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# "The Oberlin Evangelist"

Publication of Oberlin College

Sermons and Lectures given in 1846

by

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## GLOSSARY

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

# The Nature of Impenitence and the Measure of Its Guilt

Lecture I

January 21, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Matt. 11:20-24: "Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

In speaking from these words, it will be my object,

*I. To show what is included, or implied, in a state of impenitence.*

*II. To point out the guilt of this state of mind, and show that it is in proportion to the light under which it is indulged.*

**I. In a recent sermon I aimed to show what repentance is; I now wish to show what constitutes impenitence.**

- 1. It is not, as many seem to suppose, the mere negation of repentance. It is not a negative, blank state of mind--a mere nothing; but is absolute and positive. It involves moral action of the most positive kind.
- 2. It is that state of self-seeking into which men not influenced by the Spirit of God, always fall. In this state men make themselves and their own supposed good, the object of supreme regard. Their ultimate design in all they do, is their own gratification. I mean all this, and precisely this; in all they do for others, and in all they think themselves to do for God, their own self is the supreme and ultimate end. Everything terminates in self--or they feel no interest in it.

In other words, impenitence is a state of consecration to self. Beyond all controversy, impenitent men are entirely consecrated--only it is not to God, but to self. To their own

gratification, and their own supposed interests, they are supremely devoted.

It is a great mistake, to suppose that impenitent sinners are not devotional. They are most profoundly and perfectly so. You could not ask for more perfect specimens of devotion to a given object--but the object in their case is their own self. It cannot be said that they fall short of entire consecration. With them consecration is never unsteady, fitful, imperfect. Self being their idol, the worship they pay is always ardent, hearty, and consistent with their whole life. Furthermore, the impenitent man consecrates not only his own efforts and interests to himself, but the interests of every other being--of God as far as he can, and of his fellow beings also. All sentient beings in the universe within his reach are laid under contribution to minister to his supreme deity--self. He cares not for God, only as he can make God subservient to himself. He would pray to God, if he could thereby make God his own servant--not otherwise. If he does good to any of his fellow beings, you may be sure he has himself for the ultimate object--this is all; he cares for nothing in the universe, except so far as he can make it subservient to himself.

- 3. Impenitence is a state of self-exaltation. In this state the man sets himself above everything else--even above God, and every other being or interest in the universe. Every impenitent sinner makes his own interest and his own will supreme; neither God nor angels, earth nor friends, are placed above self; all are placed in his esteem below himself, and made to bow down in homage and subservience to his own shrine.
- 4. It is a spirit of self-will; a state in which a man will have everything in his own way. This man would be ready enough to be a Christian--in his own way; would go to heaven very cordially if he might go as Universalists expect to go, or as infidels dream of going; his own will being supreme, and his own way being granted him.
- 5. It is a spirit of self-indulgence. I am aware this sentiment has been expressed in other language; but you will allow me to turn this subject over and over, that you may see all sides of it, and all the terms under which it has been clothed. Now the impenitent man does not always indulge himself in the same way. He may not always choose the gross and scandalous forms of self-indulgence; he may not everywhere be a glutton, a drunkard, a debauchee; he may deem it more for his interest to taste, to consult his love of reputation, and may choose to indulge this. This may be his strongest passion, and if so, thorough self-indulgence will make him hold in check his grosser passions and appetites, especially if he resides in a truly moral community. But if a good name be his ruling motive, his decent moral conduct, having this for its end, is as real self-indulgence as you ever see in the veriest glutton or debauchee. No matter what the form of self-indulgence may be--its moral character turns upon the fact that it is self-indulgence, and not at all upon the greater or less decency it may have in the estimation of men.

This point ought to be thoroughly understood. Impenitence is self-indulgence in some form, and what the form shall be, will turn upon the relative strength of his several passions, and his estimate of the expediency under his circumstances of gratifying one rather than another. He may love money too well to be a drunkard, or his reputation too well to be licentious; but while in impenitence, whether he drink or abstain, it is to

indulge himself; whether he be a glutton or be temperate in food; whether he be avaricious or prodigal; moral, or immoral; self-indulgence is evermore the one ruling end of his life.

This is equally true of all impenitent men. All the forms of morality you see among them, have the same, and no other root. Whether he go on a pilgrimage, or immerse himself in a monastery, or subdue his flesh in his asceticism; each, or all, are only forms of self-indulgence, one or another being chosen, according to his taste or his faith in its efficacy to subserve his great end of life--selfish good. All is self-indulgence. That devotee who crawls on his knees a thousand miles, and dies, still crawling, does it all for the same end as he who gives himself up to gluttony, or to intoxication--the main difference being that the one expects his good to come now--the other is content to wait for it, say till after death. The woman who takes the veil and goes for life into the nunnery, may go for the very same supremely selfish end as she who betakes herself to the haunts of ill fame. With each her own gratification is the supreme end--if the mind be in a state of impenitence towards God.

- 6. Another phase of the impenitent spirit is its self-dependence. It never depends on God--always and only on self.

Again, it is a spirit of self-righteousness. It everywhere and always rejects Christ's righteousness, and goes about to establish its own.

It is a state of mind, finally, which cleaves to self, despite of all the claims of God, or of all the universe. Nothing is permitted to sever, or even weaken its supreme regard for its own self.

## **II. I am to show that the guilt of an impenitent state is always proportioned to the light sinned against.**

It is plain that this state of mind in which self is preferred to everything else, begins in the infant mind, where there is no light at all--when the idea of right and wrong is yet undeveloped. There the little infant chooses his own gratification, by the same law that all other animals choose theirs, and for ought we can see, as innocently, until its reason is in some degree developed, and duty to other beings and other interests is seen to impose a counter claim. We cannot tell how early the reason may begin to develop itself; it is not incumbent upon us to do this; but whenever it is, there moral agency commences; there impenitence begins in the selfish preference of its own little interests, to the greater interests of God, or of other beings. And as ray after ray of light breaks in upon that young mind, setting forth the claims of God right over against the demands of its own self-gratification, guilt is every moment increasing, if this light and the divine claims which it reveals are resisted. Nothing can be plainer than this.

The text obviously teaches this doctrine. It assumes its truth, and bases its augmented woe, upon the cities where Christ preached, on this very ground. So on another occasion Christ said, "If I had not come and spoken among them they had not had sin; but now have they no cloak for their sin."

Again, as light increases, the obstinacy of the sinner's mind increases, or he cannot remain in a state of impenitent resistance. He must gird himself up to resist, or he could not withstand the force of this light. How much I have seen of this in revivals of religion. Light pours in--the sense of obligation is quickened--conscience lifts her voice; but the sinner girds himself for desperate resistance, as he never did before. I have seen it often in this place. Young men here, pressed by truth and the Spirit of truth, to yield to God, band themselves together, as if they could not hold out if they stood alone. They hold each other up--taking the same course that devils themselves would take--they gird up their loins for more vigorous effort to resist the claims of God, and maintain their position of impenitence. Of course the guilt of sinners thus resisting, is augmented with fearful rapidity. The woes of Capernaum fall thick and fearfully upon their heads.

Again, as light increases, impenitence continuing, hardness of heart increases. This is only the same thing in other words. Greater and growing resistance of truth involves greater hardness of heart.

Yet again, as light increases, and the sinner girds himself to resist it, God has the greater reason to be incensed against him. How could he provoke God more and worse than he does! He sets at naught both the justice and the mercy of God, and seems determined to thwart every effort God can make to save him. Why should not a holy God give scope to law and justice?

As light increases, sinners see more and more of the folly and madness of their own impenitence. I once fell into conversation with a lawyer of eminence in the State of New York. He began to cavil resolutely against the claims of the gospel. I headed him in on every side, and showed him that all his cavils only rebounded upon his own head, and aggravated his own guilt. He saw it, and finally acknowledged it, saying, "Well, I know my system will not do to reason upon; I may as well stop as try. I know there is no foundation for my cavils." You do, then, replied I, understand that you have no foundation for your objections against God and His gospel? Yes, I do. Now if this man goes on still in sin, he is in the most guilty state conceivable.

Thus, as light increases, sinners see more and more of the infinite reasonableness of God's claims.

Often, for a time, sinners almost believe their own lies. Perhaps they really labor under great errors of opinion in many points, and these serve to weaken the pressure of God's claims upon their consciences. They see perhaps, a great many difficulties in the way which they know not how to surmount. I know but too well from my early experience, that sinners may involve themselves in error and darkness, from which they cannot readily extricate themselves. As the Bible says--"The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble."

But often, at last, they open their eyes and see the infinite reasonableness of truth. I never shall forget the hour when in my own case the truth broke upon my mind--when I saw that all my cavils were groundless--that all God's ways were right, and all mine wrong. I had been brought up in great darkness, yet in the midst of a Presbyterian congregation, often listening to Old School preaching. But the strain of it was--"You can and you can't," and it filled my mind with utter confusion, and put every great truth of the gospel out of joint, in my mind. It seems to me now, that in all those years of my youth, I never heard one gospel sermon, not one that I think presented the gospel in its clear and true light. It threw me headlong into all the absurdities of Old School theology, and there I stumbled along,

only getting deeper in the mire. I at first got a Bible and placed it among my law books, to study law out of it. This led me to read portions of the Old Testament, and from this for a time I derived no benefit. But at length I took up the claims of religion as I would any point of law, and while I sought to justify myself in sin, I found, to my surprise, that truth and reason were all against me. Conviction broke on my mind, that God is all right--that I am all wrong. And do you suppose that I was easy under this conviction? Infinitely far from it. My mind chafed like a chained bear; truth had harpooned me, and I could neither escape nor rest. I fretted, raved against the truth, abused professors of religion; but all this neither changed the truth, nor helped me. My mind rushed one way, and then another way; but in vain, for God, by His Spirit, had anchored His truth deep in my soul, and I seemed to have no power to dislodge it. My mind worked like a steam engine, and seemed laboring under a mighty pressure. So you may have seen the sinner agitated and struggling--God attempting to break him off from his sins, but his iron heart resisting, and holding out in stern rebellion. But guilt is all this while accumulating with fearful rapidity.

Once more; as light increases, impenitence becomes a hard and troubled course. Conscience is ill at ease; the sinner must needs brace himself up against the heaven-sent impulses to repentance; it costs him fresh and painful efforts to remain in impenitence. O what guilt this sinner must incur who will fight his way down to hell against such influences put forth by God to save his soul.

#### **REMARKS.**

1. Impenitence is the whole of sin. Nothing else in all the universe is sin but this. Outward actions being only the evidences, or manifestations of the inner moral state, we must turn our eye away from these, and look only at the heart. Then we see that nothing else is sin but impenitence towards God--that supreme regard for self which puts the mind in the attitude of rebellion against God, and against an appropriate regard for any other interests but those of its own self. Self-gratification becomes the one controlling law of action. No matter what form it may take on; its nature changes not. There is only this one thing sought as an ultimate end, by any sinner in earth or hell--self-gratification. The only difference among them all turns upon the different degrees of light sinned against, and this difference affects only the degree, not the kind, or moral quality of their conduct. So, the angel in heaven, and the saint on earth, so far as he is a saint, have each and all but one end in view--to please and glorify God; and here, too, the only difference turns on the different degrees of light which they may enjoy. The saints in earth or heaven, pursue a course right over against that of the sinner; but each class has but one heart--one supreme intention, for this is what is meant by heart. This is uniformly the Bible representation of saints and sinners.

2. There is no difference among sinners, only that the guilt of those who have had greater light, exceeds the guilt of those who have had less. It is vastly important that people would break through the shell and see the kernel of this truth. It ought to be seen by all, and may be. As I said before, no matter where the sinner is, whether in earth or hell; nor who he is, nor what his pursuits are; all is perfect sympathy among sinners of every name and grade and place--even between sinners in hell, and sinners on this earth--just as much as there is perfect sympathy between saints on earth and saints in heaven. Developments and degrees of guilt will vary according to light possessed and controlling circumstances; but no other difference will or can be found.

3. Outward acts are not sin, but are merely the evidences of the mind's state. There is not a particle of sin in your muscles. Even though they may be nerved up to stab your neighbor, yet those muscular movements are not your sins--these lie in an impenitent or selfish heart.

4. Outward acts and manifestations will of course be modified by circumstances. Suppose a man has for his supreme end his own gratification. Place him under one set of circumstances, and you will see one development of character; change his circumstances, and you will see another development of character. Take a man who in a loose community has been of loose morals himself, and transfer him to a religious and moral community, and you may anticipate a marked change, not in his character, but in its manifestation. If his love of reputation is strong, he will conform to his company enough to secure reputation as well as he conveniently can. He will be likely to become outwardly a religious man. He will probably become very moral, and perhaps a professed Christian. Why? Because his love of reputation is a controlling principle

The truth will justify a still stronger supposition. Let an impenitent man change his circumstances as we have supposed, and it will not merely affect his outward conduct, but will lead him to sympathize very strongly in his feelings with Christian people. This will be a natural result of his association with them. And yet the man may not be at all aware that it is his love of reputation that has brought him to this state of feeling, so changed from what he experienced when associated with wicked men. Hence it will be no strange thing if he comes to think himself a Christian. And indeed a great change has come over him, if you look only at his external conduct and his sympathy with his associates.

We may suppose that before a young man comes into this community, he was in the habit of frequenting balls, often drank freely, and nearly to intoxication and spent his money generously so as to be thought a hale fellow among his comrades; but he comes here--finds a different set of associates--breaks off his former habits and falls in with theirs--finds that his sympathies set almost as strongly with his new associates as they did with his old ones, and, amazed, he cries out--How changed I am! Surely this must be religion! It must be that I have become a Christian! I have no taste for strong drink; can do without my cigars; am just as happy without balls and routes; indeed I seem to take much the same pleasure in religious meetings now as I did in my social convivialities then; it must be that I am indeed converted! Now this man does not consider that all this change in him may result from the change in his circumstances, and that under the influence solely of his love of reputation and of the law of sympathy with associates he may experience all this change without a particle of religion. Indeed if he loves his own reputation and is a thoroughly selfish man, he will naturally modify his course to suite his changed circumstances.

Again, as selfish considerations alone produce this change, the improvement made in his deportment or in his sympathies may not make his guilt at all the less; nay, it may be really greater now than it was before. If his light is greater, of course his guilt will be.

Let us look at this supposed case again. That young man who came here used now and then to get drunk--to visit her "whose house is the way to hell"--to laugh and jeer at prayer and piety; but now mark the change;--he comes into a religious family and bows the knee with them in prayer; he goes regularly with them to social worship, nay perhaps he even prays sometimes in his closet; the profane oath, the derisive laugh at religion and the daring deeds of sin are abandoned; and with one voice the

people say--how much this man is improved! But mark ye; if his light has increased and he has not repented of his sins before God, his guilt is greater than ever before, instead of being less. He is just as selfish--just as really opposed to God as he ever was, and the fact that he manages it in a more decent way and has adopted a mode of sinning which conforms itself to his circumstances only shows that he uses some discretion in carrying out the ruling principle of his heart.

But we may take a case even stronger still. Let a man come into Oberlin who has been an atheist and a pirate--for most pirates are in principle atheists; take one who has been raised among bloody men in the Spanish West Indies, who boasted in New York city that he had murdered five hundred men--let this man come into Oberlin to reside among us. He has a friend here and after staying awhile with his friend, he takes it into his head that he will get an education. You may look into his trunk and you find it full of bowie knives and pistols; examine his overcoat, you will find his pockets freighted with death-weapons; he wears them for awhile, but soon is ashamed to do what nobody else here does and lays them carefully away where none will ever see them. By and by you see him in a prayer-meeting--the man who used to make the very air blue around him with horrid blasphemy, is in the place of prayer and on his knees, and possibly you may hear his voice in supplication; at all events, you see him civil, respectful towards religion--he gives up his atheism; but we may suppose continues still impenitent. Yet he professes to approve the plan of salvation and proclaims it a glorious plan. Now this man, so changed--so humanized, so much better as a citizen than before, may really be ten-fold more the child of hell now than ever before. Do you ask, how can this be? I answer, for the simple reason that his light is indefinitely greater than it was before, and yet he remains a selfish, impenitent man. His resistance to light and consequently his guilt against God are vastly enhanced by this change through which he has passed.

Until we get hold of the true idea of sin and holiness, we can never tell when men are growing better. We shall make the most egregious mistakes, and have no standard by which to correct them.

You might take this man, formerly so vile, and vicious; you might wash and white-wash his exterior ever so much; you might fit him for any lady's saloon, nay so far as the exterior is concerned, you might fit him to grace a mansion among angels, yet if he remains an impenitent sinner, he has only become the more wicked; that outside finish is only the garnishing of a sepulcher, which within is all pollution.

There are probably in this place, nay even under the sound of my voice, persons more guilty than any pirates in the universe--more monstrously wicked than the pirate Gibbs, who boasted that he had murdered so many men. The selfishness of Gibbs took one particular form; the selfishness of gospel-hardened sinners here, a different form; different, but not a whit less hostile to God, or less odious in His sight, or less really depraved and worthy of eternal condemnation. The blackest malignity as estimated by God belongs to that form of selfishness which has resisted and still resists most light.

There may be some young women here more abominably wicked than you can find in the most polluted harlot's house--even young women against whose virtue and external conduct no charge can lie, and who can scarce hear the word licentiousness without a blush. Now wherein lies the difference between this refined, impenitent young lady, and the most corrupt harlot? Only in this; that each seeks her own self-gratification, but in different ways, and the one persists in this self-seeking despite the

influence of more light and stronger dissuasives from heaven, earth, and hell, than are present to the mind of the other. She who has most of Capernaum's light to sin against must have most of Capernaum's woes to suffer, and for the best of reasons. The ultimate end of moral action--the only thing at which God looks, being the same in both cases, each has the same kind of moral character; and the difference in degree of guilt remains to be estimated by the amount of light enjoyed and resisted.

Again, as each sinner, remains impenitent, resists all the light he has, he is just as wicked, as under his circumstances, he can be. He persists in being supremely selfish despite of every reason known to him why he should repent; how then can he be any more wicked, until he has more light to resist? You will all see this point clearly if you once get thoroughly before your mind the two points I have been laboring to elucidate--namely:

(1.) That guilt is always and only in proportion to light resisted. And,

(2.) That while impenitence continues, all those modifications of the external conduct which are only choice among different forms of rebellion against God, have absolutely nothing to do in the estimation of a sinner's guilt. Let these points be well understood, and you will readily see that every sinner who resists all the light he has is just as wicked as, under his circumstances, he can be.

Again, just in proportion as light increases, sinners are in danger of committing the unpardonable sin. It is plain from what the Bible says of this sin that only those commit it who have great light and who resist and abuse that light. Those Pharisees who blasphemed the Holy Ghost, knew full well that Christ's miracles were wrought by the finger of God, and yet they impiously ascribed them to the devil. They had great light, and they greatly abused it.

Now we may ultimately see that more persons commit the unpardonable sin in Oberlin than anywhere else in all the land, for the reason that great light is enjoyed here, and by some is greatly and impiously resisted.

This is the climax of all sin. To know enough of God to make you an angel and then resist it madly and malignantly enough to make you a devil--what can be a greater sin? What can be greater folly and shame and madness?

Yet we are not wont to estimate guilt according to these plain principles of the Bible and of reason. We see a pirate--we are shocked; we cry out--"He is a pirate! Horrible! He has murdered a hundred men! Oh, such a wretch! Surely he is not fit to live." Indeed he is a wretch, a horrible and wicked wretch; but there perhaps, sits another impenitent sinner who could not see blood spilt without having his own blood creep in his veins, who yet is the guiltier sinner of the two. This sinner, here in Oberlin, has been brought up religiously, has heard preaching enough to have converted a thousand souls, but has heard it only to harden his own heart--this sinner may be a hundred fold more guilty than any pirate, and much more likely to have committed the unpardonable sin. Let the gospel-hardened soul take warning!

Again, in the light of this subject we see how to account for the events which not unfrequently occur

in the world's history. The most notorious sinners, it sometimes happens, are soon converted when they come under instruction, while in very religious places, it is almost impossible to promote a revival of religion and secure the conversion of sinner. You may go into the Sodoms of the land--the no-God settlements, as they are or may be called, and there you may find the word of God will fall with power on many hearts. I once went into a place called Sodom--notorious for its daring wickedness, where there was but one professor of religion and he bore the name of Lot. This man had invited me there to preach. I went--I came to the place of meeting and the people were all there; yet I felt strangely--could not fix my mind on any text to preach from--seemed perfectly shut up--but trusting in God I began the exercises: felt enlarged in prayer, and finally seized upon the text--"Up, get ye out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city." It was a curious looking congregation. For a while I thought they would very likely pitch at me and drag me out of the house--they seemed ready to devour me in some way--but presently I saw what was moving their minds--the truth of God fell like quick, successive peals of thunder on their hearts; one after another fell from their seats; weeping, wailing, cries, screams, and prayers for mercy filled the whole house. I had to stop preaching, for I could not go on at all; and why? What was the matter? Only this: there was a company of ignorant persons who had indeed been regarded as the most wicked of sinners, but they had not hardened their hearts under the preaching of the gospel, and now when they came to hear a gospel sermon, its truth fell on their hearts like life from the dead.

So when you see a harlot converted, or a profane swearer or a notorious Sabbath-breaker, how do you account for the fact? You can ascribe it to the circumstance that they have not resisted so much light as thousands who have lived their life long under the gospel and consequently have not committed the unpardonable sin.

But look into that deacon's family, and that minister's family: there is a son or a daughter there who has lived amid the focal blaze of God's truth for years; is he converted? No--he is gospel hardened.

Finally, gospel hardened sinners and backsliders are the very worst people this side of hell. No matter how morally or genteelly their outside deportment may be modified, they have resisted all the light God could give them and have fearfully filled up the measure of their guilt, That pious father may have great hopes of his morally behaved son--may think perhaps to train him for the ministry--Oh! does he not see that his hardened son is more fit for a minister of hell than of Christ and of heaven? That son may know enough of the gospel, it may be, to preach it; but if, with all this knowledge, he only hates that gospel: if he has trained himself to resist all this truth and all these motives which he has heard until they are to him an old story: then indeed is he far more fit to be an apostle of Satan than of Jesus Christ. The very worst character such a man can bear is that of an impenitent sinner. He cannot possibly do a worse thing than to persist in his impenitence under all the light which God pours upon his path from heaven.

## **The Rule by Which the Guilt of Sin is Estimated**

Lecture II  
February 4, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--Acts 17:30-31: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

I recently preached a sermon on impenitence in which I dwelt at length on the guilt which attaches to sin committed against great light. I purpose now to discuss this point still farther.

The text declares that God will judge the world in righteousness. I shall not at this time dwell on the fact that God will judge the world, nor upon the fact that this judgment will be in righteousness; but shall endeavor to ascertain what is the rule by which our guilt is to be measured; or in other words what is implied in judging the world in righteousness. What is the righteous rule by which guilt is measured, and consequently the just punishment of the sinner allotted?

In pursuing this subject, I shall deem it important:

*I. To state briefly what the conditions of moral obligation are; and*

*II. Come directly to the main point, the rule by which guilt is measured.*

**I. State briefly what the conditions of moral obligation are.**

- 1. Moral obligation has respect to the ultimate intention of the mind. The end had in view, and not the mere external act must evermore be that to which law pertains and of which guilt is predicated. Surely guilt cannot be predicated on the outward act merely, apart from intention: for if the outward act be not according to the intention as in the case of accidents, we never think of imputing guilt; and if it be according to the intention, we always, when we act rationally, ascribe the guilt to the intention and not to the mere hand or tongue, which became the mind's organ in its wickedness.

This is a principle, which everybody admits when they understand it. The thing itself lies among the intuitive affirmations of every child's mind. No sooner has a child the first idea of right and wrong, but he will excuse himself from blame by saying that he did not mean to do it, and he knows full well, that if this excuse be true, it is valid and good as an excuse; and moreover he knows that you and everybody else both know this and must admit it. This sentiment thus pervades the minds of all men and none can intelligently deny it.

- 2. Having premised so much, I am prepared to remark that the first condition of moral

obligation is the possession of the requisite powers of moral agency. There must be intelligence enough to understand in some measure the value of the end to be chosen or not chosen, else there can be no responsible choice. There must be some degree of sensibility to good sought, or evil shunned; else there never would be any action put forth, or effort made; and there must also be the power of choice between possible courses to be chosen. These are all most manifestly requisites for moral choice, or in other words for responsible moral action and obligation.

- 3. It is essential to moral obligation that the mind should know in some measure, what it ought to intend.

It must have some apprehension of the value of the end to be chosen, else there can be no responsible choice of that end, or responsible neglect to choose it. Everybody must see this, for if the individual when asked, why he did not choose a given end, could answer truly, "I did not know that the end was valuable and worthy of choice," all men would deem this a valid acquittal from moral delinquency.

- 4. Supposing the individual to know what he ought to choose; then his obligation to choose it does not grow out of the fact of God's requiring it, but lies in the value of the end to be chosen. I have said that he must perceive the end to be chosen, and in some measure understand its value. This is plain. And this apprehension of its value is that which binds him to choose it. In other words, the moral law which enjoins love, or good willing must be subjectively present to his mind. His mind must have a perception of good which he can will to others, in connection with which a sense of obligation to will it springs up, and this constitutes moral obligation.

These are substantially the conditions of moral obligation; the requisite mental powers for moral action; and a knowledge of the intrinsic value of the good of being.

Before leaving this topic, let me remark that very probably, no two creatures in the moral universe may have precisely the same degree of intelligence respecting the value of the end they ought to choose; yet shall moral obligation rest upon all these diverse degrees of knowledge, proportioned evermore in degree to the measure of this knowledge which any mind possesses. God alone has infinite and changeless knowledge on this point.

## **II. I come now to speak of the rule by which the guilt of refusing to will or intend according to the law of God must be measured.**

- 1. Negatively, guilt is not to be measured by the fact that God who commands is an infinite being. The measure of guilt has sometimes been made to turn on this fact, and has been accounted infinite because God whose commands it violates is infinite. But this doctrine is inadmissible. It lies fatally open to this objection, that by it all sin is made to be equally guilty, because all sin is equally committed against an infinite being. But both the Bible and every man's intuitive reason proclaim that all sins are not equally guilty. Hence the measure or rule of their guilt cannot be in the fact of their commission against an infinite being.
- 2. Guilt cannot be measured by the fact that God's authority against which sin is committed is infinite. Authority is the right to command. No one denies that this in God is infinite. But this

fact cannot constitute the measure of guilt, for precisely the reason just given--namely, that then all sin becomes equally guilty, being all committed against infinite authority; which conclusion is false, and therefore the premises are also.

- 3. The degree of guilt cannot be estimated by the fact that all sin is committed against an infinitely holy and good being; for reasons of the same kind as just given.
- 4. Nor from the value of the law of which sin is a transgression; for though all admit that the law is infinitely good and valuable, yet since it is always equally so, all sin by this rule must be equally guilty--a conclusion which being false, vitiates and sets aside our premises.
- 5. The rule cannot lie in the value of that which the law requires us to will, intend or choose, considered apart from the mind's perception of the value; for the intrinsic value of this end is always the same, so that this rule too as the preceding would bring us to the conclusion that all sins are equally guilty.
- 6. Guilt is not to be measured by the tendency of sin. All sin tends to one result--unmingled evil. No created being can tell what sins have the most direct and powerful tendency to produce evil; since all sin tends to produce evil and only evil continually. Every modification of sin may for ought we know tend with equal directness to the same result--evil, and nothing but evil.
- 7. Guilt cannot be measured by the design or ultimate intention of the sinner. It does indeed lie in his design and in nothing else; yet you cannot determine the amount of it by merely knowing his design; for this design is always substantially the same thing--it is always self-gratification in some form, and nothing else. I endeavored to show this in my last sermon on impenitence, and we need to get this idea thoroughly into our minds. The general design of the sinner being always self-gratification, and it making very little if any difference in his guilt what form of self-gratification he chooses, it follows that the measure of guilt cannot be sought here, and must therefore be sought elsewhere.
- 8. But it is time I should state, positively, that guilt is always to be estimated by the degree of light under which the sinful intention is formed, or in other words, it is to be measured by the mind's knowledge or perception of the value of that end which the law requires to be chosen. This end is the highest well being of God and of the universe. This is of infinite value; and in some sense every moral agent must know it to be of infinite value, and yet individuals may differ indefinitely in respect to the degree of clearness with which this great end is apprehended by the mind. Choosing this end--the highest well-being of God and of the universe always implies the rejection of self-interest as an end; and on the other hand, the choice of self-interest or self-gratification as an end always and necessarily implies the rejection of the highest well-being of God and of the universe as an end. The choice of either implies the rejection of its opposite.

Now the sinfulness of a selfish choice consists not merely in its choice of good to self, but in its implying a rejection of the highest well-being of God and of the universe as a supreme and ultimate end. If selfishness did not imply the apprehension and rejection of other and higher interests as an end, it would not imply any guilt at all. The value of the

interests rejected is that in which the guilt consists. In other words the guilt consists in rejecting the infinitely valuable well-being of God and of the universe for the sake of selfish gratification.

Now it is plain that the amount of guilt is as the mind's apprehension of the value of the interests rejected. In some sense as I have said, every moral agent has and must of necessity have the idea that the interests of God and of the universe are of infinite value. He has this idea developed so clearly that every sin he commits deserves endless punishment, and yet the degree of his guilt may be greatly enhanced by additional light, so that he may deserve punishment not only endless in duration but indefinitely great in degree. Nor is there any contradiction in this. If the sinner cannot affirm that there is any limit to the value of the interests he refuses to will and to pursue, he cannot of course affirm that there is any limit to his guilt and desert of punishment. This is true and must be true of every sin and of every sinner; and yet as light increases and the mind gains a clearer apprehension of the infinite value of the highest well-being of God and of the universe, just in that proportion does the guilt of sin increase. Hence the measure of knowledge possessed of duty and its motives, is always and unalterably the rule by which guilt is to be measured.

The proof of this is two-fold.

- (1.) The scriptures assume and affirm it.

The text affords a plain instance. The apostle alludes to those past ages when the heathen nations had no written revelation of God, and remarks that "those times of ignorance God winked at." This does not mean that God connived at their sin because of their darkness, but does mean that He passed over it with comparatively slight notice, regarding it as sin of far less aggravation than those which men would now commit if they turned away when God commanded them all to repent. True sin is never absolutely a light thing; but comparatively, some sins incur small guilt when compared with the great guilt of other sins. This is implied in our text.

I next cite James 4:17. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." This plainly implies that knowledge is indispensable to moral obligation; and even more than this is implied; namely, that guilt of any sinner is always equal to the amount of his knowledge on the subject. It always corresponds to the mind's perception of the value of the end which should have been chosen, but is rejected. If a man knows he ought in any given case to do good, and yet does not do it, to him this is sin--the sin plainly lying in the fact of not doing good when he knew he could do it, and being measured as to its guilt by the degree of that knowledge.

John 9:41. "Jesus said unto them, if ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth." Here Christ asserts that men without knowledge would be without sin; and that men who have

knowledge, and sin notwithstanding, are held guilty. This plainly affirms that the presence of light or knowledge is requisite to the existence of sin, and obviously implies that the amount of knowledge possessed is the measure of the guilt of sin.

It is remarkable that the Bible everywhere assumes first truths. It does not stop to prove them, or even assert them--it always assumes their truth, and seems to assume that every one knows and will admit them. As I have been recently writing on moral government and studying the Bible as to its teachings on this class of subjects, I have been often struck with this remarkable fact.

John 15:22, 24. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sins. He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father." Christ holds the same doctrine here as in the last passage cited, light essential to constitute sin, and the degree of light, constituting the measure of its aggravation. Let it be observed, however, that Christ probably did not mean to affirm in the absolute sense that if He had not come, the Jews would have had no sin; for they would have had some light if He had not come. He speaks as I suppose comparatively. Their sin if He had not come would have been so much less as to justify His strong language.

