

# Unfailing Crystal Love

by Charles Finney

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*In 'Unfailing Crystal Love,' Charles Finney explores the nature of Christian love, emphasizing its role in fulfilling the law and its manifestation in our relationships with God and others.*

**Scripture:** Micah 6:8, Matthew 22:37-40, John 17:9, Acts 20:35, Romans 13:10, 1 Corinthians 13:1-7, James 2:8, 1 John 4:8, 1 John 4:19

**Topics:** "The Nature of Love", "Christian Zeal"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the profound nature of Christian love, distinguishing between benevolence and complacency, and asserting that true love is the fulfillment of God's law. He explains that love can manifest as both an affection of the will and an involuntary emotion, and that perfect love leads to self-denial and obedience to God's will. Finney argues that love to our neighbor is intrinsically linked to love for God, and that all actions should stem from a heart filled with love, which is the essence of true Christianity. He warns against zeal without love, highlighting that genuine Christian zeal is characterized by kindness and a desire for unity rather than division. Ultimately, Finney calls for believers to strive for perfect love, which transforms both individual lives and society as a whole.

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## Transcript

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" --Romans 13:10.

The two principal forms of Christian love are benevolence and complacency. Benevolence is an affection of the mind or an act of the will that desires to promote the happiness of its object. Benevolence should be exercised toward all beings, irrespective of their moral character. Complacency is due only to the good and holy.

Love may exist either as an affection or as an emotion. When love is an affection, it is voluntary and consists in the act of the will. When it is an emotion, it is involuntary. They are not directly dependent on the will or controlled by a direct act of will. The virtue of love is mostly in the form of an affection. The happiness of love is mostly in the form of an emotion. If the affection of love is very strong, it produces a high degree of happiness; but the emotion of holy love is happiness itself.

CHOOSING TO LOVE

The emotion of love is involuntary. I don't mean that the will has nothing to do with it, but that it isn't the result of a mere or direct act of the will. No man can exercise the emotion of love by merely willing it. And emotions may often exist in spite of the will. Individuals often feel improper emotions rising in their minds and try to banish them by direct efforts of will. Finding that impossible, they conclude they have no control of these emotions.

But emotions can always be controlled by the will in an indirect way. The mind can bring up any kind of emotion it chooses by directing the attention to the proper object. They will be certain to rise in proportion to the attention fixed upon it, provided the will is right in regard to the object. So, the mind can be rid of improper or disagreeable emotions by turning the attention entirely away from the object and not allowing the thoughts to dwell on it.

Ordinarily, the emotions of love toward God are experienced when we exercise love toward him in the form of affection. But this is not always the case. We may exercise good will toward any object yet at times feel no sensible emotions of love. It is not certain that even Jesus exercised emotional love toward God at all times. A person can exercise affection and be guided and governed by it in all his actions without any felt emotion.

A husband and father may labor for the benefit of his family, having his very life controlled by affection for them. He may feel no sensible emotions of love for them at the time. His work may take up his mind so much that he has scarcely a thought of them. He may feel no emotion toward them, yet he is guided and governed by affection for them. Again, an affection is an act of the will or a volition.

Love to our neighbor naturally implies the existence of love to God, and love to God naturally implies love to our neighbor: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another has fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Romans 13:8-9).

Love to our neighbor implies the existence of love to God; otherwise it could not be said that "he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." James recognized the same principle, when he says, "If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well" (James 2:8). Here love to our neighbor is spoken of as obedience to the whole law. Benevolence, or good will to our neighbor, naturally implies love to God. So the love of complacency toward holy beings naturally implies love to God, who is a being of infinite holiness.

All that is required of man by God consists in love, in various modifications and results. (See Micah 6:8.) Love is the sum total of all. The Scriptures fully teach that love is the sum total of all the requirements, both of the law and gospel. Our Savior declares that the great command to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself, is the sum total of all the law and the prophets. (See Matthew 22:37-40.) It implies and includes all that the Scriptures, the law, and the gospel require.

## GOD'S PERFECT LOVE

God is love, and to love is to be like God; and to be perfect in love is to be perfect as God is perfect. All God's attributes consist in love, acting under certain circumstances and for certain ends. God's justice in punishing the wicked, His anger at sin, etc., are only exercises of His love to the general happiness of His Kingdom.

All that is good in man is some modification of love. Hatred of sin is only love of virtue acting itself out in opposing whatever is opposed to virtue. True faith implies and includes love, and faith that has no love in it or does not work by love has no part in Christianity. Christian faith is an affectionate confidence in God.

