

# Selfishness Not True Religion

by Charles Finney

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*A supreme regard to our own happiness is inconsistent with true religion, the law of God, and the gospel.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 13:5, Philippians 2:3

**Topics:** "Selflessness", "True Religion"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that true religion is characterized by selflessness and benevolence, arguing that a supreme focus on one's own happiness is inconsistent with genuine faith. He clarifies that while it is acceptable to care for one's own well-being, it should not take precedence over the welfare of others or the glory of God. Finney asserts that true happiness is found in serving others and aligning with God's will, rather than in selfish pursuits. He warns that those who prioritize their own interests above all else are deceived about their spiritual state. Ultimately, he calls for a shift from self-centeredness to a life of love and service, reflecting the nature of God.

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## Transcript

TEXT. "--Seeketh not her own."--1. Cor. xiii. 5.

THAT is, Charity, or Christian love, seeketh not her own.

The proposition which I design to establish this evening, is the following:

THAT A SUPREME REGARD TO OUR OWN HAPPINESS IS INCONSISTENT WITH TRUE RELIGION.

This proposition is naturally the first in the series that I have been laboring to illustrate in the present lectures, and would have been the first to be discussed, had I been aware that it was seriously called in question by any considerable number of professed Christians. But I can honestly say, that when I commenced these lectures, I did not expect to meet any serious difficulty here; and therefore I took it in a great measure for granted, that selfishness is not religion. And hence, I passed over this point with but a slight attempt at proving it. But since, I learn that there are many professed Christians who maintain that a supreme regard to our own happiness is true religion, I think it necessary to examine the subject more carefully, and give you the arguments in favor of what I suppose to be the truth. In establishing my proposition, I wish to distinguish between things that differ; I shall therefore

I. Show what is not intended by the proposition, that a supreme regard to our own happiness is not religion.

II. Show what is meant by it. And

III. Attempt to prove it.

I. I am to explain what is not meant by the proposition.

1. The point in dispute is not, whether it is lawful to have any regard to our own happiness. On the contrary, it is admitted and maintained to be a part of our duty to have a due regard to our own happiness, according to its real value, in the scale with other interests. God has commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves. This plainly makes it a duty to love ourselves or regard our own happiness, by the same rule that we regard that of others.

2. The proposition is not that we ought to have no regard to the promises and threatenings of God, as affecting ourselves. It is plainly right to regard the promises of God and threatenings of evil, as affecting ourselves, according to the relative value of our own interests. But who does not see that a threatening against us is not so important as a threatening against a large number of individuals. Suppose a threatening of evil against yourself as an individual. This is plainly not so important as if it included your family. Then suppose it extend to the whole congregation, or to the state, or the whole nation, or the world. Here, it is easy to see, that the happiness of an individual, although great, ought not to be regarded as supreme.

I am a minister. Suppose God says to me, "If you do not do not your duty, you will be sent to hell." This is a great evil, and I ought to avoid it. But suppose him to say, "If your people do not do their duty, they will all be sent to hell; but if you do your duty faithfully, you will probably save the whole congregation." Is it right for me to be as much influenced by the fear of evil to myself, as by the fear of having a whole congregation sent to hell? Plainly not.

3. The question is not whether our own eternal interests ought to be pursued in preference to our temporal interests. It is expressly maintained by myself, and so it is by the Bible, that we are bound to regard our eternal interests as altogether of more consequence than our temporal interests.

Thus, the Bible tells us, "Labor not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life." This teaches that we are not to regard or value our temporal interests at all, in comparison with eternal life.

So, where our Savior says, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break not through nor steal." Here the same duty is enjoined, of preferring eternal to temporal interests.

There is another. When Christ sent out his disciples, two and two, to preach and to work miracles, they came back full of joy and exultation, because they found even the devils yielding to their power. "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us." Jesus saith, "Rejoice not that the devils are subject to you; but rather rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven." Here he teaches, that it is a greater good to have our names written in heaven, than to enjoy the greatest temporal power, even authority over devils themselves.

The Bible every where teaches, that eternal good is to be preferred in all our conduct to temporal good. But this is very different from maintaining that our own individual eternal interest is to be aimed at as the

supreme object of regard.

4. The proposition is not, that hope and fear should not influence our conduct. All that is implied is, that when we are influenced by hope and fear, the things that are hoped or feared should be put into the scale according to their real value, in comparison with other interests.

