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**LECTURES TO  
PROFESSING CHRISTIANS**  
(ABRIDGED)

By

*Charles G. Finney*

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without  
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

**Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World**

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TO  
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Selected and Abbreviated by  
E. E. Shelhamer

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LECTURES TO PROFESSING  
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**INTRODUCTION TO THIS EDITION**

It was through the kindness of Rev. M. A. Walker that an old copy of Finney's "Lectures To Professing Christians" came to our hands. We have read everything that we can get by Charles G. Finney and consider him one of the most outstanding thinkers that the Church world has ever produced. These Lectures had been read many years ago, but we had never had a copy of our own.

After reading them and noting how up-to-date this truth is, even though he wrote it long ago, we decided to reprint it in an edition that could be distributed to thousands of people who need it.

Noting that the copyright was owned by the Nazarene Publishing House, we asked them for permission to reprint it, and that permission was graciously given. We are indebted to them for their cooperation and permission to reprint this material.

You will note that these Lectures were selected and arranged by Rev. E. E. Shelhamer, who has long since gone to Heaven. This, in itself, gives this book added interest for all those who love the old fashioned paths. Anything that Brother Shelhamer would select for the reading public must certainly be worthwhile.

We present this new edition of these Lectures, in this economical form, in the hope that the truth that is here will reach many thousands of people, and that many of you who read them will receive spiritual help thereby. We also do so in the hope that you will help us to distribute them far and wide so that multiplied blessings may result from this printing.

-- D. P. Denton, Publisher

# LECTURES TO PROFESSING CHRISTIANS

By  
Charles G. Finney

## **THE STORY OF FINNEY'S LIFE**

Charles Finney, the great evangelist, was born in America in 1792, and died at the age of eighty-two in 1875. Without Christian parentage or training, he was convicted of sin through reading the Bible while practicing law in Adams, New York, at the age of twenty-nine.

He went into the woods; and, alone with God, in deep anguish of heart, confessed his sins, and asked God to forgive and save him. In spite of the awful burden of his sin, he rested on God's promise of salvation, and took Him at His Word.

Returning to his law office, he says, "I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love, until I cried, "Lord, I cannot bear any more."

Soon after this a young man entered the office, and on hearing the story of Mr. Finney's conversion, he was so powerfully convicted of sin that he fell upon the floor, and cried out in agony of mind, "Do pray for me." When his employer entered the law office, Finney spoke to him also about his salvation. He hung his head and left the office, for the remark had "pierced him like a sword." After a long struggle, he came into the office crying, "I've got it! I've got it!" and from that time he took a decided stand for God.

Refusing to plead the lawsuit he had in hand, saying he had a "retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead His cause," Finney left the office, to converse with those whom he might meet, about their souls. "I spoke with many persons that day, but I cannot remember one whom I spoke with who was not soon converted. Just at evening I called at the house of a friend where a young man lived who was employed in distilling whiskey. I sat down to tea with them and they requested me to ask a blessing, which I had never done. I had scarcely begun before the state of these people excited so much compassion that I burst into weeping. The young man moved away from the table and rushed out. He was not seen again till next morning, when he came expressing a blessed hope in Christ. He has been for many years an able minister of the gospel.

"After a short time I went to Henderson, where my father lived. He was an unconverted man. 'Father', I said, 'you are an old man, yet I never heard a prayer in my father's house.' We went in and engaged in prayer. My father and mother were greatly moved, and in a very short time were both converted." At the monthly prayer meeting in the town a revival began, which spread all over the place.

In the spring Finney went to the town of Evan's Mills, and began preaching in the schoolhouse. Though some were convicted at every sermon, he was not satisfied, and therefore gave up one day

to fasting and prayer with a deacon of the church. That night there was such powerful conviction of sin in the meeting that he was sent for all through the night to deal with persons who were "under awful distress of mind." The Deists of the place, who were banded together to resist the revival, were nearly, or quite, all converted. A spirit of prayer pervaded the entire place. One man came to a meeting with a pistol, swearing that he would "kill Finney". In the midst of the meeting he fell from his seat groaning with conviction, and after a sleepless night and prayer, he was led to hope in Christ. A blasphemous keeper of a barroom came to a meeting, writhed in his seat in anguish, and, after a heartbroken confession of his sin, turned his liquor shop into a place of prayer.

Mr. Finney remained six months in this place, and though he had "coughed blood" and was told he could not live, he preached night and day two hours at a time. "A glorious revival spread all over that new region of the country." "Judges and lawyers and educated men were converted by scores." On his going to a settlement of Germans who were trusting in their religious observances to save them, they became deeply convicted, and "the revival resulted in the conversion of the whole church, and of nearly the whole community of Germans."

During these six months he spent part of his time in the town of Antwerp, New York. Though there were no religious services held in the town, he gave himself to prayer on Saturday, and appointed a meeting for Sunday. On that day the great mass of the population were convicted. He pointed out those whom he had heard swearing upon the streets, but with such love that he says, "the people wept about as much as I did myself." From that day the work went forward with power. He appointed a meeting for the Universalists, who had persecuted the members of other churches. He chose the text, "Ye generation of vipers," and the sermon resulted in a complete overturning of Universalism in the place. The revival penetrated every part of the town and passed on to the neighboring villages.

In 1824, Mr. Finney was married. A day or two after, he left his wife to get a conveyance to transport their goods. Before he could return, he was urged to preach at Perch River. A revival began, and he could not leave. It spread to Brownville and continued throughout the winter, so that he was unable to return for his wife. After six months he set out through the snow to get her. Stopping, however, to have his horse shod, the people ran together at noon and asked him to preach. Such a powerful revival began that he could not return for his wife, but had to send for her. "In a few weeks, the great mass of the inhabitants were converted."

In 1835 he was called to Oberlin College, then just founded. It has since become a great university of some 2,000 students. Here, as professor of theology, molding the lives, and future ministry of many students, and as pastor of the First Church, he continued to work almost till the time of his death in 1875. He writes: "We had a revival here continually. Very few students came without being converted."

Years before this, Mr. Finney wrote his "Lectures on Revivals". His health had broken down, and there was apparently no one else to do his work. He had taken a sea-voyage to regain his health, but the thought of the possibility of work ceasing which he had begun, so overpowered him that he spent the day in prayer in his stateroom. "It was the spirit of prayer that was upon me. I besought the Lord to go on with His work. After a day of wrestling and agony, the subject cleared."

On returning to New York his health was too broken to undertake evangelistic meetings, but he began a course of "Lectures on Revivals" to his church in the Broadway Tabernacle. This resulted first of all in a revival in the church itself. The publication of them in the New York Evangelist produced revivals in multitudes of places throughout the country. One publisher in England alone sold 80,000 volumes of the lectures, and great blessing resulted. They were translated into Welsh, and a revival sprang up in Wales. They were extensively circulated in Europe, and produced revivals in the Colonies, and in some of the islands of the sea. They are now little known, and accordingly selections from these lectures are appended, with the earnest prayer that God may use them yet once again.

# LECTURES TO PROFESSING CHRISTIANS

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## LECTURE I SELF- DECEIVERS

"Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

There are two extremes in religion, equally false and equally fatal. And there are two classes of hypocrites that occupy these two extremes. The first class make religion to consist altogether in the belief of certain abstract doctrines, or what they call faith, and lay little or no stress on good works. The other class makes religion to consist altogether in good works (I mean, dead works), and lay little or no stress on faith in Jesus Christ, but hope for salvation by their own deeds. The Jews belonged generally to the last mentioned group. Their religious teachers taught them that they would be saved by obedience to the ceremonial law. And therefore, when Paul began to preach, he seems to have attacked more especially this error of the Jews.

I said that these two extremes, that which makes religion to consist altogether in faith, are equally false and equally fatal. Those who make religion consist altogether in good works, overlook the fact that works themselves are not acceptable to God, unless they proceed from faith. For without faith it is impossible to please Him. And those who make religion consist altogether in faith, overlook the fact that true faith always works by love, and in variably produces the works of love.

A man may even feel an approbation of an abstract truth. This is what many persons suppose to be faith -- the approbation which they feel for the character and government of God and for the plan of salvation when viewed abstractly. Many persons, when they hear an eloquent sermon on the attributes or government of God, are set all in a glow at the excellency displayed, when they have not a particle of true faith. I have heard of an infidel, who would be moved even to ecstasy at such themes. The rational mind is so constituted that it naturally and necessarily approves of truth when viewed abstractly.

The wickedest devils in hell love it, if they can see it without its relation to themselves. If they could see the gospel without any relation that interferes with their own selfishness they would not only see it to be true, but would heartily approve of it. All hell, if they could view God in His absolute existence, without any relation to themselves, would heartily approve His character.

The reason why wicked men and devils hate God is, because they see Him in relation to themselves. Their hearts rise up in rebellion, because they see Him opposed to their selfishness.

See that man! he is sick, and his feelings are tender. In view of Christ, as a kind and tender Saviour, his heart melts and he feels strong emotion of approbation toward Jesus Christ. Why? For the very same reasons that he would feel strong emotions toward the hero of a romance. But he does not obey Christ.



And I am more and more persuaded, that great multitudes are to be found in all our congregations, where the abstract doctrines of the gospel are much preached, who like the preaching, and like to hear about God, and all these things, and yet are unconverted. And no doubt, multitudes of them get into the churches, because they love orthodox preaching, when, after all, it is manifest, that they are not doers of the word. And here is the difficulty; they have not had that searching preaching that made them see the truth in its bearing on themselves.

Oh, when shall the church be purified, or the world converted? Not till it is a settled point, that heresy in practice is the proof of heresy in belief. Not while a man may deny the whole gospel in his practice every day, and yet maintain his standing in the church as a good Christian.

See how a minister may be deceived in regard to the state of his congregation.

He preaches a good deal on the abstract doctrines, that do not immediately relate to practice, and his people say they are fed, and rejoice in it, and he thinks they are growing in grace, when in fact it is no certain sign that there is any religion among them. It is when he preaches practical doctrines his people show that they love the truth in relation to themselves, and show it by practicing it, and then they give evidence of real love to the truth.

See what a vast multitude of professors of religion there are who are deceiving themselves.

Many suppose they are Christians from the emotions they feel in view of the truth, when in fact what they receive is truth presented to their minds in such a way that they do not see its bearing on themselves. If you bring the truth so to bear on them, as to destroy their pride and cut them off from their worldliness, such professors resist it. Look abroad upon the church. See what a multitude of orthodox churches and orthodox Christians live and feed upon the abstract doctrines of religion from year to year. Then look farther at their lives, and see how little influence their professed belief has upon their practice.

Are you conscious that the gospel is producing a practical effect upon you, according to your advancement in knowledge? Is it weaning you from the world? Do you find this to be your experience, that when you receive any practical truth into your minds that you love it, and love to feel its application to yourself, and take pleasure in practicing it? If you are not growing in grace -- becoming more and more holy, yielding yourselves up to the influence of the gospel, you are deceiving yourselves.

Woe to that man who admits the truth, and yet turns away and does not practice it, like the man beholding his natural face in a glass turning away and forgetting what manner of man that he was.

LECTURES TO PROFESSING  
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**LECTURE 2**  
**REPROOF A CHRISTIAN DUTY**

"Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him" (Leviticus 19 : 17).

The whole verse reads thus: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor and not suffer sin upon him." In the margin, as those of you who have Bibles with marginal notes can see, the last words of the verse are rendered "that thou bear not sin for him." And this, I am satisfied, is the correct translation. The idea is this that men are bound to reprove their neighbors for sin, lest they become partakers with them, or accessory to their sin.

Love to God plainly requires this.

If we really love God, we shall of course feel bound to reprove those that hate and abuse Him and break His commands.

Love to your neighbor demands it.

Neighbor, here, means anybody that sins within the reach of your influence; not only in your presence, but in your neighborhood, if your influence can reach him, or in your nation, or in the world. If he sins he injures himself, and therefore if we love him we reprove his sins.

It is cruel to omit it.

If you see your neighbor sin, and you pass by and neglect to reprove him, it is just as cruel as if you should see his house on fire, and pass by and not warn him of it. Why not? If he is in the house, and the house burns, he will lose his life. If he sins and remains in sin, he will go to hell. Is it not cruel to let him go unwarned to hell? Some seem to consider it not cruel to let a neighbor go on in sin till the wrath of God comes on him to the uttermost. Their feelings are so tender that they cannot wound him by telling him of his sin and his danger. No doubt, the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. Instead of warning their neighbor of the consequences of sin, they actually encourage him in it.

To refuse to do it is rebellion against God.

For anyone to see rebellion and not to reprove it or lift his hand to oppose it, is itself rebellion. It would be counted rebellion by the laws of the land. The man who should know of a treasonable plot, and did not disclose it or endeavor to defeat it, would be held an accessory, and condemned as such by law. So if a man sees rebellion breaking out against God, and does not oppose it, or make efforts to suppress it, he is himself a rebel.

Your silence encouraged him in his sin.

He is authorized to infer from your silence that you approve his sin, or, at least, that you do not care for it. Especially if he knows you are a professor of religion. It is an old maxim that silence gives consent. Sinners do regard your silence as a virtual sanction of what they do.

By reproving your neighbor who sins, you may save him.

What multitudes have been reformed by timely reproof. Most of those who are saved, are saved by somebody's rebuking them for their sins and urging them to repentance. You may be instrumental in saving any man, if you speak to him, and reprove him, and pray for him, as you ought. How many instances there are, where a single reproof has been to the transgressor like the barbed arrow in his soul, that rankled, and rankled, the poison whereof drank up his spirits, until he submitted to God. I have known instances where even a look of reproof has done the work.

If you do not save the individual, reproved, your reproof may save somebody else who may be acquainted with the fact.

