

What Saith the Scripture?

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Abiding In Christ And Not Sinning

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Lecture XIII

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Text.--1 John 3:5, 6: "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."

I. The course of thought in this passage is exceedingly significant.

II. Understand what it is to be in Christ.

III. We must sink into Christ.

IV. One cannot live in sin while he abides in Christ.

V. All sin is voluntary disobedience and cannot be anything else.

VI. When we sin, we are no longer in Christ, but out of Christ.

VII. How can we attain to this peculiar and soul-transforming union?

I. The course of thought in this passage is exceedingly significant.

- 1. First, John affirms one of the plainest truths in the whole gospel system, viz. that Jesus Christ came in human flesh to take away our sins. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." This first truth of the gospel he might well introduce with the words--"Ye know"--for no Christian could be supposed to be ignorant of this.
- 2. He next advances to another fact in the gospel system--"In him, Christ, was no sin." He must needs be himself sinless--else he could not be adapted to save his people from their sins. His example must shine in the glory of a sinless purity; he must have no sin of his own to de-bar him from communion with the Father.

- 3. The next step in the chain of thought is that whosoever abideth in the sinless One cannot be sinning himself. To come into relations so close, so intimate, with Jesus Christ is utterly incompatible with present actual sinning. He that is now sinning knows not Christ as his Savior--"hath not seen him neither known him." Precisely this is what John affirms.

He who abides in Christ is not sinning; he doth not commit sin. This is plainly declared.

II. Hence it becomes of the utmost consequence, first, to understand what it is to be in Christ.

On this point our notions should be, not loose and vague, but clear and definite. It must be, to the real Christian life, a matter of untold importance.

- 1. Being in Christ implies that we are out of ourselves, in the sense in which selfish men are in themselves. It implies that we renounce ourselves as to any will or way of our own. A selfish heart regards itself and its own interests as supreme. The selfish man lives to himself. Self is the precise end for which he lives, labors, plans and cares. Hence, concisely speaking, he is in himself. But to be in Christ, he must cease to live and to be in himself, and must in the same sense, come to be and to live, in Christ.
- 2. Being in Christ implies that we commit ourselves to him, to be pardoned by his blood, quickened by his grace, controlled by his will. I often think we are so much in the habit of using these terms--"commit myself to Christ;" "consecrate myself to him"--that we come to miss the sense; perhaps we learn to slip over it without getting a full impression, and it may be, without any just impression of the rich and intense meaning. Who that has once felt its full significance does not see that it amounts to far more than that loose notion that so often goes with the phrase?
- 3. To commit yourself to Christ, implies that you merge yourself in him--make him your end of life--make his glory your supreme end in all you do. You merge your will in his will, so that, apart from his, you have no will of your own. You wish for nothing, save what pleases him.

In some human relations, we have an approximation to this. One so merges himself in the will of another as to think nothing of his own will. The subordinate officer so merges his own will in the will of his commander that he seeks only to learn and to carry out his will. In times of peril, where safety depends on the energetic action of one leading mind--that, say of a sea-captain in a storm, his men think of nothing but to hang upon his will, catch its intimations and hasten to obey.

III. Of course these are only faint illustrations, for we must sink into Christ in a far higher sense than we ever should, or safely can, into any other being.

- 1. Again, it implies that we take refuge in Him. In many beautiful passages of Scripture, the Christian is represented as taking refuge in Jesus Christ. He is a great rock which casts its grateful shadow in a very desert land; or a jutting rock, cleft on the mountain side, under which one may find shelter from the storm; or a strong tower into which the righteous runs and is safe. So faith takes refuge in him from all the evils of this evil world, and from the more dire wrath

that is to come! Faith seeks refuge in him as an atoning sacrifice--as one who has laid his life down for the sins of the world; also as a righteous Advocate before God who always prevails and who will surely plead our cause.

