

What Saith the Scripture?

<http://www.WhatSaithTheScripture.com/>

Tender-Heartedness- No. 3

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College

Lecture VII

April 10, 1861

Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

Text.--Eph. 4: 32: "Be ye tender-hearted."

In speaking from these words I inquire,

I. What it is to be tender-hearted.

II. The effects and manifestations of tender-heartedness.

I. What it is to be tender-hearted.

In my last I said that hard-heartedness was stubbornness; that it consisted in the committed state of the will against the claims of God; was a selfish, unsubdued will.

Tender-heartedness is the opposite of this. It is the will committed to the claims of God, in the attitude of obedience to God, of submission to Him. It is, in short, benevolence; a state of mind adjusted in the will of God; a state that accepts His whole will, and commits the whole mind to obedience.

II. I notice the effects and manifestations of this tender-heartedness.

- 1. Candor is an effect and a manifestation of this state of the will.

A tender heart will always use the intellect in a candid manner; it will weigh evidence, and be careful to do nobody any injustice in judgment; it will weigh the claims of God, and the claims of a neighbor. Hence,

- 2. It will be easily convinced of error, if error there be. Being candid and open to conviction, and in a yielding state of mind to all truth and duty, if any error is indulged, the mind is very open to conviction.
- 3. Another effect and manifestation of tender-heartedness is great readiness to retract any error

of practice or opinion.

The mind, yielding as air, is easily convinced of error; and when convinced, spontaneously retracts. The opposite of this is true in hardness of heart. The mind is uncandid, hard to be convinced, and not ready to retract even then.

- 4. Another effect and manifestation of tenderness of heart is a fear of prejudice, or pre-judgment. A mind in this state will be on its guard against a hasty opinion, and especially a hasty judgment against any person. In this state everybody is loved; consequently the mind is disposed to think favorable of all the objects of its regard.

It is disposed to judge charitably, and to avoid all prejudice. It regards prejudice as a great injustice; and if prejudices have been entertained, this state of mind will instantly yield them, and yield them joyfully, as soon as evidence can be obtained to show that there is prejudice.

- 5. Another effect and manifestation of tenderness of heart is charitableness in judgment.

As I have just said, the state of heart of which we are speaking, is that of love to God and man; consequently the mind in this state will judge kindly and hopefully of everybody so far as it honestly can.

- 6. A sixth manifestation of this state of mind is tenderness of conscience.

When the heart is tender, the conscience is very susceptible, easily excited to activity, and readily makes its impression on the sensibility. You will find persons in this state exceedingly sensitive of the presence of any sin. Its perceptions of moral distinctions are very delicate; and its decisions are very emphatic, and often tremendously severe. I have known persons to have so much tenderness of heart as to receive impressions that were almost unendurable.

- 7. A tender heart will be appreciative of the nature of sin.

Sin consists in a state of mind that does not care for God or man; but cares really only for self and for those that are regarded as parts of self.

It is a state that refuses to will the good of God and of being in general; and does not really concern itself for any interests but its own. Now a tender heart can appreciate the great wickedness of this contempt of the interests of others; this reckless disregard of God and man.

To have neglected God appears to a tender heart to be a great and awful sin.

To have cared nothing for His rights, or interests, or glory, appears to a tender heart to be a sin well-worthy of damnation.

- 8. A tender heart will manifest a great sensibility in regard to the intrinsic ill-desert of sin. It

will readily concede that it deserves eternal banishment from God. It is not blind to the ill-desert of sin, as hardness of heart is; but it can assign no bounds to the guilt of sin.

To have wronged God is an inexpressibly terrible thing to a tender heart.

- 9. A tender heart will manifest, at times, deep sorrow for sin. Not only can it appreciate intellectually the guilt of sin; but the sensibility is easily and deeply broken up by this sense of the guilt of sin.

A tender heart is a loving heart. A loving heart throws the sensibility open to be deeply moved by a sense of the intrinsic guilt of sin against God. The fountains of the great deep of the sensibility are easily broken up, and sorrows easily gush and flow where the will has yielded the whole controversy and taken its proper attitude. If the will has given scope to the feelings, and has let in upon the sensibility the real facts as they are in all their freshness, the sorrows will gush like a fountain.

- 10. A tender heart is highly appreciative of the love and compassion of God. It will not only admit the great love and compassion of God, but it will feel it.

