

# Jehovah's Appeal to Sinners and Backsliders

by Charles Finney

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*God appeals to sinners and backsliders to testify against Him, asking what He has done to justify their course of conduct.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 1:18, Jeremiah 3:12, Micah 6:3

**Topics:** "God's Mercy", "Repentance"

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## Description

Charles Finney delivers a powerful sermon addressing the backslidden and unrepentant, urging them to reflect on their relationship with God. He emphasizes God's appeal for honesty, asking what grievances they have against Him, and challenges them to consider the blessings and care they have received. Finney highlights the absurdity of turning away from a loving God who has provided for their needs and calls for a return to genuine faith and devotion. He uses vivid analogies, including the relationship between a husband and wife, to illustrate the gravity of backsliding and the depth of God's mercy. Ultimately, he invites all to return to God with a sincere heart, ready to serve and love Him fully.

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## Transcript

"O my people, what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me."  
--Micah 6:3

This is indeed a most striking passage. God himself appeals to his backslidden people to say what he has done to them that can any way justify their course of conduct towards him. The connection shows that this is addressed to sinners and backsliders--to those who had been his professed people, but who had grievously departed from him. "Hear, O ye mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel." The Gentile nations having gone after other gods and all his own chosen people having grievously revolted, where could he get a candid hearing of his case among all the race of men? How affecting in this point of light is this summoning the case before the "mountains" and the "strong foundations of the earth?" Inanimate nature is not blinded by depravity--has not gone into apostasy from its Maker. Let the case come before the mountain, and let the hills hear the pleadings and render their verdict. "Hear what the Lord saith; arise (O sinner), contend thou before the mountains and let the hills hear thy voice."

The case then, comes on for hearing, and the Lord opens with summoning his people to testify against him and show what he has done, or wherein he has wearied them. Upon you, sinners, does your Maker call, as subjects of his moral government. He has given you the existence you now enjoy, and has liberally

provided for the supply of your physical and social wants. He calls on you to bear witness against him if you can--if you have anything to say in bar of the judgment which his law has threatened against all who violate it. If you have any charge to bring against him, it shall be duly considered. He lets you have the full benefit of a candid hearing. He even asks you to bear witness against him if you can. Nothing can be farther from his heart than to do you any injustice. Indeed He is not happy to have even an erroneous impression left on your mind that you have been wronged in any way. If such an impression is there, come forward and reveal it; bring forward your strong reasons and let the case be examined and debated.

Now therefore let me speak in God's behalf to those who make no profession of love to God. Let us take up this matter as between your own souls and your Maker. Let us enter into all the important particulars. Has God injured you in any way? What have you to say against his administration? I want to put these questions specially to you. You refuse to acknowledge the Lord Jehovah as your God and Father. You ought not to do this without having some reasons in your mind for it. Probably you have something in your mind which you regard as a reason. What is it? Why do you grieve your Heavenly Father's heart? Have you a reason? If so, what is it? Has He done you wrong in any way![] Has He required you to love Him without good cause? Has He required you to repent when He had no good reason for this requirement? Has He wronged you by the implication that you have sinned and therefore ought to repent? Or has He wronged you by implying that you can repent?

I want you to understand that God is present. You may suppose Him to be sitting here, and that you can see Him. He comes down here to discuss and investigate this subject, and give you the fairest possible opportunity to vindicate yourself. He comes and asks of you your reason for not loving and obeying Him. Will you reply, Lord, thou knowest I have no good reason for loving thee? And has He indeed forfeited your confidence, so that you have no good reason to confide in Him? Has He required you to trust in Him, while yet He has given you no good reasons for so doing?

He requires you to submit unqualifiedly to his supreme authority; is there any good reason why you should not? Has He required too much of you![] Do you say--He is so exacting! He requires so much and withal so rigidly! How can I ever meet it?

If now you were to meet God face to face, would you say so? Or would you enter this complaint against him? Or would you insist that the penalties He affixes to the violation of his law are too severe? But are you a fit judge in your own case? Are you not aware that it is not common in any government to depend on the criminals to determine the justice of the penalty or its due amount in their own case? Besides, have you any good reason for objecting to the penalty, or is it merely a feeling, an impression on your mind, that it will be hard to bear it?

But consider again. Has not your God cared for you? Can you say, Lord, thou hast not cared for my immortal soul? Will you say--O Lord God, thou hast brought me into being, thou hast made me immortal and hast placed me in a most delicate and critical position where my soul may be utterly and forever lost; and having done all this, thou hast not cared for this immortal soul of mine?--Altogether happy in thyself, thou has not cared for me, a poor dependent being, destined to live forever, and moreover to have its destinies soon fixed, past all change. Or will you say-- If he has cared for me, he has given me no evidence of it? Will you say-- Lord, I can see no token of thy love--not any at all. If thou hast cared for me, I have no evidence of it. I can see no manifestations that show it! Is this what you have to say? And have you quite forgotten how "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son" for its redemption; and shall this go for nothing?

