--urging evermore on every sinner that first of all he should repent. John came crying in the wilderness of Judea--Repent ye;--and Jesus Christ followed him preaching the same thing and nothing different from this;--"Repent", says he, "for the gospel kingdom is at hand." So every prophet, and every apostle, each in his place, cried aloud--Repent, REPENT, as if there was nothing else they dared to say till this first duty is done.

This is the only rational course--the only course which is based upon scripture, upon reason, and upon the true science of mind. Every sinner knows that he is a sinner. You no more need the Holy Ghost to make you see yourself a sinner than to make you see that you exist. This shows why the Bible always faces the sinner down with the assumption--You are a sinner, and the fact needs no proof. Every sinner knows it.

- 9. Sinners are often very willing to pray, but not to repent. Only let him off from the heart-work of repenting, and he will gladly do many other things. A young man once said to me--"I would travel to any part of the world if I might thereby be saved." Yes, said I, but one thing you will not do;--give up your self-righteousness, and be saved on Christ alone, without doing anything meritorious yourself.

So with every sinner. Tell him to pray for conviction. O yes, he will pray for conviction, but he will resist conviction, until he repents. Tell him to pray for the Holy Ghost. O yes, he will pray for the Holy Ghost, but still he will perhaps resist the Holy Ghost continually. He is ready to do the outside work, but not the heart-work; he will readily cleanse the outside of the cup and platter, but the turning of his own heart from his sins and selfishness, that is the hard thing--the thing which of all others he is reluctant to do.

Sinners are wont to assume in self-vindication that it is impossible for them to control their own hearts. They admit they can control their muscles; if Jesus were on earth, they could come to him and bow their knees before him; but they cannot come with their hearts and bow their hearts to him. But what is the heart that you cannot control it? You are controlling your own hearts all the time, and the very thing God complains of is that you control it too stubbornly, so that his truth and his Spirit cannot move you--that you control it wrong and with so much obstinacy as to baffle all his efforts to save you. Therefore He cries--"Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?"

## REMARKS.

1. But you ask--Should not a sinner pray? The answer depends upon what the question means and implies. If it means--Shall a sinner mock God? I answer, No. If you mean--Shall he truly pray, in sincerity and honesty? Yes. Shall he lie to the Holy Ghost? No. Shall he turn to God? Yes.

But the sum of all that need be said on this point is that the sinner should be told to repent and pray--not pray and repent. Let him observe the scriptural order--an order founded in reason and in the nature of the case.

2. This order of duties is eminently reasonable.

Suppose a sinner had stolen money. He knows that God is greatly displeased with him for this, and he is also afraid of being detected and disgraced. Now he says--What shall I do? Shall I repent and then pray God to forgive me, or shall I pray first? Greatly disliking to confess, repent and restore, he says--I will do the other thing; I will pray. I will go alone and pray about it, and then perhaps I will repent. See him. He takes not his stolen money. He passes it from one hand to the other; I am greatly distressed he says, what shall I do? Shall I put it in my pocket and go and pray? No, sinner, no. Carry it back--repent first, and then go and pray. Don't go and pray for the Holy Ghost first: there is no need of that; the Holy Ghost is already convicting you of your great sin. Don't insult Him by refusing to yield to his persuasions, and by pretending to pray for his guidance and help!

Let this represent all sin. Stealing money is only one form of sin; let it represent all forms of sin. You, sinner, are fully committed to living for yourself. You have robbed God by wresting yourself away from his service. God says--Restore. Give yourself back to me and to my service. But you reply--What shall I do? Shall I not go and pray? God says--Restore first; give back the stolen goods first; then you may pray. What should you pray for--until you have restored what you have stolen? You surely will not insult God by praying for pardon before you have restored what you have stolen. You need not pray for the Holy Ghost unless you restore, for to pray and not restore is only resisting and mocking the Spirit of God.

But the sinner says--You talk as if I could repent. Yes, and so does God. God in his word always speaks as if you could repent, and as if you ought to know that you can. What if Simon Magus had said--But you don't expect me to repent, do you? You will observe he did not say any such thing. His own conscience neither suggested nor allowed such a defense, nor did the preaching of the Apostles encourage it.

But you say, Does the Bible always assume that I can repent? Yes, everywhere--in all its commands--by every prophet, every Apostle--by the lips of every fore-runner of Christ--by the lips of Christ Himself. Every inspired command--every inspired direction, holds the same language and makes the same implication. You can repent and you ought to do it immediately!

3. When the sinner says, I can't repent, he virtually charges God with being a tyrant. For what can be tyranny if charging God with requiring you to do impossibilities is not?

