

The Law of God--No. 2

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of obeying the law of God, which requires perfect inward and outward benevolence, and warns against the consequences of disobedience, including individual and public misery.

Scripture: Proverbs 21:13, Matthew 7:12, Matthew 22:39, Luke 6:31, Romans 13:10, Galatians 5:14, Philippians 2:3-4, James 2:8, 1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 4:20-21

Topics: "Divine Law vs. Human Law", "Love for Neighbor"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the profound implications of the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, exploring its true spirit and the consequences of both obedience and disobedience. He argues that genuine adherence to this law fosters individual and collective happiness, while its violation leads to misery and injustice. Finney highlights the distinction between divine law and human laws, asserting that true morality transcends mere legal compliance and requires a heart aligned with God's principles. He calls for restitution in cases of wrongdoing, underscoring that without repentance and restitution, forgiveness cannot be granted. Ultimately, Finney urges believers to reflect on their lives in light of God's law, advocating for a radical transformation in how they conduct their affairs.

Transcript

Text.--Matt. 22:39: And the second (commandment) is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

In continuing the discussion of this subject, I design to show:

- I. THE REAL SPIRIT AND MEANING OF THIS COMMANDMENT.
- II. ITS TENDENCY, AND THE NATURAL RESULTS OF PERFECT AND UNIVERSAL OBEDIENCE.
- III. THE TENDENCY AND NATURAL RESULTS OF UNIVERSAL DISOBEDIENCE.
- IV. THAT IT IS THE UNIVERSAL AND UNALTERABLE RULE OF RIGHT.
- V. WHEREIN IT DIFFERS FROM HUMAN LAWS.
- VI. THAT EVERY VIOLATION OF THIS RULE IS FRAUD AND INJUSTICE.
- VII. THAT THE PUBLIC, AND TO A GREAT EXTENT, THE PRIVATE CONSCIENCE IS FORMED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF COMMERCIAL JUSTICE.

VIII. THAT THE TRANSACTION OF BUSINESS UPON PRINCIPLES OF COMMERCIAL JUSTICE MERELY, IS A VIOLATION OF THE LAW--REBELLION AGAINST GOD--AND IN A PROFESSOR OF RELIGION, IS REAL APOSTACY.

IX. THAT RESTITUTION MUST BE MADE, WHENEVER RESTITUTION IS PRACTICABLE, IN ALL CASES WHERE THIS LAW IS VIOLATED, OR THERE IS NO FORGIVENESS.

I. I am to show the real spirit and meaning of this commandment.

1. I will show what the law prohibits.

(1) It prohibits supreme self-love, or selfishness. In my last lecture, I attempted to show, that the command, "love thy neighbor as thyself," implied, not that we should love our neighbor supremely, as selfish men love themselves; but that we should love ourselves, in the first place, and pursue our happiness, only according to its real value, in the scale of being. But I need not dwell upon this; as it will not probably be doubted, that this precept prohibits supreme self-love.

(2) It prohibits all excessive self-love: (i.e.) every degree of love, that is disproportioned to the relative value of our own happiness.

(3) It prohibits the laying of any practical stress upon any interest, because it is our own.

(4) It prohibits, of course, every degree of ill will, and all those feelings that are necessarily connected with selfishness.

(5) It prohibits apathy and indifference, with regard to the well being of our fellow men.

2. I will show what the law requires.

(1) It requires the practical recognition of the fact, that all men are brethren--that God is the great Parent--the great Father of the universe--that all moral agents, every where, are his children--and that he is interested in the happiness of every individual, according to its relative importance. He is no respecter of persons. But so far as the love of Benevolence is concerned, He loves all moral beings, in proportion to their capacity of receiving, and doing good.

Now the law of God evidently takes all this for granted; and that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth."

(2) It requires that every being, and interest should be regarded and treated, by us, according to its relative value; (i.e.) that we should recognize God's relation to the universe--and our relation to each other--and treat all men as our brethren--as having an inalienable title to our good will, and kind offices--as citizens of the same government--and members of the great family of God.

(3) It requires us to exercise as tender a regard to our neighbor's reputation, interest and well-being, in all respects, as to our own--to be as unwilling to mention his faults, as to have our own mentioned--to hear him slandered, as to be slandered ourselves. In short, he is to be esteemed, by us, as our brother.

