

The GOSPEL TRUTH

This message was published in The Oberlin Evangelist on Sept. 14, 1853

DEATH TO SIN THROUGH CHRIST

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[Charles Finney 1792-1875 led 500,000 souls to Christ. Not to a mere conversion but to a full salvation through sanctification. Many Christians, across denominational lines, consider him to have been America's greatest evangelist and the founder of modern revivalism. The following are virtually unedited excerpts from Charles Finney's full teaching on "Death to sin through Christ"].

"Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in (and through) Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. 6:11

Finney: "(I) What is it to be dead to sin in the sense of this scripture? Being dead to sin must obviously be the opposite of being dead in sin. The latter must undeniably be a state of entire sinfulness--a state in which the soul is dead to all good through the power of sin over it. But right over against this, to be dead to sin, must be to be indifferent to sin's attractions--beyond the reach of its influence--as fully removed from its influences as the dead are from the objects of sense in this world. As he who is dead in the natural sense, has nothing more to do with earthly things, so he who is dead to sin has nothing to do any more with sin's attractions or with sinning itself.

(II) What is it to be alive to God? To be full of life for Him--to be altogether active and on the alert to do his will; to make our whole lives a perpetual offering to Him, constantly delivering up ourselves to Him and his service that we may glorify his name and be in submission to his interests.

(III) What is it to reckon ourselves dead indeed to sin? The word rendered reckon is sometimes rendered account. Abraham's faith was accounted unto him for righteousness. So in this passage--reckon must mean--believe, esteem yourselves dead indeed to sin. Account this to be the case. Regard this as truly your relation to sin; you are entirely dead to it; it shall have no more dominion over you.

(IV) What is meant by reckoning yourselves alive indeed to God in Jesus Christ? Plainly this: that you are to expect to be saved by Jesus Christ and to calculate on this salvation as your own. You are to esteem yourself as wholly dead to sin and as consequently brought into life and peace in Christ Jesus.

(V) What is implied by what this scripture exhorts us to do? It implies the complete closing off of the mind against temptation, in such a sense that the mind truly expects to live a life purely devoted to God. This is the same sort of closing off of the mind as takes place under a faithful marriage contract. The Bible everywhere keeps this analogy with

marriage prominent. Christians are represented as the bride of Christ. They stand in a relation to Him, which is closely analogous to that of a bride to her husband. Hence when they commit their whole hearts to Him, keeping their affections in Him and trusting Him for all good, their hearts are strongly shut off against temptation. We see the principle here involved, illustrated in human marriage relationships. When a man and a woman are solemnly betrothed in mutual honest faithfulness, there is no longer any thought of letting the eye rove or the heart go abroad for a fresh object of interest and love. The heart is fixed--willingly and by solemnly pledged faithfulness, fixed; and this fact shuts out the power of temptation almost entirely. It renders it comparatively an easy matter to keep the heart safely above the influence of any temptation to be drawn away to another.

Before the sacred vows are taken, individuals may be excused for looking round and making any observations, or inquiries: but never after the solemn vow is made. After the two have become one by vow of marriage, never to be broken, there is to be no more question as to a better choice--no further thought about changing the relation or withdrawing the heart's affections. No wavering is admissible now; the pledge is made for everlasting faithfulness, settled once and forever! This is God's own illustration, and surely none need be more apt, or more forcible. It shows how the Christian should look upon sin and upon all temptation to sin. He must say; Away from my heart for ever! I am married to Jesus Christ; how then can I look after other lovers? My mind is forever settled. It rests in the deep repose of one whose affections are solemnly pledged and fixed--to rove no more! And sin? I can think of yielding to its seductions no longer. I cannot entertain the question for a moment. I can have nothing to do with sinning. My mind is settled--the question forever closed, and I can no more admit the temptation to small sins than to great sins--no more consent to give my heart to worldly idols than to commit murder! I did not become a Christian as an experiment, to see how I might like it--no more than a wife or husband take on themselves the marriage vow as an experiment. No; my whole soul has committed itself to Jesus Christ with as much expectation of being faithful forever as the most faithful husband and wife have of fulfilling their vows in all faithfulness, till death shall part them.

Again, the state of mind in question implies that the Christian knows where his great strength lies. He knows it does not lie in works of fasting, charitable giving, making prayers, doing public duties or private duties--nothing of this sort--not even in resolutions or any self-originated efforts, but only in Christ received by faith. He no more expects spiritual life of himself apart from Christ, than a man in his senses would expect to fly by swinging his arms in the air. Deep in his soul lies the conviction that his whole strength lies in Christ alone.

