

Submission to God

by Charles Finney

True submission to God requires the will's being entirely subdued and under the control of God's will, including joyful acquiescence in all the providence of God.

Scripture: Matthew 6:10, Romans 12:1, James 4:7

Topics: "Obedience", "Submission to God"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the necessity of true submission to God, defining it as the complete surrender of one's will to God's will, which includes joyful acceptance of His providence and unconditional obedience to His commands. He warns against self-deception regarding submission, asserting that without genuine submission, salvation is impossible, while true submission makes salvation inevitable. Finney outlines that true submission involves forsaking known sin, recognizing God's providence in all events, and maintaining a thankful spirit even in affliction. He concludes that true submission requires a deep longing for God's will to be done and a willingness to endure suffering for the sake of God's glory.

Transcript

Text--James 4:7: "Submit yourselves therefore to God."

In the discussion of this subject I shall inquire:

I. WHAT CONSTITUTES SUBMISSION TO GOD.

II. POINT OUT SOME THINGS THAT ARE IMPLIED IN SUBMISSION.

III. NOTICE VARIOUS DELUSIONS WHICH MANY PRACTICE UPON THEMSELVES, IN RESPECT TO SUBMISSION.

IV. SHOW THAT WITHOUT TRUE SUBMISSION SALVATION IS NATURALLY IMPOSSIBLE.

V. SHOW THAT WITH TRUE SUBMISSION SALVATION IS NATURALLY INEVITABLE.

I. What constitutes submission to God.

1. I begin by remarking, that submission belongs to the will; and that true submission consists in the will's being entirely subdued and under the control of God's will. It is just that attitude of will, or that voluntary state of the will that God requires. This includes,

2. A joyful acquiescence in all the providence of God. There is perhaps no man, however wicked, and perhaps no devil in hell, that is not pleased with some of the providences of God, because they may favor their ambitious and selfish schemes. The assassin, who prowls at midnight to plunge a dagger into his neighbor's heart, might be very willing that God's providence should favor him with a dark and stormy night, when few persons would be abroad to detect his foul deed of blood.

The pirate, also, might rejoice in a fair wind, or in any other providence that might favor his diabolical designs. Satan himself might rejoice at some providential dispensation that may give him the opportunity of extending his rebellious operations against God. The farmer, though a wicked man, may rejoice in such weather as favors his peculiar occupation. And thus the worst, as well as the best of men, may be very much pleased with the providence of God, so long as it favors their particular designs.

But there is no piety in this. One element of true submission, is, as I have said, a joyful acquiescence in the whole providence of God. A truly submissive soul cannot know what an adverse providence is; for it has no will of its own, only that the will of God shall be done. And consequently, whatever the weather is, whatever the providential occurrences with which he is surrounded may be, as these occurrences show what is upon the whole the will of God, he is well pleased with them, equally well, whatever they may be.

If in any thing, the providence of God interferes with what the submissive soul had intended to do, it is just as well pleased as if the providence had been different; for the intention to do a certain thing, to go to a certain place, or attempt any thing whatever, is founded upon the supposition, that such is the will of God. But if the providence of God is found to be adverse to the carrying out any such intention, it is regarded by that soul as a revelation from God, that that intention was not according to his will; in which case he is just as well pleased to relinquish his design, and pursue any course that at present seems to be according to the will of God, as he would have been to have pursued the intended course, which has proved to be adverse to the providence and will of God.

Having no other intention than to do the whole will of God, he is perfectly and supremely satisfied with whatever the providence of God may be. He has no interest of his own to promote, no ends of his own to accomplish--no ways, or schemes, or wishes, but such as he believes to be in accordance with the will of God. He, therefore, waits, in an attitude as yielding as air, to be led in a state of supreme sweetness and complacency, in any direction in which the will of God, as revealed in his providence, by his Spirit and word, shall lead him.

Equally well pleased, to be sick or well--to be rich or poor--to live or die--to enjoy his friends or part with them--to be employed in any way, in any place, at any time, wherever the providence of God shall lead him.

