

## What Saith the Scripture?

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# Faith

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Lecture II

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Text.--John 6:28,29: "Then said they unto him, what shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

The following is the train of thought I shall pursue:

*I. Notice several erroneous answers, commonly given to the question proposed in the text, viz: What shall we do that we may work the works of God?*

*II. Show that Christ gave the only proper answer, under the circumstances in which the question was asked.*

*III. Show that, under other circumstances, another answer might, with propriety, be given.*

### **I. I am to notice several erroneous answers commonly given to the question proposed in the text.**

1. Should the question be proposed to a Jew, "What shall I do that I may work the works of God?" he would answer, keep the law, both moral and ceremonial, i.e. keep the commandments.

2. To the same inquiry, an Arminian would answer, improve common grace, and you will obtain converting grace, i.e. use the means of grace, according to the best light you have, and you will obtain the grace of salvation. In this answer, it is not supposed, that the inquirer already has faith, and is using the means of grace in faith; but that he is in a state of impenitency, and is inquiring after converting grace. The answer, therefore, amounts to this: you must get converting grace by your impenitent works; you must become holy by your hypocrisy; you must work out sanctification by sin.

3. To this question, most professed Calvinists would make, in substance, the same reply.

They would reject the language, while they retained the idea. Their direction would imply, either that the inquirer already has faith, or that he must perform works to obtain it, i.e. to obtain grace by works.

Neither an Arminian nor a Calvinist, would formally direct the inquirer to the law, as the ground of justification. But nearly the whole Church would give directions that would amount to the same thing. Their answer would be a legal, and not a gospel answer. For whatever answer is given to this question, that does not distinctly recognize faith, as the foundation of all virtue in sinners, is legal. Unless the inquirer is made to understand that this is the first grand fundamental duty, without the performance of which all virtue, all giving up of sin, all acceptable obedience, is impossible, he is misdirected. He is led to believe, that it is possible to please God without faith; and to obtain grace by works of law. There are but two kinds of works--works of law, and works of faith. Now if the inquirer has not the "faith that works by love," to set him upon any course of works to get it, is certainly to direct him to get faith by works of law. Whatever is said to him that does not clearly convey the truth, that both justification and sanctification are by faith, without works of law, is law, and not gospel. Nothing before, or without faith, can possibly be done by the unbeliever, but works of law. His first duty, therefore, is faith; and every attempt to obtain faith by unbelieving works, is to lay works at the foundation, and make grace a result. It is the direct opposite of gospel truth.

Take facts as they arise in every day's history, to show that what I have stated is the experience of almost all, professors and non-professors. Whenever a sinner begins in good earnest to agitate the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" he resolves, as a first duty, to break off from his sins, i.e. in unbelief. Of course his reformation is only outward, he determines to do better--to reform in this, that, and the other thing, and thus prepare himself to be converted. He does not expect to be saved without grace and faith, but he attempts to get grace by works of law.

The same is true of multitudes of anxious Christians, who are inquiring what they shall do to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. They overlook the fact that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith," that it is with "the shield of faith" that they are "to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." They ask, why am I overcome by sin? Why can I not get above its power? Why am I thus the slave of my appetites and passions, and the sport of the devil? They cast about for the cause of all this spiritual wretchedness and death. At one time they think they have discovered it in the neglect of one duty; and at another time, in the neglect of another. Sometimes they imagine they have found the cause to lie in yielding to one sin, and sometimes in yielding to another. They put forth efforts in this direction, and in that direction, and patch up their righteousness on one side, while they make a rent in the other. Thus they spend years in running around in a circle, and making dams of sand across the current of their own corruptions. Instead of at once purifying their hearts by faith, they are engaged in trying to arrest the overflowing of its bitter waters. Why do I sin? they inquire; and casting about for the cause, they come to the sage conclusion, it is because I neglect such a duty, i.e. because I do sin. But how shall I get rid of sin? Answer: by doing my duty, i.e. by ceasing from sin. Now the real inquiry is, why do they neglect their duty? Why do they commit sin at all? Where is the foundation of all this mischief? Will it be replied, the foundation of all this wickedness is in the corruption of our nature--in the wickedness of the heart--in the strength of our evil propensities and habits? But all this only brings us back to the real inquiry, again: How are this corrupt nature, this wicked[ness], and these sinful habits to be overcome? I answer, by faith alone. No works of law have the least tendency to overcome our sins; but rather confirm the soul in

self-righteousness and unbelief.