4. But does not the Bible teach that God gives men repentance? Yes, and in the same sense as He gives you daily bread--which, however, you must yourself provide and yourself eat. God does not give you your daily bread, so long as you persist in starving yourself. So God gives you repentance by persuading you to repent--by drawing you--impressing truth on your heart and conscience. Indeed there is no other possible way in which He can give you repentance. It is only by bringing truth before your mind--impressing it by a thousand ways upon your heart and conscience. For, repentance is a

rational, voluntary act--an act done by the sinner, because he sees that truth and reason demand it.

5. Every sinner should see and feel that immediate repentance is what God requires. He should see that he is shut up to this precisely and to nothing else.

Nor is there anything strange or absurd in this. Suppose a man had committed murder, and you should tell him to repent of this great sin. Is there anything mysterious in this? Or if you see a man engaged in any particular form of wickedness, and you exhort him to desist and repent: is there in this course anything strange or unreasonable? How then can there be anything unreasonable in requiring a sinner to repent of all his sins? Or of that which embraces the sum of all wickedness?

6. Some of you are so much afraid you shall repent, that you get a book, even under the most solemn preaching, and try to keep from thinking of your own sins; and even then you will pretend that you cannot repent, and would fain imply that you would repent if you could! Is not this beautifully consistent!

7. Many professors of religion are greatly backslidden from God, yet they pray in form, but don't repent. Many talk about praying as if they made up in prayer what they lack of pleasing God in sinning. I asked a young lady--Do you pray? Yes sir. When? On retiring to rest at night. What for? That God would take me to heaven if I should die before morning. Do you expect God would do so? No. You expect then to so on in sin. Now be so honest as to tell God just the truth. Say to Him--Lord, forgive my sins--give me strength by sleep and food that I may sin a little more; I have sinned all the day past--I don't intend to repent; I only want to be taken to heaven if I die, for I cannot bear to sink down to hell: Lord help me to sin on against thee as long as I live, and then take me up to heaven!!

You are shocked; but what shocks you? Your course, or my language?

There, see the sinner. He gets on his knees to tell God that he wants repentance, but he lies in saying so, every moment until he does in fact repent. And you, backslidden professor, lie to God in every word of your pretended prayer. Do you say--I will not repent--I don't intend to repent? If you say anything else than this you lie to God, for nothing else is true until you do in fact repent. The truth is, so long as you continue in your selfish, impenitent state, you don't mean to repent. Therefore, let him pray as he will, his true meaning is, I have no intention of repenting of my sins. This is always true, until he does repent.

But this praying of sinners in their sins when they do not mean to repent! Hear him, "O Lord, I beseech thee to search my heart." No, you don't mean any such thing; you are covering up your own heart all the time. "O God, come near to me." But you are pushing away from God every moment, and as you strive to get away, you only look back over your shoulder and cry to God to reveal his face and draw near to your soul! Hark, hear what the Bible says. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination." And what is your course but this?

8. Let me tell you, God is infinitely ready to meet and bless you. He comes with pardons in his hands--pardons all sealed with blood. You need only renounce your sins and come to Him; then all will be well. The very first moment you come before God with a penitent heart, He will meet you with

smiles of loving-kindness. His parable of the prodigal son, both illustrates and proves this. See, the wandering son comes to himself. Instead of staying away and trying to live on husks, he turns his face towards home, and comes with a confession on his lips, and tears of penitence on his cheeks. He is coming--and now see the aged father. He spies him in the distance; he recognizes his long-lost son. See how he leaps from his door, and rushes to embrace this returning son. O how ready! O how much more than merely READY!! O how ready is God in your case to meet you with the fullest pardon--and wipe all your tears away, and soothe down that aching sensibility!

Now, dear hearer, don't go away and say I told you not to pray. If I should tell you not to go into your closet, get upon your knees and swear, and blaspheme God, could you say with any truth that I told you not to pray? So I do not teach you not to pray; but I do teach you to be honest. I warn you when you pray not to mock God. I entreat you when you pray to give up your heart to God and repent of all your sin. When I repented first, I did it on my knees and in the act of prayer. I knelt down an impenitent sinner, and rose up a penitent. In the very act of speaking to God, my heart broke; I yielded myself to God. This is the way. And do you ask--Can I believe God? Yes. Can I pray in faith? Yes. Can I give my heart to God in penitence? Yes. Why not you as well as Paul--as well as Peter--as well as any one of the myriads who have done this very thing, and in so doing have found mercy?

## 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 1851 Collection.**