

Pride of Heart Deceives

by Charles Finney

Pride of heart deceives men by making them blind to their own faults, excusing or palliating their own faults, and leading them to imagine virtues that do not exist.

Topics: "Self-Deception", "Pride"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the deceptive nature of pride in the heart, emphasizing that it leads individuals to overestimate themselves, ignore their faults, and create delusions about their spiritual state. He outlines how pride blinds people to their true character, causes them to evade self-knowledge, and leads to a false sense of righteousness. Finney warns that many believe they are Christians while living in sin or lacking true love for God, ultimately calling for a deep self-examination to uncover the truth of one's spiritual condition.

Transcript

"The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee." Obadiah 3.

The connection in which these words are found, not being important to my present purpose, I shall pass it without remark, and proceed at once to the subject it presents. It will be my aim,

I. TO NOTICE BRIEFLY WHAT CONSTITUTES PRIDE OF HEART.

II. TO SHOW HOW IT DECEIVES MEN.

III. TO SPECIFY SOME OF THE FORMS OF DELUSION TO WHICH IT LEADS.

I. Pride of heart may be defined to be a disposition of mind to exalt ourselves. It is a spirit of self-exaltation--a disposition to get out of our own place, and get above those who of right, even in our own estimation, ought to hold a place above ourselves.

II. How does pride of heart deceive men?

1. It renders men in a great measure blind to their own faults. The man of a proud heart will not see his own faults. He has no desire to see them. He would sooner see anything else in the world than see the bad side of his own character, and of course he takes every precaution to avoid the honest view of himself. He has no intention or even desire to find his own proper level in society, but tries to deceive both

himself and others. He would fain imagine that he is vastly better than he really is, and make everybody else believe it if he can. Hence he will overlook his own faults either wholly, or at least as far as he can, and would be glad to make others do the same. This is one of the workings of a proud heart.

2. It leads men to excuse, or at least palliate their own faults. If a proud man can no longer cover his own faults, this will be his next resort. When he can not deny that many things in his conduct are palpably wrong objectively considered, he will yet maintain that under his very peculiar circumstance, they are nearly or quite right. They will at least admit of much palliation; so he sets himself most diligently to this labor. He will be that last man to come down to a candid and thorough examination of his own faults. Ah, he does not relish this honest-hearted work.

3. It leads men to imagine that they have virtues which they have not. This is often manifest in their egotistical manner of speaking. In their common conversation they assume that they possess virtues which nobody ever saw them exhibit, or ever dreamed of attributing to them. Whatever in their own conduct has the remotest appearance of virtue, they are sure to drag into their service to prove themselves the best of men.

4. It leads men to overrate the apparent virtues which they really possess. I say apparent virtues, for while a man is proud of heart, he can have no real virtue. Semblances of virtue he may have, and these his pride of heart will lead him to exaggerate as much as possible. He will be sure to give himself more credit for even these than he deserves.

5. It leads to an uncandid estimation of ourselves. The proud man becomes of course partial in his views of his own merits--committed to self, and incapable of taking sober views of his own real character.

6. Pride of heart is always prone to make self-flattering comparisons. The proud man is never slow to institute comparisons between himself and others, but will be always sure to give himself the advantage. He is always better than his neighbors. Although he may be an impenitent sinner, he is better than most professed Christians. "The pride of his heart hath deceived him."

7. The proud man avoids making humiliating comparisons between himself and others. If there are those with whom he cannot compare himself favorably, he turns away from them and avoids if he can, the painful self-mortification of contemplating superior excellence; or perhaps more often he will set himself to traduce their character, and will create or at least retail and aggravate slander against them until he can flatter himself that they are below him; then and then only can he feel happy to let them alone. The sight of superior excellence is annoying, not to say agonizing; so he goes about to level it down and make himself and others believe that the reputed best man is not as good as himself. It is pride of heart that begets envy, that fills society with slander and makes it so grateful to the feelings of some men to pick at the character of their more excellent neighbors. This is the reason why so many of the best men are slandered, and why so few escape its shafts.

8. Pride of heart induces an entirely dishonest application of truth. If the proud man sits under preaching and if what he hears applies to himself ever so fitly, he is sure not to notice at all its application to himself, but will be very prompt and active in applying it to his neighbor. See him stretch up his neck to look over the heads of the congregation; he wants to see if Mr. B. is not there--this touch in the sermon hits him so nicely. O, thinks he, how completely that point hits such an one, and such an one--so the poor fool (for none are such fools as the proud) cheats himself out of all the truth that fits his own case, and with a strange, self-deceptive politeness, serves out all the food to others and gladly starves himself. Has not his

pride of heart deceived him?

