

Holiness Essential to Salvation

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of salvation from sin and the need for individuals to abandon reliance on themselves, seek forgiveness while forsaking their sins, and live a holy life in order to achieve salvation.

Scripture: Matthew 1:21, Romans 6:1

Topics: "Holiness", "Salvation"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that salvation from sin is the essential need of humanity, as true happiness and peace can only be found in being freed from sin. He asserts that Jesus has taken on the mission to save people from their sins, highlighting the importance of both justification and sanctification in the process of salvation. Finney warns that many fail to attain salvation because they cling to their sins, seek forgiveness without true repentance, and misunderstand the nature of the gospel as merely a means of justification rather than a call to holiness. He urges believers to abandon self-seeking and to actively pursue holiness, as true peace and hope are found in a life devoted to God. The sermon concludes with a call to action, encouraging individuals to seek genuine sanctification and to embrace the transformative power of Christ.

Transcript

"And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins."--Matthew i. 21.

In speaking from these words, I design to show.--

I. THAT SALVATION FROM SIN IS THE GREAT NECESSITY OF MAN.

II. THAT JESUS HAS UNDERTAKEN THIS WORK.

III. INQUIRE WHY IT IS THAT SO MANY PERSONS FAIL OF THIS SALVATION.

I. That salvation from sin is the great necessity of man. This is a fact of universal observation. It is also a fact of universal consciousness. Every man is conscious of the fact that he is a sinner, and while he is a sinner he cannot be satisfied with himself, he cannot truly respect himself, he cannot have peace of mind, he cannot have the favour of God; and he ought not to have all or any of these things. In short, it is a fact of universal experience that men are sinners, and that they must be saved from sin as a condition of their being made happy, either in this world or in the future world. Men are so constituted that they cannot doubt

that ultimate happiness is impossible unless they can be delivered from that which they know to be a great curse in this world, and which they also know will be their ultimate ruin, if persisted in. While men are violating their own consciences, they know that happiness is impossible. These facts are always assumed in the Bible, and their truth is declared by the universal sentiment of mankind. But I must not dwell on this thought; the text announces the fact that Jesus Christ has come into the world, and that his great business is to save men from sin. This leads me to the second thought--

II. That Jesus has undertaken this work. "He shall save his people from their sins," therefore is his name called JESUS--the name Jesus signifying a Saviour. Now, salvation from sin is of the highest importance to mankind. The term strictly, as here used, means merely deliverance, or safety from some tremendous evil; it is often found in the Bible, and includes in it very generally, in addition to mere deliverance, the result of it--eternal happiness and enjoyment in heaven with the people of God. Thus, properly and scripturally speaking, the term salvation means deliverance, both from guilt and its consequences. In this text, the reason assigned for the name that was to be given to the child of Mary was, that he should save his people from their sins--that he should bear the particular relation of a Saviour--that he should save both from the guilt and the punishment of sin. The Bible represents him as having given himself to be the Saviour of the world, as having consecrated himself to this end, as having died and opened a way by which sinners could be saved; and that previous to this, as being in a waiting attitude to accomplish this work; as endeavouring to gain the consent of God and man to comply with the natural and necessary conditions of sinners being saved; and that now he possesses in himself all the fulness of power necessary to the accomplishment of the work--he is able to save unto the uttermost all that will come to God by him. The Bible represents Jesus as coming on this great mission, and as occupying himself exclusively with this work, and as having fully secured this end. Now, whenever persons come into sympathy with him, and seek what it is his business to give, knock at the door which it is his business to open, the Bible represents him as ready and willing to do these things for them. We now come to the inquiry--

III. Why it is that so many persons fail of this salvation. That many do fail of it, is a simple matter of fact. Now, the question is, Why do they fail? We remark, first, that many persons fail of this salvation because they have not abandoned reliance upon themselves. It is the most obvious thing in the whole world, that many persons are living not to God, but to themselves. Now, wherever this principle is manifested, it is certain that persons are not saved from sin, for what is sin but living to self and not to God; self-seeking is the very essence of sin. Now, multitudes of persons manifest that this spirit is not set aside in them, but that, on the contrary, the whole end and aim of their life is self-seeking, instead of the first and great end being the glory and honour of God. Now, a man cannot be saved unless he is justified, and he cannot be justified unless his sins are pardoned,--this must be a condition of a sinner's salvation. Salvation consists in being saved from sin; and the reason why a great many persons are not saved is, that they are unwilling to accept of salvation on such a condition,--they are unwilling to give up their sins; but if they will not be persuaded to be saved from their sins, and become sanctified,--if they will not relinquish and renounce their sin, they never can be saved. Many persons will even pray to God that he will save them, but they really do not desire that for which they ask--they do not mean what they say; to get men to consent to relinquish their sins, is the great difficulty. Now observe, if a man is saved at all he must consent to it; his will must acquiesce in the arrangement; and the will is not moved by physical force. A man must voluntarily consent to be saved, or Jesus himself cannot possibly save him. Man is a moral agent, and he is addressed by God as such, and therefore, in order to his salvation, he must voluntarily consent to relinquish sin, and have his mind brought into obedience with the law of God.

