

# It Is Impossible but That Offences Come

by Charles Finney

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*Charles Finney's sermon emphasizes the necessity of recognizing one's moral nature and the importance of divine revelation for understanding salvation and God's law.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 19:1, Isaiah 53:5, John 3:16, Romans 1:20, 2 Corinthians 4:2, Ephesians 2:8

**Topics:** "Faith and Doubt", "The Nature of God"

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## Description

Charles Finney addresses the prevalent infidelity among young men, emphasizing that many doubt the inspiration of the Scriptures not from honest study but from a lack of understanding their own moral nature. He argues that our conscience and moral intuitions reveal the existence of God and the moral law, which the Bible assumes as a foundation for its teachings. Finney illustrates this through a conversation with a skeptic, demonstrating how acknowledging one's moral failures leads to the recognition of the need for salvation through the Gospel. He concludes that rejecting the Bible is absurd when it aligns with our innate moral convictions and that the Gospel provides the necessary hope for redemption. Ultimately, he urges listeners to embrace the truth of the Gospel as the solution to their spiritual needs.

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## Transcript

THERE are many who believe that a loose indefinite infidelity has rarely, if ever, been more prevalent in our country than at this time, especially among young men. I am not prepared to say it is an honest infidelity, yet it may very probably be real. Young men may really doubt the inspiration of the Christian Scriptures, not because they have honestly studied those Scriptures and their numerous evidences, but because they have read them little and reasoned legitimately yet less. Especially have they almost universally failed to study the intuitive affirmations of their own minds. They have not examined the original revelation that God has made in each human soul, to see how far this would carry them, and how wonderfully it opens the way for understanding and indeed for embracing the revelation given in God's Word.

To bring these and kindred points before your minds, I have taken as my text, the words of Paul,

"By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." -- 2 Cor. iv. 2.

Paul is speaking of the Gospel ministry which he received, and is stating how he fulfilled it. He shows plainly that he sought to preach to the human conscience. He found in each man's bosom a conscience to

which he could appeal, and to which the manifestation of the truth commended itself.

Probably no thoughtful man has ever read the Bible without noticing that there has been a previous revelation given in some way to man. It assumes many things as known already. I may have said in the hearing of some of you that I was studying in my law-office when I bought my first Bible, and that I bought it as one of my law-books. No sooner had I opened it than I was struck to see how many things it assumed as known, and therefore states with no attempt at proof. For instance, the first verse in the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This assumes the existence of God. It does not aim to prove this truth; it goes on the presumption that this revelation -- the existence of a God -- has been made already to all who are mature enough to understand it. The Apostle Paul also, in his epistle to the Romans, asserts that the real Godhead and eternal power of the one God, though in some sense "invisible things," are yet "clearly seen," in the creation of the world, "being understood by the things that are made," so that all wicked men are without excuse. His doctrine is that the created universe reveals God. And if this be true of the universe without us, it is no less true of the universe within us. Our own minds -- their convictions, their necessary affirmations -- do truly reveal God and many of the great truths that respect our relations to Him and to His government.

When we read the Bible attentively, and notice how many things, of the utmost importance, it assumes, and bases its precepts on them, without attempting to prove them, we can not forbear to inquire -- Are these assumptions properly made?

The answer to this question is found when we turn our eye within and inquire for the intuitive affirmations of our own minds. Then we shall see that we possess an intellectual and moral nature which as truly reveals great truths concerning God and our relations to Him and to law, as the material world reveals His eternal power and Godhead.

For instance, we shall see that man has a moral nature related to spiritual and moral truth, as really as he has a physical nature related to the physical world. As his senses -- sight, touch, hearing -- intuit certain truths respecting the external world, so does his spiritual nature intuit certain truths respecting the spiritual world. No man can well consider the first class of truths without being forced to consider and believe the second.

Let us see if this be true.

It is not long since I had interviews with a young lady of considerable intelligence who was a skeptic. She professed to believe in a God and in those great truths pertaining to His attributes which are embraced in Deism; but she quite rejected the Bible and all that pertains to a revealed way of salvation.

