

The
SPIRIT
FILLED



LIFE

A large, elegant, black, cursive-style letter 'L' is positioned below the word 'FILLED'. It has a long, sweeping stroke that loops back towards the left, crossing over itself. To its right, the word 'LIFE' is written in a bold, sans-serif font.

The
SPIRIT
FILLED



LIFE

CHARLES
FINNEY



WHITAKER
HOUSE

Publisher's note:

This new edition from Whitaker House has been updated for the modern reader.

Words, expressions, and sentence structure have been revised for clarity and readability. Although the more modern Bible translation quoted in this edition was not available to the author, all the Bible quotations were carefully selected in order to make the language of the entire text readily understandable while maintaining the author's original premises and message.

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THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

(Selections excerpted from the book originally titled *Sermons on Gospel Themes*)

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PREFACE

The following sermons are only a few of the many preached by Charles Finney at Oberlin College during the years 1845–1861. Few preachers in any age have surpassed Finney in clear and well-defined views of conscience, and of man's moral convictions. Few have been more fully at home in the domain of law and government. Few have learned more of the spiritual life from experience and from observation. Few have discriminated the true from the false more closely, or have been more skillful in speaking forth their points clearly. Hence, these sermons under God were full of spiritual power. They are given to the public in this form, directed toward a reader rather than listeners, in the hope that at least a measure of the same saving power that touched the listeners may bless the reader.

CHAPTER 1

THE INNER AND OUTER REVELATION

By manifestation of the truth commanding ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

—2 Corinthians 4:2

There are many people who feel that unbelief has rarely, if ever, been more prevalent in our country than at this time, especially among young people. I am not prepared to say it is an honest unbelief, yet it may very well be real. Young men and women may really doubt the inspiration of the Christian Scriptures, not because they have honestly studied those Scriptures and their numerous evidences, but because they have read them little and reasoned about them even less. Moreover, they have almost universally failed to study what their own minds intuitively tell them. They have not examined the original revelation that God has made in each human soul, to see how far this will carry them and how wonderfully it opens the way for understanding and for embracing the revelation given in God's Word.

I have taken as my text verse the words of Paul: "*By manifestation of the truth commanding ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*" Here, Paul was speaking of the gospel ministry that he received, and he was stating how he fulfilled it. He showed plainly that he sought to preach to the human conscience. He

found in each man's soul a conscience to which he could appeal, and to which the manifestation of the truth commended itself.

Probably no thoughtful person has ever read the Bible without noticing that there has been a previous revelation given in some way to mankind. The Bible assumes many things as being already known. When I was studying in my law office, I bought my first Bible as one of my law books. No sooner had I opened it than I was surprised to see how many things it assumes as known, and therefore states with no attempt at proving them. For instance, look at the first verse in the Bible, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1). This assumes the existence of God. It does not attempt to prove this truth; it goes on the presumption that this revelation—the existence of God—has been already made to all who are mature enough to understand it.

In his epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul also asserted that the real Godhead and the eternal power of the one God, though in some sense "*invisible attributes*," are yet "*clearly seen*" in the creation of the world, "*being understood by the things that are made*," so that all wicked men are "*without excuse*" (Romans 1:20). His teaching is that the created universe reveals God. If this is true of the universe around us, it is no less true of the universe within us. The convictions of our own minds truly reveal God and many of the great truths concerning our relationship to Him and to His government.

When we read the Bible attentively, we notice how many things of the utmost importance it assumes. The Bible bases its precepts on them, without attempting to prove them. Thus, we must inquire, "Are these assumptions properly made?"

The answer to this question is found when we look within ourselves, at what our own minds intuitively affirm to be true. Then we will see that we possess an intellectual and moral nature that

reveals great truths concerning God and our relationship to Him and to His law—just as the material world reveals His eternal power and Godhead.

For instance, just as man has a physical nature related to the physical world, we will see that he also has a moral nature related to spiritual and moral truth. As his senses—sight, touch, hearing—perceive certain truths of the external world, so does his spiritual nature perceive certain truths of the spiritual world. No one can carefully consider the first class of truths without being forced to consider and believe the second. Let us see if this is true.

Not long ago, I spoke with a young lady of considerable intelligence who was a skeptic. She claimed to believe in God and in the great truths pertaining to His attributes that are embraced in Deism. But she quite rejected the Bible and all that pertains to a revealed way of salvation.

I began by presenting to her some of the great truths that our own minds affirm concerning God, His attributes, and His government. From here, I went on to show her how the Bible completes the system of truth needed by man as a race of lost sinners. She admitted the first point, of course. Then she saw that the second must also be true if the first was, or there could be nothing for man but hopeless ruin. Seeing the great gulf of despair, she was horrified and saw that only her unbelief was ruining her soul. She then renounced this, yielded her heart to God, and found gospel peace and joy in believing. I will now present the same ideas here that I presented to her.

