

True and False Peace

by Charles Finney

True peace is the result of the heart's having yielded to God, and is characterized by a deep and constant repose in the will of God.

Scripture: Psalm 119:165, Matthew 11:28

Topics: "True Peace", "Love for God's Law"

Description

Charles Finney explores the concept of true and false peace in relation to loving God's law, emphasizing that true peace arises from a genuine love for God's will, leading to a harmonious state of mind. He explains that this love is not merely compliance out of obligation but a heartfelt preference for God's will, resulting in great peace and the ability to remain unoffended by life's challenges. Finney warns against the delusion of false peace, which can arise from selfish motives rather than true love for God, and encourages believers to examine their hearts to ensure they are truly aligned with God's will. He concludes by urging listeners to reflect on their relationship with God's law and the peace that should accompany it.

Transcript

Text. Psalm 119:165: --Great peace have they, who love thy law; and nothing shall offend them.

In this lecture, I design to show,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY LAW, IN THIS PASSAGE.

II. WHAT IT IS TO LOVE THE LAW OF GOD.

III. THAT THE NATURAL RESULT OF THIS LOVE IS GREAT, AND CONSTANT PEACE OF MIND.

IV. THAT NOTHING SHALL OFFEND THEM, THAT LOVE THE LAW OF GOD.

V. NOTICE A DELUSION UPON THIS SUBJECT, THAT IS VERY COMMON AMONG PROFESSED CHRISTIANS.

I. I am to show, what we are to understand by law, in this passage.

Law is the revealed will of the law-giver. The whole revealed will of God, is to be understood as his law, however that revelation is made--whether in the Bible--in the Providence--or by the Spirit of God. The term

law, as used in this Psalm, and very often in the Bible, is doubtless to be understood, in this extended, and indeed its most proper sense.

In a more restricted sense, all the commandments of God, are to be considered as his law. And in a sense still more limited, the ten commandments are his law. And these, again, are condensed into the two precepts, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself."

But God's will--his whole will--is his law. And whenever this will is revealed, in any way whatever, it becomes binding on us. So that when we are informed, by his word, or Providence, that any thing is agreeable to the Divine will, that is to settle the question, with us, and we are sweetly to acquiesce in it.

II. I am to show, what it is to love the law of God.

It is a disinterested preference of the will of God--a preferring, with all our heart, that the will of God, whatever it is, should be done; because it is holy, wise, and good. It is not the making a virtue of necessity, and yielding by constraint, because resistance will do no good--but it is the mind's supreme choice, that God's will shall be done, on earth, as in heaven. It is a sweet, and entire complacency in the will of God, however that will may be revealed. It is that state in which the mind continually cries, and echoes, and re-echoes, "thy will be done, on earth, as it is done in heaven." It is a supreme, and sweet delight in whatever is the will of God; because it is his will. It is not that forced submission of the mind when it is prostrated, and the will broken down, by absolute agony. But it is a sweet and heavenly rest, in the will of God--a spontaneous gushing forth of the heart, that meets, and responds, Amen, to all the will of the blessed God.

III. I am to show, that the natural result of this love is great, and constant peace of mind.

By peace, I do not mean indifference, or that quiet of the mind, that results from diverting the attention, from that which had before agonized it.

Peace is opposed to war. A war of mind is a state of mutiny, where the heart, and conscience, and perhaps other powers of the mind, are in conflict with each other. The heart chooses what the conscience condemns; and the conscience demands what the heart refuses. And the emotions, in such cases, may be thrown into a state of great excitement, and agitation, filling the mind with agony, and every hateful passion.

Now peace is the opposite of this state of mind--not the mere absence of it--not the mere absence of agony, and inward mutiny; but a delightful, and sweet harmony, in the exercise of all the powers of the mind. The will, and the conscience are at one--the heart sweetly choosing, and delightfully reposing, in that which is agreeable to the decisions of the conscience--and the conscience, as it were, sweetly smiling approbation upon the decisions of the will--and the emotions flowing, like a gentle streamlet, in delightful accordance with both the conscience, and the heart.

