

The Law of God--No. 1

by Charles Finney

True religion is the exercise of supreme and disinterested love to God and men.

Scripture: Matthew 22:36-40, Luke 6:32-34, Romans 8:4, Romans 13:8-10, James 2:15-16

Topics: "Obedience to God", "Love"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that true religion is encapsulated in the two great commandments: to love God with all one's heart and to love one's neighbor as oneself. He explains that genuine obedience to these commandments is the essence of virtue and outlines the nature of true love, which must be supreme, disinterested, and benevolent. Finney also addresses common misconceptions about love and obedience, asserting that partial or selfish love cannot coexist with true holiness. He concludes that true religion fulfills rather than abrogates the law of God, highlighting the importance of love as the foundation of all moral obligations.

Transcript

Text.--Matt. 22:36-40: Master, which is the great commandment, in the law? Jesus said unto him, thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law, and the prophets.

In discussing this subject, I shall show,

I. THAT OBEDIENCE TO THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS, COMPRISES THE WHOLE OF TRUE RELIGION.

II. WHAT CONSTITUTES TRUE OBEDIENCE.

III. NOTICE SEVERAL MISTAKES INTO WHICH MEN HAVE FALLEN ON THIS SUBJECT.

I. I am to show that obedience to these commandments comprises the whole of true Religion.

1. This is evident from the text itself. Upon these two precepts, said the Savior, "hang all the law and the prophets," i.e. the whole of what is required in the law, and the prophets, is here epitomized.

2. In Rom. 13:8-10, it is said, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, thou shalt not commit adultery--thou shalt not kill--thou shalt not steal--thou shalt not bear false witness--thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, viz. thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Here it is declared, that love, with corresponding action, of course, comprises our whole duty to our fellowmen.

Reason affirms that there is no virtue without love, and that perfect love to God and man, with its natural fruits, is the consummation, and the whole of virtue. This is also agreeable to the dictates of conscience and common sense.

3. The law of God is the standard of right and wrong. The whole law of God is summed up in these two precepts. Consequently, obedience to these is the whole of virtue or true religion. In other words, it is the whole of what God requires of man. But I need not insist at large upon this, as it will not probably be denied or doubted.

II. I am to show what constitutes true obedience.

Love is the sum of the requirement. But I may, and should be asked what is the kind of love required by these commands? I shall consider:

1. The kind of love to be exercised towards God.

(1) It is to be love of the heart, and not a mere emotion. By the heart I mean the will. Emotions, or what are generally termed feelings, are often involuntary states of mind; i.e. they are not choices, or volitions, and of course do not govern the conduct. Love, in the form of an emotion, may exist in opposition to the will; e.g. we may exercise emotions of love contrary to our conscience, and judgment, and in opposition to our will. Thus the sexes often exercise emotions of love towards those to whom all the voluntary powers of their mind feel opposed, and with whom they will not associate. It is true, that, in most cases, the emotions are with the will. But they are sometimes, nay, often opposed to it.

Now, it is a voluntary state of mind that the law of God requires; i.e. it lays its claims upon the will. The will controls the conduct. And it is, therefore, of course, the love of the heart or will, that God requires.

(2) Benevolence is one of the modifications of love, which we are to exercise towards God. Benevolence is good will. And certainly we are bound to exercise this kind of love to God. It is a dictate of reason, of conscience, of common sense, and of immutable justice, that we should exercise good, and not ill-will to God. It matters not whether he needs our good will, or whether our good, or ill will, can, in any way, affect him.--The question does not respect the necessities but deserts.

God's well-being is certainly an infinite good in itself, and consequently, we are bound to desire it--to will it--to rejoice in it--and to will it, and rejoice in it, in proportion to its intrinsic importance. And as his well-being is certainly a matter of infinite importance, we are under infinite obligation to will it with all our hearts.

(3) Another modification of this love, is that of complacency or esteem. God's character is infinitely good. We are therefore bound, not merely to love him, with the love of benevolence; but to exercise the highest degree of complacency in his character. To say that God is good and lovely is merely to say that he deserves to be loved. If he deserves to be loved, on account of his goodness and love, then he deserves

to be loved in proportion to his goodness and loveliness. Our obligation, therefore, is infinitely great to exercise towards him the highest degree of the love of complacency, of which we are capable.

