

It All Adds Up To **LOVE**



by J. W. Jepson

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(a digest of Charles G. Finney's Systematic Theology)

by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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A Very Unusual Man

In the small frontier town of Adams, in western New York, a young lawyer paced back and forth in his office. He was troubled--deeply troubled.

Outside, trees had turned from the green of summer to the red, gold and brown of autumn. The October morning air had a zestful edge to it. All the signs of nature clearly signaled the waning of the year. Soon 1821 would be history.

But Charles G. Finney's attention that day was not on the weather or the season of the year. The questions that disturbed him so deeply were about matters that reach beyond all time.

He stopped his pacing and sat down again to read the book lying open on his desk. Finney had recently passed his twenty-ninth birthday. For twenty-six of those years he had paid little attention to the Bible. But that was before he began studying law.

Noticing that the old legal authorities frequently appealed to The Scriptures, Finney decided to secure a copy and read for himself the passages cited in the law books.

Meanwhile, he began to attend the local Presbyterian church. There he listened to the preaching of Reverend George W. Gale, the Princeton-educated pastor.

Gradually he became aware of the pressing importance of eternal issues. Heavy conviction of sin weighed him down. This frame of mind continued for some time, becoming almost unbearable. Then, on Sunday night, October 7, he resolved to seek the salvation of his soul without further delay.

Monday came. Then Tuesday. He prayed. He read The Scriptures. Whenever he heard someone coming to the office, he threw his Blackstone law books over his Bible so the visitor would not know he had been reading it.

His stress increased. Tuesday night Finney's nerves gave way under the stress of his spiritual conflict.

The next morning he rose early and started for the office. Just before he arrived, an inner voice stopped him with the question: "What are you waiting for?"

Suddenly, standing there in the street, he realized that salvation comes not through our own works but through the completed work of Christ on our behalf, accepted as a free gift.

"Will you accept it now--today?" The question bore down on Finney's mind.

"Yes, I will accept it today, or I will die in the attempt!" he replied.

Self-consciously he walked into the woods north of town. Out of sight of the village, he tried to pray. But every few minutes he imagined he heard someone coming.

Then it dawned on him--he was too proud to be seen praying! He was ashamed to be seen on his knees making his peace with God. Realizing his sinful pride, he shouted out that he would not leave that place even if everybody saw him.

Finney was heartbroken before the Lord. Soon the promise of Jeremiah 29:13 came to him: "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Immediately he seized the promise by faith. God cannot lie; so Finney decided then and there to trust His word.

As other promises came to him from The Scriptures, his heart took them in. Soon his heart was full. His distress was gone. He had peace with God.

That evening God mightily baptized him in the Holy Spirit. Here is how Finney described it:

"The Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love; for I could not express it in any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me, like immense wings.

"No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say, I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart." ¹

The call of God to preach the gospel came to Finney immediately. He was certain of it and eager to fulfill it.

A well-known incident demonstrates Finney's resolve. One of the deacons of the church had retained Finney to be his attorney in a pending lawsuit. On the morning the case was to be tried, the deacon reminded him of it. Finney replied: "I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause, and I cannot plead yours." ²

Finney's conversion and his testimony for Christ had a profound effect on the little town. Some of his close friends and associates were converted almost right away. In some cases Finney said just a few words to someone about his personal relationship with God and the person would go off into the woods and seek God for salvation.

Finney began theological studies under his pastor, Reverend Gale. But the experience turned out to be most frustrating for both teacher and student. Hyper-Calvinism was the popular theology of the times. But when the good Reverend tried to instill those views into Finney, the lawyer's keen analytical mind could not accept them as being either Scriptural or logical.

As Finney saw it, man has something more to do in conversion than to wait passively for God to change him. The sinner has a free will. He is a sinner by choice. By the exercise of his free will he can repent of his sins and receive Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. This God commands him to do--*now*.

In love, God is doing all He wisely can to persuade the sinner to change his own heart. But God will not force him. The sinner is totally responsible for being a sinner. His own desires have such a hold on him that he will not repent unless the Holy Spirit mightily persuades him to do so. But the divine influence is aimed at getting him to make the decision to submit to God and believe the gospel; and that decision is up to the sinner.

And so, armed with these convictions, and with an intense love for God and the souls of men burning deeply inside him, Charles Grandison Finney set out to preach the gospel.

Initially Finney felt that he was qualified only for home missionary service among the frontier settlements.

Finney's strategy in preaching was to appeal to reason--to press the claims of Christ upon the intelligence of his hearers. But he knew full well that his own persuasions alone would not move the stubborn wills of the unconverted. For that he depended entirely on the Holy Spirit. That is why he prayed so much and so earnestly. He prayed in faith, and thus prayed effectively.

Things began to happen immediately. When he called on the people at Evans Mills to indicate publicly whether they would accept Christ or reject Him, they were astonished. No preacher had ever confronted them with such a demand! They rose up in anger and walked out of the meetinghouse. Finney went to prayer.

The next night the building was packed. Once again Finney preached. Assuming that they had indicated the day before their intention to reject Christ, the evangelist pressed upon them the consequences of their commitment. Many listeners became deeply distressed. Through the night these alarmed souls came to Finney for help. They were lost if they did not find peace with God, and suddenly they realized it.

Conversions multiplied. Revival fires spread to the little German village of Antwerp, then to Perch River, Brownville, LeRayville, Gouverneur, DeKalb, and Western. In some cases nearly the whole community surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ. Some conversions were dramatic. The Holy Spirit was mightily at work.

Such a revival could not go unnoticed very long. Soon the churches in the east began hearing of the unusual happenings in western New York, particularly in the town of Western. When the revival hit Western, the eastern establishment took notice. As the news spread, accounts of what was happening grew proportionately. Some stories were factual; some were distorted.

With the theological climate extremely Calvinistic, strong objections were inevitable. Telling sinners that they can repent on the spot if they but choose to do so! Telling them that they were to blame for not being Christians! Such heresy! Pelagianism! Self-salvation! Emotionalism! Didn't Finney know that sinners can do nothing about their own salvation? Didn't he know that everyone has to wait passively and see if God will regenerate him before he can know whether or not he is elect?

But the reaction was not all negative or hostile. Some influential ministers in larger city churches recognized that Finney's preaching and his methods were right on target.

So Finney was invited to Rome, New York. Immediately the power of God took hold of the people. Hardened sinners were cut down by the Holy Spirit under Finney's preaching. People of all classes were affected equally.

Meanwhile, over in Utica, the spirit of travailing prayer took hold of an influential Christian woman. The worldliness of the church and the carelessness of sinners distressed her deeply. Soon her pastor became aware of her prayer burden and recognized it as the work of God. Believing that God was ready to awaken Utica, he sent for Finney. The evangelist arrived shortly and began laboring for souls. In a few weeks' time, five hundred people were converted to Christ.

During the revival at Utica, the evangelist was invited to tour a cotton factory a few miles west of the city. He agreed to go to a nearby village, preach there in the evening, and go through the cotton mill the next day. Finney tells us what happened:

"The next morning, after breakfast, I went into the factory, to look through it. As I went through, I observed there was a good deal of agitation among those who were busy at their looms, and their mules, and other implements of work. On passing through one of the apartments, where a great number of young women were attending to their weaving, I observed a couple of them eyeing me, and speaking very earnestly to each other; and I could see that they were a good deal agitated, although they both laughed. I went slowly toward them. They saw me coming, and were evidently much excited. One of them was trying to mend a broken thread, and I observed that her hands trembled so that she could not mend it. I approached slowly, looking on each side at the machinery, as I passed; but observed that this girl grew more and more agitated, and could not proceed with her work. When I came within eight or ten feet of her, I looked solemnly at her. She observed it, and was quite overcome, and sunk down, and burst into tears. The impression caught almost like powder, and in a few moments nearly all in the room were in tears. This feeling spread through the factory. Mr. Wolcott, the owner of the establishment, was present, and seeing the state of things, he said to the superintendent, 'Stop the mill, and let the people attend to religion; for it is more important that our souls should be saved than that this factory run.' The gate was immediately shut down, and the factory stopped; but where should we assemble? The superintendent suggested that the mule room was large; and, the mules being run up, we could assemble there. We did so, and a more powerful meeting I scarcely ever attended. It went on with great power. The building was large, and had many people in it, from the garret to the cellar. The revival went through the mill with astonishing power, and in the course of a few days nearly all in the mill were hopefully converted." ³

While at Utica, Finney became aware of the nature and extent of the opposition building up in the east. The reports clearly indicated that many objections to the revival were based on misinformation. But Finney refused to be diverted from the work at hand and left to others the task of replying to the misrepresentations.

As a result of the Rome and Utica awakening in 1826, three thousand converts were received into the Presbyterian churches of the Oneida Presbytery.

From Utica, Finney went to Auburn, Troy, New Lebanon, Stephentown, Wilmington, and Philadelphia.

In spite of well-organized opposition led by influential men, the larger cities of the east began to open their pulpits to Finney. The pastors who invited him had a love for God and for souls that overrode their objections to Finney's emphasis on man's free will. God blessed their broadminded, Christian attitude.

For about a year and a half, Finney ministered in Philadelphia with great power. The results in the city were deeper and more far-reaching. The city population generally was better educated and more intellectually responsive to the profound logic of Finney's sermons; so the results were more lasting.

From Philadelphia Finney went to two other Pennsylvania cities, Reading and Lancaster. In both, the need for genuine revival was urgent. Professed Christians were very worldly and the public very dull and careless about eternal matters. But God blessed His Word and the cities woke up.

In 1830 Finney returned to the state of New York. During a short revival in Columbia nearly everybody in the town was converted.

Then the Christian philanthropist, Anson G. Phelps, invited Finney to come to New York City. Phelps was both deeply spiritual in heart and highly successful in business. He put both himself and his pocketbook into revival. He rented a vacant church building on Vandewater Street and Finney started preaching there. People were converted and soon a congregation gathered. Phelps purchased a church building on Prince Street, and Finney and many of the converts organized a new church there.

During 1830 Finney received an invitation from Rochester, New York, to labor for souls in that place. Rochester did not look like a very promising field to him. In his own mind he wanted to go back to New York City or Philadelphia. The issue perplexed him for a while. Finally he realized that the problems at Rochester were part of the very reason he should go there. So, trunks packed, the Finneys were off to Rochester!

It is a good thing they went. A tremendous revival broke out. Most of the community leaders were converted, including many in the legal profession.

News of the Rochester revival spread all over New England. People started coming from far and near. Dr. Lyman Beecher (who had led the earlier opposition to Finney) told Finney later that from that revival one hundred thousand converts were added to the churches in one year! It is said that Rochester's jail was empty for years afterward.

Finney worked himself to exhaustion at Rochester. The local doctors thought he had "consumption" and was dying. His friends implored him to rest. But instead of resting, he went back to Auburn. The invitation came from the very ones who had led the opposition to him when he was there previously! Five hundred were converted in six weeks. From Auburn he went to Buffalo, where again the revival had a great effect among the influential classes.

In 1831 Finney went to Providence, Rhode Island, for three weeks. Then Boston opened its doors. The pastors cooperated beautifully and revival started immediately. By this time

Finney realized how exhausted he really was from his intense labors and decided to accept an invitation from the Second Free Presbyterian Church in New York City to become its pastor.

Lewis Tappan and others leased a theater on Chatham Street, and in April of 1832 the Finney family moved again to the big city.

Revival broke out. So did the cholera. Finney himself came down with it and spent the winter recuperating both from the disease and from the primitive medical practices of the time. Eventually, Finney recovered and went on with his work.

The people who worked with Pastor Finney realized the power of the printed page. Soon the presses were busy and revival literature blossomed in New York City, spreading its delightful fragrance over the nation and across the ocean to Europe. The *New York Evangelist* began publication as an "official organ" for the defense and promotion of the revivals. And when Finney's *Lectures On Revivals* was published, twelve thousand copies sold as fast as they could be printed. Wherever they were read and applied, revivals broke out.

Finney moved into the Tabernacle on Broadway and continued his preaching there.

But out west in Ohio something was happening. A group of young ministerial students had left Lane Seminary because the trustees had prohibited the discussion of slavery. These young students headed for Oberlin. In those days, Oberlin consisted of a clearing in the woods, a few dwellings, a charter for a college and one college building. These dissident students from Lane Seminary, most of whom had been converted under Finney's ministry, now wanted to study for the ministry under the great evangelist himself, even if it meant "roughing it" in barracks out in the wilderness.

The call went out for Finney to come to Oberlin. What should he do? After wrestling with the question for some time, he decided to spend his summers teaching in Oberlin. Arthur Tappan, a successful business man, opened his big heart and substantial resources to fund the project as long as necessary (that was before the depression of 1837 wiped him out). In the summer of 1835 Finney brought his family and a round tent one hundred feet in diameter to Oberlin.

Finney came on two conditions: (1) there would be complete academic freedom to discuss slavery, and (2) there would be no racial discrimination.

The news spread that Finney was coming to Oberlin. More students poured in, and by the time classes started about a hundred eager young people were on hand. In the years that followed many young people received their theological education and training for the ministry under Charles G. Finney. Oberlin grew, and so did Finney. His influence expanded--through his students, his preaching, and his writings.

In 1842 he returned to Rochester, where at one service a group of lawyers rose spontaneously and came forward *en masse* to accept Christ.

The parade of revivals, conversions and victories marched on. Finney labored diligently, teaching at Oberlin, pastoring the First Church at Oberlin, conducting revivals in the United

States and Britain, and writing prolifically.

In 1857 and 1858 a great revival spread across the northern states. Prayer meetings sprang up from Omaha to Boston. During the peak of the awakening, fifty thousand people were being converted per week.

In some of the cities where Finney's influence had been the greatest, the majority of the adult population were born-again Christians. It is reported that in some villages around Boston, hardly one sinner could be found!

Finney continued his labors as health permitted him right up until his death early in the morning of August 16, 1875, at nearly eighty-three years of age.

In fifty years of ministry, Charles G. Finney won approximately half a million people to Jesus Christ. Volumes have been written about his remarkable life and ministry, about the times in which he ministered, about his great influence on nineteenth century America.

But our main concern now is to find out what it was that Finney believed and preached that had such a powerful effect on his hearers, especially on the more educated and intelligent audiences--not the sermons themselves, but the deep underlying principles and philosophy.

What clear Scriptural concepts did Finney present with compelling logic that would bring such full endorsement by the Holy Spirit? What great principles were so deeply instilled in the new converts that kept the majority of them true to Christ and made them effective workers in the Church?

Yes, Finney was a man of tremendous prayer and faith. But so have been others with fewer results. Yes, he had many helpers. But so have others.

A lot could be said about social and political factors, about the nature of the young nation. But none of these explains a qualitative difference about Finney's ministry.

Did he say something fresh and meaningful? Did he present some principles that are valid in every age--principles that society in general and the Church in particular desperately need to know now, today? Many of us believe he did.

In 1846 Finney wrote his most important work. He called it *Lectures On Systematic Theology*. It is his declaration of the principles that produced such great results when put into practice.

And do we have access to those principles today?

Fortunately, we do. But for some reason they have been neglected. This neglect is one of the tragedies of our times.

Oh, yes, people like to talk about Finney's great life and revivals. But not very many are willing to dig down into his theology with an open mind to discover the real *why*--the logical, Scriptural truth that set so many free.

The dynamic ministry of Charles G. Finney is an eloquent practical demonstration of the principles set forth in his *Theology*. Likewise, the *Theology* is an outpouring of the giant intellect and noble heart of this prince of soul-winners. No, Finney was no cold logician or dead theologian; his ministry proves that!

So, when someone who won half a million souls to Christ tells us what the basic principles are, we ought to examine those principles very carefully.

Let us do so.

Principles Do Not Change

Something deep within the human intellect says that absolutes must exist. Man cannot live without them and maintain his sanity and the other elements of his distinctive humanity. Reason demands absolutes because absolutes integrate everything. Without them nothing makes sense.

So a thinking man looks at himself and his world and says, "Everything should make sense; it should be meaningful. All the elements are there." All that remains is to find the absolutes, and chaos is turned into cosmos. There must be a core, a fundamental reality, an underlying set of facts and unchanging principles!

But where to look? Philosophy, Ethics, or Religion broadly defined? Modern man has done that but has heard discord instead of harmony.

Western man devotes himself to technology. In the physical sciences things are governed by laws--workable, predictable, harmonious. But "know-how" is no substitute for "know why." Man must know why, and no amount of knowing how will bring the answer.

Groping to find their way out of the dilemma, many Westerners are experimenting with parapsychology, the occult and metaphysical Eastern religions. Rejecting plastic materialism, they hope to find immutable universals in the preternatural, or within their own minds and emotions. But for those who reject the reality and finality of the God who has revealed Himself authoritatively and personally in The Scriptures, few things are more vague than the metaphysical, or more changeable than human emotions. Cut loose from their anchorage in the Judeo/Christian revelation, they drift into the dark and dangerous waters of the supernatural they neither understand nor from which they can escape by themselves.

Then we have the Epicurean and/or Hedonist. This is the person who accepts the premises of materialism and proceeds to escape from his reasonable humanity into pleasure seeking. He believes that he is a meaningless animal and tries to live like one. His is the bumper-sticker philosophy "if it feels good, do it." The Bible describes this as the "eat, drink, and be merry" philosophy--the philosophy of the fool. (Luke 12:16-21.)

We turn from these delusions to something that meets the demands of both reality and reason while satisfying the yearnings of the human soul--Biblical principles.

MORAL LAW

We know that the physical world operates according to definite physical law. If this were not true, we could not have put men on the moon.

It might come as a surprise to many that morality also operates according to definite law--moral law.

The laboratory where moral law is observed in operation is not equipped with test tubes, flasks, Bunsen burners and embalmed specimens. It is populated by real persons, moral

agents who live, move, love, suffer, struggle, hope, and sometimes rejoice.

Some people do attempt to account for human behavior by ascribing it to physical causes only (biochemistry, brain cells, stimulus-response associations). But human values and moral actions go far beyond physical considerations.

True, physical law and moral law do operate side-by-side. They do affect each other. But--and this is fundamentally important--they are separate and distinct from each other and operate in different areas.

Physical law does not govern moral action, and moral law does not directly govern physical action. Moral law governs people who live in the world of substance, but moral law does not govern substance itself. It governs morality and moral relationships, including what people do with their physical world.

Physical law governs everything that is involuntary, including matter and involuntary states and actions of the mind. Everything is under physical law except free will and the actions produced by the exercise of free will. Physical law is the law of automatic sequence, necessity, force, cause and effect.

Moral law is the law of free will, including the actions produced by the exercise of free will. It is the law of intelligence, the law of liberty, the law of responsible choice. It operates by persuasion, not coercion. It does not force, but holds up to the intelligence the values to be chosen and the consequences of free choice. It moves by motivation. It rules by reason.

If a moral agent will not be governed by reason, external restraints may be applied to safeguard society. But, strictly speaking, moral law operates only in the area of free will. Whatever is not the action of free will or the result of free will is under physical law, not moral law. This must be kept clearly in mind.

For example, Joe decides to steal Bill's watch. He plans how he is going to do it. He waits for the opportune moment. Then he carries out his plan. His hand reaches out and takes the watch. Swiftly, his feet carry him away from the scene of the crime and he is lost in the crowd.

Now, where does moral law apply *directly*? To the emotional excitement of planning the theft? To the movement of the hand to grasp the watch? To the muscular action of the body as Joe hurried away?

No.

Did Joe's hand reach out of its own accord and grab Bill's watch against Joe's will? Can Joe say, "I just don't know what I'm going to do with this thieving hand of mine. It just keeps stealing things against my will."

Of course not. Joe's hand cannot take anything unless Joe wills for it to do so. In other words, the sin (theft) takes place in Joe's heart (will, choice), not in his hand.

So moral law applies directly to the choices involved--the choice to commit the act in the first place and the choices involved in carrying it out (which are a continuation of the original

choice). Thoughts, emotions and physical actions are the direct and indirect results that follow necessarily from the choices. They are under physical law, the "law of necessity," the law of automatic sequence. They derive their moral character only from the choices, the willing, that produced them.

In other words, the guilt is in the heart; that is, the will, motive, purpose. What is in the heart is carried out into the life. "Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:15 NASB). Lust (desire) conceives the moment it gains the consent of the will against light (reason).

THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF MORAL LAW

Moral law has several attributes, or permanent qualities. Let's look at them as Finney listed them.

"1. Subjectivity. It is, and must be an idea of the reason developed in the mind of the subject." ⁴

To be a free moral agent, a person must have some inner knowledge of right and wrong. This means that he or she must have some perception of the valuable and therefore be under a personal moral obligation to choose the valuable. This is the point where conscience starts operating and the "age of accountability" arrives.

"2. Objectivity. Moral law may be regarded as a rule of duty prescribed by the supreme Lawgiver and external to self." ⁵

Being all-knowing and all-wise, God knows absolutely what is beneficial and what is harmful. So, as the supreme Lawgiver, He has the right and the obligation to reveal the rule of duty and to maintain it.

"3. Liberty. The precept . . . cannot possess an element or attribute of force in any such sense as to render conformity of will to its precept unavoidable. This would confound it with physical law." ⁶

Love cannot be forced. By its very nature it is voluntary. If obedience is not willing, if it does not come from the heart, it is no obedience at all. So it is with sin. No one can be forced to sin. Persuaded, yes; forced, no. So then, though we use it, the term "free moral agent" is redundant, because moral choice is free choice by its very nature. In his Preface Finney states:

"Especially do I urge to their logical consequences the two admissions that the will is free and that sin and holiness are voluntary acts of mind." ⁷

"4. Fitness. It must be the law of nature, that is, its precept must prescribe and require just those actions of the will which are suitable to the nature and relations of moral beings and nothing more nor less." 8

Moral law demands exactly what God's highest glory and our highest good naturally require. Holiness is natural, beneficial, wholesome, reasonable. Sin is unnatural, harmful, disruptive, dissipating, unreasonable. If sin were "natural," it would be beneficial. It would conform to our nature and thus promote our good, which it does not.

"5. Universality. The conditions and circumstances being the same, it requires, and must require, of all moral agents the same things, in whatever world they may be found." 9

The moral obligation to love God with all the heart and our neighbor as ourselves is the universal moral obligation. It applies everywhere, at all times, to every nation, in every culture, in Heaven, on earth, and in hell. Love is the universal obligation. If certain violations of the good and well-being of others are permitted within a certain culture, they are not thereby justified. Stealing, immorality, killing--whatever. Even the members of those cultures that permit such things know that they do not want done to them what they find culturally acceptable in doing to others. The words of Jesus are universal and unchanging: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12 NKJV).

"6. Impartiality. Moral law is no respecter of persons It demands one thing of all." 10

As moral law applies everywhere, so also it applies to every moral agent. If we can perceive the valuable--that is, if we have reason and light--we are responsible moral agents to the extent that we possess reason and light. No moral agent is exempt from moral law. None is above the obligation to love--not even God Himself. In fact, the greater our reason and light, the greater is our moral obligation to conform our whole being to reason and light. The clearer our perception of what is valuable to God and others, the greater is our responsibility to pursue it for His sake and the sake of others.

How beautiful is God's love! He has infinite intelligence, and perfect knowledge of what is truly best for all. And His great heart is perfectly conformed to His intelligence and knowledge. He seeks the highest good with a perfect heart. Oh, the grandeur of His holiness! the perfection of His character!

"7. Practicability. That which the precept demands must be possible to the subject. That which demands a natural impossibility is not, and cannot be, moral law To talk of inability to obey moral law is to talk nonsense." 11

Everything required by moral law is possible. Remember, moral law applies to free will. It applies to what we can do by choosing to do. What we cannot do by choosing to do is outside the jurisdiction of moral law and moral obligation. Moral law cannot require natural impossibilities, because no one is morally obligated to perform natural impossibilities.

There is no such thing as a moral impossibility. "Moral impossibility" is an oxymoron, a contradiction of terms. If something is impossible, it is not required by moral law. If something is moral, it is something the person is obligated to do and can do; otherwise it would not be classified as moral.

The only impossibility is this: We cannot do what we refuse to do. But this impossibility applies only to the outward action, not the heart (will). The refusal is a deliberate choice. The sinner cannot live for God as long as he or she refuses to do so. This is sin.

"8. Independence. It is an eternal and necessary idea of the divine reason. It is the eternal, self-existent rule of the divine conduct, the law which the intelligence of God prescribes to himself As a law, it is entirely independent of his will just as his own existence is." 12

The will of God always requires what the law of love itself already requires on the basis of the values that impose obligation in and of themselves.

God's happiness (well-being, rights, honor, joy) is valuable in itself. That is why we should choose *His* happiness supremely. We must love God for His sake, and not just for the sake of His will. That would be confusing the means with the end. Of course, it is the will of God that we love Him supremely and others as ourselves. But we are to do this for His sake and for the sake of others.

This makes the will of God very precious, because it is the only way we can properly secure these intrinsic values (valuable in themselves) . The will of God is a necessary means to the valuable end, but it is not the end in itself. We will return to this subject later.

"9. Immutability. Moral law can never change, or be changed." 13

What does moral law require? "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40 NKJV). Moral law requires this and nothing more nor less of every moral agent. No one can possibly do more. No one can morally do less. If a genius suffers a blow on the head and becomes an idiot, he or she has less mind than before, but can still love God with all that is left. We are held responsible according to the amount of moral ability that we possess.

"10. Unity. Moral law proposes but one ultimate end of pursuit to God and to all moral agents. All its requisitions . . . are summed up in one word, love or benevolence. Moral law is the idea of perfect, universal and constant consecration of the whole being to the highest good of being." 14

Partial obedience to moral law is impossible. Either we do love God with all the heart and our neighbor as ourselves, or we do not. We often do so with far less than perfect knowledge and understanding. But we obey with a perfect heart according to the knowledge we do

have, or we do not obey at all. This is called "the unity of moral action." It is the integrity (wholeness) of moral law and moral action. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other" (Matthew 6:24). We cannot go in opposite directions at the same time. We cannot choose one end and at the same time *knowingly and deliberately* use means to secure the opposite end. A basketball player who is committed one team will not knowingly and deliberately make a basket for the opposite team.

"11. Expediency. That which is upon the whole most wise is expedient. That which is upon the whole expedient is demanded by moral law. . . . Expediency may be inconsistent with the letter, but never with the spirit of moral law. . . . That which is plainly demanded by the highest good of the universe is law. It is expedient. It is wise. So, on the other hand, whatever is plainly inconsistent with the highest good of the universe is illegal, unwise, inexpedient, and must be prohibited by the spirit of moral law. . . . The Bible precepts always reveal that which is truly expedient and in no case are we at liberty to set aside the spirit of any commandment upon the assumption that expediency requires it. . . . That which is upon the whole most expedient is right and that which is right is upon the whole expedient." 15

Expedient means advantageous, beneficial. We may disregard temporal laws and regulations when moral considerations clearly require us to do so (for example, exceed the speed limit to reach a hospital when seconds count), but we may not disregard absolute principles on the pretext that moral considerations require us to do so. Because the highest good is inherent within absolute principles, the violation of absolute principles is always inexpedient--harmful to the highest good. Therefore, it is self-contradictory and absurd to claim that a situation could exist in which one would be morally obligated to disregard absolute principles (for example, to throw a child to the wolves in order to save the rest of the family). Absolute principles always embody moral law and moral obligation.

The instructions of the Bible are always the wisest and most beneficial course of action in any situation. They are always what love truly demands.

"12. Exclusiveness. Moral law is the only possible rule of moral obligation. . . . This is and must be the law of love or benevolence. . . . This is the law of right and nothing else is or can be."16

Every valid law must be an expression and application of the moral law. As a guide for the choices and actions of moral beings, no law can overrule, replace, or even coexist with moral law. Moral law, that is, the law of love, is the only legitimate rule for moral conduct.

Now, is all of this just theoretical and idealistic? Not at all. It is as practical and relevant as eating and drinking. In fact, it touches every part of our lives, as we shall see.

3 Somebody Is In Charge

Every new space probe sent out to determine if "life" exists somewhere else in the universe reminds us of the story of a shipwrecked sailor who spent his first days ashore wandering over his island and calling out, "Hellooooooo! Is anybody there?"

When people deny the existence and providence of a personal God, they begin to feel terribly alone in the universe.

Volumes have been written and will be written on the compelling evidences of intelligent and even Divine activity and purpose in the creation. And everyone should become acquainted with these evidences.

Look around you. Read. Think! All the complexity and design evident in nature could not possibly have happened by the chance operation of unintelligent material forces and processes. The odds against it are astronomical.

Somebody is there and He is not idle. He has the power and the intelligence to create a universe of mind-boggling magnitude, and He is running it by physical laws that are amazing in their complexity, precision and dependability!

He is also governing His universe morally. Almighty God has an overriding moral purpose in His creation, and His moral government is just as vast, active and benevolent as His purpose is. Here is a good definition of the nature and purpose of God's moral government:

"Moral government consists in the declaration and administration of moral law. It is the government of free will by motives as distinguished from the government of substance by force." ¹⁷

We all know how physical control or government works. We push a button, or pull a lever, and a machine, circuit, or some other device goes into operation. Turn the steering wheel and the car turns. Step on the gas, and it goes. Hit the brakes, and it stops. That is physical control.

But moral control does not operate that way. We might know enough about people's psychological nature--what makes them "tick"--to be able to manipulate their emotions and behavior by certain words and actions. But this is still following a law of sequence, a "law of necessity." It is not moral persuasion by an appeal to reason. It is manipulation by externally applied motivation (stimuli).

Moral government operates on an entirely different principle. It tries to secure voluntary and intelligent obedience to moral law by internal motivation. It presents values to the reason in an appeal to the person's will to choose those values and live by them. True, external motivations (stimulation of certain emotions, the promise of reward and the threat of punishment) are used to make the choice of the values easier and to minimize the appeals of opposing emotions and circumstances. But moral government is essentially an appeal to reason, with appropriate built-in consequences of acceptance or rejection of the appeal to

reason.

THE BASIS OF THE RIGHT TO GOVERN

We are ready now to talk about the reason for moral government. Government must be based on valid reason, or it has no right to exist. Nobody has a right to exercise authority over others unless there is a basis for that right.

Does moral government rest on a solid basis? Is there an obligating reason for God to exercise moral government over His universe, including the inhabitants of this planet?

Yes, indeed. God's right to rule the human heart and conduct is based on a very solid foundation. We will never have a world where everybody agrees. Even if everyone were virtuous and living up to all the light each one has, not everybody would have the same degree of light or knowledge. Nothing would guarantee that we would not drift into ignorance. So then, we need someone to reveal, establish and uphold moral law and moral order. We need moral governance. This need for moral government is the basis for its existence.

The fundamental reason for moral government, therefore, is the *necessity* for moral government as an indispensable means of securing the highest good. Without it there would be moral disintegration. The resulting moral anarchy would be an intolerable catastrophe for the whole universe. Who would want to live in a society where the well-being of the members of that society is not maintained by appropriate moral authority? So we need moral government to sustain moral order for the good of the universe.

But who has the right to govern? Obviously, the One who is best qualified. That, of course, is God. We have every reason to believe that God is the Moral Governor of the universe. Would a God of love create beings who need His moral supervision, and then refuse to provide that supervision? Of course not. Everything that God does clearly demonstrates His determination to uphold moral order. He has given us His Word, the Bible, to show us the way. He sent His Son to die for us to save us from our sins and our sinning. Now His Holy Spirit is here doing everything morally possible to move human hearts to God and righteousness--that is, everything short of violating man's free will.

We see clearly that God's sovereignty over the universe is a just and legitimate sovereignty. He rules because our good requires it, and not merely because He happens to be powerful enough to impose His authority on us.

If God did not love us, He would not bother to commit His infinite energies to administer faithfully the vast and complex moral government that we need so desperately. He is working earnestly for our good, even though most of the inhabitants of this planet earth are in open rebellion against His just and benevolent rule. Oh, how great is God's love! God is the only one qualified to govern the universe. For that reason it is His right and also His obligation to govern.

And what does this imply? Just this:

A. "The duty or obligation to govern. There can be no right in this case without corresponding obligation, for the right to govern is founded in the necessity of government

and the necessity of government imposes obligation to govern.

B. "Obligation on the part of the subject to obey. It cannot be the right or duty of the governor to govern unless it is the duty of the subject to obey. The governor and subjects are alike dependent upon government as the indispensable means of promoting the highest good.

C. "The right and duty to dispense just and necessary rewards and punishments . . . whenever the public interest demands.

D. "Obligation on the part both of the ruler and the ruled . . . to make any personal and private sacrifice demanded by the higher public good.

E. "The right and duty to employ any force which is indispensable to the maintenance of order . . . and sustaining the supremacy of moral law....To deny this right is to deny the right to govern." 18

Again, the good of all is dependent upon the moral government of God. And God is faithful in His benevolent administration, always acting in the highest interest of His creatures.

Oh, how good and reasonable it is to yield heart-obedience to Him! How wicked and unreasonable it is to rebel in heart and life against His rightful authority in our lives! Man's selfish determination to be independent of God's holy will and rule is most destructive. The person who refuses to allow God to rule upon the throne of his heart is his own enemy as well as the enemy of the highest good of the universe.

THE LIMIT OF THE RIGHT TO GOVERN

It is important to define the limit of the right to govern. Since the right to govern is based on the necessity for government, it follows that the right cannot go beyond the necessity.

God is the Creator. Also, God is uniquely qualified to govern the universe He has created. If He were not, He would have no right to govern, no matter how much the universe needed to be governed. On the other hand, no matter how much God is able and qualified to govern, He would have no right to govern the universe unless it needed to be governed. The fact that it needs to be governed is the *basis* of God's right to govern it, and His unique qualifications are the *conditions* of His right to govern it.

This means then that God is not a bully, ruling us just because He has the power to do so. There is a compelling reason for Him to govern and for us to obey. We all need God, and we cannot get along without Him and His moral authority!

But, base the right to govern on anything else than the necessity of government for the good of all, and rulers will see no limit to their authority. Look at the parade of history. Kings, generals, Caesars, prelates, emperors march through its pages. How many of them ruled for the good of the people? How many followed the principle that their right to rule extended no farther than the people's actual need for their rule?

Look at the sad record. From ancient Nimrod to this evening's news we see a long line of monarchs, tyrants and demagogues ruling for their own ends on the basis of power and might. Only now and then will you find a ruler who governs truly for the highest good of the people and who limits his or her power by the actual requirements of the people.

In contrast, let us look at the majestic moral government of God.

Now, it is true that God is sovereign. He does not ask anyone for permission to govern His universe. He does not ask anyone's advice how to run it. But the sovereignty of God, though complete, is not arbitrary. God's authority (and duty) to govern is based on the *necessity* for moral government and is *conditioned* on His unique qualifications to govern.

And God is fulfilling His moral obligation to govern. God's sovereignty is being directed by His infinite love and wisdom. In all that He does, God is guided by His determined purpose to secure our greatest good and His highest glory by the best, wisest and most just means possible. Truly, "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Loving submission to the sovereign will of God is the only morally justifiable course of action for reasonable creatures. Sin is the basest form of treason ever introduced into the universe, because, remember, all who refuse to obey God are working directly and destructively against the good of the universe, against the good of their community, against the good of their family, and against their own personal good.

4 "Where Do I Fit In?"

Most people do not like it. They do everything possible to avoid it. They deny it. They throw it onto someone else. They try to escape it personally by spreading it over society collectively. It challenges them and makes them uncomfortable.

What is it?

Personal moral responsibility.

One school of psychology says that man is only a machine (and who ever heard of a machine being morally responsible for anything?). Stimulus-response associationism places all the blame on in-coming stimuli ("Society made me do it; my social and physical environment stimulated me, and I had to respond the way I did. I am a victim").

Maybe the excuse is genetic ("I was born this way"), or biochemical (It's my glands"), or ethnic ("Please excuse my temper; I'm Irish), or parental ("my mother dominated me"). Sometimes it sounds theological ("It's my sinful nature"), or diabolical ("The devil made me do it").

You name it; somebody has thought of it.

Of course, many things influence us or appeal to us. But they do not make us *do* anything. The choice is still ours. We are not the product of these influences unless we choose to be.

We are more than machines or animals. Our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, values, hopes, joys, sorrows, and affections are not just complex electrochemical processes. There is a spiritual part of our being that is uniquely human. One of its functions is the power of intelligent, self-determined choice--choice either in conformity with reason or in opposition to reason. And because these choices are self-generated, we are personally responsible for them. We are morally obligated to choose intelligently in conformity with the will and Word of God.

THE CONDITIONS OF MORAL OBLIGATION

"There are various forms of obligation: obligation to choose an ultimate end of life, obligation to choose the necessary conditions of this end and obligation to put forth executive efforts to secure this end." 19

A little later we shall discuss the foundation or basis of moral obligation. Right now we shall explore the conditions of moral obligation, that is, the two things a person must have to be under moral obligation.

The first is moral agency. A person must be a moral agent to be under personal moral obligation. And what must a person have to be a moral agent?

"The attributes of moral agency are *intellect, sensibility and free will*.

"Intellect includes . . . reason, conscience, and self-consciousness.

"Sensibility is . . . feeling.

"Free-will is . . . the power of choosing, or refusing to choose, . . . in compliance with moral obligation.

"Unless the will is free, man has no freedom; and if he has no freedom, he is not a moral agent, that is, he is incapable of moral action and also of moral character." 20

So then, to be capable of responsible choices one must have (1) a functioning intellect; (2) feelings by which we are aware that personal well-being and happiness is valuable in itself (our own well-being and happiness and therefore the well-being and happiness of others); and (3) the ability to choose without coercion. These three capacities make a person a moral agent.

But before our choices can have real moral character, we must have something else:

"A second condition of moral obligation is *light*, or so much knowledge of our *moral relations* as to develop the idea of oughtness." 21

We must realize what is valuable in itself and that we ought to choose it because it is valuable in itself. The moment that we realize that God's interests (well-being, rights, honor, happiness, joy) are supremely valuable and that the happiness of others is just as valuable as our own, we have *light*. We know what we ought to live for, and therefore we come under moral obligation to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. The more we understand how to please God and do good to others, and how our words, attitudes and actions affect others in practical every day living, the greater is our light.

Moral obligation cannot go beyond our knowledge, but it does go as far as our knowledge. It demands that we live up to all the light we have, and that we get all the light we can. Love can do no more. Love will do no less.

So then, as we become aware of the value of what we should live for, we become aware of personal moral obligation and of the development of a sense of right and wrong.

We human beings know right from wrong because we know the valuable. That is, we know what we ought to live for and we know whether or not we are living for it.

THE EXTENT OF MORAL OBLIGATION

Now that we have established what is required for us to be personally morally accountable, let us consider what we are morally accountable *for*. That is, to what does moral obligation apply?

We start by eliminating the things to which moral obligation does not *directly* apply. Moral obligation *indirectly* applies to some of them. Although they are not directly under moral obligation, some of them are indirectly under moral obligation.

Physical Action.

Moral obligation does not *directly* apply to physical action. Physical action itself is not directly under moral obligation. Physical action itself is neither right nor wrong. The right or wrong is in the character of the choice that produces physical action. Furthermore, some actions are only reflexive, with no deliberate choices or purposes behind them.

Some actions are only accidental. If we unintentionally bump someone, we say, "Excuse me; I didn't mean to bump you." We are saying that the action had no hostile intent and therefore no moral character in itself. If it happened because of carelessness or inattention, we apologize for that. "I should have been more careful." We are acknowledging that we are *indirectly* responsible.

The instant the moral choice is made in the heart (will), moral character is determined, whether or not a person has the opportunity to carry out the choice in practice.

For example, does a person become a murderer when he pulls the trigger or when the decision was made to do the deed? The answer is obvious--the person became a murderer the moment the decision was made. "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15). Jesus said, "Whosoever looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

In Chapter 2, under Moral Law, we had the illustration of Joe choosing to steal Bill's watch. Moral obligation applied *directly* to Joe's *choice* to steal Bill's watch, not to Joe's hand. Nobody blames Joe's hand; they blame Joe for using his hand to steal. Joe is *directly* accountable for the choice; he is *indirectly* accountable for using his hand to carry out the choice.

Emotions.

