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# "The Oberlin Evangelist"

Publication of Oberlin College

Sermons and Lectures given in 1857

by

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## GLOSSARY

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

## **Owing God- No.'s 1 & 2**

Lectures I & II

June 24, 1857

by Charles Grandison Finney

President of Oberlin College

Text.--Luke 16:5: "How much owest thou unto my Lord?"

LECTURE I.

These words are part of the parable of the unjust steward. In this parable Christ teaches the importance of using wealth so as to fulfill the conditions of being received into heaven.

It is not my purpose to comment on the parable itself. I select this verse as my text, not for its doctrine, but for its suggestions. In this way texts are sometimes selected, not as teaching any special doctrine, but because they forcibly suggest truths elsewhere taught.

This question -- "How much owest thou unto my Lord?" leads us to consider,

*I. The rights of God.*

*II. How much hast thou already paid?*

*III. What has been the foundation-motive for this act?*

*IV. What does God propose to do in the case? And what does He propose to have done?*

## **I. The rights of God.**

These should be considered in several different relations.

Our age is remarkable for a great deal of talk about rights; inalienable rights; rights of the North and of the South; State rights; Federal rights and Woman's rights; -- every other sort of rights but God's rights. On the latter, little is said, little seems to be thought. I propose to speak to you this morning in behalf of God's rights; and,

- 1. His rights as Creator of the universe. That He is the sole Creator of the universe is a fact assumed on all hands, and therefore there is no occasion to prove it.

This fact must invest Him with an absolute right of property in everything made, and pre-eminently in the intelligent beings on whom He has conferred His richest blessings.

Let it be noted that the rights of property resting in all other beings but God are relative; God's only are absolute. A right that a man has to his coat or his wages may be good as against the claim of his fellow-man, but is no right as against the claims of God. God's rights, on the contrary, are absolute, in the sense of being everywhere and always good -- good against all other claims possible or conceivable.

- 2. Let us also consider His rights as conditioned on His susceptibilities. Being a moral agent, with infinite sensibilities to happiness, He must have an infinite claim on all the moral subjects of His government to promote His happiness. Deeply susceptible to the happiness of having affectionate children to love and trust Him, this very susceptibility creates an obligation on their part to render Him the love and homage which will conduce to His happiness. This consideration seems to be strangely overlooked by most of His creatures in this world.

- 3. Next, let us study His rights as conditioned on His natural and moral attributes. The natural attributes of God; omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, etc., are all in their nature infinite. Whatever claim on us and right on His part can result from such attributes, must therefore be unlimited, because there can be no limit to His knowledge, power or presence.
  - (1.) His moral attributes; benevolence, justice, mercy, etc., are all perfect in kind and in degree, and hence God's right on the score of possessing these attributes must be unlimited.
  - (2.) The mutual relations existing between these two classes of attributes serve to perfect their claim on us. For if God were perfectly good, yet without omniscience and wisdom, He might make mistakes. If He were ever so well disposed, yet lacked the requisite power to carry out His purposes, such a failure must make an important deduction from the respect due Him and from the trust we might repose in His government. But now, being not only good but all-wise and all-powerful, He never can mistake and never can fail in any of His endeavors. Hence no subject of His can ever doubt that His claims are infinite; none, that He deserves our implicit and perfect confidence. This will not be denied, yet it may not have been well considered.
  - (3.) I have said that on the mere ground of His susceptibility to happiness, He has a claim on our benevolence. I now add, that on the mere ground of His goodness, He has an infinite claim on our complacency.
  - (4.) On grounds already presented He has a claim on our cordial affection. Perfect goodness constitutes an eternal foundation for this claim.
  - (5.) Being both wise and good, He has the highest possible claims on our sympathy. Himself engaged in the noblest object possible -- that of blessing His great family to the utmost extent of His resources, He rightly claims the cordial co-operation of all intelligent beings. Every one of them is bound to promote this same object with all his powers. The same reasons that move God to labor for this end should also move His creatures. Of course this implies that God has a right to our universal and perfect obedience. Being wise and good, He is bound to rule; the interest of His moral universe bind Him; and consequently, they equally bind us to obey.

This obligation includes the universal submission of all His creatures to everything He does or omits to do. It is their business to acquiesce in all His ways and with unqualified confidence and resignation. And we should not make a virtue of a forced submission, yielding to His will because we cannot help it; but should submit to His doings because we know He is worthy to be trusted. Even when we cannot fathom the reasons of His course, we yet know He must have good reasons, and are bound to honor Him by the most implicit confidence.

- (6.) God has a claim also on our universal adoration and praise. He rightfully claims that

we should acknowledge His attributes and duly appreciate His character, and that we should also commend His character and His infinite worthiness to others. No one can honestly deny this.

- o (7.) Let us also consider those rights of God which are conditioned on our dependence and on His fatherly care. We live and move and have our being in Him. He feeds and clothes us; sustains us in life and crowns this life with His love. Our dependence on Him is absolute and perfect, since we have no power to make our own blood to flow, or lungs to heave or our digestive organs to work. Not one of these life-processes is under our own control, so that we can dispense with God's upholding hand.

He sent these young people here to school; supported them before they came here; gives them life and health and all things. How much do you think it has cost Him already? Sometimes persons seem quite thoughtless of what God does for them and how much it costs Him to supply their wants. One winter during my absence from home, my eldest son thought he would keep account with his mother of work done and of benefits received. He kept it faithfully one week. When he came to settlement, he was greatly surprised to find himself so deeply in debt. Notwithstanding he had done some little things, he found he had by no means paid for his board, room, tuition and clothing. He looked very thoughtful. It was a new idea that he was always to be in debt, and, so deeply in debt too. What could he do?

So it would be in your account with God. Perhaps you have never thought of it; but if you ever were to think of it, you would see that it costs far more to supply your wants than you have been wont to think. How much owest thou unto my Lord for all His care in supplying your wants?

I once met an old man who used tobacco, and asked him how much it had cost, and how much he supposed God had charged against him for his waste of God's money on this filthy indulgence. I said to him -- Estimate also how much time it has wasted and how much of your strength; how much mental power; and how much you have lost of the spirit of prayer. He paused a few moments, and said "I never thought of it in this light before. I do not know what I can say for myself."

God has been every way your benefactor. Now, what has He a right to expect from you? Certainly, that you should abstain from everything injurious to yourself or to others. If parents may demand so much as this from their children, how much more may God, of His! You cannot hear the conduct of ungrateful children spoken of without tears. What, you exclaim, can that son so abuse his own father, and the mother that bare him! Can he forget how they watched around his bed in his sickness, and bore with him in his waywardness and folly?

- o (8.) These obligations you say are not mere abstractions by any means, but are the most

solemn realities. Yet they are as nothing, compared with the rights of God and the claims He has on His creatures, and the wrongs done Him when He is treated with ingratitude of heart or life.

- 4. Let us next consider His rights as conditioned upon redemption. O might we only see what an amount of obligation He has rolled upon us by redeeming us from the curse of the law and at such a cost!
  - (1.) Think how He took us out of the hands of public justice -- a thing He had no right to do and could not honorably do until He had first honored public justice and satisfied its claims. Do not start at this and say -- Has not God the right to do anything He pleases? Let it be considered that although God has rights, so also have the universe of beings whom He had made. For their sakes, God could not pardon one sinner, until He had duly regarded the claims of public justice. This He might accomplish in either of two ways. He might execute the penalty on every sinner, or He might devise some equivalent which should answer governmentally the same purpose, inasmuch as it would equally manifest the heart of the King towards His law and the welfare of His subjects. The latter course was chosen, and a substitute was found in His own beloved Son on whom He "laid the iniquities of us all."
  - (2.) How much did He pay? Suppose there is a similar exigency upon you. You are a public officer. It devolves on you to sustain law by administering the penalty, or its equivalent. The law is broken; will you smite, or will you spare?

You have an only son, dear to your heart. Can you give him up to shame and to an agonizing death for the sake of safely pardoning those transgressors? Can you estimate how much a sacrifice of this sort would cost you?

- (3.) God has bought you with a price. Bought? Did He not own you altogether before? Yes, but you had brought yourself into such relations to public justice that He must needs buy you again, or you are lost. Now, what are His rights as conditioned on His having paid the price of your soul -- paid it too by the blood of His own and only Son! Does not this purchase intensify His claims and augment them exceedingly?

Suppose you had violated the laws of this State, and the Governor had sacrificed his own son to deliver you. Would you not feel that he had fresh claims on you, immensely greater than ever before? You had no claims on him but those of your own wretchedness, and yet he gave heed to those claims. And yet all this, if true, would give us but a faint illustration of what God has done for you through the sacrifice of His Son. Have you ever considered how vast, how deep, how infinite your obligations to Him must be? Surely He has a right to your deep, unselfish, and infinite devotion. Christ died for all, that they who live by His death should not henceforth live to themselves, but to Him who hath loved them and given Himself for them. Ought you not to devote to Him a life thus saved -- a soul thus redeemed? What! Has He redeemed you from death that you might oppose Him and live

to yourself? Do you not see that He has a claim on you for all your possible love and service? Surely there is no service possible on your part which is not most emphatically due to Him who hath loved and redeemed us.

- o (4.) God's rights are peculiar and infinitely great. They are peculiar, because none are altogether like them in kind; none can ever approach them in degree. In the broad field of human relations, there are some rights which are analogous, so much so that they aid us in understanding the nature of God's claims on us; yet none can be found in all respect like His. Thus for example no rights of property can be absolute save those of God. All other property-rights are only relative. My rights to my property are good against the claims of fellow-beings; but they are nothing against the claims of God. He owns me and mine. But my fellow-beings do not own either.
- o (5.) God's rights are peculiar in degree. The rights of no other being are infinite; His are. No being has infinite susceptibilities but God; consequently none but God has a claim on His creatures for infinite benevolence.

There is no other being whose rightful authority is universal and infinite. The rights of every other being to authority are so far below His that we must regard them as infinitely less. All the rights of parents to authority over their children -- of kings to rule over their subjects, -- all vanish to nothing compared with His. Yet parents and kings have rights of authority. But they are only the shadow, of which God's infinite authority is the substance.

What would any of you who are students think of yourself if you had trampled on the reasonable authority of one of your teachers? If you had a just sense of your own meanness, you would be ashamed to be seen in the streets -- ashamed to hold up your head. How much more if you had contemned the whole Faculty! You would feel within you the deep mutterings of self-reproach, just indignation and shame, because you had set at nought an authority which you are bound to respect.

Alas how little men think of their obligation to love and honor God!

- o (6.) There is no other being whose rights and claims are sustained by every possible consideration. Let any one of you look at the considerations that bear of whom it is true that obligation comes from every possible source -- grows out of every relation, presses you from every side, springs up from every spot beneath your feet and looks down with authority from every point above you? Truly there is no limit and no measure to this obligation.
- o (7.) God has a right to claim that every man should treat himself and everybody else as belonging of right to Him. He has a right therefore to keep an account with you and to charge you with every meal He puts on your table and gives you health to partake; with every breath you draw; with all the strength you have to use; with all that property which should be used for Him. Why not? Is not this true? You know and must admit it. And you

also know that if these gifts of God are not so used for Him, He is really wronged; and more wronged than we can ever be by any robbery of what we call ours. The wrong is higher in kind, by so much as His rights and claims are greater and higher in their nature than ours can be.

Moreover, it is not only true that a wrong inflicted on God is higher and more aggravated than any wrong against man can be, but it is also true that He will realize and feel it more keenly than we ever can. The more holy a man is the more keenly will he feel any injustice. No matter whether the injustice be done against himself, or against someone else. He may have a forgiving spirit and yet may feel the wrong only the more keenly. He will feel it the more by how much the greater his holiness may be.

So God must have a keener sense of the injustice done to Him than any creature can have of the injustice done against a creature. Yet farther; God's sense of this wrong and injustice is greater than the aggregate of all the wrong and of all the sense of wrong and injustice ever felt in the universe. You talk about the sense of wrong felt by the slave. No doubt it is often keen. You speak of the wrong done to parents by their ungrateful children; but what is all this compared with that which God experiences and which He suffers?

What will you think of the forbearance of God -- say, ye who have suffered injustice so long and have felt the pang so keenly? You have been a slave perhaps and you have felt the iron of oppression enter into your very soul. You have felt a sense of wrong enkindled in your bosom, which is seemed to you could never be extinguished -- and you cried out -- How long, O Lord; O Lord, how long wilt Thou not avenge our blood! If you were to be reprov'd for this intense feeling, you would reply -- you need to be a slave yourself and to feel these wrongs in your own bosom; then you could better judge! It is only a mockery of others' unknown woes, for you to talk about meekness and patience, when you know nothing about this sense of wrong!

How much more keenly God must feel! Who can measure the depth of the keenness of His sense of the wrongs done to Him?

We sometimes see women feel deeply indignant underneath the wrongs they suffer. This may be not without some reason. But let us look into the reason God has for feeling this sense of injustice. Come, count up all the wrongs heaped on Him; measure all the accumulated sense of wrong ever felt in the universe; what is all this, compared to the sense of wrong felt by God, coming upon Him from the abuse He receives from His creatures?

Yet God's forbearance holds out still. His infinite heart waits yet. His patience and forbearance are not yet exhausted. O how would you feel! You think it an insult if anyone whispers in your ear a hint about longer

forbearance. You cannot bear it. Then what will you think of God's unutterable forbearance and long-suffering?

## LECTURE II.

July 8, 1857

### **OWING GOD--No. 2**

Text.--Luke 16:5: "How much owest thou unto my Lord?"

