

The Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of True Christianity

by Charles Finney

The sermon explores the joy that motivated Christ's sacrifices and defines true Christianity as self-denial for the good of others.

Scripture: Matthew 16:25, John 15:13, Philippians 2:3, Hebrews 12:2

Topics: "True Christianity", "Self-Sacrifice"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that the joy set before Christ was not for His own salvation or glory, but for the redemption and eternal joy of humanity. He argues that true Christianity embodies the spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to the good of others, mirroring Christ's own dedication to His mission. Finney asserts that nothing less than this selfless mindset can be considered real Christianity, as it aligns with the highest good of being and prepares believers for the joys of heaven. He encourages Christians to embrace this spirit, as true happiness is found in self-denial and serving others, just as Christ did. Ultimately, Finney calls for a deep understanding of Christ's purpose to fully grasp the essence of Christianity.

Transcript

"Who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." Hebrews 12:2.

These words are spoken of Jesus Christ. They stand in the following connection. "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

To develop fully the sentiment of our text, I will consider

I. WHAT THIS JOY SET BEFORE CHRIST WAS NOT.

II. WHAT IT WAS.

III. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE STATE OF MIND HERE DESCRIBED.

IV. SHOW THAT NOTHING SHORT OF THIS IS REAL CHRISTIANITY.

I. This joy is not the joy of his own personal salvation. Christ did not undertake this great work for the sake of saving his own soul, and hence the joy in prospect was not the joy of being himself saved from ruin. It is most manifest from the whole Bible that the object which Christ had in view was not his own good.

2. Neither was it his own glory. He every where insists that he does not seek his own glory, and that in this respect his course was directly contrasted with that of the Jews "who sought honor of one another."

II. What then was the joy set before him? I answer, it was the great good to be secured, and the satisfaction to be found in securing it. He saw a world to be redeemed, out of whom a great multitude which no man can number could be actually saved. He saw the blessedness that would accrue to them eternally from this salvation. He saw the augmented joy of the heavenly hosts in their rescue and in their eternal joy; and He saw how his Father rejoiced in reclaiming the lost; these joys set before him were enough to make his cross sweet and the shame of it a mere trifle.

III. What is implied in this state of mind.

1. Consecration to the good of being, a real devotion of one's self to this object.

2. A single eye to this end. Persons are never satisfied and filled with joy in view of an object unless their hearts are fully set upon it, and set upon it evermore in proportion to the value of that object. Our joy in any object will depend very much upon the singleness of eye with which the end is sought.

3. The end must be chosen for its own sake. This must be a condition of our receiving joy in any object that we choose it for what it is in itself. It must be a good object; an object the attainment of which is naturally adapted to give us joy. Then let it be sought earnestly and sincerely, and its pursuit will not disappoint us. The Bible represents Christ as having set his heart on this great end of securing the good of others.

IV. Nothing short of this state of mind, possessed and manifested by Jesus Christ, is real Christianity. Nothing else than this is the spirit of Jesus Christ; and we have the highest authority for saying that "if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his," and can not have any real religion. If we would understand what Christianity is, we must understand what Christ is. It is plain that we can never understand Christianity only as we understand Jesus Christ. He is the great and perfect embodiment of real Christianity. Hence to know Christianity we must know Christ--must know his ends and his means for attaining those ends. Now it is certain, as we have seen, that his end was the highest good of being. Hence nothing else than this can be Christianity.

Again, nothing short of this is intrinsically right. Nothing short and nothing else can satisfy the demands of the intelligence. We know it to be essentially and necessarily right that all beings--even the Deity himself, should devote themselves to this end. We know that we,--and that all our race ought to consecrate ourselves to this end sincerely and supremely. Hence nothing less, and nothing else than this can be real Christianity.

Nothing short of this can prepare us for heaven. How could we receive joy in the employments of heaven unless we are prepared for it by sympathy with their great ends and objects? Who does not know that there must be interest felt in an end before its attainment can give us joy? How then could even heaven be agreeable to us only as our hearts are set upon those objects, the attainment of which makes heaven

blissful to its inhabitants?