Such instances have often occurred, where the transgressor has not been reclaimed, but others have been deterred from following his example by the rebukes directed to him. Who can doubt that, if professors of religion were faithful in this duty, men would fear encountering their reproofs, and that fear would deter them from such conduct, and multitudes who now go on unblushing, and unawed, would pause and think, and be reclaimed and saved? Will you, with such an argument for faithfulness before you, let sinners go on unrebuked till they stumble into hell?

God expressly requires it.

The language of the text is, in the original exceedingly strong. The word is repeated, which is the way in which the Hebrew expresses a superlative, so as to leave no doubt on the mind, not the least uncertainty as to the duty, nor any excuse for not doing it. There is not a stronger command of God in the Bible than this. God has given it the greatest strength of language that He can. "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke him," that is, without any excuse, "and not bear his sin," not be accessory to his ruin. It is a maxim of law, that if a man knows of a murder about to be committed and does not use means to prevent it, he shall be held accessory before, the fact. If he knows of murder which has been done, and does not endeavor to bring the criminal to justice, he is accessory after the fact. So by the law of God, if you do not endeavor to bring a known transgressor to repentance, you are implicated in the guilt of his crime, and are held responsible at the throne of God.

If you do it in a right manner, you will keep a conscience void of offense in regard to your neighbor, whatever may be his end.

And you cannot do this without being faithful in the reproof of sin. A man does not live conscientiously, towards God or man, unless he is in the habit of reproving transgressors who are within his influence. This is one grand reason why there is so little conscience in the church. In what respect are professors of religion so much in the habit of resisting their consciences, as in regard to

the duty of reproofing sin? Here is one of the strongest commands in the Bible, and yet multitudes do not pay any attention to it at all. Can they have a clear conscience? They may just as well pretend to have a clear conscience and get drunk every day. No man keeps the law of God, or keeps his conscience clear, who sees sin and does not reprove it. He has additional guilt, who knows of sin and does not reprove it. He breaks two commandments. First, he becomes accessory to the transgression of his neighbor, and then he disobeys an express requirement by refusing to reprove his neighbor.

Unless you reprove men for their sins, you are not prepared to meet them in judgment.

Are you prepared to meet your children in the judgment, if you have not reproved nor chastened them, nor watched over their morals? "Certainly not," you say. "But why?" "Because God has made it my duty to do this, and he holds me responsible for it." Very well. Then take the case of any other man who sins under your eye, or within reach of your influence, and goes down to hell and you have not reproved him. Are you not responsible? Oh, how many are now groaning in hell, that you have seen commit sin, and have never reproved, and now they are pouring curses on your head because you never warned them? And how can you meet them in judgment?

Some exceptions to the universal application of this law.

He that made the law has a right to admit of exceptions. And the rule is binding in all cases, unless they come within the exceptions. There are some exceptions to the rule before us, laid down in the Bible.

God says, "Rebuke not a scorner, lest he hate thee."

There is a state of mind, where a person is known to be a scorner, a despiser of religion, a hater of God, and has no regard to His law, and is not to be influenced by any fear or care for God, why should you reprove him? It will only provoke a quarrel without any good resulting to anybody. Therefore God makes such a character an exception to the rule.

Jesus Christ says, "Cast not your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again, and rend you."

Whatever else this passage means, it appears to me to mean this, that sometimes men are in such a state of mind that to talk to them about religion would be at once irrational and dangerous, like casting pearls before swine. They have such a contempt for religion, and such a stupid, sensual, swinish heart, that they will trample all your reproofs under their feet, and turn upon you in anger besides. It is lawful to let such men go on; and your not meddling with them will be greater wisdom than to attack them. But great charity should be used, not to suppose those of your neighbors to be swine, who do not deserve it, and who might be benefited by suitable reproof.

The manner in which this duty is to be performed.

It should be done always in the name of the Lord, for the honor of God, because He has broken His law. If, by your manner, you in any way make the impression on his mind that it is a personal

controversy, or done for any private motive with you, he will invariably rise up against you, and resist, and perhaps retort upon you. But if you make the impression on his mind that it is done in the name of God, and bring him right up before God as an offender, he will find it exceedingly difficult to get away from you without at least confessing that he is wrong.

Your relation to the person who has been guilty of sin, should be properly regarded.

If a child is going to reprove a parent, he should do it in a manner suited to the relation he stands in. If a man is going to reprove a magistrate, or if an individual is about to rebuke an elder, the apostle says it must be in that way, "entreat him as a father." This relation should enter deeply into the manner of administering reproof. The relation of parents and children, of husbands and wives, and brothers and sisters, should all be regarded. So the ages of the parties their relative circumstances in life. For servants to reprove their masters in the same manner as their equals is improper. This direction should never be overlooked or forgotten, for if it is, the good effects of reproof will be all lost. But remember, that no relations in life, or relative circumstances of the parties, take away the obligation of this duty. Whatever be the relation, you are to reprove sin, and are bound to do it in the name of the Lord. Do it, not as you are complaining or finding fault for a personal injury committed against yourself, but as a sin against God. Thus, when a child reproves a parent for sin, he is not to do it as if he was expostulating with him for any injury done to himself, but with an eye to the fact that the parent has sinned against God, and therefore, with all plainness, and faithfulness, and pungency that sin calls for.

If the individual is ignorant, reproof should be more in the form of instruction, rather than of severe rebuke. How do you do with your child? You instruct him and strive to enlighten his mind respecting his duty. You proceed, of course, very differently from what you would with a hardened sinner.

You would reprove a first offense in a very different manner from what you would use toward a habitual transgressor. If a person is accustomed to sin, and knows that it is wrong, you use more severity. If it is the first time, perhaps a mere allusion to it may be sufficient to prevent a repetition.

If he has not only often committed the sin, but been often reproved, and yet has hardened his neck, there is the greater necessity for using sharpness. The hardening influence of former reproofs resisted, shows that no common expostulations will take hold. He needs to have the terrors of the Lord poured upon him like a storm of hail.

Always show that your temper is not ruffled.

Never manifest any displeasure at the transgressor which he can possibly construe into personal displeasure at himself. It is often important to show your strong displeasure at what he is doing. Otherwise, he will think you are not in earnest. Suppose you reprove a man for murder, in a manner not expressing any abhorrence of his crime, you would not expect to produce an effect. The manner should be suited to the nature of the crime, yet so as to lead him to think you have any personal feeling. Here is the grand defect in the manner of reproofing crime, both in the pulpit and out of it.

For fear of giving offense, men do not express their abhorrence of the sin, and therefore transgressors are so seldom reclaimed.

Always reprove in the Spirit of God.

You should always have so much of the Holy Ghost with you, that when you reprove a man for sin, he will feel as if it came from God. I have known cases where reproof from a Christian in that state has cut the transgressor to the heart, and stung like the arrow of the Almighty, and he could not get rid of it till he repented.

There are many different ways of giving reproof so as to reach the individual reprovèd.

Sometimes it can be done best by sending a letter, especially if the person is at a distance. And there are cases where it can be done so, even in your own neighborhood. I know an individual who chose this way of reprimanding a sea captain for intemperance in crossing the Atlantic.

He accompanied it with much prayer to God. The captain read it, and it completely cured him; he made an apology to the individual, and never drank, another drop of anything stronger than coffee or tea on the whole passage.

If Christians would universally mark transgressors, and rebuke them that trample on the Sabbath, they would do more to put a stop to Sabbath breaking than by all other means. If Christians were united in this, how long do you suppose it would be before this sin would be put down? If only a few were faithful, and constant and persevering, they might do much. If only a few do it, and these only now and then, it might not have much effect. But I believe if all professors of religion were to do it, every grocery and grog shop, and oyster cellar, and fruit stand, would be shut up. At all events, they are bound to do it, whatever the result be; and so long as they neglect their duty, they are chargeable before God with all the Sabbath-breaking in the city. If all the churches and ecclesiastical bodies in the land were united to remonstrate with the government, and would continue to do it, firmly, and in the name of the Lord, do you suppose the government would continue to violate the Sabbath with their mail? I tell you no. The church can do things, I believe in one year, if all were united throughout the country, and could speak out fully in the fear of God, and without any fear of man. No man who ever expected to be elected to office again, would ever again advise the breaking of the Sabbath. But now, while the Church is divided, and not half in earnest, and there are so few to speak out, the government despises them, and pays no attention.

Suppose every man in this city who sells rum was continually subject to the rebukes which God requires; suppose every man who passed by were to reprove him for his sin; how long could he sell rum? If only the church were to do it; if that deacon and that elder would do it, and every Christian would follow him with rebukes in the name of the Lord for poisoning men to death with rum, he could not go on and do it. Such a strong and decided testimony would soon drive him from his trade of death. In self-defense he would have to yield to the pressure of solemn rebuke.

It is often asked, Is it a duty to reprove my neighbor when there is no prospect of doing good?

I answer it may be very essential to reprove sin in many cases where there is no prospect that the individual whom you reprove will be benefited. As in cases where your silence would be taken for connivance in his sin. Or where the very fact of his being reproved may prevent others from falling into the like crime. Where the offender comes properly under the description of a scorner or a swine, there God has made an exception, and you are not bound to reprove. But in other cases, duty is yours, consequences God's.

It is asked, Should I reprove strangers? Why not? Is not the stranger your neighbor? You are not to reprove a stranger in the same way that you would a familiar acquaintance; but the fact of his being a stranger is not a reason why he should not be reproved, if he breaks the command of God. If a man swear profanely, or break the Sabbath, in your presence, his being a stranger does not excuse you from the duty and responsibility of administering reproof, or trying to bring him to repentance and save his soul.

It is asked, Should we reprove a person when he is drunk? Generally not, for when a person is drunk, he is deranged. There may be cases where it is proper, for the purpose of warning others. But so far as the drunkard himself is concerned, as a general rule, it is not expedient. Yet there are many cases where reproof of a man even when drunk, has taken such a hold on his mind as to sober him, and turn him from his beastly sin.

Shall we reprove great men and those who are above us in society and who may look down on us and our reproofs with contempt? That does not alter your duty. "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not bear sin for him." You should bear in mind the relation in which he stands, and treat him accordingly. But still, if he sins against God, it is your duty to reprove him in an appropriate manner.

Do not talk about people's sins, but go and reprove them. It is very common to talk about people's sins behind their backs, but this is great wickedness. If you want to talk about any person's sins, go and talk to him about them, and try to get him to repent and forsake them. Do not go and talk to others against him behind his back, and leave him to go on in his sins, unwarned, to hell.

We see that the great mass of the professors of religion have more regard to their own reputation than to the requirements of God.

The proof is, that sooner than run the risk of being called censorious, or of getting enemies by rebuking sin, they will let men go on in sin unrebuked, notwithstanding God says, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor." But I shall offend him if I reprove his sin. "In any wise rebuke him," says Jehovah. It shows that they have a greater fear of men than of God. For fear of offending man they run the risk of offending God. Yes, they absolutely disobey God, in one of His plainest and strongest commandments, rather than incur the displeasure of men by rebuking their sins.

We see the importance of a consistency in religion.

If a man professes to love God, he ought to have consistency enough to reprove those that oppose God. If Christians were only consistent in this duty, many would be converted by it, a right public

sentiment would be formed and sin would be rebuked and forced to retire before the majesty of Christian rebuke. If Christians were not such plain cowards, and absolutely disobedient to this plain command of God, one thing would certainly come of it either they would be murdered in the streets as martyrs, because men could not bear the intolerable presence of truth, or they would be speedily converted to God.

What shall we say, then, to such professors of religion? Afraid to reprove sinners! When God commands, not prepared to obey? How will they answer it to God?

Now, beloved, will you practice this duty? Will you reprove sin faithfully, so as not to bear sin for your neighbors? Will you make your whole life a testimony against sin? Will you clear your souls, or will you hold your peace and be weighed down with the guilt of all the transgressors around you and within the sphere of your influence? God says, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not bear sin for him."



LECTURES TO PROFESSING  
CHRISTIANS

By  
Charles G. Finney

**LECTURE 3**  
**DOUBTFUL ACTIONS ARE SINFUL**

"He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23).

A man may have equal doubts whether he is bound to do a thing or not. Then all that can be said is, that he must act according to the best light he can get. But where he doubts the lawfulness of the act, but has no cause to doubt the lawfulness of the omission, and yet does it, he sins and is condemned before God, and must repent or be damned.

One reason why an individual is condemned if he does that of which he doubts the lawfulness, is -- that if God so far enlightens his mind as to make him doubt the lawfulness of an act, he is bound to stop there and examine the question and settle it to his satisfaction.

To illustrate this: suppose your child is desirous of doing a certain thing, or suppose he is invited by his companions to go somewhere, and he doubts whether you would be willing, do you not see that it is his duty to ask you? If one of his schoolmates invites him home, and he doubts whether you would like it, and yet goes, is not this palpably wrong?

For a man to do a thing when he doubts whether it is lawful -- shows that he is selfish, and has other objects besides doing the will of God.

It shows that he wants to do it to gratify himself. He doubts whether God will approve of it, and yet he does it. Is he not a rebel? If he honestly wished to serve God, when he doubted, he would stop and inquire and examine until he was satisfied. But to go forward while he is in doubt, shows that he is selfish and wicked, and is willing to do it whether God is pleased or not, and that he wants to do it, whether it is right or wrong. He does it because he wants to do it, and not because it is right.

Where a man doubts honestly, whether it is lawful to do a thing, and doubts equally, on the other hand whether it is lawful to omit doing it, he must pray over the matter, and search the Scriptures, and get the best light he can on the subject, and then act. And when he does this, he is by no means to be judged or censured by others for the course he takes. "Who art thou that thou judgest another man's servant?" And no man is authorized to make his own conscience the rule of his neighbor's conduct.

So where an individual is engaged in an employment that requires him to break the Sabbath.

As for instance, attending on a post office that is opened on the Sabbath, or a turnpike gate, or in a steamboat, or any other employment that is not work of necessity. There are always some things that must be done on the Sabbath, they are works of absolute necessity or of mercy.