One kind of faith in God has no love in it. The devil has that kind of faith. The convicted sinner has it. But there is no virtue in it. Faith might even rise to the faith of miracles, yet if there is no love in it, it amounts to nothing. The apostle Paul, in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, said, "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2).

Repentance that does not include love is not repentance toward God. True repentance implies obedience to the law of love and, consequently, opposition to sin.

The highest degree of emotion is not essential to perfect love. The Lord Jesus Christ very seldom had the highest degree of emotion, yet He always had perfect love. He generally manifested little emotion or excitement. Excitement always equals the strength of the emotions. The Savior generally remained remarkable calm. Sometimes His indignation was strong or His grief was overwhelming, and sometimes He rejoiced in spirit. But He was usually calm and manifested no high degree of emotion. The emotion of love in a high degree is plainly not essential to perfect love.

The growth of the mind in knowledge naturally implies growth in love. The Lord grew in stature and in favor with God and man. As He grew in knowledge, He grew in love toward God and in favor with God. His love was perfect when He was a child, but it was greater when He became a man. As a human being, Jesus probably continued to increase in love to God as long as He lived. It may be so with all the saints in glory--their perfect love will increase throughout eternity.

In perfect love, love cannot always be exercised toward all individuals alike. You cannot think of everyone you know at once. The degree of love toward an individual depends on the fact that he is present in the thoughts.

The spirit of prayer is not always essential to pure and perfect love. The saints in heaven have pure and perfect love for all beings, yet we do not know if they have the spirit of prayer for anyone. You may love any individual strongly yet not have the spirit of prayer for him. The Spirit of God may not lead you to pray for his salvation. Jesus Christ said expressly that He did not pray for all mankind: "I pray not for the world" (John 17:9).

This has been a great mistake in regard to prayer. Some suppose Christians haven't done their duty if they haven't prayed in faith for every sinner on earth. Then Jesus Christ never did His duty, for He never did this. God has never told us He will save all mankind and never gave us any reason to believe He will do it. How then can we pray in faith for the salvation of all? What does that faith have to rest on?

## THE EVIDENCE OF PERFECT LOVE

Excitement exhausts our powers. Although one may feel more like lying down and sleeping than he does like praying, his love may still be perfect. The Lord often felt this weariness and exhaustion.

If perfect love is to reign, there must be nothing in the mind inconsistent with love--no hatred, malice, wrath, envy, or any other negative emotion that are inconsistent with it. All our actions, words, and thoughts must be continually under the entire and perfect control of love.

In perfect love, the love to God is completely supreme, so entirely above all other objects that nothing else is loved in comparison. God is loved for the excellence of His character.

Love to our neighbor should be equal. His interest and happiness should be regarded by us as of equal value with our own, and he and his interests are to be treated accordingly by us.

Perfect love to God and man will certainly create delight in self-denial for the sake of promoting the interests of God's Kingdom and the salvation of sinners. Affectionate parents delight in self-denial for the sake of promoting the happiness of their children. A loving father labors from year to year, rising early and eating the bread of carefulness to promote the welfare of his family. He counts all his self-denial and toil not as a grief or a burden but as a delight because of love for his family.

Loving parents rejoice more in gifts to their children than they would in enjoying the same things themselves. What parent does not enjoy giving a piece of fruit to his little child more than eating it himself?

The Lord Jesus enjoyed more solid satisfaction in working out salvation for mankind than any of His saints can ever enjoy in receiving favors at His hands. He testifies that it is more blessed to give than to receive. (See Acts 20:35.) This was the joy set before Him for which He endured the cross and despised the shame. His love for mankind was great, and it constrained Him to undertake this work and sustained Him triumphantly through it.

The apostle Paul did not count it grief to be hunted from place to place, imprisoned, scourged, stoned, and counted the offscouring of all things for the sake of spreading the gospel and saving souls. It was his joy. The love of Christ so constrained Him that it was his highest delight to lay himself on that altar as a sacrifice.

Other individuals have had the same mind as the apostle. They would be willing to live to the end of time if they could do good, promote the Kingdom of God, and save the souls of men.

Perfect love leads a person to obey God not because he fears the wrath of God or hopes to be rewarded but because he loves God and loves to do His will. Two extremes exist on this subject. One class makes virtue to consist in doing right simply because it is right, without any reference to the will of God or any influence from His love. Another class makes virtue to consist in acting from love to the employment, without reference to God's authority as Ruler and Law-giver. Both of these are in error.

To do a thing simply because one thinks it right is not virtue. Neither is it virtue to do a thing because one loves to do it, with no regard to God's will. A woman might do something because she knew it would please her husband. But if she did the same thing because she loved to do it, with no regard to her husband, it wouldn't be virtue as it respects her husband. If a person loves God, as soon as he knows God's will, he will do it because it is God's will. Perfect love leads to universal obedience to God's will in all things because it is His will.