9. Pride leads men to evade self-knowledge. How often in conversing with men have I been struck with this! You cannot make them see their own faults. They will dodge and shuffle--change the subject if they can, and look in every other direction rather than within. In courts of justice you may sometimes see a man pushed to admit a fact that incriminates himself, and you may mark his shuffling and evasion, and his skill in denying or concealing the fact that he is badly crowded; but the same thing occurs often enough out of court when the pride of a man's heart makes him hate the light and stubbornly, though often awkwardly, shut his eyes against it. You may hold up the light close to his face--he can't see. Try to open his eyes--he doesn't see anything. You may draw his character to the life--he does not recognize the likeness--because he does not wish to! What is the reason? Pride of heart. It often seems as if a proud man would sooner go to hell than open his eyes to see candidly his own faults. So terribly does pride deceive those who love to indulge it!

III. I am next to sketch some of its forms of delusion.

1. It makes men imagine that they believe the Bible when they do not. Nothing in my own experience has ever more surprised me than the deep and strong delusion under which I labored during my early life on this point. I honestly supposed that I believed the Bible to be God's word. For a long time it had been impossible for me to evade the arguments in its favor. Indeed so thoroughly was I convinced on this point, that the first thing I did after my conversion was to make out a skeleton of an argument to prove on legal grounds the truth of the Bible--which I deemed to be unanswerable. If any body had told me then that I did not believe the Bible, I should have felt that they slandered me most ungenerously and shamefully. But yet mine was then only a mere historical belief, and no act of the heart at all. My will did not bow to the supremacy of Bible truth. Indeed I gave it no place at all in my heart; I did not allow it to have the influence of admitted truth upon my heart or my life. Hence my notion that I believed the Bible to be true was a mere delusion.

That this sort of merely historical faith is a delusion is manifest in various ways. (1.) Whoever really believes the Bible will be strongly exercised in view of its truths. In the nature of mind it is impossible that such truths--believed, can fail to influence the mind powerfully. It is intrinsically essential to the nature of mind to be moved by the truth. Hence there never was and never can be a mind of man or angel that will be unmoved by the belief of such truth as the Bible reveals. It is indeed true that the will many resist the demands of this truth; but even so, if thoroughly believed, it would arouse the sensibility and lash it up into mountain waves of excitement. Yet who does not know that thousands read the Bible and profess to believe it, but are not half so much interested or affected by it as they are in reading Tom Thumb. It is a fact. Many say they believe the Bible, and yet are more interested in reading the silliest story-book ever got up to amuse mere children. Do these people really believe the Bible? Oh, "the pride of their heart hath deceived them."

This delusion is also manifest (2) in the fact that, professing to believe the Bible, they yet take no pains to understand what it teaches.

Suppose Br. M. comes to me saying, I have something very important indeed to communicate--something you never heard of before; do you believe it to be true, Br. F.? O yes, beyond all doubt, I reply. But stop; how can I quite say this without first knowing what it is. Let me know what it is and then I can better--more rationally,--tell you whether I believe it.

Suppose an angel from heaven should present you a book, sealed with seven seals, saying--This is a revelation from God to you; and you believe that it really is so;--would you let it lie unopened and unread? Would you let it rest a moment till you should have understood its contents! You would search after the means to understand it--would traverse this whole nation if need be, and if all this sufficed not, you would explore all Europe and even to the ends of the earth. No labor would seem to you to be labor at all in an enterprise like this.

Yet here is the Bible, with its resistless and admitted claims of being direct from God. How many tens of thousands believe it to be the word of God, yet never take pains to read it--are never upon their knees before God pleading for light to shine upon that blessed page. O this is, as Dr. Young says, one of "guilt's blunders, and the loudest laugh of hell," that men should delude themselves about their belief of the Bible. Do you believe that this Bible is a revelation from God to your deathless soul! and then do you treat this book as if it were a silly tale? You never need ask for stronger proof of your being grossly and fatally deluded.

2. Men are deluded by their pride when they think they love God, yet do not love to please Him. Who does not know that it is a law of our being that we delight to please those whom we love, and always shape our conduct accordingly? Love will have a kind of omnipotent influence upon us affecting everything we do. Love has this influence in every relation of life--between husbands and wives--parents and children. Who does not know it? Who does not know that if the husband love his wife or the wife love her husband, every word and every act will show it; every word and every act will come under the influence of a desire to please, a desire to promote the real interest of the party loved? It can not be otherwise. It is in the very nature of love to study to please, and to seek the happiness of its object. Withdraw this element from love and what is there left?

Hence it is impossible that true love to God can exist, and yet with it no desire to please Him and do his will. The heart of love will be continually raising the question--"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" "Lord, how shall I most fully please Thee?"

What then shall we think of those thousands of nominal Christians who profess to love God, and yet do nothing to please God, and everything to please themselves? Every day and hour they are doing things and indulging states of mind which they know God must abhor, and yet they flatter themselves that they love God! What delusion!