The Spirit of Christ will naturally manifest itself in all men as it did in Christ himself. Why should it not? Why should not the same spirit manifest itself in the same forms and modes?

Hence when persons have set their hearts upon the same object as Christ set his heart upon, they will count all things else but trifles in order to attain this. They will cheerfully make any sacrifices and count them mere trifles, enduring the cross, and despising the shame, as if all or either were matters of small account in view of an object so valuable. Who does not know that when men have a worldly fortune in view, they carry out this principle to its full extent? How many will tear themselves away from all the social endearments and comforts of home and go to California for gold, encountering hardships without number and perils of almost every sort, and yet they shrink not, because the object before them is so attractive and their hearts are so earnestly set upon it. We often see worldly men set their hearts so strongly upon some favorite object that they make no account of the greatest sacrifices. In the same manner, it was perfectly natural for Christ in his state of mind to endure the cross despising the shame. No hardships could discourage, no perils could daunt, no scorn could deter him; for his great end seemed too glorious, so precious, there was nothing so forbidding that he would not endure for the sake of securing it.

Often when you are thinking of his self-denials and sacrifices you ask yourself, How can this be? What motive could have induced such a course of life and of suffering? But when you get your eye upon his state of mind and see the deep love of his heart for the souls of men, all is explained. It is perfectly in accordance with a law of our mind that we count everything else of trifling value compared with the one great end upon which the heart is set. Who has not experienced at least some degree of this? When your heart has been set upon some great worldly good--property, a valued companion for life,--some post of honor and emolument, you have not deemed it a great thing to labor and toil and make many sacrifices. How many count it no great hardship to labor and toil their life long to secure a competence for themselves and their families.

Now with this universal law of mind in view, consider the great end which Christ placed before himself. You can now understand his devotion to this great end; his readiness to make sacrifices for its attainment; you see how he could despise all the shame and endure all the pains, never shrinking for one moment from anything whatever which he had to encounter.

Now let any man have the same end in view that Christ had and he too will account all things but loss for such an object. Self-denial will be as easy and natural as a second nature. By the very laws of our mind, it is sweet to deny ourselves of a lesser good for the sake of a greater. Husbands and wives deem it no hardship to deny themselves of positive good for each other's benefit, the pleasure of giving scope to their deep and pure affection for each other readily overbalances and throws into the shade all the hardships they may be called to endure for each other's welfare. That mother will labor till her strength is gone that she may meet the wants of the children she loves. That father will toil till he is bent and worn with years and many infirmities--so does the love of his household fill his heart, and make toil for them a daily pleasure. The fond mother will toil over her washtub year after year to educate her son at college, until at last, he comes forth a young man of promise, and she says--"I am more than paid for all my sacrifices and all my toils." You might perhaps have entered her humble dwelling at some hour when most ladies are at leisure, but you find her over her wash-tub. You accost her--"Madam, I am indeed sorry that you have so hard a lot--that you are doomed to such and so much labor." "Are you indeed," she replies; "I am glad of it. I enjoy it. There you see my dear children educating themselves I trust for God, and to serve their

generation according to the will of God and it is my daily joy to toil and suffer if need be for such an object. I can endure any cross and despise any shame for their sakes." You, my hearers, have seen exemplifications of this principle even among yourselves. It may have occurred to you as it has often to me that such cases develop the same spirit which we see in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, "who for the joy set before him, endured the cross despising the shame." It is only what we always see when the mind lays hold of the great end that God lays hold of. Then men can not grudge the sacrifices they may be called to make, however great, or frequent, or long protracted, any more than God does.

REMARKS.

1. True Christians need no appeal to their selfishness or to their self-interest to secure their highest exertions. You need not urge them to deeds of charity that they may be seen by men; not implicate their good name in any way, and the reason is, they sympathize with Christ. They have a single eye to the same end which He sought. Hence they do not ask as many others do--"Who is the Lord, that we should obey his voice?" or "What profit shall we have" if we give anything for his cause? You need only place before them the good to be secured; and at once the joy springs up in their hearts, and they use most cheerfully the means to secure the good contemplated.