Or has God been impatient with you? Has He been severely impatient, so severely as to repel you from all confidence and trust? Can you justly say--O my Heavenly Father, thou hast so repelled me, and hast so fretted and wearied me, how can I ever approach Thee? Thou hast been so hard and cruel withal.

But in what way has He been cruel? Wherein has He wearied you? Has He done you no good? Can you think of no way in which He has blessed you? Look all round about you and make up an inventory of your enjoyments; then say, is there no hand of God in these things?

Or will you say--All God has done for me hast cost him nothing? Will you say this? Do you regard it as nothing that He should give up his Son to death for you? Has He made you no offers of mercy? And does mercy cost nothing? Do you claim it as of right yours? Or can it be exercised without risks and hazards to the great interests of the government? If special provision is made in this case to obviate these risks, then you should at least inquire whether this provision did not cost something.

Look now at this whole subject. Has God in no way tried to overcome your aversion? Has he not sought to melt your heart by kindness? Say now as in his very presence--Has He refused to open before you the gate of Mercy? Has he locked its doors and thrown the key away? Or on the other hand, has He offered to save you on the very lowest possible terms? Is it the case that He has only required on your part your full consent to be saved? And will you look up into his face and tell him that even this is asking too much?

Again, has he not given you time? Have you not had time enough--days and months and years enough to consider this subject fully as you need to do, and to decide it wisely and for your own eternal well-being? Have you not also had ample opportunity to get instruction? Has not the sanctuary opened its doors before you and made you welcome to come in and hear the words of life? Have you not had Sabbaths, many and precious, inviting you to serious thought upon your ways? What more could you have had done for you that you have not had? You cannot say you have not been urged to repent and accept of mercy. Yet you may be disposed to complain that you have been urged too much. You have often felt that you were urged unreasonably. Indeed this is precisely one of the points of this investigation. God asks you--"Wherein have I wearied thee?" What ground of complaint can you find against me for being in earnest to secure your salvation? What better could I do, or what should I do, for your eternal well-being?

Thus stands the matter at issue as between Jehovah and those who profess no allegiance to his law or gospel.

II. We come now to press similar questions upon the attention of those who have professed to know and love him, but have left their first love and have backslidden from their God.

It is a most remarkable fact that persons of this class are exceedingly slow to admit it and say--I am the man! They would not justify backsliding; they know it cannot be justified. As for themselves, they are not guilty.-- We find this most serious difficulty, lying across our path in the onset as we attempt to apply this subject to the case of real backsliders. It is precisely for this reason that the appeal which God made to his backslidden people is likely to have so little useful application to you. How is it you get into such an attitude that you cannot be reached? The moment you hear any thing that would open your case to your own view, you repel it.

But this must not be! You must consent to see your case as it is, and on God's behalf I must plead with you.

What has God done to you? How do you account for this, that you are so backslidden from God? Suppose a young bride, not married longer than some of you have been professedly united to Jesus Christ, should give signs of great alienation of heart from her husband. You are that husband, and sitting down by her side you kindly enquire, "What have I done? What is the reason of this too obvious coldness in your affections towards me? It is sometimes said that persons soon after marriage become remiss in those little attentions which sustain affection and hence that love grows cold. Has this been my fault towards you?" So you might debate and enquire in a case between yourself and your bride.

So God debates and enquires with you. What has He done towards you? Has he been remiss in those little attentions which are the life of love? When each day he spreads your table and fills your cup with earthly good, does He not show his kind remembrance of you? and when He provides day by day your spiritual bread, and evermore fulfills his promise to manifest himself to those who keep his commandments and show forth their love, does He not show himself mindful of you,--most tenderly so?

Or has He required too much self-denial of you--or of such sort as would really injure you? Has He taken away your friends arbitrarily, with no good reasons? Has He smitten you and drawn blood from your heart unfeelingly, as if He did not care how much pain he caused you? Has He taken away your property or your children in a hard and apparently unfeeling way? If you dare to think so, tell him so. Say, "O, Lord, didst thou not cut down my husband or my wife, reckless of the pain and the agony it would cost me?" Did he die hard, in great pain and racking torture? And was this done on God's part without consideration? Nay, was it not all mercy and kindness on his part? Has He not told you that he never does afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men for his own pleasure?

