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On Tenderness of Heart

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Lecture I

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Text.--2 Kings 22:19-20: "Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before Me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place."

These words are spoken of Josiah, one of the pious kings of Judah. He came to the throne in very early life, yet with a heart tender towards the Lord God of his fathers. It was in an age of abounding iniquity, in which the cup of Judah's transgressions was nearly full. At the time to which our text refers, the copy of the Mosaic law, kept in the archives of the temple, was brought forth, after having been mislaid, or perhaps only long neglected; but be this as it may, the reading of it before the king took hold of his very soul, and enkindled the deepest apprehensions of God's displeasure. Probably the passages read were some of those terrible denunciations against idolatry and against God's own people if they should fall into idolatry. On hearing them, king Josiah said--"Go ye, inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not harkened unto the words of this book to do according to all that is written concerning us."

In reply to this enquiring of the Lord, He said--"Behold, I will bring evil upon this place and upon the inhabitants thereof; because they have forsaken Me and have burnt incense to other god's to provoke Me to anger; therefore My wrath shall be kindled against this place and shall not be quenched."

But to the good king Josiah, the Lord sent a special message, exempting him personally from this fearful scourge, and assuring him that he should go to his grave in peace and that his eyes should not see all this threatened evil.

It is to our purpose now to enquire,

1. Why did the Lord thus exempt Josiah?

II. A tender heart implies a reverential fear of God.

III. All this is true of God as towards His penitent children.

I. Why did the Lord thus exempt Josiah?

- 1. Our text informs us--"Because his heart was tender and he humbled himself before the Lord," because, when he heard this fearful threatening, he rent his clothes and wept before the Lord; therefore did the Lord hear his prayer, and grant him personally an exemption from this terrible infliction. In one word, his tenderness of heart averted this judgment from him.
- 2. The term heart is used in Scripture with some variety of meaning--the special sense being determined by the connection and by the nature of the case. In the present instance, it is manifestly a virtuous state of mind -- such a state as God approves. Hence, it must imply voluntariness. This element may not be the whole of its meaning, but it must be a part -- really included.
- 3. Hardness of heart is a committed, stubborn state of the will; and over against this, a tender heart is a yielding, submissive state of will.
- 4. It is also a state of mind susceptible of deep impressions. We know that sometimes our minds are in such a state that God's word makes deep impressions; every message sinks deep. At other times, it makes none at all; our hearts are hard. This difference is a matter of experience.
- 5. In the case before us, the moment Josiah became apprised of the fearful monitions of God's word against the sins of his nation, his heart trembled; these words took hold with thrilling power. His state of mind gave the truth great force. All of us are conscious at times of this peculiar result when our hearts are tender. Sometimes the mind rules out God's word and allows it no access. But the tender heart is quite the opposite of this; it gives the truth free access and allows it to take strong hold.
- 6. This state of mind often expresses itself in tears. It did so in Josiah's case. This is a common experience when the heart is tender.

II. A tender heart implies a reverential fear of God.

We see this plainly developed in Josiah. It implies also faith, love, and submission. Unbelief, aversion and stubbornness make the spirit hard and dry--with no tenderness--no tears. But this tenderness of mind is best known to us by its manifestations. Among these we notice,

- 1. A disposition to confess, as compared with covering up.
- The man of tender heart chooses to make full confession. He has no wish to avoid it. He will be deeply honest and thorough in his confessions, because this is congenial with his feelings. He

will confess not only what is known, and must be confessed, but everything which his conscience condemns.

- 2. It manifests itself also in a readiness to accept evidence against one's self. Such a mind does not resist proof because it bears against its personal interests. On the other hand, such a man will go even farther against himself than the proof compels him to go.
- 3. The man of tender heart cannot endure to make apologies and excuses for sin. He will not make them for himself and will not hear them made for himself by others. He naturally shrinks from them and loathes them. He is amazed that anybody can fear confessing too much.
- 4. He is also ready to recognize his own complicity with others in guilt--ready, I mean, if such be the fact. When the parent's heart is tender, he will readily assume his share of the guilt of his children. Often it seems to him that the great guilt of a child's sin is on his own soul and he is verily guilty of the blood of his offspring if they die in their sins. He feels himself involved in their wrong doing because he might have prevented it.

Persons in this tender state of mind often see that they are chargeable with the death of Christ. This idea does not seem to them like a fiction, or a fancy of the imagination, but like a reality--as it is beautifully expressed in the hymn--

I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood;
He fixed His languid eyes on me;
As near the cross I stood.

O! never, till my latest breath
Shall I forget that look;
It seemed to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke.

My conscience felt and owned the guilt;
It plunged me in despair.
I saw my sins His blood had spilt,
And helped to nail Him there.

A second look He gave, that said,
"I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid --
I die that thou may'st live."

This feeling makes the idea something more than poetry. It is a deeply solemn reality--and the legitimate fruit of a tender heart. We see that by our sins we brought

ourselves into a state in which Christ must needs die for us or we must perish. Then our tender hearts say--I did as truly bear an effective part in bringing Jesus Christ to the cross as any one of the Jews or Romans did. But the hard heart parries off this sense of guilt, and will not take the conviction of it home to self. Such hearts are far from penitence, and of course, far from pardon.

