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On Neglecting Salvation

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

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

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

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

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

word that comes through His equal Son!

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

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

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

III. Neglect of salvation.

IV. Reasons for this neglect of salvation.

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

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

But what difference does this make in regard to the comfort or discomfort of the suffering? Pain is pain, and it matters little to the sufferer whether it comes in one form or in another. In the sinner's case, the suffering comes ultimately from God as punishment for his sin;--how then can it much concern him whether it comes directly from Jehovah's hand in the form of inflicted penalty, or indirectly, through such a constitution, physical and mental, that sin brings its own consequences of sorrow and woe? God creates the constitution, and of intent makes it such that sin begets pain,--to some extent,--here;--to

an infinite extent, hereafter. Small difference, indeed, does it make to the sufferer. If the suffering be eternal, and eternally increasing, this is sufficiently awful, let it come in one form or in another; and if so much be granted, it makes only the least imaginable difference in which form it may come.

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

O, what an idea is that, of eternity!

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

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

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

III. Neglect of salvation.

- 1. It is a wonderful fact that this great salvation is neglected by so many persons. It is one of the most unaccountable things that occur in this strange world! What a mystery!--that men should neglect this salvation is when they admit the reality of those evils and dangers from which it saves them. They admit this salvation to be a good thing, nay more, an indispensable thing; that, considered as a remedy it is not one which will come, whether they attend to it, or not. They know that the evil impending forces itself upon them, even as death does--as a thing that can by no means be averted, only as they accede to God's mode of deliverance.
- 2. Further, they admit the guilt and danger of neglect to be very great;--they know that every moment's delay may be fatal -- that any single moment of their lives may seal their destiny and consign them beyond hope to everlasting destruction; and that this is true not only of delay in general, but of this present moment's delay--and yet they strangely linger. Now, is it not strange that men should delay so ! Suppose the interest at stake were the title to a man's estate. If one moment's delay might prove fatal, what a rush would be made to secure it! Just in proportion to the greatness of the interest at stake, and the imminence of danger from delay, would be the eagerness to ensure the prize. O how would men rush to the means of ensuring an earthly treasure! On every other subject but this of salvation, men would act rationally, and would by no means let slip a great treasure by default of vigorous exertion;--but on this subject you cannot move them!

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

The great point was now gained; I began to act as a rational being should, and God shed

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

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

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

He is gone! There; he opens his eyes in hell! My room-mate, my class-mate; my dear friend--in hell! O! Alas! a soul is lost, and that, through my influence, I have done nothing to save him. I might have saved him if I had done my duty. Alas, that a soul should be in hell through my neglect! Example is the highest influence. If you neglect this great salvation, you are doing all that you can to induce others to do the same. Your example urges them on in that course, with greater power than anything else you can do or say.

- 4. Do not presume upon God's forbearance. You probably think you may presume without losing your soul. You think God is too good to cut you down in your sins;--but you may find He is too good to spare you--too good to let you allure others down to hell -too good to let you

accumulate more guilt, and make your eternal doom more dreadful. Ought He not to be afraid lest your example should ruin other souls? Ah, you may provoke Him to pass His hand over your pale brow and take your equity, oh, mighty man! So a man might vainly presume that he could burn down buildings, and murder innocent people, and yet escape punishment, because the magistrate is a good-hearted man. Take care, sinner, lest the very goodness you rely on to save you should secure your destruction! It is the worst of all folly to neglect this great salvation because you know that God is merciful.

- 5. Mere neglect secures the soul's ruin.
- 6. Many seem to suppose that heaven is a place, and of such sort that access to it turns not at all on fitness of character. Some, also, suppose that death has great sanctifying power, and will, of itself, make them quite fit for heaven, Or, they think God is so good He will take them to heaven without insisting on a new heart. Yet the very least consideration ought to show men that they must be radically changed in character, and be sanctified by the truth of the gospel, or they can never see the Lord. According to the plain and uniform teaching of the Bible, this renewal must take place in this life. The means for it are to be used here, and here they must take their effect. What is death but the gate-way to the eternal world--to the sinner, the door by which he passes from earth and goes down to hell. There is nothing in the door to change his character or his destiny! Neither to expect this. Then why do men live on in this way?
- 7. Neglect ought to be fatal. There is not a conscience in the universe which does not say it ought to be. If men will neglect the richest provisions God could make for their salvation, there is a moral fitness in His holding them to the legitimate results of their folly, and giving them the doom they so richly deserve.
- 8. Neglect, even so long as through the period of youth, is generally fatal. Young persons are prone to assume that they can safely neglect their souls for a season, while amusements press on their attention, and other engagements engross their regard; but while they sport and God is waiting, time flies away, and often the day of grace shuts down upon them, closing in hopeless night. The day of hope is gone, and their neglect has proved fatal.
- 9. To make up the mind only for once to neglect salvation, often proves fatal. It may be your intention to delay but one hour, or till you can go from the house of God to your home: and yet that one short delay may be just once too many. That call from God may have been the very last! You turned away, and soon you found that your soul was left in darkness--that your moral sensibilities were dead--that a deep spiritual desolation had come over you, consequent on that one fatal purpose to delay. It was said of one--"He wist not that the Lord had departed from him." So, many a sinner, after he has turned God away. It often happens that those who are guilty of one deliberate act of turning away from God find themselves devoid of moral sensibility and utterly without conviction of sin.
- 10. Persons may as well neglect wholly as to give attention in the way many do. They attend just enough to deceive themselves, yet not enough to make any real progress. This is true of some professors of religion. They make no progress in sanctification; they grow no better; but

rather worse. They keep up the forms of family prayer, and just enough of the forms of religion generally to keep up the strong delusion that they are on their way to heaven. Thus they manage to quiet their fears, and prop up a ruinous hope. No doubt hundreds of thousands are doing this continually. Many of you, I fear, are in this very career of self-deception--just giving attention enough to delude yourselves along on a hope that must perish when God shall take away your soul. You do not half enough to keep your souls in the atmosphere of God's love; but only enough to coast along under the trade winds of death, hard upon the rocks of damnation! All along your course, you might, if you would listen, hear the roar of the breakers under your bow. Ah, ere you are aware you are gone!

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

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

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)*.