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GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

All Things for Good to Those that Love God-- and All Events Ruinous to the Sinner- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures I & II

January 6, 1847

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Text.--Rom. 8:28: "For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

In illustrating the subject presented in these words, I shall,

I. Show what the passage means.

II. Illustrate the manner in which this is accomplished.

III. Notice some particulars as illustrations of this truth.

IV. Show how we know this truth, as the text affirms that we do.

I. The most important question pertaining to our first topic of remark is, Does the text affirm a universal proposition?

- 1. The language of the text is universal. It affirms in an unqualified manner that all things work together for good to God's friends. Now it is a good rule of interpretation to understand scripture as it reads, that is, according to its most obvious sense,--unless the nature of the affirmation, or some circumstances pertaining to it seem urgently to demand a modification of this meaning. All sound-minded men follow this rule in interpreting both the Bible and all other books and documents.
- 2. There is nothing in the nature of the case to limit the meaning of this language. On this point especially there is ample room to enlarge very greatly--but my time will not permit.
- 3. There is nothing in the context which demands any limitation, but much on the contrary which favors the universal construction.
- 4. There is nothing anywhere in scripture that conflicts with this, understood as a universal truth. On the contrary the Bible throughout teaches us that every thing in the whole plan of God's universal government conspires to this result. All is adapted to befriend his people and to promote their highest good. God is evermore controlling all things for the good of his children. He is their great and good Father.

II. The manner in which this result is accomplished.

This point deserves special consideration, because there are many things, affecting true Christians, which in their present operation seem to work together for their evil and not for their good.

It would require many sermons to investigate this subject thoroughly. At present I can only sketch a few leading principles.

The highest well-being of moral agents depends upon their holiness. This is perfectly obvious. Their holiness, moreover, is conditioned upon knowledge. There can be no holiness in intelligent being without knowledge, and holiness can advance only as knowledge advances. In fact, holiness is nothing else but conformity of heart to knowledge, so that of course there must be knowledge or there could not be holiness. Hence knowledge is both the condition and measure of holiness.

Consequently every thing that is a means of knowledge is also a means of holiness. Whatever gives

moral agents a knowledge of themselves will if they are holy in character increase their holiness, for they would cease to be holy if they did not use their knowledge to increase their holiness.

Now all events that occur are providential;--that is, they occur under the universal government of God, and occur as they do either because the hand of God controls and shapes them, or because his wisdom permits them to occur as they do, rather than interpose to prevent them. Hence all events reveal God. No event can possibly occur which shall not teach moral agents something concerning God, or themselves, or something useful that they need to know. These events also teach us very much that reveals our relations to God, and hence our duties towards him. And these are precisely the things that are requisite to augment the blessedness of intelligent moral agents.

These remarks apply especially to all those events that fall directly within the range of our present knowledge. But things not within our present knowledge are so related to things that are, as to have a remote bearing upon us, and hence will ultimately come to be known to us. It is probably not too much to presume that all events that ever did or ever shall occur in this world will ultimately be known to all the people of God, and hence will have an important bearing upon their holiness and highest well-being.

III. I am to specify some particulars which serve to illustrate the doctrine of our text.

- 1. What we call mercies work out the good of those that love God. For if men love God, these mercies quicken their love and gratitude. Every real Christian knows this. It is a precious part of his daily experience.
- 2. What we call rebukes have also the same tendency to good. Though they may seem evil, yet are they really among the good things that flow to us from the hand of our great Father. They serve to increase our knowledge of God. They show us his faithfulness and assure us that his heart is thoroughly set upon correcting all in us that is wrong--and strengthening all that is right.

The rebukes of God's providence naturally serve to increase our virtue, and hence are often among the very best things God can give us.

- 3. Again, the crosses of saints work together for their good. Those very things that disappoint their plans, and frustrate their schemes are often among the indispensable things for their real and highest welfare. They are the means by which God breaks them off from their own ways and shows them that they must not have any ways of their own at all. While men are in a state in which they can be crossed, they of course need more discipline. You may recollect the remark made by Dr. Payson that since he had given up his own will and quite lost it so as to have no will of his own, he had not known a single disappointment. He was perfectly satisfied with every thing just as God arranged and ordered it, for he had no other will than God's. Now God is seeking to produce such a state of mind in his children that they will say--"I want only to do this or that according to the will of God. Nothing pleases me except what pleases Him. I want to learn His will before I have any special preference of my own. Then if His apparent will changes, I am perfectly pleased, for His will is always best."

Now this state of mind should extend to all events wherein the special will of God is not

known by revelation. Hence crosses are exceedingly well calculated for doing good to God's people and are most kindly and wisely designed for this end. We are not to suppose that it is agreeable to our Father to perplex and distress us; but it is agreeable to Him to discipline and chasten us, because he knows that the results are so precious.

It often happens that persons come to see the truth of this in their own case. Then they say, "Now I see how well it has been for me to be disappointed, and how good and wise my Heavenly Father has been in doing it." When I have seen men eagerly set upon some earthly good, I have said to myself, "They need to be disappointed, and God will doubtless do it." I shall think it strange if He does not. If they are real Christians and God loves and cares for them as his children, He will surely bring them under discipline to break off their hold upon the world and save their souls.

- 4. Afflictions should doubtless be accounted among our good things. The Bible teaches this in many passages. One says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." Another testifies-- "I know that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me." Afflictions therefore are not to be regarded as evidences of peculiarly great guilt in those who experience them. The case of Job seems to have been designed to teach us this lesson. They rather evince the special faithfulness of God. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."
- 5. All those trials which we call temptations are to be accounted among these good things. They very often establish our virtue and greatly develop and strengthen our graces. For this manifestly they were intended. Hence the Apostle says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience."--James 1:2-3.
- 6. The responsibilities which God throws upon His children are among the things that work for their good. We may perhaps be made to groan out under these things, and possibly stagger under their burden, yet shall they work out good at last. They are perhaps the very things that are needed to develop our powers. It may be that nothing less than these burdens would make us feel our need of God's daily support, and thus discipline us to daily dependence.

Moreover, some perhaps are naturally so sluggish that God could not save them if He should not lay upon them almost crushing responsibilities.

- 7. Our own infirmities work out our good. How often do we see this! Physical infirmities and frailties teach us our dependence upon God, and bring us to walk softly with Him and before Him. They often compel us to exercise sobriety, temperance and self-control, and in this way often become our greatest blessings.

Paul had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, sent to buffet him. What it was we are not told, but the result plainly shows that it was greatly useful to him.

Now all such things are in certain points of view greatly trying and painful, yet in other respects, they are exceedingly valuable. And when we shall ultimately come to see all their bearings, we shall see that Infinite Wisdom sent them, or at least permitted them,

and then overrules them for our good.

- 8. Our very mistakes often work for our good. Said a pious man once who had fallen into a great error--"Now that is just like me" --that is just like me. I see it now. I might not have seen myself as I am, if that had not happened."
- 9. The same is doubtless true of the sins of those that love God. Peter's great sin in denying his Lord seems to have been greatly blessed--that is overruled so as to work out good to him. So with the sins of the children of God generally. Yet they have no excuse for themselves and are none the less guilty for committing them, because God is so good and wise as to counteract some of their evil tendencies and bring good out from them instead of unmingled evil.
- 10. The infirmities, mistakes and sins of others are among the things that work for our good. Who does not know how much we are benefited by witnessing the sins of others! No thanks indeed to them that their sins are a warning to us, nor can this circumstance lessen their guilt.

Also the afflictions of others often work out great good to us. The afflictions which we see others suffering may and often do have much the same beneficial result as if we endured them ourselves. So wonderfully has God framed the social economy of our nature and of society.

Finally, it is plain that all events that occur under the providence of God serve to promote the good of His people.

But we must hasten to enquire,

IV. How is it that we know this.

The Apostle says, "We know that all things work together for good to those that love God." Now we cannot suppose he meant to say merely that all inspired men know this. His meaning doubtless is that all Christians may know it. For,

(1.) Reason affirms that it must be so under the government of an infinitely wise and benevolent God. No one can take just views of the character of God without seeing that he must have had a plan for governing this world--must have foreseen all possible and actual results--and must have provided that nothing should occur in vain. That is, He must have determined to prevent the occurrence of all those events which He could not overrule for so much good as on the whole to justify Him in permitting their occurrence. These conclusions are either the direct affirmation of reason, or they are arrived at by the plainest inferences from its intuitions.

(2.) But it is a truth of revelation, and Christians may know it because the Bible teaches it. The Bible every where directly or indirectly teaches that God is overruling all events for the good of the righteous.

(3.) Experience and observation universally teach the same thing. Who does not know

that all real Christians can say this. Looking over their past history, they can say-- "This and that--yea all these things, have been made, through divine mercy and wisdom, to work out my good and fit me for more usefulness here, or, at least for more glory hereafter." It is instructive to see how many of the saints of God can set up here their Ebenezer,. and testify-- "Hitherto has the Lord helped me!"

REMARKS.

1. We may blame ourselves for that which upon the whole we do not regret. For example, a man may commit a sin, and of course, he is guilty and inexcusable for this, and ought most surely to blame himself for committing it. His intention is all wrong and he is entirely to blame for it. Yet on the whole it may not be a matter of regret that the sin viewed as an event, occurred, because God has brought a vast amount of good from it.

As a full illustration of this point, take the sin of Satan in tempting Judas and the sin of Judas in yielding to the temptation to betray Christ. This transaction in both Satan and Judas was all evil and nothing else but evil; and was none the less a sin and a great sin because the Lord overruled it for so much good. Yet this good result has been infinitely great. The event therefore is not to be regretted on the whole though Satan and Judas are none the less to be blamed because the wisdom and the love of God have brought so much good from their sins.

You will all recollect the view given in the Bible of the sin of Joseph's brethren in selling him into Egypt. "Be not grieved, said he, nor angry with yourselves that ye sent me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life." They had sinned, but God had educed so much good from their sinful act, that it was now fit that they should rejoice in those manifestations of wisdom and love.

2. God may blame us and often does, when perhaps on the whole He does not see cause to regret the occurrence of the event. Doubtless God blamed both Judas and Satan, yet He does not regret on the whole that great event towards which their sin directly contributed. Referring to this event, Peter said, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain." Their hands were none the less wicked for the good which the Lord brought forth as a result from their evil doing. And it surely may be that the event as a whole even, including the sins of Judas and of the wicked Jews, is not regretted by the Most High.

3. It does not follow from this that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good; or that God could not bring about a still greater good if all his creatures were perfectly obedient. It cannot be shown that in every instance where sin occurs, more good results than would have resulted if holiness had been in its stead. Indeed we cannot conceive of any higher blessedness to the created universe than universal holiness and its consequent happiness. Now if in every instance when sin occurs, holiness under the same circumstances had occurred, the result would of course be universal holiness, and a degree of blessedness, than which we can conceive of none higher. But it is not my intention now to enter at length into this often disputed subject.

I am aware that those who maintain that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good argue thus;--all holiness depends upon knowledge of God; many truths respecting the character of God could never have been revealed if sin had not occurred; hence sin is necessary to the greatest amount

of holiness and consequently of real good.

This reasoning would have weight if the case were such that creatures could not be holy without such knowledge of God as nothing can reveal but the occurrence of sin. But none can suppose that such can be the case of moral agents under the government of God. The argument therefore only shows that, sin having occurred, the Lord makes the wisest possible use of it--a fact which none can reasonably doubt. It altogether fails to prove that the state of the universe is better now than it would have been if all had persevered in holiness under the light they had.

But it is especially to my purpose to maintain that God's overruling all things for good to his people forms no apology or excuse for sin. No thanks to the guilty sinner that a God of infinite wisdom can and does manage to work good out of his intended evil. No thanks to him;--he is altogether evil and wicked. He does not use it for good himself, nor mean it for good, no more than the devil did in the case of Judas, or than Judas himself did. Suppose that Christ's death, and his death in precisely that manner, was the very best thing that could have occurred;--no thanks to Judas or Satan for that; they meant only evil, and all the resulting good must be ascribed to God alone.

Hence it does not follow that we should do evil that good may come. In fact, it is in the nature of the case impossible that a man should do evil for the sake of its resulting good. It is impossible that a man should sin for the sake of doing good thereby, and with this design. Suppose a man to say--let me sin on now for this is the way to do good! Pause a moment and ask--What is sin? Surely it is not doing anything with the design of bringing about good; no but, sin is mere selfishness--is always a trampling down of the greater good for the sake of a far less good for myself. Sin, therefore, never can have the greatest good for its object. Every act that has the greatest good for its design, object or motive, is holiness, not sin.

I am fully aware that the doctrine of my text has been greatly abused. Men have said, "Because sin results in good, therefore let us sin on, and leave it with God to bring out the good which he needs sin in order to educe." But this is an outrageous perversion of this precious truth. The fact that God can overrule sin for good affords not the least mitigation of the guilt of any sinner. Every sinner is just as guilty as if all sin tended to evil only and as if God had no power or disposition to bring any good out of it whatever.

4. It often happens that we are unable to see how the providence of God will result in our ultimate good. Events that affect us or our friends look utterly dark and we seem almost compelled to say with Jacob, "All these things are against me." All this must be evil to me and mine, and cannot work out my good. But in such cases we are bound as believing children to dismiss the views which sight gives us, and fall back upon faith. We must now believe God, who says "All things shall work together for good to those that love me." Let all my children believe that and trust their own kind Father!

Now it is not wonderful that in a world like this, framed for a state of trial, events should often assume such an aspect as this. It results in the trial of our faith. And here apply those most pertinent and consoling words of Jesus Christ-- "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Howmuchsoever, then, the events of divine providence may make us smart, or throw us into perplexity,. still let us fall back upon the unfailing promise-- "All things shall work together for

good to those that love God."

5. We see why we should give thanks for all things, and why every thing that occurs is, in reference to God and His agency in it, [a] matter of gratitude. We see why we should thank Him for every thing he brings about directly by his providence, and also for every thing He suffers to be done by moral agents, Himself not preventing them from doing it. We should thank God for not preventing the murderous deeds of Judas and of Satan; for He had wise and good ends in view in not preventing them. Under the circumstances, the Lord did the very best thing he could in permitting those wicked beings to go on, and consummate the murder of his own dear Son.

The same is true of every sin that occurs in the universe. So far as God has any thing to do with it, we thank Him, because He does all things well; always doing even in respect to sin the very best thing that under all the circumstances of the case, He can do. For this then, we thank Him. But for what sinners do, we cannot thank them, for they intend only evil. They are to be cursed--not thanked for their sins, and cursed none the less because God always overrules their sin to make it result in just as much incidental good as He can.

6. We see why it is that we are required to rejoice always. Why should not saints rejoice always in all that God is doing? Many of these things, I know, often seem for the present, not joyous but grievous, yet in their remote and ultimate bearings, they always work out great good, and the greatest good which under the circumstances God could effect. A man who is sick may need to resort to many unpleasant medicines; if maimed, he may need for his best good a painful surgical operations; and these things, though sad in many of their bearings, are yet good in their ultimate results, and therefore it is cause of gratitude, when they are skilfully and successfully performed. So with many of the events of life. They come, unmingled with sorrow, but good in their ultimate result, and it would be a great mistake to estimate them only by their present evil, leaving out of view the greater resulting good.

7. It sometimes happens that persons are in this state; "I know," say they, "that 'all things work together for good to those that love God;' but I am thrown into such circumstances of perplexity and darkness that I cannot tell whether I am one of those who love God or not. The only emotions of which I am sensible are those of pain and agony. I am full of distress, and I can scarcely think of any thing else. Especially I cannot feel on any other subjects but my own trials and sufferings."

Now all such persons should look at the attitude of their will and not of their emotions. If they would do so, they would see through this mist, and their perplexities would no longer harass them.

How often have I seen individuals in great distress, under deep trials and perplexities; but strengthening themselves in the Lord their God, they came forth from those scenes of tempest as the sun breaks out from an ocean of storms, all the more glorious for the long and fearful hiding of his beams. So the tried and believing Christian comes forth from his sorest trials, having learned lessons concerning God unknown to him before. Now he sees that his trials are among the greatest blessings he ever received from the Lord.

8. What ever befalls the saints is to be rejoiced in. Trials may befall our friends,--perhaps our own

children; but if we have evidence that they love God, we may rejoice in every thing that occurs to them. What if afflictions come--wave after wave; all things shall issue in their ultimate good;--this is as sure as the word and the government of the eternal God. Even if we should see such a case as that of Job--and none perhaps ever looked more dark--yet even in view of such a case we should rejoice; for we might know that in every similar case as in that, God prepares his afflicted child for a double blessing.

So also in the trial of Abraham's faith in the matter of offering up Isaac. In this case some things are developed, not often noticed--things pertinent to the case of some Christians at the present day. You recollect, God commanded him to go and take his own son and put him to death, and then offer him as a sacrifice on an altar. What! Abraham might naturally have said, "what! God command me to kill my own son? The devil might do this--but how can it be that God should do it? Surely I never heard any thing like this in the ways of God before! This contradicts every thing I have ever seen or heard of the Lord Jehovah! He commands me to commit one of the most horrid crimes that ever can be committed. And then this is my son of promise, and God has said that out of him he would make a great nation."

Surely this was one of the most severe trials. It threw Abraham upon his naked faith. He had no resource but to fall back upon simple trust in the Lord, and say, God has spoken--even the wise, the good, the just God, and now let me trust his name! He can raise my Isaac from the dead if need be in order to fulfill his promise.

