

What Saith the Scripture?

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

# "The Oberlin Evangelist"

Publication of Oberlin College

Sermons and Lectures given in 1853

by

Charles G. Finney

President of Oberlin College

Public Domain Text  
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lecture I. Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of The Great Harvest

Lecture II. Men Invited to Reason Together With God

Lecture III. The Saviour Lifted up, and the Look of Faith

Lecture IV. The Sinner's Excuses Answered

Lecture V. God's Love for A Sinning World

Lecture VI. Alive Without the Law, Slain Thereby

Lecture VII. The Essential Elements of Christian Experience

Lecture VIII. Death to Sin Through Christ

Lecture IX. The Rich Man and Lazarus

Lecture X. Losing One's First Love

Lecture XI. Jehovah's Appeal to Sinners and Backsliders

## GLOSSARY

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

# Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of The Great Harvest

Lecture I

January 5, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 9:36-38: "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest."

In discussing this subject, I propose,

*I. To consider to whom this precept is addressed;*

*II. What it means;*

*III. What is implied in the prayer required;*

*IV. Show that the state of mind which constitutes obedience to this precept is an indispensable condition of salvation.*

## **I. To consider to whom this precept is addressed.**

Beyond question, the precept is addressed to all who are under obligation to be benevolent; therefore to all classes and all beings upon whom the law of love is imposed. Consequently, it is addressed to all human beings, for all who are human bear moral responsibility, ought to care for the souls of their fellows, and of course fall under the broad sweep of this requisition.

Note the occasion of Christ's remark. He was traversing the cities and villages of his country, "teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." He saw multitudes before him, mostly in great ignorance of God and salvation; and his deeply compassionate heart was moved, "because he saw them fainting and scattered abroad as sheep without a shepherd." Alas! they were perishing for lack of the bread of heaven, and who should go and break it to their needy souls?

His feelings were the more affected because he saw that they felt hungry. They not only were famishing for the bread of life, but they seemed to have some consciousness of the fact. They were just then in the condition of a harvest field, the white grain of which is ready for the sickle, and waits the coming of the reapers. So the multitudes were ready to be gathered into the granary of the great Lord of the harvest. No wonder this sight should touch the deepest compassions of his benevolent heart.

## **II. What is really intended in this precept--"Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest?"**

Every precept relating to external conduct has its spirit and also its letter, the letter referring to the external, but the spirit to the internal; yet both involved in real obedience. In the present case, the letter of the precept requires prayer; but let no one suppose that merely using the words of prayer is real obedience. Besides the words there must be a praying state of mind. The precept does not require us to lie and play the hypocrite before God. No one can for a moment suppose this to be the case. Therefore it must be admitted that the precept requires the spirit of prayer as well as the letter. It requires first in value a praying state of mind, and then also its due expression in the forms of prayer.

What then is the true spirit of this precept? I answer, love for souls. Certainly it does not require us to pray for men without any heart in our prayer; but that we should pray with a sincere heart, full of real love for human welfare--a love for immortal souls and a deep concern for their salvation. It doubtless requires the same compassion that Jesus himself had for souls. His heart was gushing with real compassion for dying souls, and he was conscious that his own was a right state of mind. Therefore He could not do less than require the same state of mind of all his people. Hence He requires that we should have real and deep compassion for souls, such compassion as really moves the heart, for such most obviously was his.

- 1. This involves a full committal of the soul to this object. Christ had committed his soul to the great labor of saving men; for this he labored and toiled; for this his heart agonized; for this his life was ready to be offered; therefore he could do no less than require the same of his people.

Again, an honest offering of this prayer implies a willingness on our part that God should use us in his harvest field in any capacity He pleases. When the farmer gathers his harvest, many things are to be done, and often he needs many hands to do them. Some he sends in to cut the grain, others to bind it; some gather into the barn, and others glean the field, that nothing be lost. So Christ will have a variety of labors for his servants in the great harvest field; and no men can be of real use to him unless they are willing to work in any department of their Master's service, thankful for the privilege of doing the humblest service for such a Master and in such a cause.

Hence it is implied in honest prayer for this object that we are really committed to the work, and that we have given ourselves up most sincerely and entirely to do all we can for Christ and his cause on earth. We are always on hand, ready for any labor, or any suffering. For, plainly, if we have not this mind, we need not think to pray to any good purpose. It would be but a sorry and insulting prayer, to say--"Lord, send somebody else to do all the hard work, and let me do little or nothing." Everybody knows that such a prayer would only affront God and curse the offerer. Hence sincere prayer for Christ's cause implies that you are willing to do any thing you can do to promote its interests, in the actual and absolute devotion of all your powers and resources for this object. You may not withhold even your own children. Nothing shall be too dear for you to offer on God's altar.

Suppose a man should give nothing--should withhold all his means and suppress all efforts, only he says he will pray. He professes indeed to pray. But do you suppose that his prayer has any heart in it? Does he mean what he says? Does he love the object more than all things else? Nay, verily. You never could say that a young man does all he can for Christ's harvest if he refuses to go into the field to work, nor that an aged but wealthy man is doing all he can if he refuses to give any thing to help sustain the field-laborers.

### **III. What then is implied in really obeying this precept?**

- 1. A sense of personal responsibility in respect to the salvation of the world. No man ever begins to obey this command who does not feel a personal responsibility in this thing which brings it home to his soul as his own work. He must really feel--"This is my work for life. For this I am to live and spend my strength." It matters not on this point whether you are young enough to go abroad into the foreign field, or whether you are qualified for the gospel ministry; you must feel such a sense of responsibility that you will cheerfully and most heartily do all you can. You can do the hewing of the wood or the drawing of the water, even if you cannot fill the more responsible trusts. An honest and consecrated heart is willing to do any sort of toil--bear any sort of burden. Unless you are willing to do any thing you can successfully and wisely do, you will not comply with the conditions of a prayerful state of mind.
- 2. Another element is a sense of the value of souls. You must see impressively that souls are precious--that their guilt while in unpardoned sin is fearful and their danger most appalling. Without such a sense of the value of the interests at stake, you will not pray with fervent, strong desire; and without a just apprehension of their guilt, danger and remedy, you will not pray in faith for God's interposing grace. Indeed you must have so much of the love of God--a love like God's love for sinners, in your soul, that you are ready for any sacrifice or any labor. You need to feel as God feels. He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever should believe in him might not perish. You need so to love the world that your love will draw you to make similar sacrifices and put forth similar labors. A love for souls, the same in kind as God had in giving up his Son to die, and as Christ had in coming cheerfully down to make himself the offering, each servant of God must have, or his prayers for this object will have little heart and no power with God. This love for souls is always implied in acceptable prayer that God would send forth laborers into his harvest. I have often thought that the reason why so many pray only in form and not in heart for the salvation of souls, is that they lack this love, like God's love, for the souls of the perishing.
- 3. Acceptable prayer for this object implies confidence in the ability, wisdom, and willingness of God to push forward this work. No man can pray for what he supposes may be opposed to God's will, or beyond his ability or too complicated for his wisdom. If you ask God to send forth laborers, the very prayer assumes that you confide in his ability to do the work well, and in his willingness--in answer to prayer, to press it forward.
- 4. The very idea of prayer implies that you understand this to be a part of the divine plan--that Christians should pray for God's interposing power and wisdom to carry forward this great work. You do not pray till you see that God gives you the privilege, enjoins the duty, and encourages it by assuring you that it is an essential means, an indispensable condition of his

interposing his power to give success. You remember it is said--"I will yet for this be inquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them."

Again, no one complies with the spirit of this condition who does not pray with his might--ferently and with great perseverance and urgency for the blessing. He must feel the pressure of a great cause and must feel moreover that it cannot prosper without God's interposing power. Pressed by these considerations, he will pour out his soul with intensely, fervent supplications.

Unless the church is filled with the spirit of prayer, God will not send forth the laborers into his harvest.-- Plainly the command to pray for such laborers implies that God expects prayer, and will wait until it be made. The prayer comes into his plan as one of the appointed agencies, and can by no means be dispensed with.-- Doubtless it was in answer to prayer that God sent out such a multitude of strong men after the ascension.-- How obviously did prayer and the special hand of God bring in a Saul of Tarsus and send him forth to call in whole tribes and nations of the Gentile world! And along with him were an host. "The Lord gave the word, great was the company that published it."

- 5. That this prayer should be in faith, reposing in assurance on God's everlasting promise, is too obvious to need proof or illustration.
- 6. Honest, sincere prayer implies that we lay ourselves and all we have upon his altar. We must feel that this is our business, and that our disposable strength and resources are to be appropriated to its prosecution. It is only then, when we are given up to the work, that we can honestly ask God to raise up laborers and press the work forward. When a man's lips say--"Lord, send forth laborers;" but his life in an undertone proclaims, "I don't care whether a man goes or not; I'll not help on the work," you will of course know that he is only playing the hypocrite before God.

By this I do not imply that every honest servant of Christ must feel himself called to the ministry, and must enter it; by no means; for God does not call every pious man into this field, but has many other fields and labors which are essential parts of the great whole. The thing I have to say is that we must be ready for any part whatever which God's providence assigns us.

- 7. When we can go, and are in a situation to obtain the needful education, then the true spirit of the prayer in our text implies that we pray that God would send us. If we are in a condition to go, then plainly, this prayer implies that we have the heart to beg the privilege for ourselves that God would put us into his missionary work. Then we shall say with the ancient prophet, "Lord, here am I, send me." Do you not suppose Christ expected His disciples to go, and to desire to go? Did He not assume that they would pray for the privilege of being put into this precious trust? How can we be in real sympathy with Christ unless we love the work of laboring in this gospel harvest, and long to be commissioned to go forth and put in our sickle with our own hand? Most certainly, if we were in Christ's spirit we should say--I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished? We should cry out--Lord, let me go--let me go--for dying millions are just now perishing in their sins. How can I pray God to

send out others if I am in heart unwilling to go myself? I have heard many say--O that I were young; how I should rejoice to go myself. This seems like a state of mind that can honestly pray for God to send forth laborers.

The spirit of this prayer implies that we are willing to make any personal sacrifices in order to go. Are not men always willing to make personal sacrifices in order to gain the great object of their heart's desire? Did ever a merchant, seeking goodly pearls, find one of great value, but he was quite willing to go and sell all that he had and buy it?

Moreover an honest heart before God in this prayer implies that you are willing to do all you can to prepare yourselves to accomplish this work. Each young man or young woman should say--God requires something of me in this work. It may be God wants you as a servant in some missionary family; if so you are ready to go. No matter what the work may be--no labor done for God or for man is degrading. In the spirit of this prayer, you will say--If I may but wash the feet of my Lord's servants, I shall richly enjoy it. All young persons especially, feeling that life is before them, should say--I must devote myself, in the most effective way possible, to the promotion of my Saviour's cause. Suppose a man bows his soul in earnest prayer before God, saying, "O Lord, send out hosts of men into this harvest field," does not this imply that he girds himself up for this work with his might? Does it not imply that he is ready to do the utmost he can in any way whatever?

Again, this prayer, made honestly, implies that we do all we can to prepare others to go out. Our prayer will be, "Lord, give us hearts to prepare others, and get as many ready as possible and as well prepared as possible for the gathering in of this great harvest."

- 8. Of course it is also implied that we abstain from whatever would hinder us, and make no arrangements that would tie our hands. Many young Christians do this, sometimes heedlessly, often in a way which shows that they are by no means fully set to do God's work, first of all.
- 9. When we honestly pray God to send out laborers, and our own circumstances allow us to go, we are to expect that He will send us. What! does God need laborers of every description, and will He not send us? Depend on it, He will send out the man who prays right, and whose heart is deeply and fully with God. And we need not be suspicious lest God should lack the needful wisdom to manage his matters well. He will put all his men where they should be, into the fields they are best qualified to fill. The good reaper will be put into his post, sickle in hand; and if there are feeble ones who can only glean, He puts them there.
- 10. When youth have health and the means for obtaining an education, they must assume that God calls them to this work. They should assume that God expects them to enter the field. They will fix their eye upon this work as their own. Thinking of the masses of God's true children who are lifting up this prayer, "Lord, send forth laborers to gather in the nations to Thy Son," they will assuredly infer that the Lord will answer these prayers and send out all his faithful, fit, and true men into this field. Most assuredly, if God has given you the mind, the training, the tact, the heart, and the opportunity to get all needful preparation, you may know he will send you forth. What! is it possible that I am prepared, ready, waiting, and the hosts of the church

praying that God would send laborers forth, and yet He will not send me! Impossible!

- 11. One indispensable part of this preparation is a heart for it. Most plainly so, for God wants no men in his harvest field whose hearts are not there. You would not want workmen in your field who have no heart for their work. Neither does God. But He expects us to have this preparation. And He will accept of no man's excuse from service, that he has no heart to engage in it. The want of a heart for this work is not your misfortune, but your fault, your great and damning sin.

This brings me to my next general proposition,

#### **IV. That this state of mind is an indispensable condition of salvation.**

The church are, many of them, dreadfully in the dark about the conditions of salvation. I was once preaching on this subject, and urging that holiness is one condition of salvation, "without which no man can see the Lord," when I was confronted and strenuously opposed by a Doctor of Divinity. He said--The Bible makes faith the sole and only condition of salvation. Paul, said he, preached that faith is the condition, and plainly meant to exclude every other condition. But I answered, Why did Paul press so earnestly and hold up so prominently the doctrine of salvation by faith? Because he had to oppose the great Jewish error of salvation by works. Such preaching was greatly and specially needed then, and Paul pressed into the field to meet the emergency. But when Antinomianism developed itself, James was called out to uphold with equal decision the doctrine that faith without works is dead, and that good works are the legitimate fruit of living faith, and are essential to evince its life and genuineness. This at once raised a new question about the nature of gospel faith. James held that all true gospel faith must work by love. It must be an affectionate filial confidence, such as draws the soul into sympathy with Christ, and leads it forward powerfully to do all his will.

Many professed Christians hold that nothing is needful but simply faith and repentance, and that faith may exist without real benevolence and consequently without good works. No mistake can be greater than this. The grand requisition which God makes upon man is that he become truly benevolent. This is the essence of all true religion, a state of mind that has compassion like God's compassion, for human souls; that cries out in earnest prayer for their salvation, and that shrinks from no labor to effect this object. If, therefore, true religion be a condition of salvation, then is the state of mind developed in our text also a condition.

#### **REMARKS.**

1. This state of mind is as obligatory upon sinners as upon saints. All men ought to feel this compassion for souls. Why not? Can any reason be named why a sinner should not feel as much compassion for souls as a Christian? Or why he ought not to love God and man as ardently?

2. Professors of religion who do not obey the true spirit of these precepts are hypocrites, without one exception. They profess to be truly religious, but are they? Certainly not, unless they are on the altar, devoted to God's work and in heart sincerely sympathizing in it. Without this, every one of them is a hypocrite. You profess to have the spirit of Christ; but when you see the multitudes as he saw them, perishing for lack of gospel light, do you cry out in mighty prayer with compassion for their souls? If you have not this spirit, write yourself down a hypocrite.

3. Many do not pray that God would send forth laborers because they are afraid He will send them. I can recollect when religion was repulsive to me because I feared that if I should be converted, God would send me to preach the gospel. But I thought further on this subject. God, said I, has a right to dispose of me as he pleases, and I have no right to resist. If I do resist, He will put me in hell. If God wants me to be a minister of his gospel and I resist and rebel, He surely ought to put me in hell, and doubtless He will.

But there are many young men in this college who never give themselves to prayer for the conversion of the world, lest God should send them into this work. You would blush to pray--"Lord, send forth laborers, but don't send me." If the reason you don't want to go is that you have no heart for it, you may write yourself down a hypocrite, and no mistake.

If you say, "I have a heart for the work, but I am not qualified to go," then you may consider that God will not call you unless you are or can be qualified. He does not want unfit men in the service.

4. The ministry for the last quarter of a century has fallen into disgrace for this reason; many young men have entered it who never should have entered. Their hearts are not fixed, and they shrink from making sacrifices for Christ and his cause. Hence they do not go straight forward, true to the right, firm for the oppressed and strong for every good word and work. By whole platoons, they back out from the position which they have sworn to maintain. The hearts of multitudes of lay brethren and sisters are in great distress, crying out over this fearful defection. To a minister who was complaining of the public reproach cast on his order, a layman of Boston replied, "I am sorry there is so much occasion for it; God means to rebuke the ministry, and He ought to rebuke them since they so richly deserve it." Do not understand me to say that this vacillation of the ministry is universal;--no, indeed; I am glad to know there are exceptions; but still the painful fact is that many have relapsed, and consequently as a class they have lost character, and this has discouraged many young men from entering the ministry.

Let this be so no longer. Let the young men now preparing for the ministry come up to the spirit of their Master, and rush to the front rank of the battle. Let them toil for the good of souls, and love this toil as their great Lord has done before them. Thus by their fidelity let them redeem the character of this class of men from the reproach under which it now lies. Let them rally in their strength and lay themselves with one heart on the altar of God. So doing, not one generation should pass away ere it will be said--Mark the faithful men; note the men whose heart is in and on their work; the ministry is redeemed!

5. With sorrow I am compelled to say--many don't care whether the work is done or not. They are all swallowed up with ambitious aspirings. Who does not know that they do not sympathize with Jesus Christ?

Beloved, let me ask you, if you are honestly conscious of sympathizing with your great Leader? I never can read the passage before us without being affected by the manifestation it makes of Christ's tenderness and love. There were the thronging multitudes before Him. To the merely external eye, all might have been fair; but to one who thought of their spiritual state, there was enough to move the

deep fountains of compassion. Christ saw them scattered abroad as sheep who have no shepherd. They had no teachers or guides in whom they could repose confidence. They were in darkness and moral death. Christ wept over them, and called on his disciples to sympathize in their case, and unite with him in mighty prayer to the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers. Such was his spirit. And now, dear young men, do you care whether or not this work is done?

6. Many seem determined to shirk this labor and leave it all for others to do. Indeed, they will hardly entertain the question what part God wants them to take and perform.

Now let me ask you;--Will such as they be welcomed and applauded at last by the herald of judgment destiny, crying out--"Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord?" Never; no never!

7. Many say--I am not called, but really they are not devoted to this work so as to care whether they are called or not. They do not want to be called--not they!

Now the very fact that you have the requisite qualifications, means and facilities for preparation, indicates God's call. These constitute the voice of his providence, saying, Go forth, and prepare for labor in my vineyard! There is your scholarship; use it: there the classes for you to enter; go in and occupy till you are ready to enter the great white fields of the Saviour's harvest. If providential indications favor, you must strive to keep up with their summons;--pray for the baptisms of the Holy Ghost; seek the divine anointing, and give yourself no rest till you are in all things furnished for the work God assigns you.

It is painful to see that many are committing themselves in some way or other against the work. They are putting themselves in a position which of itself forbids their engaging in it. But do let me ask you, young men, can you expect ever to be saved if, when you have the power and the means to engage in this work, you have no heart for it? No, indeed! You knock in vain at the gate of the blessed! You may go there and knock;-- but what will be the answer? Are ye my faithful servants? Were ye among the few, faithful among the faithless--quick and ready at your Master's call? O no, no; you studied how you could shun the labor and shirk the self-denial! I know you not! Your portion lies without the city walls!

Let no one excuse himself, as not called, for God calls all to some sort of labor in the great harvest field. You never need, therefore, to excuse yourself as one not called to some service for your Lord and Master. And let no one excuse himself from the ministry unless his heart is on the altar and he himself praying and longing to go, and only held back by an obvious call of God, through his providence, to some other part of the great labor.

Many will be sent to hell at last for treating this subject as they have, with so much selfishness at heart! I know the young man who for a long time struggled between a strong conviction that God called him to the ministry and a great repellency against engaging in this work. I know what this feeling is, for I felt it a long time myself. A long time I had a secret conviction that I should be a minister, though my heart repelled it. In fact, my conversion turned very much upon my giving up this contest with God, and subduing this repellency of feeling against God's call.

8. You can see what it is to be a Christian, and what God demands of men at conversion. The turning point is--Will you really and honestly serve God? With students especially the question is wont to be--Will you abandon all your ambitious schemes and devote yourself to the humble, unambitious toil of preaching Christ's gospel to the poor? Most of this class are ambitious and aspiring; they have schemes of self-elevation, which it were a trial to renounce altogether. Hence with you, your being a Christian and being saved at last will turn much, perhaps altogether, on your giving yourself up to this work in the true self-denial of the gospel spirit.

9. Many have been called to this work, who afterwards backslide and abandon it. They begin well, but backslide; get into a state of great perplexity about their duty; perhaps, like Balaam, they are so unwilling to see their duty, and so anxious to evade it, that God will not struggle with them any longer, but gives them up to their covetousness, or their ambition.

Young man, are you earnestly crying out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" Be assured, God wants you in his field somewhere; He has not abandoned his harvest to perish; He wants you in it, but he wants you first to repent and prepare your heart for the gospel ministry. You need not enter it till you have done this.

Many are waiting for a miraculous call. This is a great mistake. God does not call men in any miraculous way. The finger of his providence points out the path, and the fitness He gives you indicates the work for you to do. You need not fear that God will call you wrong. He will point out the work He would have you do.-- Therefore, ask Him to guide you to the right spot in the great field. He will surely do it.

Young men, will you deal kindly and truly with my Master in this matter? Do you say, "O my God, I am on hand, ready for any part of the work thou hast for me to do?" What say you? Are you prepared to take this ground? Will you consecrate your education to this work? Are you ready and panting to consecrate your all to the work of your Lord? Do you say, "Yes, God shall have all my powers, entirely and forever?" "I do beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." The altar of God is before you. A whole sacrifice is the thing required. Are you ready to forego all your selfish schemes? Ye who have talents fitting you for the ministry, will you devote them with all your soul to this work? Say, will you deal honestly and truly with my Master? Say, do you love his cause, and count it your highest glory to be a laborer together with God, in gathering in the nations of lost men to the fold of your Redeemer?

## **Men Invited to Reason Together With God**

Lecture II  
May 11, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Isa. 1:18: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

God is a moral agent. If he was not, He could not have moral character. That He has moral character is sufficiently manifest from the revealed fact that man is made in his image. Every man knows himself to have a moral constitution, and to be a moral being. It is also a fact that we necessarily conceive of God as a moral agent, and cannot rationally think otherwise.

God is also a good being--not only moral, but holy and wise. He always acts upon good and sufficient reasons, and never irrationally and without reasons for his conduct.

Hence if we would appeal to God on any subject, we must address him as a good being, and must make our appeal through his intelligence, expecting him to be influenced more or less according as we present good and sufficient reasons.

God is always influenced by good reasons. Good reasons are more sure to have their due and full weight on his mind than on the mind of any other being in the universe. Nothing can be more certain than this--that if we present to him good reasons and such as ought to influence him, he will be influenced as much as he ought to be. Upon this we may rest with unlimited confidence.

1. Entering now upon the direct consideration of our text, let us first inquire, What is that to which this text invites us?

"Come now, and let us reason together"--but what are we to "reason" about? The passage proceeds to say--"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." In the previous context God makes grievous and terrible charges against men. Their sins and hypocrisies and apostasies have been provoking beyond measure;--Now therefore He comes down to look into their case and see if there be any hope of repentance, and proceeds to make a proposal. Come now, He says, let us reason together; Come near if ye will reason with me. Produce your strong reasons why your God should forgive your great sin.

2. The invitation, coupled with the promises annexed, implies that there are good and sufficient reasons why God should forgive the penitent. Hence the case is fair for practical results. The way is open for salvation. Sinners may so present their reasons before God as to ensure success.

3. The nature of the case shows that we are to address our reasons and make our appeal, not to Justice, but to Mercy. We are to present reasons which will sanction the exercise of mercy. We have no hope from any appeal that we can make to justice. We must not come to demand the blessing we need, for it is assumed that our sins are as scarlet, and hence that there can be no such thing as a justification for them. Hence our inquiry is brought within fixed limits. We have only to search for those considerations which may induce the Lord to exercise mercy in our case.

Now since sinners need two great blessings; viz., pardon and sanctification, our subject naturally embraces two points;

*I. The reasons which may be offered why God should pardon our sin;*

*II. The corresponding reasons why he should sanctify our hearts.*

### **I. First, then, what reasons have we to present before God why he should forgive sin?**

I enter upon this inquiry and bring up these reasons before your mind in order to show you what reasons you may present before God and to encourage you to present them.

- 1. You may plead that you entirely justify God in all his course. You must certainly take this position, for he cannot forgive you so long as you persist in self-justification. You know there is a breach of friendship between your soul and God. You have broken his laws. You either have good reason for your sin or you have not. If you have, God is wrong; if you have not, then you are wrong. You know how this case stands. You know beyond all question--with a force of reason that ought to silence all cavil,--that all the wrong is on your side and all the right on God's side. You might and should know also that you must confess this. You need not expect God to forgive you till you do. He ought not to publish to the universe that he is wrong and you are right, when there is no truth in such a proclamation. Hence you see that you must confess what your conscience affirms to be truth in the case.

Now therefore, will you honestly say--not as the decision of your conscience merely, but as the utterance of your heart, that you do accept the punishment of your iniquities as just, and do honour and acquit your God in all the precepts of his law, and in all the course of his providence? Can you present this reason? So far as it goes, it is a good reason, and will certainly have its weight.

- 2. You may come to God and acknowledge that you have no apology whatever to make for your sin. You renounce the very idea of apology. The case, you deeply feel, admits of none.
- 3. You must also be ready to renounce all sin and be able in all honesty to say this before God. You must utterly cease from all rebellion against God, and be able to say so from your very heart,--else you can not reasonably expect to be forgiven.
- 4. You must unconditionally submit to his discretion. Nothing less than this is the fitting moral position for a sinner towards God. You must unqualifiedly surrender yourself to his will and utterly renounce your own. This will be an important element in your plea before God for pardon whenever you can honestly make it.
- 5. You may plead the life and death of Jesus Christ as sufficient to honor the law and justify God in showing mercy. It is plain that our reasons must reach other points besides our own state of mind; they must also refer to the penalty of law, and show that such arrangements are made

as will insure the honor and sustain the dignity of the law, though sin be forgiven. Hence we see how much it is worth to us that we are able to plead before God that Christ has fully honored the law, so that God can forgive sin without the danger of seeming to connive at it. It is everything to the purpose of a returning sinner that he may plead that forgiveness through Christ's death is safe to the government of God. Pardon must not put in peril the holiness or justice of Jehovah. The utmost expression he could make, or need to make, of his holiness and justice, as touching the sins of man, is already made in the death of Christ, "whom God did himself set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past . . . that he might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

Now therefore, can you say that you are willing to accept the sacrifice which he has made, and receive the gift of salvation through his blood as all of boundless grace, and in no sense or measure of meritorious works? If you can truly say this, it will become a strong reason before God why he should forgive you.

- 6. You may also urge his professed love for sinners. God has professed the greatest love for lost men; has even spoken of loving them "with an everlasting love," and you are at liberty to urge this when you come to reason together with God. You may plead that he has manifested this love in the gift of his dear Son, and hence you must be sure that you understand his language, and there cannot be any mistake in the matter. All your life long, too, he has been manifesting his love towards you in his kind providence;--so that he has not ever left himself without witness to both the fact and the greatness of this love for the lost of our race.
- 7. He has also invited you to come and reason with him. Therefore he has fully opened the way for the freest and fullest communion on this point. With amazing condescension he suffers you to come before him and plead, filling your mouth with arguments. You may speak of all his promises, and of that solemn oath in which he swore by himself, to the end that they all "might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel."
- 8. You may also plead his honor, that seeing he is under oath and stands committed before the universe, you may ask him what he will do for his great name if he refuses to forgive a repentant and believing sinner. You may plead all the relations and work of Christ. You may say to him, Lord, will it not induce other sinners to come to thee? Will it not encourage thy church to labor and pray more for salvation? Will not thy mercy, shown to me, prove a blessing to thousands?
- 9. You may urge the influence of refusing to do so. You may suggest that his refusal is liable to be greatly misapprehended--that it may be a scandal to many, and that the wicked will be emboldened to say that God has made no such exceeding great and precious promises.
- 10. You may urge that there is joy in heaven and on earth also over every sinner pardoned and saved--that the saints everywhere will be delighted and will exceedingly rejoice in the Lord their God. The psalmist represents the young convert as saying--"The humble shall hear thereof and be glad." You may urge that since God loves to make saints happy in this world, he surely

will not be averse to giving you his Spirit and putting away your sins--it will cause such joy in the hearts of his dear people.