(4) It justly reprobates any violation of the great principle of equal love, as rebellion against the whole universe. It is rebellion against God, because it is a rejection of his authority--and selfishness, under any form, is a setting up of our own interests, in opposition to the interests of the universe of God.

II. I am to show the tendency, and natural effect of universal obedience to this law.

1. The tendency and effect of obedience, is to make the obedient individual happy. The state of mind required by the law, is itself happiness. And if there were but one individual who was obedient, he would be happy, for that reason.

2. But, were obedience universal, the tendency and effect would be the greatest sum of public happiness. Public happiness is made up of the happiness of individuals. Now, as I have said, the universal exercise of the spirit of this law, would make any individual who exercised it, happy. Furthermore, universal obedience implies, that everyone is engaged in making others happy; so that the aggregate amount of happiness, would be made up, not only by the happiness which each one would experience, by conformity to the law; but to this must be added, the vast amount of good from each one endeavoring to make all around them happy.

3. It would destroy all selfish competition among men, and, consequently, all that brood of infernal passions, and all the great and crying evils, that are the legitimate offspring of selfish competition.

4. It would promote a benevolent competition, that would greatly increase public and individual happiness. Take an illustration. Suppose two book-sellers to be actuated by principles of pure benevolence, and one of them should print an edition of the Bible, with a design of furnishing the book, to every person, at as cheap a rate as possible, from motives of pure benevolence. Now suppose the other could print a cheaper edition, equally valuable, and could thus supply the poor with the bread of life, at a still cheaper rate. Now would not the first of these rejoice in the fact, that the Bibles were afforded at this low rate, even if he should never sell his own? The great object that he had in view, (i.e.) to supply the poor with Bibles, is accomplished, and in a better manner than he could do it himself. And it is easy to see, that in this, he would heartily rejoice.

So with the American, and British and Foreign Bible Societies. Suppose them to vie with each other, in furnishing the world with Bibles, at the lowest possible rate. Now, their object being the same, each would rejoice to be outdone by the other. Thus the competition would be holy, and not selfish. And instead of engendering every infernal passion, it would increase "that love which is the bond of perfectness."

It is easy to see, that perfect obedience to this law, would create a perfect state of society; and for any community to live together, in conformity to this principle, would be heaven itself.

III. I am to show the tendency, and natural results of disobedience.

1. It would cause individual misery, because selfishness is misery. And to say nothing of the internal war and mutiny, that selfishness creates in the mind, it is misery, because it can never be gratified. From the very nature of the case, there could be but one selfish being in the universe, gratified. Nor even one; for did he possess all actual and existing good--did he possess all that is to be possessed--and govern all that are to be governed, instead of satisfying him, it would only "enlarge his desires as hell."

2. It would produce the greatest sum of public misery. Public misery is made up of the misery of the individuals who compose the public. Now each of these is miserable in the exercise of his own selfishness. And where selfishness is universal, and unrestrained, each one is engaged in making all around him miserable. In this state of things, every evil passion would be generated--perpetuated--increased--and perfected. And universal grasping after each other's

possessions, would produce universal war. Indeed, it would result in universal hell.

IV. I am to show, that it is the universal and unalterable rule of right.

Because it is founded in the nature and relations of moral beings.

It is universal, because it is entirely suited to the nature of moral beings, in whatever world they may exist.

It is unalterable, because the nature of moral beings is unalterable. And as their nature is unalterable, so are their relations, of course. While these natures and relations exist, even God himself has no right to abrogate this law. He has created these natures, and established these relations; and while they exist, this law must exist, of course.

And here let me say, that any system of religion--any pretended revelation--any scheme of doctrine, that sets aside, repeals, or alters this law, is certainly from hell. No proof can sustain the claims of such a book, or scheme of doctrine, to be a revelation from God.

V. I am to show, wherein it differs from human laws.

And let me begin by saying, that it is one of the first principles of common law, that whatever is contrary to the law of God is not law, (i.e.) is not obligatory upon men. So that the difference between human laws, and the law of God, is not that they are contrary, the one to the other, for, properly speaking, any human enactment, that is contrary to the law of God, is, after all, not law.

