

What Saith the Scripture?

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

Great Peace- No. 1

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College

Lecture I

February 12, 1862

Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

Text.--Psa. 119:165: "Great peace have they who love thy law, and nothing shall offend them."

In speaking from this text, the first enquiry is --

I. What is intended by the term "law"?

II. What is it to love the law of God?

III. What is the peace here spoken of?

IV. The text asserts two facts.

I. What is intended by the term "law"?

- 1. The term is used in the Bible in a variety of senses. Sometimes it means properly the ten commandments. At other times it manifestly includes the ceremonial law. Sometimes it means the entire Old Testament, as being then the whole revealed will of God. When the law is contrasted with the gospel, it evidently means the Old Testament scriptures as distinct from the New.
- 2. As used here, the term manifestly means the whole revealed will of God, considered as a rule of duty, whether made known to us through Moses, or any other prophet of the Lord.
- 3. The term law here manifestly includes both precept and penalty; every precept revealing God's will as to our duty, and also the penalty of violating it. Let no one think that to love the precept, and yet reject the penalty as unjust and cruel, is loving the law of God in the sense here intended.

II. The next enquiry is what is it to love the law of God?

- 1. I answer, It is more than approbation. The conscience of every moral agent, whether he be holy or sinful, approves the law of God. The wickedest of men are sometimes very conscious of strongly approving the great law of right, that is, the revealed will of God, as the rule of universal duty. Approbation belongs to the conscience. It is an intellectual state, and does not imply virtue or true religion. I think I can say myself that I as thoroughly approved the law of God before I was converted as after, so far as my conscience is concerned. This is no doubt a common experience of unconverted men.
- 2. To love the law of God is more than admiration of it. Admiration is more than an intellectual state; it is the decided approval of the conscience, together with a corresponding state of the sensibility. It includes a real feeling.
- 3. To love the law of God is more than delight in it. In Rom. 7, Paul, representing a legal experience, says -- "I delight in the law of God after the inner man." The state of mind here expressed doubtless includes approbation, admiration, and a very conscious delight or pleasure in the purity and moral beauty of God's law. Delight, by itself, is commonly intended to express a feeling of pleasure or satisfaction in a thing. It does not by any means always imply that this delight has the sympathy of the will -- the executive faculty of the soul. I think it is a common experience for persons to be pleased and very much affected in view of moral beauty, and of moral fitness and rightness in any thing. I know it was so with me before I was converted. I recollect that at one time, I wept with delight in view of an act of great moral beauty. I was conscious at the time, that I should not myself have done the thing that affected and delighted me so much. I seemed to be aware at the time, that such acts were not like me, and that my heart would not prompt me to them. Many persons seem to think that if they have a feeling of pleasure in hearing a sermon, or in reading of a good and noble act, or in the contemplation of a godly character, that this is evidence that they love goodness in the sense in which this text speaks of loving God's law. But this is a hasty conclusion. The prophet Isaiah represents the people of Israel as "seeking God daily," and delighting to know his ways as a nation that did righteousness; he even said "they take delight in approaching to God;" when in fact they were in a very apostate and rebellious state. The Lord said to Ezekiel -- "They come before thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a very pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not." Indeed I believe it is a common experience for the sensibility to sympathize, to a considerable extent, with the decisions of the conscience, and to take an intense feeling of pleasure in view of the purity of Christ's life, the excellence of his teachings, the spiritual beauty of the law of God, and the spiritual beauty of holy character in general. When the soul does not feel particularly pressed with a sense of personal obligation, it may and often does, feel a sense of satisfaction and delight in the contemplation of the law of God.

But let no one think that this feeling is true religion. It may and must exist where true religion is; but it may exist where true religion is not.

- 4. To love the law of God in the sense of the text, is to embrace it as the rule of our own lives. It is a cordial acceptance of it by the will, a cordial submission to its requirements, a cordial

yielding of one's self to be governed by this universal and beautiful rule of duty. There is certainly in human experience a complacency of conscience, also a complacency of the sensibility, and a complacency of the will. We are all at times conscious of this distinction.

Complacency of the conscience is a purely intellectual state, and has no moral character. It is simply the intense approval, by the conscience, of that which is right.

Complacency of the will is in itself moral rightness. It is the will cordially and intensely unifying itself with the law of right. It seems to me that people often misconceive what choice really is, and think of it as a mere dry decision, involving no fervor, no cordiality, nothing but a cold dry decision. Whereas the complacency of the will or choice is a deep preference. It involves an earnest cordiality, and intense embracing, a warm, ardent sympathizing with that which is right; for these words -- embracing, cordiality, sympathy, may be applied to the will as well as to the sensibility or to the intellect.