But suppose a case in which the labor is not necessary, as in the transportation of the mail on the Sabbath, or the like. The least that can be said, the lowest ground that can be taken by charity itself without turning fool, is, that the lawfulness of such employment is doubtful. And if they persist in doing it they sin, and are on the way to hell. God has sent out the penalty of His law against them and if they do not repent they must be damned.

Owning stock in steamboats, and railroad companies, in stages, canal boats, etc., that break the Sabbath.

Can any such owner truly say he does not doubt the lawfulness of such an investment of capital? Can charity stoop lower than to say, that man must work of necessity or mercy? It is not necessary in the case to demonstrate that it is unlawful -- though that can be done fully, but only to show so much light as to create a doubt of its lawfulness. Then if he persists in doing it, with that doubt unsatisfied, he is condemned -- and lost.

Tobacco. Can any man pretend that he has no doubt that it is agreeable to the will of God for him to use tobacco? No man can pretend that he doubts the lawfulness of his omission of these things. Does any man living think that he is bound in duty to make use of wine, or strong beer, or tobacco, as luxury? No. The doubt is all on one side. That shall we say, then of that man who doubts the lawfulness of it, and still fills his face with the poisonous weed? He is condemned.

I might refer to tea and coffee for it is known generally, that these substances are not nutritious at all and that nearly \$100,000,000 are spent annually for them in this country. Now, will any man pretend that he does not doubt the lawfulness of spending all this money for that which is of no use, and which are well known to all who have examined the subject, to be positively injurious, intolerable to weak stomachs, and as much as the strongest can dispose of? And all this while the various benevolent societies of the age are loudly calling for help to send the gospel abroad and save the world from hell? To think of the church alone spending millions upon their tea tables -- is there no doubt there?

Parties of pleasure, where they go and eat and drink to surfeiting. Is there no reason to doubt whether that is such a use of time and money as God requires? Look at the starving poor, and consider the effects of this gaiety and extravagance, and see if you will ever go to another such party or make one, without doubting its lawfulness. Where can you find a man, or a woman, who will go so far as to say they have no doubt? Probably there is not one honest mind who will say this. And if you do not, and still do it, you are condemned.

You see that this principle touches a whole class of things, about which there is controversy, and where people attempt to parry off by saying it is not worse than to do so and so, and thus get away from the condemning sentence of God's law. But in fact if there is a doubt, it is their duty to abstain.

Take the case of balls, of novel reading, and other methods of wasting time. Is this God's way to spend your life? Can you say you have no doubt of it?

Making calls on the Sabbath. People will make a call, and then make an apology about it. "I did not know that it was quite right, but I thought I would venture it." He is a Sabbath breaker, in heart, at all events, because he doubts.

Compliance with the extravagant fashions of the day.

Christian lady! have you never doubted, do you not now doubt, whether it be lawful for you to copy these fashions, brought from foreign countries, and from places which it were a shame even to name in this assembly? Have you no doubt about it? And if you doubt and do it, you are condemned, and must repent of your sin, or you will be lost forever.

Intermarriage of Christians with impenitent sinners.

This answer always comes up, "But, after all you say, it is not certain that these marriages are not lawful." Supposing it to be so, yet does not the Bible and the nature of the case make it at least doubtful whether they are right? It can be demonstrated indeed, to be unlawful. But suppose it could not be reduced to demonstration; what Christian ever did it and did not doubt whether it was lawful? And he that doubteth is condemned. So that Christian man or woman that is about forming such a connection -- doubting all the way whether it be right: trying to pray down conscience under pretext of praying for light; praying all around your duty, and yet pressing on. Take care! -- you know you doubt the lawfulness of what you propose and remember that "he that doubteth is damned."

If those are condemned, and adjudged worthy of damnation, who do that of which they doubt the lawfulness, what shall we say of the multitudes who are doing continually that which they know and confess to be wrong?

Woe to the man who practices that which he condemns. And "happy" is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth."

Hypocrites often attempt to shelter themselves behind their doubts to get clear of their duty.

The hypocrite is unwilling to be enlightened. He does not wish to know the truth because he does not wish to obey the Lord, and so he hides behind his doubts, and turns away his eyes from the light, and will not look or examine to see what his duty is, and in this way he tries to shield himself from his responsibility. But God will drag him out from behind his refuge of lies.

It cannot be pretended that love of God is the cause of all this following of fashions, this practicing indulgences and other things of which people doubt the lawfulness. They do not persist in these things because they love God so well. No, no, but they persist in it because they wish to do it, to gratify themselves, and they had rather run the risk of doing wrong than to have their doubts cleared up. It is because they have so little love for God, so little care for the honor of God.

Do not say, in your prayers, "O Lord, if I have sinned in this thing, O Lord, forgive me the sin."

If you have done that of which you doubted the lawfulness, you have sinned, whether the thing itself be right or wrong. And you must repent and ask forgiveness.

And now, let me ask you all who are here present, are you convinced that to do what you doubt the lawfulness of, is sin? If you are, I have one more question to ask you. Will you from this time relinquish everything of which you doubt the lawfulness? Every amusement, every indulgence, every practice, every pursuit? Will you do it, or will you stand before the solemn judgment seat of Jesus Christ condemned? If you will not relinquish these things, you show that you are an impenitent sinner, and do not intend to obey God, and if you do not repent you bring upon your head, God's condemnation and wrath forever.

LECTURES TO PROFESSING  
CHRISTIANS

By  
Charles G. Finney

**LECTURE 4**  
**CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD**

"Be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2).

You are by no means to act on the same principles, nor from the same motives, nor pursue your objects in the same manner that the world does, either in the pursuits of business or of fashion, or of politics. I shall examine, these several departments separately.

First -- **OF BUSINESS.**

The first reason why we are not to be conformed to this world in business is, that the principle of the world is that of supreme selfishness.

The whole system recognizes only the love of self. Go through all the ranks of business men, from the man who sells candy on the sidewalk at the corner of the street, to the greatest wholesale merchant or importer in the United States, and you will find that one maxim runs through the whole, to "buy as cheap as you can, and sell as dear as you can, to look out for number one, and do always, as far as the rules of honesty will allow all that will advance your own interests, let what will become of the interest of others."

It is no more certain, that any infidel, or any profligate wretch will go to hell, than that all such professing Christians will go there, who conform to the world. They have double guilt. They are sworn, before God to a different course, and when they pursue the business principles of the world, they show that they are perjured wretches.

Show me a young convert, while his heart is warm and the love of God glows out from his lips. What does he care, about the world? Call up his attention, to it, point him to its riches, pleasures, or its honors and try to engage him in their pursuit, and he loathes the thought. But let him now go into business and do business on the principles, of the world, one year, and you no longer find the love of God glowing in his heart, and his religion has become the religion of conscience, dry, meager, uninfluential -- anything but the glowing love of God, moving him to acts of benevolence.

This conformity to the world in business is one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of the conversion of sinners.

What do wicked men think, when they see professing Christians, with such professions on the lips, and pretending to believe what the Bible teaches, and yet driving after the world, as eager as anybody, making the best bargains and dealing as hard as the most worldly?

What do you think? I can tell you what they say? They say, "I do not see but these Christians do just as the rest of us do; they act on the same principles, look out as sharp for number one and drive as hard bargains, and get as high interest as anybody."

If professing Christians act on the same principles with worldly men, as the Lord liveth, they shall have the same reward. They are set down in God's book of remembrance as black hypocrites, pretending to be the friends of God while they love the world. For whoso loveth the world is the enemy of God.

Secondly -- **OF FASHIONS.**

Why are Christians required not to follow the fashions of the world?

Because it is directly at war with the spirit of the gospel, and is minding earthly things.

What is minding earthly things, if it is not to follow the fashions of the world, that like a tide are continually setting to and fro, and fluctuating in their forms, and keeping the world continually changing?

You often see professors of religion go to the extreme of fashion. Nothing will satisfy them that is not in the height of fashion. And a Christian female dressmaker who is conscientiously opposed to the following of fashions, cannot get her bread. She cannot get employment even among professing Christian ladies, unless she follows the fashions in all their countless changes. God knows it is so, and they must give up their business if their conscience will not permit them to follow the changes of fashion.

All this waste of money and time and thought, all this feeding and cherishing of vanity and the love of applause, the church sets its seal to, when she conforms to the world.

Nay, further, another reason is that following the fashions of the world professing Christians show that they do in fact love the world.

They show it by their conduct, just as the ungodly show it by the same conduct. As they act alike they give evidence that they are actuated by one principle, the love of fashion.

Conforming to the worldly fashion, you show that you do not hold yourself accountable to God for the manner in which you lay out money.

You practically disown your stewardship of the money that is in your possession. By laying out money to gratify your own vanity, and lust, you take off the keen edge of that truth, which ought to cut that sinner in two, who is living to himself.

Now suppose a person loved God, and the souls of men, and the kingdom of Christ, does he need any express prohibition from God to prevent him from spending his money and his life in following

the fashion? No, indeed, he will rather need a positive injunction to take what is needful for his own comfort and the support of his own life.

What does the gaudy ribbon, and those ornaments upon your dress say to everyone who meets you? It makes the impression that you wish to be thought pretty. Take care! You might just as well write on your clothes: "No truth in religion." It says, "Give me dress, give me fashion, give me flattery and I am happy." The world understands this testimony as you walk down the streets.

You are living epistles "known and read of all men." Only let Christians, act consistently and heaven will rejoice and hell will groan at their influence. But, O, let them fill their ears with ornaments and their fingers with rings let them put feathers in their hats, and clasps upon their arms, and heaven puts on the robes of mourning and hell holds a jubilee.

Christian parents are bound to refrain from putting ornaments on the dress of their children as much as on their own clothing. Those who indulge their children in superfluous ornaments commit the double sin of doing wrong themselves and teaching their children to do what God has positively forbidden.

You tempt the church to follow the fashions.

Where the principal members, the elders, and leaders in the church, and their wives and families, are worldly in appearance, they drag the whole church along with them, and every one apes them as far as they can, down to the lowest servant. Only let a rich Christian lady come out to the house of God in full fashion, and the whole church are set agog to follow as far as they can, and it is a chance if they do not run in debt to do it.

Objection: "Is it best for Christians to be singular?"

Certainly; Christians are bound to be singular. They are called to be a peculiar people, that is, singular people, essentially different from the rest of mankind. To maintain that we are not to be singular, is the same as to maintain that we are to be conformed to the world. "Be not singular," that is to be like the world. In other words, "Be ye conformed to the world." This is the direct opposite to the command in the text.

But the question now regards fashion, in dress, equipage and so on. And here I will confess that I was formerly myself in error. I believed, and taught, that the best way for Christians to pursue, was to dress so as not to be noticed, to follow fashions and changes so as not to appear singular, and that nobody would be led to think of their being different from others in these particulars. But I have seen my error, and now wonder greatly at my former blindness. It is your duty to dress so plain as to show to the world, that you place no sort of reliance in the things of fashion, and set no value at all on them, but despise and neglect them altogether. But unless you are singular, unless you separate yourselves from the fashions of the world, you show plainly that you do value them. There is no way in which you can bear a proper testimony by your lives against the fashions of the world, but by dressing plain. I do not mean that you should study singularity, but that you should consult convenience and economy, although it may be singular.

Objection: "But if we dress plain, the attention of people will be taken with it."

The reason of it is this, so few do it that it is a novelty, and everybody stares when they see a professing Christian so strict as to disregard the fashions. Let them all do it, and the only thing you show by it is that you are a Christian, and do not wish to be confounded with the ungodly. Would it not tell on the pride of the world, if all the Christians in it were united in bearing a practical testimony against its vain show?

Objection: "what is the standard of dress? I do not see the use of all your preaching, and laying down rules about dress, unless you give us a standard."

This is a mighty stumbling block to many. But to my mind the matter is extremely simple. The whole can be comprised in two simple rules. One is: be sure, in all your equipage, and dress, and furniture, to show that you have no fellowship with the designs and principles of those who are aiming to set off themselves, and to gain the applause of men. The other is: Let economy be first consulted, and then convenience. Follow Christian economy; that is, save all you can for Christ's service; and then, let things be as convenient as Christian economy will admit.

Objection: "We may be proud of a plain dress as well as of a fashionable dress. The Quakers are as proud as we are."

So many any good thing be abused. But that is no reason why it should not be used, if it can be shown to be good. I put it back to the objector: is that any reason why a Christian female, who fears God, and loves the souls of men, should neglect the means which may make an impression that she is separated from the world, and pour contempt on the fashions of the ungodly, in which they are dancing their way to hell?

You profess that you want to have sinners converted. But what avails it, if they sink right back again into conformity with the world?

Oh, if I had strength of body to go through the churches again, instead of preaching to convert sinners, I would preach to bring up the churches to the gospel standard of holy living. Of what use is it to convert sinners, and make them feel that there is something in religion, and when they go to trade with you, or meet you in the street, have you contradict it all, and tell them by your conformity to the world, that there is nothing in it?

Thirdly -- **IN POLITICS.**

I will show why professing Christians are required not to be conformed to the world in politics.

Because the politics of the world are perfectly dishonest.

Who does not know this? Who does not know that it is the proposed policy of every party to cover up the defects of their own candidate, and the good qualities of the opposing candidate. And is not this dishonest?



By falling in with the world in politics, Christians are guilty of setting up rulers over them by their own vote, who do not fear nor love God, and who set the law of God at defiance, break the Sabbath, and gamble, and commit adultery, and fight duels, and swear profanely, and leave the laws unexecuted at their pleasure, and that care not for the weal or woe of their country, so long as they can keep their office.

I would by no means be understood to say that Christians should refuse to vote and to exercise their lawful influence in public affairs. But they ought not to follow a party.

Christians ought to cease from conformity to the world in politics, from the influence which such a course would have on the world.

Suppose Christians were to act perfectly conscientious and consistent in this matter, and to say, "We will not vote for any man to office, unless he fears God, and will rule the people in righteousness." Ungodly men would not set men as candidates, who themselves set the laws at defiance. No. Every candidate would be obliged to show that he was prepared to act from higher motives.

