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The Excuses of Sinners Condemn God

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from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College

Lecture III
October 25, 1848

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Text.--Job 40:8: "Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?"

Although in the main, Job had spoken correctly of God, yet in his great anguish and perturbation under his sore trials, he had said some things which were hasty and abusive. For these the Lord rebuked him. This rebuke is contained in our context:

"Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said--Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct Him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it.

"Then Job answered the Lord, and said--Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea twice, but I will proceed no further.

"Then answered the Lord unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said,--Gird up thy loins now like a man; I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?"--Job 40:1-8

It is not, however, my object to discuss the original purpose and connection of these words, but rather to consider their present application to the case of sinners. In pursuing this object, I shall

I. Show that every excuse for sin condemns god.

II. Consider some of these excuses in detail.

III. Show that excuse for sin adds insult to injury.

I. Every excuse for sin condemns God. This will be apparent if we consider,

- 1. That nothing can be sin for which there is a justifiable excuse.

This is entirely self-evident. It therefore needs neither elucidation nor proof.

- 2. If God condemns that for which there is a good excuse, He must be wrong. This also is self-evident. If God condemns what we have good reason for doing, no intelligence in the universe can justify Him.
- 3. But God does condemn all sin. He condemns it utterly, and will not allow the least apology or excuse for it. Hence, either there is no apology for it, or God is wrong.
- 4. Consequently, every excuse for sin charges blame upon God, and virtually accuses Him of tyranny. Whoever pleads an excuse for sin, therefore, charges God with blame.

II. We will consider some of these excuses, and see whether the principles I have laid down are not just and true.

- 1. INABILITY. No excuse is more common. It is echoed and re-echoed over every Christian land, and handed down age after age, never to be forgotten. With unblushing face it is proclaimed that men can not do what God requires of them.

Let us examine this and see what it amounts to. God, it is said, requires what men cannot do. And does He know that men cannot, do it? Most certainly. Then He has no apology for requiring it, and the requisition is most unreasonable. Human reason can never justify it. It is a natural impossibility.

But again, upon what penalty does God require what man cannot do? The threatened penalty is eternal death! Yes, eternal death, according to the views of those who plead inability as an excuse. God requires me on pain of eternal death to do that which He knows I cannot do. Truly this condemns God in the worst sense. You might just as well charge God outright with being an infinite tyrant.

Moreover, it is not for us to say whether on these conditions we shall or shall not charge God with infinite tyranny, for we cannot help it. The law of our reason demands it.

Hence, those who plant themselves upon these grounds charge God with infinite tyranny. Perhaps, sinner, you little think when you urge the excuse of inability, that you are really arraigning God on the charge of infinite tyranny. And you, Christian, who make this dogma of inability a part of your "orthodox" creed, may have little noticed its blasphemous bearings against the character of God; but your failure to notice it alters not the fact. The black charge is involved in the very doctrine of inability, and cannot be explained out of it.

I have intimated that this charge is blasphemous against God--and most truly. Far be it from God to do any such thing! Shall God require natural impossibilities, and denounce eternal death upon men for not doing what they have no natural power to do? Never! Yet

good men and bad men agree together to charge God with doing this very thing, and doing it not once or twice only, but uniformly, through all ages, with all the race, from the beginning to the end of time! Horrible! Nothing in all the government of God ever so insulted and abused Jehovah! Nothing was ever more blasphemous and false! God says, "his commandments are not grievous;" but you, by this excuse of inability, proclaim that God's words are false. You declare that His commands are not only grievous, but are even naturally impossible! Hark! what does the Lord Jesus say? "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." And do you deny this? Do you rise up in the very face of His words and say--"Lord, thy yoke is so hard that no man can possibly endure it; thy burden is so heavy that no man can ever bear it?" Is not this gainsaying and blaspheming Him who can not lie?

But you take the ground that no man can obey the law of God. As the Presbyterian Confession of Faith has it, "No man is able, either by himself, or by any grace received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God; but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed." Observe, this affirms not only that no man is naturally able to keep God's commands, but also that no man is able to do it "by any grace received in this life;" thus making this declaration a libel on the gospel, as well as a palpable misrepresentation of the law, of its Author, and of man's relations to both. It is only moderate language to call this assertion from the Confession of Faith a libel. If there is a lie, either in hell or out of hell, this is a lie, or God is an infinite tyrant. If reason be allowed to speak at all, it is impossible for her to say less or otherwise than thus. And has not God constituted the reason of man for the very purpose of taking cognizance of the rectitude of all his ways?

Let God be true though every man be proved a liar! In the present case, the remarkable fact that no man can appease his own conscience and satisfy himself that he is truly unable to keep the law, shows that man lies, not God.

- 2. A second excuse which sinners make is want of time.

Suppose I tell one of my sons--"Go, do this or that duty, on pain of being whipped to death." He replies, "Father, I can't possibly do it, for I have not time. I must be doing that other business which you told me to do; and besides, if I had nothing else to do, I could not possibly do this new business in the time you allow." Now if this statement be the truth, and I knew it when I gave him the command, then I am a tyrant. There is no evading this charge. My conduct toward my son is downright tyranny.

So if God really requires of you what you have not time to do, He is infinitely to blame. For He surely knows how little time you have, and it is undeniable that He enforces His requisitions with most terrific penalties. What! is God so reckless of justice, so regardless of the well-being of His creatures, that He can sport with red-hot thunder-bolts, and burl them, despite of justice and right, among His unfortunate creatures? Never! NEVER! This is not true; it is only the false assumption which the sinner makes when he pleads as his excuse, that he has not time to do what God demands of him.

