

All Things Conspire for Evil to The Sinner

Charles G. Finney:

"Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him." --Isa. 3:11

"When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed forever." --Ps. 92:7

"To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste." [--Deut. 32:35]

"Whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." --2 Pet. 2:3

From the bare reading of these passages you will see that they present a direct contrast to the great truth of our morning discourse. [This was published in our last issue.] In that it was shown that all things work together for good to those that love God. In this our text leads to the opposite truth in regard to the sinner. All things conspire together for their ruin. All tends to complete and aggravate their destruction.

This awful truth is taught throughout the Bible in a great variety of forms. I have read to you a few of the passages which affirm it; I might read many others, but it cannot be necessary.

Obligation is imposed on moral agents by the light of truth. To know truth respecting duty is the condition of obligation. When moral agents are able to understand it, then the value of the good to be sought measures the obligation to seek it. All are bound to be benevolent--in other words, to seek the good of all beings. To know that any beings need some particular form of good, and that under existing circumstances you are capable of securing to them this good, imposes on you the obligation to secure it, which obligation is the greater by how much the greater is the good in question. Hence as knowledge increases, so does guilt increase. The more you know of your duty and of the interests that depend upon faithfully doing it, the greater your guilt if you refuse to do it. On the supposition that the moral agent remains is sin--refusing to do known duty, then the more his knowledge increases, the greater must be his guilt.

As all events are to be made public under God's moral government, it is for his own interests as well as for the interest of his creatures that He should apprise them fully of his character and of the principles of his government, and to make all clear to finite minds, it is important that He should spread out before them somewhat fully the details of his moral administration, so as to leave nothing involved in darkness or doubt on any important subject, to any honest mind. It seems essential to the well-working of God's moral government that He should at least ultimately, illustrate his own acts so fully as to leave no ground of cavil, that every mouth may be stopped, and every candid mind in the universe be satisfied in regard to all his works and to every point in his vast administration. Who can doubt that the Great Government of the universe will vindicate his own conduct? Who can suppose that He will leave one dark point unexplained?

Hence, as all events are to be made known, both for the vindication of God's character and for the instruction of all moral agents, it follows that the destruction of the wicked will be aggravated by every accession of light to their minds. Every new revelation of God's works or ways which is made to them must conspire, (1.) to enlighten their minds; and (2.) by consequence, deepen their guilt and enhance and aggravate their doom.

This is beyond question the truth in respect to the sinner's relation to God and to his government. It presents the subject however in an abstract form. Let us therefore proceed to notice some of the particulars which illustrate this truth.

1. Men will be held responsible for mercies abused. Hence those things which most please sinners, and which they call their good things, are charged to their account, and they must be held to the strictest accountability for their use or abuse of all their good things. The sinner is charged in God's book with every breath he breathes,--with every meal he eats--with every draught of God's water that he drinks--with every day's health that he enjoys, and with every night's rest. He is indeed welcome to all these good things, if he uses them as he ought to; but if he will use these blessings in the devil's service, he must give account thereof to God. Why should he not? The Bible most abundantly teaches this truth. It assumes that wicked men rob God, and that for this guilt they must be held to a strict account.

If these are facts, then sinners are getting deeply in debt. As a man who in his business never pays but runs

himself more and more deeply in debt, so sinners are constantly swelling their black account with their great Benefactor. The rain and the sun-shine He sends them; the food and the friends He grants them; every one of these things, used in sin and for sin, spent on their lusts and with an ungrateful heart towards the Giver, must all pass on to his book of account to be settled in the great reckoning day.

Every thing therefore that now pleases the sinner so much will swell the mass of things that shall agonize him at the judgment day and throughout his eternal existence. Why do not sinners consider that a day of reckoning will come, and that one of the most fearful things then to be canvassed will be the long catalogue of abused mercies? These things are good in themselves, yet it is better you should never have had them, than that you should pervert them to purposes of sin and self-indulgence and ingratitude. Ah, it were better for you that you should never have been born, than that you should pervert the powers God gives you, to make yourself a guilty rebel against your Maker. Better that you should never have health than that you should use it in sin. Many of you bless yourselves that you live while others die; but if you abuse life, it were better that you had died long ago--yea better that you had never been born. Take heed how you deem yourself fortunate for having so much health;--you cannot afford to have any health at all, if you abuse it in sin and lay up a fearful account to render for every hours comfort. How can you afford to live, while every hour's life swells your fearful debt and makes you worse and worse a bankrupt, on the great books of the final day!