Now, do you believe that God commands you not to be conformed to the world? Do you believe it? And dare you obey it, let people say what they will about you? Dare you now separate yourselves from the world, and never again be conformed by its maxims, and never copy again its practices, and never again be whiffled here and there by its fashions?

Will you do so? Will you break off from the world now, and enter into covenant with God, and declare that you will dare to be singular enough to be separate from the world, and from this time set your faces as a flint to obey God, let the world say what they will? Dare you do it? Will you do it?

LECTURES TO PROFESSING  
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**LECTURE 5**  
**DISHONESTY IN SMALL MATTERS**  
**INCONSISTENT WITH HONESTY IN ANYTHING**

"He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10).

If a man is dishonest in small matters, it shows that he is not governed by principle in anything. It is therefore certain that it is not real honesty of heart which leads him to act right in greater things. He must have other motives than honesty of heart, if he appears to act honestly in larger things, while he acts dishonestly in small matters.

If he was actuated by a supreme regard to the authority of God, and if this was the habitual state of his mind, such a state of mind would be quite as apt to manifest itself in smaller matters as in large. Nay, where the temptation is small, he would be more certain to act conscientiously than in greater matters, because there is less to induce him to act otherwise. What is honesty? If a man has no other motives for acting honestly than mere selfishness, the devil is as honest as he is; for I dare say he is honest with his fellow devils, as far as it is for his interest or policy to be so. Is that honesty? Certainly not. And, therefore, if a man does not act honestly from higher motives than this, he is not honest at all, and if he appears to be honest in certain important matters, he has other motives than regard to the honor of God.

It is certain that, if an individual is dishonest in small matters, he is not actuated by love to God. If he was actuated by love to God, he would feel that dishonesty in small matters is just as inconsistent as in great. It is as real a violation of the law of God and one who truly loves God would no more act dishonestly in one than in the other.

The Lord Jesus Christ has laid down the principle, that if a man is dishonest in small matters, he is not strictly honest at all. Now, here are facts, which to many appear to contradict this. We see many men that in small matters exhibit a great want of principle, and appear to be quite void of principle, which in larger things they appear to be honorable and even pious. This must be consistent, or even Christ has affirmed a falsehood. That it is consistent with truth will be admitted, if we can show that the conduct in regard to larger matters can be accounted for on other principles than honesty of heart. If we can account for it on principles of mere selfishness it will be admitted, that where a man is dishonest in small things, he is not really honest at all, however honestly he may act in regard to larger matters.

They may act honestly in larger matters for fear of disgrace.

They may know that certain small things are not likely to be mentioned in public, or to have a noise made about them, and so they may do such things, while the fear of disgrace deters them from

doing the same things in regard to larger matters, because it will make a noise. What is this but one form of selfishness overbalancing another form? It is selfishness, not honesty.

He may suppose it will injure his business, if he is guilty of dishonesty with men of business, and so he deals honestly in important matters, while in little things he is ready to take any advantage he can, that will not injure his business. Thus a man will take advantage of a seamstress, and pay her a little less than he knows it is really worth for making a garment, while the same individual, in buying a bale of goods, would not think of showing a disposition to cheat, because it would injure his business. In dealing with an abused and humble individual, he can gripe and screw out a few cents without fear of public disgrace, while he would not for any consideration do an act which would be publicly spoken of as disreputable and base.

Fear of human law may influence a man to act honestly in such things as are likely to be taken up, while in such small matters as the law is not likely to notice, he will defraud or take advantage.

The love of praise influences many to act honestly and honorably, and even piously, in matters that are likely to be noticed. Many a man will defraud a poor person out of a few cents in the price of labor, and then, in some great matter on a public occasion, appear to act with great liberality. What is the reason, that individuals who habitually screw down their servants, and seamstresses, and other people that they employ, to the lowest penny, and take all the advantage they can of such people will then, if a severe winter comes, send out cart loads of fuel to the poor, or give large sums of money to the committees? You see that it is for the love of praise, and not for the love of God nor the love of man.

The fear of God. He may be afraid of the divine wrath, if he commits dishonest acts of importance, while he supposes God will overlook little things, and not notice it if he is dishonest in such small matters.

He may restrain his dishonest propensities from mere self-righteousness, and act honestly in great things, for the sake of bolstering up his own good opinion of himself, while in little things he will cheat and play the knave.

I said in the beginning, that I did not mean that if a man would take small advantages, he would certainly never act with apparent uprightness. It often comes to pass, that individuals who act with great meanness and dishonesty in small affairs, will act uprightly and honorably, on the ground that their character and interest are at stake. Many a man, who among merchants is looked upon as an honorable dealer, is well known by those who are more intimately acquainted with him, to be mean and knavish and overreaching in smaller matters, or in his dealings with more humble and more dependent individuals. It is plain that it is not real honesty of heart which makes him act with apparent honesty in his more public transactions.

An individual who will defraud the United States treasury of eighteen cents in postage, has none too much principle to rob the treasury, if he had the same prospect of impunity. The same principle that allowed him to do the one, would allow him to do the other. And the same motive that led him

to do the one, would lead him to do the other if he had an opportunity, and if it were not counteracted by some other motive equally selfish.

A man may, in like manner, be guilty of little misrepresentations, who would not dare to tell a downright lie. Yet if he is guilty of coloring the truth, and misrepresenting facts, with a design to deceive, or to make facts appear otherwise than they really are, he is really lying, and the individual who will do this would manufacture ever so many lies, if it was for his interest, or were he not restrained by other reasons than a sacred regard to truth.

I will mention some instances, where persons are dishonest in small matters, while they appear to act honestly and even piously in regard to matters of greater importance.

For instance, there is a man takes a newspaper; the price is only a small sum, and the publisher cannot send a collector to every individual, so this man lets his subscription lie along perhaps for years, and perhaps never pays it. The same individual, if it had been a note at the bank, would have been punctual enough; and no pains would have been spared, rather than let the note run beyond the day. Why? Because, if he does not pay his note in the bank, it will be protested, and his credit will be injured, but the little debt of twenty shillings or five dollars will not be protested, and he knows it, and so he lets it go by, and the publisher has to be at the trouble and expense of sending for it, or go without his money. How manifest it is that this man does not pay his notes at the bank from honesty of principle, but purely from a regard to his own credit and interest.

I have before referred to the case of seamstresses. Suppose an individual employs women to sew for him, and for the sake of underselling others in the same trade, he beats down these women below the just price of such work. It is manifest that the individual is not honest in anything. If, for the sake of making more profits, or of underselling, he will beat down these women, suppose he is honorable and prompt in his public transactions -- no thanks to him, it is not because he is honest in his heart, but because it is his interest to seem so.

Some manifest this want of principle by committing petty thefts. If they live at a boarding house, where they are boarders, they will commit petty thefts perhaps for fuel in the cellar. An individual will be at the expense of getting a little charcoal for himself, to kindle his fire in the morning, but gets along by pilfering from the stores laid in by others, a handful at a time. Now the individual that will do that, shows himself to be radically rotten at heart.

A case came to my knowledge of this kind. An individual was sitting in a room, where a gentleman had on the table for some purpose a tumbler of wine and a pitcher of water. The gentleman had occasion to go out of the room a moment but accidentally left the door ajar, and while he was out, looking back he saw this individual drink a part of the wine in the tumbler, and then, to conceal it, fill up the tumbler with water, and take his seat. Now the individual who did that showed that he loved wine, and that he was none too good to steal; he showed, that so far as principle was concerned, he would get drunk if he had the means, and steal if he had a chance; in fact, at heart, he was both a drunkard and a thief.

Individuals often manifest great dishonesty when they find articles that have been lost, especially articles of small value. One will find a penknife, perhaps, or a pencil case, and never make the least inquiry, even among those he has reason to believe were the losers. Now, the man that would find a penknife, and keep it without making inquiry, when there was an prospect of finding the owner, so far as principle, is concerned, would keep a pocketbook full of bank notes, if he should find it, and have a equal chance of concealment. And yet this same individual, if he should find a pocketbook with five thousand dollars in it, would advertise it in the newspapers, and make a great noise, and profess to be wonderfully honest. But what is his motive? He knows that the five thousand dollars will be inquired about, and if he is discovered to have concealed it, he shall be ruined. Fine honesty, this!

Many individuals conceal little mistakes that are made in their favor, in reckoning, or giving change. If an individual would keep still, say nothing, and let it pass, when such a mistake is made in his favor it is manifest that nothing but want of opportunity and impunity would prevent him from taking any advantage whatever, or overreaching to any extent.

Frauds on the post office are of the same class.

Who does not know that there is a great deal of dishonesty practiced here? Some seem to think there is no dishonesty in cheating the government out of a little postage. Postmasters will open letters they have no right to. Many will open letters not only for their families but for their neighbors, all directly contrary to law, and a fraud upon the post office. The man that will do that is not honest. What would such a man do, if he had the same prospect of impunity in other frauds, that he has in this?

Smuggling is a common form of petty dishonesty. How many a man will contrive to smuggle little articles in his trunk when he comes from England, that he knows he ought to pay duty at the custom house, and he thinks but little of it, because the sum is so small; whereas, the smaller the sum the more clearly the principle developed. Because the temptation is so small, it shows how weak is the man's principle of honesty, that can be overcome by such a trifle. The man that would do this, if he had the same opportunity, would smuggle a cargo. If, for so little, he would lose sight of his integrity, and do a dishonest act, he is not too good to rob the treasury.

The real state of a man's heart is often more manifested in smaller matters than in business of greater moment.

For instance, suppose you are an eye servant. You are employed in the service of another, and you do not mind being idle at times, for a short time in the absence of your employer. Or you slight your work when not under the eye of your employer, as you would not if he was present. The man who will do this is totally dishonest, and not to be trusted in anything, and very likely would take money from his employer's pocketbook, if it were not for fear of detection or some other equally selfish motive. Such a person is not to be trusted at all, except in circumstances where it is his interest to be honest.

Mechanics that slight their work when it will not be seen or known by their employer are rotten at heart, and not to be trusted at all, any farther than you can make it for their interest to be honest.

Persons who will knowingly misstate facts in conversation, would bear false witness in court under oath, if favored with opportunity and impunity. They never tell the truth at all because it is truth, or from the love of truth. Let no such men be trusted.

Those who are unchaste in conversation would be unchaste in conduct, if they had opportunity and impunity. Spurn the man or woman who will be impure in speech, even among their own sex; they have no principle at all, and are not to be trusted on the ground of their principles. If persons are chaste from principles, they will no more indulge in unclean conversation than unclean actions. They will abhor even the garment spotted with the flesh.

The individual who will indulge in any one sin does not abstain from any sin because it is sin.

If he hated sin, and was opposed to sin because it is sin, he would no more indulge in one sin than another. If a person goes to pick and choose among sins, avoiding some and practicing others, it is certain that it is not because he regards the authority of God, or hates sin that he abstains from any sin whatever.

Those individuals who will not abandon all intoxicating drinks for the purpose of promoting temperance never gave up ardent spirits for the sake of promoting temperance.

It is manifest that they gave up ardent spirits from some other consideration than a regard to the temperance cause. If that had been their object, they would give up alcohol in all its forms, and when they find that there is alcohol in wine, and beer, and cider, they would give them up of course. Why not?

The man that will not practice self-denial in little things to promote religion would not endure persecution for the sake of promoting religion.

Those who will not deny their appetite would not endure the scourge and the stake. Perhaps, if persecution were to arise, some might endure it for the sake of the applause it would bring, or to show their spirit, and to face opposition. There is a natural spirit of obstinacy, which is often roused by opposition, would go to the stake rather than yield a point. But it is easily seen, that it is not true love to the cause which prompts a man to endure opposition, if he will not endure self-denial in little things for the sake of the cause.

Little circumstances often discover the state of the heart.

The individual that we find delinquent in small matters, we of course infer would be much more so in larger affairs, if circumstances were favorable.

Where you find persons wearing little ornaments, set them down as rotten at heart. If they could, they would go all lengths in display, if they were not restrained by some other considerations than

a regard to the authority of God and the honor of religion. You may see this every day in the street. Men walking with their cloaks carefully thrown over their shoulders so as to show the velvet; and women with their feathers tossing in the air. It is astonishing at how many ways there are in which these little things show their pride and rottenness of heart.

You say these are little things. I know they are little things, and because they are little things, mention them. It is because they are little things that they show the character so clearly. If their pride were not deeply rooted, they would not show in little things. If a man had it put into his power to live in a palace, with everything corresponding, it would be no wonder if he would give way to the temptation. But when his vanity shows itself in little things, he gives full evidence that it has possession of his soul.

How important it is for you to see this, and to keep a watch over these little things, so as to see what you are, and to know your characters, as they appear in the sight of God.

How important to cultivate the strictest integrity, such as will carry itself out in small things as well as in large. There is something so beautiful, when you see an individual acting in little things with the same careful and conscientious uprightness as a master of the greatest moment. Until professors of religion will cultivate this universal honesty, they will always be a reproach to religion.

Oh, how much would be gained, if professors of religion would evince that entire purity and honesty on all occasions and to all persons, and do what is just right, so as to commend religion to the ungodly. How often do sinners fix their eye on some petty delinquencies of professors of religion, and look with amazement at such things in persons who profess the fear of God. With an everlasting reproach to religion, that so many of its professors are guilty of these little, mean, paltry knaveries. The wicked have cause enough to see that such professors cannot have any principle of honesty, and that such religion as they exhibit is good for nothing, and is not worth having.

Of what use is it for a woman to talk to her impenitent servant about religion, when her servant knows that she will not hesitate to overreach, and screw down, and cheat, in petty things? Or for that merchant to talk to his clerks, who know that, however honorable he may be in his greater and more public transactions, he is mean and knavish in little things? It is worse than useless.

