

Delighting in the Lord

by Charles Finney

Delighting ourselves in the Lord implies supreme sympathy with God, supreme complacency in God, God chosen as the supreme good of the soul, universal confidence in God, universal submission of our will to God, a spirit of universal obedience to God, delight in obeying God or delight in his service, a deep interest in God's honor and glory, and supreme seeking and desire for eternal union and communion with God.

Scripture: Psalm 16:11, Psalm 37:4, Psalm 42:1-2, Isaiah 26:3, Matthew 6:33, John 15:7, Romans 12:2, Philippians 4:19, James 4:3, 1 John 5:14-15

Topics: "Delight in God", "Fulfillment of Desires"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the profound joy and fulfillment found in delighting oneself in the Lord, as expressed in Psalm 37:4. He explains that true delight in God involves a deep sympathy with His character, a commitment to His will, and a desire for communion with Him. Finney outlines that this delight leads to the fulfillment of our heart's desires, conditioned on our alignment with God's will. He warns that without this condition, our desires may be selfish and ungranted, but when we truly seek God, our desires will reflect His nature. Ultimately, delighting in God transforms our hearts and leads to a life of obedience, joy, and fulfillment.

Transcript

"Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." --Ps. 37:4

In speaking from these words I shall,

I. SHOW WHAT IS IMPLIED IN DELIGHTING OURSELVES IN THE LORD.

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE PROMISE "HE SHALL GIVE THEE THE DESIRES OF THINE HEART."

III. WHY THIS PROMISE IS THUS CONDITIONED.

I. What is implied in delighting ourselves in the Lord.

1. Supreme sympathy with him. No one can properly be said to delight himself in the Lord any farther than he sympathizes with God, in respect to the great end on which His heart is set, and in the means by which he is attempting to accomplish that end. He must adopt his principles, enter into his views and feelings, and be able to respond a hearty amen, to all the announcements of his word, to all the dispensations of

his providence, to his character, works, and ways. One who has this supreme sympathy with God, and who deeply interests himself in God's character, government, policy, ends and means, will of course delight himself in the Lord; and no one else will.

2. Delighting ourselves in the Lord implies a supreme complacency in him. Complacency in God, is benevolence or good will toward him, modified by a consideration of his character and relations. This always implies delight. Complacency is often spoken of as if it consisted altogether in a delight existing in the sensibility of the soul. But properly speaking it is not so. Complacency considered as a virtue, belongs to the will or heart. But it always implies a corresponding state of the sensibility; and of course, implies a delight or pleasure in view of the character, government, relations, works, and ways of God. Without this complacency of heart in God, we cannot be said truly to delight ourselves in him.

3. Delight in the Lord implies that he is chosen as the supreme good of the soul. The text undoubtedly implies this. It is setting our supreme affections on him, and choosing him as our all-satisfying portion, making him the great center in which the affections and sympathy of our soul delight to rest.

4. Delight in God implies universal confidence in him. We could never be said truly to delight ourselves in God, unless we had supreme, universal confidence in his character, in his providences, and in his word. Nothing could be chosen by us as an all-satisfying portion, unless the mind regarded it as infinite and perfect. The mind is so constituted that it cannot be satisfied with any thing else. The mind is so constituted that it cannot be satisfied with any thing else. The mind is naturally and necessarily dissatisfied in a greater or less degree with whatever is seen to be imperfect. Delight in God implies, that the mind regards him as possessing infinite fulness and perfection, truthfulness, and every attribute and perfection that can fill and satisfy the soul. It is common for men to seek what they suppose will make them happy, and to endeavor to find happiness in the creature. But after all, nothing but the infinitely perfect Creator can satisfy the wants and demands of the soul. And to delight ourselves in the Lord, in the sense of the text, implies that we are satisfied in God; that his fulness and perfection meet all the demands of our being; that in him we have enough; and that the mind regards him as an exceeding great reward, as a portion infinitely ample, satisfying, full and overflowing, infinitely glorious and eternal.