Thus he stood his ground, and passed this great and fearful trial. O, how useful and blessed were the results of this trial to Abraham, during all his future life and through all his glorious existence. How gloriously has this example of faith stood out before all the children of God from that day to this! How many have had their faith quickened, directed, edified, by this great example! And perhaps it is not too much to suppose that sooner or later all the angels of heaven will be blessed by the far-reaching influence of this example of trusting and obeying God.

It is a great mistake to overlook these future results of our trials. We ought ever to keep them full in our view. Doing so is indispensable in order to be able to rejoice continually in the Lord, and in all the events that occur under his all-pervading providence. If we fail to do so, how many things will disconcert us and make us stumble to the sore wounding of our peace with God and of our confidence in him.

In continuing this subject I shall show that the opposite to the doctrine of the text is true of the wicked; --all things shall work together for their evil.

LECTURE II.

January 20, 1847

ALL EVENTS RUINOUS TO THE SINNER--No. 2

Text.--Rom. 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

In my further discussion of this subject I shall attempt to show that all events conspire to ruin the obstinate and finally impenitent sinner.

This is not directly taught in the text, but is implied in it, and is abundantly taught us in the Bible.

It will be my object,

I. To show that this is and must be a universal truth.

II. To point out some particulars that will illustrate it.

III. To show that we really know this to be true, even as we know its opposite to be true of the people of God.

I. To show that this is and must be a universal truth.

It may be shown to be so in a great many ways. For example, thus: Moral obligation is conditioned upon knowledge and is always equal to knowledge. Whatever, therefore, increases knowledge increases guilt, if obligation is not complied with but the individual continues to resist the light and its claims.

One other point. Increasing guilt augments the sinner's ruin. The more guilty, the greater his punishment. Hence whatever augments his guilt conspires and conduces to aggravate his ruin.

It cannot be doubted a moment that all events that fall under the sinner's observation, or become known to him by any means whatever in this life, will increase his knowledge of God and of course his duty and obligation. All these will consequently conspire at once to augment his guilt and damnation.

All those events that remain unknown to the sinner during his present life may become known to him in the future life, and then may work out their legitimate results--increased knowledge--augmented guilt--more aggravated doom.

II. To point out some particulars that will illustrate it.

This whole point may be rendered more plain and practical by some detail of illustration.

All the gifts of providence conspire to work out the sinner's ruin.

- 1. Of these the first is the gift of existence. The existence which God gives the sinner is a blessing to him if he uses it aright, but a fearful curse to him if he abuses it. But he does abuse it in the worst possible manner so long as he lives in sin. Just so long, he devotes the existence which God gives him to rebellion against his Maker--and what can be a greater and fouler abuse of existence than this! Every moment of life spent in sin must therefore prove a curse to the sinner. It goes to aggravate his guilt and of course, his ruin.

And no sinner can avoid this fearful result, if he will persist in sinning. Exist he must--he cannot prevent it--cannot put an end to his existence--for death only changes its place and mode--does not bring it to an end. Live, then, each sinner must, and if he will go on in sin, he must go on augmenting his guilt and consequent ruin.

- 2. Reason is another gift of providence--a precious blessing if devoted to God--if used legitimately and faithfully according to its nature and design;--but if trampled down, abused, set at naught--if its demands for right and for God are all repelled and denied--how fearful the guilt which its possession and abuse involves!

In what respect do you differ from the lower orders of created beings? They have understanding; they have will;--but they lack reason;--this then is your pre-eminence above them. And will you abuse this and bring yourself quite down to a level with them in your conduct? How can you do so without awful, shameful, damning guilt?

- 3. Conscience is one of the functions of the reason. Did your conscience ever stand up and accuse you? Did it ever set your sins in order before your eyes and make you see and feel their perfect guilt? If so, then you know something of that deathless worm of your future cup;--you have had a little foretaste of the horrors of self-accusation and self-condemnation. O there is nothing in your existence so terrible as this! If you allow yourself to trample down this law of God developed in your reason, you will arouse against your own soul a fearful power within your own bosom that you can never resist or appease! It will be heard--that dreadful tone of self-accusing--self-reproach;--what can ever allay the pungency and anguish of its tortures!
- 4. Next look at what are most commonly intended by the gifts and bounties of providence--the things on which you are wont to lay much stress. Suppose you have health and wealth, friends and education;--what are they? Are they working together for your good--your real, highest, eternal good? This turns entirely on the question whether they lead you to repentance, gratitude and love to God, or whether they only yield you the pleasures of sin for a season, augment your mercies, your ingratitude, your guilt and consequent damnation. You may call these things good, and if you would use them in serving God and let them lead your heart to Him in love and gratitude and sweet obedience, they would be truly a good to you; but if you remain a sinner, you are of course the greater sinner for having received and abused these greater mercies, and they can only work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of damnation. You suffer the Lord to load you down with his blessings here, and then abuse them so that they shall become only as mill-stones about your neck in the lake that burneth with fire forever. You know it must be so, and cannot be otherwise.

So it will be with all those things by which you amuse yourself and seek to augment your enjoyment in sin. You count yourself most happy if you can secure things;--but Oh! your final disappointment when you shall see how they are converted into curses to your soul! These very amusements may have diverted your attention from saving your soul. They may have fanned and fed the fires of unhallowed passion--they may have made you ten fold more the child of hell than otherwise you could have been, and thus they may have exceedingly augmented your final ruin.

- 5. Again, what you deem your good fortune results in the same augmentation of guilt and damnation. You deem yourself most fortunate if you can secure earthly good;--but O! how do these things--abused--work out your deeper damnation! How they help to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath! Your Father sent that good fortune to turn your eye toward his kind hand--to touch your heart with gratitude, and lead you to repentance;--you abuse and pervert every thing, and swell the fearful measure of your awful doom!

Let the wicked go on his way according to his heart's desire, filling his cup with earthly joy, and finding all things prosper in his hand;--yet saith the word of Jehovah--"Say ye to the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

- 6. Yet again, the trials and the curses that fall to the sinner's lot shall all have the same result. You complain of these things as if they worked out only evil and as if God designed them for no other end; but in this you altogether fail to comprehend the gracious designs of your Heavenly Father. He sends you earthly good to melt your heart and you abuse it and wax more hard in sin;--then why should he not change his hand and at least make trial, of possibly reverses and disappointments will not bring you to reflection; or to see whether He cannot tear you away from your idols and make you search for the living God. He does so; but all is of no avail; you only fret and complain. Not so do Christians. If God sends them mercies they are grateful;--if chastisements, they are submissive. But how different is it with you! If God sends you mercies, you are thankless. You sit every day at the table which your Heavenly Father spreads and loads down for you; but you can do it each day with a heart as cold as a stone. It seems to be entirely out of the question for you to think of recognizing your Father's hand, or your own augmented obligation to serve and please him.

If on the other hand He sends afflictions upon you, you complain and harden, not humble, yourself under his chastising hand. O, you ought to understand that these trials are a part of the discipline with which God seeks to subdue your soul to his scepter. And you ought to know that if his efforts fail, it is all evil to you, utterly and infinitely evil. Oh, indeed! if all the resources of infinite power, wisdom and love fail to change you, what can be more desperate than your case or more guilty than your heart?

- 7. Your whole life of impenitence is filled up with such results. Does the Lord take away your friend? Then you repine; you feel that there never was a case so aggravated as yours, and you will not bow under the hand that chastises you. How unlike the Christians who when smitten looks up to his own Father's hand, and bows beneath it; smiles, loves, trusts, adores. But not so do you accept the punishment of your iniquity. Every effort the Lord makes to reclaim you renders you only more hardened, more guilty, more fitted for destruction.
- 8. It is indeed grievous beyond expression to see how these things work and what results are produced by all the varied discipline which the Lord employs to save your soul. It is painful to see that all these efforts only serve to harden your heart, until the Lord is forced to say of you as in Isaiah 1 of the ancient Jews;--"Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." The original in this passage seems to convey the idea that they had been chastised till from the crown of the

head to the soles of the feet there was no longer a sound spot where another blow could be inflicted. The resources of chastisement were exhausted, and still no good result followed. So it sometimes happens that a parent will chastise his child until he has no hope that mere chastisement can do any good. This seems to be the state of mind which the Lord expresses respecting the Jews. And He often has occasion for this state of feeling towards impenitent sinners. He watches all round their path, searches out all the avenues of their heart; tries now mercies and then afflictions, and follows up the alternations perhaps year after year through a long life--but all in vain. Ah, worse,--often infinitely worse than in vain, for it only serves to augment the sinner's fearful guilt and final condemnation. Strange that sinners do not see that this is true and in the nature of the case must be. Strange you do not see that sickness, losses, judgments of every kind are designed to subdue your refractory spirit, and of course if they only serve to make you the more refractory, the result can be nothing less than a fearful aggravation of your guilt and ruin.

Thus all your sins, instead of being overruled for your good, serve only to heap up a mountain load of guilt, and swell the miseries of your doom.

- 9. Again, the deeds of others, good, or bad, only enhance your guilt. I beg of you to look a moment at this fact. You live among professed Christians. If they are faithful to God and to your soul, and adorn the gospel by their life, this only hardens your heart, for you resist all the influences of their entreaties, prayers, tears and godly life. On the other hand, if they dishonor the gospel, you take offence--you stumble over them, and become the more bold and hardened in your sins.

Now you know it would not be thus in either case with Christians. If they fell in with truly pious brethren, their hearts would be refreshed and their piety quickened; if with bad professors, the result would be to quicken them to pray, to revive their own love for Zion and their sympathy for the cause of Jesus Christ.

So also, if Christians are persecuted, it only works good to them, teaching them forbearance and forgiveness of injuries; training them to love their enemies and bless those that curse them.

Far otherwise with you, sinner. In fact, you never know what it is to be benefited by any conduct, good or bad, of your fellow-beings. All works only evil to you. Indeed, every thing works out evil and only evil to you. The law of God--the gospel of God--the smiles of providence or its frowns; all possible conduct of your fellow-men and all possible varieties in the course of the Lord towards you--rain or sunshine--storm or calm--prosperity or adversity--each and all serve only the one dreadful end with you--that of augmenting your guilt, and of course your final doom of misery.

Dreadful consideration! that your character should be such that all possible events work evil and evil only to your soul! If you had a full and a just view of your case as it is, you might truly say--"Whatever happens is all evil to me. Whatever the times are--times of revival, times of plenty, or times of famine--all is evil to me; times of health, or times of pestilence--all is alike, evil to me. All conspire to fill up the measure of my guilt and

aggravate my eternal doom."

Often in looking at this have I felt as if I should sink--the view is so saddening, so awful; sinners seem so stubborn and so refractory, and it is so obvious and sure that every thing that occurs to the sinner must work evil and evil only to his guilty soul.

- 10. Again, all those providential circumstances that befall others, result alike in evil, to the sinner. If his neighbors are sick, or if they are well, this sinner will abuse the warning voice of God through his providence. Perhaps the sinner thinks that such things as these are not going to affect his own case, but they surely will, and inevitably must. They are the voice of God to him, and he must hear or refuse. Continuing in sin, he does the latter, and of course augments his own guilt and damnation.
- 11. It matters not how these events may affect your neighbor, whether for good or for evil; they are in either case evil and only evil to you. The same event may work good to another; yet shall it be only evil to you. That funeral we attended this morning when a dead child of God was laid in the grave of the saints; they may have touched your sympathies, and you may have been moved to pity over so early a death, but you might much more reasonably pity yourself. When I see sinners at a funeral, I know they are often saying to themselves-- "I am glad that I am not there in the place of the dead;" and yet it may be better far that you should die now than that you should be spared any longer, Beyond all question it is better for you to die and be laid in the grave in the place of the first death that occurs rather than that you should live longer to make every death you hear of, only an augmented curse to yourself. O, how horrible is this!
- 12. So also to live in a land of Bibles and Sabbaths and enjoy instruction and choice influences enough to make you an Angel of light:--and yet abusing and perverting them all, you convert them into the worst form of curses. All the means God uses to save you are working evil to you. God means them for good, but you pervert them into evil. God would bless you, but you will curse yourself by the very means He uses for blessing you. He would fain make all the events of his providence work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, but despite of the endeavors of infinite love, you persist in working out of all these things your own deeper damnation.

III. We know it to be true that all things work out evil to the sinner.

- 1. Though the text does not affirm this, yet the Bible does, and so does reason, and experience and observation. It is a truth that every man's reason must affirm. Every man knows that the occurring events of God's providence increase his knowledge of God and hence his obligation to love and obey him. Of course with this increase of light comes also increasing guilt in resisting its claims, and in the train of increasing guilt comes augmented ruin.
- 2. Now every sinner must know all this to be true. There is not a sinner in this house whose reason does not affirm each step in this process of argumentation to be true, and true as to himself.
- 3. This leads me to say that every man's own experience will testify that until he turns from sin

by real repentance, all the course of divine providence serves only to harden his heart. He knows that the longer he resist and the more light he has to oppose, the more hardened he becomes.

- 4. So all our observation of others testifies. We see the sinner growing old in his sins--resisting one call of God after another, breaking through every restraint, setting at naught the repeated warnings of divine providence;--and we always see such a sinner waxing fearfully hard of heart against God and the voice of his own conscience. I have often been shocked to see how fearfully hardened sinners sometimes become by resisting a long succession of means and influences adapted to bring them to repentance.
- 5. The truth we have been illustrating is evinced also by ample testimony from the word of God. The Bible seems every where to assume that all things do and shall work evil to the sinner who will not repent. Being "often reprov'd and still hardening his neck, he shall be suddenly destroyed and that without remedy."

REMARKS.

1. I remarked in my sermon this morning that Christians sometimes blame themselves for things the occurrence of which upon the whole they do not regret; so wondrously will God overrule those evil deeds of theirs for great good. Thus God will not leave them to bitter and eternal regret over the consequences of their failures or their sins, though they must forever condemn their own sins and blame themselves for sinning. It is one of the great mercies of the Lord towards them that He does not leave them under the pang of everlasting regret in view of unmingled evil resulting from their misdeeds.

But sinners are left to the double anguish of everlasting self-blame, and eternal regret over the utterly ruinous results to themselves of all their sins. Every event of their lives has been sin and only sin, and all have worked out the legitimate results of sinning, all evil to them and evil only and continually. Since they would not repent and would not open their hearts to the healing and restoring influences of God's providence and Spirit, the Lord could not counteract the natural tendency of sin on their heart to augment its moral hardness and consequently their own eternal ruin.

2. Sinners have never any good reason to rejoice as respects their own prospects. In fact, remaining in sin, they have nothing in which they can reasonably rejoice. Those very events of their lives in which they are most apt to rejoice will probably be those which above all others will fill them with anguish hereafter. Those very seasons of prosperity in which you rejoice most now may be your bitterest grounds for regret and sorrow when you shall come to see all their legitimate results upon your character and doom. So long then as you continue in sin, so long you have absolutely nothing to rejoice in. The more you rejoice and deem yourselves prosperous and happy in earthly good, the more will these very things pierce and sting your soul through all your future existence.

3. Others have no good reason to rejoice in any thing that befalls you, so long as you remain in an impenitent sinner. The only valuable hope they can have is that it may lead you to repentance. This failing, all will work for evil and only evil to the sinner.

It often happens that parents rejoice in events that befall their ungodly children. They rejoice perhaps to see them well settled in life, or peculiarly fortunate in business. But none of these things are ever looked upon on their true light except through the medium of the great truth we are now considering. Whatever leaves them still in their sins works fearful ruin to their souls, and the more joy it seems to bring, the more fearful will be its power to curse and embitter all their future being.

4. While it is true that no event, however grievous in itself, can befall a Christian which should make us grieve for him, it is equally true that no event can befall the sinner in which we are not compelled to grieve for its results upon him. Nothing can happen to him that will not fearfully curse him, if he still persists in sin. It may be ever so well adapted for his improvement, for his best good, for his happiness;--yet shall he pervert it all to the greatest of evils to his soul.

See that young man about going to college. It might prove a blessing to him, but it will prove to him only a curse. It will increase his knowledge, and thus augment his guilt. It will give him greater pre-eminence and influence; but if he improves this for greater sin and mischief, it will curse him at the last with tenfold destruction.

Another has married him a wife--beautiful, accomplished, pious;--so much the worse for him. It only serves to swell the sum of his guilt and ruin. He may live in a land of Sabbaths, and in the midst of revivals;--so much the worse; he may have pious, praying parents;--so much the worse.

5. Sinners need not stumble at the trials of the people of God. No more or greater trials shall befall the Christian than are indispensable as means to work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The truth is, God's people need these trials. They must be carried through many a fiery ordeal. What then? Let them rejoice, for all shall work out their good. Let them be sick;--it shall do them good. Let them lose their property;--it shall be for their good. Let their friends die;--all shall augment their good. Every Christian may say--whatever befalls me, the Lord will cause it to result in my greater good. Let a mighty wave dash over him, lifting high its crest and sweeping him along with torrent power--it does him good. Let another come with mighty force--it does him good. Another still;--all is good. There he stands amid those mountain-waves, happy in his God, for he believes that all shall work out good to his soul. This is only the discipline his Father sends him, and why should it not cheer his soul to think how all shall work out his eternal good.

Right over against this, every thing is occasion of grief and dismay to the sinner, no matter how joyous his soul in its approach. Whatever befalls me, he must say if he sees rightly--all is evil to me. Be it storm or sunshine; whether I lie down in peace, or take my bed of pain and languishing, all is prospectively evil to my soul!

How awful this condition! But it is even so; and the intelligence of every being in the universe affirms that these results are all right and as they should be.

