

PURITY OF HEART AND LIFE

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 8, 1850

BY THE REV. C. G. FINNEY,

AT THE TABERNACLE, MOORFIELDS

"I will wash mine hands in innocency; so will I compass thine altar, O Lord."--PS.xxvi. 6

In remarking upon these words, I propose to inquire--

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE RESOLUTION OF THE PSALMIST?

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN KEEPING THAT RESOLUTION?

III. I SHALL SHOW, THAT BOTH THE RESOLUTION AND THE KEEPING IT ARE INDISPENSABLE CONDITIONS OF ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD.

I. Inquire, *What is implied in the resolution of the Psalmist?*

We find the Psalmist among many other striking sayings forming and expressing such a resolution as this to God. I will read the connection in which this resolution occurs--"Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity." Here you see, he invites God himself to sit in judgment upon his uprightness. "I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore, I shall not slide. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart." What a laying open of himself! What an unbosoming of himself before God! "For thy loving kindness is before mine eyes; and I have walked in thy truth. I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers." He did not sit down with vain persons, neither would he associate himself with those who dissembled before God. "I have hated the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked." By *sit*, here, is to be understood to mean *associate* with, to be on familiar terms, so as to imply fellowship with them. Then follows the language of the text--"I will wash my hands in innocency; so will I compass thine altar, O Lord."

It is very plain, from the connection in which these words stand, that this resolution implies, first, *an apprehension of the holiness of God; the absolute purity of his character*. The Psalmist, undoubtedly, clearly saw this; because to form such a resolution

as this in any proper sense, always implies that the mind perceives the holiness and purity of God's character, and understands it. Why should he form a resolution to cleanse his hands in innocency, unless he saw that it was an absolutely indispensable condition of approaching God! I remark again. It implies also a perception of the condition upon which we may approach him--upon which he will allow us to come into his presence. Doubtless, the Psalmist, not only had a conception of God's holiness, but that God required him to be holy, pure, sincere, upright, in approaching him--to have "clean hands," as the Psalmist here expresses it, if he expected to have any fellowship with God. It is worthy of remark, that the Psalmist says, that he had no fellowship with wickedness, that he did not sit with vain persons himself, that he did not go in with dissemblers himself; that he had nothing to do with mockers; and it would be very curious if he should say this of himself, and yet suppose that God would have anything to do with dissemblers, pretenders, mockers! The Psalmist felt that these things would be required of him, and that they became him; that if he would approach unto God, he must be able to say what he did say. Now if he himself refused to sit with the wicked, and to have fellowship with dissemblers; could he expect that God would accept such, and allow them to have fellowship with him? Doubtless, he had a very clear perception of the holiness of God's character, for his resolution shows that he had been so contemplating it; and says also very plainly the real condition on which he could approach God and find access to him, and acceptance with him. Contemplating the holiness and purity of God, he mentions these several things as he seems to come nearer and nearer to God. As one after the other they seemed to loom up before his mind, he saw clearly that such things must be the conditions of an infinitely holy God accepting him. He would not accept the wicked himself. Would God then accept him if he went in with the wicked, and associated with dissemblers! He saw clearly that God could not accept him if he came with vile hands!

I remark again: this resolution implies, not only that he perceived the holiness of God, and the condition upon which he might have communion with him, and be accepted of him, but it implies also that he fervently desired communion with God's purity, with God's holiness; with God himself. It shows that he himself wanted to draw near to God; he viewed God's purity, so that it instead of driving him away from the throne of grace, had the effect of drawing him to it. His most anxious desire was to come very near to God, and crowd right up to his throne of grace, or why should he express himself as wishing to compass the altar of God, and declaring his intention to wash his hands in innocency, that he might be accepted of him.

It implies also that he was perfectly willing to give up everything that was inconsistent with approaching God in this way. He resolved to cleanse his hands, to wash them in innocency, and in this particular manner would he compass God's altar. Now observe, he saw the conditions, and was willing to fulfil them. He saw what God must, from his own nature naturally require of those that would come near to him--that they must come with clean hands, that he could not receive dissemblers, if they would not leave their sins behind them they could not approach the altar of God; but if they would leave their sins they might approach and find forgiveness--if they would bring their sins they must not come in. Every soul may come into his presence, and approach him, but they must not

bring their sins with them, if they do, they cannot be received. The Psalmist saw this, and he resolved to do it.