These remarks are confirmed by the Bible, by reason, by conscience, and by common sense.

(4) Another peculiarity of this love, which must, by no means, be overlooked, is, that it must be disinterested; i.e. that we should not love him for selfish reasons. But that we should love him for what he is--with benevolence, because his well-being is an infinite good--with complacency; because his character is infinitely excellent--with the heart; because all virtue belongs to the heart. It is plain, that nothing short of disinterested love is virtue. The Savior recognizes and settles this truth, in Luke 6:32-34: "For if ye love them who love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again." These words epitomize the whole doctrine of the Bible on this subject, and lay down the broad principle, that to love God, or anyone else, for selfish reasons, is not virtue.

(5) Another peculiarity of this love is that it must be in every instance supreme. The text plainly requires this. Besides, any thing less than supreme love to God, must be idolatry. If any thing else is loved more, that is our God.

Observe, that God lays great stress upon the degree of love. So that the degree is essential to the kind of love. If it be not supreme in degree, it is wholly defective and in no sense acceptable to God.

2. I will consider the kind of love to be exercised towards our fellow men.

(1) It must be the love of the heart, and not mere desire or emotion. It is very natural to desire the good of others--to pity the distressed--and to feel strong emotions of compassion towards those who are afflicted. But these emotions are not virtue. Unless we will their good, as well as desire it, it is of no avail. James 2:15, 16: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food. And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

Now here the Apostle fully recognizes the principle, that mere desire for the good of others, which of course will satisfy itself with good words, instead of good deeds, is not virtue. If it were good willing, instead of good desiring, it would produce corresponding action; and unless it is good willing, there is no holiness in it.

(2) Benevolence to men is a prime modification of holy love. This is included in what I have said above, but needs to be expressly stated and explained.

It is a plain dictate of reason, of conscience, of common sense, and immutable justice, that we should exercise good will towards our fellow men--that we should will their good, in proportion to its importance--that we should rejoice in their happiness, and endeavor to promote it, according to its real value in the scale of being.

(3) Complacency towards those that are virtuous is another modification of holy love. I say towards those that are virtuous, because while we exercise benevolence towards all, irrespective of their character, we have a right to exercise complacency towards those only who are holy.

To exercise complacency towards the wicked is to be as wicked as they are. But to exercise entire complacency to those that are holy, is to be ourselves holy.

(4) This love is to be in every instance equal. By equal I do not mean that degree of love which selfish beings have for themselves, for this is supreme. There is a grand distinction between self-love and selfishness. Self-love is that benevolence to self, or regard for our own interest, which its intrinsic importance demands. Selfishness is the excess of self-love: i.e. it is supreme self-love--it is making our own happiness the supreme object of pursuit, because it is our own. And not attaching that importance to other's interests, and the happiness of other beings, which their importance demands. A selfish mind is therefore in the exercise of the supreme love of self.

Now the law of God does not require or permit us to love our neighbor with this degree of love, for that would be idolatry. But the command, "to love our neighbor as ourselves," implies,

(a) That we should love ourselves less than supremely, and attach no more importance to our own interests and happiness than they demand.--So that the first thing implied in this command is that we love ourselves less than supremely, and that we love our neighbor with the same degree of love which it is lawful for us to exercise towards ourselves.

(b) Equal love does not imply, that we should neglect our own appropriate concerns, and attend to the affairs of others. God has appointed to every man a particular sphere in which to act, and particular affairs to which he must attend. And this business, whatever it is, must be transacted for God and not for ourselves. For a man, therefore, to neglect his particular calling under the pretense of attending to the business of others, is neither required nor permitted by this law.

Nor are we to neglect our own families, and the nurture and education of our children, and attend to that of others. "But if any provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." --To these duties we are to attend for God. And no man or woman is required or permitted to neglect the children God has given them, under the pretense of attending to the families of others.