3. Men think they are willing to be Christians, yet do not consider what is implied in it. They satisfy themselves with the loosest notions of this subject; else how could they fail to see that they are not Christians, and really have no intention to be? For consider, what is implied in being a Christian? Nothing less than a total renunciation of all self-seeking--a hearty confession of sin--in one's inmost soul renouncing it, once for all, and forever; and a perfect consecration of ourselves to the service and pleasure of God. Of course this implies a breaking up of all our selfish associations and habits--a real change--so that it may most truly be said--"If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new."

Now it is a fact that multitudes say they are very willing to become Christians; but they never take pains to know what this means, nor would they be willing to be such Christians as Christ was.

4. Men, deceived by pride of heart, think they are really Christians and truly reconciled to God, while in fact they do not obey God. Are they reconciled to God? No, for if they were, they would be reconciled to his

government, and would obey his laws. What does a man mean by saying that he is reconciled to God, while he is at war with his government, and trampling every hour on his laws? What does he mean when he says he is pleased with God's government and laws? He answers that he means nothing more than that he knows those laws and that government to be intrinsically right and good. He knows this, he says, and therefore thinks himself a Christian. So does the Devil know this, and the Devil might just as well on this ground pretend and profess to be a Christian as any man might, who does not obey God's law with all his heart. Yes, unless a man obeys the divine law with all his heart, he has no ground whatever to think himself a friend of God. No matter as to this point how much he knows about this law--the more he knows the greater and blacker will be his guilt, if he does not obey. No matter how much his reason and conscience approve the law as very good--all the worse for his Christian hope--all the worse for the doom of his soul from a just God--if he refuse to obey a law known and acknowledged to be holy and just and good.

Yet how many there are who claim to be Christians, but nevertheless live in sin, and plead for Christians living in sin, and would be very indignant if anyone should urge them to cease from all sin! They would perhaps think it an insult to their orthodoxy, or that at least there is some plot to ensnare them into a fatal heresy. What do I hear you say about your Christian experience? "O, I don't profess to be perfect--I sin and repent all the time." Oh, there is your mistake utterly. You don't repent. Indeed you don't repent if you sin all the time. The first part of what you say is probably true--but if so, the last part is of course false--utterly false. Consider for a moment. What is repentance? Many who say this don't know, or at least don't consider at all what it is. If they did, they certainly would not utter such an absurdity as to say that they sin and repent all the time. What is repentance? It is turning heartily and wholly away from sin. And how does this coincide with sinning all the time? What would you think of a man who claims to be all the time sober, and yet all the time drunk; or more precisely thus--all the time drinking, and yet all the time abstaining most sincerely and heartily from drinking--always drinking, and always reformed? All the time murder and love together in his heart--obeying God and yet disobeying, all the time, and simultaneously! Any man must be badly deluded who can believe this.

5. Unregenerate men deceive themselves in supposing that they are as good as Christians. They say--We give as much to support the gospel, we are just as kind to the poor, as ready and active in every good work, and as strong in all the reforms of the age as the best of them; why then are we not as good of Christians as they, and sometimes even better?

Laboring many years since in Rome, I found there a man living in the practice of great external morality. Nothing was more common than for impenitent sinners to make comparisons between him and professed Christians, and to maintain that he was a better Christian than most of them. How did they judge? They said--Mr. B. gives as much as any of them--attends meetings as much--is as regular in all good things, and Mr. B. is the man for us. No man sets a better example than he; he is our model and pattern. If he is not good enough to go to heaven, who is? and who can be? But he makes no profession of religion; so we think we shall get along as well without religion as with it.

The revival went on, but long before it closed, Mr. B. found that he was far enough from being as good as any Christian in the place. He came to see that his heart was full of all uncleanness--that he was proud of his reputation, and utterly far away from God in every possible respect.

But let us sift this subject more thoroughly. Take the case of the moral man. He is externally a well-behaved man, perhaps in this respect, even faultless. Well, what of this? Is it therefore certain that he

is intrinsically a good man? Can you infer from his external conduct that his heart is right before God? It is indeed true in general that we are to judge men by their fruits; yet who does not know that we can not always judge correctly of the heart from the mere outside of a man? We can judge of his heart no farther than we can understand his motives and intentions.

Now in these respects, the best moralist, being unregenerate, is precisely opposite in character to the lowest Christian. See them walk to the house of God in company; take together the attitude of worshippers; alike each pays his proportion of the expenses, and each sustains all gospel institutions by his example. And yet if you could look into their hearts you would see that one does all this to be seen of men--the other to be seen of God; the one really worships at the shrine of fashion and respectability--the other at the shrine of his Maker. Can there be a wider contrast than this?