Not only all these countless mercies, but all the particulars embraced under them and connected with them are to come into your account. All will prove a great curse to you if selfishly abused.

The same principle applies to the entire course of God's discipline towards you, embracing the various rebukes of his providence. The Lord, for purposes of discipline may smite your property or your person. He may give wings to your riches and a blight on your strength. Losses may checker the scene of your long prosperity, or by pain and weakness the Lord may seek to impress your soul with a sense of dependence on an almighty arm. All these are measures taken for your good, but if you will not improve them, they will only work out your deeper ruin. There is a sinner who has been brought down to the verge of the grave by sickness. His Heavenly Father sought by this means to induce serious thought and true repentance, but He sought in vain. The heart was made no better by this affliction. The sick man recovered through divine mercy, and he blessed himself for his restored health, but it cannot be said that he blessed his great Benefactor. He blessed himself, and thought of his good fortune, but Oh! how much better for him to have gone quick to his grave than that he should rise from his sick-bed only to have a harder heart and a blacker account to settle through all eternity with his insulted Benefactor.

Perhaps the deluded man said to himself on his recovery--Now God has punished me all I deserve and I have no more punishment to fear for my sins. Far otherwise! He has not been punished at all. These trials on earth are only chastisements, intended for moral discipline. God sent them as the most hopeful means for doing you good, but you have utterly resisted and defeated his intention; you have only converted into a curse what your Father sent upon you for a blessing.

How marvelous that wicked men should suppose that these light afflictions are the proper punishment of sin! No; these are only God's means of discipline, employed here in this life for the good of men's souls. Instead of being themselves the retribution due for sin, they are only the guarantees sent on before-hand by the Great King, involving his pledge that He will punish sin unless He can secure repentance. They imply God's holy abhorrence of sin; they are the incipient manifestations of the great truth that He can never overlook transgression. What! sinner, do you think God can by any means, and under any circumstances, fail to notice your sin? If He could, then you might find him neglecting the means of moral discipline. But if on the contrary, you find Him ever wakeful to the work of discipline, you may know that--this failing of its object,--there is another kind of notice to be taken of sin.

Suppose a parent--a father, should chasten his son with a grief that seemed to tear his very heart and deeply wound his spirit, but all is in vain; would not even you affirm that such a son ought to be punished and much the more for the pains his father has taken to save him, and for the wicked stubbornness that would not be subdued to love and duty? See that mother, wearied and worn; she has chastened her daughter, but it avails nothing;--the deep agony of her heart is crushing her to the grave, and her soul weeps over the cruel abuse of a wayward daughter;--now tell me, shall all this stubbornness and abuse towards a faithful and fond mother be passed over, and not be heeded?

So, sinner, of all the things for which you deserve to be punished, this is the chief. God has taken so much pains to bless you; his very heart has been moved to the centre of his being, and once and again He has cried out--"How can I give thee up?" And now, all effort and pains-taking having failed, shall no account of the

stubbornness and guilt which has frustrated the toil of infinite love, be made?

That sickness which your Heavenly Father sent upon you did not reclaim you from your sins. Ah, it will cost you too much to abuse not only God's mercies but his chastisements also. To your surprise and sorrow too, you will find that God has not done all this for your good, that, when abused and resisted by you, it should go for nothing. You have not seen the end of these things yet. You came up from your sick-bed, did you? Yes. And then forgot all your sick-bed vows and solemn promises of amendment? Yes! And, on you went, in your sin till you became ten fold more hardened than ever! Ah, you cannot afford to be thus chastised and to have it all result in waxing worse and worse, and in becoming only the more ripe for perdition.

All your infirmities and all your sins; also the sins of those who live near you so that you can see the course of God's dealings with them--indeed the whole history of sin in the universe so far as known to you--all conspire to heighten your responsibility and aggravate the guilt of your sin. For, all these things serve to show you the real evil and wrong of sin; they serve to reveal God's hatred of sin and to assure you that He must and will punish it. Both the good and the evil deeds of all moral beings in the universe so far as you can know them, have an important bearing upon your responsibilities as a moral agent, because they affect the amount of your knowledge of sin and of God, and hence of your own personal duty.

