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by

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## GLOSSARY

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

### **On Prayer**

Lecture I

January 3, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 18:1: "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

In discussing the subject of prayer, presented in our text, I propose to inquire,

*I. Why men should pray at all;*

*II. Why men should pray always and not faint;*

*III. Why they do not pray always;--with remarks.*

#### **I. Why men should pray at all.**

- 1. Our dependence on God is universal, extending to all things. This fact is known and acknowledged. None but atheists presume to call it in question.
- 2. Prayer is the dictate of our nature. By the voice of nature this duty is revealed as plainly as possible. We feel the pressure of our wants, and our instincts cry out to a higher power for relief in their supply. You may see this in the case of the most wicked man, as well as in the case of good men. The wicked, when in distress, cry out to God for help. Indeed, mankind have given evidence of this in all ages and in every nation;--showing both the universal necessity of prayer, and that it is a dictate of our nature to look up to a God above.
- 3. It is a primitive conviction of our minds that God does hear and answer prayer. If men did not assume this to be the case, why should they pray? The fact that men do spontaneously pray, shows that they really expect God to hear prayer. It is contrary to all our original belief to assume that events occur under some law of concatenation, too rigid for the Almighty to break, and which He never attempts to adjust according to his will. Men do not naturally believe any such thing as this.

- 4. The objection to prayer that God is unchangeable, and therefore cannot turn aside to hear prayer, is altogether a fallacy and the result of ignorance. Consider what is the true idea of God's unchangeableness. Surely, it is not that his course of conduct never changes to meet circumstances; but it is this--that his character never changes; that his nature and the principles which control his voluntary action remain eternally the same. All his natural--all his moral attributes remain for ever unchanged. This is all that can rationally be implied in God's immutability.

Now, his hearing and answering prayer, imply no change of character--no change in his principles of action. Indeed, if you ask why he ever answers prayer at all, the answer must be, because he is unchangeable. Prayer brings the suppliant into new relations to God's kingdom; and to meet these new relations, God's unchangeable principles require him to change the course of his administration. He answers prayer because he is unchangeably benevolent. It is not because his benevolence changes, but because it does not change, that he answers prayer. Who can suppose that God's answering prayer implies any change in his moral character? For example, if a man, in prayer, repents, God forgives; if he does not repent of present sin, God does not forgive;--and who does not see that God's immutability must require this course at his hands? Suppose God did not change his conduct when men change their character and their attitude towards him. This would imply fickleness--an utter absence of fixed principles. His unchangeable goodness must therefore imply that when his creatures change morally, he changes his course and conforms to their new position. Any other view of the case is simply absurd, and only the result of ignorance. Strange that men should hold it to be inconsistent for God to change and give rain in answer to prayer, or give any needed spiritual blessings to those who ask them!

- 5. Intercourse with God is a necessity of moral beings, demanded by creatures as a necessity of their natures. No doubt this is true in heaven itself, and the fact that this want of their natures is so gloriously supplied there, makes heaven. The Bible represents spirits in heaven as praying. We hear them crying out--"How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10). True, their subjects of prayer are not in all respects the same as ours; we have things to pray for which they have no occasion to ask for themselves. They are neither sick nor sinful; but can you suppose they never pray, "Thy kingdom come?" Have they lost all sympathy with those interests of Zion? Far from it. Knowing more of the value of those interests, they no doubt feel more deeply their importance, and pray more earnestly for their promotion. From the nature of the case, God's treatment of the inhabitants of heaven must be conditioned on their voluntary course in regard to him and his kingdom. It must be governed and determined by their knowledge, their progress in knowledge, and their improvement of the means and powers at their command. Obviously their voluntary worship, gratitude, thanksgiving, and service of every sort, must vary their relations to God, and consequently, his course towards them. He will do many things to them and for them which he could not do if they did not pray, and praise, and love, and study, and labour. This must be true even in heaven, of apostles, and prophets, and of all glorified saints. God makes to them successive revelations of himself, each successively higher than the preceding, and all dependent on their voluntary devotion to him and to his glory. They are for ever advancing in his service, full of worship, praise, adoration, and this only prepares them the more to be sent

on missions of love and service, and to be employed as the interests of God's kingdom require. Hence, we see that God's conduct towards saints in heaven depends on their own voluntary course and bearing towards him. This is a necessity of any and every moral system. If saints in heaven are moral agents, and God's government over them is also moral, all these results must follow. In this world sin exists; and in this fact we see an obvious necessity for this law of moral administration. But the holy in heaven are no less moral and responsible than the sinning on earth. The great object of God's administration is to assimilate moral beings to himself; hence, He must make his treatment of them depend on their moral course towards him.

In regard to saints on earth, how can God do them any good unless he can draw them to himself in prayer and praise? This is one of the most evident necessities that can be named. Men irresistibly feel the propriety of confession and supplication, in order to achieve forgiveness. This feeling lies among the primitive affirmations of the mind. Men know that if they would be healed of sin they must seek and find God.

## **II. But why pray so much and so often? Why the exhortation to pray always and not to faint?**

The case presented in the context is very strong. Whether it be history or supposition does not affect the merits of the case as given us to illustrate importunity in prayer. The poor widow persevered. She kept coming and would not be discouraged. By dint of perseverance simply, she succeeded. The judge who cared not for God or man, did care somewhat for his own comfort and quiet, and therefore thought it wise to listen to her story and grant her request. Upon this case our Lord seized to enforce and encourage importunity in prayer. Hear his argument. "Shall not God,"--who is by no means unjust, but whose compassions are a great deep--"shall not such a God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, though he seem to bear long" in delaying to answer their prayers? "I tell you he will avenge them speedily."

- 1. Men ought to pray always, because they always need the influence of prayer. Consider what is implied in prayer and what prayer does for you. Prayer bathes the soul in an atmosphere of the divine presence. Prayer communes with God and brings the whole mind under the hallowed influence of such communion. Prayer goes to God to seek pardon and find mercy and grace to help. How obvious, then, that we always need its influence on our hearts and lives. Truly, we need not wonder that God should enjoin it upon us to pray always.
- 2. God needs prayer from us as a condition of his doing to us and for us all he would. He loves us and sees a thousand blessings that we need, and that he would delight to bestow; but yet he cannot bestow them except on condition that we ask for them in Jesus' name. His treatment of us and his bestowment of blessings upon us must depend upon our views and conduct, whether we feel our dependence on him, whether we confess and forsake all sin--whether we trust him and thoroughly honour him in all things. His action towards us must depend upon our attitude towards him. It is essential in the management of a moral system that we should pray and trust, in order that he may freely and abundantly give, and especially that he may give in a way safe to us and honourable to himself. Nothing can be substituted for our own praying, either in its relations to God or to ourselves. We cannot get along without the personal benefit of prayer, confession, trust, and praise. You cannot substitute instruction, ever so much or so good; for these things must enter into the soul's experience; you must feel them before God, and carry out

the life and power of these truths in your very heart before the Lord; else they are worse than unknown to you. You are not likely to understand many of these things without prayer; and even if you were to understand them, and yet not pray, the knowledge would only be a curse to you.

- 3. What can be so useful to us, sinners, as direct communion with God--the searching of the heart which it induces--the humility, the confessions, the supplications? Other things have their use. Instruction is good; reading God's word may be a blessing; communion with the saints is pleasant;--but what are they all, compared with personal intercourse with God? Nothing else can make the soul so sick of sin, and so dead to the world. Nothing else breathes such spiritual life into the soul as real prayer.
- 4. Prayer also prepares us the better to receive all blessings from God, and hence should be constant.
- 5. Prayer pleases God as governor of the universe, because it puts us in a position in which he can bless us and gratify his own benevolence.
- 6. Search the history of the world, and you will find that where there has been most true prayer, and the soul has been most deeply imbued with the divine presence, there God has most abundantly and richly blessed the soul. Who does not know that holy men of old were eminent for usefulness and power according as they were faithful and mighty in prayer?
- 7. The more we pray, the more shall we be enlightened, for surely they are most enlightened who pray most. If we go no farther in divine things than human reason can carry us, we get little indeed from God.
- 8. The more men pray, the more they will love prayer, and the more will they enjoy God. On the other hand, the more we pray--in real prayer--the more will God delight in us. Observe this which I say, Delight; the more will God truly DELIGHT in us. This is not merely the love of benevolence, for God is benevolent to all; but he delights in his praying children in the sense of having complacency in their character. The Bible often speaks of the great interest which God takes in those who live near him in much prayer. This is naturally and necessarily the case. Why should not God delight in those who delight in him?
- 9. The more we pray, the more God loves to manifest to others that he delights in us, and hears our prayers. If his children live lives of much prayer, God delights to honour them, as an encouragement to others to pray. They come into a position in which he can bless them and can make his blessings on them result in good to others--thus doubly gratifying the benevolence of his heart.
- 10. We can never reach a position in which we shall not need prayer. Who believes that saints in heaven will have no need of prayer? True, they will have perfect faith, but this, so far from precluding prayer, only the more ensures it. Men have strangely assumed, that if there were only perfect faith, prayer would cease. Nothing can be more false and groundless. Certainly,

then, we never can get beyond prayer.

- 11. If I had time I should like to show how the manner of prayer varies as Christians advance in holiness. They pray not less, but more, and they know better how to pray. When the natural life is mingled largely with the spiritual, there is an outward effervescing, which passes away as the soul comes nearer to God. You would suppose there is less excitement, and there is less of animal excitement; but the deep fountains of the soul flow in unbroken sympathy with God.
- 12. We can never get beyond the point where prayer is greatly useful to us. The more the heart breathes after God, and rises towards him in heavenly aspirations, the more useful do such exercises become. The aged Christian finds himself more and more benefitted in prayer as he draws more and more near to God. The more he prays, the more he sees the wisdom and necessity of prayer for his own spiritual good.
- 13. The very fact that prayer is so great a privilege to sinners makes it most honourable to God to hear prayer. Some think it disgraceful to God. What a sentiment! It assumes that God's real greatness consists in his being so high above us as to have no regard for us whatever. Not so with God. He who regards alike the flight of an archangel and the fall of a sparrow--before whose eye no possible event is too minute for his attention--no insect too small for his notice and his love,--his infinite glory is manifest in this very fact that nothing is too lofty or too low for his regard. None are too insignificant to miss sympathy--none too mean to share his kindness.
- 14. Many talk of prayer as only a duty, not a privilege; but with this view of it they cannot pray acceptably. When your children, full of wants, come running to you in prayer, do they come because it is a duty? No, indeed! They come because it is their privilege. They regard it as their privilege. Other children do not feel so towards you. And it is a wonderful privilege! Who does not know it and feel it to be so? Shall we then ever fail to avail ourselves of it?
- 15. Finally, we are sure to prevail if we thoroughly persevere and pray always, and do not faint. Let this suffice to induce perseverance in prayer. Do you need blessings? And yet are they delayed? Pray always and never faint; so shall you obtain all you need.

### **III. Our third general inquiry is, Why do not men pray always? Many reasons exist.**

- 1. In the case of some, because the enmity of their hearts towards God is such that they are shy and dread prayer. They have so strong a dislike to God, they cannot make up their minds to come near to him in prayer.
- 2. Some are self-righteous and self-ignorant, and therefore have no heart to pray. Their self-righteousness makes them feel strong enough without prayer, and self-ignorance prevents their feeling their own real wants.
- 3. Unbelief keeps others from constant prayer. They have not confidence enough in God as ready to answer prayer. Of course, with such unbelief in their hearts, they will not pray always.

- 4. Sophistry prevents others. I have alluded to some of its forms. They say, God being immutable, never changes his course; or they urge that there is no need of prayer, inasmuch as God will surely do just right, although nobody should pray. These are little sophistries, such as ignorant minds get up and stumble over. It is wonderful that any minds can be so ignorant and so unthinking as to be influenced by these sophistries. I can recollect how these objections to prayer came up many years since before my mind, but were instantly answered and set aside, they seemed so absurd. This, for instance,--that God had framed the universe so wisely that there is no need of prayer, and indeed no room for it. My answer was ready. What was God's object in making and arranging his universe? Was it to show himself to be a good mechanic, so skilful that he can make a universe to run itself, without his constant agency? Was this his object? No! But his object was to plant in this universe intelligent minds and then reveal himself to them and draw them to love and trust their own infinite Father. This object is every way noble and worthy of a God. But the other notion is horrible! It takes from God every endearing attribute and leaves him only a good mechanic!
- 5. The idea that God mingles his agency continually in human affairs, prevails everywhere among all minds in all ages. Every where they have seen God revealing himself. They expect such revelations of God. They have believed in them, and have seen how essential this fact is to that confidence and love which belong to a moral government. It seems passing strange that men can sophisticate themselves into such nonsense as this! Insufferable nonsense are all such objections!

On one occasion, when it had been very wet and came off suddenly very dry, the question arose--How can you vindicate the providence of God? At first the question stung me; I stopped, considered it a few moments, and then asked, What can his object be in giving us weather at all? Why does he send, or not send, rain? If the object be to raise as many potatoes as possible, this is not the wisest course. But if the object be to make us feel our dependence, this is the wisest course possible. What if God were to raise harvests enough in one year to supply us for the next ten? We might all become atheists. We should be very likely to think we could live without God. But now every day and every year he shuts us up to depend on himself. Who does not see that a moral government, ordered on any other system, would work ruin?

- 6. Another reason is, men have no real sense of sin or of any spiritual want; no consciousness of guilt. While in this state of mind, it need not be expected that men will pray.
- 7. In the other extreme, after becoming deeply convicted, they fall into despair and think it does no good to pray.
- 8. Another reason for not praying much is found in self-righteous conceptions of what is requisite to success in prayer. One says, I am too degraded, and am not good enough to pray. This objection is founded altogether in self-righteous notions--assuming that your own goodness must be the ground or reason for God's hearing your prayer.
- 9. A reason with many for little prayer is their worldly-mindedness. Their minds are so filled with thoughts of a worldly nature, they cannot get into the spirit of prayer.

Again, in the case of some, their own experience discourages them. They have often prayed, yet with little success. This brings them into a skeptical attitude in regard to prayer. Very likely the real reason of their failure has been the lack of perseverance. They have not obeyed this precept which urges that men pray always, and never faint.

## REMARKS.

1. It is no loss of time to pray. Many think it chiefly or wholly lost time. They are so full of business, they say, and assume that prayer will spoil their business. I tell you, that your business, if it be of such sort as ought to be done at all, will go all the better for much prayer. Rise from your bed a little earlier, and pray. Get time somehow--by almost any imaginable sacrifice, sooner than forego prayer. Are you studying? It is no loss of time to pray, as I know very well by my own experience. If I am to preach, with only two hours for preparation, I give one hour to prayer. If I were to study anything--let it be Virgil or Geometry, I would by all means pray first. Prayer enlarges and illumines the mind. It is like coming into the presence of a master spirit. You know how sometimes this electrifies the mind, and fires it with boundless enthusiasm. So, and much the more, does real access to God.

Let a physician pray a great deal; he needs counsel from God. Let the mechanic and the merchant pray much; they will testify, after trial of it, that God gives them counsel, and that, consequently, they lose nothing and gain much by constant prayer.

2. None but an eminently praying man is a safe religious teacher. However scientific and literary, if he be not a praying man, he cannot be trusted.

A spirit of prayer is of much greater value than human learning without it. If I were to choose, I would prefer intercourse with God in prayer before the intellect of Gabriel. I do not say this to disparage the value of learning and knowledge, for when great talents and learning are sanctified with much prayer, the result is a mind of mighty power.

Those who do not pray cannot understand the facts in regard to answers to prayer. How can they know? Those things seem to them utterly incredible. They have had no such experience. In fact all their experience goes in the opposite direction. State a case to them; they look incredulous. Perhaps they will say--You seem to think you can prophesy and foreknow events! Let them be answered, that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." Those who keep up a living intercourse with God know many things they do not tell, and had better not tell. When I was a young convert, I knew an aged lady whose piety and prayer seemed to me quite extraordinary. You could not feel like talking much in her presence; there was something in it that struck you as remarkable. The subject of sanctification came into discussion, and meeting me on one occasion, she said--"Charles, take care what you do! Don't do things to be sorry for afterwards." A son of hers became a Christian and was astonished at the manifestations of his mother's piety. She had prayed for him long and most earnestly. When, at length, his eyes were opened, she began to say--"I did not tell anybody my experiences, but in fact I have known nothing about condemnation for thirty years past. In all this time I am not aware that I have committed a known sin. My soul has enjoyed uninterrupted communion with God, and constant access to his mercy-seat in prayer."

3. Prayer is the great secret of ministerial success. Some think this secret lies in talent or in tact; but it



is not so. A man may know all human knowledge, yet, without prayer, what can he do? He cannot move and control men's hearts. He can do nothing to purpose unless he lives in sympathy and open-faced communion with God. Only so can he be mighty through God to win souls to Christ. Here let me not be understood to depreciate learning and the knowledge of God. By no means. But prayer and its power are much greater and more effective. Herein lies the great mistake of Theological Seminaries and of gospel ministers. They lay excessive stress on learning, and genius, and talents; they fail to appreciate duly the paramount importance of much prayer. How much better for them to lay the principal stress on bathing the soul in God's presence! Let them rely first of all on God, who worketh mightily in his praying servants through his Spirit given them; and mediately, let them estimate above all other means, prayer--prayer that is abundant, devout, earnest, and full of living faith. Such a course would be an effectual correction of one of the most prevalent and perilous mistakes of the age.

## **On Persevering Prayer for Others**

Lecture II

January 17, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 11:5-8: "And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves: for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth."

*I. Prayer offered for others, and the encouragement we have for such prayer;*

*II. Why should we pray for others?*

*III. Perseverance in prayer.*

*IV. But why do not men pray more for others?*

**I. I propose, in speaking from this passage, to treat the prayer offered for others, and the encouragement we have for such prayer.**

- 1. This passage seems to have been designed to encourage us to pray for our friends and for

others in general. The same is true of the Lord's prayer, since many of its petitions obviously contemplate blessings upon others not less than upon ourselves. Indeed, the whole Bible is replete with instances and examples of prevailing prayer for others. I might begin with the case of Abraham interceding, now for Ishmael, anon for Abimelech, and yet again for Sodom; and then I might pass on to speak of Moses and of Samuel; of Jeremiah also, and of other prophets; of the Apostles moreover, who are continually in prayer for the churches. The Bible is full of this, and must make the impression on every attentive reader, that intercession for others is a natural development of the Christian spirit.

- 2. It is equally a dictate of nature to pray for others as to pray for one's self. Who does not sometimes experience the spontaneous and irresistible impulse to cry out to God for others? It is utterly impossible for a parent to see a child in a house on fire, or sinking in deep waters, or in any great peril without crying to God for help. You who read the Bible must notice how God's people are continually in prayer for his church and his cause on earth. You see there how parents pray for their children, how one prays for another under any circumstances of want. This lies out on the face of the whole Bible. None can fail to notice it who read their Bibles with any attention.
- 3. From the mere light of nature we expect God to hear our prayer for others. Consider this point and you will see it to be so. Even the wickedest of men and of women pray for their children in distress, and indeed for others besides theirs. They have an innate conviction that God should be sought in prayer, and that he will hear and help. Sometimes the impulse to pray for others is irresistible and insuppressible. You cry out spontaneously--May God have mercy on their souls! I doubt whether there is a man in our nation, however wicked, who could have stood by and have seen the cars at Norwalk plunge off into the river, without crying out, May God save their souls! This is quite as natural as to pray for ourselves, and shows fully the instinct of our minds. You may say what you please about there being no virtue in prayer, and you may try to believe what you will; yet none the less this sort of prayer will come with the occasion that calls for it. The fact remains the same, despite of all that men may strive to do by false philosophy to excuse themselves for praying so little. I am aware that some men object, saying it is of no use to pray for others; but this objection is utterly shallow and groundless. It assumes that prayer never influences God, but ourselves only. They say the influence of prayer is wholly subjective--i.e., on the person who prays; never objective--i.e., upon God. Strange that men should ever adopt a notion so absurd. This subjective influence never could be gained if men did not believe in the objective influence. How much good would it do your own heart to pray if it were the fact and you absolutely knew it to be, that God never hears and answers prayer! Think how ridiculous for a man to go before God and say to him--"Lord, I don't expect my prayer to influence thee in the least, for I know that thou canst not hear prayer at all; but I want to get a certain subjective effect on myself by this prayer, and therefore I obtrude myself before thy throne." How strange! Any man would be shocked at his own folly and absurdity.

But some of you perhaps did not fully understand me when I said in my last sermon that prayer did not change God's nature and purposes. Some men say--"Prayer must change God's plans if he answers it." No, never. It has always been God's plan to hear and answer prayer. This has always entered into his purposes.

Again, God's immutability implies that he will answer prayer. It would be strange indeed if God should not change his course in answer to prayer, if he be indeed immutable. If he were not to change for right prayer, it would prove him to be not good--it would imply that he had ceased to be benevolent; indeed, it would undeify him at once. When you come to resolve this idea into its elements, you will see that it subverts the whole idea of God and of his attributes. It must imply that God's creatures might come into any position before him, and he can never answer their prayers.

But many say--I can see how prayer may benefit myself, but cannot see how it can benefit others. I reply, the latter can easily be seen. No man can read the Bible without seeing that this is the fact--prayer does benefit others. No man can study his own convictions without seeing evidence of it. If prayer never could benefit others, the fact would belie all our innate convictions.

- 4. I have said that to pray for others is a spontaneity of our nature. Even when our enemies are in sudden danger and trouble, we lift up our cry for them spontaneously. I doubt whether even an infidel could see a child struggling in pain and peril, without crying out--May God help! Sometimes men in their sins have fallen into fearful circumstances, and have cried mightily to God, and God has interposed so signally as to astonish them. I have heard of many cases of this sort. I recollect one, of a wicked man, on the point of drowning, who cried to God for help. It was remarkable that all his sins seemed to be concentrated into one present mass. He saw them--saw himself that great sinner who had sinned so grievously; saw that he must turn from all his sins to God, as he would ever hope for mercy;--did turn to God, saying, I yield, and I will be thine forever. At once after this, he rose to the surface, and floated ashore.

I have heard of another case, of a man in his sins, praying for a sick child. God heard, and wonderful to say, God answered, and the case made an impression on his mind which terminated in his speedy conversion.

- 5. So God hears the young ravens when they cry. So he heard those heathen sailors who were in the ship with Jonah. So he often hears sailors in distress as his word most impressively declares. "God commandeth and raiseth the strong wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven; they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble. Then they cry unto the Lord, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then they are glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven." Ps. 107:25-30. Many a sailor knows that God has heard him in his cry of distress. Some of them can gratefully testify--God heard my cry and spared my life; now, therefore, I will serve him as long as I live. How often does God hear such prayer so manifestly as to leave no doubt, and no possibility of reasonable doubting!

## **II. Let us now ask--Why should we pray for others? Why has God so constituted us that we feel that we may and must pray for others? I answer,**

- 1. They need our prayer. They may be mentally incapable of prayer; or their prayers for themselves may be utterly unavailing. Hence, they need the aid of some one who has power with God to pray for them. I can well remember that, in my own case, full one year before I was

married, I had an irresistible conviction on my mind that I should lose my soul if I were to marry any other than a pious wife. I knew I could not pray for myself. An ungodly wife would not pray for me, but would only strengthen me in my sins. I therefore came fully to the conclusion that I should never marry any other than a pious woman. I had never heard my father or my mother pray, and had no reason to suppose they ever prayed for me. Hence, perhaps I felt the more need of a praying wife. But I have often heard other men say the same in regard to marrying pious wives. This may doubtless be abused; persons may depend too much on others' prayers; children often do, upon the prayers of their parents.

- 2. We need the exercise of praying for others. It will do us as well as them great good. This we may readily learn from our own experience.
- 3. Viewing God in his governmental relations and capacities, he needs this intercessory prayer for its influence on his creatures. He wants to interest his people in each other, and to cement their many hearts, as it were, into one. It is his great desire to bring all his people to care for each other and to love each other. Place before your mind the case of a great family. Suppose the father should not encourage his children to ask favors for each other. You say at once this would be very bad. Certainly a wise father would encourage that for the sake of strengthening the bands of mutual sympathy in his household. Some of the best families I ever knew have been remarkable for this. Each of the children were in the habit of asking favors not for himself, but for his brothers or sisters. You can easily see the value of this in a family. Surely its value cannot be less in Gods' great family. It cannot be strange, therefore, that God should encourage his children to expect to be heard when they pray for their brethren and sisters. You can see how important it is that a father should encourage in his children the benevolent spirit of asking favors for each other, and should induce them to do so for the very purpose of cultivating benevolence in their hearts. It certainly is a most salutary arrangement in any family, or indeed in any government. Any good ruler loves to see his people interested in each other. What do you think of that family, ten in number, with which I was acquainted, who were accustomed, when they met each evening around the family altar, to detail briefly the state of their minds to each other, and if anyone was in darkness or in sin, all would unite to pray for that one, or even, if the case seemed to call for it, would set apart an entire day for fasting and prayer in his behalf. Was not that a most admirable practice? Or what would you say of that church which should in this way pray for each other, and help those especially who were in any affliction? And will not God encourage this spirit among his people? Most assuredly you know it must be so.

Again, prayer for each other draws us into a deeper consideration of each other's wants. When you begin to pray for another, you are compelled to study his character, his temptations, his wants. This opens the way for a richer heart-union.

Again, prayer for others draws us into sympathy with God's love, and with his feelings towards his people. We may blame them more, or may pity them more; or it may be that we shall simply love them more;--but, however this may be, we shall be more likely to have the same mind towards them that God has.

Again, it is intrinsically fit and proper that God should manifest his pleasure in every case

of disinterested importunity for the souls of others. The case may be that of a stranger to you, yet your heart becomes deeply engaged and your very soul takes hold of the case; God sees it with delight. What do you want, my child, says he. I want this soul should be converted, you reply. Is there not some propriety in God's being pleased with this prayer? God looks on this suppliant, saying--"You come not to plead for yourself, not for life, not for any temporal good; but for your enemy. You come to pray for your enemy and you want I should convert his soul. I will do it." Indeed, I suppose that, other things being equal, a sincere prayer offered for any enemy is more sure to be granted than any other prayer. But whether offered for an enemy, or for a friend, it is impossible that God should not be greatly influenced by self-sacrificing, really benevolent prayer. He must be if he loves real benevolence, and seeks to promote it among his creatures.

Again, prayer for others needs this encouragement. If we were to pray earnestly for others and God did not regard it, we should lose confidence in prayer, not to say also in God himself.

- 4. This condescension on his part, is of the utmost importance to the whole universe. They need to know that they can influence the Infinite Mind by prayer for fellow creatures, for this will encourage them to try to help each other by prayer, and will serve to knit the bonds of mutual affection and interest.
- 5. It is striking to notice how our dependent relations upon each other and upon God multiply the occasions of prayer for each other. It would seem that God loves to create these occasions and to multiply them continually. So he shuts us up by his providence, straitens us all round about, and thus compels us to feel the necessity of prayer. O how he loves to multiply these occasions, and bring up one subject of prayer after another, keeping our hearts ever warm with benevolent interest in our fellow-beings, and drawing us also exceedingly near to himself. All this time he is never weary of giving us audience, and of inviting us into the secret chamber of his love.
- 6. Prayer for others supplies one important condition in the government of God upon which he can show mercy without detriment to any governmental interests. Every one can readily see that a king might grant a favor to an offender for the sake of a mutual friend, which he could not grant for the offender's sake alone. Suppose a man here in Oberlin has committed a great crime; the Government cannot pardon him on the strength of his own prayer only; but if all Oberlin were to unite their petitions, he might, perhaps, for their sakes, grant the pardon. This principle has a wide and well-known application. Thus a parent might get a blessing for his child. The child may be guilty of high treason, but his father may have rendered so great services to the government, that for the sake of these, and in answer to his prayers, the Governor may honorably and safely pardon him. The Governor would reply to the guilty son--I cannot pardon you for your own sake, but for your father's sake I can. This principle has always been exercised in God's government. For Abraham's sake God could bless Abimelech, and Sarah, and almost Sodom. Noah, Daniel and Job are cited as examples of intercessors whom God would hear except under the extreme circumstances of guilt, when the nation had become really ripe for judgments. God's language to Moses is striking and most significant. It was on the occasion of the golden calf, that the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it

is a stiff-necked people; now, therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation." (Ex. 32:9-10) God could not hear the people, but did hear Moses; indeed, he speaks as if he could not go on in the course of just judgment against the people unless Moses would withdraw his intercession and let him go on. How strong is the view thus given us of the power of prevailing prayer!

- 7. To pray for others, and to be heard and answered of God in our prayer, serves greatly to increase our love to God in the form of affection, and our love to man in the form of benevolence. No one ever prayed for another, with real prayer, without feeling an increase of love towards that person, no matter whether it be for a stranger or an acquaintance. So if a community or a church pray for some individual, the more they pray, the better they will love. Prayer creates a bond of union between our souls and the souls of those whom we love. Let one pray for others till he prevails; it results in a wonderful sympathy, like that between parent and child. I have seen extraordinary cases of prayer for others, in which a most mysterious connection seemed to be established between the party praying and the party prayed for, the latter seeming to know that blessings came through prayer, and almost adoring and idolizing the source through which they came.
- 8. We can often obtain for others what they cannot for themselves. Abraham prayed for Abimelech, and obtained for him blessings, for which Abimelech's prayers might have been made in vain. Job prayed successfully for his friends and God heard him when he could not hear them. Moses, in like manner, prayed for Aaron and Miriam, and God's hearing him, when he could not hear them, became a loud rebuke of their envy and pride. This illustrates a great principle in God's government, showing both that God means to encourage intercession for others, and that in order to pray acceptably, persons must stand in favor before God--in a position which does not demand his rebuke, but which does at least justify manifestations of his favor. It is on this principle that God can and will hear the prayers of his humble, obedient, trusting children.