It throws the sensibility open to be affected by a sense of this love and compassion. It throws open the windows of the mind to let in the light of God's compassion, its warmth and its influence. In this state the soul will not complain that it cannot realize the love and compassion of God.

- 11. A tender heart is greatly humbled by a sense of the love and compassion of Christ, and deeply moved in view of what He has done to atone for sin.

This looks dreamy to a hard heart; but to a tender heart it is reality. The love of Christ in dying for the soul, is an overwhelming consideration to a tender heart.

I can conceive that a daughter might become so hardened toward her mother, so disobedient and unsubdued, as to do that which would cost her mother her life; and yet be unable either to appreciate her own sin, or the great love of her mother in giving up her life for her daughter.

But on the other hand, I can conceive a daughter so subdued, that, if she had done that which had cost her mother her life, she would feel as if she never could forgive herself; never could think of it without a flood of tears; never could speak of it without breaking down with sorrow.

If her heart were tender, the very thought of what she had done, and what love and compassion the suffering mother had for her, would carry her away in a flood of weeping. Thus it is in respect to Christ. When the heart is tender, the whole mind is easily affected, greatly subdued, and humbled unspeakably low, in view of those sins that crucified Christ, that love that bore our sins in His own body on the tree.

- 12. A tender heart will always manifest great religious sensibility on all questions connected

with the kingdom of Christ. You will find that such a mind is easily excited, and more easily excited on religious subjects than any other. There is a general tenderness of feelings, and a great susceptibility of emotion, especially of the tender emotions.

- 13. A tender heart will always manifest great fear of grieving Christ. It will have supreme regard to Christ's feelings. It cannot bear to grieve, cannot bear to offend Him. It will often seem to such a mind that it had rather die than to grieve the Savior. It will not only say with Joseph, "How can I commit this great wickedness and sin against God," but it will spontaneously exclaim in the presence of temptation, "I cannot, will not do that which will grieve the Savior that died for me."
- 14. A tender heart will manifest great fear of stumbling others, of misleading them, of creating prejudice in their minds against Christ or His religion. It will manifest great fear of saying or doing anything that may in anywise mislead them to their injury, or to the injury of the kingdom of Christ. If at any time it has done anything to stumble others, the recollection of it will be too painful for endurance; and the soul will hasten to remove the stumbling block, and will not rest until it is done.
- 15. A tender heart will manifest great reluctance to grieve any one. If, in faithfulness to the souls of any, it finds itself obliged to be severe, to reprove and rebuke with any degree of sternness, it will be done with reluctance and with grief; and the tender-hearted will often find that in probing others he inflicts a deep wound on his own sensibility; that while he uses the sword of the Spirit unsparingly, the foundations of his own compassion are stirred to their bottom. He will be obliged to gird himself with the whole strength of his will to perform the duty, and strengthen himself to the utmost to avoid breaking down in the effort.
- 16. Tenderness of heart will manifest great readiness to repent and confess, if in anything it finds itself to have been in the wrong. The repentance will be spontaneous, and the confession thorough.

To such a mind it is no trial to confess, but rather a luxury. Confession will not be guarded and half-hearted; but such a soul will make a clean breast of it, and confess the whole, and will not stop short of finding full relief.

- 17. A tender heart will manifest great tenderness in justifying self. It is apt to be suspicious of self; and is afraid of a self-justifying spirit.

It will not, as a general thing assert at once its own consciousness of innocence; but, if there be any doubt, will take the matter into consideration, look narrowly into all the motives, weigh every circumstance with great candor, and will after all often come to the conclusion that Paul did when he said, " I will not judge mine own self."

Or at any rate, if it cannot see its wrong, it will say, " I leave it to the judgment of God. I may be wrong, though I am not conscious of it. Still, I will not be too positive; God may see that I am in the wrong."

But again,

- 18. A tender heart is very apt to manifest a self-accusing spirit.

It is curious to see that where brethren in the hardness of their hearts have each held the other to be in the wrong; as soon as their hearts become tender, each one insists that he is almost, if not altogether, in the wrong. He thinks himself greatly more to blame than his brother; and often so much so, that he frequently thinks that his brother would not have been in the blame at all if it had not been for his own wrong. I have seen many instances of this -- that as soon as the hearts of the people become tender, every one could see his own wrong much more plainly than he could his brother's.