I began with presenting to her mind some of the great truths taught by the mind's own affirmations concerning God, His attributes, and government; and then from this I passed on to show her how the Bible came in to make out a system of truth needful to man as a lost sinner. She admitted the first, of course; and then she saw that the second must be true if the first was, or there could be nothing for man but hopeless ruin. Starting back in horror from the gulf of despair, she saw that only her unbelief was ruining her soul; and then renouncing this, she yielded her heart to God and found Gospel peace and joy in believing.

I propose now to present much the same course of thought to you as I did to her.

And here the first great inquiry is -- What ideas does our own nature -- God's first revelation -- give us?

(1.) Undoubtedly, the idea of God. Our own minds affirm that there is and must be a God; that He must have all power and all knowledge. Our mind also gives us God's moral attributes. No man can doubt that God is good and just. Men are never afraid that God will do anything wrong. If at all afraid of God, it is because He is good -- is just and holy.

(2.) Man's nature gives him the idea of law -- moral law. He can no more doubt the existence of a moral law, imposed, too, on himself, than he can doubt the existence of his own soul and body. He knows he ought not to be selfish -- ought to be benevolent. He knows he is bound to love his neighbor as himself -- bound to seek the higher at the sacrifice, if need be, of the lower good.

How is it that men get these ideas? I answer, They must have them by nature; they must be in the mind before any direct instruction from human lips, else you could never teach a child these ideas, more than you could teach them to a horse. The child knows these things before he is taught, and can not remember when he first had them.

Suppose you were to close your Bible and ask, Now, apart from all this book teaches, how much do I know? How much must I admit? You would find that your moral nature gives you the idea of a God, and affirms His existence; it gives you His attributes, natural and moral, and also your own moral relations to Him and to your fellow-beings. In proof of this I can appeal to you -- not one of you can say, I am under no obligation to love God; I am not bound to love my fellow-men. Your moral nature gives you these things -- it affirms to you these truths, even more directly and undeniably than your senses give you the facts of the external world. Moreover, your moral nature not only gives you the law of supreme love to God, and of love equal and impartial toward your fellow-men, but it affirms that you are sinners; that you have displeased God -- have utterly failed to please Him, and of course that you are under condemnation from His righteous law. You know that God's good law must condemn you, because you have not been good in the sense required by that law. Hence, you must know that you are in the position of an outlaw, condemned by law, and without hope from the administration of justice.

Another thing it gives you, viz., that you are still in impenitence (I speak of those who know this to be their case); your own conscience affirms this to you past all contradiction. It affirms that you are still living in sin, and have not reformed in such a sense that God can accept your reformation. You know that you do violence to your own conscience, and that while you are doing this you can neither respect yourself nor be respected by God. You know that long as this is the case with you, God can not forgive you. Nay, more, if He should, it would do you no good; you could not be happy; you could not respect yourself even if you were told that you were forgiven. Indeed, if your nature spoke out unbiased, it would not let you believe yourself really forgiven, so long as you are doing violence to conscience. I can remember when these thoughts were in my mind like fire. I saw that no man could doubt them, any more than he can doubt his own existence. So you may see these truths and feel their force.

You know, then, that by your sins, you have forfeited the favor of God, and have no claim on Him at all on the score of justice. You have cast off His authority, have disowned subjection to His law and government; indeed, you have cast all His precepts beneath your feet. You can no longer come before God and say, "Thou oughtest not to cast me off; I have not deserved it at Thy hand." You can no more say this honestly, than you can deny your own existence.

Did you ever think of this? Have you ever tried this, to see what you can honestly do and say before God? Have you ever tried to go into God's presence and tell Him solemnly that He has no right to punish you? Not one of you can tell Him so without being conscious in yourself of blasphemy.

It is a good method, because it may serve to show you how the case really stands. Suppose, then, you try it. See what you can honestly and with an approving conscience say before God, when your soul is deeply impressed with the sense of His presence. Consider. I am not asking you whether you can harden your heart and violate your conscience enough to blaspheme God to His face; not this, but I am asking you to put the honest convictions of your own conscience to the test and see what they are and what they will allow you to do and to say before God. Can you kneel down before Him and say, "I deny that I have cast off God. I have never refused to treat Him as a friend. I have never treated Him as an enemy?"

You know you can make no issue of this sort with God without meeting the rebukes of your own mind.