Moral obligation does not *directly* apply to our emotions (feelings). Our emotions (feelings) are not *directly* under the control of our will and within our power of choice; therefore they are not *directly* under moral obligation. "Our feelings have no brains." A feeling is an involuntary reaction to a person, place or situation. For that reason our moral character does not depend on how we feel. It does depend on what we *do* with our feelings. Feelings are under the control of our thoughts, and our thoughts are under the control of our will. We can control our feelings by controlling our thoughts instead of letting our thoughts run loose. We have the ability to direct our attention. We can choose what to think about and how to think about it. Thus feelings are only *indirectly* under the control of our will. To a certain extent our feelings are also conditioned on our health and biochemistry.

Involuntary Mental States and Actions.

Moral obligation does not apply to involuntary mental states and actions. Involuntary states and actions are not under moral obligation. The actions of people who are not

responsible for what they are doing (babies, sleepwalkers, the mentally incapacitated) are not under moral obligation. The actions of people who are senile often come under this category.

The Direct Extent Of Moral Obligation.

To what then does moral obligation *directly* apply? The answer is simple: moral obligation applies *directly* to the motive (end), freely and knowingly determined by and within ourselves personally.

Every moral agent who has any degree of light has chosen an ultimate end and is pursuing it. Having chosen an ultimate end, moral agents are also choosing the known means to secure that end, and they are actively using those means. "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit" (Romans 8:5. Also Galatians 5:16, 17).

We can give up one ultimate end and choose the opposite ultimate end. But as long as we actually *choose* a particular end, we cannot deliberately refuse to pursue it. Choice produces action by "a law of necessity," automatic sequence. Choosing an end is the same thing as choosing to pursue it to the extent of one's ability and by all known available means. Refusing to pursue an end is the same as giving up the end.

So then, if we really love God, we will live for Him. If we refuse to obey Him, we do not love Him. We might experience certain sentiments about Him or toward Him. But these in themselves are involuntary and have no moral character. Our moral character is not determined by our opinions or by how we feel. Our moral character is determined by what we are living for!

Suppose you walk up to a friend at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago:

"Well, hello there, Mike. Getting ready for another jet ride? Where to this time?"

"Oh, hi, Glen. I'm heading for New York City. Really important that I be there immediately."

"New York City? Then how come your ticket is for Los Angeles?"

"Well, you see, Glen. It's like this. I really want to go to New York, and I'll make it there somehow. But right now . . . oh, excuse me, Glen. My flight to L.A. is boarding at Gate 3. See you later."

So Glen walks slowly away, muttering to himself, "Poor Mike. He's lost his mind. He's really lost it."

What was Mike's real goal? It was the one he was knowingly using means to secure, not the one he professed.

As was stated earlier, a basketball player might be on one team and wear its uniform, but if he deliberately makes the winning basket for the other team, his heart is with *that* team.

"Men are to be judged by their motives, that is, by their designs, intentions If

a man intend evil, though perchance he may do us good, we do not excuse him So if he intend to do us good and perchance do us evil, we do not and cannot condemn him He may be to blame for other things connected with the affair. He may have come to our help too late . . . but for a sincere and of course hearty endeavor to do us good he is not culpable."

"The Bible . . . recognizes this truth. 'If there be a willing mind,' that is, a right willing or intention, 'it is accepted' [2 Corinthians 8:12]. Again, 'All the law is fulfilled in one word, love' [Galatians 5:14]. If the intention [motive] is right, or if there be a willing mind, it is accepted as obedience. But if there be not a willing mind, that is, right intention, no outward act is regarded as obedience."²²

Our motive is what really counts with God. If our heart (supreme motive) is right, all else will be right according to the extent of our light. But if the heart (supreme motive) is wrong, all is wrong.

Example: A student labors to get wages, to purchase books, to obtain an education, to preach the gospel, to save souls and to please God. Another labors to get wages, to purchase books, to get an education, to preach the gospel, to secure a salary and his own ease and popularity.

"Now the proximate ends, or immediate objects of pursuit, in these two cases are precisely alike, while their ultimate ends are entirely opposite. Their first or nearest end is to get wages. Their next end is to obtain books; and so we follow them until we ascertain their ultimate end before we learn the moral character of what they are doing One is selfish and the other benevolent."²³

Now, before we can choose means and exert actions intelligently, we must first choose an end. It is the choice of an end that sets moral action in motion. In fact, it can be said that the choice of an ultimate end is *the great* moral act. All others flow from it.

Once the ultimate end has been chosen by a moral agent, the will immediately embraces all the known available means to obtain that end and generates actions accordingly. This is unavoidable. The choice of a supreme end automatically sets a moral agent in motion toward securing that end. And notice, it is the *choice* of a supreme object, not merely the recognition, admiration and mental approval of the object of supreme choice, or sympathetic feelings toward it.

A river system is a good illustration. The drops of water make their way into a rivulet, each rivulet into a creek, each creek into a tributary river, each tributary river into the main course. Finally, everything surges past the mouth of the mighty river into the ocean.

Choice is the same way. Every intelligent and meaningful choice contributes directly or indirectly toward securing the ultimate end chosen by the moral agent.

Also, there are only two ultimate ends from which to choose. One is "the highest well-being of God and the universe," that is, God first, and our neighbor as ourselves. The other is self. *There is no other mode of moral action.* As ultimate ends, the two are mutually exclusive, antithetical, antagonistic. "No one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24).

So if Jesus Christ is not occupying first place in the heart, it is for one reason and one reason only: self has usurped the throne and is ruling there.

Moral obligation applies directly only to free-will choice or motive. That being true, then moral obligation applies indirectly to everything that is controlled in some way by the free will and that is an expression or result of free choice.

For this reason right thoughts, actions and even feelings are required by the moral law because a right heart will produce them under normal conditions.

On the other hand, if thoughts, actions, and even feelings that seem to be good and righteous proceed from a selfish ultimate motive, there is no real virtue in them.

"Sinners do many things outwardly which the law of God requires. Now unless the intention [set of the will, motive] decides the character of these acts, they must be regarded as really virtuous. But when the intention is found to be selfish, then it is ascertained that they are sinful

"Moral obligation then indirectly extends to everything about us over which the will has direct or indirect control.

"We speak of thought, feeling and action as holy or unholy. By this, however, all men really mean that the agent is holy or unholy, is praiseworthy or blameworthy in his exercises and actions, because they regard them as proceeding from the state or attitude of the will." 24

The character of the end determines the character of the means and actions. The means and actions are right only if the end is right. The right end will use only means and actions that are consistent with its own character. A just end will choose only just means and actions. If love chooses the end, love will choose the means and actions.

The heart, or motive, is what counts with God. This will become clearer and more meaningful as we apply this principle to everyday living.

What Is Really Worth Living For?

In this chapter we shall examine the true basis, or foundation, of moral obligation. It is of vital importance to understand clearly just what we are required by the moral law to aim at and live for as the great ultimate end or value of life.

But first we need to define some terms. Finney frequently uses the word "intrinsic." Intrinsic means "within itself." Something intrinsically valuable is valuable within itself. It is valuable, not merely because it is scarce or because of demand, but because it has worth or value within its own nature.

Finney also uses the word "intention." He does not use the word in the popular sense of "I mean to do it someday." Rather, he uses the word to mean actual and present choice, the motive, the set of the will..

Here is what Finney says about the foundation of moral obligation:

"The ground of obligation, then, is that reason or consideration intrinsic in or belonging to the nature of an object, which necessitates the rational affirmation that it ought to be chosen for its own sake.

"The well-being of God and the universe . . . is intrinsically important or valuable, and all moral agents are under obligation to choose it for its own sake. Entire, universal, uninterrupted consecration to this end . . . is the duty of all moral agents.

"God's ultimate end in all he does or omits is the highest well-being of himself and of the universe All moral agents should have the same end, and this comprises their whole duty.

"Thus it is self-evident that moral character belongs to the ultimate intention and that a man's character is as the end for which he lives, moves and has his being.

"Let us proceed to the examination of the various conflicting theories of the ground of obligation."

1. THE WILL OF GOD AS THE GROUND OF OBLIGATION

"I will first consider the theory of those who hold that . . . God's sovereign will creates, and not merely reveals and enforces, obligation. To this I reply:

"Obligation to do what? Why, to love God and our neighbor. . . . And does God's will create this obligation? Should we be under no such obligation had he not commanded it? Are we to will this good, not for its own value to God and our neighbor, but because God commands it?

"If the will of God does of itself create and not merely reveal obligation, then the will and not the interest and well-being of God ought to be chosen for its own sake,

and to be the great end of life.

"The reason does indeed affirm that we ought to will that which God commands, but it does not and cannot assign his will as the foundation of the obligation. . . . God requires me to labor and pray for the salvation of souls. . . . Now his command is necessarily regarded by me as obligatory, not as an arbitrary requirement, but as revealing infallibly the true means or conditions of securing the great and ultimate end, which I am to will for its intrinsic value." 25

It is God's will that we love Him supremely and others as ourselves, because of the value of His highest good and the good of others.

But when people become self-convinced that the will of God is the end in itself, and not the means to the end, the result is fanaticism. Any code of ethics built on this premise becomes completely detached from real, practical values.

The Crusades are cited as a classic example. A modern example is the religiously based but passion-driven terrorism that has resulted in so much violence and bloodshed in the Middle East and elsewhere. "God wills it" is used to justify all kinds of evil and foolishness.

People who struggle to "do the will of God" without a real love for God and others are under a delusion. They are only trying to provide a moral rationale for the gratification of passion and ambition. They have no real regard for the good that truly doing God's will would bring to God and to others.

The will of God is not an end in itself to which all values, human and divine, are to be sacrificed. Rather, the will of God is always to be understood as the course of action that results in the highest practical good to God and man, and for that reason it *is* the will of God.

2. THEORY OF SELF-INTEREST

"This theory . . . makes self-interest the ground of moral obligation. Upon this theory I remark--

"If self-interest be the ground of moral obligation, . . . to be virtuous I must in every instance intend my own interest as the supreme good.

"Upon this hypothesis I am to treat my own interest as supremely valuable, when it is infinitely less valuable than the interests of God.

"But enough; we cannot fail to see that this is a selfish philosophy, and the exact opposite of the truth of God." 26

This is a popular one today. It is the "live-and-let-live" philosophy. We hear it every time someone says, "I just mind my own business. I don't bother other people and they don't bother me."

What they mean is, "I'll live for myself and you live for yourself, and we'll try to stay out of

each other's way."

Each cares only for self or what is in some way related to self.

There's no love, no morality in that. It is not "enlightened self-interest." It is selfishness, the very essence of sin.

3. THE UTILITARIAN PHILOSOPHY

"This maintains . . . that the tendency of an act, choice or intention to secure a good or valuable end is the foundation of the obligation to put forth that choice or intention. Upon this theory I remark--

"The tendency is valuable or otherwise as the end is valuable or otherwise.

"A choice is obligatory because it tends to secure good. But why secure good rather than evil? The answer is, because good is valuable. Ah! here then we have another reason, the one which must be the true reason, to wit, the value of the good which the choice tends to secure.

"The obligation to use means may and must be conditioned upon perceived tendency, but never founded in this tendency. . . . The end must be intrinsically valuable, and this alone imposes obligation to choose the end and to use the means to promote it." 27

The utilitarian philosophy is the "good works" treadmill. Its objective is to maintain one's moral self-image by piling up moral "credits."

4. THE THEORY OF RIGHT AS THE FOUNDATION OF OBLIGATION

"The law of God does not, cannot, require us to love right more than God and our neighbor. What! Right of greater value than the highest well-being of God and of the universe? Impossible!

"When we pray and preach and converse, must we aim at right, must the love of right, and not the love of God and of souls influence us? . . . Did he [God] give his Son to die for the right, for the sake of the right, or to die . . . for the sake of . . . souls?

"Consistent rightarianism is a godless, Christless, loveless philosophy. 'Do the right for the sake of the right.' But now, having adopted this maxim, the mind . . . finds God and being to exist and sees it to be right to intend their good. . . . But . . . we are to will their well-being as an end or for its own sake, or because it is right? If for its own sake, where then is the maxim, 'Will the right for the sake of the right?'" 28

This system is the opposite of utilitarianism. Here is where millions of people are

deceived. They struggle to do "right," thinking that this is true religion and morality. But ask them to surrender their hearts to God, and what do they reply?

"Well, I'm trying to do what's right. I pay my debts. I try to treat my family and my fellowman right. I try to live a good clean life."

They endeavor to assure themselves that they are "right," while all the time self sits enthroned in their hearts. Not once are they motivated by true love for God and for all mankind. They just struggle to be "right." And when they feel that they are "right," they often find pleasure in judging others. It makes them feel righteous, and reinforces their moral self-image, but they have never even come near to 1 Corinthians 13. The world accepts them as "good," and often the church accepts them as Christian. Deluded souls!

5. THE PRACTICAL TENDENCY OF THE VARIOUS THEORIES

"I will begin with the theory that regards the sovereign will of God as the foundation of moral obligation.

"One legitimate and necessary result of this theory is a totally erroneous conception both of the character of God, and of the nature and design of his government. If God's will is the foundation of moral obligation, it follows that he is an arbitrary sovereign. . . . But if his will is under the law of his reason, . . . then his will is not the foundation of moral obligation, but those reasons that lie revealed in the divine intelligence....

"There is ground for perfect confidence, love and submission to his divine will in all things. . . . His will is law . . . in the sense of its being a revelation of both the end we ought to seek, and the means by which the end can be secured.

"I will next glance at the legitimate results of the theory of the selfish school.

"It tends directly and inevitably to the confirmation and despotism of sin in the soul. All sin . . . resolves itself into a spirit of self-seeking. . . . This philosophy represents this spirit of self-seeking as virtue, and only requires that in our efforts to secure our own happiness we should not interfere with the rights of others in seeking theirs. . . . What! I need not care positively for my neighbor's happiness, . . . yet I must take care not to hinder it. But why? Because it is intrinsically as valuable as my own.

"Practical bearings and tendency of rightarianism. "Having . . . in mind a law of right distinct from, and perhaps opposed to, benevolence [love], what frightful conduct may not this philosophy lead to? This is indeed the law of fanaticism.

"It sets men in chase of a philosophical abstraction as the supreme end of life instead of the concrete reality of the highest well-being of God and the universe.

"Lastly, I come to the consideration of the practical bearings of what I regard as the true theory of the foundation of moral obligation, namely, that the intrinsic nature and value of the highest well-being of God and of the universe is the sole

foundation of moral obligation.

"If this be true, the whole subject of moral obligation is perfectly simple and intelligible.

"Every moral agent knows in every possible instance what is right and can never mistake his real duty.

"His duty is to will this end with all the known conditions and means thereof.

"Multitudes of professed Christians seem to have no conception that benevolence [love] constitutes true religion; that nothing else does; and that selfishness is sin, and totally incompatible with religion. *They live on in their self-indulgences, and dream of heaven.*"²⁹ (Emphasis added).

No code of conduct or system of ethics that leaves the soul under the control of selfishness is real morality. And no "faith" that does not break the power of selfishness (sin) in the heart is true religion.

Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). If a person's religion does not break the bondage of sin in the heart, it cannot be the truth, because the truth always liberates the soul from the power of sin.

The true foundation of and reason for moral obligation is the highest happiness (well-being) of God and His creation. God's happiness is supremely valuable; therefore, we are morally obligated to place His happiness first. Living supremely for anything else is not living right because it is not living supremely for God; it is placing something that bears an ultimate relationship to self ahead of God; therefore, it is sin.

What is to be said about the "religious" person who regards the will of God as a moral justification for some selfish end, and not out of love for God? ("I prayed about it and I feel that it's God's will"). That person's religion is a delusion. He wants to feel that God is on his side and approves of what he has made up his mind to do. But he has not the love of God in him. Serving God only for selfish reasons must be terribly tiresome. "Religion" is a burden if one does not love Jesus Christ.

The same is true of utilitarians, the folks who are always involved in doing "good," and promoting the "cause." Their "morality" consists in quantity, not quality. They strive to achieve higher quotas, more productivity. They are busy in good causes, always "involved." It is "so rewarding" and gives them such a good feeling.

But ask them why they are so active, and they become uneasy, defensive. In their hearts they know that they are not motivated by true love for God and man.

Jesus said, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:22, 23).

Remember 1 Corinthians 13. That great love chapter teaches that it is possible to give all our goods to feed the poor and even to give our body to be burned without being motivated by love.

Works motivated by self-gratification are of no moral value.

And then there is the rightarian--always a stickler for the letter of the law, regardless of whether or not it does God or anybody else any good.

In the Bible the prime example of rightarians are the Pharisees. Jesus healed a lame man and told him to carry his bedroll home. The Pharisees, however, complained that he was carrying it on the sabbath. In their twisted morality, it was wrong for Jesus to heal on the sabbath, but perfectly "right" for them to plot His death on the sabbath.

Jesus summed up all their religious activity, and then disposed of it all by saying, "All their works they do to be seen of men" (Matthew 23:5).

In other words, their motive was wrong, and when the motive is wrong, all is wrong. All their praying, fasting, tithing were only means to a selfish ultimate end--to be seen of men.

Rightarians are motivated by a smug, self-satisfying regard for the "right," not by real love for God and man. If people just believe and act "right," they are satisfied. Their standing for the "right" keeps them in good stead in the church and/or community, and reinforces their false hope that they are on the road to Heaven.

No good deeds, right opinions, firm beliefs, or fervent feelings can be moral or Christian, even in the slightest degree, while the will is not surrendered to God.

When we turn our hearts to God, open up to Him and His grace, and love Him supremely and others as ourselves, the will of God becomes our delight as the indispensable means of glorifying Him; active service flows freely and gladly; and for the first time we are truly right!

Instead of being objectives in themselves, all these things and others like them become means and conditions for promoting the great end of every true heart--the highest well-being of God and His creatures. Genuine Christians are motivated by the highest possible values. Love for God and for others commands the full commitment of their whole being and motivates them to the development and employment of their full potential. God's highest happiness and the greatest good of all mankind--these are the real, objective values worth living for. These are the values that all true believers seek. They are the basis of all morality.

It is that simple. It all adds up to love.

Yet, many people feel that they can be somewhat good and somewhat bad at the same time. But is this possible? Is there a certain amount of goodness and a certain amount of evil mixed together in all of us? Can we be partly holy and partly sinful at the same time?

That is our next subject.

We Cannot Go In Opposite Directions At The Same Time

As long as we are in this world we are subject to temptations. But temptations are not sin. They are just the invitations to sin. Our moral character depends on whether we accept the invitations or reject them.

Because we are free moral agents we can choose and do choose an ultimate end. But while we embrace one supreme end or goal, we reject its opposite. We cannot choose both at the same time. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). The possibility of changing masters always exists, and the temptation to do so often exists, but we cannot serve both at the same time.

"Obedience cannot be partial in the sense that the subject ever does, or can, partly obey and partly disobey at the same time.

"If, for example, the soul chooses the highest well-being of God and the universe as an ultimate end, it cannot while it continues to choose that end use or choose the means to effect any other end The only possible choice inconsistent with this end is the choice of another ultimate end." ³⁰

By "choice" is meant intelligent choice--choice under light. We all make a lot of ignorant mistakes, mistakes in areas where we do not yet have sufficient light. We can love God supremely and purely, and yet ignorantly do things that are not in His highest interest. But as we grow in grace and knowledge, we live for God more intelligently and effectively. And, it might be added, more happily.

We progress *in* obedience, not *into* obedience. Obedience must be with the whole heart--that is, it must be honest--or it is not obedience at all. If obedience is with the whole heart--that is, if it is honest--it is full obedience. But if it is not, it is not obedience. It is hypocrisy. Jesus said, "He who is not for Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad" (Matthew 12:30).

So then, a person's chosen ultimate end is evidenced by the means he or she uses. No one can choose an ultimate end and at the same time knowingly and deliberately choose means that work against that end and for the opposite end. The *choice* of an end necessitates the choice of the known means to that end.

This essential principle was emphasized in Chapter 2 (Unity as an essential attribute of moral law), and again in Chapter 4 (The direct extent of moral obligation). Two illustrations were used: a man in Chicago professing to go to New York but buying a plane ticket for Los Angeles; and basketball player on one team deliberately making the winning basket for the opposite team.

This essential principle can be visualized as follows:

It is to be emphasized: *the commitment of the will is what counts*. One might *approve* of the right end, *admire* it, give mental *assent* to it, sympathize with it, have good *feelings*

toward it--and yet not actually *choose* it. Many do that, both in the church and outside of the church.