The difference lies in the fact, that human laws do not require enough. Their requirements are good, so far as they go, and should be strictly obeyed. But as they fall short of the requirements of God's law, they may be strictly obeyed, without one particle of virtue, or holiness. But to be more particular, I remark,

1. That human laws are of a negative character. They are designed to prohibit outbreking selfishness; and although they are said, by legal writers, to command what is right, and prohibit what is wrong, yet it will be seen, on close examination, that they are far from prohibiting all that is wrong. And that, in no case, do they require what God's law esteems to be really right. In their prohibitions, they necessarily stop short, at the outward act, without pretending to judge, or restrain the thoughts and affections of the mind, any farther than as they are developed in the outward actions. So that, in every case, all that constitutes the real moral character of the crime, may exist in any mind, without being recognized as a crime by any human law. The moral character lies in the disposition of the mind. But if this disposition be not acted out, human laws take no cognizance of it.

2. They only prohibit outward acts of selfishness, or the open violation of other men's rights, and do not require even outward benevolence. They leave every man to be as selfish as he will, provided he restrains his selfish conduct within certain limits. Now it is easy to see, that all this falls entirely short of the spirit and letter of the law of God.

3. The law of God is positive. It not only restrains outward, but all inward selfishness. It not only prohibits outward selfish acts, but the inward selfish thoughts and feelings. It regards the outward act as crime, and deserving of punishment, only because it is the result of the inward feelings and affections of the mind. Hence, it aims its prohibitions at the heart, and spreads out its claims over all the movements of the mind.

4. It commands perfect inward and outward benevolence. (i.e.) not only that men should not hate each other, but should love each other as they do themselves--that they should not only abstain from injuring one another, but should positively engage in promoting each other's happiness, to the extent of their ability.

5. Another difference is, that perfect obedience to human laws, would not necessarily secure one particle of happiness. It would only lessen the amount of misery. As we have just seen, there might be perfect obedience to human laws, and yet supreme selfishness exist in every mind. So that perfect obedience, to the wisest and best of human enactments, may consist with a vast amount of individual and public misery.

But, on the other hand, perfect and universal obedience to the law of God, as we have seen, would secure the greatest amount of individual, and public happiness.

VI. I am to show, that every violation of this rule is fraud, and injustice.

1. Because this is the only rule of right. Remember that it is not by human law, but by his own law, that God will judge the world. The question is not, what is fraud, and dishonesty, in the light of human laws; but what is real fraud--what is real injustice? This can only be known, by a reference to the law of God. And every violation of this rule wears upon its front the seal of God's eternal reprobation. It is not enough, in the light of the law of God, that you abstain from trespassing upon your neighbor's possessions. If you do not actually love him, and love him as you do yourself, you as actually invade his rights and deny him that which is his due, as if you should steal his property. He has as absolute a right to your equal love, as he has to any article of property, which he may have in possession. And you have no more right to withhold the one, than to take the other. You are as much bound to consult his interest, in your dealings with him, as your own; and he has as actual a right to expect you to consult his interests, as well as to consult your own, as he has to expect that you will not steal his money. And to omit the former, is as absolute fraud, and injustice, as to do the latter.

Every violation of this law is injustice, fraud, and dishonesty towards God, and toward every individual in the universe. It is setting aside the rights, and authority of God, and trampling upon the rights of our neighbor. And as all mankind are one family, and have one common interest, to defraud one, is to injure the whole.

VII. I am to show, that the public, and private conscience, is formed on the principles of commercial justice.

By the principles of commercial justice, I mean mere human laws, in relation to human dealings.

In proof of this position, I observe, that men generally satisfy themselves with acting legally, and at most equitably. But the courts, both of law and equity, lay down rules for the government of human conduct, as we have seen, that fall entirely short of the law of God.

By the public and individual conscience being formed on the principles of commercial justice, I do not mean that men are always satisfied, with mere obedience to human laws, for this is far from being true; and many a man feels, in his conscience, what an elder in a Presbyterian church once said to me, "that he was avoiding the payment of his debts, by the public sale of his property, through the finesse of the law."

The truth is, that men often feel as if they were guilty, in the sight of God, when they have acted in strict conformity with human laws. Nevertheless, it is true, to an astonishing, and alarming extent, that men

generally, and even professors of religion, content themselves with transacting business in conformity with the principles of human laws.

VIII. I am to show, that the transaction of business upon principles of commercial justice merely, is a violation of this law--rebellion against God--and in a professor of religion is real apostacy.