The rights of God in regard to His creatures imply corresponding obligations on their part. It remains for us to consider what these obligations are.

The question -- How much owest thou unto my Lord, requires us to ask and consider -- How much hast thou already paid? In the light of this question you may find how much remains yet due.

These, be it remembered, are not merely abstract questions, however much they may be so regarded. It is astonishing to see how much infidelity attaches itself to these questions in the minds of men, and how little, consequently, they care for any claims God may be shown to have on their hearts. It is because these things take hold so feebly on human hearts that the Divine Spirit is needed and is sent to open our eyes to see these things truly, and to quicken our sensibility to their bearing on ourselves. It is because of this intense moral insensibility that, in regard to our moral relations, fiction seems to us to be reality, and reality fiction.

Resuming our main question, I ask once more -- How much you have already paid? Have you kept your account carefully? Can you tell from that how the case stands?

### **II. How much hast thou already paid?**

It is a curious fact, developed often in business between man and man, that men who keep no formal account, will have yet a sort of general idea of the way the matter stands. The men who run to the store and get little things on credit, are apt to suppose they know about how their account stands; but often they find, on comparing their ideal of the matter with the merchant's books, that they were widely mistaken. Some of you may be under an equal and far more dangerous mistake in the matter of your accounts with your Maker.

- 1. Probably many of you have tacitly assumed that, at least in some things, you have done all your duty. Thus you put it down that you have been to meeting today; that you get good lessons in your class; that you do about what should be expected of you in your circumstances of life. But you will need to go more deeply into the matter than this. It is of the utmost consequence to know precisely when you have a right to credit yourself with the performance of a duty to God; else you may commit the very great mistake of giving yourself a credit where God charges you as in debt. When you come to the great reckoning and lay down your books, perhaps God will not accept them. Perhaps He will cast them out as viciously kept and as being all wrong in



principle and in fact.

- 2. Hence it is important for you to consider that nothing is done to purpose unless it be done with a right state of mind towards God; for without this, there can be no real obedience. The state of heart is just the thing God has always required and always must require.
- 3. Now in the light of this great law will you renew your examination and ask -- What have I done today? Did you come to church with a heart really full of love to God? Unless you did, you have no right to put the external act to your own credit as a duty done for God. God requires, just as you see He ought to, that this and every other duty be done from a spirit of real, honest devotion -- in true love, and with an eye that looks only at His glory. Which of your duties have been performed in this spirit? Nothing less than this can be doing duty. It is God's right to claim that you should always devote yourself to His service with a single and pure intent to do all His will, and to promote His glory.
- 4. Now what have you in fact done with yourself -- with your time, your talents, your education? How many pages of your account will really meet His demands when weighed in His balances? Wherein and when have you done all your duty? Do you think God ought to be satisfied with your spirit in coming to meeting this morning, and ought to have given you credit for it? Have you spent the intermission in a way to please God? Can you write it down, saying -- Lord, Thou knowest I came with a desire to honor Thee and to do all the good I can? Thou knowest that my eye has been single to Thy glory?
- 5. Go back as far as you can remember and put your finger on the points when and the things wherein you have done your duty. Consider that you have never even approximated towards your duty save as you have earnestly sought to glorify God. Now wherein have you respected His authority? Wherein have you regarded His feelings, so that you can reasonably suppose He will say -- That satisfies Me? I speak to those of you who have not gone into bankruptcy -- pleading guilty before Him, and have thus obtained a full pardon, having your accounts canceled. To all others I speak, and I ask -- Have you met God's will in anything? Have you, in any hour of all your life, been in the state of mind that God requires? Take your pen, and sit down; make up the account. With what can you credit yourself? Did you obey your parents? You think you did. Well; with what spirit? With what purpose towards God? If we could sit down together -- you with your pen in hand, and search out these things to the bottom, and consider the state of mind requisite in real duty, it might make some revelations to your mind of points unnoticed before. We would ask -- What duties have you really done towards your fellow-men? You may be saying -- "Although I cannot set down any credits on my side towards God, yet I certainly can as towards men. I know I have been honest with man."
- 6. Have you indeed? God has a right to demand of you towards men, even, unselfish benevolence. Have you had it? Have you been as unwilling to believe evil of your brother as to have him believe it of you? Have you treated his good name as you would have him treat yours? Have you been as jealous for his honor as for your own? Has the same been your habit and your life towards all men? Or has your justice towards your fellow-men been mere selfishness? You have not cheated your neighbor, you say; but if you lack the principle of

honesty -- just that principle which will make you honest and upright towards God, it is absurd to suppose you have real honesty towards men. You have not done your duty towards your neighbor if you have neglected duty towards your God. "He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much," and on a similar principle, he that is unjust in the great things (towards God) will not fail to be unjust in the least things -- those that look towards fellow-men.

- 7. What have you done that is all right? Say, what? Got my lessons, you say. But with what motive and for what end? Was it done for the honor of it to yourself or for the honor of God? Did you come here to college, for God, or for yourself? Did you consult God's interests in that thing, or only your own? Did you ask Him if you should come; or did you come without any such enquiry? What education you get, do you faithfully use for Him? You have done thousands of things in the course of your life; but which one of them all for God? What have you done for Him in the family where you live?

### **III. The question to which we must continually return is this -- What has been the foundation-motive for this act?**

- 1. I have asked you repeatedly -- Have you done for God any service which you think He ought to accept? Let me hold the Bible before you and you may lay your hand on it and swear. Do you honestly believe that you can lay your hand on this Bible, and swear that you think you have done your life-duty, so that God ought to accept it? Sometimes men are called on to swear to their accounts. I call on you in the same manner; I put you under oath. Is your account correct? Do you honestly believe it to be true and honest? So you feel sure that God ought to accept it? Have you done anything which you can really accept yourself? And if you cannot accept it, sincerely approving both the act itself and it's motive, then you could not accept it in God if He should approve it. How could He approve what you cannot, and yet be respected by the angels, and respected too by Himself?
- 2. God is infinitely fair-minded. If you were the veriest child and had an honest intention, God would approve it. He is not exacting, is not captious, is never fault-finding. He can never try to bear down on you with His great power. But have you really been simple-hearted and child-like? That is the real question. God forbid that I should represent Him as over-bearing and exacting. No; He is fair-minded and even generous, as far as He honestly can be.
- 3. But let me ask you, if in truth you are not in a state of hopeless bankruptcy -- just in the case of one who has paid nothing and never can pay anything. Sometimes men in business get into debt, and cannot get out with any amount of struggling. It is even so with you. Deeply in debt; never able to do anything more than keep up with current duty; when will you ever perform any one single work of supererogation? When can you do the first thing to set off against a life-long course of sin? O my dear child; have you run in debt so deeply and have you nothing to pay? Why did you not think of this before? Can you find absolutely nothing in your past life that God can accept? Is there no prospect that you can ever pay the first farthing? Then what can you do?

### **IV. This brings us to our next great point: What does God propose to do in the case? And what does He propose to have done?**

- 1. Not that you should pay the debt; He knows this to be impossible. He might require you to pay the debt; but in fact He does not, but simply proposes to you to take advantage of the bankrupt law. He has made such a law and under it, He offers to forgive freely all that debt on condition that you confess judgment, accept the boon and commit yourself absolutely to His disposal. If you will restore all that remains and truly consecrate it to His use as you should and as you ought to have done from the very first moral act, then He will cross out the whole account. It shall stand as if balanced and settled, and you shall be at peace with Him.
- 2. Now what more can you ask than this? Ought not this proposition to meet all your demands? Can it be possible that you on your part can object, if God can make up His mind to offer such favors on such conditions? How does it strike you? What do you think about it? Can you persist in forgetting and disregarding God's rights, and carry out this disregard in the gospel as well as under the law? Somehow it has strangely come to pass that many men pervert the gospel scheme entirely to their own selfish purposes, assuming that it was gotten up solely for their special benefit, and is nothing more or less than a vast system of indulgences!! All they want to get from it is permission to sin at will, and exemption from its penal consequences. Hence, not content to forget all God's rights under law, they carry the same spirit into the gospel and here too would fain rob God of all the homage, love, and obedience which are due Him for His redeeming mercy.

Again, will you continue to contend for your own rights, while you refuse to respect God's? Is not such conduct outrageous? What would you think of a man here among us who should trample on everybody else's rights, but should none the less clamor violently for his own? Would you like the man as a neighbor who should crowd and prosecute other men to pay him and steadfastly refuse to pay his own debts? Will you do precisely this sort of thing towards God? Will you stringently insist on your own demands both upon God and your fellow-beings, while yet you are reckless of His rights? Will you deny your guilt, or make light of it? Will you call in question your desert of eternal damnation? Will you consent to receive neither mercy nor justice? Are you prepared to reject mercy and yet with the same breath complain of God's administration of justice? Indeed! And do you expect to carry out your scheme and withdraw from the government of Jehovah? He offers mercy and you scorn it. He falls back of necessity upon justice, and you complain of that. Thinkest thou, O man, that thou shalt evade the sweep of Jehovah's justice? Can you escape from His power, or convict His administration of wrong?

Again, when you think seriously of your case, is not this seriousness produced by a sense of danger and not by a sense of guilt? Is it not much more the fear lest you shall be cast off and lose your soul, than the conviction of great sin and guilt and wrong, of which you ought to repent? You think little of restoring what you have withheld. You are even enquiring how you are to be forgiven before you have taken the first step towards forsaking your sins and breaking them off by righteousness! And does this look like fair dealing towards God?

Again, will you treat God's claims as last and least of all? You talk as if you were doing all your duty, and yet you utterly neglect God and set aside His claims on you as if they

were altogether false and fictitious.

- 3. You show this often by the way you plan for the future. Has it not often been in your heart that you would come to God and get mercy when you have become too old to enjoy sin any longer? Virtually you assume that it will be soon enough to do right by God when you cannot otherwise keep out of hell another day. And does not this show how little you care for God's rights?
- 4. You put it in a little more plausible shape perhaps, but the thing itself is the very same and not a whit the better for its fairer seeming. You say it thus; I must attend to other matters; my lessons -- my business, the cares of life or the pleasure I love; and when I have done with them all, then I can afford for the sake of heaven to give to God the dregs of my existence! You can, indeed! But can God afford to accept you then? You propose to meet all other claims first; your own, your neighbor's, everybody's; and let God's come at the very last end of your life! Does this seem to you like fair dealing towards God? If anybody must be neglected, you say let it be God! If any claims must be shuffled off contemptuously, let it be His!

Do you flatter yourself that this treatment of God will conciliate His good will, and put your relations in a shape favorable for your final blessedness?

Once more; can you for one moment doubt that you must utterly fail to meet your obligations? Are you not certain of bankruptcy? Are you not shut up to it, past all escape? Then why will you not now acknowledge your sins; restore all that remains; and cast yourself at once on His clemency? He wants you to do this now! O come; give up the last thing you have, and throw yourself on His great mercy!

- 5. This offer is only for a season. There is a limit to it; none can tell how near! Do you say -- Then I will go on and yet increase my debt? Can you do that deliberately and with your eyes open? Then you can regard your salvation as miserably cheap and of little worth. Perhaps you incline to think so. The word of God has long since said -- "He that scorneth, he alone must bear it."

## **On Sinning & On Being Holy- No.'s 1 & 2**

Lectures III & IV

August 5, 1857

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College

Text.--James 4:17: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

## LECTURE III.

### ON SINNING--No. 1

This is only a part of what the apostle James said to those who supposed they might have true faith and yet neglect the duties required in the moral law. This was the great error of the Antinomians of that day who regarded the gospel as a grand system of indulgences and practically held that faith gave them a license to sin. Their doctrine was that faith in Christ is accepted of God instead of that affectionate obedience which the law requires. Faith, in their view, was a substitute for this in such a sense as to discharge their obligation to have and exemplify this love. It became thus a compromise; faith instead of love and obedience.

Now Paul did indeed preach that men are not justified by their obedience to law and that they cannot hope to be accepted on the ground of their own righteousness. On the contrary, he taught that the ground of their acceptance is in Christ alone -- solely in what He has done and suffered for us. Yet he at the same time taught that this faith in Christ always leads to a holy life -- always works by love, and therefore always bears the fruits of real holiness.

There were some in the church of those times, as there are in our day, who misapprehended Paul and failed to understand his idea of faith. They made faith a mere opinion, a simple belief in which there is no heart, and this heartless faith they held to be itself saving.

To withstand this grievous error, James taught that works of love and obedience are essential to salvation. Yet Paul and James are not at variance, but teach the same gospel. Paul speaks of works as the ground -- James as the condition of salvation. Hence rightly Paul denies and James affirms; Paul denies that they are the ground of salvation, as he should deny, and as James too would deny. James affirms that they are the condition of salvation and so would Paul and so should we. In maintaining his position James declares that neglect of known duty is sin. This is the doctrine of our text.

*I. The knowledge of duty implies obligation.*

*II. Here note also that neglect to comply with obligation always implies a refusal.*

#### **I. The knowledge of duty implies obligation.**

- 1. Only that can be duty to me which I am bound to perform. Hence the ideas of duty and of obligation are closely related.
- 2. Knowledge of personal duty necessitates some moral action of the mind. It is impossible to remain indifferent and not take some form of moral action when duty is really seen. Not to act at all under these circumstances is out of the question -- is simply impossible. The stimulus of known duty being applied to the mind, it must act.

The proof of this lies in human consciousness, and to this I appeal. Everybody knows that when the conviction of duty fastens on the mind, he acts one way or the other. He obeys,

or he refuses to obey.

