

All Events Ruinous to the Sinner

by Charles Finney

All events conspire to ruin the obstinate and finally impenitent sinner, increasing their guilt and ruin.

Scripture: Proverbs 29:1, Isaiah 1:5, Romans 8:28

Topics: "Consequences of Sin", "The Nature of God's Providence"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that all events ultimately conspire to ruin the obstinate and impenitent sinner, illustrating that every blessing and trial from God, when abused, only increases guilt and leads to greater condemnation. He argues that the gifts of existence, reason, and conscience, when misused, become curses that augment the sinner's ruin. Finney points out that even the trials and misfortunes in a sinner's life are designed to lead them to repentance, but instead, they often harden their hearts further. He concludes that the sinner's refusal to repent results in a life where every event works against their soul, leading to inevitable destruction. The sermon serves as a stark warning that without turning to God, all experiences will only deepen the sinner's despair and guilt.

Transcript

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." --Rom. 8:28

In my further discussion of this subject I shall attempt to show that all events conspire to ruin the obstinate and finally impenitent sinner.

This is not directly taught in the text, but is implied in it, and is abundantly taught us in the Bible.

It will be my object,

I. TO SHOW THAT THIS IS AND MUST BE A UNIVERSAL TRUTH.

II. TO POINT OUT SOME PARTICULARS THAT WILL ILLUSTRATE IT.

III. TO SHOW THAT WE REALLY KNOW THIS TO BE TRUE, EVEN AS WE KNOW ITS OPPOSITE TO BE TRUE OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

I. To show that this is and must be a universal truth.

It may be shown to be so in a great many ways. For example, thus: Moral obligation is conditioned upon knowledge and is always equal to knowledge. Whatever, therefore, increases knowledge increases guilt, if obligation is not complied with but the individual continues to resist the light and its claims.

One other point. Increasing guilt augments the sinner's ruin. The more guilty, the greater his punishment. Hence whatever augments his guilt conspires and conduces to aggravate his ruin.

It cannot be doubted a moment that all events that fall under the sinner's observation, or become known to him by any means whatever in this life, will increase his knowledge of God and of course his duty and obligation. All these will consequently conspire at once to augment his guilt and damnation.

All those events that remain unknown to the sinner during his present life may become known to him in the future life, and then may work out their legitimate results--increased knowledge--augmented guilt--more aggravated doom.

This whole point may be rendered more plain and practical by some detail of illustration.

All the gifts of providence conspire to work out the sinner's ruin.

Of these the first is the gift of existence. The existence which God gives the sinner is a blessing to him if he uses it aright, but a fearful curse to him if he abuses it. But he does abuse it in the worst possible manner so long as he lives in sin. Just so long, he devotes the existence which God gives him to rebellion against his Maker--and what can be a greater and fouler abuse of existence than this! Every moment of life spent in sin must therefore prove a curse to the sinner. It goes to aggravate his guilt and of course, his ruin.

And no sinner can avoid this fearful result, if he will persist in sinning. Exist he must--he cannot prevent it--cannot put an end to his existence--for death only changes its place and mode--does not bring it to an end. Live, then, each sinner must, and if he will go on in sin, he must go on augmenting his guilt and consequent ruin.

Reason is another gift of providence--a precious blessing if devoted to God--if used legitimately and faithfully according to its nature and design;--but if trampled down, abused, set at naught--if its demands for right and for God are all repelled and denied--how fearful the guilt which its possession and abuse involves!

In what respect do you differ from the lower orders of created beings? They have understanding; they have will;--but they lack reason;--this then is your pre-eminence above them. And will you abuse this and bring yourself quite down to a level with them in your conduct? How can you do so without awful, shameful, damning guilt?