5. The question is not, whether the persons did right, who are spoken of in the Bible, as having been at least in some degree influenced by hope and fear, or having respect unto the recompense of reward, or to the joy that was set before them. This is admitted. Noah was moved with fear and built the ark. But was it the fear of being drowned himself, or fear for his own personal safety that chiefly moved him? The Bible does not say it. He feared for the safety of his family; yea, more, he dreaded the destruction of the whole human race, with all the interests depending thereon.

Whenever it is said that good men were influenced by hope and fear, it is admitted. But in order to make it bear on this subject, it must be shown that this hope or fear respecting their own personal interest was the controlling motive. Now, this is nowhere affirmed in the Bible. It was right for them to be influenced by promises and threatenings. Otherwise, they could not obey the second part of the law: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

II. I am to show what is meant by the proposition, that a supreme regard to our own interest is inconsistent with true religion.

The question is, whether supreme regard to our own happiness is religion. It is, whether we are to fear our own damnation more than the damnation of all other men, and the dishonor of God thereby. And whether we are to aim at securing our own happiness more than the happiness of all other men, and the glory of God. And whether, if we do this, we act according to the requirements of true religion, or inconsistent with true religion. This is the proper point of inquiry, and I wish you to bear it constantly in mind, and not to confound it with any of the other points that I have referred to.

III. For the proof of the proposition.

Before proceeding to the proof of the proposition, that a supreme regard to our own happiness is inconsistent with true religion, I will observe that all true religion consists in being like God; in acting on the same principles and grounds, and having the same feelings towards different objects. I suppose this will not be denied. Indeed, it cannot be, by any sane mind. I then observe, as the first proof of the proposition,

1. That a supreme regard to our own happiness is not according to the example of God; but is being totally unlike him.

The Bible tells us that "God is love." That is, benevolence is the sum total of his character. All his other moral attributes, such as justice, mercy, and the like, are but modifications of this benevolence. His love is manifested in two forms. One is that of benevolence, good willing, or desiring the happiness of others. The other is complacency, or approving the character of others who are holy. God's benevolence regards all beings that are capable of happiness. This is universal. Towards all holy beings, he exercises the love of complacency.--In other words, God loves his neighbor as himself. He regards the interests of all beings, according to their relative value, as much as his own. He seeks his own happiness, or glory, as the supreme good. But not because it is his own, but because it is the supreme good. The sum total of his happiness, as an infinite being, is infinitely greater than the sum total of the happiness of all other beings,

or of any possible number of finite creatures.

Take a very familiar illustration. Here is a man that is kind to brutes. This man and his horse fall into the river. Now, does true benevolence require the man to drown himself in order to extricate his horse? No. It would be true disinterested benevolence in him, to save himself, and, if need be, leave his horse to perish; because his happiness is of so much greater value than that of the horse. You see this at a glance. But the difference between God and all created beings is infinitely greater than between a man and a horse, or between the highest angel and the meanest insect.

God, therefore, regards the happiness of all creatures precisely according to its real value. And unless we do the same, we are not like God. If we are like God, we must regard God's happiness and glory in the same light that he does; that is, as the supreme good, beyond every thing else in the universe. And if we desire our own happiness more than God's happiness, we are infinitely unlike God.

2. To aim at our own happiness supremely is inconsistent with true religion, because it is contrary to the spirit of Christ.

We are told, that "if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." And it is repeatedly said of him, as a man, that he sought not his own, that he sought not his own glory, and the like. What was he seeking? Was it his own personal salvation? No. Was it his own personal happiness? No. It was the glory of his Father, and the good of the universe, through the salvation of men. He came on an errand of pure benevolence, to benefit the kingdom of God, not to benefit himself. This was "the joy that was set before him," for which "he endured the cross, despising the shame." It was the great good he could do by thus throwing himself out to labor and suffer for the salvation of men.