## **II. Here note also that neglect to comply with obligation always implies a refusal.**

- 1. For the time being at least, you refuse to meet your obligation by obeying the demand of duty. The demand called on you to do something; you answered, no! In the nature of the case you must either consent to comply or you must refuse.
- 2. In such a case, there is always a positive going forth of the will to refuse, or to comply.

Again, if inaction were possible, it would be sin. For, action is the thing required. Inaction is therefore the thing forbidden. Neglect to act, therefore is positive disobedience.

- 3. The action which this subject contemplates is that of the will, the free action of the mind. And here it is quite essential to note that the will is not something separate from the mind, as for example, the hand; but is the mind itself, willing.

Neglect to obey obligation implies as opposite willing -- a committal to an opposite course of action. When you refuse to meet obligation, you do so because you purpose and choose not to meet it.

I do not stop here to agitate the question whether there can be any other duty than known duty. This would lead us into a field of enquiry foreign from our present object.

- 4. To neglect to comply with known duty is to reject the claims of moral obligation. Suppose a man sees that God requires of him a given duty; but he decides not to do it. What is this but to decide that he will not obey God and that the idea of duty shall not govern him? Surely this is a decision of the mind not to be influenced by the conviction of known duty.

This is sin, and the whole of sin. Sin is a deliberate decision of the mind, not to obey God. What can be sin if this is not?

- 5. While one known duty is neglected, none can be acceptably performed. For example, suppose a man neglects some known duty, and yet professes to do something else and call it duty; is this obedience to God? Nay, it is only a delusion of his own mind, or an act of downright hypocrisy. James says -- "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." For if a man refuses to do one known duty, he shows himself in no state of mind to do God's will. If he can refuse to comply with any one known obligation, how can he possibly perform any other duty in a way that God can accept?
- 6. To refuse to perform any one known duty is a virtual denial of moral obligation and a plain refusal to obey God at all. It is virtually telling God that you care not what He requires, that you shall take your own course and do what you please. If you were to take your oath not to obey God, it would not be a more emphatic refusal than you make when you refuse to perform one well known duty. Yea if a man were to go about the streets, proclaiming, "I don't care what God requires; I shall do as I please about obeying Him, and shall take the liberty of omitting to do

anything whatever which He requires, whenever it pleases me to do so; let no man suppose that I intend to obey God simply because He commands me" -- even this shocking declaration would not be so emphatic as his action in refusing to do known duty. It always will be true that "actions speak louder than words."

Again, for a man to know his duty and yet not do it, is moral dishonesty -- is a total repudiation of all moral principle, and, an open rejection of all moral duty. I know a young man who said he had made up his mind to obey God. Subsequently, however, he fell under adverse influences and then changed his mind and said -- How can I afford to serve God? On hearing this remark, I said to him -- "You are a dishonest man; nobody can trust you a moment." He seemed surprised at this, and would fain appear to feel hurt, as if I had slandered him, for he had piqued himself very much on his moral honesty. But let us examine this principle. Suppose a man who owes you for goods comes into your store, and you very gently suggest to him if it would be convenient to settle that old account, he says, no. Why not? Have not you the money? Yes, he says, I have the money, but I want to use it. I will pay you at my convenience, just when I think best. When will that be, you say? But he only answers, "When I please."

If you should speak out what your heart feels, you would say -- You villain! Are you lost to all moral honesty? Can you refuse to meet a known obligation?

Just so the sinner who will not do one known duty, virtually says -- I repel the idea of moral obligation. I hope you don't suppose that obligation to God has any binding force on me! Do you think I care for any supposed obligation to God -- or that I care for duty to Him?

That, sinner, is what your practical life proclaims when you know your duty and do it not. That is just what you do. And is not that as bad as the devil? The only reason why you are not fully as bad as the devil is that you don't know as much.

Is this too strong language? No, verily, I should only blink this momentous question and deceive you, if I did not tell you that you are as bad as the devil.

Again, neglect to perform duty is the true idea of impenitence. This is the very thing. Impenitence is not a mere negation -- is not a nothing; but is precisely a refusal to perform known duty.

A persistent neglect of any known duty is sin, and must be fatal to the soul.

## **REMARKS.**

1. They who neglect their duty to God never really fulfill any duty to man. Men who disown obligation towards God do not care anything about duty; it is not the consideration of duty that moves you. Unless you have a supreme respect for God and His will, there is no doing of duty. Thus the man who neglects prayer to God can never be accepted in anything he does for man. Suppose he were a very pertinacious Anti-Slavery man, or Temperance man; but he never honors God, and pays Him no

respect even; then it is plain that his principles of reform are all rotten.

2. No one who does perform duty to God will neglect duty towards man. His sense of obligation to God and his practical submission to that sense of duty will certainly ensure his obedience in the lesser duties due towards his fellow-beings. If the doctrine of this text be true, he cannot be pious without being philanthropic also. If he performs his duty towards God, he will also towards man. If he neglects his duty towards God, he will also neglect his duty towards man.

3. You may as well blink the duty of prayer and praise as neglect anything else.

4. No man can neglect his duty towards a suffering fellow-man while his wants are crying out for relief, and yet be a Christian towards God. He cannot be truly pious unless his mind is made up to serve God fully in all classes of duty.

5. He who neglects a public profession of religion -- how can he hope to be saved? Not that a public profession is in its nature saving, but it is plainly required and therefore becomes every Christian's duty. No requisition, plain as this, can be set aside, and yet the man who does it be accepted of God. Suppose the man lives where there is a visible church and there is no reason why he should not do this duty; yet he does not come out and place himself on the Lord's side, but he thinks notwithstanding, that he shall be accepted of God. How many make this very mistake! Because a man is not saved by a public profession, therefore they neglect it. This is the same mistake as that made by the Antinomian. Because he does not expect to be saved by his works, therefore he feels no interest in performing good works. Shall he not be saved without? Why then should he trouble himself about doing laborious duties? The truth is -- whosoever will neglect known duty ought to know that he cannot be accepted in anything.

6. The same is true of those who allow themselves to live below their convictions, and their expressed obligations. I admit that a man may be suddenly thrown off the track of his purposed life; the purpose was to do God's will -- that is, if he were a true Christian. The very moral attitude that makes one a Christian is that of a determined resolution and purpose of heart to do all God's will, always and everywhere. With this purpose living in one's heart in its power, he is a true Christian. If he is thrown off the track, his first concern is to get back with the least delay possible. But if persons allow themselves to live in this guilty sinning state, they cannot be saved.

7. So also if they allow themselves to live below their privileges. Some persons attempt here to set up a very curious distinction between living in known sin and living below their privileges. They would be alarmed if they knew they were living in known sin; but it seems to them a small matter that they are living below their known privileges. Just as if it were not their duty to live up fully to all their privileges. Just as if the grace provided in Christ and in the Spirit for the Christian's growth and strength and power for good, might be neglected without sin!

8. The great error of this day is the practical assumption that Christians may be accepted on the whole, although they allow themselves to do many things against known duty. Visit the churches all through the land, and you will find this assumption underlying their piety. They admit that they are living in known sin, yet they have family prayers, they pay for preaching, they give to various benevolent



objects, and they are, as they think, Christians. Sometimes the pulpit connives at this soul-destroying sentiment. But is it for the Christian pulpit to teach that a man can do his duty in some things while yet he neglects known duty in other things?

This assumption seems to underlie the hopes of the masses of modern Christians. Do you not see this to be the fact?

The true doctrine is -- You have no right to hope save as you find yourself committed to do the whole will of God; none at all, save as you cry out -- if you fall into sin -- "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; though I fall I shall rise again." You spring back to regain the ground you have lost. There is a sudden and powerful reaction; for you cannot live in sin. Peter differed from Judas; Peter was impulsive, generous, ardent, made for a leader. You see his characteristic features in the case of our Lord's washing the disciples' feet. At first it seemed to him too bad that the Lord should perform for him so menial an office; and he declared outright -- "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But when our Lord signified to him that, otherwise, he could have no part in Him, then, changing his attitude entirely, he wanted to be washed all over! No doubt he was sincere when he said -- "Though all men forsake Thee, yet will not I." Yet when temptation's power came heavily and suddenly on him, he fell. It was a sad fall; but soon Christ turned and looked on him, with one look of love and rebuke. Then Peter thought; and thinking, wept; wept as if his tears would never cease to flow. One fearful wave of temptation had torn him from his moorings; but see how soon he springs back again. Christ cast one look on him and he weeps bitterly. He did not wait for the cause to become popular before he should espouse it again; but, just then and there, while the peril was as great as ever and the scandal was unabated -- there, in the presence of all those external temptations under which he had fallen, he returns to his Lord. O, if you had seen him weep there, you would have said -- Certainly that man is a real Christian! How he springs back after his guilty lapse! As a wife or husband who have been betrayed into some offence against each other will suddenly return to their kindly and endearing relations to each other, so does the real Christian, for he cannot live away from Christ.

You see the great mistake of those who think one may be really honest and yet neglect some known duty. You call such a man honest; but in what sense can you? In the sense of having due regard to his moral obligations? Certainly not; for of this regard, he has not a particle. If he had he could not neglect one known duty.

The common standard of piety is utterly fallacious. It holds practically that we may neglect this and that moral duty and still have a good hope in Christ. Nothing can be more fallacious than this idea.

Those who believe in the entire attainability of sanctification and yet neglect the known and appropriate means and efforts to reach this attainment, are fatally deceived. They know their duty, but they do it not. They know their privilege and know that this privilege brings with it the obligations of duty, yet they fail to accept this offered mercy. They come short deliberately and with their own real consent. Alas, they are fatally deceived. They "hold the truth in unrighteousness."

9. The same is true of all who admit this attainment to be their duty, and yet come short of it. There are many of this class who admit entire sanctification to be their duty, while they do not admit that it is attainable. Now it is all in vain for this class to deny their responsibility. It is duty and nothing but

duty that brings on us responsibility. They admit entire sanctification to be their duty; how then can they escape the responsibility for attaining it? Knowing it to be their duty, if they do not strive and struggle to realize it, they are in great guilt and are surely deceived as to their own religious state.

In the discussions of this subject that took place several years ago, the Presbytery of Troy maintained that men were under obligation to be indefinitely better than they are. They did not tell us how much better -- did not define the precise limits of possible and binding attainment, and show us how much there is beyond that line that we cannot reach; but they said we all can become indefinitely better than we are. They said we might all hope to rise a good deal higher. Now persons who believe precisely this, and yet rest short of reaching it, must be lost. They know to do good, but do it not; and to them it must be sin.

It matters nothing whether they admit that men may reach entire sanctification, or hold only they may rise indefinitely higher and be a great deal better, so as to be almost sanctified; no matter how much or how little beyond their present state they know that they can attain, it is all the same as to the principle now being considered; the guilt of failing to do known duty is the same. Each alike is a case of knowing duty and not doing it. If a man does not commit himself to do his best and utmost; if he does not attempt to rise to the highest point possible in his view of his duty, then he is deceiving himself if he thinks himself a Christian, accepted of God. For what is true religion? An obedient spirit; a state in which one lives in the performance of all known duty. No one can allow himself to stop short of universal and entire obedience to God and yet be a Christian. Is not this certain? The very fact of his living in allowed and habitual sin convicts him of being a sinner. What stronger evidence can there be than this? Even Pres. Edwards held that living in known sin is conclusive evidence of an impenitent state. It is not easy to see how any man can deny this.

Those who believe entire sanctification possible should no longer act on the defensive. They should affirm men's obligation to do all known duty and to accept all their revealed privileges. I have been often asked of late -- Do you believe that a man can live without sin? I answer -- Do you believe a man ought to live without sin? They go on -- Do you believe that anybody does? That is another question entirely. Our question now turns on known duty, and accruing obligations. The great question is -- What is the state and coming doom, of those who know their duty, yet will not do it? What is to become of us if we are bound to reach perfection, and will not do it?

Is it not time, then, that we who believe in the duty of men to be holy should act on the offensive and maintain the universal duty of all men to deny all ungodliness and to walk holy and unblameably in this present world? What is living a Christian life but committing one's self fully to do all the will of God?

10. People need not think to escape responsibility by giving up great truths.

It has been sometimes said that the Oberlin people have given up some of their doctrines because they have found them too broad. But of what use can it be to give up doctrines known to be true; for if the conviction remains that you ought to obey God wholly and universally, then you must make up your mind to do all this or have no salvation. If you blink this, you fall from grace.

You who profess to be Christians, yet live in neglect of known duty, are fatally deceived. If you live on and on, below your standard of known duty, not earnestly agonizing and energizing; living on and neglecting all due effort to perform your known duty, you are fatally deceived. You are not obeying God and are not in a state of acceptance before Him.

11. You see where this subject places all the unconverted. You who are in this state are guilty of the whole of sin. Your very life is a perpetual scene of knowing yet not doing duty. Each day is full of precisely this experience. And what shall the end be of such a life?

#### LECTURE IV.

September 2, 1857

#### **ON BEING HOLY--No. 2**

Text.--1 Pet. 1:16: "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

This precept enjoins holiness, and our first business should therefore be to enquire what holiness is. It is plain that the Bible uses the term as synonymous with moral purity; but the question will still return -- What is moral purity?

I answer -- Moral fitness; that which we see to be morally appropriate; it is in substance, moral propriety; in other words -- perfect love; such as God requires. It is sympathy with God and likeness to Him; the state of mind that God has. Holiness in God is not a part of His nature in such a sense that it is not voluntary in Him; but it is a voluntary exercise and state of His mind.