# LECTURES TO PROFESSING CHRISTIANS

By  
Charles G. Finney

## LECTURE 6 FALSE PROFESSORS

"They feared the Lord, and served their own gods" (2 Kings 17:33).

There are, as you know, two kinds of fear. There is that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, which is founded on love. There is also a slavish fear, which is a mere dread of evil, and is purely selfish. This is the kind of fear which is possessed by those people spoken of in the text. They were afraid Jehovah would send His judgment upon them, if they did not perform a certain rites and this was the motive they had for paying Him worship.

Who are they who, while they profess to fear the Lord, serve their own gods?

I answer, first, all those of you who have not heartily and practically renounced the ownership of your possessions, and given them up to God.

So when a man has not renounced the ownership of himself, not only in thought, but practically, he has not taken the first lesson in religion. He is not serving the Lord, but serving his own gods.

But again; Those of you who are serving your own gods, who devote to Jehovah that which costs you little or nothing.

There are many who make religion consist in certain acts of piety that do not interfere with their selfishness. You pray in the morning in your family, because you can do it then very conveniently, but do not suffer the service of Jehovah to interfere with the service of your gods, or to stand in the way of your getting rich, or enjoying the world. The gods you serve make no complaint of being slighted or neglected for the service of Jehovah.

Those are serving their own gods, who give their time and money, when they do give, grudgingly, by constraint and not of a ready mind, and with a cheerful heart.

What would you think of your servant, if you had to dun or drive him all the time, to do anything for your interest? Would you not say he was an eye servant? How many people there are, who when they do anything on account of religion, do it grudgingly. If they do anything, it comes hard. If you go to one of these characters, and want his time or his money for any religious object it is difficult to get him engaged. It seems to go across the grain and is not easy or natural. It is plain he does not consider the interests of Christ's kingdom the same with his own. He may make a show of fearing the Lord, but he "serves" some other gods of his own.



Those who are making it their object to accumulate so much property that they can retire from business and live at ease, are serving their own gods.

There are many persons who profess to be the servants of God, but are eagerly engaged in gathering property, and calculating to retire to the country seat by and by, and live at their ease. What do you mean? Has God given you a right to a perpetual Sabbath, as soon as you have made so much money? Did God tell you, when you professed to enter His service, to work hard so many years, and then you might have a perpetual holiday? Did He promise to excuse you after that from making the most of your time and talents, and let you live at ease the rest of your days? If your thoughts are set upon this notion, I can tell you, you are not serving God, but your own selfishness and sloth.

Those persons are serving their own gods who would sooner gratify their appetites than deny themselves things that are unnecessary, or even hurtful for the sake of doing good.

You find persons that greatly love things that do them no good, and others even form an artificial appetite for a thing positive loathsome, and after it they will go, and no arguments will prevail upon them to abandon it for the sake of doing good. Certainly not. Will they sacrifice their lives for the kingdom of God? Why you cannot make them even give up a quid of tobacco! A weed that is injurious to health and loathsome to society; they cannot give it up, were it to save a soul from death!

Who does not see that selfishness predominates in such persons? It shows the astonishing strength of selfishness. You often see the strength of selfishness showing itself in some such little things more than in things that are greater.

Those persons who are most readily moved to action by appeals to their own selfish interests, show that they are serving their own gods.

You see that motives influences such a man. Suppose I wish to get him to subscribe for building a church, what must I urge? Why, I must show how it will improve the value of his property, or advance his party, or gratify his selfishness in some other way. If he is more excited by these motives, than he is by a desire to save perishing souls and advance the kingdom of Christ, you see that he has never given himself up to serve the Lord. He is still serving himself. He is more influenced by his selfish interests than by all those benevolent principles on which all religion turns. The character of a true servant of God is right opposite to this.

Propose a plan of doing good that will cost nothing and they will all go for it. But propose a plan which is going to affect their personal interest to cost money, or take up time in a busy season, and you will see they begin to divide. Some hesitate; some doubt; some raise objections; and some resolutely refuse. Some enlist at once, because they see it will do great good. Others stand back till you devise some means to excite their selfishness in its favor. What causes the difference? Some of them are serving their own gods.

When you can talk early and late about the news and other worldly topics, and when you cannot possibly be interested in the subject of religion, you know that your heart is not in it; and if you pretend to be a servant of God, you are a hypocrite.

When persons are more jealous for their own fame than for God's glory, it shows that they live for themselves, and serve their own gods.

You see a man more vexed or grieved by what is said against him than against God; whom does he serve? -- Who is his God, himself or Jehovah? There is a minister thrown into a fever because somebody has said a word derogatory to his scholarship or his dignity, or his infallibility, while he is cool as ice at all the indignities thrown upon the blessed God. Is that man a follower of Paul, willing to be considered a fool for the cause of Christ? Did that man ever take the first lesson in religion? If he had, he would rejoice to have his name cast out as evil for the cause of religion. No, he is not serving God; he is serving his own gods.

Those who seek for happiness in religion, rather than for usefulness, are serving their own gods.

Their religion is entirely selfish. They want to enjoy religion, and are all the while inquiring how they can get happy frames of mind, and how they can be pleurably excited in religious exercises. And they will go only to such meetings, and sit only under such preaching, as will make them happy.

Their daily prayer is not like that of the converted Saul of Tarsus. "Lord what wilt thou have me to do" but "Lord, tell me how I can be happy." Is that the spirit of Jesus Christ? No, He said "I delight to do thy will, O God."

See why so few Christians have the spirit of prayer.

How can they have the spirit of prayer? What should God give them spirit of prayer for? Suppose a man engaged in his worldly schemes, and that God should give that man the spirit of prayer. Of course he would pray for that which lies nearest his heart; that is, for success in his worldly schemes, with which to serve his own gods. Will God give Him the spirit of prayer for such purposes? Never.

And now, my hearers, where are you all? Are you serving Jehovah, or are you serving your own gods?

Is Satan's kingdom weakened by what you have done? Could you say now, "Come with me, and I will show you this and that sinner converted, or this and that backslider reclaimed, or this and that weak saint strengthened and aided?" Could you bring living witnesses of what you have done in the service of God? Or would your answer be, "I have been to meeting regularly on the Sabbath, and heard a good deal of good preaching, and I have generally attended the prayer meetings, and we had some precious meetings, and I have prayed in my family, and twice or thrice a day in my closet, and read my Bible." And in all you have been merely passive, as to anything done for God. You have feared the Lord, and served your own gods.

"Yes, but I have sold so many goods, and made so much money, of which I intend to give a tenth to the missionary cause." Who hath required this at your hand, instead of saving souls? Going to send the gospel to the heathen, and letting sinners right under your own eyes go down to hell? Be not deceived. If you loved souls, if you were engaged to serve God, you would think of souls here, and do the work of God here. What should we think of a missionary going to the heathen, who had never

said a word to sinners around him at home? Does he love souls? There is burlesque in the idea of sending such a man to the heathen. The man that will do nothing at home is not fit to go to the heathen. And he that pretends to be getting money for missions, while he will not try to save sinners here, is an outrageous hypocrite.

LECTURES TO PROFESSING  
CHRISTIANS

By  
Charles G. Finney

**LECTURE 7**  
**TRUE AND FALSE CONVERSION**

"Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of my hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow" (Isaiah 50:11).

It is evident, from the connection of these words in the chapter, that the prophet was addressing those who professed to be religious, and who flattered themselves that they were in a state of salvation, but in fact their hope was a fire of their own kindling, and sparks created by themselves.

Every man knows that all other men are selfish. All the dealings of mankind are conducted on this principle. If any man overlooks this, and undertakes to deal with mankind as if they were not selfish, but were disinterested, he will be thought deranged.

A man may change his means, and yet have the same end, his own happiness. He may do good for the sake of the temporal benefit. He may not believe in religion, or in an eternity, and yet may see that doing good will be for his advantage of this world. Suppose, then, that his eyes are opened, and he sees the reality of eternity; and then he may take up religion as a means of happiness in eternity. Now, every one can see that there is no virtue in this. It is the design that gives character to the act, not the means employed to effect the design. The true and the false convert differ in this.

Now I am to show some things in which true saints and deceived persons may agree, and some things in which they differ.

They may be equally prayerful, so far as the form of praying is concerned.

The difference is in their motives. The true saint loves to pray; the other prays because he hopes to derive some benefit to himself from praying, but that is not his leading motive.

They may both design to be truly holy; the true saint because he loves holiness, and the deceived person because he knows that he can be happy no other way.

They may agree not only in their desires, and resolutions and designs, but also in their affection toward many objects.

They may both love the Bible; the true saint because it is God's truth, and he delights in it, and feasts his soul on it; the other because he thinks it is in his favor and is the charter of his own hopes.

They may both love God; the one because he sees God's character to be supremely excellent and lovely in itself and he loves it for its own sake; the other because he thinks God is his particular friend, that He is going to make him happy forever, and he connects the idea of God with his own interests.

They both may love Christ. The true convert loves His character; the deceived person thinks He will save him from hell; and give him eternal life and why should he not love him?

They may both love Christians: the true convert because he sees in them the image of Christ, and the deceived person because they belong to his own denomination, or because they are on his side, and he feels the same interests and hopes with them.

They may also agree in hating the same things. They may both hate infidelity, and oppose it strenuously -- the true saint because it is opposed to God and holiness, and the deceived person because it injures an interest in which he is deeply concerned, and if true, destroys all his own hopes for eternity. So they may hate error; one because it is detestable in itself, and contrary to God -- and the other because it is contrary to his views and opinions.

They may both hate sin; the true convert because it is odious to God, and the deceived person because it is injurious to himself. Cases have occurred, where an individual has hated his own sins, and yet not forsaken them. How often the drunkard, as he looks back at what he once was, and contrasts his present degradation with what he might have been, abhors his drink; not for his own sake, but because it has ruined him. And he still loves his cups, and continues to drink, though, when he looks at their effects, he feels indignation.

They may be both opposed to sinners. The opposition of true saints is a benevolent opposition, viewing and abhorring their character and conduct, as calculated to subvert the kingdom of God. The other is opposed to sinners because they are opposed to the religion he has espoused, and because they are not on his side.

So they may both rejoice in the same things. Both may rejoice in the prosperity of Zion, and the conversion of souls! the true convert because he has his heart set on it, and loves it for his own sake, as the greatest good and the deceived person because that particular thing in which he thinks he has such a great interest in advancing.

Both may mourn and feel distressed at the low state of religion in the church: the true convert because God is dishonored, and the deceived person because his own soul is not happy, or because religion is not in favor.

Both may love the society of saints; the true convert because his soul enjoys their spiritual conversation, the other because he hopes to derive some advantage from their company. The first enjoys it because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; the other because he loves to talk about the great interest he feels in religion and the hope he has of going to heaven.

Both may love to attend religious meetings; the true saint because his heart delights in acts of worship, in prayer and praise, in hearing the Word of God and His saints, and the other because he thinks a religious meeting a good place to prop up his hopes.

Both may find pleasure in the duties of the closet. The true saint loves his closet, because he draws near to God, and finds delight in communion with God, where there are no embarrassments to keep him from going right to God and conversing. The deceived person finds a kind of satisfaction in it, because it is his duty to pray in secret and he feels a self-righteous satisfaction in doing it. Nay, he may feel a certain pleasure in it, from a kind of excitement of the mind which he mistakes for communion with God.

Both may consent to the penalty of the law. The true saint consents to it in his own case, because he feels it to be just in itself for God to send him to hell. The deceived person because he thinks he is in no danger from it. He feels a respect for it, because he knows that it is right, and his conscience approves it, but he has never consented to it in his own case.

They may be equally liberal in giving to benevolent societies. None of you doubt that two men may give equal sums to a benevolent object, but from totally different motives. One gives to do good, and would be just as willing to give as not, if he knew that no other living person would give. The other gives for the credit of it, or to quiet his conscience, or because he hopes to purchase the favor of God.

They may both be willing to suffer martyrdom. Read the lives of the martyrs, and you will have no doubt that some were willing to suffer, from a wrong idea of the rewards of martyrdom, and would rush upon their own destruction because they were persuaded it was the sure road to eternal life.

And here is the proper place to answer an inquiry, which is often made: "If these two classes of persons may be alike in so many particulars, how are we to know our own real character, or to tell to which class we belong? We know that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, and how are we to know whether we love God and holiness for their sake, or whether we are seeking the favor of God, and aiming at heaven for our own benefit?" I answer:

If selfishness is the prevailing characteristic of your religion, it will take sometimes one form and sometimes, another. For instance: if it is a time of general coldness in the church, real converts will still enjoy their own secret communion with God, although there may not be so much doing to attract notice in public. But the deceived person will then invariably be found driving after the world. Now, let the true saints rise up, and make a noise, and speak their joys aloud, so that religion begins to be talked of again; and perhaps the deceived professor will soon begin to hustle about, and appear to be even more zealous than the true saint. He is impelled by his convictions and not affections. When there is no public interest, he feels no conviction; but when the church awakes, he is convicted, and compelled to stir about, to keep his conscience quiet. It is only selfishness in another form.

You will in fact promote your own happiness, precisely in proportion as you leave it out of view. Your happiness will be in proportion to your disinterestedness. True happiness consists mainly in

the gratification of virtuous desires. There may be pleasure in gratifying desires that are selfish, but it is not real happiness. But to be virtuous your desires must be disinterested. Suppose a man sees a beggar in the street; there he sits on a curbstone, cold and hungry, without friends, and ready to perish. The man's feelings are touched, and he steps into a grocery close by, and buys him a loaf of bread. At once the countenance of the beggar lights up, and he looks unutterable gratitude. Now it is plain to be seen that the gratification of the man in the act is precisely in proportion to the singleness of his motive. If he did it purely and solely out of benevolence, his gratification is complete in the act itself. But if he did it, partly to make it known that he is a charitable and humane person, then his happiness is not complete until the deed is published to others. Suppose here is a sinner in his sins; he is truly wicked and truly wretched. Your compassion is excited, and you convert and save him. If your motives were to obtain honor among men, and to secure the favor of God, you are not completely happy until the deed is told, and perhaps put in the newspaper. But if you wished purely to save a soul from death, then as soon as you see that done, your gratification is complete and your joy unmingled. So it is in all religious duties; your happiness is precisely in proportion as you are disinterested.