When we knowingly use means to a particular end, *that* is the end we are really choosing. If we say that we are living in the Spirit but are deliberately living in the flesh, we deceive ourselves.

"But why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6).

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit" (Romans 8:5). "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another; so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Galatians 5:16, 17).

How much dedication does love produce? It cannot produce an amount of dedication equal to God's real worth because God's real worth is infinite. Remember, one's moral obligation goes only as far as one's light. That means, then, that our devotion to Jesus Christ depends on how real and precious He is to us. Love can do no more. Love will do no less. As Jesus becomes more real and precious to us, our devotion and dedication to Him will grow, as will also our service to others and our commitment to share the gospel.

Get close to God; get into His Word; "Lift up your eyes and look at the fields" (John 4:35). Give God an opportunity to make Himself more real to you and to show you the value of lost souls. Love will naturally produce the right amount of corresponding dedication. Wisdom will direct it according to a realistic understanding of our individual gifts, talents, time and opportunities.

Moral law does not require us to live on the verge of exhaustion. That is counter-productive. Moral law requires us to love God with all our heart and others as ourselves, including the expenditure of whatever strength, time, and resources that we honestly believe will do the most good both at the time and also in the long run.

On the other hand, we do not truly love God if we are not living up to our knowledge of what He deserves from us. That is selfishness, not love. The two do not mix.

So then, no one can be partly holy and partly sinful at the same time. Sin is a unit--the choice of self-gratification as the supreme pursuit of life, including the choice of all the known means to secure that end. Holiness or morality is also a unit--the choice of the highest well-being of God and of others as the supreme pursuit of life, including the choice of all the known means to secure that end.

To put it another way, moral action comes in two complete packages. Each package comes complete with a supreme end, plus the known means and actions to achieve that end. One package is labeled "love." The other is labeled "selfishness." The one is full obedience, the other is total disobedience.

The two systems are mutually exclusive and antagonistic. There is no mixing, no

crossover, no coexistence between them.

The choice of the end determines the choice of the known means. Also, the choice of the known means reveals the end we are really living for. The heart determines the life, and the life reveals the heart.

"Virtue consists in willing every good according to its perceived relative value, and... nothing short of this is virtue To talk, therefore, of a virtue . . . right in kind but deficient in degree is to talk sheer nonsense. It is the same absurdity as to talk of sinful holiness, an unjust justice, a wrong rightness, an impure purity, an imperfect perfection, a disobedient obedience." 31

Our whole moral obligation is to love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves with all the light we have and can obtain. God requires nothing more than this; He can require no less. We can do no more; we can do no less and be Christians. It is that simple.

"But," someone might ask, "can my heart be right with God when I feel all these bad desires and emotions?" Finney comments regarding the Christian--

"Emotions contrary to his intentions may, by circumstances beyond his control, be brought to exist in his mind; yet, by willing to divert the attention from the objects that produce them, they can ordinarily be banished. If this is done as soon as . . . it can be, there is no sin. If it is not done as soon as . . . it can be, . . . the intention [motive, set of the will] is not what it ought to be." 32

Emotional discipline is an important subject. The point to be emphasized here is that true religion, true morality, is not a matter of how we feel but of what we are living for.

The next question is a big one:

"Does a Christian cease to be a Christian whenever he commits a sin?"

"I answer: whenever he sins, he must for the time being cease to be holy He must incur the penalty of the law of God If it be said that the precept is still binding upon him, but that with respect to the Christian the penalty is forever set aside, I reply that to abrogate [set aside] the penalty is to repeal the precept, for a precept without penalty is no law. It is only counsel or advice. The Christian, therefore, is justified no longer than he obeys, and must be condemned when he disobeys Until he repents he cannot be forgiven." 33

In two important ways a Christian who sins is different from the person who has never been saved.

First, a Christian who sins is under a covenant of chastisement (Hebrews 12:5-11). God has invested a tremendous amount of grace in that Christian, and He is not going to let him go without doing everything wisely possible to bring him to repentance.

My father never did spank the neighbors' kids. He was more concerned about how / turned out than how they turned out. That's because he was *my* father.

Our heavenly Father is the same way. First Corinthians 11:32 tell us that we are chastened by the Lord, so that we may not be condemned with the world.

But suppose that I am arrested for a crime, and my father is the judge. Can he justly suspend the sentence because I am his son? No, He cannot.

Second, a Christian who sins feels his or her broken fellowship with God, unlike the sinner who has never experienced real fellowship with God.

When I was growing up as a boy, if our neighbor, Mr. Mathis, was displeased with me, it didn't bother me very much. But if my father was displeased with me, it was a different matter. Real fellowship was broken. I couldn't stand it. I had to make it right.

Christian, if you sin, you know it. Your joy is gone. You miss that peace--oh, how you miss it! And that sweet fellowship and tender communion with your Father--how you long for it! Something is between the you and the Father, and you can't stand it. You have to make it right!

But if you refuse to make it right, if you go right on and harden your heart, crushing the tender feelings once so carefully nurtured--you will be lost.

You will not be able to say on that day, "But, Father, I was born again. I am your child." Sorrowfully, the Father will withdraw, having turned the judgment seat over to the Son (John 5:22), and you will have to receive your sentence from the nail-scarred hand of the One whose blood you refused for your cleansing, the One whom you crucified afresh and put to open shame.

"Can a man be born again and then unborn?"

"None will maintain that there is anything impossible in this except it be those who hold to physical regeneration. If regeneration consists in a change in . . . the ultimate intention [motive, set of the will], as we shall see it does, it is plain that an individual can be born again and afterwards cease to be virtuous." ³⁴

Most people who have difficulty understanding this point do so because, like Nicodemus, they fail to realize that the new birth is a moral change, not a physical, ontological, or metaphysical change. The new birth is a change of the supreme object of pursuit in life. Sin shuts God out of the soul. Repentance and faith opens the soul to God. The result is a complete revolution in all of life. Such a change does not necessitate a change of any "thing" down inside us. It is not a change in the essence of body, soul, or spirit. It is a change of ultimate choice and ultimate choice can be changed more than once.

"Can there be no such thing as weak faith, weak love, and weak repentance?"

"I answer: if you mean comparatively weak, . . . yes. But if you mean weak in such a sense as to be sinful, no.

"Unbelief . . . is the rejection of truth perceived. Faith is the reception of truth

perceived. Faith and unbelief then are opposite states of choice and can by no possibility coexist.

"Faith to be real must be equal to the light we have." 35

Our commitment to the truth can be no stronger than our grasp of the truth.

Our faith cannot go beyond our light. Our faith is weak if we do not know the Scriptures. Our love for Jesus is weak if we do not allow the Holy Spirit to make Him as real to us as He wants to be. Our burden for lost souls will not be as great as it should be unless we "look at the fields" (John 4:35). A person's repentance and faith will be weak if he does not see clearly the guilt of his sin and the power of Christ to save him.

But in all of these cases the faith, love and repentance are real. The weak Christian does not have much light, but he or she is living up to all the light possessed. There is no rejection of light, because that would be no repentance, faith or love at all.

As light grows, so will the believer. As he feeds on the Word of God, his faith grows. As the Holy Spirit makes Jesus more real and precious, his love for his Savior grows. This is progress *in* holiness, but not progress *into* holiness.

"The theory of the mixed character of moral actions is an eminently dangerous theory, as it leads its advocates to suppose that . . . there is some holiness in them while they are in the known commission of sin.

"It leads its advocates to place the standard of conversion or regeneration exceedingly low There can scarcely be a more dangerous error than to say, that while we are conscious of present sin, we are or can be in a state of acceptance with God.

"The only sense in which obedience to moral law can be partial is that obedience may be intermittent. That is, the subject may sometimes obey and at other times disobey These may succeed each other an indefinite number of times, but coexist they plainly cannot." 36

Nobody has to sin. Victory over sin is the norm for the Christian. In fact, to be a Christian means to be in victory over sin: "Whoever has been born of God does not sin [*poiei*, from *poieo*, does not *do* sin], for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin [*ou dunatai hamartanein*], because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). God's "seed" is His word (Luke 8:11). The psalmist said to God, "Your word have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). The resources of the new birth remove the power to sin--the force of the appeal. "Whoever is born of God does not sin [*oux hamatanei*]" (1 John 5:18).

Sin is not compatible with a Christian's character. Sin is *contrary* to a Christian's character.

"Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are under the law but under grace" (Romans 6:14). Freedom from the dominion of sin is proof that you are not under the law but

under grace. The person who is under the dominion of sin is not under grace.

The cross is death to sin. Believers died to sin and may no longer live in it (Romans 6). "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision [*pronoia*, forethought, planning] for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:14). Do not make room for sinful indulgence in your thinking and planning. Do not include any "provisions" for it. Do not plan to fail. Instead, plan to overcome daily through Jesus Christ and "stock up" the spiritual resources that guarantee your victory.

But, what about the Christian who does sin? Is he lost because of that one sin? Will one sin send him to hell?

For one thing, true Christians do not sin as much or as often as some people seem to think. The idea that believers "sin every day" is just not true.

Honest mistakes, errors in judgment, temptations, moods--these are *not* sin.

We must be careful not to use the term "sin" lightly by applying it to things that are not violations of moral law. If we apply the term to things that are not really sin, we obscure the serious meaning of the word and trivialize sin.

Sin is a deliberate choice to disobey God. *That is not the believer's choice.*

Christians are walking in the light. Now, believer X might have more light than believer Y. But believer X has no right to say that believer Y is sinning just because he is not living up to his (X's) light.

Light can be imparted, but it cannot be imposed. The attempt to impose light leads to legalism. Light is imparted only when the believer is led to see it for himself or herself. The Holy Spirit does this by the word of God. Ministers and other fellow believers are part of the process through teaching and example.

The effort to impose light is a violation of the believer's liberty in Christ. Christian liberty is the privilege to live honestly in Christ in all the light one has without the imposition of external legal restrictions. But Christian liberty is *not* the privilege to sin; it is not the right to violate the light one has or to refuse further light.

Now, as the believer draws closer to God and grows in grace and knowledge, the increased awareness of God's holiness (light) reveals areas of his own life that need major improvement. The believer comes to realize that certain previous behavior does not glorify God, and also that there are certain things he or she should be doing for His glory that he or she has not been doing. When that happens, the believer might say, "How ignorant I was!" or, "I didn't realize that!" But if the believer was living up to all the light he had at the time, he or she cannot truly say, "I was sinning."

So, Christians do not sin as much or as often as is sometimes supposed. Christians do not need to be kept under self-condemnation and a sense of perpetual failure to be kept humble. Rather, Christians need to know that they are victorious in Christ, and that nothing less than present victory over sin constitutes real Christian experience.

It is amazing how victorious Christians become when they believe that they are victorious in Christ. There is no "security" in defeat. Expecting defeat produces no assurance, but expecting victory in Christ does.

Still, sometimes Christians do sin. The Christian is still a moral agent with a free will. Here is where 1 John 2:1 comes in: "My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The verb "sin" in this verses is ingressive. The ingressive places emphasis on the beginning of the action. For example, "He threw the ball" is a general statement. "He let fly with the ball" (released it) is ingressive; it emphasizes the point of the beginning of the action.

So then, if a believer sins, it should be something unplanned, unanticipated. It should be something that catches him or her off guard. That is why we must be watchful and prepared to avoid it. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him steadfast in the faith . . ." (1 Peter 5:8, 9).

Put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10 - 18). "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not [*ou me*, "no way"--double negative] fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). Keep looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). You will not sin while you have on the whole armor of God, are walking in the Spirit, and keep your eyes on Jesus. Christ is able to keep you from sinning if you allow Him to do so. But if you *do* sin, Jesus Christ is there at the right hand of the Father as your merciful and faithful High Priest, ready to cleanse and restore you.

If the Christian's sin does not bring condemnation, he would not need the Advocate. He would not need forgiveness. The very fact that he needs forgiveness indicates that he comes under condemnation if he sins.

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:6, 7). The blood of Christ cleanses *in the light*. We must be honest and be open before the light (truth). Sin is forbidden. Come clean. No denial. No excuses. No plea of moral inability. "Nobody is perfect" is no excuse for sin. Neither is "Oh, well, I'm just human."

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (verse 8). "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (verse 10). Verse 8 does not say that true believers in Jesus Christ have present sin. John is opposing Gnosticism, and some Gnostics denied the existence of sin. Although this passage is written *to* believers, it is not written exclusively *about* believers. It refutes the teaching that we human beings have no sin (considering our total personal history) and therefore we have not sinned. John is affirming universal sinfulness and therefore the universal need for the Savior. See more on this verse in the Appendix: "The Influence of Greek Philosophy On The Development Of Christian Theology."

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Genuine confession and repentance includes the sincere purpose never to sin again. The moment the believer is cleansed from all unrighteousness, he or she is morally perfect in heart and life, and will remain in *present* sinless perfection

unless and until he or she happens to sin again.

Grace is not the careless overlooking of sin. It is the forgiveness of repented sin. Only if we confess our sins are we forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness. If God can justly overlook one sin, why not two? ten? a hundred? No, God does not operate His moral government that way. If He did, the Bible's oft-repeated warnings to Christians would be meaningless.

However, the moral momentum of the believer is in the opposite direction of sin. He is not "prone to wander." To conquer the Christian, temptation has to overcome the strong moral and spiritual momentum of the believer's light, his love for God, his regard for God's honor and for eternal values, his faith in Christ's keeping power, the arsenal of Scripture hidden in his heart, the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit, plus a host of other positive influences--all combined together!

Even if temptation can concentrate its appeal on one point strongly enough to overcome such a moral momentum and such spiritual resources, usually it is able to succeed only briefly. It is contrary to the believer's character and destiny. Convicted by the Holy Spirit and feeling deeply his broken fellowship with God, the sinning believer flees quickly to his Savior and is immediately and fully restored.

We return to Mr. Finney and listen to what he has to say about "entire obedience."

"The government of God accepts nothing as virtue but obedience to the law of God.

"This . . . is generally denied. Indeed, probably nine-tenths of the nominal church deny it They maintain that there is much virtue in the world, and yet that there is no one who ever for a moment obeys the law of God; that all Christians are virtuous...and yet not one on earth obeys the moral law of God."³⁷

By "law" Finney is not referring to the Law of Moses or to any body of legislation. He means the moral law--the law of love. The law of faith has not abolished moral law. Some seem to suppose that because Christians are not under the Law of Moses, we are therefore not under moral law and moral obligation. But every moral agent is obligated to love God supremely and others as himself, and that obligation is moral law. It is the law of faith, the law of liberty, the law of love.

Moral law in itself is not a set of legal enactments. No legislature can pass or repeal moral law, because moral law is made up of principles, not regulations. The principles were there before the regulations were, and the regulations were formed to give expression to moral law within the framework of society.

Moral law was present before the Ten Commandments were given as an expression of moral law within society.

Cain never heard of the Ten Commandments; but when he killed Abel, his brother, he knew he had violated moral law. So the moral law was in existence before the Law of Moses, and it is still in existence today. The Law of Moses was replaced by the law of faith *so far as*

believers are concerned, for the very reason that the law of faith secures obedience to the moral law whereas the Law of Moses did not. Love replaced legislation because love succeeds where legislation failed. Now "the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless . . . (1 Timothy 1:9 - 11). If we leave the law of love--the law of faith, the law of liberty--and practice the sins listed in this passage, we are lawless and therefore come under the Law.

The repeal of the legislation did not mean the repeal of moral law. Personal obedience to moral law, the law of love, is still required of all moral agents.

"A common idea seems to be that a kind of obedience is rendered to God by Christians which is true religion, and which, after all comes indefinitely short of full or entire obedience at any moment . . . that they are justified by grace, not in the sense that they are made really and personally righteous by grace, but that grace pardons and accepts . . . them . . . in the present commission of an indefinite amount of sin.

"What is this, but pardoning present and pertinacious rebellion! Receiving to favor a God-defrauding wretch! Yes, this must be if it be true that Christians are justified without present full obedience.

"That surely must be a doctrine of devils that represents God as receiving to favor a rebel who has one hand filled with weapons against his throne.

"To ask for pardon while we do not repent and cease from sin is a gross insult to God.

"Does the Bible recognize the pardon of present sin . . . ? Let the passage be found, if it can, where sin is represented as pardoned or pardonable unless repented of and fully forsaken. No such passage can be found.

"The very beginning of true religion in the soul implies the renunciation of all sin. Sin ceases where holiness begins. Now, how great and ruinous must that error be, that teaches us to hope for heaven while living in conscious sin, . . . that justification is conditioned upon a faith that does not purify the heart of the believer.

"Whenever a Christian sins he comes under condemnation and must repent . . . or be lost." 38

It is clear that moral action is a unit. It is impossible to obey and to disobey at the same time. Obedience and disobedience do not mix. Either we obey or we do not obey. There are no half-Christians.

Just as the tributaries of a river system all flow to one end, so the intelligent choices of the heart all flow to one end--the object of ultimate choice.

No wonder salvation is such a radical change. It is like reversing the flow of an entire river system, turning it completely over so as to flow in the opposite direction.

When the object of ultimate choice--what the person is ultimately living for--is reversed, the whole life is revolutionized. A new heart, a new life, a right relationship with God in Christ, new motives, all produce new and exciting desires, interests, experiences and relationships.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When Christ comes in to take His rightful place on the throne of the heart, self surrenders and the person takes his or her proper subordinate position. The love of God replaces selfishness. Light replaces darkness. Peace replaces turmoil. Holiness replaces sin.

No wonder the Bible calls it a new birth, regeneration, a new life. Have you experienced it? Have you made the choice? If not, come to Jesus. He is waiting now to come into your heart. He said, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

Let's Talk About Love

Obedience to God is the most natural and normal life for any human being.

Conversion or regeneration is not like Clark Kent stepping into a phone booth, then--zap--stepping out as Superman.

Remember, the change in becoming a Christian is not physical or metaphysical. It is a moral change, a change in supreme choice, resulting in a spiritual transformation. The moment a person believes the truth, that person turns *to* God *from* sin and places his or her faith in Christ. "A great number believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21). "You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). This removes the barrier of sin and opens the soul to God and His grace.

This living relationship with the Father and the Son is eternal life. Jesus said to the Father, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3).

"Entire obedience does not imply any change in the substance of the soul or body. . . . Entire obedience is the entire consecration of the powers, as they are, to God." 39

"Nor does it imply . . . continual calmness of mind. Christ was not in a state of continual calmness. The deep peace of his mind was never broken up, but the surface . . . emotions....were often in a state of great excitement.

"Nor does it imply perfect knowledge. Nor does it imply freedom from mistake on any subject whatever.

"Nor does it imply exemption from sorrow or mental suffering. It was not so with Christ. Nor does it imply moroseness of temper and manners. . . . Cheerfulness is certainly the result of holy love." 40

Many people have strange ideas about what it means to be a Christian. Even knowledgeable people can have wrong ideas about what is implied and what is not implied in morality and true religion. They include things that have nothing to do with moral obligation, and exclude the very things that are essential to moral obligation.

In this way the world often gets the erroneous idea that the Christian life is something unreal, impractical. That is far from the truth.

Love is natural, positive, beneficial, good. Selfishness is unnatural, negative, harmful, evil. The Christian life--the life of love and obedience to God--is the only truly natural life. Christians live in conformity with reason and reality; sinners do not. .

Living in moral harmony with God is a wonderful life. The love of God rules the heart and all that the heart influences. "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, . . . love" (Galatians 5:14).

It all adds up to love.

When we speak of virtues, we are referring to choices. Yet in everyday language we frequently use the same words to describe our feelings. For that reason it is absolutely essential that we understand the difference between the two. Love as a choice or motive is far deeper than "love" as a mere feeling or emotion. The same is true of all the various expressions and characteristics of love.

Real love--the essence of true morality and religion--is a fundamental commitment of the soul. This commitment usually results in feelings, but it does not consist of feelings. Love is not just an emotion.

Here is where many people make a big mistake. They judge their character and religion by how they feel rather than by what they are living for.

Remember, feelings are neither right nor wrong, holy nor sinful, in themselves. They are involuntary. Thoughts produce feelings. In fact, many feelings are common to both saints and sinners.