- 5. To love the law of God in the sense of this text, involves confidence in the Law-Giver, and sympathy with his views, aim, and state of mind. It is the union of our will with God's will, as expressed in his law, and requirements. It involves the devotion to God, which the law requires. It is nothing else indeed, but that love of God and man, which the law in its spirit requires. It is that state of mind which truly prays, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." It is a state which accepts and conforms itself to the whole will of God, so far as that is known. It does this by a most cordial yielding and embracing; with a cordiality that really implies true enjoyment in doing and suffering the whole will of God.

III. The next enquiry is: What is the peace here spoken of?

- 1. It is not apathy of the soul -- is not a state of listlessness -- a lack of all interest in God or in divine things. Sometimes apathy that results from a seared conscience, is mistaken for peace.
- 2. The "peace" of our text is the opposite of strife. Often persons experience a great struggle of soul between the dictates of conscience under the striving and light of God's Spirit, and the will or the feelings of the soul. The soul sees duty, but is unwilling to do it. It sees the right, but cleaves to the wrong. This produces a great struggle such as that represented in Rom. 7. Now it is the opposite of this state of mind that is intended by peace.
- 3. Peace is the opposite of remorse. Remorse is a feeling of guilt and condemnation in view of our sins. Unless the conscience becomes seared, there will always be more or less remorse, so long as there is persistent neglect of any duty, or perseverance in any wrong. This state of mind is always inconsistent with peace, and (as we shall soon see) peace is an opposite state of mind to this.
- 4. It is a state opposite to a sense of condemnation. Remorse is a sense of guilt. A sense of condemnation, is a feeling of being condemned -- of being under the displeasure of God, not only of deserving condemnation, but of being actually under it. Not only is peace of mind inconsistent with this, but as we shall soon see, it is the opposite of this.

- 5. This peace is a state of mind that involves the inward harmony of the soul with itself, and also the harmony of the soul with the will and providence of God. It is a state in which the mind has the consciousness of intense satisfaction with God's will. The intellect approves it; the feelings are satisfied with it; the will embraces it.

Here there is harmony between the whole soul and God's will. It involves satisfaction with God's will, and a deep repose of soul in its perfect wisdom and goodness. The whole mind seems to be satisfied in respect to God and his will, character, and dealings. It has nothing left to desire more.

- 6. This peace also implies that the soul has a sense of cordiality between itself and God. There is a sense of acceptance, of forgiveness, and of union with God's will, that constitutes a deep quiet, not in the sense of apathy, but rather in the sense of a deep flowing, for this peace is sometimes said to be as a river. The soul is conscious of not being apathetic but of being excited, yet the excitement has in it no conflict, and there is no jar between the soul and God, or any of his ways or doings. This peace has the elements of deep, quiet joy.
- 7. I said it was the opposite of a state of condemnation. There is in this peace a sense of being accepted, and in this sense, justified. I said it was the opposite of remorse. Although sin is remembered, still it is without the pang of remorse. The mind remembers the sin, perhaps with the gushings of sorrow, but not with the dry stings of remorse. There may be an ingenuous, loving sorrow, but it has in it nothing of the feeling of remorse or condemnation.
- 8. I said it is the opposite of strife. In this state of mind, all struggling against God, in any respect, has ceased, and the mind instead of struggling against God, cleaves to him with an intense cleaving of cordiality and affection. Instead of resisting his requirements, instead of any reluctance in obeying them, there is a cordiality, an embracing, a loving of his commandments, and a real satisfaction with them and in obeying them that distils [sic.] perpetual joy upon the soul, and it feels that in obedience and in this consciousness of cordial acquiescence in the whole will of God, there is a real life. It is a state of intense and loving quiet, and repose in God.

IV. The text asserts two facts.

- 1. First, that all who love the law of God have great peace. Now that this is a fact is evident.
 - (1.) From what has been already said. If they love the law of God, they certainly have peace within themselves. Their own powers all act harmoniously; the conscience, the will, and the sensibility, are all as one. They experience therefore, no internal friction, no jar; conscience does not condemn them. The will resists neither the dictates of conscience, nor the authority of God; the sensibility is drawn into sympathy with both the conscience and the will. Hence there is no inward warfare. There may be a struggle against temptation, but there is no struggle against conscience by the will, and no condemnation of the will by the conscience. Hence if there is pain or any kind of struggle by the sensibility, it is not properly a conflict with self. The man is at peace with himself while he loves the law of God. So long as he is conscious of loving the law of God, in the

sense explained, he does not condemn his present state of mind, that is, he has no sense of remorse or self-condemnation in view of his present state. Hence thus far he has peace and must have.