5. Delight in God implies universal submission of our will to his. The soul that is not entirely submissive to God, cannot be delighted in him. He is like a child whose will is not subdued to the will of his parent; he is restive under the divine government, often made unhappy by the dispensations of his providence and by the requirements of his Word. To have true delight in God implies that we have no will of our own--only that the will of God should be done. It implies that the soul has come practically to regard God as infinitely wise and good, to feel the fullest satisfaction with his appointments and his dispensations whatever they may be.

6. Delight in God implies a spirit of universal obedience to him; a state of mind that inquires after what God would have us do with a fixed intention to do all his will without hesitation; and to devote ourselves entirely to pleasing him. It implies in short, that our whole being is given up to it; that we have no purpose or design, but in all things, at all times, in all places, and forever, to live wholly to him.

7. Delight in God implies delight in obeying him, or delight in his service. It is one thing to obey, and another thing to have delight in obedience. To be sure our nature is such that true obedience always produces delight. But obedience and delight are not the same thing. Where the true spirit of obedience exists, we shall find our delight and happiness of course in the service of God. We are always delighted

with the course on which our heart is supremely set. When, therefore our hearts are given up to pleasing God, and we live to this end, when we are heartily and universally consecrated to God's glory and interests, nothing will of course afford us so great pleasure, we shall be so delighted in nothing else, as in waiting on God, doing his bidding, and in every thing engaging in his service. The service of God will be our meat and drink. We shall know what Christ meant when he said "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." "It is my meat to do the will of him that sent me." "I delight to do thy will, O my God."

8. Delight in God implies, a deep interest in his honor and glory. Everything we do and say will have reference to God. God will be the supreme end of all we say and do. In this we shall sympathize with God himself. God has a supreme regard to his own interest and glory, and is the chief end of all his works. This is by no means selfishness in God. It is not because it is his own glory, but because it is infinitely the greatest good, that he has a supreme regard to it. God's well-being is of infinitely more value than the aggregate of the well-being of all creatures that ever were or could be made. God's well-being is infinite. --Whereas the well-being of all creatures will always be finite. Nothing can be infinite that is not eternally and necessarily so. Nothing finite can ever grow and increase until it becomes infinite. Therefore the aggregate well-being of all finite creatures, must always be finite and of course infinitely less than the well-being of God. Now if God would regard things according to their relative value he must of necessity lay infinitely more stress upon his own happiness and glory than upon the happiness and glory of all other beings together. There is no comparison between the finite and the infinite, and therefore the aggregate value of the endless happiness of all creatures is absolutely as nothing when put into the scale against the well-being of God. God so regards this; and it is reasonable and right and infinitely important that he should. Consequently himself, his own glory, and his well-being, are the supreme end of all his works. When I saw this fact announced in Pres. Edwards' writings many years since, I did not at once perceive its truthfulness. And I have often since heard persons speak as if they were stumbled by such announcements as if it implied selfishness in God. Now selfishness is preferring our own interests to our neighbors, simply because it is our own. It is not selfish in us to prefer our happiness to the happiness of a goose, because ours is really more valuable. But it is selfish in us to prefer our happiness to our neighbor's, when his is equally valuable with our own. I repeat it again; it is not because the happiness or glory is God's that his heart is set supremely on it, but because of its intrinsic value, because it is so infinitely the greater good. Now delight in God implies that we regard this as he does, so far as we understand it; that we sympathize with him in this; that we regard his interests as the supreme and infinite good, and delight ourselves in promoting his glory and honor in the universe; that we find our supreme happiness and satisfaction of soul in this.

9. Delight in God implies that we supremely seek and desire eternal union and communion with him, that so far as our own happiness is concerned, this is all we ask, to have eternal union and communion with the ever blessed God;--that, give us this and we could lack nothing essential to our happiness; but deprive us of this, and nothing in the universe could satisfy us.