2. True Christians enjoy everybody's good things. There is no such thing as robbing them of happiness. If they see anyone else enjoying good, they are always sure of being blessed in it and by it, themselves. They rejoice in their neighbor's happiness and welfare as much as in their own. So long as souls are converted and blessed, they are blessed in it and rejoice over it. They will rejoice as long as God is honored and glorified. They sympathize in his infinite joy; hence, they can never be unhappy while God exists in all the fulness of his infinite blessedness.

3. Those who have the same end in view as Christ had, will have happiness similar to his. Those who sympathize with Christ can not fail of Christ's happiness. While Christ lives, they will live. While Christ rejoices, they will rejoice. If Christ rejoices in the joy of his Father, so will they. Hence their happiness, like that of Christ, is forever interlinked with that of the infinite God. While his great ends are promoted, they will rejoice exceedingly. Why? Because this is what they most of all desire. This meets the most earnest and longing desires of their hearts. Hence, just so certainly as God is not disappointed, they will have joy. Let them know that God's great ends are secured, and their cup of joy is full. They sympathize with Him, and therefore, they cannot fail of being happy while God lives and remains the same benevolent and blessed being.

4. It is so far from being true that sinners enjoy the good things of others, that in their selfishness they do not half enjoy their own. That sinner never has enough so long as he sees anything enjoyed by others which is not at his command. Haman may be next in honor to the great king, and yet a single Jew sitting at his gate, irreverent, may spoil his enjoyment. So with the selfish sinner always. If there is anything in the universe, not his own, he cannot be happy. Every thing good which he sees must sustain a certain relation to himself, or he can not be happy in view of it, but it rather excites his envy. O how he enlarges his desire as hell, and can not be satisfied! All the good he sees beyond his reach is evil to him. He sees others enjoying it, and this spoils his own enjoyment of what he actually possesses. So restless is he, so anxious, so hungry, so thirsty after everybody else's happiness; so miserable because there are good things within his view which he can not appropriate wholly to himself. Thus he is so far from enjoying other's good things, that the sight of their good, lying beyond his reach, effectually poisons his own. Poor wretched being! Who has such a tide of misery as he? If a benevolent God fills the world with happiness, this very

fact dooms him to misery. How just and fitting that he should be wretched! He has chosen and cultivated the disposition which must make him so forever.

5. Every selfish person is at war with God by his very position and character as selfish. Hence if God secures his ends, the selfish sinner must fail of his. As surely as God succeeds, so surely must his selfish enemies be frustrated. Both can not triumph for the good reason that each party is arrayed against the other, each pursuing opposite and conflicting ends. God would make all beings happy according to their merits--that is, as far as they coincide in spirit and effort with his own ends; but the selfish sinner breaks away from God's plan, and makes it his chief end to bless himself. Of course there can be not harmony;--indeed there can be nothing but eternal opposition between God and all selfish beings. Hence, as I said, if God carries his point, the selfish must certainly fail of carrying theirs. While eternity endures, the selfish may hunger and lust after good; but they must forever hunger and lust in vain.

6. True Christians find their life by sacrificing it. They find their bread by throwing it on the waters;--it comes to them after many days. Their own highest well-being they secure by laying their souls and their all upon the altar. Jesus Christ set them an example. He did not come to our world to please Himself. No; He came to do the will of his Father in heaven. In thus living to please God and secure the good of being, sacrificing even his own life for this end, He saved his life in the noblest sense. By self-denial He obtained the highest possible good to Himself.

This is the very nature of all benevolence. It gives away, to make its own rich, immortal gain. Its profits are always in the ratio of its expenditures. True Christians save their lives by sacrificing them for God. Christ said--"He that will save his life shall lose it, and he that shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it." It is remarkable to see what an illustration we have in the life of Christ, of the truth and the meaning of this doctrine which He taught.

