

Blessedness of Benevolence

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of benevolence or love as the true nature of religion, and how it leads to true Christian happiness.

Scripture: Proverbs 11:25, Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:38, Acts 20:35, 2 Corinthians 9:7, Galatians 6:9, Philippians 2:4, James 1:27, 1 Peter 4:10, 1 John 4:7-8

Topics: "Benevolence", "True Happiness"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the 'Blessedness of Benevolence,' asserting that true religion is rooted in disinterested love and benevolence towards God and others. He explains that genuine happiness for Christians arises from the exercise of benevolence, which includes a desire to promote the happiness of all beings, including enemies. Finney warns against various forms of delusion that can mislead individuals into thinking they are benevolent when they are not, highlighting the importance of a true, abiding disposition of the heart. He concludes that true happiness is found not in selfish pursuits but in the joy of giving and serving others, reflecting God's own benevolence.

Transcript

TEXT.--Acts 20:35: It is more blessed to give than to receive.

On what occasion our Lord Jesus Christ uttered these words we are not informed, as they are not recorded by the Evangelists. But we have the authority of an inspired Apostle, that He taught this doctrine. In considering this subject I will state:

I. WHAT CONSTITUTES TRUE RELIGION.

II. SOME OF THE ELEMENTS THAT ENTER INTO THE HAPPINESS OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN.

III. NOTICE SEVERAL FORMS OF DELUSION UNDER WHICH MULTITUDES ARE LABORING.

I. What constitutes true religion.

The whole of religion may be comprehended in the simple term, benevolence or love. This love must be supreme in degree towards God, and equal to men. It must also be disinterested; i.e. God must be loved for what He is, and our neighbor's happiness must be chosen and sought for its own sake, and not from any interested motive. But I must enter still more particularly into what is implied in benevolence, or that

love which constitutes religion.

1. It implies a spirit of justice.
2. Of mercy.
3. Of truth.
4. Of complacency in goodness.
5. Of opposition to sin, and sinners as such.

These are only some of the modifications of benevolence, as it is developed by circumstances calling for these particular expressions of it. But,

6. Benevolence implies a desire to promote the happiness of all beings. Benevolence is good will, or a desire to promote the happiness of its object. In a still more extended sense, it is the love of being in general, and a desire to promote happiness for its own sake. It regards the happiness of every being capable of happiness, as a real substantial good in itself, and desires his happiness most who has the greatest capacity for happiness.

7. It implies a desire to promote the happiness of enemies as well as friends. True benevolence does not distinguish in this respect between enemies and friends, but regards the happiness of all as a real good. Happiness is its object, and whether this can be promoted in an enemy or a friend, it matters not.

8. It not only implies a desire, but the choice of the happiness of all beings, so far as it can be consistently promoted. It is very common for persons to desire things which, upon the whole, they do not choose, the desires or emotions often being in opposition to the will. It should be understood that benevolence is good willing and not merely good desiring. Man's desires do not influence his outward conduct any farther than he wills in accordance with his desire. Good willing always produces good acting, because the will always governs the external conduct; but there may be much desire that never begets corresponding action.

9. The benevolence that constitutes true religion is a disposition of the mind, in distinction from those accidental choices that are sometimes made under the pressure of peculiar circumstances, which after all, by no means, constitute the character of a man. A miser may be so wrought upon, and his constitutional susceptibilities so excited by the presence of some object of great distress, as for the moment to open his hand to give relief, and perhaps in five minutes call himself a thousand fools for having done so.

No one therefore would say that this was true benevolence. It implies no radical change in his character. It is only the wringing from his selfish hand, by the force of circumstances, acting on his constitutional susceptibilities, what it was not in his heart to give, and that which would not have been given, but as a relief to his own agony at the time. Now it should be understood that the benevolence which constitutes true religion is a continually abiding disposition of the mind.