The great and fundamental sin, which is at the foundation of all other sin, is unbelief. The first thing, is to give up that--to believe the word of God. There is no breaking off from one sin without this. "Whatever is not faith is sin," "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." Thus we see that the backslider and convicted Christian, when agonizing to overcome sin, will, almost always, betake themselves to works of law to obtain faith. They will fast, and pray, and read, and struggle, and outwardly reform, and thus endeavor to obtain grace. Now all this is in vain and wrong. Do you ask, shall we not fast, and pray, and read, and struggle? Shall we do nothing, but sit down in Antinomian security and inaction? I answer, you must do all that God commands you to do; but begin where He tells you to begin, and do it in the manner in which he commands you to do it, i.e. in the exercise of that faith that works by love. Purify your hearts by faith. Believe in the Son of God. And say not in your heart, "who shall ascend into heaven i.e. to bring Christ down from above; or who shall descend into the deep, i.e. to bring up Christ again from the dead. But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach."

Now these facts show that even under the gospel almost all professors of religion, while they reject the Jewish notion of justification by works of the law, have, after all, adopted a ruinous substitute for it, and suppose that in some way they are to obtain grace by their works.

## **II. I am to show, that Christ gave the only proper answer, under the circumstances in which the question was asked.**

In order to understand the propriety of the answer, we must understand the meaning of the question. The context shows that the question was asked by certain unbelieving Jews, who inquired what they could do, to work the works of God?--in other words, to obtain the favor of God? Christ understood them as inquiring what works would be acceptable without faith. He therefore answers: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." As if He had said, nothing is a work of God which you would recognize as such. Faith is the first great work of God, without which it is impossible to please Him. To a Jew, this answer would imply, that he believed Him to be the Messiah foretold in the scriptures. And to all persons the answer implies not only a general confidence in the character of God, but a trust in his atonement and saving grace, in opposition to all works of law for justification.

To show that this is the only proper answer to be given to a person in a state of unbelief, I will state,

*1. What I DO NOT mean by the proposition; and*

*2. What I DO mean by it.*

- 1. I do not mean that it is the only proper answer, because there is no good and acceptable work but faith.
- 2. Nor do I mean that faith without works is acceptable to God.
- 3. Nor do I mean that faith makes void the law, and sets aside the obligation and necessity of

good works. The Apostle, in James 2:17-26, sets the necessity of works, as the result of faith, in a strong light. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew you my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works, when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the son[friend], of God. Ye see, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise, also, was not Rahab, the harlot, justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

- 4. Nor do I mean that there are no other directions that may be given to an inquiring sinner or Christian that, if followed, would not in the end amount to the same thing as the direction in the text. In number eighteen of my "Revival Lectures," I said, "You may give the sinner any direction, or tell him to do anything, that includes a right heart." To repent--to submit--to give the heart to God; and all the directions there specified imply faith. Were I to preach that sermon again, I should give a greater prominence to faith, and show that the exercise of faith is the first thing to be done; and that upon the exercise of this, repentance, submission, love and every other grace depend.
- 5. But, by the above proposition, I do mean, that no works are good works, or are in any sense acceptable to God, only as they proceed from faith. Let it be forever remembered, that "without faith, it is impossible to please God," and "whatsoever is not of faith, is sin."
- 6. It is the proper answer, because both justification and sanctification are by faith alone. Rom. 3:30: "Seeing it is one God who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith;" and 5:1: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Also, 9:30, 31: "What shall we say then? that the Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law." But perhaps you will not clearly see the truth of this, unless I make a remark or two upon the nature of faith.