1. Because it is setting aside the law of God, and establishing another rule of action.

2. It is a total rejection of the divine authority.

3. This self-constituted rule, with which we blind our mind, and stifle our conscience, only restrains selfishness within certain limits, while it is consistent with the deepest selfishness of heart. Who does not know that the principles of commercial justice are established, to regulate the selfish transaction of business. They are instituted by selfish men, for selfish purposes; (i.e.) they are so framed, as to aid every man, in securing all his selfish ends, so far as is consistent with a certain degree of respect for the selfish pursuits of others.

Now if casting off God's authority be rebellion in any individual, as it really is; in a professor of religion it must be outrageous apostacy.

Obedience to God's law is the rejection of all selfishness, and the practical adoption of the principle of universal benevolence. For any individual, therefore, to engage in selfish business, is a total departure from God. And it includes in it, all that really constitutes apostacy.

And what is still worse, it adds shameless hypocrisy to apostasy; for while men really apostatize in heart, instead of openly avowing, as in all honesty they ought to do, their rejection of the law of God, they remain in the Church, and keep up a hypocritical show of obedience.

IX. I am to show, that restitution must be made in all practicable cases where this law has been violated, or there is no forgiveness.

This is evident from the fact, that without restitution there can be no repentance. Certainly, in no proper sense, can a man be said to repent, who has defrauded his neighbor, and refuses to make him the satisfaction that is in his power. But without repentance, God has no right to forgive. What would you say, if the governor should forgive a man who had stolen your money, while he refused to restore it. He has no right to do this; nor has God any right to forgive fraud, and injustice, without repentance and restitution. It would, therefore, dishonor God, and ruin the universe, should he connive at your sins, and not hold you bound to restore your ill-gotten gains.

Now I beseech you to remember, that the restitution demanded of you, is not merely where you have defrauded men at common law, but in every case, so far as you can remember where you have not acted agreeably to the law of God. Wherever you have not consulted your neighbor's interest, equally with your own, in your business transactions, you have been guilty of fraud. God's law has pronounced that transaction dishonest, and unjust, and has aimed its eternal thunders at your head.

REMARKS.

1. The Church can compel the world to transact business upon the principles of the law of God. The Church members often excuse themselves, in the transaction of their worldly business, by saying, that

they cannot compete with worldly men, without dealing upon the same principles with them. To this I answer,

(1) That if this were true, then worldly business cannot be engaged in, by men, without absolute ruin to their souls.

(2) But this is not true. It is as far from the truth as possible. Now suppose that professors of religion were universally to transact their business upon the principles of the law of God--consulting, in every instance, the real good of those with whom they deal, as much as they do their own. This would immediately result, in their doing the entire business of the world, or in compelling worldly men to follow their example; for who would trade with a selfish man, who would consult only his own interest, while those were at hand, with whom he might trade with the assurance, that he should not be over-reached, but that the business would be transacted upon principles of entire benevolence?

2. Almost any individual of any calling, may compel those in the same business to conduct their affairs upon the principles of God's law. Let him but adopt this principle, in his own dealings, and he would soon force others to come to the same standard, or drive them to bankruptcy, through loss of business.

3. You can see the desert of every act of selfishness--that it includes in it the entire rejection of the authority of God--and a trampling upon the rights of the universe. In this there is certainly infinite guilt, and the desert of eternal punishment.

4. You see what is the duty of God in relation to selfishness--that as the Father, and Supreme Executive Magistrate of the Universe, he is bound to punish it in every case, with unsparing severity, where there is not repentance.

5. That the government of God is very little understood in this world. And human law, instead of the law of God, has come to be very generally regarded as the rule of right. This has blinded the world, and the Church, in regard to what real religion is. So that much passes current, among men, for true religion, that is, after all, an entire violation of the law of God. Multitudes in the Christian Church, are regarded as pious men, who are daily transacting business upon principles of entire selfishness.

6. Infidels are always fighting a shadow, and making war, not upon Christianity itself, but on something else falsely called by this name. Where can an infidel be found, who will have the hardihood to object to these two great principles of the government of God? But these constitute the whole of the Christian religion. It is then some corrupt dogma of the Church--the lives of hypocrites--and a spurious representation of the Christian religion, against which they array themselves. But let them march up and object any thing, if they can, to the Christian religion, as it is taught in the Bible; and to the government of God, as it is embodied in these two precepts.