Luke 12: 47-48. "And that servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

Here we have the doctrine laid down and the truth assumed that men shall be punished according to knowledge. To whom much light is given, of him shall much obedience be required. This is precisely the principle that God requires of men according to the light they have.

1 Tim. 1:13. "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Paul had done things intrinsically as bad as well they could be; yet his guilt was far less because he did them under the darkness of unbelief; hence he obtained mercy, when otherwise, he might not. The plain assumption is that his ignorance abated from the malignity of his sin, and favored his obtaining mercy.

In another passage, (Acts 26:9) Paul says of himself--"I verily thought with

myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." This had everything to do with the degree of his guilt in rejecting the Messiah, and also with his obtaining pardon.

Luke 23:34. "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." This passage presents to us the suffering Jesus, surrounded with Roman soldiers and malicious scribes and priests, yet pouring out His prayer for them, and making the only plea in their behalf which could be made--"for they know not what they do." This does not imply that they had no guilt, for if that were true they would not have needed forgiveness; but it did imply that their guilt was greatly palliated by their ignorance. If they had known Him to be Messiah, their guilt might have been unpardonable.

Matt. 11:20-24. "Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee." Buy why does Christ thus upbraid these cities? Why denounce so fearful a woe on Chorazin and Capernaum? Because most of His mighty works had been wrought there. His oft-repeated miracles which proved Him the Messiah had been wrought before their eyes. Among them He had taught daily, and in their synagogues every Sabbath day. They had great light--hence their great--their unsurpassed guilt. Not even the men of Sodom had guilt to compare with theirs. The city most exalted, even as it were to heaven, must be brought down to the deepest hell. Guilt and punishment, evermore, according to light enjoyed but resisted.

Luke 11:47-51. "Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchers of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchers. Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation. From the blood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you it shall be required of this generation." Now here, I ask, on what principle was it that all the blood of martyred prophets ever since the world began was required of that generation? Because they deserved it; for God does no such thing as injustice. It never was known that He punished any

people or any individual beyond their desert.

But why and how did they deserve this fearful and augmented visitation of the wrath of God for past centuries of persecution?

The answer is two-fold: they sinned against accumulated light: and they virtually endorsed all the persecuting deeds of their fathers, and concurred most heartily in their guilt. They had all the oracles of God. The whole history of the nation lay in their hands. They knew the blameless and holy character of those prophets who had been martyred; they could read the guilt of their persecutors and murderers. Yet under all this light, themselves go straight on and perpetrate deeds of the same sort, but of far deeper malignity.

Again, in doing this they virtually endorse all that their fathers did. Their conduct towards the Man of Nazareth, put into words would read thus--"The holy men whom God sent to teach and rebuke our fathers, they maliciously traduced and put to death; they did right, and we will do the same thing towards Christ." Now it was not possible for them to give a more decided sanction to the bloody deeds of their fathers. They underwrote for every crime--assume upon their own consciences all the guilt of their fathers. In intention, they do those deeds over again. They say, "if we had lived then we should have done and sanctioned all they did."

On the same principle the accumulated guilt of all the blood and miseries of Slavery since the world began rests on this nation now. The guilt involved in every pang, every tear, every blood-drop forced out by the knotted scourge--all lies at the door of this generation. Why? Because the history of all the past is before the pro-slavery men of this generation, and they endorse the whole by persisting in the practice of the same system and of the same wrongs. No generation before us ever had the light on the evils and the wrongs of Slavery that we have; hence the guilt exceeds that of any former generation of slave-holders; and, moreover, knowing all the cruel wrongs and miseries of the system from the history of the past, every persisting slave-holder endorses all the crimes and assumes all the guilt involved in the system and evolved out of it since the world began.

Romans 7:13. "Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, worketh death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." The last clause of this verse brings out clearly the principle that under the light which the commandment, that is, the law, affords, sin becomes exceeding guilty. This is the very principle, which, we have seen, is so clearly taught and implied in numerous passages of Scripture.

The diligent reader of the Bible knows that these are only a part of the texts

which teach the same doctrine: we need not adduce any more.

- o (2.) I remark that this is the rule and the only just rule by which the guilt of sin can be measured. If I had time to turn the subject over and over--time to take up every other conceivable supposition, I could show that none of them can possibly be true. No supposition can abide a close examination except this, that the rule or measure of guilt is the mind's knowledge pertaining to the value of the end to be chosen.

There can be no other criterion by which guilt can be measured. It is the value of the end chosen which constitutes sin guilty, and the mind's estimate of that value measures its own guilt. This is true according to the Bible as we have seen; and every man needs only consult his own consciousness faithfully and he will see that it is equally affirmed by the mind's own intuition to be right.

A few inferences may be drawn from our doctrine.

- 1. Guilt is not to be measured by the nature of the intention; for sinful intention is always a unit--always one and the same thing--being nothing more nor less than self-gratification.
- 2. Nor can it be measured by the particular type of self-gratification which the mind may prefer. No matter which of his numerous appetites or propensities the man may choose to indulge--whether for food, for strong drink--for power, pleasure, or gain--it is the same thing in the end--self-gratification, and nothing else. For the sake of this he sacrifices every other conflicting interest, and herein lies his guilt. Yet since he tramples on the greater good of others with equal recklessness, whatever type of self-gratification he prefers, it is plain that we cannot find in this type any true measure of his guilt.
- 3. Nor again is the guilt to be decided by the amount of evil which the sin may bring into the universe. An agent not enlightened may introduce great evil and yet no guilt attach to this agent. This is true of evil often done by brute animals. It is true of the mischiefs effected by alcohol. In fact it matters not how much or how little evil may result from the misdeeds of a moral agent, you cannot determine the amount of his guilt from this circumstance. God may overrule the greatest sin so that but little evil shall result from it, or He may leave its tendencies uncounteracted so that great evils shall result from the least sin. Who can tell how much or how little overruling agency may interpose between any sin great or small and its legitimate results?

Satan sinned in betraying Judas, and Judas sinned in betraying Christ. Yet God so overruled these sins that most blessed results to the universe followed from Christ's betrayal and consequent death. Shall the sins of Satan and Judas be estimated by the evils actually resulting from them? If it should appear that the good

immensely overbalanced the evil, does their sin thereby become holiness--meritorious holiness? Is their guilt at all the less for God's wisdom and love in overruling it for good?

It is not therefore the amount of resulting good or evil which determines the amount of guilt, but is the degree of light enjoyed, under which the sin is committed.

- 4. Nor again can guilt be measured by the common opinions of men. Men associated in society are wont to form among themselves a sort of public sentiment which becomes a standard for estimating guilt; yet how often is it erroneous? Christ warns us against adopting this standard, and also against ever judging according to the outward appearance. Who does not know that the common opinions of men are exceedingly incorrect? It is indeed wonderful to see how far they diverge in all directions from the Bible standard.
- 5. The amount of guilt can be determined as I have said only by the degree in which those ideas are developed which throw light upon obligation. Just here sin lies, in resisting the light and acting in opposition to it, and therefore the degree of light should naturally measure the amount of guilt incurred.

#### **REMARKS.**

1. We see from this subject the principle on which many passages of scripture are to be explained. It might seem strange that Christ should charge the blood of all the martyred prophets of past ages on that generation. But the subject before us reveals the principle upon which this is done and ought to be done.

Whatever of apparent mystery may attach to the fact declared in our text--"The times of this ignorance God winked at"--finds in our subject an adequate explanation. Does it seem strange that for ages God should pass over almost without apparent notice the monstrous and reeking abominations of the Heathen world? The reason is found in their ignorance. Therefore God winks at those odious and cruel idolatries. For all, taken together, are a trifle compared with the guilt of a single generation of enlightened men.

2. One sinner may be in such circumstances as to have more light and knowledge than the whole Heathen world. Alas! how little the Heathen know! How little compared with what is known by sinners in this land, even by very young sinners!

Let me call up and question some impenitent sinner of Oberlin. It matters but little who--let it be any Sabbath School child.

What do you know about God?

I know that He is infinitely great and good. But the Heathen thinks some of his gods are both mean and mischievous--wicked as can be and the very patrons of wickedness among men.

What do you know about salvation? I know that God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son to die that whosoever would believe on Him might live forever. O, the Heathen never heard of that. They would faint away methinks in amazement if they should hear and really believe the startling, glorious fact. And that Sabbath School child knows that God gives His Spirit to convince of sin. He has perhaps often been sensible of the presence and power of the Spirit. But the Heathen know nothing of this.

You too know that you are immortal--that beyond death there is still a conscious unchanging state of existence, blissful or wretched according to the deeds done here. But the Heathen have no just ideas on this subject. It is to them as if all were a blank.

The amount of it then is that you know everything--the Heathen almost nothing. You know all you need to know to be saved, to be useful--to honor God and serve your generation according to His will. The Heathen sit in deep darkness, wedded to their abominations, groping, yet finding nothing.

As your light therefore, so is your guilt immeasurably greater than theirs. Be it so that their idolatries are monstrous--your guilt in your impenitence under the light you have is vastly more so. See that Heathen mother dragging her shrieking child and tumbling it into the Ganges? See her rush with another to throw him into the burning arms of Moloch. Mark; see that pile of wood flashing, lifting up its lurid flames toward heaven. Those men are dragging a dead husband--they heave his senseless corpse on to that burning pile. There comes the widow--her hair disheveled and flying--gaily festooned for such a sacrifice; she dances on; she rends the air with her howls and her wailings; she shrinks and yet she does not shrink--she leaps on the pile, and the din of music with the yell of spectators buries her shrieks of agony; she is gone! O, my blood curdles and runs cold in my veins; my hair stands on end; I am horrified with such scenes--but what shall we say of their guilt? Ah yes--what do they know of God--of worship--of the claims of God upon their heart and life? Ah, you may well spare your censure of the Heathen for their fearful orgies of cruelty and lust, and give it where light has been enjoyed and resisted.

3. You see then that often a sinner in some of our congregations may know more than all the Heathen world know. If this be true, what follows from it as to the amount of his comparative guilt? This, inevitably, that such a sinner deserves a direr and deeper damnation than all the Heathen world! This conclusion may seem startling; but how can we escape from it? We cannot escape. It is as plain as any mathematical demonstration. This is the principle asserted by Christ when He said--"That servant which knew his Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes; shall be beaten with few stripes." How solemn and how pungent the application of this doctrine would be in this congregation! I could call out many a sinner in this place and show him that beyond question his guilt is greater than that of all the Heathen world. Yet how few ever estimated their own guilt thus.

Not long since an ungodly young man, trained in this country, wrote back from the Sandwich Islands a glowing and perhaps a just description of their horrible abominations, moralizing on their monstrous enormities and thanking God that he had been born and taught in a Christian land. Indeed! He might well have spared this censure of the dark-minded Heathen! His own guilt in remaining an impenitent

sinner under all the light of Christian America was greater than the whole aggregate guilt of all those Islands.

So we may all well spare our expressions of abhorrence at the guilty abominations of idolatry. You are often perhaps saying in your heart--Why does God endure these horrid abominations another day? See that rolling car of Juggernaut. Its wheels move axle deep in the gushing blood and crushed bones of its deluded worshipers! And yet God looks on and no red bolt leaps from His right hand to smite such wickedness. They are indeed guilty; but O how small their guilt compared with the guilt of those who know their duty perfectly, yet never do it! God sees their horrible abominations, yet does He wink at them because they are done in so much ignorance.

But see that impenitent sinner. Convicted of his sin under the clear gospel light that shines all around him, he is driven to pray. He knows he ought to repent, and almost thinks he wants to, and will try. Yet still he clings to his sins, and will not give up his heart to God. Still he holds his heart in a state of impenitence. Now mark here; his sin in thus withholding his heart from God under so much light, involves greater guilt than all the abominations of the heathen world. Put together the guilt of all those widows who immolate themselves on the funeral pile--of those who hurl their children into the Ganges, or into the burning arms of Moloch--all does not begin to approach the guilt of that convicted sinner's prayer who comes before God under the pressure of his conscience, and prays a heartless prayer, determined all the while to withhold his heart from God. O, why does this sinner thus tempt God, and thus abuse His love, and thus trample on His known authority? O, that moment of impenitence, while his prayers are forced by conscience from his burning lips, and yet he will not yield the controversy with his Maker--that moment involves direr guilt than rests on all the Heathen world together! He knows more than they all, yet sins despite of all his knowledge. The many stripes belong to him--the few to them.

4. This leads me to remark again, that the Christian world may very well spare their revilings and condemnations of the Heathen. Of all the portions of earth's population, Christendom is infinitely the most guilty--Christendom, where the gospel peals from ten thousand pulpits--where its praises are sung by a thousand choirs, but where many thousand hearts that know God and duty, refuse either to reverence the one or perform the other! All the abominations of the Heathen world are a mere trifle compared with the guilt of Christendom. We may look down upon the filth and meanness and degradation of a Heathen people, and feel a most polite disgust at the spectacle--and far be it from me, to excuse these degrading, filthy or cruel practices; but how small their light and consequently their guilt compared with our own! We therefore ask the Christian world to turn away from the spectacle of Heathen degradation, and look nearer home, upon the spectacle of Christian guilt! Let us look upon ourselves.

5. Again, let us fear not to say what you must all see to be true, that the nominal church is the most guilty part of Christendom. It cannot for a moment be questioned, that the church has more light than any other portion; therefore has she more guilt. Of course I speak of the nominal church--not the real church whom He has pardoned and cleansed from her sins. But in the nominal church, think of the sins that live and riot in their corruption. See that backslider. He has tasted the waters of life. He has been greatly enlightened. Perhaps he has really known the Lord by true faith--and then see, he turns away to beg the husks of earthly pleasure! He turns his back on the bleeding Lamb! Now, put together

all the guilt of every Heathen soul that has gone to hell--of every soul that has gone from a state of utter moral darkness, and your guilt, backsliding Christian, is greater than all theirs!

Do you, therefore say--may God then, have mercy on my soul? So say we all; but we must add, if it be possible; for who can say that such guilt as yours can be forgiven! Can Christ pray for you as he prayed for His murderers--"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?" Can He plead in your behalf, that you know not what you are doing? Awful! Awful!! Where is the sounding line that shall measure the ocean-depth of your guilt!

6. Again, if our children remain in sin, we may cease to congratulate ourselves that they were not born in Heathenism or slavery! How often have I done this! How often, as I have looked upon my sons and daughters, have I thanked God that they were not born to be thrown into the burning arms of a Moloch, or to be crushed under the wheels of Juggernaut! But if they will live in sin, we must suspend our self-congratulations for their having Christian light and privileges. If they will not repent, it were infinitely better for them to have been born in the thickest Pagan darkness--better to have been thrown in their tender years into the Ganges, or into the fires which idolatry kindles--better be anything else, or suffer anything earthly, than have the gospel's light only to shut it out and go to hell despite of its admonitions.

Let us not, then be hasty in congratulating ourselves, as if this great light enjoyed by us and by our children, were of course a certain good to them; but this we may do--we may rejoice that God will honor Himself--His mercy if He can, and His justice if He must. God will be honored, and we may glory in this. But oh, the sinner, the sinner! Who can measure the depth of his guilt, or the terror of his final doom! It will be more tolerable for all the heathen world together than for you.

7. It is time that we all understood this subject fully, and appreciated all its bearings. It is no doubt true, that however moral our children may be, they are more guilty than any other sinners under heaven, if they live in sin, and will not yield to the light under which they live. We may be perhaps congratulating ourselves on their fair morality; but if we saw their case in all its real bearings, our souls would groan with agony--our bowels would be all liquid with anguish--our very hearts within us would heave as if volcanic fires were kindled there--so deep a sense should we have of their fearful guilt and of the awful doom they incur in denying the Lord that bought them, and setting at naught a known salvation. O, if we ever pray, we should pour out our prayers for our offspring as if nothing could ever satisfy us or stay our importunity, but the blessings of a full salvation realized in their souls.

Let the mind contemplate the guilt of these children. I could not find a Sabbath school child, perhaps not one in all Christendom who could not tell me more of God's salvation than all the Heathen world know. That dear little boy who comes from his Sabbath school knows all about the gospel. He is almost ready to be converted, but not quite ready; yet that little boy, if he knows his duty, and yet will not do it, is covered with more guilt than all the Heathen world together. Yes, that boy, who goes alone and prays, yet holds back his heart from God, and then his mother comes and prays over him, and pours her tears on his head, and his little heart almost melts, and he seems on the very point of giving up his whole heart to the Savior; yet if he will not do it, he commits more sin in that refusal than all the sin of all the Heathen world--his guilt is more than the guilt of all the murders, all the

drownings of children and burnings of widows, and deeds of cruelty and violence in all the heathen world. All this combination of guilt shall not be equal to the guilt of the lad who knows his duty, but will not yield his heart to its righteous claims.

8. "The Heathen," says an apostle, "sin without law, and shall therefore perish without law." In their final doom they will be cast away from God; this will be perhaps about all. The bitter reflection, "I had the light of the gospel and would not yield to it--I knew all my duty, yet did it not"--this cannot be a part of their eternal doom. This is reserved for those who gather themselves into our sanctuaries and around our family altars, yet will not serve their own Infinite Father.

9. One more remark. Suppose I should call out a sinner by name--one of the sinners of this congregation, a son of pious parents, and should call up the father also. I might say, Is this your son? Yes. What testimony can you bear about this son of yours? I have endeavored to teach him all the ways of the Lord. Son, what can you say? I know my duty. I have heard it a thousand times. I know I ought to repent, but I never would.

O, if we understood this matter in all its bearings, it would fill every bosom with consternation and grief. How would our bowels burn and heave as a volcano. There would be one universal outcry of anguish and terror at the awful guilt and fearful doom of such a sinner!

Young man, are you going away this day in your sins? Then, what angel can compute your guilt? O, how long has Jesus held out His hands, yes, His bleeding hands, and besought you to look and live! A thousand times, and in countless varied ways has He called, but you have refused; stretched out His hands, and you have not regarded. O, why will you not repent? Why not say at once; It is enough that I have sinned so long. I cannot live so any longer! O, sinner, why will you live so? Would you go down to hell--ah, to the deepest hell--where, if we would find you, we must work our way down a thousand years through ranks of lost spirits less guilty than you, ere we could reach the fearful depth to which you have sunk! O, sinner, what a hell is that which can adequately punish such guilt as thine!

## **On Divine Manifestations**

Lecture III

March 18, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--John 14:15-17; 21-23: "If ye love me, keep my commandments; And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, the he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for

he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, (not Iscariot,) Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

Text.--2 Cor. 6:17, 18, and 7:1: "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 spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

In remarking upon these verses it is not my design to dwell upon all the thoughts they present or might suggest. I shall aim to illustrate,

*I. The conditions of acceptance with God as here developed.*

*II. The conditions of hearty obedience to God.*

*III. The conditions of Divine manifestations.*

*IV. What is implied in these manifestations.*

## **I. The conditions of acceptance with God.**

This topic has been recently dwelt upon at considerable length in your hearing, and it has been shown most conclusively that the once unalterable condition of acceptance with God is entire obedience to his law. You must fully set your heart to obey God in all things--at all times--under all circumstances--you must in fact obey the whole law of God in spirit; that is--it must be the supreme, fixed, strong purpose of your soul to do all the will of God.

This is undoubtedly assumed in our texts, especially in the one from 2 Corinthians. In the context the Apostle urges the church at Corinth not to connect themselves unequally with unbelievers, urging as a reason that sin can have no fellowship with holiness; the temple of God no agreement with idols; "for ye," said he, "are the temple of the living God, for God has promised to dwell and walk in you;" and the condition of this promise is that you come out from among them and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing; then God will receive you, and will be a father unto you and ye his sons and daughters. Dropping the borrowed language of the Old Testament, the Apostle goes on to give in his own language what he understands to be the import of these promises and of their conditions. "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." These therefore are the conditions of God's dwelling in us--cleansing ourselves from all filthiness--perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Becoming pure in heart and life--renouncing all filthiness of either the flesh or the spirit;--this and nothing less than this can be the condition of acceptance with God.

This same truth is also plainly implied and taught in the passage from John's gospel. "If ye love me, keep my commandments. Then will I pray the Father and he will give you the Comforter &c." So again, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him." Obedience and love, evermore inseparable, are here made the condition of the divine favor.

So every where throughout the Bible we are taught that God accepts only those who fully and most heartily obey him.

Indeed it cannot possibly be otherwise. The nature of God forbids that it should be. What! God accept a rebellious spirit and own him as his child! God smile on a heart still sinning! This were to subvert his throne, and abolish all moral distinctions in his kingdom! This were to treat sin and holiness alike, and show that he regards neither! This is just as impossible as for God to cease to be holy!

It must be therefore that God makes sincere and full-hearted obedience the one unalterable condition of his favor. It would be infinitely dishonorable to him to accept anything less.

The same truth is implied in making repentance a condition of being accepted of God. For repentance is nothing else than a hearty turning away from all sin to the full-hearted love and service of God.

## **II. We must next inquire for the conditions of rendering this obedience.**

Full obedience, we have seen, is the condition of God's favor; but we have still to look for the conditions of this obedience itself. How shall we obey? Under what influence and motives and efforts may we hope to yield this obedience?

- 1. Faith. It has often struck my mind forcibly in reading the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans that the Apostle is here illustrating the impossibility of obeying the law of God without faith in Christ; not the impossibility of obeying it at all; but of obeying it under legal motives. Hence he shows that the law when it comes in contact with a depraved heart, the cross not being present, only provokes resistance and stirs up the depths of the heart's depravity. And the utmost that can be effected is to elicit ineffectual struggles between the reason and conscience on the one hand, and imperious lusts on the other. But faith coming in gives the victory.

Such is manifestly the strain of his illustration in these chapters.

Again in Hebrews 11:6, we read that without faith it is impossible to please God. This is a most concise and explicit assertion to our point.

Galatians 5:6 teaches that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails any thing; but faith (alone avails) which works by love." That faith which becomes efficient through love is the capital thing in the gospel scheme. This avails; nothing else does or can.

In Acts 5:9 we have a passage strikingly in point. Peter is there testifying before the great

council at Jerusalem, as to the manner in which the Gentile converts were sanctified. He says, God gave them the Holy Ghost even as he did us, and "put no difference between them and us, purifying their hearts by faith." By faith then did they come into a state of purity of heart and thus sincerely and fully obey God.

To the same purport is Acts 26:18 where the Lord appears to Paul and commissions him to go to the Gentiles and "open their eyes...that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified--(how) by faith that is in me." On this point then we see that the testimony of scripture is ample and explicit.

### **III. We are next to notice the conditions on which God and Christ will manifest themselves unto the soul.**

This is expressly stated in the passage taken from the gospel of John. The entire scope of this passage is worthy of consideration. Christ was about to leave his disciples by his own death and ascension to heaven. Yet he bids his disciples not to grieve--tells them that he will come again,--yea come himself, with the Father, and take up his abode with them. The world, says he, shall not see me in these visitations and indwelling of my presence with you, but ye shall see me. How, asks Thomas, how can this be that thou wilt show thyself unto us, and yet the world shall not see thee? Then comes the explanatory answer. "If a man love me, he will keep my words and my Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." Love, therefore, leading the Christian to keep Christ's words--that is, love prompting and securing full obedience--these are the conditions, as here revealed.

So elsewhere throughout the Scriptures. So in our passage from Corinthians. "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you." "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God;" so shall we realize the fulfillment of those exceeding great and precious promises which pledge us the indwelling presence and manifestations of God.

I have shown that according to the scriptures, faith is the condition of real and full obedience. Of course faith is also a condition of these manifestations. The soul must first believe in Christ and take hold of divine strength for its aid and of divine truth with realizing apprehension, before it will be thoroughly obedient.

Now considering faith as one of the conditions of these divine manifestations, the question may be asked--Must our faith fasten specifically on these promises of manifestations and plead with confidence for this particular blessing before it can be received? This is an interesting and important question.

In answer to it I remark, that this form of faith is not particularly alluded to among the conditions given in either of our texts. Obedience and love--purity of heart and life--are the things there specified.

Yet the general law in the spiritual world is clear and decisive on this point. When God gives a particular promise like this of manifesting himself to his people, he requires specific faith in that

promise--a definite laying hold of those very words or at least of the idea of that promise, and a pleading of the faithfulness of God for its fulfillment.

Famine rages in Israel. Drought has parched all the land. The Lord is about to send rain, and to send it in answer to prayer. Yet he simply tells Elijah to go and meet Ahab. Elijah obeys. But we well understand that rain does not come without special prayer. In due season he bows his soul with mighty energy for rain.

There are passages of scripture which plainly show that specific blessings being promised, specific faith must take hold of these promises as a condition of their being given. In Ezekiel 36:37, the Lord having promised to cleanse his people and give them a new heart, declares explicitly--"I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." This is given here as a universal principle of the government of God. So far as we know, the Lord never departs from this principle in his spiritual administration towards his people. Whenever he has promised a blessing either to his church or to individuals, the mere promise does not secure the bestowment; faith must take hold of that promise; you must ask, and ask believing that plighted word of the Lord;--then he gives it and not before. Thus God elicits prayer--makes us prize the blessing and love the Giver.

The conditions then, briefly, of these manifestations are;--full-hearted obedience to all known duty--walking in faith, love and obedience; and taking hold by faith of God's promise for this very blessing. Take hold of this promise and wait earnestly and in confidence, honestly and earnestly meeting every revealed condition. Then shall the blessing be given.

#### **IV. What is implied in Christ's manifesting himself to his people?**

It would seem that it must mean something more than is commonly meant by faith; for the word manifest refers our minds rather to sight than to faith. I will do more, Christ seems to say, than make you believe; I will make you see. Your apprehensions of God and of his Son shall be most vivid. It shall be as if you saw with open vision. This shall be more than mere faith.

It is also something more than love--at least more than such love as is implied in keeping God's commandments; for so much as this is a condition of these manifestations; hence must precede them; and therefore cannot be the blessing itself.

We have a clue to the real meaning in the paraphrase which our Lord himself gives. "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." O there must be precious meaning in such words as these. "We will come unto him"--the Father and the Son will come to visit him and reveal themselves to his soul--and this for no transient hour; but "we will take up our abode with him." This must be very like heaven! What more, we might almost ask, would be requisite to make one's bliss like heaven?

What then, ask we again, is implied in these promised manifestations? More of course than giving a man the Bible--and more than making a man understand the Bible. These gifts, great though they be, are never designated in such language as we find in the text. Positively:

- (1.) These manifestations imply, the baptism of the Spirit. The context plainly shows that

Christ had this in his mind. After giving the promise as in our text, He proceeds to promise the Comforter, to show that he would teach all things and bring those things to their remembrance which Christ had said to them. He would "glorify Christ, for he would receive of Christ's and show it unto them."

(2.) The text shows that the blessing promised, means the indwelling of the Father and of the Son by the Spirit. And this, as I have said is declared to be not a visit merely, but taking up an abode--not as a way-faring man who tarries for a night, but as a resident who makes your house his home.

Let it not be supposed from what I have said that the child of God to whom these manifestations are made, and who received the special baptisms of the Spirit, has of course never had the Spirit before. Let no one imagine that the faith and love and obedience which as I have said must precede these manifestations as their condition, can ever exist without the Spirit. By no means. But there is a higher kind and measure of the Spirit's influence and also a lower. The latter is essential to any sincere faith and love; the former comes only in those glorious manifestations of which our Lord here speaks.

This higher influence is said in our context to be sent by the ascended Savior on those who truly love him and fully keep all his commandments. The disciples plainly had received a lower measure of the Spirit's influence before;--now they receive a higher measure in the baptism of the Spirit.

(3.) Another thing is implied in these manifestations. Christ will actually reveal himself to the mind so that it shall know him in his official character and relations. And there is a deep and precious meaning in this. Often have I been struck with this in my own experience. Some new aspect of the Savior's character, or some new point in his relations comes before my mind with great vividness; I wonder I had not seen this before; I seem not to have been aware that Christ sustained this relation, and I now embrace him in this new relation and rejoice that I find him meeting and supplying one more want of my soul.

Thus for example, when Christ revealed a new feature of his relations to me through these words--"Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." Then I saw him not merely an atoning Redeemer, but a Sanctifier--one who came to save his people from sinning. Then my soul knew Christ in this other and more glorious relation. But more of this.

(4.) When Christ manifests himself to the soul, the Christian is rather a knower than a believer. He does indeed believe--but he also more than believes. He not merely believes that Christ died and made atonement, but he is made to know Christ. How natural is the language which a Christian enjoying these manifestations uses so spontaneously--"I believed before, but now I know it." I was often struck with the strong language of Elder Marks on his sick and dying bed. He did not say--"I believe," but "I know." He would sit in his great chair, when he could not lie down, and laugh and then cry, overcome and convulsed often with deep, unutterable emotions because God was showing him his own

blessed truth so that he knew it.

Now in such cases, this strong perception which we call seeing and knowing is not of the body but of the mind. It is not your external eye that sees, but your internal eye. Hence your perceptions are so clear and so vivid.

We here observe that when Christ manifests himself, there is something more than mere belief. There must be belief before this; a belief that begets love and obedience; but when Christ manifests himself by his Spirit, there is something more than this, Christ says, "the world shall not see me, but ye shall see me." Did he mean that he would come again during their life-time in his body, and that they should see this? No; but that he would make such revelations of himself that they should know that they had a personal interview with their Lord. He told them he was going away to heaven, but they need not grieve, for he should return again and show himself. Now did all this mean only that they should have faith in him? Much more than this;--it meant that he would return and show himself and they should know assuredly that Christ was with them.

Again, when Christ manifests himself to the soul, it must be that the mind in some way has an assurance that it is not deceived, and that the manifestation is actual.

I have spoken of personal interviews with Christ. You are aware that in various ages there have been many saints who have asserted that they had interviews with Christ. There were many cases of this before Christ's incarnation. Christ manifested his glory to Moses; to Isaiah--to John in Patmos--to Paul as he himself assures us. And in every age since, there have been those who have supposed themselves to have interviews with Christ. They are wont to say--"I have seen him." I have heard a man in this place say, he had seen Christ. He could not rid himself of the impression that he had truly seen the Lord.

Now on this point I am not going to say that Christ manifests himself to the bodily eyes of the saints, but the revelation is such that they do not know but they see him with their eyes. Perhaps it seems to them altogether as if they did.

I have often in your presence alluded to the circumstances attending my own conversion. When Christ first revealed himself to me, I certainly seemed to see him, and to rush and fall at his feet as really as if I were to turn about now and fall at Br. Mahan's feet. I felt a powerful drawing of soul towards him, as if my very soul would be drawn out of me;--I rushed into a private room and there I seemed to meet him. There--so it seemed--was Jesus--the very Savior!

Now this I do not mention because it is a peculiar case; it occurs or has occurred somewhat frequently in the experience of the people of God. Christians have often felt that they have seen Christ. They have no more question about the fact than about any other. They do not know that they see him with the bodily eye, but their mind sees Christ, and it makes all the impression on the mind of seeing.

Christ does not usually manifest himself so that one sees a form and shape; but so that the soul is perfectly conscious of the presence of Christ. I know a minister who has told me that at one particular period of his life it was frequently just as real to him that Christ was with him as that any man ever

was. It seemed to him a matter of consciousness that Christ was present as much as it ever was that another man is present;--as much as if Christ had actually come down from heaven and kept by his side daily. This is Christ's making himself manifest.

It is intimated also that the Father comes and takes up his abode in the soul. This implies that the Holy Ghost reveals both Christ and the Father. Now it is certainly remarkable that in all Christian experience there is such a distinction between the Father and the Son. The Father is revealed as a father; Christ as Savior and Redeemer. The soul seems to know God distinctly in these two relations. It has no misgivings in respect to God's being indeed a father, more than any child has respecting his own earthly father. So also the soul regards Christ as really the Redeemer, and comes to him as such.

Another thing. These manifestations involve the establishment of the soul's love and confidence. This is no doubt one of the principal designed objects of those manifestations. In the case of the primitive disciples, Christ meant to give them such a hold of the gospel as should prepare them for coming trials;--and should make them knowers and not mere believers.