II. What is implied in the promise "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

The promise implies that we shall have those things on which we set our affections, or in other words that our desire, our really cherished desires shall be gratified. If we delight ourselves in the Lord we shall have all things on which we set our hearts. "He shall give thee the desires of thine heart"--here is no limit, but it is plainly implied that what we set our hearts on, and that which we pray for shall be granted. It seems to me that the text is to be understood, not that every transient desire or awaking of appetite shall be

gratified, but that the supreme desire of the soul, that on which we can properly be said to fix our affections and our heart shall infallibly be granted to us.

III. Why this promise is thus conditioned.

1. Because without this condition the promise would be unsafe to the universe. For God to promise unqualifiedly to give us the desire of our heart, unless he knew that we had a complete sympathy with him, would be unreasonable, unsafe, and what he could not innocently do. What would it amount to for him to make such a promise without this condition? Why to this--that our selfish desires should be granted. But when selfishness is slain, when our supreme desire is on God, and our whole soul sympathizes deeply with him, it is plain that our desires may be granted. It is then both consistent with the will of God, and with the highest good of being to grant our desires. God is then the great end and center of the desires of the soul, and in giving himself to the soul, he gratifies its desires.

2. God could not safely make such a promise but on this condition; because it would be impossible to fulfill it. Suppose he should make the unqualified promise to every individual that he should have the desires of his heart. With the endless lustings of men after objects around them, how often would it come to pass that different persons would desire the same things, when but one could possess them.

3. It is perfectly safe for God to make such a promise on the condition of delighting ourselves in the Lord, because whosoever delights himself in the Lord can never desire anything inconsistent with the will of God. The Spirit of God dwells in him; all his affections and desires are under the influence of the Spirit of God. And while he delights himself in God, he is sure not to set his heart on any thing unless he is drawn to it by the Spirit of God. In this case certainly he cannot at the same time be lusting after a forbidden object and delighting himself in the Lord.

4. This promise is thus conditioned, because God delights to bestow that on which the heart is set that delights in him. He loves to bestow himself, to communicate of his own fulness to those who set their hearts on him. He loves those that love him. There is a sense to be sure in which God loves his enemies; but his love to them is not a delight in their persons or characters. But he greatly enjoys the communication of himself to those who delight themselves in him. He loves to draw them into a participation of his joy, that they may drink of the river of his pleasure. He delights in making them partakers of his own divine nature, of his own holiness and of his own happiness.

5. It is of the highest importance to the universe that God should grant the desires of the heart which delights itself in him. It is for the highest good of being that he should do so. It is for his glory; it contributes to the stability of his government. It is not only highly honorable to God, but highly useful to his creatures to know that God will grant the desire of those who set their heart on him.

REMARKS.

1. Those who delight themselves in God, will of course manifest great cheerfulness of mind.

(1.) Because this delight in God is of itself a cheerful state of mind, and

(2.) Because they have the desires of the heart.

An unsatisfied craving of mind, that produces unhappiness, gloom, despondency, and despair, is not the portion of the mind that delights itself in God. The soul that delights itself in God, is pleased with whatever

comes to pass. It has no way or will of its own, and therefore cannot be disappointed. It has no craving or lusting of a selfish nature, and therefore is not made unhappy by being crossed, and denied things on which its affections are set, because its affections are set on nothing but God. While it delights itself in God it is of course cheerful and happy under all circumstances, and can rejoice evermore, and pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks.

2. From what has been said, we may see why so few prayers prevail with God. The fact is, there is so much dissatisfaction with God and so much lusting after other things, that God cannot fulfil the desires of such souls; it would be infinitely unwise and unsafe to do so. Then, as a condition of prevailing prayer, we must delight ourselves in the Lord, and when we do this our prayers will be dictated by God's Spirit, and of course will be answered.

