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On Becoming Acquainted With God

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Text.--Job 22:21: "Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee."

The speaker here addresses Job and exhorts him to become acquainted with God. The text therefore naturally leads us to enquire,

I. What is implied in being acquainted with God.

II. What are the conditions on which we may become thus acquainted.

III. What are its consequences.

I. What is implied in being acquainted with God.

The term acquaintance means something more than the common degree of knowledge of an individual's character. You often hear it remarked, "I cannot say that I am acquainted with him; I barely know him." Acquaintance, therefore, implies a more extensive and thorough knowledge.

The degree of our acquaintance with any individual will depend much upon our means of knowledge. Our means of knowing him may be only hearsay. This can never give us a real acquaintance with him. We might have a certain knowledge of some persons from reading their history. One might know much of Washington by reading all the published histories of him; but this would not be the kind of knowledge usually called acquaintance. It is plain that there is a much higher and more perfect kind of knowledge than this. A man who should only read a history of the battle of Waterloo would not get such a knowledge of it as one might by being in the scene itself. The latter might be in circumstances to know all about it.

We may also have some knowledge of others by their works. We may examine what they have done or have written. Thus we may know much of God from His works. His works of creation reveal Him;

the course of His providence also; and the pages of His word. All these conspire to reveal to us God. But after all, none of these amount to as much as the text seems to imply in being acquainted with God.

We may also have knowledge of another's character arising from familiar, protracted, personal intercourse. If this comprise also a deep sympathy with his plans and purposes, it gives us the best possible opportunities for becoming thoroughly acquainted. And this is what is usually meant by acquaintance. When you ask me if I am acquainted with a particular individual, you want to know if I understand his character thoroughly. This is always understood to be the meaning of the language.

Thus it is often said--"I am too well acquainted with such a man to believe that he has done a mean action, or that he can do one." We can, any of us doubtless, say of some persons, "I am so well acquainted with him that I cannot easily believe anything bad of him;" and of others we could say--"I cannot believe anything good of them--certainly except on very strong evidence." Such is the result of real acquaintance.

So in the case alluded to in our text. The speaker assumes that Job knows something about God; but urges him to know more--very much more. He does not I think assume that Job is now a good man. He probably regarded him as self-deceived, and hence urges him to acquaint himself really with God.

II. What are the conditions of being thus acquainted with God?

The two first conditions that I shall name are always presupposed, and need no comment. They are

- 1. The requisite powers of intelligent, moral agency.
- 2. Light; that is the means of knowledge or instruction. But,
- 3. It is also an essential condition that we lay aside prejudice. Prejudice is pre-judgment, and such a pre-judgment as shuts out conflicting evidence. Now we shall never know God till we lay this aside. Indeed we never can depend on having a correct knowledge of any subject, or of any person's character unless we lay aside all prejudice respecting that person or character, and hold our minds entirely open to all the truth which it may be possible for us to attain. Nothing can be more certain, nothing need be more obvious than this.

Many persons seem to overlook the fact that men are ever prejudiced against God. They could not possibly make a grater mistake than this. In fact, there is more prejudice against God than against all other beings in the universe. Men are so prejudiced against God that they will not form any right views of His character. I do not mean by this that their feelings are violently hostile against God, so that they are conscious of active hatred at all times; this is not necessary to the existence of prejudice, nor is this as some suppose implied in prejudice. It is rather a fruit of strong prejudice than a part of it, or a cause of it.

Prejudice, as already shown, is a shutting of the mind against evidence. It supposes the mind to be made up, or at least to be strongly inclined to a chosen opinion--that it does

not lie open to conflicting light and evidence.

Now it is remarkable to see how strong this prejudice against God often becomes. Of course it demands a great knowledge of human nature and much sound philosophy to know how to subvert and remove this prejudice against God. I do not mean to imply that it can ever be removed without the Spirit of God; but since human means must be employed, it is essential that they be wisely chosen and applied.

The grand secret of ministerial usefulness lies in understanding these prejudices and in knowing how to subvert them. No man can hope to be useful in converting sinners without this skill. He can do nothing to purpose unless he assumes that this prejudice exists and sets himself to resist and subdue it.

All sinners have this prejudice against God; else they would at once learn His character and love it. There is no intrinsic difficulty in knowing God. He has manifested himself abundantly, and now it only remains that we open our eyes candidly, and throw open our hearts to embrace all that is good, and every sinner might become acquainted with God at once--to the everlasting peace and blessedness of his soul.

- 4. Another indispensable condition is that we give up all self-will on every subject.