And a self-accusing spirit, rather than a self-justifying spirit, is manifest throughout the whole circle of the tender-hearted.

- 19. A tender heart manifests a spirit of self-loathing. It cannot endure its former selfishness and folly. When it thinks of its former self-seeking and wicked state of mind, it cannot express the loathing that it has of self. Such a mind seems to itself to have been the most hateful of all beings -- perhaps the most worthy of damnation, or least worthy of notice; and often feels surprised that anybody should treat it otherwise than with utter neglect and contempt.

In speaking the other day to a sister in the church, whose heart has recently become tender, I said to her that I was trying to get time to call upon her. She replied, tearfully, "How can you think of calling upon me? I am not worthy that anybody should take any notice of me." As I was speaking to a brother but a few days since, he made this remark: "I am not worthy to be on the face of the earth -- I am not fit to live in human society -- I am a loathing to myself -- I have no right to live, I have been so vile."

And yet neither of these persons have been guilty, to my knowledge, of any conduct that in the sight of men would have been regarded as disgraceful. But this is the natural tendency of a tender heart when fully convinced by the Spirit of God.

In another case, a sister said to me, "I never saw myself as I have today. I am so hateful, I do not think it would be right in God to forgive me. Really, I do not want to be forgiven -- I feel as if God's honor so demanded that I should be punished." And this she said with many tears, and in a tone and with a manner so subdued as to be very touching. How opposite all this to hardness of heart!

- 20. A tender heart will manifest much concern lest it should be more highly thought of than is just and reasonable. It will manifest a desire to confess over and over again, to make confession and restitution full and complete; and if it discovers any want of fullness in the confession or restitution, it will not rest without repeating it and making such additions as shall fully meet the convictions of this deeply impressed spirit.
- 21. A tender heart will manifest a great unwillingness to blame others. It "hopeth all things;" it "believeth all things." It is ready to "cover a multitude of sins;" and especially will this be so in

regard to sins committed against itself. If it has been wronged in anywise, it does not heap the blame upon the offending party. It does not delight in this, in criminating and making out the strongest case against the offender, but exactly the opposite. It will judge him as charitably as possible; it will make for him all reasonable apologies. It does not like to bear down upon him, and dwell upon his fault; but is easily pacified, ready to overlook, spontaneous in forgiveness. It will forgive willingly and thoroughly; will make a clean breast of forgiveness, laying up nothing, holding on to no shade of resentful feeling.

- 22. A tender heart is slow to believe evil of others. It loves every one, and therefore is disposed to think well of every one. This is the natural result of love. We do not easily believe evil of those whom we greatly love, but on the contrary are slow to believe evil of them.

The tender-hearted are slow to believe evil of any one, either friends or foes.

Indeed, a tender-hearted soul has no foes, in the sense of his having any enmity toward any one. It loves all; it can pray for all; it is disposed to think well of all; and it is always grieved when compelled to believe evil of any one.

Hard-heartedness is the opposite of this. It manifests a readiness to believe evil, to judge harshly and censoriously; it is ready to retain resentful feelings; it forgives ungraciously and superficially, and after all, retains resentful feelings. But not so with tender-heartedness.

Tender-heartedness is grieved to be obliged to think evil of others; and dismisses all such thoughts, and all such judgments, and all such things, from the mind as soon as possible.

- 23. Kindness of manner is always an effect and manifestation of tenderness of heart. It cannot be unkind in manner; but is loving, compassionate, forbearing.

In manner, and tone of voice, and gesture, and look, it will be kind, compassionate, benevolent.

- 24. Another effect of tenderness of heart is generosity. It is generous to the poor, generous in trade, generous in social intercourse. Largeness of heart and beneficence will always manifest themselves when the heart is tender.
- 25. A self-sacrificing spirit for the good of others will always be manifested when the heart is tender. It is striking to see how much pains the tender-hearted will take to promote the good of others.

This Jesus did; this His followers do; this is natural as its breath to a tender-hearted mind. It does not come hard for the tender-hearted to deny themselves, to make sacrifices for the good of others. In them it is spontaneous; it is an outburst of a state of mind; it is the natural development of a Christian spirit within them.