God's First Revelation

The first great question is, What ideas does our own nature—God's first revelation—give us?

The Idea of God

Undoubtedly, the inner revelation gives us the idea of God. Our own minds affirm that there is and must be a God, and that He must have all power and all knowledge. Our minds also give us God's moral attributes. No one can doubt that God is good and just. People are never afraid that God will do anything wrong. If they are at all afraid of God, it is because He is good—because He is just and holy.

The Idea of Moral Law

Man's nature gives him the idea of moral law. He can no more doubt the existence of a moral law—imposed on himself—than he can doubt the existence of his own soul and body. He knows that he should not be selfish, that he ought to be benevolent. He knows that he is required to love his neighbor as himself—required to sacrifice the lower good, if need be, in order to seek the higher good.

How do men get these ideas? I answer, They have them by nature; the ideas are in their minds before any direct instruction comes from human lips. Otherwise, you could never teach a child these ideas any more than you could teach them to a horse. The child knows these things before he is taught, and he cannot remember when he first heard them.

Suppose you were to close your Bible and ask, "Apart from everything that this Book teaches, how much do I know? How much must I say is true?" You would find that your moral nature gives you the idea of a God and affirms His existence; it gives you His attributes, natural and moral, and also your own moral relationship to Him and to your fellowmen. As proof of this, not one of you can say, "I am under no obligation to love God; I am not required to love my fellowmen." Your moral nature gives you these things—it affirms these truths to you, even more directly and undeniably than your senses give you the facts of the external world.

Furthermore, your moral nature not only gives you the law of supreme love for God, and of equal and impartial love toward your fellowmen, but it also affirms that you are a sinner. You know that you have displeased God—have utterly failed to please Him—and of course that you are under condemnation from His righteous law. You know that God's good law must condemn you, because you have not been good in the sense required by that law. Hence, you must know that you are an outlaw, condemned by law, and without hope from the administration of justice.

Awareness of Impenitence

Another thing that man's nature gives him is the knowledge that he is still unrepentant. His own conscience affirms this to him beyond all contradiction. If you are impenitent, your nature affirms that you are still living in sin and have not reformed in such a way that God can accept your reformation. You know that you do violence to your own conscience, and that, while you are doing this, you can neither respect yourself nor be respected by God. As long as this is the case with you, you know that God cannot forgive you. Moreover, if He does forgive you, it will do you no good; you could not be happy, you could not respect yourself, even if you were told that you were forgiven. Indeed, if your nature spoke out unbiased while you were still doing violence to your conscience, it would not let you believe that you were really forgiven.

I can remember when these thoughts were in my mind *like fire*. I saw that no man could doubt them, any more than he can doubt his own existence. In the same way, you may see these truths and feel their force.

Therefore, you know that, by your sins, you have forfeited the favor of God and have no claim on Him at all in regard to justice. You have cast off His authority, have disowned subjection to His law and government; indeed, you have cast all His precepts beneath

your feet. You can no longer come before God and say, "You should not cast me off; I have not deserved it at Your hand." You can no more say this honestly than you can deny your own existence.

Did you ever think of this? Have you ever tried this, to see what you can honestly do and say before God? Have you ever tried to go into God's presence and tell Him solemnly that He has no right to punish you? Not one of you can tell Him so without being conscious of your blasphemy.

This is a good method, because it may serve to show you how the case really stands. Suppose you try it, then. See what you can honestly say before God, with an approving conscience, when your soul is deeply impressed with the sense of His presence. I am not asking you whether you can harden your heart and violate your conscience enough to blaspheme God to His face. Rather, I am asking you to put the honest convictions of your own conscience to the test and see what they are and what they will allow you to do and say before God. Can you kneel down before Him and say, "God, I deny that I have cast You off. I have never refused to treat You as a friend. I have never treated You as an enemy"? You know that you cannot do anything of the sort without encountering the rebukes of your own mind.

No Hope of Forgiveness under the Law

Again, your own mind tells you that you have no reason to hope for forgiveness under the law. Even with all the light of your Deism, you can discern no grounds for pardon. Apart from the Bible, all is dark as death. There is no hope. If you cherish any hope of forgiveness apart from the Bible, it must be in direct opposition to your own solemn convictions. You can never infer from the goodness of God that He *can* forgive, much less that He *must*.