I am aware that sinners are prone to overlook this fact. They often say--We are held responsible only for our own sins and not for the sins of others; but mark;--the sins of others increase your knowledge both of God and of duty, and hence increase your moral responsibility and heighten your guilt, if in the face of so much knowledge you still persist in sinning. The good and the evil of all beings within your knowledge serve to augment your responsibility. These things are continually pouring light on your mind. So also does the entire course of your own history and experience as a sinner under God's government. You cannot eat or drink; rise up or lie down--you can be nowhere and can do nothing without having a continual stream of influence poured upon you which heightens your responsibility because it increases the knowledge of God, of sin and of duty, under which and against which you sin. All your religious privileges belong to the same class, and bear pre-eminently upon the point of your moral responsibility and consequent guilt. Did you ever own a Bible? Has some kind Christian friend given you a copy of that blessed book? Your own Bible! You might read it at your pleasure. It is God's own message from heaven to your soul. But Oh, how you have slighted it! Other friends have sent you messages and letters, but you have treated none of them so! You have always at least read their letters and have commonly treated their expressed wishes with due respect. But you have insulted God by treating his letters with almost total neglect! O, what will that neglected Bible testify against you! Perhaps your mother gave it to you. Her careful hand laid it safely in your trunk when you prepared to leave the home of your childhood. God was in that mother's hand, and through it he placed a copy of his word under your eye, and threw on you a double responsibility to heed it well. You said then--"I am glad that I have got a Bible." So am I--if you use it well. If you study candidly its precepts and heed them in the fear of God, 'tis all well; but if not, all will go ill with you, and that neglected Bible will follow you up to the judgment, fore-casting your doom and crying out, Anathema! ANATHEMA!! let the despiser of God's word be ANATHEMA, forever!

And you know this would be only simple justice! You can see that it ought to be so!

REMARKS.

1. I said in the morning that all things work together for good to the Christian, and that ultimately, when he comes to see how all things have had this result, he will regret nothing he has ever done, although he may greatly blame himself for all his sins. It is often the case that Christians here learn lessons of deep experience under their sins. They are deeply affected when they see how God overrules even their sins for good to themselves and to others.

But nothing of this sort happens to sinners. They are not of those that love God, and they have no reason to expect that God will make all things work together for their good. Hence they must both blame themselves and also regret everything they have ever done. They must feel both self-blame and regret that they ever had a Bible; that they ever had a friend; that they ever had health--that they ever had existence! Alas, they will say, alas! that I was ever born! Alas! that I lived so long! Alas! that I ever had one mercy from God to abuse so guiltily! Wo is me that I had a pious mother! Ten thousand woes on my guilty soul that God ever sent me his gospel! Ah me! how have I treasured up wrath against the day of wrath!

2. Sinners have never any good reasons for joy. You recollect the 73d Psalm. The Psalmist had been struck with the fact that the wicked were so prosperous and so happy. It puzzled him sorely. Long time he could not understand it, and was thereby thrown into great perplexity. But when he went into God's sanctuary, then he says, "I understood their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; Thou castedst them down into

destruction." Let the sinner only see his own case in the light shed from God's word in his sanctuary and he too will understand that he has no occasion for joy. He will see how insane are all his rejoicings. What! and shall he rejoice in that which will only work out his deeper damnation? Can any but an insane mind do this?

Some one of our children may be prosperous, but yet in sin. If so, he is only abusing the blessings God sends him, and surely this can be no matter of joy either to him or to his parents. He cannot afford to have any of these blessings--to use in sin! Ah no! for he must pay for them at last in the bitterness of eternal yet unavailing regret. If you therefore have unconverted children or if I have, we have no occasion for joy in them, however prosperous they may be.

3. Sinners procure this result to themselves. It all comes, sinners, from your own wickedness--from your own voluntary and persistent impenitence and unbelief. If you would turn about and love God, all would be well for you. But if you will abuse his grace and reject his authority, all is wrong and all will work ill to your soul.

In a spirit not the most honest, you may say--Why did God give me existence at all? He knew how I should abuse it and only bring a curse on myself and curse my own existence.

You ask such questions as these perhaps, and yet you know how impious they are in their implications against your Maker! You ask, Why did God give me existence? That you might use it to his glory and to your own perfect blessedness. But you reply--What? when He knew how I should only curse myself by sin instead of blessing myself by holy obedience? Yes, certainly, none the less so, because of his foreknowledge of your course. Has God's knowledge of the course you would take at all lessened or changed your moral responsibility--the perfect freeness of your choices --the radical, essential guilt of your sin!