I mean by disposition, what is commonly meant by it, the controlling propensity of a man's mind. We speak of a man as having an avaricious disposition, a worldly, jealous, or envious disposition. We call this a disposition, because we observe it to be the permanent bent or tendency of the mind. The avaricious man manifests his disposition in all his worldly arrangements. It is seen to be the great tendency and effort of his mind to gain worldly possessions. The envious man is seen to be instituting comparisons between

himself and others, and naturally and always to manifest an ill temper towards those whom he considers as competitors or superiors.

Now a benevolent man is seen to have a benevolent disposition. That is his manifest character. The happiness of being is the great object of pursuit with him. He lays his plans of doing good, and of carrying out and gratifying his leading disposition, just as naturally and certainly as an avaricious man would. But while the avaricious man lays his plans to get and hoard up, the benevolent man lays his plans to diffuse abroad. All other men are aiming, under some form, to promote self-interest, to promote their own happiness by direct efforts.

But the benevolent man seeks not his own happiness, but finds it in endeavoring to make others happy. His own happiness is not the object of pursuit. And yet he is the most certain to find it in proportion as he has the less regard to it. To illustrate this: Suppose that two men are accosted by a miserable beggar in circumstances of the utmost necessity. One of them is a selfish and the other a benevolent man. They are both exercised however with a degree of compassion and both give of their means to the object of distress.

It is easy to see, that he is the most happy in giving who is the most disinterested, and who has the least regard to his own happiness in the case, because the relief to him is the greatest gratification. If real piety and true benevolence were the sole motives that induced the benevolent man to give, the relief of the beggar would beget in him unmingled satisfaction, while at the same time, the one who was less benevolent would feel less intent on relieving his necessities, and of course less gratified and less happy by witnessing the relief.

It should be understood then, and always borne in mind, that Christian benevolence is a controlling disposition, or propensity of mind, and develops itself just as any other disposition manifests itself, by the daily walk of its possessor.

II. What constitutes true Christian happiness.

1. It consists in the exercise of benevolence itself. The human mind is so constructed by its Author, that the exercise of benevolence in itself, is exceedingly sweet and grateful to the mind. It has an excellent relish and sweetness that enters into the very substance of the exercise. There is a conscious happiness diffused through the mind, that seems to be woven into the very texture of benevolence itself. This is to the benevolent mind like the perennial fountain, pouring forth continually the sweet and refreshing waters of life.

2. Another element of Christian happiness is, that which consists in the gratification of the benevolent disposition. I have already said, there is a sweet satisfaction in the exercise itself. But still, the exercise is one thing, and its gratification another. The gratification is another ingredient that greatly augments the sum of happiness. To will to do good, is sweet, but to really succeed in doing the good that we desire, is sweeter still.

3. Another element of the Christian's happiness is the self-complacency that follows and accompanies the exercise or gratification of benevolence. This is indispensable to complete happiness. Men may experience a kind and degree of happiness, in indulging in those things in which all the powers of the mind do not harmonize; but if they are indulging in things to which their consciences are opposed, the inward mutiny and conflict thus produced, mingles in their cup of gratification the gall of bitterness. But

benevolence always has the approbation of conscience. And the mind, from its very structure, necessarily feels a self-complacent satisfaction in the exercise of benevolent affections.

4. Another element of this happiness is the life and harmonious action of all the powers of the soul in its exercise. The mind is so constructed, that it will not, cannot harmonize in any other course of action. It was made to be benevolent. Benevolence is its proper element, and it can no more properly enjoy life in the exercise of selfish affections, than a fish can live out of water. But there is an excellent harmony, like an exquisitely tuned instrument, in the movements of all the powers of the mind in the exercise and gratification of benevolence. Like an exquisite machine, that is made of such materials, kept so clean, and so oiled as to cut off all friction as far as possible, it moves so still, so sweet, so safe, there is a loveliness in the harmony of its movements. So the soul in the exercise of benevolence is made to harmonize. Every power of the mind consents. There is no jarring, no grating, no friction, no inward mutiny or repellancy to grate like discord; but all is loveliness, quietness, and assurance for ever.