### **III. I come next to speak of the importance of perseverance in prayer.**

- 1. This text, like that of my last sermon, is designed to teach this doctrine. You will notice how strong the case is made in our present text. "I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth." This, however, does not teach that God's friendship for his people fails to induce him to give, but it is a strong case to show that Christians get for their importunity what they could not get without. There are cases where nothing short of importunity gains the desired blessing. The case of the Syrophenician woman is to the same point. If she had desisted after the first or the second rebuff, she had surely failed of the great blessing. Daniel prayed on one occasion twenty-one days, and could not give up. At last deliverance came. This being obliged to press out suit so long compels us to study and to understand our case. It leads us into a deeper sympathy with God and with all his views and policy.
- 2. We can better appreciate the value of the blessing, by how much the more it costs us and the longer we have to pray for it. The more intensely we feel in our prayer for a given case, the more fully we appreciate the blessing when it comes. It supplies a deeper want of our souls and

comes with a more refreshing consolation.

- 3. Such persevering prayer develops all the Christian graces. Especially it develops benevolence, the mother of all the rest. It brings this out in all its rich and varied phases.
- 4. It is often important that he who prays for another should have time and inducement to remove all obstacles out of the way. It does not, by any means, consist with God's plans of moral government to hear your prayer for the conversion of a soul, so long as you yourself are laying a stumbling-block in his way. God will surely give you time by delaying to answer, for you to search out and remove all such hindrances. Besides, providences must have time and scope to operate. Providential difficulties must be removed out of the way, and time may be requisite for this.
- 5. Often God delays that he may bring us lower in the dust before him. He leads us into such views that we shall not be puffed up, and such that the blessing, given, shall not injure us. To secure this object, often delays the answer long. We are not low enough, so that he can give us the blessing without mischief to ourselves. Study carefully the case of that Syrophenician woman. Some said, "Send her away, for she crieth after us." Even Christ said he was not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This was a dash of cold water upon her warm hopes, for it seemed as if Christ intended to discourage her. As if even this were not enough, he finally went so far as to say--"It is not suitable to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." Did it not seem to her cruel that he should throw this foul Jewish prejudice into her teeth? But mark, what did she do? Did she resent it? Did she turn away discouraged? By no means. She seemed to say--You don't mean to put me away; you cannot do that, I know the goodness of your heart too well. So she turned the very rebuke into an argument for her case. Truth, said she, but I do not ask for children's bread; I only want the crumbs that fall from the table, and those it is surely proper to give to dogs. Now look at our blessed Lord. All overcome by such blended humility and importunity and faith, he yielded and cried out, "O, woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." You see the great value of this importunity. All the world over wherever this story has been read, what rich lessons it has taught men on this subject.

The case of Jacob struggling with the angel of the covenant, is in point here. It was only after he had safely passed the crisis, and said, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," that the Lord blessed him as he prayed.

- 6. Sometimes God delays for the sake apparently of drawing us into more and mightier prayer. We become straitened, and agonized. Then God puts it into our hearts to do something yet more for the soul prayed for. Our experience in prayer reveals this. Then when we have done it, and are in every respect prepared, God sends an arrow and does the work.
- 7. Another reason for delay may be, that you may become more deeply unified with the subject of your prayer. Sometimes you pray for a person till you become so unified with him that you say--If that soul goes to hell, I must go with him. I have heard men say this as their own experience in prayer. So Christ himself seems to have prayed for his dying people. He grasped the masses, saying--I must save them or sink to hell with them. Paul had a like experience when

he said--"I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." So, often God waits and delays his answer to prayer till the suppliant becomes so unified that in sympathy they cannot be separated. Moses said--"Save this people, or blot my name from this book." I have seen precisely this in many cases. The Holy Ghost gives them such sympathy with the person they pray for, and such a hold of God's promise in prayer, they cry out--I cannot live unless God hear and save! How can I live and see this people die! Now, God loves this spirit and often waits till it comes up. In the case of parents, God frequently waits till they take hold of the case of their children in this very way. I well remember the striking case of a father who was so agonized in prayer for his children he told them he could not live unless he could see the salvation of the Lord among them.

#### **IV. But why do not men pray more for others?**

- 1. Mainly because they are not benevolent, but selfish only. They are selfish in all the little prayer they do make.
- 2. Or, sometimes, they are skeptical and unbelieving, and for this reason they do not lay out their strength in prayer. Or, they are presumptuous, and assume that somebody else will pray enough to answer all purposes. Or, they are too carnal to have any spirit of prayer. Ah, they do not care for the souls of the perishing. Their tender mercies even, are cruel. They see sinners going to hell, but are too carnal to pray for them. They offer no earnest, no agonizing prayer.

#### **REMARKS.**

1. Brethren, what is your state of mind in regard to the various objects of prayer around you? How do you feel for the young people gathered here? Do you sympathize earnestly in prayer for the elder members of the church? What is your state of mind towards the impenitent? Are you praying in earnest for those who have long time remained impenitent among us? Do you feel deeply for the strangers who are coming among us? Will you allow me to ask you in all faithfulness, have you the spirit of prayer for others? As a preacher, I think I can tell when you pray by the light I experience in my own mind when I study my sermons, and by the effect my words produce on the minds of my hearers. Do you not know that when some are agonizing in prayer, some sinners are correspondingly struggling under conviction? Just in proportion to the amount and power of struggling prayer will be the struggles of those who are smitten with arrows of convicting truth.

2. Some of you who once prayed with earnestness and power, I fear have lost that spirit, or have let it sorely languish. Let me ask you all--Have you as much of the spirit of prayer as you once had? Do you feel bowed down with grief because God's work revives no more? Some of you can answer in the affirmative; but some of you cannot. Some of you must say in truth, there has been a great falling off in prayer, and in interest for souls. On one occasion, as I was preaching on this subject, a man who was represented to be one of the most pious men in the church rose and said, "I am the man--Mr. Finney, you need not say another word; I am the Achan in this camp of Israel; you need not look any further for the Achan--I am he." What he said seemed to have more effect than everything else in the meeting, and was the commencement of a glorious revival.

3. To the students present, let me say--Are you aware how much you can do by praying for each



other? Are you in the habit of meeting in little circles for this purpose? Are some of your classmates in their sins, and can you let them live and die so? Are you not in fault for their impenitence? Have you set your heart so intensely upon the conversion of these souls that you cannot live unless they are converted?

4. And will you not all pray for your teachers and stay up their hands and make their hearts strong by your sympathies and your prayers in their behalf? Cry unto God for them that they may be made mighty through God for the converting and saving of precious souls. O, if all the church were filled with the spirit of prayer, what a rush we should see towards the kingdom of heaven, even this very night! What is your practice during our meetings of enquiry? Are you instant in prayer then? It always alarms me in a church to find that few or none enquire about the state of these meetings with anxious sinners. It shows that the hearts of the people are not there. Brethren, do you pray for those who have set their faces enduringly towards Zion?

## **On Being Almost Persuaded to be a Christian**

Lecture III

March 14, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Acts 26:28: "Agrippa said unto Paul -- almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

Discussing the subject presented here, I shall,

*I. Notice the fact that men are made Christians by persuasion.*

*II. Show what are not reasons why they are not altogether persuaded.*

*III. What are the reasons why they are only almost and not altogether persuaded.*

### **I. Men are made Christians by persuasion.**

- 1. You recollect the connection, which gives us the occasion and the circumstances of this remark. Paul had been arrested and brought before Agrippa to defend himself against the Jews. In this defense he gives his early history, a sketch of his conversion to the faith of Christ, then, of his labors and persecutions subsequent to that event, and finally appeals to Agrippa himself, as if assured that one, familiar with Judaism as he was, must believe the ancient prophets, and hence could not reasonably reject Jesus of Nazareth. "King Agrippa, said he, believest thou the

prophets? I know that thou believest." "Agrippa answered, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." To which Paul nobly responds, "I would to God that not only thou, but all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds."

- 2. Paul had so preached that Agrippa felt almost persuaded to become a Christian. Of course under Paul's preaching, men naturally inferred that the change from being a sinner to being a Christian is wrought by persuasion. Assuming that Paul preached not only the true gospel, but in the truest method and with the soundest philosophy, we infer that men become Christians by means of persuasion. Consequently, they do not become Christians by virtue of any physical change in the substance of either soul or body. It is not, strictly speaking, by any act of creation, an act which gives existence to either substance or qualities, not existent before. Persuasion requires no new creation of faculties. It supposes a mind already in existence and in action, capable of appreciating truth as a motive. Men are persuaded by truth -- truth which addresses the intelligence and appeals to conscience or to some form of self-interest. Thus men are persuaded to become Christians.
- 3. Now here I do not by any means intend to say that this persuasion is merely human. Far otherwise. It is far more divine than human. There is such an interposition of divine agency as sets truth in order before the mind, and brings forth its strength. Thus to human persuasion is superadded the divine. Yet the influence is altogether of a moral nature.
- 4. We are compelled to the same conclusion by the nature of this change. If the change were in the substance of the soul, or in any of its original, created powers, we might then assume that the power by which the change is wrought is creative, not moral. But since the change consists entirely in the voluntary attitude of the mind towards God, we infer that it is caused by those agencies which are adapted to produce voluntary change in the mind's free action -- viz., truth and argument, assuming the form of motive. Hence, in every point of view, it is plain that men are made Christians by persuasion.

## **II. It is next pertinent to inquire what are not the reasons why men fail of being persuaded to become Christians.**

Ordinarily, it is not for want of intellectual conviction that they ought to become Christians. For the most part, in Christian lands, the gospel has been preached so fully and so truly that the general intelligence is enlightened, and all men know that they ought to put away sinning and embrace the salvation provided for them in the gospel. They fail to do this, not for want of sufficient reasons to carry conviction that they ought to. Especially, we may say, that almost everyone has light enough before his mind to carry conviction of this duty, if he were honest and would weigh this question seriously and with candor.

The real and exact difficulty is, they do not make up their mind to obey the decisions of conscience and their better judgment. They are not so persuaded as to determine to act now. For the most part they hope to become Christians at some time. As Agrippa, so they, do not yield to their convictions. Selfish considerations overrule their better judgment.

Here I may safely appeal to your own consciences. Let me come very near to you, even as if I were

alone with you and were to urge upon your honest hearts this plain question. Is it not a matter of fact that you are in reason and conscience convinced that you ought to become Christians, but yet you suffer some selfish reasons to prevail over you, and deter you from doing manifest duty? You know you ought to do it; you know the reasons why you do not are utterly unsound -- radically selfish!

**III. Let us see what these reasons are -- the reasons why you are only almost persuaded to become a Christian.**

- 1. Ambitious schemes. This is the case especially with the young, and particularly with students. Often the young become students for the sake merely of distinction. They cherish worldly aims. They are determined that, for themselves, they will become something. They are to be prominent. Hence, when you come to such a young man with the gospel offers, his first thought is -- how will my reception of these offers affect my cherished plans of aggrandizement? Ah, how can I become a Christian at the sacrifice of the favorite object of my life and labors? You exhort him to yield his will to God's so that henceforth he shall have no schemes but such as please God. Alas, he says, but I have schemes of my own that are too dear to my heart to be relinquished yet. Is it not even so with you who are yet young, but not converted? Have you not some ambitious schemes which you seek to realize, and which you suppose are in conflict with the higher claims of the gospel?

This is for many reasons more often the case with young men than with young women, yet is sufficiently apt to occur with the latter, in some seductive form, and of such power as to overrule all the demands of conscience.

- 2. Many are kept back from a full persuasion by some subtle form of self-righteousness. He cannot quite affirm to himself or to others that he has no sin; and yet he does allow himself to think he has never done anything so very wrong, but has always done about right. He has not been a liar, nor an adulterer. He can almost say with Saul of Tarsus, "I have lived in all good conscience before God." He thinks, and perhaps truly, that he has had many good feelings; kindly, humane impulses, and these he is sure are good. Really he has no heart to renounce all his self-righteousness as filthy rags that cannot profit. He might consent in a very general sense to be indebted to Christ for his salvation, but to renounce all self-righteousness and do all that is implied in being a Christian, he cannot.
- 3. Some have too much self-will. Often and for a long time, have they been urged and have resisted, until habitually ascendancy of the will has given it giant strength, and it can easily overrule every appeal which conscience or God can make.
- 4. Some even indulge resentment against God, or against His servants. Supposing themselves to have been abused because something has been done by somebody, they fancy they do well to be angry. Thus they harbor a spirit directly opposed to the spirit of the gospel, and this suffices to overrule all the arguments which are presented to induce them to become Christians.
- 5. Those who have advanced in age to middle life, have their schemes of ambition, or their plans of business, so that when you make your appeal to them, they have interests that repel it. To you who occupy this period of life, I appeal, if it be not even so. When the gospel has come

to you, demanding your attention, and even the warmest reception you can give it, has not some scheme of business or ambition stood in your way and held you back? The political aspirant has too many hopes excited, and has committed himself too fully to his political friends; how can he turn away to be religious? Some years ago, I knew a young man of fine talents and extraordinary powers of persuasion, who, from a course of preparation for the ministry, was drawn into public life; studied law -- lost his piety -- claimed at first that benevolence called him into that department of labor, but soon he showed that he was ambitious as Caesar, and that really he had no conscience, but that of saleable politicians. Such men are in political bondage. Like Agrippa, they owe their place to some higher functionaries, and are intensely sensitive to their own position and standing as before that higher influence. Agrippa held his place under Rome; so did Pilate; therefore neither of them had independence of soul enough, in a position of so much dependence, to be a whole man. Many now, like them, are in political bondage to Caesar. Mark how Pharisees and rulers of synagogues bore themselves towards Jesus and His cause, and you see, as in a mirror, true to nature, how most political men are in such bondage that they will not break away enough to comply with their sense of duty. I have in mind the case of a gentleman who became greatly disturbed in respect to his salvation. I saw him often and urged him to give himself to the service of God. That, he replied, is a step I can by no means take, without the consent of my political friends. I have long been in the habit of consulting them in all matters which might affect my standing before the community. Furthermore, all my religious friends think differently from you. And my worldly friends, I am quite sure, would be opposed to my becoming a Christian in this revival. How, said he, can I look my friends in the face if I were to become a Christian? I answered, "how can you look God in the face, if you do not?" He said. "I am always in the habit of consulting my friends in matters so important; I will do so in the present case, and then will see you again." I told him I already knew how such a course would result, and had no hopes that could be disappointed. And so it proved. I mention the case only as an illustration of the political bondage into which many fall.

- 6. Some men have a pride of personal character which prevents their becoming Christians. One says, "My wife has become converted, and I shall be deemed weak as a woman if I change now." I have heard men taunt one another, asking, "Will you be persuaded to be religious by such and such a preacher? Will you be one of his disciples?" So it might have been said to Agrippa, "Are you almost persuaded by the prisoner, Paul? By a man who stands before you in chains, and you the honorable judge upon the bench? Will you change your religion and go over to one whom all Jews hold to be a heretic?"
- 7. In some cases, the hindering cause is sheer infatuation. They know the truth on all important points; they will say, "I know it all." Why, then, don't you yield? "I can't tell why." Then, the reason is, simple infatuation in sin.
- 8. Another reason is a spirit of deep contempt for God.

Those who feel this may not be fully conscious of it; but such is the fact. God's rights do not weigh, in their minds, as a straw. You may talk to them of God's right to govern them; you make no sort of impression. What is the reason of this? It is not that they regard God's claims as a dream of somebody's imagination, and deny the fact; but it is because they have a deep and overpowering contempt for God, and therefore no appeal on that

ground reaches their sensibility -- nothing arouses them to action. So deep and so utter is their want of moral honesty, every appeal based on God's rights falls powerless. In their esteem, moral obligation is equivalent to no obligation at all. There is in their minds a total lack of all honorable sentiments, feelings and principles of action, as towards God. Not one sentiment of honor toward the great God! Does honor bind the child to revere his parent? What would you say of one who had been dependent on you for everything, and yet should totally disregard all his obligations to you? Suppose the obligation to be the greatest possible from man to man; and the disregard to be as utter as the sinner manifests towards God, how would you feel? Horrified! You would have such feelings of indignation, you could scarcely think of the offender with calmness. And yet what are the utmost obligations of man to man, compared with those of all men towards God?

- 9. Add to this a total destitution of true self-respect. What? shall I shame my own face by refusing to do my duty? Can a man have true self-respect, who, knowing his obligation, refuses to become a Christian? Certainly if he respected himself, he never could disobey, refuse, and dishonor his God! What! shall I be such a wretch as to abuse my God? No! I would as soon leap into hell as dishonor Christ and pour contempt on my infinite Father! The very thought of so outraging His feelings is horrible. Sooner would I suffer anything in the world than the self-abhorrence and self-condemnation which must result from such contempt of God!
- 10. Add to this a total destitution of all benevolence, which must of course be the case with all those who will not become Christians.
- 11. Next, a total recklessness in regard to the evils of a course of impenitence. Said one man, as his eyes began to be opened to see himself, "The thought that I was giving my whole influence against Christ and against the salvation of souls, came home upon my conscience as an awful sin! I was appalled at myself!" Suppose a man could sit in his window, open towards the street, and there load and fire his rifle into the thronging masses, just for amusement. How horrible must his state of mind be! You, sinner, may not be firing leaden balls into quivering flesh, but you are sending forth streams of influence that damn souls to eternal death! You reply, "I do not tell them not to become Christians." Aye, not with your lips, perhaps, but with your life! -- a thing far worse, more surely fatal and more widely and terrible destructive! Not those who say most, or sin most openly, do most hurt; but your most moral sinners, who are quite intelligent, and know best their duty, yet are far -- O how far from doing it! A fair moral man, of high standing -- what can he not do for mischief? Look at that young man, accomplished, popular and moral; he has such control over the minds of the young people in his village, that you can do nothing to turn them from sin to God. Is it said -- then pray for him? You cannot. It will do no good. Preach a sermon to meet his case; he will pick it all to pieces. You cannot talk to him, he knows so much and frames his objections so skillfully. What makes all this mischief? That young man happens to possess the very attributes that give him the power to do great mischief. He can do more harm than all the rowdies in town.

So of a young woman who is accomplished and moral, yet withholds her heart from God. She is altogether in the way of saving souls, and all the more because she has so much morality. I saw a young lady of this description enter a sick room where lay one of her young associates, just passing away to the realities of another world. Calling forward this

moral sinner, she reached forth her pale hand, saying, "I am not a Christian because I leaned on you. You were so moral and so happy in sin, you had the greatest influence over me, and I easily put off the claims of my God and Savior." That young lady trembled and begged to be excused that she might retire from such a scene, but the dying girl said, "No, no; you must hear me now, my last words. How could you let me go on in my sins! Oh, my soul is lost!"

The great difficulty with sinners is that they take a selfish view of the whole subject. Having fully committed themselves to their own interests, all considerations are viewed in a selfish light. They regard nothing, save as it addresses either their hopes or their fears. If this striking fact were properly considered, it would show the need and the character of the divine Spirit's influences.

Sinners, taking only a selfish view of God's claims, are not at all prepared to take a disinterested view of the subject. They are not prepared to become Christians, although they are quite prepared to look around and see if they cannot become more happy.

- 12. Once more, many are not fully persuaded now because they expect in some way to have another call and a better opportunity. Full of hope as to this, they consequently deceive themselves. Often conscious that they egregiously trifle with their own souls, they yet are so reluctant to meet God's claims today that they let it slide over. They say, "I am not yet persuaded to become a Christian, but when God's resistless power comes down upon me, then I shall yield."
- 13. In fact, when you get at the bottom of the case, you find they are desperately depraved. Their depravity is so deep, so radical, it bids defiance to all your motives for persuasion. Sometimes the sense of being greatly obliged, breaks down a really hard heart. But even this consideration many sinners can resist. The sense of being loved and pitied of God, makes some impression on their hearts, but often fails to move them much. So dead are they to the attractions of the morally beautiful and true, that much of the most glorious truth concerning God, seems to fall powerless upon their hearts. They seem incapable of being moved by anything save it be some hope of greater selfish good. For the honor of God they care not. If they could get anything from Him to promote their own selfish good, they would be ready to grasp it. For God, they care not. They would not care if He were dead. If their course were to bring mischief on Him, they would not care. They know they act meanly, cruelly, wickedly towards God; yet they are not persuaded to desist from this course and forsake their sins. Specify some particular form of sin; bring it before their mind; convince them they had better forsake it, yet they will not. In fact, a besotted will not is the only reason why they do not.

## **REMARKS.**

1. Sin is the greatest mystery in this world. How can it be accounted for? I have often wondered at the case of men convinced of duty, who yet will persist in their sins, despite the utmost reason to forsake them. Sometimes they seem to be infatuated. In fact, they are. It is a spiritual infatuation!
2. How strange to hear sinners object to the mysteries of religion. Indeed! They assume that there is

something vastly mysterious in religion, and therefore they cannot embrace it! There can be no greater mystery than sin! All the mysteries in religion are as nothing compared with the mystery of sinning! It is safe to say that if we had not facts to prove it, nobody could believe that men would persist in sin as they do, despite all conceivable reasons to the contrary course. What can be more strange? Sin is indeed a mystery so deep, who can tell what it is and why it is? Surely, no sinner can tell. See that sinner hold his soul, as it were, in his hand, play with it as with a top, and then in the face of Calvary, throw it into hell! Knowing full well that sin brings him no good, but only evil; assured, too, that all good is given by piety, he can yet throw his soul away, for nothing! Truly, this is one of the mysteries of the universe, to be resolved into the sovereignty of a free agent abusing his liberty of free action, having been created with power to abuse it at his own option.

3. The infatuation of the sinner is an obvious fact. People may abuse Adam and other agencies tending to sin, as much as they please. Yet they cannot help knowing that this infatuation is a matter of their own, and that whatever relation it may bear to any other beings or agencies in the universe, themselves alone are to blame for their own sin. They inwardly know that they are the sole authors of their own sin, how much so ever other agencies may have been its occasions and temptations. The dreadful infatuation lives and reigns in their own souls. Suppose you were to see thousands of people rushing towards and over a precipice, and should also see all sorts of influences thrown in their way to stop them; fathers and mothers rushing in before them with imploring cries, beseeching them to stop -- pleading, rebuking, yet all in vain; on they go, and over, and down, down they plunge, with eyes wide open; how astonishing! Whole oceans of men, rushing down the steep of death -- an army of maniacs! No wonder that when Christians get their eyes open to this fearful scene, they almost die! They would if they were long subjected to this dreadful view without some sort of alleviation. You hear them saying, "Lord, I shall surely die unless Thou interpose to save these sinners, or in some way relieve me from this dreadful position of seeing souls perish before my very eyes!"

4. How shocking to hear sinners claim that they are doing about right, while yet they live in utter sin against God and the Lamb! They claim that they have none but honorable feelings and sentiments, and even talk of their moral honesty! What a burlesque upon the truth is all such talk as this! Especially, how strange is it that such sinners should set themselves up for reformers! There is something supremely ridiculous in these pretensions to be reformers. They, who have not the first particle of genuine benevolence -- who can rob God of everything they owe Him, yet profess to love the poor slave and the poor inebriate! How deep does this love go down? Is there any moral bones in it at all? If I am morally honest, can I rob and abuse my own mother? Having done just this and all this, can I then turn around and make pretensions to honor and propriety? Yet the sinner, having robbed God all his life-time, pretends to honor, and even to practice, righteousness!

5. When a man has all needful convictions of duty, he is then and thenceforth, without excuse. Every honest man's position is this: Show me what I ought to do, and I will do it. No other question need be asked than this one -- Ought I to do this? This question settled, nothing more is needed. To settle the question of oughtness, and then stop there without doing duty, is to tempt God. It is to provoke Him to consuming wrath! Such a sinner is utterly without excuse. "I know, says he, that I ought to do this." Then you must do it -- as you would be a man, and would acquit yourself of a man's responsibilities! Say -- "Anything that is my duty, I will do at all hazards; if it be my duty, I will begin now!" But to see intelligent and moral beings throw all these obligations and convictions to the winds -- how

fearful!

6. For sinners to wait God's time to repent, is infinitely absurd. God's time is now; you wait, just to miss His time and provoke Him to deny you any more time at all. You are persuaded of your duty now. What more do you ask of God than this? What more can you in reason desire of God than that He should reveal to you your condition, your peril, your way of escape, and the reasons which urge you to flee for help to the Lamb of Calvary? All this He has done; and now, in tones of love and pity, calls on you to give heed to His call. Will you do it?

## **On Neglecting Salvation**

Lecture IV  
April 11, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Heb. 2:3: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

Every thing about this question invests it with solemn interest and presses us to ask--What does it mean? Escape what? If we neglect so great salvation, what shall we not escape?

The question itself plainly implies that there is danger of something, and presupposes that you are likely to neglect, and if so, are certain to incur some fearful evil. His very mode of asking the question shows that there can be no answer--none of such sort as would show how an escape can be secured. You must be saved from something;--must make an effort to secure that salvation;--neglecting this effort, you cannot escape.

The writer conceives of this salvation as great. If you attend carefully to the context you will see that he had in eye a particular reason for representing this salvation as great. You will notice that he opens his epistle by saying--"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son"--"appointed heir of all things," "by whom He made the worlds"--above all the angels--spoken of often in the scriptures as really God. "Therefore, says the writer, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip." For if--under the old economy--the word revealed from God to men by means of angels, was sanctioned of God, and every form of disobedience was visited with retribution; "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" This salvation was first distinctly preached by the Lord Himself, and has since been confirmed unto us by those who heard Him, and by many miracles wrought of God to endorse their mission.



From this hasty sketch of the context, it is plain that the apostle conceived of Christ as infinitely above the angels through whom God revealed His law under the old economy. Indeed, the Father called Him God, and commanded all the angels to worship Him. Then turning to the history of the Jewish dispensation he alludes to the well-known fact that every insult shown to the word as published by angels was sternly punished, and on this fact, coupled with the transcendent greatness of the Son of God, he bases his appeal--How can we escape if we neglect so great salvation? If sin against God's word by angels was so surely and fearfully punished, how much more, sin against the word that comes through His equal Son!

This was obviously the particular thing before Paul's mind when he pronounced this salvation great;--yet he does not by any means imply that this salvation is great in this respect only. I shall therefore proceed now to designate certain other respects in which this salvation may be seen to be great.

*I. The greatness of this salvation must correspond to the greatness of that evil from which it saves us.*

*II. It must correspond, also, to the greatness of that positive good which it confers.*

*III. Neglect of salvation.*

*IV. Reasons for this neglect of salvation.*

### **I. The greatness of this salvation must correspond to the greatness of that evil from which it saves us.**

- 1. By how great soever the ruin wrought and threatened by sin, by so much must this salvation be great; and again, by how great soever the glory to which it exalts the saved sinner, by so much is it great. Its greatness then, is well and truly measured by the woes of hell and the bliss of heaven.
- 2. But to enter somewhat more into particulars;--This gospel saves from sinning:--yea, from endless sinning. It must be a great thing for a man to be saved from endless sinning, and the more apparently great after he has reached a point in his career of sinning where he is borne along by his passions, and under the influence of an iron habit, from which there is not the least hope that he will extricate himself. This is the condition of many sinners. Of all sinners, it is true that they never will turn from sin of themselves alone; but of some, it seems more emphatically and terribly true, for their habits become so fixed, that they seem almost to defy Omnipotence. For such to be saved from sinning is truly by a miracle of mercy and of power.
- 3. This is also a great salvation because it saves from endless suffering. There have been great speculations about the nature and degree of this suffering. For example, it has been asked--Will it be (in the future world) merely governmental,--consisting in some form of punitive infliction; or will it be wholly natural, resulting naturally from sin itself?

But what difference does this make in regard to the comfort or discomfort of the suffering? Pain is pain, and it matters little to the sufferer whether it comes in one form or in another. In the sinner's case, the suffering comes ultimately from God as punishment for his sin;--how then can it much concern him whether it comes directly from Jehovah's hand in the form of inflicted penalty, or indirectly, through such a constitution, physical and mental, that sin brings its own consequences of sorrow and woe? God creates the constitution, and of intent makes it such that sin begets pain,--to some extent,--here;--to an infinite extent, hereafter. Small difference, indeed, does it make to the sufferer. If the suffering be eternal, and eternally increasing, this is sufficiently awful, let it come in one form or in another; and if so much be granted, it makes only the least imaginable difference in which form it may come.