For example, when thinking about someone who is suffering, many sinners can feel the same emotions of pity that a Christian would feel. Think about suffering, and you feel pity. Think about injustice, and you feel indignation. This does not mean that you are religious or good. It just means that you are human. A gangster can murder a man one day, and feel pity the next day when he hears that the little girl next door was injured by a car.

Some sinners assume that they must love God a little bit because they have good feelings toward Him once in a while. In fact, some sinners have their warmest religious feelings when they are intoxicated.

I once knew a man who, when he got drunk, tried to be a soul-winner. He put his arm around my father and said, "Ssssalvation is free, Walt, ssssalvation is (*hic*) free." This is sentimentality, not love.

Everybody, saint and sinner, can have "good" feelings and "bad" feelings. And so, thinking that morality and religion are in the feelings, sinners believe that they have a lot of good in them along with the bad, just because they have some "good" feelings. Likewise, Christians can be led to believe that they have a lot of bad in them along with the good, just because they experience "bad" feelings.

"Bad" feelings make it easier to make wrong choices and harder to make good ones, and "good" feelings make it easier to make right choices and harder to make wrong ones. But moral character is in the choices, not in the feelings.

Also, morality is not a matter of following "good" feelings, either. Obeying "good" feelings does not make us good. It is still obeying our feelings, not God, and so it is nothing but a self-righteous form of self-gratification.

Whenever people do anything through emotion that they would not do through reason without emotion, they are being motivated by the emotion and not by love. Remember 1 Corinthians 13. It is possible to give all of one's goods to feed the poor just for the self-

gratification that comes from doing it and not out of real love. This is a very subtle, self-deceiving, yet highly respectable form of selfishness.

All sinners are voluntary slaves to their desires. The sinner is ruled by the desire that is the dominant one at the moment, whatever that desire might be. Today he feels generous, so he contributes liberally to charitable causes or to friends. Tomorrow he feels miserly, so he reprimands himself for "letting his feelings run away with him" the day before. One day he feels lust and commits adultery; the next day he feels affectionately toward his family, has a spasm of conscience, and resolves to be faithful.

Because he follows "good" feelings and "bad" feelings, he thinks that he is both good and bad at the same time. He does not realize that as long as he chooses to be ruled by his desires--whatever they are--there is not a particle of goodness in him. He is ruled by self-gratification, not love.

Love is a fundamental choice--the choice of the highest good to God and man. This choice has many qualities. These qualities of love are expressions of love in various relationships and situations. Love is intelligent and reasonable. It is soft-hearted, but not soft-headed.

Love is a unit, a whole, and all of its parts harmonize. Every characteristic of love is consistent with every other characteristic of love. They all work together, balance each other, reinforce each other. The result of love's integrity is beautiful.

"Every virtue is only benevolence viewed . . . in certain relations. . . . This is true of God's moral attributes. They are . . . only attributes of benevolence. . . . This is and must be true of every holy being." 41

Let us look at the qualities and characteristics of love. What can be said about love?

Love is voluntary.

Love is a free choice, made in the full knowledge that the opposite choice (selfishness) is always possible. It is an intelligent choice. The heart knows what it is choosing, why it is choosing, and that the choice is reasonable and pleasing to God. It knows that what it is choosing is really valuable and that it is being chosen on that account. It knows that it is the right choice, a holy choice.

Love is unselfish.

Love reaches out beyond the things that self has an interest in, or that self will ultimately benefit from.

Love is impartial.

"It is no respecter of persons. . . . Selfish love is partial, . . . has its favorites, its prejudices, unreasonable and ridiculous. . . . But benevolence knows neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, white nor black The fact that a man is a

man, and not that he is of our party, of our complexion, or of our town, state, or nation--that he is a creature of God, that he is capable of virtue and happiness, these are the considerations that are seized upon by this divinely impartial love."⁴²

Love is universal.

Love excludes no one from its concern. Wherever good can be done, there love reaches out. It does not stop at the boundaries of our personal family, our community, or nation. It endeavors to gain the highest good of the greatest number, wherever they are, according to our ability and opportunity.

Love is productive.

Love is an active, positive choice of the highest good of God and the universe. Certainly the choice of such tremendous values must motivate us and put us into action! What a high and holy calling! We have the Almighty God to glorify, and a world of good to be done. Such a commitment will mobilize us and all of our resources for its accomplishment. Love cannot possibly be lazy. "Lazy Christian" is an oxymoron, a contradiction of words. In everything they do, Christians have every reason to be the most highly motivated people on earth!

Love delights in holiness.

Likewise, love is opposed to all sin.

"Benevolence [love] is . . . willing the highest good of being as an end. Now there is nothing in the universe more destructive of this good than sin. Benevolence cannot do otherwise than be forever opposed to sin." ⁴³

We must keep in mind that anything that is a virtue is an act of the will. Choice is where moral action is. Real opposition to sin, therefore, must be from the heart or will.

Many sinners are opposed to sin in their mind (reason, conscience) and in their feelings while they continue to practice sin. Practically everybody disapproves of wrong in their mind, and sometimes even sinners will feel so deeply opposed to some particular form of evil that they will crusade passionately against it.

Because they feel so strongly opposed to the evil and act so vigorously against it, they suppose that they have a certain amount of virtue in them. At the same time they know that they are committing sins of their own. Thinking that virtue consists in having good feelings, or in obeying "good" feelings, they conclude that they are partly good and partly bad at the same time.

But real love is opposed to *all* sin. This opposition is a choice. It includes the rejection of all sin, the renunciation of all sin. The heart cannot be truly opposed to sin and continue to hold on to sin at the same time. The two choices are mutually exclusive.

Sinners hold onto their sins because they love the pleasure that their unreasonable indulgences give them. They do not sin because they love "sin" itself. They do not choose their sinful indulgences because the indulgences are sinful, but in spite of the fact.

For example, the thief does not say, "I crave sin tonight. I just must have some sin." Of course not. He craves the pleasure that the object he steals will bring him and perhaps the pleasure the act of stealing itself will bring. But he does not steal because it is sinful; he steals in spite of the fact that it is sinful.

Perhaps the pain of conscience and remorse, and/or the pain of the consequences of the sinner's sin to himself, will be strong enough to outweigh the pleasure of the sin itself and lead him to change his behavior. Still the ultimate motive is "enlightened self-interest," even though it might benefit others. The change is not repentance. It is only changing the means to the same selfish ultimate end. By rearranging his behavior the sinner is only rearranging his sins.

Many sinners "hate" what they are doing, but they keep on doing it anyway because it gives them the most pleasure and pleasure is what they are after. They are not truly opposed to sin. If they were, they would repent and quit sinning.

Love is compassionate.

Love chooses to lift the miserable out of misery and into happiness. Now, even sinners can *feel* compassion or pity when they see or hear of suffering and misery. They consider this feeling to be a sign of goodness in themselves.

James speaks of some who say to someone in need, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but do nothing about it (James 2:15, 16). They are content just to "feel" sympathetic. Others will act, but only because their feeling of pity is their overriding desire at the moment.

Finney makes this comment on the subject:

"A man of compassionate heart will also be a man of compassionate sensibility. He will feel and he will act. Nevertheless, his actions will not be the effect of his feelings, but will be the result of his sober judgment.

"Three classes of persons suppose themselves, and are generally supposed by others, to be truly compassionate. The one class exhibit much feeling of compassion, but their compassion does not influence their will. . . . These content themselves with mere desires and tears.

Another class feel deeply, and give up to their feelings. Of course, they are active and energetic in the relief of suffering. But being governed by feeling . . . they are not virtuous, but selfish....

A third class feel deeply, but are not governed by blind impulses of feeling. They take a rational view of the subject, act wisely and energetically....These last are truly virtuous, and altogether the most happy of the three." ⁴⁴

Love is merciful.

Love seeks to pardon. But love cannot exercise mercy at the expense of the greater

public good. This would be a denial of itself, as love is a choice to seek the greatest good.

"No one attribute of benevolence is or can be exercised at the expense of another, or in opposition to it...This would be a contradiction to will good . . . out of regard to its intrinsic value, and then choose injurious means to accomplish this end." 45

Mercy, too, is more than just a feeling. The feeling of mercy by itself would pardon regardless of the attitude of the guilty and regardless of what has or has not been done to make his pardon safe and reasonable.

Real mercy is a choice to do everything possible to bring about the conditions that will make the pardon of the guilty safe and reasonable, and therefore morally possible.

Universalism has made its fundamental mistake on this very point. God is merciful. So then, universalism rationalizes, because God is merciful, He will forgive sinners. And because He will forgive sinners, everybody will be saved. But the conclusion does not necessarily follow.

Yes, God is love; love is merciful; and mercy will forgive sinners. But love cannot exercise mercy in violation of its other qualities.

Love is also just and it is wise. These qualities of love demand that certain conditions be fulfilled before mercy is exercised--conditions that will make the exercise of mercy safe and just. That is why love requires repentance and a sacrifice for sin as preconditions for mercy.

"As mercy is an attribute of benevolence, it will naturally and inevitably direct the attention of the intellect to devising ways and means to render the exercise of mercy consistent with the other attributes of benevolence. It will employ the intellect in devising means to secure the repentance of the sinner, and to remove all obstacles out of the way of its free and full exercise. . . . This attribute of benevolence led the Father to give his only-begotten and well-beloved Son, and it led the Son to give himself to die, to secure the repentance and pardon of sinners. . . . It is an amiable attribute. . . . All its sympathies are sweet, and tender, and kind as heaven." 46

Love is just.

The world is cursed with an eruption of phony activism for "justice."

When feeling is allowed to get hold of people, havoc can result. People look at the injustices in the world and get angry. But instead of doing something constructive and consistent to meet the need, many let anger get control of them.

What happens? Out they go into the streets to protest, riot, sometimes even to wreck and destroy. Some can plant explosives that maim and kill innocent victims, and then sit back in their twisted self-righteousness, having satisfied the cruel mandate of their personal sense of justice. Horrible!

Yes, some sinners will do something practical. But if they act only because their feelings

demand it of them, they are really serving their emotions, not God and society. Self-gratification, not love, motivates them. People motivated by love will feel deeply, and they will act. But they will act reasonably within the light they have, and not merely out of obedience to their emotions.

"Justice as an attribute of benevolence is virtue and exhibits itself in the execution of the penalties of the law, and in support of public order, and in various other ways for the well-being of mankind. . . . Public justice is modified in its exercise by the attribute of mercy. . . . Mercy . . . cannot . . . extend a pardon but upon conditions of repentance, and an equivalent [substitute] being rendered to the government. Justice is conditioned by mercy, and cannot . . . take vengeance when the highest good does not require it, when punishment can be dispensed with without public loss. Thus these attributes limit each other's exercise and render the whole character of benevolence perfect, symmetrical and heavenly.

"Benevolence without justice would be anything but morally lovely and perfect.

"Let any one attribute of benevolence be destroyed . . . [and] you have in fact destroyed benevolence.

"This attribute . . . says to violence, disorder, and injustice, Peace, be still, and there must be a great calm." 47

Justice is not something distinct from love. How often we have heard the statement, "God is a God of justice as well as a God of love." That statement is faulty. God's justice is not antithetical to His love. It is not something to be placed over against His love, as something to balance His love.

God is a God of justice *because* He is a God of love. Justice is a vital part of His love, a part of His total commitment to the highest good. True, justice balances mercy and "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13); nevertheless, both mercy *and* justice are expressions of God's love.

Here is another thought:

"Where true benevolence is, there must be exact commercial justice, or business honesty and integrity. . . . This attribute of benevolence must secure its possessor against every species and degree of injustice; he cannot be unjust to his neighbor's reputation, his person, his property, his soul, his body, nor indeed be unjust in any respect to man or God." 48

Where justice is missing, love is missing.

Look at the sinner who takes pride that he pays all his debts. He would never cheat anybody out of a dime. Never! He gives an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.

But look at the way he is treating people's souls! He is extremely unjust to his family by refusing to be the spiritual head of his house. He commits a cruel injustice to his children by keeping them out of Sunday School and church week after week. He lures them away with

Sunday fishing trips and other activities, thus depriving them of their priceless right to know God and His Word, and their right to eternal life.

He might be "Honest Abe" around town. But is he really just? No. His actions show he has not a particle of real justice in him.

Love is truthful.

Becoming a Christian means the acceptance of the truth. It implies a willingness to face the truth, acknowledge the truth, obey the truth. Love is honest. Love seeks the highest good as its end, and knows that truth is the necessary means to secure that end.

A Christian cannot lie for the glory of God. Jesus Christ is the Truth, and every falsehood is a denial of Him. All who truly love our Lord Jesus Christ love the truth, and will not knowingly misrepresent the facts.

Where truth is absent, virtue is absent. A liar is in complete disobedience to moral law.

Love is patient.

Patience is the steadfastness of the heart in its love for God and for others, in spite of everything.

Calmness is not patience. It comes as the result of patience. If you hold steady under provocations, you are exercising greater patience when you are upset than when you are calm.

The story is told of a man with a bad temper who was recently converted to Christ. One rainy day he was standing on the street corner and a car drove by, splashing water over his suit. His godly wife, who had been a long-time Christian, said to him, "Control your temper, dear." He replied through his teeth: "I have controlled more temper in the last ten seconds than you have controlled in a lifetime."

Trials, adversities, provocations and things like that, test our patience and allow it to get some exercise. But if the heart gets discouraged and gives up, love stops.

Love is meek.

Meekness is "taking it on the chin," a refusal to retaliate in any way when mistreated. If you love the person who mistreats you, you cannot retaliate or try to get even. Are you mistreated, persecuted, the object of provocation? Accept it as an opportunity to develop and demonstrate meekness. Jesus did.

Meekness is not weakness; it is strength under discipline. It takes real strength to be kind and gentle toward those who mistreat you.

Love is humble.

Sometimes even sinners can feel humble. When deeply convicted by the Holy Spirit, they can feel very ashamed of themselves and their sins, and yet at the same time refuse to

surrender to God.

When the prodigal son came home, he confessed to his father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21).

Also, we listen to the words of the publican in Luke 18:13--"God be merciful to me a sinner!" That is genuine humility.

"Humility, considered as a virtue, consists in the consent of the will to be known, to confess, and to take our proper place in the scale of being . . . to pass for no other than we really are." 49

Love is self-denying.

If we love God more than we love ourselves, we will deny ourselves whenever we see that our own desires conflict with His interests. If we do not, we do not love Him. Love puts self in its proper place. Love refuses to let self be first in the heart. Nothing else is true self-denial.

A person might give up smoking during Lent, give up a meal and send the cost of the meal to the hungry, or go through all kinds of ascetic self-mortifications, and still refuse to take self off the throne of the heart. There is no love, no real self-denial, no virtue in that.

"A monk immures himself in a monastery; a hermit forsakes human society, and shuts himself up in a cave; . . . and a martyr goes to the stake. Now if these things are done with an ultimate reference to their own glory and happiness, although apparently instances of great self-denial, . . . they are in fact only a spirit of self-indulgence and self-seeking." 50

Giving up one indulgence for the sake of another is not true self-denial. Sometimes two sins conflict. For example, a selfish person cannot be a miser and a spendthrift at the same time. The desire that gives the most pleasure to self rules and the other desire gives in.

"One man will deny all his bodily appetites and passions for the sake of a reputation with men. . . . Another will . . . sacrifice everything else to obtain an eternal inheritance, and be just as selfish as the man who sacrifices to the things of time, his soul and all the riches of eternity." 51

It is also important to emphasize that self-denial is not self-rejection. Self-denial does not mean that we refuse to give ourselves *any* place, but only that we refuse to put ourselves in *first* place, above God and others. Self-denial expresses itself in choosing to make whatever sacrifices that are called for by the greater good of God and others. It certainly must be one of the characteristics of love and can be expressed by the rich as well as by the poor. In fact, the greater one's advantages, the greater the opportunities for self-denial.

The most glorious example of self-denial is found in the gospel. God gave His Son, and the Son gave Himself to die in agony and blood to secure our salvation. We can only begin to comprehend the amount of self-denial involved in God's great redemptive act.

Love is condescending.

Love is willing to reach down as far as necessary to meet the need.

"Condescending . . . consists in a tendency to descend to the poor, the ignorant, or the vile, for the purpose of securing their good. This attribute is called by Christ 'lowliness of heart.' This is a lovely modification of benevolence. It seems to be entirely above the gross conceptions of infidelity. Condescension seems to be regarded by most people, and especially by infidels, as rather a weakness than a virtue. Skeptics clothe their imaginary God with attributes in many respects the opposite of true virtue. They think it entirely beneath the dignity of God to come down even to notice . . . the concerns of men.

"The Bible represents God as clothed with condescension. . . . Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without him. No creature is too low, too filthy, or too degraded for him to condescend to--this places his character in a most ravishing light. He is infinitely above all creatures. For him to hold communion with them is infinite condescension." 52

The self-righteous think it is beneath their dignity and their moral standing to associate with sinners. Theirs is a hard, cold, loveless "morality." It wraps its proud robes around itself and snubs "that class of people."

"Benevolence cannot . . . be above any degree of condescension that can affect the greatest good. Christ could condescend to be born in a manger, to be brought up in humble life, to mingle with and seek the good of all classes, to be despised in life and die between two thieves on a cross." 53

Love is stable.

Love is not just a set of feelings that come and go. It is a choice, a fundamental commitment of the soul to the greatest values possible--the highest well-being and happiness of God and of others.

"Stability must be a characteristic of such a choice as this. . . . It is a new birth, a new creature, a new heart, a new life. The nature of the change itself would seem to be a guarantee of its stability. What then shall we conclude of those effervescing professors of religion, who are soon hot and soon cold; whose religion is a spasm? We must conclude, that they never had the root of the matter in them. . . . They are stony ground hearers." 54

Love is morally pure and holy.

To be happy, we must be holy. That is, we must have a pure heart and a pure life. Love seeks to make people truly happy. But to be truly happy, they must be holy and pure in heart. Therefore, love puts the highest priority on holiness, because it is absolutely necessary to the happiness and well-being of all.

"The love required by the law of God is pure love. It seeks to make its object happy only by making him holy." 55

So then, to sum it all up, every virtue is love expressed in some form. It is love in action, love revealed.

This love is not the shortsighted so-called "love" promoted by situational ethics. Rather, it is a commitment to the highest good in the long run, to be achieved only by means consistent with its own pure nature.

It all adds up to love.

Self Can Be A Four-Letter Word

Jesus said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37 - 40).

Jesus affirmed what has always been moral law and moral obligation. God is first. We are second.

"We" includes ourselves personally and equally with all other human beings. The well-being and happiness of others is intrinsically valuable; so is our own. We know *experientially* the value of others' well-being and happiness because we know experientially the value of our own personal well-being and happiness. We know what hurts others because we know it hurts us. Likewise, we know what is good for others because we know it is good for us.

Jesus affirmed that there is a proper love of "self"--that is, *our own person*. No reasonable person hates himself or herself as a person. Paul wrote, "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it" (Ephesians 5:29).

We should take care of our "self"--ourselves. We should eat properly, dress warmly in cold weather, avoid harm and danger, and in general seek to be happy and enjoy life. That is natural. If we do not take proper care of our "self"--ourselves, we do not truly love ourselves; we are harming ourselves. Selfishness is "anti-self" in that the sinner is his or her own worst enemy.

"Disobedience to moral law cannot consist in self-love. Self-love is simply the constitutional desire of happiness . . . an involuntary state. It has, as a desire, no moral character any more than has the desire of food. It is no more sinful to desire happiness and properly to seek it than . . . to desire food and properly to seek that."
56

Of course, love will motivate us to sacrifice a lesser good to ourselves to gain a greater good to God and/or to others.

But If we put ourselves *first* and become "number One," we sin. That is pride--selfishness. That is when *self* becomes a "four-letter word."

Love is so beautiful, so pleasant to talk about. There is also an opposite of love, and that is selfishness. In fact, selfishness is the only alternative to love.

Selfishness is not a vacuum. It is not just the absence of love. It is a deliberate choice to place self first. As such, it is the antagonist of love, the mortal enemy of the well-being of God and man.

"Disobedience to God's law must consist in the choice of self-gratification as . . . the supreme and ultimate end of life. This is selfishness. This is sin and the whole

of sin viewed in its germinating principles.

