

What Saith the Scripture?

<http://www.WhatSaithTheScripture.com/>

# Profit and Loss; Or The Worth of The Soul- No. 2

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College

Lecture XI

July 3, 1861

Public Domain Text  
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

Text.--Mark 8:36: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Text.--Luke 9:25: "For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?"

*I. Several facts of consciousness and experience.*

*II. Show that the question suggested by the text is one of profit and loss.*

*III. What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul?*

*IV. But how much would he lose, if he should gain the whole world and lose his soul?*

*V. Reverse the question in the text. What will it profit to lose the world and save your soul?*

### **III. Answer of the question, What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul?**

- The answer itself is, nothing.
- The question itself is an emphatic negative.
- This is a common form of expressing the strongest denial.

### **IV. But how much would he lose, if he should gain the whole world and lose his soul?**

I answer --

- 1. The two things cannot be compared. We have already seen that the loss of the soul is the loss of endless happiness, and that it incurs endless misery.

Whatever is endless is boundless in that direction; and whatever is bounded can never be compared with that which is boundless. In this case the law of contrast, and not that of comparison, applies. The loss and the gain can be contrasted, but never compared.

It is true that the loss of the soul is not an infinite evil, in an absolute sense. Neither the happiness nor the misery of finite creatures, can ever become in amount absolutely infinite.

Yet as the quantity is ever growing -- although at every period of the future it will fall short of being absolutely infinite -- still, as it has no bounds, it is to all purposes of comparison, infinite; because it is an ever growing quantity, having no bounds beyond which it does not pass.

The worth of the world is a finite quantity, and can therefore be easily measured and estimated. But the worth of the soul is an ever-growing, and in this sense a boundless, or infinite quantity, and can, therefore, never be estimated. The world is estimable; the soul is literally inestimable. No arithmetic can compute it; no finite mind grasp it. Indeed, God Himself must see that that which is an ever-growing quantity can never be compared with that the amount of which can be estimated, and expressed in numbers. The value of the world, then, is as nothing against infinity.

- 2. To gain the whole world would be to gain, after all, but little. And in fact, for a human being to possess the world, would be to him really no good at all; it would only load him with an ocean of cares, and anxieties, and perplexities, from which he could reap really no solid benefit. It would prove to him only what it did to Solomon; and Solomon, be it remembered, possessed as much of it as he knew what to do with. Like Solomon, he would find it vanity of vanities, and vexation of spirit.

It would really be worse for a man, as far as his own happiness was concerned, than the most abject poverty.

But the loss of the soul is really a boundless evil. It is as immeasurable as infinity. No finite mind can grasp it; the contemplation of it is overwhelming. No contemplation can reach the amount of loss that would be incurred by losing the soul; nor could it in the least approach it.

You cannot, by calculation, approach a limit, where there is none. This is so simple a statement that even a child can understand it. Let any schoolboy in this assembly attempt to exhaust the number five, by dividing it by three, and he will find that he may divide it by three forever without exhausting it, or in the least degree approaching a termination.

This is a curious, but a well-known fact. Even in so simple a case as this, you cannot exhaust five by dividing it by three, should you continue the process to all eternity.

I make this remark for the sake of illustration. To lose the soul is to incur an ever-growing quantity of misery, and to lose an ever-growing quantity of happiness.

Neither of these, happiness or misery, can have any bound in the case supposed. There is no line in that direction. In degree there is limit, both in the case of happiness and misery; but in duration, there is no limit in either case. Therefore comparison is out of the question. All that can be said is, the gain is really nothing in case you gain the world. The more a man has of the world beyond a certain amount, the worse it is for him. It becomes to him a real trouble and a burden; and beyond a certain amount, he can neither enjoy nor dispose of it.

Possessing too much of the world, is like a man's eating too much for his dinner. A certain amount is useful to him; but let him go beyond that, and all that he eats is an injury to him, and he may easily proceed to surfeiting and death in that direction.