Until one is prepared to give up all self-will on every subject, he certainly cannot become acquainted with God. How can he know God unless his heart comes into sympathy with God, and enters thoroughly and heartily into His character and plans? Now this sympathy of the soul with God can never exist till we give up our self-will on all points. For self-will is always hostile to God's will. God says to every one of His creatures--"Give me your heart," or which is the same thing, "Yield up your will to Mine." Self-will resists and rebels, and hence can have no sympathy with God; and consequently cannot really become acquainted with Him. Nothing can be real acquaintance with God which falls short of entering into His experience, and of tasting the deep joys of His benevolent heart. Plainly, for this purpose, self-will must be brought under.

- 5. We must be willing to know God as he is. Men generally overlook that fact that they are unwilling to know God as He is--a fact, too important surely to be overlooked! They are ready enough to form some conceptions of God; but in this they seek to form such as will please themselves--not such as are just and according to truth.

Just look at the idol gods which men have framed for themselves; some in the state of eternal inaction; some are monsters and patrons of vice; some are mean and all are wicked. Now are these the legitimate conceptions of God, framed by the enlightened human mind? Infinitely far from it. No man can read the records of idolatry without seeing that men have made themselves believe in just such gods as please themselves.

Or as another example of this truth, look at the god of the Universalists; have they come to the Bible to learn God as He is there revealed? So far is this from being true that they find many things in the Bible which they must construe and wrest from their obvious

meaning to suit themselves, or they will say--"God is worse than the devil?" They come to the Bible, not to find its meaning, but to make it.

- 6. Another condition of becoming acquainted with God is a really honest desire to become acquainted with Him thoroughly.

Did you never see persons reluctant to become acquainted with each other? I opened a book a few days since and I was struck with the first remark I saw. I thought it remarkably just--"Never introduce persons to each other till you see that it will be agreeable to both parties to be introduced."

I have sometimes been introduced to persons who were any thing but pleased to be introduced to me. In various situations--perhaps when traveling, I have been introduced to wicked men who looked and seemed as if an electric stream was coursing up and down their bodies--they were so evidently troubled and uneasy in their condition.

Somewhat so of wicked men in relation to God. They do not like to be introduced to Him. They know too well that they have reason to be afraid of Him. If you knew you had injured a man, you would not wish to know any more about him than you could well help. You would not choose to come any nearer to him. Thus sinners know they do not wish to meet God and have near personal interviews with Him. They do not want to become personally acquainted with God.

Right over against this, we sometimes feel exceedingly anxious to become acquainted with particular individuals. I have heard of persons whom I would go to Europe to see, and should not shrink from the cost and toil of a voyage across the Atlantic for this purpose. I recollect especially that soon after my conversion there was one man whom I exceedingly desired to see and know. I wanted to lay open my whole heart to him and seek his counsel and aid in my religious course. My heart burned with desire to make his acquaintance.

Thus we must have an ardent, burning thirst for the knowledge of God, as a condition of attaining it. We must not be satisfied with an outward, distant knowledge of God; but must long to know Him as thoroughly as is possible for mortals in the flesh. When we come into this state we shall begin to know God indeed, and not before.

Another condition is the giving up of all selfishness and of the self-seeking spirit. This is most essential to success. All selfish ends must be abandoned. If we are bent on sustaining our own interests, we certainly cannot know God.

I have recently been very much struck with hearing an individual relate his own Christian experience. His case showed how truth seemed crowding its way into his mind, and how time after time its entrance was resisted and prevented by his selfishness. It seemed for a long time impossible for him to know God, and the reason was nothing else than this--selfishness was deeply rooted in his heart, and while there, the truth concerning God could get no admission. Sometimes, he came almost up to the very gate which, once

opened, would introduce him to God; then his bounding heart would say, "Now I shall know God, and I shall be a great man--a distinguished Christian"--and lo, down he goes again--farther from God than ever. So time after time he was thrown all aback by such developments of selfishness and self-seeking.

Now it is a matter of the greatest importance especially for ministers, to philosophize justly on this subject, and to trace all events of this sort to their legitimate causes. The subject is deep and requires profound and searching investigation.

Selfishness takes on so many forms and is so subtle that many persons entirely fail to detect its workings. Hence, impeded by this fatal hindrance--they are never able to come to the knowledge of God.

Again, self-knowledge is indispensable. There is such a thing as self-penetration. This thing must exist in some good degree, or no man can know God thoroughly. Without possessing self-knowledge, one may set about to find God, but with all his searching he will fail because he does not know himself. He will be likely to suppose that his own heart is in a state acceptable to God and adapted to search out God, and yet in this be utterly mistaken. Hence he can get, at the utmost, only little fragments of divine knowledge.