Another result. Whenever Christ is thus manifested the external evidences of revealed religion have no longer any special force on the mind, comparatively; the minds' reliance is hence-forward chiefly on the internal evidence. I have often thought that if Christ had not revealed himself to me so that my mind took hold powerfully of the internal evidence, and was impressed forcibly by the manifestations to which I have alluded, I should have been an infidel, and should have apostatized utterly. It has often seemed that my natural incredulity is so great that nothing else but this could have kept me from being an infidel. My mind was in the habit of constant agitation under the questions--How do I know that this is so? How do I know but all this is delusion? Satan would often present these difficulties in the strongest light. I would set myself to reason upon them, and could see that according to all the rules of logic, all is clear and certain; yet at the same time I was conscious of such a state of mind that I knew I should not have believed if Christ had not given me conscious and certain manifestations.

These manifestations greatly confirm the mind in its convictions. Religion becomes a matter of experience so that the soul cannot but believe. If Christ manifests himself to the soul once, it can doubt no more. Yet such manifestations may be frequent, and if the conditions are fulfilled, will be.

Light from the scriptures is another result. The promise as applied to us, is that the Spirit shall take of the scriptures and show to us. Persons thus enlightened and privileged see more of the Bible than ever before. They have a new kind of confidence in it. They take up their Bible and find there new things unseen before.

## **RESULTS.**

1. Many professors of religion seem to have lost sight of this truth. It is remarkable to see to what an extent this is true. Perhaps they have lost sight of the strong faith which must precede them; perhaps they conceive of nothing better in religion than a dim hope, and enjoy nothing more. They seem to forget the conditions--"If a man love me, he will keep my sayings, and my Father will love him." In fact some seem to have lost the whole subject.

Again, there are not a few who understand this subject--know that they may have such manifestations; but have got the idea that it means more than it does; or their notions of what it is are entirely vague; they call it perhaps assurance of faith, or assurance of hope. but they fail of attaining because they quite overlook the conditions, or seem to forget that there are any conditions at all. Or as the case may be, they misapprehend the conditions, and set themselves to get it in some antinomian or legal way, and hence fail of any good result.

Others have the idea that obedience itself depends upon divine manifestations, and hence suppose they cannot obey till they get these manifestations. But this is not the Bible view of the subject. Our text says--If a man obey and love--then shall he have the manifestations--then, and not before.

Some set themselves to seek for these manifestations selfishly, for the luxury they may afford. Of course they fail of fulfilling the conditions and seek in vain. To seek these manifestations as some do that they may be distinguished and get honor to themselves, or if their motive be any other than the glory of God, the very seeking is an abomination to God, and will cause him to manifest to such seekers his wrath rather than his glory.

When persons set themselves to seek this blessing selfishly, they are commonly deluded by Satan, and suppose themselves to have obtained some great blessing when they have obtained no spiritual blessing at all. Satan, transformed in appearance to an angel of light deceives such men and makes them believe that God has revealed himself to them, when it is only the devil. This is my opinion as to such cases, and I will tell you why I think so. I have known several instances in which persons have related a most remarkable experience of most astonishing manifestations of God to the mind as they supposed; but the results were a bitter, hard, acrimonious spirit--a spirit of fierce denunciation instead of gentleness and love--a spirit such as the Holy Ghost never begets--but which is the genuine offspring of Satan's manifestations. Forthwith they plunge headlong into the most fantastical and absurd errors, and the most anti-christian practices. And yet in all these things, they will most pertinaciously insist that God is leading them. I have known several who gave up family prayer, and closet prayer, and yet insisted that God led them in all this. By the fruits we may know that it was not God but Satan who induced them to abandon prayer.

This is the history of their case. They learn from the Bible that God promises manifestations; from merely selfish motives they seek this blessing; and God answers them according to their seeking and his promise. They set up the idol of their own selfishness in their hearts, and seeking God thus, He answers them according to their idols as He has said he would. The Lord suffers Satan to deceive them. No wonder they are exceedingly positive and as bitter as they are positive. The hand of Satan is in all this. How else can you account for their state?

Yet let it be well considered--such cases do not at all impair the integrity of these promises, and ought not to shake our confidence in them. The false prophets revealed strange things; yet we know that this was the work of Satan. There were true prophets none the less, and their messages were none the less worthy of confidence. Real prophecies did not fail of coming to pass because Satan deceived some false prophets.

It is doubtful whether such persons are for any considerable time very positive that God is leading

them, and that the manifestations they have are from him. Usually God gives them so much light that they might, if they would, see that their leader is not God but Satan. Sometimes under these Satanic hallucinations the mind is thrown from its balance. Such cases are an exception to the remark last made.

Again I remark, it is of vast importance that this doctrine respecting divine manifestations should be fully developed throughout all the church, and especially among all gospel ministers. Suppose that all ministers had these interviews with Christ and lived so near to him--nay rather, had Christ and the Father abiding continually in their hearts;--would they not preach as if they had a Savior and knew him? Would not all their preaching then be full of Christ, and would it not reveal Christ to their hearers? Verily they might then say with John, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

It is one of the greatest difficulties with ministers that they have lost this experience. They do not know Christ by the living experience of their hearts through his presence abiding within them. All that they can say about the gospel of Christ, they say upon mere faith as opposed to the clearer vision of these promised manifestations. All is mere faith and often very dim. O how much better to see Christ and be able to testify from the burning impressions made by such divine visions of Jesus!

It is indeed well to be able really and fully to believe that Christ is with us; but the mind needs greatly to know this and have it in the mind as a living, burning reality, kindling every energy of the soul by its presence and power. Every minister needs this in order to preach with energy and demonstration of the Spirit. The whole church needs it and must have it before she can be clothed again with the glory and power of apostolic days.

Many persons call these divine manifestations, sanctification. But this seems not to be the scriptural view. The Scriptures plainly represent obedience and love as the conditions, and these manifestations as consequent upon their being fulfilled. Of course sanctification precedes as a condition and is not merely an effect. At the same time it is doubtless true that these abiding revelations of Christ to the soul exert a most hallowing agency, and may well be called a spiritual cleansing. They do indeed rectify the sensibility, mightily quickening it towards God and his truth, and thus serve to purify the soul. To the individual Christian they are life from the dead, giving a glorious vitality to all his spiritual apprehensions. If they might only become general, they would be like from the dead to the whole world. If all the church were to come under this influence--if all missionaries went forth with this experience; if it were a universal fact among them that Christ manifested himself among them so that they should know him as they know each other, and be as conscious of his presence and of his guidance too as they ever are of a Christian brother's presence and counsel. O what tremendous power would this give to the whole missionary enterprize!

This gave the early apostles their great power. Driven by fierce persecution, they assemble together; Christ comes among them; the whole place is shaken where they are assembled together; they pray for a bold and fearless spirit that they may preach Christ in the face of scorn and scourging--and they have it. Nothing can daunt such men--and nothing stand before them.

It would be richly instructive to read this portion of the apostle's history with the eye on this point,

and see what the results were of having such manifestations as they had on Christ, and such baptisms of the Holy Ghost.

This great blessing should be sought by every Christian. None should rest till he obtains it. Let his object in seeking it be the glory of God and his only; let him know that it is for the glory of God that he should have it, and that he cannot eminently glorify God without it--then let him know that if he will fulfill the conditions the blessing is surely given.

Every Christian is authorized to take this ground and ought to take it at once: If the conditions are within my power, as the Lord liveth, I will have it.

Let me say to those who doubt--this is the course you should pursue, for this will bring you the blessing you want. You need not be afraid to come to Christ and tell him all your difficulties; come in the simplicity and fulness of your heart and say, Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee; thou knowest it is in my heart to know and do all they will; now come and manifest thyself unto me, and take up thine abode in my heart.

You need, brethren, only to seek these blessings with all your heart and you will obtain. I have been greatly struck with the fact that within the circle of my own observation these blessings are obtained of the Lord usually in this manner. Led by the Spirit of the Lord, an individual sets himself with great earnestness to mortify every lust and subdue every sin; he spares not his dearest idol; he loathes and abhors every thing that can separate his soul from his Savior, and puts it utterly away;--this being done his Savior comes and makes his gracious presence manifest. This is just what we might expect from Christ's language. When a Christian puts down every appetite and lust of body or mind that leads the heart away from Christ, and does all this for Christ, then let him know that he may lay hold of this promise of the Savior and say--Lord, I have humbly sought to fulfil all the conditions; now in thy mercy and faithfulness bestow on me the blessing." This is the remedy for doubting.

Then will the Savior come to your soul and reveal his glories. Then he will so attract your soul that you will cry after him in the spirit of adoption, entreating him to reveal himself yet more and more, until you can say--Surely the Lord hath done great things for me whereof I am glad and I will praise him; surely he hath done exceeding abundantly above all that I could ask or think; and to his name be all glory and praise forevermore.

## **On the Lord's Supper**

Lecture IV  
April 1, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--1 Cor. 11:23-29: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me.

After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death until He come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

This text gives us the original institution of the Lord's supper. In discussing it I shall,

- I. Explain the design of this ordinance.*
- II. Show what is not implied in an acceptable reception of it.*
- III. What is implied in coming to the Lord's table acceptably.*
- IV. The consequences of an unworthy participation.*

### **I. The ordinance appears to have two great objects;**

One, to show the bearings of the death of Christ in its governmental relations, as a substitute for the death of all who else must die; and the other, to show forth the spiritual relation existing between Christ and His people whereby they live by faith on Him. The breaking of this bread and the pouring out of this wine may well represent the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of His blood, and these emblems so far considered, doubtless set forth the atoning death of Christ as a sacrifice for our sins.

But the ordinance includes another important part; this bread is to be eaten, and this wine His people are to drink. Now the frequent instructions of Christ to His disciples have made us quite familiar with the use of this emblem to denote the life of faith; the fact that the hearts of Christ's people are purified, and animated with the spiritual life of the gospel, by means of receiving Jesus to their souls thus to purify and animate. Of this spiritual life, He is the living bread. Whoever eats shall live forever; whoever eats not, has no spiritual life.

Now the fact that Christ had already made so frequent use of this emblem and had so abundantly explained it, leaves us at no loss to assign this same relation as a secondary design of the ordinance of the supper. The breaking of the bread which He said denoted His body, might of itself indicate His death, and might suffice to exhibit its governmental relations; but the other great idea--the life of faith sustained by its appropriate spiritual food, required for its full illustration that these emblems of the Savior's body and blood should be received as food and incorporated into our very being.

Hence this ordinance not only shows forth Christ's death, but shows that by His death we live. If the question then be asked--Why do you eat this bread? The answer might be--To show that we live by Christ. In Him in a most precious spiritual sense, we live and move and have our being.

Again, this ordinance is intended to remind us of our sins, and of our relation as sinners to the death of Christ. When He gathers us round His table and spreads before us those elements which represent His mangled body and His flowing blood, and says so mildly and impressively, "This is My body which was broken for you," who can fail to think of those sins of his own for which Christ died? And who can be so hard of heart as not to be melted under the thought--my life, and peace cost the Son of God such a death--a death of fearful agony!

Yet again, this ordinance reminds us how hopeless was our condition as sinners, without Christ's interposition. Surely we cannot fail to reason this;--The Father would not have given up His well beloved Son to such a death if any sacrifice less costly could have sufficed. If man could have wrought out his own redemption; or if there had been any other eye to pity and other arm of adequate power to save, then would the sacrifice of the blessed Jesus have been spared.

The hopelessness of our condition sent up its imploring cry to the throne of God for help. Deliverance could come from no lower source.

Still another object of this ordinance is to awaken and quicken our compassion for sinners. Around this table we see the fresh manifestations of the Savior's compassion for sinners; this should enkindle ours. Did He feel compassion for sinners, and shall not we also? Did His compassion burn so deeply and so strongly that He could die for sinners, and shall not our compassion at least move us to pray and weep and toil and deny ourselves that they may live? Shall there be no power in Christ's example to make us feel as He felt?

Yet again, this ordinance should keep alive in our hearts a sense of that great love which Jesus had for His enemies. We must not forget that it was for enemies--for us while we were yet sinners, that Christ died. Let us never lose sight of this fact, nor of the lesson it reads us respecting the feelings we should cherish towards all the enemies of God.

Oh, what a flood of light does this great fact shed upon the infinite compassion of Jehovah! Could He send His own Son to die for His enemies! Then we may hope in His mercy--if we will repent and trust Him.

Again, this ordinance is valuable as affording conclusive evidence of the truth of the Christian religion. Everybody knows that this ordinance exists. No fact of history is better attested than that it has existed as far back as the death of the Apostles.

But even if it were otherwise--if the historic evidence were very much less than it is, we should still stand on solid ground in affirming the utter impossibility of imposing such an ordinance upon mankind, if it had not been instituted by our Lord Himself. The fact of its existence therefore stands an incontrovertible proof of the great facts of the gospel scheme. It proves that Jesus Christ did die for

the sins of men--and that He desired His followers to show forth this great fact to the end of the world.

## **II. We pass now to enquire what is not implied in an acceptable coming to the Lord's table.**

It does not imply an avowal on our part, of Christian confidence in all those who come with us, or of Christian fellowship with them. I have often met with persons who hesitated to come to this ordinance; and when I have asked them why they hesitated, they have replied--"There are persons there of whose piety I stand in doubt. Therefore I do not feel free to come." Now this position assumes that in coming to the Lord's table we endorse the piety of all who come with us.

But this cannot be correct ground. Judas was present when Christ first partook of the supper with His disciples. The disciples to be sure might not have suspected his hypocrisy, but Christ knew it well. The example of Christ therefore in coming and allowing His faithful eleven to come also and eat with the known traitor, forever settles this point.

Suppose the disciples had known Judas' true character. The circumstances might still have been such as to justify them in coming with him to the table. This is not the place to go into detail upon the duty of disciplining those who give evidence of hypocrisy; suffice it only to say that we do not of course make ourselves responsible in coming to the Lord's table for the sincere piety of all who come. They come on their own responsibility.

If I held the views of which I am speaking, I could not commune with any church I ever saw. I could not administer the supper to any church with which I have ever been acquainted. I may believe the church to be a church of Christ, and yet may not have satisfactory evidence of the piety of some of its individual members. The general confidence I have in Christian character of the church justifies me in administering the ordinance, or in communing with them.

Yet such scruples as I here refer to are very common, and are the alleged reason why many absent themselves from the Lord's table. The reason is not a good one. If the devil should come, I would come too. Why should I be kept away by him! If he comes, let him bear his own responsibility.

## **III. We next enquire what things are implied in coming to the Lord's table acceptably.**

- 1. A living, efficient faith, as opposed to a faith that is dead and inefficient. A dead faith is a mere opinion, held in the intelligence, but not affecting the heart or the conduct. Men sometimes hold certain opinions, and suppose themselves to hold them with entire sincerity; yet those opinions have no efficient influence upon their life. Such a faith is of no avail.

On the other hand a living faith is a vital, efficient belief which at once affects and controls both the heart and the life. In every case of living faith, the mind receives the truth in love and cheerfully obeys it. This receiving the truth in love is a living faith. It is a trusting, confiding, committing the mind to the influence of truth. The efficiency of such a faith will be manifest.

It overcomes the world. "This is the victory that overcomes the world--even our faith."

This faith worketh by love--being efficient because love and trust are sweetly blended together,--this constitutes a fitness for acceptable coming to the Lord's table. But no amount of knowledge--faith being inefficient--can fit the soul to come to this table of the Lord.

- 2. Sympathy with Christ in His love for His church. All who come acceptably must have this. Christ's love was so great that He is represented as giving Himself--His very life for His church. Oh! what love is this! Love that could induce Him to lay His life down for His people! Let no one expect to be accepted at His table who does not sympathize deeply with Christ in this great love of His for His church.
- 3. Sympathy with Christ in His compassion for sinners. On this point we need to get before our minds the state of feeling in which Christ laid down His life for the lost and guilty. Into this feeling we must enter most fully if we would enjoy His presence and His smiles of love at His table.

In short you need to have a sympathy with the whole mind of Christ. Go back to the scenes of the last supper. There are His disciples. How intense the Savior's care and love for them! He would not leave them orphans--He could not part from them until He had promised them an abiding comforter--poured out His soul for them in prayer--giving them the largest promises, even assuring them that they might ask what they would in His name, and it would be given them.

Conceive too of the spirit with which He had all along anticipated the cross. Ready to sacrifice Himself--ready to be arrested, dragged like a lamb to the slaughter;--ready to be insulted, tortured, nailed to the tree--ready to endure anything--I mean not merely, anything short of death, but anything with death itself--any form of dying however full of agony. And all this for sinners! Oh what an emptying of self! What a consecration to the good of the vile and the guilty! Was every love like this! With all this love we are to sympathize if we would come acceptable to His table.

Take still another view of this point. Suppose the disciples when they came together for the first time to this supper of their Lord, to have understood its design as well as they did afterwards. Then conceive how they must have felt. There sat the meek and lovely One, around whose feet they had so often gathered to hear His precious words; He is preparing to sacrifice Himself. It is as if a man were making ready his own winding sheet. He is thinking of a memorial by which His death for them shall be had in perpetual remembrance through their lives and throughout the lives of all that should believe on Him through their word down to the end of the world. Now if the disciples had well understood all this, with what emotions would they have gathered round that table! With emotions much the same should we now celebrate the supper He then instituted. If your souls, beloved, were thoroughly to enter into these sympathies, you would find yourselves drawn into most deep and blessed communion with your Savior at His table.

- 4. Another condition of acceptable communing in this ordinance is a deep sympathy with Christ

in respect to the progress of His kingdom upon earth. One great and leading desire of this ordinance is to promote the progress of Christ's kingdom. It aims to quicken the faith, the zeal and the love of His people, and to testify before the ungodly to the great fact of the death of Jesus Christ for their salvation if they will come and receive it. We cannot therefore come acceptably unless we come in sympathy with Christ in this respect.

- 5. Every church must maintain wholesome discipline. If they neglect this they ought not to come to the Lord's table at all. They are guilty of greatly dishonoring Christ and His cause. How can it then be anything else than mockery for them to publish to the world their professions of honoring the Savior, as they do in coming to His table? If I as pastor should find that a church refused to maintain wholesome scriptural discipline, I should feel it my duty to refuse to administer to them this ordinance. I could not make myself accessory to their contempt of the Lord's authority and of the rules of His house.
- 6. Stumbling blocks must be removed. If any members of the church have openly disgraced religion they must reform and put away the disgrace they have brought on the name of Jesus. Else how can they hope to meet His smiles at His table!
- 7. All difficulties between brethren should be amicably settled. The church ought to insist on this, before they come to the communion table. All hard feelings should be all means be allayed before brethren meet together at the Lord's table. How can they appear before their Lord with such feelings cherished towards one another! And do they think to secure the smiles of their Lord, coming themselves in such a spirit?
- 8. Self-examination is always an indispensable condition of coming acceptable. So Paul taught;--"But let a man examine himself and so eat of that bread and drink of that cup." This self-examination ought to be a most thorough scrutiny into one's own heart and life. We ought to know where we are and what our spiritual state is, before we come to the Lord's table to meet our Savior face to face. We ought to know whether we are prepared to come; we ought to know what blessings we need to seek from our Lord when we meet Him at His table.
- 9. It is always important to renew our covenant at these seasons of communion with Christ. I do not believe that Christians can come acceptable unless they do virtually renew their covenant with Christ on such occasions. It is eminently fit and proper at these seasons to review our past life--to see what sins we have committed--to repent of them; confess and forsake them and again solemnly renew our covenant to be the Lord's fully and forever. All this is so fit and proper that no Christian in the right frame of mind for acceptable participation can fail to do it. You sit around the table of your crucified Lord, and before you are the elements which bring to your mind the scenes of Calvary. You stand as it were by the side of the sacrificial Lamb, and as the Jews of old, so you now lay your hand on the head of the victim and "there confess your sins." How appropriate and solemn to confess one's sins over the broken body of Jesus Christ! What place can be like this for breaking one's heart for sin, and earnestly putting it forever away! Oh let us never come to this impressive scene without improving it for penitence and confession, and for solemn renewal of our covenant with our Savior!

- 10. Restitution should be made amply for all wrongs done, as far as it lies in our power to make it. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." These precepts of our Lord's applies pertinently to any act of worship, but preeminently to communion with Christ at His table. Its meaning none can question, for nothing can be plainer than His language--nothing more reasonable than its obvious meaning. If you have done your neighbor wrong, so that he has reason to have somewhat against you, stop where you are--go not forward a step in your professed worship of God while wrong toward your brother lies unretrieved--go and make this wrong right as far as you can; make all reasonable or possible reparation and the most ample confession; become reconciled to thy brother; then mayest thou appear before thy God acceptably--not otherwise.

How can anyone who has ever read this precept dare to come to the Lord's table until he has first made restitution for all known wrongs against his fellow beings?

Restitution should also be made to God. By this I do not mean to imply that we can remunerate God for injuries done Him; but I do mean that we can restore to His cause and service what we have wrongfully withdrawn or withheld. If you have in your hands of the Lord's wealth which of right ought to have gone into His treasury for the use of His poor, or of His laborers; or if, as the case may be, you have been squandering this wealth upon your taste or your passions as you have reason to know God would not have you, then you have wronged your Maker and robbed His cause; and it becomes you to make ample restitution before you venture to meet your Lord at His table.

So if you have backslidden from the Lord, and your heart has gone after other gods, what business can you have to come to the table of your Lord, except you can come in the spirit of most deep and humble repentance? How can you come acceptably, unless it be to re-consecrate your heart and all your powers to your dying Lord? In coming to the table of the Lord, you publicly profess to sympathize with Him; if this profession is mere mockery, can you hope to be accepted?

#### **IV. The consequences of coming unworthily, next demand our consideration.**

One of the results to be expected, one indeed which always follows an unacceptable coming is great spiritual blindness. This is true of all religious duties; performed in a wicked state of mind, they induce great spiritual blindness. But I have often thought that an unsuitable attendance upon the Lord's table must harden the heart beyond everything else. There are many in the churches who do this; who come to this table, conscious most fully that they are in no fit state of mind to come acceptably; but they feel that they must come--they fear being disciplined if they refuse to come; or at least, they fear the loss of their Christian reputation; hence they come, and consequently, become dreadfully hardened.

Do you meet with a professed Christian who is in deep and awful darkness, or whose conscience seems to be seared as with a hot iron? Search out his history, and you will find in most cases that he has allowed himself to come to the Lord's table in a careless, wicked state of mind, and having thus trifled with the most solemn and effective means of melting the heart, he is now hardened fearfully--

perhaps so much so that no means or influences can ever reclaim and restore him. When one comes to the table in this wicked state of mind he is likely to go away more bewildered and hardened than ever. The curse of the Lord is upon him.

On the other hand, coming acceptable has the opposite effect. It quickens our spiritual sensibility--melts the soul in godly sorrow; and makes every grace thrive and grow like the cedars of Lebanon. Those that be planted thus in the courts of the Lord shall flourish in the house of our God.

The judgments of the Lord will follow the deliberate or reckless abuse of this ordinance. So the text plainly teaches. "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself."

There can be no doubt that in the primitive church, not merely spiritual but physical judgments befell those who abused this ordinance. For this cause said Paul, are many weak and sickly among you, and many asleep--doubtless in death. There is no reason to doubt the fact that God often sends judgments upon people in this world for their sins; and especially for the sin of perverting or disregarding this sacred ordinance.

Another danger of most fearful sort awaits those who abuse this ordinance. It is reprobation. They are in the greatest peril of being given up of God. When the best means which the Lord can use to melt the heart prove unavailing, it only remains to give over the helpless reprobate to his fit doom. If the view of his crucified Lord, dying for his sins fails to move and melt his soul, there is little if any hope of his ever being brought to repentance. In the judgment day we shall find a great many professors at the left hand of the Judge--because of their hypocrisy at the table of their Lord, and of the judicial blindness and hardness of heart thus produced. Hence followed reprobation, and their place on the left hand. They may plead--"We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence and Thou hast taught in our streets;" but He shall say, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity.

## **REMARKS.**

1. Satan tries often to keep weak believers away from this ordinance, and especially young converts. He makes them doubt whether they are real Christians, harasses their mind--accuses them of playing the hypocrite; makes them feel that it would be a horrible thing to come to the Lord's table; and perhaps ultimately succeeds in inducing them to forsake the table of the Lord and even prayer itself, and other religious duties. Now young converts and indeed all Christians ought to be on the alert that they be not caught in this snare. They should repel Satan by saying--I know I am in danger of being deceived; therefore I will flee to Christ now. Now if never before, will I repent of my sins, and take hold by faith of the offered gospel salvation. Now I will lay hold of the arm of the Lord for my help, crying, "Search, me O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." I know it is a solemn thing to come to the Lord's table, but Jesus invites me and I cannot stay away. I cannot forego the spiritual blessings which may be obtained there; there is no reason in the universe why I should. I will indeed be on my guard most diligently lest I come and partake unworthily, I will go to Jesus and confess my sins; my soul shall lie in the dust before Him; and if my brother has aught against me with any good reason, I will go and be reconciled to my brother before I come to that divine table of the Lord; but how can I be persuaded to stay away and starve--while I know there is bread enough and to spare in the banqueting

house of love?

In this way, Christian brother, you may quite baffle Satan, and make his temptations a blessing and not a curse to your soul. If you will be really honest with your God and with your own soul, you shall have nothing to fear.

2. Satan often tries to embolden real hypocrites. The true convert he will try to harass with the fear of being a hypocrite; but with the real hypocrite he plays another game. He tells him to fear nothing. He helps such persons to come to the Lord's table with heedless self-confidence, as careless, as to any common meal. Horrible presumption! Perhaps they never really ask the question, "Am I prepared in heart to commune with Jesus Christ at His own table?" If their mind does glance at such a question it soon glances off again, and they do not give themselves solemnly to self-searching in the light of God's word, and with prayer for the Spirit to guide their minds deeply into the secret things of their own real character. Those who never examine themselves may know, if they will believe it, that they are deluded by Satan and may expect to lift up their eyes in hell in the awful agony of final, remediless disappointment.

3. Satan often plays a game with backsliders which is adapted to keep them forever in a backslidden state. He says to men--This is a means of grace--you must by all means go. But he is careful not to tell them they will need to prepare their hearts by solemn self-searching and deep repentance before the Lord. He keeps this idea quite out of sight--if he can. His plan is to make them trust in external means for their salvation. Prayer he tells them too is a means of grace; hence if they will pray in form--enough to keep conscience quiet--all will be well. Thus he keeps them away from real repentance--lures them along in their backslidden state, and puts their souls in infinite peril of final perdition.

4. Those who know themselves to be backsliders have no right to come to the Lord's table, unless they mean to return to the Lord when they come; for coming in any other way, they really play the hypocrite; and what right have they to do this?

5. This ordinance is often a great curse to the church. The best things perverted, work the greatest mischief. The more precious the institution, the more shocking and pernicious its perversion. The same is true of every doctrine of the Bible; the best and richest for practical benefit, become when perverted, the very worst. It is on this principle that no one can come under all the solemn and impressive influences of the Lord's table and resist with a cold, unmoved heart, and not be awfully hardened and fearfully cursed by that which Christ gave us for the choicest blessings.

6. This ordinance is peculiarly precious to the saints. Here they meet Christ under most affecting circumstances. It is as if they were to meet Him at His own funeral or at His cross. What can be more precious! How do the most melting considerations cluster round the heart as you come to meet Jesus and remember His dying groans and His tender love for His people at His own table.

7. This ordinance must have been most affecting to Christ. Think of the circumstances under which He first instituted the ordinance. Beside Him sat the traitor; before Him lay outspread in full and distinct view that foul and cruel treason--the rush of the chief priests and of their armed men to seize

Him--the mock trial--the insults--the scourging--the dying agonies--the being forsaken of God; but these were not the only objects of His deep solicitude. Around Him sat His eleven faithful ones, and His heart sympathized deeply with their coming trials and with their yet more remote labors, persecutions, and temptations in His service. He foresaw the need of giving them some memorial of His own death, for He knew that so long as they remembered this and saw it in all its proper relations, they would be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Hence He sets up this impressive memorial, and inscribes on it the sad yet glorious and heart sustaining fact of His own bloody death for the salvation of a world.

Yet again, let us consider how affecting is this memorial in its form, and in its natural associations. "Come," He says to His beloved ones, "come sit down with Me at My table. This bread betokens My body which I am about to give for the life of the world. This wine, which I now pour out foreshows the shedding of My own blood--indeed!--My blood, which is soon to be shed for you." Oh how He must have felt amid these scenes! And how must they have looked on and listened with mingled amazement, gratitude and love, as the great idea began to break into their mind that their Lord might ere long die for them; and as they saw in His eye and His tones that love unutterable was swelling in His heart and compassion yearning in His bosom. Viewing this transaction in all its bearings, what a scene! Did earth ever witness another such?

8. The celebration of the Lord's supper may be a most interesting scene to the Savior now; perhaps in many respects as interesting now as then. Why not?

When Christ sees a church in a suitable state to come acceptably, when He sees the humble, broken heart, and the uplifted eye of confidence, trusting in His word and atoning blood, think you not that His heart is affected with tenderest sympathy? It must be an interesting scene for the exalted Redeemer to see His church on earth still celebrating His death age after age, still breaking the symbols of His body and pouring out the emblem of His blood as if they could not and would not forget the love and compassion of that wondrous death--as if they lived in and through the life begotten by that wondrous death!

Beloved, your risen Savior sees you eating of His symbolized body, and if your heart is in sympathy with your act, His eye regards it and His heart beats in sympathy with yours!

9. But on the other hand it must be exceedingly abhorrent to the mind of Christ to see His professed people come in a hard, unfeeling, unbelieving, ungodly state! To see them coming as it were to attend His funeral, without a tear, and without showing or having the least feeling adapted to such a scene! Oh what mockery of the dying Jesus is this! They come and stand before His cross--they can see His blood flow--they come and look into His open grave--but all, with hearts unaffected! Oh, how could they testify more strongly that they never loved this blessed, dying Savior! This I need not say must be utterly abhorrent to the heart of the Savior.

Brethren, are you prepared to come to the table of your Lord this afternoon? Have you such sympathy with Christ that you can come with broken hearts--can abase yourselves most spontaneously before your Savior--can pour out your tears of penitence at His feet, and then can trust and love and adore?

Come, brethren, for the voice of love invites us--come, but let none abuse the call.

## **Forfeiting Birth-Right Blessings**

Lecture V  
May 13, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Heb. 12:15-17: "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled: Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

The transaction alluded to in this passage is one of the most affecting on the records of scripture. One of the main points in it was Esau's despising and selling his birthright.

In order to understand this, we shall need to revert a moment to the custom to which it alludes. The practice originated very early, was well known in the times of Abraham and Isaac, and even prevails still in some eastern countries, whereby the whole estate of the father or a double portion in it, for it assumed these two different forms, fell to the eldest son. With this was also connected a certain authority over the younger members of the family, often regarded as the authority of the father, transferred at his death to the eldest son.

But it is more to our purpose to notice that in pious families, certainly in the family of Abraham, a father's blessing, solemnly pronounced as he drew near the point of death, was one of the precious elements in the birthright of the favored son. Nor was this all. To Abraham and to his seed a blessed covenant had been given--a covenant which on certain conditions, pledged one class of temporal blessings--namely, the land of Canaan and a numerous posterity; and also another class of spiritual blessings--the Messiah in the line of his descendants, and through him blessings on all the nations of the earth. You may find this covenant expanded in Genesis 12, 14, 17, 22 chapters; and also in respect to its spiritual bearings, in Romans 4, and Galatians 3 and 4.

This covenant formed a precious legacy, descending from Abraham to Isaac and onward in the line of his descendants through distant generation. Yet let it be noticed that this legacy of blessings did not at first diffuse itself over all branches of these patriarchal families. Abraham had an Ishmael who had no inheritance in the things of this covenant. Isaac was the sole heir next after Abraham. And of his two sons it seemed to be well understood that only one could have the birthright and the blessing.