6. All events to all eternity will make the impassable gulf between saints and sinners only the more deep and broad. The fact is, these two classes are oppositely affected by all the providences of God, and doubtless will be so, by all that shall occur to them throughout eternity. God has so constituted the human mind that in its selfish state, all right events shall work out only evil; while in its renewed state

all shall work out good. Difference of character lays the foundation for this wide contrast in the result. Only the sinner himself is ultimately to blame that all things work evil to him. If he will do evil, then shall all things be converted into evil in their results to him.

7. It is infinite folly for man to estimate events only according to their present and most obvious bearings and relations. The result of this course is and always must be that men will constantly and fatally deceive themselves. If every sinner in this house could see all the final results of the events that are transpiring now, he would stand amazed and transfixed with horror. What! he would say--is untold anguish and horror coming out of this cup of my earthly joy? Oh, if sinners could clearly see these things, they would not so often bless themselves for their good fortune.

8. The arrangements of providence in respect to both saints and sinners are made with a design to illustrate the character of God. All the events of this life and all that occur throughout eternity also, will all serve to illustrate the perfections of Jehovah. Not to have arranged all things for this end would have been a great mistake--but God never makes such mistakes. A wise and glorious end in view characterized all he does.

9. It is the perverse course of the sinner and nothing else but this that makes the providences of God work out evil to him. Sinners are wont to pity themselves, and say, alas for me, for God has made my lot such that all things work only evil to me! Let all sinners know that the fault is wholly and only their own, and that God has made the best possible arrangements for their good. It is only their perversion that makes the best things become to them the worst.

And sinners cannot help knowing this. After all their complaining and fault-finding, they know that they have no plea to make against God. You know, sinners, that it is all your own fault that every day is not a blessing to you--that every sun-rising and sun-setting does not come fraught with mercies to your soul. You know that you might place yourself in such an attitude towards God that all his providences should work out your real and highest good. You are now an enemy of God; but you know you may at once become his friend. I can make the appeal to every sinner's own conscience. You know that if you would not harden your own heart, all the events of divine providence would result in your good. They would bring admonitions that you would give heed to with the greatest profit to your soul, and would throw you into scenes of discipline which could not fail to prove a blessing to you. Only yield your heart to the providences, the truth, and the Spirit of God, and you would become a child of God, and all things would work your good.

I can well remember how it seemed to me before my conversion. I then saw most clearly that all was good to the Christian;--if he was sick, all was well to him;--or if in health, it was a real blessing. If he lives, it was to enjoy the friendship of God;--if he died it was to enter upon his eternal reward. Being himself a friend of God, evil could no sooner befall him than it could befall his great friend, Jehovah. Nothing could be an evil to him, for if he were ever so much afflicted, it would only make him the more self-denying, meek, patient, heavenly.

But right over against this--the opposite in every respect, is the case of the self-hardening sinner. He puts on an air of self-confidence and enjoyment;--he would fain make you think that sinners are the only happy men on earth. He dances along his way for a brief season, but it is on slippery places;--and

suddenly his feet slide--and he is in hell! So transient is all the bliss that sin and Satan give. It is only a lure to endless woe.

If sinners only appreciated their real condition, they could not rest in sin one moment. All their levity would appear infinitely shocking to themselves. I recollect to have seen several cases in which sinners were in such a state of mind that they could not rejoice in any possible event. There is one lady among you who could tell you a great deal about this state of mind--a state of darkness, despair and anguish, in which every thing was clearly seen to be evil and only evil, and all things however apparently prosperous were working out evil and nothing else to her soul and her eternal state. If the sun shone sweetly, all was gloom, for that God who smiled through those sunbeams was her enemy. Each storm only reminded her of Jehovah's wrath against the sinner. If friends loved her and sympathized with her, all was evil;--she had no friends above, and deserved none here below. So of every thing that could occur. All was evil, undiluted, unassuaged.

But when her soul came into the light and glory of the gospel, and found peace and joy in God, the whole scene was at once perfectly changed. Her husband has told me that he never knew her to fret or repine since that blessed hour. I asked her once what was the secret of her remarkable equanimity. She replied--"Once I escaped from the jaws of hell; from the dark iron castle of Giant Despair. Ever since I have looked upon myself as a miracle of grace, and I cannot regard any of the little troubles of life as anything to be compared with those indescribable agonies. I am often amazed to see how small a thing can disturb the equanimity of saints, or raise the mirth of sinner."

If sinners are going to continue in their sins, they may as well bid farewell at once to all peace and joy; and welcome anguish and black despair to their souls. Let them say at once--All things are evil and nothing but evil to me. Let them give themselves up to universal mourning, no matter how soon, or how utterly. "Hail everlasting horrors, hail!"

But there is only one way of escape--open yet a moment longer. Turn to God; yield your whole soul to him; accept his Son your Savior, and his service as your choice for life;--then you are a child of God and his foe no longer. Then all things are yours--and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. You are welcomed at once to the bosom of that glorious family above, and the possession of the riches and joys of heaven is all your own.

But if you remain in your sins, as from present appearances you are likely to do, all events and all agencies possible will work out your destruction. Every step you take brings you nearer the vortex of that awful whirlpool--the great Maelstrom of perdition. "Your steps take hold of hell."

Heart Condemnation, A Proof that God Also Condemns-- and An Approving Heart, Confidence in Prayer- No.'s 1 & 2

Lectures III & IV

February 17, 1847

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Text.--1 John 3:20: "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

Our text suggests as our leading subject of investigation, the CONDITION OF OUR ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD. It implies that if our heart condemn us, God will much more condemn us, being greater than our heart, and knowing all our evil things, a part only of which are distinctly noticed and remembered by ourselves.

In discussing this subject, I shall,

I. To avoid mistakes, show what is not implied in our heart's condemning us;

II. What is implied in our heart's condemning us;

III. Show what is not implied in the last clause of the text; "God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things."

IV. What is implied in this language.

I. It is obvious that the term "heart" as here used is synonymous with conscience.

- 1. The term is not used as it is frequently elsewhere in the Bible in passages where moral character is predicated of it, in which cases it plain means the will, that is, the voluntary and moral power. In our text it evidently means, the conscience, that power or faculty which approves or condemns our own moral acts and states of mind.
- 2. In reference to conscience it seems important to remark that it is not a mere feeling of any kind. Persons not unfrequently confound remorse, or a feeling of pungent sorrow, with conscience; and hence if they feel no remorse, no painful self-accusation, they say and really think that they have no conscience in reference to those points. Thus they quite overlook the fact that conscience may really condemn, and yet they may care so little for its condemnation that it shall occasion no painful emotions, no agony of feeling.

In fact such persons are in a great mistake, for they entirely misapprehend the true nature of conscience. Conscience is not a function of the sensibility as they seem to suppose, but of the reason. Its province is to apprehend intuitively the relations of right and wrong; and not directly to create either pain or pleasure. It is indeed true that in every well balanced and unperverted mind, pain and pleasure do accompany the decisions of conscience; pain its condemnation and pleasure its approval. Yet these are only secondary and not primary results of its action. The mind may come into such a state that no pain shall follow the

most deliberate and aggravated violation of conscience.

- 3. This fact, it should be well considered, by no means proves that the individual has no conscience on those subjects, nor that his conscience does not disapprove his actions. So far as I have observed this mistake is very common, and certainly, wherever it exists, is very injurious and often fatal. It ought to be well understood that conscience does often condemn although no painful feelings of remorse ensue, because the man is so hardened that his sensibility is in a state of torpor. In this state he may imagine that his conscience approves, or at least does not condemn him;--a mistake of most dangerous nature.

Again, a condemning conscience does not necessarily imply that state of mind commonly called conviction of sin. The difference between the two turns mainly upon the greater degree of thought, reflection, and consideration which belongs to the latter. Conscience may condemn us without our reflecting upon the nature of our conduct and deliberately comparing it with God's revealed law. But conviction is thoughtful. A convicted state implies that the individual is thinking and has thought upon his own guilt; that he turns the subject over and over in his mind and compares it with the demands of God's righteous law. Herein lies an important distinction between a state of real conviction for sin, and a state in which there exists only the tacit condemnation of conscience.

Indeed it seems to be the fact that in a great majority of cases, when the conscience condemns a man he is not conscious at the time of thinking deliberately on the subject. His reason tacitly assumes that he is wrong, without his being conscious at the time of making such an assumption;--that is, he does not think at all of the assumption, and consequently is unconscious that he makes it; but that he really does make such an assumption may be evident in various ways; for example, he may condemn another for doing what he does himself, and this would show that he knows the rule and knows that his violation of it is wrong. He notices this wrong in others but does not notice it in himself; and yet the reason all the time silently assumes and knows that the course he is taking is wrong.

As an illustration of this; a man may be selfish; his conscience may silently assume that he is wrong, and so certain may he be at the bottom of his mind that he is wrong that if he should be told and should know with certainty that he should die in five minutes, he would discover in a moment that he is not prepared to die, but is in his sins, and is altogether wrong in his moral state before God.

- 4. Every person will see that this is the process of the mind in respect to conscience if he will notice the operations of his own. Let him also consider how often a person may know himself to be wrong without being distinctly conscious that he knows it. Every one should make the difference between knowing an act or state of his own to be wrong, and being conscious of the fact that he knows it.
- 5. Hence we see that our conscience may condemn us when we are not conscious of its condemning sentence. We fail of being thus conscious, however, not because its decisions are in their nature occult, not appearing at all upon the field of consciousness;--but because we feel so

little interest in its decisions as not to notice them when they are made.

II. If our conscience condemns us, we shall not have the present evidence of pleasing God. The sweet consciousness that we are accepted of God will be wanting.

- 1. On this point it is important to distinguish between being sure we do not please God, and not being sure that we do. The clear, present evidence of pleasing God is lacking in both of these states; though in the latter the individual may not be conscious that his state does displease God. But even he lacks the present consciousness of pleasing God--the clear testimony of his conscience approving his own state.

Again, it of course implies being conscious of not having the decided approval of conscience. Persons are often in a state in which they feel no approval of conscience, and are not sensible of any disapproval.

Again, our heart's condemning us implies a perhaps unnoticed assumption that all is not right between the soul and God. This is often assumed, as has been said, without the mind's taking notice enough of it to fasten the truth thoroughly on the mind.

For example, suppose a man is suddenly arrested by the prospect of death just before him. It may be that this prospect will waken up his mind to see that his heart is by no means right with God. All previous decisions of his conscience to this effect have been unnoticed; now all suddenly they start forth upon the field of distinct consciousness and the man sees and knows with the clearness of mid-day brightness that his soul is utterly condemned before God. He might have known the same thing before, but he did not care enough to notice the affirmations of his own conscience.

- 2. Careless sinners often live in such a way that they think they are in the main prepared to die; but let them for once see that they certainly shall die, and their view of their case may be suddenly and utterly changed. Before this, they may have seemed to be in a certain sense honest: but let them come to this last, decisive test--to this really honest hour, and a new aspect may come over their former apparent honesty.

Suppose I sit down to converse with a man, and say to him--Friend, are you prepared to die? I think so, he says, indeed I suppose so. He seems honest perhaps. Now let him be seized with a fit--not affecting his reason, and let him know that in a few hours he must die. He wails out in agony of soul--"O my God, have mercy on me, for I am utterly unprepared to die."

- 3. Now what does this change in his views on this point reveal? Plainly this--that all along he had not been prepared to die, and that his conscience had condemned him; but he did not come to its light--did not listen to its condemning voice.

Hence we see that it is of the greatest importance that men should get at the deepest convictions of their conscience--those inner convictions that will spring out upon the field of most distinct and vivid consciousness in the honest hour of approaching death. Let all living men be awake to this danger lest they fatally deceive themselves by taking up the

mere floating thoughts of a careless hour as the testimony of their conscience to their real state before God.

Again, persons often attempt to pray, and the conviction comes over their mind that they can get no access to God. They find it impossible to expect that God will hear them. They know they shall not have the blessing they ask for. They have not by any means the same confidence of obtaining the blessing as I should have of getting a dollar if any honest man had promised it. Suppose I had promised a student here a dollar if he would call on me for it. I tell him to come to my study at such a time and that I have the money ready for him; would he not expect it? Would he have any doubt? Would he find it impossible to have faith that he should realize his money on fulfilling the conditions?

- 4. Now what is the reason men will not believe God? If you will get at this, you will learn something of the utmost importance to you to know. But to learn it you must let your enquires go down into the bottom of your heart. There you will find the conviction that you are not in a state of acceptance with God.

Have not many of you, brethren and sisters, had such an experience as this;--You have gone to the Lord in prayer to ask for things that you really needed; but your inward frame, your state of heart is such and your life too that you know you cannot honestly expect he will hear you. You go to the throne of grace and kneel down for prayer--but you dare not, and cannot expect he will answer you. You may indeed sometimes go so carelessly as not to be aware sufficiently to consider your own state, and look at all after the probability of being heard, you find you have none at all, for the reason that your own heart condemns you altogether as not being right with God.

Again, when our conscience condemns us in any one thing, God does not accept us in any thing. It is impossible that our heart should be wrong in one thing and right on another at the same time. If conscience condemns in one thing, it does really for the time being in every thing. It condemns us as not right before God, and shows conclusively that we are radically wrong. For the word of God has definitely decided that "whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." This cannot mean less than that he who offends in one point shows himself to have the spirit of disobedience, and shows that of course that law must utterly condemn his moral state of mind. The decisions of conscience harmonize with this.

- 5. Some persons are prone to regard this as a hard saying, and are sorely averse to admitting its truth. They know that conscience condemns them in some particular things, for they feel a stinging remorse in view of them; but since they feel no such remorse in reference to other things, they suppose that in the latter their conscience is clear. But if they have good reasons to feel remorse for some things, they may know that if they were to go down to the bottom and see the real state of their hearts, they would find themselves condemned universally.

Again, if our conscience condemns us, we may know that in the deepest conviction of our own minds we are not honest before God. A man may not see, on the broad face of his own consciousness, that he is dishonest; but if his conscience does not really condemn

him in one thing he may rest assured that he has no well-grounded confidence of being really honest before God. Let the inner voice of his own conscience be heard, and it will tell him so.

Again, conscience condemns us when, though we do not see any thing outward that is wrong; yet we are not conscious of being inwardly right with God. We may think ourselves very right indeed in our external morality, and yet we may know very well that we are not right in regard to zeal, faith and love--not right in our state of mind towards our enemies--not right in our sympathy with Christ for the salvation of a dying world.

- 6. Now when our conscience really condemns us in one of these latter things, we may know that all is not right; indeed we may know that nothing is really right as seen and estimated by a holy God.

It is remarkable how often men think they are right in some things though they know they are wrong in many other things at the same time. For example, a merchant may think that in his trade he is right, and has a right heart altogether. He thinks he is honest, accommodating, and perfectly honorable in his business transactions. Yet he knows that he does not feel for the souls of his customers--does not love their souls, and really seek for their best spiritual good. Oh, he is little aware how much he wrongs his neighbor by not having this love for his soul, and by consequently withholding all proper care and effort for his spiritual good. he might far better, if the thing were possible, save his neighbor's soul, and yet rob him at his counter of every dollar of his money, then give him all his just coppers, but withhold from him all just sympathy, care and effort for his soul's salvation.

Yet how often does such a merchant say--I have a conscience void of offence in my business affairs; I deal in perfect honesty with all men, and no man ever accuses me of wrong;--and yet you know you have not a clear conscience in respect to their souls; you know you do not love them and pray for them, and honestly labor to bring them to real salvation.

Just so in all the common relations of life. I have mentioned the case of the merchant only to illustrate the principle; not because it applied in his case only, or in his case more frequently than in any other. The mechanic who works for other men in his appropriate business does his work well and according to contract and expectation;--now, he says, he has a conscience void of offence. But has he indeed? Has he? Has he done all his duty to the man's soul? Has he done even any part of this branch of his duty? Will his conscience rise up and say, Well done? Will you say--I have done my work well, and what have I more to do? So much, and so far is in itself right; but is this all? Have you no other responsibilities?

Besides, even that you did not do from love to his soul; nor from regard to the just demands of your conscience, or of your God. How very far then are you from having answered the proper demands of an enlightened conscience!

But I must pass to speak,

III. Of what is not implied in the last clause of the text; "God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things."

- 1. It does not imply that God of course justifies us if we justify ourselves. This cannot be implied, for if it were, then must God justify some of the most wicked men on earth.
- 2. Nor again is it implied that God condemns us, if we really live up to and according to all the light we have. It would militate against every feature in the character of God to suppose this to be the case.

IV. We are to state, lastly, what is implied in this clause of our text.

- 1. It implies that God often sees wrong in us when we do not notice it ourselves. "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." We know but little in the sense of being conscious of our knowledges, and may fail to notice many of the evil things in our spirit, temper, heart and life; but God knows them all; and hence may condemn where we do not.
- 2. It is also implied that if we are not clear that we are right, God does not accept us. If we see good reason apparently to doubt, we have great reason to presume that God sees abundant reasons to condemn. How can God believe that we are right, if we do not believe it ourselves?

Again, if in anything, we can see that we are not right, God sees that we are right in nothing, but are for the time being wrong in everything. He sees that we are not conformed to his will heartily in anything. This seems to follow conclusively from the remarks we have made and the points we have adduced already.

REMARKS.

1. Many see that they are wrong in some things, and yet upon the whole imagine that they are acceptable before God. They notice the fact that conscience does condemn them, but they flatter themselves that these particular things are exceptions to their general conduct.

This is a very common case, yet nothing can be more dangerous, or more delusive. It is throughout and utterly a deep delusion. You are entirely deceived if you think you are right in the main, while in any particular thing whatever, you know that you indulge in transgression. There can be no such thing. It is impossible there should be a right state of heart as to obedience to God while you can allow yourself in some particular form of sin.