3. Another element of true submission is, a cordial, joyful, and actual obedience to all the known will of God. There is, perhaps, no man and no devil so wicked or in such circumstances as not to find it for their interest to do many things required by God. And although they do not do these things in obedience to the will of God, yet they give themselves credit for good behavior, as if they really did. And indeed, they are very well pleased, that God should require such things as these, because it so happens that the letter of these requirements coincides with what they find to be most agreeable to themselves, and most for their own interest, under the circumstances in which they are placed. Now in doing these things it is manifest that there is no virtue, from the fact that they do not do them because God requires them, but solely because this course of conduct is most in accordance, under the circumstances of the case, with the

selfish ends they have in view. But true submission, let it be for ever understood, consists in a spirit of universal obedience to the whole will of God, because it is his will. It regards the will of God, on all subjects, as supremely good, and just as good on one subject as another. It is necessarily under the control of the will of God, and has no end in view, but in every thing to be directed by the will of God. Nothing is so dear, nothing so desirable, nothing so desired, as to have the whole will of God done on earth as it is done in heaven. Consequently, with a submissive soul there is no picking and choosing among the commandments of God, being better pleased with some than with others, and preferring obedience to one rather than another. To a submissive soul, the revealed will of God, however it may be revealed, whether by his word, providence, or Spirit, is the supreme and universal law, to which it yields a universal and joyful obedience.

4. Consequently true submission includes the practical and joyful holding of ourselves and all our possessions and interests at the disposal of the divine will. I say a joyful holding of ourselves and our possessions at his disposal, in opposition to a reluctant yielding, in compliance with the stern demands of conscience, without in reality taking any pleasure in thus doing. I said, a practical holding of ourselves and possessions thus, in opposition to that state of fancied willingness, in which men often profess to be willing to do any thing, when in reality they will do nothing--in which they profess to hold themselves and all they possess at the disposal of God, but in reality will never suffer Him to dispose of themselves or their possessions, only as he disposes of them by sending them to hell, and of their possessions by putting them into the hands of those that will use them for his glory. By a practical and joyful holding of ourselves and our possessions at his disposal, then, I mean, that as a matter of fact, the whole body, soul, and spirit, time, talents, property, and all things over which we have control, are yielded up to the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world; not grudgingly, or by constraint, but of a ready, willing, joyful mind; finding in this course our supreme joy, and, as a matter of fact, feeling it to be true in our own experience, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

5. True submission includes an unconditional assent to be used all up, body and soul, both in time [and] eternity, for the promotion of the best interests of the universe, and the glory of God. God undoubtedly wills that the most should be made of the influence of every moral being, to promote his own glory and the interests of his kingdom; and nothing is submission short of an entire willingness and most intense desire thus to be used up, with the most divine economy, for the promotion of those vast interests upon which the heart of God is set.

6. It includes a joyful willingness to have justice take its course with us, if the interests of the universe should demand it. Every sinner in the universe deserves to be in hell; and since it is a fact that sin exists, it is indispensable that there should be a hell, that the justice of God should be vindicated in sending those who sin to hell. And certainly, it is the duty of all who are in hell to be entirely reconciled to their condition.

By this I do not mean, that they are bound to be reconciled to live in sin; for they are able to repent, and are bound to repent, and to love God with all their heart, and with all their soul. But since the interests of the universe demand, and therefore it is the duty of God to send them to hell, they are bound supremely to rejoice in being there; that is--they are bound to be willing, and rejoice to be disposed of in the best possible manner, for the promotion of the interests of the kingdom of God. And since, under the circumstances of the case, the best thing that can be done with them, is to put them in hell, they are bound to be supremely acquiescent in it. Just so in the case of every sinner on earth. He deserves to be put in hell. And if, under the circumstances of the case, this is the best disposition that can be made of him, for the glory of God, and the advancement of his kingdom; if the moral government of God can be better