Nor does this law require or permit us to squander our possessions upon the intemperate, and dissolute, and improvident. Not that the absolute necessities of such persons are in no case to be relieved by us, but it is always to be done in such a manner as not to encourage, but to rebuke their evil courses.

Nor does this law require or permit us to suffer others to live by sponging out our possessions, while they themselves are not engaged in promoting the good of men.

Nor does it require or permit us to lend money to speculators, or for speculating purposes, or in any way to encourage selfishness.

(c) But by equal love is meant, I have said, the same love in kind and degree, which it is lawful for us to exercise towards ourselves. It is lawful, nay, it is our duty to exercise a suitable regard to our own happiness. This is benevolence to self, or what is commonly called self-love. The same, both in kind and degree, we are required to exercise to all our fellow men..

(5) Another feature of holy love is that it must be impartial; i.e. it must extend to enemies as well as friends. Else it is selfish love, and comes under the reprobation of the Savior, in the passage before quoted, Luke 6:32, 34: "For if ye love them who love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same."&c.

Now observe that this test must always be applied to the kind of love we exercise to our fellow men, in order to understand its genuineness.--God's love is love to enemies. It was for his enemies that he gave his Son. Our love must be the same in kind--it must extend to enemies, as well as friends. And if it does not, it is partial and selfish.

III. I am to notice several mistakes into which men have fallen on this subject.

1. It seems to be a very general opinion among men that love to God and men may be genuine in kind, but deficient in degree; i.e. that we may have some true love to God, that is not supreme love.

Now this cannot be true. For God lays great stress, in his law, upon the degree of love. Besides it is perfectly plain, if it be not supreme in degree that the mind loves something else more, and is consequently in a state of idolatry, instead of having any degree of holy love.

2. It seems to be a very general opinion that there is such a thing as imperfect obedience to God; i.e. as it respects one and the same act.

Obedience may be imperfect in respect to its constancy. An individual may obey at one time, and disobey at another. But I cannot see how an imperfect obedience, relating to one and the same act, can be possible. Imperfect OBEDIENCE! What can be meant by this but disobedient OBEDIENCE! a sinful HOLINESS!

Now to decide the character of any act, we are to bring it into the light of the law of God. If agreeable to this law, it is obedience--it is right--wholly right. If it is in any respect, different from what the law of God requires, it is disobedience--it is wrong--wholly wrong. Consequently,

3. It is supposed that a person may be partly holy, and partly sinful, in the same act and exercise.

I was formerly of this opinion myself; and I believe in some one of my reported lectures it is expressed. I formerly reasoned in this way; that an exercise might be put forth, in view of several motives, some of which were right, and some wrong. And that the exercise, therefore, had the complex character of the motives that produced it. But I am now persuaded that this philosophy is false. Whatever may have preceded a given exercise, that may have led the way to its being put forth, is not the question; nor does it alter the character of that exercise. For whenever the exercise is put forth, it must be in view of some one consideration, which the mind contemplates at the instant. If the reason which the mind has for the exercise be disinterested, the action is holy. If otherwise, it is sinful. By disinterested I do not mean that the mind must necessarily feel that it has no personal interest in the thing. But that the degree of self-interest that is felt should not be disproportioned to the interest which the mind takes in the matter, on account of its own intrinsic importance. In other words, if the mind's interest in it is selfish, the action or exercise, whatever it may be, is sinful. If it be not selfish, it is holy, although there may be a suitable regard to our own interest, at the moment of decision.

But that the action or affection must be either right or wrong--that when the test of God's law is applied, it must be pronounced an act of obedience or disobedience seems to me to be very plain. That it should be of such a mixed character as both to be obedience and disobedience, if the nature of God's law be considered, appears to me to be impossible. It should be understood that holiness and sin belong to the will or choice of the mind. Where the mind is under the influence of an existing sinful choice, it should be understood that this choice is sinful, because it is selfish. Now a multitude of considerations may from time

to time present themselves to the mind, that may diminish the power of a wrong or sinful preference or choice. But however much the power of a selfish choice may be weakened, yet there is no virtue till the mind comes to exercise an opposite or disinterestedly benevolent choice. Now whenever the mind puts forth a holy choice, it is absurd and contradictory to say that any degree of selfishness is exercised by the mind in putting forth that choice. For selfishness is supreme love. Therefore, it is naturally impossible that selfishness should mingle with holiness. It is the same contradiction as to say that supreme self-love co-exists with supreme disinterested love. Therefore the volition cannot possibly have a mixed character; i.e. it cannot be partly selfish and partly holy. If any degree of sin can be affirmed of it--if in any way it is defective, it must be on account of the degree of its strength, and not on account of its co-existence with some degree of selfishness.