2. Some will not admit the conviction of being themselves wholly wrong, although they know themselves to be wrong in some things. The longer I live and hear persons converse the more I am satisfied that many would yield up their hopes at once if they would only admit that they are in truth wholly wrong, and that this must be the case because they do in fact indulge themselves in some things which their conscience condemns. Indeed there can be as I think no doubt that their hope rests not on the conviction that they honestly seek to do God's will in all things, but on the belief that they

mean to do right in some things, while they know they do not in fact obey, and honestly seek to obey in all things. Their hope rests on a little supposed good; while in fact some admitted evil ought to banish their hopes forever. And yet they hold on to their hopes as if their salvation depended not on faith in Christ, but on faith in their old hope. Often are they to be seen indulging in that evasive state of mind in which the conviction is struggling to come forth that all is wrong with them, but they resist it and will not give it scope for even a fair examination.

Some who are now in this state of mind were once really converted. Once they knew what it is to have that peace of God which passes all understanding. They lay down at night absorbed in the love of God, and awoke in the morning to renew his praises. Then they knew the prevalence of prayer; but now they have lost their power with the Lord. They may not know clearly the point where they departed from the Lord, but the fact of grievous backsliding is most obvious, to all but themselves. They are so blind and have so much deep spiritual apathy that they do not perceive how far and how fearfully they have fallen! They think, or at least seem to think that all is fair and about right with them, although they see very plainly that if they make religious visits, or pray, they have no power with either God or man. Yet they will not ascribe this lack of power to the fact that they are really fallen from being right with God. Such persons should read the epistles sent to the seven churches of Asia. They should study those epistles thoroughly and with much prayer, and mark the traits of character which distinguished those of them that were sorely backslidden. Then they should also observe the counsel given by our Lord to those who had forsaken him and were puffed up with pride. Mark how he shows them that they are really poor and wretched, blind and naked.

3. Others have the conviction pretty thoroughly lodged in their minds that they are wrong, but they hide it as much as they can from both themselves and their neighbors. I have known wives who would for years conceal from their pious husbands the fact that they knew they were not Christians. Sometimes they will continue in this state till their souls are wrung with such unutterable anguish that they are compelled to come out and break down in humiliating confessions.

I once knew a most striking case in the city of New York. A deacon from another church came to our meeting. For a long time, he had been anxious about himself, full of apprehension that he was not right, and yet so proud that he would not make his fears about himself known to others. His wife was an active and ardent-souled Christian. Inasmuch as he had sought for years to maintain in her view a fair reputation for piety, and withal thought much of her good opinion, he could not endure that she should know his present conviction. So dreadfully did this matter agitate his mind and so fearfully did his pride of heart rise up that as he afterwards told us, he was often tempted to take her life to save himself the mortification of disclosing his real character to her eye. At length he came one evening to our meeting and left at its close under horrible convictions, his soul writhing in agony. All the way home his wife continued talking to him about the sermon, delighted herself with such searching truth. He came home, all the way making up his mind that when he reached home, he would at least take his horsewhip and flog his wife! He entered the house, walked the room; was just stepping up to reach his whip for the purpose when his heart smote him so horribly that his hand fell; he dropped on his knees; confessed his horrible purpose; opened all the rottenness of his heart; cast himself at her feet and told her what a hypocrite he had been; and in short utterly broke down and become a new man in Christ Jesus.

How can such persons ever get into the kingdom of heaven with such satanic pride?

4. It sometimes happens that such persons are too proud to confess their sins freely even to God. Before Him, even, they will say; "If I am wrong, I pray to be forgiven"--whereas if they were truly honest, they would say--"O Lord, I know I am altogether wrong." But they will not even confess to God; how much less to their neighbors!

5. Many are so taken up with looking at their own outward conduct that they do not look narrowly into their own hearts. They seem to suppose that if the outward man is all right, the inner man is right of course.

Now, brethren, suppose conscience be questioned respecting your real state of heart. I do not ask whether you live in outward, open sin; I do not ask whether your conduct tramples on civil law, or on the external proprieties of a Christian life; I presume it does not; but let us come and call for an examination of the inner man. Let us call up conscience to the bar, and say--Conscience, are you satisfied with the state of that heart? Are you satisfied that God is as much loved, adored, believed in, and served as he should be? Are you satisfied that all is right towards God? And still further, are you satisfied that this mind is in a right state towards all the brethren? Is there real, genuine, warm-hearted brotherly love? How have you found the facts to be touching this point?

And now before I close, I have one request to make. It is that when you retire from this place, you would go by yourself and solemnly, honestly, question your conscience. Make the questioning patient and thorough. Say, "O my conscience, are you satisfied with my state before God? Can you approve it, in view of the light I have had, or could have had, of God's holy law and hence of my duty?"

I beseech you to do this without fail. I beg you to do it for my sake,--and for your own sake. Honestly push the question at the tribunal of conscience--"Is my heart right before God?" I will not ask you to look for those loathsome evidences of sin that appear so often among the ungodly. For the present at least, you may leave those points out of the account, and ask for the state of your heart as it stand before the great and holy God! And if when conscience is thus catechised respecting your heart, it condemns you, how much more will God condemn you?

Do you want to know whether you are justified before God? How easy from the point where we now are is it to answer this question. For if your conscience does not justify you, how much less can God?

But if on the other hand, your conscience, in all points approves, then we need to ask, Is your conscience enlightened, honestly dealt with, and does it speak with a firm yet modest tone?

But these points would anticipate the remarks I am to make in the afternoon in speaking upon the two verses next following our text this morning, and of course I shall defer them to that occasion.

LECTURE IV.

March 3, 1847

AN APPROVING HEART, CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER--No. 2

Text.--1 John 3:21, 22: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

In resuming and pursuing this subject, I shall,

I. Show that if our heart does not condemn us, we have and cannot but have confidence toward God that He accepts us;

II. That if we have confidence that our heart does not condemn us, we shall also have confidence that God will grant us what we ask;

III. Show why this is so, and why we know it to be so.

I. If our heart really does not condemn us, it is because we are conscious of being conformed to all the light we have, and of doing the whole will of God as far as we know it.

- 1. While in this state it is impossible that with right views of God's character, we should conceive of him as condemning us. Our intelligence instantly rejects the supposition that he does or can condemn us, that is for our present state. We may be most deeply conscious that we have done wrong heretofore, and we may feel ourselves to be most guilty for this, and may be sure that God disapproves those past sins of ours, and would condemn us for them even now, if the pardoning blood of Christ had not intervened. But where pardon for past sins has been sought and found through redeeming blood, "there is therefore no more condemnation" for the past. And in reference to the present, the obvious truth is that if our conscience fully approves of our state, and we are conscious of having acted according to the best light we have, it contradicts all our just ideas of God to suppose that He condemns us. He is a father, and he cannot but smile on his obedient and trusting children.
- 2. Indeed, ourselves being in this state of mind, it is impossible for us not to suppose that God is well pleased with our present state. We cannot conceive of Him as being otherwise than pleased; for if he were displeased with a state of sincere and full obedience, he would act contrary to his own character; he would cease to be benevolent, holy, and just. We cannot therefore conceive of him as refusing to accept us when we are conscious of obeying his will so far as we know it. Suppose the case of a soul appearing before God, fully conscious of seeking with all the heart to please God. In this case the soul must see that this is such a state as must please God.
- 3. Let us turn this subject over till we get it fully before our minds. For what is it that our conscience rightly condemns us? Plainly for not obeying God according to the best light we have. Suppose now we turn about and fully obey the dictates of conscience. Then its voice approves and ceases to condemn. Now all just views of the Deity require us to consider the voice of conscience in both cases as only the echo of his own. The God who condemns all disobedience must of necessity approve of obedience, and to conceive of him as disapproving

our present state would be in the conviction of our own minds to condemn him.

- 4. It is therefore by no means presumption in us to assume that God accepts those who are conscious of really seeking supremely to please and obey him.

Again let it be noted that in this state with an approving conscience, we should have no self-righteousness. A man in this state would at this very moment ascribe all his obedience to the grace of God. From his inmost soul he would say--"By the grace of God, I am what I am;" and nothing could be farther from his heart than to take praise or glory to himself for anything good. Yet I have sometimes been exceedingly astonished to hear men and even ministers of the gospel speak with surprise and incredulity of such a state as our text presupposes--a state in which a man's conscience universally approves of his moral state. But why be incredulous about such a state? Or why deem it a self-righteous and sinful state! A man in this state is as far as can be from ascribing glory to himself. No state can be farther from self-righteousness. So far is this from being a self-righteous state, that the fact is, every other state but this is self-righteous, and this alone is exempt from that sin. Mark how the man in this state ascribes all to the grace of God. The apostle Paul when in this state of conscious uprightness most heartily ascribes all to grace. "I laboured," says he, "more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that is in me."

- 5. But, observe that while the Apostle was in that state, it was impossible that he should conceive of God as displeased with his state. Paul might greatly and justly condemn himself for his past life, and might feel assured that God disapproved and had condemned Saul, the proud persecutor, though he had since pardoned Saul, the praying penitent. But the moral state of Paul the believer, of Paul, the untiring labourer for Christ--of Paul whose whole heart and life divine grace has now moulded into its own image--this moral state Paul's conscience approves, and his views of God compel him to believe that God approves.

So of the Apostle John. Hear what he says "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." But here rises up a man to rebuke the apostle. What! he says, did you not know that your heart is corrupt, that you never can know all its latent wickedness, that you ought never to be so presumptuous as to suppose that you "do those things that please God?" Did you not know that no mere man does ever, even by any grace received in this life, really "keep the commandments of God so as to do those things that are pleasing in his sight?" No, says John, I did not know that. "What," rejoins his reprover, "not know that sin is mixed with all you do, and that the least sin is displeasing to God!" Indeed, replies John, I knew I was sincerely trying to please God, and verily supposed I did please him and did keep his commandments, and that it was entirely proper to say so--all to the praise of upholding, sanctifying grace.

Again, when a man prays disinterestedly, and with a heart in full and deep sympathy with God, he may and should have confidence that God hears him. When he can say in all honesty before the Lord--"Now, Lord, thou knowest that through the grace of thy Spirit my soul is set on doing good to men for thy glory; I am grieved for the dishonour done to

Thee, so that rivers of water run down my eyes, because men keep not thy law," then he cannot but know that his prayers are acceptable to God.

- 6. Indeed no one, having right views of God's character, can come to him in prayer in a disinterested state of mind, and feel otherwise than that God accepts such a state of mind. Now since our heart cannot condemn us when we are in a disinterested state of mind, but must condemn any other state, it follows that if our heart does not condemn us, we shall have, and cannot but have confidence that God hears our prayers and accepts our state as pleasing in his sight.

Again, when we are conscious of sympathizing with God himself, we may know that God will answer our prayers. There never was a prayer made in this state of sympathy with God, which he failed to answer. God cannot fail to answer such a prayer without denying himself. The soul, being in sympathy with God, feels as God feels; so that for God to deny its prayers, is to deny his own feelings, and refuse to do the very thing he himself desires. Since God cannot do this, he cannot fail of hearing the prayer that is in sympathy with his own heart.

- 7. In the state we are now considering, the Christian is conscious of praying in the Spirit, and therefore must know that his prayer is accepted before God. I say, he is conscious of this fact. Do not some of you know this? Ye who thus live and walk with God, do you not know that the Spirit of God helps your infirmities and makes intercession for you according to the will of God? Are you not very conscious of these intercessions made for you, and in your very soul as it were, with groanings that cannot be uttered? Your heart within pants and cries out after God, and is lifted up continually before him as spontaneously as it is when your heart sings, pouring out its deep outgoings of praise. You know how sometimes your heart sings, though your lips move not and you utter no sound;--yet your heart is full of music, making melody to the Lord. Even so, your soul is sometimes in the mood of spontaneous prayer, and pours out its deep-felt supplications into the ears of the Lord of Hosts just as naturally as you breathe. The silent and ceaseless echoing of your heart is, Thy kingdom come--Thy kingdom come; and although you may not utter these words, and perhaps not any words at all, yet these words are a fair expression of the overflowing desires of your heart.

And this deep praying of the heart goes on while the Christian is still pursuing the common vocations of life. The man perhaps is behind the counter, or in his workshop driving his plane, but his heart is communing or interceding with God. You may see him behind his plow--but his heart is deeply engrossed with his Maker;--he follows on, and only now and then, starts up from the intense working of his mind and finds that his land is almost finished. The student has his book open to his lesson; but his deep musings upon God, or the irrepressible longings of his soul in prayer consume his mental energies, and his eye floats unconsciously over the unnoticed page. God fills his thoughts. He is more conscious of this deep communion with God than he is of the external world. The team he is driving or the book he professes to study is by no means so really and so vividly a matter of conscious recognition to him as is his communion of soul with his God.

In this state the soul is fully conscious of being perfectly submissive to God. Whether he uses these words or not, his heart would always say--"Not my will, O Lord, but thine be done." Hence he knows that God will grant the blessing he asks if he can do so without a greater evil to his kingdom than the resulting good of bestowing it. We cannot but know that the Lord delights to answer the prayers of a submissive child of his own.

Again, when the conscience sweetly and humbly approves, it seems impossible that we should feel so ashamed and confounded before God as to think that he cannot hear our prayer. The fact is, it is only those whose heart condemns them who come before God ashamed and confounded, and who cannot expect God to answer their prayers. These persons cannot expect to feel otherwise than confounded, until the sting of conscious guilt is taken away by repentance and faith in a Redeemer's blood.

Yet again, the soul in this state is not afraid to come with humble boldness to the throne, as God invites him to do, for he recognizes God as a real and most gracious father, and sees in Jesus a most compassionate, and condescending high Priest. Of course he can look upon God only as being always ready to receive and welcome himself to his presence.

Nor is this a self-righteous state of mind. O, how often have I been amazed and agonized to hear it so represented! But how strange is this! Because you are conscious of being entirely honest before God, therefore it is maintained that you are self-righteous! You ascribe every good thing in yourself most heartily to divine grace, but yet you are (so some say) very self-righteous notwithstanding! How long will it take some people to learn what real self-righteousness is? Surely it does not consist in being full of the love and Spirit of God; nor does humility consist in being actually so full of sin and self-condemnation that you cannot feel otherwise than ashamed and confounded before both God and man.

II. We are next to consider this position, namely, that if our heart does not condemn us, we may have confidence that we shall receive the things we ask.

- 1. This must be so, because it is his Spirit working in us that excites these prayers. God himself prepares the heart to pray;--the Spirit of Christ leads this Christian to the throne of grace and keeps him there; then presents the objects of prayer, enkindles desire, draws the soul into deep sympathy with God; and now--all this being wrought by the grace and Spirit of God, will He not answer these prayers? Indeed He will. How can He ever fail to answer them?
- 2. It is a remarkable fact that all real prayer seems to be summed up in the Lord's prayer, and especially in those two most comprehensive petitions--"Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The mind in a praying frame runs right into these two petitions, and seems to centre here continually. Many other and various things may be specified; but they are all only parts and branches of this one great blessing--Let God's kingdom come, and bear sway on earth as it does in heaven. This is the sum of all true prayer.

Now let it be observed that God desires this result infinitely more than we do. When

therefore, we desire it too, we are in harmony with the heart of God, and He cannot deny us. The blessing we crave is the very thing which of all others He most delights to bestow.

- 3. Yet let it be noted here that God may not answer every prayer according to its letter; but He surely will according to its spirit. The real spirit is evermore this--"Thy kingdom come--thy will be done;" and this, God will assuredly answer, because he has so abundantly promised to do this very thing in answer to prayer.

III. Why will God certainly answer such a prayer, and how can we know that He will?

- 1. The text affirms that "whatsoever we ask we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." Now we might perhaps understand this to assign our obedience as the reason of God's giving the blessing sought in prayer. But if we should, we should greatly err. The fundamental reason always of God's bestowing blessings is his goodness--his love. Let this be never forgotten. All good flows down from the great fountain of infinite goodness. Our obedience is only the condition of God's bestowing it--never the fundamental reason or ground of its bestowment. It is very common for us in rather loose and popular language to speak of a condition as being a cause or fundamental reason. But on a point like the present, we ought to use language with more precision. The true meaning on this point undoubtedly is that obedience is the condition. This being fulfilled on our part, the Lord can let his infinite benevolence flow out upon us without restraint. Obedience takes away the obstacle;--then the mighty gushings of divine love break forth. Obedience removes the obstacles;--never merits, or draws down the blessing.
- 2. If God were to give blessings upon any other condition, it would deceive multitudes, either respecting ourselves or himself. If he were to answer our prayers, we being in a wrong state of mind, it would deceive others very probably; for if they did not know us well, they would presume that we were in a right state, and might be led to consider those things in us right which are in fact wrong.

Or, if they knew that we were wrong, and yet knew that God answered our prayers, what must they think of God? They could not avoid the conclusion that He patronizes wrong doing, and lifts up the smiles of his love upon iniquity;--and how grievous must be the influence of such conclusions!

It should be borne in mind that God has a character to maintain. His reputation is a good to himself, and he must maintain it as an indispensable means of sustaining his moral government over other creatures. It could not be benevolent for Him to take a course which would peril his own reputation as a holy God and as a patron and friend of holiness and not of sin.

- 3. God is well pleased when we remove the obstacles out of the way of his benevolence. He is infinitely good, and lives to do good and for no other purpose--for no other end whatever except to pour forth blessings upon his creatures wherever He can without peril to the well-being of other creatures under his care and love. He exists for ever in a state of entire consecration to this

end. Such benevolence as this is infinitely right in God, and nothing less than this could be right for him.