Again, it implies, of course, renunciation of all sin. He designed to approach God with clean hands. But observe, persons cannot approach God with clean hands, in the sense that they never have sinned, but in the sense that they are resolved to renounce all iniquity for the time to come.

Once more, the resolution implies a solemn pledge of universal obedience to God. "I will wash mine hands in innocency;" implies, I say, the idea of universal obedience to God.

II. But I inquire in the next place, *What is implied in keeping such a resolution as this?*

If the resolution is a mere feeling, it is not a proper resolution at all; nor if it is a mere wish, a mere desire; it must be a purpose of the mind, and a determination of the heart. But let me ask what is implied in keeping this resolution! The resolution is, "I will wash mine hands in innocency." As is usual in the scriptures, an inward state of mind is expressed by an outward act--washing or cleansing the hands. "I will wash mine hands in innocency." Now, certainly, he did not mean to say literally that he could simply wash his hands, but his heart. Washing the hands, in this case, doubtless implies in the very first place--I will put iniquity away from my heart--I will renounce the spirit of self-seeking altogether--renounce from my deepest heart, every form of sin and iniquity--renounce sin as sin, and iniquity as iniquity. And here it should be remembered, that it is not enough for an individual to renounce *one* sin or one form of sin, but *all* sin and every form of sin--at least for the time being. Everybody can see that the mind cannot reject *one* sin, because it is sin; cannot put it away because of that particular quality--sin; and yet cherish some other form of sin--no man can put away one sin, as sin, without at the same time putting away *all* sin of every form and degree. The keeping of the resolution then, implies, that no iniquity shall be left, but that all shall be put away. Do you suppose that the Psalmist confined his idea to any outward act, and meant to say that he would simply reform his outward life in certain respects? Would that be to wash his hands in innocency? What say you? If he had put away *great* frauds, and retained *little* ones? If he had put away forgery, but retained little petty thefts in his business transactions? Would that have been to wash his hands in innocency? Judge ye! If a man paid his debts to save his reputation, and yet took a penny out of every person's hand who came into his shop, would that be to wash his hands in innocency? Suppose that a man kept his word in great matters which would entirely come out before the public, but should keep all his affairs in such a position as to mislead the public; or should put an article in the window, marked such a price, and when people came in, should not sell that, but an inferior article at the same price? Would that be to wash the hands in innocency? Now, suppose I had time to go over all these little tricks with which the business world is so full, should we not see a great deal to condemn? and should we not see a very little washing the hands in innocency? We look into business transactions and we see cheating, over-reaching, pulling and grasping on all sides. The resolution then to wash the hands in innocency, implies that there shall be no stain, no sin left, none of your tricks, none of your

management, none of your little petty actions in palming off goods for what they are not--no sin whether in heart or life.

