

What Saith the Scripture?

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Great Peace- No. 2

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Lecture II

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Text.--Psa. 119:165: "Great peace have they who love thy law, and nothing shall offend them."

- 2. It remains now to notice the second fact affirmed in the text, respecting those who love God's law, viz:

That "nothing shall offend them."

The word "offend" means -- to stumble, to cause to fall. The thing affirmed therefore is -- that while this love of God's law continues in the heart, nothing shall offend them.

- (1.) Thus, for example, the commandments of God will not offend them, for this love of God's law is really nothing else but an acceptance and a cordial embracing of all the commandments of God, and yielding them a willing obedience. Such a mind is not like a child, who is very pleasant so long as he is not required to do anything; but is rather as a child altogether loving, subdued, cordial, and accepting joyfully every commandment of his father.
- (2.) God's threatenings cannot stumble such a mind. He does not rebel when God threatens transgressors with punishment. He does not object to the justice and propriety of these threatenings; but with entire cordiality accepts their reasonableness and propriety.
- (3.) Neither is he stumbled by the execution of God's threatenings. This execution of God's law on the wicked, does indeed cut them off and send them to hell; but this, so far from causing the loving soul to stumble and rebel, leads him rather to exclaim -- "Just and righteous are thy ways, thou King of saints!" Yes, while the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, the loving soul will cry, Hallelujah!
- (4.) To a soul in this loving state, the doctrines of the Bible will not be a stumbling block. You will not find them cavilling at the revealed doctrines of the Bible. They have only to

know that God has revealed them, and such is their confidence in God that they embrace them thankfully, even though too deep to be fully comprehended yet, as many Bible doctrines certainly are in some of their relations. Yet, as facts revealed, they can be so far understood, and are accepted without rebellion or stumbling.

- o (5.) Nor will he stumble at the mysteries involved in the doctrines of the Bible. Proud and selfish souls are always ready to contend with the mysteries in revealed religion -- as if no mysteries were found any where else.

Now a mystery is not as absurdity. As absurdity involves a perceived contradiction -- points intuitively seen to be either self-contradictory or contradictory to some evident truth. It is that which is plainly contradictory to reason; but a mystery is something above reason. It is something we cannot account for, and which, perhaps, we cannot so analyze as to grasp or comprehend; but still it does not plainly contradict reason -- it only lies beyond its grasp.

Now a loving, confiding heart approaches all such revealed truths with awe. He accepts them as declared facts or truths, and exclaims with the Psalmist -- "My heart is not haughty, neither are mine eyes lofty; nor do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of its mother; my soul is even as a weaned child."

This truth is high, so high I cannot attain to a perfect comprehension of it. It is deep: I cannot explain it. It is too broad for me to compass it. I accept the fact, for I am but small; I am but as a little one: it is enough that my Father says so, and here my soul shall rest.

- o (6.) A loving soul is not stumbled by the providence of God. Often God's providences are to us quite a profound mystery. He sees not as we see. His ways are wonderful, a great deep, to us unfathomable. But the loving soul is not disposed to catechize his Maker, or insist on knowing all his reasons for his dealings.

It is not unfrequently the case that the providences of God seem to us at the time, unreasonable -- perhaps, even cruel, or unjust, or contrary to his character as revealed in the Bible.

It may seem so on the face of it. It is true that a more thorough consideration of the whole subject will show that the God of Providence and the God of the Bible are one. Still events will often occur that greatly stumble ungodly souls. It is amazing to see the amount of strife against God's providence that is manifest in this world. Men seem not aware of the fault they are continually finding with God.

To avoid the conviction that they are contending with God in providence,

they either deny or overlook the fact that God is concerned in the events against which they contend. Really the world is full of complaint and dissatisfaction with God, because of his providence.

But it is not so with any who love God's law all such accept every event as occurring under God's providence, and they consequently exclaim -- These are but parts of thy ways: they are mysterious; I cannot explain them, yet I cordially accept them. I do not ask God to explain to me his reasons for them prematurely. I know there must be good and sufficient reasons for them. In due time I shall know what these reasons are. At present I do not care to know. I prefer to trust. I want room left for faith. I would feel myself, and would have God see that I can trust him, however mysterious his present providences may be.

- o (7.) He that loves the law of God will not be stumbled with the sins of good men. Those who do not love are greatly stumbled if a good man is overcome with temptation. They are ready to think there is no truth in religion. They seem to be glad that professedly good men sin, that they may have an excuse for their unbelief.

But one who loves God's law will be greatly grieved with the sins of good men, yet it will not cause him to fall, but will rather make him cry out -- Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. It will inspire him with awe and fear, and cause him to cling more closely to the cross.

- o (8.) Nor will such men be stumbled by the arguments of skeptics, though they cannot answer them. They know the truth of religion by an experience of its power and a consciousness of the love of God, which no arguments against religion can ever shake. Skeptics may baffle and confound him with their sophistry, but he is just as sure that religion is true and is from God as he was before.
- o (9.) Neither will trials stumble one who loves God's law. He may meet with great opposition, or even persecution; he may have the trial of great outward prosperity, or on the other hand, of great outward adversity; still he exclaims -- These are but parts of his ways. These are parts of my earthly discipline and of the education I need. They reveal my Father's will; I accept all with meekness.

REMARKS.