"This . . . choice is the 'carnal mind,' or the minding of the flesh, which the apostle affirms to be 'enmity against God' [Romans 8:7]." ⁵⁷

As we explore the characteristics of selfishness, we shall see that every sin is an expression of selfishness, just as every virtue is an expression of love.

Selfishness *is* sin, not just the cause of sin. Selfishness *is* sin, and the cause of *sins*.

Selfishness is voluntary.

It is a free choice, made in the full knowledge that the opposite choice (love) is always possible. It is an intelligent choice in the sense that the heart knows what it is choosing, why it is choosing, and that the choice is unreasonable and not pleasing to God. It knows that what it is choosing supremely is not supremely valuable. It knows that God's interests are more valuable than its own, and that the interests of others are just as valuable as its own, but it chooses self supremely in spite of that fact. It knows that it is the wrong choice, a guilty choice.

Selfishness is unreasonable.

This has nothing to do with a person's IQ. Many sinners have high intelligence and excellent education. Yet, every sinner lives in opposition to truth, reality and reason.

No one can defend logically the proposition that the happiness of one's self is more valuable than the happiness of God and of others. The proposition itself is contrary to fact and therefore totally unreasonable. Yet it is the proposition that every sinner lives by.

Sinners live as though they had lost their mind. The choice of an end that is unreasonable leads necessarily to the use of means that are unreasonable--shrewd and effective, but unreasonable. It is unreasonable to use means to secure the unreasonable end.

"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" (Psalm 14:1; also Psalm 53:1). Notice, he has said it in his heart, not in his mind. His heart (will) is determined that his mind will believe something that his mind rejects as contrary to fact and reason. The result is an inner tension between mind and will.

"Shame on selfishness! It dethrones human reason and would dethrone the divine, and place mere blind lust upon the throne of the universe.

"Sinners, while they continue such, never say or do one thing that is in accordance with right reason. They have made an unreasonable choice of an end, and all their choices of means . . . are put forth to secure an end contrary to reason. The very first time that a sinner acts or wills reasonably is when he turns to God" ⁵⁸

Selfishness is ultimately interested only in self.

This sounds redundant; however, let us think about it for a moment.

"Nothing is practically regarded as worthy of choice, except as . . . a means of self-gratification.

"Whatever propensity [craving] is most indulged will gain the greatest development. It may be the love of reputation; and then there will be at least a public decent exterior Where the love of knowledge prevails, we have the scholar, the philosopher, the man of learning. This is one of the most decent and respectable forms of selfishness. . . . When compassion as a feeling prevails, we have as a result the philanthropist and often the reformer; not the reformer in a virtuous sense, but the selfish reformer. Where love of kindred prevails, we often have the kind husband, the affectionate father, mother, brother, sister, and so on. When the love of country prevails, we have the patriot, the statesman, and the soldier." 59

Now, the truly virtuous will do these things reasonably and out of regard for the good to be secured. And they will usually experience normal feelings about them, too. But ultimately the sinner does these things because they are what his feelings demand. He does them only because of his strong desire to do them. If the desire were not there in strong enough measure, he would not do them, even though reason demanded that they be done.

Ah, but selfishness is tricky! The selfish heart is deceitful. Many sinners do "good" even when they do not feel like it. And so, they believe that they have done "right," having performed their "duty."

But even this is selfish, because it was done to gratify the desire to do "right" or the "sense of duty." It is little Jack Horner's "what-a-good-boy-am-I" feeling of self-satisfaction. This by itself is no virtue.

Selfishness is partial.

"I am under obligation to give the practical preference to the interests of my own family, not because . . . their interests sustain such a relation to my own, but because I can more readily secure their interests

"But selfishness is always partial. It . . . always . . . lays the greatest stress upon . . . those interests the promotion of which will gratify self.

"To will the good of my neighbor, or of my country, and of God because of the intrinsic value of those interests . . . is virtue; but to will them to gratify . . . blind desire is selfishness and sin. If I yield to mere desire in any case, it must be to gratify the desire. Partiality consists in giving one thing the preference of another . . ., not because the intelligence demands this preference, but because the sensibility demands it." 60

Let it be remembered that we are referring to intelligent choices, that is, choices made under light. Even believers can do things impulsively without thinking.

Selfishness is productive

Selfishness is productive, just as love is productive. Only selfishness is productive in the opposite direction.

Selfishness is an active, positive choice of self-gratification as the ultimate end of pursuit. And choice produces action--lots of it.

Even when laziness is the form of self-indulgence preferred above others, selfishness will work as hard as necessary to avoid work!

A selfish end will produce selfish means.

Sin in the heart will produce sin in the life. As long as a person is committed to self-gratification, that is the way he or she is going to live. The only way to stop living like a sinner is to stop being one. Surrender to Christ let Him take control.

"There is no way, therefore, for the sinner to escape from the commission of sin, but to cease to be selfish. The first thing is to change the end, and then the sinner can cease from outward sin. While the selfish end continues, whatever a sinner does is selfish. The end being wrong, all is and must be wrong [Luke 6:43-45]." ⁶¹

Selfishness is opposed to love or virtue.

"This resistance to benevolence . . . is what the Bible calls hardening the heart. It is obstinacy of will under the light " ⁶²

But we hear the sinner protest: "Not me. I have nothing against God. I believe in religion and the Church. I'm for all the good that's being done."

But is that really true? The sinner has nothing against God--until God gets in his way and frustrates the pursuit of his self-interests. The sinner thinks that religion and the Church are OK--as long as they don't bother *him*. Christians are fine--as long as they just go to church on Sunday morning, keep their mouths shut, and do not get in his way.

But what happens if righteousness really gets the upper hand in the community?

The sinner hears people singing and talking about Jesus in the stores and on the streets. His wife just "got religion," and now she won't go down to the local bar with him. In fact, the bar has been losing so many customers it's about to close.

Now watch the devil's crowd get mad!

Whenever a person chooses an end, as long as the choice of that end remains, the heart must be opposed to everything that gets in the way of attaining that end.

Let the kingdom of God prosper. At first it will only annoy the sinner. Then, it begins to frustrate him, getting in his way and making him feel uncomfortable. Finally, if the interests of God and His kingdom prosper to the point that the sinner finds the road of selfishness blocked--watch out. *Frustrated selfishness is a monster.*

Selfishness hates God, the Bible, and real Christians. It is the enemy of all righteousness. It has been said that if half of the people got genuinely converted to Jesus Christ, the other half would get fighting mad.

Selfishness is cruel.

"Selfishness is always and necessarily cruel--cruel to the soul, cruel to the souls of others in neglecting to care and act for their salvation; cruel to God in abusing him in ten thousand ways; cruel to the whole universe.

"Some form of cruelty is practiced by every sinner. The fact that they live in sin, that they set an example of selfishness, that they do nothing for their own souls, nor for the souls of others; these are really most atrocious forms of cruelty." 63

Look at that man who just stands there and shakes his head when you ask him to repent and accept Jesus Christ. He knows the Bible is true. He knows he's a sinner and under condemnation. But will he take care of his own soul? No! His children and his neighbors are unsaved, but will he pray for them and try to lead them to God? No! If they follow his example, they will all go to hell. He's cruel.

And look at that hypocrite who says he believes the gospel, but who hasn't won a soul to Christ in years. He's a member of the church and believes in the hereafter. But out of church he follows the crowd. At work he's just "one of the boys," laughing, joking, getting along fine--but no prayer for their souls, no burden, no effort to speak to anyone about the Savior. He's cruel.

Selfishness is unjust.

"There is the utmost injustice in the end chosen. It is the practical preference of a petty self-interest over infinite interests. This is universal injustice to God and man. No sinner at any time is at all just to any being in the universe." 64

There is not a sinner on earth or in hell who is treating God right. And if we refuse to treat God right, we have no legitimate claim that we are treating other people right. A man might walk ten miles to pay another man a dollar he owes him, but if he cares not for the man's soul, he is still being unjust and unfair to him.

The heart of the sinner is unjust!

Selfishness is a lie.

"The selfish man has practically proclaimed that his good is the supreme good, . . . that all interests are to yield to his. His choice affirms that God has no rights, that he ought not to be loved and obeyed, . . . but that God and all beings ought to obey and serve the sinner. Can there be a greater, a more shameless falsehood than this?" 65

Every unconverted person is living the worst possible lie. By his example he is saying to everyone he influences that God is to be ignored, that eternal values are not important, that we ought to live to please ourselves.

By refusing to live according to the truth, the sinner is living in falsehood. He is lying every moment he lives.

Selfishness is proud.

"Pride is a disposition to exalt self above others, to get out of one's proper place in the scale of being, . . . to exalt not merely one's own interests, but one's person, above others and above God...A proud being supremely regards himself." 66

Pride is simply putting self on the throne of the heart. The sinner refuses to surrender first place to God. He refuses to acknowledge in heart and in practice that God is the Supreme Being. In effect, he says, "I am more important than God." This is the sin of Lucifer. It is the character of every sinner.

The claims of Christ are a threat to the sinner's self-supremacy, an intrusion into his little self-ruled world. For that reason he attempts to live as though either God does not exist as a real Person, or He has no authority, rights and business in his life.

Selfishness is opposition to God's existence.

Opposition to a government is opposition to the will of the governor. It is opposition to his existence in that capacity. Selfishness will brook no restraint in respect to securing its end. But God is the uncompromising enemy of selfishness. He is more in the way of selfishness than all other beings.

"Selfishness offers all manner and every possible degree of resistance to God. It disregards God's commands. It contemns his authority. It spurns his mercy. It outrages his feelings. It provokes his forbearance." 67

Selfishness is intemperate.

"Selfishness is self-indulgence not sanctioned by the reason." 68

Sin is knowingly allowing one's desires to take control and to rule the life. Now, this does not mean that all of the desires can rule at once. Some have to be denied in order to gratify others. But identify the ruling desires and you have found the pet sins. These take priority in the sinner's heart. They have the right-of-way to full development and gratification as the sinner has opportunity. He seeks to fulfill them and finds in them his purpose for living.

"But it may be asked, are we to have no regard whatever to our tastes, appetites and propensities [cravings]?"

"We are to have no such regard for them as to make their gratification the end for which we live, even for a moment. God has not given us propensities to be our masters and to rule us, but to be our servants and to minister to our enjoyment when we obey the biddings of reason and of God. The propensities are not, therefore, to be despised, nor is their annihilation to be desired." 69

Christians are not cold stoics or unfeeling ascetics. We have real feelings and we enjoy life. But we enjoy life more because we are not living just for the enjoyment. This is the beauty of God's economy.

Live for happiness, and you will never find it. Live for Jesus Christ, and you will discover happiness!

Now, one of the real problems with self-indulgence is that the price keeps going up. Indulgences have a way of losing their "kick." Thrill-seekers get tired of their toys. Pleasures become commonplace, and a stronger "dose" of the pleasure-producer is required to get the same effect as before.

Yet, when lusts are given control, they are never satisfied. They always demand "more." The multimillionaire and multibillionaire eagerly pursues a few more dollars. His passion for money is never satisfied, no matter how much he has. The same is true of the alcoholic, the drug addict, the sex-addict, and so forth.

Ah, but what about the hardworking man who behaves himself, stays at home and spends his leisure time with his family?

If he refuses to surrender his heart to Christ, he is just as self-indulgent as the man who destroys his job and his home for the sake of drink, sex and gambling. He is merely doing what pleases himself more than anything else does. For the sake of the pleasures of marriage, family life and home, and all that goes with it, he is denying all incompatible indulgences, at least in outward practice.

The desires for domestic pleasures might be so strong that he has never given competing pleasure a chance even to develop. Or he might have strong competing and conflicting desires but denies them for the sake of the stronger desires for a stable job and a pleasant home life.

Maybe someday he will do what many respectable people in public life do when they get tired of behaving in a socially acceptable way--blow it all and shock everybody.

At any rate, if self-indulgence rules the heart, no matter what kind of self-indulgence it might be, the heart is totally sinful. It is intemperate because it is totally committed to the fulfilling of the demands of indulgence.

"Every sinner is chargeable in the sight of God with every species of intemperance, actual and conceivable. His lusts have the reign. If there is any form of self-indulgence that is not actually developed in him, no thanks to him. The providence of God has restrained the outward indulgence, while there has been in him a readiness to perpetrate any and every sin, from which he was not deterred by some overpowering fear of consequences." ⁷⁰

Selfishness is totally sinful.

Every sinner is sacrificing the higher interests of God and of others to his own chosen desires. What greater guilt than this can there be? What more can the sinner become guilty of? He is sinning against all the light he has; for that reason he is as guilty as he can be with the light he has. What is to prevent him from sinning against more light--*all light*--if he had it?

As long as the sinner pursues the course of self-gratification, he or she will continue to reject all light received and sacrifice all interests that get in the way of the demands of self-gratification.

If the sinner will sacrifice one thing for self, what would keep him from sacrificing everything? What is to keep the sinner from expelling God from Heaven, abolishing His throne, and destroying the whole universe if the fulfillment of his selfish desires demanded it and it were possible? There is nothing in his present course of self-gratification to indicate if or when he would stop the pursuit and development of selfishness, stop the destructive effects of selfishness, and turn his heart to God.

True, he might do so under increased light, but the present course of his heart and life gives no indication of it. If he continues in selfishness, he has the potential of destroying the whole universe if he had the power to do so.

What sinner is there who really knows what he would do if his desires demanded it and he had the opportunity?

Only God knows how many Adolf Hitlers there are who never get the chance to become one. The fact that only a few sinners have succeeded in fulfilling their selfish desires to such an extent is a marvelous demonstration of the restraining providence of God.

"Every selfish being is at every moment as wicked and as blameworthy as with his knowledge he can be.

"The selfish man's guilt is just equal to his knowledge of the intrinsic value of those interests that he rejects [Luke 12:47, 48].

"Selfishness is the rejection of all obligation. It is the violation of all obligation.

The sin of selfishness is then complete; that is, the guilt of selfishness is as great as with its present light it can be." 71

This is the true definition of "total moral depravity."

Remember, the character of the end determines the character of the means. If the ultimate end is selfish, the means are selfish no matter how respectable they seem to be.

If the sinner quits drinking and carousing around, yet does not surrender the heart to God, he is merely changing means to the same end. He is only "rearranging his sins." Self-interest demands the change, not regard for God's interests or real regard for the interests of others.

Why does the "respectable" but unconverted businessman refrain from socially unacceptable behavior? Because he loves God supremely and his neighbor as himself? No. He loves himself supremely. His "morality" is plastic, self-serving.

Why does the alcoholic, the adulterer, or the spendthrift mend his ways, yet still reject Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? Out of real love? No. His desire for the benefits of a disciplined life overpowers his other desires.

Perhaps the feeling of pity or remorse over the way he has treated his family becomes his strongest emotion. If this leads him to think, and then make an intelligent surrender to Jesus Christ, well and good. But if he continues to choose to be a slave to his desires, he will let himself be controlled by the feeling of remorse. As long as this is his ruling and overriding desire, he will follow good resolutions. But self is still in control. He is still in bondage to sin. Romans chapter seven is his experience. When his desires change, his behavior will change. This is exactly what Romans 7:14 through 25 teaches. He is the "wretched man" that Paul was before he was converted.

We will do what we choose to do. If we choose to love God, we will love Him. If we choose to gratify self instead, we will gratify self. As long as self-gratification rules, we will do what self-gratification demands, even though we might hate ourselves for it. Self must be dethroned from the heart by the enthronement of Christ before the moral agent can stop sinning in his outward life.

It is important to remember that the sinful choice of self-gratification as an ultimate end is made knowingly, that is, in opposition to light. Christians often do things out of impulse ignorantly and without realizing it. Many true Christians blunder ignorantly because they do what they feel like doing instead of what they would do if they thought and prayed about the matter.

We all need more light. We need to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

As Christians, we are living for an infinitely valuable end--the highest well-being of God and man. Let us not pursue that end carelessly. It is too valuable to trifle with. Let us know the means that most effectively secure that end and follow them diligently and intelligently. Let us get all the light we can. Learn the Scriptures and follow them. Learn what pleases

God. Bring every emotion under discipline to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

For this we have the all-sufficient grace of God. And we have the illuminating presence of the Holy Spirit, who guides us into all truth and is working to perfect in us His beautiful fruit..

We Are All Headed Somewhere

We were not made to die. Something immortal is in us. God has put eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

The rich young ruler's anxious cry to Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" epitomizes the deep, universal longing of the human soul. If death ends it all, what about the unpaid moral bills? If all the rewards and punishments come in this life only, the books are way out of balance. In that case, Adolf Hitler received the same thing in the *Fuhrerbunker* as the twenty-year-old Christian GI in the burned-out Sherman tank.

Something basic in our intelligence tells us that the moral government of God is not going to let things end like that. God is going to settle accounts and balance the books. The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves it. We can count on it.

The moral law has appropriate rewards and punishments, administered by the moral government of God. Some of these are the natural consequences of obedience and disobedience. They are a simple matter of reaping what we sow.

But other rewards and punishments are specifically prescribed in addition to the natural ones. Rewards and punishments exist for several reasons:

(1) they serve as inducements to obedience and deterrents to disobedience;

(2) they demonstrate the fact that God cares enough about us to do everything morally possible to uphold moral law and order, promote obedience and prevent sin;

(3) they show us how important moral law is to us, how right it is, and how necessary it is for the highest good of all;

(4) they prove that God means business. One look at the penalty should convince us that God is not trifling with sin.

How long do the rewards and punishments last? The answer is simple: they last as long as our obedience or disobedience lasts.

Man is immortal. Every one of us will spend forever somewhere. So then, happiness must continue as long as obedience continues, and punishment must continue as long as disobedience continues.

The Bible teaches us that those who go to Heaven are the ones who will obey God forever. Revelation 22:3 says, "His servants shall serve him," and so their joy will be endless.

Also, there is no indication that sinners in hell will ever stop sinning. On the contrary, the very fact that their punishment is endless strongly implies that their disobedience will be endless also. Stubbornness has a way of perpetuating itself under severe punishment. Also, no amount of punishment can forgive our sins or make us innocent. Punishment earns us nothing.

Sin perpetuates and aggravates itself. It is not static. Sinners grow worse as they grow older. Just think of the result as this process continues. Let countless ages roll; then, if you could stop and look into hell for one brief moment, what would you find? Not one soul is willing to love and obey God. Instead, they have become immeasurably worse. The blast of vile cursing and bitterness that erupts from the caverns of the damned causes us to flee instantly in horror and revulsion.

The sin of hell continues. So must the punishment.

"It is not merely natural death, for this would in reality be no penalty at all. It would be offering a reward to sin. If natural death be the penalty, then infants and animals suffer this penalty. If natural death be the penalty, the only penalty, it sustains no proportion whatever to the guilt of sin. Natural death would be no adequate expression of the importance of the precept.

"The penal sanction of the law of God is endless death, or that state of endless suffering which is the natural and governmental result of sin."

OBJECTION: "Endless punishment is unjust because life is so short that men do not live long enough in this world to commit so great a number of sins as to deserve endless punishment."

ANSWER: "I answer . . . that one breach of the precept always incurs the penalty of the law, whatever that penalty is. The length of time employed in committing a sin has nothing to do with its blameworthiness or guilt."

OBJECTION: "A finite creature cannot commit an infinite sin."

ANSWER: "This objection takes for granted that man is . . . so much less than the Creator that he cannot deserve his endless frown. Which would involve the most guilt, for a man to smite his neighbor and equal or his lawful sovereign? The higher the ruler is exalted above the subject in his nature, character, and rightful authority, the greater is the obligation of the subject to will his good, to render him obedience, and the greater is the guilt of the transgression in the subject. Therefore, the fact that man is so infinitely below his Maker does but enhance the guilt of his rebellion.

OBJECTION: "Sin is not an infinite evil, and therefore does not deserve endless punishment."

ANSWER: "This objection may mean either that sin would not produce infinite mischief if unrestrained, or that it does not involve infinite guilt. It cannot mean the first, for . . . misery must continue as long as sin does and therefore . . . sin unrestrained would produce endless evil.

"What does all sin in its own nature deserve? They who deny the justice of endless punishment manifestly consider the guilt of sin as a mere trifle. They who maintain the justice of endless punishment consider sin as an evil of immeasurable magnitude, and deserving of endless punishment.