This is far from being a mere negative, or quiescent state of mind, which is often mistaken for peace. It is a positive, active, and heavenly state of mind. It is a wakeful, and deep composure of the soul, like the deep, pure, calm ocean; clear, composed, and heavenly. It is a state of mind far better understood, by experience, than described in words. It is "the peace of God, that passeth understanding." This peace have they, that love the law of God. To show this, let me observe,

That in this state of mind, they certainly can know, no resistance to whatever they discover to be the will of God. And whatever desires they may have, or prayers they may make, in relation to any particular event--when, by any means, they are led to understand, the will of God, respecting that event, they joyfully acquiesce. We have an illustration of this, in the case of David, who mourned sorely, when his child was sick. He "besought God for the child, and fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth;" for he said, "who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?" But as soon as the child was dead, and he was thereby informed, what the will of God was, "he arose from the earth, and washed, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped, and said, I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

This peace will be a great peace; (i.e.) it will extend to every providence, and to all the will of God. How can it be otherwise, if the heart is in such a state, as to have a supreme preference for his will? What can occur, in such a state of mind, that shall break, or disturb, its deep repose in God?

IV. I am to show, that nothing shall offend, or stumble those that love the law of God.

You will observe, that in the margin, it is written, they shall have no stumbling block; (i.e.) that they shall so acquiesce in all the will of God, as not to stumble, and fall into rebellion, on account of anything revealed in the Bible, or, on account of any Providence of God.

By this, is not meant, that persons, in this state of mind, can know no such thing as sorrow, or distress. Various things may occur, to disturb the emotions of the mind, while the heart, or will is as undisturbed, as the great deep of the ocean. We have an illustration of this, in the great agony of Christ in the garden. His conflict was so severe, and the excitement of his emotions so great, that "he sweat great drops of blood." And yet, it was manifest, that his heart, or will, was firmly settled, to do the will of God--as unmoved as the everlasting mountains. His will was not disturbed, or shaken. And, in this respect, his peace was undisturbed; and while he cried out, in the anguish almost of death, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," --the deep steadfastness of his heart, in the will of God, concluded every time, "not as I will, but as thou wilt." Here was an instance of great desire existing for a certain blessing, and yet the will most steadfastly clinging to the will of God.

Now, when I said above, that the peace spoken of in this text, includes the harmonious action of all the powers of the mind, I did not mean, certainly, that the emotions, which are involuntary states of mind, are always at rest, or composed. They generally accord with the state of the will. But sometimes circumstances occur, as in this case of Christ, when the emotions or desires, are greatly excited, while the will remains unshaken. Nor, is this to be considered as really disturbing the peace of mind. These are accidental, or perhaps more properly, providential fluctuations of the involuntary powers of the mind. And the emotions may be exceedingly joyous, without any true peace, as they often are in fits of laughter, and merriment.

So they may, on the other hand, be painful, and agonizing, without breaking up, or affecting the deep repose of the will, as was manifestly the case with Christ. When the will is at rest in the will of God, the emotions will sweetly acquiesce, unless it be in cases of strong temptation and trial, as in the case of Christ, and David, just mentioned. But in such cases, a Christian's sorrows may be stirred, and yet their peace, properly speaking, remain unbroken. So a Christian, who loves the law of God, may be exercised with great compassion for sinners--with deep travail of soul for Zion--with distress, and indignation at sin--and in many ways the surface of the mind, as it were, may be ruffled, while, like the ocean, its deep

fountains are unmoved.

The text says, "they have great peace, who love thy law, and nothing shall offend" [or stumble] "them." Nothing can occur, that can throw them into a state of discontent, or repining at God. They shall not be disappointed in anything. Dr. Payson could say, "he had not known what disappointment was, since he had given up his own will."

To love the law, or will of God, is to have our will submerged in his will--to have no will of our own, separate from his; but to will with all our heart, that his will should be done. Now this state of mind absolutely precludes a state of discontent, resistance, repining, or disappointment at the revealed will of God. Nothing certainly can occur, which is not, upon the whole, according to the will of God; (i.e.) he has either actively brought it about by his own agency, or seen it wise, upon the whole, not to prevent its being accomplished, by the agency of others. So that whatever is, is upon the whole, "according to the counsel of his own will;" (i.e.) he, upon the whole, prefers its being just as it is, to such an alteration of his providential, and moral government, as to have brought about a different result. The enlightened Christian that knows this, and every Christian who can be truly said to love the law of God, is enlightened enough to know this, will find, as a matter of fact. that nothing shall offend, or stumble him.