Let me ask you, sinner, how much time will it take you to do the first great duty which God requires--namely, give Him your heart? How long will this take? How long need you be in making up your mind to serve and love God? Do you not know that this, when done, will be done in one moment of time? And how long need you be in persuading yourself to do it?

Your meaning may be this: Lord, it takes me so long to make up my mind to serve thee, it seems as if I never should get time enough for this; even the whole of life seems almost too short for me to bring my mind to this unwelcome decision. Is this your meaning, sinner?

But let us look on all sides of the subject. Suppose I say to my son--"Do this now, my son;" and he replies, "I can't, father, for I must do that other thing you told me to do." Does God do so? No. God only requires the duty of each moment in its time. This is all. He only asks us to use faithfully just all the power He has given us--nothing more. He only requires that we do the best we can. When He prescribes the amount of love which will please Him, He does not say--Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with the powers of an angel--with the burning heart of a seraph--no, but only "with all thy heart"--this is all. An infinitely ridiculous plea is this of the sinner's, that he can not do as well as he can--cannot love God with all his own heart, and soul and mind, and strength. Thou shalt do the best that thou art able to do, says God to the sinner. Ah, says the sinner, I am not able to do that. Oh, what stupid nonsense!

You charge that God is unreasonable. The truth is, God is the most reasonable of all beings. He asks only that we should use each moment for Him, in labour or in rest, whichever is most for His glory. He only requires that with the time, talents and strength which He has given us, we should do all we can to serve Him.

Says that mother--"How can I be religious? I have to take care of all my children." Indeed! and can't you get time to serve God? What does God require of you? That you should forsake and neglect your children? No indeed; He asks you to take care of your children--good care of them; and do it all for God. He says to you--those are my children; and He puts them into your hands, saying--take care of them for me, and I will give thee wages. And now will it require more time to take care of your children for God, than to take care of them for yourself? O, but you say, I cannot be religious, for I must be up in the morning and get my breakfast. And how much longer will it take you to get your breakfast ready to please God, than to do the same to please yourself? How much longer time must you have to do your duties religiously, than to do them selfishly?

What then do you mean by this plea? The fact is, all these excuses show that the excuser is mad--not insane, but mad. For what does God require so great that you should be unable to do it for want of time? Only this, that you should do all for God. Persons who make this plea seem to have entirely overlooked the real nature of religion, and of the requisitions that God makes of them. So it is with the plea of inability. The sinner says, "I am unable." Unable to do what? Just what you can do; for God never requires anything

beyond this. Unless, therefore, you assume that God requires of you more than you can do, your plea is false, and even ridiculous. If, on the other hand, you do not assume this, then your plea, if true, would not show God to be unjust.

But I was saying that in this plea of having no time to be religious, men entirely overlook or pervert the true idea of religion. The farmer pleads--"I can't be religious; I can't serve God--I must sow my wheat." Well, sow your wheat; but do it for the Lord. O but you have so much to do! Then do it all for the Lord. Another can't be religious for he must get his lesson. Well, get your lesson, but get it for the Lord, and this will be religious. The man who should neglect to sow his wheat or neglect to get his lessons because he wants to be religious, is crazy. He perverts the plainest things in the worst way. If you are to be religious, you must be industrious. The farmer must sow his wheat, and the student must get his lesson. An idle man can no more be religious than the devil can be. This notion that men can't be religious, because they have some business to do, is the merest nonsense. It utterly overlooks the great truth that God never forbids our doing the appropriate business of life, but only requires that we shall do all for Himself. If God did require us to serve Him in such a way as would compel us to neglect the practical duties of life, it would be truly a hard case. But now the whole truth is, that He requires us to do precisely these duties, and do them all honestly and faithfully for Him, and in the best possible manner. Let the farmer take care of his farm, and see that he does it well, and above all, do it for God. It is God's farm, and the heart of every farmer is God's heart, therefore let the farm be tilled for God, and the heart be devoted to Him alone.

- 3. Men plead a sinful nature for their excuse. And pray, what is this sinful nature? Do you mean by it that every faculty and even the very essence of your constitution were poisoned and made sinful in Adam, and came down in this polluted state by inheritance to you? Do you mean that you were so born in sin that the substance of your being is all saturated with it, and so that all the faculties of your constitution are themselves sin? Do you believe this?

I admit if this were true, it would make out a hard case. A hard case indeed! Until the laws of my reason are changed, it would compel me to speak out openly and say--Lord, this is a hard case, that thou shouldst make my nature itself a sinner, and then charge the guilt of its sin upon me! I could not help saying this; the deep echoings of my inner being would proclaim it without ceasing, and the breaking of ten thousand thunderbolts over my head would not deter me from thinking and saying so. The reason God has given me would forever affirm it.

But the dogma is an utter absurdity. For, pray, what is sin? God answers--"transgression of law." And now you hold that your nature is itself a breach of the law of God--nay, that it has always been a breach of God's law, from Adam to the day of your birth; you hold that the current of this sin came down in the veins and blood of your race--and who made it so? Who created the veins and blood of man? From whose hand sprang this physical constitution and this mental constitution? Was man his own creator? Did sin do a part of the work in creating your physical and your mental constitution? Do you believe any such thing? No; you ascribe your nature and its original faculties to God, and upon Him, therefore, you charge the guilty authorship of your "sinful nature."

But how strange a thing is this! If man is in fault for his sinful nature, why not condemn man for having blue or black eyes? The fact is, sin never can consist in having a nature, nor in what nature is; but only and alone in the bad use which we make of our nature. This is all. Our Maker will never find fault with us for what He has Himself done or made; certainly not. He will not condemn us, if we will only make a right use of our powers--of our intellect, our sensibility, and our will. He never holds us responsible for our original nature. If you will observe, you will find that God has given no law prescribing what sort of nature and constitutional powers we should have. He has given no law on these points, the transgression of which, if given, might somewhat resemble the definition of sin. But now since there is no law about nature, nature cannot be a transgression.