That man is as really mad, who attempts to get more of the world than is good for him, as that man is who eats enormously, and much more than he can digest, for the sake of gratifying his appetite.

Mr. Law has said, that a man is as poorly employed in attempting to lay up a hundred thousand pounds sterling, as he would be in providing for himself a hundred thousand pairs of boots and shoes.

Let it be understood, then, that whenever a man possesses more of the world than he can usefully use and appropriate for the good of mankind and for the glory of God, he is contributing to his own misery, and not to his own happiness. He is loading himself down with cares and anxieties, that will crush and ruin him.

**V. Let us, for a moment, reverse the question in the text. What will it profit to lose the world and save your soul?**

- 1. Suppose you do not gain this world's goods; suppose you barely possess the necessities of life; nay, suppose you live in the most abject poverty for the few days you have to remain in this world, and save your soul.

In a few days you will rest from all your poverty, and enter upon the possession of eternal riches, and heir of God and a joint heir with Christ, surrounded with all the wealth, and glories, and blessedness of heaven, and that to all eternity.

- 2. How much, then, do you gain, over and above the loss sustained by not having the world?

The answer is plainly that there is no comparison in the case. Only it may be said, that you have gained infinite riches, and have really lost nothing that was of any importance.

You have all the necessaries of life; and if at any time you were straitened in circumstances and had not food enough to eat, this very poverty was made useful to you, and was upon the whole a benefit rather than a loss.

- 3. Talk of material wealth! Why you gain more thus, if you lose the world and save your soul, than the whole material universe is worth -- really, infinitely more. The loss is as nothing; the gain, infinite.

## REMARKS.

1. You have only to neglect your soul, and its loss is inevitable. The apostle asks, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

This question also is an emphatic one, as if the Apostle had said, It is impossible to escape if we neglect so great salvation.

The fact is, the soul of every unconverted sinner is in a lost state. Without faith in Christ, it is condemned already, under the law, and exposed to eternal destruction. A man need not go about to commit this, and that, and the other heinous sin. He is already a sinner; he is condemned, awaiting his execution; and he has only to remain in this impenitent, unbelieving state, and the loss of his soul is as certain as his existence. Sinner, now remember that if you neglect your soul, and neglect the gospel, your damnation is as certain and as inevitable as if you had already been in hell for a thousand years.

Do not forget this; for a great many persons talk as if -- why, they do not do anything very bad. They do not know, they say, if they should die in their present state, whether God could justly send them to hell. They seem to think it a doubtful question whether they should lose their souls, if they should die in their present situation. Now this is an awful infatuation.

The soul is already in a lost condition, already condemned, already under sentence of eternal death. Sinner, you need only to die instantly, to wake up in hell. Hence you are expected to escape, to lay hold of eternal life, to give all diligence to repent and believe the gospel, and what you do, to do quickly. How, then, can you escape, if you neglect to attend, and that effectually, to the salvation of your soul!

2. It is wise for every sinner to inquire, What are my prospects? Am I likely to be saved; or much more likely to be lost? How is it with me thus far? Have I done anything effectually for the salvation of my soul? Or have I been trying to gain the world while I have neglected my soul? Business men inquire into their business prospects. They calculate the chances for and against them; they look the matter over, examine their books, look into their business relations, and look at their debts and credits, and see how their matters stand.

Now, Sinner, have you ever done this in regard to your soul? You look over your matters in a worldly point of view, to see how much you are gaining or losing; but have you ever looked over your spiritual concerns, to see what they are? Have you cared for your soul? or are you only caring for your body? Are you laying up treasures for eternity or only for time?

3. The folly of neglecting the soul is infinite. I know of no other word than infinite that can express it. There can be no limit to the absolute madness of neglecting the soul.

To save the soul is the great errand of life, the infinitely important concern, the one thing needful, the great business and errand upon which God has sent us into this world. If we attend to the soul, eternity is secure; if we neglect the soul, eternity is lost. And to think of a soul's being ushered into this life, and commanded to prepare for an eternal state; and then to neglect it, to die in sin, and be obliged at last to say, "I have been an infinite fool, I have lost my soul!"