Again, suppose two men--the best impenitent moralist and the lowest Christian, meet on mutual business. The points involved are exceedingly perplexing, intricate, trying; both become very excited and both speak very unadvisedly. Both sin against God and against each other. Consequently, up to this point, you see no difference in their development of character. But now they part, and the Christian threads his solitary way towards his home. His mind is ill at ease. He thinks no longer of the great abuse he has received, but only of his own great sin. O, how this burns on his conscience and his heart! How can I live, he cries, for I have sinned against God and I have scandalized his name before the wicked. He seeks some solitude, that if possible he may find God. If you could follow him with velvet step you might hear him pouring out before God his confessions and imploring forgiveness. You might see his bitter tears--you might hear his groans of sorrow. He pours out the anguish of his heart as if it were an ocean of grief. Alas! he has sinned against God and brought disgrace on the loved and honored name of Jesus!

But in all this, you hear not a word about the abuse he has received--not one word. If however you track the other man away from this scene of common, mutual wrong, what will you see? He turns aside into the next shop--draws around himself a cluster of associates--proclaims with trumpet-tongue how he has seen a Christian falling into ill-temper, and seeks to hide his own wrong in the clamor he gets up over his erring friend. Not a word has he to say before either God or man, of his own wrong. Not a word has the Christian neighbor to say of the wrong of the moralist. The one confesses; the other has no confession to make. Can there be a broader distinction than this?

You may recollect a case, sketched in some of the Sabbath School books, of a Dr. Hopkins who was a very pious man, but who had a very wicked brother-in-law --a man who had long cherished a malign spirit towards Dr. H., for he could not bear his piety, and therefore wanted to ensnare him into sin. A case of very difficult business occurred between them. The brother-in-law abused Dr. H. most shamefully in his own house, and ultimately got him angry. They parted, each to their homes--the wicked man to glory over the Dr.'s sin, and taunt his pious wife, saying--"There is the man you glory in as being a good Christian. He got angry with me to day. I've got him down and got my foot on him, and I'll hold him there. He will not hear the last of this for many a day."

But where is the Doctor? Gone home, but not to rest. All night he walks the room in agony--his only meat is tears--his heart is bursting with sorrow and grief. With morning light he hastens to that brother-in-law, and pours out his confessions before him--his heart smitten and broken as a bruised reed. It is said that the wicked man was first confounded, then melted. "Now, said he, I know there is truth in religion. I never believed it before; now I see it and know it." Oh, those confessions were like arrows dipped in blood to the heart of that wicked brother-in-law, and through the blessing of God they resulted in his hopeful

repentance.

Another precious fact is recorded, namely, that thirty years after this event, Dr. H. said to a friend--"I have never known the emotion of anger since that night of agony." So thoroughly did he renounce that sin--so intense were his convictions then--so earnestly and effectually did he bathe his soul in the blood of sprinkling, that the sin was slain, to live no more.

Here now were two men who quarreled and seemed alike in it; but say--Were they really alike in character? Who does not see that they were as unlike as heaven and hell?

When sinners have the conceit that they are really as good as Christians, because their conduct is as fair externally, they overlook the fact that moral character belongs to the intention. They differ entirely from Christians, as appears from their opposite motives, and from the fact that one is impenitent and the other penitent. They also differ fundamentally in their dependence for salvation. The Christian trusts in Christ alone; the sinner not in Christ but in some form of self-righteousness. It always is and must be essential to the state of an unbelieving sinner, that he does not submit himself to the righteousness of Christ, but goes about to establish some form of righteousness of his own. Go, visit and compare the death-bed experience of the impenitent moralist, and of the Christian. Their lives may have been externally not greatly unlike, for both have sinned, and both have done many things externally proper and right. But try them on their death-beds. Visit the sinner. "You seem to be very sick." "Yes, I am." "Do you expect to recover?" "O, I don't know. I am very sick." "Are you willing to die?" "I can hardly say I am; yet if God thinks it best I suppose I must submit. I believe God is just; He will do me no injustice." "What do you think of your past life?" "O, I have always meant to be an honest man. I have not been as bad a man as many have supposed. I can't bear to think that God will send me to hell, for He knows that I have done about as well as I could."

You see, my hearer, that this man has been pretty good, pretty good in everything, and he looks to God's justice, not to his mercy, as his ground of hope. His own righteousness is his ultimate ground of reliance.

But let us go into another sick-chamber. Here lies a Christian, near his end. "How do you do, brother? You seem to be very low; do you expect to recover?" "No, not at all." "Well, you have been a very good man." (Mark, he turns his face away ashamed and troubled.) "I have no goodness at all to speak of before God or man. There is no ground for me to hope in that direction. If God were to lay righteousness to the line, I could not stand a moment before Him. If however I may be made the representative of Christ's righteousness, I may be saved. All my hope is in Christ. I never look elsewhere than to Him alone. I am a great sinner and deserve the deepest hell." "What, sir, have you been a hypocrite?" "O, no sir, but before I was converted, and often since, I have greatly dishonored God, and have utterly forfeited all claim to salvation on the ground of my own merits." "Well, brother, are you afraid to die?" "No, not in the least; I see no reason to fear. I believe that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost, and I have cast my naked soul on Him alone."