supported by his punishment than by his forgiveness, he is bound not only to consent to be punished, but to be supremely pleased to let justice take its course. By this I do not mean to affirm, that the pains of hell can be chosen for their own sake, or that any pain whatever can or ought to be chosen for its own sake. It is contrary to the very nature of moral beings, and as contrary to the will of God, as it is to the moral constitution of man, that any degree of pain should be chosen for its own sake, either in this or any other world. But while the infliction of pain, on the part of God, is indispensable to the vindication of his character, and the support of his authority, whenever the endurance of pain is demanded by the same end, whether in this or in any other world, true submission consists in choosing and joyfully acquiescing in the endurance of pain, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the end to be accomplished by it. A man is just as much bound to be willing to endure the pains of hell, in vindication of the moral government of God, should the interests of the universe demand it, as he is to be willing to endure the pains of bodily disease when physical law has been violated, and the vindication of the ways of God demand that he should suffer bodily pain.

He is as much bound to be willing to suffer the pains of hell, in support of the moral government of God, as he is to endure the smarting of a burn, in vindication of the physical government of God, when he has wantonly thrust his hand in the fire.

Let me be understood. I am not saying, that a man should be willing to remain in eternal rebellion against God. I am not saying, that God is as much gratified and pleased with the damnation as with the salvation of sinners. I am not saying, that God's glory demands, or that it is consistent with the glory of God, that any penitent sinner should be damned. I am not saying, that God desires the damnation of any soul, for its own sake. Nor am I saying, that the interests of the universe can be best promoted by the damnation of any one, who can be persuaded to repent and accept salvation.

But I am saying, and do mean to say, that upon the supposition, that any one is so circumstanced as to render it necessary for God to inflict the pains of hell upon him, that it is his bounden duty to be supremely acquiescent in it. Suppose that a man has committed the unpardonable sin, or a sin of such a nature that it cannot consistently be forgiven, can it be right for that sinner to be unwilling to have justice take its course in this case? Can it be right for him to make himself miserable, because the supreme good of the universe demands his damnation? Of his own folly he may complain. Of his sin he may and ought to repent, and be unutterably ashamed; but with being thus disposed of for the promotion of the highest interests of God's kingdom, he ought to be supremely pleased. Why, he was made to glorify God. It was always his duty, to desire, above all things, that God might be glorified and the universe benefitted, to consecrate his whole being to the promotion of this end. In this he was always bound to find his supreme happiness. And now, because of his own voluntary wickedness, he has placed himself in such a situation, that the glory of God and the best interests of his kingdom demand, that he should be put in hell, rather than in heaven, has he a right to demur to this--to refuse to be used for the glory of God--to refuse to consecrate his whole being to that which will, in the highest degree, promote this infinitely desirable end? I say again, and do insist, that in such circumstances he is solemnly bound, to consecrate his whole being to the glory of God, and the support of his government, in this particular way, and willingly to lie down upon the bed of eternal death, and give up his whole being to suffering the penalty of the law of God.

7. True submission includes a deep and continual longing of soul, that the whole will of God should be done on earth as it is done in heaven. This is the state of mind that God requires, and that Christ directed to be exercised and expressed in prayer to God. This is to be the daily constant language of our souls, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."

II. Some things that are implied in submission.

1. It implies the actual forsaking of all known sin. It is absurd to say, that an individual has any degree of true submission to God, and still indulges in the commission of any known sin. To suppose that true submission is consistent with any degree of known sin, is to overlook the very nature of submission. Submission belongs to the will, and consists in the supreme devotion of the heart to the whole known will of God. Now how manifestly absurd it is to say, that a man can be supremely devoted, or submissive to the will of God, and still indulge in some things, or even in one thing that is inconsistent with God's will. Whoever, therefore, among you, lives in the indulgence of any known sin, of heart or life, has not one particle of true religion. This is not a rhetorical flourish. It is not a random, hap-hazard assertion. It is the unalterable truth of God. By this I do not mean, that if a man is sometimes overcome by temptation, and falls into occasional sins, that this demonstrates that his character is that of an unregenerate sinner. But I do mean, that where any form or degree of sin is indulged, where it is habitual, connived at, allowed, and practiced by the mind, there is not one vestige of true religion.

