

On Refuges of Lies

by Charles Finney

The sermon warns against seeking refuge in lies and false hopes, and calls for a return to the true refuge of Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 46:1, Isaiah 28:17, Matthew 7:24-27, John 8:32, Romans 6:22, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 2:8-9, James 1:22, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "True Salvation", "Truth vs. Lies"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the futility of seeking refuge in lies, highlighting that many people are aware of their sinfulness yet choose to hide behind false hopes rather than turning to God for true salvation. He argues that any belief system that does not lead to genuine transformation from sin is a 'refuge of lies' and ultimately worthless. Finney stresses that true salvation must produce holiness, love, and a deep connection with God, and warns against relying on outdated experiences or self-righteousness. He calls on sinners to abandon these deceptive refuges and seek the true refuge found in Christ, who alone can save from sin and provide everlasting life.

Transcript

"Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." --Isaiah xxviii. 17.

All men know themselves to be sinners against God. They know also, that, as sinners, they are in peril and are not safe. Hence their anxiety to find some refuge for safety. They know they might find this in the way of forsaking sin and turning to the Lord; but they do not choose to forsake their sins. Hence there seems to be no convenient resource but to hide themselves under some refuge.

Our text speaks of "the refuge of lies." Yet it is obvious that men who resort to lies for a refuge regard those lies not as lies but as truth. This fact leads us to raise the primary fundamental question--Have we any rule or standard which will show what is truth, and what is falsehood? Men have countless opinions about religion; these can not all be true;--how can we determine which are true and which not true?

We have an infallible test.

Salvation, to be real and available, must be salvation from sin. Everything else fails. Any system of religion which does not break the power of sin, is a lie. If it does not expel selfishness and lust, and if it does not

beget love to God and man, joy, peace, and all the fruits of the Spirit, it is false and worthless. Any system that fails in this vital respect is a lie--can be of no use--is no better than a curse. That which does not beget in us the spirit of heaven and make us like God, no matter whence it comes, or by what sophistry defended, is a lie, and if fled to as a refuge, it is a "refuge of lies."

Again, if it does not beget prayer, does not unify us with God, and bring us into fellowship and sympathy with him, it is a lie.

If it does not produce a heavenly mind, and expel a worldly mind, and wean us from the love of the world, it is a lie. If it does not beget in us the love required in the Scriptures, the love of God and of his worship and of his people--indeed, of all mankind;-- if it does not produce all those states of mind which fit the soul for heaven,--it fails utterly of its purpose.

Here I must stop a moment to notice an objection. It is said, "The gospel does not in fact do for men all you claim. It does not make professed Christians heavenly-minded, dead to the world, full of love, joy, and peace."

I reply: Here is medicine which, applied in a given disease, will certainly cure. This healing power is just what it has and what we claim for it. But it must be fairly applied. A man may buy the medicine, and because it is bitter, may lay it up in his cupboard and never take it; he may provide himself with a counterfeit to take in its stead; or he may follow it with something that will instantly counteract its influence in the system. In any such case, the efficacy of the medicine is not disproved; you only prove that you have not used it fairly and honestly.

So with the gospel. You must take it and use it according to directions; else its failure is not its fault, but yours.

It is of no avail then to say that the gospel does not save men from sin. It may indeed be counterfeited; it may be itself rejected; but he who receives it to his heart will surely find his heart blessed thereby. The gospel does transform men from sin to holiness--does make men peaceful, holy, heavenly, in life and in death. Millions of such cases lie out on the face of the world's history. Their lives evince the reality and preciousness of the salvation which the gospel promises.

I will now proceed to name some things that lack this decisive characteristic. They do not save the soul from sin.

1. An unsanctifying hope of heaven. Speaking of what God's children shall be, John says--"We know that when He shall appear we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him (Christ) purifieth himself even as he is pure." A good hope, then, does purify the heart. But there certainly are hopes indulged that fail to purify the heart of those who hold them. Those hopes are lies. They cannot possibly be sound and true. On their very face, it stands revealed that they are worthless--a mere refuge of lies. The stronger and more unwavering they are, so much the more are they delusive. What hope in Christ is that which does not bring the heart to Christ?