- 11. You may also plead the great abhorrence you have of living in sin, as you surely will unless he forgives you. You may also plead that God hates sin and therefore must be more than willing to turn your heart away from sinning and make it wholly pure before his eyes. You may urge on him the worth of your soul, a thing which he understands far better than you do, and which he shows that he appreciates inasmuch as he gave up his only Son to die that souls might not perish. Ask him if he does not know what it is for a soul to be saved and what it is for a soul to be lost, and tell him that the great question between these two momentous states is now pending in your case and must be soon decided for eternity! Ask him if after all he has done and said about salvation he can refuse to save your perishing soul. Say--O my God, dost thou not know how much my soul is worth, and how certainly it is lost for ever unless thou interpose to save it?
- 12. You may mention before him your lost estate--that you are entirely dependent on his grace and mercy; that you are utterly lost to God, to happiness and to heaven, unless he has mercy on you, and you may conjure him by the love of his dear Son to take all these things into consideration.
- 13. You may also allude to his merciful disposition, and suggest how often his word has affirmed that "the Lord delighteth in mercy," and that while "judgment is his strange work, mercy is his delight." Ask him if he will not gratify his own love of showing mercy, and give you the salvation you so much need. Remind him that here is a great opportunity to magnify his mercy, and display the riches of his grace, and make an impression on the minds of both saints and sinners greatly to his own honor and to their good. Tell him that to save one so lost and so vile as you cannot but glorify his great mercy far as the case is known in earth, or hell, or heaven. Tell him how he has said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and ask him if he will not take advantage of this opportunity to show all men how he loves to act on this divine law of benevolence.
- 14. Tell him moreover how wretched you are and must be in your sins if you cannot find salvation, and what mischief you will be likely to do everywhere, on earth and in hell, if you are not forgiven and renewed in holiness. Tell him that it is awful and makes your soul shudder to think of going on in sin and of becoming hardened past all repentance. Remind him that he has invited you to come and reason with him, and that he has virtually promised to hear and to consider your case. You do not come to justify yourself, but only to plead his great mercy and what Christ has done for you. With these very strong reasons you come before him, on his own invitation, not to complain against his justice, but to intercede for his mercy; that you must beg of him to consider the awful ruin of hell, and that you cannot escape without his help, and cannot endure its everlasting horrors. He has himself said, "Can thy heart endure, or can thy hands be strong in the day that I shall deal with thee?" Tell him your heart cannot endure this, and that this should be a strong reason why he should have mercy on your soul.
- 15. You also commit yourself entirely to his hands, and resign everything to his discretion and

to his supreme disposal. Tell him you believe he will do the very best thing possible to him, all things considered, and that you shall by no means shrink from confiding your whole case to his disposal. You are not disposed to dictate or control what God shall do, but are willing to submit all to his wisdom and love. In fact you have such confidence in him that you expect he will give you salvation, for you believe he has intended to encourage you to expect this great blessing, and on this ground you do expect to find mercy. You will therefore at any rate renounce all your sin henceforth and forever. Say, "O Lord, thou knowest that I am purposed to renounce all sinning, and in this purpose I will persist and die in it if die I must, yea, go to hell, if so it must be, renouncing all my sin, and trusting in thy promised grace."

Let this be the manner of your reasoning together with God on this great question of the salvation of your soul.

## **II. We must now notice a few reasons which may be urged by the pardoned sinner who pleads for entire sanctification.**

- 1. You may plead your present justification. You have already found grace in his sight. This is a good reason to be used in your plea that he would fulfil all his promises to you, and not leave his great work, already begun, unfinished.
- 2. You may plead your relation to Him, to the church, and to the world--that having now been justified and adopted into his family, you are known as a Christian and a child of God, and it therefore becomes of the utmost consequence that you should have grace to live so as to adorn your profession and honor the name by which you are called.
- 3. You may also plead your great responsibilities, and the weight of those interests that are depending upon your spiritual progress. Tell Him you have publicly committed yourself to his faithfulness--that you have trusted that he would keep you blameless and henceforward make his grace sufficient for you. You have professed to rely upon sanctifying grace, and how can you bear now to fail of finding all you need and all you have professed to expect?
- 4. You should notice also the matter of your influence over others, especially the influence of your example. If it is known that you frequently fall into sin, how sad must be the influence! On the other hand, if God enables you to stand up and testify continually to his sustaining grace, what a testimony is this to his praise, and what a blessing to your Christian acquaintances!
- 5. Plead the desire you feel to be completely delivered from sin. Ask him if he has not given you this very desire himself, and inquire if He intends to sharpen your thirst and yet withhold the waters of life. Ask him if you must suppose that he means to enkindle the burning desire and yet leave it for ever unsatisfied.
- 6. Plead also his expressed will. Revert to that explicit avowal--"This is the will of God, even your sanctification." Ask if he did not intend you should understand this as applicable to deliverance from all sin and therefore as an unqualified expression of his desire and will that you should be altogether free from sin even now. Ask if he has not so revealed his will on this point that you do not come to him in any uncertainty as to his will. Has He not in many forms,

and in forms most clear and decisive, signified his wish that you should "perfect holiness," and rise quite above all the power of temptation? Remind Him how He has pledged his word of grace and held out before you most encouraging promises.

- 7. Tell him also how the church needs such witnesses to testify what grace has done and what they have themselves experienced. Refer to what the world is saying because the church is not sanctified, and show how great a scandal unsanctified professors are to their brethren because they testify falsely to the rich provisions of gospel grace. Plead that the church has many of them fallen almost out of sight of God's great grace, and so that they have become a sad stumbling-block to the world. Consider how much scandal and unbelief exist everywhere and ask how these great evils can be removed and evermore prevented.
- 8. Appeal to his great love for you as manifested in what Christ has done, and in his present office as your Advocate on high;--as evinced, also, in the gift of the Spirit. Tell him you must and will confide in his love. Say, "I understand it; I must and will assume it, I cannot doubt, I must not disbelieve. I do not make my appeal to one who is an alien and a stranger, but to a kind and loving Father; and I come in simple confidence as his child." Say--"I dread to offend thee and I long to live worthy of my vocation, and cannot endure to misrepresent that great and blessed grace on which my hope reposes."
- 9. So you must come to reason with your Heavenly Father. By no means forget to urge the love he has professed, and to throw yourself upon his faithfulness, pleading that He will fulfil to you all that He has promised, and gloriously finish the work He has begun. Tell him how you have stumbled many by your falls into sin and have given great occasion of reproach to the cause you love; tell Him you cannot live so--that you are ready to die under this awful burden. Cry out before Him, "How have I given thine enemies occasion to doubt thy sanctifying grace and to disbelieve thy words of promise! O, my Saviour, didst thou not give thyself to die for such a sinner as I am, to redeem me from all iniquity? and now, art thou willing that thy servants should be stumbled by me and fall over me into the depths of hell?"
- 10. Remind Him also of your dependence on Him, and that you set out in the Christian life with the understanding that without his grace to help, you could do nothing. Tell him you have consecrated yourself to Him in distinct reliance upon his promised aid, and that you cannot endure to fall so far short of what you had hoped, and what you have promised and expected. Tell him of your willingness to make any sacrifice--that there is nothing you are unwilling to give up--that you are willing to forego your good name and to lay your reputation wholly upon his altar--that there is not one sacrifice you are not willing to make and you beg of Him if He sees a single thing held so dear to your heart that you are not willing to sacrifice it for his sake, to show you what it is, and press you to forsake it. Assure Him that if self-denial comes in his service you are willing to meet all the consequences. You are ready to confess his grace to you and not conceal it from the great congregation. Can you say this? If so, do it. Tell him you are ready to die to the world--ready to give it all up and renounce it utterly and forever. You are determined you will have no more fellowship with the works of darkness--to have the world become dead to you and you to the world. You are ready to meet all and bear all that the service of Christ may impose and involve. No matter if the world disowns you and casts you out from

its regard and fellowship. You have counted the cost and are ready to meet it all.

- 11. Urge as a further reason that you are willing to become dead to a worldly and unbelieving church--that you are ready to die even to their good opinion--to be excommunicated if they will do it; to be cast out if they will cast you out. You shrink not from being reputed a heretic, if you may only have grace to overcome all sin and every temptation. You wish to please but one, and you are quite satisfied with pleasing God only. This shall be your object, and this, attained, shall fully satisfy your soul. You are willing to give up all idols and live to Him alone. No matter if your name be cast out as evil and trodden down as vile, by the church, by her ministry, by all men, if you may only live to please God. Tell Him you are willing to renounce all creature help, and all earthly reliances, with only one great inquiry--How can I most and best please God?
- 12. Be sure to remind him that you intend to be wholly disinterested and unselfish in this matter; you ask these things not for your own present selfish interest; you are aware that a really holy life may subject you to much persecution--you know that "if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he shall suffer persecution;" and you are well aware that if you receive this cleansing, it may bring on you much persecution;--you come not therefore to ask for present personal good, for you expect only greater trials; but you will consent to endure anything that does not involve sin. You want to represent him truly. You want to encourage all Christians and all sinners too to seek abounding grace by showing them how you have found mercy.
- 13. Then tell Him of your great weakness, and how you entirely distrust yourself; how, oftentimes, you are covered with confusion and filled with shame so that you cannot lift up your head and you are constrained to cry, O, my God, dost thou not pity thy child? Tell Him you loathe yourself--that you would fain spue yourself out of your own mouth, because you so much dishonor Him. Tell him you despair utterly of saving yourself, but that you still have unshaken confidence in Him. Remind Him moreover of his promises, and say that you are encouraged because you know that you are asking mercy of a most gracious God. Tell Him you shall go away greatly disappointed if you do not receive the grace you ask and need. As said a dear sister in a great struggle of her soul for spiritual blessings--"O, my God, thou hast made me exceeding great and precious promises; now if thou dost not give me these blessings, what can I say any more for thee? How can I plead for thee if thou dost shut me up in my desolations? How can I ever again present thy strong claims to be believed and trusted as to all thy words of gracious promise?"

Thus making your strong issue, you come pleading not your goodness but your badness;--appealing not to God's justice, but to his mercy; telling him how poor you are and how rich he is, and that therefore you cannot bear to go away empty.

## **REMARKS.**

1. Whenever we have considered the reasons for God's actions till they have really moved and persuaded us, they will surely move Him. God is not slow--never slower than we, to see the reasons for showing mercy and for leading us to holiness.
2. Many fail in coming to God because they do not treat Him as a rational being. Instead of

considering him as a rational being, they come without ever considering the reasons why he should and will forgive and sanctify. Of course, failing to have faith, and having views altogether dishonoring to God, they fail to get the blessing they seek.

3. Many do not present these reasons, because in honesty they cannot. Now God assumes that we ought to be in a state of mind to present all these reasons honestly. If we are not in such a state, we ought not to expect blessings.

4. When we want anything of God, we should always consider whether we can present good reasons why it should be granted. If you were to apply to any other being, e.g., your Governor, you would of course ask in the outset--Can I give any good reasons? If you are to appeal to justice, you must ask--Have I any good reasons to offer? So if you want favours on the score of mercy, what reasons have you to offer why they should be granted? If you have reasons, be sure to offer them, and by no means assume that you shall get your case without reasons.

5. All who are in any want are invited to come and bring forward their strong reasons. If in sorrow, distress, affliction, come and present your plea. If you are a sinner, oppressed with a sense of sin, fear not to unbosom your heart before your God. All those who are under any afflictive dispensation should come, like Job, and tell God how deeply you are afflicted. Why not? Did not saints of old say to God, "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not?"

Christian parents, you are invited to come and present your strong reasons why your children should be converted. Come and tell God how much you need this blessing. Tell him you cannot endure that all your prayers in their behalf should come to naught, that the great labour of your life should fail, and worse than fail, as it must if your children of the covenant should disgrace religion and press their way through throngs of offered mercies down to hell.

Backsliders should come and tell God all their case. Ask him if he will not break your chains, and bring you back, and put a new song into your mouth, even of praise for recovering grace.

6. Of all beings, God is most easily influenced to save. He is by his very nature disposed to save the lost. He loves to let his mercies flow. You have only to bring forth your strong reasons; indeed you have only to come in the spirit of a child, trustful and lowly, and your case is gained. You need not come with a bribe; you need not come and offer pay. No; you have only to come and say--I want to serve God; for this end I need spiritual blessings. Tell him how much He has loved you, and how often and richly He has manifested this love; and plead that He would still show forth this same love yet more abundantly, that you may still follow on in his service, and never more be confounded and put to shame and sorrow for your own grievous sins.

7. We, of Oberlin, have peculiar reasons to urge why God should appear for the conversion and salvation of sinners among us. Just look here, brethren, you who have come here to embosom this institution with your influence and your prayers--have you no special reasons to urge why God should bless this place and sanctify this school, and convert to Himself these precious souls? O come and ask God if the growing people of this great nation, already outstripping the progress of the means of

grace, must not become almost heathen, if his infinite mercy does not descend on all our schools and colleges and mold these young minds to Himself! These young women, what shall their influence be when they become wives and mothers, and are scattered over the breadth of the land? And these young men, destined to stand on the high places of social and moral power--shall the Great West feel their influence--and the distant South, shall it and its peculiar institutions feel the touch of their power? And the East--shall it know the weight of their principle and of their educated and sanctified talent? O have we not reason to plead mightily with God! O how many young palpitating hearts are here which need to be drawn into God's work and into the spirit of full consecration to the Lord of Hosts! Christians, have you no plea, no special, peculiar plea to urge in behalf of interests so great and so pressing?

Sinners in Oberlin, have you not some plea to urge? O, my stony heart, go not down to ruin from this Oberlin! Say rather, O my God, wash all my sins away; O fulfil thy promise and make me white as snow. Let me not die, but live and declare the high praises of my God for evermore!

## **The Saviour Lifted Up, and the Look of Faith**

Lecture III

May 25, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 3:14, 15: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Text.--John 12:32, 33: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. (This he said, signifying what death he should die.)"

In order to make this subject plain, I will read the passage referred to.--Num. 21:6-9. "And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived."

This is the transaction to which Christ alluded in the text.

The object in both cases was to save men from perishing. The bite of the serpent, its influence being unchecked, is the death of the body: the effects of sin, unpardoned and uncleansed from the heart, are the ruin of the soul. Christ is lifted up, to the end that sinners, believing in him, may not perish, but may have eternal life. In such a connection, to "perish" cannot mean annihilation, for it must be the antithesis of eternal life, and this is plainly much more than eternal existence. It must be eternal happiness--real life in the sense of exquisite enjoyment, and the counterpart of this, eternal misery, is presented under the term "perish." It is common in the scriptures to find a state of endless misery contrasted with one of endless happiness.

We may observe two points of analogy between the brazen serpent and Christ.

*I. Christ must be lifted up as the serpent was in the wilderness;*

*II. Christ must be held up as a remedy for sin, even as the brazen serpent was as a remedy for a poison.*

### **I. Christ must be lifted up as the serpent was in the wilderness.**

From the passage quoted above out of Jn. 12, it is plain that this refers to his being raised up from the earth upon his cross at his crucifixion.

- 1. In this respect the serpent of brass was a type of Christ. Whoever looked upon this serpent was healed. So Christ heals not from punishment only, for to this the analogy of healing is less pertinent--but especially from sinning--from the heart to sin. He heals the soul and restores it to health. So it was said by the announcing angel, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. His power avails to cleanse and purify the soul.
- 2. Both Christ and the serpent were held up each as a remedy; and let it be specially noted--as a full and adequate remedy. The ancient Hebrews, bitten by fiery serpents, were not to mix up nostrums of their own devising to help out the cure: it was all-sufficient for them to look up to the remedy of God's own providing. God would have them understand that the healing was altogether his own work. The serpent on a pole was the only external object connected with their cure; to this they were to look, and in this most simple way--only by an expecting look, indicative of simple faith, they received their cure.
- 3. Christ is to be lifted up as a present remedy. So was the serpent. The cure wrought then was present, immediate. It involved no delay.
- 4. This serpent was God's appointed remedy. So is Christ, a remedy appointed of God, sent down from heaven for this express purpose. It was indeed very wonderful that God should appoint a brazen serpent for such a purpose--such a remedy for such a malady; and not less wonderful is it that Christ should be lifted up in agony and blood, as a remedy for both the punishment and the heart-power of sin.
- 5. The brazen serpent was a divinely-certified remedy; --not a nostrum gotten up as thousands

are, under high-sounding names and flaming testimonials; but a remedy prepared and brought forth by God himself, under his own certificate of its ample healing virtues.

- 6. So was Christ. The Father testifies to the perfect adequacy of Jesus Christ as a remedy for sin.
- 7. Jesus Christ must now be held up from the pulpit as one crucified for the sins of men. His great power to save lay in his atoning death.
- 8. He must not only be held up from the pulpit, but this exhibition of his person and work must be endorsed, and not contradicted by the experience of those who behold him.

Suppose that in Moses' time many who looked were seen to be still dying; who could have believed the unqualified declaration of Moses, that "every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live?" So here in the gospel and its subjects. Doubtless the Hebrews had before their eyes many living witnesses who had been bitten and yet bore the scars of those wounds; but who, by looking, had been healed. Every such case would go to confirm the faith of the people in God's word and in his own power to save. So Christ must be represented in his fullness, and this representation should be powerfully endorsed by the experience of his friends. Christ represents himself as one ready and willing to save. This, therefore is the thing to be shown. This must be sustained by the testimony of his living witnesses.

## **II. As the first point of analogy is the lifting up of the object to be looked upon, the second is this very looking itself.**

Christ must be held up as a remedy for sin, even as the brazen serpent was as a remedy for a poison. It is not uncommon in the Bible to see sin represented as a malady. For this malady, Christ had healing power. He professed to be able to forgive sin and to cleanse the soul from its moral pollution. Continually did he claim to have this power and encourage men to rely upon him and to resort to him for its application. In all his personal instructions he was careful to hold up himself as having this power, and as capable of affording a remedy for sin.

- 1. Men looked upon the serpent, expecting divine power to heal them. Even those ancient men, in that comparatively dark age, understood that the serpent was only a type, not the very cause in itself of salvation.
- 2. So is there something very remarkable in the relation of faith to healing. Take for illustration, the case of the woman who had an issue of blood. She had heard something about Jesus, and somehow had caught the idea that if she could but touch the hem of his garment, she should be made whole. See her pressing her way along through the crowd, faint with weakness, pale, and trembling;--if you had seen her you would perhaps have cried out, What would this poor dying invalid do?

She knew what she was trying to do. At last, unnoticed of all, she reached the spot where the Holy One stood and put forth her feeble hand and touched his garment. Suddenly he

turns himself and asks--Who was it that touched me? Somebody touched me;--who was it? The disciples, astonished at such a question, put under such circumstances, reply--The multitude throng thee on every side, and scores are touching thee every hour; why then ask--Who touched me?

The fact was, somebody had touched Him with faith to be healed thereby, and he knew that the healing virtue had gone forth from himself to some believing heart. How beautiful an illustration this [sic.] of simple faith! And how wonderful the connection between the faith and the healing!

- 3. Just so the Hebrews received that wonderful healing power by simply looking toward the brazen serpent. No doubt this was a great mystery to them, yet it was none the less a fact. Let them look; the looking brings the cure, although not one of them can tell how the healing virtue comes. So we are really to look to Christ, and in looking, to receive the healing power. It matters not how little we understand the mode in which the looking operates to give us the remedy for sin.
- 4. This looking to Jesus implies that we look away from ourselves. There is to be no mixing up of quack medicines along with the great remedy. Such a course is always sure to fail. Thousands fail in just this way,--forever trying to be healed partly by their own stupid, self-willed works, as well as partly by Jesus Christ. There must be no looking to man or to any of man's doings or man's help. All dependence must be on Christ alone. As this is true in reference to pardon, so is it also in reference to sanctification. This is done by faith in Christ. It is only through and by faith that you get that divine influence which sanctifies the soul--the Spirit of God; and this in some of its forms of action was the power that healed the Hebrews in the wilderness.
  - (1). Looking to Christ implies looking away from ourselves in the sense of not relying at all on our own works for the cure desired, not even on works of faith. The looking is toward Christ alone as our all-prevalent, all-sufficient and present remedy.
  - (2). There is a constant tendency in Christians to depend on their own doings, and not on simple faith in Christ. The woman of the blood-issue seems to have toiled many years to find relief before she came to Christ; had no doubt tried everybody's prescriptions, and taxed her own ingenuity besides to its utmost capacity, but all was of no avail. At last she heard of Jesus. He was said to do many wonderful works. She said within herself--This must be the promised Messiah--who was to "bear our sicknesses" and heal all the maladies of men. O let me rush to him, for if I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole. She did not stop to philosophize upon the mode of the cure; she leaned on no man's philosophy, and had none of her own; she simply said--I have heard of One who is mighty to save, and I flee to him.
  - (3). So of being healed of our sins. Despairing of all help in ourselves or in any other name than Christ's, and assured there is virtue in him to work out the cure, we expect it of him and come to him to obtain it.

Several times within the last few years, when persons have come to me with the question, Can I anyhow be saved from my sins--actually saved, so as not to fall again into the same sins, and under the same temptations? I have said--Have you ever tried looking to Jesus? O yes.

But have you expected that you should be actually saved from sin by looking to Jesus, and be filled with faith, love, and holiness? No; I did not expect that.

Now suppose a man had looked at the brazen serpent for the purpose of speculation. He has no faith in what God says about being cured by looking, but he is inclined to try it. He will look a little and watch his feelings to see how it affects him. He does not believe God's word, yet since he does not absolutely know but it may be true, he will condescend to try it. This is no looking at all in the sense of our text. It would not have cured the bitten Israelite; it cannot heal the poor sinner. There is no faith in it.

- 5. Sinners must look to Christ with both desire and design to be saved. Salvation is the object for which they look.

Suppose one had looked towards the brazen serpent, but with no willingness or purpose to be cured. This could do him no good. Nor can it do sinners any good to think of Christ otherwise than as a Saviour, and a Saviour for their own sins.

- 6. Sinners must look to Christ as a remedy for all sin. To wish to make some exception, sparing some sins, but consenting to abandon others, indicates rank rebellion of heart, and can never impose on the All-seeing One. There cannot be honesty in the heart which proposes to itself to seek deliverance from sin only in part.
- 7. Sinners may look to Christ at once--without the least delay. They need not wait till they are almost dead under their malady. For the bitten Israelite, it was of no use to wait and defer his looking to the serpent till he found himself in the jaws of death. He might have said--I am wounded plainly enough, but I do not see as it swells much yet;--I do not feel the poison spreading through my system;--I cannot look yet, for my case is not yet desperate enough; I could not hope to excite the pity of the Lord in my present condition, and therefore I must wait. I say, there was no need of such delay then and no use of it. Nor is there any more need or use for it in the sinner's case now.
- 8. We must look to Christ for blessings promised, not to works but to faith. It is curious to see how many mistakes are made on this point. Many will have it that there must be great mental agony, long fasting, many bitter tears and strong crying for mercy before deliverance can be looked for. They do not seem to think that all these manifestations of grief and distress are of not the least avail, because they are not simple faith, nor any part of faith, nor indeed any help toward faith; nor are they in anywise needed for the sake of acting on the sympathies of the Saviour. It is all as if under the serpent-plague of the wilderness, men had set their wits at work to get up quack remedies; fixing up plasters, and ointments, and plying the system with

depletions, cathartics, and purifiers of the blood. All this treatment could avail nothing; there was but one effective cure, and if a man were only bitten and knew it, this would be the only preparatory step necessary to his looking as directed, for his cure.

So in the case of the sinner. If he is a sinner and knows it, this constitutes his preparation and fitness for coming to Jesus. It is all of no avail that he should go about to get up quack prescriptions, and to mix up remedies of his own devising with the great Remedy which God has provided. Yet there is a constant tendency in religious efforts toward this very thing--toward fixing up and relying upon an indefinite multitude and variety of spiritual quack remedies. See that sinner. How he toils and agonizes. He would compass heaven and earth to work out his own salvation, in his own way, to his own credit, by his own works. See how he worries himself in the multitude of his own devisings! Commonly before he arrives at simple faith, he finds himself in the deep mire of despair. Alas, he cries, there can be no hope for me! O! my soul is lost!

But at last the gleam of a thought breaks through the thick darkness, "possibly Jesus can help me! If He can, then I shall live, but not otherwise, for surely there is no help for me but in Him." There he is in his despair--bowed in weariness of soul, and worn out with his vain endeavors to help himself in other ways. He now bethinks himself of help from above. "There is nothing else I can do but cast myself utterly in all my hopelessness, upon Jesus Christ. Will He receive me? Perhaps He will; and that is enough for me to know." He thinks on a little further, "Perhaps, yes, perhaps He will;--Nay, more, I think He will, for they tell me He has done so for other sinners;--I think he will--yes, I know he will--and here's my guilty heart! I will trust Him--yea, though He slay me, I will trust in Him."

Have any of you experienced anything like that?

"Perhaps He will admit my plea.

Perhaps will hear my prayer."

This is as far as the sinner can dare to go at first. But soon you hear him crying out--He says He will; I must believe Him! Then faith gets hold, and rests on promised faithfulness, and ere he is aware, his "soul is like the chariots of Amminadab," and he finds his bosom full of peace and joy as one on the borders of heaven.

## **REMARKS.**

1. When it is said in John 12, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me," the language is indeed universal in form, but cannot be construed as strictly universal without being brought into conflict with Bible truth and known facts. It is indeed only a common mode of speaking to denote a great multitude. I will draw great numbers--a vast "multitude that no man can number." There is nothing here in the context, or in the subject to require the strictly universal interpretation.
2. This expedient of the brazen serpent was no doubt designed to try the faith of the Israelites. God

often put their faith to the test, and often adapted his providences to educate their faith--to draw it out and develop it. Many things did He do to prove them. So now. They had sinned. Fiery serpents came among them and many were poisoned and dying on every hand. God said, Make a brazen serpent and set it upon a pole, and raise it high before the eyes of all the people. Now let the sufferers look on this serpent and they shall live. This put their faith to the test.

3. It is conceivable that many perished through mere unbelief, although the provisions for their salvation were most abundant. We, look at a serpent of brass--they might say, scornfully--as if there were not humbugs enough among the rabble, but Moses must give us yet another! Perhaps some set themselves to philosophizing on the matter. We, they say, will much sooner trust our tried physicians than these "old wives' fables." What philosophical connection can any man see between looking upon a piece of brass and being healed of a serpent's bite?

So, many now blow at the gospel. They wonder how any healing power can come of gospel faith. True, they hear some say they are healed, and that they know the healing power has gone to their very soul, and they cry--"I looked to Jesus and I was healed and made whole from that very hour." But they count all this as mere fanatical delusion. They can see none of their philosophy in it.

But is this fanaticism? Is it any more strange than that a man bitten of poisonous serpents should be healed by looking at God's command on a brazen serpent?

4. Many are stumbled by the simplicity of the gospel. They want something more intelligible! They want to see through it. They will not trust what they cannot explain. It is on this ground that many stumble at the doctrine of sanctification by faith in Christ. It is so simple their philosophy cannot see through it.

Yet the analogy afforded in our text is complete. Men are to look to Jesus that they may not perish but may have eternal life. And who does not know that eternal life involves entire sanctification?

5. The natural man always seeks for some way of salvation that shall be altogether creditable to himself. He wants to work out some form of self-righteousness and does not know about trusting in Christ alone. It does not seem to him natural or philosophical.

6. There is a wonderful and most alarming state of things in many churches abroad;--almost no Christ in their experience. It is most manifest that He holds an exceedingly small space in their hearts. So far from knowing what salvation is as a thing to be attained by simply believing in Christ, they can only give you an experience of this sort. How did you become a Christian? I just made up my mind to serve the Lord. Is that all? That's all. Do you know what it is to receive eternal life by simply looking to Jesus? Don't know as I understand that. Then you are not a Christian. Christianity, from beginning to end is received from Christ by simple faith. Thus, and only thus does the pardon of sin come to the soul, and thus only can come that peace of God, passing all understanding, which lives in the soul with faith and love. Thus sanctification comes through faith in Christ.

What, then shall we think of that religion which leaves Christ out of view?

7. Many are looking for some wonderful sign or token, not understanding that it is by faith they are to be brought completely into sympathy with Christ and into participation with his own life. By faith Christ unites them to himself. Faith working by love, draws them into living union with his own moral being. All this is done by the mind's simply looking to Christ in faith.

8. When the serpent was up, no doubt many perished because they would not accept and act upon so simple a plan of remedy. Many perished because they did not and would not realize their danger. If they saw men cured, they would say--We don't believe it was done by the brazen serpent on the pole. Those men were not much poisoned--would not have died anyhow. They assume that those who ascribe their cure to the power of God are mistaken.

9. Many perished also from delay. They waited to see whether they were in danger of dying. And still they waited--till they were so bedazzled and crazed, they could only lie down and die.

10. So now in regard to the gospel. Some are occupied with other matters, more important just now, and of course they must delay. Many are influenced by others' opinions. They hear many stories. Such a man looked and yet lost his life. Another man did not look and yet was saved. So men have different opinions about their professedly Christian neighbors, and this stumbles many. They hear that some set out strong for religion, but seem to fail. They looked as they thought, but all in vain. Perhaps it was so; for they might have looked without real faith. Some will philosophize till they make themselves believe it is all a delusion to look. They think they see many pretend to look and appear to look, who yet find no healing. Who can believe where there are so many stumbling-blocks?