Now, if it is his delight and his life to do good, how greatly must he rejoice when we remove all obstacles out of the way! How does his heart exult when another and yet another opportunity is afforded him of pouring out blessings in large and rich measure. Think of it, sinner, for it applies to you! Marvellous as you may think it, and most strange as it may seem--judged of by human rules and human examples, yet of God it cannot fail of being always true that He delights supremely in doing you good, and only waits till you remove the obstacles;--then would his vast love break forth and pour its ocean tides of mercy and of grace all around about you. Go and bow before your injured Sovereign in deep submission and real penitence, with faith also in Jesus for pardon, and thus put this matter to a trial! See if you do not find that his mercies are high above the heavens! See if anything is too great for his love to do for you!

And let each Christian make a similar proof of this amazing love. Place yourself where mercy can reach you without violating the glorious principles of Jehovah's moral government; and then wait and see if you do not experience the most overwhelming demonstrations of his love! How greatly does your Father above delight to pour out his mighty tides of blessings! O, He is never so well pleased as when he finds the channel open and free for these great currents of blessings to flow forth upon his dear people!

A day or two since I received a letter from the man in whose behalf you will recollect that I requested your prayers at a late church prayer meeting. This letter was full of precious interest. The writer has long been a stranger to the blessedness of the gospel; but now he writes me--"I am sure you are praying for me, for within a week I have experienced a peace of mind that is new to me."

I mention this now as another proof of the wonderful readiness of our Father in heaven to hear and answer prayer. O what love is this! To what shall I compare it, and how shall I give you any adequate view of its amazing fullness and strength? Think of a vast body of water, pent up and suspended high above our heads, pressing and pressing at every crevice to find an outlet where it may gush forth. Suppose the bottom of the vast Pacific should heave and pour its ocean tides over all the continents of the earth. This might illustrate the vast overflowings of the love of God; how grace and love are mounting up far and infinitely above all the mountains of your sins. Yes, let the deep, broad Pacific ocean be elevated on high and there pent up, and then conceive of its pressure. How it would force its way and pour out its gushing floods wherever the least channel might be opened! And you would not need to fear that your little wants would drain it dry! O, No! you would understand how there might be enough and to spare,--how it might be said--"Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it;" how the promises might read--"Bring ye all the tithes into my store house, and prove me now herewith, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out blessings till there be not room enough to receive them." The great oceans of divine love are never drained dry. Let Christians but bring in their tithes and make ready their vessels to receive, and then, having fulfilled the conditions, they may "stand still and see the salvation of God." O how those mountain

floods of mercy run over and pour themselves all abroad till every capacity of the soul is filled! O how your little vessels will run over and run over--as in the case of the prophet when the widow's vessels were all full and he cried out--O hasten, hasten--"is there not another vessel?" Still the oil flows on--is there not another vessel? No more, she says; all are full; then and only then was the flowing oil stayed. How often have I thought of this in seasons of great revival, when Christians really get into a praying frame, and God seems to give them everything they ask for; until at length the prophet cries out--Is there not yet another vessel? O bring more vessels, more vessels yet, for still the oil is flowing and still runs over;--but ah, the church has reached the limit of her expectation--she has provided no more vessels;--and the heavenly current is stayed. Infinite love can bless no more; for faith is lacking to prepare for, and receive it.

REMARKS.

1. Many persons, being told that God answers prayer for Christ's sake, overlook the condition of obedience. They have so loose an idea of prayer and of our relations to God in it and of his relations to us and to his moral government, that they think they may be disobedient and yet prevail through Christ. How little do they understand the whole subject! Surely they must have quite neglected to study their Bible to learn the truth about prayer. They might very easily have found it there declared, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination." "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." All this surely teaches us that if there be the least sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer. Nothing short of entire obedience for the time being is the condition of acceptance with God. There must be a sincere and honest heart--else how can you look up with humble confidence and say--My Father; else how can you use the name of Jesus, as your prevailing Mediator;--and else, how can God smile upon you before all the eyes of angels and of pure saints above!

When men come before God with their idols set up in their hearts, and the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face, the Lord says, "Should I be inquired of at all by them?" Read and see. (Ezekiel 14:3-5) The Lord commissions his prophet to declare unto all such:--"I, the Lord, will answer him that cometh thus, according to the multitude of his idols." Such prayers God will answer by sending not a divine fullness, but a wasting leanness; not grace and mercy and peace, but barrenness and cursings and death.

Do not some of you know what this is? You have found in your own experience that the more you pray, the harder your heart is. And what do you suppose the reason of this can be? Plainly there can be no other reason for it than this;--you come up with the stumbling-block of your iniquity before your face, and God answers you according--not to his great mercies, but to the multitude of your idols.

Should you not take heed how you pray?

2. Persons never need hesitate because of their past sins, to approach God with the fullest confidence. If they now repent, and are conscious of fully and honestly returning to God with all their heart, they have no reason to fear being repulsed from the footstool of mercy.

I have sometimes heard persons express great astonishment when God heard and answered their

prayers, after they had been very great and vile sinners. But such astonishment indicates but little knowledge of the matchless grace and loving kindness of our God. Look at Saul of Tarsus. Once a bitter and mad persecutor, proud in his vain Pharisaism;--but now repenting, returning, and forgiven--mark, what power he has with God in prayer. In fact, after penitence, God pardons so fully that, as his word declares--he remembers their iniquities no more. Then the Lord places the pardoned soul on a footing where he can prevail with God as truly and as well as any angel in heaven can! So far as the Bible gives us light on this subject, we must conclude that all this is true. And why? Not because the pardoned Christian is more righteous than an angel; but because he is equally accepted with the purest angel, and has besides the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ,--all made available to him when he uses this all-prevalent name. Oh, there is a world of meaning in this so-little-thought-of arrangement for prayer in Jesus' name. The value of Christ's merits is all at your disposal. If Jesus Christ could obtain any blessing at the court of heaven, you may obtain the same by asking in his name--it being supposed of course that you fulfil the conditions of acceptable prayer. If you come and pray in the spirit of Christ; his Spirit making intercession with your spirit, and your faith taking hold of his all-meritorious name, you may have his intercessions before the throne in your behalf, and whatever Christ can obtain there, He will obtain for you. "Ask, therefore, now"--so Christ Himself invites and promises--"ask and receive, that your joy may be full."

O, what a vantage ground is this upon which God has placed Christians! O what a foundation on which to stand and plead with most prevailing power! How wonderful! First, God bestows pardon, takes away the sting of death; restores peace of conscience and joy in believing; then gives the benefit of Christ's intercession; and then invites Christians to ask what they will! O, how mighty! how prevalent might every Christian become in prayer! Doubtless we may say that a church living with God, and fully meeting the conditions of acceptable prayer might have more power with God than so many angels. And shall we hear professed Christians talk of having no power with God! Alas, alas! Surely such surely know not their blessed birthright. They have not yet begun to know the gospel of the Son of God!

3. Many continue the forms of prayer when they are living in sin, and do not try to reform, and even have no sincere desire to reform. All such persons should know that they grievously provoke the Lord to answer their prayers with fearful judgments.

4. It is only those that live and walk with God whose prayers are of any avail to themselves, to the church, or to the world. Only those whose conscience does not condemn them, and who live in a state of conscious acceptance with God. They can pray. According to our text they receive whatever they ask because they keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.

5. When those who have been the greatest sinners will turn to God, they may prevail as really as if they had never sinned at all. When God forgives through the blood of Jesus, it is real forgiveness and the pardoned penitent is welcomed as a child to the bosom of infinite love. For Jesus' sake God receives him without the least danger of its being inferred that Himself cares not for sin. Oh, He told the Universe once for all how utterly he hated sin. He made this point known when he caused his well-beloved Son to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, and it pleased the Father to bruise him and hide his face from even the Son of his love. O, what a beautiful, glorious thing this gospel system is! In it God has made such manifestations of his regard for his law that now He has nothing to fear in

showing favour to any and every sinner who believes in Christ. If this believing sinner will also put away his sin--if he will only say--In the name of the Lord I put them all away--all--now--forever; let him do this with all his heart, and God will not fear to embrace him as a son;--this penitent need fear nothing so long as he hides himself in the open cleft of this blessed Rock of Ages.

Look at the case of the prodigal son. Famished, ragged, poor, ready to perish, he remembers his father's house and the plenty that abounds there; he comes to himself and hence looks upon things once more according to their reality. Now he says--"In my father's house there is bread enough and to spare, but here I am perishing with hunger." But why is he ready to perish with hunger? Ah, he ran away from a bountiful and kind father, and spent all his substance in riotous living. But he comes to himself. There, see him drawing near his father's mansion--once his own dear home;--see;--the father rushes to embrace him; he hastens to make this penitent son most welcome to his home and to his heart. So God makes haste to show that he is not afraid to make the vilest sinner welcome if he only comes back a penitent and rests on the name of Jesus. O what a welcome is this!

Follow on that beautiful illustration of it which the Saviour has given us. Bring forth the best robe. Invite together all our friends and neighbours. Prepare the music. Spread the table, and kill the fatted calf. It is fit that we should make merry and be glad. Lead forward this long-lost son and put on him my best robe. Let there be joy throughout my house over my returned and penitent son.

And what does all this show? One thing--that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, and joy in the very heart of God himself over one sinner that repenteth. O, I wonder sinners will not come home to their Father in heaven!

6. Sinner, if you will come back to the Lord, you may not only prevail for yourself, but for your associates and friends. I was once in a revival where a large company of young men banded themselves together under a mutual pledge that they would not be converted. Father Nash was with me in that revival season, and on one occasion while the young men alluded too were all present, he made a declaration which startled me, and almost shocked himself. Yet, as he said afterward, he dared not take it back, for he did not know how he came to say it, and perhaps the hand of God might be in it. "Young men," said he, "God will break your ranks within one week, or he will send some of you to hell."

It was an awful time. We feared that possibly it might not prove to be so, and that then the result would be exceeding bad upon the minds of that already hardened band. But it was spoken, and we could only cry unto God.

Time rolled along. About two or three days after this declaration was made, the leader of this band called to see me, all broken down and as mellow as he could be. As soon as he saw me, he cried out, "What shall I do?" "What are you thinking about?" said I. "About my wicked companions," said he, "all of them in the way to hell." "Do you pray for them?" I asked. "Oh, yes," said he, "I cannot help praying for them every moment." "Well, then," said I, "there is one thing more; go to them and entreat them in Christ's name to be reconciled to God." He darted out of my room and began this work in earnest. Suffice it to say, that before the week was closed almost all of that band of young men were converted.

And now let me say to the impenitent sinners in this assembly, If others do not labour to promote a revival, begin at once and do it yourself. Learn from such a case as I have just stated, what you can do. Don't you think you could do something of the greatest value to souls if you would seriously try? Who is there here--let me see--what young man or young woman is there here now impenitent,--do not you believe that if you would repent yourself, you might then go and pray and labour and secure the conversion of others, perhaps many others of your companions?

Sinners are usually disposed to throw all the responsibility of this labour and prayer upon Christians. I throw it back upon you. Do right yourselves and then you can pray. Do right, and then none can labour with more effect than yourselves in this great work of bringing back wandering prodigals to their father's house.

Christian hearer, is it not a dreadful thing for you to be in a state in which you cannot prevail with God? Let us look around;--how is it with you? Can you prevail with God; and you--and you? Who are they and how many are there in such a state that their prayers avail nothing, and who know before they pray and while they are praying that they are in no fit state to offer prevailing prayer? One of the brethren, you recollect said to us at a recent church meeting, "I have lost my power to prevail with God. I know I am not ready for this work." How many others are there, still in the same awful condition?

O how many have we here who are the salt of the earth, whose prayers and redeeming influence save the community from becoming perfectly putrid with moral corruption? I hope they will be found alive and at work in this trying hour. O we must have your prayers for the impenitent--for the anxious--for backsliders;--or if you cannot pray--at least come together and confess your sins;--tell your brethren and sisters you cannot pray and beg of them to pray for you that you may be brought back to the light and the peace and the penitence of real salvation.

Conditions of Prevailing Prayer- No.'s 1 & 2 & 3

Lectures V & VI & VII

May 26, 1847

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 7:7, 8: "Ask, and it shall be given you."

Text.--James 4:3: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts."

These passages are chosen as the foundation of several discourses which I design to preach on the condition of prevailing prayer.

Before entering directly upon the consideration of those conditions, however, I deem it important to make several remarks upon the general subject of prayer and of answers to prayer. These will occupy our attention on the present occasion.

1. The Bible most unequivocally asserts that all that is properly called prayer is heard and answered. "Every one that asketh," that is, in the scriptural sense of the term, "receiveth, and he that seeketh, findeth." This declaration is perfectly explicit and to the point.

2. Prayer is not always answered according to the letter, but often only according to the spirit.

This is a very important distinction. It can be made plain by an example taken from scripture. Paul informs us that he was afflicted with a thorn in the flesh. He has not told us precisely what this was. He calls it his "temptation that was in the flesh," and evidently implies that it was a snare and a trouble to him, and a thing which might naturally injure his influence as an apostle. For this latter reason, probably, he was led to "beseech the Lord thrice that it might depart from him." This prayer was obviously acceptable to God, and was graciously answered--answered, however, you will observe, not in the letter of it, but only in its spirit. The letter of the prayer specified the removal of this thorn in the flesh; and in this view of his prayer it was not answered. The spirit of the prayer was doubtless that his influence might not be injured, and that his "temptation" from this evil thing, whatever it was, might not overpower him and draw him into sin. Thus far, and in these respects, his prayer was answered. The Lord assured him, saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." This was a real answer to Paul's prayer, although it did not follow the particular way of doing it that Paul had named in his prayer. Paul had asked that certain desired results might be secured to him in a particular manner. The results sought constituted the spirit of the prayer; the specified manner constituted the letter. The Lord secured to him the results, and perhaps even more fully than Paul expected or specifically asked; but He did it, not in Paul's specified way, but in his own.

So it often happens when we pray. The ways of the Lord are so much wiser than our own, that he kindly and most benevolently declines to follow our way, and takes his own. The great end, however, which we seek, if our prayer is acceptable to Him, He will certainly secure, perhaps more perfectly in his own way than he could in ours.

If, therefore, we suppose that prayer must always be answered according to the letter, we shall find ourselves greatly mistaken. But the spirit of acceptable prayer God will always answer. If the letter and the spirit of prayer were in any case identical, the Lord would answer both; when they are not identical, he may answer only according to its spirit.

3. No person can be saved unless in such a state of mind as to offer acceptable prayer. No man can be justified before God at all, unless in such a state of mind as would be accepted in prayer. This is so plain as to need no proof--so plain as to preclude all doubt.

4. Many things are really answers to prayer which are not recognized as such by the suppliant, nor by observers.

This you will see may very easily happen in cases where the spirit and the letter of prayer are diverse from each other. An observer, of course, is not likely to notice any thing but the letter of another's prayer. Consequently, if his prayer is answered only in the spirit of it, and not in the letter at all, he will fail to recognize the answer. And the same thing may occur in respect to the suppliant himself. Unless he notices particularly the inner state of his own mind, he may not get definitely before his eye the real thing which constitutes the spirit of his own prayer. If his attention is chiefly turned towards the letter of it, he may receive an answer to its spirit, and may not notice it as a real answer to his prayer.

The acceptable prayer of any Christian may be quite a different thing from what others suppose it to be, and sometimes different from what himself supposes. In such cases, the answer will often fail to be recognized as an answer. Hence it is of vital importance that we should ourselves understand the real spirit of our own prayer.

All this applies yet more frequently in respect to others than to the suppliant himself. Usually they see only the letter of a prayer and not the spirit. Hence if the latter is answered and not the former, they will naturally suppose that the prayer is not answered, when really it is answered and in the best possible way. Skeptics often stand by tauntingly, and cry out, "You Christians are always praying; but your prayers are never answered." Yet God may be really answering their prayer in the spirit of it, and in the most effectual and glorious manner. I think I could name many instances in which, while skeptics were triumphing as if God did not hear prayer, He was really hearing it in regard to the true spirit of it, and in such a way as most signally to glorify Himself.

5. Much that is called prayer is not answered in any sense whatever, and is not real prayer.

Much that goes under the name of prayer is offered merely for the form of it, with neither care nor expectation to be answered. Those who pray thus will not watch to see whether their prayers are answered in any sense whatever.

For example, there are some who pray as a matter of cold duty--only because they must, and not because they feel their need of some specific blessing. Hence their prayer is nothing but a form. Their heart is not set upon any particular object. They only care to do what they call a duty; they do not care with anxious heart for any object they may specify in their prayers. Hence the thing they really care for, is not the thing they pray for. In words they pray for this thing; in heart for quite another thing. And the evidence of this is in the fact that they never look after the thing they pray for in words. If they prayed in heart for any thing, they would certainly look to see whether the blessing asked for is given.

Suppose a man had petitioned for some appointment to office, and had sent on his application to the President or to the appointing power. Probably his heart is greatly set on attaining it. If so you will see him watching the mail for the reply to his communication. Every day you may see him at the office ready to seize his letter at the earliest possible moment. But if on the other hand, he applied only for form's sake; and cares nothing about the office, or does not at all expect it, you will see him about

other business or pleasure, which he does care for.

The latter case rarely occurs in human affairs, but in religious things nothing is more common. Multitudes are engaged from time to time in what they call praying; their object being often only to appease their consciences--not to obtain any desired blessing. Of course the quiet of their conscience is the only thing they really seek by prayer, and it would be absurd in them to look after any other answer than this. They are not wont to be guilty of this absurdity.

Of course those who pray thus are not disappointed if they are not heard. It would be so in case of petitions addressed to men; it is so naturally when petitions are addressed to God.

