

**The Rev. CHARLES G. FINNEY'S**

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY**

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LECTURE LXI.

SANCTIFICATION.

PAUL ENTIRELY SANCTIFIED

I MIGHT urge a great many other considerations, and as I have said, fill a book with scriptures, and arguments, and demonstrations, of the attainability of entire sanctification in this life.

But I forbear, and will present only one more consideration--a consideration which has great weight in some minds. It is a question of great importance, whether any actually ever did attain this state. Some who believe it attainable, do not consider it of much importance to show that it has actually been attained. Now I freely admit, that it may be attainable, even if it never has been attained. Yet it appears to me that as a source of encouragement to the church, it is of great importance whether, as a matter of fact, a state of entire and continued holiness has been attained in this life. This question covers much ground. But for the sake of brevity, I design to examine but one case, and see whether there is not reason to believe that, in one instance at least, it has been attained. The case to which I allude is that of the apostle Paul. And I propose to take up and examine the passages that speak of him, for the purpose of ascertaining whether there is evidence that he ever attained to this state in this life.

And here let me say that, to my own mind, it seems plain, that Paul and John, to say nothing of the other apostles, designed and expected the church to understand them as speaking from experience, and as having received of that fulness which they taught to be in Christ and in his gospel.

And I wish to say again and more expressly, that I do not rest the practicability of attaining a state of entire and continued holiness at all upon the question, whether any ever have attained it, any more than I would rest the question, whether the world ever will be converted, upon the fact whether it ever has been converted. I have been surprised, when the fact that a state of entire holiness has been attained, is urged as one argument among a great many to prove its attainability, and that too, merely as an encouragement

to Christians to lay hold upon this blessing--that objectors and reviewers fasten upon this, as the doctrine of sanctification, as if by calling this particular question into doubt, they could overthrow all the other proof of its attainability. Now this is utterly absurd. When, then, I examine the character of Paul with this object in view, if it should not appear clear to you that he did attain this state, you are not to overlook the fact, that its attainability is settled by other arguments, on grounds entirely independent of the question, whether it has been attained or not; and that I merely use this as an argument, simply because to me it appears forcible, and fitted to afford great encouragement to Christians to press after this state.

I will first make some remarks in regard to the manner in which the language of Paul, when speaking of himself, should be understood; and then proceed to an examination of the passages which speak of his Christian character.

1. His character, as revealed in his life, demands that we should understand him to mean all that he says, when speaking in his own favour.

2. The spirit of inspiration would guard him against speaking too highly of himself.

3. No man ever seemed to possess greater modesty, and to feel more unwilling to exalt his own attainments.

4. If he considered himself as not having attained a state of entire sanctification, and as often, if not in all things, falling short of his duty, we may expect to find him acknowledging this, in the deepest self-abasement.

5. If he is charged with living in sin, and with being wicked in anything, we may expect him, when speaking under inspiration, not to justify, but unequivocally to condemn himself in those things, if he was really guilty.

Now, in view of these facts, let us examine those scriptures in which he speaks of himself, and is spoken of by others.

(1.) 1 Thess. ii. 10: "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably, we behaved ourselves among you that believe." Upon this text I remark:

(i.) Here he unqualifiedly asserts his own holiness. This language is very strong, "How holily, justly, and unblameably." If to be holy, just, and unblameable, be not entire sanctification, what is?

(ii.) He appeals to the heart-searching God for the truth of what he says, and to their own observation; calling on God and on them also to bear witness, that he had been holy and without blame.

(iii.) Here we have the testimony of an inspired apostle, in the most unqualified language, asserting his own entire sanctification. Was he deceived?

Can it be that he knew himself all the time to have been living in sin? If such language as this does not amount to an unqualified assertion, that he had lived among them without sin, what can be known by the use of human language?

(2.) 2 Cor. vi. 3-7: "Giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed; but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessity, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." Upon these verses I remark: Paul asserts that he gave no offence in anything, but in all things approved himself as a minister of God. Among other things, he did this, "by pureness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned," and "by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." How could so modest a man as Paul speak of himself in this manner, unless he knew himself to be in a state of entire sanctification, and thought it of great importance that the church should know it?