Let me say again: the keeping the resolution to wash the hands in innocency, undoubtedly implies also, repentance for past sin, for unless persons repent of past sin, they do not cease from present sin--that is certain. Now suppose that a man breaks off from any actions which he formerly practiced, but does not repent of them, what does he do? Why, he continues to cleave to the iniquity still! He does not show it in his outward actions, but not having repented of it, it festers in his heart; it is like a fire covered up, there it is, although it does not for a while gush out--the iniquity is there, though it does not bubble up. If there is no repentance, there is no washing the hands in innocency. But let me say again: the keeping the resolution to cleanse the heart, implies further. Self-examination in the light of the rule, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." This is the rule that God has laid down--"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Thou shalt regard his interests as thine own; thou shalt regard his feelings as thine own; thou shalt regard his reputation as thine own. Now observe, of course, the keeping of the resolution to cleanse the hands, implies that the mind looks at the rule in view of which the hands are to be washed, the life and the heart purified. Here is the standard! No other standard than this is God's standard! Now observe--unless the mind looks at that, it will never renounce sin. A man therefore, who would approach God with his hands cleansed, must ask himself, have I done, or am I doing, in all things, as I would wish to be done by? Such a man requested a favour of me! Did I grant it, as I should have desired him to grant it had I been the petitioner? Did I grant it, as I might reasonably have expected of him? I dealt with such a man, did I deal with him just as I would have him deal with me? Such a man wanted money, I had some, did I let him have it just as I could have expected or wished him to let me have it, had I been placed in his circumstances? Such a man's character was assailed in my hearing, did I seek to vindicate his character, just as I would have had him do in reference to mine? I heard a story about him that I did not believe was true, did I deny it and resent it, as I would had it been told about myself? Did I feel for his character as I should have done about my own? Such a man is in difficulty, do I sympathise with his as I should wish him to sympathise with me if I were in his condition? Ah, I wish I had time to enter into many of these things in the sight of this rule, "Love thy neighbour as thyself." If we were to take this rule and set it before ourselves, and then go into the various business affairs of life, we should see a vast number of things that require amendment. Let me urge each one of you to take this rule, and see wherein you have transgressed it, and say, I must repent of all these things, which are not merely transgressions of human laws, but of the perfect law of God. I must repent of these things, and what is more, I must, as far as possible, set about making restitution. There is no honest repentance without this. Suppose a man were to rob you of a hundred pounds, and then say, "I am very sorry," but nevertheless keep the money, what would you think of his repentance? Would that be to wash his hands in innocency? Suppose a man has slandered you, spoken evil of you, or has connived at others speaking evil of you, and when he has learned the truth, refuses to confess it to those whom he has misled,--is that to wash his hands in innocency as becomes an honest man? You know very well that there is no more honesty in him than there is in the devil! Who does not see that this must be true? But you may say, is he not honest in reference to other things? I

answer, no! What does Jesus Christ say himself? "He that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much." The man that is unjust in the least, is universally unjust; he is not thoroughly honest in anything. Let me illustrate this. Suppose a man pays his notes to the bank, but behind his counter will take advantage of his customers in the matter of a few pence, will cheat every man that comes into his shop, as far as he can without danger to his business character. He is continually putting out his feelers, like a snail, to see how far he can go without danger to his reputation among men--is that man an honest man? No! there is not a particle of honesty about him: he is selfish and sinful from beginning to end! He pays his notes into the bank! Why? His business character would be ruined if he did not, and he would become a bankrupt. But go into his shop to make a purchase, and he will cheat you if he can. Is that an honest man because he pays his notes to the bank? No! There is not a particle of honesty in him. Now let me say; these are very practical ideas, and of great importance to be considered in a city like this.

I remark again: I said that the keeping of this resolution implies confession and restitution. Observe what is the rule by which confession and restitution is to be made; the golden rule--"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." "Love thy neighbour as thyself." Now observe, it ought to be universally known that confession must be made to the injured for the wrongs inflicted. Here let me make a difference which it seems necessary to make, between this confession and the confession insisted on by the Roman Catholics. They make a priest the depository of all confessions, but I speak now of making confession to the person who has been injured. Suppose you have slandered another, you ought to confess to him, or to the person whom you have misled, by your statement concerning him. Such a confession is demanded by justice and our duty towards our neighbours. And it is self-evident that such a confession as this is demanded by God, who has said, "he that covereth his sin shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall obtain mercy." And again, "confess your faults one to another that ye may be healed."

But let me say again: a keeping of this resolution implies a taking up of the stumbling blocks, and a making everything right as if preparing for the judgment. Just suppose that we knew, that in one week the judgment was to sit and all the preparation we should be permitted to make must be made in that space of time! Would you not at once be thoroughly upright and honest? Well you must be as honest now as you would be then! To be sure, I do not say that you must take the same course now as you would then, in all respects, for if you knew that the affairs of the world were so soon to be wound up, you would not think it necessary to continue your worldly business any longer; and many other things that you ought now to do would not be needful then; but the keeping of this resolution implies that you be as thoroughly upright and honest now as you would be then, in making confession, and as far as possible, restitution. We must remove all stumbling blocks out of the way. Suppose we look around us and see sundry things which offend, and hinder the salvation of our fellow men, what must we do? What does Christ say? "When thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift; first go and be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift." Do not offer it, for if you do it will not be accepted. Go first and remove the stumbling block and then come and offer thy gift. Here is the very principle

for which we are contending laid down by Christ. Some men seem to suppose that the gospel dispensation is a very lenient one, compared with the Old Testament dispensation. The exact opposite of this is the truth. The New Testament dispensation is the same as the Old; but while the one related chiefly to the outward life, the other comes right home to the heart. Take Christ's sermon on the Mount, in which he tells you that unless there be obedience to the law of God in the heart, there is no obedience at all. He taught us also to exercise a forgiving spirit, or else when we prayed God would not hear us; unless we are upright and honest when we pray, and make our peace with those whom we have offended, we cannot approach unto God.