God gave you voluntary powers, that, on your own responsibility you might use them for your own welfare. He gave you his Son and in him an offered salvation, that you might lay hold of everlasting life. He gave you a Bible--that you might read it and become wise unto salvation. He gave you these and a thousand other blessings, that they might be improved, and certainly you do not need to be told that if you will not improve them, you have no right to complain to God.

4. Sinners need not be stumbled by any calamities whatever which befall (sic.) God's real children. A Christian is sick;--well, what of that? Is not the Savior's arm all round about him? But he is going to die! Well, what of that? Is not heaven just before him, and his God with him all through the dark valley of the river of death? He is going to lose all his property, is he? What then? He has got no real property except God--for long ago, his heart made a choice of God for its portion forever.

Sinners often talk as if they were stumbled to see so many calamities befalling the people of God. Let them not trouble themselves about this matter. The Lord knoweth them that are his, and they shall never lack his constant care.

5. All events that transpire in this world or the next, will only make the great gulf fixed between saints and sinners the deeper and the broader--will only make the saints more holy and more happy--the sinners more sinful and more wretched. The widening space between them in character and in relations to God's throne will of necessity constitute a gulf which none can ever pass over.

6. What an infinite folly is it to judge of things only by their relations to this life! to feel and to think of them only in view of this narrow and limited relation! Looking at things in this light only, we could not rejoice in the Christian's case; we could not pronounce him happy because he has the Almighty God for his friend. Viewing things from such a stand-point of observation, we should find everything dark and perplexing. But in the light of God's sanctuary all comes out clear. See those political, money-making men, scrambling after power or wealth; suppose they get it--what then? The more they get, so much the more have they to answer for; so much the deeper will their responsibilities, if not honestly met, sink them in perdition. Christians therefore have never any reason to envy sinners for their earthly prosperity. If they are ever tempted to do so, let them go into the sanctuary; there shall they learn the sinner's awful end. Coming forth from the house of God, they will say:

"Now I'm convinced the Lord is kind

To men of heart sincere,

Yet once my foolish heart repined,

I grieved to see the wicked thrive,
And spoke with angry breath,--
"How pleasant and profane they live,
How peaceful in their death!"

**"There, as in some prophetic glass,
I saw the sinner sit,
High mounted on a slippery place,
Beside a fiery pit.**

I heard the wretch profanely boast,
Till at thy frown he fell;
His honors in a dream were lost,
And he awoke in hell."

One of our texts affirms--"Their feet shall slide in due time, and the things that shall come upon them make haste." Another declares--"Their judgment now of a long time lingereth not and their damnation slumbereth not." "Sudden destruction cometh upon them as pangs upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

7. God's conduct in all this is just and righteous altogether. Who can object because God holds the sinner responsible for the Bible He gives him, or for the existence with which he has endowed him? Dare you say or even think that God does wrong to hold you responsible for the Bible, for the Sabbath, for the gospel and for all the knowledge of duty which He has placed within your reach? Is He not bound by the eternal laws of right, to hold all his creatures responsible according to the measure of the blessings He has conferred upon them? Could his moral kingdom be safe on any other principle of administration? Would the holy beings around his throne endure any deviation from these eternally and intrinsically righteous principles? Do you not see--for yourself--that if you persist in abusing his mercies, God will bring you to account and must do it, or cease to be a righteous God? It were a mal-arrangement, and a mal-administration if God were to deviate at all from the principle of holding every moral agent to the strictest accountability for all his moral conduct, according to the light he has enjoyed.

How long, sinner have you lived? During all these years, what have you done? How have you used your life up to this hour? Is it not time that you should pause and take an observation?

In the past pages of my own personal history I can see where God summoned me to answer these solemn questions. I had spent all my early life in new settlements, had enjoyed only the most scanty means of religious instruction--had never heard a prayer in my father's house,--yet one night I most vividly remember I lay a long time awake, and I asked myself--How old am I? How have I lived up to this hour? What have I done towards

determining the future condition of my existence? These were questions I had never heard before; but God put them home to my soul in a way that made my flesh quiver and my bones quake. I had spent half my life--for I looked then upon the age of forty as the limit of my earthly days; I had lived out half my life, yet what had I done for God or for my own eternal well-being?