Now it can not be doubted that Esau understood all the important points involved in this legacy of promised blessings. He knew what his birthright included; he must have known the promises made and renewed so solemnly to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. He also doubtless understood the tenor on which these promises were to descend to him in connection with his birthright. And yet the history shows us how he took a course which forfeited them all. Returning at one time from the hunting field, faint with fatigue and hunger, he said to Jacob--"Feed me I pray thee, with that red pottage." Jacob said, "Sell me this day thy birthright." Esau said, "Behold I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright be to me?" And Jacob said, "Swear unto me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob."

Such is the simple record given us of the circumstances of this transaction. They serve to shew how little Esau valued the blessings which came down to him from his godly ancestors. The appropriate reflection to be made on reading the narrative is, not this--See how strong the temptation was, and how much to be pitied was the unfortunate Esau who stood at the point of death and bartered away an intangible and valueless ideality for what which was the very stay of his life; but rather this--"Thus Esau despised his birthright." There is Esau "that profane person, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."

God set His seal to this act of Esau's. He took him at his word. Esau said--I sell it to Jacob. God confirmed the deed and it was henceforth Esau's no more. It passed from his hands forever. The Lord suffered another train of circumstances to transpire in which the solemn affirmation of the father transferred the birthright and the blessing to Jacob. There is no need at this time that I should fully detail all the circumstances--much less, that we should attempt to justify in all points the scheme of deception by which the mother effected this end.

It may however be not amiss to remark that even before the birth of these two sons, the Lord had clearly predicted that the law of primogeniture in their case should be reversed so that the elder should serve the younger. She might therefore have felt that as the time drew near when a father's blessing was to single out the favored son, it was important that the purpose of God in respect to the younger of the two should stand.

While we can not justify her measures, yet we may remark that God's purpose did stand. The aged father pronounced on Jacob the ever memorable blessing--"Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee." Gen. 27:28, 29. Scarcely had Jacob withdrawn when Esau came, announced himself, and besought his father to arise and eat and bless him. Now the whole truth flashed upon the mind of Isaac. He had given away the blessing--to Jacob. It could not be revoked. He was conscious that the hand of God was on him in giving it to Jacob and he could not recall it. He reveals the facts to Esau--Jacob came--"I have eaten of his meat before thou camest, and have blessed him; yea and he shall be blessed." Sad news to Esau. Yet one more effort remains. He may perhaps get another blessing equally valuable for himself. He cries therefore "with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father--Bless me, even me also, O my father. Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice

and wept." But he found no place of repentance--no possibility of changing his father's mind--though he sought it carefully with tears. The die is cast forever. He himself had sold his birthright, and God had confirmed his rash mad act, and given it to Jacob.

This is indeed one of the most affecting scenes on sacred record. It is peculiarly striking and solemn when we regard it as a kind of faint portraiture of that everlasting anguish and regret which will seize upon every lost sinner's heart when the truth shall ultimately flash upon him--my soul is lost--I have sold it for a mess of pottage, and it is lost forever.

Esau's sin consisted in despising this great blessing which belonged by birth to him. It is plain that he set no just value upon it. Its spiritual part he seems to have held in no estimation whatever. Suppose that he had been at the point to die of hunger; was it nothing to him to retain even then, his hold of Jehovah's gracious covenant? Was that a fit moment to despise his birthright and all its divinely promised blessings?

We may next observe that from this point, the law of primogeniture seems to have been annulled and never restored again in its full form and force as it existed before. When Jacob came to die, he called together all his sons and gave them all his blessing. They all alike seem to have become partakers of the promises. The birthright seemed to diffuse itself over the whole family. Together they became a nation of God's people, heirs in common of most of those blessings which came down to Isaac and to Jacob in the narrow line of the birthright.

It is much to our purpose to notice distinctly the fact that when the Jewish nation were set aside for their unbelief, a still wider diffusion of these promised blessings took place. The apostle Paul both announces and evinces the fact that all who are Christ's are Abraham's seed and heirs with him of this great promise. All are equally with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, sons of the birthright, entitled to that covenant which pledges peculiar blessings to children on the ground of the faith and obedience of their parents. This is a point which we should by no means overlook. There is too much of precious promise in it, it would seem, to allow us to forget or disown it. If we were to do either, might it not be said of us that we have despised our birthright?

Recurring to our text, I observe that the transaction alluded to there, and indeed the whole history of the Bible, recognize the fact that this blessing may be forfeited. Here let me read some passages, showing that God couples children with their parents in both His promises and His threatenings. "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul that thou mayest live." Deut. 30:6. "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-sources. One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Isa. 44:3-5. "As for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and forever." Isa. 59:21. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are

afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2:38, 39. Observe here that this reveals the great law of the gospel dispensation. The gospel reign has now begun and its spirit and its principles are now beginning to be developed. Just here now we find the cheering announcement--"The promise, that is, of the Holy Ghost, is unto you and to your children."

Again, we find in Romans 4, that Paul distinctly argues this great point, to show that all believers inherit the very same spiritual covenant which God gave first to Abraham. It was given to him not of law but of faith; hence all who have this faith inherit it.

The same doctrine is held and argued in Galatians 3 and 4, it being there maintained that "the blessing of Abraham comes on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith;" and the conclusion arrived at, being that "if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Thus we see that God connects children with their parents in His promises of blessings.

But let us dwell now more distinctly on the fact so plainly involved in our text--that these blessings may be forfeited.

It is plain they may be forfeited by contempt. If either parents or children treat them as of no value, they are in infinite peril of forfeiting them altogether, and God may at once take the forfeiture at their hands. Such treatment on their part must be exceedingly provoking to God, and none need wonder that God should say--If you despise these blessings, you need not have them.

Again, these blessings may be forfeited by a delay to embrace them. There is a limit beyond which God cannot wait on either parents, or children. This very delay implies that the blessings are lightly esteemed. For this reason therefore God might well arise in His displeasure and shut the door of hope and mercy.

Another obvious reason lies in the very nature of the present scenes of probation. Life must have an end, and may end quickly.

Still again, the blessings of this covenant may be forfeited by ignorance or unbelief. If parents do not understand its provisions or do not believe its promises, they may so entirely fail of laying hold by faith of these blessings as to forfeit them utterly and forever.

Again, they may be forfeited and lost through presumption. Children may tempt God as Esau did, presuming that God will give the blessing of course, although they have despised and sold it. Such seems to have been the case of Esau. He must have known that these covenant blessings accompanied the birthright; and yet he acted as if he supposed that his having foolishly sold his birthright to Jacob could not be taken as a forfeit. He presumed either that Isaac did not know of that transaction, or that it would not prevent his bestowing the blessing on himself even if he did. But his presumption was only another sample of his folly.

So it is no doubt often the case that the children of pious parents tempt God and forfeit all these

blessings. They may have heard much of this covenant, and they rely on it for their own salvation, while they put off repentance and provoke God till he cuts them down in their sins and shuts the door against their salvation forever. We have on record in the Bible many cases of parents and children who did forfeit these blessings. In many ways has the Lord taught us that children will be greatly affected by the course pursued by their parents. Curses or blessings come on them according as their parents are faithless in God or reckless of fulfilling the conditions of the covenant on the one hand, or are faithful on the other in labors and in prayers for their salvation.

This principle is amply recognized in several passages, some of which I will now refer to as illustrations. In the second of the ten commandments, we read, "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate Me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments." Thus in this solemn promulgation of Jehovah's will did He most emphatically recognize this principle that parents and children are most closely connected together, so that for the parent's sake good or ill shall come on their children. Yet let it be here observed that this does not imply that God punishes the child for its parent's sin. By no means. Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord most distinctly declares that He never does this.

But there is yet scope for visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children. A drunken father shall entail poverty, disease, and disgrace upon his offspring; yet shall not his offspring be at all punished for his sins. The punishment of individuals pertains to the next world and never to this. These providential circumstances which place our earthly trail in poverty or plenty--in sickness or in health--in disgrace or in honor--these are by no means our punishment in any proper sense. They may be evils; and in view of their final results they may not be. It may however well be an affliction to parents to be the guilty means of bringing disease, poverty and disgrace upon their children. Yet God has so connected parents and children together that such results naturally follow a parent's sins.

When the Lord condescended to show Moses His glory, "He passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Ex. 34:6, 7.

In Lev. 20:5, the Lord expresses one of His solemn threatenings against idol worship thus; "Then will I set my face against that man and against his family." In the case of Achan you all remember that God visited His fearful judgments on both the father and all his children.

These passages and cases I have alluded to, in order to show that parents often forfeit these covenant blessings for their children.

Both parents and children may so fatally forfeit this blessing that God will not return to renew the forfeited covenant, and reverse His decision. Isaac could not reverse what he had done in giving the blessing to Jacob. He was probably conscious that God had spoken through him in the blessing on Jacob, and now how could he of his own will reverse it? He could do no such thing. He seems to have been greatly astonished and amazed to find the blessing gone to Jacob, but he knew that God's hand

was in it, and he dared not attempt a change. Yea, said he, "and he shall be blessed."

Parents may shut themselves out from these blessings. Of this we have a striking case in that generation of the Hebrew people which came out of Egypt under Moses. With an high hand and an out-stretched arm, Jehovah had led them forth; with water from the smitten rock, and bread from heaven, had He sustained them, and with His daily presence in the cloud and in the fire had He guided them, and now, brought to the very verge of Canaan, perhaps already presuming that their toils were all over, they lose all through their cruel and wicked unbelief. In the very moment perhaps of their highest anticipations the Lord crushed all their hopes, shut and barred the doors of the promised land upon them and doomed them to wander forty years with their children till the plains of that wide waste were whitened with their bones. None could enter Canaan till the unbelieving fathers were all numbered with the dead. "Ye shall know, said the Lord, My breach of promise." Ye shall know that though I promised to Moses that I would bring you into Canaan, yet I can not fulfil that promise to you who have forfeited it by your unbelief and your rebellion against Me. For good reasons God had sworn in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest; and no entreaties or measures of theirs could induce Him to reverse that awful oath.

In this transaction of Esau, there are many points of most solemn and affecting interest. It teaches us this fact--that there is such a thing as sinning once too much. So did Esau. He reached a crisis--by one fatal deed he capped the climax of his iniquity--by one additional sin, he shut the door forever upon his own soul and cut off all hope of ever regaining the lost blessing. Mark well his case. In a fit of faintness from hunger and fatigue, he showed the real attitude of his heart in respect to this blessing. He had so little regard for it that he sold it for a mess of pottage. So of the Hebrew nation on the borders of Canaan. There is a last sin--a point in transgression beyond which mercy cannot go--at which justice interposes, and takes the sinner's case into His own hands.

The forfeiture of this on the part of either parents or children depends on the light they have. Their danger is critical and their guilt great in proportion to the knowledge they may have of the nature and value of the covenant and its promised blessings. In the case of Esau, we must suppose that he had light enough to enable him to appreciate the worth of his birthright. He could not but know how God had appeared over and over again to his godly grandfather, and to his father, giving and renewing those great and precious promises; he well enough knew that Abraham valued these promises infinitely more than all his earthly wealth; and yet with all this knowledge before his mind he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Well does a sacred writer call him, "that profane person," Esau. Forcible and pertinent is the remark of the original historian--"Thus Esau despised his birthright." No wonder that the Lord abhorred his conduct, and stamped his reckless disregard of these great blessings with the seal of His own indignation. Esau had too much light. His guilt was too great; his sin could not be forgiven. See also the Hebrew nation on the borders of Canaan. What had they seen? The uplifted hand of the Almighty ten times falling on oppressive Egypt, and finally whelming her armies in the depths of the Red Sea; that same Hand guiding themselves in love by fire and by cloud through the trackless desert, spreading for them a daily table there with angel's food; smiting Amalek before them when the hands of prayer were uplifted and upheld; rebukes from on high, chastening and scourging them for their idolatry, their murmurings and unbelief; all these things were fresh before their minds, for all had transpired before their eyes with the lapse of some two or three years; and yet with all this light before them, they dare to rebel against the Lord and will not believe His word nor

trust His power to save. "So He swore in His wrath that they should never enter into His rest." What could have been more just than this?

Now if it be true that the Lord rejected them the more readily because they had great light, then how important for us to enquire into our own responsibilities and dangers. Is not our light greater far than theirs? How critical then must be our condition? How imminent our peril of provoking the Lord to swear in His wrath that neither we nor our children shall ever enter into His rest.

Whenever either parents or children have forfeited the blessings of this covenant, the fact may be known by its closing up all access to the mercy seat in prayer. If the parents themselves are rejected as the Hebrew nation were on the borders of Canaan, the door of access is shut against themselves. They cannot pray acceptably for themselves. If their children have forfeited their birthright like Esau, then the parents cannot have a spirit of prayer for those children. This is plain, beyond question. It could not be of any avail for the rejected Hebrew nation to pray that God would let them go up into Canaan. They could not possibly have an acceptable spirit of prayer for this object, since God had sworn in His wrath that they should not enter. The Spirit would not help their infirmities, and make intercession in their hearts, to pray against the fearful oath of Jehovah. Neither in the other case could it be of any avail for Isaac to pray for profane Esau's pardon and the reversal of the sentence against him.

If you have observed with care and extensively, you have doubtless seen many cases illustrating this position. I have had occasion to observe many--so many that I cannot but regard this as a most striking mark of being rejected from God's covenant. If any of you have actually rejected this covenant, and God has taken you at your word, you will have no longer any spirit of prayer for blessings that are to come through that covenant; you will have no liberty of soul before God--no pleadings of the Spirit of the Lord within you--no strugglings and agonizings of the Holy Ghost within your heart for the souls of your children--no mighty help from the Lord, giving you power to believe and lay hold of the covenant and really close in upon the naked word of the Lord and say, "Lord, Thou hast spoken, now do as Thou hast said." I recollect the case of one backslider who had long been far away from God, and during this time his children had been growing up and hardening their hearts in sin. When he came to awake to his condition and see where he had been and what he had done, it was heart-rending to hear him exclaim, "I cannot pray for my children, I have ruined their souls forever, I can get no access to God in praying for them." Now this is no uncommon case. Parents break their covenant with God, and then He withdraws it and holds Himself no longer bound by its promises.

Again, where the children of pious parents treat their birthright with indifference, or disregard, as many do, and seem not to appreciate the blessing of being born of pious parents, they may expect the God of Abraham will give them up. In every age of the world God has recognized this principle, and has taken care to leave cases of fearful warning on record both in sacred and in all church history showing that His patience cannot be forever abused with impunity, and that He sometimes takes the reckless forfeiture of His covenant at the hands of the guilty, abandoned rebel.

On the other hand the Lord has always conferred blessings on faithful parents and faithful children. How often is it implied in the Bible that God felt Himself bound to confer great blessings on the Jews because of their connection with Abraham. The Psalmist touched this point when he said, "But the

mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them." Ps. 103:17, 18.

In the same manner and by the same immutable laws of Jehovah's moral government will great curses come upon children and upon children's children for the backsliding and unfaithfulness of their parents.

Again, I remark that after parents have long violated this covenant by grievous backslidings, God sometimes renews it. He has promised yet to do this to the Jewish nation when they shall again return to Him. Thus He holds Himself ready to renew covenant with parents even after most bitter backslidings, and after their children are on the very verge of destruction. So wonderful is His long-suffering--so rich beyond expression is His mercy--so does He love to bring the families of His people into His covenant where He can bless them and show forth His faithfulness and His great lovingkindness.

When the Lord does this, it is always on the condition of repentance; it can never happen on any other condition. His people must return with brokenness of heart, and bitter tears, confessing and forsaking all their sins against Him. Then God for Christ's sake can forgive and can restore. They will have the evidence of this in a returning spirit of faith and prayer.

Now mark; perhaps I have spoken the experience of some parents here. You have some of you felt that you could not lay hold of this covenant--you could not grasp these promises by faith: the Lord did not write this covenant in your heart; but on your repentance the Lord meets you with gracious pardon--writes anew His covenant on your very hearts, and gives you thus the inward witness of your acceptance in the bonds of that covenant. Then you felt that verily you had occasion to bless and magnify the name of the Lord.

## **REMARKS.**

1. The birthright of God's children is of infinite value. The Lord promised to Abraham and to his posterity, not Canaan only or chiefly; but spiritual blessings, to children for their parents sake; and then brought all the Christian church up on to the same broad platform of promise, making them heirs by faith of the same covenant and of all its spiritual blessings. And what a covenant is this! How infinitely precious to the pious parent's heart! How glorious to God as well as blissful to man! Who can fully estimate its value? What if you might inherit the throne and crown of Britain, and then pass it down as a legacy to your children. Your eye would sparkle--your heart flutter at the tidings. What if you might inherit an estate worth a million. But how much more may you inherit in the promised mercies of this glorious covenant! Thrones and gold are only chaff in the comparison; here are substantial, everlasting realities.

2. Great multitudes in every age have broken this covenant and forfeited its blessings. Even in the family of Isaac there was one who forfeited these blessings and thus brought on himself not the blessings promised to Abraham, but the heaviest curses. Oh, how many wayward sons have sold their birthright as Esau did, and the Lord has shut them off from the blessings of His covenant. And how

many professedly pious parents too--strange that they should not more rationally appreciate the priceless value of this covenant!

Suppose you inherit a throne--a crown; would you recklessly forfeit it? Would you not say--This belongs now to my children; let me keep it for them? Indeed you would be most earnest and watchful--you would prize it, and nothing could induce you to be remiss in preserving so rich a good and handing it down unsullied to your children.

3. It is amazing to see how little many children realize the value of these blessings. What! do you not understand, dear children, that great blessings are promised you for your pious parent's sake? Do you not know the value of this birthright? Hear David urge this plea--"Have mercy upon me, O God, and save the son of Thy handmaid."

4. Many parents have occasion for most bitter reflection upon their own folly and guilt in forfeiting this covenant. Said a father to me--"I have no confidence to pray for my children; they have gone from under my influence; I cannot even reach them with my prayers." If any of you my hearers, are in this state, the only thing you can do is to repent and plead with God to return in mercy and renew His covenant with you. Go humble yourself before Him; entreat Him not to take your forfeiture of the covenant at your hands and make it final and fatal.

And brethren, how pertinent are the words of Paul to this case; "Let us therefore fear lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." A promise being left us, beloved, O let us not come short!

It is possible, nay perhaps probable that there may be parents here who have already fallen short, and lost hold of this glorious covenant. Come ye who are professedly Christian parents--let me talk with you about this. How long since you entered into this covenant with God for your children? How old were you then? How many children have you thus dedicated to God? Where are they now? Where have they been? Through much prayer and faith and most diligent keeping of the covenant, have they received its promised blessings; or does their hard heart and wicked life bear testimony against you? O have you forsaken this covenant, and has the Lord forsaken you and your children? Like Eli of old, have you neglected to restrain them, and have they in consequence plunged into fearful hardness, or possibly, crime? If you have broken covenant, will you not seek the Lord now, if possibly He may renew it and give you a fresh hold upon its promised blessings? It may be that you have let the promise slip, and now can find no place for repentance though you seek it carefully with tears. Perhaps God seems to say to you--"They shall know My breach of promise!"--awful words!

One word to children. God has committed to you a great and sacred trust. Have you despised your birthright? Have you made light of these blessings and vilely cast them off? If so, the day will come when you will see your folly in bitter anguish. Like Esau you may wail out with a great and bitter cry--"O is there no forgiveness for me--ah is there none?"

I once had a friend whose death under the attendant circumstances was deeply and awfully affecting. He had a pious and praying mother--a careful mother, who had watched over his early years with Christian assiduity, and many tears. His father was a good man, and while for some months I boarded

in the family, I could not but say, "This is a well-ordered and godly household." Rarely if ever have I seen a better regulated Christian family, or more care taken in training children.

Some years afterwards I saw this son to whom I referred, in the great revival at Rochester. He had been from home some time and of course away from the influence of his parents. In this revival he acted through out like a fool. Vain, proud, giddy, at first he took the ground that he would not be so singular as to become a Christian alone, while none else were coming out for the Lord; but when hundreds began to gather round the Savior's feet, he changed his tone and would not repent then, because he said he would not disgrace himself by going with the rabble. Just so full of nonsense and mad folly were all his positions. He lived through the revival a hardened sinner.

Next came the fearful cholera and smote him among its first victims. It swept over his robust frame with terrible desolation, and almost in an hour he was on the bed of death. His godly father and praying mother rush to his bedside; there is no time for many words; the agonized son cries out, O, my father--can't you pray for your dying son? The father is speechless. Mother, can't you pray for me before I die? The mother can't pray. No, not even that mother. It seemed to them as if there was no audience before mercy's throne. They could not pray for that son. You may conceive of their deep, unutterable agony; O could you have witnessed the awful scene! A dying son of pious parents--who could not pray himself, and for whom even a pious father and mother can get no access to God in prayer! O could you only hear his last words of shrieking anguish--"what, father, mother, can't you pray for your dying son!"

The oath of the Almighty had passed, and the Lord saw fit to make him an awful monument to the whole city of His stern, His righteous, but inexorable Justice! O how all who heard it stood aghast, and how did it make the ears of all the people tingle! It was Jehovah's awful voice of warning!

Among these young men before me is there not an Esau? Have you not despised and sold your birthright--you, young man, whose pious father and mother have poured out their scalding tears for you like water, and their agonizing prayers as if they could not be denied; but you have presumed on mercy and kept on in sin; you have resisted the Spirit and insulted your Maker; O could you have seen that young man die, and could you have heard his last imploring wail--"O can't you pray for your dying son;" and could you have realized how the iron of despair entered his soul as he sunk in the chill arms of death and all the bitterness of unutterable anguish filled the hearts of those who had prayed for him in his childhood, but might pray for him no more; O could you see, or only realize one scene of this sort, you might learn one of the lessons of fearful warning by which your Maker would admonish you not to trifle with the salvation of your soul. O! the folly of sinners--the folly of those children of pious parents who sell their birthright for less than a morsel of meat, sometimes even for poison. O! why will they forsake God, and slight His covenant? Why will they forfeit His mercies and provoke His everlasting frown?

Ye who are parents, have any of you broken your covenant with God for your children? Then come and bring along those children of the covenant, and let us all humble ourselves before the Lord, deeply repent of all our sins, and entreat His mercy, if peradventure He may be gracious to us and renew His covenant with us, and once more write it on our hearts.

## **Afflictions of the Righteous and the Wicked Contrasted**

Lecture VI

June 24, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--2 Cor. 4:17: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Read also Psalm 73.

Few things are more interesting than to contemplate the contrast every where drawn in the Bible between the righteous and the wicked. No man can thoroughly study this contrast without being greatly affected by it. Throughout the Bible we find this contrast drawn in the strongest colors respecting their character, their afflictions, their joys, their entire earthly course, and their final destiny. It is my design in this discourse to notice some particulars.

*I. The best saints are chastened.*

*II. I pass in the next place to remark that precisely the opposite in every respect is said in the Bible of the sinner.*

Our text from St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians speaks of the righteous. It affirms that their afflictions are light, are transient, and productive of augmented glory. We have another passage of similar import which asserts that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

The Bible throughout holds language directly opposite to this respecting the wicked.

But I am first to give a few particulars respecting the case of the righteous.

### **I. They have afflictions.**

This is asserted and implied throughout the Bible. And the whole course of God's providence in every age teaches the same things. The best saints are chastened. Affliction is not excluded from their cup because of their piety. Their afflictions may be in themselves as painful--may be as frequent and as long protracted as those which befall the wicked.

The book of Job shows that formerly this fact was greatly misunderstood. In those times of comparative darkness, when the light of written revelation had scarcely begun to fall upon the nations, some men, even some good men, seemed not to have understood the meaning of the divine

dispensation towards the righteous.

But I have several specific points of remark to make respecting the afflictions of the righteous.

- 1. They are light. Paul calls it--"Our light affliction." This, you will observe, is a term of comparison. We need therefore to inquire with what our afflictions are to be compared in order to be reasonably deemed light.

Obviously the afflictions of the righteous are light compared with what they know and feel that themselves deserve. This is one of the considerations which make their afflictions seem, in their own view, to be light.

Their afflictions are not said to be light compared with those of the wicked. But they are light and every real saint feels them to be so compared with what himself deserves.

Again, they are light compared with what Christ suffered in working out our salvation. Whenever we think of Christ's circumstances, apprehending in some measure his trials from being rejected of his people, from the unbelief and fickleness of his professed friends, from the wickedness and coming ruin of his nation, which he could neither remedy nor avert; from the malice of his murderers, and from his position as our sacrifice;--when, I say, we duly apprehend such points as these, we always see that all our own utmost afflictions are light compared with his. I have never yet seen a Christian who did not feel this when reminded of the sufferings endured by Christ in his earthly afflictions.

Again, these afflictions are light when compared with those that await the wicked. Compared with those, they are too small to admit of being estimated as any thing at all. They are less than the fine dust of the balance.

In the same view, these afflictions of the righteous are light compared with what they themselves must have suffered if Christ had not suffered in their stead, and if they should not by the discipline of suffering here be so purified that God can take them to heaven at death. It is well for all Christians to consider both these points;--namely: how the sufferings of Christ have saved them from the terrible necessity of ever lasting anguish, and also how the moral discipline of suffering here may perform a most important and indispensable agency in preparing the soul for exemption from all further suffering in a world of peace and joy. Then you will see how light your afflictions are compared with what they might have been, and indeed must have been if God had forborne to adopt the great remedial system.

- 2. I must pass to remark that these afflictions of the righteous are short. They are short compared with eternity; short compared with what we deserve that they should be; short compared with the measureless duration of the sufferings of the wicked. Let their duration be compared with any of these points, and you cannot fail to see that they are indeed but for a moment.

- 3. All these afflictions of the righteous are in respect to them means of grace. So the apostle implies. In his view they "work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." They do this only as they serve to prepare the soul for glory;--by no means because they merit a reward of glory. But in their disciplinary character and results, they work for the Christian a weight of glory which infinitely exceeds all the weight of the afflictions themselves.
- 4. The perceived design and tendency of these afflictions rob them of their sting. When the people of God see this design and this tendency, they feel more like embracing and kissing the rod than like repelling it. Indeed it usually happens that they can testify after the scene of trial is past,--"It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." And often, while passing through the very furnace, the conviction that the hand of their own Father is in it; that it is designed for their good, and if they will fall in with this kind design, it cannot fail to do them infinite good--these thoughts serve to sustain them so that not so much as the smell of fire is on them. Or to change the figure, these thoughts, dropped as an anodyne into the cup of their sorrows, transform what else had been gall and wormwood, to the sweetness of honey.
- 5. A consciousness of their own ill-desert serves to inspire patience and submission. Let the Christian only realize this, and he will cry out--all these afflictions are nothing compared to what I have deserved at the hand of God. I cannot murmur. All this is no suffering at all when seen in the light of my deservings.
- 6. The fact that they are so short makes them appear so light.

With almost universal application it may be said of the afflictions of the righteous--"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." A night of unbroken sorrow may appear long--but soon the morning comes in its joy, the night of anguish is forgotten. What Christian does not know this? Where is the Christian who has not had this written out in his own experience? Hence, under the heaviest pressure of affliction, he can still expostulate with his own despondencies--"Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me; hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God."

I can well recollect that before my own conversion I was deeply struck with this, that Christians were the only persons in the world who had any reason to be joyful. I could easily see that they had consolations which none others had. I saw that nothing could possibly befall them which could ultimately be an evil. All things I saw must work good and nothing but good for them. Reading such passages as our text, showed me plainly that all was well for them, and that they alone, of all men on the earth had a legitimate right to be joyful.

The opposite I saw must be true in every instance in the case of the wicked. All these thoughts passed often through my mind while in my law office. Even then I could not help thinking intensely on these points, nor could I help seeing the force and the bearing of earthly afflictions to curse the wicked and to bless and not harm the righteous. In this state of my mind, I did not perhaps quite envy Christians their lot, but I felt that none but

they had any reason to be cheerful. The sinner, I plainly saw, had no business to be cheerful. Nothing could benefit his condition and prospects but to howl and mourn in most hopeless anguish. Nothing but ill was on him; nothing but ill yet more awful was before him.

Nor in my case did those views result from a state of melancholy or depression of spirits. I never had any tendencies of that sort. These convictions were the result of sober and intense thought. I studied the great questions of the Christian religion intensely, and I could not fail of being deeply impressed with the mighty contrast between the state of the righteous even in this world, and that of the wicked.

My situation in regard to early religious instruction, was rather peculiar. I heard no preaching but the strongest form of Old Schoolism, and had to grope my way along through all its absurdities, and think out all my religious opinions in the very face of all the preaching I heard in my earliest years. This led me to think deeply and thoroughly upon the great points of the Christian life. Hence when I saw a sinner in his sins I could see nothing cheerful in his case. All was full of gloom. But a Christian--what if he does suffer now? All will soon be well. His sufferings are soon over. Who can help seeing this? It seems to me now--as it did then, quite impossible for any thinking man to avoid thinking on this subject, and if he thinks at all how can he fail of being struck with the immense contrast between the case of the righteous and that of the wicked?

- 7. The joys of the saints are only the beginning of heaven. The Bible does not represent them as being short, like their sorrows; but represents their joys as long and their grief as short. Their joys are enduring, deep, full, fadeless; not light and fleeting as are those of the sinner.

## **II. I pass in the next place to remark that precisely the opposite in every respect is said in the Bible of the sinner.**

To show this I will read you the 73d Psalm. I select this, not because it is more striking or more decisive than many other passages in the Bible on the same subject; but because it brings out more distinctly the very truths I wish to lay before you.

It appears that before the volume of written revelation was filled up, and before men had learned to interpret the providences of God, as now in the light of revelation we are enabled to do, some men were greatly perplexed with the course of divine providence towards the righteous and the wicked. Such seems to have been for a time the case with the writer of this 73d Psalm. "Truly," he says, "truly God is good to Israel; "--"truly"--as if the conviction had just now become fixed in his mind, and he had just learned this fact, so long obscured in darkness,--"truly God is good to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped." What was the matter? He proceeds at once to tell us. "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." He evidently speaks not of all wicked men, for some of them have trouble as other men have; but he speaks of the prosperous classes--of those who seem during much of their life to have all that heart can wish. "Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have

more than heart could wish. They are corrupt and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens; and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return thither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." It is all in vain he says for me to have washed my hands from sin, and to have denied myself its pleasures, for I have been sorely plagued notwithstanding--more sorely even than most of these wicked men;--"for all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." But at this point he checks himself;--it strikes his mind that to talk in this strain will be a stumbling-block to God's people; it will throw them into the same state of perplexity and repining; and he sees instantly that this will not answer; what then shall I do, says he? "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;" I was yet more painfully perplexed; I dared not speak out my feelings least I should offend the generation of God's children. And yet my heart was hot within me, and how could I refrain from speaking out the deep, burning perplexities of my soul? "It was too painful for me until I went into the sanctuary of God;" I knew not how to solve this mystery, that I should have so many troubles and the wicked so few--"until I went to the sanctuary, then I understood their end." "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment; they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so O Lord, when thou awakest thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee." I was stupid as a beast; why did I not understand before this that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and that their richest joys terminate almost in a twinkling, in everlasting desolation and anguish? "Nevertheless, I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory." "Thou shalt guide me"--what a blessing to have the infinitely wise God for a guide! "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish, thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works."

We see now that if sinners are joyful, the Bible represents their joy as only for a moment. I might quote passages almost without number to prove this. But there is no need that I should.

On the other hand, the Bible shows that when Christians are afflicted it is but for a moment, and that their afflictions are light also. O how light compared with the full lot of the wicked!

