

What Saith the Scripture?

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The One Thing Needful

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

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Lecture II

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Text.--Luke 10:41-42: "Jesus answered, and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her."

This text is introduced in the sacred narration, thus --

"Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, 'Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore, that she help me.'"

Thus it appears that on this memorable visit made by Jesus to this family, Mary gave herself up immediately to be instructed. She sat down at once at His feet to hear His words. "But Martha was cumbered about much serving," and was almost ready to complain of Christ that He would let Mary neglect the work and throw it upon her. Martha was the housekeeper and made herself a good deal of trouble in the matter of extra entertainment of guests. Jesus replied to her, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things." She was full of anxiety -- not about one thing only, but many; her mind was taken up and divided, anxious, in a state of great perturbation. This thing and that thing must be attended to. But Christ does not care for the "many things." In His view the many things were of small value; and only the one thing had a value supreme and immeasurable. This one thing He puts in opposition to the many things chosen by Martha. Mary had discriminated and chosen wisely, and had therefore taken the right thing for her portion. You, said He to Martha, have many things in your heart; Mary has seized upon the one thing, the good part, which she shall never lose.

The very emphatic manner in which Christ speaks of this one thing, might imply that but one thing is of any use; or it might mean that but one thing is indispensable -- all the rest being naturally inferior and such as one may afford to forego.

I. What is this one thing needful?

II. Why is but one thing needful?

III. The thing the sinner needs is escape from their consequences. What are these consequences?

IV. By a saving knowledge of Jesus, one gets rid also of despair.

I. What is this one thing needful?

- 1. Evidently it is a saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. To this Mary gave her earnest attention. Jesus had come to her house; immediately she gave herself up to sit at His feet and to hear His words. Christ was not displeased with her seeming inattention to His earthly wants. It did not offend Him that she should be so entirely engrossed with her own salvation. He noticed her fixed attention, her tearful eye and her trembling voice, and He would not have her diverted to anything else.
- 2. On the other hand, Martha was careful to entertain Him well, and doubtless had a high regard for Him as a friend. But she had not well understood His mission and her own need to know it. Mary did understand these things and Jesus rejoiced to see that she did.
- 3. The words of Jesus show that in His view there is no comparison between the one thing and the many things. They may be contrasted; they cannot be compared. The many things are mere trifles, finite, and of small account; but the one thing is infinite. The many are temporary, for a moment only; the one is perpetual. The finite and infinite can never be compared; they may naturally be contrasted. Christ did not intend to say that these many things had no value; but did intend to say that the one thing is not merely a good, but an indispensable good. As to those other things -- the many -- for which Martha was so careful, if He had no supper, no matter. He could not forgive Martha for not giving herself up to what both she and Mary needed so much. It was a natural necessity that Martha should have Christ for her Savior. Nothing else can suffice, or can supply the want of this.

II. Why is but one thing needful?

Because if we have this one thing, we shall escape all that we need to fear as the consequence of our sins. Let us consider what this is and must be from its own nature.

III. The thing the sinner needs is escape from their consequences. What are these consequences?

- 1. I often trace the different steps in the experience of different persons. Some seem to have always regarded God as their Father, but to have not seen Christ. I mean, have not seen Christ in the sense of the hymn,

I saw One hanging on a tree,

In agony and blood;

It is one thing to estimate God as a Father, and another to see Christ. Seeing Christ in this sense is the natural result of being deeply convicted and of feeling frequent remorse for sin. This remorse for sin seems to be the indispensable condition of seeing and appreciating Christ as a Savior. It is remarkable that remorse for sin always ceases with the exercise of true faith in Christ. It is worthy of enquiry -- Why is it that a saving knowledge of Christ not only gives the sense of pardon, but wipes out the dreadful remorse? So removes it that it is gone and cannot be found? Yet such is the fact. No one who has had this experience could ever afterwards doubt the reality of justification by faith -- so great is the power of believing on Christ on one's own state of mind. Remorse -- that most horrible condition of mind -- can never be expelled permanently, save by faith in the Lord Jesus. With this faith there comes into the soul a blessed sense of peace and pardon. This expels remorse; nothing else can.

- 2. Under this remorse, we are so displeased with ourselves that we cannot help feeling that God is angry against us -- not with malicious anger, but yet with such anger as crushed the spirit down -- a sense of God's infinite displeasure against sin. Put a man in heaven, he could not be happy there without this deliverance from remorse.