2. True submission implies a recognition of the universality of the providence of God. God is actually, or permissively, directly or indirectly concerned in all events; and many persons hide their enmity against God from their own view, by overlooking the fact, that God has in any sense any agency in the providence about which they vex themselves. They ascribe many things to Satan, and to wicked men, and seem to feel that they do right to be angry, and very rebellious, in view of many things that occur, because God has no agency of any kind in them. Now, a submissive spirit views God as so concerned in every thing, as to remain calm, undisturbed and joyful, amid all those occurrences that keep the ungodly in a state of constant fermentation.

3. It implies an honest, earnest, and diligent inquiry after the will of God. There are a great many who profess to hold themselves and all their possessions at the disposal of the will of God--who profess a willingness to do, or be, or say any thing that God requires of them. But mark, you will find it impossible to convince them, that any thing inconsistent with their selfish schemes, is the will of God. They profess to hold all their property at the disposal of God; but the agents of benevolent institutions may labor with them for months, without being able to convince them, that it is the will of God, that they should part with their possessions to promote these objects. The attitude of their minds is manifestly such, that they are unwilling to know what is the will of God in relation to the disposal of their possessions. They demand a kind and degree of evidence to satisfy their minds that cannot be had, and ought not to be expected, and would not be demanded by them, if they were in any other than a supremely selfish state of mind. And thus, while they profess to hold themselves and all they possess at God's disposal, they can always manage to quiet their consciences, in their superlative selfishness, by shutting out the light, and refusing to be satisfied in respect to what really is the will of God.

I knew a man who professed to be converted, and to give all his property to God. At one time he was about to devote it to one benevolent object, and at another to another object; and thus has excited hopes and expectations, sometimes in one direction and sometimes in another, that he would give up at least his surplus of worldly goods, to the promotion of the great benevolent objects of the day. But alas! he seems never to find any object, to which he can believe it to be the will of God, that he should devote his property. No actually existing evidence will satisfy him. It seems that nothing short of a direct revelation from God, in words to this effect, will work conviction in his mind, "Know you, A.B., of such a place, at such a time, that thus saith the Lord, it is my supreme will and pleasure, that you devote such a portion of the earthly goods in your possession to the advancement of the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, and that you deliver to

C.D., the agent of such a society, the specified amount without gainsaying." And that this order of God should be accredited by some direct miracle, or thundered in a voice from heaven, in order to afford the required evidence. I know others, who, while they make large professions of holding themselves and all their possessions at the disposal of God, can always find some excuse for doing little or nothing for the promotion of any benevolent object. Is a church to be built, they can avoid giving any thing by imposing some condition, to which the congregation cannot and ought not to consent. Is the minister's salary to be paid, they can always find some excuse for not believing it to be the will of God, that they should do any thing for his support. Is any thing to be given to the Foreign Mission cause, they can always find some fault with the proceedings of the Board, as a reason for not believing that it is their duty to give. Is any call made for funds to support the holy cause of the abolition of slavery, they don't like the proceedings of the abolition societies. They doubt, whether the funds are properly expended, or there is some imprudence in their measures, which renders it obligatory in them to withhold their funds. Is any thing to be done for the poor, they have always some evasive measure to propose, some other and better way to supply the poor, than the one proposed. If any thing is to be done for Moral Reform, they have some objection to the course pursued by its advocates and friends. And, in short, whatever is to be done, that calls them to self-denial, or to give their possessions up to the promotion of the glory of God, they have always some objection to what is done, or some proposal to have something else done, which, if not complied with, constitutes in their mind a sufficient reason for giving and doing nothing for that object.

Now it should be universally understood, that true submission implies, an earnest desire to be convinced as it respects what is really the will of God--a diligent, honest inquiry after his will, and a perfect readiness to be decided and actuated by any reasonable degree of evidence, and to follow the slightest preponderance of evidence, to whatever self-sacrifice or self-denial it may lead.