7. Sinners sometimes lose their lives by trying selfishly to save them. This result follows by an inevitable law. By grasping at their own good, and by refusing to make any sacrifice, or even any sort of effort purely for other's good, they of course and of necessity lose that at which they do aim.

8. True Christians necessarily enjoy their religion. I am aware that people often talk about enjoying religion in a way which subjects the very idea to scandal. This language is often abused and misunderstood, and as a consequence, the idea is scandalized, and hence some lose sight of the truth that religion must bring its own enjoyment.

I am aware that some make the great mistake of supposing that religion is all emotional, is all a matter of excited feelings; and hence often neglecting what is essential in true religion, and yet talking largely of their enjoying religion, they scandalize the whole subject.

Yet the real truth must forever remain;--religion must be a source of real joy to its possessor. Look at the case of the mother who toils day and night for the education of her children. Ask her how she can endure such a life of toil, and she will tell you, "I enjoy the labor and the toil for the end I have in view." Ask the missionaries. You may suppose that their whole life is misery--that their numerous self-denials and sacrifices must make them wretched; but if you think so, you have made one of the greatest mistakes. These self-denials and sacrifices constitute their revenue and income of daily happiness.

To illustrate this, let me refer to a young lady who had left home, friends and country to go to the heathen, and who, the next morning after leaving port at New York, makes this entry in her private journal: "On

rising this morning found that we were fairly out at sea, out of sight of land. Felt ready to give three cheers."

So, many would think that the life of Christ must have been full of sorrow; but no; few ever enjoyed so much even in this life as He;--nay, more, we are safe in saying that as none ever carried out so perfectly the law of self-sacrifice for others' good, so none ever enjoyed so much of the real bliss of benevolence. In accordance with this, we hear Him say--"I have meat to eat that ye know not of." You recollect the remarkable circumstances under which this was said. Traveling in midday on foot over the hill country of Judea and Samaria, He came, weary and worn, to Jacob's well, and sat down to rest Himself there. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. The benevolent heart of the weary one felt for her spiritual welfare, and prompted efforts for her good. He spake to her of the waters of life--of the pure and spiritual Being who should be worshipped in Spirit and in truth. His tenderness and sympathy won her heart; his doctrine and his wonderful bearing convinced her that this must be her Messiah; she called her neighbors, and many seem to have been converted there. So soon did the benevolent efforts and sacrifices of Christ bring forth their fruit in the salvation of souls. Hence, though faint with hunger and toil, He could say--"I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Such labors and results really refreshed his soul, and He seems to have forgotten that He was hungry.

This is just like all true religion. It forgets its own labors and self-denials. You may go and talk to the Christian of his labors and of his self-denials, and pity him; but you don't understand his case. He is the last man to think of his toils or to pity himself. Look at the men who go to the wilds of the far West. You say to them, Brethren, you must be very unhappy; how could you bear to leave your mother and your dear brothers and sisters? They reply--You do not understand the nature of our work. We have meat to eat that you know not of. We are laboring for Jesus Christ, and He never fails to give us our wages.

A missionary in the remote North West traveled one bitter cold day last winter over ice which was covered mostly with six inches of water. He says, "I froze my feet dreadfully, and suffered more from fatigue and cold than I recollect ever to have suffered before in one day; but I find that these days of greatest sufferings bring me my highest wages. The rich blessedness of divine love fills my soul only the more by how much the more I suffer for his name."

9. Let no man think he is doing the work of the Lord who can not enjoy it, or rather, let no man think he is doing the Lord's work when all his religious duties are like rolling a stone up hill. He needs not flatter himself that he is doing the Lord's work unless this is the very path in which he wants to go. There can be no greater mistake than is made by those who think they have the religion of Jesus Christ, and yet do not enjoy it. The fact is, if they are doing his work they can bear and endure all things for Christ's sake, and find delight in it too. They will not ever be called to suffer as he did in degree, and yet we know that even in his case, the cross was made light by a view of the joy set before him. His dreadful cross was not a small matter in itself considered, but it became small when compared with the great end in view. And so it will be with the Christian.