Now you can not but notice the great contrast between these two men whose dying experience we have just been contemplating. The moralist passes into an atmosphere of clouds and darkness. Despite of all his delusions and of all the false quiet they can give him, his soul is full of trouble and can find no rest.

But mark the Christian--his soul is in peace. It rests not on his own righteousness--he makes no account of his good works. My hope, he says, is in Christ alone. But his countenance is placid as a summer's sunset. His heart rests on the everlasting promises. It is enough for him that God is faithful and that Jesus is

near--inexpressibly near to his soul.

Another development of self-deception occurs in the case of professors of religion. They deceive themselves by comparing themselves with other professors, and assuming that it is right for themselves to do whatever they see other professors do. Now as to this, it is in the first place an utter mistake to set up any other standard of Christian duty than the life and example of Jesus Christ. This, and only this, is the Christian's model. If the spirit of religion reign in his heart, he will naturally enquire--not whether some other professor of religion does so, but whether Jesus Christ, in these circumstances, would do so. For his object is not to please this deacon, or that minister, but his own blessed Lord and Savior. Of course he can not make so great a mistake as to pattern after some deacon or some professed Christian of his own choice, and not after Christ.

In the second place, this practice of making some other professor of religion your model, is delusive and untrustworthy, because what may be admissible for him, may be utterly wrong for you. He may have so much less light than you that God may wink at his ignorance, but condemn you for sinning against actual knowledge of your duty. A few days since I said to a young man who was about leaving this place--"You will find different habits abroad from what you have been accustomed to here. You will doubtless find many Christian people using tea, coffee, tobacco and perhaps wine; and if you allow yourself to argue that you may rightly use these articles because other Christians do, you will be grievously ensnared, and may ruin your soul. They may have so little light on the subject that possibly it may not be wrong for them to use these articles; but you know better than to use them, and you can not hope that God will excuse your sin in the case on the ground that you had not light enough to create moral obligation. And surely it were of no avail for you to flatter yourself that with all the light you have, you can be allowed to do wrong because others do the same things under circumstances which make their sin much less than yours, or even as the case may be, which remove all guilt from their conduct."

6. Some persons deceive themselves by mistaking the excitement and play upon their sensibilities for real religion. Some persons, for example, are so constituted physiologically, that under the stimulus of ardent spirits they become exceedingly pious, and can sing and talk religiously, so that you might be tempted to think them the greatest saints.

In my early life I boarded with a family in which the father would sometimes come home at night half drunk, and then be so good-natured, and read his Bible, and weep and pray, as full of religious feeling apparently as any man could be. I looked on and marvelled; but I could not be long in solving the mystery. But suppose I had argued from this that it is good for a man to get half drunk, because it makes him so beautifully pious. Suppose I were to argue in maintaining it that I had seen its fruits with my own eyes. Fortunately the common sense of mankind has taught them that the spirit from above and the spirit from below are not at all akin to each other. Yet one might just as well plead for an alcohol religion--one which manifests itself in soft and tender developments of the sensibility--as for any other type of mere sentimentalism--as for any religion which lives only in an excited sensibility. Good music may sometimes answer the same purposes of excitement as alcohol, and may be equally deceptive. If it acts only upon the sensibility, leaving the heart untouched, its results can be in the end no more converting, and are no better proof of real piety than the similar results of ardent spirits.

Let me say further that this type of apparent piety is exceedingly deceitful, for the reason that often it seems to carry not the sensibility only, but even the will. The whole heart seems to be melted--the whole man changed and everything borne along so sweetly in the spring-tide of religious emotions. If you were to

see this man of alcohol in some of his pious moods, you would be astonished at such developments. If you only keep a little distance from him so as not to smell his breath, you would think him very spiritual--as indeed, (in a peculiar sense,) he is.

Now let it be remembered, this man's religion is just as good before God as any other type of pseudo-religious excitement which only plays upon the sensibilities, but touches not the heart.

7. Over against this is another form of delusion in which men have no other religious impulses except the hard driving and goading of their conscience. No love, no faith, no sweet drawing towards God, no cordial trust in a divine Father and a sympathizing Savior; nothing but compunction, goading, coercion, under the lash of conscience. They live in a strait jacket--grind like the blind Sampson in the mill, and wear out life in agony. A minister once said to me--"I think I must have mistaken my calling. It seems as if I had preached all I ever had to preach, and emptied it all out. You can not think how much hard labor it costs me to work out my two sermons a week. I don't see as I have any heart for the work, and you may judge that I don't have a very pleasant life of it."