Perhaps you have found it impossible to get the comforts and necessities of life, and you are therefore tempted to doubt whether God does fairly by you. You are prone to think that perhaps God does not mean to provide for you. But have you forgotten that even his dear Son when He came to dwell among men had no where to lay his head? I found a sister once who made this excuse for backsliding. She found no sympathy in the church, and therefore turned to the world. And will you also say--"God takes no notice of me, and therefore I will cast him off?"

Or again, has God manifested towards you unreasonable jealousy? Has He been too particular in regard to giving you permission to enjoy the world? Has He imposed on you unreasonable restraints? Has He been suspicious without reason, and disposed evidently to cut you off from reasonable enjoyments? Do you believe this?

Or has He attempted to govern you by authority rather than by love? Parents, you say, never get the love of their children by dint of mere authority; and do you on this ground complain of God that He has required too much and has seemed to expect to gain your love by mere requisitions? Are you disappointed, and do you find on better acquaintance that God is not what you expected? Sometimes in earthly relationships persons find themselves mistaken. Many a one has said this mournfully--"I have been mistaken; I am sorely disappointed; I am utterly undone!" So some of you are disappointed--perhaps--are you? Is not religion what you supposed it to be? Is it not as good as you expected? Does it fail to meet your wants as you expected it would? A man once said to me after I had been presenting the fulness of gospel salvation--"Either the Gospel is not what it pretends to be, or I do not know anything about it."-- Doubtless in all such cases the latter supposition is the fact--the man knows nothing about the true gospel by actual experience. How is this with you?

But let me ask you again--Wherein has God forfeited your confidence? Tell him, tell him, if you can. If such be the fact, He allows you to tell him so. He says, "Testify against me." I never shall forget the forbearance and kindness with which He treated me when I ventured to tell him how troubled I was to believe his word. I was pleading for the gift of the Holy Ghost, on the strength of the promise in Luke 11. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" I was pleading this promise, and it seemed to me that I had been asking for this bread of life a long time and yet did not obtain it. I therefore said--"O Lord, I am a father, and I love to give to my children any thing and every thing that they ask and that I think will be a real good to them. I give them such good things, and do not give them occasion to ask and tease me over and over. Now, Lord, how is this matter as between me and thee?" When I ventured to plead thus with God, he did not rebuke me, by any means, but this He did;--He showed me that the fault was wholly in myself, and He let me know what I must do. He bore with me most tenderly and most graciously; and so, my hearers, will he surely do with you. Suppose someone here in this house should say--"I have used all the means of salvation, yet I am not saved. I have done all my part faithfully; but God has dealt hardly with me, and I can trust him no longer. I thought once that I would and did give him my heart, but I take it back."

On what grounds do you say this? What has God done, or what has He failed to do, that you should thus complain of him, and break friendship and withdraw confidence? Perhaps you will say, "I have not found him a sufficient portion. Before I turned from my sins to God I was told that He would be a sufficient portion for my soul, but I have tried it and have not found it so. My heart has not been satisfied and therefore I return to the world again to make that my portion."

And must you then say that Christ is an unfaithful lover for your soul, so that you must go after other lovers? Does He withhold all proper manifestations of affection? Do you go to Him imploring some token of his friendship, and does he sternly withhold any and all such manifestations? He has said, "Seek and ye shall find." Do you seek honestly and humbly and yet find nothing? He has said also--"He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, loveth me, and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him." He has surely said--"And ye shall seek for me and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Are you prepared to deny the truth of these promises? Can you testify against God that you have sought thus and have not found?

Again, has He been hard-hearted when you have confessed your guilt before him? When you have come into his presence deeply humbled, and your bleeding heart has poured out its confessions and sorrows, has He quite certainly turned his ear away? He has promised to hear, to forgive and to restore, and will you say He has not done so? Can you say that while He has promised always to hear and to forgive, He yet has not done so?-- Now weigh this matter well, and be very sure that your own heart has been truly humbled before your God for all your sins.

Or have you found some friends more to your liking and such as more fully meet your wants? Will you say, "I must give my heart to some better friend than God?" And do you really think so?

Or are you sick of his love and does your heart therefore demand some change? Have you had the gospel until it has ceased to interest you, and has become an old story? Is this your case? Have you gained anything at all by transferring your affections to somebody else? Have you obtained better friends, more peace of mind, or more satisfaction? On the other hand, have you not lost something of substantial value? Have you not lost your own self-respect? When you look into your own face, do you not instinctively