Again: Multitudes are not saved because they seek forgiveness while they do not forsake their sins. Some individuals will spend much time in praying for pardon, while they indulge themselves in sin. Again: multitudes are seeking for salvation while they neglect the natural condition of their being pardoned. While they continue in sin, indulge in a self-seeking spirit, it is naturally impossible that they can be saved. If a man should act in this way in relation to his body, every one would plainly perceive the folly of his conduct; if he should partake of things which rendered good health impossible, and yet should wonder that he did not possess the robustness of health which he desired, people would not pity, but blame him.

Now, the fact is, that many persons are seeking for that which must result alone from holiness, while they are not themselves sanctified. They are seeking comfort while they refuse to be holy; thus they neglect to fulfill the natural conditions on which either comfort or salvation can be obtained. Again, many persons fail of this salvation because they are waiting for God to fulfill conditions which it is naturally impossible for him to fulfill, and which they themselves must fulfill, and which God is endeavoring to persuade and influence them to fulfill.

For example--God cannot repent for them; he cannot believe for them; no, but these are the natural conditions of their salvation, and these very things Christ is persuading them to do. Now, they are waiting for God to do that which he will never do, that in fact, which he cannot do, but which he is requiring us to do for ourselves. Let me be understood. God never requires of us to perform an impossibility, nor does he accomplish that for us which we can do ourselves. Don't be shocked at this, for it is truth.

Now, observe, God requires us to repent; this is an act of our own minds, and therefore he cannot do it for us. It is true that these things are spoken of sometimes as being done by God; it is said that he gives repentance, faith, and love, but he only does this in the sense of persuading and inciting our minds to the performance of these duties. Now, if anybody is seeking for God to do that which they must do themselves, they will fail of eternal life. How many are making mistakes in this matter! they are waiting for God to put repentance and faith into them, and entirely overlooking the fact of its being an exercise of their own minds.

Again: Another difficulty, and another reason, why persons are not saved is this--they profess to be waiting for the Holy Spirit, while in fact they are resisting the Holy Spirit. They pretend that they are waiting for the Holy Spirit to save them and convert them: now, mark, every moment they wait they are grieving and resisting the Holy Spirit. Now, what do they mean by waiting, when they ought to be acting? From the beginning and end He is the teacher. "No man can come unto me, except the Father which sent me draw him."

"They shall all be taught of the Lord." "He shall take of the things of mine and show them unto you." Now, the Bible represents the Holy Spirit in this way as a teacher, and those who do not yield when the truth is presented to them, are resisting and grieving the Spirit. You remember the words of our Saviour to the Jews, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye."

Now, multitudes in the present day are resisting the Holy Spirit under the pretence of waiting for it. The divine influence is always waiting to save you, if you will comply with the necessary conditions; but if under any pretence you neglect your duty, you never will be saved. But I pass next to consider another great difficulty in the way of a sinner's conversion. Many are really seeking to be justified in sin. They ask God to pardon them, but they refuse to be sanctified; they seek Christ as their justification only. They cleave to their sins, they are living in their sins, and they seek to be justified rather than sanctified--indeed, they

refuse to be sanctified at all. Now, this is a very common case.

Again, let me say that this class of persons really regard the gospel as a mighty system of indulgence, on a large scale. They really suppose that men are subjects of this salvation while they are living in selfish indulgence. In the very early ages of Christianity, the Antinomian spirit had crept into the Church: the doctrine of justification by faith, as opposed to justification by works, was sadly abused by many. While some of the Apostles were still living, many persons came to regard the gospel as a system of indulgence,--that men were to be justified in sin rather than be saved from sin; thus they took an entirely false view of the gospel of Christ. You will remember that the Apostle James wrote his epistle to denounce this wrong view, and to guard the Christians against abusing the doctrine of justification by faith. Some persons imagine that the Apostle rejected this doctrine altogether, yet this is not true; but his epistle being written for the purpose we have mentioned, he does not give this doctrine the prominence that Paul did.

Now, no man who lives in sin can be justified, because no man can be pardoned who lives in any form of iniquity. The Apostle tells you plainly that those who commit sin are the children of the devil, and while they are living in sin they cannot enjoy the privileges of the gospel. He does not mean that an individual cannot be a Christian who falls under the power of temptation and into occasional sin. The Apostle John also says, "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not"--"whosoever is born of God does not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin because he is born of God"--"he that committeth sin is of the devil." This is strong language, and if I should affirm so strongly the necessity of holiness, you would think I spoke harshly; but it ought to be insisted upon more than it is, that men cannot be Christians unless they are holy.