IV. By a saving knowledge of Jesus, one gets rid also of despair.

- 1. Think what despair is; estimate its unutterable agony, and then add to it this horrible, remorseful state of mind, and you have the consummation of sorrow and wretchedness.
- 2. I have seen persons in despair who yet seemed not to be remorseful. They could not believe that God could forgive them; yet the keen gnawings of remorse were not there. But sometimes I have seen both these things together; and there was perfect misery! How awful! How horrible!

Those of you who have felt this have said -- I cannot live so five minutes; I cannot endure this crushing weight of woe! Sometimes the sense of one sin is enough to cut down and crush out all our life. How dreadful then it must be when sin after sin comes rushing down upon us with unendurable self-reproach and condemnation! Naturally this remorseful sense of sin is an ever growing quantity. Suppose one to have it, going on from bad to worse. All the pain which the mind can inflict on itself it does with accumulating force, mountain on mountain; ocean on ocean.

- 3. Sometimes one may suffer in body all the body can endure, but the soul be in perfect peace. This state I have known to continue a long, long time; but it is by no means to be compared with the horrors of remorse. No pains of body alone can be compared with the agonies of the soul.

Besides this, think of soul-agony, enduring forever. Let the pain be ever so trifling, yet if there be no limitation of time -- if it can never end, how dreadful! No matter whether it be a governmental infliction, or a natural consequence; in either case, the results are, beyond measure, awful. Now to suppose anything can be a good, compared with deliverance from such sin and from such consequences of sin, is utterly preposterous. All things in

the comparison, are as nothing.

- 4. It is amazing to hear some men speak of religion. When you exhort them to become religious, they feel nothing. I met a man of this class some years since and said to him -- "Are you a religious man?" "No sir." "Ought you not to have religion?" "O, I suppose it would do me no hurt!" Think of that -- "no hurt!" He doesn't think it would hurt him to love God, and to love Jesus for His Savior and Friend! Strange that men do not see that if religion is anything, it must be everything.
- 5. If you have this one thing, you have everything of highest value; you have the great thing -- eternal holiness and happiness -- an enduring happiness gained, and an ever-growing misery escaped. O what an aggregate of solid misery and woe! All the misery of hell up to this day is nothing in the comparison with the prospective misery of one lost soul. Accumulate all the miseries of war, pestilence and famine; pile them up heights over height; -- all is not to be compared with the misery of one lost soul in hell. You have often heard the illustration from the supposed case of an old bird who takes one sand from our globe -- supposing it to be all sand -- one each thousand years. You say what an amazing period of time ere this globe will be exhausted. But still the soul of man lives on yet, after this globe has been exhausted of its matter and reduced to nothing -- losing one particle of sand each thousand years. And you may add still to this supposition that this same old bird removes another globe in the same way, and still another and another all the planets of our system and then the sun and then all the other suns which glitter only as stars to us because of their immense distance; let her take them all away -- all the stars and all the nebul -- one grain at a time and only one for each thousand years; let her go on till she has worn out ten thousand pairs of wings and ten thousand beaks -- what then? Eternity is not exhausted. There has not been even a beginning made towards exhausting it. That little child, reposing in its mother's lap, shall outlive all the suns and all the planets of the universe.

Suppose that little one, many years ago, had gone to heaven, and you were now to see him face to face and he could tell you what he has become; and how his mind has been expanding, and his heart become like Christ's; you see that he now knows more than you can conceive. But let that little child go on still in the same career of progress, and the day will come when he will know more than all the angels of heaven know now.

Suppose that you could see Mary -- that Mary who once sat at Jesus' feet -- as she is today -- not as she was then with her eye fixed on Christ and the tear quivering in it -- but as she is now. You would think her more than an angel, and almost divine. So glorious! so heavenly! What a part that must have been which she then chose! Well might she forget everything else. O yes, for the Savior had come, and now is the time to rush to His feet and catch the words of life from His lips. And has He really come to offer her the peerless blessing? How then can she be expected to care much for the little things that so encumber Martha.

REMARKS.

1. Christ says -- "Mary hath chosen;" -- from which you may see that something is to be chosen. To

do this choosing must therefore be the great business of life. Christ presents Himself before us to be chosen. The thing to be done is to choose Him and to receive Him thus as our own portion. Mary made this wise discrimination, and seized on the one good part. Perhaps she did not understand that the thing to be gained as her life's great labor was to be chosen and then seized upon.