Here let me say that if God were to make a law prescribing what nature or constitution a man must have, it could not possibly be otherwise than unjust and absurd, for the reason that man's nature is not a proper subject for legislation, precept, and penalty, inasmuch as it lies entirely without the pale of voluntary action, or of any action of man at all. And yet thousands of men have held the dogma that sin consists in great part in having a sinful nature. Yes, through long ages of past history, grave theologians have gravely taught this monstrous dogma; it has resounded from pulpits, and has been stereotyped for the press, and men have seemed to be never weary of glorifying this dogma as the surest test of sound orthodoxy! Orthodoxy!! There never was a more infamous libel on Jehovah! It would be hard to name another dogma which more violently outrages common sense. It is nonsense--absurd and utter NONSENSE! I would to God that it were not even worse than nonsense! Think what mischief it has wrought! Think how it has scandalized the law, the government, and the character of God! Think how it has filled the mouths of sinners with excuses from the day of its birth to this hour

Now I do not mean to imply that the men who have held this dogma have intelligently insulted God with it. I do not imply that they have been aware of the impious and even blasphemous bearings of this dogma upon Jehovah;--I am happy to think that some at least have done all this mischief ignorantly. But the blunder and the mischief have been none the less for the honest ignorance in which they were done.

- 4. Sinners, in self-excuse, say they are willing to be Christians. They are willing, they say, to be sanctified. O yes, they are very willing; but there is some great difficulty lying further back or something else--perhaps they do not know just where--but it is somewhere, and it will not let them become Christians.

Now the fact is, if we are really willing, there is nothing more which we can do. Willing is all we have to do morally in the case, and all we can do. But the plea, as in the sinner's mouth, maintains that God requires of us what is naturally impossible. It assumes that God requires of us something more than right willing; and this, be it what it may, is of course, to us, an impossibility. If I will to move my muscles, and no motion follows, I have done all I can do; there is a difficulty beyond my reach, and I am in no blame for its existence, or for its impediment. Just so, if I were to will to serve God, and absolutely no

effect should follow, I have done my utmost, and God never can demand anything more. In fact, to will is the very thing which God does require. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted." Do tell me, parent, if you had told your child to do anything, and you saw him exerting himself to the utmost, would you ask any thing more? If you should see a parent demanding and enforcing of a child more than he could possibly do, however willing, would you not denounce that parent as a tyrant? Certainly you would. The slave-driver, even, is not wont to beat his slave, if he sees him willing to do all he can.

This plea is utterly false, for no sinner is willing to be any better than he actually is. If the will is right, all is right; and universally the state of the will is the measure of one's moral character. Those men, therefore who plead that they are willing to be Christians while yet they remain in their sins, talk mere nonsense.

- 5. Sinners say they are waiting God's time. A lady in Philadelphia had been in great distress of mind for many years. On calling to see her, I asked, "What does God require of you? What is your case?" "Oh," said she, "God waited on me a long time before I began to seek Him at all, and now I must wait for Him as long as He did for me. So my minister tells me. You see, therefore, that I am waiting in great distress for God to receive me."

Now what is the real meaning of this? It comes to this;--God urges me to duty, but is not ready for me to do it; He tells me to come to the Gospel feast, and I am ready; but He is not ready to let me in.

Now does not this throw all the blame upon God? Could any thing do so more completely than this does? The sinner says--"I am ready, and willing, and waiting; but God is not yet ready for me to stop sinning. His hour has not yet come."

When I first began to preach, I found this notion almost universal. Often after pressing men to duty, I have been accosted;--"What, you throw all the blame upon the sinner!" "Yes, indeed I do," would be my reply. An old lady once met me after preaching and broke out, "What! you set men to getting religion themselves! You tell them to repent themselves? You don't mean so, do you?" "Indeed I do," said I. She had been teaching for many years that the sinner's chief duty is to await God's time.

- 6. Sinners plead in excuse, that their circumstances are very peculiar. I know my duty well enough, but my circumstances are so peculiar. And does not God understand your circumstances? Nay, has not His providence been concerned in making them what they are? If so, then you are throwing blame upon God. You say--"O Lord, thou art a hard master, for thou hast never made any allowance for my circumstances."

But how much, sinner, do you really mean in making this plea? Do you mean that your circumstances are so peculiar, that God ought to excuse you from becoming religious, at least for the present? If you do not mean as much as this, why do you make your circumstances your excuse at all? If you do mean this, then you are just as much mistaken as you can be. For God requires you, despite of your circumstances, to abandon your sin. If now your circumstances are so peculiar that you cannot serve God in them, you must

abandon them or lose your soul. If they are such as admit of your serving God in them, then do so at once.

But you say--"I can't get out of my circumstances." I reply, you can;--you can get out of the wickedness of them; for if it is necessary in order to serve God, you can change them; and if not, you can repent and serve God in them.

- 7. The sinner's next excuse is that his temperament is peculiar. "Oh," he says, "I am very nervous;" or "my temperament is very sluggish; I seem to have no sensibility." Now what does God require? Does He require of you another or a different sensibility from your own? Or does He require only that you should use what you have according to the law of love?