I said that the mind must have a disposition to know God. This must be an intense disposition--else it will not overcome the obstacles. The Bible requires men to agonize for spiritual blessings--to search, as for hid treasures. The mind must set itself to seek God with a most intense and agonizing earnestness.

It would be easy to show that this is not an arbitrary fact, but is thoroughly philosophical.

It is also fully scriptural. God has said--"Then shall ye seek and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." This is a state of mind well expressed by Paul when he said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ."

Now everyone who would become acquainted with God must do thus. He must press on most earnestly after a full and perfect knowledge of God. The text enjoins upon us to get this knowledge of God. for nothing less than this intimate and special knowledge of God is meant by acquaintance. It is such a knowledge as will give peace of mind and that blessedness which is the birthright of God's children.

Another thing implied is confidence in God. Many suppose that if they have this confidence, they have already that acquaintance with God of which the text speaks. But this does not follow of course. Persons may have some degree of confidence in God for a long time without arriving at a thorough personal acquaintance with God. Confidence is an indispensable condition of this acquaintance, for many reasons. Unless men have

confidence, they will not try God so as to become acquainted with Him. Having such confidence they get hold of some promise and try Him. Did you never do this? When oppressed with some want have you remembered that God has said--"Bring ye all the tithes into my store-house and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing." Now this is the way to know God.

Another condition of becoming thoroughly acquainted with God is attaining that experience which results from thorough confidence in God. The Lord had given us certain promises and the condition of their fulfilment is that we really believe them. If we do this, we shall experience their fulfilment. Let a man in circumstances of extreme trial throw himself upon the promise of God; he will find God faithful. Then he will learn something new and precious about God.

Very much of our trials and temptations here are designed to work out for us this experience of God's power, presence and willingness to bless. Thus we come to learn many things in God's character. For example, God has promised that on certain conditions He will reveal Himself to our souls. If we fulfill the conditions He will fulfill the promise, and we shall learn by our experience that God hears prayer. Such knowledge is of immense value in bringing us to become acquainted with God.

Another condition is that we have confidence to pass through trials. Without this we shall surely fail under trial; we shall let go our confidence in God and learn nothing by our trials but our own weakness. Trials often work out the speedy ruin of men because they learn by them only to distrust God; they stagger through unbelief and fall sadly from their steadfastness; they shrink from meeting the conditions and then throw the blame on God for not fulfilling them. Perhaps they say--"I did trust in God, and I am overcome after all." But that is a lie. There can be no greater lie than that. The Bible shows that there never was and never can be such a case as a man's really trusting God and yet failing because God does not fulfill His word. With real faith, you might walk through the fiery furnace and not be singed in its fires. Those three holy men believed. "Our God," say they, "whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." So if Daniel had lost his faith, the lions would have eaten him up before he had fallen to the bottom of their den. Daniel knew where he was, and in whom he had believed. He knew his danger well, and his refuge too. Hence when thrown into this den, he was calm as if he had been safely sitting in the royal palace.

But could his accusers stand where he stood and pass unscathed through such trials as his? No! They had no faith--no God for their refuge.

Another condition is that God should make special manifestations of Himself to the soul. God has promised thus to manifest Himself on certain conditions. By performing these conditions, we may obtain those manifestations; God will reveal Himself personally, and will show us great and wondrous thing of Himself. This is a most precious, blessed truth, and in view of it, we may well be exhorted to acquaint ourselves with God. Even Job in

that dark dispensation without a letter of written revelation might be exhorted thus to acquaint himself with his Maker.

Still another condition is intimacy of communion with God. I may live for a long time in the same neighborhood or house with a man and yet never become acquainted with him. I may know his name and many things about him, and yet never become thoroughly acquainted with him. For real acquaintance, it is essential that we have intimate communion. Some men may repel us from such communion however much we desire it; so that we cannot become really acquainted with them.

But God is always ready to hold communion with us. No fault, or reserve on His part can ever prevent our gaining acquaintance with Him. Men may shut us out of their company, or at least from their sympathies; but God has no such repulsiveness about Him. He is so meek and lowly that He is not above communing with a child even in the humblest condition possible on earth. Though He be the High and Lofty One that inhabits eternity, He yet condescends with infinite grace to dwell with the humble and contrite spirit. He knows nothing about the mere earthly distinction of the noble and the low; all are alike infinitely below Him. The only distinction recognized before Him is that between the proud and the humble. To the latter, He is ever open and most easy of access.

