

# Discovering the Way of Salvation

by Charles Finney

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*The sermon emphasizes that salvation is attained through faith in Christ, who fulfills the covenants of redemption and grace, providing wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to believers.*

**Scripture:** Acts 16:30

**Topics:** "Faith", "Covenant of Grace"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that salvation is attained through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works, highlighting the transition from the covenant of works established by Adam to the covenant of grace through Christ. He explains that Christ serves as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, and that believers are united with Him in a covenant relationship that grants them these benefits. Finney stresses that true faith is essential for receiving these gifts, as it allows individuals to relinquish their own efforts and fully embrace the grace offered by God. He concludes that salvation is a free gift, and that any reliance on personal merit hinders one's relationship with Christ.

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## Transcript

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"--Acts 16:30,31.

"Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption"--1 Corinthians 1:30.

The gospel plan of salvation is by faith, not works. Originally, the human race was to be saved by perfect and eternal obedience to the law of God. Adam was the natural head of the human race, and his sin has involved us in its consequences. But his sin is not literally accounted our sin. He stood as our natural head of, and his sin has resulted in the sin and ruin of, his descendants.

"By one man's disobedience many were made sinners"(Romans 5:19). When Adam fell, the law offered no hope of salvation.

Then the plan that had been provided by God's foresight for saving mankind by mere grace was revealed. Salvation was now placed on a new foundation by a covenant of redemption. You will find this covenant in the 89th Psalm and other places in the Old Testament. This is a covenant between the Father and the Son regarding the salvation of mankind and is the foundation of another--the covenant of grace.

GOD'S COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

In the covenant of redemption, man is merely the subject of the covenant. The parties are God the Father and God the Son. In this covenant, the Son is made the head or representative of His people. Adam was the natural head of the human family, and Christ is the covenant head of His Church.

The covenant of grace was founded on this covenant of redemption. Made with men and revealed to Adam after the fall, it was more fully revealed to Abraham. With Jesus Christ as Mediator of this covenant of grace (in opposition to the original covenant of works), salvation was now by faith. The obedience and death of Jesus Christ was regarded as the reason any individual could be saved, not an individual's personal obedience.

But Christ's obedience was not performed for us. As a man, He had to obey for Himself. If He did not obey, He became personally a transgressor. Yet there is a sense in which it may be said that His obedience is reckoned to our account. His obedience has highly honored the law, and His death has fully satisfied the demands of public justice. Grace (not justice) has reckoned His righteousness to us. If He had obeyed the law strictly for us, justice would have accounted His obedience to us. We could have obtained salvation by right instead of asking for it through grace.

Only in this sense is salvation accounted ours: that He, being God and man, voluntarily assumed our nature and laid down His life to make atonement. This casts such a glory on God's law that grace is willing to consider his obedience ours, as if we were righteous.

Christ is also the covenant head of those who believe. He is not the natural head, as Adam was, but our covenant relationship to Him is such that whatever He has done, either as God or man, is given to us by covenant. The Church, as a body, has never understood the fullness and richness of this covenant. All there is in Christ is ours in the covenant of grace.

We receive this grace by faith. Nothing we can do makes us deserving of this righteousness. But as soon as we exercise faith, all that is contained in the covenant of grace becomes ours. This is why the inspired writers make so much of faith. Faith is our part of the covenant. It is the eye that discerns, the hand that takes hold, and the medium by which we become possessed of the blessings of the covenant. By faith the soul actually becomes possessed of all that is embraced in that act of faith. If there is not enough faith received to break the bonds of sin and set the soul at liberty, it is because the act has not embraced enough of what Christ is and what he has done.

## COVENANT BENEFITS

I have referred to the verse from Corinthians for the purpose of discussing the fundamental things contained in the covenant of grace. "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.." But what is meant? How and in what sense is Christ our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption?

Jesus is often called the Wisdom of God. In the book of Proverbs, he is called Wisdom. But how is He made to us wisdom?

First, we have all the benefits of His wisdom: and if we exercise faith, we are certain to be directed by it. He is the infinite source of wisdom, and we are partakers of His wisdom and have it guaranteed to us. If we trust in Him, we may have it as certainly as if we had it originally ourselves. This is what we need from the gospel and what the gospel must furnish to suit our needs.

Any man who thinks his own theorizing and speculating are going to bring him to any right knowledge of God knows nothing at all. His carnal, earthly heart can no more study the realities of the subject than the heart of a beast. "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God"(1 Corinthians 2:11). What can we know, without experience, about the character or Spirit of God?

Do you say, "We can reason about God"? What if we do reason? What can; reason do here? Suppose I should undertake to teach a pure intellectual what it is to love. I could reason and philosophize with him about love. Yet it is impossible to make a pure intellectual understand what love is unless he has actually experienced it! It's like talking about colors to a man born blind. he hears the word, but what idea can he attach to it? To get the idea of the difference of colors into his mind is impossible. The term is a mere word.

One whose mind has not experienced Christianity may reason about it. He may prove the perfections of God as he would the theory of gravity. But the spirit and life of the gospel can no more be carried to the mind by mere words, without experience, than love to an intellectual or colors to a man born blind. You may explain the law and crush him with conviction, but to give the spiritual meaning of things without the Spirit of God is absurd.

Jesus is made to us righteousness. Righteousness means holiness or obedience to law, and sanctification means the same. What distinction, therefore, did Paul have in mind?

Christ is our outward righteousness. His obedience is, under the covenant of grace, accounted to us. He didn't obey for us, and God doesn't consider us righteous because our Substitute has obeyed; ;but as a matter of grace, we are treated as if we had obeyed.