Again, you can see no reason to hope for forgiveness under the law. With all the light of your Deism you can discern no ground of pardon. Outside the Bible, all is dark as death. There is no hope. If you cherish any, it must be directly in the teeth of your own solemn convictions. Why do you think it is so difficult to induce a discreet governor to grant a pardon? When Jerome Bonaparte was monarch of Spain, why did Napoleon send him that earnest rebuke for pardoning certain criminals? What were the principles underlying that remarkably able state paper? Have you ever studied those principles, as they were grasped and presented so vigorously by the mighty mind of Napoleon?

You can never infer from the goodness of God that He can forgive; much less, that He must. One of the first Universalist preachers I ever heard announced in the outset that he should infer from the goodness of God that He would save all men. I can well remember how perfectly shallow his sophistry appeared to me and how absurd his assumptions. I was no Christian then, but I saw at a glance that he might far better infer from the goodness of God that He would forgive none than that He would forgive all. It seemed to me most clear that if God were good and had made a good law, He would sustain it. Why not? I must suppose that His law is a good one; how could a Being of infinite wisdom and love impose any other than a good law? And if it were a good law, it had a good end to answer; and a good God could not suffer it to fail of answering those ends by letting it come to naught through inefficiency in its administration. I knew enough about law and government then to see that a firm hand in administration is essential to any good results from ever so good a law. Of course I knew that if law were left to be trampled under foot by hardened, blasphemous transgressors, and then to cap the climax, an indiscriminate pardon were given, and nothing done to sustain law, there would be an end of all authority and a positive annihilation of all the good hoped for under its administration. What shall rational men undertake to infer from God's goodness that He will pardon all sinners? Suppose the spirit of riot and misrule now so rampant at Erie, Pa., to go on from bad to worse; that the rioters perpetrate every form of mischief in their power; they tear up the rails, burn down the bridges, fire into the cars, run whole trains off the track and crush the quivering flesh of hundreds en masse into heaps of blood and bones; and by and by, when the guilty are arrested and convicted by due course of law, then the question comes up, Shall the governor pardon them? He might be very much inclined to do so, if he wisely could; but the question is -- Can a good governor do it? Supposing him to be purely good and truly wise, what would he do? Will you say, O he is too good to punish -- he is so good, he will certainly pardon? Will you say that pardon indiscriminately given, and given to all, and according to previous assurance, moreover, will secure the highest respect for law and the best obedience? Everybody knows that this is superlative nonsense. No man who ever had anything to do under the responsibilities of government, or who has ever learned the A B C of human nature in this relation, can for one moment

suppose that pardon -- in such ways -- can supplant punishment with any other result than utter ruin. No: if the ruler is good, he will surely punish; and all the more surely, by how much the more predominant is the element of goodness in his character.

You, sinners, are under law. If you sin, you must see great reason why God should punish and not forgive.

Here is another fact. When you look upon yourself and your moral position, you find yourself twice dead. You are civilly dead in the sense of being condemned by law, an outcast from governmental favor. You are also morally dead, for you do not love God, do not serve Him, have no tendencies that draw you back into sympathy with God; but, on the other hand, you are dead to all considerations that look in this direction. You are indeed alive to your own low, selfish interests, but dead to God's interests; you care nothing for God only to avoid Him and escape His judgment. All this you know, beyond all question.

In this condition, without a further revelation, where is your hope? You have none, and have no ground for any.

Furthermore, if a future revelation is to be made, revealing some ground of pardon, you can see with the light now before you on what basis it must rest. You can see what more you need from God. The first revelation shuts you up to God -- shows you that if help ever comes, it can not come out of yourself, but must come from God -- can not come of His justice, but must come from His mercy -- can not come out of law, but must come from some extra provision whereby law may have its demands satisfied otherwise than through the execution of its penalty on the offender. Somebody, you can see, must interpose for you, who can take your part and stand in your stead before the offended law.

Did you never think of this? In the position where you stand, and where your own nature and your own convictions place you, you are compelled to say -- My case is hopeless! I need a double salvation -- from condemnation and from sinning; first from the curse, and secondly from the heart to sin -- from the tendency and disposition to commit sin. Inquiring for a revelation to meet these wants of my lost soul, where can I find it? Is it to be found in all the book of nature nowhere? Look into the irresistible convictions of your own moral being; they tell you of your wants, but they give you no supply. They show what you need, but they utterly fail to give it. Your own moral nature shows that you need an atoning Saviour and a renewing Spirit. Nothing less can meet the case of a sinner condemned, outlawed, and doubly dead by the moral corruption of all his voluntary powers.