The thing now which we all need in order to become acquainted with God is an intimate personal communion. In order to know any person thoroughly we need to get into his heart. So you often express yourself. You say of a man, now I have got into his heart--now I really know him and feel myself acquainted with him. I see him through.

So with God. You need such an intimate communion with Him that you really enter into His deepest sympathies and know His real heart. Most blessed knowledge!

Having shown what is meant and what is implied in being acquainted with God, I come now to speak,

III. Of the consequences of our acquainting ourselves with God.

Under this head I can only give an outline of the principal points. I can do no more than to mention several blessings that will certainly accrue to those who acquaint themselves with God.

- 1. Peace of mind. Job was at this time in great trouble of mind. His three friends were anxious that God should pass before him in such a manner that he could not fail of apprehending God's true character. They justly supposed that peace of mind would be the natural result of his becoming truly acquainted with God.

Peace of mind always does and always must result from the harmonious and right action of all the powers of the mind. When we feel as God feels--live as He lives; and when our whole souls harmonize with His soul in the spirit and developments of benevolence, then we cannot possibly fail of having perfect peace of mind.

Peace of mind stands opposed to all anxiety, and must result from the mind's finding in God all that itself needs. Let all the demands of its being be entirely met, and it can ask no more. Let it be distinctly seen and realized that these demands of our being are met in God, and peace of mind must follow.

Now it is a most blessed truth that when the restless mind of man comes to be acquainted with God, it finds in Him everything it can need. Every want is fully and infinitely well supplied. When the mind realizes this, as it will when it comes to know God, it settles down into a state of calm repose in God which no restless anxieties can ever disturb.

One of the demands of our being is that others shall have the demands of their being met; in other words, that we shall have not our own wants only supplied, but shall know that the whole universe also have their wants supplied in God. In order to our perfect peace, we need to see that all other beings have in God all they can ask or wish; that no want can possibly exist which does not find its adequate supply in the great Father of all. Now as the soul comes to know God more and more, it sees with increasing clearness and certainty that God's goodness, wisdom, justice and power are just what they should be to secure the highest possible degree of happiness and blessedness to the whole sentient universe, so that if misery exists it must always be the creature's own fault.

When we come to understand this thoroughly and to see that God's providence is perfect and reaches to all events--marks the falling of the sparrow and counts the hairs on our head; when we see that God cannot fail of being infinitely faithful, kind and wise--that He cannot possibly mistake in anything whatever; when these truths become fully settled in our mind and we rest on them as upon changeless, eternal realities, then all is peace. It cannot be otherwise.

But this state of mind toward God never can exist until we get more knowledge of Him than mere hearsay. We must have personal experience and personal acquaintance in respect to God.

Paul's words were full of meaning when he said--"I know in whom I have believed." Did you ever consider how much he meant in these words? Surely much more than many others would mean by the same language. It should be considered that Paul had been caught up to the third heavens--had heard unutterable things--had seen the Lord Jesus Christ Himself--had passed through many scenes of sore and various trials--and in all had enjoyed varied and manifold experience of God and of Christ.

Hence this language from him must have been full of meaning. "I know Him"--says he--"I know Him;" I have seen Him--I have had a long and precious experience of His lovingkindness and faithfulness; I know Him; and if all the devils in hell should tell me that Christ would not keep me, I know He would.

So we often see Christians who seem to know Christ so well that temptations seem to have lost their power upon their hearts. Let the temptation be ever so subtle, or so fierce,

they do not slide or quake. They mildly say, I know Him whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.

- 2. Another good accruing to those who acquaint themselves with God is that their faith becomes confirmed. As they become acquainted with God they find He bears acquaintance. The more they see of Him, the more their confidence in His character rises.

Now in order to be at peace and to stand evermore in the evil day, Christians need to have their faith confirmed. They need to be assured that Jehovah is their friend, and to have such an acquaintance with Him as shall make this truth a substantial reality.

So we sometimes come to have confidence in each other, when we become intimately acquainted, and this acquaintance reveals only substantial excellencies of character. When really worthy individuals are introduced to us, the more we become acquainted with them, the more we trust them. Of such we say--they bear acquaintance well. Of others we say the opposite--they do not bear acquaintance well. The more we know of them, the less we trust them. The former class are fast friends. We can confide in them under all possible circumstances.

Now God is a being who bears acquaintance perfectly. The more we shall know of Him, the more clearly we shall see that in Him there is no frailty--no infirmity--no defect.

Now I am well aware that in all Christian communities this is admitted in theory, but I also know that it is not held in fact. It is one thing to admit it in theory, and quite another thing for the heart to rest in it as a living, abiding reality. It is quite another thing for the mind to become so acquainted with God so as to triumph in Him under all possible circumstances.