The same is true of all beings. Holiness is not a thing of nature as opposed to free action, but must always be a free and a moral thing. It is not possible to any beings but such as are made in the image of God in the sense of being moral agents. They must have free will, and then must voluntarily conform themselves to rectitude. Nothing less or other than a voluntary conformity of themselves to the moral law can be holiness. In them all, holiness is that state of mind which is precisely appropriate to their nature and relations. This state is expressed in one word -- love, meaning by this, benevolence -- good will to all. When this term is used in its widest sense, it includes all moral duty. Hence this command to be holy requires that we bring ourselves into a moral adjustment to God and our entire moral duty.

Why should we be holy?

God, as in our text, requires it. "It is written -- 'Be ye holy, for I am holy.'"

The context also combines with the text to enforce the duty by God's example. "As He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" -- according to the ancient precept -- "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Because I am holy, therefore be ye holy likewise.

Our Lord enforced the same duty by the same reason; (Matt. 5:48) "Be ye therefore perfect, even as

your Father who is in heaven is perfect."

What are the reasons of this requirement?

- 1. We cannot but require it of ourselves. Our own nature irresistibly demands it of us -- his own individual conscience of every moral agent. There is no moral agent whose nature does not require holiness of himself. Each one is so constituted that it is impossible he should not require this of himself. Hence there must always be a war in his own bosom unless he yields to this demand. He knows he ought to, and therefore, by a necessity as strong as his own nature, he must become holy, or fail of peace and conscious self-approval.

No moral agent can respect himself unless he is holy. He may be careless and thoughtless; and may thus slide over and past some of the self-reproach he must otherwise feel for unholiness; but he can never have any honest self-respect unless he behaves himself in a comely and decent way which he believes to be in his circumstances right.

Need I urge that self-respect is a thing of very great importance? Few are fully aware how very important self-respect is to themselves and to others. Let a young man lose his self-respect, and what is he? What hope can you have of his stability and manliness? A young woman void of self-respect, is no longer herself. Who does not know how complete she falls from her position as a virtuous woman!

This form of self-respect pertains to our relations to this world and to society; but suppose a moral agent in like manner, to lose his self-respect towards God. How fearful must be the influence of this loss on his heart! How reckless or moral rectitude he becomes in all that pertains to his Maker!

Or suppose God to lose His self-respect. Suppose He should cease to do what is honorable to Himself, and should no longer care to act in a manner worthy of His own esteem. How fearful must be the consequences first to Himself, and next to His whole universe! Suppose Him to be morally impure, no longer adjusting His conduct to His own standard of right. It shocks us unutterably to conceive of God as acting in a way unworthy of Himself. We know how keenly every sensitive and right-minded being feels the disgrace of having consciously acted in a way unworthy of himself. Those who have been conscious of this pain have often thought how God must feel, if, with His infinite sensibilities, He should act unworthy of Himself. You sometimes experience this feeling and therefore know how you loathe yourself and have no peace or rest in your soul.

It is true that these considerations may have but little weight with those who know nothing of holiness, and who have never cultivated their own right feelings and sentiments; but those of you who have been near to God and have had your "heart sprinkled from an evil conscience," must appreciate it.

- 2. Another reason why we should be holy is, that God requires it of us. He has made us in His own image -- like Himself in the attributes of intellect, sensibility and free-will; and therefore

for the same reasons that make Him require holiness of Himself, He must require it of us. He must require it of us because it is His duty to do so.

He requires us to be holy because He cannot make us happy unless we will become holy. Our nature being what it is, it is forever impossible that we should be happy without being holy. God is happy, because He is holy; He knows that we exist under the same law of nature and necessity; hence His benevolence prompts, nay compels Him to use this necessary means of securing our happiness.

## REMARKS.

1. Sinners know they are not holy. All know this, yet many often say -- What have I done so very bad? No matter whether very bad, (judged by the popular standard,) or not; you know you are not holy. Now do not suppose yourself to be holy as God is holy. You know there is none of this character in you. How much so ever confused men's sentiments on this subject may be, it is universally true that they conceive of God as being holy in a sense in which they are not themselves. Whatever they may say of it, they know this.

2. The hope that unconverted people often have that they shall be saved, is utterly without foundation. Many try to think they have not done anything so bad that they deserve to be sent to hell!

How strange that such men should think themselves fit for heaven! Christ said -- "Marvel not that I said unto you, ye must be born again." No marvel that men should need a radical change! Hearts so foreign from love, so full of selfishness -- how can such hearts dwell in heaven! The unholy man's hope of heaven -- how utterly absurd! What nonsense that men should cherish such hopes without any holiness to fit them for it! Just as if heaven were a certain place, of no peculiar character, and to go there would be to ensure one's bliss! You know better! You know something about the business and the delights of the Christian -- you know they are such as you delight not in. The Sabbath is no privilege to you. Rather you exclaim, "behold, what a weariness it is!" Social worship has no spiritual attractions for you. How then can you suppose that heaven would be a world of joy to you?

3. Many who know they must become holy, are yet very ignorant of the way in which they are to become so. Having begun in the Spirit, they try to become perfect in the flesh. Their reliance is more on resolutions, than on Christ embraced by faith. A leading minister of the Presbyterian church, not long since, heard a sermon showing that men are sanctified by receiving Christ into the heart by faith. He remarked -- "We are just beginning to receive this doctrine. We have a long time been trying to become holy by resolution."

Of many it is true that all their efforts are by works of law. They seem not to know that all the efforts they make without Christ avail nothing save only sin.

4. Pardon without holiness is impossible, in this sense: that the heart must turn from its sins to God before it can be forgiven. Repentance is really nothing more or less than turning from sin to holiness; and who does not know that the Scriptures teach that repentance must precede pardon? Reversing this order would ruin the sinner. The idea that God can reverse it, works only ruin to those who accept it.

5. The command to be holy implies the practicability of becoming so. I meet with some professed Christians who on this subject have really no hope. They feel that need of being holy, but they are in despair of attaining it before they die. Now these Christians claim to be believers, but they are not. The grand difficulty in their case is, that they do not believe God's word of promise. They have no faith that men can become holy in this life, yet they say they believe in Christ. Yet what is Christ if not a Savior? A Savior from what if not from sin? Is it not expressly said -- "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins"? Does it not seem strange that so many profess to be believers in Christ, but yet avow that they do not believe the plainest things said in the Bible of Christ? They claim to be believers! What! are they believers, gospel-believers, and yet do not believe what Christ says! Nay more, they tell you it is dangerous to believe that you can be holy in this world! Said a Unitarian minister -- "How strange that the Orthodox should object to sanctification in this life"! He had been reading the views presented here, and said, "Why can they object? If they profess to believe that Jesus is a divine Savior, and that in Him all fullness dwells, why should they object? They should either give up their doctrine of a divine Savior, and deny that He is able to save to the uttermost, and abandon their ideas of a divine Redeemer, or admit your views to be true" -- and certainly there seems to be force in his reasoning.

I have never been more struck with this great idea -- salvation from sinning, by Jesus Christ -- than I have during the past winter. I found it everywhere as I read the New Testament, and indeed in the Old Testament also. O how strange that the church should be fighting the idea of becoming holy through Jesus Christ! How strange that they should insist that He will not do such thing! Is it not wonderful?

6. Christ's promise and relations to His people imply a pledge of all the help we need. The entire gospel scheme is adapted to men -- not in the sense of conniving at their weakness, but of really helping them out of it. It does not say -- "Go on in your sins;" does not smooth this path by saying -- "No man can live sinless in this world;" but it says -- "Take hold of Christ's strength and He will help you." It does not encourage you to hold on in sinning, but it urges you to take hold of Christ for all the help you need to overcome the practical difficulties in your way. Its language is -- "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

While you affirm your moral obligation, you are more and more impressed with your moral weakness. But this weakness is what Christ counterbalances with His strength. In the extremest weakness, His strength finds largest scope and fullest development. "As thy day, so shalt thy strength be" -- when thou shalt thoroughly cast thyself on the arm of the Mighty One.

Hence, the command to be holy is no apology for despondency, but should really encourage us to take hold of the strength promised to meet human weakness.

7. God sympathizes with every honest effort we make to become holy. Wherever He sees a moral struggle in any soul, it interests Him exceedingly. He sympathizes infinitely more deeply than we do. And yet some of us know how deeply we sympathize where we see a convert getting hold of the idea of sanctification by Christ. In some such cases I have known the joy of older Christians to be really inexpressible. When I have seen gospel ministers getting hold of the idea of sanctification and struggling to reach the experience of that idea, I have said to myself -- If we can feel so deeply in view of such a struggle, how much more must God feel! Do you not think God feels? Ah, indeed in

every pulse of His infinite and boundless sensibility!

8. If we become partakes of His holiness, we are made sure of the river of His pleasures. This comes both of the nature of the case and of the revealed laws of His kingdom. Holiness becomes God's house forever. And while it is fearfully true that without holiness, no man shall see the Lord, it is delightfully sure that the holy shall see and enjoy spiritual blessedness in His presence.

9. All men will sometimes feel the necessity of this holiness. In some cases, it is felt most deeply. Last winter I became acquainted with a woman, hopefully a Christian, but who had heard very little on this subject. She had been converted under circumstances where the great desolation and moral darkness became the immediate occasion of her awakening. From such surroundings, she had struggled up into the light. Yet when she came to hear the real gospel, and the way of holiness was opened to her mind, it was wonderful to see how she did grasp and devour this blessed bread of life! It met a great void in her spiritual nature, and her soul exulted in it with exceeding joy.

You often feel these struggles. You know you need something more and higher; you cannot be satisfied with your present state; you are conscious something is wrong between your soul and God, and you have a deep conviction that you need more holiness. Why then do you not lay hold of this hope set before you in the gospel?

10. There is no rest, short of being holy. Many try to find rest in something less, but they are sure to fail. They suspend further efforts and would fain believe they shall have rest where they are; but all such hope is vain. There can be no rest short of coming into sympathy with God and into spiritual union with Jesus Christ.

11. Many insanely suppose that when they come to die, they shall be sanctified and prepared for heaven. Let us sit down by the bedside of such a man -- one who expects to be sanctified in death. What is he doing? What progress is he making? Would you speak kindly to him and enquire after his spiritual progress? But you must not allude to religion -- the doctor would not like to have you. He says it might retard the man's recovery. He wants his mind to be perfectly quiet and unthinking. It will not do therefore even to whisper the name of Jesus! And is it supposable that this dying man is taking hold vigorously of that blessed Name which you may not even whisper in his ear? Is he gaining the victory over the world by faith in the Lamb of God? Do you judge from what you see and hear that his soul is in a mighty struggle with the powers of selfishness and sin, a struggle in which faith in Jesus ensures the victory? Ah! he sinks -- he goes down, lower and lower; sometimes all consciousness seems to be lost; and can you think that in these dying hours, his soul is entering into sympathy with Christ -- is bursting away from the bands of temptation and taking hold with a mighty grasp of those exceeding great and precious promises? I do not ask you what you admit as to the possibility of miracles on a death-bed; but I ask if you think the circumstances are favorable for the mental effort which the nature of the case demands in renouncing sin and in receiving Jesus Christ by faith for sanctification?

12. No man has any right to hope unless he is really committed to holiness and in all honesty and earnestness intends to live so. If he does not intend to live a holy life, let him know that he is not in the way to heaven. If he is in his sins and indulges himself in sinning, by what right or reason can he

suppose himself traveling towards the abodes of infinite glory? If he hopes for heaven at the end of such a life, he is egregiously self-deceived.

Is not every person in this house most fully convinced that he must become holy if he would be saved? Notwithstanding all the looseness of your views on this subject, do you not know that you must be holy if you would find a home in heaven?

Do you believe that in any practical sense you really can become holy? Doubtless you do; for where would you be if you knew you must be holy and yet know equally well that you cannot be? You are not in this dilemma. You cannot bring yourself to think that the ever blessed God has ever shut up His children in a dilemma so hopeless.

The case with you probably is, that you know you ought to become holy, but you are not ready to be just now. If I should call on the younger classes, they would say -- I have so much to do, how can I? Certainly I am not ready now. The middle-aged also are equally unprepared yet. The great evil is that men will not act on their own convictions. They have convictions; they know what they ought to do and that it is infinitely wicked for them not to do, yet they do it not. There they stop. They stop, not in the point of gospel rest, but in the point where impenitent sinners often stop -- convicted of sin, but not acting up to their convictions of duty. Suppose one should come to you and try to hire you to make no further effort to become more holy; could you be hired to any such committal? It would affect you very much as it would have done when you were first convicted of sin, if some one had tried to hire you to defer all effort to come to Christ for a score of years longer. You would have cried out -- "Get thee behind me, Satan," -- "don't tempt me to sell my soul!" Satan took a more cunning course. He only said -- Waive it just now; let it lie over till you find a convenient season. So offered, the bait took, and you swallowed it; and so thousands are putting off their effort to become holy. You would be horror-stricken with the proposal to put off all effort to become holy for ten years longer; but the thought of putting it over for an indefinite time -- supposed to be not very long, does not startle you at all.

O my hearers, what shall the end be of such procrastination? May it not be that in your real heart you have no love of holiness, and have never sought it as the pearl of great price? Can it be well for you to go on still in a course that leads you farther every day from God? Will you forget that He is holy, and that if you would behold His face in peace, you too must become holy?

## **The Lord's People His Portion**

Lecture V

October 28, 1857

by Charles Grandison Finney  
President of Oberlin College



Text.--Deut. 32:9: "For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance."