Some people think that the righteousness of Christ is attributed to us in such a way that we are considered as having always been holy. It was once argued that righteousness was imputed to us and that we had a right to demand salvation because of justice. My view of the matter is entirely different: Christ's righteousness becomes ours by gift. God has united us to Christ and on His account treats us with favor.

For example, imagine that a father has done some service to his country, and the government rewards him. And not only is the individual himself rewarded but his entire family, because they are his children. Human governments do this, and the reason for it is very plain.

Christ's disciples are similarly considered one with Him. The Father is highly delighted with the service He has done the Kingdom, and he accounts Christ's righteousness to them as if it were their own. In other words, God treats them just as he would treat Christ Himself.

Please bear in mind that I am now speaking of outward righteousness--the reason why God accepts and saves believers in Christ. This reason includes both the obedience of Christ to the Law and His obedience unto death..

## THE AUTHOR OF HOLINESS

Sanctification is inward purity or holiness. Jesus is our inward purity. The control that he exercises over us--His Spirit working in us--sheds His love abroad in our hearts, and through faith we are made holy.

When I say that Christ is our sanctification, or our holiness, I mean that He is the author of our holiness. He not only makes it available to us, by His atonement and intercession, but by His direct contact with the soul He produces holiness. He is not the remote but the immediate cause of our being sanctified. He works in us by the influences of His Spirit in a way perfectly consistent with our freedom.

Sanctification is received by faith. By faith Jesus is received and enthroned as King in our hearts. When the mind yields to Christ, it is led by His Spirit and guided and controlled by His hand. The act of the mind that throws the soul into the hand of Christ for sanctification is faith. Nothing is necessary except for the mind to sever any confidence in itself and to give itself up to be led and controlled by Him.

Imagine a child who offers his hand to his father to have him lead wherever he pleases. If the child is distrustful or unwilling to be led, or if he has confidence in his own wisdom and strength, he will break away and try to run alone. But if all that self-confidence fails, he will come and give himself up to his father again to be led entirely at his will. Similarly, by faith an individual gives his mind up to be led and controlled by Jesus Christ. He ceases from his own efforts and leaves himself in the hands of Christ for sanctification.

Jesus is our redemption. This refers to the Jewish practice of redeeming estates or relatives that had been sold for debt. When an estate had been sold out of the family or an individual had been deprived of liberty for debt, they could be redeemed by paying a price. There are frequent allusions in the bible to this practice of redemption.

While we are in our sins, under the law, we are sold as slaves in the hand of public justice. We are bound over to death and have no possible way to redeem ourselves from the curse of the law. But Christ Himself is the price of our redemption. He has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. He redeems us from the power of sin.

## GOD'S UNMERITED FAVOR

Under this covenant of grace, works of law have no more to do with our salvation than if we had never existed. One must differentiate between salvation by works and salvation by grace. Salvation by grace is founded on a reason entirely separate from and out of ourselves. Under the law, salvation depended on ourselves. Now we receive salvation as a free gift. Jesus Christ is the sole author, founder, and reason for our salvation.

Our own holiness does not enter at all into the reason for our acceptance and salvation. We are not indebted to Christ for a while, until we are sanctified, and then stand in our own righteousness. However perfect and holy we may become, Jesus Christ will forever be the sole reason why we are not in hell. However holy we may become, it will be forever true that we have sinned. In the eye of justice, nothing in us short of our eternal damnation can satisfy the law. But Jesus Christ remains the sole ground of our salvation.

Faith in Christ puts us in possession of Jesus. He was the very blessing promised in the Abrahamic covenant. Throughout the Scriptures, He is held forth as the sum and substance of all God's favors to man. He is the bread of life, the water of life, our strength, and our all.

Faith puts the mind in possession of these blessings. It annihilates those things that stand in the way of our relationship with Christ. he says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice,

and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me"(Rev 3:20).

Why don't we receive Christ as our wisdom"? Because we depend on our own wisdom and think we know the things of God. As long as we depend on this, we keep the door shut. Throw open the door and give up your wisdom. When we are empty of any available knowledge concerning the way of salvation, then Jesus will teach us. Until we do this, there is a door between us and Christ. We have something of our own instead of coming and throwing ourselves perfectly into the hands of Jesus.

How does faith put us in possession of the righteousness of Christ? Until our mind takes hold of the righteousness of Christ, we are engaged in working out a righteousness of our own. Until we cease entirely from our own works and throw ourselves on Jesus for righteousness, we cannot come to Him. He won't patch up our own righteousness to make it suitable. If we depend on our prayer, our tears, our charities, or anything we have done, He will not receive us. But the moment an individual takes hold of Jesus, he receives all of Christ's righteousness through grace.

This is also true in regard to holiness and redemption. Until an individual receives Christ, he does not cease from his own works. The moment the mind yields itself up to Jesus, the responsibility is His. The believer by faith pledges Christ for his obedience and holiness. When the mind properly recognizes Christ and receives Him in unwavering faith, nothing is left contrary to the law of God.

Whenever you come to Christ, receive Him for all that He is--wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Nothing but unbelief can hinder you from enjoying it all now. No preparation will help. You must receive salvation as the free gift of grace.

True faith always works by love, purifies the heart, and overcomes the world. Whenever you find any difficulty in your way, you have a lack of faith. No matter what happens to you outwardly--if you find yourself backsliding or if your mind is confused--unbelief is the cause and faith is the remedy. If you lay hold of Jesus and keep hold, all the devils in hell can never drive you away from God or put out your light.

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