But such is the style of a multitude of excuses. One has too little excitement; another, too much; so neither can possibly repent and serve God! A woman came to me, and pleaded that she was naturally too excitable, and dared not trust herself; and therefore could not repent. Another has the opposite trouble--too sluggish--scarce ever sheds a tear--and therefore could make nothing out of religion if he should try. But does God require you to shed more tears than you are naturally able to shed? Or does He only require that you should serve Him? Certainly this is all. Serve Him with the very powers He has given you. Let your nerves be ever so excitable, come and lay those quivering sensibilities over into the hands of God--pour out that sensibility into the heart of God! This is all that He requires. I know how to sympathize with that woman, for I know much about a burning sensibility; but does God require feeling and excitement? Or only a perfect consecration of all our powers to Himself?

- 8. But, says another, my health is so poor that I can't go to meeting, and therefore can't be religious.

Well, what does God require? Does He require that you should go to all the meetings, by evening or by day, whether you have the requisite health for it or not? Infinitely far from it. If you are not able to go to meeting, yet you can give God your heart. If you can not go in bad weather, be assured that God is infinitely the most reasonable being that ever existed. He makes all due allowance for every circumstance. Does He not know all your weakness? Indeed He does. And do you suppose that He comes into your sick-room and denounces you for not being able to go to meeting, or for not attempting when unable, and for not doing all in your sickness that you might do in health? No, not He; but He comes into your sick-room as a Father. He comes to pour out the deepest compassions of His heart in pity and in love; and why should you not respond to his loving-kindness? He comes to you and says--"Give me your heart, my child." And now you reply--"I have no heart." Then He has nothing to ask of you--He thought you had; and thought, too, that He had done enough to draw your heart in love and gratitude to Himself. He asks--"What can you find in all my dealings with you that is grievous? If nothing, why do you bring forward pleas in excuse for sin that accuse and condemn God?"

- 9. Another excuse is in this form, "My heart is so hard, that I can not feel." This is very common, both among professors and non-professors. In reality it is only another form of the

plea of inability. In fact, all the sinner's excuses amount only to this--"I am unable"--"I can't do what God requires." If the plea of a hard heart is any excuse at all, it must be on the ground of real inability.

But what is hardness of heart? Do you mean that you have so great apathy of the sensibility that you can not get up any emotion? Or, do you mean that you have no power to will or to act right? Now on this point, it should be considered that the emotions are altogether involuntary. They go and come according to circumstances, and therefore are never required by the law of God, and are not, properly speaking, either religion itself, or any part of it. Hence, if by a hard heart you mean a dull sensibility, you mean what has no concern with the subject. God asks you to yield your will, and consecrate your affections to Himself, and He asks this, whether you have any feeling or not.

Real hardness of heart in the Bible use of the phrase, means stubbornness of will. So in the child, a hard heart means a will set in fixed stubbornness against doing its parent's bidding. The child may have in connection with this, either much or little emotion. His sensibilities may be acute and thoroughly aroused, or they may be dormant; and yet the stubborn will may be there in either case.

Now the hardness of heart of which God complains in the sinner is precisely of this sort. The sinner cleaves to his self-indulgence, and will not relinquish it, and then complains of hardness of heart. What would you think of a child, who, when required to do a most reasonable thing, should say,--"My heart is so hard, I can't yield." "O," he says, "my will is so set to have my own way that I cannot possibly yield to my father's authority."

This complaint is extremely common. Many a sinner makes it, who has been often warned, often prayed with and wept over, who has been the subject of many convictions. And does he really mean by this plea that he finds his will so obstinate that he can not make up his mind to yield to God's claims? Does he mean this, and does he intend really to publish his own shame? Suppose you go to the devils in hell, and press on them the claims of God, and they should reply, "O, my heart is so hard, I can't"--What would be their meaning? Only this--I am so obstinate--my will is so set in sin, that I can not for a moment indulge the thought of repentance. This would be their meaning, and if the sinner tells the truth of himself, and uses language correctly, he must mean the same. But oh, how does he add insult to injury by this declaration! Suppose a child should plead this--I can not find it in my heart to love my father and my mother; my heart is so hard towards them, I never can love them; I can feel pleasure only in abusing them, and trampling down their authority;--what a plea is this? Does not this heap insult upon wrong? Or suppose a murderer arraigned before the court, and permitted before his sentence, to speak, if he had aught to say why sentence should not be passed;-- suppose he should rise and say--"May it please the court, my heart for a long time has been as hard as a millstone. I have murdered so many men, and have been in the practice so long, that I can kill a man without the least compunction of conscience. Indeed, I have such an insatiable thirst for blood that I can not help murdering whenever I have a good opportunity. In fact, my heart is so hard that I find I like this employment full as well as any other."

Well, how long will the court listen to such a plea? Hold there! hold! the judge would cry--you infamous villain, we can hear no more such pleas! Here, sheriff, bring in a gallows, and hang the man within these very walls of justice, for I will not leave the bench until I see him dead! He will murder us all here in this house if he can!"

Now what shall we think of the sinner who says the same thing! O God, he says, my heart is so hard I never can love thee. I hate thee so sincerely, I never can make up my mind to yield this heart to thee in love and willing submission.

Sinners, how many of you (in this house) have made this plea--"My heart is so hard, I can't repent. I can't love and serve God!" Go write it down; publish it to the universe--make your boast of being so hard-hearted that no claims of God can ever move you. Methinks if you were to make such a plea, you would not be half through before the whole universe would hiss you from their presence and chase you from the face of these heavens till you would cry out for some rocks or mountains to hide you from their scathing rebukes! Their voice of indignation would rise up and ring along the arch of heaven like the roar of ten thousand tornadoes, and whelm you with unutterable confusion and shame! What, do you insult and abuse the Great Jehovah? Oh! do you condemn that very God who has watched over you in unspeakable love--fanned you with his gentle zephyrs in your sickness--feasted you at his own table, and you would not thank him, or even notice his providing hand? And then when the sympathy of your Christian friends has pressed you with entreaties to repent, and they have made you a special subject of their prayers--when angels have wept over you, and unseen spirits have lifted their warning voices in your pathway to hell, you turn up your face of brass towards Jehovah and tell Him your heart is so hard you can't repent, and don't care whether you ever do or not! You seize a spear and plunge it into the heart of the crucified One, and then cry out--"I can't be sorry, not I; my heart is hard as a stone! I don't care and I will not repent!" What a wretch you are, sinner, if this is your plea?