But what of the wicked man? Is he joyful? Yes, he has a feverish excitement and he calls it joy, but it cannot last; it vanishes away ere he has done quaffing off the mere foam of his pleasure-cup. Light too are all his joys--light as air; in their very nature they never can be solid and substantial; they are as the chaff which the wind drives away. Sinner, you know there is nothing in them worthy of the name of joy. You know they are vain, false, fickle, unsatisfactory; the first breath of adversity scatters them all; disappointment has hidden her sting beneath their fairest flowers. You have known all this in your own sad experience, and yet you are loath to admit it, and more loath still to act as if it were true.

Again the sinner's joys are only the means of aggravating his future sorrows. Instead of being as in the

case of the righteous an antepast of heaven, they are a prelude to hell. Every joy of the sinner in this world is a fruit of God's mercy, and every such mercy abused, will be prolific in wrath and torments in the world of retribution. God will visit for all those abused mercies.

Then, moreover, those joys of earth will be food for thought in that world of tormenting self-reflections. Conscious guilt for mercies abused will harrow up the soul of the lost sinner with unutterable pangs.

Yet again, every sinner knows that his good things are the opposite of what he deserves. The sweet consciousness of integrity and of deserving well at the hand of God, he never has, or can have. He knows that all in his case is ill-desert--desert of utter and unmingled sorrows.

Once more. In the hour of trial, how great the contrast between the afflictions of the wicked and those of the righteous! The wicked man under his afflictions can only say--if his eyes are open--These are only the beginnings of my sorrow. I have only just begun to drink the bitter cup, the dregs of which are to be my portion forever and ever.

Yes, the wicked must bear their sufferings in this life, comfortless and unsustained. No Christian's hope gladdens and cheers their heart. No solace can they have in the bitter hour. Faith in Christ is, with them, entirely out of the question; they can think of Christ only as the being whose blood they have trampled under foot--whose mediation for sinners they have set at naught; and now they can hear Him say only this--"Because I have called and ye refused, therefore when ye call I will not answer." It avails nothing to speak to them of Jesus. The name soothes not their aching bosoms; it only harrows up their souls with more bitter self-reproaches, and keener despair. No hope have they;--certainly no good hope through grace: for they have set all grace at naught.

Thus the very opposite things are true of their afflictions which are true in the case of the righteous. While the afflictions of the righteous are light because of his buoyant, trusting, submissive, peaceful state of mind; the afflictions of the wicked are heavy because of his wicked state of mind. He has no power to resist and bear up under them.

Suppose an ungodly man is visited with bereavement. His property is torn away. Alas, it is his all; and what has he more? This was his God, and now it is gone, perhaps forever. It leaves him no good to enjoy. The Christian too may lose all his property in a twinkling; but then his Father in heaven is infinitely rich, and he need not fear lest he come to want. His great treasure remains untouched by the fires or the floods of earth. He can have a thousand angels to minister to his wants if he needs their aid, and his Father sees it best to send them.

Suppose the sinner is bereaved of some dear friend, a parent or a bosom companion, or a child of his strong and tender love. The blow comes down upon him with unmitigated weight. He has no Savior, no hope, no consolation--no being in the universe able to save, to whom he can flee.

These sorrows are heavy because they are enduring. They intermit only for a brief space and then another avalanche rolls over him again, crushing all his fondest hopes and spreading desolation all around him. And then the thought must flash across his mind--These are only the beginning of

sorrows. I am bereaved here;--O how much more bereaved when every friend shall be torn away! Bereavement makes me wretched now--what shall I be hereafter?

There is another point of most solemn import. The wicked man's afflictions, instead of working for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, will only work in his case a far more exceeding and eternal weight of damnation. For all these afflictions are only appliances on the part of God to reclaim the sinner from sinning and bring him to Jesus for salvation. If he resists them all, they cannot fail to aggravate his final doom. Hence the more thorough and searching his trials, the greater his guilt, and the more heavy his final punishment. Hence we see that the more he suffers here--supposing him to resist the design of God to reclaim him by these trials, the more must he suffer hereafter as a punishment for his deeper guilt.

The reverse of this we know is true of the Christian as the more he suffers here the more he enjoys hereafter.

It is most striking to notice here that while all things joyful or sad work together for good to the Christian, all things, whether prosperous or adverse--joyous or afflictive, work together for ill to the sinner. The more he enjoys here, the more miserable he must be hereafter; and the more he suffers here, the more he must suffer hereafter. If there is in this an apparent paradox, it is still true, and you will instantly see its truth when you come to see the relation of the whole course of God's providence here towards the sinner, to this sinner's final doom. All God's providences are means of trial to the sinner, and if he abuses them all, and resists their influence, they cannot fail to work for him a deeper damnation.

Alas, the guilty course and the fearful end of the sinner! Instead of being able to say, with the Christian--welcome afflictions; welcome pains and trials and bereavements; welcome even the cross itself;--he can only say--Woe is me;--these heavy afflictions that make me weary of life now, are working for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of damnation! Nothing for me here but bitterness, and a vain pursuit of hollow pleasures, all working for me a more dire damnation for my everlasting portion!

## **REMARKS.**

1. If we would understand the Bible we must attain a position from which we shall see things as the inspired writers saw them. They estimated all things in the light of eternity. When they speak of earthly things, they compare them with eternity, and deem them long or short--valuable or valueless, as they are estimated in this scale of comparison. And why should they not? If we are to exist forever, there is surely no other rational way of estimating the value of whatever shall affect our entire well-being. Our happiness or misery in the next world is a part of the whole sum of our good or ill in existence as much as the portion which falls to us in this world.

Hence if earthly scenes and interests are brief and but for a moment compared with eternity, let them be called and deemed light and of small account. So the sacred writers seemed to regard them.

Many have fallen into serious errors in consequence of not understanding this. When the apostles

speak of its being only a step to the day of judgment, some have supposed their real meaning to be that Christ's second advent was really just about to occur. But it is by no means certain that this was their real meaning. Minds so deeply impressed as theirs were, with the solemn realities of eternity are wont to view eternal scenes as very near at hand. The intervention of earthly scenes and events between--events in which their mind takes no interest--is scarcely thought of.

Now we need to be in such a state of mind as theirs in order to understand their language. Then we shall estimate all earthly things in the near view of the solemn realities of the eternal world.

2. Afflictions are light or otherwise, very much according to the state of mind in which they are experienced. In one state, a mere trifle will appear heavy; in another state the same trial will seem scarce worth regarding. The mind sustained of God can sustain almost any thing God shall lay upon it; but when a man has all his own burdens to carry alone, and can scarcely bear the burden of his own wounded spirit and rebellious, repining heart, how can he bear the superadded weight of affliction?

3. It is often exceedingly interesting to contemplate the afflictions of the righteous. When we see the afflicted soul sustained triumphantly by grace, and consider also how these light afflictions must educe a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, we see it a most blessed thing to be afflicted. O it is a joyful scene. Their state of mind is such that they scarcely feel the pain of their afflictions. They know themselves to be blessed, and their souls sometimes exult in scenes of deep affliction with exceeding joy. They have so much of God in their souls;--God takes occasion by means of the affliction to make such peculiar manifestations of his glory and his goodness to their souls that they may well exult in the precious good of being afflicted.

You may have heard it said of one of the daughters of Pres. Edwards, that while a husband whom she tenderly loved lay a corpse in the house, her joy was so great that she sought some secret place to give it vent lest it should be misconstrued by those who could not appreciate the abounding consolations of the great joy with which God was pleased to fill her soul. Now what was this? How shall we account for it? But one rational account can be given. The Lord was pleased to make this affliction in her case a sort of conductor along which the electric fires of his own love and presence reached and filled her soul. She became so filled with the joys of the Spirit that she could not be sensible to the bitterness of grief.

Now another woman in a different state of mind would have hung over that lifeless body--would have bathed it with her bitter tear; would have given way to inconsolable grief. Why? Because, in her state of mind, the consolations and joys of God are wanting.

Payson, you may recollect, said near the close of his life--"Since I have given up my will, I have never in a single instance been disappointed." You need only be in a state in which you have no will but God's--then all will be well with you. Form no purpose except on this condition--"If the Lord will, I shall do this or that." Let a man get into this permanent state of mind, and where is he? Where he never can be disappointed. However his plans may issue, all seems well to him, because he wishes nothing otherwise than God would have it, and God's ways can never be frustrated. As a man once said of the weather when asked what he thought the weather would be--"Just such as pleases me," said he. But how could he know this? What does this mean? The answer is easy. Said he, "It will be such

weather as pleases God, I know, and whatever pleases God will perfectly please me." Thus, beloved, if you are only weaned thoroughly from your own wills, and molded into sweet submission to the will of God, every thing will go just right. However much the course of divine Providence may seem to frustrate your plans and threaten mischief to your interests, you can say, "This pleases my Heavenly Father, and therefore I know it is best, and it shall please me."

I very distinctly recollect attending a funeral in a case where a man had lost a most beloved wife by a sudden death. But O, there was such a smile on his countenance, a smile so calm, so resigned, so sweet, so like heaven--I never can forget it. Such a countenance as his;--it seemed to betoken any thing else but affliction. Why? His heart was with God.

But while this is all joyful and interesting; on the contrary all is agonizing when you come to see the wicked under affliction. Alas! they have no consolation. I once witnessed a funeral scene in New York. A most ungodly man died leaving two ungodly daughters fatherless. Their mother had died before, and they felt themselves thrown upon a blank world, orphans. They wept and wailed enough to move a heart of stone. Their tears and cries were agonizing. I felt unutterable anguish as I saw their forlorn, despairing grief. But I could do little else than stand and weep. I talked to them of Jesus, but they had no Jesus. This name, so dear to the Christian heart, had no charms to them. They did not know him. They had never learned to trust him;--they had never made him their friend. Alas! they had no friend in the universe. Their father had gone to hell, and they were following on in the same path. O, it was enough to tear a man's heart all to pieces to witness such a scene! I could not help crying out, O, were they only Christians! O, if they only had Jesus for their friend!

But these are only the beginning of sorrows. These are only the first tastings of that bitter cup which to all eternity they must drink to its dregs. These are only the first drops of that awful, rising, gathering hail storm, about to overwhelm them in its wide wasting ruin. If you have ever seen the awful tornado, rolling up in its mountain masses of cloud and hail from the west, roaring, crashing, sweeping along;--now its first drops fall--it is coming, coming--even these first drops thrill through the quick pulse and the beating heart of the houseless, naked wanderer--ah how can he bear that rushing avalanche of storm!

To the sinner in this world--the few drops of affliction cut him down; he cannot stand before these few small drops;--how can he stand when God shall make bare his awful arm and clothe it with majesty to visit wrath upon the guilty according to their deeds? O sinner, how can thy heart endure, or thy hands be strong in the day when God shall deal with thee? The first drops crush you down; you cannot bear even the first small drop, but sink and wail out under even these;--what next? Next comes the solid hail--hear it roar. O that crash--as if it would tear the world in pieces! The first drops scattered in this world scald and scathe him--ah surely he never can endure in that dread day when the storms of Jehovah's wrath shall begin to beat forever on his guilty spirit!

When I have seen sinners under conviction, gnawing their very tongues literally as I have seen it--drawing blood, I have cried out in the inward anguish of my soul--If this is conviction, what is hell? O my soul, WHAT IS HELL? No hope;--no hope, no end, no escape;--O, if there were only some way of escape--or some end though after myriads of ages had rolled away in the agonies of the second death;--then it would not be all utter, hopeless despair. These thoughts of final relief might

come as the elixir of life to bring at least a few drops of comfort; but no! hell has no hopes for its doomed ones;--it has no balm for the wounded spirits of its guilty, self-ruined victims. Every thought in every sinner's mind there, is only the fire and the gall of hell upon the dark malign spirits of that prison-house of despair!

Finally, brethren, let me say, it is exceedingly useful to us to contemplate this contrast between the earthly state of the righteous and of the wicked. Let Christians do this often and thoroughly. I have found it exceedingly useful to me to do it. It quickens the deep sympathies of my heart for my dying fellowmen and calls forth gushing gratitude for the mercies of gospel salvation. It is sometimes an evil to dwell too long and too exclusively upon the Christian's hope and the Christian's heaven, and neglect to dwell upon the bitter doom of the wicked. O, we must not forget their awful state! Our business here is to pull them out of those fires. Then let our hearts feel their awful peril. Let us often follow out this striking, heart-affecting contrast between the righteous and the wicked. If ministers would often do this, carrying out this contrast in all its great and striking points, O how would both they and their churches travail in birth for souls, and be filled with unutterable emotions of benevolent solicitude for the souls of the perishing!

Brethren, do you satisfy yourselves with the dainties of the Christian life and live to eat rather than to labor and toil? Do you come up here to this sanctuary to regale yourselves with spiritual manna, and give no crumbs to those who must starve in the agonies of the second death? Do you lose sight of the sorrows of the wicked, and quite forget their case? Do you--can you forget their awful afflictions here and hereafter--so heavy, so enduring, so fearful? O! can you let these things pass from your minds, and live on as if all were well? Beloved, you must one day give account for souls--for souls saved or lost.

## **On Becoming Acquainted With God**

Lecture VII

July 22, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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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

then 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.

## **God Manifesting Himself to Moses**

Lecture VIII

August 5, 1846

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Text.--Ex. 33:12-23: "And Moses said unto the Lord, See, Thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people; and Thou hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me. Yet Thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in My sight. Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found grace in Thy sight, show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight, and

consider that this nation is Thy people. And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said to Him, If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us? So shall we be separated; I and Thy people from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken; for thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name. And he said, I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory. And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And He said, thou canst not see My face; for there shall no man see Me and live. And the Lord said, behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by; and I will take away My hand, and thou shalt see My back parts; but My face shall not be seen."

Text.--Ex. 34:1-8: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first; and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest. And be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai, and present thyself there to Me in the top of the mount. And no man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount: neither let the flocks nor herds feed before that mount. And he hewed two tables of stone, like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone. And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped."

There are many passages of Bible history which are richly edifying, and which it is important for us to read often and ponder deeply. The passage now before us I have read often, and several times have preached upon it. Every successive reading suggests new thoughts and develops new beauties; like a deep, rich mine of gold, the more it is wrought, the richer the ore it brings up.

God had called Moses to be a leader and instructor of His people in a great and mighty movement. Moses was to superintend and guide them from Egypt to Canaan. In the first verse of our passage Moses distinctly recognizes the fact that God had designated himself for this great work. "See, Thou sayest unto me, bring up this people."

But Moses very well understood that God had not called him to perform this work in his own strength, but designed to give him aid. It seems probable that Moses had often thought particularly of this point of having a helper, had often prayed over it and asked God whom he should have to help him in this great enterprise. He saw that the work before him was great; he had been in that vast, howling, desolate wilderness before, and he could appreciate somewhat before hand the labor and responsibility of leading through it a host of three millions of dependent men, women and children. Such a work he well knew surpassed all human power, and he therefore rejoiced to know that God

would send him a helper. Accordingly in the next verse Moses makes this appeal; "Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found grace in Thy sight, show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight; and consider that this nation is Thy people."

Observe here that this was after Moses had met with God several times. He had already received the law on Mt. Sinai from Jehovah's own hand, and had seen the great "I am" in the burning bush. Yet though he had known so much of God, he still felt that he needed to know very much more. He knew far too little of God to be fit for this great work of guiding His people through that trackless desert. Now therefore, he makes his call to this work and God's acceptance of him in this capacity an argument with God for revealing Himself yet more fully. Now, he says, inasmuch as Thou hast called me and I have found grace, now show me Thy way. Let me know more of Thee.

You cannot but be struck with the simple-heartedness of Moses in this conversation with God. He unbosoms his whole soul as a man would with his friend. He is deeply impressed with the importance of knowing more of God, and feels most deeply that without this knowledge he cannot persuade the people to encounter the perils of that great and fearful desert. He felt the pressure of his own responsibilities and turned confidingly to God. Hence his simple-hearted state of mind.

Opening his heart thus before the Lord, he reminds Him that although He had called him, yet He had not told him who should go with him. The Lord seems to admit the full force of this appeal. How wonderful! Here is the great Jehovah, condescending to talk with a mere mortal man like one of us. He speaks; then He listens to the reply. He hears the appeal and feels the full force of the considerations it presents.

Now mark the gracious answer. "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest." Moses asks--Who shall go! The Lord replies--I will go with you Myself--My presence shall guide you--you need not fear. How full of kindness, love, and condescension, is this answer! If you want to know who shall go with you, let this suffice you--I will go with you Myself. I feel the force of your plea. I see all your necessities. I pledge you My presence.

How full of consolation to Moses, to be assured of Jehovah's glorious presence! How sweet the promise, "I will give thee rest."

Now listen to the beautiful answer of Moses, in which we have another exhibition of his great simplicity of character. He is so deeply sensible of his own deficiencies, that he knows and feels that he cannot go without God. "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." He thus acknowledges most fully his entire dependence on God, and his perfect despair of success unless God be with him. What can be more striking than these developments of character, both on the part of Moses and of God! On the part of Moses, you see the most perfect simplicity and dependence; on the part of God, the most astonishing goodness and condescension.

But let us examine the course pursued by Moses yet more attentively. When God had given him the promise "My presence shall go with thee," why did he not drop the subject at once? Why go on to argue and urge the case yet further? The answer is to be found in his intensely anxious state of mind. He could not endure to think of going on without God. Without God's presence, he urges, "wherein

shall it be known that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight?" Now plainly Moses had looked thoroughly through this subject. He did not say this without reflection. It was no hasty remark; nor was it made without good reason. Indeed, Moses was in an eminently collected and rational state of mind. He saw how infinitely necessary it was, for the good of Israel, and for the honor of Jehovah, that this nation should stand out before all the nations of the earth as a distinct people. Hence he urges before the Lord--how can this be manifest unless Thou be with us? Can any thing else make it manifest? Can my saying so do it? No; God Himself must be with us, sustaining us amid all our trials, guiding us in all our ways, delivering us from all our foes, else we shall not be known as the people of God, and God Himself can get no honor from our bearing His name. How perfectly reasonable are these views of the case, and the state of Moses' mind resulting from these views!

We come now to the answer of God. "And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name." The Lord seems to feel the full force of every word that Moses says. Indeed, no being in the world is so easily influenced by considerations of real importance as God is. I have always found that if I had good reasons to urge in prayer before God, I could certainly prevail with Him, for He is always reasonable. It is wonderful to see how the Lord suffers Himself to be carried by the least reason, presented even by a child. Yes, He seems to say, I know very well that your reasoning is all good, and I will surely act accordingly. So with Moses. God heard, and then did for him all that he could ask.

At this stage of the interview Moses ventured upon yet another great request. He had been drawing nearer and yet nearer to God during this whole conversation. How often in reading this narration have I seemed to be by his side, and to see God taking an attitude all along to encourage Moses to draw yet nearer and nearer. God promises to give him His gracious presence. He meets every request with His smiles and His assent. Moses therefore dares to take a position which probably no mortal had ever taken before. What is it? This--"I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory." But why should Moses make this request? Mark what had already passed. God had shown Himself gloriously on Sinai until the people trembled and did not dare to hear that awful voice anymore. Moses had come down from that awful mount, his face all blazing with the glory of this interview with God. So much of that awful majesty of the Lord of Hosts had Moses seen; yet now he ventures to draw yet nearer and nearer, and since God kindly permits him to approach, he ventures upon another request. Let me see yet more of Thy glory. Take that vail away and let me see Thy face and all Thy heart.

O what a request this must have been for a mortal man to make! But what reply did the Lord make? Did He say--"Take care, Moses, take heed what you ask?" Let us see. "And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." O how ready--how infinitely condescending and gracious! I will make thee know My name; that is, my real character--for by God's name we are to understand His character, since all His names were originally significant, and each expressed some leading attribute of His character.

Thou canst not see My face, said He; thou canst not bear the view of My unveiled glories; no man can see Me in this perfect sense and live. The Lord grants him all He can give--all that Moses can bear. Moses was in a state of mind so disinterested and confiding that God could deny him nothing which was possible in his mortal state; nothing which could be essential or useful to his success in the great work before him.

Moses needs to have such an impression made on his mind as will carry him through all possible trials and toils. Hence the Lord engages to show him all he could bear. Accordingly He proceeds to say--"Behold there is a place by Me and thou shalt stand upon a rock, and while My glory passeth by, I will put thee in a cleft of the rock." In a cleft of the rock--where else should He put him? What other place so suitable? Christ is sometimes represented as a rock cleft for us, in which we may hide ourselves and be safe. So God places Moses in a cleft of a rock, and says, "I will cover thee with My hand while I pass by; and I will take away My hand and thou shalt see My back parts; but My face shall not be seen." The Lord seems to have felt the importance of giving Moses all he had asked. Nay rather, the Lord Himself had put it in Moses' heart to make these requests and had emboldened him to ask for things so great and precious. So God is wont to do with His children, and the fact should assure us that when our souls hunger and thirst after God, He will most certainly reveal Himself to us and show us the fulness of His glory.

It deserves special notice here that the answer given by God to Moses shows in what His glory really consists. Moses says, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory." The Lord answers--yes--"I will make all My goodness pass before thee." The glory of the Lord, then, consists in His goodness. It is not as some seem to suppose some dazzling splendor, some effulgence of light ineffable and overpowering--no such thing as this seems to have been thought of; but Jehovah's goodness--the intrinsic excellencies that compose His character--these He would cause to pass before Moses, for these are His true glory. And these glories of His character were brought before Moses when, passing along, He proclaimed those glorious and most expressive names--"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious; long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." Every word in this description is full of most emphatic meaning. O how does it reiterate and amplify the precious thought that God is love.

It should also be noticed particularly that Moses had been previously prepared for just such a revelation of God. He had been a long time on Mt. Sinai amid its thunderings and smoke, and amid all the fearful manifestations of Jehovah's terrible justice. The flaming law of God had been before his mind most vividly and could not have failed to make deep and solemn impressions. He was therefore now prepared to hear of grace and mercy. He could appreciate them. He could hear the joyful promulgation and not abuse it. No man is ever prepared to hear the gospel until he has heard the law. He must in the nature of the case appreciate the strict and righteous demands of law before he can appreciate the real value of gospel grace to sinners.

None of the Hebrew people except Moses seem to have gone through this preparatory process. They had not been thoroughly impressed with the awful majesty, purity and strictness of the holy law of God. Hence they could not appreciate these manifestations of His goodness and not another one of the whole nation was allowed to be present with Moses in this glorious interview with God.

It is important in this connection to notice the precise moral attitude in which Moses stood before the Lord. He was now commanded to prepare himself two new tablets of stone. The circumstances in which the two formerly prepared were broken, you will all remember. Moses had been with the Lord on the burning mount; had tarried long; at last returns and finds that the people had made a calf and

were engaged in the grossest idolatry. His indignation was kindled; he dashed the stones to the ground and broke them to pieces. The Lord seems not to have rebuked Moses for this outburst of indignation; it appears to have been under the circumstances entirely proper and acceptable to God, as was also his subsequent conduct in calling on the Levites to take the sword and slay those of their brethren who were leading that horrible iniquity and would not desist. In all this, the Lord seems to have fully accepted Moses.

Let us now pursue the thread of our history. Moses prepares the two tables of stone, and goes up early in the morning as the Lord had commanded him and lo, the Lord descends and meets him there. What an interview was this for a mortal man to hold with the great God! Think of the circumstances; the deep solitudes of that rugged, awful mount Sinai were the temples of Jehovah's presence; the heavens above were the canopy of that temple; there was God!

When Moses went up he had already received the promise that the Lord would meet him there. But the promise was not fulfilled immediately. At least one night intervened. What a night of anticipation--still, deep, solemn, anticipation that must have been!

Probably Moses had borne about as much as he well could for one day, and the Lord kindly deferred the more glorious interview until Moses should rise refreshed on the next morning. So the Lord often does when His people get very near Him. Christian, have not scenes like these occurred in your own experience? You have a precious interview with God as the day closes and the shades of evening gather round you. You retire for the night, and your very dreams seem full of heaven, and you feel assured that those hallowed interviews with God will be renewed in the morning. You lay down yourself to rest with the sweet sustaining conviction that the Lord will reveal Himself speedily again.

So to Moses. Early in the morning you see him brushing the early dew away, climbing that well known mountain, upon whose craggy summits he had seen God more than once before. If you might only have seen him; if your eye could only have followed him as he drew near and entered into audience with the great God! How impressive and solemn must the spectacle have been!

Moses was in a state of mind in which God's saints have been frequently. The utmost conceivable awe pervaded his whole soul, yet he was not afraid of God. He was ready to go into any solitary wild and meet God alone. Many would have been oppressed with a superstitious awe under such circumstances, and would have declined or at least have dreaded such an interview. But Moses had no such superstitious dread.

Probably no mortal man was ever called to meet God under circumstances which were calculated to make a deeper impression than these. Consider what Moses desired and what his heart was now fixed on most earnestly. The renewing of the tables of the law was altogether an incidental thing. The chief thing was for God to show him His glory. He was fully aware that God was about to show such manifestations of Himself as human nature could scarce endure.

Let me ask you what you would think of such an interview with the great God? How would you like to be drawn into such near and glorious communion with the dread Jehovah? Suppose God should apprise you that you might enjoy such an interview with Himself as you retire from this place to your

rooms. He gives you the promise. Would you be ready? Would your very heart leap up within you in the prospect and cry out--O let me know more of God and of His unsearchable glories? O, then, prepare your hearts. Put away everything sinful, everything earthly. Let your soul thirst after God, yea, after the living God. When you feel your need of it and ask it with such simplicity and faith as Moses had, you may rely on receiving it--to the joy and blessedness of your souls.

With Moses the solemn hour has come. The Lord passes by and proclaims His name--"Jehovah, Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin." Observe that the previous interview of Moses with God had been at the giving of the law from Sinai, and it is remarkable that immediately after this, God should begin with proclaiming His name and should explain it by saying, "merciful and gracious," "long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth." Few except very spiritual persons would know how to understand this. But those who have had the law revealed to them as on Sinai's top can understand it well. No person ever really sees the law until it is revealed to him and he sees its pungent bearing upon his own case. So to Paul; when the commandment came he says, "sin revived and I died." But what is this? Had the commandment never come to Paul before? He had studied the law under the greatest doctors of his age; he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel; but yet he had not so understood the law as to have it cut him up root and branch and convict him powerfully of his own sins, until the moment when the commandment came to him.

Now when a man has had the law really given to him it comes in a sense very similar to that in which it came to Moses. If any of you have had the law thus revealed to your hearts and consciences, you can understand why Moses should cry out--"I do exceedingly fear and quake." You would see why the people should stand afar off and dare not to approach the awful scene.

Now this revelation of law exceedingly well fitted Moses to receive the next revelation made at this interview. The giving of the law was first in order, as indeed it always must be, or the gospel of grace and mercy cannot be appreciated. This done, the revelation of mercy and grace may follow. This same God before whom all the people and even Moses trembled on Mt. Sinai, now revealed His name--"the Lord God, merciful and gracious." Mercy is a disposition to pardon. Grace is used in a wider sense--a disposition to bestow favor. The next thing is--"long-suffering," He can suffer and bear long with abuses and provocations. He is most forbearing towards those who offend Him.

"Abundant also in goodness;"--yes infinite in goodness and loving-kindness. Abundant moreover in truth;--faithful ever to His promises of love and mercy. O how precious are these revelations made to Moses.

To Moses we must presume these were not mere announcements. Moses felt the impression of every one of these things. I might announce these very words in your ears, and though they might fall distinctly on your ears, yet the impression of their meaning might utterly fail to reach your heart.

But not so when Jehovah Himself speaks. His words then reach the very heart. You have sometimes felt the thrilling impression of these truths, when every idea in them seemed to sink into your very soul. Just think how Moses must have felt, after all he had just seen of Jehovah's awful majesty on Sinai. O how these words must have gone down into his inmost mind! And not the words merely, but

the ideas they represented--the very attributes of God must have stood right out and flashed their glorious truth before the very mind's eye of Moses. O what a scene of solemn impressions!

Perhaps I should say right here that we have no reason to suppose that all these things transpired in a moment, as some might at first thought imagine. Moses was full forty days and nights with God in this interview. A few other things were said during the whole scene, but this revelation of the name of God seems to have been the chief thing which transpired during this eventful period. It is therefore most rational to conclude that time enough was occupied to allow each thought to be fully expanded before the mind of Moses so as to make its deepest possible impression. Each feature of the divine character was doubtless developed distinctly; His mercy, His grace, His long-suffering, His abundant goodness and truth, and the blending of each of these feature with His glorious justice. Everything was so revealed to the mind of Moses that it pervaded his entire mental being and set his very soul on fire. O how did he ponder, and muse on each point, and study the illustrations presented to his mind! We can imagine the solemn, awful, thrilling impression as he sat in silence for many days together, no human being present to divert his attention for one moment--alone with God forty days--neither taking nor needing food or drink during all this time, but absorbed in beholding face to face the glory of God, and thus being changed into the same image from glory to glory.

At length he comes down from that mount of glorious manifestation. No wonder his face shone with a lustre of which he was unconscious but which was too glorious for mortal eyes to behold. No wonder the vivid impressions that filled and fired his soul should throw their reflection forth in his countenance. It was as if an angel from Jehovah's upper temple had alighted in the camp of Israel. A vail must be drawn over his face, for what mortal eye could bear the sight!

God's abundant truthfulness formed one important feature in these developments. This was especially pertinent to the case and the wants of Moses. The thorough development of this feature formed the secret of his great faith ever after. The whole subsequent history of Moses develops a most remarkable degree of confidence in God. The thousand trying emergencies through which he passed rendered it indispensable that he should have such confidence. Here in this signal interview with God the foundation was laid for it.

"Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty;" that is will never justify the impenitent and self-righteous. God did not mean that He would not pardon the guilty sinner on his repentance. He only meant that He was not a corrupt judge who could be bribed to clear the guilty yet in his sins and impenitence. Moses needed to know this, that while God was most gracious and merciful towards the contrite, He should most assuredly punish the guilty and hardened sinner. No rebel could ever escape in his impenitence and rebellion.

"Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and fourth generation." This clause needs to be explained. It has been sometimes supposed to mean that God sends children to hell for the sins of their parents. This cannot be the meaning. The declarations of God by Ezekiel affirm that only the soul that sinneth shall die, and that father and son shall each die only for his own sins.

The declaration made here to Moses refers to the course of God's providence towards families and

nations only in the present world, and to His course towards them for present discipline--not for eternal retribution.

The relations of parent and child almost inevitably involve these results. A dissolute father entails disease, poverty and degradation on his offspring. God allows, nay ordains it to be so, and this creates a strong inducement to each parent to lead such a life as shall entail blessings and not curses on his children. Yet these children are not rewarded with heaven or doomed to hell merely for their parent's deeds. The whole of the result is this--they have their own probation on earth, in which their future state of joy or woe must be decided according to their own deeds. But they shall have this probation in prosperity or adversity--amid influences adapted to bless or adapted to curse, according as their parents may have so lived before God as to leave them a legacy of good or of evil.

We often see this principle illustrated in the history of nations. Nations as such must of course receive their retribution in the present world--they having no existence as nations in any other state. Hence we often see that God holds a nation responsible for the sins of their fathers. It would be an illustration of this principle if God should do as I have thought He would do in retribution for the slavery which has so long existed in this nation. The English nation introduced slavery here; we have perpetuated it, and have done about as much to enhance its calamities as we could do. I have often thought that God will some day remove this evil in a way which will scourge both of these nations with most signal and exemplary judgments. Suppose the mighty power of England's arms should come down upon us and blood should flow over our southern plains till every spot where the tears and blood of the slave have fallen should be saturated with the blood of his oppressors--till the carnage of masters and drivers should fatten the cotton fields so long worn out by the bitter toil of the oppressed--and other groans should take the place of the long unnoticed and uncared for wailings of broken-hearted mothers and bereaved children.

In this the world might read a lesson about that awful Justice which visits the iniquities of fathers upon the children and upon children's children.

On the same principle we often see children involved in the guilt and consequent sufferings of their parents. A most cogent motive is thus created to induce parents to obey God. You can easily see that it is most wise in God so to unite parents and children that the latter shall receive good or evil in the present world according to the voluntary course taken by their parents.