- (1.) Another question is raised--to wit: in respect to the degree of this suffering. Some years since, I preached a sermon touching this point, which was reviewed, In that sermon I assumed that the capacity for suffering must increase with the increase of knowledge and of suffering also. To this the reviewer replied that, in the present life, men make progress to a certain point, but no farther; and hence, he argued that progress here fails to prove eternal progress there.
- (2.) It is enough to say in reply to him, that the fact he adduces results so obviously from physical causes, and causes connected with the general laws of decay and dissolution in this mortal state, that no inference can be drawn from it to abate the force of the general law of progress which obtains in regard to mind in all positions which admit of progress.
- (3.) But suppose all that the reviewer contended for to be true. Suppose the suffering to be endless, yet not eternally increasing, but on the other hand, unchanging and a constant quantity. Nay, go farther if you please in that direction, and suppose it to be in degree, the very least possible. Even so, how dreadful must an eternity of such suffering be! Think how long! Consider how utterly even this supposition cuts the soul off from real bliss through the entire period of its existence
- An illustration, given by some divine of other days, may help you to gain some conception of the duration of eternity, suppose this earth to be a mass of sand, and God sends, once in a thousand years, a small bird to take away, in its little bill, just one grain. At the end of one thousand years, he comes and takes away another grain--and so on, till the earth is all removed, This would be only time, not eternity, This, even, would by no means, measure eternity.
- (4.) But suppose, further that all the bodies in the solar system were, in like manner, composed of sand-particles, and one by one, at a thousand years' interval, they should be removed till they were all gone. This too, would only be time, not eternity, Nay, advance still to a supposition indefinitely more vast: suppose that every star in the universe is a sun in its system, and that not one of these systems is less vast than our own; and then let the period necessary for the removal,--or, if you choose so to regard it--the annihilation of this universe of matter --one grain each thousand years--be made our measure of duration; this, too, is time, not eternity. For this vast duration must come to an end. The poor,

forlorn sufferer would have at least this small consolation--I shall surely live to see an end of this long and bitter woe But now, he has outlived the entire period necessary in this supposed process for the complete annihilation of the material universe, he must still say--My woe is only just begun. It has not made the least approach towards its termination. There is just as much duration to suffer as when he began.

O, what an idea is that, of eternity!

Now it matters not, as I have already said, whether the suffering is in its nature governmental, or is merely natural. If one grain of earth's sand measures each thousand years, and all the material universe were sand, eternity is long enough to remove it all. Think of an endless duration, and what have you before your mind! There being no limit in that direction, it matters little whether the suffering be of the sort or of another. Of very little consequence, indeed, must it be if a man could make it appear that all this suffering is natural, or that it is all governmental; or even that it does not eternally increase. The amount in any given period may be greater, or it may be less; but the great final result is, to our conception but slightly affected, by any of these things, so long as it is eternal. This infinite duration is the dreadful fact! If the soul must exist endlessly, the final result is substantially the same. Think of this scene of woe, so long that even the tallest angel cannot remember when it began! No matter how small its amount in any given period;--if endless in duration, how awful!

## **II. But this salvation is by no means merely negative.**

- 1. It does not merely save from this inconceivable amount of misery; it bestows endless and immeasurable blessedness.
- 2. On this side of the scale, also, we may say--if it be endless, it matters little how small it be in amount, for any given period. But when you consider that the scriptures place it before us as blessedness, rich, full, deep, ever-flowing, everyone's cup swelling, enlarging to all eternity, and always full;--what a sublime and thrilling idea is this!

## **III. Neglect of salvation.**

- 1. It is a wonderful fact that this great salvation is neglected by so many persons. It is one of the most unaccountable things that occur in this strange world! What a mystery!--that men should neglect this salvation is when they admit the reality of those evils and dangers from which it saves them. They admit this salvation to be a good thing, nay more, an indispensable thing; that, considered as a remedy it is not one which will come, whether they attend to it, or not. They know that the evil impending forces itself upon them, even as death does--as a thing that can by no means be averted, only as they accede to God's mode of deliverance.
- 2. Further, they admit the guilt and danger of neglect to be very great;--they know that every moment's delay may be fatal -- that any single moment of their lives may seal their destiny and consign them beyond hope to everlasting destruction; and that this is true not only of delay in general, but of this present moment's delay--and yet they strangely linger. Now, is it not strange

that men should delay so ! Suppose the interest at stake were the title to a man's estate. If one moment's delay might prove fatal, what a rush would be made to secure it! Just in proportion to the greatness of the interest at stake, and the imminence of danger from delay, would be the eagerness to ensure the prize. O how would men rush to the means of ensuring an earthly treasure! On every other subject but this of salvation, men would act rationally, and would by no means let slip a great treasure by default of vigorous exertion;--but on this subject you cannot move them!

- 3. The strangeness of the sinner's course is seen yet more fully in the fact that he will postpone attending to the salvation of his soul for the sake of giving his attention to the merest trifles. If men were to neglect their souls for great and good reasons only, it were not so strange, but that they should do so for trifles is beyond measure strange.
- 4. It is yet more strange that men should deliberately shape their plans to neglect this salvation, while they as deliberately plan to get for themselves every sort of inferior good. They plan to eat, to sleep and to journey--to get riches, and learning, and fame; but they leave no place to attend to this greatest of all concerns. Having laid all their plans so as effectually to exclude this, they then make their business their excuse for not attending to their souls. Devotees of pleasure excuse themselves, for they are entirely occupied; and men of business, of course, are under too much pressure to think of turning aside for such a matter as the salvation of their soul. Thus they make one sin their excuse for still doing wickedly!
- 5. Many students make no sort of calculation for attending to their own salvation. They definitely plan out their time so as to exclude attention to their hearts. When they have filled up every hour, they plead that they have no place left for the concerns of their souls.
- 6. Many professed Christians even seem to lay their plans so as to make no progress in spirituality. They definitely calculate on getting all other things that they deem valuable--learning, wealth, all earthly good; but they put their religion last and lowest in the scale. When everything else has had all the attention they care to give it, then they may be ready to cultivate their spirituality. It is most remarkable that such persons never do much to purpose for either their own souls or the souls of others.
- 7. It is affecting to observe how difficult it is, when men have laid their plans for worldly good, to get them to change, and seek first their God. Even of professed Christians this is often true. They cannot go, with cheerful steps, even to a prayer-meeting. If they go at all, they are very late, to make the time as short as possible, and then they come with hearts full of the world. Instead of giving up their worldly plans and saying--"I must have salvation; my plans are all wrong from the beginning--all selfish in their spirit--and I must wash out all the past and begin a new life;"--instead of this, I say they cling ever more to their cherished plans. Perhaps I have told you how my mind became pinched under the pressure of this sort of question, after I had accepted the Bible as from God. When God's claims began to come home to my conscience, I said to myself, How do I know but God will want me to give my profession,--(to which I was very much attached,) and of so, what shall I do? This question grasped my conscience terribly, for I saw that becoming religious implied giving up my business, or, at least, making it entirely

subject to God's control. Perhaps, said I, God will want me to go on a mission, or, at least, to preach the gospel. Can I consent to do it? The impression came down heavily on my mind--God wants you to preach his gospel! He does not want you to follow the law. Then I said--I have never consulted God at all in reference to the business of my life, though He has given Christ to redeem me and watch over me all my life long to do me good. I must do so now and henceforth! I ought to know what God would have me do, and I must know. I must not go on in this way.

The great point was now gained; I began to act as a rational being should, and God shed light on my path. Now, perhaps some of you, young people, have never asked God whether He wants you to get an education, and for what purpose. Some of you may have asked this question prayerfully; others not. If you have not, how do you know what God would have you do? Is it not plain that this neglect, on your part, amounts to moral insanity? Who of you all does not admit that you ought to attend to the great business for which God sent you into this world? Have you ever asked God to show you what your special errand in this world is? Suppose an angel should meet you today and should say--have you attended yet to the great business for which you were sent into the world? In the stillness of the midnight hour, you open your eyes and lo, an angel of God is before you--and he asks if you have done anything, after so long towards executing the mission for which you were sent into the world. O, how you are smitten with dread and horror when he tells you that, if you have not, he is commissioned to demand your soul! "This night," he cries, "thy soul is required of thee!" Then, you will readily believe that to neglect the great business of life, when you knew what it was, is indeed the worst insanity! O, take care of your soul; don't lose it; the treasures of eternity are in its welfare--and how can you throw them all away!

#### **IV. What are your reasons for this neglect of salvation?**

- 1. Not ignorance, for you know your duty. Not the force of circumstance, for they have not excluded you from God and from due attention to his claims. There is no important reason. Could you study better without religion? Not so well. Would you be more happy without it? Nay, but far less so. Can you assign any reason for this neglect? What can it mean? Is it not moral insanity?
- 2. The only reason you can assign is that you love what God hates. You are not willing to be saved from your sins. The gospel comes to save you from your sins, but you are not willing to be saved from what you so much love!
- 3. You care not how much evil you do by neglecting this great salvation. The evil you inflict on your classmates and near friends is often fatal--yet how little do you care! suppose one of those friends should die this night! You have seduced him along in sin, and have really made him neglect the salvation of his soul. He is about to die. Looking up earnestly into your eye, he says--My soul is lost! Feel of my pulse. In a few minutes I shall be in hell!

He is gone! There; he opens his eyes in hell! My room-mate, my class-mate; my dear friend--in hell! O! Alas! a soul is lost, and that, through my influence, I have done

nothing to save him. I might have saved him if I had done my duty. Alas, that a soul should be in hell through my neglect! Example is the highest influence. If you neglect this great salvation, you are doing all that you can to induce others to do the same. Your example urges them on in that course, with greater power than anything else you can do or say.

- 4. Do not presume upon God's forbearance. You probably think you may presume without losing your soul. You think God is too good to cut you down in your sins;--but you may find He is too good to spare you--too good to let you allure others down to hell -too good to let you accumulate more guilt, and make your eternal doom more dreadful. Ought He not to be afraid lest your example should ruin other souls? Ah, you may provoke Him to pass His hand over your pale brow and take your equity, oh, mighty man! So a man might vainly presume that he could burn down buildings, and murder innocent people, and yet escape punishment, because the magistrate is a good-hearted man. Take care, sinner, lest the very goodness you rely on to save you should secure your destruction! It is the worst of all folly to neglect this great salvation because you know that God is merciful.
- 5. Mere neglect secures the soul's ruin.
- 6. Many seem to suppose that heaven is a place, and of such sort that access to it turns not at all on fitness of character. Some, also, suppose that death has great sanctifying power, and will, of itself, make them quite fit for heaven, Or, they think God is so good He will take them to heaven without insisting on a new heart. Yet the very least consideration ought to show men that they must be radically changed in character, and be sanctified by the truth of the gospel, or they can never see the Lord. According to the plain and uniform teaching of the Bible, this renewal must take place in this life. The means for it are to be used here, and here they must take their effect. What is death but the gate-way to the eternal world--to the sinner, the door by which he passes from earth and goes down to hell. There is nothing in the door to change his character or his destiny! Neither to expect this. Then why do men live on in this way?
- 7. Neglect ought to be fatal. There is not a conscience in the universe which does not say it ought to be. If men will neglect the richest provisions God could make for their salvation, there is a moral fitness in His holding them to the legitimate results of their folly, and giving them the doom they so richly deserve.
- 8. Neglect, even so long as through the period of youth, is generally fatal. Young persons are prone to assume that they can safely neglect their souls for a season, while amusements press on their attention, and other engagements engross their regard; but while they sport and God is waiting, time flies away, and often the day of grace shuts down upon them, closing in hopeless night. The day of hope is gone, and their neglect has proved fatal.
- 9. To make up the mind only for once to neglect salvation, often proves fatal. It may be your intention to delay but one hour, or till you can go from the house of God to your home: and yet that one short delay may be just once too many. That call from God may have been the very last! You turned away, and soon you found that your soul was left in darkness--that your moral sensibilities were dead--that a deep spiritual desolation had come over you, consequent on that

one fatal purpose to delay. It was said of one--"He wist not that the Lord had departed from him." So, many a sinner, after he has turned God away. It often happens that those who are guilty of one deliberate act of turning away from God find themselves devoid of moral sensibility and utterly without conviction of sin.

- 10. Persons may as well neglect wholly as to give attention in the way many do. They attend just enough to deceive themselves, yet not enough to make any real progress. This is true of some professors of religion. They make no progress in sanctification; they grow no better; but rather worse. They keep up the forms of family prayer, and just enough of the forms of religion generally to keep up the strong delusion that they are on their way to heaven. Thus they manage to quiet their fears, and prop up a ruinous hope. No doubt hundreds of thousands are doing this continually. Many of you, I fear, are in this very career of self-deception--just giving attention enough to delude yourselves along on a hope that must perish when God shall take away your soul. You do not half enough to keep your souls in the atmosphere of God's love; but only enough to coast along under the trade winds of death, hard upon the rocks of damnation! All along your course, you might, if you would listen, hear the roar of the breakers under your bow. Ah, ere you are aware you are gone!

You know you are not laboring for souls. Really, you are doing nothing at all in that great work, although you know God has told you to "have compassion on them," and "pull them out of the fire." What are you doing? Only just enough to keep alive your hope. The devil wants you to do so much -- just enough to work out your own destruction, and encourage others along in the same path by your example. He desires this, not only that he may be sure of you, but that he may use you to ruin other souls. He would encourage you to pray just enough to keep your hope good, and to be a stumbling-block to others. So, you please Satan; but Christ has the utmost abhorrence of your course. Ye who profess religion -- how many of you are only servants of the devil -- doing no other work but his? How many of you maintain a spirit and conversation altogether worldly ?

- 11. Finally, the excuses men make for not attending to their soul's salvation are the grossest insult to God. At bottom they assume that God's interests and honor are not worth their regard. They do not care for His feelings. It matters nothing to them how much they slight His authority, or grieve His love. And is this the rational way to secure His good will? Would it be strange if God should not turn out of His onward course of governing the world for the sake of accommodating such sinners with more time to sin unpunished, or with greater measures of His Spirit to abuse? A career of sin, so guilty, must come to a bitter end! How shall they escape who neglect so great a salvation.

## **On Prayer for The Holy Spirit**

### Lecture V

May 23, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 11:11-13: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or, if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

These verses form the concluding part of a very remarkable discourse of our Lord to his disciples on prayer. It was introduced by their request that he would teach them how to pray. In answer to this request, he gave them what we are wont to call the Lord's Prayer, followed by a forcible illustration of the value of importunity, which he still further applied and enforced by renewing the general promise--"Ask and it shall be given you." Then, to confirm their faith still more, he expands the idea that God is their Father, and should be approached in prayer as if he were an infinitely kind and loving parent. This constitutes the leading idea in the strong appeal made in our text. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or, if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or, if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

*I. The gift of the Holy Ghost comprehends all we need spiritually.*

*II. It is supremely easy to obtain this gift from God.*

*III. Injurious and dishonorable to God are the practical views.*

*IV. How to account for the impression that the Holy Spirit can rarely be obtained in satisfying fullness.*

*V. How can we reconcile this experience with Christ's veracity.*

## **I. The gift of the Holy Ghost comprehends all we need spiritually.**

- 1. Remarking upon this text, I first observe that when we rightly understand the matter, we shall see that the gift of the Holy Ghost comprehends all we need spiritually. It secures to us that union with God which is eternal life. It implies conversion, which consists in the will's being submitted to God's control. Sanctification is
  - (1.) this union of the will to God perfected and perpetuated;
  - (2.) the ascendancy of this state of the will over the entire sensibilities, so that the whole mind is drawn into union and sympathy with the mind and heart of God.



## **II. It is supremely easy to obtain this gift from God.**

In other words, it is easy to obtain from God all spiritual blessings that we truly need. If this be not so, what shall we think of these words of Christ? How can we by any means explain them consistently with fair truthfulness? Surely, it is easy for children to get really good things from their father. Which of you, being a father, does not know it to be easy for your children to get good things from you? You know in your own experience that they obtain without difficulty, even from you, all the real good they need, provided it be in your power to give it. But you are sometimes "evil," and Christ implies that, since God is never evil but always infinitely good, it is much more easy for one to get the Holy Spirit than even for your children to get bread from your hands. "Much more!" What words of meaning in such a connection as this! Every father knows there is nothing in the way of his children getting from him all the good things they really need and which he has to give. Every such parent values these good things for the sake of giving them to his children. For this, parents toil and plan for their children's sake. Can they then be averse or even slow to give these things to their children?

Yet God is much more ready to give his Spirit. My language, therefore, is not at all too strong. If God is much more ready and willing to give his children good things than you are to give to yours, then surely it must be easy and not difficult to get spiritual blessings, even to the utmost extent of our wants.

Let this argument come home to the hearts of those of you who are parents. Surely, you must feel its force. Christ must be a false teacher if this be not so. It must be that this great gift, which in itself comprehends all spiritual gifts, is most easily obtained, and in any amount which our souls need.

## **III. Injurious and dishonorable to God are the practical views.**

- 1. How very injurious and dishonorable to God are the practical views of almost all men on this subject! The dependence of men on the Holy Spirit has come to be the standing apology for moral and spiritual delinquency. Men every where profess to want the Holy Spirit, and more or less, to feel their need and to be praying for this gift; but continually and every where they complain that they do not get it. These complaints assume, both directly and indirectly, that it is very difficult to get this gift;--that God keeps his children on a very low diet; and on the smallest possible amount even of that; that he deals out their spiritual bread and water in most stinted amount--as if he purposed to keep his children only an inch above starvation. Pass among the churches and hear what they say and how they pray;--and what would you think? How would you be shocked at the strange, may I not say, blasphemous assumptions which they make concerning God's policy in giving, or rather not giving, the Holy Spirit to those that ask him! I can speak from experience and personal observation. When I began to attend prayer-meetings, this fact to which I have alluded struck me as very strange. I had never attended a prayer-meeting till I had come to manhood, for my situation in this respect was very unlike yours here. But after I came to manhood, and prayer-meetings were held in the place where I lived, I used to attend them very steadily. It was a matter of great interest to me, more than I can explain, or well express. I was filled with wonder to hear Christians pray, and the more so as I then began to read my Bible, and to find in it such things as we have in our text today. To read such promises, and then hear Christians talk was surprising. What they did say, coupled with what they seemed to mean, would run thus: I have a duty to perform at this meeting; I cannot go

away without doing it. I want to testify that religion is a good thing--a very good thing--although I have not got much of it. I believe God is a hearer of prayer, and yet I don't think he hears mine--certainly not to much purpose. I believe that prayer brings to us the Holy Spirit, and yet, though I have always been praying for this Spirit, I have scarcely ever received it.

Such seemed to be the strain of their talking and thinking, and I must say that it puzzled me greatly. I have reason to know that it has often puzzled others. Within a few years past, I have found this to be the standing objection of unconverted men. They say--"I cannot hold out if I should be converted--it is so difficult to get and to keep the Holy Spirit." They appeal to professed Christians and say, Look at them; they are not engaged in religion; they are not doing their Master's work in good earnest, and they confess it; they have not the Spirit, and they confess it; they bear a living testimony that these promises are of very little practical value.

Now, these are plain matters of fact, and should be deeply pondered by all professed Christians. The Christian life of multitudes is nothing less than a flat denial of the great truths of the Bible.

- 2. Often, when I am urging Christians to be filled with the Holy Ghost, I am asked--Do you really think this gift is for me? Do you think all can have it who will? If you tell them of instances, here and there, of persons who walk in the light, and are filled with the Spirit, they reply:--Are not those very special cases? Are they not the favored few, enjoying a blessing that only a few can hope to enjoy?
- 3. Here you should carefully observe, that the question is not whether few or many have this blessing; but--Is it practically within reach of all? Is it indeed available to all? Is the gift actually tendered to all in the fullest and highest sense? Is it easy to possess it? These being the real questions, we must see that the teachings of the text cannot be mistaken on this subject. Either Christ testified falsely of this matter, or this gift is available to all, and is easily obtained. For, of the meaning and scope of his language, there can be no doubt. No language can be plainer. No illustrations could be more clear, and none could easily be found that are stronger.

#### **IV. How to account for the impression that the Holy Spirit can rarely be obtained in satisfying fullness.**

How shall we account for this impression, so extensively pervading the church, that the Holy Spirit can rarely be obtained in ample, satisfying fullness, and then only with the greatest difficulty?

- 1. This impression obviously grows out of the current experience of the church. In fact, but few seem to have this conscious communion with God through the Spirit; but few seem really to walk with God and be filled with his Spirit.

When I say few, I must explain myself to mean, few relatively to the whole number of professed Christians. Taken absolutely, the number is great and always has been. Sometimes, some have thought the number to be small, but they were mistaken. Elijah thought himself alone, but God gave him to understand that there were many--a host,

spoken of as seven thousand--who had never bowed the knee to Baal. Ordinarily, such a use of the sacred number seven, is to be taken for a large, indefinite sum, much larger than if taken definitely. It may be so here. Even then, in that exceedingly dark age, there were yet many who stood unflinchingly for God.

- 2. It is a curious fact that persons who have really the most piety are often supposed to have the least, so few there are who judge of piety as God does. Those who preach the real gospel are often refreshed to find some in almost every congregation who manifestly embrace it. You can judge by their very looks,--their eyes shine and their faces are all aglow--almost like the face of Moses, descended from the mount.

But theirs is not the common experience of professed Christians. The common one which has served to create the general impression as to the difficulty of obtaining the Holy Spirit, is indeed utterly unlike this. The great body of nominal Christians have not the Spirit, within the meaning of Romans 8th. They cannot say--"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." It is not true of them that they "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Comparatively few of all, know in their own conscious experience that they live and abide in the Spirit.

- 3. Here is another fact. Many are praying--apparently--for the Spirit of God, but do not get it. If you go to a prayer-meeting, you hear every body pray for this gift. It is so, also, in the family, and probably in the closet also. Yet, strange to tell, they do not get it. This experience of much prayer for this blessing, and much failure to get it, is every where common. Churches have their prayer-meetings, years and years in succession, praying for the Spirit, but they do not get it. In view of this fact, we must conclude, either that the promise is not reliable, or that the prayer does not meet the conditions of the promise. I shall take up this alternative by and by; just now, my business is to account for the prevalent impression that the Spirit of God is hard to get and keep, even in answer to prayer,--a fact which obviously is accounted for by the current experience of nominal Christians.
- 4. It should also be said that the churches have been taught that God is a sovereign, in such a sense that his gift of the Spirit is only occasional, and is then given without any connection with apparent causes--not dependent, by any means, on the fulfilment of conditions on our part. The common idea of sovereignty excludes the idea that God holds this blessing free to all, on condition of real prayer for it. I say real prayer, for I must show you by and by that much of the apparent praying of the church for the Spirit is not real prayer. It is this spurious selfish praying that leads to so much misconception as to the bestowment of the Holy Spirit.

Some of you may remember that I have related to you my experience at one time, when my mind was greatly exercised on this promise,--how I told the Lord I could not believe it. It was contrary to my conscious experience, and I could not believe any thing which contradicted my conscious experience. At that time the Lord kindly and in great mercy rebuked my unbelief, and showed me that the fault was altogether mine and in no part his.

Multitudes pray for the Spirit as I had done, and are in like manner disappointed because

they do not get it. They are not conscious of being hypocrites; but they do not thoroughly know their own spirits. They think they are ready to make any sacrifices to obtain it. They do not seem to know that the difficulty is all with them. They fail to realize how rich and full the promise is. It all seems to them quite unaccountable that their prayer should not be answered. Often they sweat with agony of mind in their efforts to solve this mystery. They cannot bear to say that God's word is false, and they cannot see that it is true. It is apparently contradicted by their experience. This fact creates the agonizing perplexity.

#### **V. How can we reconcile this experience with Christ's veracity.**

In the next place, how can we reconcile this experience with Christ's veracity? How can we explain this experience according to the facts in the case, and yet show that Christ's teachings are to be taken in their obvious sense, and are strictly true?

- 1. I answer, what is here taught as to prayer must be taken in connection with what is taught elsewhere. For example, what is here said of asking must be taken in connection with what is said of praying in faith--with what is said by James of asking and not receiving because men ask amiss, that they may consume it upon their lusts. If any of you were to frame a will or a promissory note, binding yourself or your administrators to pay over certain moneys, on certain specified conditions, you would not think it necessary to state the conditions more than once. Having stated them distinctly once, you would go on to state in detail the promise; but you would not expect any body to separate the promise from the condition, and then claim the promise without having fulfilled the condition, and even perhaps accuse you of falsehood because you did not fulfil the promise when the conditions had not been met.
- 2. Now, the fact is that we find, scattered throughout the Bible, various revealed conditions of prayer. Whoever would pray acceptably must surely fulfil not merely a part, but all of these conditions. Yet in practice, the church, to a great extent, have overlooked, or at least has failed to meet these conditions. For example, they often pray for the Holy Spirit for selfish reasons. This is fearfully common. The real motives are selfish. Yet they come before God and urge their request often and long,--perhaps with great importunity; yet they are selfish in their very prayers, and God cannot hear. They are not in their inmost souls ready to do or to suffer all God's holy will. God calls some of his children through long seasons of extremest suffering, obviously as a means of purifying their hearts; yet many pray for pure hearts and for the Spirit to purify their hearts, who would rebel at once if God should answer their prayers by means of such a course of providence. Or, God may see it necessary to crucify your love of reputation, and for this end may subject you to a course of trial which will blow your reputation to the winds of heaven. Are you ready to hail the blessings of a subdued, unselfish heart, even though it be given by means of such discipline?
- 3. Often your motive in asking for the Spirit is merely personal comfort and consolation--as if you would live all your spiritual life on sweet-meats. Others ask for it really as a matter of self-glorification. They would like to have their names emblazoned in the papers. It would be so gratifying to be held up as a miracle of grace--as a most remarkable Christian. Alas, how many in various forms of it, are only offering selfish prayers! Even a minister might pray for the Holy Spirit from only sinister motives. He might wish to have it said that he is very spiritual, or a

man of great spiritual power in his preaching or his praying; or he might wish to avoid that hard study to which a man who has not the Spirit must submit, since the Spirit does not teach him, nor give him unction. He might almost wish to be inspired, so easy would this gift make his preaching and his study. He might suppose that he really longed to be filled with the Spirit, while really he is only asking amiss, to consume it on some unhallowed desire. A student may pray for the Spirit to help him study, and yet only his ambition or his indolence may have inspired that prayer. Let it never be forgotten, we must sympathize with God's reasons for our having the Spirit, as we would hope to pray acceptably. There is nothing mysterious about this matter. The great end of all God's spiritual administrations towards us in providence or grace is to divest us of selfishness, and to bring our hearts into harmony with his in the spirit of real love.

- 4. Persons often quench the Spirit even while they are praying for it. One prays for the Spirit, yet that very moment, fails to notice the Spirit's monitions in his own breast, or refuses to do what the Spirit would lead and press him to do. Perhaps they even pray for the Spirit, that this gift may be a substitute for some self-denying duty to which the Spirit has long been urging them. This is no uncommon experience. Such persons will be very likely to think it very difficult to get the Spirit. A woman was going to a female prayer-meeting, and thought she wanted the Holy Spirit, and would make that her special errand at that meeting. Yet when there, the Spirit pressed her to pray audibly and she resisted, and excused herself.
- 5. It is common for persons to resist the Spirit in the very steps he chooses to take. They would make the Spirit yield to them; He would have them yield to him. They think only of having their blessings come in the way of their own choosing; He is wiser and will do it in his own way or not at all. If they cannot accept of his way, there can be no agreement. Often when persons pray for the Spirit, they have in their minds certain things which they would dictate to him as to the manner and circumstances. Such ought to know that if they would have the Spirit, they must accept Him in his own way. Let him lead, and consider that your business is to follow. Thus it not infrequently happens that professed Christians maintain a perpetual resistance against the Holy Spirit, even while they are ostensibly praying for his presence and power. When He would fain draw them, they are thinking of dictating to him, and refuse to be led by him in his way. When they come really to understand what is implied in being filled with the Spirit, they draw back. It is more and different from what they had thought. That is not what they wanted.

#### **REMARKS.**

1. The difficulty is always and all of it, in us, not in God. You may write this down as a universal truth, from which there can be no exceptions.

2. The difficulty lies in our voluntary state of mind, and not in anything which is involuntary and beyond our control. Therefore, there is no excuse for our retaining it, and it should be at once given up.

There is no difficulty in our obtaining the Holy Spirit if we are willing to have it; but this implies a willing ness to surrender ourselves to his direction and discretion.

3. We often mistake other states of mind for a willingness to have the Spirit of God. Nothing is more common than this. Men think they are willing to be filled with the Spirit, and to have that Spirit do all its own work in the soul; but they are really under a great mistake. To be willing to be wholly crucified to the world and the world unto us, is by no means common. Many think they have a sort of desire for this state, who would really shrink from it if they saw the reality near at hand. That persons do make continual mistakes and think themselves willing to be fully controlled by the Spirit, when they are not, is evident from their lives. The will governs the life, and therefore, the life must be an infallible index of the real state of the will. As is the life, so is the will, and therefore, when you see the life alien from God, you must infer that the will is not wholly consecrated to his service--is not wholly in sympathy with God's will.

4. When the will is really on God's altar, entirely yielded up to God's will in all respects, one will not wait long ere he has the Spirit of God in the fullest measure. Indeed, this very consecration itself implies a large measure of the Spirit, yet not the largest measure. The mind may not be conscious of that deep union with God into which it may enter. The knowledge of God is a consciousness of God in the soul. You may certainly know that God's Spirit is within you, and that his light illumines your mind. His presence becomes a conscious reality.

The manner in which spiritual agencies, other than human manifest themselves in the mind of man, seems to some very mysterious. It is not necessary that we should know how those agencies get access to our minds; it suffices us to know beyond all question that they do. Christians sometimes know that the devil brings his own thoughts into the very chambers of their souls. Some of you have been painfully conscious of this. You have been certain that the devil has poured out his spirit upon you. Most horrid suggestions are thrust upon your mind--such as your inmost soul abhors, and such as could come from no other, and certainly from no better, source than the devil.