7. You see why there is so little conviction, among men, both in and out of the Church. It is because they judge themselves by a false standard. If they live in conformity with human laws, and keep up the morality of public sentiment, they feel in a great measure secure. But be assured that God will judge you by another standard.

8. In the light of this law, how perfectly obvious is it, that slavery is from hell. Is it possible, that we are to be told, that slavery is a divine institution? What! such a barefaced, shameless, and palpable violation of the law of God authorized by God himself? And even religious teachers, gravely contending that the Bible

sanctions this hell-begotten system ?

"O shame, where is thy blush?" What! make a man a slave--set aside his moral agency--treat him as a mere piece of property--

"Chain him--and task him,

And exact his sweat, with stripes

That Mercy, with a bleeding heart, weeps

When she sees inflicted on a beast;"

and then contend that this is in keeping with the law of God, which, on pain of death, requires that every man should love his neighbor as himself! This is certainly, to my mind, one of the most monstrous and ridiculous assertions ever made. It is no wonder that slaveholders are opposed to the discussion of this subject. It cannot bear the light--it retires from the gaze, and inspection, and reprobation of the law of God, as darkness retires before the light.

9. We see the true character of those speculations in provisions, and in the necessaries of life, with which the land is becoming filled. The custom of buying up the necessaries of life, so as to control the market, and raise the price of provisions, while there is an abundance of them in the country, is a plain and manifest violation of the law of God.

Suppose there were a famine in this land, and a multitude of vessels should be freighted with flour, and sail from Europe to supply the starving population. Suppose the owners to instruct their captains to sell it for five dollars per barrel. And now, suppose certain speculators in New York should receive advices of the arrival of the fleet upon our coast--they charter a boat, and go out and purchase all the flour. And when the fleet comes in sight, the docks, and every passage in the city is thronged with starving people, with their bags, and whatever money they can command to supply their starving families. But on the fleet's coming to anchor, they are informed, that the speculator demands seventy-five dollars per barrel for the flour. In this case, no doubt, the public would set the seal of reprobation, on such an outrage. But how does this differ, in principle, from that which is becoming so common, even among professed Christians, to secure as far as possible, and so as by all means to control the market, the bread stuffs, and to a great extent, the other provisions, throughout the length and breadth of the land, and then enrich themselves, by selling them at their own prices? Is this loving their neighbor, or is it supreme and horrible selfishness?

In speaking of this speculation in provisions, I have taken it for granted, that they were not in reality scarce; but merely rendered so by speculators controlling the market. But suppose they were really scarce; suppose that a great drought, such as we have had the past summer, should extend throughout the whole land, and produce a universal scarcity of provisions. In this case, it is contrary to the law of God, for those who have them to spare, to increase their price, simply because they are scarce. I say simply because they are scarce, for cases may occur, in which the raising of them may have cost more than in ordinary seasons. I have, for many years, known one man, of whom it is said, that he has practically recognized the principle of the government of God, in his transactions upon this point. When there has been a scarcity of provisions, and of course the prices were greatly increased, he would receive no more than the common prices of articles, when there was no scarcity. If questioned, in regard to the reasons of his conduct, he would simply answer, that they cost him no more than formerly, and what his family did not

want, the consumers might have at former prices.

Now the corrupt maxim of business men is this, that an article is worth all that it will bring in market; and they will cause it to bring in market just what the necessities of people may compel them to give. So that if the scarcity of an article will permit, they make no conscience of demanding any price for it. Now the real question should not be, what, under the circumstances, may you compel a man to give; but what did it cost, and how cheap can you afford it to him, without injuring yourself more than you will benefit him? For it should be borne in mind, that the law of love requires, that we should afford every thing as cheap as we can, instead of getting as much as we can. The requirement is, that we do all the good we can, to others, and not that we get all we can ourselves. The law of God is, sell as cheap as you can--the business maxim, as dear as you can.

But suppose it should be asked, by what rule am I to be governed, in the sale of an article, when, in the purchase of it, I gave more than it has since proved to be worth? I answer, the loss is yours. You have no right to sell it, or to expect to sell it, for more than its real value, whatever price you may have paid for it.