The first element of saving faith is a realizing sense of the truth of the Bible. But this is not alone saving faith, for Satan has this realizing sense of truth, which makes him tremble.

But a second element in saving faith is the consent of the heart or will to the truth perceived by the intellect. It is a cordial trust or resting of the mind in those truths, and a yielding up of the whole being to their influence. Now it is easy to see, that without the consent of the will, there can be nothing but an outward obedience to God. A wife, without confidence in her husband, can do nothing more than perform outwardly her duty to him. It is a contradiction to say that without confidence, she can perform her duty from

the heart. The same is true of parental and all other governments. Works of law may be performed without faith; i.e. we may serve from fear or hope, or some selfish consideration; but without the confidence that works by love, obedience from the heart is naturally impossible. Nay, the very terms, obedience from the heart without love, are a contradiction.

- 7. By the above, I mean that to seek the grace of faith by works of law, is an utter abomination. It is as abominable as to attempt to purchase the Holy Ghost with money. It is to set aside the testimony of God with respect to our utter depravity, and attempt to palm off our unbelieving, heartless works upon an infinitely holy God. It is an attempt to purchase his favor, instead of accepting grace as a sovereign gift.
- 8. It is as preposterous as it is wicked. It is seeking to please God by our sins--to purchase the grace of faith by making God a liar.
- 9. To give any other answer to one in unbelief, and to set him to perform any work, with the expectation that by it he shall obtain faith, is to confirm him in self-righteousness--to prolong his rebellion--to lead him either to settle down in a self-righteous hope, or to produce, in the end, discouragement and blasphemy.
- 10. Because that repentance, faith, love, and every other holy exercise, both imply and proceed from faith. Without confidence in the character and requirements of God, it is impossible to repent. For what is repentance but heartily to justify God, and condemn ourselves. So it is equally impossible to exercise a complacent love to God, without faith. Submission to God also implies and presupposes the exercise of confidence in God, and in His requirements.
- 11. This is a proper answer, because all right affection, and all good works will necessarily proceed from faith. Christ was not afraid of begetting an Antinomian spirit, by laying so much stress upon faith. He knew full well, that true faith as naturally and necessarily begets every other inward grace, and all outward good works, as a cause produces its effects.
- 12. It is the only proper answer, because faith is the only exercise that receives Christ with all His powerfully sanctifying influences into the heart. The Bible every where represents the sanctified soul, as being under the influence of an indwelling Christ. Now the exercise of faith is that opening of the door by which Christ is received to reign in the heart. Who will pretend that any works are properly good, or that any true faith exists in the mind, except as the result of the operation or influence of Christ in the mind. Now if this is so, the proper direction plainly is, to do that which receives Christ. If this is done, all else will be done. If this is neglected, all else will be neglected, of course.

### **III. I am to show, that under other circumstances another answer might, with propriety, have been given.**

- 1. The careless, unawakened sinner, who knows nothing of his depravity, or helplessness, it might be important and proper to direct to the law of God as the rule of his duty. Not with the expectation of directly promoting holiness thereby, but of convicting him of sin. Thus we find

Christ requiring the young man who was wrapped up in self-righteousness, "to keep the commandments," and taking such a course as to bring out before his mind his supreme love of the world. This produced regret and discouragement in him; and when required to "part with all that he had," and follow Christ, he "went away sorrowful."