Conscience is one of the functions of the reason.--Did your conscience ever stand up and accuse you? Did it ever set your sins in order before your eyes and make you see and feel their perfect guilt? If so, then you know something of that deathless worm of your future cup;--you have had a little foretaste of the horrors of self-accusation and self-condemnation. O there is nothing in your existence so terrible as this! If you allow yourself to trample down this law of God developed in your reason, you will arouse against your own soul a fearful power within your own bosom that you can never resist or appease! It will be heard--that dreadful tone of self-accusing--self-reproach;--what can ever allay the pungency and anguish of its tortures!

Next look at what are most commonly intended by the gifts and bounties of providence--the things on which you are wont to lay much stress. Suppose you have health and wealth, friends and education;--what are they? are they working together for your good--your real, highest, eternal good? This turns entirely on the question whether they lead you to repentance, gratitude and love to God, or whether they only yield you the pleasures of sin for a season, augment your mercies, your ingratitude, your guilt and consequent damnation. You may call these things good, and if you would use them in serving God and let them lead your heart to Him in love and gratitude and sweet obedience, they would be truly a good to you; but if you remain a sinner, you are of course the greater sinner for having received and abused these greater mercies, and they can only work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of damnation. You suffer the Lord to load you down with his blessings here, and then abuse them so that they shall become only as mill-stones about your neck in the lake that burneth with fire forever. You know it must be so, and cannot be otherwise.

So it will be with all those things by which you amuse yourself and seek to augment your enjoyment in sin. You count yourself most happy if you can secure things;--but Oh! your final disappointment when you shall see how they are converted into curses to your soul! These very amusements may have diverted your attention from saving your soul. They may have fanned and fed the fires of unhallowed passion--they may have made you ten fold more the child of hell than otherwise you could have been, and thus they may have exceedingly augmented your final ruin.

Again, what you deem your good fortune results in the same augmentation of guilt and damnation.--You deem yourself most fortunate if you can secure earthly good;--but O! how do these things--abused--work out your deeper damnation! How they help to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath! Your Father sent that good fortune to turn your eye toward his kind hand--to touch your heart with gratitude, and lead you to repentance;--you abuse and pervert every thing, and swell the fearful measure of your awful doom!

Let the wicked go on his way according to his heart's desire, filling his cup with earthly joy, and finding all things prosper in his hand;--yet saith the word of Jehovah--"Say ye to the wicked, it shall be ill with him;--for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

Yet again, the trials and the curses that fall to the sinner's lot shall all have the same result. You complain of these things as if they worked out only evil and as if God designed them for no other end; but in this you altogether fail to comprehend the gracious designs of your Heavenly Father. He sends you earthly good to melt your heart and you abuse it and wax more hard in sin;--then why should he not change his hand and at least make trial, of possibly reverses and disappointments will not bring you to reflection; or to see whether He cannot tear you away from your idols and make you search for the living God. He does so; but all is of no avail; you only fret and complain. Not so do Christians. If God sends them mercies they are grateful;--if chastisements, they are submissive. But how different is it with you! If God sends you mercies, you are thankless. You sit every day at the table which your Heavenly Father spreads and loads down for you; but you can do it each day with a heart as cold as a stone. It seems to be entirely out of the question for you to think of recognizing your Father's hand, or your own augmented obligation to serve and please him.

If on the other hand He sends afflictions upon you, you complain and harden, not humble, yourself under his chastising hand. O, you ought to understand that these trials are a part of the discipline with which God seeks to subdue your soul to his scepter. And you ought to know that if his efforts fail, it is all evil to you, utterly and infinitely evil. Oh, indeed! if all the resources of infinite power, wisdom and love fail to change

you, what can be more desperate than your case or more guilty than your heart?

Your whole life of impenitence is filled up with such results. Does the Lord take away your friend? Then you repine; you feel that there never was a case so aggravated as yours, and you will not bow under the hand that chastises you. How unlike the Christians who when smitten looks up to his own Father's hand, and bows beneath it; smiles, loves, trusts, adores. But not so do you accept the punishment of your iniquity. Every effort the Lord makes to reclaim you renders you only more hardened, more guilty, more fitted for destruction.