2. An old experience, that is all old, is a lie. You have perhaps heard of the man who had his old experience all written down and laid away with his deeds of land to keep till his time of need. This being all the evidence he had, he used to refer to it from time to time for his comfort. At length, when the time came for him to die, he felt the need of this record of his religion, and sent his little daughter to bring it. She

returned with only the sad story that the mice had found their way to his drawer and had eaten up the paper--all the dying man's evidence of piety! Alas! he must die in despair! He had no other hope but this!

On the face of it, such a refuge is only lies.

3. There are two forms of self-righteousness--the legal and the gospel,--both of which are refuges of lies.

The legal depends on duty-doing--evermore trying to work out salvation by deeds of law. The gospel form sets itself to get grace by works. Men try to get a new heart not by trying to turn from all sin, but by praying for it. I meet such a man. He says, "I tried to become religious." Indeed, and, what did you do? "I prayed for a new heart." You did! But you did not do what God says you must--"Make yourself a new heart and a new spirit;" you did not repent--you did not bow your heart to God. Therefore, all your doings come short of what God requires. They fail of saving the soul from sin.

There is a great deal of this gospel self-righteousness--this throwing off the responsibility upon God.

4. Universalism is an old refuge of lies. And here let me give you a case. Being out from home in my carriage, I overtook a young man and invited him to ride. Almost immediately he told me he was a Universalist and came out strongly in defence of his system. I said to him,--"I am not well and may not live long, and I do not dare to be deceived in this matter." He said for his part he was sure enough of its truth. He had heard smart men say so, and prove it from Scripture. I said to him--I have one objection. There is a certain train of facts which I cannot account for if Universalism be true. I have known families once reputed orthodox, which were then upright, moral, and justly respected. These same families I have known become loose in morals, forsake the house of God, turn to strong drink, and become fearfully vicious. Such families I have observed along with this change almost always become Universalists. This is one set of facts.

On the other hand, I have never known a holy, prayerful Universalist backslide into orthodoxy--forsake his Universalism and his morality and degenerate into vice and orthodoxy by one uniform and simultaneous declension. I have known men reformed from drunkenness and vice, and then become orthodox; but I have never known men reform from vice into Universalism. In short, it seems to me that thousands of facts evince a natural sympathy between vice and Universalism on the one hand, and between virtue and orthodoxy on the other.

By this time, he began to feel troubled, and said, "I am afraid I am all wrong. Would you believe it?["] said he, ["I am running away from being converted. There is a revival in my place, and I am running away from it." You are! said I. And do you think it will hurt you? Will it do you any harm?

He looked deeply anxious and said--"Had not I better go back? My good father and mother looked sad when I left my home. I don't believe Universalism can save me. Everybody knows it never did save anybody and never can."

The same must be said of proper Unitarianism. Some who bear this name are not such in fact. But where you find men who deny depravity, regeneration, atonement, you will certainly find that their system does not make them heavenly-minded, holy and humble. You need not reason with them to find this out; you need only to take the facts of their history.

So of Davisism--the doctrines of Andrew Jackson Davis. Do these doctrines make men holy? Never.

I have known a man, once a friend and patron of gospel reforms, who turned back to Andrew Jackson Davis. Did this change make him more holy? No, indeed. He said, "It makes me more happy." No doubt; and for the reason that before, he was only and always under conviction, never enjoying the peace of the gospel. What is the use of reasoning about his Universalism? Look at the facts! They alone are sufficient to show its utter falsehood. Universalism never saved any man from sin. It throws no influence in that direction. So of Mormonism and all similar delusions. We need not stop to write books against this and such like lies;--it stands out on the fore-front of this system that it saves no man from sin. It is therefore a refuge of lies--deceiving men into hopes that can never be realized. So of every creed and system that does not save men from sin and fit them for heaven.

And now let my hearers take notice of what God says. He declares,--"The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place." No doubt this hail is the symbol of God's displeasure. It is fit that God should be displeased with these refuges of lies. He loves truth too well to have the least sympathy with lies. He loves the souls of men too deeply to have any patience with agencies so destructive. Therefore he loathes all these refuges of lies, and has solemnly declared that the hail shall sweep them all away.