Text.--Mal. 3:17: "And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

In speaking on the subject presented in these passages, I propose,

*I. To notice briefly some of the Bible representations respecting God's regard for His people;*

*II. Some of the reasons for His regarding them thus;*

*III. Show that they are truly His portion.*

### **I. The great love of God to His people is one of the leading themes of the Bible.**

- 1. Through Jeremiah (31:3) God declared of His collective people -- "Yes, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." To the same purport are the two passages read to you as my text. "The Lord's portion is His people;" but one's portion is that which he most highly values. It is his peculiar treasure.
- 2. "They shall be Mine when I make up My jewels;" and jewels are of all things most precious and most prized. On no other earthly thing do men set so high a value. This term, therefore, chosen of God to indicate His regard for His people, must be intensely expressive.
- 3. Elsewhere His love for His people is spoken of as being exceedingly great and unchangeable. How rich is the view given of its intensity by those words found in Isa. 49:14-16. But Zion had said -- "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."
- 4. Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me."

Can any illustration be found more expressive than this? What love is more tender and more enduring than a mother's?

- 5. The Bible abounds with representations to show that God rejoices over His people with great joy and rests in this love with intense satisfaction. It also represents His love for His people as very peculiar -- altogether unlike the love He has for any other creatures. Indeed this class of statements are so abundant in the Bible that no careful reader can fail to have noticed them. I need not dwell on these passages, nor expand this point of my subject.

### **II. God has good reasons for this high regard.**

- 1. Of course we must assume that if the fact be as the Bible represents, God must have good reasons, for He is never unreasonable in anything -- never cherished a regard for any person or object, save as there were the best of reasons for such regard. Least of all would He be unreasonable in His estimate of things valuable and worthy of His love. We are safe in saying that He is never partial -- never capricious in His love for His people. It cannot be supposed that He loves them for any other than good reasons. So far forth as His love is peculiar, there must be peculiar reasons for it. It must forever be true that He loved them for good reasons and not for no reasons at all.

Before I became a Christian I was perplexed very much by what I heard said on this subject; for it seemed to me to represent God's love for His people as altogether capricious. It seemed to me that special pains were taken to represent God as loving them for no known reasons, or at least, for reasons, if any, which were not at all apparent and could not be known by us. To my mind, this seemed to be precisely what we call partiality and caprice -- to love without any good reason, existing either in the object of this love, or in anything else that ought to influence such a being. I cannot enter at length into this subject; it would occupy too much time.

- 2. It is made plain in the Bible that God loves all men, irrespective of their character with a great love, vastly surpassing all our conceptions. He loves to do them good and this love is so exceedingly great and far reaching that He is always seeking opportunities for its exercise and manifestation. We see it on every side in His providence; it shines out in every feature of His glorious gospel.
- 3. But His love to His people is peculiar -- a love unlike any other -- a complacent regard -- a delight of entirely another sort from any that He feels in ungodly men. One reason for His peculiar love for them is that He has been able to gain their confidence. In the case of others, He has failed, although He has always done all He wisely could to gain it. It is strikingly true that God is always doing all He reasonably can to gain the confidence of all His intelligent creatures. Great is the joy of His heart when He succeeds. We know how parents enjoy it to have the entire confidence of their children. So, and more, does God enjoy the confidence of His people. The fact that they repose confidence in Him cheerfully, must greatly endear them to His heart. It is this primarily which makes them His people -- their faith in His name.

Again, He loves them because He has been able to gain their hearts, and hence their consent to become His people and be adopted by Him as His children. He has in the same manner offered His hand to others, but they would not accept it. Hence there is good reason for His very peculiar regard for them. Why should not He love His own adopted children -- those who are willing to be adopted and to regard themselves as truly the Lord's? He is their Father in a peculiar sense. In the general sense of being their Creator, He is the Father of all His creatures; but He is a Father to His people in a far higher sense. He has begotten them to Himself by regeneration of the Spirit. He has won them to His love and service from a state of great enmity. Why should not He feel a most tender regard for them?

Again, He loves them for their steadfastness to Him amid great trials and temptations. He

knows that this is a world of great trial and He also very well knows our frailty and intrinsic weakness. When therefore He finds that by His constant grace He can hold them in the main steadfast in His love and service, He must look upon them with intense interest. True they sometimes falter; but on the whole they endure and are steadfast, and in this He greatly rejoices. The very watchfulness He exercises over them may serve to endear them to Him the more. Just as parents love those children most whom they watch over, down almost to the gates of the grave; and for the same reason those also who greatly tax their solicitude for their morals and their souls. If, after many a care and struggle and many tears, they have the joy of seeing them stronger in virtue, their joy in them is exceedingly great. The parent who sees a child passing through great trials -- somewhat as God sees His children tried, yet only the more purified thereby -- cannot fail to feel for such one a most deep and thrilling regard. All a parent's heart is drawn out towards him.

- 4. We may put this general analogy in a somewhat different form. Suppose an earthly sovereign is called to pass through great trials and difficulties, of such sort as must test his people's love and allegiance very severely, yet they are firm and never fail; will not this greatly endear them to his heart?

So the cause of God on earth sometimes passes under a cloud. Adverse circumstances throw their shade over it; foes are strong and bold, and friends are few and weak; -- then if God's people stand firm, and are only the more decided and bold for God, must not this endear them to His heart exceedingly?

Again, the nature of their dependence on Him must greatly endear them to His heart. He sees how absolute this dependence is -- how utterly powerless in a moral sense they are against temptation and sin, save as they look to Him to be upheld and made strong. Earthly parents can understand how and why the weakness of children makes them dear to a parent's heart. They will tell you they always love their most dependent children most tenderly. I never felt this fully in my experience till the birth of my youngest who, as most of you know, was extremely dependent. Poor weak creature, and as dear to our hearts as she was weak -- how she used to hang upon us for all her comforts, and how warmly did her parents' hearts respond to this so earnestly expressed dependence! I never shall forget how her last look went to my heart as I was leaving her to visit England. That look was so imploring, so full of dependence, it seemed to say so expressively -- Will my last friend leave me? -- It seemed almost too much for a parent's heart to bear. The nature of that dear little one's dependence on her parents taught me many lessons in regard to the feelings of God towards us in view of our extreme dependence on Him. I have said -- If God is indeed a father to His people and sees and feels all their weakness and their utter dependence on Him, and if He feels as earthly parents do when weakness makes its touching and melting appeal to their hearts, then certainly we may trust Him forever!

- 5. Consider, again, as another reason for His great and tender regard for His people -- the great sacrifices He has made for them. We know that things become dear to us much in proportion to the sacrifices they cost us. Sacrifices are the price we pay, and that which costs us dear will be held as correspondingly dear to our hearts.

Now as to God, it cost Him little to create the universe. It was done in a very short time -- and cost but little of either trouble, effort or sacrifice, compared with what it has cost Him to redeem His people from their sins, and make them what they should be. The creating of the universe did not cost Him the blood of His own Son!

Again, God loves His people for their sincerity. However great their weakness, they are sincere. They may sometimes falter before the shock of some strong temptation; but deep in their hearts they are sincere, and God cannot but know it. If they lack this fundamental quality, they are not His children. It may please Him sometimes to put this sincerity to the test. He may ask them as He did Peter -- Lovest thou Me? But yet He knows they can answer with Peter -- "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." He loves them for their sincerity, and does not despise them for their weakness. It is written -- "For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." We may perhaps despise our sincere friends for their weakness; but God does not. He regards their affection towards Him with tenderness, although they are really and exceedingly weak as to moral strength.

- 6. Another reason for His peculiar love to them is that He views them as in Christ, perfect. Not as perfect in themselves; but as perfect, seen in Christ. So viewed, He sees no iniquity in Jacob. He has made Christ unto them, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, and whatever part Christ sustains is borne perfectly -- is so sustained as leaves nothing more or better to be desired. Whoever is in Christ is "complete in Him." Hence there is a sense in which God does not regard His people as so very imperfect -- as we do when we see them only as in themselves. God sees them in Christ, and therefore sees abundant ground for their free pardon and full acceptance before Him. It is also true that prospectively, He sees them in the beauty of perfect holiness -- the germ of which is already developing and it is His great joy to nourish and cultivate it to that destined perfection.

### **III. God's people are His portion.**

- 1. This implies that they are set apart to Him -- made over and sure to His use and possession. It also implies that they are of some real value to Him and to interests which He holds dear. A portion, held as such by one so capable of judging of values as God is, must be of very great value.
- 2. That they are His is manifest from the nature of their relations to Him. In the nature of the case, children are the wealth of their parents. What other wealth can be so real to parents, as this? Well may they regard all other sorts of wealth as only relative -- that is, as valuable only as it may be useful to their children. Especially is it true of good children that they are eminently the wealth of their parents.

So God's people are valuable to Him because they are sincerely good -- sincerely devoted to His interests. Pre-eminently is it true that those children are a treasure for whom great sacrifices have been made and who labor to requite those sacrifices by a grateful and a devoted life. Precisely this is the peculiar characteristic of all honest and earnest Christians. This state of mind proves that they are His children, and it is this state,

especially, which makes them a real treasure to God.

Compared with this, the physical universe is of small value to Him -- of almost no value, save as a home for intelligent minds, and a means of their existence and culture. Planets are cheap, but souls are precious.

- 3. The mutual relations between God and His people, when well considered, show that God's people must be of great value. For, His government is moral; it acts on intelligent minds and aims to secure their highest obedience and happiness. Consequently, to make this government eminently efficient for these ends, God needs such subjects as converted men, who may become witnesses for Him and children under such a Father. He needs and knows how to use this example. Beyond all question He can use them for great and widely useful ends in His mural kingdom. To all eternity we shall be learning more and more of this great value of His people to His kingdom.
- 4. Again, they are an ever-increasing portion. By this I mean, not merely that they are perpetually increasing in number, although this may be true and some passages of scripture seem to support it; but I mean, in yet another sense, that they are a fountain of great interest to Him because they are constituted for perpetual and indefinite progression. Look at this. Once we were in a state of deep, entire ignorance and our mental capacities were low, in accordance with that stage of acquisition. But the law of progress obtains throughout the entire family of God's intelligent creatures. Carrying out this law, we shall see that a period will arrive when the one who entered heaven last and least will know more and will have more capacity of knowing than all the intelligent universe have now. This aggregate, taken now must be less than the knowledge and capacity of him who shall enter heaven last and least, taken at some remote period in the onward march of his mind. This result is of necessity just as certain as the law of progress itself, gives, an eternity to be used in making this progress, and it inevitably follows that he who is least in heaven will one day know more than the whole created universe knows now. And how can any one doubt for a moment that this is the law of all human intelligences?
- 5. We see this law pervading the present world. It is this law which so greatly heightens our interest in our children. We see them begin with nothing, but almost immediately, the law of progress develops its operation.

We see that they are growing -- their mind is expanding and their knowledge is increasing. As they pass one point after another, our heart burns within us at the grateful sight. With a sacred pride, we watch this growth and acquisition. I have sat here on commencement day and looked with admiration at parents sitting in this house to see their children graduate. Some of you have observed it, you have seen the tears in their eyes as they listened to the performance of their son or their daughter in their graduating exercises. If you speak to them of that son or daughter, you will see that they think there is wealth there and a wealth in which they feel a most intense interest. So we may suppose God to feel when He sees His people graduating from one stage of their mental and moral progress, to another. Some of us may have lost children. If we were now to meet them in heaven and were to see how much they have advanced since they left us and how fast their powers have been developed, perhaps we should not even know them.

We might be in danger of supposing one some angel of light, rather than that little and immature thing we once called our own child.

- 6. In regard to this law of progress it matters not as to our argument whether the progress be slow or fast, with eternal ages for growth and expansion, the amount of progress must at some remote point be so great as to defy all computation.

So will virtue and love increase. Saints in heaven will grow in love to God. Even the least of them will advance beyond the point where the greatest are now. That little imbecile of mine may be so advanced already that if I were to meet her now, I might almost suppose her to be some angel. Those of us who have lost children, going before us to the better country, may find when we come to meet them that all our highest views of progress are low and our most exalted conceptions of progress in heaven are mean compared with the reality. Doubtless there will be more in each of God's children to be loved than we can now conceive. In the lapse of ages there will come an hour when their beauty and loveliness will far surpass all we had ever dreamed. Even here we have seen their loveliness -- their humility, their deep peace -- their earnest consecration to their Master's work; and seeing all these, we have exclaimed -- What beauty. What divine loveliness overspreads this character! But how much greater must these developments be in heaven!

How do you regard those children of yours who are increasing in loveliness when you see one pleasing trial of character after another putting forth, like the opening rose bursting its prison doors and coming forth in ever fresh beauties and glories!

We must conceive of this future increase as big as a compound ration, since it depends on both knowledge and virtue, each of these acting unutterably on the other, and moral growth being conditioned on each. With the growth of knowledge, the soul is able to comprehend more and more of the deep things of God, and to pass on continually to newer lessons, using them all evermore to subserve the greater ends of real holiness. On the other hand, religious purpose pushes the soul forward in attainment of divine knowledge, and in many ways fosters intellectual growth. Then when all the powers of both intellect and heart are brought to act harmoniously and are put to their fullest development, the soul's progress must be exceedingly rapid. How wonderfully will the mind grasp new thoughts, and how naturally will all this acquired knowledge be carried out to the legitimate ends of a holy life!