V. I am to notice, a delusion upon this subject, that is very common among professing Christians.

The delusion consists in their obtaining a false peace, from time to time, by a natural process of mind, which they do not seem to understand. In an impenitent state, the heart is selfish, and the conscience and heart are opposed to each other. Instead of their being at one, and thus creating a great calm and peace in the mind, there is often a great conflict--the conscience sternly demanding, and insisting upon sacrifices, which the heart is unwilling to make. It is often the case, that the conscience continues to distress the mind, and press the will with its claims, until, from some consideration purely selfish, the heart will yield one point after another, and thus afford the mind a temporary relief. Suppose (e.g.) the conscience to upbraid the mind with the indulgence of any particular form of sin. This throws the mind into distress, and in its agony, it casts about for relief. Suppose the sin to be intemperance. It is easy to see, that the mind, in contemplating the subject, may see a great many reasons for yielding the point, and giving up intemperance, and it may be yielded, and intemperance really abandoned, from any other, and every other consideration, than love to the will of God, and hatred of sin, as such. Now if the point is yielded, from whatever motive, although true peace does not follow, yet a natural reaction takes place in the mind, which is often mistaken for peace. Thus, when anything is proposed, and pressed upon the heart, which it resolutely resists, the tendency is to throw the mind into an agony. But if the point is yielded, there is naturally induced a quiescent state of mind, and sometimes a verging to the opposite extreme of joyousness, which, though a common fact, does not seem to be generally understood.

Perhaps some of you have witnessed a case of this kind, where a proposal of marriage has been made to a lady, on many accounts highly honorable, and advantageous; but to which her heart is strongly opposed, either from a want of interest in the person, or on account of a pre-existing attachment. Now if the proposal be pressed, by the person himself, and by her friends--urging considerations upon her as inducements to consent, she becomes agonized--can neither eat nor sleep; and in her distraction casts about for relief, until overcome by argument, and persuasion, and flattery, and appeals to her ambition, she consents. Now the will is carried, but not from proper motives. The conflict ceases, and a natural reaction of the mind takes place. A calm ensues, that verges towards sweetness, and affection, for her admirer, and complacency in the proposal. But still he is not the object of her choice. It is not love to him,

but other considerations that have influenced the will. Now as soon as they are united, and his will comes to be the rule of her action, she will discover her mistake, and find that it was a forced submission. And not loving her husband, it is impossible for her to be at peace. At every turn, she will find her will opposing his will. And conscience--a regard for reputation--or some other like inducement, must force submission from time to time, after a protracted and agonizing struggle.

Now this is exactly the conduct and character of many a convicted sinner, who obtains a false hope, and many a deceived professor of religion. Enlightened by the Spirit, conscience gives them no rest. Their distress increases till a forced submission is produced. The fear of punishment--the hope of pardon--a desire for peace, and the consolations of the gospel, and many other selfish inducements, may come in to influence the will, till there is a forced submission of some point, upon which the mind is particularly pressed. Perhaps it is the duty of family prayer, which the mind is resisting--perhaps it is the confession of some sin--the making restitution--the taking an anxious seat--attending a meeting of inquiry--the opening the mind to a minister, or something of this kind. Now when inducements are held out to yield this point, instead of the character of God being so presented as to make the mind fall in love with him, it is plain, that multitudes of selfish considerations may cause the mind to yield, when, after all, it has no knowledge of God, and no love to him--when the mind is as far as possible from true repentance, or faith, or love to God, or man. Conscience has forced the will upon such a dilemma, that it has yielded the point, yet from selfish considerations--it has not at all changed its attitude toward God--it has only substituted one form of selfishness for another. When driven to desperation, and looking all around for peace, it has taken sanctuary in yielding the point--from some selfish motive.