5. Another element of the Christian's happiness is the full assurance that he pleases God. The mind is so constructed, that when it is conscious of exercising perfect benevolence, it can no more doubt that it pleases God, than it can doubt its own existence. Love naturally and necessarily casts out all fear. There is in the very workings of benevolence itself, the accompanying assurance, that these affections and this course of conduct please God.

6. Another element in the Christian's happiness is joy and rejoicing in the happiness and the glory of God. Remember, the happiness of being is the benevolent man's object of pursuit. He always rejoices in true happiness, wherever he sees it; and of course he feels the greater satisfaction, by how much the more happiness he contemplates or beholds as existing. To him the happiness of God is infinitely the greatest good in the Universe, and the glory of God, as it stands connected with the happiness of God and that of His whole government, is considered by him as the supreme good. The consideration then of God's infinite and eternal happiness, of His infinite and eternal glory, is the source of present, perpetual, boundless, and eternal consolation. What a consideration for a benevolent mind to dwell upon, is the infinite and unchanging happiness of God--an infinite, fathomless, shoreless ocean of perfect, infinite blessedness. To a benevolent mind this is an unfailing source of eternal joy.

7. Another element of the Christian's happiness is the happiness and good things of all other beings. A truly benevolent mind participates in the happiness, and really enjoys the happiness of all around him, as if those things were his own. And nothing can prevent a benevolent mind from tasting the cup of every man's happiness and sharing with every man, the happiness of those good things which God bestows upon him, and that too without, in the least degree, diminishing the bliss of him whose happiness he shares. He is entirely satisfied and rejoiced to see things bestowed upon others that are withholden from himself. If, in time of great drought, for example, a cloud arises that promises fair to water his farm, his garden, or his neighborhood; if a change of wind carries the blessing to another town, where it is as much needed, he is equally well pleased, and enjoys the refreshing of his neighbors as if it were his own.

8. Another element of the Christian's happiness consists in his direct personal efforts to promote the good of others. His very toils and labors have in them the relish of an excellent sweetness, as carry with them and in them their own reward. Why, a benevolent mind is a disposition to do good to others. Now in doing good he is gratifying his natural propensities; he is acting out his governing disposition; so that while he is not seeking his happiness as an end at all, he is surely finding an exquisite enjoyment, in his disinterested efforts to do good.

9. The Christian's happiness consists in the present and eternal indulgence of a ruling propensity or disposition to do good. A Christian has nothing else to do any more than God has. And from the very moment of his conversion, he has nothing to do to all eternity but to pursue uninterruptedly and as zealously as he pleases, the ruling disposition of his soul. And God has so circumstanced him, as to surround him continually with objects upon which he can gratify his benevolence. He has an ample field for the exercise and pouring out of all the benevolence of his soul, in efforts to do good; without ever, for one hour, being called off from that which constitutes his chief delight--from pursuing and indulging without restraint, the grand, peculiar, absorbing disposition of his soul.

III. Several forms of delusion.

1. Many seem to mistake light for religion. They get some new views of religious truth which produce a corresponding excitement of mind, and they bustle about, under the impression that this excitement is religion; when, at the same time, if they would narrowly watch, it would be seen that their heart is still selfish, and not benevolent--that their ruling propensity or disposition is not changed--that while they are excited by their new views of religious truth, it is emotion and not will that is active. Their business habits and transactions will soon develop the fact, that selfishness is, after all, in some form, the ruling propensity of their mind. In all such cases, there is of course a radical mistake, a fatal delusion, under which the mind is laboring.

2. Many are deceiving themselves, by the exercise of a legal religious zeal. Paul testified of his countrymen, that "they had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." I have long been convinced, that much of the zeal manifested by professors of religion, and many of the professed converts, is of this character. They slumber on, until awakened by the thunders of Sinai; when they bluster about, urged by a sense of duty and conscience, and a multitude of legal considerations, while they are conscious, that they are not influenced by the deep love of God and of souls. The evidences of their legal spirit are:

(1.) A manifest want of a deeply heart-broken and humble spirit.

(2.) A manifest want of a deep satisfaction of mind in the work itself.