- 2. To the anxious sinner, who makes this inquiry, Christ, as I have shown, gave the only appropriate answer. Also, to the Christian, inquiring after sanctification, this is the only appropriate answer. In short, to anyone who is convinced of his real character, this is the proper, and the only proper answer.
- 3. But to one already full of faith and love, and of the Holy Spirit, another answer may be given; simply because, by the inquiry he means a different thing. When he asks, "what shall I do to work the works of God," his heart breaks forth with the inquiry, "what shall I do to honor and glorify God?" --not "what shall I do to be saved?" Let such an one be directed to the whole preceptive part of the Bible. Do this, and avoid that, is just the instruction which he needs, and upon which he will eagerly seize, to glorify God with all his heart. Such a mind needs instruction, not command and threatening. To him the preceptive part of the Bible is just what his circumstances and state of feeling demand. The commands of the Bible will not beget in him, a legal spirit, and thus prove a stumbling block to his soul. He will not set himself self-righteously to perform the duties enjoined; but his heart goes forth to meet his responsibilities, and perform the requirements of God.

#### REMARKS.

1. You see, from this subject, how to understand Rom. 9:20-32, which I have before quoted, "What shall we say, then," &c. The Jews sought by their own doings to please God, without faith; but all their righteousness was as filthy rags.--While the Gentiles, who had lived in open rebellion, when they heard the gospel, believed it at once, instead of betaking themselves to works of law; and thus exercising faith that works by love, they attained to the righteousness which is of God, by faith.

2. You see why the church is not sanctified.--They overlook the office and necessity of faith, as that which alone can produce acceptable obedience to God. They are engaged in efforts to obtain faith by works, instead of first exercising that faith which will beget within them a clean heart. In this way they seek in vain for sanctification. How common is it to see persons full of bustle and outward efforts and works--fasting and praying, giving and doing, and struggling; and after all, they have not the fruits of the Spirit--love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which there is no law. They have not, after all, crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. They do not live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit. They do not, in their own experience, realize the truth of that saying, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is staid[stayed] on thee: because he trusteth in thee." Without that trust they cannot have peace; cannot be sanctified.

Others endeavor to force themselves to exercise the various Christian graces, of love, submission, &c., without faith, overlooking the fact that it is faith that works by love, and that repentance and submission imply faith, and are the results of faith. They are the surrendering of our wills to the will of God. But this certainly cannot be, without confidence in the character of God. In short, every

Christian grace implies the exercise of faith as its foundation.

3. You see why the Bible lays so much stress upon faith.

4. You see what is the difficulty with those who are constantly in a complaining state, on the subject of religion. They seem to know they are wrong; but do not understand wherein the foundation of their wrong consists. They sometimes think that a neglect of this duty is the grand difficulty, and sometimes something else is that upon which their minds fasten, as the prime difficulty in the case. They set themselves to break off from one sin and another, and practice this self-denial, and that duty, and all without that faith that fills the heart with love. Thus they go round and round in a circle, and do not see that unbelief is their great, their damning sin; without the removal of which no other sin can be repented of or forgiven. All their efforts are entirely legal, hypocritical, and vain till they exercise faith.

5. You see the mistake of Antinomian Perfectionists, in setting aside all preceptive religion, and understanding obedience to the commands of God as legality. They do not make the discrimination here made. If persons without faith, in an unsanctified state, set themselves to obey the commandments of God, their efforts must necessarily be legal, self-righteous and ruinous. To them the precepts of the Gospel, as well as the commandments of the law, are a horrible pit of miry clay. You cast a man into a horrible pit of miry clay, and the more he struggles, the deeper he sinks. Now to a man without faith, the precepts of the law and gospel are fitly compared to miry clay. Every effort at obedience without faith is sin; and as it confirms self-righteousness, is sinking him farther and farther from God, and rational hope. And the more vehemently he struggles, the more desperate and alarming his case becomes. The clay surrounds him, and cleaves to him, suffocates and kills him. Just so the commands of God to an unbelieving heart, are a snare and a pit. They are miry and suffocating clay. Without faith, there is ruin and damnation in them.