- 3. Another result is confirmed love. The Bible speaks of our "being root and grounded in love." There is a great deal of meaning in this expression. It develops most clearly the great truth that love is the basis of the Christian's character. In love it rests as its foundation, or to change the figure--in love it takes root and grows.

But of how few can this be said! The more I become acquainted with Christians, the more I am struck with their weakness in love. Their religion is not rooted and grounded in love. Many professed Christians are, to say the least, much of their time away from the spirit of love. There is a want of that universal love to God and man which gives to religion an unction, and makes it grateful both to God and man. If they had this unction of love at their first conversion, they seem to lose it and become legal. Then some of the forms of religious duty remain and some of the forms of humanity and human sympathy; but the spirit of genuine love is lacking. It is infinitely important to be rooted and grounded in love. The more you become acquainted with God, the more you will see that love is the only principle worthy of being regarded as the rule of life. This only is living like God, and this only is the spirit and life of real excellence.

- 4. Another result of becoming acquainted with God is a disposition to obey God in all our life; a

disposition to conform the whole life to God's will. It is a great thing to obey God under all circumstances, and a great thing to have one's mind thoroughly settled in this supreme law of action.

This will result from becoming really acquainted with God. It will become more and more easy and natural as the mind becomes more and more acquainted with God; for the mind becomes thus more and more confiding, and if it cannot see, it will still assume that God is and must be wise.

- 5. Another result of becoming acquainted with God is fruitfulness. The Bible represents that our Father is glorified when we bear much fruit. But multitudes of professed Christians are remarkable for nothing so much as for their barrenness in the fruits of piety. With them, it seems to be a perpetual drought. They seem like Mount Gilboa on which no dew or rain descend. Of course, no fruits are borne to the praise of God. Of earthly seasons some are fruitful and some are barren; but with these professed Christians, all seasons and months are alike barren. This must be ascribed to their want of personal acquaintance with God. It would not be possible for them to be acquainted with God, and yet be so barren.
- 6. Another result would be moral courage. Unbelief is always the secret of moral cowardice. Persons who have not much faith are forever stumbling on the point of obeying God. They dare not trust God to take care of them in the path of straight forward obedience. They dare not face public sentiment--as if they feared it would ruin them, despite of the promises of God in their behalf. They are afraid of the censures of the church or of the world, their faith in God being so weak, and their apprehensions of God being so dim that they practically fear man more than God. Hence they cringe, shuffle, dodge, evade, shrink away from self-denying duty, afraid to take a simple-minded honest course, and trust God to bear them safely, nay triumphantly through.

Faith always cures this state of mind. It strikes at once at its very root.

See what a remarkable illustration of this we have in the case of the apostles. Before the Spirit of God was shed down upon them, they were timid. Peter was afraid of a servant girl, and they all forsook their Master and fled before a small band of armed men. They had nothing more at best than the courage of children. They needed a mighty change, and God provided means to produce it.

Christ had told them it was necessary that He should go away and that He should send the Comforter to teach them the (divine) things of Christ. He did so. He went up Himself to heaven, and thence sent down the Comforter upon them. Then, O how changed! How full of moral courage! At once they become moral heroes. No dangers can daunt them. The same men who quailed before power and authority but a few days before are now fearless. The awful Sanhedrim no longer inspires terror. "We ought," say they, "to obey God rather than men." "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye."

Now this is always the result of becoming acquainted with God. Where you see a

professor of religion who is a moral coward, you see one who does not know much about God.

I have been struck with this in seeing the moral cowardice of many ministers. I think I have seen not a few ministers more afraid of the Presbytery than a Roman Catholic would be of the Pope. Such men I have seen whose first and last question pending a case of duty, is--what will my Presbytery think of me? O, how disgraceful--how dishonoring to the Christian name--that a minister of the gospel should think so! O, were they only once filled with the Spirit of God, it would put another soul within them. Before the apostles were filled with the Spirit they might have quailed before the Sanhedrim; but afterwards, the Sanhedrim--not they--were confounded. The Sanhedrim were confounded with the boldness of those unlearned men--fishermen and publicans of Galilee. O to be afraid of men--they are the last things in the universe to be afraid of! As if God were not infinitely greater and mightier than men! Surely those who quail before men rather than before God must be very far from any just acquaintance with Him.

- 7. Another result of knowing God will be great searching of heart.

I have often been struck to see how it happens that many persons under the influence of a false philosophy, have taken a false view of this subject. This is a point which it seems to me of great importance that we should understand correctly.