These discouraging appearances drove some into despair in the wilderness, we may suppose; and certainly we see that the same causes produce these effects here in the case of sinners. Some think they have committed the unpardonable sin. They class themselves among those who "having been once enlightened," "there remains for them no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain looking for of vengeance and fiery indignation." Some are sure it is too late for them now. Their heart is hard as the nether mill-stone. All is dark and desolate as the grave. See him; his very look is that of a lost soul! Ah, some of you are perhaps reasoning and disbelieving in this very way!

11. Many neglected because they thought they were getting better. They saw some change of symptoms as they supposed. So with sinners; they feel better for going to meeting, and indeed there is so much improvement, they take it they are undoubtedly doing well.

12. Many of the ancient Hebrews may have refused to look because they had no good hope; because indeed they were full of doubts. If you had been there you would have found a great variety of conflicting views, often even between brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, parents and children. Some ridicule; some are mad; some won't believe anyhow. And must I say it--some sinners who ought to be seeking Christ are deterred by reasons fully as frivolous and foolish as these.

13. It is easy for us all to see the analogy between the manner of looking and the reasons for not looking at the brazen serpent and to Christ the Saviour. I need not push the analogy into its minute particulars any further. But the question for you all now is: Do you really believe that as "Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so is the Son of man lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him

shall not perish, but shall have eternal life"? Do you understand the simple remedy of faith? Perhaps you ask--What were they to believe? This; that if they really looked at the brazen serpent on the pole, they should certainly experience the needed healing. It was God's certified remedy, and they were so to regard it. And what are you now to believe? That Christ is the great antitype of that serpent lifted up in the wilderness, and that you are to receive from him by simple faith all the blessings of a full and free salvation. By simple faith, I say, and do you understand this? Do I hear you say to these things--What, may I, a sinner, just fix my eye in simple faith on Jesus? Who, who may do this? Is it I? How can it be that I should have this privilege?

I see here to-day the faces of some whom I saw last fall in the meetings for inquiry. What have you been doing? Have you been trying to work yourselves into some certain state of mind? Are you wishing intensely that you could only feel so and so--according to some ideal you have in your mind? Do you understand that you are really to look by faith, and let this look of faith be to you as the touch of the poor woman with an issue of blood was to her dying body, believing that if you look in simple trust, He surely will receive you, and give you his divine love and peace and life and light, and really make them pulsate through your whole moral being? Do you believe it? Nay, don't you see that you do not believe it? Oh, but you say, "It is a great mystery!" I am not going to explain it, nor shall I presume that I can do so, any more than I can explain how that woman was healed by touching the hem of the Saviour's garment. The touch in this case and the looking in that, are only the means, the media, by which the power is to be received. The manner in which God operates is a thing of small consequence to us; let us be satisfied that we know what we must do to secure the operations of his divine Spirit in all things that pertain to life and godliness.

You have doubtless had confused notions of the way of salvation, perhaps contriving and speculating, and working upon your own feelings. Now you pray, and having prayed, you say--Now let me watch and see if this prayer has given me salvation! This course is much as if the Hebrew people when bitten by serpents and commanded to look to the serpent of brass, had gone about to apply here a plaster, there a blister, and then a probe, all the time losing sight of just that one thing which God told them would infallibly cure. Oh! why should men forget, and why not understand that all good needed by us comes from God to simple faith? When we see any want, there is Christ, to be received by faith alone; and His promises leave no want unprovided for.

Now, if this is the way of salvation, how wonderful that sinners should look every other way but toward Christ, and should put forth all other sorts of effort except the effort to look at once in simple faith to their Saviour! How often do we see them discouraged and confounded, toiling so hard and so utterly in vain. No wonder they should be so greatly misled. Go round among the churches and ask, Did you ever expect to be saved from sin in this world? No;--but you expect to be saved at death. Inasmuch as He has been quite unsuccessful in his efforts to sanctify your soul during your life, you think He will send death on in season to help the work through!

Can you believe this?

While Christians disown the glorious doctrine of sanctification by faith in Christ, present, and according to each man's faith so done to him, it cannot be expected that they will teach sinners with intelligible clearness how to look to Christ in simple faith for pardon. Knowing so little of the power

of faith in their own experience, how can they teach others effectively, or even truthfully? Thus blind leading blind, it is no wonder that both are found together where the Bible proverb represents both the leaders and the led as terminating their mutual relations.

There seems to be no remedy for such a finality except for professing Christians to become the light of the world; and for this end, to learn the meaning and know the experience of simple faith. Faith once learned, they will experience its transforming power, and be able to teach others the way of life.

## **The Sinner's Excuses Answered**

Lecture IV  
June 8, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Job 36:1-3: "Elihu also proceeded and said, Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf. I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker."

Elihu was present and heard the controversy between Job and his friends. The latter maintained that God's dealings with Job proved him wicked. This Job denied, and maintained that we could not judge men to be good or bad, from God's providential dealings with them, because facts show that the present is not a state of rewards and punishments. They, however, regarded this as taking part with the wicked, and hence did not shrink from accusing Job of doing this.

Elihu had previously said--My desire is that Job may be tried in regard to what he has said of wicked men. But ere the discussion closed, he saw that Job had confounded his three friends, maintaining unanswerably that it was not because of any hypocrisy or special guilt that he was so signally scourged. Yet plainly even Job had not the key to explain the reason of God's dealings with him. To him it was still a mystery. He did not see that God might have been seeking to test and discipline his piety, or even to make an example of his integrity and submissiveness to confound the devil with.

Elihu purposed to speak in God's behalf and ascribed righteousness to his Maker. It is my present object to do the same in regard to sinners who refuse to repent, and who complain of God's ways. But before I proceed, let me advert to a fact. Some years since, in my labours as an evangelist, I became acquainted with a man prominent in the place of his residence for his general intelligence, and whose two successive wives were daughters of Old School Presbyterian clergymen. Through them he had received many books to read on religious subjects, which they and their friends supposed would do him good, but which failed to do him any good at all. He denied the inspiration of the Bible, and on

grounds which those books did not in his view obviate at all. Indeed, they only served to aggravate his objections.

When I came into the place, his wife was very anxious that I should see and converse with him. I called; she sent for him to come in and see the new minister;--to which he replied that he was sure he could do him no good, since he had conversed with so many and found no light on the points that so much stumbled him; but upon her urgent entreaty, he consented for her sake to come in. I said to him in the outset, "Don't understand me as having called here to have a quarrel with you, and provoke a dispute. I only wish at your wife's request to converse with you if you are perfectly willing, upon the great subject of divine revelation." He signified his pleasure to have such a conversation, and accordingly I asked him to state briefly his position. He replied--"I admit the truths of natural religion, and believe most fully in the immortality of the soul, but not in the inspiration of the scriptures. I am a Deist." But, said I, on what ground do you deny the inspiration of the Bible? Said he, I know it cannot be true. How do you know that? It contradicts the affirmations of my reason. You admit and I hold that God created my nature, both physical and moral. Here is a book, said to be from God, but it contradicts my nature. I therefore know it cannot be from God.

This of course opened the door for me to draw from him the particular points of his objection to the Bible as teaching what his nature contradicted. These points and my reply to them will constitute the body of my present discourse.

1. The Bible cannot be true because it represents God as unjust. I find myself possessed of convictions as to what is just and unjust. These convictions, the Bible outrages. It represents God as creating men and then condemning them for another's sin.

Indeed, said I, and where? Say, where does the Bible affirm this?

Why, does it not? said he. No. Are you a Presbyterian? said he. Yes. He then began to quote the catechism. Stop, stop, said I, that is not the Bible. That is only a human catechism. True, said he, but does not the Bible connect the universal sin of the race with the sin of Adam? Yes, said I, it does in a particular way, but it is quite essential to our purpose to understand in what way. The Bible makes this connection incidental and not direct; and it always represents the sinner condemned as really sinning himself, and as condemned for his own sin.

2. But, continued he, children do suffer for their father's sins.

Yes, said I, in a certain sense it is so, and must be so. Do you not see yourself, everywhere, that children must suffer for the sins of their parents? and be blessed also by the piety of their parents? You see this and you find no fault with it. You see that children must be implicated in the good or ill conduct of their parents; their relation as children makes this absolutely unavoidable. Is it not wise and good that the happiness or misery of children should depend on their parents, and thus become one of the strongest possible motives to them to train them up in virtue? Yet it is true that the son is never rewarded or punished punitively for his parents' sins. The evil that befalls him through his connection

with his parents is always disciplinary--never punitive.

3. Again, he said, the Bible certainly represents God as creating men sinners, and as condemning them for their sinful nature.

No, replied I; for the Bible defines sin as voluntary transgression of law, and it is absurd to suppose that a nature can be a voluntary transgressor. Besides, it is in the nature of the case impossible that God should make a sinful nature. It is in fact doubly impossible, for the thing is a natural impossibility, and if it were not, it would yet be morally impossible that he should do it. He could not do it for the same reason that He can not sin.

In harmony with this is the fact that the Bible never represents God as condemning men for their nature, either here or at the judgment. Nowhere in the Bible is there the least intimation that God holds men responsible for their created nature, but only for the vile and pertinacious abuse of their nature. Other views of this matter, differing from this, are not the Bible, but are only false glosses put upon it usually by those whose philosophy has led them into absurd interpretations. Every where in the Bible, men are condemned only for their voluntary sins, and are required to repent of these sins, and of these only. Indeed there can possibly be no other sins than these.

4. Again, it is said, the Bible represents God as being cruel, inasmuch as He commanded the Jews to wage a war of extermination against the ancient Canaanites.

But why should this be called cruel? The Bible expressly informs us that God commanded this because of their awful wickedness. They were too awfully wicked to live. God could not suffer them to defile the earth and corrupt society. Hence He arose in his zeal for human welfare, and commanded to wash the land clean of such unutterable abominations. The good of the race demanded it. Was this cruel? Nay, verily, this was simply benevolent. It was one of the highest acts of benevolence to smite down such a race and sweep them from the face of the earth. And to employ the Jews as His executioners, giving them to understand distinctly why He commanded them to do it, was putting them in a way to derive the highest moral benefit from the transaction. In no other way could they have been so solemnly impressed with the holy justice of Jehovah. And now will any man find fault with God for this? None can do so, reasonably.

5. But the Bible allows slavery.

What? The Bible allow slavery? In what sense allow it? and under what circumstances? and what kind of slavery? These are all very important inquiries if we wish to know the certainty and the meaning of the things we say.

The Bible did indeed allow the Jews, in the case of captives taken in war, to commute death for servitude. When the customs of existing nations put captives taken in war to death, God authorized the Jews in certain cases to spare their captives and employ them as servants. By this means they were taken out from among idolatrous nations and brought into contact with the worship and ordinances of the true God.

Moreover God enacted statutes for the protection of the Hebrew servant, which made his case infinitely better than being cut off in his sins. And who shall call this cruel? Jewish servitude was not American slavery, nor scarcely an approximation toward it. It would require too much time to go into the detail of this subject here. All that I have stated might be abundantly substantiated.

6. Again, it is objected God is unmerciful, vindictive, and implacable. The gentleman to whom I have alluded said--I don't believe the Bible is from God when it represents Him as so vindictive and implacable that He would not forgive sin until He had first taken measures to kill His own Son.

Now it was by no means unnatural that, under such instructions he had received, he should think so. I had felt so myself. This very objection had stumbled me. But I afterwards saw the answer so plainly that it left nothing more to be desired. The answer indeed is exceedingly plain. It was not an implacable disposition in God which led Him to require the death of Christ as the ground of forgiveness. It was simply his benevolent regard for the safety and blessedness of His kingdom. He knew very well that it was unsafe to forgive sin without such a satisfaction. Indeed this was the strongest possible exhibition of a forgiving disposition, to consent to the sacrifice of His Son for this purpose. He loved His Son, and certainly would not inflict one needless pang upon Him. He also loved a sinning race, and saw the depth of that ruin toward which they were rushing. Therefore He longed to forgive them, and to prepare a way in which He could do so with safety. He only desired to avoid all misapprehension. To forgive without such atonement as would adequately express His abhorrence of sin, would leave the intelligent universe to think that He did not care how much any beings should sin. This would not do.

Let it be considered also that the giving up of Jesus Christ was only a voluntary offering on God's part to sustain law so that He could forgive without peril to His government. Jesus was not in any sense punished; He only volunteered to suffer for sinners that they might be freed from the governmental necessity of suffering. And was not mercy manifested in this? Certainly. How could it be manifested more signally?

7. But, says the objector, God is unjust, inasmuch as He requires impossibilities on pain of endless death.

Does He, indeed? Then where? In the law, is it, or in the gospel? In these taken together we have the aggregate of all God's requirements. In what part, then, of either law or Gospel do you find the precept contained which requires impossibilities? Is it in the law? But the law says only--"Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart;" not with another man's heart, but simply with thine own; only with all thine own heart, not with more than all. Read on still further: "and with all thy strength." Not with the strength of an angel--not with the strength of any other being than thyself, and only with such an amount of strength as you actually have for the time being. The demands of the law, you see, exactly meet your ability; nothing more and nothing else.

8. Indeed, said he, this is a new view of the subject.

Well; but is not this just as it should be? Does not the law carry with it, its own vindication in its very terms? How can any one say that the law requires of us impossible service--things we have no power to do? The fact is it requires us to do just what we can and nothing more. Where then is this objection to the Bible? Where is the impossibility of which you speak?

9. But, resumed he, is it not true that "no mere man since the fall has been able wholly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed?"

Ah, my friend, that's catechism, not Bible; we must be careful not to impute to the Bible all that human catechisms have said. The Bible only requires you to consecrate to God what strength and powers you actually have, and is by no means responsible for the affirmation that God requires of man more than he can do. No, verily, the Bible nowhere imputes to God a requisition so unreasonable and cruel. No wonder the human mind should rebel against such a view of God's law. If any human law were to require impossibilities, there could be no end to the denunciations that must fall upon it. No human mind could possibly approve of such a law. Nor can it be supposed that God can reasonably act on principles which would disgrace and ruin any human government.

10. But, resumed he, here is another objection. The Bible represents men as unable to believe the Gospel unless they are drawn by God, for it reads--"No man can come to me except the Father who hath sent me draw him." Yet sinners are required to believe on pain of damnation. How is this?

To this the reply is, first, the connection shows that Christ referred to drawing by means of teaching or instruction; for to confirm what he had said, he appeals to the ancient scriptures, "It is written, They shall all be taught of God." Without this teaching, then, none can come. They must know Christ before they can come to Him in faith. They cannot believe till they know what to believe. In this sense of coming, untaught heathen are not required to come. God never requires any to come, who have not been taught. Once taught, they are bound to come, may be and are required to come, and are without excuse if they refuse.

11. But, replied he, the Bible does really teach that men cannot serve the Lord, and still it holds them responsible for doing it. Joshua said to all the people, "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is an holy God."

Let us see. Joshua had called all the people together and had laid before them their obligation to serve the Lord their God. When they all said so readily and with so little serious consideration that they would, Joshua replied--"Ye cannot serve the Lord for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins." What did he mean? Plainly this--Ye cannot serve God, because you have not heartily abandoned your sins. You cannot get along with a God so holy and so jealous, unless you give up sinning. You cannot serve God with a selfish heart. You cannot please Him till you really renounce your sins altogether. You must begin by making to yourselves a new heart. Joshua doubtless saw that they had not given up their sins and had not really begun

to serve God at all, and did not even understand the first principles of true religion. This is the reason why he seemed to repulse them so suddenly. It is as if he would say--Stop; you must go back and begin with utterly putting away all your sins. Ye cannot serve a holy and jealous God in any other way, for He will not go along with you as his people if you persist in sinning against Him.

It is a gross perversion of the Bible to make it mean that men have no power to do what God requires. It is true indeed, that in this connection it sometimes uses the words can and cannot, but these and similar words should be construed according to the nature of the subject. All reasonable men construe thus intuitively in all common use of language. The Bible always employs the language of common life and in the way of common usage. Hence it should be thus interpreted.

When it is said that Joseph's brethren hated him and could not speak peaceably to him, the meaning is not that their organs of speech could not articulate kind words; but it points us to a difficulty in the heart. They hated him so badly they could not speak pleasantly. Nor does the sacred historian assume that they could not at once subdue this hatred and treat Joseph as brother should treat brother. The sacred writers are the last men in the world to apologize for sin on this wise.

There is the case of the angels sent to hasten Lot out of guilty Sodom. One said, "Haste thee, escape thither, for I can not do anything until thou be come thither." Does this mean that the Almighty God had no power to overwhelm Sodom so long as Lot was in it? Certainly not. It meant only that it was his purpose not to destroy the city till Lot was out. Indeed all men use language thus in common life. You go into one of our village stores and say to the merchant--Can you lift a ton of your goods at once? No. Can you sell me that piece of cloth for a shilling a yard? No. Does this "can" mean the same as the other? By no means. But how is it that you detect the difference? How is it that you come to know so readily which is the physical cannot and which the moral? The nature of the subject tells you.

But, you say, the same word ought always to mean the same thing. Well, if it ought to, it does not, in any language ever yet spoken by man. And yet there is no difficulty in understanding even the most imperfect of human languages if men are honest in speaking and honest in hearing, and will use their common sense. They intuitively construe language according to the nature of the subject spoken of.

The Bible always assumes that sinners cannot do right and please God with a wicked heart. It always takes the ground that God abhors hypocrisy--that He cannot be satisfied with mere forms and professions of service when the heart is not in it, and hence that all acceptable service must begin with making a new and sincere heart.

12. But here is another difficulty. Can I make to myself a new heart?

Yes, and you could not doubt but that you could, if you only understood what the language means and what the thing is.

See Adam and Eve in the garden. What was their heart? Did God create it? No; it is not possible that He should, for a heart in this sense is not the subject of physical creation. When God made Adam, giving him all the capacities for acting morally, he had no heart good or bad until he came to act morally. When did he first have a moral heart? When he first waked to moral consciousness and gave his heart to God. When first he saw God manifested and put confidence in Him as his Father and yielded up his heart to Him in love and obedience. Observe he first had this holy heart because he yielded up his will to God in entire consecration. This was his first holy heart.

But at length the hour of temptation came, alluring him to withdraw his heart from God and turn to pleasing himself. To Eve the tempter said--"Hath God indeed said--Ye shall not surely die?" Ah, is that so? Thus he raised the question either as to the fact that God had really threatened death for sin, or as to the justice of doing so. In either case it raised a question about obedience and opened the heart to temptation. Then that fruit came before her mind. It was fair and seemed good for food. Her appetite enkindles and clamours for indulgence. Then, it was said to be fitted to "make one wise," and by eating it she might "be as the Gods, knowing good and evil." This appealed to her curiosity. Yielding to this temptation and making up her mind to please herself, she made herself a new heart of sin; she changed her heart from holiness to sin, and fell from her first moral position. When Adam yielded to temptation, he made the same change in his heart; he gave himself up to selfishness and sin. This accounts for all future acts of selfishness in after life.

Adam and Eve are again brought before God. God says to Adam--Give me thy heart. Change your heart. What! says Adam, I cannot change my own heart! But God replies, How long is it since you have done it? It is but yesterday that you changed your own heart from holiness to sin; why can't you change it back?

So in all cases. Changing the ruling preference, the governing purpose of the mind, is the thing, and who can say, I cannot do that. Cannot you do that? Cannot you give yourself to God?

The reason you cannot please God in your executive acts, is that your governing purpose is not right. While your leading motive is wrong all you do is selfish, because it is all done for the single object of pleasing yourself. You do nothing for the sake of pleasing God, and with the governing design and purpose of doing all His holy will; hence all you do, even your religious duties, only displease God. If the Bible had anywhere represented God as being pleased with your hypocritical services it would be proven false, for this is perfectly impossible.

13. But you say--The Bible requires me to begin with the inner man--the heart;--and you say you cannot get at this; that you cannot reach your own heart or will to change it.

Indeed, you are entirely mistaken. This is the very thing that is most entirely within your power. Of all things conceivable, this is the very thing that you can do most

certainly--that is most absolutely within your power. If God had made your salvation turn upon your walking across the room, you might not be able to do it; or if upon lifting your eyelids, or rising from your seat, or any, the least movement of your muscles, you might be utterly unable to do it. You could will the motion required, and you could try; but the muscles might have no power to act. You often think that if God had only conditioned your salvation upon some motions of your muscles, it would have been so easy; if he had only asked you to control the outside; but oh, you say, how can I control the inside? The inside is the very thing you can move and control. If it had been the outside, you might strive and groan till you die, and not be able to move a muscle, even on pain of an eternal hell. But now inasmuch as God only says, "Change your will," all is brought within your control. This is just the thing you always can do; you can always move your will. You can always give your heart, at your own option. Where, then, is your difficulty and objection? God requires you to act with your freedom; to exercise the powers of free voluntary action that he has given you. He asks you to put your hand on the fountain head of all your own power, to act just where your central power lies--where **YOU ALWAYS HAVE POWER** so long as you have a rational mind and a moral nature. Your liberty does not consist in a power to move your muscles at pleasure, for the connection between your muscles and your will may be broken, and at all events is always necessary when your body is in its normal state; therefore God does not require you to perform any particular movement of the muscles, but only to change your will. This, compared with all other things, is that which you can always do, and can do more surely than anything else.

Again, considering volitions as distinct from ultimate purposes, and as standing next before executive acts, it is not volitions that God requires, but he lays his requisition directly upon the ultimate purposes. The ultimate purposes being given, these subordinate volitions follow naturally and necessarily. Your liberty therefore does not, strictly speaking, lie in these subordinate volitions--such as the volition to sit, to walk, to speak. But the ultimate purpose controlling all volition, and relating to the main object you shall pursue, as for example, whether you shall in all things strive to please God, or on the other hand, strive to please yourself; this, being the precise point wherein your liberty of free action lies, is the very point upon which God lays his moral requisitions. The whole question is, will you please God, or please yourself? Will you give your heart to Him, or give it to your own selfish enjoyment?

So long as you give your heart to selfish pleasure and withhold it from God, it will be perfectly natural for you to sin. This is precisely the reason why it is so natural for sinners to sin. It is because the will, the heart, is set upon it, and all they have to do is to carry out this ruling propensity and purpose. But, just change this governing purpose and you will find obedience equally natural and equally easy in all its executive acts. It will then become natural to please God in everything. Now pleasing yourself is natural enough; why? Because you are consecrated to pleasing yourself. But change this purpose; make a new and totally opposite consecration; reverse the committed heart, and let it be for God and not for self; then all duty will be easy for the same reason that all sin is so easy now.

So far is it from being true that you are unable to make your heart new, the fact is you

would long ago have done it if you had not resisted God in His efforts to move you to repentance. Do you not know that you have often resisted God's Spirit? You know it well. So clear were your convictions that you ought to live for God, you had to resist every appeal of your own conscience, and march right in the face of known duty, and press your way along directly against God. If you had only listened to the voice of your reason, and to the demands of your conscience, you would have had a new heart long ago. But you resisted God when He tried to persuade you to have a new heart. O sinner, how strong you have been to resist God! How strong to resist every consideration addressed to your intelligence and to your reason! How strangely have you listened to the considerations for sinning! O the miserable petty things--tell me, what were they? Suppose Christ should question you, and ask--What is there in earth that you should love it so well? What in sin that you should prize it above my favour and my love? What are those little indulgences--those very small things that always perish with the using? Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Most utterly contemptible! You have been holding on to sin with no reasonable motive for so doing. But O, consider what motives you have fought against and resisted--motives of almost infinite force! Think of the motives resulting from God's law--so excellent in itself, but so dreadful in its penalties against transgressors; and then think also of God's infinite love in the Gospel; how He opened the life-tides of his great heart and let blessings flow with fullness like a God! Yet consider how, despite of this love, you have abused your God exceedingly. You have gone on as if the motives to sin were all persuasive, and as if sin's promises of good were more reliable than God's. When God spread out before you the glories of heaven, made all attractive and delightful in the beauties of holiness, you coolly replied, Earth is far better! Give me earth while I can have it, and heaven only when I can have earth no longer! O sinner, you would have been converted a long time ago if you had not opposed God, and trodden under foot his invitations and his appeals.

O what a thing is this moral agency! How awful its power, and how momentous therefore must be its responsibilities. When God is pouring forth influences in waves of light and power, with a kind of moral omnipotence, you resist and withstand all! As if you could do anything you pleased despite of God! As if His influence were almost utterly powerless to move your heart from its fixed purpose to sin!

Does it require great strength to lay down your weapons? Indeed this is quite a new thing; for one would suppose it must rather require great strength to resist and to fight. And so you put forth your great strength in fighting against God, and would fain believe that you have not got strength enough to lay your weapons down! O the absurdity of sin and of the sinner's apology for sinning!

14. But you say--I must have the Holy Ghost.

I answer, Yes; but only to overcome your voluntary opposition. That is all.

After I had gone over this ground with my friend, as I have already explained, he became very much agitated. The sweat started from every pore; his feelings overcame him; he dropped his head down

upon his knees, buried in intensest thought and full of emotion. I rose and went to the meeting. After it had progressed awhile he came in; but O how changed! Said he, "Dear wife, I don't know what has become of my infidelity. I ought to be sent to hell! What charges I have been making against God! And yet with what amazing mercy did my God bear with me and let me live!" In fact, he found he had been all wrong and he broke all down and became as a little child before God.

And you, too, sinner, know you ought to live for God, yet you have not; you know that Jesus made himself an offering to the injured dignity of that law which you violated, yet you have rejected him. He gave himself a voluntary offering, not to suffer the penalty of the law, but as your legal substitute; and shall He have done all this in vain? Do you say--"O, I'm so prejudiced against God and the Bible!" What, so prejudiced that you will not repent? How horrible! O let it suffice that you have played the fool so long and erred so exceedingly. It has been all wrong! At once return and devote yourself to God. Why should you live to yourself at all? You can get no good so!

Come to God--He is so easily pleased! It is so much easier to please Him than to please and satisfy yourself. The veriest little child can please Him. Children often have the most delightful piety, because it is so simple-hearted. They know what to do to please God, and, meaning honestly, to please Him, they can not fail. No matter how simple-hearted they are, if they mean to please God, they surely will.

And cannot you at least do so much as honestly to choose and aim to please God?

## **God's Love for A Sinning World**

Lecture V  
June 22, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Sin is the most expensive thing in the universe. Nothing else can cost so much. Pardoned or unpardoned, its cost is infinitely great. Pardoned, the cost falls chiefly on the great atoning substitute; unpardoned, it must fall on the head of the guilty sinner.

The existence of sin is a fact everywhere experienced -- everywhere observed. There is sin in our race, everywhere, and in awful aggravation.

Sin is the violation of an infinitely important law, -- a law designed and adapted to secure the highest good of the universe. Obedience to this law is naturally essential to the good of creatures. Without obedience there could be no blessedness even in heaven.

As sin is a violation of a most important law, it cannot be treated lightly. No government can afford to treat disobedience as a trifle, inasmuch as everything -- the entire welfare of the government and of all the governed--turns upon obedience. Just in proportion to the value of the interests at stake is the necessity of guarding law and of punishing disobedience.

The law of God must not be dishonoured by anything He shall do. It has been dishonoured by the disobedience of man; hence the more need that God should stand by it, to retrieve its honour. The utmost dishonor is done to law by disowning, disobeying, and despising it. All this, sinning man has done. Hence, this law being not only good but intrinsically necessary to the happiness of the governed, it becomes of all things most necessary that the law-giver should vindicate his law. He must by all means do it.

Hence sin has involved God's government in a vast expense. Either the law must be executed at the expense of the well being of the whole race, or God must submit to suffer the worst results of disrespect to His law--results which in some form must involve a vast expense.

Take for example any human government. Suppose the righteous and necessary laws which it imposes are disowned and dishonoured. In such a case the violated law must be honoured by the execution of its penalty, or something else not less expensive, and probably much more so, must be endured. Transgression must cost happiness, somewhere, and in vast amount.

In the case of God's government it has been deemed advisable to provide a substitute, one that should answer the purpose of saving the sinner, and yet of honouring the law. This being determined on, the next great question was--How shall the expense be met?

The Bible informs us how the question was in fact decided. By a voluntary conscription--shall I call it,--or donation? Call it as we may, it was a voluntary offering. Who shall head the subscription? Who shall begin where so much is to be raised? Who will make the first sacrifice? Who will take the first step in a project so vast? The Bible informs us. It began with the Infinite Father. He made the first great donation. He gave his only begotten Son--this to begin with--and having given him first, He freely gives all else that the exigencies of the case can require. First, He gave his Son to make the atonement due to law; then gave and sent his Holy Spirit to take charge of this work. The Son on his part consented to stand as the representative of sinners that he might honor the law, by suffering in their stead. He poured out his blood, made a whole life of suffering a free donation on the altar--withheld not his face from spitting, nor his back from stripes--shrunk not from the utmost contumely that wicked men could heap on him. So the Holy Ghost also devotes himself to most self-denying efforts unceasingly, to accomplish the great object.

It would have been a very short method to have turned over his hand upon the wicked of our race, and sent them all down quick to hell, as once He did when certain angels "kept not their first estate." Rebellion broke out in heaven. Not long did God bear it, around his lofty throne. But in [the] case of

man he changed his course--did not send them all to hell, but devised a vast scheme of measures, involving most amazing self-denials and self-sacrifices, to gain men's souls back to obedience and heaven.