When men are so enlightened as to truly get a hold of this subject, then to expect less than this from Jesus Christ as the result of committing the whole soul to Him for full salvation, is virtually to reject Him as a revealed Savior. It does not honor Him for what He is; it does not honor the revelations He has made of Himself in his word by accepting Him as there presented. For consider what is the first element of this salvation? Not being saved from hell, but being saved from sin. Salvation from punishment is a secondary thing, in every sense. It is only a result of being saved from sin and not the prime element

in the gospel salvation. Why was the infant Messiah to be called Jesus? Because He should save his people from their sins. And does the Bible anywhere teach any other or different view from this?"

FINNEY'S REMARKS

"How perfectly chilling and horrible for persons to oppose the idea of expecting deliverance from sin and yet talk calmly of going on in sin all the rest of their earthly days! As an elder whom I knew rose in a meeting and told the Lord he had been living in sin thus far and expected to go on in sin as long as he lived; he had sinned to-day and should doubtless sin to-morrow and so on--and yet he talked as calmly about it all as if it were foolish to even question it, as well as impossible to attempt any change for the better. To talk of all this calmly--think of that! Quite calmly, of living in sin all the rest of his days! How horrible!! Suppose a wife should say to her husband, "I love you some, but you know I love many other men too, and that I find it pleasant to indulge myself with them. You certainly must be aware that all women are frail creatures and liable to fall continually, and indeed you know that I expect to fall more or less as it may happen every day I live, so that you certainly will not expect from me anything so impracticable and fanatical as unblemished virtue! You know none of us have any idea of being perfect in the present life--we don't believe in any such thing!"

Now let me ask you to look at this woman and hear what she has to say. Can you hear her talk so, without having your soul filled with horror? What! Is this woman a wife, and does she think and talk in this way about faithfulness in marriage?

And yet this is not to be compared in shocking guilt and treason with the case of the Christian who says, "I expect to sin every day I live," and who says this with unmoved carelessness. You expect to be a traitor to Jesus each day of your life; to crucify him afresh each day; to put him each day to an open shame; each day to dishonor his name, and grieve his heart, and to bring sorrow and shame upon all who love Christ's cause; and yet you talk about having a good hope for eternity through grace! But tell me, does not every true Christian say, "Do not let me live at all if I cannot live without sin; for how can I bear to go on day by day sinning against him whom I so much love!"

Those who are really opposed to this idea of being dead, in Christ, to sin, are either very ignorant of what the gospel is, or they are un-repentant and of course do not care to be delivered from their sins; or at best they are guilty of great unbelief. Into which of these classes the opposers of the doctrine may fall, is a question for themselves to settle, as between their own consciences and their God.

There are two distinct views of salvation held among professed Christians, and correspondingly two distinct classes of professing Christians--often embraced within the same church. The one class regard the gospel as a salvation from sin. They think more of this and value it more than the hope of heaven, or of earth either. The great thing with them is to appropriate the truth of deliverance from sin. This constitutes the attraction and glory of the gospel. They seek this more than to be saved from hell. They care more by far to be saved from sin itself than from its penal consequences. Of the latter they think

and pray but little. It is their glory and their joy that Christ is sent to deliver them from their bondage to iniquity--to lift them up from their wretched state and give them the liberty of love. This they labor to realize; this is to them the good news of gospel salvation.

The other class are mostly anxious to be saved from hell. The punishment due for sin is the thing they chiefly fear. In fact, fear has been mainly the spring of their religious efforts. The gospel is not thought of as a means of deliverance from sin, but as a great system of indulgences, that is, a vast allowance of sin, which takes off the fear and danger of damnation, while yet it leaves them free to continue in their sin. Now, here I do not by any means imply that they will call their system of gospel faith a scheme of indulgences: the name doubtless will be an offence to them. They may not have distinctly considered this point, and may have failed to notice that in fact it is indeed such and nothing else.

They seem not to notice that a plan of salvation that removes the fear of damnation for sin, and which yet leaves them in their sins to live for themselves to please themselves, and which holds that Christ will at last bring them to heaven, notwithstanding their having lived in sin all their days, must be a vast system of indulgences. Indeed, it is a compromise on a most grandiose scale. By virtue of it, the whole church is expected to wallow on in sin through life, and be none the less sure of heaven at the end.