The worst mischief of infidelity is that it ignores all this; it takes no notice of one entire side of our nature, and that the most important side; talking largely about philosophy, it yet restricts itself to the philosophy of the outer world and has no eye for the inner and higher nature. It ignores the fact that our moral nature affirms one entire class of great truths, with even more force and certainty than the senses affirm the facts of the external world. Verily, this is a grand and a fatal omission!

#### REMARKS.

1. Without the first revelation the second could not be satisfactorily proved. When the Bible reveals God, it assumes that our minds affirm His existence and that we need no higher proof. When it reveals His law, it pre-supposes that we are capable of understanding it, and of appreciating its moral claims. When it prescribes duty, it assumes that we ought to feel the force of obligation to obey it.

Now, the fact that the Bible does make many assumptions of this sort establishes an intimate and dependent connection between it on the one hand, and the laws of the human mind on the other. If these assumptions are well and truly made, then the divine authority of the Bible is abundantly sustained by its correspondence and harmony with the intellectual and moral nature of man. It fits the beings to whom it is given. But, on the other hand, if these assumptions had, on examination, proved false, it would be impossible to sustain the credit of the Scriptures as coming from a wise and honest Being.

2. Having the first revelation, to reject the second is most absurd. The second is, to a great extent, a re-affirmation of the first, with various important additions of a supplementary sort, e.g. the atonement, and hence the possibility of pardon, the gift and work of the Spirit, and hence the analogous possibility of being saved from sinning.

Now those things which the first revelation affirms and the second re-affirms are so fundamental in any revelation of moral duty to moral beings, that, having them taught so intuitively, so undeniably, we are left self-convicted of extreme absurdity if we then reject the second. Logically, there seems no ground left on which to base a denial of the written revelation. Its supplementary doctrines are not, to be sure, intuitive truths, but they are so related to man's wants as a lost sinner, and so richly supply those wants; they, moreover, are so beautifully related to the exigencies of God's government, and so amply meet them, that no intelligent mind, once apprehending all these things in their actual relations, can fail to recognize their truthfulness.

3. The study of the first secures an intellectual reception of the second. I do not believe it possible for a man to read and understand the first thoroughly and then come to the second and fairly apprehend its relation to his own moral nature and moral convictions, and also his moral wants without being compelled to say -- All is true; this book is all true! They coincide so wondrously, and the former sustains the latter so admirably and so triumphantly, a man can no more deny the Bible after knowing all his own moral relations than he can deny his own existence.

4. You see why so many reject the Bible. They have not well read themselves. They have not looked within, to read carefully the volume God has put on record there. They have contrived to hush and smother down the ever-rising convictions of their own moral nature. They have refused to listen to the cry of want which swells up from their troubled bosom of guilt. Hence, there is yet one whole volume of revelation of which they are strangely ignorant. This ignorance accounts for their rejection of the Bible.

A little attention to the subject will show you that the ground here indicated is beyond question that on which the masses in every Christian land really repose their faith in the Bible. Scarce one in ten thousand of them has studied the historical argument for divine revelation extensively and carefully, so as intelligently to make this a corner-stone for his faith in the Bible. It is not reasonable to demand that they should. There is an argument shorter and infinitely more convincing. It is a simple problem; given, a soul guilty, condemned and undone; required, some adequate relief. The Gospel solves the problem. Who will not accept the solution? It answers every condition perfectly; it must, therefore, come from God; it is at least our highest wisdom to accept it.

If it be replied to this, that such a problem meets the case of those only who give their hearts to God, it may be modified for yet another class, on this wise: given, a moral nature which affirms God, law, obligation, guilt, ruin; required, to know whether a written revelation is reliable, which is built upon the broad basis of man's intuitive affirmations; which gives them the sanction of man's Creator; which

appends a system of duty and of salvation of such sort that it interlocks itself inseparably with truth, intuitive to man, and manifestly fills out a complement of moral instructions and agencies in perfect adaptation to both man and his Maker. In the Bible, we have the very thing required. A key that threads the countless wards of such a lock must have been made to fit. Each came from the same Author. You can not grant to man an origin from God, but you must grant the same origin to the Bible.