When God had made these revelations to Moses, naming these attributes distinctly and giving him time to dwell on each one until his whole soul was impressed with the truth, Moses prostrated himself before the Lord in most profound adoration. This was its first result on his mind. "He made haste and bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped."

Do you understand this feeling? Have you never found when God had revealed Himself to you that you have felt pressed to bow yourself in deep prostration of soul before the Lord?

Mark his next step. He has a request to make. He said, "If now I have found grace in Thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray Thee, go among us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Thine inheritance." Moses feels that it is time now to find how the Lord

really feels towards the nation. It is a time to intercede in their behalf that God would pardon all their sin and make them forever His own inheritance.

The Lord replies--"Behold I will make a covenant, before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the Lord; for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee."

The history then narrates various precepts and closes with the descent of Moses, his face resplendent with the unutterable glory of this wonderful and most instructive scene.

### **REMARKS.**

Whatever is written in the Bible is for our instruction. Much of the historical part is rich with the most practical instruction conceivable. All this may be said most truly of the passage we have been considering. It teaches,

1. That a personal acquaintance with God is indispensable to one who is to lead the people in reform. We must know God and have God preeminently with us, or we cannot lead on His people to higher degrees of holiness.

We may learn something of God by study and thought; but all this will fail us without special revelations from God. Some expect by the mere force of learning to prepare themselves for usefulness. They seem to take pains to get more learning rather than to get nearer God. They could not make a worse mistake. The learning is good, but the things God teaches when He draws the soul into deep personal communion with Himself are incomparably better.

Moses was before this a very learned man. He was skilled in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and their science was at this period pre-eminently rich. Education and learning there were indeed only that of heathen, yet God saw that this would be valuable to Moses, and therefore arranged it in His providence that Moses should be trained in the royal family with all the facilities for education that Egypt could afford. But he needed infinitely more than all this, and God drew him into His own school to impart it.

2. Every part of this history is replete with instruction to us. Mark for instance the peculiar features of character developed in Moses at this time. A careful study of these will reveal to us the conditions on which we may expect divine revelations to our own souls.

When I see a man deeply impressed with a sense of this dependence upon God, feeling that he cannot get along and bear his great responsibilities without God, I know such a man is being prepared for usefulness. God will meet him and reveal to him the great things of His own character. Let him only give himself wholly to the work and to the interests of God's cause, and then have confidence enough to lay hold of the Lord; such a soul never fails of being blessed.

3. Another thing peculiar in the case of Moses was his very clear apprehensions of what he needed to fit him for his work. This is immensely important. If a man lacks this just apprehension he will

struggle on in the dark; and how long often and how fruitlessly! He does not know what he wants.

But read this history of Moses and you will see that he had a clear idea of his responsibilities and of the qualifications he needed to discharge them well. He knew that he needed a revelation from God to his own mind. He knew that he needed to apprehend all these great truths so that they should stand out before his mind as living realities.

4. When these attributes of God are clearly developed to the mind of anyone he will have an entirely new view of the character of God. It will be so different from his former views as to make him doubt whether he really knew anything right of God before. The impressions will be such as he can never lose during all his future life.

5. Moses saw that he needed to have God reveal Himself to his mind. This is just what young men fitting for the gospel ministry need. Did you never see the difference in the manner in which two different individuals will speak of the attributes of God? One speaks mere words and they fall as if they were only wind. The words of the other come out of his heart and seem to fall like lead into the hearts of the people who hear him.

Here is a young man studying theology. He may become as wise as a man can become by merely human learning; but unless God reveal Himself all will be mere words. If you ask what such a man has been preaching, the answer will always be--nothing but words, words, mere words. This is the great difficulty with much of the preaching of this age--it is nothing but words.

Do you not think that when Moses came down from the mount, the people felt? The influence of Moses on them was not that of mere words. Have you never seen how the eyes of the hearer would stand out when one is speaking from the heart? Even so when the people heard Moses, they hung on his lips and stood tiptoe to catch his burning words and the glory of his unearthly countenance. If young men feel as Moses did--"O my God, send me not up without Thy presence"--they will seek that presence, and never rest without it. God calls you to the ministry; how can you go into it without His presence--until you have seen as Moses saw, His glory.

6. This whole history is most replete with instruction for us. If those arguments used were good in his mouth as reasons for God's revealing Himself to him, they are equally good for us. He pleaded God's call of him and acceptance of him for a great work, and said--Lord, since Thou hast called me, now make me fit for the labor. "I beseech Thee show me Thy glory." Young man, go and do likewise. If God calls you to lead His church up out of the wilderness, see to it that you insist before you set out that the Lord be with you and show you His glory. Nor is this truth applicable to young men destined for the ministry alone. Every Christian is a priest of God, and should in some sense preach the gospel. Every man needs grace to fill the station to which God calls him. And every Christian should seek this grace even as Moses sought the grace he needed.

7. The disinterestedness of Moses is worthy of all commendation. He never once thought of lifting himself up. Do you suppose he was continually saying in his mind--How people in future generations will honor me and reverence my name! No, not this--he is all swallowed up in another and a very different great idea; how shall this nation honor God? How may I do something to magnify His dread,

His glorious name?

If we ever expect or hope to be great men, in mercy, don't let us aim at it. We shall pluck down ruin and disgrace on ourselves if we do; and as far as in us lies, on the cause of God also. I once knew a young man who had considerable trouble in getting license to preach. He was not thought to be very promising. This difficulty seemed to set all his ambition on fire. He declared--"I am determined to get to the head of the heap." Someone said to him--You never will by aiming at it. But he gave no heed to this warning, and set off on his career of attempted greatness. I don't know where he is now. Gone I suppose, sunk from public observation into that obscurity which alone forms a fitting place for unholy ambition. "He that exalteth himself shall be abased." So it must ever be. This is the law of Christ's house.

How remarkable that Moses seemed never to care for himself or for his family. On one occasion some persons began to prophesy, and some of his friends seem to have been jealous for his honor. But Moses felt no jealousy of this sort. "I would to God," said he, "that all the people were prophets." How noble! God could make Moses a great man without his making himself a great fool. Not so with some men, God cannot make them great without their making themselves fools.

8. All these features of the character of Moses should be distinctly studied. They are features of the character of Jesus Christ. Are you not in the habit of studying the character of those great men, such as Moses, Daniel, Job, Paul and John with the distinct design of drinking in their spirit and conforming your own to theirs? This is your true wisdom.

9. The urgency of Moses is well worthy of special notice. How strongly he insists upon God's giving him the blessing he asks for. On one occasion the Lord put his serious earnestness to the test most fully. The Lord said--Let me alone--go get thee down, for thy people have corrupted themselves; let Me alone that My wrath may wax hot against them and that I may consume them, and I will make of thee a great nation." But no, Moses could not let the Lord alone. He seemed to seize right hold of His hand and insist that God should spare and forgive the guilty people. The Egyptians will hear of it and will say, "For mischief did He bring them out and to slay them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth. Then what wilt Thou do for Thy great name? I cannot let Thee go. What will become of Thy glory? Blot out my name, but blot not out the name of Thine Israel." Thus did Moses hold fast upon the hand of the Lord as it was uplifted to smite the nation. And what was the secret of his power with God? His disinterested love, and his zeal for Jehovah's name.

Let this be our example. Surely it is most worthy of all imitation. How noble to be thus swallowed up and filled with zeal for the glory of God.

10. The great faith of Moses constitutes another point worthy of distinct consideration. Where everybody else's faith would fail, that of Moses remains firm. Yet he had his sore trials. Once he cried out--"What shall I do, Lord, for this people are almost ready to stone me?" But remark that under this great trial he runs at once to God and hence is safe. So every man should do. If a man only has such faith as to run at once to the Lord, he cannot fail to get strength for all emergencies of trial.

11. His implicit obedience also was wonderful. He knew no law but the will of God. This spirit of

universal obedience was one condition of those remarkable manifestations. He could not have had them without his obedient spirit.

When first appointed to his work, he felt great reluctance to go. He pled that he was slow of speech. But God overlooked the objection; Moses yielded and seems never afterwards to have shrunk from duty.

12. Moses seems always very careful to do all that God required of him, so that he could always have near access to God. It was very common before the Lord made any manifestations to the people, for Him to say--"Sanctify yourselves;"--ye are now unfit to meet Me. But Moses seems to have been always in a state of readiness to meet God and receive any manifestations. It is of infinite importance to maintain this state of sanctification--to abstain thoroughly from all iniquity and never fall into such a state of defilement as to feel your need of penitence, pardon, and cleansing before you can meet God.

I once knew a Christian who had been eminently a man of prayer--who had lived for years so that he could pray daily with acceptance before God, and whose conversations and prayers had created quite an interest in the subject of the prayer of faith. Yet this man sadly declined from this state and the Lord at length recalled him in the following way. I had, said he in his diary, an intimate friend who was impenitent, and who in raising a building was suddenly crushed with a fatal blow. I rushed to him. The dying man begged me to pray for his soul. That is all, said he, that you can do for me; pray for my soul lest I sink at once into hell. But I could not pray if it had been to save my own life. I was away from God and I could not get near Him to pray a word. O my agony of soul was perfectly inexpressible. But that was the last hour of my quiet in such a state. I could not live so.

Moses could not get away from God. His circumstances demanded ceaseless watchfulness and permanent sanctification. Only once afterwards was he overcome and then by the sin of impatience. For this sin the Lord took him up on Mt. Nebo to let him view the land of promise and then die without ever going over. This was a sore affliction; yet for one sin the Lord sent it upon him; yea for one sin only. But this in Moses was a great sin. His light had been so great and the sin itself had been so public; God could not do less than to put His mark of intense displeasure upon it. So, beloved, must you keep your heart pure and your hands pure, if you would be always ready for communion with God, and if, having enjoyed these seasons of communion you would not fall under the marked displeasure of a jealous and holy God. But if you are content to live so that you must go and repent and cleanse yourself from present sin in order to be prepared to commune with God, of what use can you be to the world?

## **Coming to The Waters of Life**

Lecture IX

September 2, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--John 7:37: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink."

The feast spoken of here is the feast of tabernacles, of which we have a full account in Leviticus. It was one of the three great feasts observed annually by the Jewish people. Those who are learned in Jewish antiquities give us many interesting and important particulars respecting the mode of celebrating this great festival.

A tabernacle is simply a tent, and the institution might be called the feast of tents. Its object was to commemorate the forty years sojourning of the Hebrews in the wilderness when tents were their only dwellings. In observing it, the people gathered the boughs of trees and built themselves booths or tents in the streets or on the house-tops in which they sojourned during the eight days of the celebration.

The last day of the eight was deemed the great day, and on this day was observed one ceremony of special interests. Our text evidently alludes to it. The whole people moved in procession to the pool of Siloam and took thence a quantity of water in a golden vessel, carried it thus to the temple, and there poured it out before the Lord. The design of this was to represent the outpouring of the Spirit as taught abundantly by their prophets. It is a most remarkable fact that this great prophecy of the effusion of the Spirit in the times of the Messiah should have been universally understood by the Jews, and that the knowledge of the coming fact should have been kept fresh in their minds, by this ceremony engrafted upon the great festival of tabernacles. Jewish writers concur in stating that the ceremony of bearing and pouring out the water meant just this and was always so understood by the nation.

It was on this occasion that, as stated in our text, Jesus stood and cried, saying "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." It would seem that He was in the temple as the procession returned from the pool of Siloam, and that He seized upon that solemn, eventful moment to lift up His voice before all the people and call attention to Himself as the great Giver of that very blessing which they were foreshadowing so beautifully in the out-pouring of the waters of Siloam. Then and there did the Man of Sorrows stand out in the presence of the assembled nation and proclaim "If any man thirst, let him--not go to Siloam, but--come unto Me and drink." "He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The historian here adds his explanation of these words; "But this spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive." Christ very well understood what was represented by the pouring out of the water and He knew that the Jews also understood it; hence His solemn annunciation at this time, calling attention to Himself as the giver of the Holy Spirit according to their well known prophecies. In discussing this subject, I shall show,

*I. What is implied in the text by thirst;*

*II. What is implied in coming to Christ to drink;*

*III. What is the invitation--Come unto Me and drink.*

**I. What is implied in the text by thirst.**

- 1. It is manifest that Christ has no reference to physical thirst for water, but to a state of mind--a state of intense desire, well illustrated by that natural desire for water which is called thirst. No doubt Christ alludes to that intense desire for communion with God which saints often have, and which is aptly expressed by the term, thirst.

Thus the Psalmist says--"My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" Indeed he often represents himself as thirsting and panting after God--even as the hart pants after the water brooks.

Now whatever the philosophy of the fact may be, every Christian knows it to be a fact that there is such a thing as an intense desire of mind, terminating upon God. The soul feels most intensely that nothing but the smiles and the manifested presence of God can meet and fill its desires.

You know that we are so correlated to the outward world that certain objects awaken intense desires for their attainment. There is that in our physical constitution which creates a demand for its appropriate gratification. A foundation is laid in our constitution for the desire which we call thirst, and the demand is for water.

Now it is very remarkable that there is a state of mind which corresponds to this state of the physical system. There is a thirst of the soul for God. The soul pants and longs after God with a singleness of desire and a burning intensity which nothing can appease but the attainment of its object. As the thirsty man cries out for water and can be relieved by nothing else, so those who are spiritually thirsty cry out after God, and nothing else can by any means suffice to stay their irrepressible longings. When a man is famished with hunger he wants food, and nothing but food will satisfy him; you might spread his table with gold--his soul still cries out for bread; you might clothe his brow with pearls--but you cannot even thus quench his insatiate longings for sustenance: so when the soul thirsts after God, this demand of the inner being can be met only by the actual revelations of God to this mind. God has so correlated our inward being to Himself that the mind struggles and cries out after God and cannot possibly be satisfied with anything else. The words of God are beautiful and lovely in their place--the smiles of His common providence are precious; but the spiritual mind can never be content to take these in place of those inward smiles of Jehovah's presence and those testimonies of His love which He gives to His favored children.

Every Christian knows that the Bible abounds with expression of this intense thirsting after God. And all who have had any experience in the deep things of the divine life in the soul understand well what is meant by this language. It may sound like an unknown tongue to those who have no spiritual discernment. What, they will say--the mind pant after God! What does this mean? Is there really any such thing as this? Yes, I answer,

there surely is just such a thing as this--just such a longing of soul for God as the man dying with thirst feels for water. When the inward life is thoroughly developed and the soul renewed into the divine image, it thirsts after God, and longs most intensely for the light of His face.

Now it cannot be doubted that Christ had this very state of mind in His eye, and meant to invite to Himself all those who had this longing after the knowledge and the favor of God. Most perfectly did He understand that it is not naturally possible for us to attain the highest state of blessedness on earth unless we draw and drink the living waters of life which He has promised, and which He alone can give.

I have said that this spiritual thirst is a certain state of mind. It may be defined thus--an intense desire for the fulness of a present salvation--a desire to realize in our own case what it is to be filled with all the fulness of God. In this state the mind pants after the fulness of a present enjoyment of God. This is the state which Christ had under His eye; a state in which the soul longs and pants after the fulness of a present communion with God.

The state ultimately desired by the individual who thus longs after God may be expressed thus; a universal and entire cleansing of the mind from all that pollutes--in which all wanderings of thought in prayer are suppressed and controlled;--the appetites are brought into subjection and kept there; and soul lives and moves and has its being as it were in an atmosphere of God and of purity.

This state of mind is well illustrated in the experience of a lady, a letter from whom I saw some years since in R----. A friend of mine there showed me a letter written many years since by his grandmother. In this she gives in detail the course of her experience, showing how her mind had been greatly stirred up on respect to her falling so often and so sadly into bondage to sin--in respect to wanderings of thought in prayer and those various things over which Christians so often mourn. She felt the bitterness of these things, and came to feel at length that she could not live in such a state of bondage any longer.

In reading the scriptures, moreover, she had noticed that the Apostles got above this state of mind and evidently lived in liberty and not in bondage. Pursuing this train of inquiry she lighted upon many of those promises in the Bible which may well be called "exceeding great and precious," and she believed them. She knew they were the word of the Lord, and she had long since settled it in her mind that God must be believed in all He said. Of course her next step was to take hold of these promises and cry to God in mighty prayer that He would fulfill them in her case. She did so. Her feelings became so intense that the strongest language of scripture expressive of thirsting, longing, panting after God, was none too strong to express her actual state of mind. So earnestly did her soul agonize for this blessing that she literally cried aloud after God, saying, "I cannot let Thee go unless Thou bless me"--I must absolute die in this room if Thou give me not this blessing which I so greatly need. O, she cried, I cannot live without it.

Now she came to realize that very state of mind of which the sacred writers spake. She knew what it is to have the soul thirst and long after God, yea, the living God. She thirsted for that water of life which Jesus had promised, and she rushed to His feet to lay hold there of a present salvation from sin. I need not say that such seeking is never in vain. Jesus Christ has said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." "He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Such was the experience of this lady.

This hungering implies a right state of the will. The hungering itself is a state of the sensibility inasmuch as it is simply desire and feeling; but it results from the heart's being in a right state, and could not exist if the heart were in a wrong state. The thirst for spiritual blessings does not, as some seem to suppose, imply that the individual is in a sinful state, but that he is in a holy state comparatively;--yet is he striving to get higher and still nearer to God.

Again, this thirsting implies a self-loathing and disgust towards everything that stands in the way of the most intimate communion with God. Men find that the outward life is not so crucified but that it seems to come between the soul and God. There is something that prevents the soul from entering into that great, deep, calm communion with God, and the mind is in agony because it finds itself thus withheld from God. There is a waywardness of the physical propensities--an agitation and fluttering which I hardly know how to describe, but which most Christians understand but too well in their own experience; and when this develops itself, it comes directly in the way of entering into real and deep peace with God. It creates a sort of effervescing and agitation, not itself sinful perhaps, but excessively annoying and dangerous inasmuch as it often operates powerfully as temptation to sin. Many of you doubtless know what this is, and you also know perhaps how the soul is thrown into deep agony by means of this conflict with the flesh, and gives itself up to mighty energizings of prayer and faith that it may be delivered from this foe within and brought into a state of pure and perfect peace. This is one of the forms of thirsting for the waters of life.

Again, this thirst implies a great drawing of the Spirit of God. The soul is drawn out after God with a deep and powerful drawing, so that it truly yearns after God, and feels that nothing can begin to satisfy this craving desire of the soul with its Maker. It deserves special notice here that this often seems to the individual himself to be the very calling of the Spirit of God, as if he heard that voice and was conscious of being drawn upward towards the blessed God by some influence not self-originated. The spiritual christian recognizes this call at once as the voice of his Beloved.

Again, this thirsting for the water of life implies being heartily sick of sin and heartily sick of tampering with anything that can become an occasion of sin and that embarrasses the soul and hinders its living in the closest communion with God. It implies a supreme desire to live wholly for God and an utter loathing of any form of life which falls short of this. How often in looking at this point have I thought of Paul's experience. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life

which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." The Apostle here develops a state of mind which I fear but few enter into and thoroughly understand. I live, he says, yet not I; not I, the same Paul or Saul who once followed the flesh and lived afar from God--it is not the same I, that now lives, but it is Christ within me that now becomes my life. He knew what it was to have a new and spiritual life energizing through all his inmost soul.

Beloved, how many of you know what this means? Who of you have tasted in your own experience and know the blessedness of this divine life?

## **II. We are to enquire what is implied in coming to Christ to drink.**

- 1. A belief in His real divinity; a belief that Christ is truly God. This cannot fail to be obvious to you upon a due examination of the text in its connection. For, what is the thing about which the Savior is here speaking? Nothing else surely but the gift of the Holy Ghost; and since the Holy Ghost is also divine--nothing else but the gift of our Savior's language; "this spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive."

Coming to Christ then, according to this invitation is coming to one who can give God to the soul. Of course therefore none can come in faith unless he has confidence in the true divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Take another view of this. The object of this thirst of the soul is nothing other than God Himself. The soul as I have already said, when thirsting in the sense of the text, thirsts after God--after His presence--His love and His communion. Now then, while thirsting after God, can we come to Jesus to receive the blessing unless we believe Him to be truly divine? Can any being who is less than divine give us communion and peace with God? Can one who is not God Himself give God to our souls?

Again, mark the language of the text--"Come unto Me and drink." If any man thirst truly after God, let him come unto Me--I can quench his thirst, and supply all his wants. How can we believe this unless we truly believe that Christ is God?

There is no escape from this course of argument. Some may seek to escape by maintaining that the thirst spoken of is not really a thirst after God. But surely every spiritual Christian knows that this is nothing else than a longing after God. What else is it? Does the soul thirst after a mortal man, or after an angel? Is it the favor of man or angel which awakens such intense desires and irrepressible thirstings? Nay verily; the Christian does not thus learn Christ. God and God alone is the supreme object of his thirst, and he comes to Jesus to be filled with God. How can he intelligently do this, unless he believes in His real divinity?

Again, this coming to Christ implies self-renunciation. None will ever come so long as they can find enough of good in themselves and without Christ to satisfy the demands of their own mind. This is most obvious. Their own vessel must be empty before they can rationally come to Christ to have it filled. None will ever come to Christ for these waters

of life so long as he supposes he can get them by any efforts of his own. One's own righteousness must be utterly renounced and all one's own ways of being saved; else there will be no real coming to trust in Christ. Self must be utterly renounced.

Again, coming to Christ implies a reception of Him by faith as the promised Messiah, as our own Savior, Redeemer, and Mediator before God. There must be a personal appropriation of Christ by faith to one's self as ours in all those respects in which the divine gospel plan makes Him the Savior of lost men.

All this implies that the Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. We have no reason to suppose that any soul ever receives Christ as his own Savior except as the Spirit sets before that mind just views of its own need and of the perfect adaptation of Christ to supply that need.

Again, this coming to Christ implies some degree of expectation of receiving the blessing to be sought. It is naturally impossible to come to Christ without faith in His promises; and this faith you will readily see must imply some degree of expectation that if we come as we are invited to do, we shall receive.

### **III. What does this invitation imply?**

As I have already said, it implies His divinity. On this I need not now enlarge.

Of course the invitation implies His entire ability to give the blessings needed. If He be really divine, none need to doubt His ability. If He promises to give, we ought not to doubt that He can.

Again, the invitation implies also His willingness to bestow upon us the spiritual good promised. The very promise itself most perfectly implies this.

The promise implies also that if we do come to Him to drink, we shall receive. When He invites, it is not to tantalize; it is not to raise expectation only to disappoint it again; it is not that He may send us away empty and confounded; no, but it is to induce us to come and enjoy the bliss of being blessed; and this of course implies the strongest, richest pledge that if we do come in honesty of heart and in humble faith we shall receive the promised blessings.

Again, we must get this blessing of Christ and of no one else. He doubtless intended to teach this most emphatically, that if anyone thirsted for the waters of life, that soul must come unto Him and to none other but to Him for those waters.

Mark how beautifully and impressively He taught this. See Him in front of that lofty temple and in the presence of that vast triumphant procession as they move slowly along. He waits till the priest has brought forward the golden vessel of water from Siloam's pool and poured it forth at the foot of the altar, He stands by in silence till the ceremony is completed, and then He lifts up His voice before the assembled nation and cries aloud, Ho, ho, all ye people of Israel, ho, all ye children of the promises and covenants of the Lord, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." With Me are the waters of real life. "He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow

rivers of living water."

What an announcement is this! And with what mingled emotions was it received by those dense masses of human beings on whose ears it fell! Some of the Pharisees were man enough to murder Him on the very pavements of the temple; they would not have scrupled to shed His blood, so enraged were they at Him--but He meekly goes on in His Master's work, and perhaps through fear of the people they did not dare just now to lay their hands upon Him. "Many of the people," it is beautifully added, "when they heard this saying, said, of a truth this is a Prophet." Some said one thing and some another, so there was a division among them. What a scene of prodigious excitement did this startling announcement make! Such a sort of excitement the gospel in these later days often produces where it is announced with demonstration of the Spirit and the power of God.

## REMARKS.

1. Many persons have none of this thirst, for several reasons.

(1.) They have never suffered themselves to be thoroughly convinced of sin. I say, never suffered themselves, for mark me, they could not fail of being thus convinced if they would not resist the Holy Ghost. His Spirit would reprove them of their sin if they would not resist His reproof. But they do resist, and hence they never know the depth of their own guilt and vileness so as to be led to cry out after deliverance and to thirst after God.

(2.) Many know not this thirst and supply, because though they have had a conviction of sin, yet they have never believed and tasted so as to know the blessedness of receiving these waters of life. In fact men need to know God by having some degree of communion with Him before they will have their desires kindled intensely for more and deeper communion. The heart must first be submitted to God, and some experience be had of the rich blessedness of gospel peace and gospel love; than the soul will naturally thirst after God. But multitudes never have this thirst because they have not tasted of these waters.

(3.) I am often struck with the fact that many seem to know nothing of the meaning of such language as the Bible employs to express the longings of the soul after spiritual blessings. They confess that when they read such passages as the text, and many passages to which I have alluded in the Psalms of David, they really know nothing of this thirsting: these terms would express a far stronger desire than they have ever felt. It is astonishing to see how many there are who never know God--never have the soul cry out after a full and perfect salvation--never feel a longing, a quenchless, burning desire, just like a natural thirst, which nothing else can supply but the very thing desired. They do not understand how the mind gravitates towards God. They do not know what it is to have God become the natural food and drink of the soul, so that nothing but God Himself can satisfy its demands. There is such a state in which nothing but God can satisfy the demands of the soul. If all the angels of heaven were given us it would not satisfy; if everything else besides God in the whole universe were laid at our feet, it would not suffice; it would not be the thing which the soul craves. This object of supreme desire is nothing else but God. O how the soul cries out after God, the infinite God, the perfect, the glorious, the ever-blessed God! There is a most beautiful and wonderful correlation

established between God and the human soul which lays a foundation for this want, this demand of the soul for God as its only satisfying portion. Consequently when the soul comes into an upright state, and the inner voice of its spiritual nature is heard, that voice cries out after God and feels that the soul must live in God and that to depart from God is hell itself. The living in and with God and being sunk in Him, is the natural, the necessary and the eternal good of the soul.

In view of this great and glorious good, where and what is all that pertains to this outward life? It effervesces for a day--it bustles for a moment;--it is, and then it is no more; men may be fascinated by it for an hour: but when the soul comes to understand God, then nothing but God can suffice. Nothing else can meet its demands.

It is remarkable that this is the sum of all the blessings promised to the saints of God in the Bible. To Abraham God said--"Fear not--I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." Mark this language. God does not say--I will give thee an exceeding great reward--but I am--I Myself am thy glorious reward. I give you Myself as thy portion.

So God often represents Himself as being the infinite good of the soul. The spiritual Christian can easily understand this.

On the other hand, some think of heaven as being some place which is itself blessed. They fancy its streets to be of gold--its rivers and flowers and fruits combine every thing that can regale the senses and charm the taste, and the place itself becomes in their view the heaven, and would be if there were no God there.

But all such views are false and delusive. Really it is the presence of God and nothing else that makes heaven blessed. There the mind is swallowed up and forever enfolded in God. There the glorious God becomes truly the portion and the everlasting blessedness of every holy soul.

(4.) Many confound conviction of sin with this thirst for the waters of life. A state of conviction will truly precede it; but this thirst is entirely a different thing, and arises from the fact that the mind really knows and has entered into the enjoyment of God. You recollect how our Lord most beautifully represents His people as eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Now this must certainly denote a cordial reception of Christ by a living faith. And the previous hunger and thirst which are always implied in eating and drinking must in their spiritual acts imply much more than simply conviction of sin.

(5.) Many have not this thirst because they allow themselves to thirst for other things. The two are absolutely incompatible with each other. There is even among professors of religion a vast deal of thirsting after the outward life and its enjoyments. When this is indulged the inward thirst after God must cease.

2. It is a great blessing to have this inward thirst developed.

It is in itself a very great blessing to have the soul thus drawn out after God. The very desire is a

heavenly state of mind, for you are conscious that your exercises are perfectly reasonable and that your affections are now taking hold of objects which are most perfectly worthy of an immortal mind.

And if the state of desire is blessed, how much more so is the fulfillment of it? O, to be filled even on earth with all the fullness of God! This is of all things below, most blissful!

3. When this has ceased in the mind, one can have no reason to hope that he is going to heaven. If the mind has become so apostate from God, there is no hope left. Why should God take that soul to heaven which has no longings for His presence?

4. Many persons stop short with this thirst because they have not faith to come to Christ. Do you see them come to Christ and plead--"Lord, didst not Thou say--if any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink, and now, Lord, I have come, expecting Thou wilt give me those blessed waters." Do you see this state of mind? No. They do not come to Christ believing absolutely that He will give them the blessings they need.

I can well recollect a scene in my own experience which is in point here. My soul was drawn out exceedingly for this blessing and I did not see why I did not attain it. My heart seemed full of prayer, echoing and echoing with pleadings and promises, till all at once the thought came across my mind--you do not believe you shall receive. I instantly thought of a dear friend of mind who would always anticipate my wants, who seemed to have the faculty always of foreseeing the things I needed, and who would be sure to supply them as if this was the chief pleasure of his existence. Then I asked myself--Do you as much expect Christ to supply your wants as you expect it of this earthly friend? I saw then that I did not. I saw the shameful unbelief of my state of mind, and I felt so rebuked and so perfectly ashamed that I could not help crying out--"O my blessed Jesus, I have not had so much faith and confidence in Thee as I have often had in a man!"

So, many are withered and blighted because you do not believe that God is drawing, but you are resisting. O, you do not believe. Jesus Himself comes near--yea very near;--He puts the cup into your very hand and says "drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved;" but alas, how many still will not believe.

O this fountain of life--what is it but the fountain of God bubbling up in your inward, spiritual being. Verily the blessing offered you is nothing less than the glorious God Himself; and now will you not believe? If any man will come believing, the voice divine says, I will give him of the waters of life freely.

## **The Blessedness of Enduring Temptation**

Lecture X

September 30, 1846

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--James 1:12: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."

This passage presents the subject of enduring temptation. In discussing it, I will enquire,

*I. Into the nature of temptation.*

*II. Into its design.*

*III. Inquire what it is to endure temptation in the sense of the text.*

*IV. Show that thus to endure temptation is one condition of being saved.*

### **I. The words tempt and temptation are synonymous with trial.**

To tempt is to try; to subject one to trial. Now sin consists in self-seeking, self-indulgence. Whatever, therefore, tends to selfishness, and draws the mind to self-seeking, is temptation, and is more or less strong according as this tendency is more or less strong towards self-indulgence.

The Bible mentions three great sources of temptation--the world, the flesh and Satan. The outward world is so correlated to our susceptibilities as to excite them and thus beget a temptation to self-indulgence. The flesh with its appetites and passions clamor for gratification; and hence the flesh and the outward world become temptations. Satan also presents his temptations in every form which subtle malignity can devise.

But I need not enlarge on this point; you are familiar with it in all its details.

### **II. A few words should be said next of the design of these temptations.**

These temptations which environ us on every side in our present state are by no means designed by God to do us harm, but altogether to do us good. In creating the external universe and in giving us outward senses that we may behold and enjoy it, He had but one great end in view, and that is our good. From the fact that we are susceptible to pleasure from these sources, we are not to infer that God's end in view was to harm us by these temptations. They are undoubtedly to be considered as parts of a great system of moral probation, in which they perform the functions of means to a great, wise and good end. Real evils may be incidental to their operation, yet important good is their ultimate result.

The very term trial, shows that these things are intended as a test of character. God everywhere represents Himself as trying His people that He may test and develop the real state of their hearts.