The truth is, God has so constituted the mind of man, that it must seek the happiness of others as its end, or it cannot be happy. Here is the true reason why all the world, seeking their own happiness, and not the happiness of others, fail of their end. It is always just so far before them. If they would leave off seeking their own happiness, and lay themselves out to do good, they would be happy.

LECTURES TO PROFESSING  
CHRISTIANS

By  
Charles G. Finney

**LECTURE 8**  
**RELIGION OF THE LAW AND GOSPEL**

"What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith; but Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not obtained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law" (Romans 9:30-32).

My design tonight is, to point out as distinctly as I can, the true distinction between the religion of law and the religion of faith.

The distinction between law religion and gospel religion does not consist in the fact that the gospel is any greater latitude of self-indulgence than the law. Not only does the gospel not cancel the obligations of the moral law, but it does in no degree abate them. Some people talk about gospel liberty as though they had got a new rule of life, less strict, and allowing more liberty than the law. I admit that it has provided a new method of justification, but it everywhere insists that the rule of life is the same with the law. The very first sentence of the gospel, the command to repent, is in effect a reenactment of the law, for it is a command to return to obedience. The idea that the liberty of the gospel differs from the liberty of the law is erroneous.

There is a class of legalists that depend on Christ, but their dependence is not gospel dependence, because the works which it produces are works of law; that is, from hope and fear, not from love. Gospel dependence may produce, perhaps, the very same outward works, but the motives are -- radically different. The legalist drags on a painful, irksome, moral, and perhaps, outwardly, religious life. The gospel believer has an affectionate confidence in God, which leads him to obey out of love. Instead of being dragged to duty, he goes to -- it cheerfully, because he loves it, and doing it is a delight to his soul.

Is it so with you? Do you feel, in your religious duties constrained by love? Are you drawn by such strong cords of love, that it would give you more trouble to omit duty than to obey? Do your affections flow out in such a strong current to God, that you cannot but obey?

Some persons are all faith without works. These are Antinomians. Others are all works and no faith; these are legalists. In all ages of the Church, men have inclined first to one of these extremes, and then over to the other. Sometimes they are settled down on their knees, pretending to be all faith, and waiting God's time; then they get roused up, and dash on in works, without regard to the motive from which they act.

You see the true character of these professors of religion who are forever crying out "Legality!" as soon as they are pressed up to holiness. When I began to preach, I found this spirit in many places;



so that the moment Christians were urged up to duty, the cry would arise. This is legal preaching do preach the gospel; salvation is by faith, not by duty; you ought to comfort the saints, not distress them. All this was nothing but rank Antinomianism.

On the other hand, the same class of churches now complain, if you preach faith to them, and show them what is the true nature of gospel faith. They now want to do something, and insist that no ways the same, and consists in disinterested love to God and man. Have you the kind that consists, not in disinterested love, but in the pursuit of happiness as the great end? Which have you? The fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace. There is no condemnation of such religion. But if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

LECTURES TO PROFESSING  
CHRISTIANS

By  
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**LECTURE 9**  
**INNOCENT AMUSEMENT**

Text, "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31).

We hear much said, and read much, in these days, of indulging in innocent amusement. I heard a minister, some time since, in addressing a large company of young people, say that he had spent much time in devising innocent amusements for the young. With your consent, I wish to suggest a few thoughts upon this subject -- first, what are not, and secondly, what are innocent amusements?

1. This is a question of morals.

2. All intelligent acts of a moral agent must be either right or wrong. Nothing is innocent in a moral agent that is not in accordance with the law of the gospel of God.

3. The moral character of any and every act of a moral agent resides in the motives or the ultimate reason for the act. This I take to be self-evident and universally admitted.

4. Now, what is the rule of judgment in this case? How are we to decide whether any given act of amusement is right or wrong, innocent or sinful?

I answer: 1. By the moral law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," etc., "and thy neighbor as thyself." No intelligent act of a moral agent is innocent or right unless it proceeds from and is an expression of supreme love to God and equal love to man. In other words, unless it is benevolent. 2. The gospel. This requires the same: "whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." "Do all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." 3. Right reason affirms the same thing. Now, in the light of this rule, it is plain that it is not innocent to engage in amusements, merely to gratify the desire for amusement. We may not innocently eat or drink to gratify the desire for food or drink. To eat or drink merely to gratify appetite is innocent enough in a mere animal, but in a moral agent it is sin. A moral agent is bound to have a higher ultimate motive -- to eat and drink that he may be strong and healthy for the service of God.

God has made eating and drinking pleasant to us; but this pleasure ought not to be our ultimate reason for eating and drinking. So amusements are pleasant, but this does not justify us in seeking amusements to gratify desire. Mere animals may do this innocently, because they are incapable of any higher motive. But moral agents are under a higher law, and are bound to have another and a higher aim than merely to gratify the desire for amusements. Therefore, no amusement is innocent which is engaged in for the pleasure of the amusement, any more than it would be innocent to eat and drink for the pleasure of it.

Nothing is innocent unless it proceeds from supreme love to God and equal love to man, unless the supreme and ultimate motive be to please and honor God. In other words, to be innocent, any amusement must be engaged in, because it is believed to be at the time the most pleasing to God, and is intended to be a service rendered to Him, as that which upon the whole, will honor Him more than anything else that we can engage in for the time being. I take this to be self-evident. What then? It follows: 1st. That none but benevolent amusements can be innocent. Fishing and shooting for amusement are not innocent. We may fish and hunt for the same reason that we are allowed to eat and drink to supply nature with aliment, that we may be strong in the service of God. We may hunt to destroy noxious animals, for the glory of God and the interests of His kingdom. But fishing and hunting to gratify a passion for these sports are not innocent. Again, no amusement can be innocent that involves the squandering of precious time, that might be better employed to the glory of God and the good of man. Life is short. Time is precious. We have but one life to live. Much is to be done. The world is in darkness. A world of sinners are to be enlightened, and, if possible, saved. We are required to work while the day lasteth. Our commission and work require dispatch. No time is to be lost. If our hearts are right, our world is pleasant. If rightly performed, it affords the highest enjoyment and is itself the highest amusement. No turning aside for any amusement involving an unnecessary waste of time.

Again, no amusement can be innocent that involves an unnecessary expenditure of the Lord's money. All our time and all our money are the Lord's. We may innocently use both time and money to promote the Lord's interests. But we may not innocently use either for our own pleasure and gratification. Expensive journeys for our own pleasure and amusement, and not indulged with in a single eye to the glory of God, are not innocent amusements, but sinful. Again, in the light of the above rule of judgment, we see that no form of amusement is lawful for an unconverted sinner. Nothing in him is innocent. While he remains impenitent and unbelieving, does not love God, and his neighbor according to God's command, there is for him no innocent employment or amusement; all is sin.

## **NOTHING INNOCENT TO THE UNREGENERATE**

And right here I fear many are acting under a great delusion. The loose manner in which this subject is viewed by many professors of religion, and even ministers, is surprising and alarming. Some time since, in a sermon, I remarked that there were no lawful employments or innocent amusements for sinners. An aged clergyman, who was present, said, after the service, that it was ridiculous to hold that nothing was lawful or innocent in an impenitent sinner. I replied: "I thought you were orthodox. Do you not believe in the universal necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit?" He replied, "Yes." I added: "Do you believe that an unregenerate soul does anything acceptable to God? Before his heart is changed, does he ever act from a motive that God can accept, in anything whatever? Is he not totally depraved, in the sense that his heart is all wrong, and therefore his actions must be all wrong?" He appeared embarrassed, saw the point, and subsided.

To teach, either directly or by implication, that any amusement of an impenitent sinner or of a backslider is innocent, is to teach a gross and ruinous heresy. Parents should remember this in regard to the amusements for their unconverted children. Sabbath School teachers and superintendents who are planning amusements for their Sabbath Schools, preachers who spend their time in planning

amusements for the young, who lead their flocks to picnics, in pleasure excursions, and justify various games, should certainly remember that, unless they are in a holy state of heart, and do all this from supreme love to God and a design in the highest degree to glorify God thereby, these ways of spending time are by no means innocent, but highly criminal, and those who teach people to walk in these ways are simply directing the channels in which their depravity shall run.

I must say again, and, if possible, still more emphatically, that it is not enough that they might be engaged in as the best way, for the time being, to honor and please God; but they must be actually engaged in from supreme love to God, with the ultimate design to glorify Him. If such then, is the true doctrine of innocent amusements, let no impenitent sinner and no backslidden Christian suppose for a moment that it is possible for him to engage in any innocent amusement. If it were true, as the aged minister to whom I have referred and many others seem to believe, that impenitent sinners or backsliders can and do engage in innocent amusements, the very engaging in such amusements, being lawfully right and innocent in them, would involve a change of heart in the unconverted, and a return to God in the backslider. For no amusement is lawful unless it be engaged in as a love service rendered to God and with design to please and glorify Him. It must not only be a love service; but, in the judgment of the one who renders it, it must be the best service that for the time being, he can render to God -- a service that will be more pleasing to Him and more useful to His kingdom than any other that can be engaged in at the time. Let these facts be borne in mind when the question of engaging in amusements comes up for decisions. And remember, the question in all such cases is not, "what harm is there in this proposed amusement?" but, "what good can it do?" "Is it the best way in which I can spend my time?" "Will it be more pleasing to God and more for the interest of His kingdom than anything else at present possible to me?" "If not, it is not an innocent amusement, and I cannot engage in it without sin."

The question often arises: "Are we never to seek such amusement?" I answer; "It is our privilege and our duty to live above a desire for such things. All that class of desires should be so subdued by living so much in the light of God, and having so deep a communion with Him as to have no relish for such amusements whatever. It certainly is the privilege of every child of God to walk so closely with Him, and maintain so divine a communion with Him as not to feel the necessity of worldly excitements, sports, pastimes and entertainments, to make his enjoyment satisfactory. If a Christian avails himself of his privilege of communion with God, he will naturally and by an instinct of his new nature repel solicitations to go after worldly amusements. To him such pastimes will appear low, unsatisfactory, and even repulsive. If he is of a heavenly mind, as he ought to be, he will feel as if he would not afford to come down and seek enjoyment in worldly amusements. Surely, a Christian must be fallen from his first love; he must have turned back into the world, before he can feel the necessity or have the desire of seeking enjoyment in worldly sports and pastimes.

## **A SPIRITUAL MIND**

A spiritual mind cannot seek enjoyment in worldly society. To such a mind that society is necessarily repulsive. Worldly society is insincere, hollow, and to a great extent a sham. What relish can a spiritual mind have for the gossip of a worldly party of pleasure? None whatever. To a mind in communion with God their worldly spirit and ways, conversation and folly are repulsive and painful, as it is so strongly suggestive of the downward tendency of their souls, and of the destiny

that awaits them. I have had so marked an experience on both sides of this question that I think I cannot be mistaken. Probably but few persons enjoy worldly pleasure more intensely than I did before I was converted; but my conversion, and the spiritual baptism which immediately followed it, completely extinguished all desire for worldly sports, and amusements. I was lifted at once into entirely another plane of life and another kind of enjoyment. From that hour to the present the mode of life, the pastimes, sports, amusements and worldly ways that so much delighted me before, have not only failed to interest me, but I have had a positive aversion to them.

Professed Christians are bound to maintain a life consistent with their professions. For the honor of religion, they ought to deny worldly lusts; and not, by seeking to gratify them, give occasion to the world to scoff and say that Christians love the world as well as they do. If professors of religion are backslidden in heart, and entertain a longing for worldly sports and amusements, they are bound by every consideration of duty and decency to abstain from all outward manifestations of such inward lustings. Some have maintained that we should conform to the ways of the world somewhat -- at least; enough to show that we can enjoy the world and religion too; and that we make religion appear repulsive to unconverted souls by turning our backs upon what they call their innocent amusements. But we should represent religion as it really is -- as living above the world, as consisting in a heavenly mind, as that which affords an enjoyment so spiritual and heavenly as to render the low pursuits and joys of worldly men disagreeable and repulsive.

It is a sad stumbling block to the unconverted to see professed Christians seeking pleasure or happiness from this world. Such seeking is a misrepresentation of the religion of Jesus. It misleads, bewilders, and confounds the observing outsider. If he ever reads his Bible, he cannot but wonder that souls who are born of God and have communion with Him should have any relish for worldly ways and pleasures. The fact is that thoughtful, unconverted men have little or no confidence in that class of professing Christians who seek environment from this world. They may profess to have, and may loosely think of such as being liberal and good Christians. They may flatter them, and commend their religion as being the opposite of fanaticism and bigotry, and as being such a religion as they like to see; but there is no real sincerity in such professions on the part of the impenitent.

### **A DYING SLAVEHOLDER**

In my early Christian life I heard a Methodist bishop from the South report a case that made a deep impression on my mind. He said there was in his neighborhood, a slaveholder, a gentleman of fortune, who was a gay and agreeable man, and gave himself to various field sports and amusements. He used to associate much with his pastor, often invite him to dinner, and to accompany him in his sports and pleasure seeking excursions of various kinds. The minister cheerfully complied with these requests; and a friendship grew up between the pastor and his parishioner that continued till the last sickness of this gay and wealthy man. When the wife of this worldling was apprised that her husband could live but a short time she was much alarmed for his soul, and tenderly inquired if she should not call in their minister to converse and pray with him. He feelingly replied: "No, my dear; he is not the man for me to see now. He was my companion, as you know, in worldly sports and pleasure-seeking; he loved good dinners and a jolly time. I then enjoyed his society and found him a pleasant companion. But I see now that I never had any real confidence in his piety, and have now no confidence in the efficacy of his prayers. I am now a dying man, and need the instruction and

prayers of somebody that can prevail with God. We have been much together, but our pastor has never been serious with me about the salvation of my soul, and he is not the man to help me now."