(3.) 2 Cor. i. 12: "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to youward." This passage plainly implies the same thing, and was manifestly said for the same purpose--to declare the greatness of the grace of God as manifested in himself.

(4.) Acts xxiv. 16: "And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." Paul doubtless at this time had an enlightened conscience. If an inspired apostle could affirm, that he "exercised himself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men," must he not have been in a state of entire sanctification?

(5.) 2 Tim. i. 3: "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with a pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day." Here again he affirms that he serves God with a pure conscience. Could this be, if he was often, and perhaps every day, as some suppose, violating his conscience?

(6.) Gal. ii. 20: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." This does not assert, but strongly implies, that he lived without sin, and also that he regarded himself as dead to sin in the sense of being permanently sanctified.

(7.) Gal. vi. 14: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." This text also affords the same inference as above.

(8.) Phil. i. 21: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Here the apostle affirms that for him to live was as if Christ lived in the church, that is, by his doctrine illustrated

by his life, it was as if Christ lived again and preached his own gospel to sinners and to the church; or for him to live was to make Christ known as if Christ lived to make himself known. How could he say this, unless his example, and doctrine, and spirit, were those of Christ?

(9.) Acts xx. 26: "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men." Upon this I remark--

(i.) This passage, taken in its connexion, shows clearly the impression that Paul desired to make upon the minds of those to whom he spake.

(ii.) It is certain that he could in no proper sense be "pure from the blood of all men," unless he had done his whole duty. If he had been sinfully lacking in any grace, or virtue, or labour, could he have said this? Certainly not.

(10.) 1 Cor. ii. 16, 17: "Wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church." I remark--

(i.) Here Paul manifestly sets himself up as an example to the church. How could he do this if he were living in sin?

(ii.) He sent Timotheus to them to refresh their memories in regard to his doctrine and practice; implying that what he taught in every church he himself practised.

(11.) 1 Cor. xi. 1: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." Here Paul commands them to follow him "as he followed Christ;" not so far as he followed Christ, as some seem to understand it, but to follow him because he followed Christ. How could he, in this unqualified manner, command the church to copy his example, unless he knew himself to be blameless?

(12.) Phil. iii, 17, 20: "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. For our conversation is in heaven, from whence we also look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Here again, Paul calls upon the church to follow him, and particularly to notice those that copied his example, and assigns as the reason, "for our conversation is in heaven."

(13.) Phil. iii. 9: "Those things, which ye have both learned and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." The Philippians were commanded to "do those things which they had learned, and received, and *seen* in him." And then he adds, that if they "do those things, the God of peace shall be with them." Now can it be, that he meant that they should understand anything less, than that he lived without sin among them?

I will next examine those passages which are supposed by some to imply that Paul was not in a state of entire sanctification.

(14.) Acts xv. 36-40: "And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other; and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed to Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God." Upon this passage I remark--

(i.) This contention between Paul and Barnabas arose out of the fact, that John, who was a nephew of Barnabas, had once abruptly left them in their travels, it would seem, without any justifiable reason, and had returned home.

(ii.) It appears that the confidence of Barnabas in his nephew was restored.

(iii.) That Paul was not as yet satisfied of the stability of his character, and thought it dangerous to trust him as a travelling companion and fellow labourer. It is not intimated, nor can it fairly be inferred, that either of them sinned in this contention.

(iv.) Being men of principle, neither of them felt it to be his duty to yield to the opinion of the other.

(v.) If either was to be blamed, it seems that Barnabas was in fault, rather than Paul, inasmuch as he determined to take John with him, without having consulted Paul. And he persisted in this determination until he met with such firm resistance on the part of Paul, that he took John and sailed abruptly for Cyprus; while Paul choosing Silas as his companion, was recommended by the brethren to the grace of God, and departed. Now certainly there is nothing that we can discover in this transaction, that Paul, or any good man, or an angel, under the circumstances, needs to have been ashamed of. It does not appear, that Paul ever acted more from a regard to the glory of God and the good of religion, than in this transaction. And I would humbly inquire, what spirit is that which finds sufficient evidence in this case to charge an inspired apostle with rebellion against God? But even admitting that he did sin in this case, where is the evidence that he was not afterwards sanctified, when he wrote the epistle? for this was before the writing of any of his epistles.

