

THE BREAD OF HEAVEN

Charles G. Finney:

"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law"--Romans 3:31.

Paul proved that all men were in sin, refuting the doctrine generally held by the Jews that they were a holy people saved by their works. He showed that justification can never be by works but by faith.

The greatest objection to the doctrine of justification by faith has always been that it is inconsistent with good morals and opens the flood-gates of iniquity. It has been argued that to maintain that men are to be saved by faith will make them disregard good morals and encourage them to live in sin, depending on Christ to justify them. Others maintain that the gospel does in fact release men from obligation to obey the moral law so that a more lax morality is permitted under the gospel than was allowed under the law.

Justification by faith does not set aside the moral law, because the gospel enforces obedience to the law and lays down the same standard of holiness. Jesus Christ adopted the words of the moral law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27).

BREAKING SINFUL HABITS

The gospel requires repentance as the condition of salvation. What is repentance? The renunciation of sin. Man must repent of his disobedience to the law of God and return to obey it. If it did not maintain the law to its full extent, it might be said that Christ is the minister of sin!

By the gospel plan, the sanctions of the gospel are added to the sanctions of the law to enforce obedience to the law. The apostle says, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:28-29). Adding the awful sanctions of the gospel to those of the law enforces obedience to the precepts of the law.

Justification by faith produces sanctification, or holiness, by producing the only true obedience to the law. When the mind understands this plan and exercises faith in it, it naturally produces holiness. Sanctification is holiness, and holiness is nothing but obedience to the law, consisting in love to God and man.

True holiness can never be produced among selfish or wicked beings by the law itself, separate from the consideration of the gospel or the motives connected with justification by faith.

If the motives of the law did not restrain men from committing sin, it is absurd to suppose the same motives can reclaim them from sin once when they have fallen under the power of selfishness. Sin is confirmed by habit. The motives of the law lose a great part of their influence once a being is fallen.

They even exert an opposite influence. The motives of the law, viewed by a selfish mind, have a tendency to cause sin to abound. This is the experience of every sinner. When he sees the spirituality of the law and does not see the motives of the gospel, it raises the pride of his heart and confirms him in his rebellion.

The case of the devil is an exhibition of what the law can do to a wicked heart. He understands the law, sees its reasonableness, has experienced the blessedness of obedience, and knows that to return to obedience would restore his peace of mind. This he knows better than any sinner of our race, who never was holy. And yet it presents to his mind no motives that reclaim him. On the contrary, it drives him further from obedience.

THE TERROR OF SINAI

When obedience to the law is held forth to the sinner as the condition of life, immediately it starts him making self-righteous efforts. In almost every instance, the first effort of the awakened sinner is to obey the law. He thinks he must first make himself better before he embraces the gospel. He has no idea of the simplicity of the gospel plan of salvation by faith, offering eternal life as a gift.

Alarm the sinner with the penalty of the law, and by the very laws of his mind he tries to amend his life and self-righteously obtain eternal life, under the influence of slavish fear. The more the law presses him, the greater are his pharisaical efforts. He hopes that if he obeys he will be accepted.

What else could you expect him to do? He is purely selfish, and although he ought to submit at once to God, he does not understand the gospel terms of salvation. His mind is first turned to the object of getting away from the danger of the penalty, and he tries to get to heaven some other way. I don't think there is an instance in history of a man who has submitted to God until he has seen that salvation must be by faith and that his own self-righteousness cannot save him.

If you try to produce holiness by legal motives, the very fear of failure has the effect to divert attention from the objects of love--God and Christ. The sinner is all the while dreading Mount Sinai, watching his footsteps to see how near he comes to obedience; how can he get into the spirit of heaven?

The penalty of the law has no tendency to produce love at first. It may increase love in those who already have it when they contemplate it as an exhibition of God's infinite holiness. The angels in heaven and good men on earth contemplate its excellence and see it as an expression of God's good will to His creatures. Then it appears amiable and lovely and increases their delight and confidence in God.

It is the opposite for the selfish man. He sees the penalty hanging over his head with no way of escape. He doesn't consider becoming enamored with the Being that holds the thunderbolt over his devoted head. The nature of his mind causes him to flee from Him, not to Him. The inspired writers never dreamed that the law could sanctify men. The law is more prone to slay than to make alive, to cut off men's self-righteous hopes forever and compel them to flee to Christ.