For myself I thought so indeed. If a man has no more gospel in him than this, and finds it such enormous labor to grind out enough for a sermon in four or five days' labor, he has probably mistaken his calling. Above all, if he has no heart for the work, or in it either, he might better try some other business.

Emphatically and characteristically is it true of these self-deceived men, that religion is not their theme. This is not the subject upon which they love to converse. They can talk freely and abundantly on other subjects, but on this one subject of religion their hearts are not interested, and of course their words cannot flow out from the fullness of their hearts. If they should get to heaven, unchanged, how could they live there unless they might have up there their favorite topics? How could they endure to stay where "Holiness to the Lord," is blazing in light and fire all around?

But they expect to go to heaven! Let us see. Suppose they get in. What do they say? Hear them talk: What's the price of wheat? Now for great bargains. What news from the polls? How goes the election? --But these men would think you had lost all your Christian charity, if you should intimate that they are not on the way to heaven.

Now let it be known forever, all real Christians have the spirit of religion in their hearts--their souls are full of it. Worldly men are full of the world, and no wonder that it boils over and flows out incessantly. Christ says--"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks;" and who does not know that this is profoundly philosophical? Of course this principle will be developed in the Christian. The Spirit of Christ has taken possession of his soul, and now, how can it help gushing out in rich overflowings of love, meekness, faith and humility? Mark me now--as God is true--if this is not your character--if love does not reign in your heart, and fill your soul, so that religion must be your theme--nearer and dearer to your heart than all things else--if this be not the case with you, you are a hypocrite, and when your death-knell tolls, you are damned! mark what I say!

8. Many think themselves Christians, although conscious that they have no peace of mind. What but a desperately wicked and deceitful heart can cherish such a hope? For what is religion? "Not meat and drink" surely;--"but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." What says the Bible? That "Wisdom's ways are pleasantness and all her paths peace." "Come unto me all ye that labor, and ye shall find rest for your souls." "His commandments are not grievous."

Now look around you and mark those professed Christians whose religion involves no peace of mind. You see them all afloat--drifted and driven by all those impulses which agitate other minds. Where is their religion? Do they know anything about peace with God and joy in the Holy Ghost? Do they withdraw from the agitations of worldliness and selfishness, and find repose as on the bosom of their Savior? Have they such faith that they can glory in tribulation, and does their tribulation work for them experience, and experience hope; and is their hope one that does not make ashamed? Is this their experience? If so, then 'tis well; but how can men who go on year after year without peace of mind and without trust in God, flatter themselves that they are real Christians?

9. Many think they are accepted of God although aware that they are indulging in sin. This delusion is more common than any other I have mentioned, and becomes so for the reason that even the church have lost sight of the fact that Christians can and do live without sin. Strange to tell, multitudes of professed Christians--with ample access to the Bible--do hold that all men are to be expected to live in sin, notwithstanding all the gospel can do in this world to deliver them from its power.

Under this view, it is no wonder such results should follow. They expect, they say, to be saved through the imputed righteousness of Christ, and they hold that this will avail for them without any righteousness of their own. But let us reason a moment about this. I admit most fully that men are to be justified by Christ alone, and on the condition of personal faith in him; but mark, not without personal holiness. Here lies the fundamental error of those who think to get to heaven without being free from sin;--they assume that saving faith in Christ does not involve personal holiness. No mistake can be greater than this. The Bible says, "faith works by love." It declares "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Of course there can be no such faith as this while the soul is in the bondage of sin.

A certain Doctor of Divinity not long since, in opposing the doctrine of sanctification, insisted that holiness is in no sense and in no degree a condition of salvation, and that the condition is nothing but faith. Faith, he holds, can exist, pure and acceptable to God, ensuring the salvation of the believer, and all without holiness. Monstrous absurdity! What! teach that a man can have saving faith without being turned from sin, without forsaking all or even any of his iniquities! Horrible! HORRIBLE! There never was a worse error taught by men or devils! I would as soon rebuke a man for this as for downright atheism. There is not a truth in the moral universe more palpable and certain than that saving faith must imply holiness. The faith that justifies must also sanctify. If not, it were easy to show that God has made a grievous and fatal mistake in the conditions of salvation! What! has God contrived a system for justifying sinners IN THEIR SINS?

10. Multitudes suppose themselves converted who have never been even convicted. I have often fallen in with a certain man who has been instrumental in convicting many sinners, and probably of converting some, but who could give no account whatever of the spirituality of God's law and of what sin is. Not less than a dozen times in a single week has he asked me what benevolence is. He could not retain the idea of what constituted true religion. "What is it," he would say, "how did you define disinterested benevolence?"