10. It will always be found true that real Christians make light work of their religion, just in proportion as they make a just estimate of the great ends in view and as they earnestly set their hearts upon those ends. In the same degree as they give themselves up to their work will they find their trials light and their joys abounding.

On the other hand, as they swerve away from God will their trials and crosses seem great and unendurable, and they will feel as if they did not know how to meet their difficulties.

11. Self-indulgent persons are not Christians. The proof that they are not is simple and short;--they are not Christ-like--for "Christ pleased not Himself." And "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

12. The most laborious and self-denying Christians are the most happy. The more sacrifices, honestly made for the good of souls, the more blest in the very deed themselves. Only let his eye be single--let it be in his heart to do all for God, and he can not fail to give the deepest and purest joy in the midst of his toils and sacrifices.

Great mistakes are wont to be made in this matter. Indeed sinners usually make them. Many suppose that to give up all idea of being rich is almost awful. It is a great thing, scarcely to be endured for any consideration. That young man says in his heart, Why should I go and preach and toil for almost nothing, laboring for a very small salary and for a most ungrateful people? Ah indeed! You can not make up your mind to follow in the steps of Him who "had not where to lay his head," and who "came unto his own and his own received Him not." It would involve too many sacrifices! But did you not know that after all, the most devoted and self-sacrificing ministers of Christ, are among the happiest people in the world? You entirely mistake, young man, if you think otherwise. Even when nobody thanks them, God smiles on their souls and all is joy and blessedness within. If nobody else gives to supply their wants, God does. He knows how to supply the great, deep want of the soul for peace and joy, and He is not forgetful to do so towards his faithful, self-denying servants. Ask the faithful missionary of the cross in what portion of his life he has had most satisfaction. You will be told that by how much the more he has sacrificed, by so much the greater is his joy. He will say to you--I love my work; it is good for me to endure the cross, despising the shame. Ask any true missionary--Are you rewarded for your toils and self-denials? He will reply--O if I might see salvation flow to those heathen tribes, it would be my greatest joy. Nothing else could make me so happy. It is the hope of this success and the consciousness of pleasing God in my labors that makes all my toils sweet. Why should I not give myself up to such a work with my utmost might?

13.* Persons who have no true religion are made less happy by what religion they have. Look at such a man. If his heart is not in his work and upon it, he certainly gets no good from it. Let a man preach the gospel who does not love the work, and all is labor without compensation; toil without a redeeming object. But if he loves his work, it sheds a fresh and precious balm over his spirit;--and fills his daily cup with joy.

14.* The most selfish are the most unhappy. The very fact of being selfish is an infinite mistake. If a man keeps his money for selfish purposes, instead of pouring it out bountifully for others' good, he makes the greatest mistake possible. If he thinks to enjoy it most by self-gratification, he does not begin to know what the highest enjoyment is. He could not suppose so if his heart were set upon God's work.

By the very laws of mind, a man is never so much delighted with the disposal of his property as when it goes most directly to promote his most favorite object. He hates to bestow upon objects foreign to his heart's chief desire. Whenever, therefore, you see Christians giving grudgingly, you may know that selfishness is the law of their life. For all men, and of course Christians too, will naturally make most efforts to secure their chief object. Whatever stands highest in their esteem and regard will command the most of their efforts, and of their money. If they are selfish, they will think they can not do better than to lay out their money for self. Hence you will see them constantly shaping all their plans to give little and keep

much. Why, say they, should I not do this thing since it will be for my good? Instead of finding their highest satisfaction in giving, they find it in hoarding.