A real Christian sometimes asks in the letter of prayer for what he finds God cannot give. In such a case he can be satisfied only with the consideration that God always exercises his own infinite wisdom and his not less infinite love. One great thing that lay nearest his heart if he was in the true spirit of prayer will be granted, namely, that God may be honored in the exercise of his own wisdom and love. This God will surely do. So far forth, therefore, the spirit of his prayer will be granted.

It deserves special notice that those who pray as a matter of form only, and with no heart set upon the blessing named in the prayer, never enquire for the reasons why they are not answered. Their minds are entirely at ease on this point, because they feel no solicitude about the answer at all. They did not pray for the sake of an answer. Hence they will never trouble themselves to enquire why the answer to the words of their prayer fails of being given.

How many of you who hear me, may see in this the real reason why you so rarely look after any answer to your prayers; or the reason why you care so little about it, if your mind should chance to advert to it at all?

Again, when our petitions are not answered either in letter or in their spirit, it is because we have not fulfilled the revealed conditions of acceptable prayer. Many persons seem to overlook the fact that there are conditions of acceptable prayer revealed in the Bible. But this is a fact by far too important to be ever wisely overlooked. It surely becomes every Christian to know not only that there are conditions, but also what they are.

Let us, then, fully understand that if our prayers are not answered, it is because we have failed of fulfilling the revealed conditions. This must be the reason why our prayers are not answered, for God has assured us in his word that all real prayer is always answered.

Nothing can be more important than that we should thoroughly understand the conditions of prevailing prayer. If we fail thus to understand them, we shall very probably fail to fulfill them, and of course fail to offer prevailing prayer. Alas, how ruinous a failure must this be to any soul!

There are those, I am aware, who do not expect to influence God by their prayers; they expect to produce effects upon themselves only. They hope by means of prayer to bring themselves to a better state of mind, and this is all they expect to gain by means of prayer.

To all such I have two things to say:

(1.) It may be that an individual not in a right state of mind may be benefited by giving himself to prayer. If the prayer is offered with sincerity and solemnity--with a real feeling of want, as it is sometimes in the case of a convicted sinner, it may have a very happy effect upon his own state of mind. When such a man gives himself up to confession and supplication, and spreads out his case before the Lord, it is usually a most important step towards his real conversion. It helps to bring the character and claims of God distinctly before his mind, and has a natural tendency to make his own soul realize more deeply its guilt, its need of pardon, and its duty of submission and of faith in Christ.

But if any person should suppose that a case of this sort involves all that is included in prevailing prayer, he mistakes greatly. In prevailing prayer, a child of God comes before him with real faith in his promises and asks for things agreeable to his will, assured of being heard according to the true intent of the promises; and thus coming to God he prevails with him, and really influences God to do what otherwise he would not do by any means. That is, prayer truly secures from God the bestowment of the blessing sought. Nothing less than this corresponds either with the promises of scripture, or with its recorded facts in respect to the answers made to prevailing prayer.

(2.) God is unchangeably in the attitude of answering prayer. This is true for the same reason that He is unchangeably in the attitude of being complacent in holiness whenever he sees it. The reason in both cases, lies in his infinitely benevolent nature. Because he is infinitely good, therefore and for no other reason is it that He is evermore in the attitude of answering suitable prayer, and of being complacent towards all real holiness. As in the latter case, whenever a moral change takes place in a sinner of such a nature that God can love him, his infinite love gushes forth instantaneously and without bounds; so in the former case, as soon as any suppliant places himself in such an attitude that God can wisely answer his prayer, then instantly the ear of Jehovah inclines to his petition, and the answer is freely given.

To illustrate this point, suppose that for a season some obstacle interposes to obstruct the sunbeams from the rosebush at your door; it fades and it looks sickly. But take away the obstacle, and instantly the sunbeams fall in their reviving power upon the rose. So sin casts its dark shadow upon the soul, and obstructs the sunbeams of Jehovah's smiles. But take away the obstacle--the sin--and the smiles fall in of course, and in their full blaze on that penitent and morally changed heart. The sun of Jehovah's face shines always; shines in its own nature; and its beams fall on all objects which are not cast into some deep shade by interposing sin and unbelief. On all objects not thus shaded, its glorious beams forever fall in all their sweetness and beauty.

Hence all real prayer moves God, not merely by benefiting the suppliant through its reflex action, but really and in fact inducing Him to grant the blessing sought. The notion that the whole benefit of prayer is its reflex influence upon the suppliant, and not the obtaining of any blessing asked for, is both vain and preposterous. You might as well suppose that all the good you get by removing obstacles that cut off the sunbeams, is the physical exercise attending the effort. You might as well

deny that the sunbeams will actually reach every object as soon as you take away that which throws them into the shade.

God does truly hear and answer prayer, even as an earthly parent hears the petition of a dutiful child, and shapes his course to meet the petition. To deny this involves the denial of the very nature of God. It is equivalent to denying that God is benevolent. It seems most obviously to deny that God fulfills his promises; for nothing can be more plain than the fact that God promises to be influenced by prayer so as to bestow blessings to the suppliant which are given to none others, and on no other condition. If God is pure and good, then it must needs follow that--the obstacle of sin being removed in the case of a fallen being--the divine love must flow out towards him as it did not and could not before. God remains forever the same, just as the sun forever shines; and then his love meets every object that lies open to his beams, just as the sun's rays cheer every thing not shaded by positive obstructions.

Again, God may hear the mere cry of distress and speedily send help. He "hears the young ravens when they cry," and the young lion too when they roar and seek their meat from God. The storm-tossed mariners also, "at their wit's end, cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distress." His benevolence leads him to do all this, wherever he can without detriment to the interests of his government. Yet this case seems not to come under the promises made to believing prayer. These cases of distress often occur in the experience of wicked men. Yet sometimes God seems obviously to hear their cry. He has wise reasons for doing so; probably often his object is to open their eyes to see their own Father, and to touch their hearts with a sense of their ingratitude in their rebellion against such a God.

But be the reason what it may, the fact cannot be disputed. Cases not unfrequently occur, in which persons not pious are afflicted by the dangerous illness of near friends or relatives, and lift their imploring cry of distress to the Lord and He hears them. It is even said in scripture that Christ heard the prayer of devils when they "besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country," and said, "send us into the swine, that we may enter into them."

Manifestly the Lord often hears this kind of prayer, whenever no special reason exists for refusing to hear it. Yet this is far from being that peculiar kind of prayer to which the special promises of hearing and answering prayer are made.

It is however both interesting and instructive to see how often the Lord does hear even such prayer as these cries of distress. When the cattle moan in the fields because there is no water, and because the grass is withered, there is One on high who listens to their moans. Why should he not? Has he not a compassionate heart? Does not his ear bend under the quick impulse of spontaneous affection, when any of his creatures cry unto him as to their Father, and when no great moral considerations forbid his showing favor?

It is striking to see how much the parental character of the great Jehovah is developed in the course of his providence by his hearing this kind of prayer. A great multitude of facts are exhibited both in the Bible and in history, which set this subject in a strong light. I once knew a wicked man who under deep affliction from the dangerous illness of his child, set himself to pray that God would spare and restore the dear one; and God appeared to answer his prayer in a most remarkable manner.

Those of you who have read the "Bank of Faith," know that Mr. Huntington, before his conversion, in many instances seemed to experience the same kind of signal answers to his prayers. Another anecdote was told me the past winter which I should relate more freely if it were not somewhat amusing and laughable as well as instructive. A wicked man who had perhaps never prayed since he was a child, was out with a hunting party, on the confines of Iowa, hunting wild buffalo. Mounted on trained horses, lasso in hand, they came up to a herd of buffalo, and this man encountered a fierce buffalo bull. The animal rushed upon him, and at his first push unhorsed him; but quick as thought in his fall, the man seized his own horse's neck, swung upon the under side of the neck, and there held on in the utmost peril of his life; his horse being at full gallop, pursued by a ferocious wild bull. To break his hold and fall, was almost certain death, and he was every moment in the utmost danger of falling under the flying feet of his rushing horse. In this predicament he bethought himself of prayer; but the only words he could think of, were,

"Now I lay me down to sleep,

I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

Perhaps he had never heard much other prayer than this. This lay embalmed among the recollections of his childhood days. Yet even this prayer the Lord in his infinite mercy seemed to hear and answer by rescuing the man unhurt from this perilous condition. The case affords us a striking exemplification not only of the fact that God hears the cry of mere distress, sometimes even when made by wicked men, but also of another fact, namely, that the spirit of a prayer may be a very different thing from its letter. In this case, the letter and the spirit had no very close resemblance. The spirit of the prayer was for deliverance from imminent peril. This the Lord seems to have heard.

But it should be continually borne in mind, that these are not the prayers which God has pledged himself by promise to hear and answer. The latter are evermore the believing prayers of his own children.

Our great enquiry now has respect to this class of prayers, namely, those which God has solemnly promised to answer. Attached to the promises made respecting this class of prayers are certain conditions. These being fulfilled, God holds himself bound to answer the prayer according to the letter and spirit both, if they both correspond; or if they do not correspond, then He will answer according to the spirit of the prayer. This is evermore the meaning of his promise. His promise to answer prayer on certain conditions is a pledge at least to meet it in its true spirit, and do or give what the spirit of the prayer implies.

It now becomes us to enquire most diligently and most earnestly for the conditions of prevailing prayer. This point I shall enter upon in my next discourse.

LECTURE VI.

June 9, 1847

CONDITIONS OF PREVAILING PRAYER--No. 2

Text.--Matt. 7:7, 8: "Ask, and it shall be given you."

Text.--James 4:3: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts."

I will commence the present discourse by briefly recapitulating the prefatory remarks which I made in my first sermon on this subject. I then observed,

1. That all real prayer is heard and answered.
2. Prayer is not always answered according to the letter of it, but often only according to its spirit. As an instance of this, I spoke of the striking case recorded respecting Paul's thorn in the flesh.
3. None can be saved who are not in a state of mind to prevail in prayer.
4. Many things are really answers to prayer which are not recognized by the suppliant as such nor by those who witness the prayer, the blessing bestowed, or the thing done in connection with it.
5. Much that is called prayer is not really prayer at all.
6. Many neither care nor expect to be heard, and therefore do not watch to see whether their prayers are answered. They pray merely as a duty; their heart being set on doing the duty and appeasing their consciences, and not on obtaining the blessing nominally asked for.
7. Nor do such persons feel disappointed if they fail of obtaining what they profess to ask for in prayer.
8. They do not trouble themselves to enquire why they are not answered. If they can only discharge their duty and appease their consciences, they have their desire.
9. Failure to obtain the blessing sought is always because the revealed conditions are not fulfilled.
10. Nothing is more important for us than to attend to, and understand the revealed conditions of prevailing prayer.
11. God may answer the mere cry of distress when benevolence does not forbid it. He often does hear the sailor in the storm--the young ravens in their hunger; but this is a very different thing from that prayer which God has pledged himself by promise to hear and answer on the fulfilment of certain conditions.

This Brings Us To A Consideration Of The Conditions Of Prevailing Prayer.

1. The first condition is, a state of mind in which you would offer the Lord's prayer sincerely and acceptably.

Christ at their request taught his disciples how to pray. In doing so, He gave them an epitome of the appropriate subjects of prayer, and also threw a most important light upon the spirit with which all prayer should be offered. This form is exceedingly comprehensive. Every word is full of meaning. It would seem very obvious however that our Lord did not intend here to specify all the particular things we may pray for, but only to group together some of the great heads of subjects which are appropriate to be sought of God in prayer, and also to show us with what temper and spirit we should come before the Lord.

This is evidently not designed as a mere form, to be used always and without variation. It cannot be that Christ intended we should evermore use these words in prayer and no other words; for he never again used these precise words himself--so far as we know from the sacred record--but did often use other and very different words, as the scriptures abundantly testify.

But this form answers a most admirable purpose if we understand it to be given us to teach us these two most important things, namely, what sort of blessings we may pray for, and in what spirit we should pray for them.

Most surely, then, we cannot hope to pray acceptably unless we can offer this prayer in its real spirit--our own hearts deeply sympathizing with the spirit of this prayer. If we cannot pray the Lord's prayer sincerely, we cannot offer any acceptable prayer at all.

Hence it becomes us to examine carefully the words of this recorded form of prayer. Yet, be it remembered, it is not these words, as mere words, that God regards, or that we should value. Words themselves, apart from their meaning, and from their meaning as used by us, would neither please nor displease God.--He looks on the heart.

• **Let us now refer to the Lord's prayer, and to the connection in which it stands.**

"When ye pray," says our Lord, "use not vain repetitions as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."

Yet be it well considered, the precept, "Use not vain repetitions," should by no means be construed to discourage the utmost perseverance and fervency of spirit in prayer. The passage does not forbid our renewing our requests from great earnestness of spirit. Our Lord himself did this in the garden, repeating his supplication "in the same words." Vain repetitions are what is forbidden; not repetitions which gush from a burdened spirit.

This form of prayer invites us, first of all to address the great God as "Our Father who art in heaven." This authorizes us to come as children and address the Most High, feeling that he is a Father to us.

The first petition follows--"Hallowed be thy name." What is the exact idea of this language? To hallow is to sanctify; to deem and render sacred.

There is a passage in Peter's Epistle which may throw light on this.

He says, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." The meaning seems plainly to be this;--Set apart the Lord God in your hearts as the only true object of supreme, eternal adoration, worship, and praise. Place Him alone on the throne of your hearts. Let Him be the only hallowed object there.

So here in the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, we pray that both ourselves and all intelligent beings may in this sense hallow the name of the Lord God and sanctify Him in their hearts. Our prayer is--Let all adore thee--the infinite Father--as the only object of universal adoration, praise, worship, and love.

This prayer hence implies:

(1.) A desire that this hallowing of Jehovah's name should be universal.

(2.) A willingness to concur heartily ourselves in this sentiment. Our own hearts are in deep sympathy with it. Our inmost souls cry out--Let God be honoured, adored, loved, worshipped and revered by all on earth and all in heaven. Of course, praying in this spirit, we shall have the highest reverence for God.--Beginning our prayer thus, it will so far be acceptable to God. Without such reverence for Jehovah's name, no prayer can possibly be acceptable. All irreverent praying is mockery, most abhorrent to the pure and exalted Jehovah.

The second petition--"Thy kingdom come." What does this language imply?

(1.) A desire that God's kingdom should be set up in the world and all men become holy. The will is set upon this as the highest and most to be desired of all objects whatever. It becomes the supreme desire of the soul, and all other things sink into comparative insignificance before it. The mind and the judgment approve and delight in the kingdom of God as in itself infinitely excellent, and then the will harmonizes most perfectly with this decision of intelligence.

Let it be well observed here that our Lord in giving this form of prayer, assumes throughout that we shall use all this language with most profound sincerity. If any man were to use these words and reject their spirit from his heart, his prayer would be an utter abomination before God. Whoever would pray at all, should consider that God looks on the heart, and is a holy God.

(2.) It is implied in this petition that the suppliant does what he can to establish this kingdom. He is actually doing all he can to promote this great end for which he prays. Else he fails entirely of evincing his sincerity. For nothing can be more sure than that every man who prays sincerely for the

coming of Jehovah's kingdom, truly desires and wills that it may come; and if so, he will neglect no means in his power to promote and hasten its coming. Hence every man who sincerely offers this petition will lay himself out to promote the object. He will seek by every means to make the truth of God universally prevalent and triumphant.

(3.) I might also say that the sincere offering of this petition implies a resistance of everything inconsistent with the coming of this kingdom. This you cannot fail to understand.

We now pass to the next petition--"Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

This petition implies that we desire to have God's will done, and that this desire is supreme.

It implies also a delight in having the will of God done by all his creatures, and a corresponding sorrow whenever it fails of being done by any intelligent being.

There is also implied a state of the will in harmony with this desire. A man whose will is averse to having his own desires granted is insincere, even although his desires are real. Such a man is not honest and consistent with himself.

In general I remark respecting this petition that if it be offered sincerely, the following things must be true:

(1.) The suppliant is willing that God should require all He does, and as He does. His heart will acquiesce both in the things required and in the manner in which God requires them. It would indeed be strange that a man should pray sincerely that God's will might be done, and yet not be willing himself that God should give law, or carry his will into effect. Such inconsistencies never can happen where the heart is truly sincere and honest before God. No, never. The honest hearted suppliant is as willing that God's will should be done as the saints in heaven are. He delights in having it done, more than in all riches--more than in his highest earthly joy.

(2.) When a man offers this petition sincerely, it is implied that he is really doing, himself, all the known will of God. For if he is acting contrary to his actual knowledge of God's will, it is most certain that he is not sincere in praying that God's will may be done. If he sincerely desires and is willing that God's will should be done, why does he not do it himself?

(3.) It implies a willingness that God should use his own discretion in the affairs of the universe, and just as really and fully in this world as in heaven itself. You all admit that in heaven God exercises a holy sovereignty. I do not mean by this, an arbitrary unreasonable sovereignty, but I mean a control of all things according to his own infinite wisdom and love--exercising

evermore his own discretion, and depending on the counsel of none but himself. Thus God reigns in heaven.

You also see that in heaven, all created beings exercise the most perfect submission, and confidence in God. They all allow him to carry out his own plans framed in wisdom and love, and they even rejoice with exceeding joy that He does. It is their highest blessedness.

Such is the state of feeling towards God universally in heaven.

And such it should be on earth. The man who offers this petition sincerely must approximate very closely to the state of mind which obtains in heaven.