(15.) Acts xxiii. 1-5: "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." In this

case sinful anger has been imputed to Paul; but, so far as I can see, without any just reason. To my mind it seems plain, that the contrary is to be inferred. It appears, that Paul was not personally acquainted with the then officiating high priest. And he manifested the utmost regard to the authority of God in quoting from the Old Testament, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people;" implying, that notwithstanding the abuse he had received, he should not have made the reply, had he known him to be the high priest.

(16.) Rom. vii. from the fourteenth to the twenty-fifth verse, has by many been supposed to be an epitome of Paul's experience at the time he wrote the epistle. Upon this I remark:--

(i.) The connexion and drift of Paul's reasoning show, that the case of which he was speaking, whether his own or the case of some one else, was adduced by him to illustrate the influence of the law upon the carnal mind.

(ii.) This is a case in which sin had the entire dominion, and overcame all his resolutions of obedience.

(iii.) That his use of the singular pronoun, and in the first person, proves nothing in regard to the point, whether or not he was speaking of himself, for this is common with him, and with other writers, when using illustrations.

(iv.) He keeps up the personal pronoun, and passes into the eighth chapter; at the beginning of which, he represents himself, or the person of whom he is speaking, as being not only in a different, but in an exactly opposite state of mind. Now, if the seventh chapter contains Paul's experience, whose experience is this in the eighth chapter? Are we to understand them both as the experience of Paul? If so, we must understand him as first speaking of his experience before, and then after he was sanctified. He begins the eighth chapter by saying, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" and assigns as a reason, that "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." The law of sin and death was that law in his members, or the influence of the flesh, of which he had so bitterly complained in the seventh chapter. But now, it appears, that he has passed into a state in which he is made free from this influence of the flesh,--is emancipated and dead to the world and to the flesh, and in a state in which "there is no condemnation." Now, if there was no condemnation in the state in which he then was, it must have been, either because he did not sin, or, if he did sin, because the law did not condemn him; or because the law of God was repealed or abrogated. Now, if the penalty of the law was so set aside in his case, that he could sin without condemnation, this is a real abrogation of the law. For a law without a penalty is no law, and if the law is set aside, there is no longer any standard, and he was neither sinful nor holy. But as the law was not, and could not be set aside, its penalty was not and could not be so abrogated, as not to condemn every sin. If Paul lived without condemnation, it must be because he lived without sin.

To me it does not appear as if Paul speaks of his own experience in the seventh chapter of Romans, but that he merely supposes a case by way of illustration, and speaks in the first person, and in the present tense, simply because it was convenient and suitable to his purpose. His object manifestly was, in this and in the beginning of the eighth chapter, to contrast the influence of the law and of the gospel--to describe in the seventh chapter the state of a man who was living in sin, and every day condemned by the law, convicted and constantly struggling with his own corruptions, but continually overcome,--and in the eighth chapter to exhibit a person in the enjoyment of gospel liberty, where the righteousness of the law was fulfilled in the heart by the grace of Christ. The seventh chapter may well apply either to a person in a backslidden state, or to a convicted person who had never been converted. The eighth chapter can clearly be applicable to none but to those who are in a state of entire sanctification.

I have already said, that the seventh chapter contains the history of one over whom sin has dominion. Now, to suppose that this was the experience of Paul when he wrote the epistle, or of any one who was in the liberty of the gospel, is absurd, and contrary to the experience of every person who ever enjoyed gospel liberty. And further, this is as expressly contradicted in the sixth chapter as it can be. As I said, the seventh chapter exhibits one over whom sin has dominion; but God says, in the sixth chapter and fourteenth verse, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." I remark finally upon this passage, that if Paul was speaking of himself in the seventh chapter of Romans, and really giving a history of his own experience, it proves nothing at all in regard to his subsequent sanctification; for--

(i.) If this was his experience at the time he wrote the epistle, it would prove nothing in regard to what afterwards occurred in his own experience.