Now it often occurs, that when a sinner sits upon his seat, and a call is made for the inquirers to come forward, as soon as he makes up his mind to go, from whatever motive, his distress leaves him. He felt a desperate struggle, till the question was decided; but as soon as the decision was made to go, although it was the anxious seat, and not God, or Christ, that was in all his thoughts, perhaps he became calm--he felt as if a mountain weight had rolled off from his soul. Now how natural for him to mistake the calm, which is the legitimate effect of a reaction in his mind, for the peace of God. He has yielded the point that occasioned so great a struggle. Others have gone to the anxious seat, and obtained hopes. He knew he was kept back by pride. His conscience, and reason, and a thousand inducements clustered around him, and bade him go, if peradventure he might be blessed. Now while the pride of his heart resisted, there would of course be a tremendous struggle; and whatever inducements caused him to yield, would produce calm, and that calm might, and doubtless often is, fatally mistaken for true peace. For it should be understood, that this natural reaction may be sudden and great, in proportion to the greatness of the distress, that had preceded it. The reaction may go much further than a calm, and the absence of distress. A joyousness may, and naturally will succeed, which, being mistaken for true religion, will encourage hope; and hope encouraged in the mind will increase joy--and joy increased, will strengthen hope--this strengthened will, in its turn, strengthen joy, until the deluded soul persuades himself, that he is filled with the love of God. Now the true distinction between this state of mind, and that peace, which they have who love the law of God is this. Instead of enforcing submission to the performance of some particular duty, the mind apprehends and loves the character of God--the will yields not to the biddings of conscience--or force of circumstances--or selfish considerations; but the mind, being diverted from all selfishness, looks away to God, and Christ, and sweetly yields to, and acquiesces in, his will.

Now the difference in these two states of mind. will be apparent in this. The deluded sinner, not having his will merged in the will of God, will soon find, that what he calls his peace, is continually broken. Instead of

finding that he is not stumbled, or offended with the providences, and will of God, he will find that he is almost continually stumbled. He is thrown into an excitement of mind, at every providence, and every commandment of God, that crosses his path. The will of God is not the law of his being. So far from it, he often finds himself in such a state of mind, that conscience must enforce its claims upon the heart, and sometimes a severe conflict, compels him to yield one form of sin after another. Thus he submits, and yields one point today, from some selfish consideration, and to-morrow there is some new call to duty--some demand of self-denial--or something else, which brings him up to a stand of strong resistance, and throws him into great confusion. This, perhaps, after a severe struggle, the mind will yield, and retreat to some refuge, prepared to resist the next demand upon its selfishness.

Now right over against this, is that state of mind, that constitutes true peace. True peace is the result of the heart's having yielded to God, (i.e.) in its loving God, and preferring the will of God to all other things. Instead of being fretted, and stumbled, and thrown into agony, and disappointment, and discontent, by every call to self-sacrifice, and duty, all these calls are so many joyful occasions, on which to gratify its love, and in which it feels the sweetest, and most profound complacency. As it turns over the leaves of the Bible--as it listens to sermons--as the unfoldings of Providence point out new paths of duty, and call afresh for self denial, instead of being thrown in an agony at these demands, it is delighted with these opportunities of manifesting its love; and it finds that its repose is deepened, and its joy heightened, and rendered more exquisite, by how much the more frequently these demands are made.

Now perhaps I am relating the very experience of some of you. How is it, when duty is pointed out? Do you find that the pressure of obligation disturbs your peace? Does conscience, the law, and the Spirit of God point out your duty, and does your heart hold back? It is then to you a stumbling block, and a rock of offense. And if you find it impossible to divert your mind, you may take shelter in the outward performance of duty, and so far yield the point, as to perform the duty, without any love to God. A calm succeeds, which you mistake for true peace. You rest in your delusion, for a day, to be called, perhaps to-morrow, to a new conflict with your conscience, and the will of God.

Now rest assured, if this is your character, and this your experience, "you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity." How many such persons have I seen, who would appear to be very happy in religion, while no sacrifice was called for, and no demand made upon their selfishness. But attack their lusts--call on them for self denial--ask their money for benevolent objects--point at some of their intemperate practices, in eating and drinking--reprove some favorite indulgence, and instantly you have destroyed all their religion. Their peace is all gone. Conscience, and the will are up in arms, and mutiny, and war immediately ensue.

Now let me place beside this picture, the experience of a Christian. In him, so far as he is a Christian, selfishness is subdued, and his conscience and heart are at one. In such a case, the office of conscience is not to force the heart, for the heart needs no force. Conscience is that power of the mind, that points out the moral qualities of actions, and enables the mind to distinguish between what is right, and what is wrong. Now the Christian heart is in love with what is right, (i.e.) with the will of God, whenever it discovers what it is. So that the dictates of conscience are readily, spontaneously, and joyfully obeyed by the heart. In this case, the peace of mind is unbroken, and there is a joyful acquiescence in all the will of God. Let there be new calls to duty--new occasions for self-denial--new demands upon life, and health, and strength, for the promotion of God's glory--no mutiny results, but peace, and a joyful yielding--a supreme and delightful preference of the will of God, reigns throughout the soul.