It is indeed grievous beyond expression to see how these things work and what results are produced by all the varied discipline which the Lord employs to save your soul. It is painful to see that all these efforts only serve to harden your heart, until the Lord is forced to say of you as in Isaiah 1. of the ancient Jews;--"Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." The original in this passage seems to convey the idea that they had been chastised till from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet there was no longer a sound spot where another blow could be inflicted. The resources of chastisement were exhausted, and still no good result followed. So it sometimes happens that a parent will chastise his child until he has no hope that mere chastisement can do any good. This seems to be the state of mind which the Lord expresses respecting the Jews. And He often has occasion for this state of feeling towards impenitent sinners. He watches all round their path, searches out all the avenues of their heart; tries now mercies and then afflictions, and follows up the alternations perhaps year after year through a long life--but all in vain. Ah, worse,--often infinitely worse than in vain, for it only serves to augment the sinner's fearful guilt and final condemnation. Strange that sinners do not see that this is true and in the nature of the case must be. Strange you do not see that sickness, losses, judgments of every kind are designed to subdue your refractory spirit, and of course if they only serve to make you the more refractory, the result can be nothing less than a fearful aggravation of your guilt and ruin.

Thus all your sins, instead of being overruled for your good, serve only to heap up a mountain load of guilt, and swell the miseries of your doom.

Again, the deeds of others, good, or bad, only enhance your guilt. I beg of you to look a moment at this fact. You live among professed Christians. If they are faithful to God and to your soul, and adorn the gospel by their life, this only hardens your heart, for you resist all the influences of their entreaties, prayers, tears and godly life. On the other hand, if they dishonor the gospel, you take offence--you stumble over them, and become the more bold and hardened in your sins.

Now you know it would not be thus in either case with Christians. If they fell in with truly pious brethren, their hearts would be refreshed and their piety quickened; if with bad professors, the result would be to quicken them to pray, to revive their own love for Zion and their sympathy for the cause of Jesus Christ.

So also, if Christians are persecuted, it only works good to them, teaching them forbearance and forgiveness of injuries; training them to love their enemies and bless those that curse them.

Far otherwise with you, sinner. In fact, you never know what it is to be benefited by any conduct, good or bad, of your fellow-beings. All works only evil to you. Indeed, every thing works out evil and only evil to you. The law of God--the gospel of God--the smiles of providence or its frowns; all possible conduct of your fellow-men and all possible varieties in the course of the Lord towards you--rain or sunshine--storm or

calm--prosperity or adversity--each and all serve only the one dreadful end with you--that of augmenting your guilt, and of course your final doom of misery.

Dreadful consideration!--that your character should be such that all possible events work evil and evil only to your soul! If you had a full and a just view of your case as it is, you might truly say--"Whatever happens is all evil to me. Whatever the times are--times of revival, or times of declension;--all is evil to me; times of plenty, or times of famine--all is evil to me; times of health, or times of pestilence--all is alike, evil to me. All conspire to fill up the measure of my guilt and aggravate my eternal doom."

Often in looking at this have I felt as if I should sink--the view is so saddening, so awful; sinners seem so stubborn and so refractory, and it is so obvious and sure that every thing that occurs to the sinner must work evil and evil only to his guilty soul.

Again, all those providential circumstances that befall others, result alike in evil, to the sinner. If his neighbors are sick, or if they are well, this sinner will abuse the warning voice of God through his providence. Perhaps the sinner thinks that such things as these are not going to affect his own case, but they surely will, and inevitably must. They are the voice of God to him, and he must hear or refuse. Continuing in sin, he does the latter, and of course augments his own guilt and damnation.