(ii.) The eighth chapter shows conclusively, that it was not his experience at the time he wrote the epistle. The fact that the seventh and eighth chapters have been separated since the translation was made, as I have before said, has led to much error in the understanding of this passage. Nothing is more certain, than that the two chapters were designed to describe not only different experiences, but experiences opposite to each other. And that both these experiences should belong to the same person at the same time, is manifestly impossible. If therefore Paul is speaking in this connexion of his own experience, we are bound to understand the eighth chapter as describing his experience at the time he wrote the epistle; and the seventh chapter as descriptive of a former experience.

Now, therefore, if any one understands the seventh chapter as describing a Christian experience, he must understand it as giving the exercises of one in a very imperfect state; and the eighth chapter as descriptive of a soul in a state of entire sanctification. So that this epistle, instead of militating against the idea of Paul's entire sanctification, upon the supposition that he was speaking of himself, fully establishes the fact that he was in that state. What do those brethren mean who take the latter part of the seventh chapter as entirely disconnected from that which precedes and follows it, and make it tell a sad story on the subject of the legal and sinful bondage of an inspired apostle? What cannot be

proved from the Bible in this way? Is it not a sound and indispensable rule of biblical interpretation, that a passage is to be taken in its connexion, and that the scope and leading intention of the writer is to be continually borne in mind, in deciding upon the meaning of any passage? Why then, I pray, are the verses that precede, and those that immediately follow in the eighth chapter, entirely overlooked in the examination of this important passage?

(17.) Phil. iii. 10-15. "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." Upon this passage I remark:--

(i.) Here is a plain allusion to the Olympic games, in which men ran for a prize, and were not crowned until the end of the race, however well they might run.

(ii.) Paul speaks of two kinds of perfection here, one of which he claims to have attained, and the other he had not. The perfection which he had not attained, was that which he did not expect to attain until the end of his race, nor indeed until he had attained the resurrection from the dead. Until then he was not, and did not expect to be perfect, in the sense that he should "apprehend all that for which he was apprehended of Christ Jesus." But all this does not imply that he was not living without sin, any more than it implies that Christ was living in sin when he said, "I must walk to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." Here Christ speaks of a perfection which he had not attained.

Now it is manifest, that it was the glorified state to which Paul had not attained, and which perfection he was pressing after. But in the fifteenth verse, he speaks of another kind of perfection, which he professed to have attained. "Let us therefore," he says, "as many as be perfect, be thus minded;" that is, let us be pressing after this high state of perfection in glory, "if by any means we may attain unto the resurrection of the dead." The figure of the games should be kept continually in mind, in the interpretation of this passage. The prize in those races was the crown. This was given only at the end of the race. And besides, a man was "not crowned except he ran lawfully," that is, according to rule. Paul was running for the prize, that is, the crown, not, as some suppose, for entire sanctification, but for a crown of glory. This he did not expect until he had completed his race. He exhorts those who were perfect, that is, those who were running lawfully or according to rule, to forget the things that were behind, and press to the mark, that is, the goal, for the prize, or the crown of glory, which the Lord, the righteous judge, who was witnessing his race to award the crown to the victor, would give him at that day.

Now it is manifest to my mind, that Paul does not in this passage, teach expressly nor impliedly, that he was living in sin, but the direct opposite--that he meant to say, as he had said in many other places, that he was unblameable in respect to sin, but that he was aspiring after higher attainments, and meant to be satisfied with nothing short of eternal glory.

Again, Phil. iv. 11-13: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Here Paul undoubtedly meant to affirm, not merely his abstract ability to do all his duty, but that he had learned by experience, that as a matter of fact and reality, he found himself able to do all things required of him.

In relation to the character of Paul, let me say:--

(a.) If Paul was not sinless, he was an extravagant boaster, and such language used by any minister in these days would be considered as the language of an extravagant boaster.