In a similar spirit, we shall unify ourselves with our friends and neighbors, and hold ourselves responsible for their wrong doing in just so far as we have influenced them to it, or might have influenced them from it.

- 5. The tender heart trembles at God's word. You see this in king Josiah. He fully believed God's threatenings and felt their justice. Hence how could he do otherwise than fear and tremble?
- 6. He will also be watchful against all sin; will be exceedingly tender of God's feelings; cannot endure the thought of grieving His heart; fears also to incur His displeasure, but yet more fears to deserve it; has evermore a tender regard to the rights of God, and no sympathy with that recklessness towards His rights that is common with sinners of a hard heart. His fear of God is deep and earnest, but not slavish. I have often been struck with the significance of that Scripture which speaks of God as being the "Fear of Isaac." That good man seems to have had a sweetly solemn, tender frame of mind--in which he walked softly and tenderly before the Lord, a filial fear pervading his mind and controlling his life. So Josiah moved softly and solemnly before the Lord, jealous lest he should do anything to displease His divine Father.
- 7. Such a mind will be full of prayer; will seek communion with God and will breathe itself out towards God in humble supplication and trust.
- 8. One in this state will be submissive under afflictions and grateful on the other hand, for mercies. He will have no heart to complain of his neighbors, his friends or his enemies even, and least of all, of God, but in the deepest poverty would say with the poor woman asking God's blessing over her bowl of water and crust of bread--"All this, and Jesus too!" Like this I heard one man say--"I have many things to be thankful for, and little to complain of;" yet I have occasion to know that his circumstances were those of very great trial and privation.
- 9. The tender heart will manifest itself in great charity in judging of other's conduct and motives. One in this state of mind will readily suppose there may be good reasons for whatever appears wrong. He will assume that good men apparently in fault, may not be so bad as might be supposed from certain appearances. He is disposed to make apologies, and shrinks from injuring others in their reputation. In a case where several are involved in the same general wrong, the man of tender heart will apologize for the rest and take the blame largely to himself, instead of apologizing only for himself and blaming only his associates. He will say, "I am greatly to blame; if I had done all my duty, they might have done much better than they did."
- 10. This tenderness will manifest itself in making all possible restitution. For, such a mind is sensitive to its own faults, yielding and tender. In this spirit if you have wronged anyone you will hasten to make it right. If you have injured another's feelings, you will seek to heal the wound.

- 11. It is altogether natural to such an one to flood off the heart's sorrows with tears. Confessions for sin bring tears from your eyes in copious measure. The will and the sensibility are in such a state that tears will come. So the Lord said to Josiah--"Because thine heart was tender and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord; and hast rent thy clothes and wept before Me; I have also heard thee, saith the Lord."

A hard-hearted, selfish soul will not understand this tenderness or these tears; will not appreciate or respect it, but there are some who can both appreciate it and respect it. When parents see it in their children, their souls are deeply moved. It is truly affecting to notice how such manifestations touch the hearts of parents. Their anxieties for the wandering one have been, we may suppose, very great; but when they see him returning, and mark the proofs of a tender heart, how their souls yearn to embrace that child in parental love! The father in the parable saw his prodigal son coming while yet he was a great way off, and he could not wait; he ran to meet him, fell on his neck and kissed him.

III. All this is true of God as towards His penitent children.

- 1. Indeed in view of such manifestations, He is as much more affected than earthly parents are as He is greater and better and more loving in heart than they. It is remarkable to notice how often in the Bible God is said to have been affected by the tears of His people. If you were to turn over your Bibles and to note these passages, you would be surprised at their frequency and no less at their beauty and power. Hagar--out in the desert--her water all spent, cast her only son under one of the shrubs and went and sat down a good way off saying -- "Let me not see him die!" and like a true mother, "she lifted up her voice and wept." But God heard the lad's feeble, moaning cries, and God saw those mother's tears and He opened her eyes to see a well of water for his life.

Hannah, mourning before the temple for her barrenness, wept, and the Lord saw her tears and heard her prayers. Hezekiah wept that he must die so soon and leave so much of the work he sought to do undone; and then God said--"I have seen thy tears; I have heard thy prayer; behold, I will add to thy days fifteen years." Peter, convicted by one look of His Master, "went out and wept bitterly." Nothing more is said of it; but the breach was healed; his penitent soul found pardon.

- 2. Often the historian records that when God's guilty people humbled themselves and wept before Him, God came down to restore and to save. Greatly moved by their tears, He could not bear to see them perish, but hastened down to bring deliverance and to wipe those tears away. Just as the mother hears the first cry of sorrow from her child, and hastens to wipe the tears away and to minister comfort to the broken hearted. Indeed He has said -- "To this man will I look even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and who trembleth at My word."

REMARKS.