3. To regard our own happiness as the supreme object of pursuit is contrary to the law of God.

I have mentioned this before, but recur to it again for the sake of making my present demonstration complete. The sum of that law is this--"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This is the great thing required; benevolence towards God and man. The first thing is really to love the happiness and glory of God, above all other things, because it is so infinitely lovely and desirable, and is properly the supreme good. Some have objected that it was not our duty to seek the happiness of God, because his happiness is already secured. Suppose, now, that the king of England is perfectly independent of me, and has his happiness secured without me; does that make it any the less my duty to wish him well, to desire his happiness, and to rejoice in it? Because God is happy, in himself, independent of his creatures, is that a reason why we should not love his happiness, and rejoice in it? Strange!

Again: We are bound by the terms of God's law to exercise complacency in God, because he is holy, infinitely holy.

Again: This law binds us to exercise the same good will, or benevolence, towards others that we do to ourselves; that is, to seek both their interests and our own, according to their relative value. Who of you is doing this? And we are bound to exercise the love of complacency towards those who are good and holy.

Thus we see that the sum of the law of God is to exercise benevolence towards God and all beings, according to their relative value, and complacency in all that are holy. Now I say, that to regard our own happiness supremely, or to seek it as our supreme end, is contrary to that law, to its letter and to its spirit.

And

4. It is as contrary to the gospel as it is to the law.

In the chapter from which the text is taken, the apostle begins--"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." Charity here means love. In the original it is the same word that is rendered love. "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

Now, mark! In no stronger language could he have expressed the idea that charity, or benevolence, is essential to true religion. See how he throws out his guards on every side, so that it is impossible to mistake his views. If a person has not true charity, he is nothing. He then proceeds and shows what are the characteristics of this true charity. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Here you see that one leading peculiarity of this love is that charity "seeketh not her own." Mark that! If this is true religion, and without it there is no religion, then one peculiarity of true religion is that it "seeketh not her own."

Those of you who have Bibles with marginal references can follow out these references and find a multitude of passages that plainly teach the same thing. Recollect the passages I quoted in the last lecture. I will just refer to one of them--"Whosoever will save his life shall lose it." Here you see it laid down as an established principle of God's government, that if a person aims supremely at his own interest he will lose his own interest.

The same is taught in the tenth chapter of this epistle, verse 24: "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." If you look at the passage, you will see that word wealth is in italic letters, to show that was a word added by the translators, that is not in the Greek. They might just as well have used the word happiness, or welfare, as wealth. So in the 33d verse: "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."

Therefore I say, that to make our own interest the supreme object of pursuit, is as contrary to the gospel as it is to the law.

5. It is contrary to conscience.

The universal conscience of mankind has decided that a supreme regard to our own happiness is not virtue. Men have always known that to serve God and benefit mankind is what is right, and to seek supremely their own personal interest is not right. They have always regarded it mean and contemptible for individuals to seek their own happiness as the supreme object, and consequently, we see how much pains men take to conceal their selfishness and to appear benevolent. It is impossible for any man, unless his conscience is strangely blunted by sin, or perverted by false instruction, not to see that it is sinful to regard his own happiness above other interests of more importance.

6. It is contrary to right reason.

Right reason teaches us to regard all things according to their real value. God does this, and we should do the same. God has given us reason for this very purpose, that we should weigh and compare the relative value of things. It is a mockery of reason, to deny that it teaches us to regard things according to their real value. And if so, then to aim at and prefer our own interest, as the supreme end, is contrary to reason.

7. It is contrary to common sense.

What has the common sense of mankind decided on this point. Look at the common sense of mankind in regard to what is called patriotism. No man was ever regarded as a true patriot, in fighting for his country, if his object was to subserve his own interest. Suppose it should appear that his object in fighting was to get himself crowned king; would any body give him credit for patriotism? No. All men agree that it is patriotism when a man is disinterested, like Washington; and fights for his country, for his country's sake. The common sense of mankind has written reprobation on that spirit that seeks its own things, and prefers its own interests, to the greater interests of others. It is evident that all men so regard it. Otherwise, how is it that every one is anxious to appear disinterested?