For whom was this great donation made? "God so loved the World," meaning the whole race of men. By the "world" in this connection cannot be meant any particular part only, but the whole race. Not only the Bible, but the nature of the case shows that the atonement must have been made for the whole world. For plainly if it had not been made for the entire race, no man of the race could ever know that it was made for himself, and therefore not a man could believe on Christ in the sense of receiving by faith the blessings of the atonement. There being an utter uncertainty as to the persons embraced in the limited provisions which we now suppose to be made, the entire donation must fail through the impossibility of rational faith for its reception. Suppose a will is made by a rich man bequeathing certain property to certain unknown persons, described only by the name of "the elect." They are not described otherwise than by this term, and all agree that although the maker of the will had the individuals definitely in his mind, yet that he left no description of them which either the persons themselves, the courts, nor any living mortal can understand. Now such a will is of necessity altogether null and void. No living man can claim under such a will, and none the better though these elect were described as residents of Oberlin. Since it does not embrace all the residents of Oberlin, and does not define which of them, all is lost. All having an equal claim and none any definite claim, none can inherit. If the atonement were made in this way, no living man would have any valid reason for believing himself one of the elect, prior to his reception of the Gospel. Hence he would have no authority to believe and receive its blessings by faith. In fact the atonement must be wholly void--on this supposition--unless a special revelation is made to the persons for whom it is intended.

As the case is, however, the very fact that a man belongs to the race of Adam--the fact that he is human, born of woman, is all-sufficient. It brings him within the pale. He is one of the world for whom God gave his Son, that whosoever would believe in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.

The subjective motive in the mind of God for this great gift was love, love to the world. God so loved the world that he gave his Son to die for it. God loved the universe also, but this gift of his Son sprang from love to our world. True in this great act he took pains to provide for the interests of the universe. He was careful to do nothing that could in the least let down the sacredness of his law. Most carefully did he intend to guard against misapprehension as to his regard for his law and for the high interests of obedience and happiness in his moral universe. He meant once for all to preclude the danger lest any moral agent should be tempted to undervalue the moral law.

Yet farther, it was not only from love to souls, but from respect to the spirit of the law of his own eternal reason, that he gave up his Son to die. In this the purpose to give up his Son originated. The law of his own reason must be honoured and held sacred. He may do nothing inconsistent with its spirit. He must do everything possible to prevent the commission of sin and to secure the confidence and love of his subjects. So sacred did he hold these great objects that he would baptize his Son in his own blood, sooner than peril the good of the universe. Beyond a question it was love and regard for the highest good of the universe that led Him to sacrifice his own beloved Son.

Let us next consider attentively the nature of this love. The text lays special stress on this--God so loved--his love was of such a nature, so wonderful and so peculiar in its character, that it led Him to give up his only Son to die. More is evidently implied in this expression than simply its greatness. It is most peculiar in its character. Unless we understand this, we shall be in danger of falling into the strange mistake of the Universalists, who are forever talking about God's love for sinners, but whose notions of the nature of this love never lead to repentance or to holiness. They seem to think of this love as simply good nature, and conceive of God only as a very good-natured being, whom nobody need to fear.-- Such notions have not the least influence towards holiness, but the very opposite. It is only when we come to understand what this love is in its nature that we feel its moral power promoting holiness.

It may be reasonably asked, If God so loved the world with a love characterized by greatness and by greatness only,-- why did He not save all the world without sacrificing his Son? This question suffices to show us that there is deep meaning in this word so, and should put us upon a careful study of this meaning.

1. This love in its nature is not complacency--a delight in the character of the race. This could not be, for there was nothing amiable in their character. For God to have loved such a race complacently would have been infinitely disgraceful to himself.

2. It was not a mere emotion or feeling. It was not a blind impulse, though many seem to suppose it was. It seems to be often supposed that God acted as men do when they are borne away by strong emotion. But there could be no virtue in this. A man might give away all he is worth under such a blind impulse of feeling and be none the more virtuous. But in saying this we do not exclude all emotion from the love of benevolence, nor from God's love for a lost world. He had emotion, but not emotion only. Indeed the Bible everywhere teaches us that God's love for man, lost in his sins, was paternal--the love of a father for his offspring--in this case, for a rebellious, froward, prodigal offspring. In this love, there must of course blend the deepest compassion.

3. On the part of Christ, considered as Mediator, this love was paternal. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." In one point of view he is acting for brethren, and in another, for children. The Father gave him up for this work and of course sympathizes in the love appropriate to its relations.

4. This love must be altogether disinterested, for he had nothing to hope or to fear--no profit to make out of his children if they should be saved. Indeed it is impossible to conceive of God as being selfish, since his love embraces all creatures and all interests according to their real value. No doubt he took delight in saving our race--why should he not? It is a great salvation in every sense, and greatly does it swell the bliss of heaven;--greatly will it affect the glory and the blessedness of the Infinite God. He will eternally respect himself for love so disinterested. He knows also that all his holy creatures will eternally respect him for this work and for the love that gave it birth. But let it also be said, he knew they would not respect him for this great work unless they should see that he did it for the good of sinners.

5. This love was zealous--not that cold-hearted state of mind which some suppose--not an abstraction, but a love, deep, zealous, earnest, burning in his soul as a fire that nothing can quench.

6. The sacrifice was a most self-denying one. Did it cost the Father nothing to give up his own beloved Son to suffer, and to die such a death? If this be not self-denial, what can be? Thus to give up his Son to so much suffering,--is not this the noblest self-denial? The universe never could have the idea of great self-denial, but for such an exemplification.

7. This love was particular because it was universal, and also universal because it was particular. God loved each sinner in particular, and therefore loved all. Because He loved all impartially, with no respect of persons, therefore He loved each in particular.

8. This was a most patient love. How rare to find a parent so loving his child as never to be impatient. Let me go round and ask, how many of you, parents, can say that you love all your children so well, and with so much love, and with love so wisely controlling, that you have never felt impatient towards any of them;--so that you can take them in your arms under the greatest provocations, and love them down, love them out of their sins, love them into repentance and into a filial spirit? Of which of your children can you say, Thank God, I never fretted against that child; Of which, if you were to meet him in heaven, could you say--I never caused that child to fret? Often have I heard parents say, I love my children, but oh how my patience fails me! And after the dear ones are dead you may hear their bitter moans, --O my soul, how could I have caused my child so much stumbling and so much sin!

But God never frets--is never impatient. His love is so deep and so great that He is always patient.

Sometimes when parents have unfortunate children, poor objects of compassion, they can bear with anything from them; but when they are very wicked, they seem to feel that they are quite excusable for being impatient. In God's case, these are not unfortunate children, but are intensely wicked, intelligently wicked. But O, his amazing patience--so set upon their good, so desirous of their highest welfare, that however they abuse Him, He sets himself to bless them still, and weep them down, and bleed them down, and die them down by the death of His Son in their stead!

9. This is a jealous love, not in a bad sense, but in a good sense--in the sense of being exceedingly careful lest anything should occur to injure those he loves. Just as husband and wife who truly love each other are jealous with ever wakeful jealousy over each other's welfare, seeking always to do all they can to promote each other's true interests.

This donation is already made--made in good faith--not only promised, but actually made. The promise, given long before, has been fulfilled. The Son has come--has died, has made the ransom and lives to offer it--a prepared salvation, to all who will embrace it.

The Son of God died not to appease vengeance, as some seem to understand it, but under the demands

of law. The law had been dishonoured by its violation. Hence Christ undertook to honour it by giving up to its demands his suffering life and atoning death. It was not to appease a vindictive spirit in God, but to secure the highest good of the universe in a dispensation of mercy.

Since this atonement has been made, all men in the race have a right to it. It is open to every one who will embrace it. Though Jesus still remains the Father's Son, yet by gracious right he belongs in an important sense to the race--to every one; so that every sinner has an interest in his blood if he will only come humbly forward and claim it. God sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world--of whomsoever would believe and accept this great salvation.

God gives his Spirit to apply this salvation to men. He comes to each man's door and knocks, to gain admittance if he can, and show each sinner that he may now have salvation. O, what a labor of love is this!

This salvation must be received, if at all, by faith. This is the only possible way. God's government over sinners is moral, not physical, because the sinner is himself a moral and not a physical agent. Therefore God can influence us in no way unless we will give him our confidence. He never can save us by merely taking us away to some place called heaven--as if change of place would change the voluntary heart. There can, therefore, be no possible way to be saved but by simple faith.

Now do not mistake and suppose that embracing the gospel is simply to believe these historical facts, without truly receiving Christ as your Saviour. If this had been the scheme, then Christ had need only to come down and die; then go back to heaven and quietly wait to see who would believe the facts. But how different is the real case! Now Christ comes down to fill the soul with His own life and love. Penitent sinners hear and believe the truth concerning Jesus, and then receive Christ into the soul to live and reign there supreme and for ever. On this point many mistake, saying, If I believe the facts as matters of history, it is enough. No! No! This is not it by any means. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." The atonement was indeed made to provide the way so that Jesus could come down to human hearts and draw them into union and sympathy with himself--so that God could let down the arms of his love and embrace sinners--so that law and government should not be dishonoured by such tokens of friendship shown by God toward sinners. But the atonement will by no means save sinners only as it prepares the way for them to come into sympathy and fellowship of heart with God.

Now Jesus comes to each sinner's door and knocks;--hark--what's that? what's that? Why this knocking? Why did He not go away and stay in heaven if that were the system, till men should simply believe the historical facts and be baptized, as some suppose, for salvation. But now, see how He comes down--tells the sinner what He has done--reveals all his love--tells him how holy and sacred it is, so sacred that He can by no means act without reference to the holiness of his law, and the purity of his government. Thus impressing on the heart the most deep and enlarged ideas of his holiness and purity, He enforces the need of deep repentance, and the sacred duty of renouncing all sin.

## **REMARKS.**

1. The Bible teaches that sinners may forfeit their birthright and put themselves beyond the reach of

mercy. It is not long since I made some remark to you on the manifest necessity that God should guard himself against the abuses of his love. The circumstances are such as create the greatest danger of such abuse, and, therefore He must make sinners know that they may not abuse his love and cannot do it with impunity.

2. Under the gospel, sinners are in circumstances of the greatest possible responsibility. They are in the utmost danger of trampling down beneath their feet the very Son of God. Come, they say, let us kill Him and the inheritance shall be ours. When God sends forth, last of all, his own beloved Son, what do they do? Add to all their other sins and rebellions the highest insult to this glorious Son! Suppose something analogous to this were done under a human government. A case of rebellion occurs in some of the provinces. The king sends his own son, not with an army, to cut them down quick in their rebellion, but all gently, meekly, patiently, he goes among them, explaining the laws of the kingdom, and exhorting them to obedience. What do they do in the case? With one consent they combine to seize him and put him to death!

But you deny the application of this, and ask me, Who murdered the Son of God? Were they not Jews? Aye, and have you, sinners, had no part in this murder? Has not your treatment of Jesus Christ shown that you are most fully in sympathy with the ancient Jews in their murder of the Son of God? If you had been there, would any one have shouted louder than you, Away with him--crucify him, crucify him? Have you not always said--Depart from us--for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways?

3. It was said of Christ that, Though rich He became poor that we through his poverty might be rich. How strikingly true is this! Our redemption cost Christ his life; it found Him rich but made Him poor; it found us infinitely poor but made us rich even to all the wealth of heaven. But of these riches none can partake till they shall each for himself accept them in the legitimate way. They must be received on the terms proposed, or the offer passes utterly away, and you are left poorer even than if no such treasures had ever been laid at your feet.

Many persons seem entirely to misconceive this case. They seem not to believe what God says, but keep saying, If, if, if there only were any salvation for me--if there were only an atonement provided for the pardon of my sins. This was one of the last things that was cleared up in my mind before I fully committed my soul to trust God. I had been studying the atonement; I saw its philosophical bearings--saw what it demanded of the sinner; but it irritated me and I said--If I should become a Christian, how could I know what God would do with me? Under this irritation I said foolish and bitter things against Christ--till my own soul was horrified at its own wickedness and I said--I will make all this up with Christ if the thing is possible.

In this way many advance upon the encouragements of the gospel as if it were only a peradventure, an experiment. They take each forward step most carefully, with fear and trembling, as if there were the utmost doubt whether there could be any mercy for them. So with myself. I was on my way to my office, when the question came before my mind--What are you waiting for? You need not get up such an ado. All is done already. You have only to consent to the proposition--give your heart right up to it at once--this is all. Just so it is. All Christians and sinners ought to understand that the whole plan is complete--that the whole of Christ--his character, his work, his atoning death, and his ever-living

intercession--belong to each and every man, and need only to be accepted. There is a full ocean of it. There it is. You may just as well take it as not. It is as if you stood on the shore of an ocean of soft, pure water, famishing with thirst; you are welcome to drink, and you need not fear lest you exhaust that ocean, or starve any body else by drinking yourself. You need not feel that you are not made free to that ocean of waters; you are invited and pressed to drink--yea to drink abundantly! This ocean supplies all your need. You do not need to have in yourself the attributes of Jesus Christ, for his attributes become practically yours for all possible use. As saith the Scripture--He is of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. What do you need? Wisdom? Here it is. Righteousness? Here it is. Sanctification? Here you have it. All is in Christ. Can you possibly think of any one thing needful for your moral purity, or your usefulness which is not here in Christ? Nothing. All is provided here. Therefore you need not say, I will go and pray and try, as the hymn--

"I'll go to Jesus tho' my sin

Hath like a mountain rose,

Perhaps He will admit my plea;

Perhaps will hear my prayer."

There is no need of any perhaps. The doors are always open. Like the doors of Broadway Tabernacle in New York, made to swing open and fasten themselves open, so that they could not swing back and shut down upon the crowds of people thronging to pass through. When they were to be made, I went myself to the workmen and told them by all means to fix them so that they must swing open and fasten themselves in that position.

So the door of salvation is open always--fastened open, and no man can shut it--not the Pope, even, nor the devil, nor any angel from heaven or from hell. There it stands, all swung back and the passage wide open for every sinner of our race to enter if he will.

Again, sin is the most expensive thing in the universe. Are you well aware, O sinner, what a price has been paid for you that you may be redeemed and made an heir of God and of heaven? O what an expensive business for you to indulge in sin!

And what an enormous tax the government of God has paid to redeem this province from its ruin! Talk about the poor tax of Great Britain and of all other nations superadded;--all is nothing to the sin-tax of Jehovah's government--that awful sin-tax! Think how much machinery is kept in motion to save sinners! The Son of God was sent down--angels are sent as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation; missionaries are sent, Christians labour, and pray, and weep in deep and anxious solicitude--all to seek and save the lost. What a wonderful-enormous tax is levied upon the benevolence of the universe to put away sin and to save the sinner! If the cost could be computed in solid gold, what a world of it--a solid globe of itself! What an array of toil and cost, from angels, Jesus Christ, the Divine Spirit, and living men. Shame on sinners who hold on to sin despite of all these benevolent efforts to save them! who instead of being ashamed out of sin, will say--Let God pay off this tax: who cares! Let the missionaries labour, let pious women work their very fingers off to raise funds to keep all this human machinery in motion; no matter: what is all this to me? I have loved

my pleasures and after them I will go! What an unfeeling heart is this!

Sinners can very well afford to make sacrifices to save their fellow sinners. Paul could for his fellow sinners. He felt that he had done his part toward making sinners, and now it became him to do his part also in converting them back to God. But see there--that young man thinks he cannot afford to be a minister, for he is afraid he shall not be well supported. Does he not owe something to the grace that saved his soul from hell? Has he not some sacrifices to make, since Jesus has made so many for him, and Christians too, in Christ before him--did they not pray and suffer and toil for his soul's salvation? As to his danger of lacking bread in the Lord's work, let him trust his Great Master. Yet let me also say that churches may be in great fault for not comfortably supporting their pastors. Let them know God will assuredly starve them if they starve their ministers. Their own souls and the souls of their children shall be barren as death if they avariciously starve those whom God in his providence sends to feed them with the bread of life.

How much it costs to rid society of certain forms of sin, as for example, slavery. How much has been expended already, and how much more yet remains to be expended ere this sore evil and curse and sin shall be rooted from our land! This is part of God's great enterprise, and He will press it on to its completion. Yet at what an amazing cost! How many lives and how much agony to get rid of this one sin!

Woe to those who make capital out of the sins of men! Just think of the rumseller--tempting men while God is trying to dissuade them from rushing on in the ways of sin and death! Think of the guilt of those who thus set themselves in array against God! So Christ has to contend with rumsellers who are doing all they can to hinder his work.

Our subject strikingly illustrates the nature of sin as mere selfishness. It cares not how much sin costs Jesus Christ--how much it costs the Church, how much it taxes the benevolent sympathies and the self-sacrificing labours of all the good in earth or heaven;--no matter; the sinner loves self-indulgence and will have it while he can. How many of you have cost your friends countless tears and trouble to get you back from your ways of sin? Are you not ashamed when so much has been done for you, that you cannot be persuaded to give up your sins and turn to God and holiness?

The whole effort on the part of God for man is one of suffering and self-denial. Beginning with the sacrifice of His own beloved Son, it is carried on with ever-renewed sacrifices and toilsome labours--at great and wonderful expense. Just think how long a time these efforts have been protracted already--how many tears, poured out like water, it has cost--how much pain in many forms this enterprise has caused and cost--yea, that very sin which you roll as a sweet morsel under your tongue! God may well hate it when He sees how much it costs, and say--O do not that abominable thing that I hate!

Yet God is not unhappy in these self-denials. So great is his joy in the results, that he deems all the suffering but comparatively a trifle, even as earthly parents enjoy the efforts they make to bless their children. See them; they will almost work their very hands off;--mothers sit up at night to ply their needle till they reel with fatigue and blindness--but if you were to see their toil, you would often see also their joy, so intensely do they love their children.

Such is the labour, the joy, and the self-denial of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, in their great work for human salvation. Often are they grieved that so many will refuse to be saved. Toiling on in a common sympathy, there is nothing, within reasonable limits, which they will not do or suffer to accomplish their great work. It is wonderful to think how all creation sympathizes too in this work and its necessary sufferings. Go back to the scene of Christ's sufferings. Could the sun in the heavens look down unmoved on such a scene? O no, he could not even behold it--but veiled his face from the sight! All nature seemed to put on her robes of deepest mourning. The scene was too much for even inanimate nature to bear. The sun turned his back and could not look down on such a spectacle!

The subject illustrates forcibly the worth of the soul. Think you God would have done all this if he had had those low views on this subject which sinners usually have?

Martyrs and saints enjoy their sufferings--filling up in themselves what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ; not in the atonement proper but in the subordinate parts of the work to be done. It is the nature of true religion to love self-denial.

The results will fully justify all the expense. God had well counted the cost before He began. Long time before He formed a moral universe He knew perfectly what it must cost Him to redeem sinners, and He knew that the result would amply justify all the cost. He knew that a wonder of mercy would be wrought--that the suffering demanded of Christ, great as it was, would be endured; and that results infinitely glorious would accrue therefrom. He looked down the track of time into the distant ages--where, as the cycles rolled along, there might be seen the joys of redeemed saints, who are singing their songs and striking their harps anew with the everlasting song, through the long long, LONG eternity of their blessedness; --and was not this enough for the heart of infinite love to enjoy? And what do you think of it, Christian? Will you say now, I am ashamed to ask to be forgiven? How can I bear to receive such mercy! It is the price of blood, and how can I accept it? How can I make Jesus so much expense?

You are right in saying that you have cost Him great expense--but the expense has been cheerfully met--the pain has all been endured, and will not need to be endured again, and it will cost none the more if you accept than if you decline; and moreover still, let it be considered Jesus Christ has not acted unwisely; he did not pay too much for the soul's redemption--not a pang more than the interests of God's government demanded and the worth of the soul would justify.

O, when you come to see Him face to face, and tell Him what you think of it--when you are some thousands of years older than you are now, will you not adore that wisdom that manages this scheme, and the infinite love in which it had its birth? O what will you then say of that amazing condescension that brought down Jesus to your rescue! Say, Christian, have you not often poured out your soul before your Saviour in acknowledgment of what you have cost Him, and there seemed to be a kind of lifting up as if the very bottom of your soul were to rise, and you would pour out your whole heart. If any body had seen you they would have wondered what had happened to you that had so melted your soul in gratitude and love.

Say now, sinners, will you sell your birthright? How much will you take for it? How much will you

take for your interest in Christ? For how much will you sell your soul? Sell your Christ! Of old they sold Him for thirty pieces of silver; and ever since, the heavens have been raining tears of blood on our guilty world. If you were to be asked by the devil to fix the sum for which you would sell your soul, what would be the price named? Lorenzo Dow once met a man as he was riding along a solitary road to fulfil an appointment, and said to him--Friend, have you ever prayed? No. How much will you take never to pray hereafter? One dollar. Dow paid it over, and rode on. The man put the money in his pocket, and passed on, thinking. The more he thought, the worse he felt. There, said he, I have sold my soul for one dollar! It must be that I have met the devil! Nobody else would tempt me so. With all my soul I must repent, or be damned forever!

How often have you bargained to sell your Saviour for less than thirty pieces of silver! Nay, for the merest trifle!

Finally, God wants volunteers to help on this great work. God has given himself, and given his Son, and sent his Spirit;--but more labourers still are needed; and what will you give? Paul said, I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Do you aspire to such an honour? What will you do--what will you suffer? Say not, I have nothing to give. You can give yourself--your eyes, your ears, your hands, your mind, your heart, all; and surely nothing you have is too sacred and too good to be devoted to such a work upon such a call! How many young men are ready to go? and how many young women? Whose heart leaps up, crying, Here am I! send me?

## **Alive Without the Law, Slain Thereby**

Lecture VI  
July 6, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 7:9: "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."

In my remarks upon this passage, I shall pursue the following outlines:

- I. Show in what sense Paul was without the Law.*
- II. What were the consequences of this state.*
- III. In what sense the "commandment came".*
- IV. The consequences of this "coming of the commandment".*

## **I. In what sense Paul was without the Law.**

- 1. Paul was thoroughly a Pharisee. He had been brought up and instructed in the oracles of God according to the best teachings of his time, and therefore could not have been "without law" in the sense of not having the letter of it in his hands and before his mind. He had the law as given to Moses, the whole of it, both moral and ceremonial, and indeed he had given much of his life to the study of it, having been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, enjoying the best advantages his country could afford for knowledge in the Jewish law.
- 2. Yet Paul was really ignorant of the true meaning and spirit of the law. His grand mistake was that he regarded it only in its relations to his outward life, as if he assumed that it had no other relation, made no other demands. His moral and spiritual eyes were not open. I mean by this language that he did not see his moral and spiritual relations to God and to his fellowmen, and did not even seem to recognize the fact of the existence of any such relations.

As to his outward relations, the course of life was objectively just, while subjectively it was altogether unjust. By subjectively just, I mean just and right at heart, being and doing in reference to the law what it requires. In the state of his heart he was all wrong, for he was supremely selfish. Here lay the great error of his school of moralists. Their whole attention was directed to the objective and withdrawn from the subjective. In other words, they thought everything of the outside, nothing of the heart. Exclusively regarding the letter and the ceremony, they seemed never to ask--Is the heart honest and pure before God? Thus the moral and spiritual eye was not trained to discern or even to notice the real meaning of the law. Consequently it is not strange that Pharisees, so trained, should suppose themselves to be obeying the law, while in truth they entirely overlooked all that is really valuable. So with Paul. His spiritual consciousness was not awake.

Here let us make a distinction which is somewhat important in reference to this subject. There is a natural consciousness; a moral consciousness, and also a spiritual consciousness. The natural is exercised upon things merely natural and worldly--external and not in regard to their moral relations. The moral relates to things of a moral nature, and when distinguished from spiritual, should refer to our relations to fellow-beings, while the term spiritual may be applied to our relations to God. An active spiritual consciousness keeps the mind awake to the presence of God, as naturally, we are conscious of the presence of each other. It keeps us alive to all that is embraced in our relations to God. Moral consciousness respects moral questions, yet, in the strict sense, only as they lie between ourselves and our fellow-beings. The difficulty with Paul was that his moral and spiritual eyes being closed, he entirely overlooked his own subjective state of mind, the very thing which God's law primarily regards.

## **II. I am now to speak of the consequences of being in this sense "alive without the law."**

- 1. Paul was in a state of both moral and spiritual delusion. He supposed himself to be performing his duty to his fellow men, when really he was doing no such thing. He had only the idea of objective justice, justice viewed in its outward relations. If he did not cheat a man, it

mattered in his view little or nothing how much he coveted his goods, or how utterly void his heart might be of true love to his neighbor. Consequently he never performed the duty which the law required of him, towards his fellow men.

The same was true of his spiritual relations to God. He regarded simply what the law required externally; went round and round with the routine of his outside duties, while his heart all this time was dead and cold, and as it showed itself subsequently, bitter as hell itself, towards the lovely and innocent Son of God.

- 2. Another consequence was a false hope. Supposing himself to be complying with the law of God, he expected to be saved as much as he expected anything whatever. Yet this expectation was altogether unfounded, for although he was very zealous yet he was also very bitter in his spirit, showing that his zeal sprang from any other source, rather than real benevolence. Indeed he showed that his spirit was bitter as the bitterness of the pit. How then can it be supposed that his hope of heaven was anything better than a delusion?
- 3. Another result was a self-righteous performance of all he called his religion. But there I must explain; for I am afraid many are not well aware what the Bible means by self-righteousness; certainly it is the case that many professed Christians do not well understand this matter. For explanation of the point that is most important for discrimination, take the case of Paul. When he performed what he called his duties, and thanked God, Pharisee-like, that he prayed and fasted, and paid tithes, did he feel himself so utterly lost that he ascribed all his acceptable work to Christ, working in him? Far from it. He had done all these things himself.

When he came ultimately to know himself and then to know Christ, he could speak on this subject with intelligent discrimination, and ever wakeful interest. Then he dwelt much on the fact that the Jews depended on their own works and on themselves alone, to do their own works; while on the other hand he insisted that while left to themselves they never did anything but sin. He always maintained that the energetic power of the divine Spirit wrought in them all that was ever acceptable to God. Often does he illustrate this by his own experience. Before he was a Christian, he performed religious duties as regularly as now; says "I profited in the Jews' religion above many of mine equals," but all along, he regarded his obedience as in such a sense rendered in his own strength that he made no hearty acknowledgments of dependence on sovereign grace. Of that grace which comes through divine mercy, and first moves the heart to good, he seemed to know nothing. His own righteousness was self-originating, self-performed. There was nothing else of it but what came of himself. It had no spiritual life or power in it, for the reason that there was no power of God in its origin, no influence from God, molding its character. Paul did not truly recognize God's grace in this obedience, and God did not impart His grace to subdue selfishness and beget true love in his soul.

Now here is a curious distinction which spiritually-minded persons make, but which others, if they use it, never understand. The spiritually-minded say with Paul--"By the grace of God I am what I am." With many, this language degenerates into mere cant; but really there is a world of meaning in it, and a meaning which is inexpressibly dear to the real Christian's heart. The man who truly enters into the spirit of religion never regards

himself as having done it; he knows it is all of grace; nothing can offend him more than to have it assumed that it is himself and not God's grace that has wrought in him all good. He knows deep in his consciousness, that if left to himself, there never was and never will be any good thing in him. Hence he honors and praises divine grace with a fullness of meaning and an outgushing of heart, which self-righteousness never knew. This deep recognition of God's grace comes to be wrought into the very life, intertwined through all the fibers and incorporated into the substance of the soul. Through all his being he feels that all is of rich grace, and nothing of praise is due to himself.

Not that his exercises are not right, for to deny this were to impugn the efficiency of God's grace; and not that they are not his own acts, for to deny this were to set aside man's agency and responsibility, and involve the Bible doctrine of God "working to will and to do" in us, in entire confusion. The simple idea is that the Spirit of God, acting upon our minds in harmony with the laws of mind, instructs, stimulates, draws, and thus substantially causes right voluntary action on our part.

### **III. We are next to consider in what sense "the commandment came" to Paul.**

The law was set home to both his moral and spiritual consciousness and perception. He was led to see what the law meant in its moral relations to himself and to his neighbor, that without love, all was nothing. He saw the same also in regard to prayer, to alms, to worship, that all is nothing, only a grievous abomination in the sight of God when the subjective state of the heart is wrong. He became fully aware of this, all suddenly, as if a flash of lightning had broken upon him. He saw the reality of this spiritual meaning, and with it a purity and blessedness in the law itself which commanded his most intense regard. And what was the result of this new view of God's law? This is the point we are next to consider.