But what does your plea amount to? Only this--that your heart is fully set to do evil. The sacred writer has revealed your case most clearly--"Because vengeance against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." You stand before the Lord just in this daring, blasphemous attitude--fully set in your heart to do evil.

- 10. Another form of the same plea is, my heart is so wicked I can't. Some do not hesitate to avow this wickedness of heart. What do they mean by it? Do they mean that they are so hardened in sin, and so desperately wicked that they will not bow? This is the only proper sense of their language, and this is the precise truth.

Since you bring this forward, sinner, as your excuse, your object must be to charge this wickedness of heart upon God. Covertly, perhaps, but really, you imply that God is concerned in creating that wicked heart! This is it, and this is the whole of it. You would feel no interest in the excuse, and it would never escape your lips, but for this tacit implication that God is in fault for your wicked heart. This is only the plea of inability, coupled with its twin sister, original sin, coming down in the created blood and veins of

the race, under the Creator's responsibility.

- 11. Another kindred plea, is--My heart is so deceitful. Suppose a man should make this excuse for deceiving his neighbour--"I can't help cheating you. I can't help lying to you and abusing you; my heart is so deceitful!" Would any man in his senses ever suppose that this could be an apology or excuse for doing wrong? Never. Of course, unless the sinner means in this plea to set forth his own guilt and condemn himself, he must intend it as some sort of justification; and if so, he must, in just so far, cast the blame upon God. And this is usually his intention. He does not mean sincerely to confess his own guilt; no, he charges the guilt of his deceitful heart upon God.
- 12. Another excuses himself by the plea, I have tried to become a Christian. I have done all I can do; I have tried often, earnestly, and long.

You have tried, then, you say, to be a Christian; what is being a Christian? Giving your heart to God. And what is giving your heart to God? Devoting your voluntary powers to Him; ceasing to live for yourself and living for God. This is being a Christian--the state you profess to have been trying to attain.

No excuse is more common than this. And what is legitimately implied in this trying to be a Christian? A willingness to do your duty is always implied; that the heart, that is, the will is right already; and the trying refers only to the outward efforts--the executive acts. For there is no sense whatever in a man's saying that he is trying to do what he has no intention or will to do. The very statement implies that his will is not only in favor but is thoroughly committed and really in earnest to attain the end chosen.

Consequently if a man tries to be a Christian, he heart is obedient to God, and his trying must respect his outward action. These are so connected with the will that they follow by a law of necessity unless the connection is broken, and when this takes place, no sin attends our failure to secure the outward act. God does not hold us responsible.

Hence the sinner ought to mean by this plea--"I have obeyed God a long time--I have had a right heart--and I have tried sincerely to secure such external action as comports with Christian character.

Now if this be true, you have done your duty. But do you mean to affirm all this? No, you say. Then what do you mean?

Suppose I should say to my son, do this; do it my son; why have you not done it? O, he says, "father, I have tried;" but he does not mean that he has ever intended to do it--that he has ever made up his mind to obey me; he only means, "I have been willing to try--I made up my mind to try to be willing;" that is all! O he says I have brought myself to be willing to try to will to do it.

So you say--I have tried to get religion. And what is religion that you could not get it? How did you fail? You have been trying probably in this way. God has said "Give me thy

heart," and you turned round and asked God to do it Himself, or perhaps you simply waited for Him to do it. He commanded you to repent, and you have tried to get Him to repent for you. He said, believe the gospel, and you have only been thinking of getting Him to believe for you. No wonder you have tried for a long time in vain. How could it be otherwise? You have not been trying to do what God commanded you to do, but to induce God to change his system of moral government and put Himself in your place to do Himself the duty He enjoins upon you. What a miserable perversion is this?

Now as to this whole plea of having tried to be a Christian, what is the use of it? You will easily see its use when you realize duly;

- (1.) That it is utterly false when understood as you intend it.
- (2.) That it is a foul implication of the character of God.

You say--Lord, I know I can't--I have tried all I can and I know I can not become a Christian. I am willing to get religion, but I cannot make it out.

Who then is to blame? Not yourself, according to your statement of your case. Where then is the blame? Let me ask--what would be said in the distant regions of the universe if you were believed there, when you say, I have tried with all my heart to love and serve God but I can't?

But they never can believe such a libel on their own infinite Father! Of course they will pronounce your doom as you deserve.

- 13. Another excuses himself by the plea--it will do no good to try. And what do you mean by this? Do you mean that God will not pay well for service done Him? Or do you mean that He will not forgive you if you do repent? Do you think (as some do) that you have sinned away your day of grace?