4. It implies a thankful spirit, for all the past and present providential dealings of God with us. And especially a thankful spirit for those providences that have been and are most deeply afflicting to us. "God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." And in all the afflictions of his children, the tender heart of God is afflicted. People are very apt to suppose themselves to be thankful to God for those providential dealings that seem, at the time, matters of great joy to them; while they think themselves excused from being thankful for dispensations that greatly afflict them.

Indeed, they suppose themselves to be very virtuous, if they fall short of going into downright rebellion at such providences. But now let us look at this, Mother; are you a Christian? Yes. And God has given you a little blooming babe. It lies smiling at your breast. You touch its little cheek and chirp as to a little bird; and it looks up and smiles, with such a look of love as to seduce your heart into an attitude of idolatrous attachment. You hang over it when it wakes and when it sleeps.

It is in your thoughts at the earliest dawn, at midday, and at evening. All the mother is awake in your soul. And as its little opening powers develop themselves, day after day, your attachment grows stronger and stronger, until it is the object of your thoughts by day, and your dreams by night. You cannot pray, without the image of your babe before you. You cannot go to the church of God, without having your warmest affections clustering around your little nursling at home.

In the solemn worship of the house of God, your thoughts are upon your little idol, and you are weary with the length of the exercises, because they separate you from your little charmer. Now mark; you suppose yourself very thankful, that God has committed to you this little treasure. God loves the little one--He loves its mother. But O! He sees that this sweet gift is too much for your piety. He loves to see you pleased and

happy with it. But He cannot consent to see it ruin you.

Nor can He willingly see you, through your idolatrous attachment, ruin it. He puts forth his hand and plucks it from your bosom. You open your eyes, and it is gone! And O! God, as it were, turns away his face when He strikes the blow. He feels the pang, as if it had touched the apple of his eye. It has cost Him much. Viewed by itself, it is grievous to his heart thus to afflict you. It has cost Him more self-denial than all the sweet and pleasant things He ever bestowed upon you.

He would sooner have borne the pain Himself, than have inflicted it upon you, could it have answered the purpose, which He has proved to a demonstration, by sooner dying for you than to inflict death upon you. O! how you have grieved his parental heart, by forcing Him thus to smite you. Do you feel grieved, when you are obliged to chastise your children? And when you feel obliged to use the rod, to deprive them of their food, or take some prompt measures to subdue their wayward tempers--is it not a matter of grief to you?

Are you not more tried and afflicted by it than by all your other pains to do them good. Would you not rather often take the blows yourself, could the same end be answered by it? Indeed, do you not consider it the very climax of parental kindness, self-denial, and love, to march up to the thorough infliction of chastisement when the good of those you love so well requires it at your hand? Now what would you say of a child who, when he had grown to manhood, should look back upon his life and say, I feel grateful to my mother for watching over my helpless infancy.

I thank my father for the trouble and expense of my education, and for giving me a farm, and for all the good things of his providence. But, ah! there are many dark spots in the history of my father's dealings with me, to which I find it difficult to be reconciled, and for which I feel that I am far from having any cause to be thankful. At such and such a time he chastised me. This I do not like. I remember that he did it with tears. I recollect how he trembled when he took the rod.

I recollect how he lifted up his streaming eyes to heaven. I remember well, that when he had repeated the blows, he turned him away and wept. I saw and knew, that it cost him much--that his heart was bleeding at every pore--that much sooner would he receive the blows himself than have inflicted them on me.

Now do let me ask, for what portion of parental kindness are children under so great obligations of gratitude, as for that needed discipline, which so deeply wrung the parent's heart? O, you will say, of all the trials that I have ever had with my children; of all that I have ever done for them; and of all their obligations to me; I feel that those are the greatest which compel me to the self-denial of inflicting wounds on them.