Now look around over the world. How few seem to have their supreme delight in God. How few are seeking communion and fellowship with God. How few make union with God the supreme end of their lives. It is not strange then that our prayers are not answered. The conditions of prevailing prayer are not fulfilled. Many pray because they are pressed up to it by conviction, not because their soul pants after communion with God, and delights itself in God. Instead of loving to dwell in the Bible, and in the house of God, and in the closet--in short, instead of delighting itself in God, it is constantly roving about here and there, to see if it cannot find some good. "Who will show us any good?" seems to be its constant inquiry. Now those who are in this state cannot have their desires granted.

The reason why so many desires are ungratified, is, because they are not the right kind of desires. The truth is, where an individual delights himself in the Lord, he will have the desires of his heart. Instead of being wretched all the time, and setting his heart on some thing he cannot get, when he comes to delight himself in the Lord, all this scrambling and lusting after what is beyond his reach, will be gone; he will be like a weaned child, all peace. When the mind has God, it has enough.

Much prayer, or that which is called prayer, is after all, nothing but lusting in the Bible sense of the term. It is a craving of the mind after some selfish good. Much prayer is nothing else but the pouring out of these cravings of the selfish heart. The Apostle James speaks of this state of mind; "Ye lust, says he, and have not; ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not because ye ask not; ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it on your lusts."

3. When there is delight in God, the supreme desire of course, will be for union and communion with God. This will be the all-absorbing desire of the mind. It will, as it were, swallow up all other desires. I will explain a little. We often see one state of mind or desire that comes to swallow up all others. The mind becomes so engrossed with one object of desire as to care for little else besides. We see this state of mind often in this world. One desire seems to eat up and swallow up all the rest.

We see this too sometimes in the case of individuals that are very wicked. The drunkard's appetite for strong drink sometimes, will kill and completely destroy every other appetite; even natural affection seems to be annihilated by it. Sometimes a husband's affection for his wife is so strong, that he cares for almost nothing else. If the object of his affection is lost, he says, "what have I more? I have nothing to care for now." His interest in every thing else is destroyed.

Now let this illustrate what I mean here. When the mind becomes acquainted with God and the sensibility is rightly developed towards him, as it always must be before it can be at rest, and all the desires center in God, he comes to be the supreme end of the soul in such a sense, that take any thing that you will, and

leave his God, and you cannot affect his happiness; this one desire so swallows up all the rest. With such a soul, nothing else weighs a straw in comparison to the love of God.

Christ was so swallowed up at one time with this one great idea, that when it was told him saying, "Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to speak with thee;" He replied, "Who is my mother? and who are by brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples and said, Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my mother, and sister and brother." He meant to rebuke the idea that our blood relatives are to be considered so much dearer than our spiritual relatives.

He would say to those who sustain this relation to God, "Ye are my mother and my brethren." Now whoever has his sensibility much developed towards God, comes to feel that every thing must sustain some relation to this end, or it is of no value. Nothing else pleases. It must bear a relation to God, to his government, and to his glory, to make it of any regard to such a mind. The thing nearest and dearest to men naturally, if it does not sustain this relation, will be cast off as of no value.

Said an individual some time since to another, "I am praying that the Lord would destroy your influence." "Well," remarked the other, "I hope the Lord will answer your prayers, if my influence is not good; for it is of no use to me unless it can glorify God, and if it does no good, I hope it will be destroyed." Now I suppose that individual answered just as he felt. He felt that his influence was worth nothing. Unless it would do some good to the universe, he cared nothing about it. Now when an individual comes into this state of mind, he regards every thing in this light. It must be valuable to God or he cares nothing about it.