You will find that such persons are always willing to do all they can for God and souls;

and indeed, they are greatly desirous of doing a great deal more good than they can. Their hearts are often too large for their means. When they have done all they can, it seems to them that they have done little; and their grief is that they cannot do more. They will cry out within, " O, for an ocean of means to meet the necessities of all the children of want!"

- 26. A tender heart never indulges hard or resentful feelings at all. If in any way disobliged, it lays up nothing ; if in anywise wronged, it spontaneously forgives; and can earnestly pray that God would bring the wrong-doer to repentance, and forgive him.
- 27. The tender-hearted will not resent reproof; but are always thankful for it. The more thoroughly and honestly you call the attention of such a one to anything that has been wrong in himself, he is all the more your friend. He really thanks you for the suggestion or the reproof; and will be sure to profit by it. He realizes that they are his best friends who deal most faithfully with him. He sincerely wishes to be rid of everything that can hinder his usefulness, or in anywise do harm. He sincerely wishes to set everything right with God and man; and most thankful is he to any one that will kindly help him to understand himself.
- 28. Of course the tender-hearted have no enemies, in the sense that they have any quarrel with anybody.

They are not easily offended; they are not jealous, and critical, and ready to make another an offender for a word. They are ready to make apologies for those who in anywise appear either to neglect them or to encroach upon their rights.

- 29. The tender-hearted will manifest a realizing sense of the reality of religious truth. The Bible deeply impresses them; preaching, and all religious truth, makes them deeply solemn. It greatly searches them; it takes hold upon their whole being; and to them it is a solemn matter to have God speak to them. In this state of mind they are easily and savingly influenced by the truth of God. Every sermon will take effect upon them.
- 30. The tender-hearted manifest great depth and sincerity of feeling.

In them there is nothing of affectation; for they feel so deeply that no affectation is necessary, and there is no temptation to any such thing. There is no cant about them, no effort to get up an appearance of feeling; but it requires a great deal more effort to suppress the too audible manifestation of it. There is everything in religious truth to make the soul feel, to excite it in the very highest degree. When the heart is hard this is not realized, the truth is not seen; but when the eye is single, the whole body is full of light. When the heart is tender, then truth has a tremendous bearing on the sensibility. It moves it in all its depths and manifestations; and it sometimes requires not a little effort to suppress even the boisterous manifestations of feeling. I have often, myself, when my heart was thoroughly subdued, felt it difficult to avoid screaming in view of the state of sinners, or shouting in view of the love of God. In this state of mind the will is yielded up to truth; and consequently the feelings, having full scope, are very liable to boil over.

But of course there is a good deal of difference in different temperaments, in respect to

the extent to which the feelings will be excited when the heart is tender. But as all men have sensibility, all men can feel when the appropriate conditions are fulfilled; and when the heart is tender, there is generally a very great susceptibility to feeling in every mind.

Men are very apt to apologize for the want of feeling, by saying, that they are of such a temperament that they cannot expect to feel. I have heard much of this; and often have I seen these same persons, when thoroughly subdued to God, as full of feeling as they could hold.

- 31. A tender heart will manifest much prayerfulness for the salvation of souls. When the heart is tender, compassion is strongly excited, the danger of souls is clearly apprehended, so that crying to God in their behalf is an inevitable result.

Persons in this state of mind will not go over with a cold statement of their own wants, and confine their prayers to themselves and a few friends; but the yearnings of such a mind will pour themselves out in mighty prayer for those that are perishing.

- 32. A tender heart will manifest much watchfulness, and will walk softly before God. When the heart is tender, there is a solemn awe vesting upon the mind; a fearfulness of offending in word, or thought, or deed; a watchfulness over the tongue and over the life; and a walking carefully and softly, lest the Holy Spirit should be grieved.
- 33. A man of tender heart will manifest much concern for backsliders. He will be pitiful and earnest; and in endeavors to reclaim them will try to restore them in the spirit of meekness, considering himself lest he also should be tempted.

REMARKS.

1. How differently does everything appear in this state from what it does in a state of hardness of heart. Religion, the world, our neighbors, our sins, the conduct of everybody else -- all, all appear so changed as soon as the heart is softened.

The change is indeed wonderful, in passing from a state of hardness to a state of tenderness of heart. It seems almost as if we had changed worlds. Everything is seen in so different a light; everything makes so different an impression upon us! Life is altogether a different affair -- and so is death.