But let me say again: regard to the rights of others in all respects is implied in washing our hands in innocency, including the payment of our debts and exact uprightness in all business transactions; not in the sense of compliance with human laws, but in the view of the great principle of loving your neighbour as yourself. Washing your hands in innocency, implies that all your business be transacted upon this principle. You cannot really be honest except only when you love your neighbour as yourself, and regard his interests as you would your own, and seek his good as well as your own. Suppose a man comes into your shop for a certain article, and you knew well that you have not got what he wants; but you show him another, and say, that this is not exactly the article you wanted, but it is better than the one you inquired for, and it is the article most generally used, while at the same time you know that you are deceiving the man; you know it is an inferior article, but you say, though this is not exactly what you wanted, I guess it is better and will answer your turn quite as well; you will get it on to him if you can, no matter by what means. Now let me ask, is this being honest with God? Is this washing the hands in innocency? Is it indeed! O, the endless tricks of selfishness, and the endless subterfuges with which men excuse themselves; and yet so much piety in the midst of it all--*selfish all the week, but mighty pious on the Sabbath!* Sometimes it is that persons would not on any account stay away from church on the Sabbath, but they would cheat you in their business on the Monday if they had an opportunity of doing so. Suppose a man comes into your shop and asks if you have such an article, and if you are not sure that you have, will you tell him so? will you say--I do not know that I have: I will look, but I do not think I have anything that will exactly answer your purpose. There is an article something like it, you can look at it and see if it will suit you. Now, will you tell him all that you know about that, and be right up and down with him? Or do you say that is not my business. Let me take care of myself. Your customer is ignorant of the quality of the article: will you be honest with him, or will you take advantage of his ignorance, and charge him more than it is worth? Perhaps he will barely get home before he finds out that neither the article nor the price were what they ought to have been. Suppose you say, well, I am seeking to get money that I may give it to the Missionary cause! Let me tell you that a man might as well fit out a pirate ship for the same purpose! You take advantage, lie and cheat, to get money for God! Well, when you have got the money so for God; just go into your closet, lay the money down, and say, "Lord, thou knowest how I got this money today: there was a man came into my shop and wanted a certain article; and I had not what he wanted, but I had one not so good, but I managed to get him to take it, and I charged him a little more than it was worth, because I wanted to give something to the Missionary cause!" Now would that be washing the hands in innocency? Can you

serve God in such a way as that? Would an infinitely holy God accept such an offering? Judge ye!

III. We now pass to show in the next place, that *both the resolution, and the keeping of it, are indispensable conditions of acceptance with God.*

Now let me here explain what I mean by the condition of acceptance. I do not mean that these things which I have mentioned are *grounds* upon which God will accept us. He will not accept us for these things, because after all, there is no satisfaction made for past sin--not at all: therefore, he cannot accept us as if we had not sinned. While this resolution, or the keeping of it is not the ground of an acceptance, I say it is a condition, in the sense that we cannot be accepted without it. Because if God were to accept us without this, he would do the very thing that the Psalmist himself would not do. The Psalmist declared that he would have no fellowship with iniquity, and would not go in with dissemblers, and shall you do so? No! Then I say this is an indispensable condition of acceptance with God.