It matters not how these events may affect your neighbor, whether for good or for evil; they are in either case evil and only evil to you. The same event may work good to another; yet shall it be only evil to you. That funeral we attended this morning when a dead child of God was laid in the grave of the saints; they may have touched your sympathies, and you may have been moved to pity over so early a death, but you might much more reasonably pity yourself.--When I see sinners at a funeral, I know they are often saying to themselves--"I am glad that I am not there in the place of the dead;" and yet it may be better far that you should die now than that you should be spared any longer, Beyond all question it is better for you to die and be laid in the grave in the place of the first death that occurs rather than that you should live longer to make every death you hear of, only an augmented curse to yourself. O, how horrible is this!

So also to live in a land of Bibles and Sabbaths and enjoy instruction and choice influences enough to make you an Angel of light:--and yet abusing and perverting them all, you convert them into the worst form of curses. All the means God uses to save you are working evil to you. God means them for good, but you pervert them into evil. God would bless you, but you will curse yourself by the very means He uses for blessing you. He would fain make all the events of his providence work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, but despite of the endeavors of infinite love, you persist in working out of all these things your own deeper damnation.

III. We know it to be true that all things work out evil to the sinner. Though the text does not affirm this, yet the Bible does, and so does reason, and experience and observation. It is a truth that every man's reason must affirm. Every man knows that the occurring events of God's providence increase his knowledge of God and hence his obligation to love and obey him. Of course with this increase of light comes also increasing guilt in resisting its claims, and in the train of increasing guilt comes augmented ruin.

Now every sinner must know all this to be true. There is not a sinner in this house whose reason does not affirm each step in this process of argumentation to be true, and true as to himself.

This leads me to say that every man's own experience will testify that until he turns from sin by real repentance, all the course of divine providence serves only to harden his heart. He knows that the longer

he resists and the more light he has to oppose, the more hardened he becomes.

So all our observation of others testifies. We see the sinner growing old in his sins--resisting one call of God after another, breaking through every restraint, setting at naught the repeated warnings of divine providence;--and we always see such a sinner waxing fearfully hard of heart against God and the voice of his own conscience. I have often been shocked to see how fearfully hardened sinners sometimes become by resisting a long succession of means and influences adapted to bring them to repentance.

The truth we have been illustrating is evinced also by ample testimony from the word of God. The Bible seems every where to assume that all things do and shall work evil to the sinner who will not repent. Being "often reprov'd and still hardening his neck, he shall be suddenly destroyed and that without remedy."

REMARKS.

1. I remarked in my sermon this morning that Christians sometimes blame themselves for things the occurrence of which upon the whole they do not regret; so wondrously will God overrule those evil deeds of theirs for great good. Thus God will not leave them to bitter and eternal regret over the consequences of their failures or their sins, though they must forever condemn their own sins and blame themselves for sinning. It is one of the great mercies of the Lord towards them that He does not leave them under the pang of everlasting regret in view of unmingled evil resulting from their misdeeds.

But sinners are left to the double anguish of everlasting self-blame, and eternal regret over the utterly ruinous results to themselves of all their sins. Every event of their lives has been sin and only sin, and all have worked out the legitimate results of sinning, all evil to them and evil only and continually. Since they would not repent and would not open their hearts to the healing and restoring influences of God's providence and Spirit, the Lord could not counteract the natural tendency of sin on their heart to augment its moral hardness and consequently their own eternal ruin.

2. Sinners have never any good reason to rejoice as respects their own prospects. In fact, remaining in sin, they have nothing in which they can reasonably rejoice. Those very events of their lives in which they are most apt to rejoice will probably be those which above all others will fill them with anguish hereafter. Those very seasons of prosperity in which you rejoice most now may be your bitterest grounds for regret and sorrow when you shall come to see all their legitimate results upon your character and doom. So long then as you continue in sin, so long you have absolutely nothing to rejoice in. The more you rejoice and deem yourselves prosperous and happy in earthly good, the more will these very things pierce and sting your soul through all your future existence.

3. Others have no good reason to rejoice in any thing that befalls you, so long as you remain in an impenitent sinner. The only valuable hope they can have is that it may lead you to repentance. This failing, all will work for evil and only evil to the sinner.