(3.) The absence of that abiding soul satisfaction which belongs to the exercise and gratification of benevolent feeling. Many very zealous persons are any thing but truly happy in the exercise of the affections which are working within them. They carry with them all the while a sense of condemnation. They feel as if their holiest exercises needed to be confessed as sins, and there is all the time a grating and friction within, and a felt consciousness, that all is not right, a sense of defilement, a want of integrity and perfect uprightness of intention, and a consciousness of more or less selfishness in every thing they say or do. Now persons in this state of mind do not conceive what a clean heart is. They do not understand the immense and radical difference between their feelings and the exercises of a purely benevolent mind. How a person can live without condemnation, they cannot understand. And their experience being what it is, they of course look with great suspicion upon any who profess to live without a sense of condemnation, and judge of course that it is because they are not well acquainted with their own hearts, and also are ignorant of the purity of God's law. Now I can understand very well, from my own experience, what this state of mind is. I know very well what it is to have a legal zeal, that would compass sea and land to make a proselyte, and yet carry with it, as if woven into its very texture, the sense of condemnation. The fact is, the mind is so constructed that whenever it is enlightened, it cannot be satisfied with a legal zeal. Nothing but the exercise of unmixed benevolence can make it happy. Nothing but a

conscious exercise of right affections can free it from the sting of self-condemnation. Herein is a vast delusion. Persons in this state of mind are very apt to suppose that there is no other state than this to which Christians may attain in this life, and to judge, and censure, and condemn all who profess the consciousness of a clean heart.

3. Many mistake emotion for disposition. They do not distinguish between the emotions which constitute their excitement of mind and that controlling disposition, or state of the will, that constitutes true benevolence.

4. Others still mistake mere assent for disposition. They are enlightened, and hold correct opinions; and knowing that religion does not consist in emotion, they are satisfied without emotion, and do not consider, that although emotion may sometimes exist independent of the will, yet as a matter of fact and philosophy, the emotions take fire most easily in accordance with the disposition, and men feel most naturally and easily on that subject, that most fully chimes with the leading disposition of their minds. Therefore if an individual supposes that he has a benevolent disposition, while his emotions are not easily enkindled and fanned into a flame, upon the presentation of the objects of benevolence, he is deceived. He has the religion of opinion, and not the propensity or ruling disposition.

5. There are many instances in which individuals are deceived, by setting down to the account of benevolence that which as a matter of fact, is only one form of selfishness triumphing over another. As for example:

(1.) The love of reputation may be the supreme ruling propensity of mind, and triumph over lust, intemperance, and a host of other subordinate propensities. So that a man or a woman may be liberal in giving, chaste in conversation and deportment, and of temperate habits; and all this may be put to the account of true benevolence, or religion, when it should be ascribed only to the love of reputation.

(2.) Again, a literary ambition may triumph over sloth or appetite, and many other evil, but subordinate, propensities of the mind.

(3.) A spirit of avarice may be the ruling propensity of the mind, and triumph over lust, intemperance and many forms of sin.

(4.) Selfish fears and hopes may restrain inward wickedness, and all these restraints may be, and often are, supposed to result from pure benevolence, when in fact they are only one form of selfishness, controlling and subordinating other forms of the same principle.

6. The only remaining form of delusion, that I shall now notice, is, where the individual's happiness consists, not in the exercise of his benevolence, but in the consideration of his own safety. We sometimes see persons settle down into an Antinomian security, and manifest great quietness and peace of mind, where happiness and peace are manifestly based upon the consideration of their own safety. Now this is as far as possible from a truly religious state of mind. Real religious happiness arises out of the exercise of religion itself, with its necessary accompaniments, that constitutes the happiness of true saint. To be sure, the contemplation of the grace of Christ, the joys of Heaven, and an eternity of blessedness at God's right hand, come in to make up the aggregate of a Christian's happiness; but the basis and foundation of the whole is that which belongs to the exercise and gratification of benevolent affections themselves.

REMARKS.