Now, if the devil can thus make us conscious of his presence and power, and can throw upon our souls his own horrid suggestions, may not the Spirit of God reveal his? Nay, if your heart is in sympathy with his suggestions and monitions, may He not do much more? Surely none can doubt that he can make his presence and agency a matter of positive consciousness. That must be a very imperfect and even false view of the case which supposes that we can be conscious of nothing but the operations of our own minds. Men are often conscious of Satan's thoughts, as present to their minds;--a fact which Bunyan well illustrated where he supposes Christian to be alarmed by some one whispering in his ear behind him, and pouring horrid blasphemies into his mind. Cases often occur like the following. A man came to me in great distress, saying, "I am no Christian; I know of a certainty. My mind has been filled with awful thoughts of God." But were those awful thoughts your own thoughts, and did you cherish them and give your assent to them? "No, indeed; nothing could have agonized me more." That is the work of the devil, said I. "Well," said he, "perhaps it is, and yet I had not thought of it so before."

So God's Spirit within us may become no less an object of our distinct consciousness. And if you do truly and earnestly wait on God, you shall be most abundantly supplied of his fullness.

5. To be filled with the Holy Ghost, so that he takes full possession of our souls, is what I mean by

sanctification. This glorious work is wrought by the Spirit of God; and that Spirit never can take full and entire possession of our hearts without accomplishing this blessed work.

I do not wonder that those persons deny the existence of any such state as sanctification who do not know anything of being filled with the Holy Ghost. Ignoring his glorious agency, we need not wonder that they have no knowledge of his work in the soul.

6. Often the great difficulty in the way of Christian progress is an utter want of watchfulness. Some are so given to talking that they cannot hold communion with the Spirit of God. They have no leisure to listen to his "still small voice." Some are so fond of laughter, it seems impossible that their minds should ever be in a really serious frame. In such a mind, how can the Spirit of God dwell? Often in our Theological discussions, I am pained to see how difficult it is for persons engaged in dispute and mutual discussion, to avoid being chafed. Some of them are watchful and prayerful against this temptation, yet sometimes, we see persons manifestly fall before this temptation. If Christians do not shut down the gate against all abuse of the tongue, and, indeed against every form of selfishness, there is no hope that they will resist the devil and the world so far as to be conquerors at last.

7. The Spirit of God troubles or comforts us, according as we resist or receive this great gift. The gospel scheme was purposed for the end of accomplishing this complete union and sympathy between our souls and God, so that the soul should enjoy God's own peace, and should be in the utmost harmony with its Maker and Father. Hence, it is the great business of the Spirit to bring about this state. If we concur, and if our will harmonizes with his efforts, he comforts us; if we resist, he troubles us;--a struggle ensues;--if, in this struggle, we come to understand God, and submit, then his blessings come freely and our peace is as a river; but so long as we resist, there can be no fruit of the Spirit's labor to us, but rebuke and trouble. To us he cannot be the author of peace and comfort.

8. How abominable to God it must be for the church to take ground, in regard to the Spirit, which practically denies the truth of this great promise in our text! How dreadful that Christians should hold and teach that it is a hard thing to be really religious! What abominable unbelief! How forcibly does the church thus testify against God before the world! You might as well burn your Bible as deny that it is the easiest thing in the world to get the gift of the Spirit. And yet, strange to tell, some hold that God is so sovereign, and is sovereign in such a sense, that few can get the Spirit at all, and those few only as it may happen, and not by any means as the result of provision freely made and promise reliably revealed on which any man's faith may take hold. O, how does this notion of sovereignty contradict the Bible! How long shall it be so?

Do you, young people, really believe that your young hearts may be filled with the Spirit? Do you really believe, as our text says, that God is more willing to give his Spirit to those that ask him, than your own father or mother would be to give you good things? Many of you are here, far from your parents. But you know that even your widowed mother, much as she may need every cent of her means for herself, would gladly share the last one with you if you needed it. So would your earthly father. Do you really believe that God is as willing as they--as ready--as loving? Nay, is he not much more so? as much more as he is better than your father or your mother? And now, do you really need and desire this gift of the Spirit? And if you do, will you come and ask for it in full confidence that you have a real Father in heaven?

Do you find practical difficulties? Do you realize how much you dishonor God if you refuse to believe his word of promise? Some of you say--I am so poor and so much in debt, I must go away and work somewhere and get money. But you have a father who has money enough. Yes; but he will not help me. He loves his money more than he loves his son. Would not this be a great scandal to your father--a living disgrace to him? Surely, it would;--and you would be so keenly sensible of this that you would not say it if it were not very true, nor then unless some very strong circumstances seemed to require of you the painful testimony. If your mother, being amply able, yet would not help you in your education or in your sickness, you would hardly tell of it--so greatly would it discredit her character.

And now will you have the face to say--God does not love me; he does not want to educate me for heaven; he utterly refuses to give me the Holy Spirit, although I often ask him and beseech him to do so? Will you even think this? And can you go even farther and act it out before all the world? O, why should you thus dishonor your own God and Father!

## **Conscience and The Bible in Harmony**

Lecture VI

June 6, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--2 Cor. 4:2: "By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

The context shows that these words of Paul refer to his manner of preaching, and to the aim which he had in those labours.

*I. Conscience is a moral function of the reason, or intellect.*

*II. The Bible and the human conscience are at one and entirely agree in all their moral decisions and teachings.*

### **I. Conscience is a moral function of the reason, or intellect.**

- 1. It is that department of our natural faculties which has to do with moral subjects--with morality and religion. This faculty gives us moral law and obligation; it has the idea of right and wrong, of praise or blame-worthiness; of desert of retribution. It comprehends all the intuitions



of the intellect on moral questions. The term is sometimes used to include those states of the sensibility which are occasioned by, and connected with, the action of conscience; yet, strictly speaking, the term is confined to the intellect, and does not embrace the sensibility.

- 2. Every man has a conscience. This is implied in our text. How could Paul commend himself in presenting the truth to every man's conscience if every man had not a conscience--that is, if some men had no conscience at all? The existence of a conscience in every man is a fact of consciousness and one of its ultimate facts. Every man knows that he has a conscience, and it is impossible he should know any fact with higher evidence, or with greater certainty than he knows this. If he had no conscience, it would be impossible he should have the ideas of right and wrong, of good or ill desert, of virtue and of vice. No being could convey these ideas to his mind if he had not a conscience. No language could be of any use to convey such ideas if man had no conscience wherewith to apprehend and appreciate them.
- 3. These ideas of God, duty, right, and desert of retribution, belong to man--to all men; are found in all men, and cannot be expelled from the human mind.
- 4. This faculty distinguishes man from the lower animals. Obviously they have some intellect; but whether they know by direct intuition, or in some other way, it seems impossible for us to determine. For example, we cannot ascertain whether the bee, in constructing his cells on the most perfect mathematical principles, gets his knowledge of this most perfect method, by intuition or in some other process. Be this as it may, neither the bee nor any other of the lower animals has any moral law, or any ideas of moral character, of right and wrong, of good or ill desert, or of retribution. This is the great characteristic difference between these animals and man. Hence, if any man sets up the claim that he has no conscience, he claims to be a brute, for he denies of himself the great distinction between the man and the brute.
- 5. Metaphysicians are not agreed whether brutes have sensibility and will, or not; they do agree that brutes have no conscience and no moral responsibility; so that those men who claim this distinction for themselves, put themselves at once by that claim on a level with the lower animals.

## **II. The Bible and the human conscience are at one and entirely agree in all their moral decisions and teachings.**

- 1. This fact proves conclusively that they both come from the same author.
- 2. Beginning with our text, I ask, what can Paul mean in saying that, by manifestation of the truth, he commends himself to every man's conscience? Obviously this--that by exhibiting to men the great truths of the gospel and of the law, he made his appeal to every man's conscience in a way, and with sentiments that enforced each man's approval. The truth commended itself as truth; the claims of duty, as right. No man who understood this truth could doubt its evidence--none who understood its moral claims could dispute those claims.
- 3. But this point is so important that it should be examined in detail. I, therefore, remark, that conscience reveals the same rules of duty and the same measure of obligation as God's revealed

law does. Conscience imposes the same law of love as God's law does--love supreme towards God, love equal and impartial towards our neighbour. Conscience never fails to affirm that each man is bound to love his neighbor as himself. There never was a human being of developed and sane powers, whose conscience did not impose this obligation upon him.

- 4. Conscience, also, postulates this law as binding on all moral beings, and as extending to all the activities of every moral being. In fact, conscience and reason show that this is the only possible law or rule of duty for moral beings; and the Bible teaches the very same in every particular. Both are entirely at one in all their teachings on this great subject.
- 5. Both conscience and the Bible harmonize, also, in this--that man, in his natural state, has entirely fallen from duty. Conscience universally affirms that men do not, apart from grace, love God with all their heart, nor their neighbours as themselves. The human conscience proclaims man in a state of total moral depravity. So does the Bible. Conscience affirms that nothing, short of full obedience to God's law of love, is real virtue; and so does the Bible. Conscience presses the sinner with a sense of guilt, and holds him condemned;--and so does the Bible. And each decides by the same rule in every respect. You may take each individual precept you find in the law and the gospel; go into the examination ever so minutely; canvass all the teachings of Jesus Christ, all those of the apostles and of the prophets;--you will find that conscience says amen to them all.

What a remarkable fact is this! Here is a book containing myriads of precepts--that is, if you enumerate all the specific applications; yet they are comprised under two great principles--supreme love to God, and equal love to our fellow man. But in all these countless specific applications of these great principles, whatever the Bible affirms, conscience endorses. This is a most remarkable fact. It never has been true of any other book, that all its moral precepts without exception are approved and endorsed by the human conscience. This book, so endorsed, must be inspired of God. It is impossible to suppose that a book so accredited of conscience can be uninspired. It is the greatest absurdity to deny its inspiration. A book so perfectly in harmony with conscience must come from the author of conscience.

Men said of Christ when he taught--"Never man spake like this man"--so wonderfully did the truths taught commend themselves to every man's conscience. He spake "with authority," and "not as the scribes;"--for every word went home to man's conscience, and every precept revealing duty, was recognized and endorsed as right by the hearer's own convictions. This striking feature characterized all his teachings.

- 6. Both the Bible and conscience harmonize in respect to the requisition of repentance. Each affirms this to be every man's duty. Each rests this claim on the same ground--to wit: that God is right and the sinner wrong;--and, therefore, that the sinner ought to turn to God in submission, and not God turn to the sinner in a change of his course.
- 7. In like manner, both conscience and the Bible harmonize in the requisition of faith and of entire holiness. On all these great gospel precepts, the Bible affirms and conscience responds most fully. As to the demand of entire holiness, it is a clear dictate of our moral sense that we

cannot enjoy God without being like him. When our intelligence apprehends the true character of God and of man, it recognizes at once the necessity that man should be like God in moral character in order to enjoy his presence. Beings possessed of a moral nature can never be happy together unless their spirits are congenial.

- 8. Conscience affirms man's position as a sinner to be wrong. So does the Bible. It is impossible for a sinner to believe that his sin is right and pleasing to God. This also, is the doctrine of the Bible.
- 9. Conscience affirms the necessity of an atonement. Mankind have always felt this necessity, and have manifested this feeling in many ways. Through all ages, they have been devising and practicing some form of sacrifice to render it proper for God to forgive the sinner. The idea has been in their mind that God must demand some sacrifice that would honor his law and sustain its injured majesty. That the law has been dishonored by the sinner, all have fully admitted. And obviously the idea has been in the minds of men that it would be dishonorable, degrading and injurious to God, to forgive sin without some atonement. They seem to have apprehended the great truth that, before God can forgive sin, he must demand some demonstration which shall sustain law and evince his own position and feelings as a lawgiver. How, but from these universal affirmations of conscience, can you account for the fact that all mankind have felt the necessity for some mediator between God and man? So universal is this felt necessary that when men have had their conscience aroused, and have been in doubt or in darkness as to Christ, the Mediator, they have plunged into despair. If conscience sleeps, the sinner may pass along with little concern; but when it arouses itself like a mighty man, and puts forth its emphatic announcements, then no sinner can resist. It is a well-known fact that Unitarians, when thoroughly convicted of sin, can find no rest in their system of religious belief. I am well aware that so long as their conscience is not aroused to its functions, and they are in great darkness, they can say--"Man is pretty good by nature, and I see no need of a vicarious atonement. I accept Christ as a good man, an excellent teacher, and a fine example; but what do I want of an atoning sacrifice?" So he can say--till conscience wakes up its voice of seven thunders;--then he cries out, "I am undone. How can I live if there be not some atoning sacrifice for my sins?"

There never was a sinner, awakened to see his sins truly, who did not go into despair unless he saw the atonement. I could give you many cases of this sort which have fallen under my own observation, in which, persons, long denying the need of any atonement, have at length had conscience fully aroused, and have then invariably felt that God could not forgive unless in some way his insulted majesty were vindicated.

Indeed, God might be perfectly ready to forgive so far as his feelings are concerned, for he is not vindictive, neither is he implacable; but he is a moral governor and has a character, as such, to sustain. The interests of his created universe rest on his administration, and he must take care what impression he makes on the minds of beings who can sin.

In this light we can appreciate the propensity always felt by the human mind to put some Mediator between a holy God and itself. Catholics interpose saints and the Virgin--

supposing that these will have a kind of access to God which they, in their guilt, cannot have. Thus, conscience recognizes the universal need of an atonement.

The Bible every where reveals the adequacy of the atonement made by Christ; and it is remarkable that the human conscience also promptly accepts it as sufficient. You may arouse the conscience as deeply as you please--may set it all on fire, and yet as soon as the atonement of Christ is revealed, and the mind understands what it is, and what relations it sustains to law and government, suddenly conscience is quiet; the sense of condemnation is gone; the assurance of an adequate atonement restores peace to the troubled soul. Conscience fully accepts this atonement as amply sufficient, even as the Bible also does.

But nothing else than this atonement can satisfy conscience. Not good works, ever so many or so costly; not penance, not any amount of self-imposed suffering and sacrifice. Let a sinner attempt to substitute ever so much prayer and fasting, in place of Christ as an atoning sacrifice, it is all of no avail. The more he tries, the more he is dissatisfied. Conscience will not accept it. Neither will the Bible. Most wonderfully, we find it still true, to whatever point we turn, that conscience and the Bible bear the same testimony--take the same positions.

- 10. But how does this happen? Whence comes this universal harmony? This is a problem for those to solve who deny the inspiration of God's word. Those who admit its inspiration have only to refer both to the same Author. It is no strange thing on their theory, that God's voice in the Bible, and God's voice in the bosom of man, should utter the same notes, each responsive to the other, and each affirming or denying in perpetual unison.
- 11. Both the human conscience and the Bible teach justification by faith. I do not suppose the human conscience could have revealed to us the fact of the death of Christ; but the Bible having revealed it, the conscience can and does appreciate its fitness and adequacy, and, therefore, can and does accept this sacrifice as a ground of justification before God. It recognizes the sinner as brought into a state of acceptance with God on the ground of what Christ has suffered and done. What can be the reason that faith in Christ has such wonderful power to extract the smart of sin, take away the sense of condemnation, and give the consciousness of being accepted of God? The fact we see developed every day. You cannot make the mind afraid of punishment when once it rests in Christ Jesus. You cannot create a sense of condemnation while your heart has an active faith in the blood of Christ. By no methods you can employ, can you force it upon the soul. With faith there will be hope and peace, despite of all your efforts to dislodge them. When the soul really embraces Christ, peace will ensue. The truth is, the provisions of the gospel for the pardon of sin meet the demands of conscience. It affirms that God is just, and therefore is satisfied, while he justifies the penitent believer in Jesus. It is the province of conscience to affirm the propriety or impropriety of God's moral conduct as well as man's; and hence, it moves only within its sphere when it affirms that God can rightly accept such a satisfaction as that made in the atonement of Christ for sin.

Conscience affirms that there can be no other conceivable way of justifying the sinner except by faith in Christ. You may try ever so much to devise some other scheme, yet you

cannot. You may try to get peace of mind on any other scheme than this--as some of you have--but all is of no avail. I once said to a Roman Catholic--"When you went to confessional, you hoped to be accepted and to get peace?" "Yes." "But did you find it to your full satisfaction?" "Not certainly. I cannot say that I knew I was accepted."

There never was a Catholic who had been through all their ceremonies, and afterwards, being converted to faith in Christ alone, experienced the deep peace of the gospel, who did not see the wide difference between his experience as a papist and his experience as a gospel believer. His conscience so completely accepts his faith in the latter case, and gives him such deep, assured peace;--while in the former case there could be nothing of this sort.

- 12. The Bible and conscience agree in affirming the doctrine of endless punishment. Conscience could teach nothing else. At what period in the lapse of future ages of suffering would conscience say, "He has suffered enough. The law of God is satisfied; his desert of punishment for sin is now exhausted, and he deserves no more"? Those who know anything about the decisions of conscience on this point, know very well that it can conceive of no limitations of ill-desert for sin. It can see no end to the punishment which sin deserves. It can conceive of the man who has once thus sinned, as being nothing else but a sinner before God, since the fact of his having sinned can never cease to be a fact. If you have been a thief, that fact will always be true, and in that sense you must always be a thief in the eye of law. You cannot make it otherwise. Your suffering can make no sort of satisfaction to an offended law. Conscience will see more and more guilt in your course of sin, and your sense of guilt must increase to all eternity. You can never reach the point where conscience will say--"this suffering is enough; this sinner ought to suffer no longer." The Bible teaches the same.

Yet each agree in teaching that God can forgive the penitent through faith in Christ, but can extend forgiveness to no sinner on any other ground.

## REMARKS.

1. We see why the Bible is so readily received as from God. Few have ever read any treatise of argument on this subject; but as soon as one reads those parts which relate to morals, conscience at once affirms and endorses all. You need no higher evidence that he who speaks in the Bible is very God. The truth commends itself to every man's conscience, and needs no other endorser of its divine origin. Probably in all this congregation not one in fifty ever sat down to read through a treatise on the evidences of a divine revelation; and you can give perhaps no other reason for your belief in the Bible than the fact that it commends itself to your conscience.

2. You see why one who has seen this harmony between conscience and the Bible, cannot be reasoned out of his belief in the Bible by any amount of subtle sophistry. Perhaps he will say to his opponent--"I cannot meet your sophistries; I have never speculated in that direction; but I know the Bible is true, and the whole gospel is from God; I know it by the affirmations of my own mind. I know it by its perfect fitness to meet my wants. I know it has told me all I ever felt, or have ever needed, and it has brought a perfect supply for all my need." This he can say in reply to sophistry which he may have no other logic to withstand. But this is amply sufficient.

In my own case, I know it was the beauty and intrinsic evidence of the Bible which kept me from being an infidel. I should have been an infidel if I could, and I should have been a Universalist if I could have been, for I was wicked enough to have been either. But I knew the Bible to be true; and when I set myself to make out an argument against it, I could not divest myself of an ever present conviction that this was the wrong side. Just as a lawyer who sits down to examine a case and finds at every turn that his evidence is weak or irrelevant, and is troubled with a growing conviction that he is on the wrong side; and the more he examines his case and his law books, the more he sees that he must be wrong--so I found it in my investigations into the evidences of revelation, and in my readings of the Bible. In those times I was wicked enough for anything, and used to go out among the plain Christian people and talk to them about the Bible, and puzzle them with my questions and hard points. I could confound, even though I could not convince them, and then I would try to enjoy my sport at their expense. Sometimes afterwards, I would go and tell them I could show them how they settled this question of the divine authority of the Bible, although they could not tell me.

I don't believe there ever was, or ever can be, a candid man who shall candidly examine the Bible, compare its teachings with the affirmations of his own conscience, and then deny its authority.

3. Neither Paul nor Jesus Christ preached sermons on the evidences of a revelation from God;--how was it then that Christ brought out the truth in such a way as to reach the conscience, wake up its energies, and make it speak out in fearful tones? He manifested the truth in such a way as to commend it to every man's conscience.

4. Just in proportion as a man fails to develop his conscience, or blinds, abuses, or silences it, can he become skeptical. It will always be so far only as his conscience becomes seared and blind; while, on the other hand, as his conscience has free scope and speaks out truthfully will his conviction become irresistible that the Bible is true and from God.

5. The Bible is sometimes rejected because misunderstood. I once fell in with an infidel who had read much (not in the Bible) and who, after his much reading, settled down upon infidelity. I inquired of him as to his views of the inspiration of the Bible, when he promptly replied--"I know it is not true, and is not from God, for it teaches things contrary to my conscience." Ah, said I, and pray tell me in what particulars! What are these things, taught in the Bible, that are contrary to your conscience?

He began thus:

(1.) "It teaches the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity." But stop, said I, is that Bible, or is it only catechism? He soon found that he had to look in his catechism to find it, for it was not in his Bible.

(2) "It teaches that human nature, as made by God, is itself sinful." I soon showed him that the Bible said no such thing. He declared that this doctrine was contrary to his conscience; I admitted it, but vindicated the Bible from such impiety as ascribing the creation of sin to God.

(3) "But," said he, "the Bible certainly does teach that men are naturally unable to obey

God, and, especially, are unable to repent and believe the gospel."

I replied, that is neither taught nor implied in the Bible, in the sense in which you urge it; but, on the contrary, the Bible both teaches and implies that sinners can obey God and are for that very reason responsible, and guilty if they refuse.

(4) There was one other point on which all the books were clear and strong, but which was utterly against his conscience--namely, "that Christ was punished for our sins. This punishing the innocent instead of the guilty," he said, "was one of the most unjust things that could be imagined." Well, said I, that is just what the Bible does not teach. It nowhere holds the doctrine that Christ was punished as a criminal. Punishment implies guilt, and is inflicted as penalty for crime,--neither of which is true in the case of Christ. He only suffered as an innocent being, and of his own free accord. You cannot say that this is wrong. If one man in his benevolence chooses to suffer for another, no principle of justice is violated. This he conceded.

(5) "According to the Bible," said he, "none can be saved without having their natures constitutionally changed. But no man can be held responsible for changing his own constitution."

Here, too, I showed him his misapprehension of the Bible. The change is only that which pertains primarily to the voluntary powers, and of course is just that which man is made capable of doing, and which he must do himself.

(6) He urged, I think, but one point more--namely, "that God has elected some to be saved, and some to be damned, and that none can escape their foreordained destiny."

To this you know I would reply that the Bible did not teach such an election, nor authorize such an inference, but everywhere implied the opposite. Such was our discussion.

You doubtless all know that such mistakes as these have led some men to reject the Bible. It is not strange that they should. I could never have received the Bible as from God if I had believed it to teach these things. I had to learn first that those things were not in the Bible, and then I was prepared to accept it in accordance with my conscience and reason, and from God.

6. Skepticism always evinces either great wickedness, or great ignorance as to what the Bible teaches, and as to the evidence on which its claims rest. Both the nature of the case and the testimony of observation conspire to prove this.

7. All the truths of natural religion are taught and affirmed both in the conscience and in the Bible. This is a most remarkable fact; yet easily shown in the fullest detail.

8. The conscience recognizes the Bible as its own book--the book of the heart--a sort of supplement to its own imperfect system--readily answering those questions which lie beyond the range of vision,

which conscience enjoys. There are questions which conscience must ask, but cannot answer. It must ask whether there is any way in which God can forgive sin, and if so, what is it. Such questions conscience cannot answer without help from revelation. It is striking to observe how conscience grasps these glorious truths when they are presented, and the heart has come to feel its need of God's light and love. Mark how, when the moral nature of man has sent forth its voice abroad over the universe, far as its notes can reach, imploring light, and crying aloud for help, and listening to learn if any response is made;--then when it catches these responsive notes from God's written revelation, it shouts amen! AMEN! that brings me salvation! Let God be praised!

9. The skeptic is obliged to ignore the teachings of his own nature and the voice of his conscience. All those moral affirmations must be kept out of sight or he could not remain an infidel. It will not do for him to commune with his own heart and ask what testimony conscience bears as to duty, truth, and his God. All he can do to smother the spontaneous utterance of his conscience, he must needs do for the sake of peace in his sin and skepticism.

10. But these efforts must be ultimately vain, for, sooner or later, conscience will speak out. Its voice, long smothered, will break forth with redoubled force, as if in retribution for being abused so long. Many may live skeptics; few can die such. To that few you cannot hope to belong;--you already know too much on this subject. You cannot satisfy yourself that the Bible is false, and make yourself disbelieve its divine authority, so that it will stay disbelieved. Such a notion, resting on no valid evidence, but starting up under the stimulus of a corrupt heart, will disappear when moral realities shall begin to press hard on your soul. I am aware that in these latter times some young men make the discovery that they know more and are wiser than all the greatest and best men that have ever lived. They think so, but they may, in divine mercy, live long enough to unlearn this folly, and to lay off this self-conceit. One thing I must tell you,--you cannot die skeptics. You cannot die believing that God can accept you without faith in Christ. Do you ask, Why? Because you have heard too much truth. Even this afternoon you have heard too much to allow you to carry such a delusion to your graves. No! you cannot die in darkness and delusion. I beg you to remember when you come to die, that I told you, you could not die a skeptic. Mark my words then, and prove them false if you can. Write it down for a memorandum, and treasure it for a test in the trying hour--that I told you solemnly, you could not die a skeptic. It will do you no hurt to remember this one thing from me; for if you should in that hour find me mistaken, you can have none the less comfort of your infidelity. It is not improbable that I shall be at the death-bed of some of you this very summer. Not a summer has passed yet since I have been here that I have not stood by the dying bed of some dear young man. And shall I find you happy in the dark discomfort of infidelity? There is no happiness in it;--and if there were, you cannot have it, for not one of you can die an infidel! Dr. Nelson once informed me that he said this same thing to a young infidel. Not long after, this infidel was sick, and thought himself dying, yet his infidelity remained unshaken; and when he saw the Doctor next, he cast into his teeth that prediction, which he thought had been triumphantly disproved. "Dr. N.," said he, "I was dying last month; and, contrary to your strange prediction, my infidelity did not forsake me." Ah! said the Doctor, but you were not dying then! And you never can die an infidel! When that young man came to die, he did not die an infidel. His conscience spake out in awful thunders, and his soul trembled exceedingly as it passed from this to another world.

But such fears may come too late! The door perhaps is shut, and the soul is lost! Alas that you should



lose eternal life for a reason so poor--for a compensation so insignificant.

## God Has No Pleasure In The Sinner's Death

Lecture VII  
June 20, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Ezek. 18:23, 32: "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his way and live? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore, turn yourselves, and live ye."

Text.--Ezek. 33:11: "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil way, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

In speaking upon these texts, I am to show,

*I. What this death is not;*

*II. What it is;*

*III. Why God has no pleasure in it;*

*IV. Why He does not prevent it;*

*V. The only way in which He can prevent it.*

### **I. What this death is not.**

- 1. The death spoken of in our texts cannot be that of the body. "It is appointed to all men once to die, and after this the judgment." I need not say that men die a physical death none the less surely because they turn to God and live.
- 2. This cannot mean spiritual death either, for this death is nothing else than a sinful state of mind -- a fixed habit and condition of sinning. If this had been the sense of the term death in these passages, they should have read --Why are ye already dead! -- not, Why will ye die? The death referred to is manifestly an event yet future.

## II. What it is.

Positively, this death must be the opposite of that life which they would have if they would turn from their evil ways. Throughout the Bible we are given to understand that this is eternal life -- life in the sense of real blessedness. By the terms, death, and life, when used of the final rewards of the wicked and of the righteous, the Bible does not mean annihilation and existence. It does not teach that one class shall cease to exist and the other shall simply continue to exist; but most obviously implies that both alike have an immortal existence, which existence, however, is, in the one case, infinite misery; in the other, infinite blessedness.

## III. Why God has no pleasure in it.

God has no pleasure in the death of the sinner. He avers this, and even takes His solemn oath of it. Surely, it must have been His intention to make himself believed; and certainly He ought to be believed. "When He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself." Such "an oath for confirmation should be an end to all strife" of conflicting opinions.

- 1. It is contrary to His very nature that He should take pleasure in the sinner's death. Indeed such is the nature of all moral beings that none of them can take pleasure in the misery of others, in itself considered. If any of them could, then might devils in hell find happiness in the misery of those whom they have brought into that place of torment. But the very laws of moral nature are such that it is painful to witness misery. Even the sufferings of the wicked in hell only aggravate, instead of lessening, the misery of the devil. He did not entice them there to enjoy their misery, but to vent his selfish spite against God. Yet, as always must happen, selfishness punishes itself, and the very thing Satan has done out of selfish hatred of God, will only augment his own eternal anguish. It is intrinsically contrary to the moral nature of any moral agent to enjoy the spectacle of suffering, apart from any other collateral source of enjoyment.
- 2. On still higher grounds is it contrary to God's nature that He should take pleasure in the sinner's death, for His benevolence forbids it. He takes infinite delight in the happiness of His creatures, and, therefore, cannot take delight in their misery -- in itself considered.
- 3. It is abundantly manifest that God loves sinners with the tenderest compassion. He pities them. So His word and His nature conspire to show. Christ manifested this towards the wicked Jews in most affecting words and even with tears, when He beheld that doomed city and wept over it, saying -- "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace? But now they are hid from thine eyes."
- 4. No doubt God will pity sinners in hell forever. He has given the highest evidence that He loves sinners. Think how long He spares them to live in their sins; at how great a sacrifice He sent His Son to die for them, even while they were yet enemies. What proof of love can be greater than this?
- 5. It must be that God regards the death of the wicked as a great evil in itself, for it surely is so, and He must regard things as they are, and according to truth. Misery is intrinsically a great evil

in itself, and it must seem to Him to be so. Nay, more; it must seem a greater evil to Him than it can to you or to me, or to any other being besides Himself, in the universe. He never could have done what He has to save men if He had not viewed it so.