4. It is time to take a stand against the spirit of delay in this matter.

We sometimes see men, in worldly matters, act as if they were in a kind of infatuation. There is some important matter to which they ought to attend; but somehow or other the spirit of delay takes possession of them, and they keep putting it off, and putting it off. Some persons seem to have this infirmity in regard to almost everything of a worldly nature.

They delay, and delay; and delay becomes with them a habit, so that you can really depend on them for nothing. This habit of delay in worldly matters, is sure to bring ruin in its train. No person will ever prosper in worldly matters who contracts this habit of delay in worldly business. Persons are peculiarly in danger of contracting this habit in respect to things which are not congenial to their feelings, things to which they dread to attend.

Now in regard to spiritual things -- the carnal mind being enmity against God, spiritual religion is repulsive to the feelings of the unconverted soul. The mind is set upon worldly gratifications, and to deny these and enter into sympathy with Christ, is that to which the sinner has no heart. Hence the infinite danger of contracting the habit of delay.

Indeed, this is the great sin that ruins the millions -- it is simply this habit of delay.

When very young, they think there is time enough, of course; and as they grow older, they contract the habit of delay more and more firmly, flattering themselves that there is time enough. They always expect, at some future time to attend to their souls. They do not mean always to neglect it; but as it is not congenial to their feelings, they put it off for the present.

Now for this there is no remedy, but for men to set reason to work, as we say, and take a decided stand against the spirit of delay. I say, this spirit of delay; for it seems as if there was a spirit in it, an evil spirit. It is a strange infatuation, a moral insanity that seems to take possession of the soul.

There seems to be no end to this delay, delay, delay.

You talk with a Sabbath School child, and he will put it off; you talk with him when he is a young man, and he will still delay. You talk with him in middle age, and exhort him in an earnest manner -- there is still time enough. Talk with him in the decline of life, and his habit of delay has become so strong, that he will finally put it off till his death-bed. And when he can put it off no longer for years, he will adjourn the question from day to day, and then from hour to hour, till at last he will sink down

to hell under this horrible infatuation of delay.

5. Every man should act in regard to the salvation of his soul, as prudent men do in worldly matters.

Prudent business men do not allow things to be put off where they run a great risk.

Should one of you learn tonight that your whole estate was liable to be lost through some fraud or some defect in your title, and should you understand that if now attended to thoroughly, all might be secure, but that every hour's delay exposed you to the loss of all you have, would you sleep till you had made all secure, if possible? If you would, you are not a prudent man.

Would you allow things to run on in this loose way from day to day? No, indeed! you would not give sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till you had satisfied yourself that all was secure. Now this is prudence in worldly matters. Great interests are at stake; and it is remarkable that a man should be prudent, and wise, and energetic in attending to such matters in such circumstances.

But what is the reason that you are not acting thus in regard to your spiritual concerns? Are you neglecting your soul? Then you know that this is infinite imprudence.

If you should lose your worldly estate, you might, by industry, and economy, and greater prudence, recover yourself; and obtain at least a competency for this life. The loss might not be irreparable; it might not plunge you into endless poverty. But remember that if you lose your soul, the loss is eternal; it is irreparable; there is no remedy for it; there is no recovering yourself; you have lost all that is valuable, and that to all eternity; you have incurred all that is dreadful and horrible, and that to all eternity.

6. What change would a realizing belief in this fundamental truth necessarily secure!

While men profess to believe in the truths of religion, in the worth of the soul, they in fact do not believe it. That is, they do not believe it in such a sense that they realize its truth. They admit it; but they do not truly believe it. It is by them in a certain sense admitted -- in a misty, unrealizing sense; but as soon as this truth is believed in the sense of its becoming to the mind a fact, a reality, it arouses all the energies of the soul. Just think how differently men would conduct themselves, did they believe that every moment's delay exposes them to the loss of the soul.