Well, suppose you have; is this any reason why you should go on in sin? Do you not believe that God is good? O yes. And that He will forgive you if the good of the universe admits? Most certainly. Then is the impossibility of his forgiving you any reason why you should go on in sin forever, and forever rage against a God of infinite goodness? You believe Him to be compassionate and forgiving; then should you not say, I will at least stop sinning against such a God! Why not say with the man who dreamed that he was just going to hell, and as he was parting with his brother--going, as his dream had it, to heaven, he said--"I am going down to hell, but I want you to tell God from me that I am greatly obliged to Him for ten thousand mercies which I never deserved; He has never done me the least injustice--give Him my thanks for all the unmerited good He has done me." At this point he awoke, and found himself bathed in tears of repentance and gratitude to his Father in heaven. O, if men would only act as reasonably as that man dreamed, it would be noble--it would be right. If when they suppose themselves to have sinned away the day of grace, they would say, "I know God is good--I will at least send Him my thanks--he has done me no injustice;" if they would take this course they might

have at least the satisfaction of feeling that it is a reasonable and a fit one in their circumstances. Sinner, will you do this?

- 14. Another, closely pressed, says, "I have offered to give my heart to Christ, but He won't receive me." "I have no evidence that He receives me or ever will." In the last inquiry meeting, a young woman told me she had offered to give her heart to the Lord, but He would not receive her. This was charging the lie directly upon Christ, for He has said--"Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." You say, I came and offered myself and He would not receive me. Jesus Christ says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man"--not if some particular, some favored one--but if any man "hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him." And yet when you offered Him your heart, did He spurn you away? Did He say--away sinner, BEGONE? No, sinner, He never did it, never. He has said He never would do it. His own words are, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." "He that seeketh, findeth: to him that knocketh it shall be opened." But you say, I have sought and I did not find. Do you mean to make out that Jesus Christ is a liar? Have you charged this upon Him to his very face? Do you make your solemn affirmation--"Lord I did seek--I laid myself at thy gate and knocked--but all in vain?" And do you mean to bring this excuse of yours as a solemn charge of falsehood against Jesus Christ and against God? This will be a serious business with you before it is done with.
- 15. But another says--"there is no salvation for me." Do you mean that Christ has made no atonement for you? But He says, He tasted death for every man. It is declared that God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whomsoever believeth on Him shall have eternal life. And now do you affirm that there is no salvation provided and possible for you? Are you mourning all your way down to hell because you cannot possibly have salvation? When the cup of salvation is placed to your lips, do you dash it away, saying, That can not be for me? And do you know this? Can you prove it even against the word of God Himself? Stand forth then, if there be such a sinner on this footstool of God--speak it out, if you have such a charge against God, and if you can prove it true. Ah, is there no hope? none at all? Oh, the difficulty is not that there is no salvation provided for and offered to you, but that there is no heart for it. "Wherefore is there a price put into the hands of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart for it?"
- 16. But perhaps you say in excuse--"I cannot change my own heart." Can not? Suppose Adam had made this excuse when God called him to repent after his first sin. "Make you a new heart and a right spirit,"--said the Lord to him. "I can not change my own heart myself," replies Adam. Indeed, responds his Maker, how long is it since you changed your heart yourself? You changed it a few hours ago from holiness to sin, and will you tell your Creator that you can't change it from sin to holiness?

The sinner should consider that the change of heart is a voluntary thing. You must do it for yourself or it is never done. True there is a sense in which God changes the heart, but it is only this: God influences the sinner to change, and then the sinner does it. The change is the sinner's own voluntary act.

- 17. You say, again, you can't change your heart without more conviction. Do you mean by this

that you have not knowledge enough of your duty and your sin? You can not say this. You do know your sin and your duty. You know you ought to consecrate yourself to God. What then do you mean? Can't you do that which you know you ought to do? Ah, there is the old lie--that shameless refuge of lies--that same foul dogma of inability. What is implied in this new form of it? This--that God is not willing to convict you enough to make it possible for you to repent. There is a work and a responsibility for God, and He will not do his work: will not bear his responsibility. Hence you, alas, have no alternative but to go down to hell. And because God will not do his part towards your salvation! Do you really believe that, sinner.

- 18. Again you say in excuse, that you must first have more of the Spirit. And yet you resist the Spirit every day. God offers you his Spirit, nay more, God bestows his Spirit; but you resist it. What then do you mean when you pretend to want more of the Spirit's influence?

The truth is, you do not want it--you only want to make it appear that God does not do his part to help you to repent, and that as you can't repent without his help, therefore the blame of your impenitence rests on God. It is only another refuge of lies--another form of the old slander upon God;--He has made me unable and won't help me out of my inability.

- 19. The sinner also excuses himself by saying--God must change my heart. But in the sense in which God requires you to do it, He cannot do it Himself. God is said to change the heart only in the sense of persuading you to do it. As in a man's change of politics--one might say--"such a man changed my heart--he brought me over," which however by no means implies that you did not change your own mind. The plain meaning is that he persuaded and you yielded.

But this plea made by the sinner as his excuse, implies that there is something more for God to do before the sinner can become religious. I have heard many professors of religion take this very ground. Yes, thousands of Christian ministers, too, have said to the sinner--"wait for God; He will change your heart in his own good time; you can't do it yourself, and all that you can do is to put yourself in the way for the Lord to change your heart. When this time comes, He will give you a new heart, while you are asleep, perhaps, in a state of unconsciousness. God acts in this matter as a sovereign, and does his own work in his own way."

So they teach--filling the mouth of the sinner with excuses and making his heart like an adamant against the real claims of God upon his conscience.

- 20. The sinner pleads, again, "I can't live a Christian life if I were to become a Christian. It is unreasonable for me to expect to succeed where I see so many fail." I recollect the case of a man who said, "It is of no use for me to repent and be a Christian, for it is altogether irrational for me to expect to do better than others have done before me." So sinners who make this excuse come forward very modestly and tell God, "I am very humble--thou seest, Lord, that I have a very low opinion of myself; I am so zealous of thine honour and so afraid that I shall bring disgrace upon thy cause; it does not seem at all best for me to think of becoming a Christian, I have such a horror of dishonoring thy name.