Again, God can have no pleasure in the sinner's death, because, after the penalty is inflicted, He can show the sinner no more favor forever. Under any efficient administration, after the authorities have passed the sentence of the law, they must not retract. The support of government forbids it. There could be no force in penalty, and no influence in law, if its penalties could be lightly set aside, or could be set aside for any other grounds that such as would amply sustain the dignity and the principles of the administration. Hence, after God has taken the sinner's life, in the sense of our text He can show him no more favor or mercy forever. This must be a sore trial to His feelings, mercy is so much His delight.

Sinners have had all their good things in this life. So Christ distinctly taught in the account He gives of the scenes after death, in the case of the rich man and Lazarus. He represents Abraham as saying to the rich man "Son, remember that thou, in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things." This you bear in mind, was said in answer to his earnest entreaty that Lazarus might be sent to him and might dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue, for, said he, "I am tormented in this flame." To this Abraham replied, "Son, remember that thou, in thy life time, receivedst thy good things." It is affecting to think that he had exhausted all his good things so utterly that not one drop of water remained to be given him now -- not a drop! It must be greatly trying to God's feelings, after having so much enjoyed doing good to even sinners in this world, that, after death He can do them no more good forever? Yet this is plainly the view which Christ gives of the case. It is the sinner's relations to God's government that preclude so utterly all further manifestation of mercy. He stands before that government in the relation of an enemy, one whom that government must punish as it would protect the rights and welfare of myriad's who depend on it for their happiness. It is truly an awful thought that the sinner must suffer so -- so intensely and without the least possibility of mitigation forever; and that God, when the sinner cries for one drop of water, must forever reply -- No, No, I have done you all the good I ever can do. You have had all your good things, even to the last drop of water!

- 6. Another reason why God can have no pleasure in the death of sinners is, that their depravity is henceforth unrestrained. To see this working itself out intensely and without restraint, as long as they exist, is sad indeed. Yet so it must be. God has done all He wisely could do to restrain it while yet they lived on the earth, and under all His efforts, it only waxed worse and worse. Now, therefore, He desists from all further efforts forever.
- 7. God can take no pleasure in the death of sinners, because, henceforward, their sufferings must be unmitigated and endless. Can God have any pleasure at all in this? What an everlasting accumulation of woe! Sorrow upon sorrow, swelling and expanding, deepening and strengthening, beyond all our powers of estimation or expression; -- verily God can take no pleasure in this and well does He take His solemn oath to this effect -- "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked.

#### IV. Why then, I am next to ask, does He not prevent it?

- 1. The answer in one word is, because He cannot and yet be good. In fact, if God could wisely prevent it, He should have done so; else He could not be a good being. What wisdom allows to be done for the relief or prevention of suffering, love requires -- else He forfeits His claim to goodness. In order to give virtue its utmost scope for development, moral agents are left free to obey or disobey, and then take the consequences. We cannot see how else a really moral government could be administered. Besides, the fact that God does govern thus, shows what He can wisely do, and all that He can wisely do. For it must be that God acts in accordance with His own sense of what is wise and good; -- else He is not wise and good, for to have wisdom and yet not act according to its dictates, is by no means to be wise. So also, to claim to be good, and yet not act according to goodness, is an absurd claim. Hence, if God is really wise and good, we know that all His acts must be in harmony with His own ideas of what is wise and good under the circumstances of every case. Hence, nothing that ever occurs under His government can be wisely prevented. If it could be, He would prevent it. No improvement can be made in His actual administration. You cannot suppose it to be changed for the better.
- 2. Hence, God cannot deal with sinners otherwise than He has without violating His own sense of what is wise and good.

Again, the death that sinners die, though so great an evil, is yet a less evil than any change in His government which might be necessary in order to prevent it. For example, it may be said that God could annihilate moral agents, instead of punishing them in hell eternally. To this, I answer, if this were a better way God would certainly have adopted it. Hence, we are driven to the conclusion that it is a less evil to let His government go on, and let penalty take its course. In fact, to annihilate moral agents, for their sin, instead of punishing them in hell, would be to abandon the idea of moral government, administered under law, by rewards and penalties. It would amount to an acknowledgment of a failure under this system.

Again, God knows He can make a good use of the sinner's death. He can turn it to good purpose. Such a manifestation before the universe of the terrible evil of sin, may be indispensable to the best interests of the masses -- being the very influence they need to preserve them from falling themselves into sin. Under a government where so much depends upon developing and making all realize the idea of justice, what finite mind can fully estimate the useful results God may educe from the eternal death of sinners? This glorious idea of justice is manifestly most vital to a system of moral agents. Its importance to the universe is such as must greatly over-balance all the evil that can accrue from the punishment of sin.

These propositions I take to be altogether self-evident -- so much so, that none who understand the meaning of the terms, can deny them. If you admit the attributes of God, all the rest follows by the strictest logical necessity. If God is admitted to be holy, just, wise and good, then He must govern moral agents as He does; -- and must reclaim to obedience and induce to accept of pardon.

## V. How can the death of sinners be avoided?

- 1. In no way that is inconsistent with the nature and character of God, or with His relations to His creatures. This is plain. You cannot expect that God will act inconsistently with His own attributes of character in order to save sinners from death, or that He will suffer any thing to be done that is thus inconsistent. Nothing can He either do or suffer to be done that shall interfere with the best interests of His government. It were the merest folly to expect this. Hence, it is plain that if the sinner would be saved at all, he must turn from his evil ways. He cannot expect God to turn from His good ways and ought not to desire it. Hence, the only alternative is -- repent, or die. Every sinner must cease to sin and must meet God's conditions of life, or he must take death as his certain doom. To turn from his sin is the naturally necessary condition of being saved from eternal death. Who can doubt this? Who can rationally suppose that any sinner can possibly escape death unless he turns from his sins to God?
- 2. That this is the only possible way of life is further evident from the fact that sinners, continuing in their sins, must be wretched from the very nature of sin. The death of the body removes them from all physical enjoyment. Sin itself will then be left to bring forth its legitimate fruits of disquiet, trouble, remorse of conscience, -- so that even if there were no punitive inflictions from God, and no misery to be endured beyond the natural consequences of sin, the wicked would be only wretched.
- 3. But, let it be considered, we cannot set aside the governmental infliction of suffering, for this is a necessity of government that it should have a penalty attached to the violation of its laws, and should inflict this penalty. No government can exist which does not punish when justice demands it. Its authority is at once gone, and it ceases to be any government at all. Hence, God must punish as long as the sinner refuses to turn.

### REMARKS.

1. The goodness of God is no argument against the punishment of sin, but the very reverse of this; -- it is a reason why sin should be punished and will be. Men may say that God is too good to punish sin and may profess to hold that His goodness explodes the doctrine of future punishment. But really not one of these men is ever afraid that God will be unjust. Yet they fear him. And the thing they at heart fear is that He is good and too good to let sin pass unpunished. They are afraid He is good, and so good, that He cannot fail to punish sin.

2. Some will ask -- Will not the great misery of sinners in hell abridge God's happiness? I answer no. God has done all He can wisely do to save them. So He solemnly avers;-- "What more could I have done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?" Why, then, should He be unhappy in the death of sinners?

3. Having done all He wisely could, He will be content with this. To do the best and the utmost that infinite love and power can do, satisfies Him, and He will not be restive and uneasy, so long as this conviction reposes on His bosom.

4. He will rejoice in the realization of the great idea of justice, and in the results of its manifestation

before all finite minds. He does not rejoice in the misery, but does rejoice in the other results which accrue from the sinner's death. He rejoices that the great idea of justice is brought out before the universe so that they shall see what sin is, and what an exceedingly bitter thing it is to rebel against God and goodness.

God will rejoice none the less really in this immense good resulting from punishment, because of the conditions under which it is realized. It costs something to develop the great idea of justice; -- it necessarily must; it always does in any government. But the results are cheap even at such a cost. Hence, God rejoices in the use He can make of the sinner's death. Why should He not? He will be satisfied with Himself in view of all He has done, and satisfied with the results as a whole. Beholding them all He will say as of His original creation -- all very good. There are indeed incidental evils, but the good so indefinitely overbalances the evil that He cannot but be satisfied.

The death of the wicked will not abate the happiness of heaven. They will say that it could not have been wisely avoided. They know that every sinner richly deserves all the punishment he receives, and hence they will be content. They will not rejoice in the suffering, but will rejoice in the results of glory to God, stability to His throne -- good influence over all the unfallen. According to the scriptures, they shout, Alleluia, as they see the smoke of their torment ascend up forever and ever.

There is a moral beauty in the display of justice and holiness that will enrapture all the inhabitants of heaven. It will seem to them so infinitely fit and right and wise that God should reign and should sustain His law by means of penalty, so as to secure the highest possible moral power to promote holiness and deter from sin; -- how can they do otherwise than acquiesce and ever rejoice? But they discriminate -- as we also should -- between rejoicing in misery and rejoicing in its results. They rejoice, not in the misery, but in those glorious results which are so signally brought out before the universe.

5. It will be seen in heaven and felt throughout all eternity that God could have done no other way, wisely, than to punish sinners as He does. Hence, there will be no complaining.

Their sense of the wrong and mischief of sin is so just and so deep, and their sense of its ill-desert, also, will be so intense, that it will not abate from the eternal calmness of their souls to witness the execution of the law.

6. They will also see that it is the lest of two evils -- a less evil than to use any other means, possible to God, such, for example, as annihilating the wicked. Hence, they will not regret that God should do the best He can. Any change that should set aside punishment for actual sin would only be a greater evil than the punishment it sets aside, and hence they could not desire it. They will always see that a good use is made of punishment, and that positive good is educed from it. Just as we see that good use is made of the gallows in civil government. It is made conducive to the greater influence of the law to deter men from crime. Life is rendered more secure, and thus every important interest of life is promoted.

7. Here it should be borne in mind that it is not the object of government to do good to the criminal who is executed. In capital executions its only object is to do justice to the government. Punishment

never has for its object to do good to the criminal. In so far forth as it is punishment, it has no aim specially towards the criminal, only to make of him an example for the good of the government and of the governed. That which aims at the good of the criminal is discipline. In this world God is administering discipline towards all sinners, and even towards His own children when they sin. In the next world all His treatment of the wicked will be penal, none of it disciplinary.

It is true that in human government, punishment and discipline are often blended, as in State's prison, where the criminal is undergoing the penal sentence of law, and yet the law also aims at his good, using means so far as may be for his correction of life and manners. But in capital executions all idea of discipline is dropped -- especially it is so after the fatal hour has come. After that hour, government does all it can by delay of execution, to impel the sinner to prepare to meet his God. Persons often confound discipline and punishment, failing to make those essential discriminations to which I have now adverted. It is important to notice distinctly that all those features in God's administration towards sinners which contemplate their good are discipline, not punishment.

8. It is a great thing under God's government to execute His law. This is immensely important in its bearings upon the sentiments and feelings of moral agents, and upon their continued obedience. It is especially in this administration of God's law that they see God revealed and learn to regard Him as the great Father of His creatures, evermore watchful to secure their highest obedience and blessedness. This execution of law is indeed done at a great expense of suffering to the criminal; but the fact that they all deserve it -- that there is no other way of sustaining law and its influence, and that an indefinitely great amount of good results from it, -- these facts conspire to hush every murmur and will by no means allow the blessedness of heaven to be interrupted by the execution of law on the wicked.

9. God will make sinners very useful in life and in death; in this world and in the next. They do not mean it; they mean only evil; but God means all the good, and will take care to insure it. He can over-rule their sin so as to bring out great good from it, all along through the whole course of their existence. He will so control it that they shall not have lived in vain; so that they shall not die in vain, and shall not make their bed in hell forever, in vain. No thanks to them. They have done nothing meritorious. No thanks to Satan that he laid the corner-stone of human salvation when he tempted Judas to betray Jesus, that he might be put out of the way. God's plans went too deep for Satan; for, while Satan thought to frustrate those plans, he only fulfilled them. He did not understand God's scheme for saving sinners, else he had not taken a step so directly adapted to promote it. So always, God lays His plans too deep for sinners. They try to frustrate God's plans, but to their confusion, at length find that they only promoted those plans the more. It was said in reference to the plans laid by Joseph's brethren, -- Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, to save many people alive. God suffered their plans to go forward and seem to be fully executed but then He put forth His hand and turned the whole to the utmost good. So God is wont to do in regard to the plans of the wicked.

But it is time that I should present distinctly before you and press on your immediate regard the great question of my text, -- "why will ye die?" To all who have not yet turned from your sins, God makes this earnest appeal. Fain would He know of you why it is that you will die. What answer will you give to this appeal? -- What can you say? That there is no help for you, and therefore you must die? But that is not true, for glorious help is laid on one who is mighty to save.

Will you insist that there is none to pity you? That too, is utterly false. Does not the great God pity you? And Jesus Christ too; and every angel in heaven? And indeed all the holy in God's universe?

Or will you say, there is no mercy for me? That also is alike false. There has been most abundant mercy shown you in the gospel. Nothing can exceed that mercy and compassion; and even today, after so long an abuse of it, you may perhaps yet find it waiting to bless you.

Or will you say -- I can't help myself? How can I turn to God? Doubtless you think you can turn at any time, or you would not so long have put it over to a convenient season. You intend at some time to turn to God; but when? Perhaps when it shall be forever too late! One day, or perhaps only one hour, too late!

I have perhaps mentioned in the hearing of some of you the case of a young man whose converted sister earnestly besought him to repent, and come at once to Christ. He put her off; she still entreated. Especially she pressed him one Sabbath, and felt that she could not be denied. At length, as he could not well do less, he said to her -- I have to make a short journey on Monday, and shall return on Tuesday; when this is over, I will attend to it. On Wednesday I promise you, I will devote myself to this work. Thus he promised. Monday came, he started on horseback to accomplish his business and get all things ready to turn to the Lord. God had done waiting on him! He was thrown from his horse, brought home a corpse, and on Wednesday, his set day for repentance, his funeral was attended by sad friends, and his body committed to the grave. Alas, who shall give the history of the spirit that God summoned so fearfully away?

Many cases of a similar character I have met with, painfully showing that God is not well pleased that sinners should deliberately set aside His proposed time and adopt their own. I once heard a young lady say that she meant to be converted just before she graduated. In fact she had her plans laid very definitely. On the Sabbath before commencement, she was to unite with the church and sit down with them to the table of the Lord. See there! how she proposed to take her own course and set aside God's earnest call to repent now! But God will surely have His way and will as surely defeat your plans. You cannot have your way against God, labor for it ever so much. It would be wrong for God to endorse your plans when they designedly disown His, and you ought not to wish Him to do so. You ought rather to say -- Lord, I do not wish Thee to come over to my wicked schemes. Let Thy perfect will be done! God forbid that I should die, if He has no pleasure in it. If thou, O God, hast no pleasure at all in my death, why should I have? Does not God know how awful a thing it is to die eternally?

Do you think, sinner, that God means to trifle with you? Ye who say that there is no danger of dying eternally for sin -- say how is this, -- that God should so solemnly ask you why you will die and under His solemn oath affirm that He has no pleasure in your death? Does God do all this to frighten you, when as you insinuate, there is really no death to fear? Is the great God deceiving you, or trying to disturb you with needless alarms? Is it not rather the case that you are deceiving yourself with hopes that are baseless and that must vanish away like the giving up of the ghost?



## On Being Searched of God

Lecture VIII

July 4, 1855

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Text.--Psa. 139:23, 24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

These words occur at the close of that wonderful Psalm, written under a vivid sense of God's omniscience and omnipresence, and which begins--"O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me."

In treating my text, I propose,

*I. To show when this prayer, always appropriate, is especially and peculiarly so.*

*II. Why do men need divine searching?*

*III. I must next speak of the manner in which God answers prayer to be searched.*

### **I. To show when this prayer, always appropriate, is especially and peculiarly so.**

- 1. When persons are in spiritual darkness, and have low and faint conceptions of spiritual things. Then they have great reason to suspect that something is wrong, and should be searched out that it may be set right. It must be that something separates between your soul and God, and you should set yourself to urge this prayer unceasingly.
- 2. In a state of spiritual insensibility let men cry to God in like manner to be searched. When you do not feel the power of truth, you may be assured something is wrong, and you certainly should not rest till it be searched out. Those who suffer themselves to remain in such a state, without enquiry for the cause, wrong their own souls.
- 3. When the mind is oppressed with a sense of guilt, but does not clearly see where the guilt lies, no one should remain at ease at all till the whole matter is searched to the bottom. Often persons carry a sense of guilt in their souls a long time, yet do not see the particular cause. Probably they will not see it, unless the Spirit of God search them thoroughly. Hence, they should cry mightily unto him for his searching power.
- 4. When in attempting to approach God, you find access denied you. You try to pray, but find no access to God. Your prayer seems to be shut off; it falls, but never rises toward God. Then you

should enquire why your Father's door is shut against you, and why, when you try to come to a throne of grace you can get no access to it. Then ask God to search you.

Again, when you have no spirit of prayer. When you have no inclination to go to God; when you know you need blessings, but do not feel inclined to go to God and seek them in earnest prayer; then cry to God for the searching grace of his Spirit.

- 5. When prayer, instead of being spontaneous, costs you effort, and it seems a hard labor to bring your mind to prayer, then you should know that your heart does not pray--it is only your lips that pray at best; and, alarmed at such a state of things, you should fall back upon this preliminary prayer, and earnestly implore grace from God to search you and bring to your own view all the fearful wrong of your heart or life.

Some of you may be in this state; will you ask yourself how this is, and what the reason of it can be?

- 6. Equally so, if your prayers do not prevail with God. Then you should by all means enquire what can hinder your prayers before God. You may safely assume that there is something wrong in yourself; nothing wrong in God, nor has he even forgotten his promises.

Again, when you are not successful in your efforts to do good; when God does not animate your efforts and crown them with his blessing; then let not your soul rest, but arise and cry mightily to God that you may know wherefore his grace is withheld from your endeavors.

Again, when the Bible and religious truth in general, and gospel means, are not enjoyed; when you can neglect the Bible and not find it precious to your soul; and your soul is not deeply in earnest; then something is in the way; the Spirit of God is grieved, and you should awake to a most earnest search for this cause. This is an unnatural state of things for a Christian.

- 7. Indeed, whenever you are not filled with the Spirit, you should enquire why not? There is surely some valid reason why you are not, and it behooves you to search for that reason.

When the medium between our souls and God is not clear; when, instead of standing in his sunlight, there is plainly some thick cloud between God and your soul, and you cannot commune freely with him, then you need to be alive to your danger. If you are weak in faith, and your heart does not take hold of the great things of God and of salvation with earnest power, then something is wrong, and you should by no means suffer it to remain unsearched and still undermining your spiritual life.

## **II. Why do men need divine searching?**

Many have supposed that they need the Spirit, not because they are not well disposed, but because there is some defect beyond and beneath their own activities and which therefore they cannot reach, and none but God can. Their need of divine aid is of such a nature that they can excuse themselves if they do not have it. Now in fact, if Christians examine themselves they will see that the very reason

they need it lies wholly in themselves. This will appear, as I proceed to show what these reasons are.

- 1. The influence of prejudice. Men take up a one-sided view of the case, and they do this even under the influence of a dishonest prejudice, for if they were thoroughly honest, they would be careful about forming opinions, and would more often avoid serious mistakes. We are prone, under temptations, to adopt opinions with only a partial and one-sided view of the case, and yet may not be aware of the fact. The mind acts under its present views, but the reason why these views and no others are present, is due to prejudice. Those who form them do not know better, but they ought to know better. In such cases men should pray earnestly that God would reveal to them their prejudices, and they should cast themselves on God for his aid.
- 2. Again, men need the Spirit because they are prone to justify themselves on a false standard. Not having before their minds the love required in both the law and the gospel, they judge themselves, not by God's rule, but by some other rule. Whereas, if they would bring themselves under the light of the golden rule and require of themselves the same love every where in all relations, which they bear towards wives and children, brothers and sisters, they would soon see their mistake.

But men are not wont to use this golden rule in honest application. When you see a difficulty spring up between two men, each wrong, perhaps, yet each justifying himself, you will find they have a false standard of judgment. If you bring their conduct to the standard of gospel love, you will readily see that all is wrong.

I have been often shocked at my own mistakes in judging myself from a false point of view, neglecting and forgetting Christ's spirit, in which he could even die for an enemy. Instead of looking at it in that light, I found myself inclined to take quite another view, and therein, I learned my great need of the Holy Spirit.

- 3. Again, we are often blinded by our feelings. These have a wonderful influence on our opinions. Feelings control the intellect, and this acts towards the control of the will. Hence, we fall into errors because we are blinded by excited feelings.

Persons sometimes say--We have been so tried and abused, we have good reason for feeling excited. Yet, after all, they cannot be satisfied in a course which conscience condemns. Yet they manage to keep themselves blind, while really their excuse is no excuse at all. It avails nothing that men try to justify themselves in wrong-doing because others have done wrong first, arguing that we may rightly injure those who have injured us. Such a state of self-justification needs to be thoroughly searched out by the Spirit of God.

- 4. One peculiarity is often overlooked. It often happens that persons, when themselves the subject of abuse, bear it firmly, being on their guard; but when another is abused, then they think it noble to resist and repel the wrong, and often go into this with a spirit which they would at once condemn if it were aimed to repel a wrong done themselves. The devil gets great advantage over them. They think they are standing up in defense of truth and right; but do it with a spirit altogether wrong. Many a man has pled for the slave in a spirit that shuts him off

from God. Seeing despotism lording it over his fellow-man, he lets his indignation loose, and steps into the place of him who has said--"Vengeance is mine." God wants no such advocacy of even the oppressed. Let no man assume that God neglects his duty of avenging the wrongs of earth!

- 5. Often in this way men are led stealthily into a wrong spirit. They find themselves shut out from God and begin to enquire for the reason. They say--In such a case, I recollect I became greatly excited, but I had good reason, for that poor man was shamefully abused. Take care; you must not become uncharitable and grieve the heart of God!
- 6. We often need God's searching Spirit because we forget. We cultivate the habit of forgetting what we do not wish to remember. Under some influence, leading in that direction, we do not care to remember. God says, "They do not consider that I remember all their sins." Hence, it behooves you to cry--"O Lord, what is it?" We need some special providence, or some form of divine utterance, that shall wake us up to the remembrance of our deeds.
- 7. Men often shield themselves under some false principle, or some supposed fact, wither of which they admit to be true without sufficient care. Having once adopted the principle or the fact, the mind becomes incapable of seeing things as they are. This incapability is a great sin, because of the influence which the will has had in producing it. Thus blinded, men pass on till they plunge into an ocean of errors, all growing out of their self-will.
- 8. Often men are blinded by self-esteem. They have a much better opinion of themselves than they ought to have. Hence, they under-estimate their wrong deeds and over-estimate their right ones. By this means they must, of course, fall into darkness. Indeed, the spirit of egotism amounts sometimes to a sort of insanity. There is a species of egotistical insanity, in which the mind forever recurs to itself, and never sees anything pertaining to self in a just light. Let me not be understood to imply that this insanity is a misfortune and not a crime, for it certainly is a great crime, growing out of a culpable and sinfully indulged self-esteem. This egotism is one of the most difficult things to root out from the mind. There is little hope for him unless God interposes to open his eyes and reveal his own heart to himself in its just light.
- 9. Persons are often blinded by self-interest. You are aware that courts of law will not allow a man to be either witness or juror, if he has any self-interest in the case. A judge will not even allow himself to sit and hear a case as judge if he has any personal interest in it. I knew the case of a man who had been consulted as a lawyer upon a case, and gave his opinion upon it, and subsequently coming upon the bench, the same case was brought before him in the court of appeals, and he refused to hear it, on the ground that he might be biased by his previously formed and expressed opinion. Persons often overlook this danger and get deeply involved in some sin and allow themselves to justify their own course, under the obvious influence of self-interest. In such a case, how earnestly should men cry out to God--"O my God, open my heart, and let thy light in! Draw me out lest I die in my sin!"

Again, we often need God's light because we are blinded by the fear or the love of man. The fear or the love of the creature more than the Creator leads us astray. I think I could name ministers who have lost their power with God and with man, by means of being led

astray by the fear or the love of some of their congregation. Their prayers are cold as death, and their position on great moral questions plainly shows that they do not stand in God's counsels.

Again, men often fall into the habit of professing more in their prayers and otherwise, than is strictly true. Sometimes they remain professors of religion, when they knew they ought not to, for they have no heart in it. They may excuse themselves by pleading that they are about as good as their neighbors are, yet they know this excuse can avail nothing before God. Such persons must fall into great darkness. O how many ministers have continued on in all the forms of religion with hearts hard as a stone, their very professions altogether hypocrisy and deceit before God!

- 10. In this spirit men sometimes fill the office of deacon, holding it solemnly before God and the church, yet with none of the spirit of a true deacon. Some men hold on in this way year after year, and completely destroy their own souls. Sanctimonious in their professions, selfish, fast asleep, they never find that when they open their mouths there is a bursting out of feeling from the living fire in their souls. Cold, formal, speculative, dead, the heart with no mellowness--how plainly such persons ought to cry out to God, "O my Strength, cast me not off; there must be something wrong in me; O tell me what it is! Search me till all is revealed."

Again, we need divine searching because we are so prone to attend to others' sins more than our own. We are in great danger of this, especially if we feel annoyed by others' sins, and get into a bad state of mind ourselves. Indeed, we are in the more danger precisely as we get farther away from God. Often this becomes a habit, insomuch that persons hear preaching in this way, neglecting entirely to take the part which belongs to themselves, and never allowing the truth to come close home to their hearts. Now unless God comes down to search such persons, they will never return to life and love again.

- 11. Men are exceedingly apt to rest in the letter without the spirit, satisfied with holding the truth without obeying it. The Jews of old stumbled on this rock. Such people are not aware of their danger, for those truths which they hold may be truly valuable, yet if this truth does not affect and even arouse them, it is all bad.
- 12. Men need God's searching Spirit because they are so liable to sear [their] conscience if it be abused. They see nothing on the field of consciousness, and therefore, think all must be right. Surely they will go to destruction unless God arouse them and search them thoroughly! By conscience, such persons understand a feeling of remorse; and hence, not feeling this, they think all is well. It is not strange, therefore, that they should live in a great sin a long time, and yet not see their real condition. Yet, none the less for their blindness do they lose their communion with God. There is little hope in their case unless they arouse themselves to cry mightily unto God for his searching Spirit.
- 13. Men are apt to overlook the sin of unbelief, perhaps confounding it with disbelief; and hence, not being conscious of denying the truth in disbelief, they assume that they are not guilty of resisting its power in unbelief. Really, they do not give God credit for veracity, and much less still do they earnestly trust him according to all their wants and to his grace to supply them.

Only by God's searching Spirit are they likely to be recovered from this snare.

- 14. Often men mistake the will for the conscience. They think their conscience is clear and right, when, in fact, in their case, conscience is seared and the will is up in its strength, and has assumed more than all the functions of conscience. If their conscience were in a healthy state, they would readily distinguish between the two; but now, having only a will in action, they must have their eyes thoroughly opened by the divine Spirit, or they will not discriminate between the will and the conscience.
- 15. Or, persons confound memory with imagination. Having passed through a course of doubtful conduct, they conceive what would excuse them, and then bring themselves to think it was so. The circumstances are suggested by the imagination, and are then supposed to be held as by simply memory. Such persons are very probably not aware of this deception, but go on, sinning and covering up their sin as they go. Unless God convince them of their sins, they wax worse and worse; get fearfully far away from God, even while assuming that all is right; while plainly, if they were to apply honestly even the simplest tests of Christian experience, they would find the bottom of their piety altogether fallen out.
- 16. Men are prone to take credit for what is of little or no real value. Often they do things only in the letter, without a particle of the spirit which God requires, and which only could make the outward doing, real obedience. Thus, men will attend religious meetings--right in the letter,--but with no heart of worship, and no regard to pleasing God--and hence, all is wanting in the spirit of the deed. Or, they give their money for a benevolent object, yet give it most grudgingly or selfishly, and therefore, in a spirit which God abhors. Now, if men take credit to themselves for such services, they are under a most radical mistake, and need God's Spirit to open their eyes to see it.
- 17. Often men overlook a multitude of dishonesties and hypocrisies. They go on in a course of professions towards God which, being empty, are unutterably loathsome to him. Who can save them from this delusion, but God himself!
- 18. Men are apt to resist and grieve away the Spirit without remembering when and how they did it. They were walking with God, up to a certain point; then they parted from him, but they did not at once notice the fact and do not subsequently recall the circumstances so as to see the reason why God there left them. The truth, doubtless, was that the Spirit urged some point of duty, but they resisted. So they lost their life and peace, and passed on, so much interested in something else that they failed to notice that God had departed from them. In such a state man's only help is to cry to God for his searching Spirit.
- 19. We are apt to fail in fulfilling the conditions of prayer, and hence begin to doubt and become greatly discouraged. Parents praying for children fail to fulfill the conditions, and hence make no real use of the promises. Such persons greatly need God's searching Spirit to show them their own case.
- 20. Some men are at issue with God by reason of making excuses for their sins. How many

have been in a terrible state of commotion, agonized, distressed, anxious to know wherefore it is thus with them, when really the fact is they are excusing some sin.