1. This tenderness of heart is the condition of enlargement in grace. You will notice that this tenderness and solemnity, in the case of sinners, always precedes peace and enlargement. Who has not

seen men in great agony and trouble for their sins? But soon their heart was humbled, subdued, tender, and then came pardon and peace. They were like a weaned child; ready to confess and to take blame to themselves. If you notice humility and tenderness, you expect enlargement to follow.

2. A genuine revival is sure to manifest its power on the heart by many tears. It was noticeable in the last revival in Rochester that men of the highest standing in society, arising to speak in religious meetings, were melted to tears. They could not speak without weeping. This indicates a true revival. Whenever any heart becomes tender, you will see this manifestation. There will be a deep breaking of the sensibilities. This state of mind is an essential condition of prevailing prayer. When you hear persons speak of their great struggles in prayer and the failing of an earnest spirit of supplication upon their souls, they can only speak of tears and overflowing griefs in view of the sin against which they are praying. Then they gain the assurance that God has heard their cries. Ah, that was a solemn hour! When you rose from your knees, you could hardly bear the sound of your own footsteps, so solemn was the place, so tender your spirit and so imbued with the sense of a present God!

3. This state of mind leads one to unify himself with a whole people, as Daniel, praying for his people, confesses the sins of the whole nation; and unites himself not only with the men of that age but of many ages past -- saying, "because for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers, are Jerusalem and Thy people become a reproach." This readiness to unify one's self with others is altogether natural to a tender heart, because this is a spirit of love. So kind Josiah, filled with astonishment and sorrow that the people of God has so departed from the Lord, unified himself with the whole nation and wept for their sins. So Jesus Christ blended His sympathies with the world of sinners whom He came to save, and seemed really to be bearing the sins of the whole race. He had no occasion to confess sins of His own; but He did bear the sins of others on His holy soul -- as the prophet said of Him in anticipation -- "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

4. Every real Christian knows what this spirit is -- of deep sympathy with others in view of their sorrows not only, but of their sins. Pastors of churches often feel it for their people. It often seems to them that they must confess their complicity with the sins of the church, partly because the church might have done better if their pastor had; and also because their love and sympathy draw them to confess and to pray for those they love. The same is true of deacons and private members. They have similar reason to take the whole membership on their hearts, crying, "O God, we have broken Thy covenant! Let Thy mercy reach us in the depth of our guilt." How natural it is for those who are in this tender and humble state of mind to shoulder the whole responsibility for the sins of the people with whom they are associated. I pity that professed Christian who does not in his experience know what this feeling is. What would you think of yourself as a parent if their were great sins in your family and you did not confess them? One who has this tenderness of heart has eyes keen to discern his own guilt, and to see in how many respects he has lacked the unction and power which might have saved others from sin. So in the case of husbands and wives. If one is not converted, the other mourns and confesses, and is afraid of becoming in any way the occasion of the other's sin and impenitence. A tender heart can see ten thousand things to confess and to mourn over. If you could hear the secret prayer of some Christians, what do you suppose would be your impressions of them? They might be like those of a servant girl who overheard the broken-hearted confessions of her mistress and her sad complaints of her own sins, and then went away and said, "My mistress is a hypocrite, I know, for she as much as confessed it!" The girl could not comprehend such confessions.

5. Again, with a tender heart, it is easy to forgive. Who can lay up any thing against another, when the heart is tender? It is altogether natural in such a frame of mind to forgive and even to weep over an enemy.

When a whole church are in this tender frame, it is exceedingly easy to settle difficulties and heal up old sores. Then those who should confess will surely do it; and indeed those who have little if any complicity in the wrong things will be ready enough to confess and weep and pray that all may be healed.

Brethren, do we not all need such a revival of tenderness and of humility and of broken and contrite hearts? Do we not need one that shall break up and subdue our pride and our hardness of heart? Beloved, do you know what this is--this readiness to confess and to make restitution? Have you ever felt this? How long since you have felt the power of such a revival? How long since your soul has been melted to tears for your own sins first and then also for the sins of others? How long is it since you and I have known what it is to tremble before the word of the Lord? This, surely, is what we all need.

6. Sometimes a tender spirit of confession is checked. Someone suggests that you are going too far, confessing too much. He is afraid that some advantage will be taken of it; and so he holds himself and his brethren back, and by consequence his heart becomes hard and he hardens the hearts of his brethren as well. Some years since Josiah Bissel of Rochester--a man quite prominent as a reformer--was greatly moved with the spirit of tenderness and confession. It so happened that his earnestness in reforms had made him some enemies, and there were those who suggested to him to be sparing of his confessions lest they should take undue advantages. "No," aid he, "I will not be kept back by any such fear; I must confess according to the movings of my own soul. Let no man hinder me! My heart must be right with God, whatever becomes of my reputation. I love to confess my sins and nothing shall hinder me. My enemies are not likely to charge upon me more than I am guilty of. They may charge me with other things; scarcely can they with more!"

So this noble hearted man said and felt. The people were wondering at such a manifestation of humility and tenderness; but it soon appeared that God was preparing him to die. A few months only and the Lord gave him a place among those who wear white robes, being washed from their sins in Jesus' own blood! Brethren, do not fail to pray for a tender and humble heart.

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)*.