2. When the heart is softened there is a great readiness to correct any mistakes that were made while the heart was hard. Even bargains that were made in hardness of heart, and without any misgiving, at the time, as to their being truly honest, will be seen, often, when the heart is tender, to have been oppressive and selfish; and the mind will not willingly let them rest without proposing to set the matter right.

A hard-hearted man buys a poor man's cow. The poor man needs to sell her, and he buys her for a little less than what she is worth. When his heart becomes tender and he thinks of the poor man's cow, he will be very apt not to rest till he pays the full value of her. I have known many striking instances like this.

3. A tender heart always brings great peace to the soul.

While the heart is hard, the mind is restive under the government of God; and in human society the will is too stiff. The hard-hearted man elbows his way in human society, and chafes under the government of God. But as soon as his heart is tender and subdued, he quiets himself like a weaned child under the government of God. He bows himself to the providence of God; he feels his way carefully and kindly among mankind; he walks in peace with God, and so far as in him lies with all men.

4. It is easy to deal with tender hearted people. They are fair-minded, honorable, and will take no advantage. In dealing with them you need not stand upon your guard lest they should devour you; for they spontaneously give you that which is your own.

They are not grasping, and trying to get the lion's share; but would do by their neighbors as they would do by themselves.

It is easy to get along with tender-hearted people, in all the concerns of life. They are candid, unselfish, good neighbors, kind friends, generous and loving in all the relation of life.

5. There is something very beautiful in tender-heartedness.

Indeed, it is often very affecting to see the beauty of a tender-hearted mind.

To see its simplicity, its unaffected sincerity, its self-sacrifice, its pains-taking for the food of others, its care not to injure others, its fear of prejudice -- and indeed all the manifestations of such a mind are so symmetrical, so beautiful, so Christ-like -- it is a luxury to live and move in the midst of such minds.

6. How beautiful will heaven be, where all hearts are tender; and God's heart the most tender of all.

There is no hard place in God's heart; no hard heart in heaven; no blind, selfish mind; no censorious, cruel, unfeeling soul there; but all is perfect tenderness, and on God's part infinite tenderness.

7. It often requires great nerve to probe and search a tender heart. It sometimes happens that a mind that has become tender-hearted, has forgotten some past wrong. Its attention needs to be called to something it has not considered. In this state the soul will be aware that there is something that binds here and there; and that the mind, though tender, has not yet full liberty. The spirit of prayer does not flow spontaneously; there is something that binds the feelings, something that checks the power of faith.

In such cases the heart needs searching; the wedges that bind, need to be sought out; the error detected. But to do this, as I said, requires nerve, and is often a painful operation to the one who is called to this duty.

I must say, that in my own experience, I have often undergone exquisite suffering from having such a work to do.

It has been sometimes with the utmost difficulty that I could make up my mind to use the probe thoroughly; and when I could see what needed to be said, it seemed as if I could scarcely say it. But yet such a labor always pays. When the work is done, the mind is healed; and you will surely say that the pain could be well-afforded.

8. Tenderness of heart is always essential to peace of mind and joy in God. And where the heart is really tender, and it has been thoroughly searched and emptied, its peace will be like a river, and its joy purely spontaneous.

Lastly. Let no one stop short of a thoroughly tender heart. When the members of a church are tender-hearted, it is easy to settle all difficulties.

The brethren are then disposed, each one, to blame himself; and to go as far as he ought in justifying others.

All are ready to forgive; and there is no difficulty that cannot be well and easily settled. I have often seen brethren in a state of controversy in which I could see that the whole difficulty with them was the hardness of their hearts. They were blind, and for the time being each thought the other to be the most in fault. But as soon as their hearts are tender, this state of things is reversed. Each one is ready to blame himself, and difficulties will soon be adjusted. Brethren in such cases will not rest nor sleep, if they can avoid it, till they have confessed to each other, and prayed with each other, and restored each other to confidence.

Neighborhood broils will cease, family broils will cease, church broils will cease, as soon as the hearts of the parties are tender. Church-members will cease to oppose their ministers, and ministers cease to think hard of their people, when there is mutual tenderness of heart. Then there will be no controversy which shall be greatest; but members will vie with each other to get the lowest seat, each one feeling, the lowest seat belongs to me.

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)*.