- 21. Men sometimes suppose themselves fully consecrated to God when they are not so. Some little idols are hid among the stuff, as in the case of Rachel. No matter how small--a finger ring, or a pin, if reserved as our own, and not heartily laid on God's altar, it mars your consecration to God. You are not a fruitful branch, but only a dry stalk. You can have no hold on God in prayer. In real consecration, the heart is full of God, and this full heart breaks forth in appropriate emotions and reveals itself in a rich spiritual life. If your case lack these evidences, you need to enquire, Lord, is this all? Is Christianity a powerless religion? You need to cry out--Tell me, O my Father am I really consecrated to Thee, or am I deceived?
- 22. Men are in great danger in the line of covering up sin, or refusing when convicted, to confess it. These causes involve them in great spiritual darkness.
- 23. Sometimes persons harbor resentment without being aware of it. They would not exactly like to inflict evil on another, but are more than willing it should befall him, no matter who does it. There is really an ill feeling. In this state of mind, you find yourself shut out from God and need to cry out for light.

### **III. I must next speak of the manner in which God answers prayer to be searched.**

- 1. By directly calling our attention to the thing we need to see. He may do this by the direct agency of his Spirit, bringing up some truth of his word with amazing power and applying it in a most searching manner to our hearts. It is not so much the Bible, as the Spirit of God in the Bible, and by means of the Bible, that brings such light.

A lady, having made a profession of religion and entered upon a Christian life, subsequently found herself so greatly tried, that she at length said, "I must give up all profession of piety and all attempt to live a Christian life unless I can succeed better. At that time she had not been taught that she might find deliverance through Christ. But at this juncture, the doctrine of sanctification was brought before her mind, and she felt her need of its provisions. She embraced it in theory, hoping, and for the time assuming, that this would bring her the desired relief. But this failed, and she was about to abandon the theory, when it was suggested that she had not faithfully put the doctrine in practice. One of her most besetting and powerful sins was in her temper. She began to see that she must have grace for a victory over this. Just at this crisis, her husband in family worship read the passage--"In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:38) It thrilled her very soul. She cried out --"My temper is dead; through grace I have conquered, and my victory is complete." Many years afterwards, she said of herself--"Never since that hour have I felt any risings of unhallowed temper, and I no more expect to give way to that sin than I expect to cut my neighbor's throat."

- 2. Often God brings about the same result by the aid of his providences, these acting from without, and his Spirit, within. Together they reveal to the mind what was not seen before. One

man meets with losses of property, and the loss shows him that this property was held as his, not as God's.

Only last winter, a lady told me she had fallen into a dreadful state of mind, bordering on despair, so that her friends even feared that she would kill herself. At length, providence showed her what the matter was. Her husband had refused to perform the duty of family worship, and she got angry about it. She was so full of zeal for God, as she thought, that she was not aware of her great sin. At length, God brought help by converting her husband. Then, seeing that she was parted from him, and that she had been sinfully angry, her heart was broken down into penitence, and her soul restored to the joys of God's salvation.

In conclusion, let me say--

### **REMARKS.**

1. Having made this prayer, be careful not to resist the divine searching. Whatever means God may use, let him go on, unresisted on your part. When we most need to be searched, we are in greatest danger of resisting the process.
2. Having begun, be careful not to desist from praying and self-searching till the work has gone to the bottom. Cease not, till you find your soul filled with peace and power, such as will reveal itself everywhere.
3. As fast as God reveals light, we should use it. Many begin well and pray well, but defer repentance and reform till they shall have seen the whole. They want everything revealed before they begin to repent and reform. Or they look for the blessing before they have fulfilled all the conditions. They say--"Give me the blessing, and then I will repent." This is no way to deal with God. Let them rather deal honestly and put away all iniquity as fast as they discover it.
4. When persons pray that God would search them, they should use all fit means to search themselves. Not to do this shows that you are not really honest in desiring the blessing.

Some of you have lived here many years, and passed through many scenes of refreshing, and many agencies of both providence and grace, designed for your good, but now seem to have thrown off a sense of responsibility and to have wandered far from God. How greatly do you need to open your hearts before God and expose all to the light of his face and truth. It would be wonderful if amid so many excitements, some should not be very far out of the way. I am sure something must be wrong here. We need a general awakening of mind, in which each one shall fix his mind on his own sins. After such a sermon as this, some one will say--"That is the preaching we need; do not you think the church needs such preaching?" And yet this very man who cares so benevolently for the church, needs the sermon more than any other man in town. The thing most of all needed is, that each man should apply it to himself--asking--In what respect do I need this sermon? For what do I need to be searched, and to pray that God would search me and try me, and see if there be any evil way in me? Some of you, I am afraid, are in most perishing need of this personal treatment. Brethren, when shall this church be as holy as it professes to be; as it is supposed to be; and as its theory leads people to assume



that it is? When shall all our theories be reduced to practice?

5. It often happens that people most in the fog about their own state are most tried with the bad state of others. This is sometimes a great and sore delusion! Beware of it.

How many of you are in the habit of taking your spiritual reckoning every week, or even every month, to see where you are, and whether you may not be coasting along a lee shore, just on the rocks--heading towards them under wind and tide--the breakers roaring under your bow! Pray that God may search you all out, and leave nothing undisclosed! Pray that God may search all this people, each according to his need. This, more than anything else, is what the impenitent here need to see in every house and in ever Christian--each one an epistle of Jesus Christ, known and read of all. So would the gospel be honored, and its truth be enforced with resistless power.

## **On Injustice To Character**

Lecture IX

August 29, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 7:1-3: "Judge not, that ye be not judged, For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again, And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye."

This passage forbids us to judge persons; and our first inquiry should be --

*I. What is not intended in this prohibition?*

*II. What is intended?*

*III. Wherein does character consist?*

*IV. How is character revealed?*

*V. What is the rule of judgment?*

*VI. What are the sources of injustice to character?*

*VII. Consider our danger of falling into this sin.*

*VIII. The great wickedness of this sin.*

*IX. The results of injustice to character.*

### **I. What is not intended in this prohibition?**

I answer,

- 1. It does not forbid forensic judgments, for this would make the passage forbid what God elsewhere requires, and what is obviously essential to the ends of justice among men.
- 2. Nor, does it prohibit all forming opinions as to others. If we have the means of forming a correct opinion, and of circumstances render it fit and needful that we should form an opinion, obviously it cannot be forbidden. Plainly it does not prohibit the forming of righteous opinions whenever we have the means and it becomes necessary to form an opinion.

### **II. What then does this passage mean?**

I answer, it means to prohibit injustice to character. It forbids unjust judgments.

Here it becomes necessary to inquire --

### **III. Wherein does character consist?**

I answer, in the voluntary state of mind of an active agent. I say by his state, rather than by any individual volition. You must take the man and his acts as a whole in order to estimate his character. His character is as the voluntary state of his mind. If this be committed to good, such is his character; if not evil, his character is to be estimated accordingly. Character always pertains to ultimate purpose and intention, and should never be predicated on individual, abnormal acts, which are aside from the general strain of a man's life.

### **IV. How is character revealed?**

In the habitual life and temper, and not in any one individual act. Our Lord reveals the true doctrine when he says -- "By their fruits ye shall know them,"

### **V. What is the rule of judgment?**

Not to judge from single, insulated acts. To judge David only by his acts towards Uriah and his wife, would do him great injustice. In that transaction, David acted not in, but out of his general character. Hence, we are never to judge by occasional, irregular acts; such are aside from the common course of one's life; but by its general tenor. Some persons have their easily besetting sins, that do occasionally develop themselves; yet their general character should not be judged altogether from these. To do so, would greatly wrong them.

## VI. What are the sources of injustice to character?

All prejudice towards character is injustice. It is prejudgment -- forming an opinion in advance of adequate grounds for it. This is always wrong.

As to the sources whence unjust judgments arise, we may trace them,

- 1. To human selfishness. Men judge others by themselves. Being themselves selfish, they judge others to be so likewise. Nothing is more common than for men to regard others as selfish who will not give in to their own selfish demands. It is through their own selfishness that sinners mis-estimate God and withhold from Him the credit due for His loving-kindness. In the same manner they mis-estimate better men than themselves. They mis-conceive everybody's motives if those motives are of a higher moral grade than they are conscious of possessing.
- 2. In the same manner self-will leads men to mis-estimate others. Becoming offended and irritated, they are in no state of mind to judge others fairly.
- 3. The selfish representations of others often mislead us into false judgments. We are little aware how often and how sorely we are misled in this way. Others mistake, and then lead us into the same false opinions. In such cases we are not responsible, provided we use our best judgment in all candor and kindness, being duly on our guard against being deceived and making all due allowance for this liability.
- 4. Another source is the absence of that love which would forbid us to do injustice to character. It is unnatural to love to do injustice to others. Love in our hearts secures us against this liability; but if love be wanting, we are almost sure to err. The absence of love leads to a want of consideration as to the value and sacredness of character. Often we see persons treat the character of others with a reckless levity, as if they had no due regard to its value and sacredness. Such persons are always inflicting wanton wrong on character.
- 5. Often persons misjudge because they form opinions without sufficient knowledge. They judge before they have any right to judge. No man has any right to judge the character of another until he has sufficient data. Especially should he cautiously refrain from an unfavorable judgment, if compelled to form an opinion on slender acquaintance. In such cases, let his mind by all means lean towards a favorable opinion and not its opposite.

Again, men should never be impetuous and rash in forming judgments of others. We sometimes see this in a most alarming degree. It is often a fruitful source of great wrong.

- 6. Any form of dishonesty in us works mis-judgment in regard to others. A man given to lying will have no confidence in other men's veracity. A hypocrite has no confidence in other people's piety, but will have it that others are as hypocritical as himself. The licentious man thinks others licentious; the ambitious man suspects everybody else of ambition. If avaricious, he assumes that others are as much so; if given to over-reaching, he suspects others of the same tendency. Thus any special type of vice in his own character will surely affect his judgments of others.

Again, the state of one's feelings often prejudices the judgment. A wrong bias in one's feelings almost always results in injustice towards others.

- 7. Existing prejudice begets new and additional prejudice. One prejudice begets another. Under the influence of a first prejudice, it is almost impossible to avoid a second. A man already prejudiced, is in great measure incapacitated from right judgment, and consequently he goes on in one mistake and wrong after another, till he surrounds himself with an ocean of prejudice.

## **VII. Let us next consider our danger of falling into this sin.**

- 1. We are in danger of receiving too strong an impression from first acquaintance. Some are proud to say that they can read anyone's character on an acquaintance of five minutes. "Let me only see a person once -- hear a single remark -- I can read him through and through." They seem to pride themselves on their discernment, as if they had a superhuman power. But observe where you will, this is commonly a Satanic discernment -- sure almost to be a false one, and to do injustice to character.
- 2. We shall almost certainly misjudge if we form our opinion from single facts. Suppose men should judge David thus on the case of Uriah; how greatly would they wrong him and themselves too? Yet there are persons who, having heard of one thing, say, That is enough? I know him now. They refuse to hear anything more; but leap to an unjust conclusion at once.
- 3. Often we suffer ourselves to be influenced by that which is no fact at all. We accept it on testimony which would by no means, in our view, have condemned a husband or a wife, a parent or a child, or any whom we love as ourselves. Then it ought not to be accepted against a stranger.
- 4. Of course we are in danger of mis-judgment when we form opinions without knowing all the essential facts in the case. We are specially culpable when we rush to a conclusion without first learning all the important facts within our reach. For this rash conduct, God will by no means hold us guiltless. Manifestly we ought to suspend our judgment till we can and do know, and not be restive or rash. Some months since, I was favorably impressed with the course of a gentleman of deservedly high standing, to whom I had been presenting my views of the doctrine of sanctification. I had given him the outlines of the doctrine and of the grounds of it as it lay in my mind, and then asked him his opinion. He replied -- I have been a judge on the bench for many years, and I have learned that it is never safe to form an opinion without hearing the other side. In the present case, I have not thought on the subject enough to form a reliable judgment. You have made out a fair case, but I want to hear all sides. You may be right; but how can I say I think you are till I have given the subject a thorough and all-sided investigation?

Now, in this case, it was, doubtless, important to hear all sides and give the question a patient and full investigation. How much more, if the case had involved personal character?

- 5. Where the question turns on the quality of an individual act, we are in danger of misjudging

it by omitting to consider the individual's general character. For example, here is a good man, whom you have known to be such, and it is now said he has lied. Now, whether this be so or not so, you should certainly be very slow to admit it, and should by all means give him the credit of his previous good character, on the side of innocence. If there be testimony to outweigh this presumption, see that you examine it candidly, and be sure there is enough of it.

- 6. Public men are liable to be placed in circumstances where they cannot give to others the reason of their conduct. Suppose you were to judge such men without regard to their general character, and without the means of knowing their reasons. You surely would wrong them greatly.
- 7. Sometimes we are in great danger because we overlook our own state of mind. In such cases we shall doubtless be misled. It is of the utmost importance that we should be aware of our relation to the facts in the case, and the influence which this relation may have on our own judgment. Disregarding this, we shall most surely do injustice to character. For example, suppose a friend of ours is accused of crime. Our friendship for him arouses our feelings, and must have a strong influence on our judgment in the case.
- 8. Often we are biased by an undue regard to our own consistency. If we are not aware of the influence which this feeling has on our minds, we shall most surely be misled by it in the formation of our judgments.
- 9. I need not urge that we are in danger of being biased by those who themselves make mistakes; or by those who are dishonest; or who are reckless; or by the general injustice to character which prevails among mankind, in the midst of which we are born and influence of which it must be exceedingly difficult for us entirely to escape.

### **VIII. I must now call your attention to the great wickedness of this sin.**

- 1. Character, as a condition of happiness, is the most valuable treasure in the universe. To each moral agent, his own character is the greatest good. If his character be not intrinsically upright, it must be a scorpion sting in his bosom. If it be bad in his own estimation, he can have no self-respect, and his very bosom becomes a sort of hell. Every man's happiness and usefulness, therefore, depend on his own character, and, to a great extent, on his reputation -- that is, on the estimate that others shall form and express of his character. God, in His word, assumes that His honor and great name are a most sacred treasure. How could He govern His moral universe without it? Many persons forget that God has a character to sustain, and that He must, therefore, most severely punish every insult and wrong inflicted upon it. In like manner they forget that, out of sympathy with the slandered, if for no other reason, God will surely take vengeance on those who traduce their neighbors.
- 2. Injustice to character is in every point of view a most detestable and infamous crime. God hates and denounces it; it is an abomination in the eyes of all the good in the universe. The stealing of money is nothing compared to it. "Who steals my purse, steals trash; but he who steals my name steals that which nought enriches him, but makes me poor indeed."

- 3. The greatest injury we can inflict on anyone is to rob him of his good name. So, the greatest injustice we can do to God is to manifest want of confidence in Him. It is like taking hold of the pillars of the universe and shaking them to their foundations. Everywhere, this sin involves serious consequence beyond any other. It inflicts the greatest evil on the wronged party; the greatest on society. Suppose it falls on the character of one who devotes his utmost powers to doing good; then it cripples his power, and wrongs the community out of the good he might otherwise do in it. No mischief that any moral agent can do is greater than this.

**IX. Next, let us notice some of the results of injustice to character, and first -- to the authors of this injustice.**

- 1. Those who commit this great wrong are sure to quench the Spirit. If they are impenitent sinners, they are sure to grieve the Spirit away. God regards character as sacred; -- that of His own people, is to Him as the apple of His eye. "Touch not, says He, mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm." The Bible is full of indications like this of God's regard to the reputation of His people. Hence, we must infer that this sin is especially repugnant to the divine Spirit, who comes under the gentle, loving emblem of a "dove."
- 2. This sin benumbs the religious sensibility. We should not wonder that one guilty of stealing should benumb his moral sensibility; and if he could bring his feelings to commit the crime of murder, we should expect him to be utterly callous to all tender and kind emotions; but it is too much overlooked -- strangely indeed -- that slanderers and all who can coolly inflict injustice on character, do utter violence to their own sensibility. They so benumb it that it refuses to move and act in its natural way. They become so hardened, they can sit under preaching that might almost electrify the very seats they sit on, and yet nothing moves their sensibility or their conscience. Go where you will among the churches, you see that this is one of their sorest evils. This sin fearfully stifles the voice of conscience, and perverts the moral judgment. Under its influence, men come to feel no compunction for this sin, and they also seem to lose that nice perception of evidence under which an unperverted mind judges uprightly of character. It is amazing to see of how slight evidence they will take up an evil report against a neighbor, and how incapable they become of judging righteously.

Again it augments the selfishness of the will. It is wonderful to see how the soul, under the sway of this sin, becomes committed to selfishness, loses all regard to others' rights and interests, and thus shuts itself up to the eternal dominion of the basest, purest selfishness. There cannot be a worse obstacle to conversion or to sanctification than this.

- 3. It destroys one's influence. It wounds the feelings of others, and puts them beyond the reach of your influence. What good can a minister do, or a deacon, if they allow themselves to injure the good name of their people! Sometimes a whisper, or even a look, will paralyze all the power and influence which a brother may have. It may break the arm of its strength so that it shall ever after hang useless by his side.
- 4. Wrong done to the moral government of the universe spreads its mischief far and wide. Wrong done to the good name of God's people reaches indirectly His own good name and influence of His cause in the world, and thus favors hell and wrongs heaven!

## REMARKS.

1. God sustains to the universe a very difficult and responsible position. The reasons of His policy cannot be fully explained to His finite subjects, and, therefore, are almost of necessity misunderstood. At least it is safe to say that His reasons for His course will not ever be fully understood. He cannot explain if He would; and often it may not be wise to explain all He could. On every side He has many and most unreasonable prejudices to overcome. No earthly monarch ever had such opposition to contend against; no, not all of them together have had so much trial, so much grief, so much strange and blind opposition from this source as God has had. In part, this is to be ascribed to human depravity, and in part to the relations of the Infinite to finite minds. Christ had occasion to say to His friends, "What I do ye know not now, but ye shall know hereafter." God often needs to say to His people -- I cannot explain this to you now; you must have faith in Me.

2. This reveals the importance of faith in finite minds towards their Infinite Father. We know God is infinitely wise, and makes no mistakes. We equally know Him to be perfectly good, and, therefore, that He always acts with the best intentions; yet we cannot know all His reasons -- cannot fathom all His plans. Here, then, is the struggle -- here between unbelief and faith. Will you embrace all God's character and ways, so as to give Him the fullest credit for all He is and for all He does? This is the highest style of virtue; this most eminently pleases God.

3. As I have already said, no being in all the universe is the subject of so much injustice to character as God. He has reason to complain of His subjects, and to hold them responsible for their great sin in this thing. Rulers in all governments are in a very trying position. Civil magistrates, parents, teachers, -- often have their motives impugned. Often they have reason to feel that theirs is a thankless position. They find it perhaps quite impossible to reconcile their convictions of duty with the wishes and expectations of their subjects. Persons in such relations must make up their minds to bear meekly all they are called to suffer. Every parent has this class of trials more or less. Sometimes they are unable to make their children appreciate their views.

Hence, both rulers and ruled should exercise great patience and forbearance, and should be slow to judge unfavorably of each other, even though there should seem to be real testimony looking towards an unfavorable decision.

4. Mutual love and consideration are demanded in all the relations of life. Everything that may qualify the motives of others should be candidly considered. There should be an abounding fullness of that love which hopeth all things, -- since only this can prevent great injustice to character.

5. Violations of this precept are the greatest evils in general society. Who can bear to read the political newspapers? Sometimes the same objection lies equally against the religious papers. They are full of calumny; they reek with rankest abuse of character. Never since I have been a Christian have I been able to read a daily paper. I have never found one that was safe to read.

6. A great deal is said in professedly promoting reform which injures and retards reform. I have always supposed that the injustice done to character in the great reforms of the age has hindered these reforms more than everything else has done. For this reason, God is displeased with these movements,

and suffers them to be frustrated, and truth, for the present, to fall to the ground; -- this being a less evil than for Him to seem to sanction a spirit so utterly alien to genuine love.

7. This sin strengthens itself, and, therefore, is one of the hardest to overcome. He who commits himself to evil speaking against a neighbor, will be strongly tempted to carry it out. He has said that neighbor is a bad man; now he must prove it. He must rake up more low and perhaps false scandal against him; -- else his own reputation will suffer. So he plunges deeper and yet deeper into this sin. Perhaps if called to account, he replies -- You think that statement of mine is not true; I will look the matter all over and see." I tell you, he won't! He will do no such thing as revise that opinion candidly. Far more likely his committal will blind him the more and he will become only the more confirmed in his sin at every step.

8. Many are so hardened as not to realize the relation of what they say to God and to the moral universes. They do not seem at all to appreciate the great evil of injustice to character. What sinner ever realizes the nature of his unbelief towards God? God says -- "He that believeth not, makes Him a liar!" How terrible to destroy confidence in God! What an awful, mischievous, damning sin! Look at the wrong done to Christ by the Scribes and Pharisees, and the mischief it did in the world. But for their virulence and prejudice in rejecting Christ, the people would have embraced Him as their Messiah. To all human view, if they had received Christ candidly, and given Him their hearts, the nation would have been converted, and that nation, converted, would have sent the gospel at once all over the world. Such was their location, and such their relation to the nations of the earth, they would have given the gospel to all nations in a single generation, and long ago, shouts of salvation would have rolled over every mountain, and echoed through every valley in all the globe! Alas, hell gloats over the misery and all nature groans under the evils, wrought by injustice to character! Who can measure the depth, and length and breadth thereof!

If this sin were not so common, it would be universally disgraceful. If, according to its real turpitude, it were in as low repute as other sins, who would dare commit it?

9. It is most painful to come near one who is in the habit of taking up evil reports and casting them about him as "firebrands and arrows, saying -- Am I not in sport?" You should avoid one who has this habit as you would a viper.

I have thought a mistake is working in community as to the manner in which we should treat persons who wrong society and manifest no repentance for this sin. It is easy and but too natural for us to put on a plaster where we should put in a probe. Certainly we ought to mark the man who goes about slandering society. In this thing, there are two extremes; one consists in treating such offenders without any compassion; the other, in overlooking their great wickedness. Plainly we should try to avoid both extremes.

How great is the cruelty of injuring the character of another, and especially, of using an influence to crush it! Their words eat as doth a canker, annihilating those on whom they fall! O how much does it become us to take care what we say of others' character!

It is most cruel towards God to injure the character of His children. God Himself feels outraged by



such abuse offered to those He loves. We who are parents know very well how it affects us to have our children slandered, even though they may be wicked.

10. It is specially cruel to injure those who labor for our good. Ingratitude in this case heightens to wrong.

What an awful amount of sin the conductors of the press have to answer for! Especially for their course on the eve of an election. Then we cannot, often, believe a word they say. It would almost seem that many of them lie then on principle and by system! Perhaps the election is carried by such slander, and the men who rule us in the places of civil power are there because their friends had superior skill in falsehood and slander! Before high heaven, what a nation of slanderers! I have often had occasion to say to editors who coin and pass on slanders just before election -- If you allow a lie to go out from your press for election purposes, you must answer for it to God! Are you prepared to meet God for this thing?

A man not just to character is not just to anything! He is a totally dishonest man, and just to nothing. If he appears to be just, it is an appearance only. What an appalling thought! There can be no stronger proof of radical dishonesty of character, and unmitigated selfishness.

11. Some seem to regard confidence in those around us as a ridiculous weakness, if not crime. This is most unfortunate, for how much is he to be pitied -- perhaps blamed too -- who confides in no one, and lives in everlasting distrust of all mankind! The Psalmist once said, "All men are liars;" but he said it "in his haste," and we hope only when in haste.

When one shows a general want of confidence, he deserves none in himself. This is obvious as an axiom.

12. Perhaps in no other thing is frequent self-examination more demanded than in this matter of doing injustice to character. The temptation and tendency to violate the law of love is so great, we need to overhaul our practice continually. Evermore let us search our hearts and our words, asking -- Do I deal justly with others even as I would have others do with me? Do I judge the motives of others only as I would have another judge mine?

No department of self-examination is more difficult than this. Hence, it needs to be pressed faithfully, with much self-distrust, and thoroughly, through all the circle of our formed and expressed opinions as to others. On no point is there more danger of delusion, and on none is this delusion more likely to prove fatal. Professed Christians are but too apt to forget that this is radically a dishonest state of mind, and hence, must be inevitably damning.

It is shocking to notice how evil reports are gotten up, spread abroad and received; how a lie passes round and round, and how rarely it meets with one kind, honest, loving heart, to impede its progress!

Men guilty of this sin, will die and be damned for it unless they are willing to repent, confess and make restitution. Who does not say -- if a man steals but a horse or a sheep, and dies without confession and restitution, he cannot be saved. How much more must he die for such a sin as this,

unrepented of and unforgiven!

This sin is so fearfully common, its great enormity is overlooked. Scarce anyone estimates it according to its real malignity. But suppose a sin of this kind should occur in heaven. Suppose one of the holy there should slander his brother unjustly! What a sensation! How would those pure and loving hearts be paralyzed with horror! And suppose society here were what it should be, how suddenly would men shut out from their fellowship one who could recklessly or maliciously traduce his brother! Is not this true? When we are really benevolent, what a shock comes over our feelings to hear one belch out an avalanche of venom! We are horrified! What! We say, is not this the spirit of hell?

In the great judgment God will show up this sin in its true light. Then He will place him that loves and him that receives, on a par with him that makes, a lie. The spirit of the act will give it its character then.

13. Where persons are really guilty, there is danger of doing them injustice. But God never falls into this danger. His judgment is eternally and perfectly just. And He would have us aim at entire justice. His word informs us that one of the loftiest angels did not bring a railing accusation against even the devil -- but said -- "The Lord rebuke thee." This example in high places stands for our admonition. We should no more abuse and wrong an enemy than a friend.

We would be specially on our guard in cases where we differ from others in opinion. Here pride of opinion comes in to heighten the danger of doing injustice to others.

14. Often, (as our text suggests) God visits retribution for this sin on men visibly in the present life. He shapes His providence's so that those who judge others censoriously, are themselves judged censoriously. But, if this retribution should not come down on men in this world, it surely will, (and only the more surely for the omission here,) in the world to come. God will judge those who thus judge their brother! And what a judgment must that be!

## **God's Goodness Toward Men Basely Requited**

Lecture X

September 12, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Psa. 109:5: "They have rewarded me evil for my good and hatred for my love."

David is here speaking apparently of himself, yet really says much that is appropriately applicable to the Messiah. This is common to those ancient prophets who were, in a sort, types of the Messiah, and is especially developed in the case of David, who, as God's chosen king of his covenant people, was so extraordinary a precursor and model of Zion's greater King.

In one aspect, this and several other kindred passages, have been a stumbling-block to some, and a trial to many. They are thought to breathe a vindictive spirit. But there is really in them no occasion for stumbling, for, justly interpreted, they contain nothing inconsistent with the revealed character of God - nothing repugnant to the genius and spirit of the New Testament. These objections grow out of ignorance of God.

God is benevolent. But benevolence has many attributes, and justice is one of them. When occasion calls for it, justice must be revealed. The occasions are less frequent now than they will be at some future day - because this is a period of probation, of long-suffering and of mercy. Under the Gospel, and during the progress of this great experiment of mercy on depraved hearts, we need not expect the ordinary manifestations of justice, that must obtain, in general, under God's government.

It should never be forgotten that God is not all mercy. If He were to become so, He could be no longer good. Indeed, it is impossible for us to conceive of a being all mercy and no justice, or all justice and no mercy.

In this psalm, the special manifestations are those of justice. We hear the writer pleading for justice. The Spirit of Christ within the Psalmist is praying God to execute justice on the wicked. Of course the Spirit which indited prayer in David's mind, was well aware of the necessity of justice in the government of God. Why, then, should He not direct David's mind to offer prayer accordingly? In the case of truly spiritual Christians, led by the Spirit of God, we see the same thing developed now. The soul demands the administration of justice. Under a deep conviction of its necessity as a means of the greatest good, strong desire is awakened, and this, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, assumes the spirit of prayer.

On all hands, it is conceded that God is good - perfectly, infinitely good; - in other words, is truly love. All unselfish, He is only and infinitely benevolent.

The text assumes that God does good to men, and affirms that they requite Him evil therefor. Let us now inquire,

*I. In what God's goodness and love to men are manifested;*

*II. How these manifestations ought to be received;*

*III. How they are received in fact.*

### **I. In what God's goodness and love to men are manifested.**

- 1. God manifested His love to man in creating him with a far nobler nature than He gave other

animals. Man He made capable of knowing his Maker, and, in connection with this capability, made him capable, also, of loving and obeying Him, and of entering into His sympathies and views in regard to the welfare of His creatures. These glorious prerogatives, conferred on man by his Maker, are surely manifestations of His great love, and should be so regarded.

Again, this love appears, also, in His establishing over man a government, such as he greatly needed for his welfare. Beyond all doubt, such beings as we are, need to be trained. Even in Eden, holy man needed God's watchful care to keep him from sin. Much more does he need God's care and help, since his fall. If our children need parental training to make them good men and women, much more do we, under God, our Father, to make us holy and happy. If this training is an act of benevolence in parents, much more is it in God.