But here let it be understood that it cannot be defective in degree, and yet be holy, unless it can be holy without being agreeable to the law of God. It must be supreme in degree to have the character of holiness at all. It must be disinterested in opposition to selfish or it is wholly sinful. If, therefore, it is disinterested in kind, and supreme in degree, it is wholly a right affection. Otherwise, it is wholly wrong.

4. Another mistake is, that holiness may be deficient in degree as well as in permanency.

This is only another form of expressing nearly the same idea. But I aim at perspicuity; and I choose to re-assert the mistake in this form, (viz.) that holiness may be real, while deficient in degree, as well as in permanency.

Now, holiness is love. To say therefore, that holiness may be deficient in degree, is the same as to say that love may be true, acceptable love to God, while it is less than supreme in degree, which is plainly contrary to both the letter and spirit of the law of God; or, in other words, it may be acceptable to God, while we love something else more, and are in fact idolaters.

5. That we may be conscious of loving God less than something else, and yet have some genuine love, and some true religion.

Now love, to be genuine, must possess all the attributes which the law of God requires. And as God lays great stress upon its being supreme, if we are conscious that we love other things more than God, it is impossible that we should be in the exercise of any true religion.

6. That emotions of love, while the heart or will is selfish is true religion.

Now that there may be emotions, and strong emotions of love to a being, or thing, to which our will is opposed, is the experience of every day. And I see not why emotions of love to God, as well as emotions of gratitude to God, may not exist, while the will is selfish, and therefore the heart entirely depraved. I know from my own experience, that such emotions can exist in an unconverted mind; and it appears to me, that herein consists the grand delusion of vast multitudes of professors of religion, as well as of those who are professedly impenitent. When some flashes of light, in regard to some of the attributes of God are witnessed--when he is exhibited in certain relations--and his feelings of compassion are thrown out before the mind, as exhibited in the death of Christ, I think I know by experience, and I see not why it is not in accordance with true philosophy, that there should be a gush of emotion, which may be, and often is taken for true religion, while the heart or will is entirely selfish. This is illustrated in the character of those who, in revivals and seasons of religious excitement, will manifest a high degree of religious emotion, while in their business operations they prove to be completely selfish.

7. That some degree of selfishness may co-exist with some degree of holiness.

I say co-exist. I do not mean to deny, that a mind may be selfish at one time, and benevolent at another. But I do deny, that a mind can be selfish and benevolent at one and the same time; or that any degree of holiness can exist in the mind, in the exercise of selfishness. Selfishness, as we have already seen, is the supreme love of self. It is always the supreme affection of the mind, and cannot be exercised in any one instance, in any other form than that of supreme regard to self. It is what God expressly forbids. Every exercise of it, therefore, not only implies that we love ourselves more than we love our neighbor; but as it is a violation of the law of God, it is loving ourselves more than we respect the authority of God.

To say therefore, that some degree of selfishness may co-exist with some degree of holiness, is the same absurdity, as to say that we can love ourselves supremely, and God supremely, at one and the same time.

8. That we may be conscious of loving our neighbor less than ourselves, and still love our neighbor with some degree of acceptable or holy love.

Now this is a radical and ruinous mistake. That we should feel compassion or pity for a person in distress is natural, whatever be the state of our will. But if our love only amount to desire--if it is not good willing as well as good desiring, there is not a particle of anything good in it. It must be love of the heart, or will--that which will control the conduct. Again I repeat James 2:15, 16: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food. And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed, and filled; notwithstanding, ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit?"