But here another question may arise. What is the duty of the individual who sold me the property, for so much more than it afterwards proved to be worth? I answer, that he is bound to act upon the law of love. And if, at the time of the purchase, you and he were both deceived, with regard to the real value, he has a right to receive of you no more than the real ascertained value. But if he will insist upon the wrong, and compel you to pay what you agreed to pay, or not refund what you have already paid, you are, nevertheless, bound to be governed by the law of love, in the sale, and not to ask, or receive, more than its real value.

To illustrate this, suppose that you had purchased a piece of land, under the impression that it contained a mine of gold--that it was sold to you in good faith, both you and the seller supposing that this was the matter of fact. If, afterwards, it should prove that you were deceived--that no such mine existed--and that, therefore, the land is of no more value than any other land, it were contrary to the law of God, for him to insist upon the fulfillment of this bargain--and that you should pay what, under the circumstances, you had agreed to pay.

10. You see the character of those speculations in government lands, that have become so common. The government proposes to sell their lands to those who will improve them, for one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre, designing thereby to encourage the settlement of the country. But speculators rush forth, and purchase all the most eligible locations, and raise the price, and thus retard the settlement of the country. When the laborer, who would cultivate the land, with a small amount of means, comes, he finds that, instead of being able to purchase at the government prices, he must pay ten, twenty, thirty or even one hundred dollars per acre; and that, too, when no improvement has been made by the speculator.

Now it is in vain to attempt to justify this, as some have done, by saying that those lands are really worth what the speculator demands for them. Suppose they are; what right has he to demand that price? He did not design to cultivate the land; and but for him, the laborer might have had it at the government price. Now the violation of the principles of God's law, in this case, is just as manifest, as it would be if my family were starving for a barrel of flour, and I was on the point of purchasing it for five dollars--all the money I had--and a speculator, knowing my circumstances, should forestall me, and buy the barrel, and then demand seventy-five dollars for it; and should say to me, "O sir, it is worth that to you." True, it may be worth that, rather than that my family should starve. But I ask, what right had he to purchase it, and then

make this demand?

But for all this, there are many hypocritical excuses urged. Many pretend to be making money for God. This is truly a strange manner of serving God; to rob his children to give to him--to violate the law of God--to set aside God's authority, for the sake of making money for him.

But, as a general thing, this is a mere pretense; for it is seen to be true, that, in proportion as the speculators grow rich, they increase their expenditures, until men of the greatest wealth, are among the first to complain of poverty, when called upon to give. Now they can never convince mankind, that they are honest, in pretending to be driving their speculations for God, until it is seen, as a matter of fact, that they do not increase their expenditures with the growth of their property, and lay out this money upon their lusts; but that they really appropriate it to benevolent purposes.

But if it were true, as it sometimes may be, that they really intend to appropriate money, obtained in this way, to build up the kingdom of God, still the manner of getting it can never be justified, by the law of God, and can never be acceptable in his sight. Will the end sanctify the means?

11. Much restitution is to be made by speculators, or they must go to hell. Those that have enriched themselves, by speculations that involved a violation of the law of love, must give back all their ill-gotten gains--must renounce their wealth, and render obedience to the government of God or they must be damned.

12. It is very obvious, that many persons have involved themselves in a snare, from which probably they never will escape. They plunged into a series of speculations, and at the time, no doubt, were so blinded by public sentiment, that its utter inconsistency with the law of God, was not seen; and now, when the test is applied, and the law comes to pour its light upon them, they will either hide away in darkness, and strive to conceal the true character of their conduct even from their own eyes; or, seeing it, they will "go away sorrowful, because they have great possessions," and will not make the restitution that the law of God demands.

13. In the light of this subject, you can easily judge what kinds of business are lawful. And that for any person to engage in selling articles that are injurious, is rebellion against God, and a trampling upon the rights of the universe. Such is the sale of alcohol, tobacco and narcotics of every kind, that are used as articles of luxury, or diet. Their sale for these purposes is utterly unlawful. It is no excuse, to say that people will have them, and that you may as well sell them as any body else. I beseech you to remember the words of the Savior: "It is impossible but that offences should come; but woe unto HIM through whom they come."

14. It is objected, that the adoption of this principle, in the present state of human society, is impossible. To this I reply,

(1) That it is the law of God, and must be adopted, and practiced by you, or you must be damned.