It often happens that parents rejoice in events that befall their ungodly children. They rejoice perhaps to see them well settled in life, or peculiarly fortunate in business. But none of these things are ever looked upon on their true light except through the medium of the great truth we are now considering. Whatever leaves them still in their sins works fearful ruin to their souls, and the more joy it seems to bring, the more fearful will be its power to curse and embitter all their future being.

4. While it is true that no event, however grievous in itself, can befall a Christian which should make us grieve for him, it is equally true that no event can befall the sinner in which we are not compelled to grieve for its results upon him. Nothing can happen to him that will not fearfully curse him, if he still persists in sin. It may be ever so well adapted for his improvement, for his best good, for his happiness;--yet shall he pervert it all to the greatest of evils to his soul.

See that young man about going to college. It might prove a blessing to him, but it will prove to him only a curse. It will increase his knowledge, and thus augment his guilt. It will give him greater pre-eminence and influence; but if he improves this for greater sin and mischief, it will curse him at the last with tenfold destruction.

Another has married him a wife--beautiful, accomplished, pious;--so much the worse for him. It only serves to swell the sum of his guilt and ruin. He may live in a land of Sabbaths, and in the midst of revivals;--so much the worse; he may have pious, praying parents;--so much the worse.

5. Sinners need not stumble at the trials of the people of God. No more or greater trials shall befall the Christian than are indispensable as means to work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The truth is, God's people need these trials. They must be carried through many a fiery ordeal.--What then? Let them rejoice, for all shall work out their good. Let them be made to weep;--it shall work for their good. Let them be sick;--it shall do them good. Let them lose their property;--it shall be for their good. Let their friends die;--all shall augment their good. Every Christian may say--whatever befalls me, the Lord will cause it to result in my greater good. Let a mighty wave dash over him, lifting high its crest and sweeping him along with torrent power--it does him good. Let another come with mighty force--it does him good. Another still;--all is good. There he stands amid those mountain-waves, happy in his God, for he believes that all shall work out good to his soul. This is only the discipline his Father sends him, and why should it not cheer his soul to think how all shall work out his eternal good.

Right over against this, every thing is occasion of grief and dismay to the sinner, no matter how joyous his soul in its approach. Whatever befalls me, he must say if he sees rightly--all is evil to me. Be it storm or sunshine; whether I lie down in peace, or take my bed of pain and languishing, all is prospectively evil to my soul!

How awful this condition! But it is even so; and the intelligence of every being in the universe affirms that these results are all right and as they should be.

6. All events to all eternity will make the impassable gulf between saints and sinners only the more deep and broad. The fact is, these two classes are oppositely affected by all the providences of God, and doubtless will be so, by all that shall occur to them throughout eternity. God has so constituted the human mind that in its selfish state, all right events shall work out only evil; while in its renewed state all shall work out good. Difference of character lays the foundation for this wide contrast in the result. Only the sinner himself is ultimately to blame that all things work evil to him. If he will do evil, then shall all things be converted into evil in their results to him.

7. It is infinite folly for man to estimate events only according to their present and most obvious bearings and relations. The result of this course is and always must be that men will constantly and fatally deceive themselves. If every sinner in this house could see all the final results of the events that are transpiring now, he would stand amazed and transfixed with horror. What! he would say--is untold anguish and horror coming out of this cup of my earthly joy? Oh, if sinners could clearly see these things, they would not so

often bless themselves for their good fortune.

8. The arrangements of providence in respect to both saints and sinners are made with a design to illustrate the character of God. All the events of this life and all that occur throughout eternity also, will all serve to illustrate the perfections of Jehovah. Not to have arranged all things for this end would have been a great mistake--but God never makes such mistakes. A wise and glorious end in view characterized all he does.