8. It is contrary to the constitution of the mind.

I do not mean, by this, that it is impossible, by our very constitution, for us to seek our own happiness as the supreme object. But we are so constituted that if we do this, we never can attain it. As I have said in a former lecture, happiness is the gratification of desire. We must desire something, and gain the object we desire. Now, suppose a man to desire his own happiness, the object of his desire will always keep just so far before him, like his shadow, and the faster he pursues it, the faster it flies. Happiness is inseparably attached to the attainment of the object desired. Suppose I desire a thousand dollars. That is the thing on which my desire fastens, and when I get it that desire is gratified, and I am happy, so far as gratifying this desire goes to make me happy. But if I desire the thousand dollars for the purpose of getting a watch, a dress, and such like things, the desire is not gratified until I get those things. But now suppose the thing I desired was my own happiness. Getting the thousand dollars then does not make me happy, because that is not the thing my desire was fixed on. And so getting the watch, and the dress, and other things will not make me happy, for they do not gratify my desire. God has so constituted things, and given such laws to the mind, that man never can gain happiness by pursuing it. This very constitution plainly indicates the duty of disinterested benevolence. Indeed, he has made it impossible for them to be happy, but in proportion as they are disinterested.

Here are two men walking along the street together. They come across a man that has just been run over by a cart, and lies weltering in his gore. They take him up and carry him to the surgeon, and relieve him. Now it is plain that their gratification is in proportion to the intensity of their desire for his relief. If one of them felt but little and cared but little about the sufferings of the poor man, he will be but little gratified. But if his desire to have the man relieved amounted to agony, his gratification would be accordingly. Now suppose a third individual that had no desire to relieve the distressed man; certainly relieving him could be no gratification to that person. He could pass right by him, and see him die. Then he is not gratified at all. Therefore, you see, happiness is just in proportion as the desires are gratified, by obtaining the things desired.

Here observe, that in order to make the happiness of gratified desire complete, the desire itself must be virtuous. Otherwise, if the desire is selfish, the gratification will be mingled with pain, from the conflict of the mind.

That all this is true, is a matter of consciousness, and is proved to us by the very highest kind of testimony we can have. And for any one to deny it, is to charge God foolishly, as if he had given us a constitution that would not allow us to be happy in obeying him.

9. It is also inconsistent with our own happiness, to make our own interest the supreme object. This follows from what I have just said. Men may enjoy a certain kind of pleasure, but not true happiness. The pleasure which does not spring from the gratification of virtuous desire, is a deceptive delusion. The reason why all mankind do not find happiness, when they are all so anxious for it, is that they are seeking IT. If they would seek the glory of God and the good of the universe as their supreme end, IT would pursue them.

10. It is inconsistent with the public happiness. If each individual is to aim at his own happiness as his chief end, these interests will unavoidably clash and come into collision, and universal war and confusion will follow in the train of universal selfishness.

11. To maintain that a supreme regard to our own interest is true religion, is to contradict the experience of all real saints. I aver, that every real saint knows that his supreme happiness consists in going out of himself, and regarding the glory of God and the good of others. If he does not know this, he is no saint.

12. It is also inconsistent with the experience of all those who have had a selfish religion, and have found out their mistake and got true religion. This is a common occurrence. I suppose I have known hundreds of cases. Some members in this church have recently made this discovery. And they can all testify that they know now by experience that benevolence is true religion.

13. It is contrary to the experience of all the impenitent. Every impenitent sinner knows that he is aiming supremely at the promotion of his own interest, and he knows that he has not true religion. The very thing that his conscience condemns him for is this, that he is regarding his own interest instead of the glory of God.

Now just turn the leaf over, for a moment, and admit that a supreme regard for our own happiness is true religion; and then see what will follow.

1. Then it will follow that God is not holy. That is, if a supreme regard to our own interest, because it is our own, is true religion, then it will follow that God is not holy. God regards his own happiness, but it is because it is the greatest good, not because it is his own. But he is love, or benevolence; and if benevolence is not true religion, God's nature must be changed.

2. The law of God must be altered. If a supreme regard to our own happiness is religion, then the law should read, "Thou shalt love thyself with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength, and God and thy neighbor infinitely less than thyself."

3. The gospel must be reversed. Instead of saying, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God," it should read, "Do all for your own happiness." Instead of "He that will save his life shall lose it," we should find it saying, "He that is supremely anxious to save his own life shall save it; but he that is benevolent, and willing to lose his life for the good of others, shall lose it."

4. The consciences of men should be changed so as to testify in favor of selfishness, and condemn and reprobate every thing like disinterested benevolence.

5. Right reason must be made not to weigh things according to their relative value, but to decide our own little interest to be of more value than the greatest interests of God and the universe.

6. Common sense will have to decide, that true patriotism consists in every man's seeking his own interest instead of the public good, and each one seeking to build himself up as high as he can.