Another end in view is that He may greatly search their hearts. We are prone to be exceedingly ignorant of ourselves. Were it not for trials, we should live and die in this ignorance. To prevent so deplorable a result, God permits temptations to assail us on every side and bring out all the deep things of our hearts. Just so a chemist would take any particular substance into his laboratory and test it in his crucible. He would try it by placing it in contact with other substances that act powerfully upon it and by this he ascertains its affinities and its real character. So God takes us into His great laboratory and applies the tests of spiritual chemistry to our hearts. Often we are not at all aware that we have any such affinities for earthly objects, until we are brought into close contact by temptation; then perhaps we find that we have strange susceptibilities about us which we had not known before.

Temptations are designed to empty us of our self-complacency. Peter was very self-complacent until he came into circumstances of great trial. It proved a great blessing to him to be thus tried. He thought much less of himself afterwards than before.

So it often happens. I know how often, perhaps in some hundred or thousand instances, I have seen men brought into circumstances which greatly abated their opinion of themselves. They had been very self-complacent--they had come to imagine that they had something very good in themselves. They cherished this notion with self-satisfaction; God saw their danger and permitted His fierce and strong temptations to try them until He had developed to their own view the unknown tendencies of their hearts and made them loathe themselves in their own sight as much as they had delighted in themselves before.

The real children of God may always expect such self-disclosures. As sure as God loves them and sets His heart on their salvation, so surely may they expect some form of trial that will cure them of self-complacency.

Again, trials serve to empty the heart of self-righteousness. By self-righteousness I mean that which originates in ourselves and not in Christ working in us to will and to do. That is always self-righteousness where one supposes that his obedience to God originates in himself, and he does not realize that there is no good inherent in himself whatever.

Lest I be misunderstood on this point, let me say that I do not mean to imply at all that we are passive in our obedience to the divine law. If I had supposed the mind passive in this obedience I could not have spoken of God's working in us "to will." An influence which leads us to will must of course terminate in our highest activity. It never can be exerted effectually and yet we remain passive. Nothing can be more active than an act of the will.

Further, my meaning is not that whatever good we do, does not really belong to us, and is not really our own doing, pertaining to our own actions and states of mind. This cannot be denied.

These explanations being made, let me say again, that if any Christian loses sight of this fact that he never does any good except as God works in him, he must soon learn it by the endurance of such trials as will compel him to see it.

Again, another design is to teach us our dependence of God; to hedge us in and shut us up to Christ and make us abide in Him. When temptations teach us our own weakness and certainty of falling unless we abide in Christ, we wax really strong in the Lord. Temptations are designed to develop, establish, and strengthen every form of virtue. This is made abundantly plain in the Bible.

### **III. What is it to endure temptations?**

The original word is used for the trying of metals by fire and by such tests as are adapted to develop their real character, or to remove their impurities. That which abides the test and remains after the trial, might be said to have endured the temptation.

So of the moral trials of the Christian. To endure temptation is to stand the trial--to abide constant in the faith--to hold out and come forth only the more pure, as the precious metals when the searching fire has passed over them. It is to persevere, despite of all temptations to be inconstant in our allegiance to Christ.

### **IV. This endurance of temptation is a condition of being saved.**

Temptation is always implied in a state of probation. There could be no such thing as a state of trial if it included no temptation. A person could not be tried or proved except in a state fitted for such a process and for such results.

Again, temptations are naturally incidental to our present state. They spring up from our very constitution, and from the relations we sustain to the world we live in. Indeed we might say, they spring out of our moral being, and that no moral being can exist in circumstances where he can find sources of happiness without being exposed to have those very sources of happiness become temptations to selfishness. We have reason to believe that there is no world where moral being may not be thus tempted.

Certainly in this world, temptations are incidental to our very existence. Look at Adam and Eve. As long as they had bodily appetites they were in circumstances of temptation. Sometimes these temptations urged the will with great vehemence; at other times with less power, or not at all.

Now inasmuch as we all have these appetites and susceptibilities, temptation is naturally and necessarily incidental to our present state of existence. When the susceptibilities become strongly excited in any given direction, then temptation becomes in that degree powerful. The temptation urges us to forsake the guidance of God and of reason and give ourselves up to self-indulgence.

At this point, let us contemplate another great fact; viz. that holiness is naturally and necessarily a condition of our salvation. It is of all things most absurd to suppose that anyone can be saved without holiness. Of all human dreams and fantasies this is the most absurd. Strange that men who can think should entertain so flagrant a delusion.

I have often been struck with the absurdity of those who say that the doctrine of regeneration is a mystery and a humbug. So far is this from being true that it is naturally and forever impossible that

one should ever be happy and be saved unless he comes into the state described in the Bible as the regenerate state, and made according to the Bible, a condition of salvation. When God declares--"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," He makes no arbitrary appointment. This is no capricious decree of the Almighty. It is one of the laws of our being that a selfish man must be born again, and be thereby changed from selfish to benevolent, or he never can be happy in God, or really happy anywhere or anyhow in the universe. He must be sanctified, that is saved from being a sinner, or he cannot be saved from the misery inherent in sinning, or from the punishment consequent upon it.

Again, regeneration and sanctification are not physical changes, capable of being wrought upon us by an exertion of God's physical omnipotence. It is sometimes said--We know men must become holy, but God can work this thing in us. God can create in us the very state of mind which His law demands.

Now such persons need to consider that holiness is not some substance created in us, but is a voluntary conformity of heart and life to the law of God and to the laws of our own nature. It implies that we willingly and cheerfully consecrate ourselves to the very ends demanded in the law of God. This and nothing else but this, is true holiness.

The more I have thought of it the more I have been astonished that any class of men who ever think at all on moral subjects can ever tend towards infidelity. What! reject the religion of the Bible and then talk of salvation? The man knows not what he is talking about. He knows no more about the subject and no more understands what he says than the veriest maniac! For, what is salvation? What is eternal life? Only let the individual press the question--what is this thing about which I am talking? And he will see that he must become just what the Bible represents men as becoming before they can be saved. He will see that it is in the nature of the case impossible that any man should be saved from misery to happiness unless he be changed from selfishness to benevolence.

It is therefore no arbitrary or governmental ordination of God which sends the sinning rebel to hell; he only goes to his own place--the only fitting place for one of his character which the universe affords. He has passed through his state of trial and has come out not pure but vile; hence no place but one fitted for the vile and filled with the vile can at all befit him. Surrounding circumstances and divinely employed means and influences must actually secure our purity of heart here, or we cannot be saved hereafter. So both reason and scripture conspire to affirm.

## **REMARKS.**

1. With this subject before us, we can see the real difference between those who are true saints and those who are not. The former are distinguished by enduring temptation; the latter by being overcome by it. All, both saints and sinners, are tried for the very purpose of developing character; in all cases it produces this very result; some endure the trial and some do not. The former of course are the real saints; the latter are deceived if they suppose themselves to be Christians. Temptation does not overcome the Christian; he overcomes it.

2. We see what constitutes the Christian warfare. It is made up of resisting temptation--of resisting

and overcoming all those inducements to turn away from God and to seek one's own ends and gratification. This is the strife and the struggle in which the Christian is engaged.

3. All men whether saints or sinners are tried, and all either endure temptation, or are carried away by them. The sinner is continually carried away. He is conscious of no conflict and no warfare, because he makes no resistance. He knows no other law than self-gratification. If he resists the temptation to self-gratification in one form it is only that he may secure it in some other form. Whenever he desires self-gratification, he seeks it; and just for this reason he is a sinner.

The Christian is tried in the same manner, but he resists the temptation. He knows that it will not do to give himself up to seek after sensual or selfish indulgences.

4. Another remark is due here which may explain to impenitent men a thing they often wonder at as unaccountably strange. I can well recollect much of my own experience on this point before my conversion. I saw that Christians had trials of mind and many troubles and difficulties which I could not account for. I thought they of all persons ought to be happy, (for I was sure the wicked had no ground for being so.) I could not account for the fact which I often noticed that Christians seemed quite unhappy. I was quite observing of all the movements I saw among Christians, for I used to attend their prayer meetings and ponder all the developments of character I saw among them. For a long time I was at a loss to account for the fact that they seemed to have so much trouble and so little enjoyment. I rarely fell in with one of the rejoicing ones whose face would shine; this class were few in number then, and I rarely met with them. I can well remember one deacon who used to visit our office. Often however he seemed to be in an agony of soul; I could often hear him sigh, --could see his struggles of mind; --the tear would start in his eye, and the words falter on his tongue. I used to be searching after the causes of this. Why is it I would say that one who has so much reason to be joyful in God should seem so sad?

Perhaps some impenitent man who hears me has a pious wife, and sometimes surprises her in tears. Repelled perhaps by seeing tears, the cause of which he knows not, he may perchance peevishly exclaim--"I don't want such a wife--so often weeping and unhappy." You ought, my friend, to use a little philosophy about this and try to understand it. Perhaps your own conduct may have caused those tears. The indifference you manifest to the welfare of your own soul may be agonizing your wife. She may love you too well and her Savior too well to see you at enmity against Him without feeling bitterly afflicted. Do not scorn those tears which your own folly and danger may have wrung out.

After my conversion I could see that I had often given Dea. H this trouble and anxiety which I had so frequently seen in his countenance. I saw that my folly and sin had caused him this deep grief. The fact is that if persons would consider they would often see the reason of this fact. The Christian has sore trials, and then instead of yielding as others to, he resists. Hence the struggle. Feeling a deep solicitude for the salvation of souls, when he sees their peril, his soul is troubled within him.

Instead therefore of wondering at these trials and seeing in them the evidence that they are wicked, we should rather deem it no strange thing and should see in them the evidence that such are righteous. The fact is that the Christian, standing in the midst of trials, is on battle ground. He is in a great strait, and if he might not take refuge in Christ, he would indeed be without hope.

Hence when you see Christians in the greatest agony and despondency, think not that they are not Christians, but rather be assured the more that they are. Those struggles are nothing else but a state of the sensibility and are not in themselves sin. They may rise to any degree of strength and yet not involve sin at all.

5. Sinners and false professors never learn the secret of standing by faith in Christ. Deceived professors sometimes seem to try; they talk as if they had some thought of making efforts, but alas, they seem to make no progress. In them are fulfilled the words of the apostle--"Ever learning, yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Some kinds of truth they may learn, but never this great truth, that through faith in Christ, they may gain the victory over all sin. They do not learn how to take refuge in Christ under circumstances of temptation. They do not apprehend the great and blessed truth--"Thou standest by faith." How great the secret and how vitally important! Nothing can be more so. If a Christian does not understand this, his resolutions are all air, mere wind--good for nothing at all. All false professors and sinners of every sort utterly fail to learn this great secret of so standing by faith in Christ that they can endure temptation. They have none of this element in their religion and of course their religion can avail them nothing.

6. Temptations are among the most powerful means of grace. They are often the most effective instrumentalities which the Lord employs to bring sinners to Christ. Often we see them the most powerful means used to break men off from self-dependence. They serve to show men their utter weakness in themselves for any moral good; and this lesson once thoroughly learned, the individual is prepared to take hold of real help and strength in Christ.

7. There is no escaping temptation in the present life. We may get grace for victories, but we need not look to grace for exemption from all conflict. The form of the conflict usually varies as saints make progress in the divine life. As they ascend higher in holiness, or rather as they go deeper into their own hearts, they must expect the form of the attack will change; but the same law of the Christian life will still prevail--war against sin--struggle against temptation.

8. Saints cannot but grow under temptations. It is just as natural as it is for the winds of heaven to strengthen the trees of the forest. You see a tree growing in the dense forest--it is tall and slender; it lifts its lofty head towards heaven and reels under the blasts of the storm; but there are so many other trees to help bear the pressure that no severe trial of strength comes upon any one. But let this tree take its growth in the open field and all alone; then see how it thrusts out its broad, bracing roots; see how rugged the form it assumes; see how the mighty thunder gusts break upon it and it only braces itself the more firmly to withstand;--so does the Christian under temptation. He grows up strong, fixed, steadfast. He is compelled to live in Christ all the time, and hence he cannot but learn to walk by faith and to stand in the evil day.

But place the Christian where he has little or no temptation, and he will come up slender, pale and faint-hearted. Not being in circumstances to develop his energies, they are not developed as under trials they might and would be.

The true doctrine on this point plainly is that trials afford us the means of gaining strength in the life

of God. If then we trust by faith in Jesus for sustaining grace, we grow; if we fail to trust, we fall before the temptation and bring disaster of the worst sort on our own souls and on the cause of Jesus.

9. Christians are sometimes so troubled as not to be aware of their growth and hence they get greatly discouraged. How often have I seen this! There is a Christian;--how he is dashed along on the mountain surges--hurled from one crested wave to another--how hard it is to keep his head above water; he does not know as he is making any progress at all towards the shore and haven of rest; but he is, and as you stand upon land you can see it though he does not see it at all.

So often in the case of saints. Those who look on rejoice to see them making great progress. We bless the Lord that we can see how these temptations are molding and fashioning them in the most lovely manner and imbuing their tempers with all the humility, the meekness and the sweetness of Christ.

See that Christian who has fallen into sore trials. His very countenance shows that he knows what sore temptations are and also what it is to have great consolations. The moral agencies that renovate character operate in his case with intense energy.

Some seem to think that a state of sanctification is beyond trial, and quite exempt from its struggles. This is one of the greatest mistakes. The saint never in this life gets so high that the Lord would not develop his graces yet a little more. The Christian is never too far advanced to be blessed by being carried along yet farther. You are never so far along that God may not have yet other blessings in store for you, to come through being tried yet more perhaps in the furnace of affliction.

Commonly when Christians have endured a scene of stern and fiery trial, they find it succeeded by one of great peace and rest. It is with them as with our Lord; --when Satan had gone, "lo, angels came and ministered unto Him."

Now some suppose that this peace in God is a state of sanctification. But perhaps it may not be. It may be only a temporary reward--a visit of some angel of mercy to refresh the weary soldier after a hard fought battle for the Lord, to prepare him for another scene of struggle.

Persons are sometimes thrown into trials when nothing is to be seen but the naked promise. All external circumstances may seem in the highest degree forbidding; and nothing remains but to trust the naked work of the Lord.

And sometimes we seem not even to have any explicit promise, but are thrown upon the general character of God. We are shut up to Him and can only say--"I know Him, and though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him." Job seems to have been in this condition; every earthly helper had failed him; perhaps he knew of no specific promise of the Lord on which he could rest; but he knew something of God's general character, and knew therefore that he could trust Him everywhere and always.

This case of Job is indeed in many respects exceedingly interesting. If you could have seen him in the midst of his trials: property and children torn away; his wife become his tempter; Satan let loose upon him; his flesh full of fire and his bones of anguish; if you could have seen all this, you would have said, surely Job is the last man in the world to be benefited by affliction. This was indeed a fierce and

terrible furnace through which to pass. Sometimes he frets, and sometimes almost slips; but still the Lord holds him up from falling; and probably there was no period in his whole life in which he grew so fast in the thorough knowledge of himself and of God--none in which he struck his roots down so deep and made them fast so firmly in the deep foundations of faith and trust, as then. If any suppose that Job was overcome in this trial they greatly mistake. Expressions did indeed escape him which showed that he was tried and almost beyond endurance, but his by no means proves that he was overcome. His constancy in God abides the trial, and by faith on the whole endures to the end.

You may have had an experience similar in some respects to this. You have been attacked by some vile, subtle, fierce temptation; your soul has been thrown into deep commotion; if any impenitent sinner had seen your struggles he would have been stumbled perhaps exceedingly and confounded; but through grace you conquered and you came out as gold seven times purified, prepared to testify with one of old--"It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

While all things work together for the good of the true saint, the very opposite of this is true of every sinner. All things work ill to him. He falls before every temptation, and of course every scene of trial only serves to develop more and more his ungodly lusts, or his unbelief and his settled alienation from God. Often you see such persons thrown into a fever of irritation against God. Secretly, perhaps sometimes openly, they repine and complain of the Almighty and fret against the course of His Providence. Every thing goes to develop their true character and strengthen all its bad points. This is all evil.

Let it also be remembered that it is only those that have a good hope that will endure temptation. Those whose hopes are false will not abide in the day of trial.

Hence those who fail and yield in the hour of temptation may see that they have no reason to hope. The features of their character are marks of the self-deceived and not of the true believer.

But you say perhaps--"I can't tell--I don't know where I am." A young man came to me a few days since with this complaint--I don't know where I am; --I don't know what to think of myself. In fact I am so afraid of sinning against God that I hardly dare to eat or drink or sleep" Indeed, thought I, and where can you be? What is your state of mind, dear young man? So afraid of sinning that you scarcely dare to eat! So full of fear lest you displease God! Surely this shows for itself where you are. A heart so tenderly alive to the fear of displeasing God may be easily known.

Yet one cannot look at such a case as that of this young man without crying out--how cruel the devil is! And how mean, that he should love to torment a conscientious mind and throw him into a state in which he will scarcely dare to eat, drink, or sleep. What a devil he is!

When you see real Christians thrown into great temptations you will find that ultimately it will do them great good. Their graces will shine beautifully during the rest of their life, and God has said that when they die they shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away.

When, therefore you hear saints groaning, agonizing, trembling, be not afraid for them. The roots are striking deeper, and they will surely gain a firmer footing and will glorify God in the midst of the

fires. You may see him enter his closet, looking sad, perhaps haggard, almost distracted; but anon he will come out, meekly saying--The Lord knoweth my way. The Lord knows the tears I shed. He has delivered me in six troubles and in seven and still I know that He will deliver me, and I will yet own and bless His name. O beloved, it is good to be afflicted, if only we have faith in God and so hold on upon His arms as to endure to the end. Then there remains for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

## Quenching the Spirit

Lecture XI

October 13, 1846

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Text.--1 Thess. 5:19: "Quench not the Spirit."

In discussing the subject presented in this text, I shall aim,

- I. To show how the Holy Spirit influences the mind;*
- II. To deduce some inferences from the known mode of the Spirit's operations;*
- III. Show what it is to quench the Spirit;*
- IV. Show how this may be done; and,*
- V. The consequences of quenching the Spirit.*

### **I. How does the Holy Spirit influence the human mind?**

I answer, not by physical agency;--not by the interposition of direct physical power. The action of the will is not influenced thus, and cannot be. The very supposition is absurd. That physical agency should produce voluntary mental phenomena just as it does physical, is both absurd and at war with the very idea of free agency. That the same physical agency which moves a planet should move the human will is absurd.

But further; the Bible informs us that the Spirit influences the human mind by means of truth. The Spirit persuades men to act in view of truth, as we ourselves influence our fellow-men by truth presented to their minds. I do not mean that God presents truth to the mind in the same manner as we

do. Of course his mode of doing it must differ from ours. We use the pen, the lips, the gesture; we use the language of words and the language of nature. God does not employ these means now; yet still he reaches the mind with truth. Sometimes his providence suggests it; and then his Spirit gives it efficiency, setting it home upon the heart with great power.

Sometimes the Lord makes use of preaching; indeed his ways are various.

But, whatever the mode, the object is always the same,--namely, to produce voluntary action in conformity to his law.

Now, if the Bible were entirely silent on this subject, we should still know from the nature of mind and from the nature of those influences which only can move the human mind, that the Spirit must exert not physical but moral influences on the mind. Yet we are not now left to a merely metaphysical inference; we have the plain testimony of the Bible to the fact that the Spirit employs truth in converting and sanctifying men.

## **II. We next inquire what is implied in this fact, and what must be inferred from it?**

God is physically omnipotent, and yet his moral influences exerted by the Spirit may be resisted. You will readily see that if the Spirit moved men by physical omnipotence, no mortal could possibly resist his influence. The Spirit's power would of course be irresistible--for who could withstand omnipotence?

But now we know it to be a fact that men can resist the Holy Ghost. For the nature of moral agency implies this and the Bible asserts it.

The nature of moral agency implies the voluntary action of one who can yield to motive and follow light or not as he pleases. Where this power does not exist, moral agency can not exist; and at whatever point this power ceases, there moral agency ceases also.

Hence if our action is that of moral agents, our moral freedom to do or not do must remain. It cannot be set aside or in any way overruled. If God should in any way set aside our voluntary agency, he would of necessity terminate at once our moral and responsible action. Suppose God should seize hold of a man's arm with physical omnipotence and forcibly use it in deeds of murder or of arson; who does not see that the moral, responsible agency of that man would be entirely superseded? Yet not more so than if, in an equally irresistible manner, God should seize the man's will and compel it to act as himself listed.

The very idea that moral influence can ever be irresistible originates in an entire mistake as to the nature of the will and of moral action. The will of man never can act otherwise than freely in view of truth and of the motives it presents for action. Increasing the amount of such influence has no sort of tendency to impair the freedom of the will. Under any possible vividness of truth perceived, or amount of motive present to the mind, the will has still the same changeless power to yield or not yield--to act or refuse to act in accordance with this perceived truth.

Force and moral agency are terms of opposite meaning, They cannot both co-exist. The one effectually precludes the other. Hence to say that if God is physically omnipotent, he can and will force a moral agent in his moral action, is to talk stark nonsense.

This fact shows that any work of God carried on by moral and not by physical power not only can be resisted by man, but that man may be in very special danger of resisting it. If the Lord carries the work forward by means of revealed truth, there may be most imminent danger lest men will neglect to study and understand this truth, or lest, knowing, they shall refuse to obey it. Surely it is fearfully within the power of every man to shut out this truth from his consideration, and bar his heart against its influence.

### **III. We next inquire what it is to quench the Spirit.**

We shall readily understand this when we come to see distinctly what the work of the Spirit is. We have already seen that it is to enlighten the mind into truth respecting God, ourselves, and our duty. For example, the Spirit enlightens the mind into the meaning and self-application of the Bible. It takes the things of Christ and shows them to us.

Now there is such a thing as refusing to receive this light. You can shut your eyes against it. You have the power to turn your eye entirely away and scarcely see it at all. You can utterly refuse to follow it when seen;--and in this case God ceases to hold up the truth before your mind.

Almost every one knows by personal experience that the Spirit has the power of shedding a marvelous light upon revealed truth, so that this truth shall stand before the mind in a new and most impressive form, and shall operate upon it with astonishing energy. But this light of the Spirit may be quenched.

Again there is, so to speak, a sort of heat, a warmth and vitality attending the truth when enforced by the Spirit. Thus we say if one has the Spirit of God his soul is warm; if he has not the Spirit, his heart is cold.

This vital heat produced by the Divine Spirit may be quenched. Let a man resist the Spirit, and he will certainly quench this vital energy which it exerts upon the heart.

### **IV. We are next to notice some of the ways in which the Spirit may be quenched.**

- 1. Men often quench the Spirit by directly resisting the truth he presents to their minds. Sometimes men set themselves deliberately to resist the truth, determined they will not yield to its power, at least for the present. In such cases it is wonderful to see how great the influence of the will is in resisting the truth. Indeed the will can always resist any moral considerations; for, as we have seen, there is no such thing as forcing the will to yield to truth.

In those cases wherein the truth presses strongly on the mind, there is presumptive evidence that the Spirit is present by his power. And it is in precisely these cases that men are especially prone to set themselves against the truth, and thus are in the utmost peril of quenching the Spirit. They hate the truth presented--it crosses their chosen path of indulgence--they feel vexed and harassed by its claims; they resist and quench the Spirit

of the Lord.

You have doubtless often seen such cases, and if so, you have doubtless noticed this other remarkable fact of usual occurrence--that after a short struggle in resisting truth, the conflict is over, and that particular truth almost utterly ceases to affect the mind. The individual becomes hardened to its power--he seems quite able to overlook it and thrust it from his thoughts, or if this fails and the truth is thrown before his mind, yet he finds it comparatively easy to resist its claims. He felt greatly annoyed by that truth until he had quenched the Spirit; now he is annoyed by it no longer.

If you have seen cases of this sort you have doubtless seen how as the truth pressed upon their minds they became restive, sensitive--then perhaps angry--but still stubborn in resisting--until at length the conflict subsides; the truth makes no more impression, and is henceforth quite dead as to them; they apprehend it only with the greatest dimness, and care nothing about it.

And here let me ask--Have not some of you had this very experience? Have you not resisted some truth until it has ceased to affect your minds? If so, then you may conclude that you in that case quenched the Spirit of God.

- 2. The Spirit is often quenched by endeavoring to support error.

Men are sometimes foolish enough to attempt by argument to support a position which they have good reason to know is a false one. They argue it till they get committed; they indulge in a dishonest state of mind; thus they quench the Spirit, and are usually left to believe the very lie which they so unwisely attempted to advocate. Many such cases have I seen when men began to defend and maintain a position known to be false, and kept on till they quenched the Spirit of God--believed their own lie, and it is to be feared, will die under its delusions.

- 3. By uncharitable judgments.

Perhaps nothing more certainly quenches the Spirit than to impeach the motives of others and judge them uncharitably. It is so unlike God, and so hostile to the law of love, no wonder the Spirit of God is utterly averse to it, and turns away from those who indulge in it.

- 4. The Spirit is grieved by harsh and vituperative language. How often do persons grieve the Spirit of God by using such language toward those who differ from them. It is always safe to presume that persons who indulge such a temper have already grieved the Spirit of God utterly away,
- 5. The Spirit of God is quenched by a bad temper. When a bad temper and spirit are stirred up in individuals or in a community, who has not seen how suddenly a revival of religion ceases--the Spirit of God is put down and quenched; there is no more prevailing prayer and no more sinners are converted.

- 6. Often the Spirit is quenched by diverting the attention from the truth. Since the Spirit operates through the truth, it is most obvious that we must attend to this truth which the Spirit would keep before our minds. If we refuse to attend, as we always can if we choose to do so, we shall almost certainly quench the Holy Spirit.
- 7. We often quench the Spirit by indulging intemperate excitement on any subject. If the subject is foreign, from practical, divine truth, strong excitement diverts attention from such truth and renders it almost impossible to feel its power. While the mind sees and feels keenly on the subject in which it is excited, it sees dimly and feels but coldly on the vital things of salvation. Hence the Spirit is quenched. But the intemperate excitement may be on some topic really religious. Sometimes I have seen a burst--a real tornado of feeling in a revival; but in such cases, truth loses its hold on the minds of the people; they are too much excited to take sober views of the truth and of the moral duties it inculcates. Not all religious excitement however is to be condemned. By no means. There must be excitement enough to arouse the mind to serious thought--enough to give the truth edge and power; but it is always well to avoid that measure of excitement which throws the mind from its balance and renders its perceptions of truth obscure or fitful.
- 8. The Spirit is quenched by indulging prejudice. Whenever the mind is made up on any subject before it is thoroughly canvassed, that mind is shut against the truth and the Spirit is quenched. When there is great prejudice it seems impossible for the Spirit to act, and of course his influence is quenched. The mind is so committed that it resists, the first efforts of the Spirit.

Thus have thousands done. Thus thousands ruin their souls for eternity.

Therefore let every man keep his mind open to conviction and be sure to examine carefully all important questions, and especially all such as involve great questions of duty to God and man.

I am saying nothing now against being firm in maintaining your position after you thoroughly understand it and are sure it is the truth. But while pursuing your investigations, be sure you are really candid and yield your mind to all the reasonable evidence you can find.

- 9. The Spirit is often quenched by violating conscience. There are circumstances under which to violate conscience seems to quench the light of God in the soul forever. Perhaps you have seen cases of this sort where persons have had a very tender conscience on some subject, but all at once they come to have no conscience at all on that subject. I am aware that change of conduct sometimes results from change of views without any violation of conscience; but the case I speak of is where the conscience seems to be killed. All that remains of it seems hard as a stone.

I have sometimes thought the Spirit of God had much more to do with conscience than we usually suppose. The fact is undeniable that men sometimes experience very great and sudden changes in the amount of sensibility of conscience which they feel on some subjects. How is this to be accounted for? Only by the supposition that the Spirit has

power to arouse the conscience and make it pierce like an arrow; and then when men, notwithstanding the reproaches of conscience will sin, the Spirit is quenched; the conscience loses all its sensibility; an entire change takes place, and the man goes on to sin as if he never had any conscience to forbid it.

It sometimes happens that the mind is awakened just on the eve of committing some particular sin. Perhaps something seems to say to him--if you do this you will be forsaken of God. A strange presentiment forewarns him to desist. Now if he goes on, the whole mind receives a dreadful shock; the very eyes of the mind seem to be almost put out; the moral perceptions are strangely deranged and beclouded; a fatal violence is done to the conscience on that particular subject at least, and indeed the injury to the conscience seems to affect all departments of moral action. In such circumstances the Spirit of God seems to turn away and say--"I can do no more for you--I have warned you faithfully and can warn you no more."

All these results sometimes accrue from neglect of plainly revealed duty. Men shrink from known duty through fear of the opinions of others, or through dislike of some self-denial. In this crisis of trial the Spirit does not leave them in a state of doubt or inattention as to duty, but keeps the truth and the claims of God vividly before the mind. Then if men go on and commit the sin despite of the Spirit's warnings,--the soul is left in awful darkness--the light of the Spirit of God is quenched perhaps forever.

I know not in how many cases I have seen persons in great agony and even despair who had evidently quenched the Spirit in the manner just described. Many of you may know the case of a young man who has been here. He had a long trial on the question of preparing himself for the ministry. He balanced the question for a long time, the claims of God being clearly set before him;--but at last resisting the convictions of duty, he went off and got married, and turned away from the work to which God seemed to call him. Then the Spirit left him. For some few years he remained entirely hardened as to what he had done and as to any claims of God upon him, but finally his wife sickened and died. Then his eyes were opened; he saw what he had done. He sought the Lord, but sought in vain. No light returned to his darkened, desolate soul. It no longer seemed his duty to prepare for the ministry; that call of God had ceased. His cup of wretchedness seemed to be filled to the brim. Often he spent whole nights in most intense agony, groaning, crying for mercy, or musing in anguish upon the dire despair that spread its universe of desolation all around him. I have often feared he would take his own life, so perfectly wretched was he under these reproaches of a guilty conscience and these thoughts of deep despair.

I might mention many other similar cases. Men refuse to do known duty, and this refusal does fatal violence to their own moral sense and to the Spirit of the Lord, and consequently there remains for them only a "certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation."

- 10. Persons often quench the Spirit by indulging their appetites and passions. You would be astonished if you were to know how often the Spirit is grieved by this means until a crisis is

formed of such a nature that they seem to quench the light of God at once from their souls. Some persons indulge their appetite for food to the injury of their health, and though they know they are injuring themselves, and the Spirit of God remonstrates and presses them hard to desist from ruinous self-indulgence, yet they persist in their course--are given up of God, and henceforth their appetites lord it over them to the ruin of their spirituality and of their souls. The same may be true of any form of sensual indulgence.

- 11. The Spirit is often quenched by indulging in dishonesty. Men engaged in business will take little advantages in buying and selling. Sometimes they are powerfully convinced of the great selfishness of this, and see that this is by no means loving their neighbor as themselves. It may happen that a man, about to drive a good bargain will raise the question--is this right?--will balance it long in his mind--will say--"now this neighbor of mine needs this article very much, and will suffer if he does not get it; this will give me a grand chance to put on a price;--but then would this be doing as I would be done by?" He looks and thinks--he sees duty but finally decides in favor of his selfishness. Eternity alone will disclose the consequences of such a decision. When the Spirit of God has followed such persons a long time--has made them see their danger--has kept the truth before them, and finally, seizing the favorable moment, makes a last effort and this proves unavailing--the die is cast--thereafter all restraints are gone and the selfish man abandoned of God, goes on worse and worse, to state's prison perhaps, and certainly to hell!
- 12. Often men quench the Spirit by casting off fear and restraining prayer. Indeed restraining prayer must always quench the Spirit. It is wonderful to see how naturally and earnestly the Spirit leads us to pray. If we were really led by the Spirit, we should be drawn many times a day to secret prayer, and should be continually lifting up our hearts in silent ejaculations whenever the mind unbends itself from other pressing occupations. The Spirit in the hearts of saints is pre-eminently a spirit of prayer, and of course to restrain prayer must always quench the Spirit.