- 1. It quickened his selfishness. This was the first result of bringing the spirituality of the law home to his selfish heart. This new light as it flashed upon his mind found him in a most self-complacent state, altogether satisfied with himself. No sooner however did he see the spirituality of the law than one of two results must inevitably take place;--either he must break down at once, acknowledge his guilt and empty himself of all his self-righteousness, or if he resist this, his selfishness must be quickened into fresh activity. In Paul's case the latter result ensued; his selfishness was aroused and stirred up as if Ithuriel's spear had touched him. The long unnoticed enmity of his heart was developed. We are not to suppose that during all the time he was persecuting the Church, he enjoyed an easy, self-complacent state of mind, and that all was quiet until the moment when the great light from heaven broke upon him. By no means. It must not be assumed that he had no serious thought about his moral relations to God, prior to the scenes at Damascus. Doubtless his mind had been stirred up long before. He had heard of the sermon on the mount; had heard about Christ's pungent and terrible denunciations against the Pharisees; he had known that Christ had publicly rebuked and exposed their favorite interpretations of the law, and had torn up their system from its very foundations, and that the masses of the common people heard him gladly. This had greatly quickened the selfishness and stirred up the enmity of his heart against that man, so that his very soul was maddened. You recollect he says of himself--"I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." It was obviously under color of being very zealous

for the truth;--but really his selfishness was all on fire and all the malign passions of his soul were astir. It is exceedingly plain from the history that Paul was all this time warring against his own consciousness. This great fact was perfectly known to Jesus, and hence, when He came down in that flood of overwhelming light and arrested the burning persecutor, what did He say? "Saul, Saul, who persecutest thou Me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Here we have the secret of Saul's state of mind. He is kicking against the pricks. The sharp points of his moral sense are against him, and he is resisting and is wounding himself upon those piercing points continually. He is like a hampered animal trying to run away, while every step drives the goads into his quivering flesh. He tries to kick--he winces and shrieks, yet has too much obstinacy to yield. Sometimes perhaps he half persuaded himself that he ought to oppose Jesus of Nazareth; but the whole case shows that he was ill at ease in that impression, and that on the whole he knew better and was truly fighting against his prevailing convictions of duty.

- 2. When the law came home to his soul, it compelled reflection. This almost always supervenes when the law comes home more and more to the soul. There will be hours of deep and earnest reflection, producing first consternation--then a deep sense of shame, the mind waking up to see things in their true light. This leads to great consternation, remorse, self-condemnation, and then, often to despair. The man is stripped of all his excuses, and then, not having yet seen the great love of God, and having therefore no faith and trust, he settles down in the conviction,--I ought to be damned and I certainly must be! There can be no help for me! More than one such case have I seen where men, long time settled down in infidelity, are wakened to see themselves as they are before God and His holy law, and they cry out, I deserve eternal damnation! One such I have in my mind's eye. I shall never forget how he looked. Every feature of his countenance depicted horror. Every muscle was in a tremor. A little reflection had brought him into an attitude in which he could not stand before God. There was also the case of Dea. H. whom I well knew in his years of infidelity. He is now in heaven, but when an infidel, he professed to be entirely satisfied that the Bible was all priestcraft, and verily thought that soon this delusion (Christianity,) would be swept from the earth. Returning at one time from the dale of infidel books, full of self-complacency, all elated with his success, he conversed freely with his wife upon his labors for the day--when all suddenly, a new view of the truth and meaning of God's word broke in upon his mind; intuitively he saw himself a sinner and undone; he could no longer shut his eyes to the fact that Jesus whom he had been opposing was truly the Savior of the world, that the Bible he had been gainsaying was really God's own revelation to lost men. Seeing all this he was in agony. His wife, alarmed, cried out, Dea. H., what is the matter with you? Still he groaned as a man in agony of body, and still she pressed her question--What's the matter? At last he broke out saying--"The stubborn oak must bow! Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world!" She was thunderstruck! It could not have surprised her more if a bolt from heaven had broken through the roof and smote him to the floor. There he was--but how changed! Go and ask him now what Paul meant by saying--"When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." He can doubtless tell you.

#### **IV. The consequences of this "coming of the commandment".**

Paul had long thought on this subject and was troubled. But at last the matter came to a head. Jesus

met him in the way and broke him down. He let in light upon his already troubled conscience; He made him see the purity and the spiritual meaning of His law; and now mark what follows--mark that self-condemnation, shame, that dreadful remorse! Nothing is more common than for despair to supervene for a season in such cases as this. In the case of Paul, this was momentary. Yet we must suppose that he utterly gave up his old hope, and this to him was like the giving up of the ghost. It was as death. No wonder, therefore, that he should say--"Sin revived, and I died." When he saw how strangely the rebellion of his heart burst forth, and sin in this sense "revived," his hope perished, his heart sank within him;--such revelations were made of himself as suddenly blighted all his hopes of being in the divine favor, and he died in the darkness of despair. This seems to be the obvious explanation of his language, and corresponds entirely with what we must infer from the laws of mind and the uniform course of similar experiences.

## REMARKS.

1. The Pharisees generally in those days, and all Pharisees in heart in every age, are under the same delusion. Yet they were then and are often supposed to be the most pious people. It was a common saying then that if only two men were to be saved out of all mankind, one of them must be a Pharisee. But they were entirely deceived--their moral perceptions were blunted; the subjective state which alone constitutes true religion was not even apprehended in their minds. When you hear them speak, you hear nothing of religious experience, like that of David for example; they do not cry out--"O how I love the law!" "Cleanse me from secret faults;" "My soul thirsteth for God, yea, for the living God." Indeed you seldom hear any of them go farther than to pray for those states of mind which they know God requires. They do not profess to have them already, nor do they use language in the honest simplicity of their hearts which implies that they have a right subjective state of heart now. Many do nothing more than hold on to a hope. With no small difficulty they manage to do so much, and often they call into exercise the utmost pertinacity of purpose to effect even this.

2. Manifestly the teachings of Christ roused up the whole tribe of Pharisees. It deeply disturbed their peace. They were like a hive of bees as you have seen them when somebody breaks up their house, or as when they are forced to swarm, or are led out to battle. So thoroughly had He torn up their entire system, root and branch, and so fully had its great defects been laid open to the eye of the world, that they could rest no longer. This general result was produced by the lingering yet almost departing rays of the Spirit's light upon the nation. God was giving a corrupt people their last call; here was a deep and damning delusion fastened strongly on the hearts of thousands, and if any were to be saved, this terrible delusion must be broken up by outspoken and crushing truth. It was but natural and necessary that in such an effort, many hearts should become excited, maddened, and thrown into a state of most bitter opposition.

So in our own day many professed Christians, who are living along in a legal and pharisaic state, get now and then some scattering rays of new light--glimpses of truth break in upon their minds as they hear the true gospel, faithfully preached, or as the Spirit sets home upon their souls some portions of God's word; something within says--"That is true Religion, but I have not got it--I have no such experience as that." Sometimes in reasons of searching power, the Spirit of God hurls His arrows broadcast, and many are pricked in their heart and constrained to say--"My hope is vain and I am yet in my selfishness, and know nothing yet of true religion as I must know it. I must give up this old

rotten hope, or be lost!" But they resist at the moment; they cannot quite bring their minds to give it all up now and throw their naked souls on divine mercy as lost sinners; and, thus resisting, they relapse into ten fold greater hardness and delusion. If under such appeals from God they would not resist, light would increase, and they would doubtless be soon brought forth into day. I knew the case of an elder who took an honest course, unlike most persons in similar circumstances. I was preaching in the place of his residence; the Spirit was pressing truth on some minds, as I endeavored to aid His searching scrutiny into the heart by preaching on the case of Achan and the accursed thing. I was progressing in my sermon, in search after that accursed thing, when suddenly he rose in the midst of the congregation and cried out--"Mr. Finney, Mr. Finney, you need not say another word, it's found; I am the man, I am the very man!" There he stood pale as ashes. "If there were no other Achan here," said he, "I am enough to curse the whole church. I did not want to disturb the congregation," he added, "but I saw that I must speak. I have been brought almost to this point before, but I drew back and my soul relapsed into darkness. I knew that I must meet the demands of my conscience now, or my soul would be lost."

So with many, there are times when God lifts the veil and lets them see their naked hearts. Constrained by truth they cry out--"I am deceived, I know I am," but instead of making thorough work and acting with decision, they hesitate, lose the light God gave them, grieve the Spirit away, fall back to their old position, go on as before, and perish utterly in their own corruptions. I should not be surprised if in fact there had been hundreds in this place who have passed through this very course, doomed, unless they earnestly repent, to reach the same awful end. Influenced by your pride of character, and by the force of an old hope, you delay, and put over the thorough examination you ought to make, and thus slide on to ruin. O that everlasting spirit of DELAY! How many souls it has lured along to ruin!!

3. There are many non-professing sinners, who are laboring under this same difficulty. They have the objective but not the subjective, of religion. Externally they are upright; but alas, internally, there is no true love to God or man. Some of you here in this congregation are in just this position. I know you well; I have had business dealings with you and know you to be honest and upright in all those things; but what shall I say of your treatment of your God and Savior! Nobody denies you the credit of being prompt in your business with men and of doing your work as you ought to do it; you would scorn to do objective wrong; but you seem not to think that this, in itself, is nothing towards real obedience. Suppose any of you, students, were as upright in externals as Saul of Tarsus himself;--you might nevertheless be as guilty a sinner as lives out of hell! What did Paul say of himself when his eyes came to be opened? Speaking of sinners he says, "Of whom I am chief." He looked upon himself as a heart-hypocrite! He did not attempt to say one good thing of his former Pharisee life, but condemned it all. You mean to do right you say, but you think only of objective right--right as to the external only. You know that all your rightness is only this, no more. You know that all you think of when you speak of doing right is of the external and objective; you do not even inquire whether the heart, the motive, is pure before God. You know that real love to God and man is not the life and spring of your activities. Precisely here is your deep and ruinous delusion!

Suppose my wife should claim to do right in her relations as a wife, and think, like you, only of the objective, the outside appearance. She says she means to do all right, but what does she mean by that? Suppose she trims her ways to answer the demands of external propriety;--but suppose also that

everybody has reason enough to know that she loves somebody else with all her heart! What would you say to that? Suppose you know that any wife is absolutely devoted to some other man than her husband; would you not abominate all her professions of doing right towards her husband? Suppose it to be your own wife,--would you not spew her out--nauseated and sick of such right-doing!

Let every mere moralist know--you never have done one thing in all your life of which God did not say--"Who hath required this at your hand?" You need not come and tell Him it is all right--you mean to do right; for all is utterly wrong because your heart is after your idols and is not yielded up trustfully to God. How can all your right-doing be anything but an abomination so long as you do not give God your heart?

4. This text does not profess to give the whole of Paul's conversion. It only gives us his conviction. "I was alive without the law once--(In my self-righteous hopes) but when the commandment came--(revealing God's holy law) then sin revived, and I died--(my hopes perished then). There he was till he gave himself up to the Lord Jesus Christ. Substantially this experience of being slain by the law must always precede the acceptance of Jesus Christ as our own Savior. The reason of this is--men will not accept Christ's robe while their own apparel suits them better; they will not rely on another for salvation while they are strong in their self-dependence.

5. We can see in the light of our subject what the work of the Spirit is in both conversion and sanctification.

Some are forever inquiring--What is the work of the Spirit? Others think there is no need of any divine Spirit in order to produce conviction of wrong, for they assume that natural conscience is all-sufficient for this result.

But who does not know that the light of nature and all the force of mere conscience will never slay the enmity of the sinner's heart and break him down in real penitence and humiliation? The Spirit of God must wake and rouse the moral and spiritual consciousness: the Spirit must take God's holy law and hold it up as a molten looking-glass. There the sinner must see the meaning of that law and his own awful sin in having so long trampled it beneath his feet.

The Spirit also reveals the spiritual nature of the gospel. Having with one hand held up the spiritual nature of the law, with the other He reveals in like manner the love of the gospel, unfolding the heart of Jesus till the sinner says--How can I abuse such love! How can I refuse to trust such a Savior!

6. Those of you who are not conscious of such things as these in your experience are not converted. Ye who have not had before your mind's eye this looking-glass of the law and gospel,--what do you know about the gospel? If Christ has not been revealed to your soul, what do you know about faith in Christ?

Do not some of you see that you are certainly deluded? You who are merely moralists--impenitent sinners still, have you utterly failed to see today the utter abomination of all your offerings and sacrifices?

What awful danger there is lest some of you should put out the light of the Holy Ghost as it shines in upon your souls! What result can be more fatal and more awful than this? How can we account for the moral state of many men except on the supposition that they have grieved away the Spirit of God? They go and come--go and come with God's people; but they seem never to see the very thing that stands right out before their eyes--their own self-deception and impending damnation!!

I have seen some of you writhe under the truth as if an arrow had struck you. And did you then at once give up all and say--I am a deceived wretch! I must repent! Did you not rather say--I will look this subject over after I get home? Several times during the last season, I thought I saw most clearly that some of you were on the very pivot of life; and I said--"Come now--come right forward and settle this matter at once for all;--but you did not come, and what was the result? Go and see--all gone back. You did not come up to the light and therefore of course fell back into deeper darkness than ever. And are you still waiting for more light? I beseech you, be not so absurd as to wait, in such resistance to God as surely grieves away the Spirit and sinks the soul into yet more fatal darkness. Have not some of you young men, waited for more light until you have lost all you had? The Bible doctrine is, Use, and you gain more; neglect and you lose. "From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Why? Because the fact that he hath not proves that he has not improved.

To professors of religion let me next say--It is becoming most alarmingly true that there is a great want of discrimination in distinguishing what is essential from what is merely incidental, to a good Christian life. Often in attending examinations of candidates for admission to the church have I been pained to hear questions put which did not at all touch the real merits of the case. They might have been answered in the most favorable way and yet the answers should have afforded no decisive testimony of real conversion. The questions altogether failed to show whether the candidates had ever really felt themselves to be lost sinners, and as such had thrown themselves upon God's mercy. Did this conviction of being lost and self-ruined fasten on them, and then under its impression, did they search for the remedy and find it in casting themselves wholly on infinite grace? Where this is wanting, there can be no Christian experience.

Often and perhaps I may say always, where under gospel light true conversion does not take place, the reason is, something binds the mind. Truth adapted to wake up the consciousness, first to fear and then to love, fails to produce its effects. Do you ask the reason? Selfishness has bound up the mind all round about and it has no enlargement--no freedom, to go forth in confidence or in penitence. When they attempt to pray, it is as if something bound up the mind; no earnest going out of soul after God. When they say, I will go and seek God, they go not. It is not with them as with those whom the Spirit of God is drawing, who feel as if their very soul would go out after Christ--even almost out of the body. This going out of the soul I often compare to what you may have noticed often when you put a burning candle in a strong draft of air; the wind bears the blaze away and almost forces it entirely from the wick, yet it flickers and hangs--yet you can see it borne quite a perceptible distance from the wick--but the connection is still maintained and when you arrest the draft, the candle burns again as before. So the Christians almost goes off from the body--his soul being drawn away by the power of his ravishing views of Jesus.

Right over against this is the state which I have been noticing; no spontaneous going out of the heart after God either in prayer or in attempted consecration. Ask such an one--Do you feel your whole soul

going, going, as if nothing were held back? No; I know nothing about that, yet when one really yields himself to the drawing of the Spirit, he is as conscious of giving himself up as he ever is of giving anything to another. A lady whom I saw last winter, said--"I went to my room to give myself to God there and as soon as I knelt down there was a spontaneous going forth of my heart to God and it seemed hardly necessary for me to say a word for my heart had already gone out to Christ. Words seemed too poor to express my mind to God, for it seemed as if my very soul had gone itself, and no words were needed." She came down from her room so wonderfully filled with the Holy Ghost that her soul was all on fire and some suggested that such a woman must be crazy. But many are utterly hard and unmoved--no going out of heart towards God and no melting of soul before Him.

Christian, do you know what it is to be slain by the law and truly made alive by the Holy Ghost? Or is it the case that you are living along with a hope that does not assimilate you to Jesus Christ? Are not some of you aware that you have so long resisted God and His truth, that it will not do for you to try it again? Now is your time--you need not pause to make terms with God; for all the terms are fixed already. Let your inward heart go! Say--Lord, I come to Thee! It is long enough that I have lived on in my sins. I am ashamed to ask another hour's life in which to fight and war against God! Let it be enough that I have lived in sin so long; now and forevermore I will be the Lord's!

## **The Essential Elements of Christian Experience**

Lecture VII

August 31, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 5:6: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

There are a great many things in the experience of Christians, which traced out in their natural history, are exceeding interesting. I have been struck to notice how very commonly what is peculiar to Christian experience, drops out of the mind; while that which is merely incidental remains, and constitutes the mind's entire conception of what religion is. Their way of talking of their experience leaves you quite in the dark as to its genuineness, even when they propose to give you especially the reasons of their hope.

My design is first to state some of the facts which belong to the life of God in the soul.

1. Hunger and thirst are states of mind, and do not belong to the body. They are of two kinds, natural and spiritual. The objects on which the natural terminates are food and drink. By our very constitution

these are necessary to our well-being in the present world. These appetites are natural and terminate on their appropriate objects.

There are also spiritual hunger and spiritual thirst, which are as truly natural as the former. It is no more a figure of speech to use these terms in this case than in the other.

The appetites that demand food and drink are facts and experiences. Everybody knows what it is to have them, and everybody knows in general what those things are, which are so related to the human constitution as to meet those demands.

So also the spiritual appetites are not less things of fact and experience, and stand in like manner related to the objects which are adapted to the demand.

2. Sin is a fact in the natural history of our race. That it is so, must be attributed to the fall of our first parents. Yet whatever explanation be given of the introduction of sin into the human family, it now exists as an undeniable fact.

Some attention to the manner in which sin is first developed, may serve to show its relations to what I have called the natural history of the race.

We all know it to be a fact that the natural appetites commence their development immediately after the natural birth. The first awakening to a conscious existence in this world seems to be, if not occasioned by, yet closely connected with, a constitutional demand for food. The alternations of demand and supply commence and go on while health continues--all the time developing the strength of this class of appetites. Commonly the natural make their development far in advance of the spiritual.

Not much is said in the Bible as to the mode in which sin entered our world and acquired such relations to the human soul, but it is distinctly referred to Adam's first sin, and is asserted to be in some way connected with that event. Facts show that sin has become in a most significant sense natural to the race, so that they all spontaneously, not of necessity, yet spontaneously, if no special grace interpose, begin to sin as soon as they begin to act morally, or in other words, as soon as they become capable of moral action. Not that men are born sinners, not that they sin before they are born, not that sin is born in them, nor that they are beyond their control born into sin; but yet the constitution of the man--body and mind--is such, and the law of development is such, that men sin naturally (none the less voluntarily, responsibly, and guiltily), but they all sin of free choice; the temptations to sin being developed in advance of those intellectual and moral powers which should counteract the excessive demands of the sensibility. Mark the developments of the new-born child. Some pain or some appetite awakens its consciousness of existence, and thus is created a demand for the things it perceives itself to need. Then the little infant begins to struggle for good--for that particular good which its new-developed sensibility demands. Want, the struggling demand for supply, and the gratification, form a process of development which gives such power to the sensibility as generates ere long an intense selfishness; and before the conscience and the reason are perceptibly developed, have laid the foundation for spiritual death. If the Spirit of God

does not excite spiritual wants and arouse the mind to efforts in obtaining them, the mind becomes so engrossed and its sensibilities acquire such habits of control over the will, that when the idea of right and wrong is first developed the mind remains dead to its demands. The appetites have already secured the ascendancy. The mind seems to act as if scarcely aware that it has a soul or any spiritual wants. The spiritual consciousness is at first not developed at all. The mind seems not to know its spiritual relations. When this knowledge first forces itself upon the mind, it finds the ground pre-occupied, the habits fixed, the soul too much engaged for earthly good to be called off. The tendency of this law of development is altogether down ward; the appetites become more and more despotic and imperious; the mind has less and less regard for God. The mind comes into a state in which spiritual truth frets and chafes it, and of course it thoroughly inclines to spiritual apathy-- choosing apathy, though not unaware of its danger before the perpetual annoyance of unwelcome truths. This tends toward a state of dead insensibility to spiritual want.

The first symptom of change is the soul's awaking to spiritual consequences. Sometimes this is feeble at first, or sometimes it may be more strongly aroused to its spiritual relations, position, and wants. This brings on anxiety, desire, a deep sense of what the soul truly needs. From this arises an influence which begins to counteract the power of appetite. It begins to operate as a balance and check to those long unrestrained demands.

Here you may notice that just in proportion as the spiritual consciousness is developed, the mind becomes wretched, for in this proportion the struggle becomes intense and violent. Before, the man was dead. He was like an animal as to the unchecked indulgence of appetite--above the mere animal in some things, but below in others. He goes on without that counteracting influence which arises from the spiritual consciousness. You see some who live a giddy, aimless life. They seem not at all aware that they have a spiritual nature or any spiritual wants. When they awake to spiritual consciousness and reflection, conviction produces remorse and agony. This spiritual struggle, at whatever age it may occur, is in its general character the same as occurs in the infant when its spiritual consciousness is first awakened.

It is but natural that when the spiritual faculties are aroused, men will begin to pray and struggle under a deep sense of being wrong and guilty. At first this may be entirely selfish. But before conversion takes place, there will be a point in which the counter influences of the selfish against the spiritual will balance each other, and then the spiritual will gain the ascendancy. The animal and the selfish must relatively decline and the spiritual gain strength, till victory turns on the side of the spiritual powers. How commonly do you observe that when the mind becomes convicted of sin, the attractions of the world fade away; all it can give looks small; sinners can no longer take the pleasure in worldly things they once had. Indeed this is a most curious and singular struggle. How rapid and great are the changes through which the sinner passes! To-day, he quenches the light of God in his soul, and gropes on in darkness; tomorrow the light may return and reveal yet greater sin; one day he relapses back to worldliness, and gives up his soul to his own thoughts and pleasures; but ere another has past, there is bitterness

in this cup and he loathes it, and from his soul cries out: This can never satisfy an immortal mind! Now he begins to practice upon external reformation; but anon he finds that this utterly fails to bring peace to his soul. He is full of trouble and anxiety for salvation, yet all his struggles thus far have been entirely selfish, and ere he is converted he must see this to be the case. He is in a horrible pit of miry clay. The more he struggles, the deeper he sinks and the more desperate his case becomes. Selfish efforts for spiritual relief are just like a quagmire of thick clay. Each struggle plunges the sinking man the deeper in the pit. The convicted man is ready to put himself to hard labor and mighty effort. At first he works with great hope of success, for he does not readily understand why selfish efforts will not be successful. He prays, but all in a selfish spirit. By this I mean that he thinks only of himself. He has no thought of honoring or pleasing God--no thought of any benefit to his fellow-beings. He does not inquire whether his course of life and state of heart are such that God can bless him without detriment to the rest of his great family. In fact he does not think of caring for the rest of that family nor for the honor of its great Father. Of course such selfish praying brings no answer; and when he finds this to be the case, he frets and struggles more than ever. Now he goes on to add to his works and efforts. He attends more meetings, and reads his Bible more, and tries new forms of prayer. All is in vain. His heart is selfish still. What can I do? he cries out in agony; if I pray I am selfish, and if I desist from prayer, this too is selfish; if I read my Bible or neglect to read it, each alike is selfish, and what can I do? How can I help being selfish?

Alas, he has no idea of acting from any other or higher motive than his own interests. It is his darkness on this very point that makes the sinner's struggle so long and so unprofitable. This is the reason why he cannot be converted at once, and why he must needs sink and flounder so much longer in the quagmire of unavailing and despairing works. It is only when he comes at last to see that all this avails nothing, that he begins to take some right views of his case and of his relations. When he learns that indeed he cannot work out his own salvation by working at it on this wise, he bethinks himself to inquire, whether he be not all wrong at bottom--whether his motives of heart are not radically corrupt. Looking round and abroad, he begins to ask whether God may not have some interests and some rights as well as himself. Who is God and where is He? Who is Jesus Christ and what has He done? What did He die for? Is God a great King over all the earth, and should He not have due honor and homage? Was it this great God who so loved the world as to give His Son to die for it? O, I see I have quite neglected to think of God's interests and honor! Now I see how infinitely mean and wicked I have been! Plainly enough, I cannot live so. No wonder God did not hear my selfish prayers. There was no hope in that sort of effort, for I had, as I plainly see, no regard to God in any thing I was doing then. How reasonable it is that God should ask me to desist from all my selfish endeavors and to put away this selfishness itself, and yield myself entirely and forever to do or suffer all his blessed will!

It is done; and now this long-troubled soul sinks into deep repose. It settles itself down at Jesus' feet, content if only Christ be honored and God's throne made glorious. The final result--whether saved or lost--seems to give him no longer that agonizing solicitude; the

case is submitted to the Great Disposer in trustful humility. God will do all things well. If He takes due care of his own interests and glory, there will be no complaining--nothing but deep and peaceful satisfaction.

In the case of most young converts, this state of peaceful trust in God is subject to interruptions. The natural appetites have been denied--their dominion over the will disowned; but they are not dead. By and by they rise to assert their sway. They clamor for indulgence, and sometimes they get it. Alas, the young convert has fallen into sin! His soul is again in bondage and sorrow. O, how deeply is he mortified to think that he has again given away to temptation, and pierced the bosom on which he loved to recline! He had promised himself he should never sin, but he has sinned, and well for him if he finds no heart to evade or deny the fact. Better admit it all, and most freely, although it wounds his heart more than all his former sins. Mark his agony of spirit! His tears of repentance were never before so bitter! He feels disappointed, and it almost seems to him that this failure must blast all his plans and hopes of leading a Christian life. It does not work as he thought it would. He feels shy of God; for he says, how can God ever trust me again after such developments of unfaithfulness. He can hardly get himself to say a word to God or to Christ. He is almost sure that he has been deceived. But finally he bethinks himself of the Cross of Calvary, and catches a faint ray of light--a beam of the light of love. He says, there may be mercy for me yet! I will at least go to Jesus and see. Again he goes, and again he falls into those arms of love and is made consciously welcome. The light of God shines on his soul again, and he find himself once more an accepted son in his Father's presence.

But here a new form of desire is awakened. He has learned something of his own weakness and has tasted the bitterness of sin. With an agony of interest never known before, he asks, Can I ever become established in holiness? Can I have righteousness enough to make me stand in the evil day? This is a new form of spiritual desire, such as our text expresses in the words "hunger and thirst after righteousness."

These extended remarks are only an introduction to my general subject, designed to get before your mind the true idea of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. This state of mind is not merely conviction; it is not remorse, nor sorrow, nor a struggle to obtain a hope or to get out of danger. All these feelings may have preceded, but the hungering after righteousness is none of these. It is a longing desire to realize the idea of spiritual and moral purity. He has in some measure appreciated the purity of heaven, and the necessity of being himself as pure as the holy there, in order to enjoy their bliss and breathe freely in their atmosphere.

This state of mind is not often developed by writers, and it seems rarely to have engaged the attention of the Church as its importance demands.

When the mind gets a right view of the atmosphere of heaven, it sees plainly it can not breathe there, but must be suffocated, unless its own spirit is congenial to the purity of that world. I remember the case of a man, who after living a Christian life for a season,

relapsed into sin. At length God reclaimed his wandering child. When I next saw him, and heard him speak of his state of relapse, he turned suddenly away and burst into tears, saying, "I have been living in sin, almost choked to death in its atmosphere; it seemed as if I could not breathe in it. It almost choked the breath of spiritual life from my system."

Have not some of you known what this means? You could not bear the infernal atmosphere of sin--so like the very smoke of the pit! After you get out of it, you say, Let me never be there again! Your soul agonizes and struggles to find some refuge against this awful relapsing into sin. O, you long for a pure atmosphere and a pure heart, that will never hold fellowship with darkness or its works again.

The young convert, like the infant child, may not at first distinctly apprehend its own condition and wants; but such experience as I have been detailing develops the idea of perfect purity, and then the soul longs for it with longings irrepressible. I must, says the now enlightened convert, I must be drawn into living union with God as revealed in Jesus Christ. I can not rest till I find God, and have him revealed to me as my everlasting refuge and strength.

Some years since, I preached a sermon for the purpose of developing the idea of the spiritual life. The minister for whom I preached said to me, I want to show you a letter written many years ago by a lady now in advanced age, and detailing her remarkable experience on this subject. After her conversion she found herself exceedingly weak, and often wondered if this was all the stability and strength she could hope for from Christ in his gospel. Is this, said she, all that God can do for me? Long time and with much prayer she examined her Bible. At last she found, that below what she had ever read and examined before, there lay a class of passages which revealed the real gospel--salvation from sinning. She saw the provisions of the gospel in full relief. Then she shut herself up, determined to seek this blessing till she should find. Her soul went forth after God, seeking communion with him, and the great blessing which she so deeply felt that she needed. She had found the needed promises in God's Word, and now she held on upon them as if she could not let them go until they had all been fulfilled in her own joyful experience. She cried mightily to God. She said, "if thou dost not give me this blessing, I can never believe thee again." In the issue the Lord showed her that the provisions were already made, and were just as full and as glorious as they needed to be or could be, and that she might receive them by faith if she would. In fact it was plainly the case the Spirit of the Lord was pressing upon her acceptance, so that she had only to believe--to open wide her mouth that it might be filled. She saw and obeyed: then she became firm and strong. Christ had made her free. She was no longer in bondage; her Lord had absolutely enlarged her soul in faith and love, and triumphantly she could exclaim: Glory be to God! Christ hath made me free.