6. You see how to the Jews, and to all unbelievers, the commandments of God are a stumbling block. All outward conformity to them is useless, yea, ruinous. Love without faith is impossible. And consequently, the merciful direction and instructions contained in the preceptive parts of the Gospel, are made the food of self-righteousness, and the snare of death. But to those whose souls are full of faith and love, the commandments of God are just the instruction which they need, when, in their ignorance, they earnestly inquire, what they shall do to glorify God. Do this, and avoid that, and the like, are just the things upon which hearts of love will seize, as the needed directions of their heavenly Father.

7. But someone may inquire, do not men learn to exercise faith, by what you call legal efforts, and in obedience to legal directions? No. They only learn by experience, that all such directions are vain, and that they are totally depraved and dependent, which they ought to have believed before. They set themselves to pray, and read, and struggle, expecting at every meeting they attend, every prayer they make, to obtain grace and faith. But they never do until they are completely discouraged, and despair of obtaining help in this way. And the history of every self-righteous sinner's conversion, and every anxious Christian's sanctification would develop this truth--that deliverance cometh not until their self-righteous efforts were proved, by their own experience, to be utterly vain, and abandoned as useless, and the whole subject thrown upon the sovereign mercy of God. This submitting a subject to

the sovereign mercy of God is that very act of faith, which they should have put forth long before, but which they would not exercise until every other means had been tried in vain.

8. But perhaps you will say, if by this self-righteous struggle they learn their depravity and dependence, and in this manner come to prove, by their own experience, the truth of God, why not encourage them to make these efforts, as, at least, an indirect way of obtaining faith? Answer: Blasphemy and drunkenness, and any of the most shocking sins, may be, and often have been the means of working conviction, which has resulted in conversion. Why not encourage these things, as such is sometimes their indirect effect? The truth is, when a sinner's attention is awakened, and he is convicted, and puts forth the inquiry, "what shall I do?" and when a Christian, struggling with his remaining corruption, puts forth the same inquiry, why should they be thrown into the horrible pit of which I have spoken? Why not tell them at once, in the language of the text, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent"?

9. Let me say to you who would make the inquiry in the text, don't wait to fast, read, pray or any thing else; don't expect to break off from any sin in your unbelief. You may break off from the outward commission--you may substitute praying for swearing, reading your Bible for reading novels, outward industry and honesty for theft and idleness, sobriety for drunkenness, and any thing you please; and it is, after all, only exchanging one form of sin for another. It is only varying the mode of your warfare. But remember that in unbelief, whatever your conduct is, you are in high-handed rebellion against God. Faith would instantly sanctify your heart, sanctify all your doings, and render them, in Christ Jesus, acceptable to God. Unbelief is your great, your crying, your damning sin--against which the heaviest thunderbolts of Jehovah are hurled.

10. Don't wait for any particular view of Christ before you believe. When persons in the state of mind of which I have been speaking hear those who live in faith describe their views of Christ, they say, "O, if I had such views, I could believe; I must have these before I can believe." Now you should understand that these views are the result and effect of faith. These views of which you speak are that which faith discovers in those passages of Scripture which describe Christ. Faith apprehends the meaning of those passages, and sees in them these very things which you expect to see, before you exercise faith, and which you imagine would produce it. Take hold, then, on the simple promise of God. Take God at his word. Believe that he means just what he says. And this will at once bring you into the state of mind after which you inquire.

11. Let what has been said be an answer to that sister in New York, who inquired, by letter, what she should do to obtain the blessing of sanctification. My dear child, you inquire whether you shall obtain by reading the Bible, or by prayer, fasting, or by all these together. Now let this sermon answer you, and know that by neither, nor by all these, in the absence of faith, are you to grow any better, or find any relief. You speak of being in darkness, and of being discouraged. No wonder you are so, since you have plainly been seeking sanctification by works of law. You have "stumbled at this stumbling stone." You are in the horrible pit and miry clay of which I have just spoken. Immediately exercise faith upon the Son of God. It is the first--the only thing you can do to rest your feet upon the rock, and it will immediately put a new song into your mouth.

## **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)*.