say--That is the face of a hypocrite? Have you not lost that sweetness of temper which you had in your first love? Do not your acquaintances see that something is wrong with you? Have you not such a sense of guilt that you dread everything that may enforce conviction? Are you not oppressed with a sense of shame? Do you not inwardly know that you are altogether hypocritical in your religion? Can you honestly draw near to God and tell him how much you love him? Or, on the other hand, is it not true that desire has fled--that every vestige of true affection has perished from your heart, and that the whole of your religion is mere hypocrisy? Do you not feel that you have acted most unreasonably and cruelly? Have you not acted madly? Has not your course in leaving your first love been one of moral insanity and infatuation?-- Have you not been compelled to say of yourself--"I have had no reason, I have acted like a lunatic; God knows I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly!"-- Have you not done as a treacherous wife who madly goes after other lovers and forsakes the covenant of her God and the plighted love of her vows? And are you not evermore going from bad to worse, getting still farther and farther from God, more and more grieving the Spirit by your course of dealings with God? Are you not doing more and more things which you will hate to confess and yet which you must confess, or never turn acceptably to God? Are you not wandering from God, and still building up walls of separation to obstruct your return? And worse still, if possible, are you not laying stumbling-blocks before others?

Let all these points be deeply pondered. Are you prepared to come before God and table your complaints against him, and show that in all the points at issue between your soul and him, the fault is wholly on his side?

#### REMARKS

Do you think any body ever treats you as badly as you treat God? Was ever any one so abusive to you as you have been to your Maker and to your Redeemer? If God were to summon all his creatures before him, could he find one among them all, who has treated him so badly as you have? Must you not say--["]All the evil I have ever received from all creatures together is as nothing compared with the treatment I have shown to God?"

Considering his nature and his resources, how wonderful that He should permit us to live and treat him so!-- He who abhors sin and meanness so intensely, and who has withal such power to punish, or even to annihilate us, how wonderful that He should still prolong our days and still pour out blessings upon us!

When men are once convinced of duty to God, to procrastinate is most abominable. It is not only violating conscience deliberately, but it is deliberately insulting God! What can be more provoking? What can more surely bring down on the soul the fearful wrath of the Most High?

God does not exact of us what He refuses to do himself. When He asks us to do our duty, He always holds himself responsible to do his. If He has done wrong He is willing to stand rebuked before the universe. We see this truth lying out upon the very face of our text.

By a law of necessity sinners know they have no excuse for sin. If any one should really and honestly suppose that he had a good excuse for what might be called sin, it could not be sin in him under those circumstances; for real sin is never that which men do for good reasons and which they suppose they ought to do. Sin lies in the intention. It is not an intention to do right and to do what ought in the actor's view to be done, but an intention to do what is seen to be wrong.

To live in a backslidden state is most disgraceful.-- What should we say of a wife who should forsake her husband and go off into down right whoredom? Yet this is the very figure which God uses to express the guilt and shamefulfulness of his people's backslidings from Him.-- You may read a vivid delineation of this sin under this figure in Hosea 2, and often in the prophet Jeremiah.-- Who that reads these passages and considers for a moment what intense feelings of abhorrence and detestation are naturally excited by this sin can fail to get a strong impression of God's abhorrence of backsliding? Yet He invites you to return, and gives you many most precious assurances that on your return you shall again be welcomed to his confidence and love. So God does; but I suppose a wife to have proved a harlot while her husband had borne a blameless character and course towards her. Suppose a wife to have been utterly treacherous to her vows, giving herself up to most shameful conduct, going on from step to step in depravity and crime till she becomes a filthy prostitute--on the street;--suppose that while in this forlorn and wretched state, her husband should come to her and say--"I have come to do you good, to clothe and feed and bless you, and take you with your consent again to my house and home and heart;"--would not this be a wonderful scene? Has human nature often manifested such tenderness and such forgiveness of wrongs?

But you will perhaps say, "I am not so degraded and debased as that. I can yet take care of myself and I can not admit that the case you have supposed presents my case fairly." Whereas, the fact is that you are almost infinitely worse than she is who has only played the harlot in her earthly relations and as towards a husband. The great God had consented to take you into a similar relation to himself, and you have disowned Him!

The parable of the prodigal son may be applied both to the unconverted sinner and to the backslider. To either and to both, God is a father if they will return and seek his face. You may see in the parable how God feels towards everyone in whom He sees the spirit of true penitence and confession.

And now, how long ere you will turn your footsteps towards the house and home of your Father above? Hear what He says, "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Will you yield the controversy now, or will you still persist in your course of sin and folly?-- Let the case be settled. Either come on and table your charges against your God, and make out your case if you can, or forever withdraw them, and turn once for all to seek the face of your injured God in penitence and prayer. Come back if you pretend to come at all, not to play the hypocrite again, but to devote yourself henceforth and forever to the love and service of your God.-- Come and say--Here, Lord, are all my powers. I give to Thee all thou hast ever given me, withholding nothing. Here am I, and here is all I am and have; take all my powers and use them up in most divine economy in thy service forever. Nothing that I can do is too much for me to desire to do."

"Had I ten thousand hearts to give,

Lord, they should all be thine."

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