The state of mind expressed by hungering and thirsting is a real hunger and thirst, and terminates for its object upon the bread and water of life. These figures (if indeed they are to be regarded as figures at all) are kept up fully throughout the Bible, and all true Christians can testify to the fitness of the language to express the idea.

I have said that this state of mind implies conversion; for although the awakened sinner may have agonies and convictions, yet he has no clear conceptions of what this union with Christ is, nor does he clearly apprehend the need of a perfectly cleansed heart. He needs some experience of what holiness is, and often he seems also to need to have tasted some of the exceeding bitterness of sin as felt by one who has been near the Lord, before he shall fully apprehend this great spiritual want of being made a partaker indeed of Christ's own perfect righteousness. By righteousness here, we are not to understand something imputed, but something real. It is imparted, not imputed. Christ draws the souls of his people into such union with himself, that they become "partakers of the divine nature," or as elsewhere expressed, "partakers of his holiness." For this the tried Christian pants. Having had a little taste of it, and then having tasted the bitterness of a relapse into sin, his soul is roused to most intense struggles to realize this blessed union with Christ.

*I. What is implied in being filled with this righteousness.*

*II. What are the conditions of receiving this fullness*

**I. A few words should now be said on what is implied in being filled with this righteousness.**

- 1. Worldly men incessantly hunger and thirst after worldly good. But attainment never outstrips desire. Hence they are never filled. There is always a conscious want which no acquisition of this sort of good can satisfy. It is most remarkable that worldly men can never be filled with the things they seek. Well do the Scriptures say, this desire enlarges itself as hell, and is never satisfied. They really hunger and thirst the more by how much the more they obtain.
- 2. Let it be especially remarked that this being filled with righteousness is not perfection, in the highest sense of this term. Men often use the term perfection, of that which is absolutely complete, a state which precludes improvement and beyond which there can be no progress. There can be no such perfection among Christians in any world--earth or heaven. It can pertain to no being but God. He, and He alone, is perfect beyond possibility of progress. All else, but God, are making progress--the wicked from bad to worse, the righteous from good to better. Instead of making no more progress in heaven, as some suppose, probably the law of progress is in a geometrical ratio; the more they have, the farther they will advance. I have often queried whether this law which seems to prevail here will operate there, viz: of what I may call impulsive progression. Here we notice that the mind from time to time gives itself to most intense exertion to make attainments in holiness. The attainment having been made, the mind for a season reposes, as if it had taken its meal and awaited the natural return of appetite before it should put forth its next great effort. May it not be that the same law of progress obtains even in heaven?
- 3. Here we see the operations of this law in the usual Christian progress. Intense longing and desire beget great struggling and earnest prayer; at length the special blessing sought is found,

and for the time the soul seems to be filled to overflowing. It seems to be fully satisfied and to have received all it supposed possible and perhaps even more than was ever asked or thought. The soul cries out before the Lord, I did not know there was such fullness in store for thy people. How wonderful that God should grant it to such an one as myself! The soul finds itself swallowed up and lost in the great depths and riches of such a blessing. O, how the heart pours itself out in the one most expressive petition, "Thy will be done on earth as in heaven!" All prayer is swallowed up in this. And then the praise, the FULLNESS OF PRAISE! All struggle and agony are suspended: the soul seems to demand a rest from prayer that it may pour itself out in one mighty tide of praise. Some suppose that persons in this state will never again experience those longings after a new baptism; but in this they mistake. The meal they have had may last them a considerable time--longer perhaps than Elijah's meal, on the strength of which he went forty days; but the time of comparative hunger will come round again, and they will gird themselves for a new struggle.

- 4. This is what is sometimes expressed as a baptism, an anointing, an unction, an ensembling of the Spirit--an earnest of the Spirit. All these terms are pertinent and beautiful to denote this special work of the Divine Spirit in the heart. They who experience it, know how well and aptly it is described as eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Lord Jesus, so really does the soul seem to live on Christ. It is also the bread and the water of life which are promised freely to him that is athirst. These terms may seem very mystical and unmeaning to those who have had no experience, but they are all plain to him who has known in his own soul what they mean. If you ask why figures of speech are used at all to denote spiritual things, you have the answer in the exigencies of the human mind in regard to apprehending spiritual things. Christ's language must have seemed very mystical to his hearers, yet was it the best he could employ for his purpose. If any man will do his will, he shall know of his doctrine; but how can a selfish, debased, besotted, and withal disobedient mind, expect to enter into the spiritual meaning of this language? How strangely must Christ's words have sounded on the ears of Jewish priests: "God in us," "The Holy Ghost dwelling in you," "Ye shall abide in me." How could they understand these things? "The bread that came down from heaven," what could this mean to them? They thought they understood about the manna from heaven, and they idolized Moses; but how to understand what this Nazarene said about giving them the true bread from heaven which should be for the life of the world, they could not see. No wonder they were confounded, having only legal ideas of religion, and having not even the most remote approximation to the idea of a living union with the Messiah for the purposes of spiritual life.

## **II. What are the conditions of receiving this fullness?**

- 1. That the soul hunger and thirst for it, is the only condition specified in this passage. But we know it is very common to have promises made in the Bible, and yet not have all the conditions of the promise stated in the same connection. If we find them elsewhere, we are to regard them as fixed conditions, and they are to be understood as implied where they are not expressed.
- 2. Elsewhere we are told that faith is a fundamental condition. Men must believe for it and receive it by faith. This is as naturally necessary as receiving and eating wheat bread is for the sustenance of the body. Ordinary food must be taken into the system by our own voluntary act. We take and eat; then the system appropriates. So faith receives and appropriates the bread of

life.

In general it is found true that before Christians will sufficiently apprehend the relations of this supply to their wants and to the means of supplying them, this hunger and thirst becomes very intense, so as to overpower and cast into insignificance all their other appetites and desires. As by a general law one master passion throws all minor ones into the shade, and may sometimes suspend them for a season entirely, so we find in this case a soul intensely hungering and thirsting after righteousness almost forgets to hunger and thirst even after its common food and drinks. Place before him his study-books, he cannot bring his mind to relish them now. Invite him to a singing-concert, he has no taste that way at present. Ask him into company, his mind is pressing in another direction. He longs to find God, and can take but little interest in any other friend at present. Offer him worldly society, and you will find he takes the least possible interest in it. He knows such companions will not understand what his soul so intensely craves, and of course it were vain to look for sympathy in that quarter.

- 3. It is an important condition that the mind should have somewhat clear apprehensions of the thing needed and of the means of obtaining it. Effort cannot be well directed unless the subject be in some good measure understood. What is that ensembling of the Spirit? What is this baptism? I must by all means see what this is before I can intelligently seek it and hope to gain it. True, no man can know before experience as he can and will know afterwards; but he can learn something before and often much more after the light of experience shines in upon his soul. There is no more mystification than there is in hungering for a good dinner, and being refreshed by it after you have eaten it.

Again, if we would have this fullness, we must be sure to believe this promise and all this class of promises. We must regard them as truly promises of God--all yea and amen in Christ Jesus, and as good for our souls to rely upon as the promise of pardon to the penitent and believing

Yet again we must ask and insist upon their fulfillment to our souls. We are authorized to expect it in answer to our faith. We should be first certain that we ask in sincerity, and then should expect the blessing just as we always expect God to be faithful to his word. Why not? Has he said and shall he not do it? Has He promised and shall he not perform?

- 4. We must believe that the promise implies a full supply. Our faith must not limit the power or the grace of Christ. The Christian is not straitened in God; let him take care therefore that he do not straiten himself by his narrow conceptions of what God can do and loves to do for his hungering and thirsting children. Often there is need of great perseverance in the search for this blessing. Because of the darkness of the mind and the smallness of its faith the way may not for a long time be prepared for the full bestowment of this great blessing.

## REMARKS.

1. The Antinomian Perfectionists mistook the meaning of this and of similar passages. They supposed that whoever believes gets so filled as never to thirst any more. But the fact is, the mind may rise

higher and higher, making still richer attainments in holiness at each rising grade of progress. It may indeed find many resting-places, as Bunyan gives to his pilgrim--here at the top of the hill Difficulty, there on the Delectable Mountains, where he passes through scenes of great triumph, great faith and great joy in God. Subsequently to these scenes will occur other periods of intense desire for new baptisms of the Spirit, and for a new ascent upon the heights of the divine life. This is to be the course of things so long at least as we remain in the flesh, and perhaps forever. Perhaps the blest spirits in heaven will never reach a point beyond which there shall not be the same experience--new developments of God made to the mind, and by this means new stages of progress and growth in holiness. With what amazement shall we then study these stages of progress and admire to look abroad over the new fields of knowledge successively opened, and the corresponding developments of mental power and of a holy character, all which stand related to these manifestations of God as effects to their cause. What new and glorious views have been bursting upon us, fast as we could bear them, for myriads of ages! Looking back over the past, we shall say--O, this everlasting progress--this is indeed the blessedness of heaven! How far does this transcend our highest thought when we looked forward to heaven from the dim distance of our earthly pilgrimage! Here there is no end to the disclosures to be made, nor to the truths to be learned.

If there was to be no more food, how could there be any more spiritual thirst and spiritual hunger? How, indeed, could there be more spiritual joy? Suppose that somewhere in the lapse of Heaven's eternal ages, we should reach a point where nothing more remains to be learned--not another thing to be inquired after--not another fact to be investigated, or truth to be known.--Alas, what a blow to the bliss of heaven!

We are told that the angels are desiring to look into the things of salvation. Oh, yes, when they saw our Messiah born they were allowed to come so near us with their joyous outbursts of praise that even mortals could hear. Do you not suppose those angels too are growing in grace, and advancing in knowledge? No doubt they are, most wonderfully, and have been ever since they came into being.

How much more they must know of God now than they did before our world was created! And how much more they have yet to learn from God's government over our race Think you they have no more desires after the knowledge of God? And have they no more desire to rise to yet higher conformity of heart and character to the great Model of Heaven?

If so with angels, surely not less so with their younger brethren--the holy who are redeemed from among men.

You might suppose that by studying in this school for a few days, you would learn all human science. This were a great mistake. You might master many sciences and still have other heights to ascend--other vast fields of knowledge to explore. You might have the best of human teachers and the best possible opportunities for learning, yet still it would be enough to occupy you the length of many lives to master all there is in even human science. The mind is not made to be so filled to satiety that it craves no more--can receive no more. Like the trees planted on the rivers of the waters of life, which bring forth twelve manner of fruits and whose roots go deep and drink largely of those blessed waters--so is the mind which God has endowed with the functions of immortal progress.

As our ideal becomes elevated, and we see higher points to which we may arise, we shall have more enkindlings of desire, and more intense struggles to advance. What Christian does not find as he reads the Bible over, new and deeper strata of meaning never seen before--new truths revealed and new beauties displayed. Old father O. used to say, "I am reading the Word of God. It is deep and rich, like the great heart of its Author. I have read now two hours and have not got over but two verses. It will take me to all eternity to read it through." So it was. He really found more in the Bible than other men did. He went deeper, and the deeper he went, the richer did he find its precious ores of gold and silver.

So the Psalmist says--"Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Have you not been so ravished with love to this blessed book that you wanted to clasp it to your bosom and become purified with its spirit? As you go down into its depths and find in each successive stratum of its deep thoughts new beauties and new fields of truth to explore, have you not been filled with intense desire to live long enough and have time and strength enough to see, to learn, and to enjoy it all? Like the successive landscapes as you ascend the lofty mountain's side;--at each stage you see them spreading out in grander beauty and broader range--so, as you really study into the great and rich things of God's spiritual kingdom, there is no limit to this sweep of the knowledge of God; for the fields only become the broader and the more enchanting as you ascend. Do you not think that his soul must be truly blessed who eats and drinks and fills his soul with divine righteousness?

2. I am strongly impressed with the conviction that some of you need a new development of the spiritual life. You need to go deeper into the knowledge of God as revealed in the soul; you need to hunger and thirst more intensely, and be by this means filled as you have not often been as yet. Even though you may have tasted that the Lord is gracious, you yet need to eat and drink largely at His table. It will not avail you to live on those old dinners, long past and long since digested. You want a fresh meal. It is time for you to say--"I must know more about this being filled with righteousness. My soul languishes for this heavenly food. I must come again into this banqueting house to be feasted again with his love."

3. The full soul cannot be satisfied to enjoy its rich spiritual provisions alone. If well fed himself, he will be only more exercised to see others also fed and blessed. The Spirit of Christ in his heart is a spirit of love, and this can never rest except as it sees others reaching the same standard of attainment and enjoyment which is so delightful to itself.

4. Real Christians should be, and in the main they will be growing better and holier as they come nearer heaven. On the other hand, how great and fearful is the contrast between an aged growing Christian and an aged sinner growing in depravity and guilt. The one is ripening for heaven, the other for hell. The one goes on praising and loving, laboring and suffering for God and for his generation according to the will of God; but the other goes on his downward course, scolding and cursing as he goes, abhorred of men and disowned of his Maker. You have seen the awful contrast. You could hardly believe that two men so unlike were both raised in the same township--taught at the same school--instructed in the same religious assembly and presented with the same gospel;--and yet see how manifestly the one is saved and the other damned. Each bears the sign beforehand--the palpable, unmistakable evidence of the destiny that awaits him.

5. Is it not full time that each one of you who has any spiritual life should stand out before the world

and put on your beautiful garments? Let all the world see that there is a power and a glory in the gospel, such as human philosophy never has even approached. Show that the gospel begets purity and peace. Show that it enlarges the heart and opens the hand for the good of all human kind. Show that it conquers selfishness and transforms the soul from hate to love.

Sinners, ye who have earthly hunger and thirst enough, let your ears be opened to hear the glad tidings of real salvation. Ye whose hearts have never known solid peace--ye who are forever desiring yet never satisfied--ye who cry in your inmost souls--O for office--O for honor--O for wealth! See, here is that which is better far than all you seek. Here are durable riches and righteousness. Here are the first installments of pleasures that flow forever at God's right hand. Here is heaven proffered and even pressed upon your regard and your choice. Choose life before death, as you would be wise for your eternal well-being.

## **Death to Sin Through Christ**

Lecture VIII

September 14, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rom. 6:11: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The connection of this passage will help us to understand its meaning. Near the close of the previous chapter Paul had said--"The law entered that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." He speaks here of sin as being a reigning principle or monarch, and of grace also as reigning. Then, in chapter 6, he proceeds--"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

You observe here that Paul speaks of the man, the old sinner--as being crucified with Christ--so destroyed by the moral power of the cross that he who was once a sinner shall no longer serve sin. When he speaks of our being planted or buried with Christ we must of course understand him as employing figures of speech to teach the great truth that the gospel redeems the soul from sin. As Christ died for sin, so by a general analogy we die to sin; while, on the other hand, as He rose to a new and infinitely glorious life, so the convert rises to a new and blessed life of purity and holiness.

But recurring particularly to our text, let me say--The language used in our translation would seem to

denote that our death to sin is precisely analogous to Christ's death for sin; but this is not the case. We are dead to sin in the sense that it is no longer to be our Master, implying that it has been in power over us. But sin never was in power over Jesus Christ--never was His master. Christ died to abolish its power over us--not to abolish any power of sin over himself, for it had none. The analogy between Christ's death in relation to sin and our dying to sin, goes to this extent and no farther: He died for the sake of making an atonement for sin and of creating a moral power that should be effective to kill the love of sin in all hearts; but the Christian dies unto sin in the sense of being divorced from all sympathy with sin and emancipated from its control.

But I must proceed to remark upon the text itself, and shall inquire,

*I. What it is to be dead unto sin in the sense of the text.*

*II. What it is to be alive unto God.*

*III. What it is to reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*IV. What it is to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ.*

*V. What is implied in the exhortation of our text.*

*VI. What is implied in complying with this injunction?*

## **I. What it is to be dead unto sin in the sense of the text.**

Being dead to sin must obviously be the opposite of being dead in sin. The latter must undeniably be a state of entire sinfulness--a state in which the soul is dead to all good through the power of sin over it. But right over against this, to be dead to sin, must be to be indifferent to its attractions--beyond the reach of its influence--as fully removed from its influences as the dead are from the objects of sense in this world. As he who is dead in the natural sense, has nothing more to do with earthly things, so he who is dead to sin has nothing to do any more with sin's attractions or with sinning itself.

## **II. What it is to be alive unto God?**

To be full of life for Him--to be altogether active and on the alert to do his will; to make our whole lives a perpetual offering to Him, constantly delivering up ourselves to Him and his service that we may glorify his name and subserve his interests.

## **III. What it is to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto Him?**

The word rendered reckon is sometimes rendered account. Abraham's faith was accounted unto him for righteousness. So in this passage--reckon must mean--believe, esteem yourselves dead indeed unto sin. Account this to be the case. Regard this as truly your relation to sin; you are entirely dead to it; it shall have no more dominion over you.

A careful examination of the passages where this original word is used will show that this is its usual and natural sense. And this gives us the true idea of gospel faith--embracing personally the salvation which is by faith in Jesus Christ. But more of this hereafter.

#### **IV. What is meant by reckoning yourselves alive indeed unto God through Jesus Christ?**

Plainly this: that you are to expect to be saved by Jesus Christ and to calculate on this salvation as your own. You are to esteem yourself as wholly dead to sin and as consequently brought into life and peace in Christ Jesus.

#### **V. What is implied in the exhortation of our text?**

That there is an adequate provision for this expectation, and for realizing these blessings in fact. For if there were no ground for realizing this, the injunction would be most absurd. A precept requiring us to account ourselves dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God, would be utterly untenable if there were no probability of the thing--if no provision were made for our coming into such relations to sin on the one hand and to God through Christ on the other. For if these blessings could not be reasonably expected, there could be no rational ground for the expectation. If it were not reasonable to expect it, then to enjoin us to expect it would be palpably unreasonable. Who does not see that the very injunction implies that there is a foundation laid and adequate provision made for the state required?

#### **VI. What is implied in complying with this injunction?**

- 1. Believing such a thing to be possible. Believing it possible that through Christ we may live in the required manner, that we may avoid sin--desist from sinning--give it up and abandon it altogether, and put it forever away. There can be no such thing as an intelligent compliance with this precept except as there shall underlie it this belief in its practicability.
- 2. That the mind regards the state required as a practicable one--not merely as true in theory--not merely as good philosophy--but as actually made practicable by adequate grace, adapted to the laws of mind and to the actual moral condition of lost men.
- 3. That we cease from all expectation of attaining this state of ourselves, and by our own independent, unaided efforts. There is no beginning to receive by grace till we renounce all expectation of attaining by natural works. It is only when empty of self that we begin to be filled of Christ.
- 4. A present willingness to be saved from sin. We must actually renounce all sin as such--that is, renounce sin because it is sin, and for what it is. This position the mind must take: I can have nothing more to do with sinning--for God hates sin, and I am to live henceforth and forever to please and glorify Him. My soul is committed with its strength of purpose to this pleasing of God and doing his will.
- 5. It implies also an entire committal of your whole case to Jesus Christ, not only for present but for all future salvation from sin. This is absolutely essential. It must always be the vital

step--the cardinal act in this great work of salvation from sin.

- 6. It implies also the foreclosing of the mind against temptation, in such a sense that the mind truly expects to live a life purely devoted to God. This is the same sort of foreclosing of the mind as takes place under a faithful marriage contract. The Bible everywhere keeps this figure prominent. Christians are represented as the bride of Christ. They stand in a relation to Him, which is closely analogous to that of a bride to her husband. Hence when they commit their whole hearts to Him, reposing their affections in Him and trusting Him for all good, their hearts are strongly foreclosed against temptation. We see the principle here involved, illustrated in the merely human relation. When parties are solemnly betrothed in mutual honest fidelity, there is no longer any thought of letting the eye rove or the heart go abroad for a fresh object of interest and love. The heart is fixed--willingly and by blighted [sic.] faith fixed, and this fact shuts out the power of temptation almost entirely. It renders it comparatively an easy matter to keep the heart safely above the influence of temptation to apostasy. Before the sacred vows are taken, individuals may be excused for looking round and making any observations, or inquiries: but never after the solemn vow is made. After the parties have become one by vow of marriage, never to be broken, there is to be no more question as to a better choice--no further thought about changing the relation or withdrawing the heart's affections. No wavering is admissible now; the pledge is made for everlasting faithfulness, settled once and forever! This is God's own illustration, and surely none need be more apt, or more forcible. It shows how the Christian should look upon sin and upon all temptation to sin. He must say, Away from my heart for ever! I am married to Jesus Christ; how then can I look after other lovers? My mind is forever settled. It rests in the deep repose of one whose affections are plighted and fixed--to rove no more! Sin? I can think of yielding to its seductions no longer. I cannot entertain the question for a moment. I can have nothing to do with sinning. My mind is settled--the question forever fore closed, and I can no more admit the temptation to small sins than to great sins--no more consent to give my heart to worldly idols than to commit murder! I did not enter upon religion as upon an experiment, to see how I might like it--no more than a wife or husband take on themselves the marriage vow as an experiment. No; my whole soul has committed itself to Jesus Christ with as much expectation of being faithful forever as the most faithful husband and wife have of fulfilling their vows in all fidelity till death shall part them.

Christians in this state of mind no more expect to commit small sins than great sins. Hating all sin for its own sake and for its hatefulness to Christ, any sin however small is to them as murder. Hence if the heart is ever afterwards seduced and overcome by temptation, it is altogether contrary to their expectation and purpose; it was not embraced in their plan by any means, but was distinctly excluded; it was not deliberately indulged aforetime, but broke on them unexpectedly through the vantage ground of old habits or associations.

Again, the state of mind in question implies that the Christian knows where his great strength lies. He knows it does not lie in works of fasting, giving alms, making prayers, doing public duties or private duties--nothing of this sort--not even in resolutions or any self-originated efforts, but only in Christ received by faith. He no more expects spiritual life of himself apart from Christ, than a man in his senses would expect to fly by swinging his arms in the air. Deep in his soul lies the conviction that his whole strength

lies in Christ alone.

When men are so enlightened as truly to apprehend this subject, then to expect less than this from Jesus Christ as the result of committing the whole soul to Him for full salvation, is virtually to reject Him as a revealed Saviour. It does not honour Him for what He is; it does not honour the revelations He has made of Himself in his word by accepting Him as there presented. For consider what is the first element of this salvation? Not being saved from hell, but being saved from sin. Salvation from punishment is quite a secondary thing, in every sense. It is only a result of being saved from sin, and not the prime element in the gospel salvation. Why was the infant Messiah to be called Jesus? Because He should save his people from their sins. And does the Bible anywhere teach any other or different view from this?

## REMARKS.

1. This text alone--"Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ"--most entirely justifies the expectation of living without sin through all-abounding grace. If there were no other passage bearing on this point, this alone is adequate, and for a Christian to offer this only as a reason for such a hope in Him is to offer as good a reason as need be given. There are indeed many others that fully justify this expectation.

2. To teach that such an expectation is a dangerous error is to teach unbelief. What if the apostle had added to this injunction which requires us to account ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, this singular averment: "Yet let me warn you, nobody can rationally hope to be free from sin in this world. You must remember that to entertain such an expectation as God enjoins in this language is a dangerous error."--What should be thought of this if--it were attached to Rom. 6:11?

No man can deny that the passage treats of sanctification. The whole question is shall Christians "continue in sin" after having been forgiven and accepted in their Redeemer. Paul labours to show that they should, and of course that they may die to sin--even as Christ died for sin; and may also live a new--a spiritual life (through faith in his grace), even as Christ does a higher and more glorious life.

Let me refer here to another passage, in which it is said--"Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers--what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God. Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." This is a very remarkable passage. Note how precept and promise are intermingled, and how, finally, upon the basis of a most glorious promise, is founded the precept enjoining us to perfect holiness. Now what should we think of Paul and of the Divine Spirit who spake through Paul, if He had immediately subjoined--"Take care lest any of you should be led by these remarks to indulge the very dangerous and erroneous expectation that you can "perfect holiness," or "cleanse yourselves from any sin, either of flesh or spirit, in this world." Would not this have been trifling with the intelligence and Christian sensibility of every reader of his words through all time? Should we not account it as substantially blasphemous?

It so happens that the Bible never gainsays its own teachings; but I ask--What if it had? What if the Bible had solemnly asserted--"No mere man either of himself or by any grace received in this life, has ever kept or shall ever keep the commandments of God wholly, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed?"

To teach that such an expectation is dangerous is a great deal worse than no teaching at all. Far better to leave men to their own unaided reading of God's word, for this could scarcely in any case so sadly mislead them, however inclined they might be to the misapprehension. Dangerous to expect salvation from sin? Dangerous?!--What does this mean? What! Dangerous to expect victory over any sin? If so, what is the gospel worth? What gospel have we that can be deemed good news at all?

Many indulge the very opposite expectation. Far from expecting any such thing as the apostle authorizes them to expect, they know they have no such expectation.

Of some yet more than this is true--they expect to count themselves always in sin. They depend on reckoning themselves, not dead indeed unto sin but somewhat alive to it through all their mortal life, and in part alive to God through Jesus Christ. It follows as quite a thing of course that expecting no such thing as complete victory over sin, they will use no appropriate means, since faith stands foremost among those means, and faith must include at least a confidence that the thing sought is possible to be attained.

In this and the following chapters we have the essence of the good news of the gospel. Any one who has been wounded and made sore by sin--its bitter shafts sinking deep into his moral being--one who has known its bitterness and felt the poison thereof drink up his spirit--such an one will see that there is glory in the idea of being delivered from sin. He will surely see that this deliverance is by far the greatest want of his soul, and that nothing can be compared with escaping from this body of sin and death. Look at Rom. 7th. There you will have the state of a man who is more than convinced, who is really convicted. It is one thing to be convinced, and a yet further stage of progress in the right direction to be convicted. This term implies the agency of another party. The criminal at the bar may be quite convinced of his guilt by the view he was compelled to take of his own case; but his being convicted is a still further step; the testimony and the jury convict him.

Some of you know what it is to see yourself a sinner, and yet the sight of the fact brings with it no smart--no sting; it does not cut deep into your very soul. On the other hand, some of you may know what it is to see your sins all armed like an armed man to pierce you through and through with daggers. Then you cry out as here--O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? You feel a piercing sting as if your soul were filled with poison--with dark rankling venom, diffusing through the depths of your soul the very agonies of hell! This is what I mean by being convicted, as a state of mind beyond being merely convinced. The shafts and the smiting of sin seem really like the piercings of an arrow, as if arrows from the Almighty did really drink up your spirit. When you experience this, then you can understand what the good news of the gospel is. A remedy for such pangs must be good news beyond all contradiction. Then to know that the blood of Christ can save, is indeed a cordial of life to the fainting soul.

Place a man in this state of cutting, piercing conviction, and then let him feel that there is actually no remedy, and he sinks under the iron shafts of despair. See his agony! Tell him there can never be any remedy for his guilty soul! You must lie there in you wailing and despair forever! Can any state of mind be more awful?

I remember a case that occurred in Reading, Pa., many years ago. There was a man of hard heart and iron frame--a strong, burly man, who had stood up against the revival as if he could shake off all the arrows of the Almighty, even as the Mastodon of which the tradition of the red man says, he shook off all the arrows of the warriors from his brow and felt no harm. So he stood. But he had a praying wife and a praying sister, and they gathered their souls in the might of prayer close about him as a party of men would hem in a wild bull in a net. Soon it was apparent that an arrow from the quiver of the Almighty had pierced between the joints of his harness and had taken hold of his innermost heart. O, was not he in agony then! It was night--dark and intensely cold. It seemed that absolutely he could not live. They sent for me to come and see him. I went. While yet sixty rods from his house I heard his screams and wailings of woe. It made me feel awfully solemn--so like the echoes of the pit of hell! I reached the house: there he lay on the floor rolling in his agony and wailing, as is rarely heard this side the pit of despair. Cold as the weather was, he sweat like rain, every part of his frame being in a most intense perspiration. O his groans! and to see him gnaw his very tongue for pain--this could not but give one some idea of the doom of the damned. O, said I, if this be only conviction, what is hell?! But he could not bear to hear anything about sin; his conscience was already full of it, and had brought out the awful things of God's law so as to leave nothing more to be done in that direction. I could only put Christ before him, and just hold his mind to the view of Christ alone. This soon brought relief. But suppose I had nothing else to say but this--"Mr. B., there is no help possible for your case! You can wail on and wail on: no being in the universe can help you?" Need you say to him hell has no fire? Oh, he has fire enough in his burning soul already. It seems to him that no hell of fire can possibly be worse than this.