Yes, and what then? "Therefore, I will sin on and trample the blessed gospel under my feet. I will persecute Thee, O my God, and make war on Thy cause, for it is better by far not to profess religion than to profess and then disgrace my profession." What logic! Fair specimen of the absurdity of the sinner's excuses.

This excuse assumes that there is not grace enough provided and offered, to sustain the soul in a Christian life. The doctrine is, that it is irrational to expect that we can, by any grace received in this life, perfectly obey the law of God. There is not grace and help enough afforded by God! And this is taught as BIBLE THEOLOGY! Away with such teaching to the nether pit whence it came!

What! is God so weak that He can't hold up the soul that casts itself on Him? Or is He so parsimonious in bestowing his gracious aid that it must be expected always to fall short of meeting the wants of his dependent and depending child? So you seem to suppose. So hard to persuade the Lord to give you a particle of grace! Can't get grace enough to live a Christian life with honor! What is this but charging God of withholding sufficient grace.

But what say the word and the oath of Jehovah? We read that "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." You say, however, "If I should flee and lay hold of this hope, I should fail for want of grace. I could have no 'consolation' in reposing upon the word of Him who cannot lie. The oath of the immutable God can never suffice for me."

So you belie the word of God, and make up a miserably slim and guilty apology for your impenitence.

- 21. Another excuse claims that this is a very dark, mysterious subject. This matter of faith and regeneration--I can't understand it.

Sinner, did you ever meet the Lord with this objection, and say, "Lord thou hast required me to do things which I can't understand?" You know that you can understand well enough that you are a sinner--that Christ died for you--that you must believe on Him and break off your sins by repentance. All this is so plain that "the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein." Your plea, therefore, is as false as it is foul. It is nothing better than a base libel on God!

- 22. But you say, "I can't believe." You mean, (do you?) that you can't believe a God of infinite veracity as you can believe a fellow man? Would you imply that God asks you to believe things that are really incredible--things so revolting to reason that you cannot admit them on any testimony that even God himself can adduce?

And do you expect to make out this case against God? Do you even believe the first point in it yourself?

But you urge again that you can't realize these things. You know these things to be true, but you can't realize--you can't realize that the Bible is true--that God does offer to forgive--that salvation is actually provided and placed within your reach. What help can there be for a case like yours? What can make these truths more certain? But on your own showing, you do not want more evidence. Why not then act upon the known truth? What more can you ask?

Do you ever carry your case before God and say, "O Lord, Thou sayest that Christ died for me, but I can't realize that it is so, and therefore Lord, I can't possibly embrace Him as my Saviour?" Would this be a rational excuse?

But you also plead that you can't repent. You can't be sorry you have abused God. You can't make up your mind now to break off from all sin. If this be really so, then you cannot make up your mind to obey God, and you may as well make up your mind to go to hell! There is no alternative!

But at any rate, you can't become a Christian now. You mean to be converted some time, but you can't make up your mind to it NOW. Well, God requires it now, and of course you must yield or abide the consequences.

But do you say, You can't now? Then God is very much to blame for asking it. If however the truth be that you can, then the lie is on your side, and it is a most infamous and abusive lie against your Maker.

III. All excuses for sin add insult to injury.

- 1. A plea that reflects injuriously upon the court or the lawgiver is an aggravation of the original crime. It is always so regarded in all tribunals. It must be pre-eminently so between the sinner and his infinite Lawgiver and Judge.
- 2. The same is true of any plea made in self-justification. If it be false, it is considered an aggravation of the crime charged. This is a case which sometimes happens, and whenever it does, it is deemed to add fresh insult and wrong. For a criminal to come and spread out his lie upon the records of the court--to declare what he knows to be false; nothing can prejudice his case so fearfully.

On the other hand, when a man before the court appears to be honest, and confesses his guilt, the judge, if he has any discretion in the case, puts down his sentence to the lowest point possible. But if the criminal resorts to dodging--if he equivocates and lies, then you will see the strong arm of the law come down upon him. The judge comes forth in all the thunders of judicial majesty and terror, and feels that he may not spare his victim. Why? The man has lied before the very court of justice. The man sets himself against all law, and he must be put down, or law itself is down.

- 3. It is truly abominable for the sinner to abuse God and then excuse himself for it. Ah, this is only the old way of the guilty. Adam and Eve in the garden fled and hid themselves when they

heard the voice of the Lord approaching. And what had they done? The Lord calls them out and begins to search them: "Adam, what hast thou done? Has thou eaten of the forbidden tree in the centre of the garden?" Adam quailed, but fled to an excuse: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." God, he says, gave him his tempter. God, according to his excuse, had been chiefly to blame in the transaction.

Next He turns to the woman: "What is that thou hast done?" She too has an excuse: "The serpent beguiled me and I did eat." Ah, this perpetual shuffling the blame back upon God! It has been kept up through the long line of Adam's imitators down to this day. For six thousand years God has been hearing it, and still the world is spared, and the vengeance of God has not yet burst forth to smite all his guilty calumniators to hell! O! what patience in God! And who have ever abused his patience and insulted Him by their excuses more than sinners in this house?

REMARKS.

1. No sinner under the light of the Gospel lives a single hour in sin without some excuse, either tacit or avowed, by which he justifies himself. It seems to be a law of man's intelligent nature that when accused of wrong, either by his conscience or by any other agent, he must either confess or justify. The latter is the course taken by all impenitent sinners. Hence the reason why they have so much occasion for excuses, and why they find it convenient to have so great a variety. It is remarkable with what facility they fly from one to another, as if these refuges of lies might make up in number what they lack in strength. Conscious that not one of all the multitude is valid in point of truth and right, they yet, when pressed on one, fly to another, and when driven from all in succession they are ready to come back and fight the same ground over again. It is so hard to abandon all excuses, and admit the humbling truth that they themselves are all wrong, and God all right.