1. The natural heart does not apprehend the true nature of religion. I have often wondered what sceptics can be thinking about, and how it is that they can have any doubts of the necessity of a change of heart. But a consideration of the selfishness of their hearts, explains the whole difficulty. God's state of mind is the exact opposite of their own. Benevolence is the contrast of a selfish disposition. Selfishness finds its happiness in getting; benevolence in giving. Selfishness is always endeavoring to promote its own, and benevolence the happiness of others.

2. This remark leads me to say, that we can here see the necessity of examples, to illustrate the true nature of religion. A leading object of Christ in taking to Himself human nature was, to associate with men, and possess their minds of the true idea of God's character, so to live and associate with them, that they might observe what God would be as a Neighbor, or Brother, or Son, or Friend; what spirit and temper He possessed, and would manifest, under the circumstances in which men are. As soon as a few had caught the rare idea, that God was love, He sends them forth, "as sheep among wolves," to lay down their lives, as He had done, for a rebellious world. They catch His spirit, imitate His example, and the waves of salvation roll wherever they go; and a few years had well nigh seen a world prostrate at the feet of Christ. But alas! the state, with her selfish and polluting embrace, soon seduced the Church into selfishness and apostacy from God. And the world can never be converted, only as examples and illustrations of what true religion is, are held up in the lives of professed Christians, before the eyes of men.

3. You can see from this subject, what constitutes real apostacy from God. The moment you set up a selfish interest as the object of pursuit, go to any place, engage in any business, marry, or take any other step, inconsistent with the exercise and pursuit of the great ends at which God aims, you are in a state of apostacy from God; you have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and are "hewing out broken cisterns that can hold no water."

4. You see from this subject, what constitutes the happiness of God. Benevolence is His whole character. His benevolence is infinite. His happiness is, therefore, infinite and unchangeable.

5. You see, that Christians may and ought to be as happy, in proportion to their capacity, as God is.

6. You see what constitutes the unhappiness of many professors of religion. It is selfishness. It is naturally impossible, that a selfish mind should be happy. Selfishness lets loose an infernal brood of scorpions and vipers, to sting the soul's happiness to death.

7. You see also, what constitutes the misery of all men. They are pressing after happiness but cannot obtain it. And the reason is, they are seeking it in that in which it cannot consist. If a man pursues his own happiness as an end, he may as well expect to overrun his own shadow. The mind is so constituted that it cannot possibly be obtained in this way. To be disinterestedly benevolent, is the only possible way to be happy. To seek not your own, but another's good, is for ever and unalterably indispensable to the happiness of a moral being.

8. What striking evidence does the human constitution afford of the benevolence of God! He has so constructed it, that happiness is the certain and necessary result of benevolence, and that no other possible working of the constitution can result in happiness. What striking and unanswerable testimony is this to the benevolence of the Author of our nature!

9. Those who do not enjoy the good things of others, or find occasions of gratitude, and really feel the spirit of gratitude, for blessings bestowed upon others, are not Christians. I have already said, that true

benevolence is the love or desire of our neighbor's happiness, or rather the willing or choosing his happiness. Now whenever blessings are conferred upon others, then we are pleased. It is what we choose. It is in accordance with and a gratification of the ruling propensity of our minds. It is just as certain then as our existence, that if we are benevolent, we shall rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep; that we shall participate in the joys and sorrows of those around us, and rejoice in and be thankful for all the good bestowed upon the world.

10. From this subject it is easy to see, of what spirit those are who are ready to murmur at others possessing good things, of which themselves are deprived. Did you ever see a family of selfish children, and witness their complainings and murmurings, whenever something was bestowed upon one, which the others had not received? "Now, Ma, you have given brother such a thing and have not given it to me. Now let me have the best things; let me have the largest piece, and the most and best of every thing." Now this is a supremely hateful spirit; but it is exactly the spirit of many professors of religion. Instead of rejoicing to see their brothers and sisters blest with temporal or spiritual good things, they are ready to murmur and be offended, because these things are not bestowed on them. This manifests the supreme selfishness of their minds, and affords the highest demonstration that they are not Christians.