9. It is the perverse course of the sinner and nothing else but this that makes the providences of God work out evil to him. Sinners are wont to pity themselves, and say, alas for me, for God has made my lot such that all things work only evil to me! Let all sinners know that the fault is wholly and only their own, and that God has made the best possible arrangements for their good. It is only their perversion that makes the best things become to them the worst.

And sinners cannot help knowing this. After all their complaining and fault-finding, they know that they have no plea to make against God. You know, sinners, that it is all your own fault that every day is not a blessing to you--that every sun-rising and sun-setting does not come fraught with mercies to your soul. You know that you might place yourself in such an attitude towards God that all his providences should work out your real and highest good. You are now an enemy of God; but you know you may at once become his friend. I can make the appeal to every sinner's own conscience. You know that if you would not harden your own heart, all the events of divine providence would result in your good. They would bring admonitions that you would give heed to with the greatest profit to your soul, and would throw you into scenes of discipline which could not fail to prove a blessing to you. Only yield your heart to the providences, the truth, and the Spirit of God, and you would become a child of God, and all things would work your good.

I can well remember how it seemed to me before my conversion. I then saw most clearly that all was good to the Christian;--if he was sick, all was well to him;--or if in health, it was a real blessing. If he lives, it was to enjoy the friendship of God;--if he died it was to enter upon his eternal reward. Being himself a friend of God, evil could no sooner befall him than it could befall his great friend, Jehovah. Nothing could be an evil to him, for if he were ever so much afflicted, it would only make him the more self-denying, meek, patient, heavenly.

But right over against this--the opposite in every respect, is the case of the self-hardening sinner. He puts on an air of self-confidence and enjoyment;--he would fain make you think that sinners are the only happy men on earth. He dances along his way for a brief season, but it is on slippery places;--and suddenly his feet slide--and he is in hell! So transient is all the bliss that sin and Satan give. It is only a lure to endless woe.

If sinners only appreciated their real condition, they could not rest in sin one moment. All their levity would appear infinitely shocking to themselves. I recollect to have seen several cases in which sinners were in such a state of mind that they could not rejoice in any possible event. There is one lady among you who could tell you a great deal about this state of mind--a state of darkness, despair and anguish, in which every thing was clearly seen to be evil and only evil, and all things however apparently prosperous were working out evil and nothing else to her soul and her eternal state. If the sun shown sweetly, all was gloom, for that God who smiled through those sunbeams was her enemy. Each storm only reminded her of Jehovah's wrath against the sinner. If friends loved her and sympathized with her, all was evil;--she had

no friends above, and deserved none here below. So of every thing that could occur. All was evil, undiluted, unassuaged.

But when her soul came into the light and glory of the gospel, and found peace and joy in God, the whole scene was at once perfectly changed. Her husband has told me that he never knew her to fret or repine since that blessed hour. I asked her once what was the secret of her remarkable equanimity. She replied--"Once I escaped from the jaws of hell--from the dark iron castle of Giant Despair. Ever since I have looked upon myself as a miracle of grace, and I cannot regard any of the little troubles of life as anything to be compared with those indescribable agonies. I am often amazed to see how small a thing can disturb the equanimity of saints, or raise the mirth of sinner."

If sinners are going to continue in their sins, they may as well bid farewell at once to all peace and joy; and welcome anguish and black despair to their souls. Let them say at once--All things are evil and nothing but evil to me. Let them give themselves up to universal mourning, no matter how soon, or how utterly. "Hail everlasting horrors, hail!"

But there is only one way of escape--open yet a moment longer. Turn to God; yield your whole soul to him; accept his Son your Savior, and his service as your choice for life;--then you are a child of God and his foe no longer. Then all things are yours--and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. You are welcomed at once to the bosom of that glorious family above, and the possession of the riches and joys of heaven is all your own.

But if you remain in your sins, as from present appearances you are likely to do, all events and all agencies possible will work out your destruction. Every step you take brings you nearer the vortex of that awful whirlpool--the great Maelstrom of perdition. "Your steps take hold of hell."

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