- 2. So the believer, by faith, loses himself in Christ. He no longer appears as one making atonement for his past sins; he thinks of no such thing, nor does he appear as his own advocate before God; he dares not--would not; it is enough for him that he has Jesus Christ.
- 3. In some respects the wife loses herself in her husband. According to the law of some countries, she is no longer known in law; she relinquishes her name, her property under certain contingencies, and is known only as being in him. True, some of these laws may have gone too far and may have become odious and offensive; yet as an illustration of the point in hand, they are none the less pertinent. None need fear that they shall be too entirely lost in Christ. To be lost in him is man's highest peace and glory.
- 4. Again, this relation to Christ accepts him as our "Paracletus," in the sense of 1 John 2:1--"If any man sin, we have a Paracletos with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous." This significant term denotes a next friend, a legal advocate who pleads your cause and who appears for us before the courts. This is a most beautiful figure. Christ takes his people into himself; hides them in himself so that he appears for them and they are not seen. How expressive!
- 5. Again, by Scripture figure, we are in him as members of his body. He is the Head--the great center and fountain of nervous energy; from which the vital currents flow out to every member of the body. Thus to be in Christ is to be constantly supplied with life-power from him, our Head.
- 6. It implies, of course, that we are fully possessed and controlled by his presence. The old self is dead and Christ becomes our life. This is one of the most common figures used in Scripture.

Now to those who have never passed through the outer courts into the inner sanctuary of the great spiritual temple, this may seem all dark. Some seem to suppose that the ancient temple did not prefigure our earthly relationships to Christ, but only the heavenly, and therefore they do not once dream that they are permitted now to enter into the holy of Holies. They content themselves to live as the ancient Jews did--drawing never any nearer than the outer court and never assuming it possible for them while they live on earth to have free access within the vail to the very presence-chamber of Jehovah. They forget that the vail of that temple has been rent in twain, and that the fullest possible access is offered now to all Christ's people

"He that abideth thus in him sinneth not."

- 7. I understand this to be true in the sense that his disposition to sin is taken away, and his mind is drawn into the opposite attitude--that of true love to God and obedience. He no longer has a selfish disposition; the moral attitude of his soul is reversed.
- 8. Again, it is true in the sense that, abiding in Christ, we live a life of faith. The heart depends

on Christ for its strength, moment by moment, as little children live a life of faith on their parents, while they are drawn by love and live in constant trust. See when the father enters the room, the little ones run to meet him for a smile and a caress. They expect their daily bread from his hands. More yet, their hungry souls live on the tokens of his love and approbation. This is faith working by love. So the Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ. There is no life to him, out of Christ. The fact is, there is a wonderful difference between living on one's self and living on Christ. He who lives on himself is forever anxious, restive, as one who is conscious of being too weak to bear his own burdens; but he who lives on Christ is out of weakness made strong with a strength all above his own. He knows what it is to repose on Christ.

IV. One cannot live in sin while he abides in Christ, because so to abide implies a life of love.

- 1. This inexpressibly near and precious relation to Christ, called "abiding in him," must surely include love to him as the ruling element. You are in Christ as friend is one with friend. Thus in him, you honor his name, love his character, devote yourself to his interests. To do this is to be controlled by love.
- 2. The spirit of love goes to keeping Christ's commandments. Our Lord said--"He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me,"--implying that obedience is the natural and necessary outgrowth of love. It should be always understood that love is the underlying principle of all obedience--nothing is obedience but that which springs from love. On the other hand, we cannot disobey so long as love rules the heart.
- 3. To be in Christ, therefore, is a state of mind which by its own nature excludes sin. Some strangely suppose that they are in Christ as a sort of Federal Head--a representative, in this governmental sense. In this way, they suppose themselves to have an "imputed righteousness"--and to have this, whether they have any personal righteousness or not. I fear they will not be likely to have any other, unless they come to know him in a more intimate and heart-affecting relation. True, there is a sense in which we are in Christ as our Head--as has been already indicated in our reference to the Bible figure which makes him the head and his people members of his body.

V. It must not be forgotten that all sin is voluntary disobedience and cannot be anything else.

To make anything else sin, is to talk nonsense. Living in Christ, therefore, must exclude sinning.