These opposite views are so prevalent and so noticeable, you will see them everywhere as you go round among the churches. You will find many in the church who are altogether worldly and selfish; who live conformed to the world in various neglects of duty, and who expect to indulge themselves in sin more or less all the way through life. You may ask them, Do you think that is right? They answer: No. Why then do you do it? O, we are all imperfect, and we can't expect to be any better than imperfect while here in the flesh. Yet they expect to be saved in the end from hell, and to have all their sins forgiven; but how? Not on condition of sincerely turning away from all their sins, but on the assumption that the gospel is a vast system of indulgences--more vast by far than Pope Leo X. ever wielded and worked to comfort sinning Catholics in his day. For here, not merely those that sin occasionally as there, but those who live in sin and know they do, and expect to as long as they live, yet still expect to be saved without fail at the end.

Let me tell you, a Christian man who repents of sin, repents of it as sin. He makes no such discriminations as between a little secret sin and a great sin, for example, a murder. He knows no such distinction between sins as will leave him to commit the one class without scruple and to shrink from the other. With him anything that grieves God is a horrible thing. Anything that displeases God--"Ah," he cries out, "God will see it; it will grieve his heart!" How it will affect God--this is everything with him. One who knows what it is to appear guilty of sin before God, and then who knows also what it is to be delivered from this condition, will understand how the Christian ought to feel in circumstances of temptation, where he feels himself in danger of sinning. His hair all stands on end! How awful to sin against God! Hence anything that seems likely to bring him into danger will rouse up all his soul within him and put him on his guard.

Many seem to have hardened their hearts against all expectation of this deliverance from sin. They have heard the doctrine preached. They've seen some profess to being saved

from sin, but they have also seen some of this class fall again, and now they deliberately reject the whole doctrine. But is this consistent with really embracing the gospel? What is Christ to the believer? What was his mission to the world? What is he doing and what is he trying to do? (1 John 3:5 “You know He was manifested to take away our sins...”)

He has come to break the power of sin in the heart, and to be the life of the believer, working in him a perpetual salvation from sin, aiming to bring him thus, and only thus, to heaven in the end. What is faith, what but the actual giving of yourself up to Christ that he may do this work for you and in you! What are you to believe of Christ if not this, that he is to save his people from their sins? Can you tell of anything else? Does the Bible tell you to expect something different and less than this? The fact is, that it has been the great stumbling-block to the church that this thing has not been well understood. The common experience of nominal Christians has misrepresented and undermined the truth. The majority form their views much more from this continuing in sin experience than from the Bible, or at best applying this experience to interpret the Bible. They have adopted exceedingly defective, not to say false, opinions as to the nature and design of the gospel. They seem to forget altogether that Paul in writing to Christians at Rome, assures them that if they are under grace, sin shall not have dominion over them.

When Christians do not expect this blessing from Christ, they will not get it. While they expect so little as they usually do, no wonder they get so little. According to their faith, they must expect to receive and not ever very much beyond it.

It is often the case that sanctification (being made dead to sin, alive to God, and conformed to Christ) is held as a theory, while the mind does not yet by any means embrace the truth in love. The case is analogous to that of un-repentant sinners who hold in theory that they must have a new heart. They profess to believe thus, but do they really understand it? No. Suppose it were revealed to their minds so that they should really see it as it is, would they not see a new thing? Would they not be startled to see how utterly far they are, while un-repentant, from being acceptable to God, and how great the change they must experience before they can enter the kingdom? Equally so with sanctification. Although many Christians profess to hold it in theory, yet the passages of Scripture which describe it do not enter into their experience. They do not see the whole truth. If they were to see the whole truth, and should then reject it, I believe it would be in them the unpardonable sin. When the Spirit of God discloses to them the real meaning of the gospel, then if they deliberately reject it, how can the sin be less than what the Scriptures represent as the unpardonable sin? Having once been enlightened and having received the knowledge of the truth that they might be saved, then turning back, is it not thenceforth impossible that they should be renewed again to repentance? One thing, at least must be said, there is a peril which many of the professed Christians of our day seem not to realize. Having, as they do, so much light before the mind in regard to the provisions made in the gospel for present sanctification, and then in rejecting this light practically and living still in sin as if the gospel made no provision to save the Christian from his sins. Into this awful peril how many rush blindly and to their own destruction!”

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