The wife was greatly affected, and asked:

"What shall I do, then?" He replied:

"My coachman Tom is a pious man. I have confidence in his prayers. I have often overheard him pray, when about the barn or stables, and his prayers have always struck me as being quite sincere and earnest. I never heard any foolishness from him. He has always been honest and earnest as a Christian man. Call him." Tom was called, and came within the door, dropping his hat and looking tenderly and compassionately at his dying master. The dying man put forth his hand, saying: "Come here, Tom; take my hand, Tom, can you pray for your dying master?" Tom poured out his soul in earnest prayer.

I often ask myself; "What can it mean that so many of our highly-fed and most popular preachers are pleading so much for amusements? Is not human depravity strong enough in that direction, without being stimulated by the voice of the preacher? Has the church worked so hard for God and souls, are Christians so overdone with their exhausting efforts to pull sinners out of the fire, that they are in danger of becoming insane with religion fervor and need that the pulpit and the press should join in urging them to turn aside and seek amusements and have a little fun? What can it mean? Why, is it not true that nearly all our dangers are on this side?"

Let no one say that this doctrine prohibits all rest, recreation, and amusement, whatever. It does not. It freely admits all rest, recreation, and amusement, that is regarded, by the person who resorts to it, as a condition and means of securing health and vigor of body and mind with which to promote the cause of God. This tract only insists, as the Bible does, that "whether we eat or drink", rest, recreate, or amuse ourselves, all must be done as a service rendered to God. God must be our end. To please Him must be our aim in everything, or we sin.

# LECTURES TO PROFESSING CHRISTIANS

By  
Charles G. Finney

## LECTURE 10 THE DECAY OF CONSCIENCE

I believe it is a fact generally admitted that there is much less conscience manifested by men and women in nearly all the walks of life than there was forty years ago. There is justly much complaint of this, and there seems to be but little prospect of reformation. The rings and frauds and villainies in high and low places, among all ranks of men, are most alarming, and one is almost compelled to ask, "Can nobody be safely trusted?" Now, what is the cause of this degeneracy? Doubtless there are many causes that contribute more or less directly to it; but I am persuaded that the fault is more in the ministry and public press than in any and all things else. It has been fashionable now for many years to ridicule and decry Puritanism. Ministers have ceased, in a great measure, to probe the consciences of men with the spiritual law of God. So far as my knowledge extends, there has been a great letting down and ignoring the searching claims of God's law, as revealed in His Word. This law is the only standard of true morality. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." The law is the quicker of the human conscience. Just in proportion as the spirituality of the law of God is kept out of view there will be a manifest decay of conscience. This must be the inevitable result. Let ministers ridicule Puritanism, attempt to preach the gospel without thoroughly probing the conscience with the divine law, and this must result in, at least, a partial paralysis of the moral sense. The error that lies at the foundation of this decay of individual and public conscience originates, no doubt, in the pulpit. The proper guardians of public conscience, have, I fear, very much neglected to expound and insist upon obedience to the moral law and moral obligation in any proper sense of these terms. A consistent phrenology can have no proper ideas of moral obligation, of moral guilt, blameworthiness, and retribution. Some years since, a brother of one of the most popular preachers heard me preach on the text, "Be ye reconciled to God ." I went on to show, among other things, that being reconciled to God implied reconciled to the execution of His law. He called on me the next morning, and among other things, said that neither himself nor two of his brothers, whom he named, all preachers, had naturally any conscience. "We have," said he, "no such ideas in our minds, of sin, guilt, justice and retribution as you and father have." "We cannot preach as you do on these subjects." He continued; "I am striving to cultivate a conscience, and I think I begin to understand what it is. But naturally, neither I nor the two brothers I have named, have any conscience." Now, these three ministers have repeatedly appeared in their writings before the public. I have read much that they have written and not infrequently the sermons of one of them, and have been struck with the manifest want of conscience in his sermons and writings. He is a phrenologist, and, hence, he has in his theological views no free will, no moral agency, and nothing that is really a logical result of free will, and moral agency. He can ridicule Puritanism and the great doctrines of the orthodox faith; and, indeed, his whole teachings so far as it has fallen under my eye, most lamentable shows the want of moral discrimination. I should judge from his writings that the true ideas of moral depravity, guilt, and ill-desert, in the true acceptation of these terms, have no place in his mind. Indeed, as a consistent phrenologist, such ideas have no right in his mind. They are necessarily excluded by his philosophy. I do not know how extensively phrenology has poisoned the minds of ministers of different

denominations; but I have observed with pain that many ministers who write for the public press fail to reach the consciences of men. They fail to go to the bottom of the matter and insist upon obedience to the moral law as alone acceptable to God. They seem to me to hold up a different standard from that which inculcated in Christ's Sermon on the Mount, which was Christ's exposition of the moral law. Christ expressly taught in that sermon that there was no salvation without conformity to the rule of life laid down in that sermon. True faith in Christ will always and inevitably beget a holy life. But I fear it has become fashionable to preach what amounts to an Antinomian gospel. The rule of life promulgated in the gospel is precisely that of the moral law. These four things are expressly affirmed of true faith -- of the faith of the gospel.

1. "It establishes the law."
2. "It works by love."
3. "It purifies the heart."
4. "It overcomes the world."

These are but different forms of affirming that true faith does, as a matter of fact, produce a holy life. If it did not, it would "make void the law." The true gospel is not preached where obedience to the moral law as the only rule of life is not insisted upon. Wherever there is a failure to do this in the instructions of any pupil, it will inevitably be seen that the hearers of such a mutilated gospel will have very little conscience. We need more Boanerges or sons of thunder in the pulpit. We need men that will flash the law of God like vivid lightning and arouse the conscience of men. We need more Puritanism in the pulpit. To be sure, some of the Puritans were extremists. But still under their teaching there was a very different state of the individual and public conscience from what exists in these days. These old, stern, grand vindicators of the government of God would have thundered and lightened till they had almost demolished their pulpits, if any such immoralities had shown themselves under their instructions as are common in these days. In a great measure the periodical press takes its tone from the pulpit. The universal literature of the present day shows conclusively that the moral sense of the people needs toning up, and some of the most fascinating preachers have become the favorites of infidels, skeptics of every grade, Universalists, and the most abandoned characters. Has the offense of the cross ceased, or is the cross kept out of view? Has the law of God, with its stringent precept and its awful penalty, become popular with unconverted men and women? Or is it ignored in the pulpit, and the preacher praised for that neglect of duty for which he should be despised? I believe the only possible way to arrest this downward tendency in private and public morals, is the holding up from the pulpits in this land, with unsparing faithfulness, the whole gospel of God, including as the only rule of life the perfect and holy law of God.

The holding up of the law will reveal the moral depravity of the heart, and the holding forth of the cleansing blood of Christ will cleanse the heart from sin. My beloved brethren in the ministry, is there not a great want in the public inculcations of the pulpit upon this subject? We are set for the defense of the blessed gospel and for the vindication of God's holy law. I pray you let us probe the consciences of our hearers, let us thunder forth the law and gospel of God until our voices reach the capital of this nation, through our representatives in congress. It is now very common for the secular



papers even to public extracts of sermons. Let us give the reporters of the press such work to do as will make their ears and the ears of their readers tingle. Let our railroad kings, our stock gamblers, our officials of every grade, hear from its pulpits if they come within the sound, such wholesome Puritanic preaching as will arouse them to better thoughts and a better life. Away with this milk-and-water preaching of a love of Christ that has no holiness or moral discrimination in it. Away with preaching a love of God that is not angry with sinners every day. Away with preaching a Christ not crucified for sin.

Christ crucified for the sins of the world is the Christ that the people need. Let us rid ourselves of the just imputation of neglecting to preach the law of God until the consciences of men are asleep. Such a collapse of conscience in this land could never have existed if the Puritan element in our preaching had not in great measure fallen out.

Some years ago I was preaching in a congregation whose pastor had died some months before. He seemed to have been almost universally popular with his church and the community. His church seemed to have nearly idolized him. Everybody was speaking in his praise and holding him up as an example; and yet both the church and the community clearly demonstrated that they had had an unfaithful minister, a man who loved and sought the applause of his people. I heard so much of his inculcations and saw so much of the legitimate fruits of his teachings, that I felt constrained to tell the people from the pulpit that they had had an unfaithful minister; that such fruits as were apparent on every side, both within and without the church, could never have resulted from a faithful presentation of the gospel. This assertion would doubtless have greatly shocked them had it been made under other circumstances; but, as the way had been prepared, they did not seem disposed to gainsay it. Brethren, our preaching will bear its legitimate fruits. If immorality prevails in the land, the fault is ours in a great degree. If there is a decay of conscience, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the public press lacks moral discrimination, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the Church is degenerated and worldly, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the world loses its interest in religion, the pulpit is responsible for it. If Satan rules in our halls of legislation, the pulpit is responsible for it. If our politics become so corrupt that the very foundations of our government are ready to fall away, the pulpit is responsible for it. Let us not ignore this fact, my dear brethren; but let us lay it to heart, and be thoroughly awake to our responsibility in respect to the morals of this nation.

# LECTURES TO PROFESSING CHRISTIANS

By  
Charles G. Finney

## LECTURE 11 BACKSLIDERS IN HEART

Text, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways" (Prov. 14:14).

The text implies that there may be a backslidden heart, when the form of religion and obedience to God are maintained. As we know from consciousness that men perform the same, or similar acts from widely different, and often from opposite motives, we are certain that men may keep up all the outward forms and appearances of religion, when in fact, they are backslidden in heart. There is no doubt, that the most intense selfishness often takes on a religious type, and there are many considerations, that might lead a backslidden heart, to keep up the forms, while he had lost the power of godliness in his soul.

What are evidences of a backslidden heart?

Manifest formality in religious exercises. A stereotyped, formal way of saying and doing things, that is clearly the result of habit, rather than the outgushing of the religious life. This familiarity will be emotionless and cold as an iceberg, and will evince a total want to earnestness in the performance of religious duty. In prayer and religious exercises the backslider in heart will pray or praise, or confess, or give thanks with his lips, so that all can hear him, perhaps, but in such a way that no one can feel him. Such a formality would be impossible where there existed a present, living faith and love, and religious zeal.

A want of religious enjoyment is evidence of a backslidden heart. We always enjoy the saying and doing of those things that please those whom we love most; furthermore, when the heart is not backslidden, communion with God is kept up, and therefore all religious duties are not only performed with pleasure, but the communion with God involved in them, is a source of rich and continual enjoyment.

Religious bondage is another evidence of a backslidden heart. God has no slaves. He does not accept the service of bondmen, who serve Him because they must. He accepts none but a love service. A backslider in heart finds religious duties a burden to him. He has promised to serve the Lord. He dare not wholly break off from the form of service, and he tries to be dutiful, while he has no heart in prayer, in praise, in worship, in closet duties, or in any of those exercises which are so spontaneous and delightful, where there is true love to God. The backslider in heart is often like a dutiful, but unloving wife. She tries to do her duty to her husband, but fails utterly because she does not love him. She is committed for life, and must therefore perform the duties of married life, but oh, it is such a bondage! Just so with religious bondage. He drags painfully about it, and you will hear him naturally sing backslider's hymns.

An ungoverned temper.

While the heart is full of love, the temper will naturally be chastened and sweet, or at any rate, the will will keep it under, and not suffer it to break out in outrageous abuse, or if at any time, it should so far escape from the control of the will as to break loose in hateful words, it will soon be brought under, and by no means suffered to take the control and manifest itself to the annoyance of others. Especially will a loving heart confess and break the love is gone, the Bible becomes not only uninteresting but often repulsive. There is no faith to accept its promises, but conviction enough left to dread its threatenings. But in general the backslider in heart is apathetic as to the Bible. He does not read it much, and when he does read it, he has not interest enough to understand it. Its pages become dark and uninteresting, and therefore it is neglected.

A want of interest in secret prayer is also an evidence of a backslidden heart.

Young Christian! If you find yourself losing interest in the Bible and in secret prayer, stop short, return to God, and give yourself no rest, till you enjoy the light of His countenance. If you feel disinclined to pray, or read your Bible, if when you pray and read your Bible, you have no heart in it, no enjoyment, if you are inclined to make your secret devotions short, or, are easily induced to neglect them, if your thoughts, affections and emotions wander, and your closet duties become a burden, you may know that you are a backslider in heart, and your first business is, to break down, and see that your love and zeal are renewed.

A want of interest in published accounts or narratives of revivals of religion, is also an evidence of a backslidden heart. While one retains his interest in the conversion of souls, and in revivals of religion he will, of course, be interested in all accounts of revivals of religion anywhere. If you find yourself, therefore, disinclined to read such accounts, or find yourself not interested in them, take it for granted that you are backslidden in heart.

A loss of interest in the conversation and society of highly spiritual people, is an evidence of a backslidden heart. We take the greatest delight in the society of those who are most interested in the things that are most dear to us. Hence, a loving Christian heart will always seek the society of those who are most spiritually minded, and whose conversation is more evangelical and spiritual. If you find yourself wanting in this respect, know for certain that you are backslidden in heart.

The loss of interest in the question of sanctification is an evidence of a backslidden heart. I say again, the loss of interest, for, if you ever truly knew the love of God, you must have had a great interest in the question of entire sanctification, or of entire consecration to God. If you are a Christian, you have felt that sin was an abomination to your soul. You have had inexpressible longings to be rid of it forever, and everything that could throw light upon that question of agonizing importance, was most intensely interesting to you. If this question has been dismissed, and you no longer take an interest in it, it is because you are backslidden in heart.

If the spirit of prayer departs, it is a sure indication of a backslidden heart, for while the first love of a Christian continues he is sure to be drawn by the Holy Spirit to wrestle much in prayer.