2. Nothing should divert us from this choice. The mind needs to seize upon it with all its strength. If Mary had run about the house, and set her heart upon getting a good supper for her guest, she would have missed this good part and lost it, perhaps forever. Her mind needed to be fastened, and her attention held until her heart's great choice was fully made. Christ encouraged her to sit there and attend to His life-giving words. When Martha came along, fretting and complaining, Mary may have been deeply grieved. But Jesus took her part, and replied for her, so that she had nothing to do but to bend her ear and her whole heart again to the words of her Lord. Thus to this one thing to be chosen, everything else should yield. Christ said -- "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

3. Many never fulfill the conditions of this choosing -- never give their fixed attention to this subject. There are multitudes who have seasons of serious thought; but Satan says to them -- "You must not neglect any of your duties;" -- and in this temptation, Christians are sometimes his most effectual allies. Christ says, "Sit down and give your attention earnestly to this one thing." This attention must be a necessity -- a thing indispensable to the wise and blessed choice. You never get the good thing save as you fulfill this condition. Undoubtedly it was Mary's duty to sit down and to give her whole mind up to thought and feeling, so that His truth might find its way to her soul. Christ wanted to save her soul; He saw the way opening -- saw the need of continuous attention, and therefore directed His efforts to this end.

4. If this one thing is secured, all that is really important is gained; if this is lost, all is lost. To secure this one thing needful, there must first be fixed attention, diligent hearing and earnest thought.

5. This leads me to say that some people seem to have forgotten the conditions of having a general revival, or else have made up their minds never to have one. How difficult it is here for the people to agree to make a general effort. When some are ready and urgent, others are not. But if you mean to have a general revival, you must have a general attention; if your heart be for an extensive revival, you must have an extensive attention. If as soon as the church begins to feel the importance of a concerted movement, one goes off to this thing and another to that, all comes to nought. I do not suppose that true Christians intend to frustrate a revival, but they really do so without purposed intention.

Think of the men among us who have been here for years but are not converted. Shall they be saved? Thus far they are only more hardened. Will they ever choose that good part? When shall it once be? I will tell you. It will be when Christian people shall unite in treating this matter as the one thing needful. Then, when unconverted people see that Christians are absorbed in efforts to save them, and treat everything else as of no value, compared with their souls, then you may expect them to believe you are sincere, and then your example and efforts will have weight. But suppose a general effort to promote a revival is made; they are invited to come in; but they hear that a party is being gotten up at this place and another at another place and that many professed Christians attend these parties, what

will they think of it? Must it not tend to banish all serious thought from their minds?

On the other hand, if you all come to the prayer meeting, you cannot keep these men away. They will get ahead of you all.

6. Now if this saving knowledge of Christ be the one thing needful, will you not treat it as if it were?

What will you do now? Some of you may say -- If I should do as Mary did and get no supper for my guest, and prepare him no lodgings, then what would he do? Jesus Christ would say to you -- You don't know your duty!

Christ demands your heart, young man, and yours too, young woman. Do you say -- I must study while I am here, for I am here to study? But what of your soul? Is it nothing to you that you lose your soul?

Will you, Christian, fulfill your part of the conditions of a general revival? Do you answer -- I will give my whole heart to it? I will bend to it my utmost efforts? Then it will not be long before each one will have chosen the one thing needful. Christ would say -- You have all chosen that good part which shall not be taken from you.

7. Each one must take up this matter for himself. It is in its very nature a personal thing.

Conversion will be more or less sudden -- other things being equal -- according as you give up your mind more or less singly and exclusively to the effort. Until you give up your heart fully, you do nothing to purpose.

I once attempted to labor as an evangelist with a church which seemed determined not to make any change in their usual habits. Their custom was to have a sewing society once a month. The minister would go and close with prayer. I had been engaged for some time preaching every evening and minds were becoming solemn; when all at once I heard that the preaching was suspended because of the sewing circle. Preaching went over. By and by, when the interest had become yet greater, another sewing circle, and no preaching. Everything was fixed and nothing could be changed. When I found out all this I said to them -- I cannot stay here, good bye. If any people want a revival, they must consent to give their attention to it.

Many of you are crying out -- Who will show us any good? Our text answers -- Jesus Christ. He will show you the good part which shall never be taken away from you. Will you have it?

"Say, will you have this Christ or no?"

But one thing is needful; do not distract your attention among other things that are comparatively worthless.

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)*.