REMARKS.

1. Selfish professors cannot understand religion. They continually make conscience, and selfish resolutions, supply the place of love. They do not distinguish between being influenced, in their conduct, by selfish resolutions, and purposes, and by the reproaches of conscience; and that love which begets a joyful acquiescence in all the will of God.

2. Many persons are spending their time, in putting a conscientious restraint upon selfishness, instead of giving it up. They are, like children, building dams of sand, that by the slight risings of the water, are instantly driven away. They see the risings of their pride--the rufflings of their temper--their worldly-mindedness, and their sin, under many forms. These they are busied in putting down. They resolve, and re-resolve--they vow, and break their vows--they purpose, and fail to fulfill, and for the best of all reasons, their heart does not love God; and selfishness is too strong for their conscience; and sin will break over their dams of sand.

But here, it may be asked, are we to have no regard to conscience, in our daily walk and conversation? I answer, yes. No man can walk with God, unless he "keeps a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man." But observe, there is no virtue--no real holiness, except the heart loves what the conscience pronounces to be right. To comply with conscience, from some other motive than love, is not religion. Saul of Tarsus, it is said, "lived in all good conscience before God;" but his conformity to the dictates of conscience was legal; (i.e.) he was influenced by legal or self-righteous considerations, and not by love.

3. In this discourse, you can see the true distinction, between a professor under the law, and a Christian, who has entered into the rest of the gospel.

4. From what observation I have been able to make, I cannot but fear, that only a comparatively few of the visible Church are converted to God. It is a matter of fact, that they have not the peace expressly promised, in the text, to those that love the law of God. Indeed, I should not say that this peace is promised--it is expressly declared to be the state, in which they now are, who love the law of God: "Great peace HAVE they, that love thy law."

Now have you this peace? Have the Church this peace, as a matter of fact? As God is true, they only love the law of God, who do, as a matter of fact, have this peace.

5. Much of the instruction given to anxious sinners, and professors of religion, is only calculated to give, and encourage a false peace. When they are convicted, and anxious, instead of spreading out before them the objects of faith, and love, to engage their attention and win their affections, they are perhaps pointed to some form of sin, and required to give that up, and to resolve never to commit it again; and then to another, and another, leading them, perhaps by various, and selfish considerations, to yield some point, or points, upon which there is a conflict in the mind; and thus inducing, as I have already shown, a false peace, while there is not a particle of the right knowledge, or of the love of God.

It appears to me to be impossible, that true religion, and true submission, should be produced in the mind, without pressing upon the attention the character of God, and of Christ, as presented in the Bible. Those great and commanding objects of love, and of faith, must be presented, and embraced: and there must be a yielding up of selfishness, through the power of truth, and the Holy Ghost, or there is no true religion in the soul. But if selfishness is subdued, you will not witness these perpetual conflictings, that are so

common, when professors of religion are pressed up to duty.

6. And now I must conclude, by pressing home upon you, the solemn inquiry, are you a Christian? Do you love the law of God? Is the will of God your rule of action? Or do you merely acknowledge, that it ought to be, while, as a matter of fact, you do not make it so?

Have you so renounced your own will, as to find yourself undisturbed, peaceful, and joyous, when anything turns out, in the providence of God, different from what you had hoped, and expected?

Whenever a sin is pointed out to you, or any duty to perform, do you find that it distresses you, to sacrifice that sin, or to perform that duty? Do you yield by constraint, or willingly--joyfully?

Beloved souls, be ye not deceived. To love the law of God, is to love the will of God--to prefer his will to your own will. Now do you, as a matter of fact, find your mind to be in this state? Or is it true of you, that instead of yielding your own will to the will of God, without debate, or distress, you only yield after a severe conflict, and are compelled by conscience, rather than sweetly constrained by love?

Now just mark what this text says--not that they may have--ought to have--or shall have great peace, that love the law of God; but that they actually DO HAVE great peace.

This is a matter of fact, and the natural result of yielding the will to the will of God. Indeed, I should rather say, that this peace consists in your yielding to the will of God, and preferring his will to your own.

Now your own consciousness must teach you, with absolute certainty, whether you are in this state of mind.

Will you be honest before God?

Will you decide this question, as before the solemn judgment?

I pray you to settle these solemn questions; and remember, that your salvation, or damnation, is suspended upon their being decided according to truth.

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