The moral law is as much binding upon Christians as it was upon those to whom it was first given. Faith without love will never save man; but let me say, that true faith is always true love. Every man who breaks the law systematically and designedly, living in violation of its precepts, is a child of the devil, and not of God. Let this be thundered in the ears of the Church and the world.

Now, it is very common for men to overlook this great truth, and fall into the worldly-mindedness and sinful practices of the those around them. Again: multitudes are not saved because they regard the gospel as an abrogation of the moral law--a virtual repeal of it. Now, the gospel does not repeal the moral law. What saith the Apostle? "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid! Yea, we establish the law." Now, it is true that the gospel was designed to set aside the penalty of the law, upon all who should be persuaded to come back to its precepts, and yield that love and confidence which the law requires. Now, it is frequently the case, if ministers begin to say anything about obedience to the law, the people call out against it as legal preaching! If they are roused up and urged to do that which the law of God requires of them, they tell you they want the gospel. Now, such people know nothing at all of the gospel! They make Christ the minister of sin! They seem to think that Christ came to justify them in their sin, instead of saving them from it.

Let me say, once more, that another reason why men are not saved from sin is, that they have really come to regard justification in sin, as a means to save them from it! In support of this monstrous idea, they will even appeal to the Scriptures. They found justification on the atonement; now, this work of Christ can never be imputed to any man in such a sense as to justify him while he remains in sin! Justification in sin is a thing impossible! Now, how can a man be pardoned and justified, before he repents and believes! It is impossible! He must be in a state of obedience to the law of God before he can be justified! The fact is, there is a very great mistake among many people on this subject. They think that they must persuade

themselves that they are justified, but they are not, and never can be, till they forsake sin, and do their duty.

In the next place, multitudes make this mistake--they seek hope, rather than holiness; instead of working out their own salvation, they seek to cherish a hope that they shall be saved. Again, they seek to persuade themselves that they are safe, while they are in a state of condemnation. Those who seek salvation oftentimes fail because they seek it selfishly; not so much because they abhor sin, and want holiness, as because they desire personal happiness, or personal honour, by being held up as very pure and good men, and because they seek sanctification for some selfish reason they do not get rid of their sins. Again, some individuals content themselves in sin so long as they can indulge a hope, or get others to indulge a hope for them. If they have certain feelings, which lead them to hope that all will be well with them at last, they are perfectly satisfied, and have no desire to be saved from sin.

But I cannot continue this train of observation, and will therefore conclude with some remarks.

First, no person has any right to hope for eternal life, unless he is conscious of possessing the spirit of Christ within him--unless he is free from those sinful tempers which are indulged in by wicked men--unless he is free from a self-seeking spirit of doing business which characterizes the men of the world. How can a man in such a condition expect or hope for eternal life? How can any man suppose that he is justified before he is sanctified? I do not mean to say, that a man is not in any sense justified before he is sanctified; but, as a matter of fact, a man is not safe for eternity unless he is saved from sin. He has no right to expect to get to heaven unless the work of sanctification is going on in his soul.

Again, it is easy to see from what has been said, that many persons regard the doctrine of justification by faith, as the whole gospel. It is the gospel, in their conception of it. Now, why is this the gospel to them? Why is it good news? Why is it not good news that Christ will save them from sin? How is it that the good news of the gospel as it strikes them is the good news that will justify rather than sanctify?--that Christ is precious to them, not so much because he came to save from sin, as because he came to forgive, to die for their sins, and to justify them? Is there not something wrong in all this? Does it not show, when persons lay more stress upon justification than upon sanctification, that they are more afraid of punishment than of sin?--more afraid of the consequences of sin than of the sin itself? If they can but get rid of the penalty, the governmental consequence of sin, they are satisfied.

Again, it is certain, that where this principle takes possession of the mind, that the individual seeks much more to be pardoned than to be made holy. It is better news to him that Christ will justify him, than that Christ will save him from his sins. Talk to him about his sins; preach to him about his sins; require him to become holy; present Christ as his sanctification, and that is not the gospel! Let me say, that there are multitudes of persons who have contracted their views into that one point--that Christ has died to save men from punishment. All idea about Christ being the believer's sanctification, or that sanctification is a condition of salvation, is wholly lost sight of. There is no stress laid upon the doctrine of sanctification.

Christ is chiefly precious because he saves from wrath, much more than because he saves from sin; more because he justifies, than because he sanctifies. Now, rely upon it, that, whenever this is the case, there is a sad defect of character. What is the true spirit of the children of God? Why, it is this,-- they feel as if they must get rid of sin, at any rate. They don't want to be saved in their sins; they feel that to live in their sins is hell enough. They abhor themselves on account of their sins. They must get away from their sins. They would not wish to be saved at all, if they could not be saved from sin. They are ready to say, If the gospel

cannot save me from sin, it is a failure, for this is my necessity.