Now there can be no doubt that multitudes are radically deceived upon this point. They mistake their kind feelings, which are merely constitutional, for that love which the law of God requires them to exercise. Hence they will be very pitiful and benevolent in word but not in deed.

9. That a man can be selfish in his business, both in its design and in the manner of performing it, and yet be truly, though defectively religious--that in establishing himself in business, he may have a supreme regard to his own interest--that it is neither love to God nor man, that mainly actuates him, in the establishment of his business--but that his great object may be to make property for himself and family, and yet be truly religious--that the transaction of his business may be on the same principle upon which it was established--that in his dealings with men, he may aim mainly at promoting his own interest, and may consult his own side of the bargain, with very little reference to the individual with whom he is trading, or the community in which he lives.

I believe this to be a sad and ruinous mistake. A man's business is that in which he is engaged, or at least is supposed to be engaged, six days in seven of his whole life. It is that which mainly occupies his time, and thoughts, and energies. Now, if in this he is selfish, either in his object, or manner of performing it, it is as impossible that he should have any degree of true religion, as that he should be supremely selfish and religious at the same time.

It is supposed by many, that selfish love to God is true religion. In my lecture to Christians, published in the last volume of my Sermons, is a whole discourse, devoted expressly to the discussion of this question. As you can consult that, I will not dwell upon it here.

10. That selfish, or partial love to man is true religion.

There are many who cannot speak peaceably of an enemy, who are nevertheless, very affectionate to their friends--who seem to have adopted the corrupt maxim of the Jews: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy," which Jesus Christ so severely reprobates. Christ insists, that, to be like God, we must "love our enemies," "do good to them that hate us," and "pray for those that despitefully use us." Here also, doubtless, many make a ruinous mistake. They have a great affection to individuals, who are friendly to them--of their own sect, or party, or way of thinking--while they exhibit and manifest any thing but love towards those that differ from them.

11. That entire holiness implies a high, and constant, and, of course insupportable degree of excited emotion.

Whatever may be true of the mind, when separated from the body, it is certain, while it acts through a material organ, that a constant state of excitement is impossible. When the mind is strongly excited, there is of necessity, a great determination of blood to the brain. A high degree of excitement cannot long continue, certainly, without producing inflammation of the brain, and consequent insanity. And the law of God does not require any degree of emotion, or mental excitement, that is inconsistent with life and health.

Our Lord Jesus Christ does not appear to have been in a state of continual excitement. When he and his disciples, had been in a great excitement, for a time, they would turn aside, "and rest awhile."

Who, that has ever philosophized on this subject, does not know that the high degree of excitement which is sometimes witnessed in revivals of religion, must necessarily be short, or that the people must become deranged. It seems sometimes to be indispensable, that a high degree of excitement should prevail for a time, to arrest public and individual attention, and to draw people off from other pursuits, to attend to the concerns of their souls. But if any suppose that this high degree of excitement is either necessary, or desirable, or possible, to be long continued, they have not well considered the matter.

And here is one grand mistake of the Church. They have supposed that the revival consists mostly in this state of excited emotion, rather than in conformity of the human will to the will of God. --Hence, when the reasons for much excitement have ceased, and the public mind begins to grow more calm, they begin immediately to say, that the revival is on the decline; when, in fact, with much less excited emotion, there may be vastly more real religion in the community.

Excitement is often important and indispensable. But the vigorous actings of the will are infinitely more important. And this state of mind may exist in the absence of highly excited emotions.

12. That entire conformity to the law of God implies, that the attention of the mind is continually and exclusively directed to God. So that God is the direct object of thought, volition, and feeling.

Now holiness implies no such thing. The law of God requires supreme love of the heart. By this is meant, that the mind's supreme preference should be of God--that God should be the great object of its supreme love, and delight. But this state of mind is perfectly consistent with our engaging in any of the necessary business of life-- giving to that business that attention--and exercising about it all those affections and emotions, which its nature and importance demand.

If a man love God supremely, and engage in any business, for the promotion of his glory, if his eye be single, his affections and conduct are entirely holy, when necessarily engaged in the right transaction of his business, although, for the time being, neither his thoughts, or affections are upon God.