7. The human constitution must be reversed. If supreme selfishness is virtue, the human constitution was made wrong. It is so made, that man can be happy only by being benevolent. And if this doctrine is true, that religion consists in seeking our own happiness as a supreme good, then the more religion a man has the more miserable he is.

8. And the whole frame-work of society will have to be changed. Now it is so, that the good of the community depends on the extent to which every one regards the public interest. And if this doctrine holds, it must be changed, so that the public good will be best promoted when every man is scrambling for his own interest regardless of the interests of others.

9. The experience of the saints will have to be reversed. Instead of finding, as they now do, that the more benevolence they have, the more religion and the more happiness, they should testify that the more they aim at their own good, the more they enjoy of religion and the favor of God.

10. The impenitent should be found to testify that they are supremely happy in supreme selfishness, and that they find true happiness in it.

I will not pursue this proof any farther; it would look like trifling. If there is any such thing as proof to be had, it is fully proved, that to aim at our own happiness supremely is inconsistent with true religion.

#### REMARKS.

I. We see why it is, that while all are pursuing happiness, so few find it.

The fact is plain. The reason is this; the greater part of mankind do not know in what true happiness consists, and they are seeking it in that which can never afford it. They do not find it because they are pursuing it. If they would turn round and pursue holiness, happiness would pursue them. If they would become disinterested, and lay themselves out to do good, they could not but be happy. If they choose happiness as an end, it flies before them. True happiness consists in the gratification of virtuous desires; and if they would set themselves to glorify God, and do good, they would find it. The only class of persons that never do find it, in this world, or the world to come, are those who seek it as an end.

II. The constitution of the human mind and of the universe, affords a beautiful illustration of the economy of God.

Suppose man could find happiness, only by pursuing his own happiness. Then each individual would have only the happiness that himself had gained, and all the happiness in the universe would be only the sum total of what individuals had gained, with the offset of all the pain and misery produced by conflicting interests. Now mark! God has so constituted things, that while each lays himself out to promote the happiness of others, his own happiness is secured, and made complete. How vastly greater then is the amount of happiness in the universe, than it would have been, had selfishness been the law of Jehovah's kingdom. Because each one who obeys the law of God, fully secures his own happiness by his benevolence, and the happiness of the whole is increased by how much each receives from all others.

Many say, "Who will take care of my happiness if I do not? If I am to care only for my neighbor's interest, and neglect my own, none of us will be happy." That would be true, if you care for your neighbor's happiness was a detraction from your own. But if your happiness consists in doing good and promoting the happiness of others, the more you do for others, the more you promote your own happiness.

III. When I gave out the subject of this lecture, I avoided the use of the term, selfishness, lest it should be thought invidious. But I now affirm, that a supreme regard to our own interest is selfishness, and nothing else. It would be selfishness in God, if he regarded his own interest, supremely because it is his own. And it is selfishness in man. And whoever maintains that a supreme regard to our own interest is true religion, maintains that selfishness is true religion.

IV. If selfishness is virtue, then benevolence is sin. They are direct opposites and can not both be virtue. For a man to set up his own interest over God's interest, giving it a preference, and placing it in opposition to God's interest is selfishness. And if this is virtue, then Jesus Christ, in seeking the good of mankind as he did, departed from the principles of virtue. Who will pretend this?

V. Those who regard their own interest as supreme, and yet think they have true religion, are deceived. I say it solemnly, because I believe it is true, and I would say it if it were the last word I was to speak before going to the judgment. Dear hearer, whoever you are, if you are doing this, you are not a Christian. Don't call this being censorious. I am not censorious. I would not denounce any one. But as God is true, and your soul is going to the judgment, you have not the religion of the Bible.

VI. Some will ask here, "What! are we to have no regard to our happiness, and if so, how are we to decide whether it is supreme or not?" I do not say that. I say, you may regard it according to its relative value. And now I ask, is there any real practical difficulty here? I appeal to your consciousness. You cannot but know, if you are honest, what it is that you regard supremely. Are these interests, your own interest on one side, and God's glory and the good of the universe on the other, so nearly balanced in your mind, that you cannot tell which you prefer? It is impossible! If you are not as conscious that you prefer the glory of God to your own interest, as you are that you exist, you may take it for granted that you are all wrong.