How perfectly chilling and horrible for persons to oppose the idea of expecting deliverance from sin and yet talk calmly of going on in sin all the rest of their earthly days! As an elder whom I knew rose in meeting and told the Lord he had been living in sin thus far and expected to go on in sin as long as he lived; he had sinned today and should doubtless sin tomorrow and so on--and yet he talked as calmly about it all as if it were foolish to make any ado, as well as impossible to attempt any change for the better. Talk of all this calmly--think of that! Quite calmly of living alone in sin all the rest of his days! How horrible! Suppose a wife should say to her husband, "I love you some, but you know I love many other men too, and that I find it pleasant to indulge myself with them. You certainly must be aware that all women are frail creatures and liable to fall continually, and indeed you know that I expect to fall more or less as it may happen every day I live, so that you certainly will not expect from me anything so impracticable and fanatical as unblemished virtue! You know we have none of us any idea of being perfect in the present life--we don't believe in any such thing!"

Now let me ask you to look at this woman and hear what she has to say. Can you hear her talk so, without having your soul filled with horror? What! is this woman a wife, and does she think and talk in this way about conjugal fidelity?

And yet this is not to be compared in shocking guilt and treason with the case of the Christian who

says, "I expect to sin every day I live," and who says this with unmoved carelessness. You expect to be a traitor to Jesus each day of your life; to crucify him afresh each day; to put him each day to an open shame; each day to dishonour his name, and grieve his heart, and to bring sorrow and shame upon all who love Christ's cause; and yet you talk about having a good hope through grace! But tell me, does not every true Christian say, "Do not let me live at all if I cannot live without sin; for how can I bear to go on day by day sinning against him whom I so much love!"

Those who are really opposed to this idea, are either very ignorant of what the gospel is, or they are impenitent and of course do not care to be delivered from their sins; or at best they are guilty of great unbelief. Into which of these classes the opposers of the doctrine may fall, is a question for themselves to settle, as between their own consciences and their God.

There are two distinct views of salvation entertained among professed Christians, and correspondingly two distinct classes of professors--often embraced within the same church. The one class regard the gospel as a salvation from sin. They think more of this and value it more than the hope of heaven, or of earth either. The great thing with them is to realize the idea of deliverance from sin. This constitutes the charm and glory of the gospel. They seek this more than to be saved from hell. They care more by far to be saved from sin itself than from its penal consequences. Of the latter they think and pray but little. It is their glory and their joy that Christ is sent to deliver them from their bondage in iniquity--to lift them up from their wretched state and give them the liberty of love. This they labour to realize; this is to them the good news of gospel salvation.

The other class are mostly anxious to be saved from hell. The punishment due for sin is the thing they chiefly fear. In fact, fear has been mainly the spring of their religious efforts. The gospel is not thought of as a means of deliverance from sin, but as a great system of indulgences--a vast accommodation to take off the fear and danger of damnation, while yet it leaves them in their sin. Now, here I do not by any means imply that they will call their system of gospel faith a scheme of indulgences: the name doubtless will be an offence to them. They may not have distinctly considered this point, and may have failed to notice that in fact it is such and nothing better.

They seem not to notice that a scheme of salvation that removes the fear of damnation for sin, and which yet leaves them in their sins to live for themselves, to please themselves, and which holds that Christ will at last bring them to heaven notwithstanding their having lived in sin all their days, must be a vast scheme of indulgences. Indeed, it is a compromise on a most magnificent scale. By virtue of it, the whole church is expected to wallow on in sin through life, and be none the less sure of heaven at last.

These opposite views are so prevalent and so palpable you will see them everywhere as you go round among the churches. You will find many in the church who are altogether worldly and selfish; who live conformed to the world in various neglects of duty, and who expect to indulge themselves in sin more or less all the way through life. You may ask them, Do you think that is right? They answer: No. Why then do you do it? O, we are all imperfect, and we can't expect to be any better than imperfect while here in the flesh. Yet they expect to be saved at last from hell, and to have all their sins forgiven; but how? Not on condition of sincerely turning away from all their sins, but on the assumption that the gospel is a vast system of indulgences--more vast by far than Pope Leo X. ever wielded and

worked to comfort sinning professors in his day. For here, not merely those that sin occasionally as there, but those who live in sin and know they do, and expect they shall as long as they live, yet expect to be saved without fail at last.

The other class of professed Christians have no expectation of being saved only as they have a pure heart and live above the world. Talk to them about living in sin, they hate and dread the very thought. To them the poison of asps is in it. Sin is bitter to their souls. They dread it as they dread death itself.

No one can go round within this church or any other without finding these two classes as distinct in their apprehension of the gospel as I have described them to be. The one class are in agony if they find themselves even slipping, and they are specially cautious against exposing themselves to temptation.

Not so with the other class. Two ministers of the gospel being together, one urged the other strongly to engage in a certain service. The other declined. "Why not go?" said the first. "Because I do not think myself justified in exposing myself to such and so much temptation."

"But why stop for that? We expect to sin more or less always; and all we have to do is to repent of it afterwards."

Horror-smitten, the other could only say, "I hold to a different gospel from that altogether."

Suppose a wife should say to her husband, "I am determined I will go to the theater." "But, my dear," says he, "you know bad people congregate there, and you may be tempted." But she replies, "Never mind; if I sin I will repent of it afterwards."

The real Christian may be known by this, that the very thought of being drawn into sin drives him to agony. He cannot bear the idea of living in sin; no, not for one moment.

The young people here who are truly Christians, are careful about this ensuing vacation. You will be on your guard, for you are afraid you may be ensnared into sin. I do not mean that you need fear to go where God calls you, but it is a terrible thing to be ensnared into sin, and you cannot but feel it to be so. If you know what it is to be wounded by the arrows of sin in your soul, you will go abroad into apparent danger, walking softly and with caution, and much prayer. You will surely be much on your guard. But if you say, "O, if I sin I will repent," what shall I say of you? You will repent, will you? And this will make all right again so easily? Suppose you foresaw that in going abroad for vacation, you would get drunk a few times, and would commit one or two murders, would you say, "O, I may be a good Christian notwithstanding. I will be careful to repent of it after it is all over." Horrible! And yet you can think yourself a good Christian! Let me tell you, a Christian man who repents of sin, repents of it as sin. He makes no such discriminations as between a little secret sin and a great sin, for example, a murder. He knows no such distinction between sins as will leave him to commit the one class without scruple and to shrink from the other. With him anything that grieves God is a horrible thing. Anything that displeases God--"Ah," he cries out, "God will see it; it will grieve his heart!" How it will affect God--this is all in all with him. One who knows what it is to appear guilty of sin before God, and then who knows also what it is to be delivered from this condition, will understand how the Christian ought to feel in circumstances of temptation, where he feels himself in danger of

sinning. His hair all stands on end! How awful to sin against God! Hence anything that seems likely to bring him into danger will rouse up all his soul within him and put him on his guard.

The unbelief of the Church as to what they may receive from Christ, is the great stumbling-block, hindering themselves and others from experiencing deliverance. Not only is this a great curse to professed Christians, but it is also a great grief to Jesus Christ and a sore trial.

Many seem to have hardened their hearts against all expectation of this deliverance from sin. They have heard the doctrine preached. They have seen some profess to be in this state of salvation from sin, but they have also seen some of this class fall again, and now they deliberately reject the whole doctrine. But is this consistent with really embracing the gospel? What is Christ to the believer? What was his errand into the world? What is he doing, and what is he trying to do?

He has come to break the power of sin in the heart, and to be the life of the believer, working in him a perpetual salvation from sin, aiming to bring him thus, and only thus, to heaven at last. What is faith, what but the actual giving of yourself up to Christ that he may do this work for you and in you! What are you to believe of Christ if not this, that he is to save his people from their sins? Can you tell of anything else? Does the Bible tell you to expect something different and less than this? The fact is, that it has been the great stumbling-block to the church that this thing has not been well understood. The common experience of nominal Christians has misrepresented and belied the truth. The masses forming their views much more from this experience than from the Bible, or at best applying this experience to interpret the Bible, have adopted exceedingly defective, not to say false, opinions as to the nature and design of the gospel. They seem to forget altogether that Paul writing to Christians at Rome, assures them that if they are under grace, sin shall not have dominion over them.

When Christians do not expect this blessing from Christ, they will not get it. While they expect so little as they usually do, no wonder they get so little. According to their faith, and not ever very much beyond it, need they expect to receive.

It is often the case that sanctification is held as a theory, while the mind does not yet by any means embrace the truth in love. The case is analogous to that of impenitent sinners who hold in theory that they must have a new heart. They profess to believe thus, but do they really understand it? No. Suppose it were revealed to their minds so that they should really see it as it is, would they not see a new thing? Would they not be startled to see how utterly far they are, while impenitent, from being acceptable to God, and how great the change they must experience before they can enter the kingdom? So of sanctification. Although this class of persons profess to hold it in theory, yet the passages of Scripture which describe it do not enter into their experience. They do not see the whole truth. If they were to see the whole truth, and should then reject it, I believe it would be in them the unpardonable sin. When the Spirit of God discloses to them the real meaning of the gospel, then if they deliberately reject it, how can the sin be less than what the Scriptures represent as the unpardonable sin? Having once been enlightened, and having received the knowledge of the truth that they might be saved, then turning back, is it not thenceforth impossible that they should be renewed again to repentance? One thing, at least must be said, there is a peril which many of the professed Christians of our day seem not to realize, in having so much light before the mind as they actually have in regard to the provisions made in the gospel for present sanctification, and then in rejecting this

light practically and living still in sin as if the gospel made no provision to save the Christian from his sins. Into this awful peril how many rush blindly and to their own destruction!

## **The Rich Man and Lazarus**

Lecture IX

November 9, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 16:19-31: "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day; and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores.

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried: and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you, cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

"Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

A parable is a little anecdote or a case of supposed history, designed to illustrate some truth. A simple and striking mode of illustration--it makes no attempt at reasoning; indeed it takes the place of all reasoning by at once revealing truth to the mind. In general, parables assume certain truths--a thing which they have an ample right to do, for some truths need no proof, and in other cases, a teacher may speak from his perfect knowledge, and in such a case, there can be no reason for demanding that he stop to prove all he asserts.

In the case of parables it is often interesting to notice what truths they do assume. This is especially true of the parables of Christ for none were ever more rich by virtue both of the truths directly taught

and also by virtue of the truths they assume. I may also remark here that truths are taught in Christ's parables both directly and incidentally. Some one great truth is the leading object of the illustration, yet other truths of the highest importance may be taught incidentally, not being embraced in his direct design.

The passage which I have read to you this morning, is probably a parable though not distinctly affirmed to be so. The nature of the case seems to show this; although these very circumstances might have all actually occurred in fact and in the same order as here related.

In discussing the passage, I propose,

*I. To notice some truths that are assumed in it;*

*II. To present some that are intentionally taught.*

### **I. Some truths that are assumed in this parable.**

- 1. Christ assumes in this passage the direct opposite of annihilation. He assumes that men are not annihilated at death, nor indeed ever. For he speaks of things that take place immediately after death. The men who lived on earth live beyond death and receive according to the things they have done here in the body. It was no part of his direct object to affirm this doctrine; yet his statements imply it. Being himself the Great Teacher, it is not without reason that He should assume the fundamental truths that pertain to man's future existence under God's moral government.
- 2. He assumes that the state into which both good and bad men pass at death is one of real and intense consciousness. This of course denies the assumption that this state is an unconscious one. You are aware that some do not hold to annihilation, yet hold to unconsciousness in the intermediate state between death and the resurrection. This doctrine, whether applied to saints or sinners, is entirely set aside by our Saviour's teachings in this narrative.
- 3. He assumes that the righteous and the wicked recognize each other after death. The rich man knew both Abraham and Lazarus. Abraham knew him. They all respectively knew each other. The statements represent the colloquy to have been held between the rich man and Abraham. Abraham, though long since in heaven, knew both this rich man and Lazarus. It was not our Lord's design directly to affirm this, yet he obviously implies it.
- 4. It is also assumed that they are acquainted with each other's state and history. All these matters were entirely familiar to their minds.
- 5. It is fully assumed that at death the righteous go immediately to a state of bliss and the wicked to a place of torment. This lies out undeniably on the face of the passage.

### **II. I am next to notice some of the truths distinctly and directly taught in this passage.**

- 1. That at death angels conduct the righteous to their place of blessedness. It is expressly said of Lazarus that he was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. Dogs were his companions here up to his death; angels immediately thereafter. When the dogs could minister to his wants no longer, angels stepped in and took his case in charge. They bore him away to the home of the blessed.

We may infer that this is the common employment of angels. Paul in Hebrews 1:12 strengthens this position, in his question, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

- 2. Saints after death are sensible of no want. They have nothing left to desire. They are sensible of wanting nothing that can be needful to their highest happiness. In this life they may have had their cup filled with bitterest grief; but at death, this cup is removed for ever away, and quite another cup is placed to their lips--forever. Lazarus had his evil things in this world; poverty, pain, sores, and want, were his portion here; but after death, he knew these things no more at all. They passed away forever.
- 3. On the other hand sinners after death are full of want, and have no good at all. The rich man asked for only the very smallest favour. He had fared sumptuously every day; but now he is reduced so low, he can only beg for one drop of water to cool his tongue. He asks for only so much as might adhere to the tip of one's finger when taken from the water. You have seen persons lie under a burning fever--prostrate, parched, can't say a word, can only beckon for water--water--one drop to cool their burning tongue. See the man dying;--he tries to move a little, towards the water;--ah he fails; he sinks back in his bed for the last time, and the burning fever has used up all his strength. You who have suffered from fever know what this means--to have a consuming fire shut up within you. Here mark. The Great Teacher makes the rich man cry out, "Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." Why did he not ask for an ocean of water, or a pail--full at least, or a pitcher--full; why restrict himself to the least drop? Plainly he knew himself to be placed beyond all good. He knew this was the utmost he could ask, and even this is denied him! What could our Lord have designed but to teach this? How irresistibly is this taught and with what overpowering force! What remarkable facts are these! How obviously and how forcibly is the truth taught here that saints at death pass into a state all joyful, but the wicked into one of unutterable torment!
- 4. We learn the state of mind in which the wicked are. This man asks for only the very slightest mitigation. He says not one word about pardon; this he knows to be impossible. How small the boon he dares to ask! How very small if he could have had it, would have been the boon of one small drop of water on a tongue tormented in flame. Yet he does not dare to ask for anything beyond this;--nor even this of God! He knew and he most deeply felt that he had cast off God and God in turn had cast off him. He could not think of speaking to God. He could venture to speak only to Abraham, and this solitary Bible case of prayer to saints in heaven surely affords no very plausible foundation for the Romish practice. This rich man had not the least hope of release from his woe. He did not ask so great a boon as this. Deep in his soul he felt that such a request was for ever precluded.

It is remarkable too that, though the boon he did ask was so trifling and his need so great, yet even this pittance was denied him. Abraham gave him plainly to understand that this was impossible. Son, said he, remember that thou in thy lifetime hast received thy good things; thou hast had thine all; there are no more for thee to enjoy!

- 5. Besides this, there is a great gulf fixed--parting forever the saved from the damned: we cannot go to you if we would; you cannot come to us, however much you may desire it. Most plainly does Christ teach in this representation that the state of both the righteous and the wicked is fixed, fixed forever, and forever changeless. There can be no passage open therefore as some would fain have it, from one world to the other. They who are in heaven can never get to hell to help the suffering ones there if they would; and on the other hand, the miserable in hell can never get to heaven. What less than this could the Saviour have intended to teach--that each class enter at death upon another state which is to each alike unchangeable? The righteous cannot pass the great gulf to hell; the wicked cannot pass it to heaven. Once heaven's gate was open to even the sinner on his repentance; now it is open to him no more. He has passed away from the world where his moral state can be changed. He has entered on one where no change can reach him any more at all forever.
- 6. The wicked dread to have their friends come to them in this place of torment. You see this feeling most distinctly manifested in this parable. The reason of the feeling is obvious. They are still human beings and therefore it can be no joy to them to have their earthly friends come into their place of woe. They have human feelings. They know they can look for no alleviation of their own woe from the presence of their friends. They know that if those friends come there as they did they can never escape; therefore they beg that those friends may never come. Therefore this rich man prays that Abraham would send Lazarus to his five brethren, to testify to them, lest they also come into that place of torment.
- 7. The state of mind that rejects the Bible would reject any testimony that could be given. This is plainly taught here, and can be proved. It can be proved that the testimony of one who should rise from the dead is no better or stronger than that of the Bible. Paul said he had been caught up to the third heaven, but men would not believe him. Or take the case of Lazarus, raised beyond all question from the dead. We are not told what he taught, nor is it said that his instructions made any special impressions on the living unbelievers of that generation. Those of you who have read the history of William Tennant--a co-labourer with Whitfield and Edwards, know how he apparently died; how after death he went to heaven; how he too like Paul, saw there unspeakable things which no man could utter; how he returned again and lived several years as one who had seen the glories of heaven; but was this stronger evidence than the Bible itself? Did it surpass in strength of demonstration the teachings of Moses and of the prophets? Yet more, did it surpass the force and evidence with which Jesus spake and also his apostles? No, verily. When unbelief has taken possession of the mind, you may pile miracle on miracle; men will not believe it. Suppose ever so many should rise from the dead. Men who reject the Bible would not believe their testimony. They would insist either that they had not been really dead, or that if they had been, they did not bring back a reliable report from that other country. They would make a thousand objections, as they do now, against the Bible, and with much more plausibility than now. Now, they only know their objections are really unfounded; then they would have more plausible objections to make, and would be sure to give them credit

enough to refuse to repent under their teachings. They would not be persuaded even then.

- 8. The estimation in which God holds men may not be learned from their outward circumstances. His favor cannot be inferred from the trappings of wealth; nor is it precluded by any amount of poverty. These external things neither prove nor disprove God's approbation of the hearts and the life of men.
- 9. The righteous need not envy rich sinners. Lazarus did not envy the rich man. He saw that he was petted for his great wealth, but pitied rather than envied him. He doubtless understood that this man was having his good things in this world. So good men, if they have faith, understand that those rich and wicked men are receiving all their good things in this world therefore are far from being objects of envy.
- 10. The former poverty of the righteous poor will give a keener relish to the joys of heaven. Think of the abject poverty of this man--wandering about with no home, no place even to lay his head. So multitudes in Eastern countries may be seen lying around the city walls like the swine of the streets. I saw them in Malta when I was there, and in Sicily also. They had no home to go to, no resources against a sick or stormy day. So Lazarus lived and it was from such a life and such scenes that he was transferred to the royal palace of Jehovah. Take the case of some poor beggar lying helpless outside the palace-walls of Queen Victoria. Suppose him suddenly taken up and exalted to the highest honors of the palace itself. How would his joy intoxicate his brain--too much for flesh and blood to bear! So poor saints passing from the dunghill on earth to the golden palaces of heaven. It is well they lose their nerves in the change, for surely nerves of flesh could not bear so great a change. See Lazarus, sick and sore, perhaps putrid--licked by dogs; but he reached at length the crisis of his sorrows, and all suddenly the mortal coil drops, and his spirit takes wings--angels receive him; he soars away and heaven opens wide its gates of pearl to make him welcome! Sometimes when I have stood and seen the Christian die--have seen him struggle and pant and gasp and pass away, I have said, What a wonderful change is this! See how that eye grows glassy and dark; then it closes; it sees no more of earth, but all suddenly it opens on the glories of the upper world to be closed no more forever!
- 11. But to have the luxuries of this life superseded by the poverty and woe of hell--how awful! This rich man had royal wealth. We are told that he fared sumptuously every day--not only on special occasions, but every day! Every day too he was clad in purple and fine linen; but now how wonderful the contrast! Nothing is said of the burial of Lazarus; perhaps he had none worth noticing; but this man had a funeral. It was a noticeable fact. Perhaps thousands gathered round his remains to do him honour--but where is he? Lifting up his eyes in hell, being in torments! What a change! From his table and his palace, to hell! Lazarus passed from his sores and beggary to heaven; the rich man, from his pomp and pride and feasting, to hell. As the great poverty of Lazarus, so set off in contrast with heaven, must have given great edge and keenness to the joys of that world, so on the reverse scale, how dreadful the contrast which this rich man experienced! If we always get clearer and stronger views by contrast, surely we have a picture drawn here that is adapted to teach us awful truth and force it home on the soul with telling power.

- 12. If it be true that angels convey saints to heaven, as we are taught both here and elsewhere in God's word, then it is not irrational to suppose that what many saints say in their dying hours of the things they see is strictly true. Gathering darkness clouds the senses, and the mind becomes greatly spiritual as their looks plainly show; those looks--the eye, the countenance, the melting whisper, these tell the story better than any words can do it; indeed no words can describe those looks--no language can paint what you can stand by and see and hear--a peace so deep and so divine; this shows that the soul is almost in heaven. In all ages it has been common for some dying saints to hear music which they supposed to be of heaven and to see angels near and around them. With eyes that see what others cannot see, they recognize their attending angels as already come, "Don't you hear that music?" say they. "Don't you see those shining ones? they come, they come!" But attending friends are yet too carnal to see such objects and to hear such sounds; for it is the mind and not the body that has eyes. It is the mind that sees, and not the body. No doubt in such cases, they do really see angelic forms and hear angelic voices. The Bible says--"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." How gloriously do these closing scenes illustrate this truth.
- 13. If this be true of saints, then doubtless wicked spirits are allowed to drag the wicked down from their dying beds to hell. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose that they too really see awful shapes and hear dreadful sounds. "Who is that weeping and wailing? Did I not hear a groan? Is there not some one weeping as if in awful agony? O, that awful thing; take him away, take him away! He will seize me and drag me down; take him away, away!"

So the wicked are sometimes affected in their dying moments. There is no good reason to doubt that these objects seen and sounds heard, by saints and sinners in their last earthly moments, are realities. You who have read Dr. Nelson's book on infidelity, cannot but have noticed especially what he says of the experience of persons near death. These things passed under his observation chiefly while he was a physician, and while yet an infidel himself. Dying sinners would cry out, "O, that awful creature! take him away, away; why don't you take him away?" Ye who know Dr. Nelson, must have known that he did not say these things at random. He did not admit them without evidence, or state them without due consideration.

- 14. We are left to infer the character of this rich man from his worldly-mindedness. Christ did not seem to deem it necessary to state that he was a wicked man, but left this to be inferred from his self-indulgent life. He needed only to say of him that he lived for self-gratification; that he used his wealth for himself only, and not for the good of man, or for the glory of God. This explained his character sufficiently.

People act very much in this world, as if they supposed poverty would disqualify them for heaven. They would seem to hold the exact opposite of the truth. Christ said, "How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven"; and yet, who seems to have the least fear of losing heaven by means of the snare of wealth? How wonderful is the course that men pursue, and indeed a great many Christian men are pursuing! A Christian mother, writing to me from New York, said, "All, even Christians, are giving themselves up to making money, MONEY, MONEY! They are wholly given up to stocks, and banks,

and getting rich." There is a great deal of this spirit all over the country, and even here. But look at it in the light of this parable and of our Saviour's assumption in regard to the character of this rich man, and what a fearful state is this to live and to die in.

- 15. What can Universalists say or believe when they read such passages as this? What miserable shifts they must make to interpret these words! I recollect when I tried and wanted to be Universalist, and for this purpose went to their meetings and heard their arguments; I said to myself, "For very shame, I could never use such arguments; no, not for the shame of admitting and avowing such absurdities!" What can be more absurd than to resort to such sophistry and special pleading to set aside statements so clear and direct to the point as these in this chapter.
- 16. God is giving to all sinners--to you sinners in this place--a great many rich gifts. What use are you making of them? What are you doing with these gifts? What are you doing with these things which God comes down each day to bring to you? Are you cavilling, to prevent Christ from saving you if you can? Many act as if they meant to avoid being saved if by any means they can. You act just like reprobates. But I must explain myself. I often meet with persons whose spirit makes me believe they are reprobates. You know that all things are eternally present to the mind of God. He saw how these sinners would treat the gospel. He saw they would repel and hate Christ--would not love his service nor accept the offers of his great salvation. He saw all this in his past eternity; therefore he reprobated them; therefore he gave them over to their own hearts' lusts. Those things which God saw in the depths of his eternity, we only see as they boil up upon the surface of actual present life. You see them resist the Spirit; you see them cavil and fight against God's truth; you know they are fighting against God. So strongly does the conviction fasten on the minds of Christians in some cases, that they cannot pray for those who they are assured are reprobates. Said a very pious woman, "For ten years, I have not prayed for that son." Why? She saw that he was set against God, and she could not pray for him. It is indeed an awful thing to find such cases in Christian families. Nobody can tell the agony of a parent's heart to see a son setting at naught all the claims and all the mercies of God, and working his dismal way obstinately down to the depths of an eternal hell. Some of you before me today, know that you have children who give awful evidence of being reprobate!

Hear that man across the street sighing as he moves along. What is the matter? He is in agony for a hardened, reprobate son.

You call at a neighbor's door; you ring the bell; the mother comes. You see the tear in her eye; she can scarcely speak. What is the matter? She has a son, and she fears he is a reprobate. All his conduct heightens the awful fear that he is given over of God.

But let those who have not gone so far, take warning. Some of those whom you have mocked and reviled, you may by and by see in glory. They may be in Abraham's bosom, and you afar off! You may cry to them for help, but all in vain. Will they rush to your help? No. You see your father, your mother, afar off in that spirit land,--you think they will fly to succor you, and bring you at least one drop of water,--they used to do so many a time when you were in pain. Ah! many a time has that mother watched over your suffering frame, and rushed to your relief; but will she do so now? "My son, hear this:

there is no passing from this place to that. You once lived in my house and lay in my bosom, but I cannot bring you one drop of water now!" And has it come to this? Must it come to this? Ah, yes, it must come to this!

Christian parents, one word to you. Suppose you conceive of this as your case. You see one of your children crying, "O give me one drop of water to cool my burning tongue!" I know what Universalists would say to this. They say, "Can a parent be happy, and see this? And do you think a parent is more compassionate than God?"

But in that hour of retribution, those Christian parents will say even of the sons and daughters they have borne, "Let them perish, they are the enemies of God and of his kingdom! Let them perish, since they would not have salvation! They must perish, for God's throne must stand and ought to stand, though all the race go down to hell!"

## **Losing One's First Love**

Lecture X

November 23, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Rev. 2:4: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love."

This passage occurs in a part of this Epistle which Jesus dictated and John wrote to the Church of Ephesus, "These things saith He who holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks."

Christ says many good things of this Church. They had been jealous for the truth; they had found some to be liars and could not bear such; they had borne and had had patience. Christ always loves to say all the good He can of His people. The faults which He sees in them do not by any means blind His eyes to their good qualities.

Nor on the other hand, could their good things shut His eyes to their evil. "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love"

The word "somewhat" is in italics, indicating that there is no corresponding word in the original. The sense is given better without it. "I have it or this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love." The leaving of their first love is exactly the thing He has against them. This is what He means to say; and not this other thing--that He has a somewhat--a little objection to them because they had left their first

love.

Mark the solemn threatening. "Repent; else I will come unto thee quickly and remove the candlestick out of his place;--that is--will annihilate the Church itself.

Discussing this subject I shall inquire:

*I. What the first love of a christian is;*

*II. How it evinces or manifests its existence;*

*III. How it may be known whether persons have left  
their first love.*

*IV. Some of the consequences of this sin.*

### **I. First love involves sincere devotion of heart to God.**

Of course it includes all that such devotion implies;--confidence in God; sympathy with His benevolence; in short, it implies just what is implied when a wife is truly devoted to her husband and when true benevolence underlies all.

### **II. It manifests itself in an intense interest in His word.**

- 1. Think how much interest husbands and wives take in each other's letters. You who have been separated from each other know this well and can understand even a brief allusion. Or take the case of children who are absent from dear home; you know how they prize letters from those they love and from those in whom they confide. So in the very nature of the relation sustained by Christians towards their heavenly Father, they must be intensely interested in His letters--His written words. These letters come from One we love supremely and trust implicitly; from One in whom we take a lively and affecting interest. Of course we shall have a desire to read them. We shall study them intently, and oftentimes with tears.
- 2. Again, this first love will manifest itself in an intense love for the ordinances of God's house. It will beget a lively interest in all the scenes and places where God is wont to meet the soul; where so to speak, He has an appointment to meet His people to bless them. How sweetly the Sabbath rises on one who is in his first love! This, he says, is one of my best and most blessed days; my own Lord's day and I may surely meet Him this day according to His own arrangement. How sweet the worship of God's house! All incomprehensible to those who never relish it! How can they expect to understand what they never experienced? I well remember how my own mind was impressed on the first Sabbath after my conversion. I had been in that congregation for some time; I had led the choir--had taken the same sort of interest that other sinners do. But now my heart was so drawn out to God that I wanted to keep my eyes shut all the day. I thought how I had led the choir without any real devotion. Indeed I had so much to

think of, I felt that I could not open my eyes to have my mind diverted to external objects at all. The worship and ordinances of God's house were sweet beyond expression.

