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# The Self-Righteous Sinner Doomed To Sorrow

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Text.--Isa. 50:11: "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of Mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow."

In speaking from this text, I shall enquire,

*I. What is this self-kindled fire -- what are these "sparks ye have kindled"?*

*II. We may next consider the destiny of all these classes.*

## **I. What is this self-kindled fire -- what are these "sparks ye have kindled"?**

The answer must be found in the description which the text itself gives, and in the contrast between this class and that described in the preceding verse. The spirit of this class is one of self-dependence, as opposed to the spirit of depending on God. Here we may well enter into particulars, to illustrate some of the many particular forms it will assume.

- 1. Many assume and take comfort in the assumption that they are in a good state before God. They have done nothing very bad. Setting up a standard of their own by which to judge in the case, they conclude, even on their death-beds, that all is well with them. But these little sparks that cast their glimmer of light over the darkness of the grace, are entirely of their own kindling. They have not carefully compared their own state with the Bible standard of the Christian life. The glimmering light that casts its lurid rays over their death-scene, comes not from the gospel hope, or from divine promise.
- 2. There is another form of self-righteousness. Some will say to you -- "I have endeavored to do right." Do right! What is the law of right-doing? Is there any other save to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind, and your neighbor as yourself? And does your right-doing come up to the demands of this rule?

- 3. In another form, the sinner says -- "I am doing as well as I can." But are you quite sure of that? Has your own conscience never condemned you? Have you always honored and loved God as your Father -- and have you always treated all your fellow-creatures as His children should be treated? Have you no consciousness of having come greatly short of your real ability in these things?
- 4. Some will say -- "I have at any rate, done a great deal of good. I have been kind to my wife and children, or to my brothers and sisters, and to my neighbors."
- 5. But if you propose to place yourself on the ground of strict law and justice, the one question which the law of God will ask is this -- "Have you continued in all the things written in the law to do them?" Have you kept the whole law and not offended in one point -- ever?

Anything less than this by ever so little will forfeit your title to eternal life on the ground of law.

- 6. Others comfort themselves with good resolutions. With those they get up a fire of their own kindling -- and are fain to think that if they are not as good as they should be, they shall be by and by.
- 7. Many take great credit to themselves for kind feelings and obliging manners. Perhaps by nature they have generous impulses. There are such. Yet they entirely neglect God. They may be very humane. Their bearing towards their fellow-men may not be savage, or oppressive. Therefore they take comfort.

But let such men consider -- the lower animals are more generally kind towards their species than men are towards theirs. Cases are often brought to light in which animals cleave to each other even to death. There is said to be one species of animals so devoted to each other, that if you were to shoot down one of their young, the rest would gather round the dying or the dead, and mourn there, and allow themselves to be shot down till they all lay in death together! Some animals have this feeling; and now shall mankind take great credit for themselves for even far less of it than the lower animals?

- 8. Some men glory in their reformatory principles. Because they are doing so much to improve society and bless mankind, they assume that all must be right between themselves and God. Often such men seem not aware how much they really depend on their own good deeds and righteousness before the Lord.
- 9. Many think themselves as good as professors of religion. Measuring themselves by their neighbors who are in the church, they flatter themselves that they shall be accepted before the great tribunal. It sometimes happens most conveniently for their purpose that there are a few professors whose lives honor ungodliness rather than godliness. Taking advantage of these, they get no small comfort in comparing themselves with ungodly professors of religion.
- 10. Others strike yet a little higher and think themselves as good as the deacons or as some

gospel ministers. Thus their dependence is altogether human in its foundation. They warm themselves with sparks of their own kindling.