- 7. God has enjoyed all this from eternity. His happiness has always been found largely in His obedient creatures. Their value is therefore by no means fictitious. Things are valuable in God's sight and in truth, according as they are conducive to happiness. God's intelligent and obedient creatures conduce exceedingly to His happiness, and to the happiness of the universe, and they are therefore really His portion. Some have supposed that God is above all wants -- that even if He existed alone in a vacant universe, sustaining no relations whatever to other existences because there are no other, He would still be no less happy than He now is. I suppose no such thing. I take this view of the case. God is benevolent. He finds His blessedness in this benevolence: in other words, He finds it in promoting the happiness of His creatures. In harmony with this view, the scriptures represent God as happy in His creation prospectively,

before it came into being. Even from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. Wisdom was with Him rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth and her delights were with the sons of men (Prov. 8:22-31). God's infinity does not absolve Him from the conditions of moral agency. To be happy, He must be virtuous -- a law of moral agency which is no less applicable to God, the Infinite One, than to any of His finite creatures. The laws of His being must come from His own intelligent and moral nature, and must be in essence the same as obtain in the case of all intelligent and moral beings. Hence His benevolent happiness demands as its condition the existence of creatures whom He can bless and in whose blessedness He may find the heightening and perfecting of His own. His people, therefore, have to Him a value not fictitious by any means, but real. Through all a past eternity, it has been His purpose to do all He is doing in time. Evermore His virtue has been His blessedness.

## REMARKS.

1. This subject is not enough considered. In its practical applications, it is exceedingly useful to encourage faith in God. I know personally that one phase of faith, more difficult than any other, is to realize that I can be of any consequence in God's universe. It is hard to see how I can be regarded as anything but a filthy, contemptible wretch. Hence I have found it important to study the Bible on this point and to receive it and believe it and take the comfort of its teachings, despite of the devil. He is a liar and tries to drive me off and shut me up in despondency; but I need the comfort of God's truth and I will have it.

2. This truth -- that God's people are His portion -- and are objects of His intense love and regard -- is of great value to us in resisting temptations to despondency. The tendency of conscious guilt and unworthiness is always to make one say, "What am I and what is my father's house?" It is not in vain therefore that God has expressed this love for His people. However great therefore our guilt may be, and however great our conviction of sin and our reasons for regarding ourselves as the offscouring of all things, yet if we will look into what God has said about rejoicing over His people; if we will notice how He mourns over their misdeeds and rejoices over them when they repent; if we listen and hear Him say -- "How can I give thee up Ephraim, how can I deliver thee, Israel; My heart is turned within Me; My repentings are kindled together"; -- if we think of these manifestations of our Father's heart, we shall surely see that we should be encouraged to trust Him as our Father. We should know that He loves us and cares most deeply for our welfare.

I fear that we who are parents are not sufficiently aware of the importance of encouraging obedience in our children by manifestations of our regard for them. Perhaps we think it bad to commend; but God does not take this course; the apostles did not; but they commended warmly, although they also rebuked sharply. It is well always to commend and encourage obedience and to show that we love to see it and are happy in them when they are obedient.

It is even right that we should both feel and manifest a sacred pride in their obedience and virtue. How greatly this encourages children, we ought to know from our own experience. Daughter, will you make your mother's heart leap for joy! Is not this a good motive for obedience and for love? Did you even think it wrong to say -- I will try to make my father's heart glad? Think of it; he can scarcely read your letters, his heart so yearns with joy over a virtuous, lovely daughter; and is it not best for you to cherish this feeling of joy in making his heart glad? And now shall we not believe that God

feels the same yearning and the same intense love of His children -- the same joy in seeing them do well? If so, shall we not find our highest joy in making Him happy?

Whenever you have had anything come home to your heart, saying -- Well done, good and faithful servant, -- what effect did it have upon you? Did it make you proud? No; you longed to keep low at His feet, and never did you feel this more deeply -- I never shall -- I never can, offend Him again.

3. This subject is adapted to the case of impenitent sinners. I can remember how I used to feel in regard to God's people. I looked on them as the excellent of the earth, although I saw some of them living wrong. But the question would often arise -- What are they in the estimation of God? This would always take hold of my heart and make me say -- Is it possible for me ever to be loved of God as His people are?

Again, this subject encourages supplication. When we duly appreciate the wealth God has in His people, then we shall see that we may come and ask anything that is in harmony with His heart, anything that seems essential to the interests of His kingdom, assured that He will hear and do. If we regard our children as our wealth, our children will know it. When they see how much we enjoy their developments in the right direction, they are encouraged to ask anything of us that manifestly conduces to the ends they know we seek and love. They learn what influence they can rightly have over us and how they may properly use it. So, as we come to learn more and more of God's heart we shall have greater confidence in praying for those things which we see to be in harmony with His heart.

4. This subject, well considered, tends strongly to win home to God the backslider. Let him listen and hear his divine Father say, "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Does not this naturally draw him back to such a Father? Who can withstand such an appeal to his heart? When God calls back His wanderers thus and shows the great depth of His heart's love for them; when He says to an apostate and unfaithful wife -- "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you" -- he sees that however guilty and lost, he may come back to God and find a Father's heart open.

He will see that it is not in God's heart to despise one of His least children. Before I had an imbecile child myself, I used to think a parent would be ashamed of such a child, and could find no heart to love them, and nothing in them to love. But now I know very well that no children can be loved so deeply and tenderly as an imbecile. Never could the thought come into my heart to despise such a child -- never any other feeling but that of unqualified pity. With all my heart, I would make common cause with such a child and stand by it forever. Now I can understand how God cannot despise one of His least and weakest children.

5. Hence the subject is useful to the poor of this world and to the uneducated. There always are many who have no other prospect but to be poor and uneducated. Be it so; if you are God's child, you have a sincere heart and God cannot despise you because of your poverty or lack of education. I see some here today who can never enjoy the same opportunities for education which they are struggling hard to give to their children. Often have I been affected, more than I can express, with the interest



manifested here by parents to give their children a far better education than they ever had or could have. It is noble; it is often a truly Christian self-sacrifice for others' good. Perhaps God rewards you for it even now by giving you children who do not despise you because you are illiterate. So and much more, God does not despise His poor and unlearned children.

6. The subject is appropriate to humble the worldly great and rich. In a meeting of the church in Boston last winter, a brother rose and spoke of the importance of interesting themselves in the case of the Lord's poor. Another rose and said, if we wished to look for God's choice and loved ones, we should not find them among those who are rich in gold, but among those who are rich in faith. These are prevalent in prayer, and happy in God. Such are most often among the poor of this world. Then let the rich man come down, and not think himself because of his riches above his poorer brother. God knows no man after the flesh. In His sight mere worldly distinctions go for nothing. Why should not we try to estimate values as God does?

## **The Wrath of God Against Those Who Withstand His Truth**

Lecture VI

December 9, 1857

by Charles Grandison Finney  
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Text.--Rom. 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

The following context shows that in these words the apostle has his eye especially on those who, not having a written revelation from God, might yet know Him in His works of nature. Paul's view is that God's invisible attributes become apparent to the human mind, ever since the creation of our world -- being revealed by the things He has made. In and by means of these works, we may learn His eternal power and His real Divinity. Hence all men have some means of knowing the great truths that pertain to God, our infinite Creator. And hence God may, with the utmost propriety, hold men responsible for accepting this truth reverently, and rendering to their Creator the homage due. For withholding this, they are utterly without excuse. In discussing the subject presented in our text let us enquire,

*I. First, what is the true idea of unrighteousness?*

*II. What is implied in "holding the truth in unrighteousness?"*

*III. What is intended by "the wrath of God revealed from heaven" and why is it thus revealed against all such "unrighteousness"?*

*IV. Wherein and how is this wrath revealed?*

**I. What is the true idea of unrighteousness?**

Beyond question, it cannot be less than the negation of righteousness, and may imply more or less of positive wickedness. Here the question will arise -- What is righteousness? To which I answer, rightness -- moral rightness, the original term being used in regard to material things to denote what is straight, as for example, a straight line. Unrighteousness, the opposite of this, must mean what is morally crooked, distorted -- not in harmony with the rightness of God's law. To denote sin, the scriptures employ some terms which properly signify a negation, or utter absence of what should be. Some theologians have maintained that the true idea of sin is simply negative, supposing sin to consist in not doing and not being what one ought to do and to be. This idea is strongly implied in our text. Sin is, indeed, a neglect to do known duty and a refusal to comply with known obligation. Inasmuch as love is required always and of all men, this must be a state of real disobedience. Suffice it then to say that unrighteousness is an omission -- a known omission -- a refusal to be what we should, and to do what we should. Of course it is only and wholly voluntary. The mind's refusal to obey God is a matter of its own free choice.

**II. What is implied in "holding the truth in unrighteousness?"**

The meaning of the original term -- "hold" -- is to hold back, to restrain. The idea here is that the man restrains the legitimate influence of the truth and will not let it have its proper sway over his will.

The human mind is so constituted that truth is its natural stimulus. This stimulus of truth would, if not restrained and held back, lead the mind naturally to obey God. The man holds back the truth through his own unrighteousness when, for selfish reasons, he overrules and restrains its natural influence, and will not suffer it to take possession and hold sway over his mind.

**III. What is intended by "the wrath of God revealed from heaven" and why is it thus revealed against all such "unrighteousness"?**

The obvious sense is that God, manifesting Himself from heaven, has revealed His high and just displeasure against all restraining of the truth and withstanding of its influence.

Before I proceed to show why this is, I must be permitted to come very near to some of you whom I see before me this day and talk to you in great frankness and faithfulness. I do not charge on you that you have been outwardly immoral, but you have restrained the truth, you have withstood its influence. You are therefore the very persons against whom the wrath of God is said to be revealed. This is true of every one of you who has not given himself up to the influence of truth; you have restrained that natural influence; therefore against you God has revealed His wrath.

This is a terrible thing. The wrath of a king is terrible; how much more so is the wrath of God! Ah, who can stand before Him when once He shall arise in His wrath to avenge His truth and His own glorious name!

- 1. Why does God's wrath wax hot against this sin? Comprehensively the reason is this -- withstanding the truth is resisting God's revealed claims of love and obedience and is therefore the whole of sin. All is comprised in it. This is the very essence -- the true idea of sin; it is deliberate, intelligent, and intentional rebellion against God. There could be no obligation until your conscience affirms it to yourself. The conscience cannot thus affirm obligation until there is some knowledge of God revealed to the mind; but when this knowledge is revealed, then conscience must and will affirm obligation. Subsequently to this point, the more conscience is developed, the more it unfolds, and the more strongly it affirms your obligation to obey God. Suppose a person were created asleep. Until he awakes, there could be in his mind no knowledge of God -- not one idea of God, and consequently no sense of obligation to obey Him. But as soon as the moral functions of the reason and the conscience create a sense of obligation, then the mind is brought to a decision. It must then either choose to obey or to disobey God. It must elect either to take God's law as its rule of duty or to reject it.

The alternative of rejecting God makes it necessary to hold back the truth and withstand its claims. We might almost say that these processes are substantially identical -- resisting the natural influence of God's truth on the mind, and withstanding the known claims of God. When you know the truth concerning God, the great question being whether or not you will obey it, if your heart says no! you do of course resist the claims of truth; you hold it back through your own unrighteousness.

- 2. The very apprehending of moral truth concerning God renders it impossible to be indifferent. Once seeing God's claims, you cannot avoid acting upon them one way or the other. Hence to stop there, after your duty is made known, and hold your mind aloof from obedience, is being just as wicked as you can be. You disown your whole obligation towards God, and practically say unto Him -- "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." Is not this as wicked as you can be, with the light you may have at the time? What more wicked thing could you do?

Let us look at this matter a little farther. Holding back the truth through unrighteousness, implies the total rejection of the moral law as a rule of duty. This must be the case, because when light concerning the meaning of this law comes before the man, he repels it and resists its claims, thus virtually saying -- That law is no rule of duty to me. Thus resisting the influence of truth, he practically denies all obligations to God. Truth coming before his mind, he perceives his obligation, but he withholds his mind from its sway.

You may probably have observed that some persons seem to have no sense of any other obligation save that created by human law. Legal obligation can reach them, but not moral. They will not pay an honest debt unless it is in such a shape that the strong hand of the law can take hold of them. Others have no sensibility to any claims save those that minister to their business reputation. Take away their fear of losing this; remove all the inducements to do right save those that pertain to moral obligation, and see if they will ever do any thing.

Now such men practically reject and deny God's rights altogether, and equally so, their own obligations to God. Their conduct, put into words, would read -- I have some respect

for human law and some fear of human penalty; but, for God's law or penalty, I care nothing!

- 3. It is easy to see that to hold back the truth thus is the perfection of wickedness. For suppose a man refrains from sinning, only because of his obligations to human laws. Then he shows that he fears human penalties only, and has no fear of God before his eyes.

Again, this holding the truth in unrighteousness settles all question as to the moral character. You may know the man with unerring certainty. His position is taken; his course is fixed; as to moral obligation, he cares nothing. The fact is perceived moral obligation does not decide his cause at all. He becomes totally dishonest. This of course, settles the question of his character. Until he reveres God's authority, there is not a particle of moral goodness in him. He does not act with even common honesty. Of course his moral character towards God is formed and is easily known. If he had any moral honesty, the perceived fact of his own moral obligation would influence his mind; but we see it does not at all; he shuts down the gate on all the claims of truth and will not allow them to sway his will; hence it must be that his heart is fully committed to wickedness.

- 4. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all who thus hold back the truth, because this attitude of the will shows that you are reckless of your obligations towards God. It shows that, with you, a moral claim on your heart and conscience goes for nothing. If you restrain the truth from influencing your mind, this very fact proves that you do not mean to serve God. Some of you know that you are not doing what you know to be your duty. You are conscious that the presence of known duty does not move you. You have not done one act of obedience to God's claims because they are God's.