Just so a man who is supremely devoted to his family may be acting consistently with his supreme affection, and rendering them the most important and perfect service, while he does not think of them at all. As I have endeavored to show, in my lecture on the text, "Make to yourselves a new heart, and a new spirit," I consider the moral heart to be the mind's supreme preference. As I there stated, the natural, or fleshly heart, is the seat of animal life, and propels the blood through all the physical system. Now there is a striking analogy between this and the moral heart. And the analogy consists in this, that as the natural heart, by its pulsations, diffuses life through the physical system; so the moral heart, or the supreme governing preference of the mind, is that which gives life, and character to man's moral actions; (e.g.) suppose that I am engaged in teaching Mathematics. In this, the supreme desire of my mind is to glorify God, in this particular calling. Now in demonstrating some of its intricate propositions I am obliged, for hours together, to give the entire attention of my mind to that object. Now, while my mind is thus intensely employed in this particular business, it is impossible that I should have any thoughts directly about God, or should exercise any direct affections, or emotions, or volitions towards Him. Yet if, in this particular calling, all selfishness is excluded, and my supreme design is to glorify God, my mind is in a sanctified state, even though, for the time being, I do not think of God.

It should be understood, that while the supreme preference of the mind has such efficiency, as to exclude all selfishness, and to call forth just that strength of volition, thought, affection, and emotion, that is requisite to the right discharge of any duty, to which the mind may be called, the heart is in a sanctified state. By a suitable degree of thought, and feeling, to the right discharge of duty, I mean just that intensity of thought, and energy of action, that the nature and importance of the particular duty to which, for the time being, I am called, demand.

In this statement, I take it for granted, that the brain, together with all the circumstances of the constitution are such, that the requisite amount of thought, feeling, &c. are possible. If the constitution, physical, or mental, be in such a state of exhaustion as to be unable to put forth that amount of exertion which the nature of the subject might otherwise demand, even in this case, the languid efforts, though far below the importance of the subject, would be all that the law of God requires. --Whoever, therefore, supposes that a state of entire sanctification, implies a state of entire abstraction of mind, from everything but God, labors under a grievous mistake. Such a state of mind is as inconsistent with duty, as it is impossible, while we are in the flesh.

13. That entire holiness implies an equal degree of strength in the affections of the mind, at all times.

Now, this is neither consistent with duty, nor possible. Every particular duty to which we are called, does not demand the same degree of mental action. Nor, as I have already said, is the brain, the physical organ through which the mind acts, capable of sustaining the same degree of mental affections. If, in performing any work for God, the affections be as high as the nature of the particular subject requires, in order to its right performance, and in every case where the action of the mind is equal in strength to the present capacity of the brain, or physical organ through which the mind acts, it is all that the law of God requires. Here it should be distinctly remembered, that the holiness of the mind, when some kind of business, or labor for God is the object of the mind's attention, does not consist, so much in the strength of those particular affections, which may be more or less energetic, as the state of the brain may admit, or the nature of the subject may require. But it does consist in the supreme preference of the mind--in that state of supreme devotedness to God, that has called the mind to the performance of this particular work, and for this particular reason, (i.e.) for the glory of God.

14. That a state of entire holiness implies equal strength in all the volitions of the mind.

But this is absurd. It is neither requisite, nor possible. All volitions do not need the same strength. They cannot have equal strength, because they are not produced by equally powerful reasons.

Should a man put forth as strong a volition to pick up an apple, as to extinguish the flames of a burning house? Should a mother, watching over her sleeping nursing when all is quiet and secure, put forth as powerful volitions, as might be requisite to snatch it from the devouring flames? Now, suppose that she was equally devoted to God, in watching her sleeping babe, and in rescuing it from the jaws of death. Her holiness would not consist in the fact that she exercised equally strong volitions, in both cases; but, that in both cases, the volition was equal to the accomplishment of the thing required to be done. So that persons may be entirely holy, and yet continually varying in the strength of their affections, according to their circumstances--the state of their physical system--and the business in which they are engaged.

15. That no degree of mental languor, or rest is consistent with a state of entire holiness.

This is so far from true, that every degree of rest and languor, which the nature of man requires, is consistent with a state of entire sanctification.