"The Bible . . . represents the future punishment of the wicked as eternal, and never once represents it otherwise. It expresses the duration of the future punishment of the wicked by the same terms and . . . as forcibly as it expresses the duration of the future happiness of the righteous." ⁷²

God is not trifling with sin and sinners, because He is not careless in protecting and promoting the well-being of the universe. Calvary proves that. With God, moral issues are of fundamental and eternal importance. So should they be with us.

Don't Blame It All On Adam

Man's problem is called moral depravity. It is a voluntary condition, requiring a total moral and spiritual transformation. External remedies will not work.

Man needs more than behavior modification. He needs a new heart, that is, a complete change of ultimate choice. A new heart will correct a person's behavior. Without a new heart, behavior will regress, reverting back to the self-commitment of the will.

But change the direction of the will, and the life will change.

"Moral depravity is depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. Depravity of the will as a faculty is, or would be, physical and not moral depravity. Moral depravity is depravity of choice." ⁷³

The most common Greek word in the New Testament for "sin" is *hamartia*. It means "missing the mark." In other words, sin is aiming at the wrong target, striving for the wrong goal, living for the wrong end.

Virtue is living for God. Sin is living for self.

Remember, all choices of means are made with the purpose of securing the chosen end. Consequently, the character of the end determines the character of the means. What we are living for determines how we are going to live and the moral character of our living. The motive of the heart counts for everything, because it is the reason why we do what we are doing.

So then, a person's total moral character is determined by what he is living for. If he is living for God, he is morally right one hundred percent. If he is living for self, he is morally wrong one hundred percent.

If self is the ultimate preference of the soul, the total moral character of the person is selfish. While this selfish ultimate preference continues, he does nothing to please God and can do nothing to please God; for if pleasing God were his motivation, he would order his whole life accordingly.

"So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8). They miss the mark. Holding on to the wrong end, everything they do is wrong. It is selfish. It is sinful.

That means, then, that every unconverted person is totally morally depraved, without any real moral goodness in him. He does nothing consciously that is contrary to the selfish ultimate purpose that motivates him. He is pursuing this purpose with all his heart according to all the knowledge and opportunity he has. He is totally self-committed, and therefore totally guilty.

But why is selfishness so universal, and why is every one of us so committed to self-gratification at an early age that to save even some of us, God has to use the most powerful

persuasions to pry us away from selfishness and win our hearts to Himself?

The most common explanation is to say that we were all born that way, that we all were born with a "sinful nature" down inside of us that craves sin and causes us to commit sin.

Whether we agree with this explanation or not is influenced largely by how we have been taught to interpret certain Scriptures (e.g., Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Romans 5:12-19).*

Finney was opposed to this doctrine of original sin. For one thing, he did not believe that the Bible really teaches that we are born with a sinful nature or a natural disposition toward sin *per se*.

Also, Finney believed that the idea of original sin inherited by the whole human race from Adam involves a wrong concept of what sin is. Sin is a choice, not a substance. It is moral, not physical or metaphysical. It is a choice that we are responsible for individually and personally. It is not an accident or calamity that happened to us, but a crime that we commit and are accountable for.

"Moral depravity consists in selfishness, or in the choice of self-interest, self-gratification, or self-indulgence as an end. Consequently it cannot consist in a sinful constitution or in a constitutional craving for sin. Moral depravity is sin itself, and not the cause of sin.

"To talk of a sinful nature . . . is to ascribe sinfulness to the Creator, who is the author of nature.

"It is a monstrous and blasphemous dogma that a holy God is angry with any creature for possessing a nature with which he was sent into being without his knowledge or consent.

"If sin necessarily implies a sinful nature, how did Adam and Eve sin? How did angels sin? Had they also a sinful nature?

"Can we not account for Eve eating the forbidden fruit without supposing that she had a craving for sin? Her craving was for the fruit, for knowledge, and not for sin. This led to prohibited indulgence. All men sin in precisely the same way. They consent to gratify, not a craving for sin, but a craving for other things, and the consent to make self-gratification an end is the whole of sin.

"I object to the doctrine of constitutional sinfulness that it makes all sin, original and actual, a mere calamity, and not a crime.

"Upon this supposition, the law is tyranny and the gospel an insult to the unfortunate.

"What! Create them with a sinful nature, from which proceed by a law of necessity actual transgressions, and then send them to an eternal hell for having this nature, and for transgressions that are unavoidable! Impossible!

"The Bible intimates that Adam's first sin has in some way been the occasion, not

the necessary physical cause, of all the sins of men.

"James says that a man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lusts and enticed. . . . Paul and other inspired writers represent sin as consisting in a carnal or fleshly mind, . . . in minding the flesh.

"The representations of Scripture are that the body is the occasion of sin. The law in his members, that warred against the law of his mind, of which Paul speaks [Romans 7] is manifestly the impulse of the sensibility opposed to the law of the reason.

"Selfish choice is the wicked heart . . . This sinful choice is properly enough called indwelling sin.

"Moral depravity in our first parents was induced by temptation. . . . All moral depravity commences in substantially the same way. The impulses of the sensibility are developed gradually . . . from . . . birth. The first acts of will are in obedience to these. A habit of self-indulgence is formed. When reason affirms moral obligation, it finds the will in a state of... committal to the impulses of the sensibility.

"Selfishness confirms, strengthens and perpetuates itself. . . . It grows with the sinner's growth, strengthens with his strength, and will do so forever unless overcome by the Holy Spirit through the truth.

"The constitution of a moral being as a whole, when all the powers are developed, does not tend to sin, but strongly in an opposite direction. When reason is thoroughly developed by the Holy Spirit, it is more than a match for the sensibility, and turns the heart to God. The Holy Spirit reveals God and the spiritual word . . . so as to give reason the control of the will. This is regeneration and sanctification."

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So then, sin is not a thing--a solid, liquid, gas, or some mystical substance that pollutes our body, our blood stream and our reproductive system.

Sin is a choice. It is not just a thought. It is a commitment. It is not something that sits inside of us and makes us do bad things. Sin is inside of us only in the sense that choices take place inside of us.

Our moral choices are not determined by internal or external essence. We determine them ourselves. When we choose whom we will serve, that is whom we will serve unless and until we choose otherwise.

Internal and external influences appeal to us to choose in their direction, but they cannot force us to do so. Our attention is continually addressed by considerations that tend to stir up feelings. Many of these feelings are normal and proper. Some are not. In either case we can keep our feelings under subjection to reason and to the higher interests of God, of others and even of ourselves, or we can surrender to them and let them rule us in spite of the consequences to God, to others and even to ourselves.

The surrender of the will to be controlled by the desires is sin when it is done under light and in opposition to the reason. It is deliberately placing the demands of desire above the values presented to us by reason and the revealed Word of God.

So then, we do not have to look any further than our own desires and the things that stimulate our desires to find the cause of temptation and the reason for sin. People are doing what they feel like doing instead of what they know they ought to do. It all adds up to selfishness--a refusal to love.

*See Appendix: "The Influence of Greek Philosophy on the Development of Christian Theology."

11
God Came To The Rescue

We all know what a red traffic light means. It means stop. And most of us know better than to run through that stop light or sign.

Why? Because we know we might kill somebody or get killed ourselves if we do.

At least, that is the ultimate reason. But there is another reason, too. That traffic signal has a penalty behind it. And it is the penalty that makes it a law. Without the penalty that stop light would not be a law. It would be only very good advice.

But when the penalty is added and enforced, it is a different matter. People start taking it seriously, because people pay more attention to penalties than they do to good advice. And the more serious the penalty, the more seriously they regard the law.

"The design of legal penalties is to secure obedience to the precept. The exercise of mercy in setting aside the execution of penalties is a matter of extreme delicacy and danger. The influence of law . . . is found very much to depend upon the certainty felt by the subjects that it will be duly executed." ⁷⁵

Mother tells little Suzie, "Don't dig up mother's flowers. If you do, I'll punish you."

So little Suzie goes out to play. Fifteen minutes later mother looks out the window and sees her little darling uprooting her tulips.

"Suzie!" mother yells, "Come in here right now!"

"Oh, mother, I'll never, never do it again. Please don't punish me!" the little tike pleads.

"All right," mother responds, "I won't punish you this time. But don't do it again."

Suzie goes back to playing and mother returns to her housework. Ten minutes later mother glances out the window, and there is little misbehave right in the middle of the flowerbed, pulling up more tulips.

"Suzie! What did I tell you?" Mother's voice sounds stern this time.

"Mama, I'm sorry. Please don't punish me. I'll never do it again!" Suzie sounds so sincere.

"All right," mother repeats, "I won't punish you this time. But don't you ever do it again."

Well, five minutes later mother looks out the window, and what does she see?

You guessed it. Suzie is back in the tulips.

Why? Because she did not really believe that mother meant what she said. She violated

her mother's word and escaped the penalty merely by acting sorry. As a result, mercy was interpreted as leniency. Law had become only advice.

Now, God is not dealing with minor acts of mischief. He is the moral Governor of the universe and planet Earth is in open mutiny. He is dealing with total rebellion in the human heart. Moral order on Earth is threatened with total collapse.

What shall God do about it? Inflict the penalty appropriate to such sin? This He must do if all else fails.

But God wants to win sinners away from their rebellion and forgive their sin. He wants to have mercy upon them, but He will not pardon any of them in any way that will make mercy look like leniency. God loves the universe too much to allow that.

Something must be done so that the offer of mercy will not lead people to think, "That was easy. All we had to do was say 'we're sorry.' God must not be very serious about sin after all."

"The exercise of mercy . . . where no atonement is made weakens government by begetting and fostering a hope of impunity." 76

God has the moral responsibility to promote the happiness and well-being of the universe in general, and the world in particular, and to protect it from everything that would harm or destroy it.

Now, the most harmful and destructive influence of all is sin (selfishness).

So then, because God loves the world and is committed to our highest well-being, as well as to the highest well-being of the whole universe, He must and will do everything possible to protect it from the destructive influence of sin.

One necessary way He does this is by upholding moral law, including enforcing the penalty when moral law is violated.

But God wants to forgive, not punish. But forgiveness means dropping the penalty for the person who is forgiven, and dropping the penalty for even one person who has broken the law is a very dangerous thing. In fact, it would be wrong because it would endanger everything. If even one person can get by with doing wrong, the safety of all is threatened because the basic integrity of moral law is violated.

Therefore, if God is going to drop the penalty in any case, something must be put in the place of the penalty that will do what the penalty was intended to do. Whatever it is, it must have the same influence as the penalty in preventing sin, in demonstrating the seriousness and destructiveness of sin, and in letting people know that God means business.

Well, what can that be?

Repentance? Repentance is a necessary condition of forgiveness. Unless we repent, we cannot be forgiven. But repentance alone is not enough. It is too easy in the sense that it

promotes the "I-can-do-it-myself-whenever-I-get-ready" idea. No, our repentance in itself will not forgive us. It cannot save us. We have sinned before the holy Lord God of the universe, and only He can forgive us.

Well, then, why doesn't God just go ahead and forgive everybody? Because God is no fool. We would not respect Him if He did, just as we would not respect a judge or a governor who opened up all the prisons and turned all the inmates loose.

Well, then, what about a substitute? Let an animal be sacrificed as a substitute for the punishment of the guilty person.

No, because the sufferings and death of an animal would not demonstrate the seriousness of sin. It would not have enough influence to stop people from sinning. It will take something much more than that.

But a substitute is the right idea. Who shall it be?

Another mere human being cannot do it. For one thing all have sinned (Romans 3:23). All of us would have to suffer the penalty for our own sins, and so we could not do it for someone else. Besides, just one human being's suffering and death still would not stop people from sinning.

Then how about an angel coming down Heaven and dying for us?

No, again for the same reason.

Then, who can do it?

1) It would have to be someone who is innocent.

2) It would have to be someone who really loves us, because he certainly would not owe it to us.

3) It would have to be someone very, very important, because his sufferings and death would really have to have a tremendous and effective influence. When people really understood what he had done for them, it would have to have enough of an effect on them to cause them to love God and stop sinning. But who?

There is only One--God Himself!

And that is exactly what God did! In his Son Jesus Christ, God came to earth, became a man, took our place, and suffered and died on the cross as our Substitute!

So now, if the guilty soul will turn to God (repent) and trust his great Substitute, he will receive forgiveness as a free gift.

Why?

Because God in Jesus Christ did for us the one and only thing that can wake us up to the seriousness of sin, make us hate sin and turn to God, with a moral effect on us at least equal

to the threat of the penalty, and that would thus satisfy the requirements of moral law.

In fact, the cross of Christ should have a far greater influence on us than the threat of punishment. If the sight of our innocent Sovereign and our great and gentle God dying on the cross in agony and blood for our sins and out of love for us does not break our stubborn hearts and turn us to Him now and forever, nothing will.

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

He did it all for me, and He did it all for you.

Oh, turn to Him, receive Him, believe Him, trust Him, love Him, obey Him, serve Him-- forever and ever!

Allow the mercy and grace of God offered at such an awesome and staggering cost to melt your heart, to win your heart! Accept it by faith.

Let the blood of Jesus Christ wash your sins away. It is the only way to be forgiven. If you refuse, you will have to face the penalty.

Why die when you can live?

Let Jesus Christ take His rightful place on the throne of your heart as your Savior and Lord. Let Him bring you His joy, peace, happiness and eternal life.

12
We Need A Change

Many people do not want to change. They like their little self-centered world just the way it is. They like running their own lives and are not interested in having Jesus Christ come in and take over. If they gave Him first place in their hearts, things would change--completely. The change would be greatly for the better, of course, but it would mean the end of selfishness.

And selfishness has so many little pets. Christ cannot save people as long as they refuse to let Him change them.

Usually people have to become sick and tired of sin before they are willing to give up to God and come to Jesus Christ. They wait until sin has wrecked and ruined them before they have had enough of it. And some hold onto their pet indulgences until death. How foolish! How much better it is to live for Christ from early life and let Him build a beautiful life than to bring the broken pieces of sin-wrecked years for Him to mend.

Yes, we human beings need a change, whether we realize it or not.

Some do realize it but fail to understand what it is they need. What they do not know--or are unwilling to admit--is that they need a change of heart.

A change of heart, that is, a change in what one is ultimately living for, is the greatest possible moral change that can come to an individual. It is a new birth, a new life. This makes regeneration a total change, because a change of the supreme goal of living will produce a change in every part of living--actions, emotions, values, plans, preferences.

Most of all, it is a spiritual change. Being reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ, we come into a dynamic living relationship with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit--GOD!

Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot not tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is every one who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

In other words, you see the dramatic effects of the wind, but you do not see the wind. Just so, you see in the life of the believer in Christ the results of the Holy Spirit's work, but you do not see the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, if we hear no wind, feel no wind, and see no evidence that any wind is blowing, it is likely that, in fact, no wind is blowing. Just so, if no evidence of a real change of heart appears in the life, it is likely that no real change has taken place.

Now, before bringing this book to a close, it is only fair to point out that Charles G. Finney said much more about the subjects we have explored than the few quotations that are cited here. Often he becomes very eloquent in developing his thesis.

One might not agree with all that Finney says. However, before his views on any point be rejected, fairness demands a careful study of his full treatment of the subject in his Lectures

On Systematic Theology.

In our present exploration we have seen Paradise lost and regained.

Every unconverted person is in "death-row" right now, under the condemnation he cannot rid himself of.

But God in Christ took the sinner's place--my place, your place. It happened on a cross at the top of a hill just outside Jerusalem. Now God can safely and wisely pardon every one who will let Him do so. What must we do? Come to Him and accept it. That's all. But that involves everything. It means accepting the terms of the reconciliation: the surrender of the whole heart, renouncing all sin and receiving Jesus Christ by faith as Savior and Lord.

"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Have you surrendered to God and accepted His free offer of forgiveness, reconciliation and eternal life through Jesus Christ? If not, do so right now. You will be forever glad that you did.

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Words set in brackets have been supplied. Elliptical marks (...) in quotations indicate words have been omitted for the sake of clarity or brevity. Care has been taken not to change the meaning of the sentences by the omission of words.

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Appendix: The Influence Of Greek Philosophy On The Development Of Christian Theology

by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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Early Christians were slow to develop a distinctly Christian philosophy. When they did, their philosophical environment was Neo-Platonic. This mind-set directly influenced the historic development of Christian philosophy and theology.

Flavius Justinus (Martyr), ca. 100 - 164, admired Plato's philosophy and used some Platonic terms, but not necessarily with Platonic meaning. Tatian, a pupil of Justin Martyr, did not share his teacher's admiration for Greek philosophy; he believed that if the Greeks possessed any truth, they must have received it from The Scriptures.

Theophilus of Antioch, who wrote Ad Autolyicum, esteemed Plato. Minucius Felix, a Latin apologist, held that the philosophers had at least recognized some truths.

It was in the catechetical school at Alexandria, however, that philosophy gained its greatest influence in Christian theology. Titus Flavius Clemens (Clement of Alexandria), born ca. A.D.150, was the first of what might be called the Christian philosophers. Though he rejected the crude speculations of the Sophists, he held firmly to the belief that philosophy held an element of truth. He taught that the passages of Scripture that declare the insufficiency of human wisdom and that warn against being spoiled by philosophy applied only to empty Sophism and Epicureanism, but not to what he considered the best of philosophy. He maintained that philosophy brought the Greek mind to Christ, just as the Law brought the Hebrew to Him. To Clement, philosophy provided a natural framework for the expression of truth (Stromata I:3, 5, 11).

Having devoted most of Book One and some of the remaining sections of his Stromata to a defense of his philosophical approach, Clement proceeded to build on a Neo-Platonic metaphysical foundation what was intended to be a Christian philosophy. To him, the God of the Christians is the God of Plato, now worshiped by Christians more perfectly than by the Greeks. According to Clement, Plato plagiarized revelation from the Hebrews; this gave the Athenian's highest ideas a flavor of divine authority in the estimation of Clement.

What began in Clement was expanded in one of his pupils, Origen (ca.185 - 254). To Origen, sin is negative, a privation (which makes man the victim of sin rather than its responsible cause).

The prevalence of dualistic ideas provoked controversies in the Church. Tertullian (ca. 155 - 222) vigorously opposed the intrusion of Neo-Platonic philosophy into Christian doctrine. His cry was "free Jerusalem from Athens and the church of Christ from the Academy of Plato." Historically, it was the attitude of Clement, not of Tertullian, that won out in ecclesiastical Christianity.

In the Third Century A. D., Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch, taught that God, being One, could not appear substantially on earth; therefore He could not have become man in Jesus Christ but rather filled the man, Jesus, with His Logos and power. Lucian of Antioch, his follower, believed that the Logos became man in Christ; however, Lucian's Logos was a lower, created essence and not fully God.

Arius, one of Lucian's pupils, fully absorbed Lucian's Logos concept. In A.D. 311. Arius was ordained a presbyter in the church at Alexandria. After several years of controversy, Arius was excommunicated. Because many of the clergy sympathized with his views, a struggle was precipitated that threatened to split Christianity. The emperor Constantine became alarmed. The result was the Council Of Nicaea (A.D. 325). Christ was declared to be of the same substance as the Father. This settled the matter officially, but not historically.

Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 265 - 340) agreed with Clement of Alexandria regarding the value of philosophy. He believed that Plato had been enlightened by God and was in agreement with Moses.

Augustine (A.D. 354 - 430) spent several years of his early life in Manichaeism. He was converted in A.D. 386 and later became Bishop of Hippo. His early writings, such as Contra Academicos, De Beata Vita, and De Ordine, have a strong Neo-Platonic flavor, which carried through into his later writings. He wrote, "Let every good and true Christian understand that truth, wherever he finds it, belongs to his Lord" (Epistle 166).

Augustine taught that the mind of God contains the eternal, changeless Ideas, Forms, or Archetypes of all things. These creative Ideas are independent of matter. They are the rationes seminales which the divine Creative Will developed within time into seen forms (De Ideis, 2). The view that these Ideas are in the Word goes back to Philo and the Stoic Logoi Spermatikoi, and, from Augustine, passed into medieval theology.

To Augustine, created things tend toward non-being; but so long as they exist, they must assume some form. That form is the reflection of the eternal and immutable Form (De Libero Arbitrio 2, 17, 46). Evil is that which tends to non-being and also tends to make what is cease to be (De Moribus Ecclesiae, 2, 2, 2).