Again, not only does this settle the question of moral character -- which is of itself a good reason for God's wrath; but it also settles the question of moral relations. Because it shows that your moral character is altogether corrupt and wrong, it also shows that in regard to moral relations, you are really God's enemy. From that moment when you resist the claims of moral truth, God must regard you as His enemy, and not by any means as His obedient subject. Not in any figurative sense, but in its most literal sense, you are His enemy, and therefore He must be highly displeased with you. If He were not, His own conscience would condemn Him. You must know that it must be His duty to reveal to you this displeasure. Since He must feel it, He ought to be open and honest with you. You could not, in reason, wish Him to be otherwise. All of you who know moral truth, yet obey it not -- who admit obligation which yet you refuse to obey; you are the men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Let this be settled in every one of your minds; that if you restrain the influence of any truth known concerning God and your duty, then against you is His wrath revealed from heaven.

#### **IV. We must next enquire -- Wherein and how is this wrath revealed?**

Perhaps some of you are already making this enquiry. Moralists are wont to make it and to say -- "We do not see any wrath coming. If we are as good as professors of religion, why shall we not be saved as well as they?"

Wherein then is God's wrath revealed against this great wickedness?

- 1. Your conscience affirms that God must be displeased with you. It certifies to you beforehand that you are guilty, and that God cannot accept you.
- 2. The remorse which will sometimes visit such sinners yet more confirms God's displeasure. True, the feeling of remorse belongs to the sensibility; but not the less does it give admonitory warning. Its voice must be accounted as the voice of God in the human soul. He who made that sensibility so that it will sometimes recoil under a sense of guilt, and turn back to consume the life and joy of the soul, did not make it a lie. It is strange that any should suppose this remorse to be itself the punishment threatened of God against sin and the whole of it. Far from it. This is not that punishment which God has threatened; it is only a premonition of it.
- 3. The very fears men feel are often to be taken as an indication that the thing they dread is a reality. Why is it that men in their sins are so often greatly afraid to die? It is no other than a trumpet-tone of the voice of God, sounding up from the depths of their very nature. How can they overlook the fact that these grim forebodings of coming doom are indeed a revelation of wrath, made in the very nature God has given them!
- 4. Another revelation of God's wrath He makes is in His judicial abandonment of sinners. God manifests His despair of doing any thing more for their salvation when He manifestly withdraws His Spirit and gives them over to hopeless abandonment. Withdrawing His Spirit, He leaves them in great moral blindness. They may have been able to see and to discriminate spiritual things somewhat before, but after God forsakes them, they seem almost utterly void of this power. Everything is dark; all is confused. The light of the Holy Spirit being withdrawn, it were practically vain for the sinner himself or for his sympathizing friends to expect his salvation. This mental darkness over all spiritual things is God's curse on his rejection of truth, and significantly forebodes his speedy doom.
- 5. Analogous to this is the indication given in a moral paralysis of the conscience. Strangely it seems to have lost its sensibility, its ready tact in moral discrimination is gone; its perceptions seem unaccountably obtuse, and the tone of its voice waxes feeble and almost inaudible. Practically, one might almost as well have no conscience at all.
- 6. What does this paralysis of conscience indicate? Plainly, that God has abandoned that soul. The conscience so long over-borne by a perverse will, gives way, and God ceases longer to sustain its vitality.

It is painful to see how persons in this condition strain their endeavors, but such debility comes down upon them -- they become so indifferent; diverting influences are so potent -- they drop their endeavors, powerless. Once their conscience had some activity; truth fell on their mind with appreciable force, and they were aware of resisting it; but, by and by, there ensued a state of moral feeling in which the mind is no longer conscious of refusing; indeed it seems scarcely conscious of any thing whatever. He has restrained the influence of truth until conscience has mainly suspended its function. Like the drunkard

who has lost all perception of the moral wrong of intemperance, and who has brought this insensibility on himself by incessant violations of his better judgment, so the sinner has refused to hear the truth, until the truth now refuses to move him. What is the meaning of this strange phenomenon? It is one of the ways in which God reveals His indignation at man's great wickedness.

An ungodly student, put on the intellectual race-course alongside of his classmates, soon becomes ambitious and jealous. At first, he will probably have some sense of this sin; but he soon loses this sense, and passes on as if unconscious of any sin. What is this but a revelation of God's displeasure?

Again, this wrath against those who hold back the truth in unrighteousness, is abundantly revealed in God's word. Think of what Christ said to the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees -- "Fill ye up, then, the measure of your fathers." What did He mean by that? Their fathers had filled their cup of sin till God could bear with them no longer, and then He filled up His cup of wrath and poured it forth on the nation, and "there was no remedy." So Christ intimates it shall be with the Scribes and Pharisees. And what is this but to reveal His wrath against them for holding back the truth through unrighteousness?

Again, He lets such sinners die in their sins. Observe how, step by step, God gave them one revelation after another of His wrath against their sin; remorse, moral blindness, decay of moral sensibility, and the plain assertions of His word. All these failing, He gives them up to some strong delusion that they may believe a lie. God Himself says -- "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." It is painfully instructive to study the workings of modern delusions, especially spiritualism; to notice how it has come in following the track of those great revivals that blessed our country a few years since. Do not I know scores of persons who passed through those revivals unblessed, and now they are mad with this delusion? They saw the glory of God in those scenes of revival power; but they turned away, and now they are mad on their idols, and crazy under their delusions. God has given them up to die in their sins, and it will be an awful death! Draw near them gently, and ask a few kind questions; you will soon see that they make no just moral discriminations. All is dark which needs to be light, ere they can find the gate of life.

## REMARKS.

1. You may notice the exact difference between saints and sinners, including among sinners all professors of religion who are not in an obedient state of mind. The exact difference is this; saints have adopted Gods' will as their law of activity, the rule that shall govern all their life and all their heart. You reveal to them God's will; this settles all further controversy. The very opposite of this is true of the sinner. With him, the fact of God's supposed will has no such influence at all; usually no influence of any sort, unless it be to excite his opposition. Again, the Christian, instead of restraining the influence of truth, acts up to His convictions. If the question of oughtness is settled, all is settled. Suppose I go to Dea. A. or Dea. B., and I say, "I want you to do a certain thing; I think you must give so much of your money to this object." He replies, "I don't know about that, my money costs me great

labor and pains." But I resume and say -- "Let us look calmly at this question;" and then I proceed to show him that the thing I ask of him is beyond a doubt his duty to God and to man. He interposes at once, "You need not say another word; that is enough. If it is my duty to Christ and to His people, I ask no more." But the sinner is not moved so. He knows his duty beforehand, but he has long been regardless of its claims on him. You must appeal to his selfish interests if you would reach his heart. With the Christian, you need not appeal to his hopes or his fears. You only need show him his duty to God. The sinner you can hope to move only by appeals to his interests. The reason of this is that his adopted course of life is to serve his own interests, nothing higher.

2. With sinners, the question of religion is one of loss and gain. But with Christians, it is only a question of right and duty towards God. This makes truth to him all important, and duty imperative. But the sinner only asks, "What shall I gain?" or "What shall I lose?" It is wholly a question of danger. Indeed so true is this that ministers often assume that the only availing motive with a sinner must be an appeal to his hopes and fears. They have mostly dropped out the consideration of right as between the sinner and God. They seem to have forgotten that so far forth as they stop short of the idea of right and appeal only to the sinner's selfishness, their influence tends to make spurious converts. For if men enter upon the Christian life only for gain in the line of their hopes and fears, you must keep up the influence of these considerations, and must expect to work upon these only. That is, you must expect to have selfish Christians and a selfish church. If you say to them, "This is your duty," they will reply -- "What have we ever cared for duty? We were never converted to the doctrine of doing our duty. We became Christians at all, only for the sake of promoting our own interests, and we have nothing to do in the Christian life on any other motive."

Now observe, they may modify this language a little if it seems too repugnant to the general convictions of decent people; but none the less is this their real meaning. They modify its language only on the same general principle of making everything subservient to self.

Again, we see how great a mistake is made by those selfish Christians who say -- "Am I not honest towards my fellow-men? And is not this a proof of piety?"

What do you mean by "honest?" Are you really honest towards God? Do you regard God's rights as much as you wish Him to regard yours? But perhaps you ask, as many do; What is my crime? I answer -- Is it not enough for you to do nothing -- really nothing towards obedience to God? Is it not something serious that you refuse to do God's will and hold back the claims of His truth? What's the use of talking about your morality while you disregard the greatest of all moral claims and obligations -- those that bind you to love and obey God? What can it avail you to say perpetually -- Am I not moral and decent towards men?

Why is God not satisfied with this?

3. Ye who think ye are almost as good as Christians; in fact it is much nearer the truth to say that you are almost as bad as devils! Indeed you are fully as bad, save that you do not know as much, and therefore cannot be so wicked. You say -- "We are kind to each other." So are devils. Their common purpose to war against God compels them to act in concert. They went in concert into the man possessed with a legion of devils as we learn in the gospel history. Very likely they are as kind

towards each other in their league against God and goodness, as you are towards your neighbors. So that selfish men have small ground to compliment themselves on being kind and good to each other, while they withstand God, since in both these respects, they are only like devils in hell.

And now, my impenitent hearers -- what do you say? Putting your conduct towards God into plain language, it would run thus; "Thou, Lord, callest on me to repent; I shall refuse. Thou does strive to enforce my obligation to repent by various truths; I hold back those truths from their legitimate influence on my mind. Thou doest insist on my submission to Thy authority; I shall do no such thing."

This, you will see, is only translating your current life and bearing towards God, into plain words. If you were really to lift your face toward heaven and utter these words, it would be blasphemy. What do you think of it now? Do you not admit and often assert that actions speak louder than words? Do they not also speak more truthfully?

To those of you who are business men, let me make this appeal. What would you think of men who should treat you as you treat God? You take your account to your customer and you say to him; this account, sir, has been lying a long time past due; will you be so good as to settle it? You cannot deny that it is a fair account of value received, and I understand you have abundant means to pay it. He very coldly refuses. You suggest the propriety of his giving some reasons for this refusal; and he tells you it is a fine time to get large interest on his money, and he therefore finds it more profitable to loan it out than to pay his debts. That is all. He is only selfish; all there is of it is simply this, that he cares for his own interests supremely, and cares little or nothing for yours when the two classes of interests -- his and yours, come into competition.

When you shall treat God as well as you want your creditors to treat you, then you may hold up your head as, so far, an honest man. But so long as you do the very thing towards God which you condemn as infinitely mean from your fellow-men towards yourself, you have little ground for self-complacent pride.

All this would be true and forcible even if God were no greater, no better, and had no higher and no more sacred rights than your own; how much more then are they weighty beyond expression, by how much God is greater, better, and holier than mortals!

## **On Confessing and Being Cleansed From Sin**

Lecture VII

December 23, 1857

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Text.--1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The connection in which this passage stands, is this -- "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

The first inquiry under our text is,

*I. What is implied in "confessing our sins?"*

*II. Let us next consider what the text affirms upon the condition of true confession.*

### **I. What is implied in "confessing our sins?"**

- 1. Of course, it must mean something more than merely verbal confession. For,

"God abhors the sacrifice,

where not the heart is found."

A merely lip confession can be no other than an abomination to God.

- 2. It is plain that some do not confess to purpose, for they are not thereby cleansed from their sin. Their own life shows that they have not secured the fulfillment of this promise, and, therefore, we know they have not performed its condition.
- 3. Confession implies that we understand what our sin consists in. It is one of the most remarkable things in the history of human nature, that men can sit under the sound of the gospel, and yet never seem to understand what their sin consists in -- that it consists in refusing to do our duty to God.

Suppose one of these merchants here holds a claim against a man. He has often asked him to pay it. The man confesses the duty in words, but always denies it in practice. What will this merchant think of his customer? Is it not strange that this customer of his can pretend not to see wherein his own sin consists? This is sin. As Pollok says of the man wailing in eternal despair -- he hears ever and anon a voice as if it came down from the Light above --

"Ye knew your duty, but ye did it not."

- 4. So sin consists in a known and voluntary neglect to know and obey God, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Again, true confession implies that we cease from all known sin, of either omission, or commission. Also, that we cease from all excuses or apologies for sin. He who makes an honest confession does it under the heart-conviction that all sin is utterly wrong. Feeling this, he cannot say one word in excuse or apology for sinning.

- 5. It also recognizes our guilt, and not only for all want of outward conformity to God's law, but for all inward sin -- for all sins of the heart. The confession contemplates sin as against God, and, therefore, it makes no discrimination in favor of those that escape the human eye.

Again, to confess our sin rightly, recognizes this fact -- that, so far as we are not perfect before God, the fault is our own. Of course, this imports that God requires of us perfection, and has proffered us such aid, that this command is in no sense unreasonable.

- 6. It implies, also, that we recognize our moral weakness as really our sin. Many people do not go so deep as this. Really, they assume that some how or other, this moral weakness is their misfortune, and not their great sin. They ascribe it to Adam, and not to themselves. Few men will march straight up to the idea that they are to blame for their spiritual weakness. They try to get around it. But all real and right confession implies that we admit this sin to be our own, and not Adam's. It leaves to Adam to bear his own sin, but does not try to shirk its own blameworthiness, by passing it over upon the father of the race.

Notice how the Bible speaks of this moral weakness. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" This is, indeed, a very strong representation of the moral weakness of our race; but what does it say? Does Jeremiah here drop a hint that this weakness comes from Adam, and that, considered as a sin, it is to be accounted as only Adam's? Hear what he says -- "Then shall they who are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well." The difficulty is, he began wrong and has kept on wrong. By his own acts, this course of wrong-doing has become confirmed. And is not this his own fault? To be sure it is. He has not only tied his own hands himself, but he has kept them tied of his own free will.