Take the case of Isaiah as given in chap. 6, when God made fresh and most vivid manifestations of His glory before him. He then came to know God more fully by far than ever before; and it searched him through and through. Suddenly he cries out, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips." Job also, when the Almighty came down to talk with him, cried out--"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Now all this class of passages have an important meaning. It is very important that we understand what they do teach and that we avoid ascribing to them a sense which does not belong to them.

In the case of Isaiah, we are not to suppose that he was sinning at the moment when God thus revealed Himself. He did not cry out--"Woe is me--I am a man of unclean lips"--because he was then in rebellion against God. It is by no means either natural or necessary to suppose this. The same may be said of the case of Job, and of all other cases of the same sort. This subject might be understood if persons would take pains to do so. Experience would teach us much, very much about it. How common a thing it is for Christians to stand perfectly confounded when some new views of God's law and character flash upon the soul. They then cry out--"I have seen an end of all perfection, for Thy commandment is exceeding broad."

What in such cases is the nature and what the results of this new revelation? Is it this, "I am now sinning; I see as I never did before that my present state is utterly wrong before God?" No; but the mind sees a vastness--a breadth in the law and in God's claims which

it had not seen before and sees that more is implied than had been before supposed, in being obedient. And so it will be to all eternity. More and still more will be seen of the breadth and glory of the divine law and character.

Now in order to understand such a case as is that of Isaiah or of Job, we need to consider that we are always inclined to judge our past state and conduct by our present light. I have often in my own experience found that when drawn very near to God, I had such new and enlarged views of scripture passages that I felt sure I had never understood them before, It has really seemed sometimes as if I had never known God before. It was then perfectly natural if I judged all the past by my present views of God and of His law that I should cry out--all is rottenness. In such situations I have felt almost irresistibly impelled to do so.

In reference to this state of mind I often think of Mrs. Pres. Edwards. She represents herself as sometimes feeling such an attraction towards the divine character that it really seemed as if she should go right up, body and soul together. On such occasions she was wont to cry out--"All my past life is rottenness." Yet this was not because she then saw that her present state of mind was entirely sinful, but she saw a higher standard than she had ever seen before, and comparing her past life with this new and enlarged standard she saw its utter deficiency. If in these states of holy attraction towards God she deemed herself to be actually sinning, the explanation of her mistake is doubtless this, that she estimated her past obligation by her present light.

On this point it should be well considered that our former life is not to be judged by our present light. To do so would be to subvert one of the great principles of God's moral government: viz: that guilt is always to be estimated by existing light--not by light attained afterwards but not possessed then; not by light enjoyed by other beings yet not by ourselves. Suppose we should go back to the times when all men and all ministers with the rest drank alcohol; and should judge the men of those times by our present light, we should inevitably condemn the whole church and all the good men of that day. On the same principle future generations may look back upon us and condemn us and all other good men who have lived since the times of the apostles; for their standard we hope and presume will be in some respects more elevated than ours, and their light greater on some moral questions. Consequently, if they may judge other men of other ages by their own light they will pass a most sweeping sentence of condemnation upon all past ages of the race. A principle which leads to such results must be radically false.

The nearer a man gets to God, the more clearly he sees that his past life is objectively wrong, although it may have been subjectively right. It seems important to make this distinction which I have now stated. An act may be said to be objectively wrong when it is wrong in itself considered, or in its relations to law; but the same act may be subjectively right, in reference to the state of mind of the subject or agent who puts forth the act--because with his light he did the best he could do, and his motives are acceptable in the sight of God. Acting according to the best light he has, his acts are subjectively right, and yet in view of the real spirit of the law, they are objectively wrong. Let this

distinction be carefully made.

Now when a man becomes more enlightened by revelations from God than he has been, he will look back upon his past life and cry out--"What an infinite wretch I have been--how far my whole life falls short of meeting the spirit of God's pure and perfect law"--while perhaps with even all this increased light he does not see that his former intentions were wrong. Subjectively considered, therefore, his heart was right before, but objectively considered, his conduct seems egregiously wrong.

- 8. Another result of knowing God will be great humiliation. As men become thoroughly acquainted with God, they will see more and more of His excellence, and of course will realize more and more deeply the infinite wrong of sin against such a God. Hence they will feel an irrepressible inclination to humble themselves before Him, and pour out their souls with great and bitter weeping at His feet. You are aware that such is the result among earthly friends. If you have wronged a good friend of yours, and if your growing acquaintance with him reveals more and more of his excellent qualities, you will see more and more of the cruel wrong of your conduct and will seek opportunities to humble yourself before him and pour out your full confessions as if you never could confess enough.