Some of you, perhaps, have been in this very case. You have once had the spirit of prayer; now you have none of it: you had access to God--now you have it no longer; you have no more enjoyment in prayer--have no groaning and agonizing over the state of the church and of sinners. And if this spirit of prayer is gone where are you now? Alas, you have quenched the Spirit of God--you have put out his light and repelled his influences from your soul.

- 13. The Spirit is quenched by idle conversation. Few seem to be aware how wicked this is and how certainly it quenches the Holy Spirit. Christ said "that for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."
- 14. Men quench the Holy Ghost by a spirit of levity and trifling.

Again by indulging a peevish and fretful spirit.

Also by a spirit of indolence. Many indulge in this to such an extent as altogether to drive away the Holy Spirit.

Again by a spirit of procrastination, and by indulging them selves in making excuses for neglect of duty. This is a sure way to quench the Spirit of God in the soul.

- 15. It is to be feared that many have quenched the Spirit by resisting the doctrine and duty of sanctification.

This subject has been for a few years past extensively discussed; and the doctrine has also been extensively opposed. Several Ecclesiastical bodies have taken ground against it, and sometimes it is to be feared that members have said and done what they would not by any means have said or done in their own closets or pulpits. Is it not also probable that many ministers and some laymen have been influenced by this very ecclesiastical action to oppose the doctrine--the fear of man thus becoming a snare to their souls? May it not also be the case that some have opposed the doctrine really because it raises a higher standard of personal holiness than they like--too high perhaps to permit them to hope as Christians, too high for their experience, and too high to suit their tastes and habits for future life?

Now who does not see that opposition to the doctrine and duty of Sanctification on any such grounds must certainly and fatally quench the Holy Spirit? No work can lie more near the heart of Jesus than the sanctification of his people. Hence nothing can so greatly grieve him as to see this work impeded--much more to see it opposed and frustrated.

A solemn and awful emphasis is given to these considerations when you contemplate the facts respecting the prevalent state of piety in very many churches throughout the land. You need not ask--are revivals enjoyed--are Christians prayerful, self-denying, alive in faith and in love to God and to man. You need not ask if the work of sanctifying the Church is moving on apace, and manifesting itself by abounding fruits of righteousness; the answer meets you before you can well frame the question.

Alas, that the Spirit should be quenched under the diffusion of the very truth which ought to sanctify the Church! What can save if gospel promise in all its fullness is so perverted or resisted as to quench the Spirit and thus serve only to harden the heart?

#### **V. I am lastly to speak of the consequences of quenching the Holy Spirit.**

- 1. Great darkness of mind. Abandoned of God, the mind sees truth so dimly that it makes no useful impression. Such persons read the Bible without interest or profit. It becomes to them a dead letter, and they generally lay it aside unless some controversy leads them to search it. They take no such spiritual interest in it as makes its perusal delightful.

Have not some of you been in this very state of mind? This is that darkness of nature which is common to men when the Spirit of God is withdrawn.

- 2. There usually results great coldness and stupidity in regard to religion generally. It leaves to the mind no such interest in spiritual things as men take in worldly things.

Persons often get into such a state that they are greatly interested in some worldly matters, but not in spiritual religion. Their souls. are all awake while worldly things are

the subject;--but suggest some spiritual subject, and their interest is gone at once. You can scarcely get them to attend a prayer meeting. They are in a worldly state of mind you may know, for if the Spirit of the Lord was with them, they would be more deeply interested in religious services than in anything else.

But now, mark them. Get up a political meeting, or a theatrical exhibition and their souls are all on fire; but go and appoint a prayer meeting or a meeting to promote a revival, and they are not there; or if there, they feel no interest in the object.

Such persons often seem not to know themselves. They perhaps think they attend to these worldly things only for the glory of God;--I will believe this when I see them interested in spiritual things as much.

When a man has quenched the Spirit of God his religion is all outside. His vital, heart-affecting interest in spiritual things is gone.

It is indeed true that a spiritual man will take some interest in worldly things because he regards them as a part of his duty to God, and to him they are spiritual things.

- 3. The mind falls very naturally into diverse errors in religion. The heart wanders from God, loses its hold on the truth, and perhaps the man insists that he now takes a much more liberal and enlightened view of the subject than before.

A short time since I had a conversation with a man who had given up the idea that the Old Testament was inspired--had given up the doctrine of the atonement, and indeed every distinctive doctrine of the Bible. He remarked to me--"I used to think as you do; but I have now come to take a more liberal and enlightened view of the subject."

Indeed! this a more liberal and enlightened view! So blinded as not to see that Christ sanctioned the Old Testament as the oracles of God, and yet he flatters himself that he now takes a more liberal and enlightened view! There can be nothing stronger than Christ's affirmations respecting the inspiration of the Old Testament; and yet this man admits these affirmations to be true and yet denies the very thing they affirm! Most liberal and enlightened view truly!

How can you possibly account for such views except on the ground that for some reason the man has fallen into a strange, unnatural state of mind--a sort of mental fatuity in which moral truths are beclouded or distorted?

Everybody knows that there cannot be a greater absurdity than to admit the divine authority of the teachings of Christ and yet reject the Old Testament. The language of Christ affirms and implies the authority of the Old Testament in all those ways in which, on the supposition that the Old Testament is inspired, He might be expected to affirm and imply this fact.

The Old Testament does not indeed exhaust divine revelation; it left more things to be

revealed. Christ taught much, but nothing more clearly than the divine authority of the Old Testament.

- 4. Quenching the Spirit often results in infidelity. What can account for such a case as that I have just mentioned, unless this--that God has left the mind to fall into very great darkness?
- 5. Another result is great hardness of heart. The mind becomes callous to all that class of truths which make it yielding and tender. The mobility of the heart under truth depends entirely upon its moral hardness. If very hard, truth makes no impression; if soft, then it is yielding as air, and moves quick to the touch of truth in any direction.
- 6. Another result is deep delusion in regard to their spiritual state. How remarkable that persons will claim to be Christians when they have rejected every distinctive doctrine of Christianity. Indeed, such persons do sometimes claim that by thus rejecting almost the whole of the Bible, and all its great scheme of salvation by an atonement, they have become real Christians. Now they have got the true light. Indeed!

How can such a delusion be accounted for except on the ground that the Spirit of God has abandoned the man to his own ways and left him to utter and perfect delusion?

- 7. Persons in this state often justify themselves in most manifest wrong, because they put darkness for light and light for darkness. They entrench themselves in perfectly false principles, as if those principles were true and could amply justify their misdeeds.

#### **REMARKS.**

1. Persons often are not aware what is going on in their minds when they are quenching the Spirit of God. Duty is presented and pressed upon them, but they do not realize that this is really the work of the Spirit of God. They are not aware of the present voice of the Lord to their hearts, nor do they see that this solemn impression of the truth is nothing other than the effect of the Holy Ghost on their minds.

2. So when they come to take different views and to abandon their former opinions, they seem not conscious of the fact that God has departed from them. They flatter themselves that they have become very liberal and very much enlightened withal, and have only given up their former errors. Alas, they do not see that the light they now walk in is darkness--all sheer darkness! "Woe to them who put light for darkness and darkness for light!"

You see how to account for the spiritual state of some persons. Without the clue which this subject affords, you might be much misled. In the case just described, suppose that I had taken it for granted that this man was in truth taking a more rational and liberal view; I should have been misguided entirely.

3. I have good reason to know how persons become Unitarians and Universalists, having seen at least some hundreds of instances. It is not by becoming more and more men of prayer and real spirituality--not by getting nearer and nearer to God; they do not go on progressing in holiness,

prayer, communion with God, until in their high attainments they reach a point where they deny the inspiration of the Bible, give up public prayer, the ordinances of the gospel, and probably secret prayer along with the rest. Those who give up these things are not led away while wrestling in prayer and while walking humbly and closely with God; no man ever got away from orthodox views while in this state of mind. But men first get away from God and quench his Spirit;--then embrace one error after another; truth falls out of the mind and we might almost say truthfulness itself, or those qualities or moral attributes which capacitate the mind to discern and apprehend the truth; and then darkness becomes so universal and so deceptive that men suppose themselves to be wholly in the light,

4. Such a state of mind is most deplorable and often hopeless. What can be done when a man has grieved the Spirit of God away?

5. When an individual or a people have quenched the Spirit, they are in the utmost danger of being given up to some delusion that will bring them by a short route to destruction.

6. They take entirely false ground who maintain that if a religious movement is the work of God, it cannot be resisted. For example, I have often seen cases where persons would stop a revival, and then say--"It was not a real revival, for if it had been it would not have stopped."

Let a man adopt the opinion that he cannot stop the work of God in his own soul;--nothing can be more perilous. Let a people adopt the notion that revivals come and go without our agency and by the agency of God only, and it will bring perfect ruin on them. There never was a revival that could exist three days under such a delusion. The solemn truth is that the Spirit is most easily quenched. There is no moral work of his that can not be resisted.

7. An immense responsibility pertains to revivals. There is always fearful danger lest the Spirit should be resisted.

So when the Spirit is with an individual, there is the greatest danger lest something be said, ruinous to the soul.

Many persons here are in the greatest danger. The Spirit often labors with sinners here, and many have grieved away.

8. Many seem not to realize the nature of the Spirit's operations, the possibility always of resisting, and the great danger of quenching that light of God in the soul.

How many young men could I name here, once thoughtful, now stupid. Where are those young men who were so serious, and who attended the inquiry meeting so long in our last revival? Alas, have they quenched the Holy Spirit?

Is not this the case with you--young man; with you, young woman? Have not you quenched the Spirit until now your mind is darkened and your heart woefully hardened? How long ere the death-knell shall toll over you and your soul go down to hell? How long before you will lose your hold on all truth and the Spirit will have left you utterly?

But let me bring this appeal home to the hearts of those who have not yet utterly quenched the light of God in the soul. Do you find that truth still takes hold of your conscience--that God's word flashes on your mind--that heaven's light is not yet utterly extinguished, and there is still a quivering of conscience? You hear of a sudden death, like that of the young man the other day, and trembling seizes your soul, for you know that another blow may single out you. Then by all the mercies of God I beseech you take care what you do. Quench not the Holy Ghost, lest your sun go down in everlasting darkness. Just as you may have seen the sun set when it dipped into a dark, terrific, portentous thunder cloud. So a benighted sinner dies! Have you ever seen such a death? Dying, he seemed to sink into an awful cloud of fire and storm and darkness. The scene was fearful, like a sunset of storms, and gathering clouds, and rolling thunders, and forked lightnings. The clouds gather low in the west--the spirit of storm rides on the blast--belching thunders seem as if they would cleave the solid earth;--behind such a fearful cloud the sun drops, and all is darkness! So have I seen a sinner give up the ghost and drop into a world of storms, and howling tempests, and flashing fire.

O how unlike the setting sun of a mild summer evening. All nature seems to put on her sweetest smile as she bids the king of day adieu.

So dies the saint of God. There may be paleness on his lip and cold sweat on his brow, but there is beauty in that eye and glory in the soul. I think of a woman, just converted, when she was taken sick--brought down to the gates of death--yet was her soul full of heaven. Her voice was the music of angels; her countenance shone, her eye sparkled as if the forms of heavenly glory were embodied in her dying features. Nature at last sinks--the moment of death has come--she stretches out her dying hands and hails the waiting spirit--"Glory to God!"--she cries--"I am coming!--I am coming!" Not going--observe--she did not say--"I am going,"--but "I am coming!"

But right over against this, look at the sinner dying. A frightful glare is on his countenance as if he saw ten thousand demons! As if the setting sun should go down into an ocean of storms--to be lost in a world charged with tornadoes, storms, and death!

Young man, you will die just so if you quench the Spirit of God. Jesus Himself has said--"If ye will not believe, ye shall die in your sins." Beyond such a death, there is an awful hell.

## **Responsibility of Hearing the Gospel**

Lecture XII

December 23, 1846

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Text.--Luke 8:18: "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have."

These words follow almost immediately after the parable of the sower--a parable which was intended to represent the various classes of hearers and the diverse results of their different or opposite courses.

Immediately after recording that parable, Luke subjoins.

"No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed, but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light."

"For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known and come abroad."

The idea of this seems to be that in the ultimate results of this state of probation, God will show who have improved their opportunities and who have not. These things, however secret now, shall be made manifest. All the workings and results of our present hearing or refusing to hear, shall in due season be spread out before the universe.

Hence the solemn injunction--

"Take heed, therefore, how ye hear." How forcible, if it be indeed the case that all its consequences are to be revealed before the universe!

Luke adds also--

"Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have."

From this and the parallel passages we infer that whoever improves the instruction proffered him shall have grace needful to understand it. He shall also have more truth revealed to him. The providence, the word and the Spirit of God may perhaps all combine to fulfil this promise--more to him that improves what he has. So also will God take away from him who does not improve.

My remarks on the text will be confined chiefly to the first clause--"Take heed how ye hear." I shall, inquire;

*I. What it is to take heed.*

*II. Why persons ought to take heed how they hear.*

*III. Show in several particulars how men ought to hear and must hear if they would ever profit by hearing.*

## **I. What it is to take heed.**

To take heed is to be wakeful, attentive, to be very considerate. It implies that we seriously ponder the word of the Lord and consider attentively its meaning and its application to ourselves.

## **II. Why is this injunction given? Why should we take heed how we hear?**

You will observe that it respects especially the word of God. It does not require special attention to every thing which we can hear on all possible subjects and from any source whatever; no, it only requires us always to listen when God speaks; always to hear with the utmost attention what God may say.

Now the reasons of such a requirement are surely very plain.

- 1. Because it is God who speaks. We are to consider that it is really God who speaks to us through His word, and through the faithful and sound preaching of His gospel. He may employ human organs; He may use the language and the types or the living voice of man--yet it is still the voice of God, for it is His chosen mode of revealing Himself to mortal man.

And now how ought all men to listen to the word of God! With what profound and solemn attention!

And do any ask why we should thus listen when God speaks? I answer. Because He always has something important to say. Because He never speaks in vain. He is not an incessant talker--is not a trifler--never speaks unless to communicate truths of infinite moment for mortal man to hear and know.

How then ought men to hearken when the Infinite Jehovah speaks!

Suppose you were apprised of the fact that the Great God--the Infinite Maker of the Universe, had appointed the time and the place where He would audibly speak to mortal men--in language intelligible to them and of course on subjects of infinite concern to them. Would not you and would not every man living stand on tiptoe to hear every word that should go forth from the eternal God?

But what would you think if men should pay no attention? If the notice should not draw together even a respectably large congregation? What would you think if there were some who would not hear at all?

But again--God speaks to you--to you as if it were by name; as if He were to call out your name, and make His communications particularly to you. Suppose now it were known that God was about to address someone in this congregation by name--but no one knows who the individual is. How every heart would quiver with intense interest to know who it should be--each one anxious almost to agony and saying--Is it I? Will that majestic voice pronounce my name? And what will He say?

Now such a course would be striking--would be thrilling. It would doubtless startle some

into wakefulness who are rarely wakeful under the ordinary mode of divine communication. But yet God as really speaks now to mortal men as if He were to call out with audible voice their very names. And, my hearer, He just as really speaks now to you, as if He were to pronounce your very name before this whole assembly.

This is one of those great truths which you need to know and fully realize. When God speaks through His word, through His providence, or through His gospel preached by His servants, He really speaks to you.

Again, you should take heed because if you do not you will certainly misunderstand what the Lord says. You cannot understand without giving your attention, and surely you must know that if God speaks to you, He will say something which is vitally important for you to know.

It is well for you to consider the fact that multitudes fail to understand these messages of the Lord, and hence go on to the judgment under a fatal mistake. God spake to them; they gave no such heed as would secure a right understanding of His message, and hence they go to perdition.

Again, you should take heed how you hear because God speaks on subjects of infinite importance to your soul. Life and death hang on every word He utters. He speaks to tell you of salvation--to show you what you must do to secure everlasting life. And should a single young man or young woman in this house be indifferent?

Your salvation does and must depend on the manner of your hearing. If you hear so as not to understand, you can never be saved. The very things of which God speaks are the conditions on which you can be saved. How can you be saved if you fail to understand these conditions? These conditions you are yourself to fulfill; how then can you do them and be saved unless you understand what they are?

Again, not only is your own salvation depending on your hearing the truth of God attentively, but the salvation also of many others. Perhaps thousands of persons may be deeply and personally interested in your hearing as you should. You cannot neglect to hear as you ought without wronging your family, your friends, your posterity, your whole generation. All these will have reason to blame, yea, to reproach, and even to curse you if you do not hear as you ought.

Consider further that God is offering you eternal life. It is on this subject that He speaks to you, offering you life and threatening you with death if you will not attend and obey. When God is about to speak on such a subject, is it not fitting that He should introduce His communication with the solemn admonition--"Take heed how ye hear?"

Consider also that everything may depend upon your present hearing. Perhaps some of you are hearing the word of the Lord now for the last time. Death may lock up all your senses forever, ere you shall enter the sanctuary or open your Bible again.

Or it may be that though you should hear the word of the Lord a thousand times hereafter, yet God may withdraw His Spirit henceforward, never to bestow it any more upon you. There is the more reason to fear it in your case since you are now solemnly warned of your responsibility and of your danger. Your whole eternity therefore may now be suspended upon the manner of your hearing the word of God this day. Will you slight that solemn word and put in peril the salvation of your soul forever?

### **III. I am to show in some particulars how you ought to hear and must hear if you would ever be saved.**

It is perfectly plain that you cannot possibly be saved only by means of understanding and obeying the word of God. There is only one possible way of being saved, and that is by becoming holy, since "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." Nor can you become holy only as you obey the truth, nor can you obey the truth only as far as you understand it. Hence the immense importance of understanding and obeying the truth of the Lord.

If this is so, then certain other things follow and must be true.

- 1. You must hear with very deep and fixed attention when the word of God is spoken to you. You must give your mind up most deeply and thoroughly to understand and obey it.
- 2. You must hear with reverence and awe. Nothing is more displeasing to God than a state of levity of mind when He is speaking. You can readily understand this. If you were a father, think how you would feel if your children received your most solemn remarks or appeals to them with insulting levity.
- 3. You must hear with a most sincere desire to understand what God says. How many persons are there in this house who have never set yourselves with seriousness really to understand the Gospel as if you felt it to be a matter of infinite concernment to you? How many are there here who have never really pondered the plan of salvation--"I must understand the will of God concerning myself--I must know whether I am still held guilty and still doomed to hell, or whether I am pardoned?" Some of you perhaps have never said this honestly in all your life. Yet you have had the Bible in your hands; and you have heard sermons enough to have enlightened unto salvation a thousand heathen souls. Who of you have come to the house of God today with an intense desire to understand everything said to you? But how can you expect ever to understand these great things of salvation unless you give up your minds to this study in solemn earnestness?

I am often astonished to hear persons saying--"The Bible is a mysterious book; I don't understand it."

Have you ever studied it as you do your class books? Do you ever give your whole mind to understand it as you do to understand Euclid or Cicero?

Yet with what intense interest should you desire to understand it! Nothing in all the

universe is so important to you as to understand this way of salvation. Your state of mind therefore by no means corresponds to your responsibilities, or to the subject you have to study; and how can you expect the Lord to bless you?

- 4. You must hear with candor, and be willing to know the worst of your case. Your heart must be really open to hear the whole truth.

Few persons have really come to understand how much importance is to be attached to this state of mind. Many seem not to be sensible of being prejudiced. Perhaps they have not even dreamed of being committed against the truth of God; but yet they are, full of committal--and most resolutely fixed in their false opinions. They are by no means candid.

I doubt whether a really candid man ever came to the reading of the Bible or to the hearing of the preached gospel, without being infinitely benefited by such hearing and reading. Now in revivals I have always noticed that however wicked and prejudiced men may have been yet if they could be persuaded to lay aside their prejudice and be candid, they are at once enlightened and are usually converted. They did not know really that they were not candid; yet if they had used the least reflection they must have seen that they did not give up their whole mind honestly and search for truth. So much at least they must have known.

And how is it here in this matter? Are there not persons here who know they do not give up their minds to understand the truth--who know they have not heard the gospel this morning with any real desire to learn their duty that they may do it? I wish I could go round to every individual here, with this question--Did you come here this morning with an intense desire to open your whole heart to the truth, and to give yourself up to be carried by it just where the truth might carry you? Without so much candor and so much earnestness as this, how can you hope ever to be enlightened by the truth? How can you rationally expect ever to be converted?

- 5. The Bible represents it as important that you should hear with fear and trembling lest you fail to understand. Surely nothing can be more reasonable than this. How would you feel if you were actually to hear the voice of Jehovah proclaiming to you your duty, or your doom? Would you not tremble?

How did Israel hear at Sinai, when the awful voice of the Lord of Hosts shook the solid mountain, and smote every heart with fear and awe! O they felt then that they could not stand before that awful Lord God! How earnestly did they implore that they might not themselves hear that dread voice again, but that Moses might stand between themselves and the Lord and hear from Him and communicate to them?

And is it not most fit that you no less than they, should hear the word of God with fear and solemn awe?

- 6. You should hear with an intense desire to learn what the will of God is that you may do it

whatever it may be. Now if you do not hear with a determination to obey, your hearing is only tempting God. It is an insult to God of the foulest stamp. Willing and ready to know your duty--but your heart fully set to disregard it however clearly known! What can be more horrid impiety than this!

- 7. You should hear with your heart set upon present obedience. You should not merely intend to do at some future time the duty you may learn today; but you should fully determine to do present known duty immediately.

Moreover your heart should be thoroughly set to do your duty fully--not partially; and perpetually,--not merely for the present hour.

- 8. You must also hear with penitence for past neglect. How many times have you heard in vain? And is it not fit that for this you should stand before God with a broken heart?
- 9. You must hear with implicit confidence in God. Else of what use can it be to you. The Bible says the Jews were not benefited by their hearing because it was not mixed with faith. So unless you really believe God, of what possible use can it be to you to listen to His word?

This reveals the secret why so many hear without any real profit. If they truly believed God, it would be of use to hear; but having no faith in God, all is to them as an idle tale. May it not be so with many of you?

But let us try to appreciate this subject. Imagine to yourself how you should listen if God should send an angel to speak to you, or should come to speak to you Himself. Suppose that I were now to take my seat, and that God should fill this house with His own voice. You would see no physical form but you would hear a voice, and know it to be the voice of the great God. How would awe and wakeful attention hold your mind in such dread moments! Oh, you would say--this is the great God! This is that Being in whose hand our breath is, and whom by our sins we have offended! O will He forgive us graciously for Christ's sake, or frown upon us in His righteous wrath?

Or again, suppose God speaks by an angel. The angel comes and takes his position before you. Suppose you were to see him come down from heaven in robes of dazzling light and glory; you see he holds in his hand a book and every page of it is luminous with unearthly radiance. He opens it, assuring you that God sends it to you to tell you the plan of salvation and show you what you must do to be saved. Suppose the angel opens that book and expounds to you its contents; would you not listen as for your very life? Would not the scene and its solemn responsibilities make an impression on your mind which you could never forget? Aye, indeed, as if it were embossed on your very soul; there the living remembrance and impression of the truths he should explain to you would stand as if they were written with the point of a diamond.

But again, let us suppose, that an apostle should come or one of the prophets of yet more ancient time; suppose one of them to be sent from the other world and you were assured of the fact; would you not listen with amazing attention?

Or still again, suppose that God should send to you an inspired man, and you knew him to be inspired; would you not even then listen with wakeful, thrilling interest? Would you not yield your utmost attention to such messages from the living God?

But here you have the living oracles of Jehovah. Here they are in the language of men: and yet you know they come from God. Suppose it to be the fact that God has chosen to reveal Himself to you just in this way, rather than by making His own voice distinctly and awfully audible, or rather than by an angel radiant with glory--or rather than by sending from the other world a prophet or an apostle, or rather than by sending to you an inspired preacher; and the reason of His choice has been that He might put you on a more effective trial and see whether you would believe Him on such evidence as your reason tells you is adequate, and see moreover whether you will under such circumstances search for truth as for hid treasures. Suppose you understand the precise nature of your trial; ;you know that it turns very much upon the point whether you will hear the voice of God through His word and His preached gospel or not; now, knowing all this, will you give heed to the warning voice of God and listen to His truth? O how you would search this truth if you understood the results of the trial by which the Lord is now trying you to see if you will indeed obey His voice though it comes to you through the silent words of the book and the merely human voice of one who is a frail mortal, like yourselves!

#### **REMARKS.**

1. Many seem to pay as little attention to the word of God as if no such injunction were found in the bible. They act as if they had never thought of the solemn responsibility of hearing with serious attention to the word of the Lord. It would seem from their conduct as if they were not aware that God had over and over again reminded them of this solemn responsibility.

Even among us, there are those who pay not half so much attention to a solemn message which God sends by one commissioned to preach His gospel as they would to a young man's commencement speech, or to the monthly declamations; not half so much as they would to a stump speech on politics!

How can this be? Do such persons at all consider the contempt they thus pour upon God? Would they treat their Governor or their President, as they do God? And do they know that this is that God in whose hand their breath is?

2. Men ought to know that all their hearing of the gospel, is either "a savor of life unto life, or a savor of death unto death." Do you realize this, dear hearer? Are you aware how much this hearing affects your moral state?

You might watch this point, and mark how your hearing of the gospel affects your moral state. You might doubtless notice how your heart becomes hardened by careless, inattentive hearing, and how declension steals on apace while you get no strength from the preached gospel.

Or on the other hand you might notice how your spiritual strength is renewed when your heart takes hold of the sermons you hear as the hungry man takes hold of suitable food set before him. By a

figure at once fit and beautiful, does Paul say--"We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one we are a savor of death unto death, to the other, a savor of life unto life." So to some of you, no doubt, the gospel preached is "death unto death"--accumulated guilt and damnation; while to others it is "life unto life," increasing knowledge and piety, and augmented glory.

3. We may see how it is that many become so exceedingly hardened. Such persons often seem not aware that they are becoming greatly hardened, or perhaps that they have become so already. They seem not sensible of the fact that the hearing of the gospel is altogether vain and worse than vain, and that they really hear so as to resist the truth and acquire the habit of being utterly insensible to its claims.

It may be so with some of you. You may have taken so little heed to what you hear that now it does you absolutely no good at all to hear a sermon or to read your bibles. You might hear or read, but the truth has utterly ceased to make any impression.

If you have reached a state so hardened, you are in as bad a predicament as you need to be this side of hell.

4. How exceedingly mad persons are for taking credit to themselves for going to the house of God, when really they have no intention of "taking heed how they hear." They come with no desire whatever of obeying the word of God; indeed nothing is farther from their thoughts than this. They go to church only that they may have it to say they have been there. They go for the credit of going--because they do not like to incur the disgrace of not going.

Suppose your child should come to you each morning and say--Father, what do you want that I should do today? But having heard, he goes his way, and never thinks for a moment of doing the first thing you desire him to do. So he does day after day--hearing, but never doing, and withal congratulating himself for having done so nobly. O, indeed, who had done like him--every morning he came and asked his parent what he should do:--but never in one instance did he obey.

So that young man or woman in this assembly, may have gone a hundred times to hear what God, the Lord will say--but having heard and learned, they never in one instance have done it. So does the devil go to meeting;--the bible says he goes:--but does he hear and obey? Not he--and suppose he too should strut about and glory in his good deeds inasmuch as he goes to meeting! As well might he do this, as any of those careless hearers and proud formalists who glory in it that they do the same thing.

5. Every seventh day is a Sabbath. Every seven years of your life makes up one year of Sabbaths. Every Sabbath school child seven years old has therefore seen one year of Sabbaths. Each youth fourteen years old has spent two full years of Sabbaths--time enough to go half through college. Have those youths now fourteen years old, been learning of God and of His truth so that they can pass examination?

Another class have lived twenty one years. These have filled up three years of Sabbaths--time enough to have gone three fourths of the way through college. O think of your examination. Are you ready to

meet it and to pass it honorably?

Others have lived twenty eight years--making four years of Sabbaths--time enough to go through college--time enough to get a college education in the principal branches of literature and science.

Now suppose you had studied your Algebra and Latin as you have your bibles, and heard scientific lectures as you have sermons; how much science would you now have?

But let us come up among the fathers--the men of gray hairs; how many years of Sabbaths have you lived? Think of it; how many whole years made up of Sabbaths! O! have you taken heed? Have you studied the great things of the bible with the utmost diligence and intensity? What do you know of God's word? How many of its promises do you really understand?

6. How perfectly shocking and astounding is the manner in which many persons treat the word of God! Suppose an angel should visit this place--should really come down among yourselves with a message from the great God! He summons the people together, and the most of them come. But instead of attending with all your souls to what he may bring from God relating to your salvation, many of you are gazing about upon one another, and during the whole time he is speaking to you, you are thinking about anything and everything else except the very thing of which he is speaking, so that it would be hard to say which is the most stupid--the people that sit before him, or the seats they sit on. O, surely there is not another world in the universe where this would not be looked upon as perfect madness! What do they think of it in heaven? Suppose an angel should pass among those shining hosts and tell them how the messages of God are received in this world. And suppose he should speak of it in some such manner as this. It is common there for men to pay the least possible attention to the messengers whom God sends among them, and all this is natural enough too. O, you see the Lord is only telling them some things of little consequence about their salvation--that is all--you know all that is really nothing to them.

O tell me; what would they think of such an angel as this? What shuddering amazement would run through all their ranks to hear such words, in such a strain!

But if such a state of mind ought to seem strange and even horrid in heaven, how ought it to seem here among you?

7. There are some here as to whom I have little hope of making any impression on their minds. O how astonishing, I have often said to myself--how astonishing that they should be always hearing, and only going still farther and farther away from God and from heaven! O how will they stand before God in the great day of trial!

Others hear with so much skepticism, it can do them no good. How surpassingly strange it is that men should be skeptical respecting the revealed word of God! Surely God has made the evidence in support of His bible clear enough to convince any unprejudiced mind.

8. In view of the solemn responsibilities of giving heed to the word of the Lord, I want to ask the listeners here today, how will you yourselves regard it when you come to your death bed? What are

your anticipations now of that solemn hour and of its reflections? Do you now expect that then, your conscience will pronounce its approving "well done?"

And how will it be with you when you pass beyond that death bed scene to your final account before the great God? Are you ready for that dread account? If you were then to pass an examination as to your attainments in divine science, as some of the professors here examine their pupils in human science and literature, could you pass the examination? Are you quite clear that you have at least been diligent, so that you shall have no occasion to reproach yourself for culpable neglect?

9. It is infinitely important that you should make up your mind at once to hear God's truth as you know you should. Everything depends on your coming to this determination now, and saying--"I will at once and henceforth listen to God as for my life."

You who are professors of religion, how do you hear? Can you go before God now in your closets and say;--"Lord, I have heard Thy word as for my life--I have given up my whole soul to understand and to obey all Thy truth." Who of you can say this in the deep sincerity of your souls?

And what sinner in this house can say this? Who of you is prepared to say solemnly, "O Lord God Almighty, the great and heart-searching God, I have heard Thy words now these many days, and I have always listened with serious attention; my mother taught me about Thee my God, and my duty to Thee, and my young heart hailed the first knowledge of God with joyful welcome."

Who of you can say, "I have always been a prayerful student of the bible--I have always obeyed its heaven-sent truth?" Must you not rather say, "I have been guilty--I am covered with shame--I have treated Thy word with contempt--I have turned away my ear and my heart from hearing Thy words; Thou hast risen morning by morning, and sent me line upon line and precept upon precept, but my heart has always been as an adamant stone; Alas, I am still in my sins, although Thou hast sent me Thy word and Thy Son--although Thou hast done all for me that could be done, yet am I still in my sins, condemned, and ready to sink down to hell."

Sinner, let me ask you here today, if this shall be your course any longer? Do you say No; by the grace of God it shall be so no longer--from this good hour, I give my being up to be influenced by the word of God? So do, dear hearer, and it shall be your life. By all the peril of a guilty soul in its sins, I beseech you, give up your heart now to most solemn and fixed attention to the word of the Lord your God.

## 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 intuitis

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 1846 Collection.**