Have you, sinner, ever taken such a reckoning? Sailing along unknown seas in the voyage of life, have you ever paused to take in sails, get out your instruments, and take your bearings? Have you ever stopped, as every wise mariner does, to get out your instruments on some fair, sunny day, to find where you are and which way you must steer to gain the haven of peace and rest? Oh, some of you have never made one careful, thorough, observation to find your course and your actual position. The fair sunny days God gives you, you are too reckless to improve for so needful a purpose. Oh, sinner, there are fearful rocks of damnation close under your lee! The darkness of the tempest is gathering fast upon you; soon you will feel the mountain waves tossing your trail bark and the storm-blast will howl through your shrouds to shriek the requiem of a lost spirit! How will the vivid lightnings gleam down your masts and the thunders break in peals like the judgment trump!

Ah sinner, why did you not take your observation before your bark made these rocks of damnation, and before the storm-king was out in his fearfulest terrors, to dash your soul upon the breakers of final ruin? How can you afford to live in such mad recklessness of your soul's well-being? How can you afford to live content in sin amid such perils of damnation? O to think of your case! When I pass you in the streets, sometimes I rejoice in your joy, for you seem to be happy; but more often I weep, for I see you in your sins, treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Yes, here you are in your sins, getting an education, doing the very thing which above all other things must augment your responsibility and aggravate your guilt if you will not repent. Ah, you cannot afford to live so. Dear youth, how can you afford to go to the judgment with all the heightened responsibility of an educated sinner? Why will you make your very existence and all the mercies with which God has blessed this existence, a living and an eternal curse?

It need not be so. You may change the whole current of your future destiny. It may be done by simply changing the current of your present life--by simply giving your heart to God and your whole being to his service. Will you do this? How many times you have been called to decide this question--and alas! called only in vain! O, come now and make one thorough observation. See where you are and what is before you. And will you refuse to do a thing so reasonable? Ah, what a dark night is coming on! How will the dreadful tempest roar and howl around your miserable soul--the tempest of divine wrath that must break on the head of the despiser of saving mercy! And must you be thrust into prison and not be released till you have paid the uttermost farthing? Must the doom of the damned be your eternal portion? It will be so if you choose. "They that hate me," saith the voice of offered mercy, "love death."

8. What a contrast is here! All things work good to the saint. Although he weeps along his pathway of life with mingled tears of penitence and joy, yet soon he passes beyond all his pains and trials. Up, up, he soars, high above all sorrow, high aloft from this vale of tears. But the sinner dances along, gaily laughing and sporting his way--God calling, rebuking and entreating; saints weeping in grief over his madness and his impending doom; all creation in agony for him, but he dashes on. See, mark the contrast! Note how it widens continually. Saints ascend upward-- mounting up, UP;--but sinners descend, going down, down, along the sides of the pit, amid the wailings of eternal despair.

Do you say--enough, enough, I have heard enough; you have said enough; I am persuaded, and I am ready to come; I will no more abuse my Savior--no longer slight his offered love. Come, then, you prodigal, come back to your father's house; for there is bread enough and to spare and you need not perish with hunger. Come back with your free hearted confessions of folly and guilt; come and beg for a pittance of the crumbs that fall from his table. Now is the day and the hour of mercy--now is the accepted time!

Need I press again on your attention the wide and awful contrast between saints and sinners? They live together here; the same roof shelters them; the same table spreads for them their daily bread; the same sun rises and pours its blaze of light and joy over all; the same clouds come freighted with waters of summer and distil their precious drops for all; but Oh! how unlike is the scene that lies beneath! Underneath the surface God marks in one a heart of gratitude and penitence; in another a soul tainted with selfishness and mad upon its lusts and its idols. Of course the one must go up, up, rising in the perfection of its holy character;--and the other down, down, sinking under the depraving influence of its own headstrong appetites and its will, opposed to God and goodness.

And where will be the end of these courses? You know, full well. You have no need to know better than you do.

All Things Conspire for Evil to The Sinner

The fatal thing with you, O sinner, is that you don't make up your mind to do known duty. I thought I should, you say, but I did not. I half resolve, but fail to do it. Scores of precious opportunities you have let slip, and each one left you only the more hardened. One opportunity came and waited on you--you were not ready to embrace it, and it passed away;--another came and tarried--then rose up and went its way; and yet another and another;--and what shall be the end of these things? Satan loves to beguile you; and he it is who is playing this game with you, seducing you to delay till each and every opportunity shall have gone past, hopelessly and forever. Will you let him ruin your soul? You see his hand, winding his fatal chain about your neck;--O how long can you be quiet under this operation! How long will you consent to be led captive by Satan at his will, when you know his object is to plunge your soul quick into the depths of hell!