We oftentimes see persons so much attached to others in this world as to seem really to enjoy nothing only as it sustains some relation to the object of their affection. Husbands and wives sometimes sustain this relation so that every thing is valued or not valued according to the relation it sustains to the one or the other. Now I suppose the mind becomes so completely swallowed up in God, so "sick in love," and so ravished with the love of God, and comes to take such delight in him as to say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, O God." The Psalmist knew what he said, "Whom have I in heaven but thee!" His father and mother, and many whom he had greatly loved, had gone to heaven, but still he exclaims, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" His children, and those to whom he was greatly attached, were all around him, and yet when he comes to think of God, his whole soul cries out, "There is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Now this will be the case with a mind that is so ravished, so carried away with the love of God. There is such a dying of the mind to all other things, to self, to the world, to friends, to every thing, that the individual comes to care for nothing, not even to take his food, unless for the glory of God. He is dead to all but God. How safe it is, then, for God, to make such a promise as this, to an individual who thus delights himself in God!

4. An individual who delights himself in the Lord, will postpone every thing that comes in competition with communion with God. You will not find him making excuses for not attending prayer meetings, for not spending time in his closet, and holding much communion with God. You see persons who seem to be really honest, in saying they would like to commune with God, they would like to attend the prayer meeting, but they have worked very hard to day, or they have so much to do, or there is some good excuse, and they cannot attend. Now I have learned that when persons come really to delight themselves in the Lord, that such excuses don't appear to be really important. Show me a man whose soul is panting after God, who can say with the Psalmist, "As the hart panteth after the water-brook, so panteth my soul after thee, O God," such a man will love to go where he can have communion with God. He will as

naturally postpone every thing else that interferes with his communion with God, as he draws his breath. The truth is, when persons make such excuses about reading their Bible and attending meetings, the secret is, they have lost their keen relish for communion with God, and are beginning to lose their delight in him.

5. If we delight ourselves in God, he will delight himself in us; and he will delight himself in us just in proportion as we delight ourselves in him. As we seek communion with him, so will he seek communion with us. God loves society--the society of the holy. If we embrace him, he will embrace us. If we pant after him, he will pant after us. If we are drawn to him, he will be drawn to us. This is a law of mind. It is impossible that he should not delight in the soul that delights in him; impossible that he should not seek after the soul that seeks after him. It would be the same thing as denying himself, not to delight in those that delight in him. Whenever a mind seeks union with God, God sets his heart on that soul. It is as dear to him as the apple of his eye. He loves it as he loves his own soul. Why should he not? It is like him; it is a part of himself; it is, so to speak, flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone. It has come to be assimilated to his own nature. He comes to love it as he loves the man Christ Jesus, and for the same reason. And he will no more turn from it and not hear it than he would turn from his own beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Now we ought to understand this, that whenever we find ourselves strongly drawn to God, God is infinitely drawn towards us; when our heart is panting after God, he is panting after us. More! it is God panting after us, that draws us towards him! This should be understood. It is of great importance that we should get this thing fixed in our mind, that when our mind is tending towards God, he is tending towards us. "Draw nigh to me," says God, "and I will draw nigh to you. Turn unto me, and I will turn unto you." ["]Love me, and I will love you."

6. The soul that delights in God, will greatly mourn, if for any reason, communion is withheld. Those will be days of mourning to that soul, when, for any reason God withholds the light of his countenance. It is impossible for him, then, to be cheerful and happy. He may have confidence, and say with David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." Now in this case the Psalmist had confidence in God, but he mourned. He tried to cheer up his soul, but he could not but mourn. In such a case, the soul is ready to cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

I have thought many times that there was not so much mystery in what Christ said, at the time, as many would make us believe. The Christian, that knows what it is to commune and walk with God, and to have God withdraw his countenance from him, will naturally use this same language. And he will cry out with the Psalmist, "Will the Lord cast off forever? and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? doth his promise fail forever more? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" It is not strange that Christ should cry out, as he did. God's countenance was withdrawn from him, and he could not help crying out to God to know why this was so.

Where an individual has come to delight himself in God, and falls into this state of mind in which he mourns, his mourning will be very submissive and very peculiar. It will be nothing like the mourning of this world. Not a rebellious, complaining state of mind; it will be the mourning of a "weaned child," very submissive,--a peculiar kind of mourning, and a peculiar kind of submission. It is not rebellious nor complaining, and yet it is not joyful. It is not distrustful. "Hope thou in God," is its language, "for I shall yet praise him." It expects good from God. "I shall rejoice! Yes, for my Father will not always hide his face from me."