Now it is no wonder that he could not develop the true idea of sin and impress it on the minds of others. He did not seem to have himself the very first idea of what sin is. It is therefore natural that under his instructions many should suppose themselves converted who were not even convicted. They had not felt deep and pungent conviction for sin, and therefore it was not naturally possible that they should repent and put it away. Nothing can be more philosophical than this--that men must know the truth, and the truth must make them free.

11. Many fall into the error of mistaking conviction for conversion. The great distress of conviction passes away;--the ease and peace that follow give birth to the hope that they are converted. There is indeed a change, and they flatter themselves it is from sin to grace. They have been alarmed and the alarm has subsided, but they have not received Christ at all.

Now I want you to apprehend this. Many get a hope, but do not get Christ. They get a different state of mind, but not a Christian state. They have no other faith than they had before. They are not conscious of having cast off their own righteousness and put on Christ's. They have not renounced sin and self and gone over to the new covenant.

How is it with you? Do you know how you came by your hope? And what it is to go over from the law as a ground of salvation, to the gospel--to abandon the old way of self-righteousness, and trust in the righteousness of Christ alone? Have you begun really to drink of Christ's fullness--to know the depths of that fountain of living waters--to have it in your very soul, a well of living water, springing up to everlasting life, bubbling up and pouring forth as if really an exhaustless fountain were in your very soul? You know we read of such things in the Bible. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." "And this Christ said of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive."

Have you received it? If not, then there must be a mistake about your having believed with saving faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Rely upon it, if a man has this faith in Christ, the living waters from his full soul will flow out, and there will be a green spot around him, however barren the region round about may be. Religion will be his theme. He can not live without manifesting forth that Christ who lives and reigns within him.

How is it with you in this respect? Do your spirit and life bear witness that you have this faith in Jesus Christ, and this indwelling Spirit of Christ in your soul?

12. Many confound resolutions to do what they think right, with real religion. Now it should be considered that mere resolutions are purely legal, and differ fundamentally from the religion of love. Suppose, for illustration, that the wife should say, "I must do just right towards my husband--precisely right in every thing;"--and she screws herself up by dint of resolutions to do every thing that is right--and this is all. Would you suppose this to be love--the whole of the love which befits the relation of a wife to her husband?

I saw a lady in Boston who manifested the greatest anxiety lest some word or thought should be wrong. Indeed she seemed to be in agony lest she should infringe upon some principles of duty towards God or man. I noticed her great legality. I said to her, "Sister, I see you seem to be in great distress lest you should not please your Savior--you seem to be in agony about it all the time;--now tell me--Have you the same sort of distress and agony lest you should not please your husband?" "O no," said she. "Why not?" "Because," said she, "It is natural for me to please my husband, and I know that I do. I love to please him and it does not seem to cost me any effort." "Why then," said I, "should it not be so towards Christ? Why not make his service a sweet labor of love? Why act as if nothing but the pricks of conscience can keep you in the path of obedience? Why not yield up your soul to all the impulses of pure love, and let it reign, strong, sweet, attractive, all-controlling? This would make your religious duties a paradise."

13. Many have made up their minds to serve God, as they suppose, and this is the form of their religion and the whole of it. Now it is plain that if they have not formed the right conception of what this service is, it may be the case and probably is, that they have no religion at all.

Let us illustrate this in reference to one vital point. Suppose a wife should make up her mind to serve her husband. By this she understands that she shall do all the things externally which he requires. She is going to be his real servant and evermore do all his bidding. But unfortunately in her estimate of duties, the element of love has entirely dropped out, and she takes no notice of this whatever. She means to be faithful in all her domestic duties--she will keep his house and his clothes in first rate order and will leave no external duty neglected--but all may be as heartless as if it were done by a steam engine. Now although such duty, so performed, might be endurable in an employed domestic, yet who could endure it in a wife? What husband would not say--"You are the chosen companion of my life--the chosen object of my love, and when I vowed my conjugal affections to you, I flattered myself the vow was really reciprocated. I do not want your tasks--I want your heart."

And is it strange that God also should ask for the heart? Has He not given us his, in such forms as most impressively demand the reciprocal devotion of ours?

But let us see what this man proposes to do who has made up his mind to serve God. First, he is going to pray--pray to be forgiven. Wonderful service this, if rendered as some profitable work for the Lord--with no brokenness, or affection of heart in it! Just as if I should go to a man fifty times a day or twice a day and ask him to cancel my debt to him; and should enter my charge in account for each prayer, paying off my debt--in praying!