- 1. It is generally admitted that this text means so much as this--Those who abide in Christ do not sin habitually; --although there are some who would not say this, for they hold that one may be in Christ and yet live a long time in constant sinning. But in my view this text must mean more than that men do not sin habitually. If John had meant only this, why did he not say this?
- 2. Besides, abiding in Christ must be more than this, else it does not meet our wants. We need something better and more than being kept from sinning habitually. We need something that will save us really from sinning. Nothing less can supply the great want of our fallen life.

- 3. In the case of one who truly abides in Christ in the exercise of a living, active faith, to sin--to disobey God--involves a contradiction in terms. To say that one sins while in the exercise of faith and of love, is absurd. Thus the Bible testifies:--"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature"--not merely ought to be, but is. So throughout the Bible. I know not one passage, descriptive of being in Christ, which does not imply living without sin. If it were otherwise--if faith in Christ for salvation from sin left the soul yet in sin, then is faith in Christ a failure; for being in Christ by faith has for its special object, victory over sin. And faith is declared to be that which gives the victory over the world. (1 John 5:4)

VI. Hence when we sin, we are no longer in Christ, but out of Christ.

- 1. This is implied in the text, and it equally follows from the very nature of being in him.

I am often amazed that people should think they have faith when they have not even so much as conviction of the great truths pertaining to Christ. To be in Christ, men must not only know and feel those truths, but they must receive them to their hearts in love.

- 2. Faith holds on upon the sustaining arm of Jesus. Thus holding fast, you are sustained. It is only when you let go that you fall. Then you lose his protection, you fail of his support and lose his power. If while you are in vital union with Christ, you sin, then of course he has failed to keep you. The remedy of God's own providing against sin proves unreliable. Reverting to my own experience some years since, there was a long time in which I could see my difficulty. I thought I had faith, but I could see many things in myself that were all wrong--all selfish. My mind became exceedingly exercised and anxious; I could not live so. I even began to question whether I had not misunderstood the Bible by giving its promises too much meaning. I was anxious lest I had overstrained the promises and thereby had come to expect more than God ever intended to grant. I became greatly straitened in my soul until at length I said before the Lord most solemnly--"If thou hast done all for me that is provided in the gospel for thy people, then I am disappointed. I expected more. The gospel has not saved me from sin."
- 3. I cannot say that I clearly saw that I had availed myself of all there is in the gospel, but my mind was dark and doubtful. So far forth as my preaching was to Christians, it fell far short of the fullness of the gospel. But now my own experience agonized me and in great anguish and by no means impudently or reproachfully, but in the agony of my soul, I spread out my sorrows and discouragements before the Lord.

It was then I saw that, instead of expecting too much, I had expected too little. I had not expected enough. I had by no means attached to these promises their rich meaning, their full and glorious sense.

- 4. You need to understand, brethren, that you may be in a general covenant relation to Christ, and yet not have this personal faith and this intimate union which saves the soul from sinning, because it so unites us to Christ. The ancient Jews were in this general relation, yet many of them failed of the particular and close union of which our text speaks. Many thousands of them did not receive Christ in a saving sense. Obviously they did not so receive him any farther than they were actually saved.

VII. Do any say--How shall we get into Christ? How can we attain to this peculiar and soul-transforming union?

- 1. In the first place do not begin with assuming that the thing is exceedingly difficult. Do not impeach your loving Savior by supposing that He is so far off and so averse that you can have at least but a faint hope of ever finding him. No indeed; for lo, HE CALLETH THEE even now; arise and go to him. He seeks this very union.
- 2. Then the next and main thing is to cast out from your heart all other lovers--all rivals to your Lord. Let your heart go out to him alone. Let your will be lost in his will; not lost in the sense of being annihilated, but in the better sense of being submitted--merged in his will. Let it be enough for you to know and follow his will.
- 3. Dismiss all selfish ideas and all selfish pursuits. Cease to form selfish schemes, or to scramble after selfish good. Be satisfied with Christ and his love; so shall he accept your heart's love and make you his own.
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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)*.