11. They are not Christians, who have no heart to thank God for bestowing blessings upon their enemies. There is no religion in selfish gratitude. A supremely selfish mind might be thankful for blessings bestowed upon itself, or upon its friends who are accounted as parts of itself. But a truly benevolent mind will rejoice in blessings bestowed on enemies as well as friends.

12. It is easy to see, that the covetous and the ambitious are not and cannot be Christians.

13. That a spirit of worldly competition is utterly inconsistent with the spirit of benevolence.

14. We see what that state of mind must be, that is never willing to do a neighbor a kindness without taking pay for it. Some persons seem never to have the spirit of doing good, or of obliging any body but themselves. The pay seems to be the sole motive in doing almost any thing and every thing for those around them. They seem never to enjoy a luxury in making those around them happy, for its own sake. And if they do any thing for a neighbor, it is, by no means, for the sake of doing good, but for the sake of the pay. Now every one can see, that if a minister should be actuated by such motives in visiting the sick, and in preaching the gospel, every one would say there was no virtue in it. They will go and visit the sick as often as the physician does, and take as much pains to restore the health of the soul as the physician does the health of the body; and in all this they are expected to be actuated by pure benevolence. And for all this they never think of asking any pay, whether they have any salary or not. What minister has not traveled hundreds of miles, and spent hours, and days, and weeks, and months, in such labors of love, without ever expecting or desiring to receive an earthly remuneration for it. He found in the very exercise itself an excellent solace, and an exquisite relish, that was to his benevolent mind worth more than gold. But what is expected of ministers of the gospel in this respect, should be true of all men. They should as far as possible, "do good and lend, hoping for nothing again." They should be actuated by disinterested benevolence, knowing that "with whatsoever measure they mete it shall be measured to them again."

15. We see what we should think of those who are unwilling to exercise any self-denial, for the sake of doing good to others. There is one man, who will not give up what he calls the temperate use of alcohol, for the sake of doing good. He contends, that it is lawful for him to use it moderately; that others have no right to make a stumbling-block of his use of it; and as for practising a little self-denial for the sake of the

example, he will not do it. Here is a woman, who professes to love God supremely, and her neighbor as herself. She prays for the heathen, and thinks herself truly religious; and yet, she will not deny herself the use of tea and coffee, to save the heathen world from hell. The wail of eight hundred millions of human beings is coming upon every wind of heaven, crying out, 'send us tracts, send us Bibles, send us missionaries, send us the means of eternal life; for we are dying in our sins.' 'But ah!' says these professing Christians, men and women-- 'It is hard times; money is scarce; we are in debt; we must turn away our ears from hearing these wailings of wo.' Now brother--sister--let me sit down at your table. What have you here? How much does this tea and coffee cost you a year? How much do these worse than useless articles of luxury curtail your ability to send the gospel to the perishing? My sister, how many Bibles and tracts have you used up in this way? How many Bibles, at five shillings each, might be sent by you to the heathen every year, were you willing to exercise a little self-denial, and that too, a self-denial which your own health and highest good demand? Brother, perhaps you use tobacco. How long have you used it? The price of how many Bibles does it cost you a year? And how many heathen might this day have had Bibles in their hands, who will now go down to hell, without ever hearing of the Savior, who might have had the Bible and eternal life, had you had one particle of benevolence in your heart? Will you make the calculation? Will you ask, how many Bibles and tracts might have been purchased by the money you have squandered in this manner? And will you settle the question, definitely, whether you are influenced by the love of God and of souls? Whether you eat and drink these things for the glory of God, or for the gratification of your own lust? Surely, the question is of no less importance, than whether benevolence or selfishness constitutes your character.

16. Again, we see what to think of those whose religious duties are not a source of the highest enjoyment to them. The religion of many persons seems to make them miserable, and whatever they do for the cause of Christ they seem to do painfully and grudgingly. The reason is, they are not actuated by love. If love were the ruling disposition of their hearts, their religion would be a source of the sweetest enjoyment to them.