- 11. Many rely on certain experiences, which perhaps are dreams or visions. Yet they think it concerns them little how they live. They are, it may be, utterly selfish, unwilling to do their part for any public object. Or they are grasping, worldly-minded, hard-fisted, ever loving this present world. Strange, yet true -- such persons will fall back on their own experiences, and find in those, a basis for comforting hopes of heaven! In one instance, a man had written out his experience, so that what he might fail to keep in his memory might be faithfully kept on the written record. In his hours of trial he used to get this and read it over. At last he came to his death-bed. There, feeling the need of his old experience, he sent his little daughter to the drawer to get it; when lo! the mice had found and destroyed it! It was eaten up, and his hope had perished! He had to "Lie down in sorrow!"
- 12. Many prepare for themselves refuges of lies to be used in the same way -- and I may say -- with the same result.
- 13. Some rely for their defence before God, on their unbelief. They do not believe the Bible, and they really make their great sin their special apology and defence before God! They say -- "Lord, we would not believe a word Thou didst say, and therefore we could be under no obligation to obey Thee."
- 14. All those nominally Christian hopes that fail to sanctify the heart, are of this self-righteous -- self-dependent sort. Everything, save the sincere dependence on Christ which makes you like Him in Spirit, falls under this general character, and must end in this fearful doom.

## **II. We may next consider the destiny of all these classes.**

On this fearful subject I surely would not say a word, save that silence would be unfaithfulness to your souls. It is no pleasure to me to disturb your fond hopes, or to trouble you with dreaded fears. But how can I be unfaithful to your souls!

Listen then to God's words of warning. Our text has a word for you! Mark what I say -- all ye who hold on to your delusions -- "This shall ye have at My hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." At whose hand? The hand of Him who speaks in this passage; and He is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. The whole context shows this. He, the Lord of all worlds, cries -- "This shall ye have of My hand." What is this? What will He do? This; "Ye shall lie down in sorrow." When? At the close of life's short day. Then, when the hours of your probation shall be numbered and finished. Then, when your life work shall be over, you shall lie down in sorrow.

- 1. Sorrow naturally bows one down as under a grievous burden. I have known persons so bowed down under sorrow that they could not rise up. O if they could forget; but they cannot; and they must lie down forever under their load of sorrow.
- 2. There is the sorrow of self-reproach; who does not know the keenness of those pangs? I remember the case of a mother who reproached herself for neglecting two lost children. She

was almost deranged. Ah, she never could forgive herself! Whenever you should mention their case, she would look wild and haggard. I could not understand her appearance until she told me the circumstances. O this was an awful case! So you will reproach yourself for neglecting Christ and salvation. With but too much fearful truth, you will say of yourself -- I have been an infinite fool! Alas, "a wounded spirit, who can bear?"

- 3. In your cup there will be the sorrow of unavailing regret. Partial losses may be borne, for while they leave room for hope, human fortitude will rally. But if you have lost all -- if there is nothing left to you -- if your eternity is pure and hopeless ruin, then what can you do? O what a thought is that -- your eternity one mass of unmingled ruin! Nothing can remain to you but everlasting, unavailing regret!
- 4. There will be also the sorrow of a burdened conscience. Each individual sinner will know that he is condemned by God and by every other being in the universe. He cannot but know that every other being must despise him as a guilty, unworthy wretch! Herein is involved the sorrow of being without friends and without sympathy. Your Christian friends -- really the best you ever had -- will have done all they can for you, and then, compelled by your own folly, they left you to your chosen doom. Ah, they can stand by you no longer! Long had they wept in your pathway to hell; but their tears were unavailing! They leave you and you have now no friends in the universe!
- 5. Sympathy often blunts the keen edge of sorrow. The tender relations of the present life seem beautifully arranged to help us bear the bitterness of human sorrow. But there are no such relations there! Each wicked man will have too much of his own to bear to think of you. In all that world of woe, there cannot be one sympathizing look; no, not one sympathizing whisper! In this world, though the mind may sink under the keenest sorrow, and go down, down, under its load of bitterest woe, yet even then, a sympathizing tear will bring relief. But no such relief can visit the home of the finally lost.
- 6. Sorrow is sometimes compared to a consuming fire. The figure is not inappropriate. It has been known to turn the hair all white in a single night. O how does such sorrow drink up the spirit and waste its living energies! But what is this compared with that other sorrow which no man can endure!
- 7. By an effort of will, we can in this world sometimes rule sorrow out of the mind; but vain are all such efforts there. Think of the appalling emphasis with which Christ speaks of the place "where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." Or think of the solemnity of His words -- "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" His compassions were so deep that we find His warnings to sinners more emphatic and solemn than those of any inspired prophet or apostle. Not one among them all uttered words so thrilling, so solemn. This is but natural to One whose compassions were so deep and so tender.