- 3. This first love manifests itself also in a cheerful obedience. He is perfectly joyful in its obedience. Weary of sinning, turning away from all transgression with deep unutterable loathing, he is prepared to run in the way of God's commands with all the heart. You know how we fear to displease those we love, how we supremely dread to offend those whom we love supremely. So the young convert has a conscience tender in the extreme, and sensitive to the least approach towards sin. He not only fears to sin himself, but he is deeply grieved at the sins of others. Are we not always grieved when our dear friends are absent?
- 4. First love implies great zeal for the cause and honor of God. With most intense care, he will refrain from whatever might dishonor God. On the other hand he will feel a great interest in the prosperity of God's cause. You will see him manifest the most lively joy in the prosperity of Zion and the most pungent grief in her calamities. All wakeful to the interests of religion--all jealous of everything that may injure those interests--full of care if anything threatens to go wrong--you will see in all those ways that his heart is in the cause of his Lord.
- 5. It will also manifest itself in self-denying labors for God and for souls. He will not count it a grievous thing to toil and deny himself for His Savior. You may always count upon his being ready to perform the most self-denying service with all cheerfulness.

The world will lose its dominion over his soul. His heart will set very loosely on worldly things, instead of being engrossed and absorbed in those interests. He will esteem them as of very little importance. Other things of far more absorbing interest are blessing his soul.

Again, this first love of converts will develop itself in intense desire for the salvation of sinners. It will be a love for souls;--a deep interest also in humanity in general. How strongly is the heart drawn out towards fellow-beings, in warm desire for the happiness of all mankind.

- 6. Especially you may see this love manifested towards enemies. If a convert in his first love has any enemies, you will see a more striking development of this love towards them than anywhere else. If his bosom burns with first love, he will surely love his enemies with a feeling of tenderness and forbearance very unlike what is often seen in such a world as this. Persons almost always think they may speak as reproachfully as they please of their enemies. But not so does the convert in his early love feel. He is ready to say--I may have been mistaken. That man whom I thought so hostile to me may sin much less than I had supposed. I will at least make for him all the apology I honestly can.

Again, this true love to God will manifest itself in the absence of a spirit of self-seeking. These persons are really devoted to God and not to self. Hence you will observe they are not continually making self the chief end of their efforts.

On the contrary, they are full of intense interest in the conversion of sinners, and in all efforts bearing directly on the great end. You will hear them asking--How did the meeting

of inquiry appear? What is the state of the prayer meeting? Was the Spirit of the Lord there? Were any souls converted to God? Were any convicted of sin? If a meeting of inquiry is appointed, they are asking--Who will go? Are there not some whom I can persuade to attend? If they see any indication of a revival, they are all awake. I recollect the case of a young convert whom I knew for several years. He made progress rapidly in grace himself, but the Church kept running down. At length some indications of a revival appeared. A young man arose in a prayer-meeting to say that his soul was borne down beneath a burden of sin. This young man could scarcely refrain from shouting and crying--Bless the Lord, for here are tokens of another revival! This was a living manifestation of his first love, living yet and burning in his soul.

### **III. Evidences of having left one's first love.**

- 1. Being very much engrossed in worldly business. Seest thou a man in this state of mind? He is getting away from his first love. Sinking more and more deeply into the scenes and the spirit of business, his attention becomes more and more withdrawn from spiritual things, and soon he finds that when he does return to them, it is with decidedly abated interest. He may try to make himself think he is doing his business for the Lord; but let him beware lest even so it ensnare his soul and draw him from his first love.

Again, a legal spirit takes possession of his mind. He begins to do his service as a duty and not from love to God. They fall to duty-doing as they call it and make this their business. Their labors for God and the devoted affections of their soul do not flow out spontaneously, prompted by deep love which boils up so fervently that their spirit naturally longs for communion with God as its daily food. The living Christian loves to bathe his soul in such communion with God. But the man who has left his first love only presses himself into duty-doing as a thing he may not neglect.

- 2. Another evidence is an antinomian spirit. Whatever faith they have does not work by love. They may suppose they rely on Jesus Christ, but their faith lacks the distinctive spiritual feature, for it does not inspire true love, nor does it co-operate along with love in begetting active and cheerful obedience to God's law.

The meaning of the term Antinomian is -- against law. You will often see Antinomians hold the Bible and the Sabbath very loosely. They have a slovenly way of getting on in religion. Their faith in Christ, instead of quickening their souls to love and to labor, serves only to make them feel vastly easy about everything of a spiritual nature. They trust in Christ in just such a way as makes them reckless about doing much to honor God or benefit man. They can do almost anything and yet never allow themselves to doubt that all is well.

- 3. While first love continues there will always be a careful discharge of duty and an equal care to maintain first love in its unabated warmth and power. It sometimes happens that when first love declines, duty-doing is kept up, with the heart out. This is but a sorry service to offer to God, when the affections of the heart are dropped out.

- 4. When persons have left their first love, they are often more anxious to obtain comfort in religion than to be reinstated in communion with God, so as to have power with Him and a holy heart. Once they knew the comfort of public worship and of secret devotion. Now they know very little indeed about comfort, except as they find it in the hope that they shall yet be restored to see again the light of their Savior's face. When they lived near the Lord, how often were their hearts borne aloft as if enraptured with heavens' own music. But let their love die away, and with all their musical taste and cultivation, they get but little indeed of the rapture of soul they once found in Zion's songs. Now all their joys are in the music; they have lost all else.
- 5. In general you will find that if first love is lost, there will be a manifest loss of interest in whatever respects religion. On going to labor in a new field, I have had occasion to rebuke the leading men sharply for the small concern felt to provide things necessary for the comfort of the people and the success of the efforts to be made. If they had been about to have a public auction, they would have had due notice given -- the room comfortable -- all things in order. But here it is only a religious meeting; let anybody take care of its business. Little does it concern them, though the windows be broken -- the wood exhausted, or too green to warm the room. Their first love has gone and with it their lively interest in the work of saving souls. If full of love and interest, they would inquire -- Who were there? Was there prayer in that meeting? Was anything done? Are there signs of Zion's reviving?
- 6. But exactly over against this, if first love has declined, they ask no questions on such points, though they will be ready enough to ask questions on matters of business or pleasure. Oh, how many times you may see which way the wind blows by the flying feathers. You may learn where a man's heart is by noticing what it is that interests him most. If he can be more interested in a party of pleasure or an excursion ride, or in a political meeting, than he is in efforts to save souls and honor God, you may read his spiritual state at once. If the heart is true with God, nothing is to him like the solemn assembly, the season of prayer, and the communion his soul finds with God. In the spirit of the world, persons will go to a party of pleasure and never think the service long though it stretch onto 10, 11, 12, or 1 o'clock in the night. It is never too long for them. But oh, how long the meetings are, when there is nothing to entertain them, nothing to enjoy, but God!
- 7. The same loss of first love is manifested often by conformity to the world, You may detect this in many ways. When a young lady begins to backslide, she will begin to put on ornaments, jewelry, and costly attire. These things are natural indications of the state of the heart.

Again you will see them taking more interest in other books than in the Bible, especially in books of a worldly sort. They prefer worldly to spiritual conversation. They entirely forget to pray for others than themselves, or than their nearest friends who are a part of themselves.

Yet all these are only a part of the manifestations of this loss of first love. But we must pass now to speak,

#### **IV. Of the consequences of losing one's first love.**

- 1. He will be brought again under the dominion of old sins and propensities. Grace declining, sin will rise and reassert its sway. Strangely he will find himself returning, as the Scripture hath it, "like a dog to his vomit." Where he had thought himself washed, he finds himself again "wallowing in the mire."
- 2. He will also have a sense of guilt, in place of that sweet peace of mind which he once enjoyed. Self-condemned, he can no longer feel a sweet assurance of acceptance and favor with God. His present religion is formal, and he cannot but see and know that it is. Hence he is thrown into serious and distressing doubts whether he were ever a child of God. Distrustful of himself it is but natural that he should become distrustful of others, and ultimately uncharitable and severe in his judgments.
- 3. He ceases to be prevalent in prayer. He loses his hold on God; fails of obtaining sensible access to the throne of grace, and not improbably will begin to query whether anybody prays acceptably and whether prayer avails anything ever.
- 4. There will be for many reasons a constant tendency to self-delusion. Many a backslider wraps himself all round about with delusions. He says -- It is true I don't feel much, and I know my chief interests are absorbed in earthly things; yet still I think I am supremely devoted to God. The fact is if you have left your first love, you have opened the door for every form of delusion. You are not making one particle of real progress in religion. All is movement in the wrong direction.

Thus are the consequences of losing your first love fearfully disastrous.

## **REMARKS.**

1. Those who have left their first love are a great stumbling block to all their acquaintance. They scandalize religion, misrepresent the gospel, and do just those things which most effectually shut the gate of heaven against immortal souls.
2. A state of backsliding of heart is most odious to God. There is nothing He more abominates than the forms and pretensions of godliness where the heart is gone. It is the instinct of human nature to abhor hypocrisy; how then must God abhor it? It never deceives Him. He sees through it, even as if it had no covering.
3. It is withal a most dangerous state. It is dangerous because like all forms of sin, it tends to perpetuate itself; dangerous because it is insulting to God; dangerous because it abuses and grieves the Holy Spirit. If Christ would threaten to annihilate the church at Ephesus, despite of their many good qualities, unless they would repent of losing their first love, what may the individual Christian professor expect who falls into the same sin and provokes the same indignation?
4. Those who have never had a first love will not understand what I have been saying. They may suppose they do, but they do not and will not. But if you have known what a first love is and have not left it, you may in some measure understand; yet only those who have once had a first love and have left it can be supposed to know the full reality of these things. Your experience covers the whole

ground.

5. It is time this subject were brought home to your hearts and consciences. What is your state? Are you willing to make sacrifices? Do you love to make them for Christ and His cause? Have you retained even the religion you once had? Some of you, I know have made progress. You can say -- "How little I knew at first, compared with what I know now, of the height and depth and breadth of the love of God! On looking back, I can see how much of my first zeal was merely an animal excitement. Since those days, I think I have learned to live more truly upon God."

Still let me ask -- Where are you now? Have you measured the depth of the love of God, in your own experience of its power? Have you known successively one and another of Christ's offices by receiving Him in them so as to taste and see their richness and their adaptation of your wants? Have you in this sense known the exceeding great and precious promises of God? Do you say -- Talk to me no more of my "first love;" that was only an infant's love; God has shown me broader things and deeper far -- even the great depths of His love. He has made me see that there is no end to the vastness and richness of His spiritual blessings. He has shown me indeed that in my Father's house is bread enough and to spare, so that I never need suffer from hunger.

If this be truly your state, you will experience real and deep grief over those who wander from their way and decline in their spiritual life. Your heart will be bowed in sorrow that they should fall so sadly and dishonor the Savior's name so grievously.

But some of you ought to see that these delineations of the state and guilt of losing your first love, apply to yourselves. You may, perchance, be very slow to admit this; while all your acquaintances see it, you may be blind to the glaring facts; yet as I said, you ought to see it and ought to be alarmed. It is high time that you were deeply concerned and crying out from the depth of your declension -- Where and how shall I find God? How can I regain my first love? Can I ever be forgiven? Shall my soul ever know again the joy of pardoned sin and of deep peace in God, my Savior?

One word to those who have recently expressed hope in Christ. How is it with you? Where are you? Are you planting your feet more and more firmly upon the Rock of Ages? Are you learning to take hold by faith of the arm that "bears creation up?" That arm can surely sustain God's children well. You need not fear while undergirded with Almighty strength. If underneath you are these "everlasting arms," you cannot fall or falter. "Even the youth shall faint and be weary and the young man shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

## **Jehovah's Appeal to Sinners and Backsliders**

Lecture XI

December 7, 1853

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Micah 6:3: "O My people, what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee?  
Testify against Me."

This is indeed a most striking passage. God Himself appeals to His backslidden people to say what He has done to them that can any way justify their course of conduct towards Him. The connection shows that this is addressed to sinners and backsliders -- to those who had been His professed people, but who had grievously departed from Him. "Hear, O ye mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel." The Gentile nations having gone after other gods and all His own chosen people having grievously revolted, where could He get a candid hearing of His case among all the race of men? How affecting in this point of light is this summoning the case before the "mountains" and the "strong foundations of the earth?" Inanimate nature is not blinded by depravity; has not gone into apostasy from its Maker. Let the case come before the mountain, and let the hills hear the pleadings and render their verdict. "Hear what the Lord saith; arise (O sinner), contend thou before the mountains and let the hills hear thy voice."

The case then, comes on for hearing, and the Lord opens with summoning His people to testify against Him and show what He has done, or wherein He has wearied them. Upon you, sinners, does your Maker call, as subjects of His moral government. He has given you the existence you now enjoy, and has liberally provided for the supply of your physical and social wants. He calls on you to bear witness against Him if you can; if you have anything to say in bar of the judgment which His law has threatened against all who violate it. If you have any charge to bring against Him, it shall be duly considered. He lets you have the full benefit of a candid hearing. He even asks you to bear witness against Him if you can. Nothing can be farther from His heart than to do you any injustice. Indeed He is not happy to have even an erroneous impression left on your mind that you have been wronged in any way. If such an impression is there, come forward and reveal it; bring forward your strong reasons and let the case be examined and debated.

Now therefore let me speak in God's behalf to those who make no profession of love to God. Let us take up this matter as between your own souls and your Maker. Let us enter into all the important particulars. Has God injured you in any way? What have you to say against His administration? I want to put these questions specially to you. You refuse to acknowledge the Lord Jehovah as your God and Father. You ought not to do this without having some reasons in your mind for it. Probably you have something in your mind which you regard as a reason. What is it? Why do you grieve your Heavenly Father's heart? Have you a reason? If so, what is it? Has He done you wrong in any way? Has He required you to love Him without good cause? Has He required you to repent when He had no good reason for this requirement? Has He wronged you by the implication that you have sinned and therefore ought to repent? Or has He wronged you by implying that you can repent?

*I. Issues between Jehovah and those who profess no allegiance to His law or gospel.*

*II. Similar questions upon the attention of those who have professed to know and love Him, but have left their first love and have backslidden from their God.*

**I. Issues between Jehovah and those who profess no allegiance to His law or gospel.**

- 1. I want you to understand that God is present. You may suppose Him to sitting here, and that you can see Him. He comes down here to discuss and investigate this subject, and give you the fairest possible opportunity to vindicate yourself. He comes and asks of you your reason for not loving and obeying Him. Will you reply, "Lord, Thou knowest I have no good reason for loving Thee"? And has He indeed forfeited your confidence, so that you have no good reason to confide in Him? Has He required you to trust in Him, while yet He has given you no good reasons for so doing?
- 2. He requires you to submit unqualifiedly to His supreme authority; is there any good reason why you should not? Has He required too much of you? Do you say -- "He is so exacting! He requires so much and withal so rigidly! How can I ever meet it?"

If now you were to meet God face to face, would you say so? Or would you enter this complaint against Him? Or would you insist that the penalties He affixes to the violation of His law are too severe? But are you a fit judge in your own case? Besides, have you any good reason for objecting to the penalty, or is it merely a feeling, an impression on your mind, that it will be hard to bear it?

- 3. But consider again. Has not your God cared for you? Can you say, Lord, Thou hast not cared for my immortal soul? Will you say -- "O Lord God, Thou hast brought me into being, Thou hast made me immortal and hast placed me in a most delicate and critical position where my soul may be utterly and forever lost; and having done all this, Thou hast not cared for this immortal soul of mine? Altogether happy in Thyself, Thou has not cared for me, a poor dependent being, destined to live forever, and moreover to have its destinies soon fixed, past all change." Or will you say, "If He has cared for me, He has given me no evidence of it"? Will you say, "Lord, I can see no token of Thy love; not any at all. If Thou hast cared for me, I have no evidence of it. I can see no manifestations that show it"! Is this what you have to say? And have you quite forgotten how "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" for its redemption; and shall this go for nothing?
- 4. Or has God been impatient with you? Has He been severely impatient, so severely as to repel you from all confidence and trust? Can you justly say, "O my Heavenly Father, Thou hast so repelled me, and hast so fretted and wearied me, how can I ever approach Thee? Thou hast been so hard and cruel withal."

But in what way has He been cruel? Wherein has He wearied you? Has He done you no good? Can you think of no way in which He has blessed you? Look all round about you and make up an inventory of your enjoyments; then say, is there no hand of God in these things?

- 5. Or will you say, "All God has done for me has cost Him nothing"? Will you say this? Do you regard it as nothing that He should give up His Son to death for you? Has He made you no offers of mercy? And does mercy cost nothing? Do you claim it as of right yours? Or can it be exercised without risks and hazards to the great interests of the government? If special provision is made in this case to obviate these risks, then you should at least inquire whether this provision did not cost something.

Look now at this whole subject. Has God in no way tried to overcome your aversion? Has He not sought to melt your heart by kindness? Say now as in His very presence -- Has He refused to open before you the gate of Mercy? Has He locked its doors and thrown the key away? Or on the other hand, has He offered to save you on the very lowest possible terms? Is it the case that He has only required on your part your full consent to be saved? And will you look up into His face and tell Him that even this is asking too much?

Again, has He not given you time? Have you not had time enough; days and months and years enough to consider this subject fully as you need to do, and to decide it wisely and for your own eternal well-being? Have you not also had ample opportunity to get instruction? Has not the sanctuary opened its doors before you and made you welcome to come in and hear the words of life? Have you not had Sabbaths, many and precious, inviting you to serious thought upon your ways? What more could you have had done for you that you have not had? You cannot say you have not been urged to repent and accept of mercy. Yet you may be disposed to complain that you have been urged too much. You have often felt that you were urged unreasonably. Indeed this is precisely one of the points of this investigation. God asks you, "Wherein have I wearied thee?" What ground of complaint can you find against Me for being in earnest to secure your salvation? What better could I do, or what should I do, for your eternal well-being?

Thus stands the matter at issue as between Jehovah and those who profess no allegiance to His law or gospel.

## **II. We come now to press similar questions upon the attention of those who have professed to know and love Him, but have left their first love and have backslidden from their God.**

It is a most remarkable fact that persons of this class are exceedingly slow to admit it and say -- I am the man! They would not justify backsliding; they know it cannot be justified. As for themselves, they are not guilty. We find this most serious difficulty, lying across our path in the onset as we attempt to apply this subject to the case of real backsliders. It is precisely for this reason that the appeal which God made to His backslidden people is likely to have so little useful application to you. How is it you get into such an attitude that you cannot be reached? The moment you hear any thing that would open your case to your own view, you repel it.

But this must not be! You must consent to see your case as it is, and on God's behalf I must plead with you.

- 1. What has God done to you? How do you account for this, that you are so backslidden from God? Suppose a young bride, not married longer than some of you have been professedly united to Jesus Christ, should give signs of great alienation of heart from her husband. You are

that husband, and sitting down by her side you kindly inquire, "What have I done? What is the reason of this too obvious coldness in your affections towards me? It is sometimes said that persons soon after marriage become remiss in those little attentions which sustain affection and hence that love grows cold. Has this been my fault towards you?" So you might debate and inquire in a case between yourself and your bride.

- 2. So God debates and inquires with you. What has He done towards you? Has He been remiss in those little attentions which are the life of love? When each day He spreads your table and fills your cup with earthly good, does He not show His kind remembrance of you? And when He provides day by day your spiritual bread, and evermore fulfills His promise to manifest Himself to those who keep His commandments and show forth their love, does He not show Himself mindful of you, -- most tenderly so?
- 3. Or has He required too much self-denial of you, or of such sort as would really injure you? Has He taken away your friends arbitrarily, with no good reasons? Has He smitten you and drawn blood from your heart unfeelingly, as if He did not care how much pain He caused you? Has He taken away your property or your children in a hard and apparently unfeeling way? If you dare to think so, tell Him so. Say, "O, Lord, didst Thou not cut down my husband or my wife, reckless of the pain and the agony it would cost me?" Did he die hard, in great pain and racking torture? And was this done on God's part without consideration? Nay, was it not all mercy and kindness on His part? Has He not told you that He never does afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men for His own pleasure?
- 4. Perhaps you have found it impossible to get the comforts and necessities of life, and you are therefore tempted to doubt whether God does fairly by you. You are prone to think that perhaps God does not mean to provide for you. But have you forgotten that even His dear Son when He came to dwell among men had no where to lay His head? I found a sister once who made this excuse for backsliding. She found no sympathy in the church, and therefore turned to the world. And will you also say, "God takes no notice of me, and therefore I will cast Him off?"
- 5. Or again, has God manifested towards you unreasonable jealousy? Has He been too particular in regard to giving you permission to enjoy the world? Has He imposed on you unreasonable restraints? Has He been suspicious without reason, and disposed evidently to cut you off from reasonable enjoyments? Do you believe this?
- 6. Or has He attempted to govern you by authority rather than by love? Parents, you say, never get the love of their children by dint of mere authority; and do you on this ground complain of God that He has required too much and has seemed to expect to gain your love by mere requisitions? Are you disappointed, and do you find on better acquaintance that God is not what you expected? Sometimes in earthly relationships persons find themselves mistaken. Many a one has said this mournfully, "I have been mistaken; I am sorely disappointed; I am utterly undone!" So some of you are disappointed -- perhaps -- are you? Is not religion what you supposed it to be? Is it not as good as you expected? Does it fail to meet your wants as you expected it would? A man once said to me after I had been presenting the fulness of gospel salvation, "Either the Gospel is not what it pretends to be, or I do not know anything about it."

Doubtless in all such cases the latter supposition is the fact; the man knows nothing about the true gospel by actual experience. How is this with you?

- 7. But let me ask you again -- Wherein has God forfeited your confidence? Tell Him, tell Him, if you can. If such be the fact, He allows you to tell Him so. He says, "Testify against Me." I never shall forget the forbearance and kindness with which He treated me when I ventured to tell Him how troubled I was to believe His word. I was pleading for the gift of the Holy Ghost, on the strength of the promise in Luke 11. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" I was pleading this promise, and it seemed to me that I had been asking for this bread of life a long time and yet did not obtain it. I therefore said, "O Lord, I am a father, and I love to give to my children anything and everything that they ask and that I think will be a real good to them. I give them such good things, and do not give them occasion to ask and tease me over and over. Now, Lord, how is this matter as between me and Thee?" When I ventured to plead thus with God, He did not rebuke me, by any means, but this He did; He showed me that the fault was wholly in myself, and He let me know what I must do. He bore with me most tenderly and most graciously; and so, my hearers, will He surely do with you. Suppose someone here in this house should say, "I have used all the means of salvation, yet I am not saved. I have done all my part faithfully; but God has dealt hardly with me, and I can trust Him no longer. I thought once that I would and did give Him my heart, but I take it back."
- 8. On what grounds do you say this? What has God done, or what has He failed to do, that you should thus complain of Him, and break friendship and withdraw confidence? Perhaps you will say, "I have not found Him a sufficient portion. Before I turned from my sins to God I was told that He would be a sufficient portion for my soul, but I have tried it and have not found it so. My heart has not been satisfied and therefore I return to the world again to make that my portion."
- 9. And must you then say that Christ is an unfaithful lover for your soul, so that you must go after other lovers? Does He withhold all proper manifestations of affection? Do you go to Him imploring some token of His friendship, and does He sternly withhold any and all such manifestations? He has said, "Seek and ye shall find." Do you seek honestly and humbly and yet find nothing? He has said also, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, loveth Me, and I will love him and will manifest Myself unto him." He has surely said, "And ye shall seek for Me and find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." Are you prepared to deny the truth of these promises? Can you testify against God that you have sought thus and have not found?

Again, has He been hard-hearted when you have confessed your guilt before Him? When you have come into His presence deeply humbled, and your bleeding heart has poured out its confessions and sorrows, has He quite certainly turned His ear away? He has promised to hear, to forgive and to restore, and will you say He has not done so? Can you say that while He has promised always to hear and to forgive, He yet has not done so? Now weigh this matter well, and be very sure that your own heart has been truly humbled before your God for all your sins.

- 10. Or have you found some friends more to your liking and such as more fully meet your wants? Will you say, "I must give my heart to some better friend than God?" And do you really think so?
- 11. Or are you sick of His love and does your heart therefore demand some change? Have you had the gospel until it has ceased to interest you, and has become an old story? Is this your case? Have you gained anything at all by transferring your affections to somebody else? Have you obtained better friends, more peace of mind, or more satisfaction? On the other hand, have you not lost something of substantial value? Have you not lost your own self-respect? When you look into your own face, do you not instinctively say, "That is the face of a hypocrite?" Have you not lost that sweetness of temper which you had in your first love? Do not your acquaintances see that something is wrong with you? Have you not such a sense of guilt that you dread everything that may enforce conviction? Are you not oppressed with a sense of shame? Do you not inwardly know that you are altogether hypocritical in your religion? Can you honestly draw near to God and tell Him how much you love Him? Or, on the other hand, is it not true that desire has fled; that every vestige of true affection has perished from your heart, and that the whole of your religion is mere hypocrisy? Do you not feel that you have acted most unreasonably and cruelly? Have you not acted madly? Has not your course in leaving your first love been one of moral insanity and infatuation? Have you not been compelled to say of yourself, "I have had not reason, I have acted like a lunatic; God knows I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly?" Have you not done as a treacherous wife who madly goes after other lovers and forsakes the covenant of her God and the plighted love of her vows? And are you not evermore going from bad to worse, getting still farther and farther from God, more and more grieving the Spirit by your course of dealings with God? Are you not doing more and more things which you will hate to confess and yet which you must confess, or never turn acceptably to God? Are you not wandering from God, and still building up walls of separation to obstruct your return? And worse still, if possible, are you not laying stumbling-blocks before others?

Let all these points be deeply pondered. Are you prepared to come before God and table your complaints against Him, and show that in all the points at issue between your soul and Him, the fault is wholly on His side?

## REMARKS.

Do you think anybody ever treats you as badly as you treat God? Was ever anyone so abusive to you as you have been to your Maker and to your Redeemer? If God were to summon all His creatures before Him, could He find one among them all, who has treated Him so badly as you have? Must you not say, "All the evil I have ever received from all creatures together is as nothing compared with the treatment I have shown to God?"

Considering His nature and His resources, how wonderful that He should permit us to live and treat Him so! He who abhors sin and meanness so intensely, and who has withal such power to punish, or even to annihilate us, how wonderful that He should still prolong our days and still pour out blessings upon us!

When men are once convinced of duty to God, to procrastinate is most abominable. It is not only violating conscience deliberately, but it is deliberately insulting God! What can be more provoking? What can more surely bring down on the soul the fearful wrath of the Most High?

God does not exact of us what He refuses to do Himself. When He asks us to do our duty, He always holds Himself responsible to do His. If He has done wrong He is willing to stand rebuked before the universe. We see this truth lying out upon the very face of our text.

By a law of necessity sinners know they have no excuse for sin. If anyone should really and honestly suppose that he had a good excuse for what might be called sin, it could not be sin in him under those circumstances; for real sin is never that which men do for good reasons and which they suppose they ought to do. Sin lies in the intention. It is not an intention to do right and to do what ought in the actor's view to be done, but an intention to do what is seen to be wrong.

To live in a backslidden state is most disgraceful. What should we say of a wife who should forsake her husband and go off into down right whoredom? Yet this is the very figure which God uses to express the guilt and shamefulness of His people's backslidings from Him. You may read a vivid delineation of this sin under this figure in Hosea 2, and often in the prophet Jeremiah. Who that reads these passages and considers for a moment what intense feelings of abhorrence and detestation are naturally excited by this sin can fail to get a strong impression of God's abhorrence of backsliding? Yet He invites you to return, and gives you many most precious assurances that on your return you shall again be welcomed to His confidence and love. So God does; but I suppose a wife to have proved a harlot while her husband had borne a blameless character and course towards her. Suppose a wife to have been utterly treacherous to her vows, giving herself up to most shameful conduct, going on from step to step in depravity and crime till she becomes a filthy prostitute -- on the street; suppose that while in this forlorn and wretched state, her husband should come to her and say, "I have come to do you good, to clothe and feed and bless you, and take you with your consent again to my house and home and heart;" would not this be a wonderful scene? Has human nature often manifested such tenderness and such forgiveness of wrongs?

But you will perhaps say, "I am not so degraded and debased as that. I can yet take care of myself and I can not admit that the case you have supposed presents my case fairly." Whereas, the fact is that you are almost infinitely worse than she is who has only played the harlot in her earthly relations and as towards a husband. The great God had consented to take you into a similar relation to Himself, and you have disowned Him!

The parable of the prodigal son may be applied both to the unconverted sinner and to the backslider. To either and to both, God is a father if they will return and seek His face. You may see in the parable how God feels towards everyone in whom He sees the spirit of true penitence and confession.

And now, how long ere you will turn your footsteps towards the house and home of your Father above? Hear what He says, "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still; therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Will you yield the controversy now, or will you still persist in your course of sin and folly? Let the case be settled. Either come on and table your charges against your

God, and make out your case if you can, or forever withdraw them, and turn once for all to seek the face of your injured God in penitence and prayer. Come back if you pretend to come at all, not to play the hypocrite again, but to devote yourself henceforth and forever to the love and service of your God. Come and say, "Here, Lord, are all my powers. I give to Thee all Thou hast ever given me, withholding nothing. Here am I, and here is all I am and have; take all my powers and use them up in most divine economy in Thy service forever. Nothing that I can do is too much for me to desire to do."

"Had I ten thousand hearts to give,

Lord, they should all be Thine."

## 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 1853 Collection.**