17. We see what to think of those who prefer getting, to giving for the cause of Christ. The truly benevolent value property, only as the means of forwarding the great object upon which their heart is set. Every thing is esteemed by them in proportion as it relates to and bears upon the Kingdom of Christ. Life, health, time, property, talents, all things, are brought into the service of God, and regarded only as they are the means of promoting His glory, and the good of souls. A truly benevolent mind places no value upon money for its own sake. It no more desires to hoard up money to gratify and please self, than it would board up chips and stones. In short, it places no earthly value upon money, or any thing else, only as it can be made instrumental in doing good. When, therefore, you see a man that loves to make great bargains, who is engaged in getting all he can, and gives to the poor and to the cause of Christ grudgingly and sparingly, it is a simple matter of fact, that he is a selfish, worldly man, and no Christian at all. In this connection you can see the delusion of that professor of religion, who will be more zealous in seasons of speculation, and enter with more enthusiasm into a money-making enterprise, than into a money-giving enterprise for the cause of Christ.

18. You see the delusion of that professor of religion, who more readily loses the spirit of revival than the spirit of speculation--in other words, whose religious zeal can be cooled down by an opportunity to make money, and who can be driven away from God and prayer, by the opening of navigation, the coming in of the business season, or when any new project of money-making comes up before the public. There are many painful instances, in which professors of religion will seem to bustle about and be active in religion,

at seasons of the year when they have little else to do, or when little can be done at money-making; but are ever ready to backslide, and are sure to do so, whenever an opportunity occurs to favor their own interests. But this is almost too plain a case of delusion to need remark.

19. In the light of this subject, you can see that there is no true spirituality without real benevolence of heart and life. Many persons seem to be engaged in a most absurd attempt to keep up spirituality and a spirit of prayer and intercourse with God, while they live and conduct their business upon principles of selfishness. Now nothing can be a greater insult to God, than this--to pray for His Spirit, to attempt to have intercourse with Him, or even pretend to be His friend, while as a matter of fact selfishness is the rule of your life.

20. If "it is more blessed to give than to receive," what infinitely great satisfaction must God take in supporting so great a family. He is pouring out, from His unwasting fulness, an ocean of blessings continually. And what an infinite gratification it must be to His benevolent mind to plan and execute all the good that He is planning, and executing, and will plan and execute to all eternity.

21. We see from this subject, how to understand that declaration concerning Christ, "that for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is for ever set down at the right hand of God." Although multitudes of things connected with the Atonement were in themselves painful, yet, upon the whole, the great work was a source of infinite satisfaction to the Father and the Son. And God is virtuous in the Atonement, just in proportion as he really enjoys the making of it Himself. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver;" and we always regard that self-denial as most virtuous, that is exercised most willingly. And where the greatest self-denial is exercised, not only with great willingness, but with great joyfulness, for the sake of doing good to others, we pronounce that the highest degree of virtue. The Father is represented as being well pleased with the conduct of Christ in the Atonement. He was greatly gratified with the virtue of His Son, and to see Him count the work a joyous one, in so freely and joyfully denying Himself to save His enemies from death.

22. If God finds it "more blessed to give than to receive," why should we not abound with every blessing that we need? Why should we, by our narrow-mindedness and unbelief, render it impossible for God to gratify His benevolent heart in giving us great things?

23. You see the secret of all unbelief in prayer. It is our own selfishness. I have already said that a selfish mind finds it difficult to conceive of the true character of God. A selfish man knows that he gives grudgingly; and he very naturally conceives of God, as being altogether such a one as himself. He finds it exceedingly difficult to get hold of the rare and great idea, that God is his exact opposite in this respect--that giving is His happiness--that He has infinitely more satisfaction in giving good things, than we have in receiving them--that He has greater pleasure in giving things, than the most avaricious man on earth has in getting. But it is no wonder that selfish minds are slow to understand and believe this.

24. There is no religion but that which consists in a sympathy with God, in being benevolent as He is benevolent; in having a benevolent disposition--a settled, fixed, abiding disposition to benevolence. 1 John 4:7, 8, 16: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. * * * * And he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/blessednesss-of-benevolence/>

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