1. This 119th Psalm has always appeared to me to reveal true Christian experience in a striking manner. The state of mind expressed in every verse of this psalm, is just what Christians are experiencing as they move along in their pilgrimage. It would seem as if the Psalmist had copied from a diary of his own exercises. If thoughtful, intelligent Christians were in the habit of recording in a diary their daily exercises, they might after a few years, copy from their own diary all the essential points found here. Hence I think this psalm must have been an inspired diary. The saint who wrote it was a poet, and inspired of God to select such passages from his own experience as are here recorded. It is a Bible experience, perfectly replete with the Bible. At every verse the love of God's word and

law boils up, and shows clearly the state of mind which every Christian is conscious of passing through.

2. How opposite is this experience to the Antinomian experience of many who profess to be Christians. Antinomians talk about loving the law of God, but they do not wish to hear about duty. They want to hear about "doctrine," -- by which they mean justification in sin, and by a faith that does not sanctify. By "doctrine" they mean that by one act of faith, men are brought into such a state of perpetual justification, that however they may live afterwards they are still saved. Justification by an unjustifying faith, is their doctrine. You do not hear them exclaiming -- "Oh how love I they law!" How I love duty! How I love all God's commandments! How I love the obligation of every requirement of God! Ah! preaching duty to them is not edifying: it is legal to them; it is not comforting; it is not gospel. They want to be told that they are justified by their one act of faith while they are living in sin.

But just read from this 119th psalm, and see if you find any antinomianism here.

3. The state of mind of which I have been speaking finds the deepest satisfaction in the preceptive parts of God's word. It is so well satisfied with God's requiring such things, it perceives so much divine fitness, propriety, and beauty in these requirements, that its own highest ideal of what God should require is fully met. It would be dissatisfied if God required less. Such a soul loves to yield implicit obedience to God. This is its life and joy. It finds the very oil of its joy and life in the obedience it so cordially renders to God.

4. To hear duty preached is always very agreeable and edifying to those who love God's law. Herein a minister will soon find on whom he can depend as true Christians. Let him bring forth the preceptive parts of the Bible, and he will find at once who love the law of God. There are many who will appear to be greatly edified if you preach to them simply justification by faith, leaving out of view the requirements of God. While you only hold up Christ as a justifying Savior, they seem to be greatly delighted, and say -- how precious he is! But when you urge upon them his most express requirements, they are not pleased. They think this is legal. It is not gospel!

5. From what has been said, it is easy to see how God's revealed will often detects false hopes. His will revealed in providence will often detect professors of religion in being the enemies, not the friends, of God. They seem to be his friends while every thing goes to suit them; but if God's providence or will runs across their path and interferes with their selfish schemes, he touches them; they rebel; they stumble; they are too much tried; they begin to complain, and you see that they do not love the law of God.

6. We can see why it is that many professors of religion have been stumbled, and have even become skeptics by the conformity and sins of the church of God. Since the anti-slavery agitation has commenced, we have had in this country many mournful examples of this. The conservatism of ministers and their want of sympathy with the slave, have caused some to renounce religion, and to lose all confidence, not only in the piety of those conservative professors, but in the reality of religion itself.

Now, so far as my observation extends, it is a remarkable fact that this class of persons, who have become skeptics under such circumstances, never manifested a loving zeal in religion. Their religion never seemed to be love. Their zeal was rather legal than loving and of the gospel. So far as I have known it, their religion was rather of the head than of the heart. They have stumbled; but there is no good reason to think that they loved the law of God, for if they had, their experience and consciousness would have put it out of the question for them to give up religion itself, the Bible, prayer, and communion with God. Not even if tens of thousands should stumble all around them, yet with their experience of the truth of religion, and of the love of God and of his law, it would seem that they could never give up the Bible as God's word and the religion of Jesus as from heaven.

7. A sense of condemnation in the soul reveals the fact of non-acceptance of God's whole will. I often find persons who are manifestly under conviction. They are in trouble and under a sense of condemnation, yet they often think they accept God's whole will. But in this they are manifestly mistaken.

God knows there is some point not yet yielded. As soon as his whole will is accepted, all is quiet. This conscious quietness and peace, beget hope and remove a sense of condemnation.

8. This union with God's will is the end of strife and the beginning of heaven in the soul. No man knows or can know real happiness until his strife against God ceases. He is forever annoyed by the revelations of God's will in providence, and in all its other ways of manifestation. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." There is no end in time and no bound in space to the disturbing elements that disquiet the soul of one who is striving with his Maker. An omnipotent influence struggles against him. That Holy Ghost and conscience within him, and the providence of God without, forbid his having rest of soul.

But let him yield his whole being to the law or will of God, and then nothing can stumble him. He lives and moves and has his being in God, and if at peace with God and with himself, though the surface of his sensibilities might be filled with pain, yet in the depths of his soul, he has rest deeper than words can express. It is often surprising to see how much pain there may be in the sensibility and yet peace at the bottom of the mind.

In crossing the Atlantic some years since, we were overtaken by a gale of wind. Upon the deck the roar and confusion was terrific. The sea boiled like a pot. The spray from the crests of the waves blew upon the face with almost force enough to blister it. While I stood upon deck, the noise of the waves howling and roaring and foaming was almost deafening.

But when I stepped into the engine room, every thing was quiet. The mighty engine was moving with a quietness and stillness in striking contrast with the roar without. It reminded me of the peace that can reign at the bottom of the soul, while storms and tempests are howling without.

So it is often with the mind. Oftentimes the outward circumstances are trying; the nerves are in a state of intense excitement and bodily pain, but in the realm of conscience, all is peace. There is harmony between the conscience and the will, and between the soul and God. Within there is great peace.

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)*.