The waters, he declares, shall overflow the hiding-places. Every resort that leaves the soul in sin is a hiding-place. All religious affectation is such, and is nothing better. To put on the mere appearance of devoutness and sanctimony, as if God could be made to believe you sincere and could not see through it all;--this is a flimsy hiding-place indeed. So of all religious formality--going through the forms of worship, being in the church, being baptized--what avails it all unless their piety be instinct with life and that life be the soul of real holiness?

A great many people hide in the church. Judas Iscariot crept in there to hide. A minister of the Dutch Reformed Church told me once of a case, in point just here. A man who had been confirmed in that church was out at sea in a fearful storm. It was a time of intense alarm, and many were exceedingly fearful of death, not to say also of that terrible state beyond. When they said to him, How is it that you are so cool? He replied, "What have I to fear--I belong to the South Dutch!"

Many hide under orthodox creeds. They are not Unitarians; they are not Mormons; they are not Universalists; they are orthodox! Such religious opinions held so tenaciously must, they think, ensure their safety.

Others hide under the plea of a sinful nature. They are naturally unable to do anything. Here they have found a sure retreat. They are very willing to do all their duty--but this sinful nature is all against them, and what can they do? This is a refuge of lies.

Some dodge under professors of religion. I fear there are many such here among us. Alas, your hiding-place will fail you in the day of trial! When the hail comes and the storm rolls up fearfully, and the awful thunder breaks with appalling crash, you will try in vain to find your professor, to hide under his wing! Where is he now? Suppose he were as bad as you claim, how much can he help you in that all-devouring storm? If he is not as good as he should be, you ought to be better than he, and not try to hide yourself under his shortcomings.

REMARKS.

Sinners know these things to be refuges of lies because they do not save men from their sins. Certainly they must see this and know it to be the truth.

They resort to these refuges, not as being quite fully true, but as an excuse for delay. Miserable subterfuge, this! They are not honest, and therefore need not think it strange if they are deluded.

They admit that if one lives like Christ, all will be well; and they know that nothing less than this will avail for their safety.

Of course, to seek a refuge of lies is to tempt God to destroy you. How can it be otherwise?

Remember the test--this one plain simple principle: That and only that which saves from sin is true; all else is false and ruinous. Now you all have some hope of a happy future; what is this hope? good or bad? Is it truthful and sure, or is it a refuge of lies?

Does your hope sanctify you--does it make you humble, holy, prayerful? Does your faith purify your heart? Have you the fruits of the Spirit--love, joy, peace, long-suffering? Have you daily communion with God? Are you so united to him that you can say--Truly we have fellowship with the Father? If so, this will be a hiding-place indeed--not one which the hail shall sweep away, but one which shall save the soul.

Have you the life of God in your soul? Does it pervade your heart, and diffuse itself over all the chambers of your soul? Let nothing less than this avail to satisfy your mind.

Hear Catholics talk about the Virgin and the sacraments and absolution; what are all these things, and a thousand more such, good for, if they do not save from sin? What is the use of running after these things that do not save?

But you say--I love to believe that all will be saved; it makes me so happy. But does it make you holy? Does it renew your heart? This is the only sure test.

But you say, "I do not believe as you do." I answer--Here are great facts. You are in sin. Are you saved from your sin by your system? If so, well; if not so, then it is not well. Will your believing it to be one way or the other make it so? Does believing a lie make it the truth? If you were to believe that you could walk on the water, or that water could not drown you, and should leap overboard, would your belief save you?

Dying sinner, all those refuges of lies will surely deceive and destroy you. It is time for you to arise and say--I must have the religion of Jesus. Not having it, I cannot go where Jesus is. With a lie in my right hand, what have I to hope for? None of you, I hope, have reached that forlorn state described by the prophet, "A deceived heart hath turned him aside, neither can he say to his soul, There is a lie in my right hand."

O sinner, there is a refuge for you which is not one of lies. There is a hiding-place for you which no waters can reach to overwhelm. It lies far above their course. O, take refuge in Christ! away with these refuges of lies! Cry out--Give me Christ and none besides! Christ and him only,--for what have I to do with lies and delusions? You need to come into such communion with Christ that his power and presence and fullness shall flow through your heart fully and freely, and be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

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