How serious, how earnest, how devout, how feeling, how tender, how truthful, how honest, would men become! Indeed, it would greatly change all the business operations of the world; and human society would become another affair. Instead of the vast scramble after the world, the lusting after earthly pleasures, the incessant cry for more, and more, and more of earthly good, the world would lose its hold upon mankind in a great measure.

The whole world would take on a type of behavior, of spirit, and life, so fundamentally different from what we now see, that we should hardly recognize this as the same world. Even the Church, did she but steadily realize this great truth, would become so changed as hardly to be known as the same people.

7. But it is maintained by some, that the souls of the wicked will be annihilated at death; or if not at death, that still they will not be immortal, and will not suffer forever. Now suppose this to be true -- which surely, if reason or Revelation are to be trusted, it cannot be -- but suppose that it is true, what then would a man gain if he should gain the whole world, and be annihilated?

Suppose he did not incur eternal death -- as in this case he would not -- still he would lose eternal happiness, eternal glory, eternal holiness and communion with God. He would lose, at least, an infinite amount of good -- and what would he gain? Nothing, of any real value to him.

There would be, in this case, no computing the loss, no possibility of any finite conception of it.

He has lost his existence; it is blotted out; he has no more life, no more consciousness, no more good. Instead of an eternal existence of ever-growing enjoyment, he is cut short; and, like the beast that perisheth, he is lost in annihilation.

8. But let me ask one more question. What are the chances, either in your favor or against you, in this case? How old are you? How many years have you lived in sin? How much privilege, and how much light have you enjoyed? How many times have you resisted your conscience, and the strivings of the Holy Spirit?

How many prayers have been offered for you? and how much has God done that you have resisted and condemned?

Are you aware how great a proportion of mankind that are ever converted, are converted when they are young? Are you not, many of you, at least, past the age that leaves you much room for a rational expectation that you will ever be converted? Have you not already hardened your heart, resisted the Spirit, and gone so far in sin as that the habit of delay has become so fixed, that you stand but a very slight chance of ever being converted?

Now, so far as we see the grace of God taking effect among men, by far the majority of men live and die in sin. Again, of those that are converted, by far the majority of them are converted under twenty years of age. Comparatively few are converted that live on in sin to be forty years of age; and only now and then one in old age is converted. How many chances, then, to one, do you think some of you stand of losing your soul?

Can you rationally expect to be saved any farther than as a mere peradventure, a possibility that you may be? You know that if you make sure of the present moment, you may be saved. But hitherto you have put it off; and are you not likely to put it off?

Some of you may have quenched the Spirit already, may have extinguished His light; you may already be reprobate because the Lord has rejected you for your spirit of delay. But suppose you are not already given up of God, is there much reason to believe you will ever effectually attend to your salvation?

When will you do so?

9. Are not worldly men mad? They call Christians crazy; they say that we are insane. But they know better. They know that if any men have any claim to rationality, it is those who seriously attend to the salvation of their souls.

But I ask the question, are not worldly men insane? Should they treat their worldly interests as they do their spiritual interests, would not any court in Christendom, upon proof, pronounce them insane?

Yes, indeed. Go in to any court, having jurisdiction in the case, and prove that any man treats his worldly interests as sinners treat their spiritual and eternal interests, and the court would pronounce them insane, and grant them a commission of lunacy to prevent them from ruining themselves in a worldly point of view. O that a commission of lunacy could be sued out in the high Court of Chancery above, and men compelled to attend to the salvation of their souls! But this is a question that can never be taken out of their hands. In worldly matters, the earthly courts can take the possessions of a mad man and dispose of them in such a way that he cannot squander them. But in spiritual things, the madness is moral; it is culpable; it is the madness of a moral agent. God will not issue a commission of lunacy to compel him to attend to the salvation of his soul. He will warn him, and urge him, and strive with him; but after all He must leave him free to act for himself, and take the consequences.

O Sinner! take care what you do! and let this question in the text ring in your ears, and murmur in your deepest soul -- "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

And this other question -- "How shall we escape if we neglect so great 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)*.