Again, God's goodness to men appears in the fact that He writes His law in man's very nature, giving him a conscience whose voice responds to the voice of God. Surely, it was good in our Father to bring His law so very near as to write it in our inmost mind. For, if holiness is happiness, and hence, we must have God's law developed in all our moral being, then to give us a conscience on which this law should be written, is surely a development of real love.

- 2. Also, God reveals His love in giving man a written copy of this law. The case was that, by reason of sin, man did not like to retain God in his knowledge, and so, though he might have known, yet did not know God fully and rightly. Then that God should come down and spread out this law on the written page, was truly an act of love - love that would seek to vary the experiment in every way, and would use the best possible means for man's instruction and salvation.
- 3. And, yet further, after this law had been utterly broken, to open another door of hope through Jesus Christ - to throw it open so widely that none need fail of gaining admittance; - how significantly radiant with love is this!

But I have time only to glance at some of these things, passing unmentioned a great multitude of special developments.

- (1.) I might speak of His love in giving us a Sabbath. Suppose we were immersed in worldly business incessantly. What a calamity! Now we may return to God one day in seven -, and, oh, what a rest and blessing is this! It is striking to observe how much of our time is Sabbath. The very child seven years old has had one whole year of Sabbaths, and the young man or woman twenty-eight years old, has had four full years of Sabbaths! - enough to go through college! O, if you had only used it to complete your education for the everlasting Sabbath!
- (2.) Observe these Sabbaths are not a yoke, but a gift - made for man, to minister to his welfare - a holy day, to conduce the more to his holiness and happiness. How sad the mistake of those who never call the Sabbath a "delight," but only a "weariness!" Said a brother who had been sick - I had a new view of the Sabbath. I saw it to be a holiday, in

which, like a weary laborer, I might go home and commune with my Father in heaven. I now thank God for Sabbaths!

- (3.) God's goodness appears in all the means of grace He has appointed; in the blessings of His providence, also, in countless number and untold variety; in the restraints of His providence no less; in everything God does for us and in regard for us. All the needful discipline, all the chastisements, rebukes, corrections - all come from a loving heart, designed in real wisdom for our highest good.
- (4.) We might extend even this view, and add - the restraints of physical government, for, what would this world be without these restraints? The restraints of family government too; the means of education and the government necessary for their efficiency and for the formation of good habits; all these things have in view the development of what is good in man, and must, therefore, be put on our list among the manifestations of our Heavenly Father's love. All things - whatever God does or suffers - are intended for our good. Indeed, the kindness of God's intentions is absolutely infinite. You cannot measure it; you can in no wise measure up or appreciate its wonderful manifestations. And, let us add, also, that all these things manifest not only love but wisdom. They are not only done with good intent, but they are done well. As the purpose is good, so is the plan for its attainment, wise. All is love, and all is perfect.

## **II. Let us now inquire - How ought these manifestations to be received by us?**

- 1. As kindly as they were intended. Our gratitude should correspond to His loving-kindness. Our confidence should meet His goodness. For, how ought human government to be received in the family, the school, or the State? Plainly, if that government is framed in wisdom, to answer ends of love, it should be met with responsive love and gratitude; should be accepted in a grateful and obedient spirit. Why not?
- 2. So should we receive all God's administration in providence. Christian, did you never fall before God, saying - O, Lord, help me to receive this chastisement as kindly as Thou hast intended it. May I be as grateful for it as Thou hast been good in its administration."
- 3. Sometimes children do not take discipline kindly, although they know they ought to. The fact that "no chastisement for the present seemeth to be joyous," but only grievous, creates a demand for some faith in the wisdom and loving-kindness of the Lord. This faith both honors and pleases God, and surely ought never to be lacking. Manifestly, all the details of God's government over us, should be received in the same docile, humble, and trustful spirit. How do you feel in regard to the way in which your own children receive your discipline toward them? You know you are liable to err in judgment; so do they know this? Yet you are wont to feel strongly that so long as you bear your heart and hand toward them in love, and with your best wisdom, they ought to receive it kindly. You claim this as a parent; you feel the reasonableness of this claim all the more from the consciousness of loving them as your own soul. How reasonably, then, may God feel all this, and even more as His love is greater, and the sacrifices He has made for us are exceedingly more manifest and heart-revealing. Besides, He never lacks wisdom - never makes any mistakes. There is no occasion to which that His judgment were as

wise as His heart is kind; - it is so, and we have nothing more to wish.

- 4. Then why not accept God's discipline as kindly as He gives it? Why should we not? What are we thinking of when we murmur, or question His wisdom or His love? How ought we to receive the gospel? Who can doubt its wisdom and its love? Shall we then receive it as if it were some attack on our habits and interests? How utterly strange this would be! Yet scarcely more so than to view God's providential discipline towards us as hard. For myself, I have often thought I did not want anything else but to receive all God's discipline toward me just as He gives and intends it - as grateful as He is good - my heart responsive evermore in confidence to His darkest dealings.

Again, how ought we to receive God's gift of a Sabbath? Shall we take it as an assault on our liberty? Shall we deem it only a burden and cry out - O, what a weariness it is? How strangely would this be standing in our own light, and accepting with suspicion what God gives in the purest wisdom and love! Therefore, all reason demands that, under the most afflictive rebukes of His providence, we should bow most trustfully and most humbly, knowing that all these things are intended in the utmost kindness and love. These very things are, more than all the rest, trying to our Heavenly Father's heart; yet they are so useful and even necessary to us, that He may not withhold them.

### **III. But I must now proceed to inquire, not how God's administration toward us ought to be received by us, but how it is. On this point, what are the facts?**

The text has it - "They rewarded me evil for my good, and hatred for my love." Is this in accordance with the facts? Let us look at the position which sin takes towards God and the interests of His great family. Sin consists in selfishness. In all selfishness, the mind holds on to its own particular interests, real or supposed, and disregards the general interests in comparison with its own. But God, the Father of all, loving all equally, cannot endure selfishness in any one of them, for the good reason that it is intrinsically unjust and ruinous to interests which He loves and defends. He cannot bear to see one of His family outraging the rights of another one out of mere selfishness. This is the reason why He hates and withstands sin. It is not selfish in Him to take care of all the interests of His great family, nor to regard their general interests as of supreme importance, for they are really so. Consequently, it cannot be selfish in Him to maintain His own honor as King and Lord of all; for, unless He did, how could He rule His subjects so as to ensure their highest good? Hence, to be truly wise and good, He must maintain His dignity and authority against all the insults and abuses of selfish beings, and against all their encroachments on the interests of His great family. It should never be forgotten, that sin and selfishness are intrinsically unjust; - unjust to God and unjust to His creatures. This injustice God must and ought to oppose. Consequently, every being, persisting in his own selfishness, will fret against God and be rasped by unceasing collision with His righteous administration. It cannot be otherwise. A God who cares justly for all, must forever come into collision with creatures who care excessively for self. He will move on righteously; they will chafe and fret, selfishly; He, seeking evermore to secure the highest good of all; they seeking supremely the small and particular good of self as against all. Hence, it is impossible for a sinner remaining selfish, to deny that he renders to God evil for good. He opposes God for His love to all His great family. On this principle he opposes God's gospel - opposes His Law - opposes His Sabbaths - opposes His means of grace - opposes the course of His providence. Mark any one of these forms of opposition to God. See, for example, how

men complain of God's providence. For what? Has God done anything wrong? They do not even pretend that He has. They act like bad children in a family, who are forever restive under a government which they know to be right, yet practically regard as wrong. You know how such children thwart all attempts for their good, rewarding their parents evil for all the good done and attempted to be done for themselves. What is all this rasping and fretting against God? Only selfishness working itself out in requiting God with evil for good - resisting measures which God adopts to bless His great family.

In conclusion, let me ask some personal questions.

### **REMARKS.**

1. Would you, who remain in sin, be any better pleased if God should take a different course with you. What can He do to conciliate you? He would like to be at peace with you if He reasonably could, and never has sought a quarrel with you. Suppose He should abolish His law and not require you to obey Him in anything. Suppose He should not ask you to love your neighbor. Would this please you any better? To be released from all requisition from God to love your fellow-beings, would be quite a change; would you like it? You are not easy under His government now: would you have it reversed? Would you have God reverse the requisitions of His law and require you to hate instead of love your neighbor? Would you like this change? No. Your conscience would resist and condemn this new law not less than your selfish heart has resisted the old one. Yea, your whole moral nature would cry out against it. Especially when other selfish beings come down upon yourself, in obedience to this new law, you would exclaim against it as an infinite outrage. Nay, further, if God were merely to throw up the reins of government and leave every selfish being to prey upon your happiness as much as he pleased, you would cry out against even this as insufferable. You would say - Why does not God take care of His wicked creatures? Why does He not restrain their infamous selfishness? So, while you complain because God governs you to control your selfishness, you would complain infinitely more, and with some good reasons, too, if He were to do all what you demand for yourself! Let men alone, to be as selfish as they list.

2. Yet, again; would you have the penalty of His law altered? Would you have Him make it less? Would it better meet your demands then? But penalties, you know, are infinitely important. Law is good for nothing without them, and hence, their value is just as great as the value of the law itself. You would condemn the change which should annex a finite penalty to an infinitely valuable law. Of course you would, just as you would condemn a law which affixed a ten cent penalty to the crime of murder.

3. Can you suggest any change in His gospel? What change would improve it? Or can you say how His providence would be administered better? If so, explain how. You do not like its restraints, but suppose they were removed; would you be any the better? Does not your highest reason say there can be no change for the higher? Some of you, perhaps, do not like the restraints of his school, or of your own father's family; but does this prove that either is badly governed, or would be better if changed? Yet you cannot suggest any reasonable improvement. Your own reason affirms that all is as it should be, and that no change for the better can be made. No, in God's great kingdom, you cannot show that any change for the better can be made. Suppose I come to you as God's servant and say - What do you

want? You are chafing and fretting against God; what would you have? What change would satisfy your demands? Can you name any change in His providence that would please you, and that you know would be on the whole an improvement? If so, what is it? What change do you demand in His gospel - or in His bible? Do you say, "It is so difficult for me to become a Christian!" What change shall God make to please you? Shall He forgive you without repentance? Would this please you? Shall He save you without faith on your part - without any confidence in Him? But this is a natural impossibility. Without confidence in God, you could not be happy anywhere in the universe.

4. What could be more unreasonable than your course toward God? He justly complains - "They have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love." You know this is true! You cannot deny it. And your misbehavior has not been caused by any fault in God, for God's law is unselfish. His whole course towards you is full of lovingkindness, while yours towards Him has been altogether selfish and mean.

5. What can be more trying to God than your course towards Him? Think of the sacrifices His love has made to bless you, and then consider how you have requited those sacrifices. Nothing can be so painful to a benevolent heart as this. If anyone among you has ever labored to do good to a friend, and that good so benevolently intended, has been requited only with abuse and evil, you know how this agonizes your heart! You can understand, in some measure, how God must feel when sinners requite Him evil for good. God says to them - "Thou has spoken and done evil things, as thou couldest." What worse could they do to Him than to abuse His love and repay His kindness with insult - His efforts to save with efforts to bring down on their own heads damnation?

So far as concerns God and the holy, it is infinitely better that you would make war on God for His goodness than for any wickedness. Therefore, it is not well that God should change to accommodate you. So of ourselves; if men will abuse us, let it be for our well-doing and not for our evil-doing. We must, by no means, do evil to accommodate them. It is an inexpressible consolation to God's people that sinners never can have any occasion to find fault with God for anything cruel, tyrannical or severe. There is not the least danger that anything will ever appear in any part of the universe to God's discredit;- nothing that can tarnish His name or reproach His administration, If there were the least reason to fear anything of the sort, it would clothe heaven in mourning, and thrill the hearts of the holy with horror.

Tell me, sinner, is not your course necessarily fatal, either to you or God? You oppose Him; He abhors you. If you are right, it will doubtless one day appear so, and then what can we say for God and His kingdom? But if God is right and you are wrong, you have within yourself the elements of the deepest ruin and destruction. You have such a moral nature - such powers of reason and conscience, that you will certainly condemn yourself, and load your own soul down eternally with self-reproaches and self-condemnation. Though all the universe beside you soul, were to caress you and shout your praises, yet your own conscience would come down on you with curses which no power in the universe can avert.

Then why not yield? Why not confess and repent? Come out now, in honesty and say - Lord, I have always been dreadfully wicked. I have obeyed neither Thy law nor Thy gospel. I have not received kindly the things that Thou hast so kindly given. So far from this, I have only been rasped and full of



dissatisfaction. Have you ever gone before God to say - I have wronged Thee all my life by my suspicions? I have never realized that Thou has had kind intentions for me. To this day, my heart is hard as marble. I am only a wretch - a vile, ungrateful worm! Never have I received Thy blessings in a spirit corresponding to Thy love that gave them." Now why do you not cast yourself down before God in this way, saying - Lord, I know Thou hast been good, but I have been utterly and only evil; Thou hast sought to bless me, but I have only resisted and abused Thee! O break my spirit down in penitence! Can you say - Lord, I am afraid there is something wrong in Thy heart? Said a woman to me not long since - "God is not my Father. My heart will say - I am so poor, God will not own me. He is my adversary to resist me on every hand. He comes and stands in the way, as He sent an angel to meet Baalam." Now, I am aware that God's dispensations towards individuals sometimes have this appearance, even as old Jacob said - "All these things are against me." When God deals with them in real mercy, and strives to lead them in His own right way, they only rebel the more. Oh, how sad that men are so slow of heart to trust God!

Consider how Jesus Christ is treated, for it is He who speaks in the text. For His love, what hatred does He experience! He who has loved sinners, how strangely do sinners hate Him even to the ruin of their own souls!

But perhaps some of you will say - I know it all; my conscience is wounded desperately; where is any remedy for me? Where can I find any balm for my soul? How can I ever have peace again? My soul is so hard, and my conscience so dead, it surely must be that I am past hope - given over to be lost forever! But have you ever gone to that long-abused Savior, saying - Lord, is there any help for me? Can you persuade yourself to go humbly to Him for help? Mark what He says - Wilt Thou not from this time cry unto Me, - "My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth?" Do you say - May I call Him Father? Do you ask, Where is He, that I may come even to His seat and pour out my confessions and my sorrows into His ear? Broken-hearted sinner, He is near thee - even where thou art - in thy room - at thy right hand; and it is only for thee to speak, and He heareth thee!

## **Losing First Love**

Lecture XI

October 10, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rev. 2:4: "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou has left thy first love."

In speaking from these words, I shall:

*I. Notice briefly what the first love of a Christian is;*

*II. How it manifests itself;*

*III. How it may be known that Christians have left their first love;*

*IV. Describe the state into which they fall;*

*V. The only remedy for this state of things.*

## **I. What the first love of a Christian is.**

The Christian's first love is best known by experience. Those who are really brought from great darkness into marvellous light-- from sensible condemnation into conscious and assured peace and joy in God, cannot but know what this first love of the convert is. Ardent, earnest, self-sacrificing,-- it makes religious duties supremely delightful, and fills the heart with joy in God all the day long.

## **II. How it manifests itself.**

- 1. The modes of its manifestation are obvious, and have, indeed, been necessarily indicated in what I have said of its nature. It should be remembered that it is as natural to the Christian life to do what pleases God for the sinner's life to do what pleases himself. For example, prayer is as natural to the true convert as living without prayer is to the unconverted. The latter are conscious of being pushed forward to perform these duties before they can be persuaded to do them. Other considerations besides the pleasantness of the thing itself must be brought to bear on the mind, or the man will not pray. But to the one who loves God, it is sweet to worship, and pray and praise. These things have a sweet attraction to his heart, and come with a rich relish to his soul.
- 2. The Christian, in his first love, is free from a sense of guilt and condemnation. He has great peace of mind, and, living in such faith as pleases God, he cannot have a sense of condemnation.

Again, nothing that God requires seems hard or grievous. No matter what it may be, "the yoke is easy and the burden light."

"'Tis love that makes his willing feet

In swift obedience move."

- 3. Even the burdens that pertain to the Christian life do not at all abate his interest in religious duties. He takes up these labors as part of his business in life. He feels no sense of burden in doing these laborious things; a divine peace fills his soul.

These states and experiences are, of course, unknown to the unconverted. Even some who think themselves converted, know them not, and are exceedingly jealous sometimes of

those who do.

### **III. How it may be known that Christians have left their first love.**

- 1. It may be known that persons have left their first love when they begin to talk of the burden of the Lord, and manifestly show that religion has become a weariness to them. If other considerations besides love to God are requisite to sustain the Christian life, and even to keep their outward observance of its forms, then you may be sure that their first love is gone. It may be that still "they cannot bear them that are evil;" Christ gives even the Ephesian church credit for so much; but this may be more a thing of conscience than of love.

Again, this loss of first love is indicated by a sense of bondage. When the Christian performs his religious duties, not from any sense of love, but of bondage to conscience, you may know that "first love" is gone. Obedience is not spontaneous. Under one's first love, it always is.

- 2. The annexed exhortation to "remember from whence they have fallen," shows that they had fallen from grace in the sense of having lost a gracious state of mind-- a state in which the gifts of the Spirit beget the Christian virtues, and the resulting state of the heart is acceptable in God's sight. Such cannot be in a justified state. Can it be possible that those are in a justified state whom God commands to repent, on pain of being blotted from the roll of his recognized churches?

### **IV. Describe the state into which they fall.**

- 1. The state into which they fall is (1) one of hypocrisy . This must be the case unless they have become openly impenitent and irreligious. But the passage gives no hint of this. Of course we must conclude that they retain the forms of godliness without its power. This is real hypocrisy.
- 2. It is a state utterly odious to God. He who makes no pretensions to religion is odious enough; but one who makes professions and yet dishonors God, is much more so. But many sinners profess to love God. Ask them if they love God. O, yes, say they. Ask them if they love to pray and praise; and they will tell you they do. They make profession enough, but are only hypocrites.
- 3. It is, moreover, a state of delusion, for they keep up the notion that they are still accepted of God. They are so hardened as not to see that they are the victims of the most fearful delusion. Scarce any thing is more adapted to blind the mind and scar the conscience than hypocritical forms of prayer. Let a man practice prayer without any heart in it, and who does not know that this course benumbs the conscience and kills the moral sensibility? Trace the history of such a man's praying. The first time he prayed, prayer filled his soul with awe. Usually those who have not been accustomed to prayer, experience this impression of awe and reverence. But a moderately long period of observance of the mere forms of prayer, kills this solemn impression, and he can pray as coldly unconcerned as if he had no heart. Prayer makes no impression on him. Nothing seems to touch him. This keeping up the forms of religion in a heartless way is playing a game with ourselves in which the interests of the the soul are fearfully the loser. You

win nothing.

- 4. Notice, also, that the influence of this on unbelievers is most ruinous. Nothing leads them so naturally to condemn religion as the sight of so much heartless profession. On the other hand, when they see a living manifestation of religion, it will either drive them towards religion or make them uneasy without it, or drive them further off. The latter effect is produced only when the heart's depravity rebels utterly against God's claims, and therefore, it is more a testimony for than against the agencies that excite it. But false professions are naturally fatal to the unconverted; and it is no wonder they are so. On this subject I am often reminded of impressions made on my mind in my early and unconverted life. I then had on my mind the strong impression that the great mass of professed Christians seemed not to understand what they professed. There were one or two men and some women who, I knew, had religion. They exhibited what I could not account for on any other supposition. Their life had more weight on my mind than the forms and professions of ten thousand of the other and more common sort. Being a lawyer, I could understand that the few gave a positive testimony, witnessing to what they knew, and revealing what their souls had certainly felt; while the testimony of the other class was only negative. It did not know anything in particular on the subject. I know one man who is not a Christian, but his wife is a Christian. He has been struggling for years to work himself into infidelity, but he cannot - never can so long as his wife lives to let the light of her example and spirit shine before him, or so long as he remembers her. I have already intimated the reason of this; he sees multitudes around him whose professed piety he contemns; but there is one - his own wife - whose life refutes infidelity most utterly.
- 5. Such religious declensions are most injurious to young converts. Said Dr. Hawes, of Connecticut, and Dr. Campbell of London - O, if these young converts could only be kept by themselves, and not be brought under the influence of dormant professors who have left their first love, they might be made a living and working church. But thrown back under this untoward influence, how surely will they fall under the same example of unbelief!
- 6. This state of mind must be painfully trying to Jesus Christ. What can be more so than to see his professed people lose their first love! When we see a wife who has lost all affection for her husband, it makes us naturally suspicious of him. Despite of all we can do to resist the feeling, it will arise. The wife is either lost to all the common impulses to humanity, or the husband is radically a bad man. Hence, when I see professed Christians lose their first love, I often say - Are you disappointed in Christ? Does he not bear acquaintance well? What has he done that you should lose your hearty interest in his character and in his cause? Is he in fault? If he is not, then surely you are - greatly so. This interest is entirely unavoidable.
- 7. The implication in backsliding, is most dishonorable to Christ. The Jews called God's service a great burden until he sent them a prophet to rebuke them. And who does not see that they deserved to be rebuked?

Ungodly men draw this inference: "If I must live such a life, let me put off its commencement as long as I can, for such a religion is not the thing to live by and enjoy." Who does not see that such an impression is most disastrous in all its influences?

- 8. These men who lose their first love are uneasy and unhappy. None of them can be satisfied with it. For the most part, they must be in great doubt as to their acceptance with God. Often they query with themselves - "I wonder if Christians ever do fall from grace. Methodists think they do; Presbyterians and Congregationalists think they don't, for in this case I am safe. But if they ever do, then I am fallen." Thus they trust in an old hope, with nothing to rely on except their old experiences. They need some such reliance as men get by abusing the doctrine of saints' perseverance. It is not the true doctrine, but only in its perversion that they find any of this false peace; for the true doctrine holds that saints really persevere in love and faith; and that, falling from this, they have no ground of hope whatever. And it, instead of using God's promises of sustaining grace, they only pervert them to quiet their souls in sin, they are surely cheating themselves out of salvation!
- 9. Such persons are not prepared to die. If there is no truth in the Bible, they are sure to be lost, for the Bible pronounces their doom. If there were no truth on the Bible, they would be none the less lost, for they are not prepared to dwell in heaven - not in the heaven revealed in the Bible, nor in any other place of real happiness!

They are fallen into impenitence, as our passage itself implies; for how else could the Savior call on them to "repent?" Can one who is impenitent go to heaven?

- 10. They are not prepared to live to any good purpose. So far as their influence is concerned, it were better they should die than live. To live, as to them, is only to curse others by their example, and to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath for themselves.

#### **V. The only remedy for this state.**

The only remedy for this condition is given in the text: "Repent and do your first works." Repent more deeply than ever before, for now there are new and more aggravated sins to be repented of. When one has waded through such a life, all his former sins, prior to his professed conversion, are as nothing compared with these. After being so far enlightened, and after having tasted the good word of God and his precious love - after having known God and Christ as revealed in the Gospel, and after having entered into covenant with God - then to violate this sacred covenant - to disown those solemn vows - to dishonor that ever-to-be-remembered name;- for all this, there can be no remedy short of coming down into the lowest dust before the Lord - lower than ever before - with confessions of greater guilt than ever before. Hence, it comes to pass that, where persons, once backslidden, do really return and repent, they are more thoroughly broken in spirit than they ever were before.

#### **REMARKS.**

1. Many persons keep just enough of what they call religion to fasten their delusions on their own souls. By dint of resolution and self-impulses, they keep up the forms of family prayer and of public worship, and by these means, they sustain the delusion that they are true Christians. If they had dropped these forms and gone into open apostasy, they would have known themselves, and would not have once thought of maintaining a hope of personal religion. The delusion could not have existed. But those who maintain the forms of religion, and the forms only, cannot have the witness of God's Spirit - can have no evidence from their own daily experience, but content themselves to live on the

most meagre allowance of testimony to their own piety. They dare not speak very confidently, yet they are hopeful. They love to bring up the case of persons who had a great many doubts, and yet, on the whole are esteemed good Christian people. Some of them live on the doctrine of election, or perseverance of saints. Some live on the case of those who were reclaimed just before death. They sing the backslider's hymns and pray the backslider's prayer. From every quarter they are picking up shreds of matter of every sort wherewith to feed their own delusion. Sometimes, to help themselves out of their trouble, they set themselves to pick flaws in better Christians than themselves. This avails to relieve their conscience a little.

2. This is a most common delusion. A minister related to me certain facts respecting a doctor of divinity whom I had myself known, and in whom, I must say, I had never seen much evidence of personal piety. When this doctor of divinity came to die, he was greatly concerned about himself. My informant said - He asked me to pray that he might be restored to his first love! What! one who had lived forty or fifty years in the church, and one of her honored ministers too, yet, on his death-bed, asks his friends to that he may be restored to his first love,- really, that he may be converted! If we have not even so much as first love - not so much as when we started, what are we? What state are we in, if we have not as much love as when first converted?

3. Many persons have occasionally strong exercises of mind - often a compound of anxiety about their final salvation, and conviction of sin - yet it falls short of true religion. They quite fail of coming into a state of true love to God or to Jesus Christ. There is feeling, action, energy; but love is wanting! That deep love which affectionately honors and recognizes God as supreme Lord and Father, and which then goes forth to embrace in its arms all his offspring; that love which "suffereth long and is kind"- which is never weary in well-doing - which finds its life in acts of kindness: - this is not there.

My beloved people, I have been your pastor now a long time. Going in and out before you as I have these many years, I have seen most of you pass through seasons that have been greatly interesting to me. In some of you I have seen grace developed and shining all the more clear and lovely for your trials; but of some of you I am constrained to ask - Have you not lost your first love? Is it not very difficult for you to live a Christian life? Some of you are in such a state that I have not seen you at a prayer-meeting for a year. You were not confined to your bed by sickness; you were not out of town; what was the matter? What is your spiritual state?

Of some of you who do come to the prayer meeting I must ask - What is your state? Is your experience daily becoming more rich, and more fresh, and more quickening? Do you live more closely on God? Are you daily walking more and more surely in newness of life?

## **Men, Ignorant of God's Righteousness, Would Fain Establish Their Own**

### Lecture XII

November 21, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Rom. 10:3: "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."

Paul here states three facts in respect to the Jews, viz.: that they were ignorant of God's righteousness--that they sought to establish their own, and that they did not submit to God's. This is a condensed statement of their religious condition. The fundamental difficulty with them was, their ignorance of God's righteousness. On this rock the nation were wrecked. Not knowing Jesus, they were forever going about to establish their own righteousness--and forever unsuccessful.

What was true of the Jews is still true to an alarming extent of multitudes, both in and out of the church, among all classes in Christian lands. It may be said that all do this who are not really Christians and receive Christ.

In discussing this subject, I enquire,

*I. When one may be said to be ignorant of God's righteousness.*

*II. When men may be said to go about to establish their own righteousness.*

*III. What this righteousness of God is--this of which sinners are so ignorant.*

### **I. When one may be said to be ignorant of God's righteousness.**

- 1. I answer, when he does not truly know God: particularly when he does not know Him as he reveals himself in the spirituality of his law. It was at this point the Jews failed. They did not see that the law called for the inmost heart and for perfect love there. Their carnal eye was attracted by the external and ceremonial, and the amount of visible doing in the Mosaic system gratified their ambition for distinction and display, so that they quite overlooked those very explicit statements, everywhere frequent throughout their scriptures, which were designed to call attention to the state of the heart as the only thing of real value in God's sight.
- 2. God's righteousness and perfect purity of character are revealed in his law, and are especially to be learned there.

Again, men are ignorant of God's righteousness when they do not understand his method of making sinners righteous. The Jews did not feel any need of such a system as the gospel. They supposed they should be accepted if they merely obeyed their ceremonial law. In this they made a grand and fatal mistake. God never gave that law for this purpose, but for another entirely different from this. It was only introductory to the real gospel--intended to prepare the way for it. That ceremonial hinted plainly at the true

system, and aimed to illustrate the great principles upon which it reposes.

- 3. It is remarkable that sinners generally have no idea of God's plan of securing in them what he commands. They look no further than the precept and the penalty, and seem utterly unaware that the high aim of God is to bring them back to obedience and love. Hence God must bring them first under a felt sentence of death; but this does not make them righteous; it only prepares the way for bringing them to Christ.

Again, men are ignorant of God's righteousness when they fail to understand the conditions on which He can treat them as righteous, that is, can justify and save them. This was the mistake of the Jews and is the mistake of all sinners. They do not understand how it is that God proposes to make them righteous, and turn them from all their sin.

## **II. I am next to enquire, When men may be said to go about to establish their own righteousness.**

- 1. And first, what is meant by establishing one's own righteousness?
  - (1.) Suppose you see a man come into a court of justice. He is accused. He pleads not guilty. In some way he justifies his conduct. Perhaps he will even attempt to prove his own entire righteousness in the whole transaction, so that he can face the judge down and insist that in every particular he has done nothing wrong and only what is right. This would be going about to establish his own righteousness.
  - (2.) Sinners go about to establish their own righteousness when they bring in pleas of excuse for their sin. If a man can show his right under the circumstances to do as he does, this goes to establish his righteousness. So sinners go about to parry conviction--to bring in extenuating and justifying circumstances. Of this, God accuses them: "Wilt thou condemn Me, that thou mayest be righteous?"
  - (3.) Legitimately, the bearing of an excuse goes to arraign God. What do you mean, sinner? So you think God can accept your apology, and admit himself to be wrong? If not, why do you present it? Why bring it up before your Almighty Judge, to insult him to his very face, by impeaching his equity?
  - (4.) Every sinner who brings forward any form of excuse for his own sin, is really trying to establish his own righteousness.