Did you ever see a miser? If so, you have seen a man who grudged every thing he gave unless the object were to secure property. I knew one in New York. He wore a buckskin coat for his only covering, and as this was never washed, he made an important saving of money on it. He seemed to grudge himself even his necessary food, and to find all the comfort he ever had in hoarding up money. So all-controlling did his passion become that he could starve himself for the sake of laying up the more money. Of course when this passion of money-hoarding is so terribly developed that men will pinch and wring every thing they can out of themselves to put into their great iron chest, you need not expect them to be merciful, if they are even so much as just, towards their fellow men. O how terribly does that man curse both himself and his race who gives himself up to this form of selfishness!

But Christianity is entirely another thing. It sets the heart with most intense and all-consuming energy upon the great object of serving God and one's generation according to the will of God. It is the same great principle which, energizing in the depth of the Infinite Mind, moved Him to create beings whom He might bless. The same glorious principle gave birth to the plan of redemption. "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son" to save it. There arose an exigency. A race had fallen, and must be rescued or lost. The Divine Word saw and felt the exigency; rushed forward to the rescue; seized as it were upon human flesh, that in and with our nature he might live and labor, suffer, bleed and die. This great work became with him an all-absorbing passion. See him toil in Judea, traverse the regions of Samaria and Galilee; hear Him pray during the long hours of the night; hear his deep groans in the garden of Gethsemane, and mark that bloody sweat; see him on the cross, pierced and bleeding;--then ask--What is all this? What but the working out of the great principle of benevolence--love to God and love to man, consuming the energies of his being! Mark how he rolls off to the right and to the left all other objects that invite attention and would divert him from his work. He suffers nothing to intervene between his heart and the labors and sacrifices needful to effect the work of human salvation.

And now must it be deemed so great a cross for his people to spare even a dollar to complete this work by sending the gospel to every creature? Shall they grudge their shillings where Jesus Christ gave ungrudgingly his heart's blood! It must be that many Christians are under a great and radical mistake in this matter. Every true Christian as really has a cross to endure and shame to despise as Christ had, although his crucifixion may come in a very different form. But it is equally his duty to live and to die for the promotion of the same great object. This is so far from seeming to be a hardship to the real Christian, that it is the very thing which before all other things he would choose. Ask him which among all the objects of life he deems most precious, and most desirable. He will tell you at once, this, of suffering and toiling for Jesus Christ and for his cause. I ask no higher honor, and no purer enjoyment than to deny myself and bear my cross for my dear Lord and Master.

15. If men would be merely comfortable, they must abandon living for self. I need not say that none can enjoy selfishness. I say more. If men would not be positively unhappy they must cease to be selfish. Self is so utterly unreasonable in its demands, and makes you so wretched if all its demands are not met, there is no living in peace unless it is thoroughly kept under. No man, or woman either, ever yet satisfied self by indulgence. Like the horse-leach, it cries forever, Give, give; and might well have been numbered among the three and four things which never say--"It is enough." Consequently, persons only torture themselves and make their own happiness impossible by giving scope to their selfishness.

16. Those who have Christ's Spirit will have also his peace of mind. They who "bear his cross will wear his crown," not in the future world only, but in the present. "If they suffer with Him, they shall also be glorified together."

17. You may see why so few professors really enjoy their religion. If their eye were single for God, they would not fail of enjoying his service; but being selfish, they starve themselves, and pave their path with many thorns. The principle which prompts all their religious duties is, that they had rather do them than go to hell. These religious duties give them no pleasure, and never would be done for their own sake; but they can be endured as a choice of evils, it being better to endure them than do so much worse. The hope of escaping hell thereby makes even these religious duties tolerable. All these toils and hardships are better than hell. But as for positive satisfaction in their Christian work, they know nothing about it. If they want any present satisfaction, of course they look for that in the way of self-gratification.

Let the reader pause and ask--Am I the character described here? Is this a painting of my heart?