(2) It is the simplest, and most practicable rule of conduct conceivable. To a selfish mind, I grant, it may be a stumbling block; but to a truly benevolent mind, it is, in almost all cases, as plain as sun-light. In those cases where individuals do really love each other, as they love themselves--as husbands and wives, parents and children, do they find any difficulty in the application of this rule? No. And should they extend their benevolent regards to all mankind, and did all mankind recognize their relations to each other, and

regard themselves as one family, this rule would be found to be of the easiest application.

15. It is objected, that its application would overturn nearly all the business transactions of the world. It would certainly revolutionize nearly all the business of the world, and produce changes in the state of society, that to most people is wholly inconceivable. As business is now transacted, the more business, the more jealousy, envy, and strife. But were all men really benevolent, they would universally vie with each other, in seeing who could accomplish the greatest good, and produce the greatest amount of human happiness.

16. I said that the government of God was very little understood, in this world. Now it is plain, that a leading object of Jesus Christ, was to put the world in possession of the true spirit and meaning of the law of God. It is astonishing to see how slow of heart, a selfish mind is, to understand the law of God, and the nature of true religion. For a mind, whose whole object is to get, and appropriate to itself all it can, it is difficult to conceive of the nature of that religion which finds its happiness in giving, instead of getting.

The preaching of Christ, but more especially his example, put his followers in possession of the idea, "that it is more blessed to give than to receive." The life of Christ was designed as an illustration of this cardinal principle, that the proper happiness of a moral agent lies in doing good--in denying self, for the benefit of others. In diffusing happiness, it finds its own happiness.

Now the Apostles and early Christians, caught this same idea--preached it--carried it out in living illustration before the world--and it was soon said of them, that they had "turned the world upside down."

If I mistake not, an infidel writer has somewhere attempted to account for the rapid spread of Christianity, in the Apostles' days, by saying, that "it was the natural result of the spirit and conduct of the primitive Christians. They gave themselves up to acts of benevolence, and in laboring for the good of others." Now this is true, and it is also true, that the natural result of this would be, powerfully to influence mankind, in favor of Christianity. But how could he overlook the fact, that such a spirit and temper must be divine?

It is true, as a modern writer has said, that "the Church now, is the exact contrast of the primitive Church." Primitive Christians rushed forth, at the hazard of their lives, and millions of them sacrificed their lives without hesitation, for the salvation of the world. They were seen denying themselves, and offering themselves upon the altar of benevolence, for the salvation of those who were perishing in sin.

But for centuries, selfishness has been the most prominent feature of the Church. And instead of sacrificing herself for the salvation of men, she is sacrificing the world, to gratify her own lusts.

17. It is naturally impossible that a selfish Church should ever succeed in converting the world. They cannot possibly make the world understand the gospel. The light which they hold up is darkness. Their "salt has lost its savor"--their benevolence is selfishness--their religion is rebellion against God. Suppose Jesus Christ had come, as the Jews expected, as a great temporal prince--living, and reigning in mighty earthly splendor--overawing and subduing the nations--and exterminating his enemies by the sword. Could he, by any precepts whatever, have put the world in possession of the true spirit of religion? Could they have possibly received from him the idea of what constitutes obedience to the law of God? Certainly not. Nor could the Apostles, and primitive Christians, have possibly possessed the world with the right idea of religion, in any other manner, than by offering themselves up a living sacrifice for their salvation. And never can the world be converted--never can missionary enterprises succeed, until true religion is taught in the lives of its professors--until benevolence, and not selfishness, is exhibited by the Church.

18. I beg of you to remember, that this law is to be the rule of judgment, by which all the secrets of your heart, and soul, and life, shall be judged. Do therefore, I beseech you, bring yourselves to the true test--examine yourselves by this rule--decide your former life, and your present character, by inspecting it in the light of this law. You have never embraced the gospel, any further than you are under the practical influence of the law of God. The gospel was designed to annihilate selfishness--to produce true obedience. If it does not produce this result in you, you are lost forever.

Now will you go down on your knees--will you open your heart before God--will you spread this discourse before him--will you be honest, in deciding upon the real character of your business transactions--of your daily life, and walk, and spirit?

Now I urge this upon you, at the conclusion of every lecture, for these truths must be to you "a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death." I beseech you, do not cover up your sins, nor try to avoid the light. It will do you no good to cavil. Truth is truth, whether you receive it or not. And I pray God that you may receive it, so that your whole body, soul, and spirit, may be sanctified through the truth, and preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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