When these seasons last long, they head the soul into such a state, and so show the individual to himself, that he is filled with such deep grief, and is led to utter such unearthly, heart-rending groans, and at the same time has such an expression of holy submission, such a child-like dependence on God and confidence and hope in him,--O if the sinner could only hear him, could listen to such an individual when he supposed none but God near, he would go away and say, "Now I know, as I exist, I know there is such a thing as communion with God. O such expressions! such language! I know God was there!"

When I was an impenitent sinner, I had been out to attend to some law business. Returning and passing by a school-house, I heard a man praying. That prayer did more to impress my mind with the subject of religion, than all I had heard before, from my birth. I have not the least doubt but that such a prayer would affect almost any man of reflection, could he hear it. The man did not know that any one could hear him. He had left his work in the field, and had retired to the school-house for secret communion with God. And as I rode along, I heard him and stopped, and listened to what he said. And Oh! It set my mind on fire! That was what I had never witnessed before. It seemed as if I was brought right into the presence of God! The very tones of his voice, before I could understand what he said, seemed to come down upon me, like the voice of God from heaven. Every word he spoke seemed to come right from the bottom of his heart. His voice was frequently choked with groans, and sighs. It was the voice of a man pleading with God!

When an individual is in this state of mind I am speaking of, when he has fallen into darkness from any reason whatever, although he mourns, he will not betake himself to any other source of happiness. He has gone too far in this way, to go anywhere else for happiness. When a person has but little grace, he will sometimes betake himself to other objects, run into company, and go here and there, trying this thing and that, to get happiness; but when one has come to delight himself in God, and the supreme desire of his soul has centered in God--now let him fall into such circumstances as I have mentioned, and he will not betake himself to such and such places and scenes, to make himself happy! No. Indeed he will not. He will say, "O God, I cannot, I will not go anywhere else for happiness. O God, thou hast taught me to love thee; thou hast weaned my soul from everything else, so that I cannot love anything but thee, and now, wilt thou take thyself, thou who are my all, from me? O my God, I will find my joy in thee, or joy I will never have." Such will be the language of a soul in this state.

Hearer, do you know what this is? You will know if you will give yourself up to God, so as to be all absorbed in him, so that your whole being will be given up to God. If this is not the case with you, you need to be crucified.

7. The happiness which the soul, that delights itself in God, finds in Him, is so different from all other delight, so peculiar, it is like no other happiness in the world. All other joy is nothing at all like it. It has such a peculiarity, such purity,--there is nothing else that can compare with it. The intelligence, the heart, the sensibility, the whole being is so satisfied in God. Oh! I wish I had some unspeakable word to express this! For we need some unearthly language to express what every Christian has, when he comes into such a state of mind with God. He is so elevated in God. He is drinking the very river of which God drinks. There is such a peculiarity, such sweetness in this, that the soul abhors all other joy. It cannot go and sip, and sip, in the polluted fountains of this world. What are they! What are they? Shall a man, who has bathed in the very atmosphere of heaven,--shall he go about to sip of the filthy cups of this world? Never! never! Only as he delights in God can he find any delight whatever. He cares for nothing else but what comes from God.

8. Be sure when you pray, that you fulfil these conditions, that you delight yourself in God.

9. He that will be content with God, and will really be satisfied with God, may have as much of God as he will. And just in proportion, as we give ourselves up to find our delight in God, just in that proportion shall we have delight in God. Go the universe over, and you will find, just in proportion as the soul gives itself up to God, just in that proportion, it finds its fullness in God. If you divide your enjoyment, how can God fill your cup? Just empty your whole heart of self and of everything else, then hold it up to God, and he will fill it with his own purity, with his own love and blessedness. Yes, you will have it filled with the ocean of God.

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