Sinners naturally and necessarily view God as an irreconcilable enemy. They are wholly selfish, and apart from the consideration of the gospel, they view God just as the devil views Him. No motive in the law can be shown to a selfish mind that will inspire love. Can the influence of the penalty do it?

This would be a strange plan of reformation, to send men to hell to reform them! Let him go on in sin and rebellion to the end of life and then be punished until he becomes holy. I wonder why the devil has not become holy! He has suffered long enough. Having been in hell these thousands of years, he is no better than he was. The reason is, no gospel and no Holy Spirit exist there to apply the truth--the penalty only confirms his rebellion.

FREEDOM THROUGH FAITH

Justification by faith can produce real obedience to the law. It doesn't set aside the law as a standard but sets aside the penalty of the law. The preaching of justification as a gift bestowed through the simple act of faith is the only way that obedience to the law is brought about.

It relieves the mind from the pressures that naturally tend to confirm selfishness. While the mind is looking only at the law, it feels the influence of hope and fear, which furthers selfish efforts. But justification by faith annihilates this spirit of bondage. The apostle says, "We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear" (Romans 8:15). This plan of salvation produces love and gratitude to God and leads the soul to taste the sweets of holiness.

The believer in the gospel plan finds salvation full and complete, with both sanctification and eternal life already prepared. Instead of being driven to the life of a Pharisee in laborious and exhausting religion, he received it as a free gift and is left free to exercise true love. He now can live and labor for the salvation of others, leaving his own soul unreservedly to Jesus.

The fact that God has provided and given him salvation is calculated to awaken in the believer a concern for others when he sees them dying. How far from every selfish motive are those influences. It portrays God not as an irreconcilable enemy but as a grieved and offended Father, desirous that His subjects should become reconciled to Him and live. This is calculated to produce love. It exhibits God as making great sacrifice to reconcile sinners to Himself from no other motive than a pure and disinterested regard to their happiness.

The law represents God as armed with wrath, determined to punish the sinner without hope or help. The gospel represents Him as offended but anxious that they should return to Him. And He has made the greatest conceivable sacrifices out of a pure disinterested love to His wandering children.

I once heard a father say that he had tried in his family to imitate the government of God. When his child did wrong, he reasoned with him and showed him his faults. When he was fully convinced, confounded and

condemned, the father asked him,

"Do you deserve to be punished?"

"Yes, sir," his son answered.

"I know it," said the father, "and now if I were to let you go, what influence would it have over the other children? Rather than do that, I will take the punishment myself." So he laid the paddle on himself, and it had the most astonishing effect on the mind of the child. He had never tried anything so perfectly subduing to the mind as this. And from the laws of mind, it must be so. It affects the mind in a manner entirely different from the naked law.

Under the law, nothing but hope and fear can operate on the sinner's mind. But under the gospel, the influence of hope and fear are set aside, and a new set of considerations are presented--God's entire character, in all the attractions He can command. It gives the most heart-breaking, sin subduing views of God and presents Him to the senses in human nature. It exhibits disinterestedness and love.

DEATH TO SELFISHNESS

Satan prevailed against our first parents by leading them to doubt God's selfless love. The gospel demonstrates the truth and corrects this lie.

The law represents God as the inexorable enemy of the sinner, securing happiness to all who perfectly obey but thundering down wrath on all who disobey. The gospel reveals new features in God's character not known before. Doubtless the gospel increases the love of all holy beings and gives greater joy to the angels in heaven, greatly increasing their love, confidence, and admiration when they see God's amazing pity and forbearance toward the guilty.

The law drove the devils to hell, and it drove Adam and Eve from Paradise. But when the believer sees the same holy God giving His beloved Son for rebels and taking unwearied pains to save sinners, it strengthens the motives in their minds to obedience and love.

The devil, who is a purely selfish being, always accuses others of being selfish. He accused Job of this: "Doth Job fear God for nought?" (Job 1:9). Satan came to our first parents and accused God of being selfish. He told them that the only reason for God's forbidding them to eat of the tree of knowledge was the fear that they might come to know as much as Himself. The gospel shows what God is. If He was selfish, He would not take such pains to save those whom He might with perfect ease crush to hell.

Nothing will make selfish people more ashamed of their selfishness than to see disinterested benevolence in others. Therefore wicked people are always trying to appear unselfish. Let a selfish individual who has any heart see true benevolence in others, and it is like coals on his head. The apostle Paul understood this when he said, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Romans 12:20).