So with the soul before God. As you remember more and more your past sins, and see yet more of God's goodness, you will love to humble yourself more and more deeply at His feet.

In reading the life of Pres. Edwards, I have been struck with the recurrence of these scenes in his experience. Whenever he was drawn very near to God, his very soul seemed to burst forth in loud weeping and convulsive sobbing, pouring out his soul before God in the deepest humiliation. This was only the natural result of becoming more acquainted with God. In my own experience, I have found that when I have had new views of God I have felt that I must get down infinitely low before Him. Nothing less could satisfy the demands of my own mind.

This must be the natural result of seeing Christ in heaven. Did you never think how, when you get to heaven you will want to spend months in confessing, pouring out your soul in the deepest humiliation--as if you never could get low enough, or say enough to magnify His infinite grace, and strip yourself of all glory to give it all to Him? How can our eyes look on the pure and lovely Jesus without being filled with these self-abasing thoughts of ourselves and thoughts of honor and glory to Him?

- 9. Another result will be great wrestling with God. As we become acquainted with God, we shall become emboldened to ask of Him great things. We shall then understand what it is to "come with boldness" to a mercy seat. We shall learn that God has a great heart, and is not displeased if we come and wrestle with Him with great and overpowering importunity.

When we have become thoroughly acquainted with God, the mind will fasten upon some great things for His kingdom--not for ourselves--and we shall feel that we are authorized, and invited to come with boldness and with wrestling importunity and say with Jacob--"I

will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." We know it is Christ with whom we plead, and we feel that we may venture on the most urgent importunity It is to us as if we were pleading before some long tried and proved earthly friend.

Again, there will result a great use of the promises of God.

To one who has no faith, the promises lie in the Bible as unused as if they were never made for use. They are in fact of no more avail to such a person than if they were made for angels and not at all applicable to sinning mortals. But as you become acquainted with God, you see that these promises are given to be used, and you feel that they are indeed your own.

Father Carpenter used often to cry out--"Lord, what are the promises good for, unless they are to be kept?" It was with him a living reality that God had given us these exceeding great and precious promises for our use, and that we should keep them bright as it were by constant use, and never let them get rusty. They were given us to live upon and to work upon, and if we mean to live or to work we must use them.

- 10. Another result will be great and constant sympathy with God in all His purposes and doings. As we know God more, we shall be charmed more and more with His plans and ways and shall feel ourselves more and more identified with all His interests. This will operate powerfully to transform us into His glorious image.
- 11. As another result, we may name, great transparency of character. There will be an openness of soul before God--a continual holding of the heart out for constant inspection, a longing to have God's own eye search us continually. "Let Thine eye search me"--we shall say--"show me all in me that is displeasing to Thee."
- 12. Finally, there will result a full assurance of faith and hope. This cannot but result from becoming thoroughly and personally acquainted with God. Faith will become assurance; for as we come to know more of God, we shall see that He is infinitely worthy of being trusted and believed most perfectly. The assurance therefore is a natural result of our acquaintance with God.

So with hope. The expectation of promised good, like faith, must become strong and assured just in proportion as we thoroughly acquaint ourselves with God. There is no other valid foundation for assured faith and hope.

Whatever men may call these states of mind, and whatever relations they may suppose them to bear to sanctification or to consecration, it is quite certain that they can result only from becoming deeply and personally acquainted with God and from devoting the whole powers of the soul to Him. They naturally result from knowing God in the full and deep sense of personal acquaintance and they can have no other foundation.

REMARKS.

1. There is and can be no real comfort without acquaintance with God. The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. They know not what it is to be free from cares and troubles, and how should they? Why should they not be restless, and tossed forever without solid peace for they have not found anything which can satisfy them, and what is to them more distressing still, they never can with all their searching unless they will seek it in God. Traverse the world up and down as they will, they never can find, away from God, the happiness and peace they need.

2. With this subject before you, you may see why the Holy Spirit is called "The Comforter." The name is pertinent because it is His office to reveal God to the mind, and thus comfort the hearts of His people. Who has not been struck to see how, when Jesus had ascended to heaven, the Spirit came and revealed a divine Jesus, taking of the things of Christ and showing to them His higher glories. Then they knew Christ as they had never known Him before.

So with all Christians who live in the Spirit. The Comforter brings real comfort to their souls--just what their souls need. Beloved, you know this by an experience which the world cannot give.

3. All other knowledge of God except this which the Holy Ghost reveals, only agonizes the mind. It serves only to fill the mind with fear and dread; but never leads the soul to trust God as its own precious Father. It is most obvious that nothing but that which promotes faith and trust in God can ever afford real comfort.