(b.) This setting himself up as an example so frequently and fully, without any caution or qualification, was highly dangerous to the interests of the church, if he was not in a state of entire sanctification.

(c.) It was as wicked as it was dangerous.

(d.) His language in appealing to God, that in life and heart he was blameless, was blasphemous, unless he was really what he professed to be; and if he was what he professed to be, he was in a state of entire sanctification.

(e.) There is no reason for doubting his having attained this state.

(f.) It is doing dishonour to God, to maintain, under these circumstances, that Paul had not attained the blessing of entire sanctification.

(g.) He nowhere confesses sin after he became an apostle, but invariably justifies himself, appealing to man and to God, for his entire integrity and blamelessness of heart and life.

(h.) To accuse him of sin in these circumstances, without evidence, is not only highly injurious to him, but disgraceful to the cause of religion.

(i.) To charge him with sin, when he claims to have been blameless, is either to accuse him of falsehood or delusion.

(j.) To maintain the sinfulness of this apostle, is to deny the grace of the gospel, and charge God foolishly. And I cannot but inquire, why is this great effort in the church to maintain that Paul lived in sin, and was never wholly sanctified till death?

Two things have appeared wonderful to me--

1. That so many professed Christians should seem to think themselves highly honouring God in extending the claims of the law, and yet denying that the grace of the gospel is equal to the demands of the law.

2. That so many persons seem to have an entirely self-righteous view of the subject of sanctification. With respect to the first of these opinions, much pains has been taken to extend to the utmost the claims of the law of God. Much has been said of its exceeding and infinite strictness, and the great length, and breadth, and height, and depth of its claims. Multitudes are engaged in defending the claims of the law, as if they greatly feared that the purity of the law would be defiled, its strictness and spirituality overlooked, and its high and holy claims set aside, or frittered down somehow to the level of human passion and selfishness. But while engaged in their zeal to defend the law, they talk, and preach, and write, as if they supposed it indispensable, in order to sustain the high claims of the law, to deny the grace and power of the gospel, and its sufficiency to enable human beings to comply with the requisitions of the law. Thus they seem to me, unwittingly, to enter the lists against the grace of Christ, and with the utmost earnestness and even vehemence, to deny that the grace of Christ is sufficient to overcome sin, and to fulfil in us the righteousness of the law. Yes, in their zeal for the law they appear to me either to overlook, or flatly to deny, the grace of the gospel.

Now let the law be exalted. Let it be magnified and made honourable. Let it be shown to be strict, and pure, and perfect, as its Author; spread its claims over the whole field of human and angelic accountability; carry it like a blaze of fire to the deepest recess of every human heart; exalt it as high as heaven; and thunder its authority and claims to the depths of hell; stretch out its line upon the universe of mind; and let it, as it well may, and as it ought, thunder death and terrible damnation against every kind and degree of iniquity. Yet let it be remembered for ever, that the grace of the gospel is co-extensive with the claims of the law. Let no man, therefore, in his strife to maintain the authority of the law, insult the Saviour, exercise unbelief himself, or fritter away and drown the faith of the church, by holding out the profane idea, that the glorious gospel of the blessed God, sent home and rendered powerful by the efficacious application of the Holy Spirit, is not sufficient to fulfil in us "the righteousness of the law," and cause us "to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

With respect to the second thing which appears wonderful to me, namely, that so many seem to have an entirely self-righteous view of the doctrine of sanctification, let me say, that they seem afraid to admit, that any are entirely and perfectly sanctified in this life, lest they should flatter human pride, seeming to take it for granted, that, if any are entirely sanctified, they have whereof to glory, as if they had done something, and were in themselves better than others. Whereas, the doctrine of entire sanctification utterly

abhors the idea of human merit, disclaims and repudiates it as altogether an abomination to God, and to the sanctified soul. This doctrine, as taught in the Bible, and as I understand it, is as far as possible from conniving in the least degree at the idea of anything naturally good in saints or sinners. It ascribes the whole of salvation and sanctification from first to last, not only till the soul is sanctified, but at every moment while it remains in that state, to the indwelling Spirit, and influence, and grace of Christ.