When I came to examine these things in the light of my own convictions, I wondered I had not seen them truly before.

Suppose I should stand here and announce to you the two great precepts of the moral law; would not their obvious nature and bearings enforce on your mind the conviction that these precepts must be true and must be from God? As I should descend to particulars, you would still affirm -- these must be true; these must certainly have come down from heaven. If I were even to go back to the Mosaic law (a law which many object against, because they do not understand the circumstances that called for such a law) -- yet if I should explain their peculiar circumstances, and the reasons for such statutes, every man must affirm the rectitude of even those statutes. The Old Testament, I am aware, reveals truth under a veil, the world not being prepared then for its clearer revelation. The veil was taken away when, in the fullness of time, people were prepared for unclouded revealings of God in the flesh.

The reason, therefore, why the masses receive the Bible, is not that they are credulous, and hence swallow down absurdities with ease; but the reason is that it commends itself so irresistibly to each man's own nature and to his deep and resistless convictions, he is shut up to receive it -- he must do violence to his inner convictions if he reject it. Man's whole nature cries out -- This is just what I need! That young lady of whom I spake could not help but abandon her infidelity and yield up her heart to God, when she had reached this point. I said -- Do you admit a God? She answered -- Yes. Do you admit a law? Yes. Do you admit your personal guilt? Yes. And your need of salvation? O, yes. Can you help yourself? said I. Ah, no, indeed, she said, I do not believe I can ever be saved.

But God can save you. Surely nothing is too hard for Him.

Alas, she replied, my own nature has shut me up -- I am in despair; there is no way of escape for me; the Bible, you know, I don't receive; and here I am in darkness and despair!

At this point I began to speak of the Gospel. Said I to her -- See there; God has done such and such things as revealed in the Gospel; He came down and dwelt in human flesh to meet the case of such sinners as you are; He made an ample atonement for sin; there, what do you think of that? "That is what I need exactly," said she, "if it were only true."

If it is not true, said I, you are lost beyond hope! Then why not believe?

I can not believe it, she said, because it is incredible. It is a great deal too good to be true!

And is not God good, said I -- infinitely good? Then why do you object that anything He does is too good to be true?

"That is what I need," again she repeated, "but how can it be so?"

Then you can not give God credit for being so good! said I.

Alas, I see it is my unbelief; but I cannot believe. It is what I need, I can plainly see; but how can I believe it? At this point I rose up and said to her solemnly -- The crisis has come! There is now only one question for you -- Will you believe the Gospel? She raised her eyes, which had been depressed and covered for half an hour or more; every feature bespoke the most intense agitation; while I repeated -- Will you believe God? Will you give Him credit for sincerity? She threw herself upon her knees, and burst into loud weeping. What a scene -- to see a skeptic beginning to give her God credit for love and truth! To see the door of light and hope opened, and heaven's blessed light breaking in upon a desolate soul! Have you ever witnessed such a scene?

When she next opened her lips, it was to show forth a Saviour's praise!

The Bible assumes that you have light enough to see, and to do your duty, and to find the way to heaven. A great many of you are perhaps bewildered as to your religious opinions, holding loose and skeptical notions. You have not seen that it is the most reasonable thing in the world to admit and embrace this glorious truth. Will you allow yourself to go on, bewildered, without considering that you are yourself a living, walking revelation of truth? Will you refuse to come into such relations to God and Christ as will save your soul?

In my early life, when I was tempted to skepticism, I can well recollect that I said to myself -- It is much more probable that ministers and the multitudes of good men who believe the Bible are right, than that I am. They have examined the subject, but I have not. It is, therefore, entirely unreasonable for me to doubt.

Why should you not say -- I know the Gospel is suited to my wants. I know I am afloat on the vast ocean of life, and if there is no Gospel, there is nothing that can save me. It is, therefore, no way for me to stand here and cavil. I must examine -- must look into this matter. I can at least see that if God offers me mercy, I must not reject it. Does not this Gospel show you how you can be saved from hell and from sin? O, then believe it! Let the blessed truth find a heart open for its admission. When you shall dare to give God credit for all His love and truth, and when you shall bring your heart under the power of this truth, and yield yourself up to its blessed sway, that will be the dawn of morning to your soul! Whosoever will, let him come and take of the waters of life, freely.

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