One of the first Universalist preachers I ever heard speak announced, at the beginning of his sermon, that he believed God

would save all men because of His goodness. I clearly remember how perfectly shallow his ideas appeared, and how absurd his assumptions were to me. I was not a Christian then, but I saw at a glance that he might do better to believe that, because of the goodness of God, He would forgive *no one* rather than everyone. It seemed very clear to me that, if God were good and had made a good law, He would sustain it. Why not? God's law must be a good one; how could a Being of infinite wisdom and love impose any law but a good law? And if it is a good law, it has a good purpose to fulfill. A good God cannot allow it to fail in fulfilling that purpose by letting it come to nothing through inefficiency in its administration.

I knew enough about law and government to know that a firm hand in administration is essential to any good results from a law, no matter how good the law may be. Suppose a law were left to be trampled underfoot by hardened, blasphemous transgressors. Then suppose that an indiscriminate pardon were given and nothing were done to sustain the law. In such a case, there would be an end of all authority and a definite annihilation of all the good hoped for under its administration. Considering this, how can a rational individual infer from God's goodness that He will pardon all sinners?

Suppose that a riot erupts in your town. The rioters tear up the train tracks, burn down the bridges, run whole trains off their tracks, and crush the flesh of hundreds en masse into heaps of blood and bones. When the guilty are arrested and convicted by due course of law, the question will come up, Will the mayor pardon them? He might be very much inclined to do so, if he could. But the question is, Can a good mayor do it? Supposing that he is purely good and truly wise, what would he do? Will you say, "Oh, he is too good to punish! He is so good, he will certainly pardon"? If a pardon were indiscriminately given, and given to all, would the highest respect for law and the best obedience be

secured? Everybody knows that this is sheer and utter nonsense. No man who ever had any interactions with the responsibilities of government, or who has ever learned the ABCs of human nature in this context, can for one moment suppose that such pardon can replace punishment with any result other than pure ruin. Indeed, if the ruler is good, he will surely punish the rioters; and the more goodness he has in his character, the surer the punishment will be.

You, sinners, are under law. If you sin, you must see great reason why God should punish and not forgive.

The Need for a Second Revelation

Here is another fact. When you look at yourself and your moral position, you find yourself twice dead. You are *civilly* dead, in the sense of being condemned by law, an outcast from the favor of government. You are also *morally* dead, for you do not love God, do not serve Him, have no tendency to be drawn back into sympathy with Him. Rather, you are dead to all careful thought in this direction. You are indeed alive to your own low, selfish interests, but dead to God's interests. You care nothing for God except to avoid Him and escape His judgment. You know all this, beyond all doubt.

In this condition, without a further revelation, where is your hope? You have none, and you have no basis for any.

Furthermore, if a future revelation is to be made, revealing some basis for pardon, you can see with the light now before you that it must come from God. The first revelation shows you that if help ever comes, it cannot come out of yourself, but must come from God. You can see what more you need from Him. Help cannot come from His justice, but must come from His mercy. It cannot come out of law, but must come from some extra provision by which law may have its demands satisfied other than through

the penalty being carried out on the offender. Somebody must intervene for you—somebody who can take your part and stand in your place before the offended law.

Did you never think of this? In the position where you now stand, and where your own nature and your own convictions place you, you are compelled to say, "My case is hopeless! I need a double salvation!" You need salvation both from condemnation and from sinning; first from the curse, and second from the tendency to commit sin. If you were to ask for a revelation to meet these needs of your lost soul, where could you find it? Is it to be found in all of nature? No; it is nowhere. Look into the irresistible convictions of your own moral being; they tell you of your needs, but they give you nothing with which to meet those needs. Your own moral nature shows that you need an atoning Savior and a renewing Spirit. Nothing less can meet the case of a sinner condemned, outlawed, and doubly dead by the moral corruption of all his voluntary powers.

The worst harm that unbelief causes is that it ignores all this; it takes no notice of one entire side of our nature—the most important side. Those who do not believe the Gospel talk a great deal about philosophy, yet they restrict themselves to the philosophy of the outer world and have no eye for the inner and higher nature. They ignore the fact that our moral nature affirms an entire class of great truths with even more force and certainty than the senses affirm the facts of the external world. Truly, this is a great and fatal omission!



REMARKS

1. Without the first revelation, the second could not be satisfactorily proved. When the Bible reveals God, it assumes that

our minds affirm His existence and that we need no higher proof. When it reveals His law, it presupposes that we are capable of understanding it and of grasping the significance of its moral claims. When it prescribes duty, it assumes that we ought to feel the force of obligation to obey it.