18. Selfish persons may as well give up their selfishness first as last, for they can not get good by it. Have you not seen plainly enough that it is of no use to be selfish;--that if you gain anything, it is all of no use as to the matter of substantial enjoyment? If you should gain the whole world, it would be of no avail to you as a fund of enduring happiness. There can therefore be no real motive--no good motive for being selfish. Have you not often seen this so clearly as to be compelled to say--"I will never again act for self, for I may just as well not act at all, and better too." It does no good to seek to gratify self, for it only serves to enlarge one's desire even as hell, and it can never be satisfied. It is as if a man diseased should drink to slake his thirst, and it only makes him the more thirsty; or should eat to allay his hunger and it only sharpens his appetite the more. What then can you gain by pushing on in this direction or in that, to gratify the insatiate demands of self? Suppose you should drive your efforts selfishly even for your own salvation. You make a great mistake--yea, an infinite mistake. You will only make the matter inexpressibly worse. I can well recollect a crisis in my own religious history. I felt that there was not another step to take in the direction I was going. I had pursued my worldly interests a long time, all in vain; I had sought God selfishly, but all in vain; and I now betook myself to mighty prayer as I supposed, as if I would pull down blessings at any rate upon my needy soul. Often since, I have looked back with wonder to that moment. I came then to see and I actually said to myself--I may just as well stop this course of seeking now as ever. I hastened away to the woods to pray, pressed with the consideration--I am a selfish man--altogether selfish. I must come to a dead stand in this course; my selfish efforts are of no use, and even my selfish prayers are nothing better than an abomination before God. I had gone out with the determination never to leave the place without giving myself to God. I could see that all had been perfectly selfish, and that now the thing God demanded of me was to desist from my selfishness and give up myself supremely and wholly to Him.

While laboring in Western New York, I saw a young woman who seemed to be by nature and education most amiable and lovely. Indeed, she was regarded by her friends as a perfect model of propriety. Her sisters and relatives could not bear to think that she was a sinner, or to hear her spoken to as a sinner. Yet she was selfish. When I saw her I could not help being strongly impressed with this fact, and urged it earnestly upon her conscience. At length she saw it and then exclaimed, I have sown to the wind and I must reap the whirlwind. My whole heart is selfish. I see that I might as well make no effort for salvation as to make selfish ones, and that truly I have but one right and hopeful way, and this is, to renounce my selfishness at once and forever.

See that young man selfishly pursuing his education. What do you want of your education? What will you do with it? You reply, "O, perhaps I shall be a great man." Then persisting in your selfishness, you will be the greater in hell. "Perhaps I shall get to be the President of these United States." Then, unless you repent of your selfishness, you will sink to be the merest drudge in hell. "Oh," says that young man, "I shall get into some learned profession and make a brilliant display of my talents, and make an impression on the world." And will all this make you happy? If selfishness rule in your heart, it will only make you a greater curse to yourself. You may drive in this direction and in that, you can only fill up the cup of your own misery, if you will make self your idol God. Suppose you toil for fame; there will be a canker-worm at its root. What good will it do you? All is against you and nothing can work for your real good so long as you will not yield your heart to God and crucify your selfishness.

Do you ask, Who will show me any good? I will show you all the good you can ever need. I have been showing you to-day where real good is to be found. You have money, and do you ask, what money is good for? To do good with. This is all. What is the strong arm for, and the ardor of youthful energy? To do good with--nothing else. O young man, you who do not want to be a minister of the gospel because there will be so much hardship and so little emolument--if you don't know the peace and blessedness of self-denial, you know nothing yet as you need to know. You have not yet begun to learn how to live for real blessedness.

Living for the general good is the only way to secure your own individual good. If you would be happy, pour out your heart for others' good. Set your heart on the great end which God is laboring to secure, and your happiness is safe.

Brethren, is it a matter of real experience with you that you enjoy your religion? Do you enjoy it even without any of the accompaniments of superadded respectability, and public confidence, and social regard? Do you enjoy the simple business of doing good, in itself, and for its own sake? Is self-denial for Christ's sake, a positive enjoyment to you in view of the great and glorious end of the joy set before you of honoring God and doing good? Does your religion, attended though it be with many toils and trials, become to you daily the very elixir of life? How is this?

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/the-spirit-of-christ-and-the-spirit-of-true-christianity/>

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