- o (2.) While he thus loves the law of God, God must be at peace with him, that is, with his present state of mind. This state of mind which I have described as constituting this love to the law of God, is really obedience to this law. It complies with all present known obligation, both outward and inward. With this state of mind, while it lasts, God must be at peace. While we have this love, there can be no friction between God's Spirit and our souls. Remember, we accept God's whole will, so far as known; therefore between us and God, there is a state of profound, present peace. The will has ceased to reject his commands. It cordially accepts them all.

It cordially accepts the will of God as revealed in providence. Therefore the peace of the soul in this state is great. It is not only peace, but great peace; profound, deep, flowing, conscious peace.

- o (3.) To one in this state of mind, God reveals a sense of pardon. Indeed the very peace itself involves a sense of being accepted by God, else a sense of controversy will still continue. Although we had no controversy with God, still if He really had a controversy with us, we could not have peace. There would be conscious condemnation. We should realize that God is displeased with us, even though we are pleased with him, unless he reveals it to us that he is pacified and propitiated, and does not frown but smiles upon our soul. It is a curious fact that when the love of God's law possesses the soul, we are pardoned before we are aware of it, and the sense of peace filling the soul gives us the mind of God in relation to us, and suggests to us the fact of pardon and acceptance. I think that in every marked case of conversion, thoughtful, self-reflecting minds observe this -- they have a sense of God's being no longer angry or displeased with them. Their former sense of remorse, their struggle and agony, their fearful forebodings, are gone; and in their place is a state of mind that spontaneously cries -- My Father, my reconciled God and Father! I know thou are reconciled; I know thou dost forgive me; I know thy sweet smile rests on my soul, for all is great peace within.

Oftentimes this sense of acceptance comes in connection with some passage of Scripture, which suggests that God has accepted or does accept us; but in every case, this sense of acceptance involved in this great peace is no doubt the inward witness of the Spirit. By this I mean, it is God himself revealing to us his own state of mind towards us. We become in some way inwardly aware that God is pacified and at peace with us, and the spirit of adoption, by which we cry Father, Father, is often a matter of intense consciousness.

- o (4.) This love of the law of God inevitably results in a state, the opposite of conflict, remorse, self-condemnation. To my mind the fact that we are justified by faith, becomes a simple matter of consciousness. Whoever has true faith, has this love of God's law. And now he finds in fact that he is justified in the sense of being at peace with God and God at peace with him. This is just what the Bible teaches. It is an all-important fact, that

whenever we put the truth of the Bible to the test of experience and consciousness, we find it verified. That our text is true, every real Christian can testify from his own consciousness. It is equally true of hundreds and thousands of texts in the Bible. Whenever we put God's word to the test, by complying with the conditions on which he gives us promises, we realize in our experience that his promises are true. By this means Christians know that the Bible is true. It is not with them a matter of speculation; it is not a fact that needs support from historical evidence or from any other merely outward evidence; its truth has become to them a matter of consciousness.

- (5.) This peace is the opposite of dissatisfaction with God in any respect. So long as we are dissatisfied with any thing God says or does, we cannot have peace. So long, there will be friction and collision between us and him.

But suppose that all manifest resistance should cease, and we should fall into apathy and not think of God at all. Suppose his providence should move in such channels as not to disturb us, and we should remain without feeling or any thought of God:-- this would not be peace. Peace is not the mere absence of dissatisfaction and opposition to God. It is positive acquiescence, a cordial embracing of his will. It implies, as already shown, complacency in God's whole will and in all his ways.

- (6.) This state of mind would have peace in hell, provided hell did not imply a sense of God's present displeasure. Provided there were no conflict between God's mind and ours -- that we have no friction against his will and he no displeasure to manifest against us -- then no degree of pain on our part would forbid this peace of soul. Therefore, if the pains of the second death could be inflicted on us while in this state of loving the law of God, it could not destroy our peace. I do not suppose the thing is possible, but I wish to make the impression that nothing can disturb the repose of the soul while this peace remains.

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)*.