Hence it becomes the great business of a gospel minister to search out and expose the sinner's excuses; to go all round and round, and, if possible, demolish the sinner's refuges of lies, and lay his heart open to the shafts of truth.

2. Excuses render repentance impossible. For excuses are justifications, and who does not know that justification is the very opposite of confession and repentance? To seek after and embrace excuses therefore, is to place one's self at the farthest possible remove from repentance.

Of course the self-accusing sinner makes it impossible for God to forgive him. He places the Deity in such a position toward himself, and I might say, places himself in such an attitude toward the government of God, that his forgiveness would be ruin to the very throne of God. What would heaven say, and hell too, and earth besides, if God were to forgive a sinner while he by his excuses is justifying himself and condemning his Maker?

3. Sinners should lay all their excuses at once before God. Surely this is most reasonable. Why not? If a man owed me, and supposed he had a reasonable excuse for not paying the debt, he should come to me and let me understand the whole case. Perhaps he will satisfy me that his views are right.

Now, sinner, have you ever done so in regard to God? Have you ever brought up one excuse before

the Lord, saying, "Thou requirest me to be holy, but I can't be;" "Lord, I have a good excuse for not obeying thee?" No, sinner, you are not in the habit of doing this--probably you have not done it the first time yet in all your life. In fact, you have no particular encouragement to carry your excuses before God, for you have not one yet that you yourself believe to be good for anything except to answer the purpose of a refuge of lies. Your excuses won't stand the ordeal of your own reason and conscience. How then can you hope they will stand before the searching eye of Jehovah? The fact that you never come with your excuses to God shows that you have no confidence in them.

4. What infinite madness to rest on excuses which you dare not bring before God now! How can you stand before God in the judgment, if your excuses are so mean that you cannot seriously think of bringing one of them before God in this world? O, sinner, that coming day will be far more searching and awful than any thing you have seen yet. See that dense mass of sinners drawn up before the great white throne--far as the eye can sweep, they come surging up--a countless throng;--and now they stand, and the awful trump of God summons them forward to bring forth their excuses for sin. Ho, sinners--any one of you all--what have you to say why sentence should not be passed on you? Where are all those excuses you were once so free and bold to make? Where are they all? Why don't you make them now? Hark! God waits; he listens;--there is silence in heaven--all through the congregated throng--for half an hour--an awful silence--that may be felt; but not a word--not a moving lip among the gathered myriads of sinners there;--and now the great and dreadful Judge arises and lets loose his thunders. O, see the waves of dire damnation roll over the ocean-masses of self-condemned sinners! Did you ever see the judge rise from his bench in court to pass sentence of death on a criminal? There, see, the poor man reels--he falls prostrate, there is no longer any strength in him, for death is on him and his last hope has perished!

O, sinner, when that sentence from the dread throne shall fall on thee! Your excuses are as millstones around your neck as you plunge along down the sides of the pit to the nethermost hell!

5. Sinners don't need their excuses. God does not ask for even one. He does not require you to justify yourself--not at all. If you needed them for your salvation I could sympathize with you, and certainly would help you all I could. But you don't need them. Your salvation does not turn on your successful self-vindication. You need not rack your brain for excuses. Better say, I don't want them--don't deserve them--have not one that is worth a straw. Better say, "I am wicked. God knows that's the truth, and it were vain for me to attempt to conceal it. I AM WICKED, and if I ever live, it must be on simple mercy!"

I can recollect very well the year I lived on excuses, and how long it was before I gave them up. I had never heard a minister preach on the subject. I found however by my experience, that my excuses and lies were the obstacles in the way of my conversion. As soon as I let these go utterly, I found the gate of mercy wide open. And so, sinner, would you.

6. Sinners ought to be ashamed of their excuses, and repent of them. Perhaps you have not always seen this as plainly as you may now. With the light now before you it becomes you to beware. See to it that you never make another excuse, unless you intend to abuse God in the most horrible manner. Nothing can be a more grievous abomination in the sight of God than excuses made by a sinner who knows they are utterly false and blasphemous. O you ought to repent of the insult you have already

offered to God--and NOW, too, lest you find yourself thrust away from the gate of mercy.

7. You admit your obligation, and of course are estopped from making excuses. For if you have any good excuse, you are not under obligation. If any one of you has a good excuse for disobeying God, you are no longer under obligation to obey. But since you are compelled to admit obligation, you are also compelled to relinquish excuses.

8. Inasmuch as you do and must admit your obligation, then if you still plead excuses, you insult God to His face. You insult Him by charging Him with infinite tyranny.

Now, what use do you calculate to make of this sermon? Are you ready to say, "I will henceforth desist from all my excuses, now and for ever; and God shall have my whole heart?" What do you say? Will you set about to hunt up some new excuse? Do you at least say, "Let me go home first--don't press me to yield to God here on the spot;--let me go home and then I will?" Do you say this? And are you aware how tender is this moment--how critical this passing hour? Remember it is not I who press this claim upon you--but it is God. God Himself commands you to repent today--this hour. You know your duty--you know what religion is--what it is to give God your heart. And now I come to the final question--Will you do it? Will you abandon all your excuses, and fall, a self-condemned sinner, before a God of love, and yield to Him yourself--your heart, and your whole being, henceforth and for ever? WILL YOU COME?

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)*.