- 7. A proper confession of sin implies, therefore, that we recognize the great extent of our moral debility, and feel that it is our own fault. The question is not precisely whether, at the point of final struggle, we can withstand the influence of motives, temptations; but whether we cannot -- at a point further back -- control the state of mind which gives motives to sin their great power. What does the wife complain of in her drunken husband? Not merely that, in the final conflict, he yields to temptation and is overcome; but she complains of that state of mind in which he refuses to become temperate, and in which -- in the cool hour when no temptation is upon him, he gives himself up to strong drink, and will not try to deliver himself from his powerful foe.

So of all sinners. God says of them -- "They will not frame their doings to return to the Lord their God, because the spirit of whoredom is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord."

The great difficulty with sinners lies in their self-justifying spirit. They will not confess their sins. They have never in heart given up their sins, and thrown themselves in

desperation on that strong Arm that is able to save them to the uttermost.

Nothing is plainer than this -- that, if sinners would be saved, they must renounce all their sins -- must go to the bottom, and make a clean break before the Lord, and before men too, so far forth as their sin affects their fellow-men.

- 8. Many are so taken up with the sins of others, they have no time to think of confessing their own. But, confessing to purpose implies that you really renounce your own sin, wholly, and confess it to all who have a personal interest or concern in it.

## **II. Let us next consider what the text affirms upon the condition of true confession.**

This is it: "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This may be regarded as a promise; but it really is an explicit assertion. Let us see what it affirms.

- 1. "He is faithful" to forgive us our sins -- implies that He has promised, and will surely perform, His word is pledged, and He cannot fail to perform it. And is also "just to forgive" -- implying that performance is now a matter of justice in the sense of veracity -- fidelity in the performance of what He has promised. He adds -- and "to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This is just what we want.
- 2. Our great unrighteousness is our ruin. The absence of righteousness is essentially the same as the moral weakness of the soul. This moral weakness is so great, that, without God's gracious aid, no one will ever repent. You know how men sometimes fall under the dominion of some strong appetite, like that for alcohol, or opium, or tobacco, and become so fearfully enslaved and subjected to this appetite, that their utmost efforts to free themselves seem only like the struggles of an infant against some gigantic power. Many such cases you have seen -- illustrative of the very nature of all sin. Now the glorious grace of God which cleanseth from all unrighteousness and from all want of conformity to God's will, is the very thing we need.

How many of you have felt this difficulty. You have practically so little power to stand before temptation that you find yourselves almost perpetually overcome. If tempted to anger, you give way before the temptation. Or if tempted to peevishness, or to lust, you are easily overcome. This experience of moral weakness is but too painfully familiar to your whole history. You, then, ought to understand and appreciate the blessedness of a gospel which cleanseth from all unrighteousness.

Perhaps most of you cannot remember when you first repelled the monitions of conscience. Somewhere far back, in the memory of your moral existence, when your mother admonished you of duty, or your Sabbath school teacher gave you some instruction as to your duty to God, or to man, you felt some impressions of duty, and some monitions of conscience, but you did not yield to their demands. Ah, that was a momentous hour! How fearful the mischief which you did to your own moral nature by that first distinct resistance to the conviction of duty! Then you entered on a career of sin and hardness of heart, which has naturally led you on from bad to worse ever since. It may be that some of you are so hardened that you can go on shamelessly in sin, and care

no more for the monitions of conscience than you do for the idle wind. Is not this a fearful state?

Those of you who have never submitted your will to God's will must say, if you were to speak the whole truth -- "When I see my duty, I do not perform it; I cannot tell why not; I can give no account, but I know I always fail; and however it is to be accounted for, such is the fact." True, this is the real fact, whether you frankly confess it, or whether you conceal and evade it.

Those of you who attempt to begin to turn to the Lord find yourselves amazingly weak. The iron habits of years are not broken up without a fearful struggle.

Do you not say, when you speak out what you feel -- "I have no tendencies towards God; all my tendencies are towards sinning." You have observed this. Most of you have felt it. You have often dwelt on your case in precisely this strain of thought; saying, "I am dead in sin; whatever may be the reason of it, I am not prepared for heaven, and I dare not go to heaven, for the spirit of obedience to God is not in me." Such is your deplorable case.

- 3. Ye who have submitted to God feel the need of salvation deep and thorough. Sometimes, your experience compels you to exclaim, "I need a salvation omnipotent in its moral force; else I cannot stand." All this decay of moral vigor -- this collapse in the moral system -- this is what you need to overcome, and grace for this result is precisely the thing your case requires. You try to pray, but heart and language fail you! Ah, this sinking away from God -- this perpetual gravitation earthward and sinward -- how terrible! You must be delivered from this; and nothing else can deliver you short of this moral cleansing which is provided in the blessed gospel.
- 4. The thing you need is that the Holy Spirit should become a moral power in your soul, antagonistic to the moral forces there that urge you towards sinning. This is the antidote of God's own providing.

This death in sin is complete. Unless there be some supernatural power to counteract it, all your efforts will be vain -- vain essentially for the reason that you are not disposed to make efforts to any practical purpose. When you receive this divine power to help, you will understand what this means -- "I am the resurrection and the life." To have this resurrection power and life of Christ in you, working in you to do all His will -- this is the cleansing which the gospel promises, and which you so greatly need. When you experience it, you will find it a most effectual influence. Then you will know how blessed it is to have a supernatural and ever-present power at hand on which you may perpetually lean. Unless this power takes possession of the soul, nothing effectual will be done. How often does it happen that "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." Do you understand this?

## REMARKS.

1. We have before us now precisely the true mission of Christ. The text speaks particularly of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as it is said that "His blood cleanseth us from all sin." The entire work He does for

us is composed of two parts; forgiveness and moral cleansing. Through His blood shed for us, He can forgive; through His Spirit, sent down to dwell in our souls, He can cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The atonement is one part of this great work, naturally first in order. This is finished. This work is wrought out and complete, and needs not to be done again. And Jesus has risen from the grave and ascended on high to great power and glory that He may accomplish the remaining part of this work -- sending His Spirit down to convince of sin and to cleanse the soul from its pollutions.

2. If Christ be really divine, then He is doubtless able to do this work in both of its great departments. Being truly divine, His death, we readily see, must make an ample atonement; and it is equally clear, that if He be truly divine, there can be no limit to His power to save the soul from sin. But if He is nothing but a man, then this claim to be able to save to the uttermost, it is all nonsense! Nothing can be so absurd! What a blasphemer He is! But if He be truly divine, then this is just what may be expected of Him. A leading Unitarian of New England, on learning our views of sanctification, and being informed of the objections raised against these views in many quarters, said -- "What is the ground of these objections, raised by those who are called Orthodox, against your views of sanctification? If the orthodox views of Christ are correct, and He is truly divine, then this result, as held by Oberlin men, is just what ought to be expected. A Savior really divine ought to be able not only to pardon but to cleanse from sin. If He were human only, then it might ever remain true that "no mere man, either of himself, or by any grace received in this life, can wholly keep the commandments of God, but must daily break them in thought, word, and deed. Every thing seems to turn on the question of His true divinity. And I marvel how men who hold to this divinity, can yet object against His having such power to save."

3. The gross inconsistency of holding Christ's divinity and rejecting His ability or His willingness to save, is the great stumblingblock of the world. It is the more glaring because the scriptures announce His mission in precisely this language -- "Thou shalt call His name Jesus (Savior) for He shall save His people from their sins." Matthew 1:22

4. The self-excusing spirit is the ruin of the race. It begins by throwing back the guilt of all human transgressions upon Adam. What monstrous wickedness! It can be shown that this moral weakness can be only voluntary, and can lie nowhere save in man's moral nature -- in that nature where everything is free and voluntary.

Take the case of a drunkard, and admit, if you please, that he commenced moral agency with a strong bias in his constitution towards strong drink. But this bias is not his sin -- is not in itself sin at all. It may become an occasion of sinning, but it is not itself sin. If he resists firmly, he is the more virtuous for that constitutional tendency, and can by no means be deemed the more sinful. Thus there are some young men who resist all the temptations incident to city life, and who may be trusted even in a bank, or anywhere else. The more temptation they withstand, the greater their virtue. It may be true of some of you that you have inherited tendencies to temptation: but this is not sin. It may occasion temptation; but it does not necessitate sin. Take the case of Paul's thorn in the flesh. This was manifestly in some form a temptation and an occasion to sin. No matter what it was; we know not and cannot know what it was; but it did not result in moral weakness -- did not paralyze his moral strength; but rather made him strong, because it emptied him of himself and cast him wholly on Christ for strength.

5. Many overlook the real nature of their sin, do not see wherein it lies, and hence have never confessed it. Often like a man enslaved to opium or tobacco, they will not see that this very enslavement is their sin, and therefore they do not confess and find mercy.

You may see also why the church is not sanctified. Many in the church have never yielded the great controversy with God -- have never taken sides with God against themselves and against all their own sin. Many years ago in preaching to an Old School church and congregation on "making to themselves a new heart," I showed them that the sinner first made his own heart wicked, then kept it wicked, and therefore was under perpetual and growing obligation to make to himself a new heart. This threw them into great agitation. They had heard ever so much about inability, dependence, the work of the Spirit, &c., &c., but had never heard this truth. Consequently, they came into great excitement. While I was yet preaching, many rose to their feet, startled by such things as God helped me to say. The minister who sat in the desk behind me, kept moving from one end of the seat to the other in the greatest excitement; you might hear him breathe hard under so much intense emotion. It was not that he dissented from the doctrine preached, but he felt so intensely anxious for the effect it might have on the people. As we came down and walked along through the aisles, one woman cried out to the minister -- What do you think of that? "Worth five hundred dollars," said he. "Then you have never preached the gospel to us," said she, to which he replied, "Very true, I have not."

To another woman there who found fault with this doctrine, I said -- "You would make it out that God ought to provide an atonement as a thing of simple justice, and ought to give to men the Holy Ghost, and that no man has done wrong by sinning against God." True, said she, I have always thought that God ought to help sinners since they cannot help themselves.

Thus it is that men who lay their sin on Adam and not on themselves, and on God but not on themselves, never confess to any purpose. Their pretended confession is no confession at all. They deny the very foundation of the gospel.

6. You, sinners here, perhaps do not think you are so wicked, as you are told you are here. You try to think that this great sin of yours is not your fault. Hence you do not confess and you get no peace.

Many of you have held the truth in theory, but you reject it in practice. Have you not seen your own sin so clearly that it seemed to you utterly loathsome, and you could spew it out of your mouth -- even as a drunkard abhors himself and knows that this horrible weakness which lets him sink down into sottishness, is the very thing he ought to confess as his sin and shame, and ought to abhor?

7. True Christians do find a power not their own, really cleansing, sustaining, and making them clean. This is indeed a rich and blessed experience.

Ye who are conscious of not being cleansed, do ye not feel your need of a power not your own? You find yourself exceedingly weak and easily overcome. Do you not need a far different experience? There is a far higher life than this you are living. To illustrate this truth, let me refer to a lady in Rochester who has for many years known much of the indwelling power of Christ. Two years since she suffered a great physical affliction which subjected her to severe bodily suffering, so great and so

fearful that one could not bear to look at her in her extreme paroxysms of pain. Yet under this extremest suffering, she was so blessed and so happy, she often said she would not have one feature in her case otherwise than God should order it in one single point. Afterward however, she thought she fell into sin. Consequently she became fearfully dejected, and often said -- "Can I ever be forgiven?"

I saw her while in this state of mind and said to her -- "Are you aware that your very question implies the greatest unkindness towards your Savior? Suppose it lay between you and your husband. Suppose you have in one case spoken unkindly of him; and now you feel this very questioning as to him. You cannot see how he can ever forgive you. How would this affect his feelings? What would he say? How would he grieve over this unbelief of his wife!" She had not seen how this doubting had wronged Christ. It had not occurred to her that this was really "the unkindest cut of all." She did not see it till it was mentioned; then she saw that the greatest sin she had to confess was this very sin of doubting Christ's love and His readiness to forgive.

Is not here a fountain opened? Are not its waters just such as you perpetually need? Suppose there were somewhere an artesian well, out of which gushed up a constant and mighty stream; and suppose further that it is found to have a power to cleanse from all sin. Absolutely, whoever comes and drinks of this water is cleansed from his iniquities. How far would you go to reach this well and to drink from these waters? You, brother, and you, sister, how far would you go for these waters? Do you not say -- If I knew they actually had this healing virtue, and would make everyone strong as with Christ's own power, how readily would I go to Asia, or to the ends of the earth! "Ah, said a young man, I was straining to reach this water; I had been struggling and pressing to get to it -- and lo, in a moment, I opened my eyes and it is here -- at my feet; I am standing in it and it flows like a river all around about me." So, many see the gospel when their spiritual eye is opened.

The thing you need is to confess and renounce your sin, and then come to Christ and cast yourself on Him for life.

Sinner, is there not hope for you in Jesus? Will you really come to Him? See here is your help. Not in Asia, nor in Africa; not in some unknown land; but here, in Christ who is here to save. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart -- the word of faith which we preach."

Some of you have feared that if you became Christians, you could not stand. Never fear, but come, and cast yourself on Jesus and trust Him to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

O this glorious idea -- being cleansed from all unrighteousness -- putting from us all this moral weakness which has crippled us so long!

Brethren, what is the reason we should not right here do this very thing? Why not come out at once and freely say -- I do confess; I abhor myself for my sins; I have been long time in bondage; but here the rock is smitten, and while the waters of salvation flow, let me at least step in and be healed!

## GLOSSARY

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

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.
3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free,



responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.

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