## DYING TO THE WORLD

The individual who exercises perfect love will be dead to the world. He will be cut loose from the influence of worldly considerations. Perfect love will so annihilate selfishness that he will have no will but the will of God and no interest but God's glory.

A loving wife will cut loose from her friends as if she were dead to them and not pay the least regard to what they say. She will leave all the riches, honors, and delights they can offer to join the husband whom she loves and live with him in poverty, disgrace, or exile. Her affection is so great that she will joyfully go from a palace to a cave and be perfectly happy. And all that her friends can say against the man of her affection only makes her cling more closely to him.

This one all-absorbing affection has actually killed all the influences that used to act on her. To attempt to influence her by such things is vain. Only one avenue can approach her mind, and only one class of motives move her--and that is through the object of her affection.

The perfect love of God operates in the same way. A mind filled with perfect love is impossible to divert from God. Take away his worldly possessions, his friends, his good name, or his children; send him to prison, beat him with stripes, bind him to the stake, fill his flesh full of pine knots, and set him on fire; and then leave him his God, and his is happy. His strong affection can make him insensible to everything else. It is as if he were dead to the world.

Cases have been known of martyrs who, while their bodies were frying at the stake, were so perfectly happy in God that they lost the sense of pain. Put such a one in hell, in the lake of fire and brimstone, and, as long as the love of God fills his soul, he is happy.

We have all witnessed or heard of cases of affection where a person lives only for a loved object. Sometimes parents live for an only child, and when that child dies, they wish themselves dead. Sometimes a husband and wife have such an absorbing affection for each other that they live for nothing else. If the husband dies, the wife pines away and dies also. The soul-absorbing object for which she lived is gone, and why should she live any longer?

When an individual is filled with the perfect love of God, he wishes to live only to love and serve God. He is dead to the world and his own reputation. He has no desire to live for any other reason--here, in heaven, or anywhere else in the universe--than to glorify God. He is willing to live anywhere and suffer throughout eternity if it will glorify God.

I often heard a friend say, "I would never think of living a single moment for any purpose other than to glorify God, any more than I should think of leaping right into hell." This was said soberly and deliberately, and his whole life corresponded with the declaration. He was intelligent, sober-minded, and honest, and I have no doubt that he expressed what had been his fullest conviction for years.

What was this but perfect love? What more does any angel in heaven do than this? His love may be greater in degree because his strength is greater. But the highest angel could not love more perfectly than to sincerely say, "I would rather leap into hell than live one moment for anything besides glorifying God." What more could Jesus Himself say?

## THE FRUIT OF LOVE

Perfect joy and peace are the natural results of perfect love. Turn your attention to what Paul says in the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians. The word translated charity means love: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am becoming as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing" (1

Corinthians 13:1-2). He might have enough faith to move mountains from their everlasting foundations and yet have no love.

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). You see how far a man can go without love.

"Charity suffereth long." Long-suffering is meekness under opposition or injury. One of the effects of love is to bear great provocations and not retaliate or revile. Love "is kind," or affectionate in all relationships, never harsh, rude, or needlessly giving pain to any. Love "envieth not," never dislikes others because they are more thought of, noticed, honored, useful, or wise. Love "is not puffed up" with pride but is always humble and modest. (See 1 Corinthians 13:4).

"Love doth not behave itself unseemly" but is naturally pleasant and courteous toward all. However unacquainted the individual may be with the ways of society, if he is motivated by perfect love, it is natural for him to be kind, gentle, and courteous. Love "seeketh not her own" or has no selfishness, and "is not easily provoked." This is always the effect of love. A loving mother bears with her children because she loves them. (See verse 5.) If you see an individual that easily plies into a passion when anything goes wrong, he is by no means perfect in love. To be easily provoked is always a sign of pride. If a person is full of love, it is impossible to make him exercise sinful anger while love continues. He exercises such indignation as God exercises at what is base and wrong, but he will not be provoked by it.

Love "thinketh no evil" (verse 5). Show me a man who is always suspicious of the motives of others, forever criticizing the words and actions of his fellowmen, and I will show you one who has the devil in him, not the Holy Spirit. If an individual is honest and simple-hearted, he will be the last to think evil of others. On the contrary, such people are often easy to take advantage of. Not from any lack of good sense but from the effect of love. They don't suspect evil.

Love "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth" (verse 6.) A man who exults at his neighbor's fall or cries out, "I told you so" is far from being perfect in love.