And now let me ask you, Christian, do you think that you do well, barely to keep away from downright murmuring and rebellion, when you are chastised by your heavenly Father. O, do you remember, how much more deeply you have afflicted Him than He has wounded you? Do you remember, how much it costs Him thus to smite you?--What! can He who loves you so much as to give his life for you, rebuke and distress you, without affliction? Of all the things that He has ever done for you, you are bound to be the most grateful for his stripes. For when He has been obliged to smite, He has been obliged to touch the apple of his own eye, and reach the deep fountains of compassion in his own heart. O how his heart has pitied you, when He has lifted up the rod. O, how his bowels yearned over you, when it fell upon you; and when you wept, how deeply did He sympathize with your grief. And as soon as you relented how instantly would He smile and wipe away your tears. O! how readily He forgave you. And as soon as the prodigal

returned, "He saw you a great way off, and ran, and fell upon your neck, and wept, and kissed you." He took off your rags of shame and guilt. He clothed you in the robes of gladness, and by his love He chased away all your grief. Now can a spirit of true submission imply any thing less than deep gratitude to God for all his providential dealings, and the deepest of all, for those in which He so deeply wounded Himself in wounding you. And of what ought you in infinite measure to repent, if not of those idolatries and sins that lay upon Him such a necessity?

5. True submission to God implies, the absence of all carefulness or perplexing anxiety in regard to his future dealings with us. That man certainly cannot be reconciled to God--he cannot be perfectly willing that God should deal with him in future in all respects according to his own will, and at the same time be perplexed with anxieties, and carefulness, and fears, in respect to his future dealings. True submission leaves all such questions entirely in the hands of God, without distress, distrust, anxiety, or fear.

And furthermore, true submission rejoices in the fact, that the wisdom and goodness of God will meet out all his changes for him, in a way that best promotes his own glory and the highest good of the universe.

6. True submission also implies, that you have no will of your own, except that "the will of God be done on earth as it is done in heaven." It is the constant language and breathings of a submissive soul, "thy will be done." And whenever, in any way, the will of God is known, the submissive soul not merely consents that it should be so, but rejoices in having it so; and would prefer, that this should take place, to any other possible course of events. Because it regards the will of God as supremely wise and good.

7. It implies, that you are equally well pleased with whatever God does. The submissive soul does not make a virtue of necessity, and merely consent, or assent to what God does, because to resist will be of no avail. Submission is not the mere absence of murmuring and repining at the providence of God; but is the most joyful and hearty acquiescence and delight in what He does; and that too, not merely in those dispensations of providence that are usually accounted merciful and joyous, but also in those that are usually regarded most afflictive and severe.

8. It implies the subjugation of all our appetites and passions to his will and glory. God requires, that "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God." And true submission implies, that this requirement be completely obeyed.

9. It implies implicit confidence in God. It is certainly impossible that there should be true submission, when there is not true, real, heart-felt, and practical confidence in God. To submit, and rejoice in whatever He does, certainly implies the most implicit confidence that what He does is right and best to be done. Implicit faith is therefore always implied in true submission. And this faith must respect the goodness and power of God--that He is wise, and good, and powerful enough, to do in all respects that which is best to be done.

10. It implies true repentance for sin. Repentance is that change of mind, that takes the part of God, against all sin--that condemns all sin under every form and in every degree--that fully and heartily justifies God in all the measure of his government. It is not a mere intellectual change of views, but a change of heart, a thorough radical change in the controlling disposition or affection of the soul, in regard to sin and the government of God. Therefore, true submission always implies and includes, in a sinner, true repentance, a thorough reformation of heart and life.

11. It implies a cordial acceptance of the salvation of the gospel. And here, when I speak of the salvation of the gospel, I mean, not merely the acceptance of a pardon, on account of the Atonement of Christ; but an acceptance of Christ, as a risen, reigning Savior from sin--not merely an outward, but an inward Savior as a glorious deliverer from all iniquity. This is proffered in the gospel; and nothing is true submission short of a cordial and practical obedience to and acceptance of the gospel of the blessed God.

12. It implies actual holiness of heart and life.

13. It implies a deep abhorrence of sin and sinners. Said the Psalmist, "Do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? Am I not grieved with them that rise up against thee. Yea, I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies" This hatred is a benevolent hatred. It is a hatred mingled with compassion. Nevertheless, it is a real and deep abhorrence of those that rise up against God.

The subject will be resumed.

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