What else? Well, he will go to church. O, what service is this, of mocking insult to God, if no heart is in it! In truth no matter what the outside service may be, it is an odious abomination to God, unless the deep outgoings of the heart are with it. You might circumnavigate the globe with your zeal, or give your flesh to a martyr's flame, yet all would be less in Gods' esteem, no heart being in it--than the little tear of penitence and affection which quivers in the dying eye of a saint who can not raise his finger in any act of outward service for God. Aye, it is the love lying deep in the heart, which catches the eye of the great God. And for you to talk about serving Him without love is supreme nonsense.

14. Many deceive themselves by supposing that selfish regrets and sorrow are real repentance. That sorrow and regret are always selfish, which leave sin still in existence--which can be felt and sin still be indulged. Nothing can be plainer than this. You would all judge thus in the case of your child who should regret and sorrow bitterly about his crime and its consequences, if he still kept up the practice of the crime. You could not have any confidence in his tears, if you knew they only covered the purpose to steal or lie as soon as your back is turned. You would know what account to make of such tears.

Let those professors who can weep and pray about their sin, yet never give it up, but hold on in sinning, look into this mirror and behold their own hearts.

15. Many deceive themselves by a faith which abolishes instead of establishing the law. Obviously such faith never can answer under the government of a righteous God.

16. Many suppose that God justifies and accepts them while they really condemn themselves. They seem to think that God approves of them and of their moral state while deep in their minds there is self-condemnation. Now the Bible says that if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things, and of course condemns us. No delusion can be greater than this. Strange notions must he have of the purity of God and the strictness of his law, if he supposes that his own conscience is more strict than God is. He sees that he himself must condemn such a state as his own; but he flatters himself that God is not so particular about little sins as his own conscience is! O, what a delusion!

REMARKS.

1. These delusions are all voluntary. Men need not be deceived by their pride of heart, and would not be if they were not quite willing to have it so.

2. God will by and by tear the mask away and reveal our real character to all the universe. He is now employing various means in his providence and through his grace to undeceive men; but if all these means fail, ere long He will send His hail to sweep away all refuges of lies forever. Then and thenceforward, "he that is filthy shall be filthy still," forever hopeless of moral cleansing.

3. All these delusions are based upon dishonesty of mind. Where there is real honesty, carried out in faithful performance of known duty, and humble trust in divine guidance, there is no danger of being deluded.

4. We see the great folly of those who imagine that if they are only sincere, they shall be saved. What do they mean by sincerity? This; namely, that they really believe what they profess. But may not men really believe a lie? Is it not said of some that because they "do not love the truth, God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness?" The fatal mistake made by those who think that all sincere men will be saved, is this: they overlook the fact that men may be sincerely wicked, and, becoming sincerely wicked, they may bring themselves to believe a lie sincerely, and God may judicially leave them to the natural influence of a wicked heart upon the mind's apprehension of truth.

5. Many cry "peace, peace, when there is no peace." I often wonder how it happens that when they go alone and fall down before God to pray, it does not strike them at once that they are shut out, and have no communion with God at all. Why do they not see that they have made a fatal mistake in supposing that they have any spiritual access to God, and real communion of soul with Him?

6. Many love to have their hurt healed slightly. They cannot bear to have their wound thoroughly probed. Hence instead of throwing their naked bosom open to the probe of truth, and crying--God of mercy, let this search me, and let it go to the bottom of all the hidden evils of my heart--they wrap themselves all about with mufflers of self-righteousness, and then they will sit and writhe and dodge through fear that some word of truth will make unwelcome revelations of self to their own view. O, what will they say when God shall come down in the cool of the day, and talk with them face to face about this!

7. Some seem determined never to know themselves. They will evade self-knowledge, press it upon their attention as you may. You may try to seize them to hold the mirror before their eyes; they will shut their eyes or turn their heads round--you can not make them look into any moral self-revealer. I have known cases in which a man's friends have tried to seize him, and hold him still long enough to get the truth before his eyes, but they might as well have tried to grasp the North wind.

8. Pride of heart is one of the most disgusting as well as most dangerous of all forms of sin. A proud man is perpetually exposed to deceive himself in every thing. There he stands on top of a precipice; sheets of lightning blaze around his head, and dark waves of damnation roll beneath his feet. What is he doing there? Ah, me! dancing! dancing giddily as if he never had the first idea of danger in his mind.

"I heard the wretch profanely boast,

Till at thy frown he fell;

His honors in a dream were lost,

And he awoke in hell."

O, let us put all these delusions away. Go to your closet. Search your inmost heart; tear away every delusion--cry out, O, my God, bring in a light! Let me see myself! O for a light--A LIGHT; let me know my own heart to the bottom. O, search and find out where you are, before an arrow smite you!

Hark? has it struck him? Is he dead? Yes, dead; and from my knowledge of him, I fear he has gone down to hell! Religion never was his theme. He did not love God's most searching truth. He never loved to examine his own heart. I think without a doubt, he is afar down in the depths of hell.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/pride-of-heart-deceives/>

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