It should always be understood then, that when we talk of persons being justified by faith, we always mean that faith implies repentance, making restitution, obedience and holiness of heart. The faith that takes hold on Christ implies all this. We are justified by faith; but it is the faith of obedience to God; the faith which leads to sanctification; the faith which works by love and purifies the heart; the faith that overcomes the world. Ah, the faith that overcomes the world, that's the faith to mark an honest man! The Bible describes the faith that justifies as the faith that overcomes the world. Look at that man, he says he has faith. Does his faith enable him to overcome the world? Why, it has not made him an honest man in his worldly business! It does not keep him from cheating! Is that the faith of the gospel? No, indeed! It is the faith that makes void the law; and "do we make void the law through faith? God forbid! Yes, we establish the law." True faith produces the very spirit of the law in the mind, and consequently obedience to it in the outward life. Do not let me be misunderstood, I am not advocating a system of self-righteousness. I am not saying that men may be saved by their own works, and denying that they are justified by faith; for this I maintain; but I maintain that the faith which justifies, is the faith which overcomes the world. Faith implies honesty with God and man. Faith implies uprightness of heart; and faith implies a cleansing of the hands. Beloved, *no man has faith that justifies him who has not faith that makes him honest.* If you are not honest, you have not faith; in God's sense of the term, you have not the faith of the gospel.

But let me say again: this must be a condition of acceptance, for God would disgrace himself if it were not. We could not ourselves feel a respect for God if he did not make this a condition of our acceptance. He does not require that we should be saved by our own works, for that is impossible. He does not require us to undo the actions of our past lives, for that were impossible; but he requires us *now* to become honest, and all which is implied in that state of mind, sincerity, simplicity of heart, and confidence in him. Furthermore, let me say, if we could approach God, and be accepted by him without becoming honest men, it would not do us any good. If God was such a being that he could have fellowship with our sins, we should be wretched beings still. The fact is,

beloved, there is no way in which the soul can be at peace with God, without its becoming like God. There must be written upon the heart of a man holiness to the Lord, before he can be at peace with God. There is a natural attraction between the mind of God and a good man, as there is between the sun and the planetary system; instead of our earth running in a straight line away from the sun, it is drawn round and round and round by the attraction of that planet. Just so it is with a good man and God. There is such a natural attraction between the good and the holy soul, and the God of infinite purity, that it is continually drawn towards him. The sun attracts the earth, and in a certain degree the earth attracts the sun, and thus the earth is carried round its diurnal and annual rotations. In a similar manner does God attract the soul of the good man, and the soul of a good man, in a measure, attracts God. The soul knows nothing about gravity in respect to this earth. The mind is not material, and if it was not tied down by the body, it would not go round with the earth, but would ascend to its author. Why, Christian, have you not found sometimes that there was such an attraction between yourself and God, as if your soul would almost leap from its body, or draw the body up with it to heaven. An eminent Christian lady once said, that at one time the attraction from God was so great, that it seemed to her as if she should go to heaven body and soul together.

I mention these things to show you, that when we speak of being drawn towards God, we are not merely using a figure.

But let me say further. Some people suppose that they are to be saved by imputed righteousness, while they are destitute of personal righteousness. Suppose you had imputed righteousness, what then? Suppose you were to get to heaven? that would be no place for you. Heaven would be hell to you. But let me assure you that you must have an imparted righteousness, and become pure in heart and life, ere God will accept you.

A few remarks must close what I have to say. The first remark I make is this--you are not accepted of God; if you have not conscious communion with him; if you do not find God in his house, in your closet, and do not enter into sensible communion with him. Again: you see from this subject why there is so little real communion with God in the church. For the best of all reasons--there is so little of the washing of the hands in innocency. Let me say again: many persons do not seem to understand at all that this is a condition of acceptance; they seem to suppose that somehow the gospel was designed to make men pure, but they do not understand what is implied in washing the hands in innocency, in casting themselves upon God for present grace and for future grace. Again: you have seen from this subject how abominable it must be to God for persons to pretend to love and serve him while they indulge in a worldly spirit and live a worldly life. I remark once more; you need not make some great and wonderful preparation--occupying months or years before you give your heart to God. Now suppose that every person in this house were at this moment willing to do as the Psalmist did, and were to come right out and say, "I will wash my hands in innocency"--what is there to hinder? We are soon to unite in prayer. Let the whole congregation then make one move toward the throne of grace! everyone make a move with his heart, and say, Lord, I give up all sin, and I do it now, and as soon as possible I will set about making everything right outwardly. In my heart *now* I renounce sin, all sin, I will now consecrate my heart, and wash my hands in

innocency. Are you all willing to do this? Come along then! come along! every one. The veil has been rent, and the door has been thrown wide open, and no man can shut it against you but yourself. Will you then shut it against yourself? Will you refuse to enter? Be not so foolish; come now, come with earnestness and sincerity and God will accept you.