Again, men are trying to establish their own righteousness when they depend on doing right for acceptance with God. How often do they tell you they mean to do about right, showing plainly by their manner, and by the use they make of this supposed intention, that they think hereby to secure favor with God. They turn off his claims with this plea, and so not at all believe they are in danger of being sent to hell. Now is this anything else but going about to establish their own righteousness?



- 2. The same must be said of those who depend on their own reformation.
  - (1.) I often meet with young persons, who, before they came here, had been much more loose, in many points of moral conduct, as for instance, the observance of the Sabbath; but coming here they attempt to reform, and this greatly relieves their consciences. Of course, now they are in a good way, and think themselves almost sure of heaven; whereas this reform may be wholly due to their love of a fair reputation. Mingling here with people who themselves observe the Sabbath, and who have established this general usage, they are forced to conform, and do so, without any more regard for God than they had before.
  - (2.) Such persons I have seen pass through other stages of self-righteous endeavor. They become convicted of sin, and begin to pray perhaps. Still they are uneasy, and, therefore, resort to some forms of external reformation. How very common is this among the masses of awakened sinners! Many of you who are before me, have had this sort of experience. How long it took you to understand that you were all wrong, and that nothing would avail for you short of a most radical change of heart.
  - (3.) In the same train of feeling, men depend on having done nothing worthy of condemnation. Indeed! What is this but going about to establish their own righteousness? They think they have done nothing that can justify God in sending them to hell. On this point they take issue with God, assuming that they have done nothing very wrong. They must know that, in God's sight, sin deserves hell, else He would not have built hell, nor have made it the penalty of sin. How, then, should they dare to dispute this point with God, and arraign him on the implied charge of injustice!
  - (4.) The same thing is seen, under a slightly different form when men depend on their general integrity of character. They have been honest and kind, and on the whole, so good that they think God cannot send them to hell, but will strike the balance in their favor. They have done a great many things that are about right. On the whole, they have done more good than hurt, and therefore, they are sure it cannot be right for God to send them to hell. Their life shows more obedience than disobedience--as they insist.  
  
Indeed, sinner! What do you know of personal holiness? What experience have you of a pure heart--of real love to God--of sincere regard for his will? Surely, you are only going about to establish your own righteousness.  
  
Again, sinners evince the same spirit when they hold on to the idea that they are about as good as professors of religion. Some such, they know of, who are not any better than they should be, and with whom they think their own case might compare favorably. Such, are going about to establish their own righteousness.
  - (5.) Also, when they depend on their religious observances. Many have learned better than to rely on their honesty or morality; so they resort to their religious observances. Like the Catholics, they, virtually, count their beads, and doup their senseless, unmeaning

services;--yes, even Protestants do this, and just as really make a merit in these observances, as the poor man who expects to go to heaven, by kneeling before the holy altar, kissing the holy wafer, and saying his Ave Marias. This Protestant prays just like the Catholic--that is, with the same purpose, and the same state of heart; he reads his Bible on the same principle, and in the same way goes through what he calls his "religious duties."

This was the mistake of the Jews. They fasted twice in the week--were greatly given to prayer and alms to the poor. In these services, their scribes, priests, and Pharisees, spent a great share of their time. Thrice a year they went up to Jerusalem to the solemn feasts. Religious duties absorbed a large share of their time and money. You would be appalled to learn how much their temple cost, and their religious worship, sacrifices and offerings. On all these they placed the utmost dependence. But evermore, when men rely on other methods of salvation than God's, they are really going about to establish their own.

### **III. I am next to enquire what this righteousness of God is--this of which sinners are so ignorant.**

- 1. In general, God's righteousness is synonymous with his infinite moral purity; but, in such connections as this, it seems to mean more specifically his integrity as a moral Governor, bound to sustain the interests of his government in its relations both to the unfallen and to the fallen. Under the most solemn obligations to do his utmost to secure universal obedience as a necessary means to the highest happiness, he cannot suffer law to be broken, nor rebels to live--except on the ground of some satisfaction made, that shall amply sustain the sanctity and honor of law. Of course, this quality of his character, as a moral Governor, determines the great features of his plan of saving sinners. It stands revealed in his law and in his gospel. This righteousness of God renders it forever certain that no sinner can be accepted on the ground of any works of his own. God's claims are so high, and the sinner has fallen so low, that God can never accept any work of his hands. Even his prayers--out of Christ--and his best works are all odious to God. He is trying to put God off with something less than a perfect heart.
- 2. By the very terms and spirit of the law, it demands perfect obedience, and the exigencies of God's great kingdom require no less. The law, in both its precept and penalty, must be honored, or no sinner can be saved. I do not mean that God will insist that the utmost measure of penalty shall be visited on the sinner's own person;--but it must be this, or a substitute that will answer the one great end of fully sustaining the dignity, influence, and authority of his law. His throne must be infinitely removed from all supposable connivance with sin.
- 3. Hence, it became necessary that our Surety should honor the law, as to its penalty, by offering his humanity on the altar of his divinity. In his own person, too, he obeyed the law fully.
- 4. Hence, sinners, to be saved, must return to real obedience. God's righteousness requires this.
- 5. We can now apprehend God's method of making sinners personally righteous. First he opens the way, by giving his Son to honor the law, so that God can come down from heaven and enter

into covenant with the sinner and draw him back to life and love. This is God's method--that Christ be received as the sinner's righteousness, having borne for him the curse of the law, obeying it perfectly, and then suffering in place of the penalty, which the sinner else must have suffered. The sinner, by faith accepting Christ, becomes, in the governmental respect, united to Christ, so that, for Christ's sake, God accepts them both. Families sometimes come into such a relation to government, that the children stand in the stead of the parents, and are rewarded or forgiven for their parents' sake. Similar is the relation sustained by Christ and the believing sinner to the government of God. Christ is "set forth to be a propitiation for us through faith in his blood," in this sense, that the merits of his death are made over to us, on condition of our believing, and we have the full benefit of all that Christ has suffered and done to honor the law. We now abandon all hope of justification from personally obeying the law, and receive Christ as God's mode of making us right before the law. He is given to us as a Redeemer and Savior. He is treated in this transaction as if he had been a sinner,--we, as if we were righteous.

- 6. Thus we stand before God as if in Christ. Paul said--"If any other man thinketh he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more;" "touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless;"--"but what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, that I may be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ--the righteousness which is of God by faith."
- 7. Thus by a governmental act, God merges in Christ the whole mass of believers--he having become our Surety, our Advocate, Mediator and King. In this wonderful arrangement, God turns the whole race round from looking to the law for justification, to looking unto Christ.
- 8. Submission to God's righteousness is the condition of salvation. So the apostle implies. "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Here you cannot fail to observe that this method of salvation is something to be submitted to. The will must yield its full assent to this plan.
- 9. The constant effort of sinners is to do something of their own--some work of some sort, or get up some experience. This is the great idea which they aim to realize as soon as they are convicted. Hence they cannot have peace of mind, nor real pardon, because they do not meet God's plan. They struggle against God's Spirit, and resist his influence; they turn and shift in all possible ways to get up some righteousness of their own. The seventh chapter to the Romans, is only a picture of one who is struggling and floundering as in a spiritual quagmire--bringing himself by promises and resolves, and yet finding them all of no avail. What masses of even professed Christians, are in precisely this condition! They make not a prayer in which they do not feel condemned. Their state is one of conviction and despair, so deeply agonizing that they can have no peace. They are struggling to effect an impossibility,--to establish, in some way, their own righteousness; and failing in this, they sink down into despair. Hence it comes to pass that the last step a man takes before submission to God is usually a mighty effort to establish his own righteousness;--which effort ends in despair, after which, he consents to submit to God's plan of being made righteous. How often have I seen this in professors who thought they knew what religion is, but in the clear light of these truths have seen their mistake. If they come really

to despair of help in themselves, and then cast their souls on God through Christ, all is well. Probably most ministers find cases of this sort. Great numbers of them have fallen under my observation. How many have I seen who struggle and struggle, long, and without relief, because they struggle in a wrong direction. They are ignorant of God's righteousness, and therefore go about to establish one of their own. A striking case now occurs to me, of a lady, now on mission-ground, a lady of many noble traits of character, but before her conversion, strong in her self-righteousness. Hearing of the great revivals in Oneida County, some thirty years since, she came to see them. Her object was to learn what this new and strange movement might be. She heard sermon after sermon, but writhed under their pointed truths, often finding fault with the preaching as being too personal, and as being full of wrong things. Conviction, however, sank deeper and yet deeper. Soon a friend with whom she was boarding, said to me--We have a dreadful case at our house--you must come and see her. I went. I found she had set herself to defend the idea that she did not deserve to be damned, for if she was a sinner, it was only because she was made so, and born so. Being cornered up on these points, and shown her error, she became more agonized; the struggle was fearful! At last she screamed at the top of her voice, and yielded! Then a change came over her--a charming, glorious change, which no language can describe. Almost her first words, as she broke silence again, were "I'll be a missionary!" But few months passed ere this vow was fulfilled, and she has lived a missionary to this day. Her self-righteousness, like a mighty tower of strength, came down wonderfully;--and when Jesus became her righteousness, she was a lamb at His feet. Such a change in the whole being, manifest in every aspect, is truly wonderful.

Often it happens that you see professors of religion moving heaven and earth by their self-righteous efforts to get up some righteousness of their own. You will be struck in examining their religious system, to see how utterly Christ is left out of it, as a practical Savior. They think of their good and right things--not of Christ--as really the ground of their hope before God.

- 10. This method of God's righteousness is exactly opposed to human pride. Pride loves to do the work and have the honor of it; but God's system has done all the meritorious work itself--leaving nothing for man to do that he can be proud of.

It is for this reason that conversion costs such a conflict. Often it seems indispensable that God should startle sinners with awful fears before they will yield. On Mt. Sinai and all around, the trump of God waxed louder and louder--the mountain is all ablaze, and rocks quake under Jehovah's mighty voice long and loud, till every nerve of the sinner trembles, and he sees nothing but darkness--until the atonement reveals a living Christ to his agonized soul.

- 11. This gospel plan seems to sinners deep and dark as midnight, till the Holy Ghost reveals to him his self-righteousness, cleaves down that self-righteous spirit, knocks out his props, and he falls and dies!--then the cross reveals life, and he rejoices with exceeding joy in a salvation wrought of God through redeeming blood.
- 12. This righteousness of God must be submitted to. The sinner must submit to the righteousness which has sentenced him to hell. He must admit it to be right and just. I often ask

sinner--Are you prepared to subscribe to that righteousness which dooms you to hell? If I find him wavering on that point, I say to him--You do not understand God's righteousness. You cannot be saved till you subscribe to God's righteousness in this--till you fully admit its justness and propriety. You must yield also to his supreme authority and right to govern all his creatures, and consent to be saved wholly by grace--things which many fail to understand. In England, I found, to my surprise, that many ministers talked much of grace, yet did not believe that men deserve damnation for their sins. I said to them--What do you mean by this? You talk largely of grace, yet deny all need of it! For, grace is the antithesis of justice. How can there be grace shown the sinner, if it be not just to punish him!

- 13. The point of greatest struggle with the sinner is in laying aside as worthless, his own righteousness. You recollect the case of the poor Indian and his rich white neighbor, both awakened and convicted at the same time, but the Indian came at once to Jesus, while the white man remained a long time in extremest darkness and distress. At last, he asked the Indian how it happened that he found Christ so soon, while himself had sought so long in vain. The Indian stammered his reply--"Indian poor; white man rich; poor Indian no clothes; white man good clothes, fine clothes; Indian throw his old rags right away, take Christ's robe at once; white man can't throw away his fine clothes."

You recollect, also, the case of the poor woman in the gospel. Christ had been invited to a rich man's table; they sat reclined at their meal, with their feet somewhat extended behind them, when this woman came up gently, clasped his sacred feet, bathed them with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Blessed woman! She knew her position as a lost sinner, and she had tasted the grace that forgives freely. What an act was that! Her humility of spirit charms us, and we read in her case the feeling of those who discard all righteousness of their own, and come to understand the righteousness of God.

## REMARKS.

1. The ignorance of the Jews came of their great pride, and is not at all to be ascribed to the obscurity of the subject itself. The ignorance of sinners now, even under the gospel, is amazing. I have recently seen one who had been well instructed in the letter of these things, yet when he became deeply hungry for gospel life, seemed scarcely to know how to use one of the plainest truths it embraces. It was affecting to see him drink in a few of the simplest gospel truths, saying--"I am sure I never heard of that before--never thought of that." How common it is for sinners, under the Spirit's light, to say--"All this is new to me; I wonder I was never told of this before!"

2. Many feel the need of becoming truly religious; they mean to be, and they set themselves to work for it in some way. Perhaps they set themselves to serve God, but have no right idea of what it is to be truly religious. Hence, we find so few who seem, in their own experience, to know the deep power of the gospel. Ah, the deep foundations of their selfishness are not broken up. They have never been made conformable to Christ's death. Hence, the difference between this class and those who are utterly cut down and slain by the law--then raised from the dead to a new life in Christ.

3. When the sinner is truly convicted of sin, the way opens before him, and the first conditions are fulfilled for his free pardon. Now, he has new apprehensions of God's law--of its great spirituality. But

it is not enough to know this; another lesson yet remains. I am glad to see you cut down under thorough conviction, but you must also learn not to fly in the face of that fiery law for salvation! Sinner, professed Christian, do you know how you are to be saved? You need not make any atonement; you need not suffer and toil to work up an atonement; no need of this at all. In my own first convictions, I said, under my great sorrow--I shall have to bear a great deal of this, I have been a sinner so long; I shall have to be nearly killed before I can be saved. Ah, how mistaken! God wants no such atonement--no such suffering of you. The atonement is all made, ready to your hands! Do you understand that no works, or prayers, or tears of your own can do anything for you towards an atonement, and towards constituting a ground of your acceptance before God? God himself has provided the lamb for the offering. Now come, as the ancient Jew came, and lay your hand on that dear sacrifice, and there confess your sins. The vail of the great temple is rent away, and you may enter the inner sanctuary; may come quite to the mercy-seat and lay your own hand on the head of the victim that takes away the sin of the world. Will you come?

## **Adorning the Doctrine of God Our Savior**

Lecture XIII

December 5, 1855

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Titus 2:10: "But showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."

In our last Friday prayer meeting, one of the brethren quoted this passage in prayer. It struck me with great force; indeed, I never had seen its beauty and power so fully before. It turned my mind upon this passage with so much interest, that I have concluded to present my views upon it in this morning's discourse.

*I. What is this doctrine of God our Savior?*

*II. What is it to adorn this doctrine?*

*III. What are the particular reasons for our thus adorning the gospel?*

*IV. What are the conditions of so adorning this gospel?*

**I. First, let us inquire, what is this doctrine of God our Savior?**

The chapter in which the passage occurs, affords us all the answer we need. Paul is instructing Timothy how to teach and preach the gospel to his converts. He specially applies the gospel to "aged men," "aged women," "young women," "young men," to himself, as a "pattern of good words," and to "servants;" and in this latter connection, comes in our text. This exhortation is then enforced as well as explained in these remarkable words: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Let this suffice to show what the doctrine is that Christians of every class in life should strive to adorn. The essential idea of the doctrine is that God's infinite grace towards our lost world had for its aim to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto Himself -- in short, to make us holy.

## **II. We must next inquire -- what is it to adorn this doctrine?**

To adorn it is to honor it, and make it honorable before all. It implies that we commend it by being ourselves an illustration of its meaning, and by evincing to all its spirit and efficacy. We are to prove the excellence of the doctrine by showing, in our own case, what it can do in the hands of the Holy Spirit to reform the world. The doctrine is good or otherwise, according to its practical results. If it accomplishes what it aims to, it is beyond expression valuable and glorious. That it can and does, is just the thing which God leaves for His people to prove by their lives. Hence, they must live so as to hold forth the excellence, beauty and power, of the gospel.

## **III. What are the particular reasons for our thus adorning the gospel?**

- 1. Unless we adorn and honor the gospel, it will dishonor us. Paul said -- "I magnify my office." He honored the office of an apostle and it honored him. But if he had neglected and disparaged the office, it would have visited disgrace on him. So if we do not magnify our office, all will despise us -- the devil and all the universe will count us too mean to be cared for. To have such responsibilities and then to heed them not; to be pressed with such motives, and yet have no sensibility to their pressure and force - this would show that our character has no worthy elements in it, and ought to subject us to dishonor. If you do not adorn the gospel, there must be a reason; and what is it? This -- that you are playing the hypocrite!

Again, if we do not adorn the gospel, it will more deeply ruin us. The gospel, instead of blessing us, will only work for us a deeper damnation. There is no avoiding such a result from such a life.

- 2. It will greatly grieve the Savior. If we profess the gospel and yet do not adorn it, we do the worst thing we can do to injure His cause and wound His feelings. Accordingly, we find that He expresses the utmost displeasure and disgust towards those who profess to love and honor Him, yet do not. To one of the seven churches of Asia, He said - "I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth!" No such language can be found elsewhere in the Bible; from which we may infer that the Savior hates no other form of sin

more intensely and with more utter loathing.

Again, if we do not adorn the gospel, we shall greatly hinder and retard its success. We shall stumble others who would enter the narrow way. Our life scandalizes the gospel which it should, but does not, adorn. He who, professing the gospel, does not adorn it, gives his highest influence against it. He throws against it the whole weight of his example.

- 3. If you reply to this that it is better to profess religion and be a somewhat decent backslider, than to come out in open opposition, this is not true. No argument which an opposer can use against the gospel will have the weight that a protesting life will have. He who professes love but lives hatred; whose lips honor Christ, but whose life protests against Him, is Christ's worst enemy. The gospel does not suffer from any other foes as from him.
- 4. On the other hand, if we do adorn the gospel, it will surely adorn us. Let any one really adorn the gospel, it shall be to him a mantle of glory. If men witness in him the spirit of Christ, they will admire that spirit and honor him who exhibits it. Besides this, it will win others to love the Savior. If we illustrate it in our lives, it will carry conviction and persuasion too. It is true that in many things, the motives of Christians are liable to be misjudged. Sometimes, when they do right, false motives are imputed to them. Yet, though this be true, there will be many things which the world will be obliged to confess, and this reluctant testimony will be the more to their real honor. Wicked men cannot gainsay their living testimony to the power of the gospel on their own hearts, as manifest in their lives. A holy life will command the attention of the world, and they will inquire what this doctrine may be. They are forced to exclaim -- How beautiful their lives are! And how sweet their temper! Who is this Savior whom they profess to follow, and to whose influence they attribute their peculiar spirit and life? If this doctrine begets such a spirit and such a life, we ought to know it and ought to have it!

So it will always be. If this doctrine is really adorned, it will be sure to create inquiry. It must arrest attention. There are probably few men of the least observation who have not known certain persons whose lives have arrested their attention. A man can hardly live anywhere without coming in contact with someone of whom he is constrained to ask -- What is it that enables him to live so? What spirit is this? When they see its striking and beautiful manifestations, they are constrained to inquire thus for its causes, and are anxious to learn what they may be.

Mere philanthropists commonly ascribe everything to phrenological development, and make nothing of it but mere humanity. But let them come into contact with a living and earnest Christianity, and they will see the difference. They will see that while the Christian lays all due stress on the rights of man and of woman too, they lay yet more stress upon the rights of God, and ought to. They will see that God has a rightful claim to the homage of His creatures, and that no man deserves much praise for justice who does not give God His rights as well as man his. Thus, the presence of a living Christianity corrects the common mistake of the mere philanthropist. In fact, this class are wont to make this mistake only where they see no living Christianity, but only a doctrinal one -- only one which has its embodiment in creeds and pulpit teachings -- not in the spirit and



life of its professors. Let them see the doctrine really adorned, and they will then know the difference.

It is remarkable that modern philanthropy goes out only to the animal part of our nature, being, in this respect, on a level with the sympathy of brutes towards their own species. It troubles not itself to save the soul -- all this is dropped out. You may see these philanthropists exceedingly zealous in defence of mere earthly interests, solicitous about visible and bodily joys and sorrows, boiling over with excitement about the body; but call them to labor for the soul, they have no heart in it -- no interest, no sympathy; those things lie beyond their sphere of care or concern.

- 5. Now let the doctrine of God our Savior be really adorned by those who believe it, and let no rights of man or woman be overlooked, and yet let all the rights of God be seen to be uppermost in their regards; then philanthropists will see their mistake.

Again, let this doctrine be steadfastly honored, and men will surely see the beauty and truth of the doctrine of sanctification. Let Christians persevere, and they will certainly overcome. Overcoming sin and Satan, they will certainly prove to all that there is a power in the gospel to save from sin. Here what they will say: "I have seen this man or woman now these years, and I know there must be something in them that I do not understand." Said one man of my acquaintance concerning a young lady who had been several weeks in his family, and whose life eminently adorned the gospel -- "Now, wife, I want you to tell me in what one thing that young woman sinned while she was in our family! Did you see her do or hear her say any single thing that was not in harmony with the gospel? I must confess, I say and heard nothing out of the right way." Yet he watched her with an eagle eye. He was not a Christian himself, and was by no means prejudiced in her favor as a Christian; but he could not help observing so peculiar a life, and he soon found that it commended itself most entirely to his moral feelings and judgements, so that he could say nothing against it.

- 6. Now, to produce such results, professors of religion need not be disputatious; they need only live out the spirit of the gospel in word and deed; so will it steadily confound gainsayers. The ungodly will see their need of the gospel, and the religion of the cross will work its way into the profound esteem of mankind.
- 7. One of the great reasons many give for not becoming religious is this -- "If I should be converted, I could not stand; I should backslide and disgrace myself." This objection is not so common here as elsewhere. Abroad I meet with it almost everywhere; men saying, "I am afraid to profess religion, lest I should disgrace it and myself too. I had rather not profess than profess, and not adorn it." But, let me say, if the gospel be adorned by its professors, men will see that it can be honored in the profession -- that men can live a holy, blameless life. When abroad among strangers, I often ask individuals, "Do you not know of some one or more within your personal acquaintance, who really honor the gospel?" Some, perhaps, will answer, no; but if you converse with them much, you are likely to conclude that they are either dishonest or untruthful. For, with most remarkable forethought, God, in His providence, has scattered some salt all abroad over Christian lands, so that every man shall have the moral trial of deciding

whether he will or will not receive the lessons which it teaches.

- 8. Adorning the doctrine of Christ will encourage the impenitent to believe that there is something stable in religion. Beholding it in the real life, they will say, "There is something that I want. I know that must be true religion." I now recollect the case of a lawyer not a professed Christian, one of the leading men in the State in his profession, who, though an entire stranger introduced himself to me while I was preaching from time to time in the city, saying -- I have a friend whom I should like to have you see, and should be happy to have you go with me to her residence. Certainly, said I, and with pleasure. I found her an elderly lady, but her heart running over with love to God and to all her fellow-creatures. As our conversation drew out her deep knowledge and experience of the gospel, I saw him dash the tear from his cheek, greatly moved at such a demonstration of the power of the gospel. After we had left the house, he said to me -- "What do you think of that? Is not that the true religion of the Bible? I know it is, and am determined never to rest till I have it.

If we adorn this doctrine people who know our life and yet do not embrace religion will feel severely self-condemned. Whether they are ungodly men out of the church or backsliders in it, they will see that their own course is wrong and without excuse. It will beget a sense of guilt and shame that they do not themselves live so as to adorn the gospel. They will see that they must adorn this gospel in heart and life, or they cannot be saved. For this world also they will see that they must be either a blessing in society or an odious nuisance.

#### **IV. What are the conditions of so adorning this gospel?**

- 1. We must earnestly intend it. We must really set our hearts on being living epistles for God, and upon developing in our lives all that the gospel requires.
- 2. We must not be satisfied with merely having evidence of our acceptance with God. A hope that we are Christ's should not suffice, and certainly not, a hope which is weakened by much doubt. We ought to know that we have no right to hope unless we are truly in love with this gospel, and unless our heart is set upon adorning it in our temper and life. It will not do for us to rest with being about as good as most professors of religion. We are by no means to make any man our standard.
- 3. We should beware of legal motives lest we become unamiable in temper and come under the sway of a legal spirit instead of the spirit of peace, love and joy in the Holy Ghost. Such a temper as would represent the gospel as being unamiable in spirit is especially to be guarded against and deplored.
- 4. Beware of mistaking license for liberty; for this doctrine is designed to make us holy, and holiness surely can give no license to sin.
- 5. Guard against being in thought diverted from Christ. Let people do what they will, resolve ever so much, they never will live holy if Christ be left out. With Christ left out of one's thoughts, the gospel is left out, and there is no power left. You must give yourselves much to

communion with Him. Rely upon this, that unless you look to Christ as the center and fountain of your life, you will not live, and all your promises and covenants and resolutions, will not give you life. When you have let Christ pass from your thoughts, He no longer influences you, and He will not save you. Hence, He must be your theme -- the great center of your thoughts and of your heart's power.

- 6. You will be wise to keep in mind one passage standing in our context -- "Who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Remember that this was His object in dying for us -- to make us a holy people in His own praise. For this end He endured all that mortal flesh could bear. Let us then strive to appreciate the value of this great end, even as He did. Let it be with us an omnipresent consideration, that Christ suffered for us to redeem us from all personal sin. Let no one fail to realize the worth of this great object, for none can bring their souls under the full pressure of gospel motives and gospel power unless they keep this great truth in the right place in their mind. You must realize that this is His object and should be yours also. Christ would have you take hold of Him for this result that He may take hold of you. David Brainard made a remark which, in my early Christian life, was a great stumbling block to me -- to the effect that "he did not expect to make much progress in holiness in this life, sin was so strong." Can this be according to the Bible? If so, then the provisions of grace for sanctification must be radically defective, and that fitness and fulness which so strikingly characterizes everything else in the gospel are strangely wanting here -- here, just where we might expect them to be most abundant. This cannot possibly be true.
- 7. Do you believe that Christ wants you to be saved from sin as much as you desire to be? Some of you have come to me to inquire how you may and can be delivered from sin; and I now ask you if you suppose that you are more anxious to be rid of sin than Christ is to have you? Will you not believe that Christ is at the bottom of all those desires which you feel; that His own mind energizes within your soul; that He is always intensely anxious to press this work along -- always more interested by far in it than you ever are? What! Will you assume that Christ is so attracted and engrossed by the thundering hallelujahs of heaven that He loses sight of your struggles of a holy heart? Will you think that, when on a lovely Sabbath morning you lift up your heart before Him for holiness, he does not hear you? Has He backslidden? Has His love for His people below grown cold? Ah never, NEVER! On this subject His interest never wanes. It has been burning many thousand years, and never can be quenched. Every desire you feel for victory over sin is only reciprocated action, coming from its fountain in His bosom.
- 8. Fully expect Him to do all He has promised. Do not adopt that blasphemous assumption -- that if you expect Him to fulfill His promises to you, you will be deceived. Away with that infidel absurdity! Do not insult God by such an assumption; an assumption that God is a liar!
- 9. Be sure to make use of all appropriate instrumentalities for light and life. The reason for this is that God uses them to accomplish His results in the soul of man; therefore, you should use them, that you may co-operate with Him. Yet do not rest in these means as having, in themselves, the power to save you. The power resides only and wholly in God. "According as His divine power hath given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness."

- 10. It is affecting to think what an interest Christ must have in our character. Could He die for us to redeem us from all iniquity? Then His interest in our holiness is measured by nothing less than His own blood! An interest so deep that He did not even think His life too great a sacrifice for such an end! What a flood of light does this fact throw on His heart-interest for our sanctification!

## REMARKS.

1. What an interest every member of the true church must have that we should adorn the doctrine of God our Savior! Paul said -- "Who is offended and I burn not?" If any were stumbled in their Christian course, it seemed to set his soul on fire!
2. What an interest the wicked world must have in the living piety of the church. That ungodly man who has a pious wife might say -- I would not have her lose that piety of hers for a thousand worlds! I need it always before me, a living example and rebuke. So may all wicked men say of their Christian neighbors. If there is to be any hope of their salvation, they must have these instrumentalities which God Himself has ordained.
3. What an interest it gives us in defending the character of Christians. Those who love Christ and His cause will not circulate slander against Christ's children. They feel too keenly alive to the interests that cluster around the Savior's name! Sometimes you find persons deeply distressed because they see Christ dishonored through His friends. Sometimes even the fear that He will be, greatly agonizes them, so deeply are their hearts set on His honor and praise. I could name to you facts that show the greatest distress felt by Christians in the supposed dishonor done to Christ through His children
4. To be careless about adorning this doctrine evinces hypocrisy. There can scarcely be a stronger proof of it than this.
5. When we really love this doctrine of God our Savior, how watchful we become of each other. Then how it strikes one to see Christ dishonored. But those who are not in sympathy with Christ can see His name continually dishonored, yet manifest no grief. They feel none.
6. But living Christians will be jealous and tender of each other's reputation. It will offend and grieve them to see the character of Christian brethren assailed. How can it be otherwise, so long as they see Christ thus wounded in the dishonor cast on His doctrine through His professed people?

## GLOSSARY

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

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.
3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

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**End of the 1855 Collection.**