16. Another mistake respects what constitutes partial, and what entire sanctification.

As I have already said, some seem to suppose, that partial sanctification relates, as well to the degree of holy affection, as to its constancy. I trust I have already said enough to show, that partial sanctification cannot relate to the degree of holy love; but that love must be supreme, in degree, to be holiness at all. And here let me remind you again, that all holy affections, thoughts, and volitions, have not necessarily God for their direct object, but may be employed about other things, and are entirely holy, when the design of the mind, in engaging in these callings, and pursuits, is supremely to glorify God. You will here understand, also, that by the constancy of holy affections, is not meant, as I have just said that they should have God for their immediate object, or that it is an interruption of obedience for the mind to think, and act, and feel upon any subject to which duty calls it.

By partial sanctification, I mean that state of mind, in which, it sometimes acts selfishly, and at other times benevolently.

17. That entire holiness in man, implies the same degree of holiness that is in God.

No such thing is implied, for God's holiness is infinite. For us to be holy as God, is not to be as holy as he is in degree, but to have as single an eye as he has.

Nor does entire sanctification imply the same strength of holy affections, that Adam may have had before the fall--before his powers were debilitated by sin.

Nor does it imply that we exercise the same strength, or consistency of holy affection, that we might have done had we never sinned. If we love him with what strength we have, be it more or less, however debilitated our powers may be, it is all that the law of God requires.

Nor does it imply, that we love him as much as we should, were we not so ignorant, or had we as much knowledge of Him as we might have had, had we improved our time, and opportunities of gaining information. The law of God requires, nothing more than the right use of our powers, as they are, without

respect to whatever might, and would have been, had we never sinned.

18. That a state of entire holiness is inconsistent with the existence, and exercise of our constitutional susceptibilities.

A great portion of the temptations to which the mind is subject, consists in the excited state of the susceptibilities of the body and mind, that are purely constitutional. All the susceptibilities of our nature, Christ must have had, or he could not have been "tempted in all points like as we are." It was the excitement of Adam's constitutional appetites and susceptibilities, that led him to sin. But his sin consisted not, either in the existence of these susceptibilities and appetites, or in their being excited, but in consenting to gratify them in a prohibited manner. If our constitutional susceptibilities were annihilated, our activity would cease. So that if anyone supposes, that to be sanctified "wholly, body, soul and spirit," implies the extinction of any appetite, or susceptibility that is purely constitutional, he is deceived. A state of sanctification consists in subordinating all these to the will of God, and not, in their annihilation.

19. That it implies a cessation of spiritual warfare.

If, by this, they mean a war with our selfishness, they are right. But if they mean that our war with the world, the flesh and the devil, will ever cease in this life, they are mistaken.

20. That it is inconsistent with growth in grace.

I suppose that saints will continue to grow in grace to all eternity, and in the knowledge of God. But this does not imply, that they are not entirely holy, when they enter heaven, or before.

21. That it is entirely inconsistent with any sorrow, or mental suffering.

It was not so with Christ. Nor is it inconsistent with our sorrowing for our own past sins, and sorrowing that we have not now the health and vigor, and knowledge, and love, that we might have had, if we had sinned less; or sorrow for those around us--sorrow in view of human sinfulness, or suffering. These are all consistent with a state of entire sanctification, and indeed are the natural results of it.

22. That it is inconsistent with our living in human society--with mingling in the scenes, and engaging in the affairs of this world. Hence the absurd and ridiculous notions of papists, in retiring to monasteries, and convents--in taking the veil--and, as they say, retiring to a life of devotion.

Now I suppose this state of voluntary exclusion from human society, to be utterly inconsistent with any degree of holiness, and a manifest violation of the law of love to our neighbor.

23. That a state of entire holiness would be recognized as such by all men.

Now this is as far as possible from being true. It was insisted, and positively believed, by the Jews, that Jesus Christ was possessed of a wicked, instead of a holy spirit. Such were their notions of holiness, that they no doubt supposed him to be actuated by any other than the Spirit of God. They especially supposed so on account of his opposition to the current orthodoxy, and the ungodliness of the religious teachers of the day. Now, who does not see, that when the Church is in a great measure conformed to the world that a spirit of holiness in any man, would certainly lead him to aim the sharpest rebukes, at the spirit and life of those in this state, w[h]ether in high or low places. And who does not see that this would naturally result in his being accused of possessing a wicked spirit?