"Love beareth all things," all injustices and injuries, without revenge. Love "believeth all things" instead of doubting what is in favor of others, always ready to believe good wherever there is the least evidence of it. Love "hopeth all things," even where there is reason to suspect evil. As long as there is room for hope, love puts the best construction upon the things it will bear (verse 7).

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbor" (Romans 13:10). No ill! Perfect love never overreaches, defrauds, oppresses, or does any wrong to a neighbor. How can a man who hates or injures his neighbor pretend to love God?

James says, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26). The man that professes Christianity yet allows himself to speak against his neighbor with an unbridled tongue deceives himself if he thinks he loves his neighbors as himself.

## TRUE CHRISTIAN ZEAL

People often intellectually understand about the Lord and can share it with others, while it is plain they are not motivated by the spirit of love. They do not have the law of kindness of their lips.

Individuals who have great religious knowledge and zeal, without love, are unlovely and dangerous. They are always censorious, proud, heady, and high-minded. They may make a strong impression but don't produce true Christianity. They zealously affect you but not well.

If the light in a man's mind is accompanied with love, his zeal will not be sectarian in its character. Show me a man full of jealousy toward those that don't belong to his denomination, and there is a man far from perfect love.

True love is never denunciatory or harsh. If it has occasion to speak of the faults of others, it does it in kindness and sorrow. Perfect love cannot speak in a rough or abusive manner, either to or of others. It will not lay great stress on the ceremonies of religion or be picky about particular measures or forms. Many contend fiercely either for or against certain things, but if they were full of love they wouldn't do it.

Zeal governed by perfect love will not spend itself in contending for or against any forms in religion. Love leads to laying stress on the fundamentals of Christianity. It cleaves to warm-hearted Christians, regardless of their denomination, and delights to associate with them.

True Christian zeal is never full of controversy. Find a man who loves to attend ecclesiastical meetings and enters into all the janglings of the day, and that man is not full of love. To a mind filled with holy love, it is exceedingly painful to see ministers dividing into parties and striving for the mastery. Find an individual who loves controversy in the newspaper, and he is not of love. If he was, he would rather be abused, reviled, and slandered than to defend himself or to reply. As much as possible, he would live peacefully with all men.

Much of what passes for works of Christianity is constrained by outward causes and influences instead of love. Unless love is the mainspring, no matter what the outward action may be--praying, praising, giving, or anything else--there is no truth in it. Much excitement that passes for Christianity has no love.

Religious excitements not grounded in the spirit of love aren't true revivals. People may be excited and bustle about with a great show of zeal and boisterous noise but still have no tenderness of spirit.

I once knew a young man who acknowledged that he aimed at making people angry. He thought that it brought them under conviction and led to their conversion. And so it might if he should go in and utter horrid blasphemies until they were frightened into a consideration of their own character. But who would defend such conduct on the ground that occasionally someone got saved?

If the character of the revival is wrath, malice, and uncharitableness, it is not Christianity. I do not mean that when some or many are "filled with wrath" it is certain evidence that there is no revival. But when the excitement has this prevailing character, it is not true revival. But certainly those filled with a bitter, malicious zeal are not Christians.

## WHEN LOVE REIGNS

If love is not the ruling feature in a person's character, he is not truly converted. However well he appears in other respects, and no matter how clear his views or how deep his feelings, if he doesn't have the spirit of love to God and man, he is deceived.

The time will come when there will be nothing to hurt or destroy, and the spirit of love will universally prevail. What a change in society! What a change in all the methods of doing business and in all the

relationships of mankind. Each man will love his neighbor as himself and seek the good of others as his own! Could one of the saints that live now revisit the earth in that day, he would not know the world--everything will be so altered. "Is it possible," he would exclaim, "that this is the same earth that used to be full of jangling, oppression, and fraud?"

The Lord Jesus Christ is working to bring all men under the influence of love. Is this not a worthy objective? He came to destroy the works of the devil, and this is the way to do it. Suppose the world was full of such men as Jesus Christ was in His human nature. Compare it with what it is now. Would not such a change be worthy of the Son of God? What a glorious end, to fill the earth with love!

Heaven is love--perfect love. It is easy to see what makes heaven on earth in those who are full of love. How sweet their temper, what delightful companions, how blessed to live near them and to associate with them. They are full of candor, kind, gentle, careful to avoid offense, and divinely amiable in all things!

Is this to be attained by men? Can we love God here in this world with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind? Is it our privilege and our duty to have the Spirit of Christ? Beloved, let our hearts be set on perfect love, and let us give God no rest until we feel our hearts full of love and all our thoughts and lives are full of love to God and man.

When will the Church come up to this standard? Let the Church be full of love, and she will be fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible to all wickedness.

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