A backslidden heart often reveals itself by the manner in which people pray. For example, praying as if one was in a state of self-condemnation, or very much like a convicted sinner, is an evidence of a backslidden heart. Such an one will reveal the fact, that he is not at peace with God. His confessions and self-accusations will show to others that perhaps he does not well understand himself. It will be seen by his prayer that he is not in a state of Christian liberty -- that he is having a 7th Romans experience, instead of that which is described in the 8th of Romans.

A backslidden heart will further reveal itself in praying almost exclusively for self, and for those friends that are regarded as parts of self. It is often very striking and even shocking to attend a backsliders' prayer meeting, and I am sorry to say that many prayer meetings of the Church are little else. Their prayers are timid and hesitating, and reveal the fact that they have little or no faith. Instead of surrounding the throne of grace and pouring their hearts out for a blessing on those around them, they have to be urged up to duty, or to take up their cross. Their hearts do not, will not, spontaneously gush out to God in prayer. They have very little concern for others and when they do, as they say, take up their cross and do their duty, and pretend to lead in prayer, it will be observed that they pray just like a company of convicted sinners, almost altogether for themselves. They keep up family prayer, and attend a weekly prayer meeting and never get out of the old rut of praying round and round for themselves.

They could not render it more evident that they are backsliders in heart, if they were every one to take his oath on it.

Absence from stated prayer meetings for slight reasons is a sure indication of a backslidden heart. No meeting is more interesting to a wakeful Christian than the prayer meeting, and while they have any heart to pray, they will not be absent from prayer meeting unless prevented from attending by the providence of God. If a call from a friend at the hour of meeting, can prevent their attendance, unless the call be made under very peculiar circumstances, it is strong evidence that they do not wish to attend, and hence that they are backsliders in heart. A call at such a time would not prevent their attending a wedding, a party, a picnic, or an amusing lecture. The fact is, it is hypocrisy for them to pretend that they really want to go, while they can be kept away for slight reasons. If it were any place where they much desired to go, they would excuse themselves, and say, "I was just going to ride," or, "I was just going to such a place," and away they would go.

While the heart is engaged in religion, Christians will not readily omit family devotions, and whenever they are ready to find an excuse for the omission, it is a sure evidence that they are backslidden in heart.

Pleading for worldly amusements, is also an indication of a backslidden heart. The most grateful amusements possible, to a truly spiritual mind, are those engagements that bring the soul into the most direct communion with God. While the heart is full of love and faith, an hour, or an evening spent alone, in communion with God, is more delightful than all the amusements which the world can offer. A loving heart is jealous of everything that will break up or interfere with its communion with God. For mere worldly amusements it has no relish. When the soul does not find more delight in God than in all worldly things, the heart is sadly backslidden.

A self-indulgent spirit is a sure indication of a backslidden heart. By self-indulgence, I mean a disposition to gratify the appetites, passions and propensities, "to fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind."

This, in the Bible, is represented as a state of spiritual death. I am satisfied that the most common occasion of backsliding in heart, is to be found in the clamor for indulgence of the various appetites and propensities. The appetite for food is frequently, and perhaps more frequently than any other, the occasion of backsliding. Few Christians, I fear, apprehend any danger in this direction. God's injunction is, "whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Christians forget this, and eat and drink to please themselves -- consult their appetites, instead of the laws of life and health. More persons are ensnared by their tables than the Church is aware of. The table is a snare of death to multitudes that no man can number. A great many people who avoid alcoholic drinks altogether will indulge in tea and coffee, and even tobacco, and in food, both in quantity and quality that violates every law of health. They seem to have no other law, than that of appetite, and this they so deprave by abuse that, to indulge it, is to ruin body and soul together. Show me a gluttonous professor, and I will show you a backslider.

Loose moral principles are a sure indication of a backslidden heart. A backslider in heart will write letters on the Sabbath, engage in secular reading, and in much worldly conversation. In business, such an one will take little advantages, and play off business tricks, conform to the habits of worldly business men, in the transaction of business, will be guilty of deception and misrepresentation in making bargains, will demand exorbitant interest, and take advantage of the necessities of his fellow men.

The text says, that the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.

He shall be filled with his own feelings. Instead of that sweet peace and rest, and joy in the Holy Ghost, that he once experienced, he will find himself in a state of unrest, dissatisfied with himself and everybody else, his feelings often painful, humiliating, and as unpleasant and unlovely, as can be well conceived. It is often very trying to live with a backslider. They are often peevish, censorious, and irritating, in all their ways. They have forsaken God, and in their feelings is more of hell than heaven.

They will be filled with their own prejudices. Their willingness to know and do the truth has gone. They will very naturally commit themselves against any truth that bears hard upon their self-indulgent spirit. They will endeavor to justify themselves, will neither read nor hear that which will rebuke their backslidden state, and they will become deeply prejudiced against everyone that shall cross their path. If anyone reproves them, they account him as an enemy. They hedge themselves in, and shut their eyes against the light, stand on the defensive and criticize everything that would search them out.

A backslider in heart will be filled with his own enmities. Such an one will almost surely lay up things against those with whom he has any business or other relations. He will chafe in almost every relation of life, will allow himself to be vexed and angry, and get into such relations with some, and

perhaps many persons, that he cannot pray for them honestly, and can hardly treat them with common civility. This is an almost certain result of a backslidden heart.

The backslider in heart will be filled with his own lustings. His appetites and passions, which had been kept under, have now resumed their controls and having been so long suppressed, they will seem to avenge themselves by becoming more clamorous and despotic than ever. The animal appetites and passions will burst forth to the astonishment of the backslider, and ten to one, if he does not find himself more under their influence, and more enslaved by them than ever before.

The backslider in heart will be full of his own perplexities. Having forsaken God, having fallen out of his order, and into the darkness of his own folly, the course he shall pursue to accomplish his selfish ends. He is not walking with, but contrary to God. Hence, the providence of God will constantly cross his path, and baffle all his schemes. God will frown darkness upon his path, and take pains to confound his projects, and blow his schemes to the winds.

The backslider in heart will be full of his own delusions. Having an evil eye, his whole body will be full of darkness. He will almost certainly fall into delusions in regard to doctrines, and in regard to practices. Wandering on in darkness, as he does, he will, very likely, swallow the grossest delusions. Spiritism, Mormonism, Universalism, and every other ism that is wide from the truth, will be very likely to gain possession of him. Who has not observed this of backsliders in heart?

## **HOW TO RECOVER FROM A STATE OF BACKSLIDING?**

Remember whence you are fallen.

Take up the question at once, and deliberately contrast your present state with that in which you walked with God.

Take home the conviction of your true position. No longer delay to understand the exact situation between God and your soul.

Repent at once, and do your first work over again.

Do not attempt to get back, by reforming your mere outside conduct. Begin with your heart, and at once set yourself right with God.

Do not act like a mere convicted sinner, and attempt to recommend yourself to God, by any impenitent works of prayers. Do not think that you must reform and make yourself better before you can come to Christ, but understand distinctly, that coming to Christ, alone, can make you better. However much distressed you may be to know for a certainty that until you repent and accept His will, unconditionally, you are no better, but are constantly growing worse. Until you throw yourself upon his sovereign mercy, and thus return to God He will accept nothing at your hands.

Do not imagine yourself to be in a justified state, for you know you are not. Your conscience condemns you, and you know that God ought to condemn you, and if He justified you in your present

state, your conscience should not justify you. Come, then, to Christ at once, like a guilty, condemned sinner, as you are, own up, and take all the shame and blame to yourself, and believe that notwithstanding all your wanderings from God. He loves you still -- that He has loved you with an everlasting love, and, therefore, with loving kindness is drawing you.

# LECTURES TO PROFESSING CHRISTIANS

By  
Charles G. Finney

## LECTURE 12 GROWTH IN GRACE

Text, "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Conditions of growth in grace.

Growth or increase in anything implies a beginning. Growth in the favor of God implies that we have already found favor in His sight, and that we are already in grace, in the sense of having a place among His favored ones.

Consequently, growth in grace implies that we have already repented of our sin, having actually and practically abandoned all known sin. It cannot be that we are in favor with God if we are still indulging in known sin against Him. Being in favor with God implies, of course, that we are pardoned and favored by him, for the sake of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Pardon is favor, and implies the renunciation of rebellion against God.

What is proof of growth in grace?

The manifestation of more implicit and universal trust in God is an evidence of growth in grace.

Another evidence of growth in grace is an increasing weanedness from the world. The will may be in an attitude of devotion to God, while the world's seductive charms very much embarrass the healthy action of the Christian life. As the soul becomes crucified and dead to the world, it grows in the favor of God.

Less reluctant of feeling, when called to the exercise of self-denial, is an evidence of growth in grace. It shows that the feelings are becoming less and less despotic, that the will is getting more the mastery of them, that the sensibility is getting more into harmony with the devotion of the will, and the dictates of the intelligence.

Losing more and more the consciousness of self, and respect to self, in every action of life, is an evidence of growth in the favor of God. Some have so much consciousness of self in everything, and so much respect to self in everything they say and do, as to be embarrassed in all their Christian life, whenever they attempt to act or speak in the presence of others. As they lose this self-consciousness, and they have less respect to self, their service to God becomes more free and unembarrassed, and they are all the better servants by how much less they think of self.



Sometimes young converts cannot speak or pray, or perform any public duty, without being either proud or ashamed, as they think of themselves to have performed those duties with more or less acceptance to those around them. While this is so, their piety is in a feeble state. They must lose sight of their own glory, and have a single eye to the glory of God, to find acceptance with Him. But as they lose sight of self, and set God always before them, having an eye single to His glory, they grow more and more in His favor.

Consequently, a growing deadness to flattery or the censure of men, is an evidence of growth in grace. Paul had grown in grace so much that he counted it a light thing to be judged of man; he only sought to commend himself to God. As you find yourself growing in this state of deadness to the flatteries of men, you have evidence that you grow in grace.

Growing calmness and quietness under great afflictions, is an evidence of growth in the favor of God. This evinces a broader and more explicit faith, a fuller and more cordial acceptance of the will of God, as revealed in these afflictions, and shows that the soul is more steadily and firmly at anchor upon its rock, Christ.

A growing tranquillity under sudden and crushing disasters and bereavements, is an evidence of growth in grace. The more tranquil the soul can remain, when sudden storms of providence come upon it, sweeping away its loved ones, and blighting its earthly hopes, and greater is its evidence of being under the particular favor of God. This tranquillity is both a result of an evidence of the favor of God.

Less and less temptation to resentment, and the spirit of retaliation when we are in any wise insulted or abused, is evidence that the sensibility is becoming more and more thoroughly subdued, and consequently, that we are growing in favor with God.

Less temptation to dwell upon, and to magnify our trials and troubles, to think of them, and speak of them to others, is evidence that we think less and less of self and accept our trials and troubles with more and more complacency in God. It is sad to hear some professing good people, dwelling ever upon and magnifying their own troubles and trials. But, if they grow in grace, they will think less and less of these, be more inclined to think of them as "light afflictions." The more we grow in grace, the less stress we lay upon the evils we meet in the way.

A growing and realizing confidence in the wisdom, benevolence, and universality of the providence of God, a state of mind that sees God in everything, is evidence of growth in grace. Some minds become so spiritual that they hardly seem to reside in the body, and appear continually to perceive the presence of God in every event, almost as if they were disembodied, and beheld God, face to face. They seem to dwell, live, move, and have their being, rather in the spiritual, than in the natural world. They are continually under such a sense of the divine presence, agency, and protection, as hardly to appear like inhabitants of earth. They are a living, walking mystery to those in the midst of whom they dwell. The springs of their activity are so divine, their life is so much hidden in God, they act under influences so far above the world, that they cannot be judged by the same standards as other men. Carnal minds cannot understand them. Their hidden life is so unknown, and so unknowable to those who are far below them in their spiritual life, that they are

necessarily regarded as quite eccentric, as being mystics or monomaniacs, and as having very peculiar religious views, as being enthusiasts, and perhaps fanatics. These persons are in the world, but they live above the world. Such persons are evidently growing in the grace of God.

Being less and less disposed to dwell upon the faults and foibles of others, is an evidence of growth in grace.

Being less and less disposed to speak sarcastically or severely, or to judge uncharitably of others. A growing delicacy or tenderness in speaking of real or supposed faults, is an evidence of growth in grace.

An increasing reluctance to regard or treat anyone as an enemy, and an increasing ease and naturalness in treating them kindly, in praying for them heartily, and in efforts to do them good is an evidence of growth in grace.

Less and less temptation to remember an injury, and the abatement of all desire to retaliate when injured, is an evidence of growth in grace.

A growing readiness and cordiality in forgiving and burying an injury out of sight, and a kind of moral inability to do otherwise than seek the highest good of those who have injured us most deeply, is an evidence of growth in grace.

When we find in our own experience, and manifest to others, that it is more and more natural to regard all men as our brethren, especially to drop out of view all sectarian discriminations, all ideas and prejudices of caste, and of color, of poverty, and of riches, of blood relation, and of natural, rather than of spiritual ties, and to make common cause with God, in aiming to do good to all men, to enemies and friends alike, we have then in ourselves, and given to others the highest evidence of growing in the favor of God.

When we find less and less reluctance to making full confession to those whom we have injured, when with increasing readiness and cordiality we lay our hearts open to be searched, take home conviction of wrongdoing and when in such cases, we cannot rest till we have made the fullest confession and reparation within our power, when we own up, and confess, and make the fullest satisfaction, is a luxury to us rather than a trial and a cross, we have evidence that we are growing in the favor of God.

When we are more and more impressed and affected by the mercies of God, and by the kindnesses of our fellowmen and those around us, when we more deeply and thoroughly appreciate manifestations of kindness in God, or in anyone else, when we are more and more humbled and affected by these kindnesses and find it more and more natural to be grateful for them, then we are growing in the grace and favor of God and are ready to meet Him in peace.