24. That a state of entire holiness implies a state of entire moroseness of temper and manners.

Nothing is farther from the truth than this. It is said of Xavier, whom perhaps few holier men have ever lived, that "he was so cheerful as often to be accused of being gay." Cheerfulness is certainly the result of holy affections. And sanctification no more implies moroseness in this world than it does in heaven.

25. That entire holiness is inconsistent with any further dependence on Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Now this idea arises out of the very obscure notions, that people have with regard to what constitutes entire sanctification. They seem to suppose, that in sanctification, the Holy Spirit changes the nature, so that men remain holy without any further influence from the Spirit of Christ. Whereas, a state of entire and permanent sanctification is nothing else, than a state of entire and perpetual dependence on Christ, and on the Holy Spirit. It is the state in which the mind throws itself entirely upon the supporting grace of Christ.

REMARKS.

1. From what has been said, you can see the error of those who suppose, we are incompetent witnesses of our own sanctification.

It is true that our testimony may not be satisfactory to others. But still it is true, that so far as we are regarded as honest men, our testimony should be as satisfactory upon this, as upon any other subject. It is a point upon which, we have the testimony of our own consciousness, which is the highest kind of evidence. And we are just as competent witnesses, to testify to our entire sanctification, as that we have any religion at all.

But it is objected, that we may be deceived. True: but is this any good reason why a man should not be a competent witness to that of which he has the testimony of his own consciousness?

But it is said, that many profess sanctification, who are manifestly deceived. Therefore, it is a suspicious circumstance, not to say ridiculous, for a person to profess sanctification. Now this is the very reason urged, by Unitarians, against all spiritual religion. They say, that men may be, and many manifestly are, deceived; and therefore it is ridiculous for men, to profess spiritual regeneration.

Again, it is objected that it is dangerous to preach the doctrine of holiness, because it may lead to deception--that many may, and will think themselves sanctified, when they are not, and will consequently be puffed up with pride, and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Now, who does not know that this is the very objection to insisting upon spiritual religion at all? And the argument is just as forcible, against our having any knowledge of our being regenerated, as against our knowing that we are entirely sanctified.

2. I said that religion is always a matter of consciousness. This must be true, if religion consists in supreme love to God. If we are not conscious of the supreme affection of the mind, of what are we conscious? And here let me guard you against a mistake. Do not suppose that I mean by this, that every thought, volition, and feeling has God for its direct object, and is an act of supreme conscious love to God. A man may be engaged in transacting some business for God, that may require, for the time being, his whole attention. In this state of mind he cannot be conscious, all the while, that God is the direct object of thought, and affection, for this is not the fact. But he may, all the while, be conscious that he is doing this for God. And that it is the supreme preference of his mind for God, that has engaged him in his present business.

3. True religion does not abrogate the law of God, but fulfills it.

Hence Paul declares, (Rom. 8:4) "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Here let me remark, that it is a strange infatuated dream, that persons in a sanctified state, are under no obligation to obey the moral law. If they are under no such obligation, then obedience is not virtue. And it is the aggregate of all that is absurd and contradictory; to say that a man is entirely holy, and yet under no obligation to obey law. What is law, but a rule of action; and what is holiness, but conformity to this rule; and what is sin, but a violation of it? Now if the rule is abrogated, then there is neither holiness, nor sin in men, any more than there is in brutes.

It is true, that a person, in a sanctified state, does not obey the law, through fear of the penalty. Nor does he love God, simply because God commands it; but grace gives him such an acquaintance with God, and Christ, as to produce the very spirit of the law, (i.e.) perfect conformity of heart to the law. The very love which the law requires is thus begotten in the mind. Hence the Apostle says, "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid, yea, we establish the law."

I design to continue this subject in my next lecture, and shall then show more particularly, that the law of God can never be repealed, or altered.

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