He will rejoice that God appoints all things as He pleases, and that all beings should be, and do, and suffer as God ordains. If man has not such confidence in God as to be willing that he should control all events respecting his own family, his friends, all his interests, in short, for time and eternity, then certainly his heart is not submissive to God, and it is hypocrisy for him to pray that God's will may be done on earth as in heaven. It must be hypocrisy in him because his own heart rebels against the sentiment of his own words.

This petition, offered honestly implies nothing less than universal, unqualified submission to God. The heart really submits, and delights in its submission.

No thought is so truly pleasing as that of having God's will done evermore. A sincere offering of this prayer or indeed of any prayer whatever involves the fullest possible submission of all events for time and for eternity to the hands of God. All real prayer puts God on the throne of the universe, and the suppliant low before Him at his footstool.

(4.) The offering of this petition sincerely, implies conformity of life to this state of the will. You will readily see that this must be the case, because the will governs the outward life by a law of necessity. The action of this law must be universal so long as man remains a voluntary moral agent. So long therefore the ultimate purpose of the will must control the outward life.

Hence the man who offers this prayer acceptably must live as he prays; must live according to his own prayers. It would be a strange and most unaccountable thing indeed if the heart should be in a state to offer this prayer sincerely and yet should act itself out in the life directly contrary to its own expressed and supreme preference and purpose.

Such a case is impossible. The very supposition involves the absurdity of assuming that a man's supreme preference shall not control his outward life.

In saying this, however, I do not deny that a man's state of mind may change, so as to differ the next hour from what it is this. He may be in a state one hour to offer this prayer acceptably, and the next hour may act in a manner right over against his prayer.

But if in this latter hour you could know the state of his will, you would find that it is not such that he can pray acceptably--"Thy will be done." No, his will is so changed as to conform to what you see in his outward life.

Hence a man's state of heart may be to some extent known from his external actions. You may at least know that his heart does not sincerely offer this prayer if his life does not conform to the known will of God.

We pass to the next petition--"Give us this day our daily bread."

It is plain that this implies dependence on God for all the favors and mercies we either possess or need.

The petition is remarkably comprehensive. It names only bread, and only the bread for "this day;" yet none can doubt that it was designed to include also our water and our needful clothing--whatever we really need for our highest health, and usefulness, and enjoyment on earth. For all these we look to God.

Our Saviour doubtless meant to give us in general the subjects of prayer, showing us for what things it is proper for us to pray; and also the spirit with which we should pray. These are plainly the two great points which he aimed chiefly to illustrate in this remarkable form of prayer.

Whoever offers this petition sincerely is in a state of mind to recognize and gratefully acknowledge the providence of God. He sees the hand of God in all the circumstances that affect his earthly state. The rain and the sunshine--the winds and the frosts, he sees coming, all of them, from the hand of his own Father. Hence he looks up in the spirit of a child--saying, "Give me this day my daily bread."

But there are those who philosophize and speculate themselves entirely out of this filial dependence on God. They arrive at such ideas of the magnitude of the universe that it becomes in their view too great for God to govern by a minute attention to particular events. Hence they see no God, other than an unknowing Nature in the ordinary processes of vegetation, or in the laws that control animal life. A certain indefinable but unintelligent power which they call Nature, does it all. Hence they do not expect God to hear their prayers, or notice their wants. Nature will move on in its own determined channel whether they pray or restrain prayer.

Now men who hold such opinions cannot pray the Lord's prayer without the most glaring hypocrisy. How can they offer this prayer and mean anything by it, if they truly believe

that everything is nailed down to a fixed chain of events in which no regard is had or can be had to the prayers or wants of man?

Surely, nothing is more plain than that this prayer recognizes most fully the universal providence of that same infinite Father who gives us the promises and who invites us to plead them for obtaining all the blessings we can ever need.

It practically recognizes God as Ruler over all.

What if a man should offer this prayer, but should add to it an appendix of this sort--"Lord, although we ask of thee our daily bread, yet Thou knowest we do not believe Thou hast anything at all to do with giving us each day our daily bread; for we believe Thou art too high and Thy universe too large to admit of our supposing that Thou canst attend to so small a matter as supplying our daily food. We believe that Thou art so unchangeable, and the laws of nature are so fixed that no regard can possibly be had to our prayers or our wants."

Now would this style of prayer correspond with the petitions given us by Christ, or with their obvious spirit?

Plainly this prayer dictated by our Lord for us, implies a state of heart that leans upon God for everything--for even the most minute things that can possibly affect our happiness or be to us objects of desire. The mind looks up to the great God, expecting from Him, and from Him alone, every good and perfect gift. For everything we need, our eye turns naturally and spontaneously towards our great Father.

And this is a daily dependence. The state of mind which it implies is habitual.

We must pass now to the next petition, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

In this immediate connection, the Saviour says, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." The word trespasses, therefore doubtless explains what is meant by debts in the Lord's prayer. Luke, in reciting this Lord's prayer, has it--"Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us." These various forms of expression serve to make the meaning quite plain. It may often happen that in such a world as this, some of my fellow men may wrong or at least offend me--in some such way as I wrong and displease God. In such cases this petition of the Lord's prayer implies that I forgive those who injure me, even as I pray to be forgiven myself.

The phraseology in Matthew makes the fact that we forgive others either the measure, or the condition of our being forgiven; while as given by Luke, it seems to be at least a condition if not a ground or reason of the request for personal forgiveness. The former

reads--"Forgive us as we forgive," &c. and the latter;-- "Forgive us, for we also forgive every one indebted to us."

Now on this petition I remark,

(1.) It cannot possibly imply that God will forgive us our sins while we are still committing them. Suppose one should use this form of petition;--"Lord, forgive me for having injured Thee as Thou knowest that I do most freely forgive all men who injure me;" while yet it is perfectly apparent to the man himself and to everybody else that he is still injuring and abusing God as much as ever. Would not such a course be equivalent to saying, "Lord, I am very careful, Thou seest, not to injure my fellow men, and I freely forgive their wrongs against me; but I care not how much I abuse and wrong Thee!" This would be horrible! Yet this horrible prayer is virtually invoked whenever men ask of God forgiveness with the spirit of sin and rebellion in their hearts.

(2.) This petition never reads thus; "Forgive us our sins and enable us to forgive others also." This would be a most abominable prayer to offer to God; certainly if it be understood to imply that we cannot forgive others unless we are specially enabled to do so by power given us in answer to prayer; and worse still, if this inability to forgive is imputed to God as its Author.

However the phraseology be explained, and whatever it be understood to imply, it is common enough in the mouths of men; but nowhere found in the book of God.

(3.) Christ, on the other hand, says;--Forgive us as we forgive others. We have often injured, abused, and wronged Thee. Our fellow men have also often injured us, but Thou knowest we have freely forgiven them. Now, therefore, forgive us as Thou seest we have forgiven others. If Thou seest that we do forgive others, then do Thou indeed forgive us and not otherwise. We cannot ask to be ourselves forgiven on any other condition.

(4.) Many seem to consider themselves quite pious if they can put up with it when they are injured or slighted; if they can possibly control themselves so as not to break out into a passion. If, however, they are really wronged, they imagine they do well to be angry. O, to be sure! somebody has really wronged them, and shall they not resent it and study how to get revenge, or at least, redress? But mark; the Apostle Peter says, "If when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." "For even hereunto were ye called," as if all Christians had received a special call to this holy example. O how would such an example rebuke the spirit of the world!

(5.) It is one remarkable condition of being answered in prayer that we suffer ourselves to harbour no ill-will to any human being. We must forgive all that wrong us, and forgive them too from the heart. God as really requires us to love our enemies as to love our friends,--as really requires us to forgive others as to ask forgiveness for ourselves. Do we always bear this in mind? Are you, beloved, always careful to see to it that your state of mind towards all who may possibly have wronged you is one of real forgiveness, and do you never think of coming to God in prayer until you are sure you have a forgiving spirit yourself?

Plainly, this is one of the ways in which we may test our fitness of heart to prevail with God in prayer. "When thou standest, praying, forgive, if thou hast ought against any." Think not to gain audience before God unless thou dost most fully and heartily forgive all who may be thought to have wronged thee.

Sometimes persons of a peculiar temperament lay up grudges against others. They have enemies against whom they not only speak evil, but know not how to speak well. Now such persons who harbor such grudges in their hearts, can no more prevail with God in prayer than the devil can. God would as soon hear the devil pray and answer his prayers as hear and answer them. They need not think to be heard;--not they!

How many times have I had occasion to rebuke this unforgiving spirit! Often while in a place laboring to promote a revival, I have seen the workings of this jealous, unforgiving spirit, and I have felt like saying, Take these things hence! Why do you get up a prayer-meeting and think to pray to God when you know that you hate your brother; and know moreover that I know you do? Away with it! Let such professed Christians repent, break down, get into the dust at the feet of God, and men too, before they think to pray acceptably! Until they do thus repent all their prayers are only a "smoke in the nose" before God.

Our next petition is-- "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

And what is implied in this?

A fear and dread of sin;--a watchfulness against temptation; an anxious solicitude lest by any means we should be overcome and fall into sin. On this point Christ often warned his disciples, and not them only, but what He said unto them, He said unto all,--"Watch."

A man not afraid of sin and temptation cannot present this petition in a manner acceptable to God.

You will observe, moreover, that this petition does not by any means imply that God leads men into temptation in order to make them sin, so that we must needs implore of

Him not to lead us thus, lest He should do it. No, that is not implied at all; but the spirit of the petition is this;--O Lord, Thou knowest how weak I am, and how prone to sin; therefore let thy providence guard and keep me that I may not indulge in anything whatever that may prove to me a temptation to sin. Deliver us from all iniquity--from all the stratagems of the devil. Throw around us all thy precious guardianship, that we may be kept from sinning against Thee.

How needful this protection, and how fit that we should pray for it without ceasing!

This form of prayer concludes--"For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, amen."

Here is an acknowledgment of the universal government of God. The suppliant recognizes his supremacy and rejoices in it.

Thus it is when the mind is in the attitude of prevailing prayer. It is most perfectly natural then for us to regard the character, attributes, and kingdom of God as infinitely sacred and glorious.

How perfectly spontaneous is this feeling in the heart of all who really pray, "I ask all this because Thou art a powerful, universal, and holy Sovereign.--Thou art the infinite Source of all blessings. Unto Thee, therefore, do I look for all needed good either for myself or my fellow beings!"

How deeply does the praying heart realize and rejoice in the universal supremacy of the great Jehovah! All power, and glory, and dominion are thine, and thine only, for ever and ever, amen and amen. Let my whole soul re-echo, amen. Let the power and the glory be the Lord's alone for evermore. Let my soul for ever feel and utter this sentiment with its deepest and most fervent emphasis. Let God reign supreme and adored through all earth and all heaven, henceforth and for ever.

REMARKS.

1. The state of mind involved in this prayer must be connected with a holy life. Most manifestly it can never co-exist with a sinning life. If you allow yourself in sin, you certainly cannot have access to God in prayer. You cannot enter into the spirit of the Lord's prayer and appropriately utter its petitions.
2. The appropriate offering of this prayer involves a corresponding sensibility--a state of feeling in harmony with it. The mind of the suppliant must sympathize with the spirit of this form of prayer. Otherwise he does, by no means, make this prayer his own.
3. It is nothing better than mockery to use the Lord's prayer as a mere form. So multitudes do use it, especially when public worship is conducted by the use of forms of prayer. Often you may hear this form of prayer repeated over and over in such a way as seems to testify that the mind takes no cognizance of the sentiments which the words should express. The chattering of a parrot could scarcely be more senseless and void of impression on the speaker's mind. How shocking to hear the

Lord's prayer chattered over thus! Instead of spreading out before God what they really need, they run over the words of this form, and perhaps of some other set forms, as if the utterance of the right words served to constitute acceptable prayer!

If they had gone into the streets and cursed and swore by the hour, every man of them would be horribly shocked, and would feel that now assuredly the curse of Jehovah would fall upon them. But in their senseless chattering of this form of prayer by the hour together, they as truly blaspheme God as if they had taken his name in vain in any other way.

Men may mock God in pretending to pray, as truly as in cursing and swearing. God looks on the heart and He estimates nothing as real prayer into which the heart does not enter. And for many reasons it must be peculiarly provoking to God to have the forms of prayer gone through with and no heart of prayer attend them.

Prayer is a privilege too sacred to be trifled with. The pernicious effects of trifling with prayer are certainly not less than the evils of any other form of profanity. Hence God must abhor all public desecration of this solemn exercise.

Now, brethren, in closing my remarks on this one great condition of prevailing prayer, let me beseech you never to suppose that you pray acceptably unless your heart sympathizes deeply with the sentiments expressed in the Lord's prayer. Your state of mind must be such that these words will most aptly express it. Your heart must run into the very words, and into all the sentiments of this form of prayer. Our Saviour meant here to teach us how to pray; and here you may come and learn how. Here you may see a map of the things to pray for, and a picture of the spirit in which acceptable prayer is offered.

LECTURE VII.

July 21, 1847

CONDITIONS OF PREVAILING PRAYER--No. 3

Text.--Matt. 7:7, 8: "Ask, and it shall be given you."

Text.--James 4:3: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts."

In a former discourse on this text, I mentioned, among other conditions of prevailing prayer, that confession should be made to those whom our sins have injured, and also to God. It is most plain that all sins should be confessed to God, that we may obtain forgiveness and be reconciled to him; else how can we have communion of soul with him? And who can for a moment doubt that our confessions should not omit those of our fellow beings whom we have injured?

2. In the next place I remark that restitution should be made to God and to man.

To man we should make restitution in the sense of undoing as far as possible the wrong we have done,

and repairing and making good all the evil. If we have impeached character wrongfully, we must recall and undo it. If we have injured another even by mistake, we are bound, if the mistake come to our knowledge, to set it right,--else we are criminal in allowing it to remain uncorrected. If the injury done by us to our neighbor affect his property, we must make restitution.

But I wish to call your attention more especially to the restitution which we are to make to God. And in respect to this, I do not mean to imply that we can make good our wrongs against God in the sense of really restoring that which we have withheld or taken away; but we can render to him whatever yet remains. The time yet to be given us we can devote to him, although the past has gone beyond recall. Our talents and influence and wealth, yet to be used, we may freely and fully use for God; and manifestly, so much as this, God and reason require of us, and it were vain for us to hope to be accepted in prayer unless we seriously intend to render all the future to God.

Let us look more closely into this subject. How many of you have been robbing God,--robbing him for a long time, and on a large scale? Let us see.

(1.) We all belong to God. We are his property in the highest possible sense. He brought us into being, gave us all we have, and made us all we are; so that He is our rightful owner in a far higher sense than that in which any man can own any thing whatever.

(2.) All we have and are, therefore, is due to God. If we withhold it, we are just so far forth guilty of robbing God. And all this robbery from God, we are unquestionably bound, as far as possible, to make up.

(3.) Do any of you still question whether men ever do truly rob God? Examine this point thoroughly. If any of you were to slip into a merchant's store and filch money from his drawer; you could not deny that the act is theft. You take, criminally, from your fellow-man what belongs to him and does not at all belong to yourself. Now can it be denied that, whenever by sin you withhold from God what is due to him, you as really rob God as any one can steal from a merchant's drawer? God owns all men and all their services in a far higher sense than that in which any merchant owns the money in his drawer. God rightfully claims the use of all your talents, wealth, and time for himself--for his own glory and the good of his creatures. Just so far, therefore, as you use yourselves for yourselves, you as really rob God as if you appropriated to yourself any thing that belongs of right to your neighbor.

(4.) Stealing differs from robbery chiefly in this: the former is done secretly;--the latter by violence, in spite of resistance, or, as the case may be, of remonstrance. If you go secretly, without the knowledge of the owner, and take what is his, you steal; if you take aught of his openly--by force--against his known will, you rob. These two crimes differ not essentially in spirit; either is considered a serious trespass upon the rights of a fellow-man. Robbery has usually this aggravation; viz. that it puts the owner in fear. But the case may be such that the owner may do all he wisely can to prevent being robbed, and yet you may rob him without exciting alarm and causing him the additional evil of fear. Even in this case, there might still be the essential ingredient of robbery; forcibly taking from another what is his and not yours.

(5.) Now how is it that we sin against God? The true answer is, we tear ourselves away from his service. We wrest our hearts by a species of moral violence away from the claims he lays upon us. He says--Ye shall serve me, and no other God but me. This is his first and great command; and verily, none can be greater than this. No claim can be stronger than God's upon us.

Still, it evermore leaves our will free, so that we can rebel and wrest ourselves away from the service of God, if we will do so. And what is this but real robbery?

Suppose it were possible for me to own a man. I know we all deny the possibility of this, our relations to each other as men being what they are; but for illustration it may be supposed that I have created a man and hence own him in as full a sense as God owns us all. Still he remains a free agent,--yet solemnly bound to serve me continually. But despite of my claims on him and of all I can wisely do to retain him in my service, he runs away; tears himself from my service. Is not this real robbery? Robbery too of a most absolute kind? He owed me every thing; he leaves me nothing.

So the sinner robs God. Availing himself of his free agency, he tears himself away from God, despite of all his rightful owner can do to enlist his affections, enforce his own claims, and retain his willing allegiance. This is robbery. It is not done secretly, like stealing, but openly, before the sun; and violently too, as in the case of real robbery. It is done despite of all God can wisely do to prevent it.

(6.) Hence all sin is robbery. It can never be any thing less than wresting from God what is rightfully his. It is therefore by no figure of speech that God calls this act robbery. Will a man rob God? "Yet ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." Sin is never any thing less than this,--a moral agent owned by the highest possible title, yet tearing himself away from his rightful owner, despite of all persuasions and of all claims.