This is what the gospel does to sinners. It shows them that regardless of all they have done to God, He still loves them with selfless love. When he sees God stooping from heaven to save him and understands that it is indeed true, it melts and breaks his heart, strikes a death blow to selfishness, and wins him over to unbounded confidence and holy love.

God has so constituted the mind that it must acknowledge virtue. It must do this as long as it retains the power of moral agency. This is as true in hell as in heaven. The devil feels this. When an individual sees that God doesn't want to condemn him and offers salvation as a gift through faith, he must feel admiration for God's benevolence. His selfishness is crushed--the law has done its work, and he sees that all his selfishness has done no good. The next step is for his heart to surrender to God's love.

Suppose a man was sentenced to death for rebellion and had tried to get pardoned but failed because his reasons were hollow-hearted and selfish. He sees that the government understands his motives and that he is not really reconciled. He knows himself that they were hypocritical and selfish, moved by the hope of favor or the fear or wrath.

But now let the government offer him a free pardon on the simple condition that he receive it as a gift, making

no account of his own works--what influence will it have on his mind? The moment he finds the penalty set aside and that he has no need to go to work by any self-righteous efforts, his mind is filled with admiration. The government has made great sacrifices to grant this. When his selfishness is slain, he melts like a child at his sovereign's feet, ready to obey out of love.

MOTIVES OF THE GOSPEL

All true obedience turns on faith, which secures self from its errors and weights and rises up in communion with God.

To attempt to convert and sanctify the minds of sinners without the motives of the gospel is unphilosophical and unscriptural. You can press the sinner with the law and make him see his own character, the greatness and justice of God, and his ruined condition. But hide the motives of the gospel from his mind, and it is all in vain.

Some people are afraid to expose the sinner's mind to the character of God. They try to make him submit to God by casting him down in despair. This is not only against the gospel but it is absurd in itself. It is absurd to think that, in order to destroy the selfishness of a sinner, you must hide the knowledge of how much God loves him and the great sacrifices He has made to save him.

Sinners are in no danger of getting false hopes if they are allowed to know the real compassion of God. While you hide this, it is impossible to give him anything but a false hope. Withholding the fact that God has provided salvation as a gift from a convicted sinner is the best way to confirm his selfishness. If he gets any hope, it will be a false one. To pressure him with the law alone is to build a self-righteous foundation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING

The only possible way of reclaiming selfish beings is by grace. Suppose salvation was not totally a gift but that some degree of good works was taken into account in justification. Within this consideration is a stimulus to selfishness. You must bring the sinner to see that he is entirely dependent on free grace. A full and complete justification is bestowed on the first act of faith as a gift. No part of it is a reward for something he can do. This alone dissolves the influence of selfishness and secures holy action.

If all this is true, sinners should be given the fullest explanation, as soon as possible, of the whole plan of salvation. They should be made to see the law, their own guilt, and their helplessness to save themselves. Then the depth of the love of God should be opened. You will effectually crush his selfishness and subdue his soul in love to God. Don't be afraid to show the whole plan of salvation and give the fullest possible testimony of the infinite compassion of God. Show him that, despite his guilt, the Son of God is knocking at the door and pleading with him to be reconciled to God.

Many convicted sinners continue to embrace Mount Sinai with self-righteous efforts to save themselves by their own works. Many sinners try to get more feeling by waiting until they have prayed more and made greater efforts. They expect to reconcile themselves to God in this way.

The sinner needs to see that he is looking for salvation under the law. He must see that all this is superseded by the gospel, which offers him all he wants as a gift. He must hear Jesus saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me." Instead of trying your self-righteous prayers and efforts, here is what you are looking for. Believe and you will be saved. (See John 14:6.)

The law is useful to convict men, but it never breaks the heart. The gospel alone does that. The degree in which a convert is brokenhearted is in proportion to the degree of clearness with which he understands the gospel.

Converts, if you can call them so, who entertain a hope under legal preaching may intellectually approve the law and have a sort of dry zeal, but they are never brokenhearted Christians. If they have not seen God in the gospel, they are not Christians with tears trembling in their eye, shaking with emotion at the name of Jesus.

Sinners must be led to Christ and made to take hold of the plan of salvation by faith. To expect to do them good in any other way is vain.