Now, who does not know that the true Christian is more afraid of sin than of punishment? Yes, a great deal more! They abhor sin; and when they ever fall into sin, they are ready to curse themselves; and all the more because Christ is so willing to forgive them. The man in this condition of mind will never look upon the gospel as mere justification. Again: whenever the doctrine of justification comes to be more prominent in the church than sanctification, there is something wrong, there is a radical error crept into the church; there is a danger of that church losing all true idea of what the gospel is. I don't know how it is in this country, but I greatly fear that the doctrine of sanctification is kept very much in the background. Now, why is this? While there is so much said about justification, there is very little said about personal holiness. So much is said about a Saviour, as if the gospel was meant simply to save men from punishment.

Now, while I know that the gospel presents salvation from punishment, and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ, I know that its chief relation to men, is to save them from their sins--to become their sanctification. Again: the true state of men is always known by the great absorbing idea which is in their minds. A man's character is as is the end for which he lives. Now, a man who lives in any sin, any form of self-pleasing, and self-seeking, cannot be a Christian; for the true idea of the gospel is, that, for a man to be a Christian he must be devoted to God, and thoroughly withdrawn from all forms of sin and iniquity. He must be devoted to God, living for God, living for the same end that God lives; sympathizing with Christ, and with everything that is good. This is the character of every true Christian. This is the true conception of Christianity; and just in proportion as individuals approach to this standard have they a good hope of salvation, and just in proportion as they recede from this standard they fail of salvation. Again: there are a great many persons whose aim is to get peace of mind, and who are constantly crying "peace" to others, when there is no peace.

Now, let me say that there can be no real, true peace, unless all the conditions of the gospel have been complied with. You cannot have that peace of God which passeth all understanding, while you are in an unsanctified state; and, if you think so, you are deceiving yourself. Now, let me ask of you, Are you not conscious that this "peace of God" does not "rule in your hearts?" If I am not greatly mistaken, there are many persons in this house who have been trying for years to make themselves happy, but who, after all, are in such a state of mind as not to know that they are pardoned, have no real confidence in their own piety; now, how is it possible that they should have peace of mind? Peace of mind results from sanctification, and this they have never obtained. Let an individual who has been making justification the great idea, be at the point of death, and does he feel happy and resigned, having a full confidence that he shall go to heaven? How often do we hear such persons exclaim under such circumstances, "I am undone, I am not prepared." Why are you not prepared? A short time ago you were indulging a comfortable hope that you were a Christian, and now you cry out in fear, lest you should lose your soul. How is this?

There is a great delusion in the minds of men on this subject. They suppose that they have a very comfortable hope, but it is in the absence of piety; and when death stares them in the face they discover that they have no confidence in religion, or any ground of hope. Again: persons who do not like to have their hopes tried, and themselves searched, do great wrong to their souls. The more hope is tried, if it be good hope, the more consoling and satisfactory will it become. The man who is seeking to be sanctified, desires to be searched that he may not be resting in any degree upon an uncertain and unsafe foundation, because he is more afraid of sin than of anything else; he is more ready to forsake sin, than anything else in the world; he would rather forego any earthly good than have anything to do with sin. Now, don't say

that this is extreme, because it is a universal truth, if religion implies supreme love to God: if we supremely love any being, we shall supremely delight to please him: this is a universal characteristic of the children of God.

Now, if this be so, what shall we say of the great mass of professors, who give the highest possible evidence that self-indulgence is the chief end of their lives? They wait to be saved, not from sin, but in it. But while they live in sin they never can be saved! Before hope can be cherished, the conditions of salvation must be fulfilled: you will never be saved at all unless you are saved from sin--mind that! You must become holy in order to become happy. Fulfil the conditions; become holy, and then your peace shall flow like a river. Give up your sins, give your heart to God, and rely upon it that the peace which passeth all understanding shall rule in your hearts.

Believer in Christ, the Lord hath set you apart for himself, separated you from the rest of the world; but you are only set apart as "holiness to the Lord:" this must be written plainly upon you; and if the Lord has written his name upon you you are safe, not else. And let me say to every one in this house, Don't you expect to be forgiven, don't you expect to be pardoned, unless you will consent to be separated from your sins, and have the name of the Lord Jesus Christ written upon your hearts; unless your prayer is, "O Lord, write thy law upon my heart and make me holy." Receive his name in your forehead and his law in your heart, give yourself up to him, body and soul, and rely upon it, as the Lord liveth, as Jesus liveth, you shall understand what is the salvation of God. Will you do it to-night?

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