(7.) Hence, if any man would prevail with God, he must bring back himself and all that remains not yet squandered and destroyed. Yes, let him come back saying--Here I am, Lord; I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly, I am ashamed that I have used up so much of thy time,--have consumed in sin so much of that strength of mind and body which is thine;--ashamed that I have employed these hands and this tongue and all these members of my body in serving myself and Satan, and have wrested them away from thy service: Lord, I have done most wickedly and meanly; thou seest that I am ashamed of myself, and I feel that I have wronged thee beyond expression.

So you should come before God. See that thief, coming back to confess and make restitution. Does he not feel a deep sense of shame and guilt? Now unless you are willing to come back and humbly confess and freely restore to God the full use of all that yet remains, how can you hope to be accepted?

(8.) You may well be thankful that God does not require of you that you restore all you

have wrested from him and guiltily squandered; all your wasted time and health perhaps, and influence;--if He were to demand this, it would at once render your acceptance before him, and your salvation too, impossible. It would be forever impossible, on such a condition, that you should prevail in prayer.

Blessed be God, He does not demand this. He is willing to forgive all the past--but remember, only on the condition that you bring back all the rest--all that yet remains to be used of yourself and of the powers God has given or may yet give you.

So much as this God must require as a condition; and why should He not? Suppose you have robbed a man of all you can possibly get away from him; and you know that the facts are all known to him. Yet you come before him without a confession or a blush and ask him to receive you to his confidence and friendship. He turns upon you--Are not you the man who robbed me? You come to me as if you have never wronged me, and as if you had done nothing to forfeit my confidence and favor; do you come and ask my friendship again? Monstrous!

Now would it be strange if God were, in a similar case, to repel an unhumiliated sinner in the same way? Can the sinner who comes back to God with no heart to make any restitution, or any consecration of himself to God, expect to be accepted? Nothing can be more unreasonable.

(9.) It is indeed nothing less than infinite goodness that God can forgive trespasses so great, so enormous as ours have been;--O what a spectacle of loving-kindness is this! Suppose a man had stolen from you ten thousand pounds, and having squandered it all, should be thrown in his rags and beggary at your door. There you see him wasted and wan, hungry and filthy, penniless and wretched; and your heart is touched with compassion. You freely forgive all. You take him up; you weep over his miseries; you wash him, clothe him, and make him welcome to your house and to all the comforts you can bestow upon him. How would all the world admire your conduct as generous and noble in the very highest degree!

But O, the loving-kindness of God in welcoming to his bosom the penitent, returning sinner! How it must look in the eyes of angels! They see the prodigal returning, and hear him welcomed openly to the bosom of Jehovah's family. They see him coming along, wan, haggard, guilty, ashamed, in tattered and filthy robes, and downcast mien--nothing attractive in his appearance; he does not look as if he ever was a son, so terribly has sin defaced the lineaments of sonship; but he comes, and they witness the scene that follows. The Father spies him from afar, and rushes forth to meet him. He owns him as a son; falls upon his neck, pours out tears of gladness at his return, orders the best robe and the fatted calf, and fills his mansion with all the testimonies of rejoicing.

Angels see this--and O, with what emotions of wonder and delight! What a spectacle must this be to the whole universe--to see God coming forth thus to meet the returning penitent! To see that He not only comes forth to take notice of him, but to answer his

requests and enter into such communion with him, and such relations, that this once apostate sinner may now ask what he will and it shall be done unto him.

I have sometimes thought that if I had been present when Joseph made himself known to his brethren, I should have been utterly overwhelmed. I can never read the account of that scene without weeping.

I might say the same of the story of the prodigal son. Who can read it without tears of sympathy? O, to have seen it with one's own eyes--to have been there, to have seen the son approaching, pale and trembling;--the father rushing forth to meet him with such irrepressible tenderness and compassion;--such a spectacle would be too much to endure!

(10.) And now let me ask--What if the intelligent universe might see the great God receiving to his bosom a returning, penitent sinner. O, what an interest must such a scene create throughout all heaven! But just such scenes are transpiring in heaven continually. We are definitely told there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents. Surely all heaven must be one perpetual glow of excitement--such manifestations are ever going forward there of infinite compassion towards sinners returning from their evil ways.

Yet be it evermore remembered,--no sinner can find a welcome before the face of God unless he returns most deeply penitent. Ah! you do not know God at all if you suppose He can receive you without the most thorough penitence and the most ample restitution. You must bring back all that remains unwasted and unsquandered. You must look it all over most carefully and honestly, and say--Here, Lord, is the pitiful remnant--the small amount left: all the rest I have basely and most unprofitably wasted and used up in my course of sin and rebellion. Thou seest how much I have squandered, and how very little is left to be devoted now to thy service. O! what an unprofitable servant I have been; and how miserably unprofitable have I made myself for all the rest of my life.

It were well for every hearer to go minutely into this subject. Estimate and see how many years of your life have gone, never to be recalled. Some of these young people have more years remaining, according to the common laws of life, than we who are farther advanced in years. Yet even you have sad occasion to say--Alas, how many of the best years of my life are thrown away, yes, worse than thrown into the sea; for in fact they have been given to the service of the devil. How many suits of clothing worn out in the ways of sin and the work of Satan. How many tons of provisions--food for man, provided under the bounty of a gracious Providence--have I used up in my career of rebellion against my Maker and Father! O, if it were all now to rise up before me and enter with me into judgment--if each day's daily bread, used up in sin, were to appear in testimony against me; what a scene must the solemn reckoning be!

Let each sinner look this ground all over, and think of the position he must occupy before an abused yet most gracious God, and then say--How can you expect to prevail with God if you do not bring back with a most penitent and devoted heart, all that remains yet to

you of years and of strength for God.

How much more, if more be possible, is this true of those who are advanced in years. How fearfully have we wasted our substance and our days in vain! How then shall we hope to conciliate the favor of God and prevail with him in prayer, unless we bring back all that remains to us, and consecrate it a whole offering to the Lord our God?

3. We must pass now to another condition of prevailing prayer; namely, that we be reconciled to our brother.

On this subject you will at once recollect the explicit instructions of our Lord; "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

This passage states very distinctly one important condition of acceptable prayer, and shows that all men are not at all times in a fit state to pray. They may be in a state in which they have no right to pray at all. If they were to come before the Lord's altar in this state, He would bid them suspend their offering of prayer, go back at once, and be reconciled to their brother.

(1.) It is important for men to understand that they should approach God in prayer only when they have a right to pray. Others seem entirely to misconceive the relations of prayer to God and to themselves, and think that their prayers are a great favor to God. They seem to suppose that they lay the Lord under great obligations to themselves by their prayers, and if they have made many prayers, and long, they think it quite hard if the Lord does not acknowledge his obligation to them, and grant them a speedy answer. Indeed, they seem almost ready to fall into a quarrel with God if He does not answer their prayers.

I knew one man who on one occasion prayed all night. Morning came, but no answer from God. For this he was so angry with God, that he was tempted to cut his own throat. Indeed, so excited were his feelings and so sharp was this temptation, that he threw away his knife the better to resist it. This shows how absurdly men feel and think on this subject.

Suppose you owed a man a thousand dollars, and should take it into your head to discharge the debt by begging him to release and forgive it. You renew your prayer every time you see him, and if he is at any distance you send him a begging letter by every mail. Now inasmuch as you have done your part as you suppose, you fall into a passion if he won't do his and freely relinquish your debt. Would not this be on your part sufficiently absurd, sufficiently ridiculous and wrong?

So with the sinner and God. Many seem to suppose that God ought to forgive. They will have it that He is under obligation to them to pardon and put away from his sight all their sins the moment they choose to say.

(2.) Now God has indeed promised on certain conditions to forgive; and the conditions

being fulfilled, he certainly will fulfil his promise; yet never because it is claimed as a matter of justice or right. His promises all pertain to an economy of mercy and not of strict justice.

When men pray aright, God will hear and answer; but if they pray as a mere duty, or pray to make it a demand on the score of justice, they fundamentally mistake the very idea of prayer.

But I must return to the point under consideration.

4. Sometimes we have no right to pray.

"When thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift, and go, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." The meaning of this precept seems to be plain. If you are conscious of having wronged your brother, go at once and undo that wrong. If you know that he has any good reason for having aught against you, go and remove that reason as far as lies in your power to do so. Else how can you come before God to ask favors of Him?

Here it is important to understand certain cases which though they may seem, yet do not really come under the spirit of this rule. Another man may suppose himself to have been injured by me, yet I may be entirely conscientious in feeling that I have done no otherwise than right towards him, and still I may be utterly unable to remove from his mind the impression that I have wronged him. In this case, I am by no means cut off from the privilege of prayer.

Thus it often happens when I preach against backsliders that they feel exceedingly hurt and think I have wronged them unpardonably; whereas I may have been only honest and faithful to my Master and to their own souls. In such a case I am not to be debarred the privileges of prayer in consequence of their feelings towards me. It were indeed most absurd that this should shut me away from the mercy-seat. If I am conscious of having done no wrong, the Lord will draw me near to himself. In such a case as this I can make no confession of wrong-doing.

But the case contemplated by our Lord is one which I know I have done wrong to my neighbor. Knowing this, I have no right to come before God to pray until I have made restitution and satisfaction.

(1.) Sometimes professors of religion have come to me and asked, Why are we not heard and answered? We pray a great deal, yet the Lord does not answer our prayers.

Indeed, I have asked them--Do you not recollect many times when in the act of prayer you have been reminded of having injured a brother, and yet you did not go to him and make restitution, or even confession? Yes, many have said; I can recollect such cases; but I passed them over, and did not trouble myself with them, I do not know that I thought much about the necessity of making confession and restitution, at all events I know I soon forgot those thoughts of having wronged my neighbor.

(2.) You did, indeed; but God did not forget. He remembered your dishonesty and your neglect, or perhaps contempt of one of his plainly taught conditions of acceptable prayer, and he could not hear you. Until you had gone and become reconciled to your brother, what have you to do with praying? Your God says to you--Why do you come here before me to lie to my very face, pretending to be honest and upright towards your fellow-beings, when you know you have wronged them, and have never made confession and restitution?

In my labors as an Evangelist, I have sometimes fallen into a community who were most of them in this horrible state. Perhaps they had sent for me to come among them saying that they were all ready and ripe for a revival, and thus constrained me to go. On coming among them I have found the very opposite to be the fact. I would preach to the impenitent; many would be convicted; and awful solemnity would prevail; but no conversions. Then I would turn to the church and beg them to pray, and soon the fact would come out that they had no fellowship with each other and no mutual confidence; almost every brother and sister had hard feelings towards each other; many knew they had wronged their brethren and had never made confession or restitution; some had not even spoken kindly to one another for months; in short it was a state of real war; and how could the Dove of Peace abide there? And how could a righteous God hear their prayers? He could do no such thing till they repented in dust and ashes, and put away these abominable iniquities from before his face.

(3.) It often happens that professors of religion are exceedingly careless in respect to the conditions of prevailing prayer. What! Christian men and women in such a state that they will not speak to each other! In such relations to each other that they are ready to injure one another in the worst way--ready to mangle and rend each other's characters! Away with it! It is an offence to God! It is an utter abomination in his sight! He loathes the prayers and the professed worship of such men, as he loathes idolatry itself.

Now although cases as outrageous as those I have described, do not occur very frequently, yet many cases do occur which involve substantially the same principle. In respect to all such, let it be known that God is infinitely honest, and so long as he is so, he will not hold communion and fellowship with one who is dishonest. He expects us to be honest and truthful, willing ever to obey him, and ever anxious to meet all the conditions of acceptable prayer. Until this is the case with us, He cannot and will not hear us, however much and long we pray. Why should he? "Thou requirest truth in the inward parts," said the Psalmist of his God, as if fully aware that entire sincerity of heart, and of course uprightness of life towards others, is an unalterable condition of acceptance before God. It is amazing to see how much insincerity there often is among professed Christians, both in their mutual relations to each other, and also in the relations to God.

5. Again, we ought always to have an honest and good reason for praying and for asking for the specific things we pray for.

(1.) It should be remembered that God is infinitely reasonable, and therefore does nothing without a reason. Therefore in all prayer you should always have a reason or reasons that will commend themselves to God as a valid ground for his hearing and answering your

prayers.

You can have a rational confidence that God will hear you only when you know what your reasons are for praying and have good grounds to suppose they are such as will commend themselves to an infinitely wise and righteous God.

Beloved, are you in the habit of giving your attention sufficiently to this point? When you pray, do you ask for your own reasons? Do you enquire; Now have I such reasons for this prayer as God can sympathize with--such as I can suppose will have weight with his mind?

Surely this is an all-important enquiry. God will not hear us unless He sees that we have such reasons as will satisfy his own infinite intelligence--such reasons that He can wisely act in view of them;--such that He will not be ashamed to have the universe know that on such grounds He answered our prayers. They must be such that he will not be ashamed of them himself. For we should evermore consider that all God's doings are one day to be perfectly known. It will yet be known why he answered every acceptable prayer, and why he refused to answer each one that was not acceptable.

Hence if we are to offer prayer, or to do any thing else in which we expect God to sympathize with us, we ought to have good and sufficient reasons for what we ask or do.

(2.) You can not help seeing this at your first glance at the subject. Your prayer must not be selfish but benevolent--else how can God hear it? Will he lend himself to patronize and befriend your selfishness?

Suppose a man asks for the Holy Spirit to guide him in any work; or suppose he ask for that Spirit to sanctify himself or his friends. Let him be always able to give a good reason for what he asks. Is his ultimate reason a selfish one--for example, that he may become more distinguished in the world, or may prosecute some favorite scheme for himself and his own glory or his own selfish good? Let him know that the Lord has no sympathy with such reasons for prayer.

Thus a child comes before its parent, and says, Do give me this or that favor. Your reason, my child, says the parent;--give me your reason; what do you want it for?

So God says to us, his children;--your reason, my child; what is your reason? You ask, it may be, for an education; why do you want an education? You say, Lord furnish me the means to pay my tuition bills and by board bills and my clothing bills, for I want to get an education. Your reason, my child, the Lord will answer; your reason; for what end to you want to get an education? You must be able to give a good reason. If you want these things you ask for, only that you may consume them upon your lusts; if your object be to climb up to some higher post among men, or to get your living with less toil, or with more respectability, small ground have you to expect that the Lord will sympathize with any such reasons. But if your reasons be good: if they are such that God will not be

ashamed to recognize them as his own reasons for acting, then you will find him infinitely ready to hear and to answer. O, he will bow his ear with infinite grace and compassion.

(3.) Your hope of success in prayer therefore should not lie in the amount, but in the quality of your prayers. If you have been in the habit of praying without regard to the reasons why you ask, you have probably been in the habit of mocking God. Unless you have an errand when you come before the Lord, it is mocking to come and ask for any thing. There should always be something which you need. Now, therefore, ask yourself,--Why do I want this thing which I ask of God? Do I need it? For what end do I need it?

A woman of my acquaintance was praying for the conversion of an impenitent husband. She said, "It would be so much more pleasant for me to have him go to meeting with me, and to have him think and feel as I do." When she was asked--Is your heart broken because your husband abuses God, because he dishonors Jesus Christ, she replied, she never had thought of that--never; her husband had troubled and grieved her, she knew; but she had not once thought of his having abused and provoked the great and holy God.

How infinitely different must that woman's state of mind become before the Lord can hear and answer her prayer! Can she expect an answer so long as she takes only a selfish view of the case? No, never until she can say, O my God, my heart is full of bleeding and grief because my husband dishonors thee; my soul is in agony because he scorns the dying blood and the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

So when parents urge their requests for the salvation of their children, let them know that if they sympathize with God, he will sympathize with them. If they are chiefly distressed because their children do not love and serve their own God and Savior, the Lord will most assuredly enter into the deep sympathies of their hearts, and will delight to answer their requests. So of the wife when she prays for her husband, so universally when friend prays for friend. The great God seems to say evermore--"If you sympathize with me, I sympathize with you." He is a being of infinite sympathies, and never can fail to reciprocate the holy feelings of his creatures. Let the humblest subject in his universe feel sincere regard for the honor and glory of God and the well being of his kingdom, and how suddenly is it reciprocated by the Infinite Father of all! Let one of all the myriads of his creatures in earth or heaven be zealous for God, then assuredly will God be zealous for him, and will find means to fulfil his promise,--"Them that honor me I will honor." But if you will not feel for him and will not take his part, it is vain for you to ask or expect that he will feel for you and take your part.

(4.) It is indeed a blessed consideration that when we go out of ourselves and merge our interest in the interests of God and of his kingdom, then he gathers himself all round about us, throws his banner of love over us, and draws our hearts into inexpressible nearness of communion with himself. Then the Eternal God becomes our own God, and underneath us are his almighty arms. Then whoever should "touch us, would touch the apple of his eye." There can be no love more watchful, more strong, more tender, than

that borne by the God of infinite love towards his affectionate, trustful children. He would move heaven and earth if need be, to hear prayer offered in such a spirit.

O for a heart to immerse and bathe ourselves, as it were, in the sympathies of Jehovah--to yield up really our whole hearts to him, until our deepest and most perfect emotions should gush and flow out only in perfect harmony with his will, and we should be swallowed up in God, knowing no will but his, and no feelings but in sympathy with his. Then wave after wave of blessings would roll over us, and God would delight to let the universe see how intensely he is pleased with such a spirit in his creatures. O then you would need only put yourself in an attitude to be blessed and you could not fail of receiving all you could ask that could be really a good to your soul and to God's kingdom. Almost before you should call, He would answer and while you were yet speaking he would hear. Opening wide your soul in large expectation and strong faith before God, you might take a large blessing, even "until there should not be room enough to receive it."

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)*.

End of the 1847 Collection.