## REMARKS.

1. A portion of the sinner's final doom will be the natural outgrowth of his self-deception. When men

deceive themselves, they have only themselves to blame. In the very nature of their case therefore, self-reproach must be one of the bitter ingredients in their cup.

2. It is also true (and this is one element of their sorrow,) that God will give expression to His infinite displeasure. He says -- "This shall ye have at My hand." It must be made apparent to the universe that God's hand is in this unutterably awful affliction.

3. It has often been the case here that young people have ruled this subject out of their minds. It hindered their studies. So, assuming that study is worth more than salvation, they have said to Jesus Christ -- "Go Thy way for this time."

4. Some cannot bear to feel sorrow now, and therefore put their sorrows over till they shall come in one eternal flood, that nothing can assuage! They thrust away religious duties now because they dislike them -- as if time could make them more pleasant! Some do not like to have their friends made sad, and therefore they exclude this subject from their attention. How often is this course pursued towards the sick.

5. God's warnings are most emphatic. You see this in our text. It declares most explicitly -- "This shall ye have at My hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow." Listen also to those most emphatic and awful words that fell from the lips of our Savior, "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea, And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Mark 9:42-48.

Is it not amazing that men can have the hardihood to sneer at such language? Who does not know what such figures of speech must mean? Think of going with two hands, two feet -- in your own human body -- "into hell -- into the fire that never shall be quenched!" Think of a soul immortal -- doomed to endless sorrow! If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out. Though it be terrible to lose an eye, it is far less terrible than to lose your soul! What emphasis goes with these awful words! How solemnly are they reiterated! With what thunders of power they must have fallen from the lips of the Crucified One!

6. This text and subject should be a warning to the skeptic in his fancied security. Ah, does he think to sneer hell out of existence? Does he vainly dream that his sneers will annihilate that prison-house of woe? Ah! poor, wretched skepticism! How unutterably weak and wicked! Can you warm yourself by such sparks of your own kindling? Thinkest thou to enjoy life where their "worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched?"

7. This subject comes with its warning to the delaying sinner. Now, when pressed to repent, you comfort yourself with the promise -- I shall not always neglect it. Ah, but you may neglect it too long!

Ere you are aware, the line -- the unseen line between God's mercy and His wrath, may be forever passed by.

8. Let Universalists take warning. You have but a miserable refuge. You expect to go to heaven because all the wicked are there. Yes, because all the men of Sodom are there, ascending along with the smoke of their blasted, doomed city, when they were "set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire;" -- because they all went up quick to heaven, you expect to go there too! Because all the pirates and murderers of every land and age go there, you expect to get in amongst them! Indeed! But may it not be that your hope, like that of the hypocrite, shall perish when God shall take away the soul?

9. Let spurious converts beware. Those who have long professed piety, but have also long given their hearts to the world, must come within the fearful sweep of the warnings of this text. You are a professor of religion, are you? And yet you live as if this world were your god. How will your hopes abide in the great day that shall search and try men's hopes?

10. Let this warn also, the ambitious, whether students, or ministers, or politicians -- whoever you may be -- take heed lest it come to thee at last, that thou lie down in sorrow!

11. All who live in the experience of Romans 7, whose hearts are in bondage under sin, and not in the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free; take warning! What are the sparks with which you compass yourself about? These; that with your conscience, you approve the right, but, with your will, you do the wrong; and can you suppose this will avail you in the great day of the Lord?

12. Ye who depend on the forms of religion without the power of it -- hear what the Savior says in the text: "This shall ye have of Mine hand -- ye shall lie down in sorrow." How do you avoid being aroused and thrown into an agony of anxiety? How is it, ye who are not walking in the Spirit, but in the flesh; you seem to be very much composed. So far from smiting on your breast and crying out -- "Alas, I am undone!" you are finding comfort amid some sparks of your own kindling. What is your comfort? No matter whence it comes if it comes not from Christ. It can be of no value. It is only a flattering unction which you lay to your soul. Wilt thou be warned now? O wilt thou now awake from thy death-sleep, and arise from the dead, that Christ may give thee light?

## 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)*.