Others also contributed to the influence of Neo-Platonism. Boethius (A.D. 480 - 524) wrote a Platonic theodicy, On The Consolation Of Philosophy, which had considerable influence in Christian theology.

Neo-Platonic ideas also influenced Christianity, especially in the west, through the pseudonymous Dionysius The Areopagite, a work dated not earlier than A.D. 500. The author took the Neo-Platonic ideas of Proclus and developed them into an esoteric Christianity. Erigena, Peter Lombard, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and others carried on the pseudo-Dionysian theme.

Not all leaders of the Latin Church held a high regard for Greek philosophy. Jerome cried, "What has Horace to do with the Psalter, Virgil with the gospels, and Cicero with Paul?" (The Virgin's Profession).

The influence of the ancient philosophies is evident in various contemporary religious

views and practices.

The Platonic concept of God as an impersonal One, pantheistically immanent in nature and of which all visible beings are emanations, the concept of mystical reunion of the human soul with the Divine Mind and the acquisition of esoteric *gnosis* through meditation, inner mental and psychic development and ecstasy, and the concept of the more or less unreality of material being are all present in the various modern "mind science" sects. In most of these systems, Christ is considered to be some kind of demigod, a second-rate Platonic Logos who has attained to a high degree of liberation from the mundane and achieved an advanced spiritual (metaphysical) state. The Arian view of Christ is vigorously taught by the Watchtower Society ("Jehovah's Witnesses").

Some (but not all) of these concepts are deeply ingrained in the theology of eastern Orthodoxy. This is to be expected because the roots of the eastern Orthodox churches are deeply planted in ancient Greek thought and culture. Some of these roots are found in the ontology of Athanasius (ca. 298 - 373). Eastern Orthodox concepts such as the divinization of nature through the Incarnation of Christ, and *theosis* (the process of man becoming divine) are based on Greek philosophy. This philosophical premise leads to an ontological interpretation of 2 Peter 1:4 ". . . you may be partakers of the divine nature" "Divine nature" (*physis*) is automatically assumed to mean the very essence of God rather than His moral character (as the context clearly demonstrates).

It is in morality and ethics that philosophy has had its most far-reaching practical influence in Christian theology. This has developed on the one hand from the Neo-Platonic view of sin, and on the other from the Stoic concept of ethical self-sufficiency.

In Platonism and its subsequent variations the question of the cause and nature of evil was basic. The general assumption that sin and evil are ontological (that they have actual essence) contributed to and forms the basic premise of the doctrine of original sin. To be inherited, sin must have essence, real being; it must consist in some thing that causes evil choice and action, instead of being the moral character of the choice itself. With this mind-set it is common to regard sin in the heart as an essence instead of a voluntary choice; hence the term "sinful nature." This evil essence is regarded as a part of human nature. Although Augustine did not originate the concept, he passed it on to subsequent generations. Calvin built heavily upon it. It is with us today.

It appears that the early framers and proponents of the doctrine of original sin did not use the Bible as their starting point. That is, the doctrine did not emerge on its own out of Biblical exegesis. Even though Tertullian objected to the influence of Greek philosophy on the Church, his stoic psychology was a tributary of the emerging new doctrine. The main stream, however, goes back to its headwaters in Plato and his notion of the fall of the soul. From this and from the assumptions behind infant baptism, Origen contributed to the doctrine. But even these in themselves would not have institutionalized the doctrine of original sin in the Church without the concepts of the prevailing philosophical milieu at the time of Augustine.

Largely out of his own personal experience--his struggle with temptation and his life of defeat in sin--rather than out of the Scriptures themselves, Augustine advanced the new doctrine. Being the bishop of Hippo, in North Africa, and being within the sphere of influence and authority of the Bishop of Rome and the developing papacy, Augustine had a strong position from which to inculcate the theology that emerged in his brilliant mind.

Pelagius (ca. 360 - 420) came to Rome from Britain. Coming from the purer form of Christianity that existed at the time in Scotland and Ireland, Pelagius was scandalized by the lack of holiness and the excuse of moral inability, and set out to correct the situation. Pelagius published his objections in the capital city. Coelestius, a pupil of Pelagius, adopted his teacher's ideas and promoted them aggressively. When Rome was sacked by the Goths in 410, Pelagius and Coelestius moved to Africa. Not long afterward Pelagius went to Palestine.

Coelestius remained in Carthage. A council met at Carthage in 412 and condemned Coelestius on several doctrinal points. In 417 the Bishop of Rome, "Pope" Innocent I, confirmed the condemnation of Coelestius and also censured Pelagius.

The regions ecclesiastically under Rome were strongholds of the new doctrine of original sin. Innocent I was succeeded by Zosimus, who reversed the judgment on Coelestius. An influential council in Africa protested the action of Zosimus. The Roman Emperor Honorius compelled Zosimus to reinstate the condemnation of Coelestius and the censure of Pelagius. The bishops of Italy were required to sign the condemnation. At least 18 refused to sign and were banished from Italy by imperial decree. And so the doctrine of original sin was officially established in the Church, first in the West and eventually in the East (Ephesus, AD 431).

Certainly Pelagius and Coelestius held doctrines that are indefensible; however, so did Augustine and his supporters, notably the doctrine of original sin. Although Augustine did not originate the concept, he formulated it and passed it on to subsequent generations. Calvin built heavily upon it. It is with us today, with all of its pleas of moral inability as an excuse for sub-Christian living.

The supporters of the doctrine of inherited original sin appeal to several Bible passages that have come to be viewed from the presuppositions of an essentially Platonic/Neo-Platonic frame of reference. That frame of reference is a prism that determines the definitions and connotations of certain Biblical words and phrases, notably "sin." Because these Biblical passages did not in themselves teach the later doctrine of original sin, they had to be "retrofitted" by *eisogesis* to conform to a Greek philosophical template.

It is important that we consider and understand these Biblical passages from a Hebrew/moral frame of reference instead of a Greek/ontological frame of reference. That is, we will regard the Scriptures in their natural definition of sin and holiness as voluntary moral choices, not ontological (metaphysical) essences. "*Spiritual*" does not mean "*mystical*." It has to do with moral choices and character, and a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Let us start with Job 14:4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!" This verse is pressed into service to support the doctrine of original sin only because the doctrine it claims to support is first presupposed. Taken in its context and in view of the Bible's definition of sin as voluntary, this verse can mean no more than this: infants born in a morally and spiritually degenerate cultural environment will themselves become such. They will slide into the prevailing moral depravity by following the course of least resistance. This is made all the more certain by the brevity and difficulties of this life.

Job 15:14, "What is man, that he could be pure? And he who is born of a woman, that he could be righteous?" At most these words of Eliphaz teach the same as the previous

passage. Every person who is "born of a woman"--that is, the entire human race--falls into voluntary moral depravity because of the combination of influences in that direction (the world, the flesh, and the devil).

Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin my mother conceived me." If taken precisely, the psalmist is speaking of the sinful character of his mother at the time of his conception and gestation. To make this verse teach the supposed "sinfulness" of David's natural being is to go against God's own definition of sin as a voluntary and therefore responsible choice. This is the strong poetical language of David's penitential psalm, expressing the fact that he had been a sinner from the inception of his moral ability and accountability, and that his mother had also been a sinner. He is confessing his generational pattern of sinning, not some supposed sinfulness in his human substance.

We find the same strong poetical language in Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." No one has ever seen a newborn baby get up and walk around the nursery telling lies to its parents, the other newborns, and the nurses! This verse affirms what the other verses we are considering affirm: people yield to temptation from the beginning of their ability to make moral choices. Trace the lifelong pattern of the wicked back as far as possible, and it will be discovered that they began their pattern of sinful choices as early as they were capable of making moral choices at all. To make this verse teach otherwise is to make it teach nonsense.

James 1:14 tells us that temptation comes from our own human desires. These are not evil in themselves, because Jesus Himself had them; otherwise, He could not have been tempted. Temptation does not come from some "indwelling" sinful nature; it comes from our humanity, just as it came from Jesus' humanity. In infants and small children, desire is developed before reason; couple that with the influences of the world and the devil, and it is no marvel or mystery why people universally sin before being enlightened by the Scriptures, influenced by the Church, and drawn by the Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil." This verse itself refutes the assumptions of original sin. The moral bondage is the result of being accustomed to doing evil, not one's birth.

John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." This means that as flesh is produced from parental flesh, so a redeemed, purified and renewed human spirit is the product of the influence of the Holy Spirit.

John 9. The disciples asked if the man had been born blind because of his sins or his parents' sins. Jesus replied that neither was the case. Later, the Pharisees treated the man with contempt, saying that he had been completely born in sins (verse 34). In the first place, Jesus dismissed the rabbinical assumptions of the disciples. In the second place, we cannot base doctrine on an insult by the Pharisees.

Romans 5:12-19, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned--for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died because of the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (NIV).

Of course sin was introduced into human experience by one man. Adam started it. Because God saw that sin would become the universal practice, He placed a limitation on the human life-span to set boundaries on mankind's opportunity to sin in this life. So *physical* death came to all men. The fact that all have sinned demonstrates the wisdom of God's pre-emptive action.

No Bible passage is interpreted correctly if that interpretation leads to a conclusion that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible as a whole. Any such interpretation is in error. If this passage is taken to mean that Adam's sin automatically made everyone guilty, consistency necessarily drives us to the inescapable conclusion that Christ's sacrifice automatically saved everyone. It does no good to plead otherwise. The Greek is very strong: "just as". . ."so also." To conclude otherwise one has to make an arbitrary assertion contrary to the fact. This *mis*interpretation forces its adherents and defenders to the error of Universalism--that everyone will be saved. The Augustinian view of this passage is a stronghold of Universalism.

In this passage Paul teaches that Adam's sin brought about a tragic universal result, but Christ's obedience (His death on the cross) brought about a glorious universal result. It states that each affects everyone without going into the specifics of *how*, beyond opening the door to universal sinfulness and condemnation by Adam and opening the way of salvation to all by Jesus Christ. Involved in this are universal *physical* death and universal *physical* resurrection (the latter taught also in 1 Corinthians 15:21).

Romans 7:7-25. This passage is quite lengthy. Please refer to it in your Bible. By no reasonable standard of Biblical interpretation can this passage refer to Paul's experience as a born-again believer. It is impossible for anyone to live in Romans chapter 7 and chapter 8 at the same time. To force this passage to teach the notion of "two natures" in the believer, it is necessary to fall back on the mysticism of Greek and middle-eastern dualism.

Paul is *not* describing the believer's on-going struggle with temptation. To illustrate and personalize the point, he is putting himself in the place of the unconverted person who is experiencing the war between that person's reason and his or her desires. It was his own miserable state before *his* conversion. These are the two laws that are in conflict within every sinner, producing the wretchedness mentioned in verse 24. The result of this conflict between reason and desire in every person who is a voluntary slave to desire is constant defeat, bondage, and spiritual death (death in sin is alienation from God because of one's sin). This is the "law of sin and death."

Sin "dwells" in sinners because choices are made within us. Please keep in mind the Biblical definition of sin as a voluntary commitment to and pursuit of self-gratification (Romans 8:5-7). That commitment "dwells" in us because it is the stubborn set of the soul (the "will"). For example, if greed "dwells" in us, it is because we put it there; we choose the passion and hold on to it in our souls.

Sinners are "sold under sin" because they voluntarily sell themselves to sin (1_Kings 21:20; 2 Kings 17:17; Isaiah 50:1; Isaiah 52:3).

The latter part of Romans 7:25 is not a conclusion; it is a summary of what had been said before. The conclusion is in chapter 8:1 and 2--"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. . . ." The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made them free from that law of sin and death described in Chapter 7. So good news, believer! You do not live in perpetual sinning. You live in victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! So, get out of Romans 7 and live in Romans 8. There is where every true believer stands.

Romans 8:3. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh." Some suppose that the phrase "sin in the flesh" means that sin is a mystical substance that resides in and permeates our human flesh. This supposition is contrary to the Bible's teaching that sin is a voluntary choice, not an essence. Also, it misinterprets the Greek. If "in the flesh" refers to "sin," it would read "the sin *the* in the flesh." But it does not. Therefore, "sin" connects with "condemned." That is, in His flesh (His Incarnation, as in "the days of his flesh" in Hebrews 5:7) Jesus condemned sin by demonstrating that it is not an unavoidable necessity. We are not in bondage to it unless we choose to be. In His humanity Jesus overcame sin by the same spiritual resources that are available to all believers in the power of the Holy Spirit. "He condemned the sin of men and the condemnation took place in the flesh of Jesus" (A. T. Robertson, Word :Pictures In The New Testament, Volume IV, page 372).

Also, "sinful flesh" means the members of the body that people use as tools to sin. They use their flesh in a sinful way. "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments [tools] of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:11 - 13 NKJV).

Romans 11:32, "For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all" (NASB. Also Galatians 3:22). Both of these passages contain the first aorist active indicative of *sunkleio* ("to shut together completely," as in a net--Luke 5:6). The King James Version reads "concluded," an obsolete use of the word that meant "to shut in, enclose". A.T. Robertson states, "This is a resultant (effective) aorist because of the disbelief and disobedience of both Gentile and Jew."

There are two essentially different perspectives on this word as it is used in these passages. Moulton and Milligan give it the meaning, "put them under compulsion to be disobedient or given them over to disobedience." Thayer says, "(the Scripture has shut up or subjected, *i.e.*, declared them to be subject)." In Galatians 3:22 the NIV reads, "the whole world is a prisoner of sin," but in Romans 11:32 the NIV reads, "God has bound all men over to disobedience." Both are interpretations of the word sunkleio.

To charge God with compelling people to sin is an outrageous slander on the character of God. It leads us to declare with Elihu, "I will ascribe justice to my Maker" (Job 36:3). This cannot be the meaning, as it is totally inconsistent with everything God has revealed about Himself and His own definition of sin as a voluntary choice. Also, consistency would tend to lead those who hold this view of these verses to universalism.

The other view is completely harmonious with both reason and revelation. Paul is his own best interpreter. When he writes in Galatians 3:22 that the Scriptures teach that everything is a prisoner of sin, he is referring to the Scriptures that he quotes later in Romans, Chapter Three. By using the neuter Paul is also affirming what he wrote in Romans 8 about the consequences of Adam's sin on the physical creation.

Accordingly, Romans 11:32 simply states that all moral agents (Jew and Gentile) have sinned and therefore are under the same sentence. They chose it; God let them have it with the all the bondage it brings. They are now locked up in "death row." The Law cannot save us; therefore we have only one hope--the mercy of God that is *offered* to all through Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 7:14, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy." This and other passages have been misused to teach the monstrous doctrine that babies of unregenerate parents are morally defiled and therefore go to hell (or at least to the imaginary place called "limbo") if they die in infancy. All that this verse teaches us is that by the grace of God the influence of the believing spouse is able to overcome the influence of the unbelieving spouse, create a prevailing godly influence in the marriage and home, resulting in holy children. At the very least, it teaches that the marriage of a believer to an unbeliever is still a valid marriage in God's sight, so that children born as a result of that marriage are fully legitimate.

Ephesians 2:3, "we all . . . were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." (Notice, "were.") God is never angry with people because of their ontological nature--how and with what they were born. Guilt cannot be predicated of essence (substance). No one is guilty of something that is beyond his or her control. The Bible always teaches that God's wrath rests upon people because of their sinful choices and the resulting deeds and practices, not for their natural being. To teach that God's wrath rests upon people because they were born a certain way is an outrageous blasphemy, a charge against God, Who is the Creator of our natural being (unless one holds to the notion of dualism). It is an offense to His justice and a stumblingblock to unbelievers. "Nature" (*physis*) has the same meaning here as in 2 Peter 1:4. It is the moral nature of sinners, acquired by their own choices, that offends a holy God. "Nature" here can also refer to our corrupt cultural heritage. This concept is found also in 1 Peter 1:18 and 19. Sin is "natural" to sinners only in the sense of the combination of their culture, other influences, and habitually yielding to the desires of the flesh and of the mind. If sin were truly "natural," it would be beneficial, because it would conform to our nature. The fact that sin is so destructive shows that it is totally unnatural.

2 Peter 2:14, "Having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin." This verse teaches that people who pursue the indulgences of the flesh are never able to get enough and so cease. This is a voluntary, never-ceasing bondage to sin. It is a voluntary slavery (verse 19; also Romans 6:16). The pursuit of the gratification of the flesh is like chasing a

carrot on a stick. They who do so can never get enough to provide permanent satisfaction and thus end the pursuit.

1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Although this passage is written to believers, it is not written exclusively *about* believers. It refutes the teaching that "we" (human beings) have no sin (considering one's total personal moral history). All who hold this gnostic error are self-deceived. John is affirming universal sinfulness and therefore the universal need for the Savior. It certainly cannot teach that believers have some kind of essence called "sin" down inside of them. Here again, such a notion is contrary to the consistent Biblical definition of sin as a voluntary act of the will. Moral depravity is just that--moral, voluntary. It is not depravity of the "will" itself but of its acts, its choices. That is, that part of our human being that makes choices (the soul) is not depraved ontologically (in its essence), but voluntarily (in its commitment to selfish desires and the choices and acts that flow from that commitment). Sinners are not depraved in their being (except as their sinful lifestyle has a deteriorating effect on them--body, soul, and spirit); they are depraved in their moral choices and resulting lifestyle.

"The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16).

If sin is an ontological substance or essence instead of a moral choice, if it is a metaphysical principle that causes choice instead of being the evil choice itself, the logical and necessary result is to remove the blame for evil from the human moral agent and to place it instead on the metaphysical essence itself. Man becomes the victim of this thing called "sin," rather than the responsible perpetrator. Human depravity is regarded as a metaphysical state rather than a moral and voluntary choice. God's grace is needed to overcome, not voluntary depravity (depravity of choice), but an involuntary helplessness and a natural inability to choose in any way other than evil. This holds out to communicants no real hope of being rid of sin in this life (because it is said to be inherent in them), and leaves them in a continuous cycle of confession of sinfulness and appeal for forgiveness, even when no actual sins might have been committed. They are kept under condemnation for what they *are*, rather than for what they have chosen to do. ("Pray for us poor sinners. But don't hold us responsible, because we are helpless victims").

Spiritual regeneration becomes, then, a metaphysical rather than a moral change. It is the essence of the will ("heart") itself rather than its voluntary direction that is viewed as being changed in salvation. The Holy Spirit's agency becomes metaphysically generative (following Augustine's idea of ideogenetic illumination) rather than morally persuasive and efficient. The new birth is viewed as metaphysical ("spiritual") rather than moral and therefore truly spiritual. The voluntary moral and spiritual change is regarded as the result of an inner regenerative process rather than regeneration itself.

Not only is sin viewed metaphysically, but so are virtues and qualities. We hear God's attitudes, dispositions, and choices spoken of as having essence. For example, God's "grace" is swallowed in the Eucharist or is poured into the heart by faith much as light is poured through a window glass.

From Stoicism and Neostoicism evolved a system of ethics and morality in which moral character is ascribed directly to outward actions instead of to the motive from which the actions spring. Moral duty becomes a certain minimum of outward works beyond which a

surplus of merit is accumulated, instead of loving God and others and acting at all times in accordance with that love.

The idea that moral agents are able to accumulate works of supererogation ("surplus righteousness") has been a prime factor in the practice of praying to "the saints." It also vitally affects one's view of the redemptive work of Christ. It is behind the notion that Jesus Himself provided a surplus of righteousness that is dispensed to believers either by faith or by the Eucharist to make up for their moral failures. It tends to the idea that real holiness belongs only to the esoteric few, whose moral surplus will somehow compensate for the moral and ethical deficiencies of the many. Anyone who testifies to a life of victory over sin through Christ is regarded as spiritually proud and self-righteous.

This Christian duality, exoteric and esoteric, has resulted in a paradox, a double standard. High Stoic ethics are essential to Christ and to the initiated elite to provide a reservoir of good works to be distributed by "grace" to the mass of the adherents, who are generally deficient and to whom a life of holiness is at best a desirable option. Christ is viewed as assisting the helpless and making up for their unfortunate deficiencies rather than conquering our deliberate rebellion, breaking the power of voluntary sin in our hearts, and giving us victory over sin.

Perhaps a few more thinkers of the caliber and persuasion of Tertullian will yet arise to "free Jerusalem from Athens and the church of Christ from the Academy of Plato."