VII. You see why the enjoyment of so many professors of religion depends on their evidences. These persons are all the time hunting after evidence; and just in proportion as that varies, their enjoyments wax and wane. Now, mark! If they really regarded the glory of God and the good of mankind, their enjoyment would not depend on their evidences. Those who are purely selfish, may enjoy much in religion, but it is by anticipation. The idea of going to heaven is pleasing to them. But those who go out of themselves, and are purely benevolent, have a present heaven in their breasts.

VIII. You see, here, that all of you, who had no peace and joy in religion before you had a hope, are deceived. Perhaps I can give an outline of your experience. You were awakened, and were distressed, as you had reason to be, by the fear of going to hell. By and by, perhaps while you were engaged in prayer, or while some person was conversing with you, your distress left you. You thought your sins were pardoned. A gleam of joy shot through your mind, and warmed up your heart into a glow, that you took for evidence, and this again increased your joy. How very different is the experience of a true Christian! His peace does not depend on his hope; but true submission and benevolence produce peace and joy, independent of his hope.

Suppose the case of a man in prison, condemned to be hung the next day. He is in great distress, walking his cell, and waiting for the day. By and by a messenger comes with a pardon. He seizes the paper, turns

it up to the dim light that comes through his grate, reads the word PARDON, and almost faints with emotion, and leaps for joy. He supposes the paper to be genuine. Now suppose it turns out that the paper is counterfeit. Suddenly his joy is all gone. So in the case of a deceived person. He was afraid of going to hell, and of course he rejoices if he believes he is pardoned. If the devil should tell him so, and he believed it, his joy would be just as great, while the belief lasts, as if it was a reality. True Christian joy does not depend on evidence. He submits himself into the hands of God with such confidence, and that very act gives him peace. He had a terrible conflict with God, but all at once he yields the controversy, and says, "God will do right, let God's will be done." Then he begins to pray, he is subdued, he melts down before God, and that very act affords sweet, calm, and heavenly joy. Perhaps he has not thought of a hope. Perhaps he may go for hours, or even for a day or two, full of joy in God, without thinking of his own salvation. You ask him if he has a hope, he never thought of that. His joy does not depend on believing that he is pardoned, but consists in a state of mind, acquiescing in the government of God. In such a state of mind, he could not but be happy.

Now let me ask which religion have you? If you exercise true religion, suppose God should put you into hell, and there let you exercise supreme love to God, and the same love to your neighbor as to yourself, that itself is a state of mind inconsistent with being miserable.

I wish this to be fully understood. These hope-seekers will be always disappointed. If you run after hope, you will never have a hope good for any thing. But if you pursue holiness, hope, and peace, and joy, will come of course. Is your religion the love of holiness, the love of God and of souls. Or is it only a hope?

IX. You see why it is that anxious sinners do not find peace.

They are looking at their own guilt and danger. They are regarding God as an avenger, and shrinking from his terrors. This will render it impossible they should ever come at peace. While looking at the wrath of God, making them wither and tremble, they cannot love him, they hide from him. Anxious sinners, let me tell you a secret. If you keep looking at that feature of God's character, it will drive you to despair, and that is inconsistent with true submission. You should look at his whole character, and see the reasons why you should love him, and throw yourself upon him without reserve, and without distrust; and instead of shrinking from him, come right to him, and say, "O, Father in heaven, thou art not inexorable, thou art sovereign, but thou art good, I submit to thy government, and give myself to thee, with all I have and all I am, body and soul, for time and for eternity."

The subject for the next lecture will be, the distinction between legal submission and gospel submission, or between the religion of the law and the religion of faith. And here let me observe, that when I began to preach on the subject of selfishness in religion, I did not dream that it would be regarded by any one as a controversial subject at all. I have no fondness for controversy, and I should as soon think of calling the doctrine of the existence of God a controversial subject, as this. The question is one of the greatest importance, and we ought to weigh the arguments, and decide according to the word of God. Soon we shall go together to the bar of God, and you must determine whether you will go there with selfishness in your hearts, or with that disinterested benevolence that seeketh not her own.--Will you now be honest? For as God is true, if you are seeking your own, you will soon be in hell, unless you repent. O, be honest! and lay aside prejudice, and act for eternity.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/selfishness-not-true-religion/>

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