4. The mass of Christians seem to know only just enough of God to keep them always worried and always in trouble. They know enough of God to understand His holiness and hatred of sin; enough to add pungency and power to the rebukes of their own consciences; but not enough to find through grace victory over their sins and abiding peace with God through Jesus Christ their Lord. Hence they seem in many respects to be even worse off than careless sinners who have almost no knowledge of God at all. For the latter, if they find no peace with God, do not find much disturbance of their dreams from that quarter, at least for a season.

5. A selfish mind cannot be properly acquainted with God. Experience seems to show that where selfishness takes on certain peculiar forms, it effectually precludes all right knowledge of God. Ambition and avarice seem to be its worst and most fatal forms. Ambition--O what a curse to the soul! If the ambitious man sets about seeking his own salvation, his aim is to make himself great or to enhance his reputation. Seeking it with such a motive, God will of course repel his proud heart away from His own mercy-seat. If the ambitious man seeks more piety--supposing him to be a Christian--still he is prone to let his ambition work in even here, and his object will be to gain distinction. Oh, how such a soul will be blighted by its own selfishness!

No better is the case of the avaricious man. His selfishness is wont to assume such power as utterly to exclude all right knowledge of God. See the case of Judas. He could attend the personal preaching of Christ for three years, and yet never have so much as the crust of his selfishness broken through. Alas, Judas was a thief and carried the bag. His heart was wholly in that bag, and the thought of making something for himself was ever present, and no matter how sacred his employment, nothing could be so sacred as to save it from being perverted by his sordid heart. If he had been building a meeting house, he would contrive if he could to make some speculation out of it. Ask such a man now to do

something for the Institution here and he would try to make it turn in some way to his own personal advantage. Self, you may be sure, will somehow be cared for--else what good will his life do him? His reigning disposition is--"I might as well not live as live and get no good to myself."

Now where these and similar forms of selfishness exist, it seems utterly impossible that men should become acquainted with God. The mighty currents of their heart drift them forever away from God and they cannot serve God and Mammon if they try ever so earnestly. If they would give up their selfishness--forsake their idol Mammon, they might then seek God and find Him when they should seek Him with all their heart.

6. Sinners are often ashamed to become acquainted with God. Men who would deem it their highest honor to be introduced to a President, are actually ashamed to be introduced to God. They would be ashamed to have it understood that they are His friends and value His acquaintance and friendship. O how they would fain cast contempt on the Infinite God! They know that no mortal man would bear such insults as they heap on Him. Is it strange that Christ should disown them in the awful day when He comes in all the glory of His Father and with His holy angels?

7. It really seems as if the great mass of professed Christians had no expectation of becoming acquainted with God. They seem not to consider that even in this world they may form as absolute an acquaintance with God as they can in heaven. They seem not to appreciate the value of those exceeding great and precious promises which assure us that the Spirit will reveal to us both Christ and the Father. All these rich provisions of the gospel for revealing the knowledge of God to man are to them as if they were not. Alas that they should know so little of their own mercies!

8. This is an infinitely dangerous state, and no professed Christian ought to rest in it one moment. Even if you are a real Christian your course is full of peril if you do not acquaint yourself with God. You will not trust Him; you cannot have the security which His presence and His friendship afford.

9. A sensual state of mind is infinitely perilous. It is so especially because it is utterly repugnant to your becoming acquainted with God. You cannot grow in anything good or great if you indulge in a sensual state of mind.

10. All who are really acquainted with God will have an earnest longing to see others made acquainted with Him. They know how blessed the knowledge is, and hence they cannot fail to desire that others too should know and enjoy this blessedness.

Beloved, have you this proof that you know God? Does your soul long to see all others enlightened into all the riches of this divine knowledge?

11. Finally the text exhorts us to become acquainted with God now. How reasonable and cogent is this exhortation! It does seem to me that persons must be infatuated who can pursue other knowledge eagerly, and yet be remiss in seeking the knowledge of God. I cannot but wonder that the persons now before me who are conscious of being strangers to God, or at least destitute of an intimate acquaintance with God, do not at once resolve--"I will know God. I must search for this knowledge more than for hid treasures. I am ready to forego all other knowledge rather than fail of this. All other

acquisitions of any sort whatever shall be held as of no account compared with this. O let my soul know God!"

Christian, have you this burning thirst for divine knowledge? Does your very soul cry out within you as if indeed nothing else could by any means satisfy you? Then you need not fear. God will reveal Himself to you in His richest glories.

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)*.