Now, the fact that the Bible does make many assumptions of this kind establishes an intimate connection between the Scriptures and the laws of the human mind. If these assumptions are well and truly made, then the divine authority of the Bible is abundantly sustained by its harmony with the nature of man. It fits the beings to whom it is given, both intellectually and morally. But on the other hand, if these assumptions had proved false, it would be impossible to sustain the credibility of the Scriptures as coming from a wise and honest Being.

2. Having the first revelation, to reject the second is most absurd. The second is, to a great extent, a reaffirmation of the first, with important additions, including the Atonement (and thus the possibility of pardon) and the gift and work of the Spirit (and thus the analogous possibility of being saved from sinning).

Now, the things that the first revelation affirms and the second revelation reaffirms are fundamental in any revelation of moral duty to moral beings. They are so fundamental that, since they are taught so intuitively and undeniably, we can only convict ourselves of extreme absurdity if we then reject the second revelation. Logically, there seem to be no grounds left on which to base a denial of the written revelation. Its supplementary doctrines are certainly not intuitive truths, but they are directly related to man's needs as a lost sinner, and they richly supply those needs. Moreover, they are so beautifully related to the requirements of God's government, and so amply meet them, that no intelligent mind, once understanding all these things in their actual relationships, can fail to recognize their truthfulness.

3. The study of the first revelation brings us to an intellectual reception of the second. If a man will thoroughly examine and understand what his own mind tells him and then come to the Scriptures and properly understand their relationship to his own moral nature, moral convictions, and moral needs, I believe he must be compelled to say, "All of it is true; this Book is all true! They coincide so wondrously, and the former sustains the latter so admirably and so triumphantly, a man can no more deny the Bible after knowing all his own moral position than he can deny his own existence."

4. You see why so many people reject the Bible. They have not read *themselves* well. They have not looked within, to read carefully the volume that God has put on record there. They have attempted to hush and smother the ever rising convictions of their own moral natures. They have refused to listen to the cry of need that swells up from their troubled souls of guilt. Hence, they are yet strangely ignorant of one whole volume of revelation. This ignorance accounts for their rejection of the Bible.

Suppose I told you the two great precepts of the moral law. Wouldn't their obvious nature and importance cause you to feel that these precepts must be true and must be from God? As I presented more of the precepts' particulars, you would still affirm, "These must be true; these must certainly have come down from heaven." Even if I were to go back to the Mosaic Law (a Law that many people oppose because they do not understand the circumstances that called for such a Law) and to explain the reasons for its statutes, every man would have to affirm the rightness of those statutes. The Old Testament, I am aware, reveals truth under a veil, the world not being prepared then for its clearer revelation. (See 2 Corinthians 3:14–16.) The veil was taken away when, in the fullness of time, people were prepared for unclouded revelations of God in the flesh. (See Galatians 4:4.)

Therefore, the reason why so many people receive the Bible is not that they are gullible and swallow absurdities with ease. Rather, the Bible commands itself so irresistibly to each man's own nature and to his deep and restless convictions, he has no choice but to receive it—he would violate his inner convictions if he were to reject it. Man's whole nature cries out, "This is just what I need!"

One young lady with whom I spoke could not help but abandon her unbelief and yield up her heart to God when she had reached this point. I said, "Do you admit that there is a God?" She answered, "Yes." "Do you admit that there is a law?" "Yes." "Do you admit to your personal guilt?" "Yes." "And your need of salvation?" "Oh, yes." I then asked, "Can you help yourself?" She said, "Ah, no, indeed. I do not believe I can ever be saved." "But God can save you. Surely nothing is too hard for Him," I told her. (See Jeremiah 32:17, 27.) She replied, "My own nature has bound me. I am in despair; there is no way of escape for me. You know, I don't believe the Bible, and here I am in darkness and despair!"

At this point I began to speak of the Gospel. I said to her, "God has come down and dwelt in human flesh to meet the case of such sinners as you are. He has made an ample atonement for sin. What do you think of that?" "That is exactly what I need," she said, "if it were only true." "If it is not true," I said, "you are lost beyond hope! Then why not believe?" "I cannot believe it," she said, "because it is incredible. It is a great deal too good to be true!" "And isn't God good," I said, "infinitely good? Then why do you object that anything He does is too good to be true?" "That is what I need," she repeated, "but how can it be so?" "Then you cannot give God credit for being so good!" I said. She replied, "Oh, I see it is my unbelief! But I cannot believe. It is what I need, I can plainly see; but how can I believe it?"

At this point I rose up and said to her solemnly, "The crisis has come! There is now only one question for you: Will you believe

the Gospel?" She raised her eyes, which had been covered for half an hour or more. Every feature showed the most intense agitation. I repeated, "Will you believe God? Will you give Him credit for sincerity?" At that moment, the young lady threw herself upon her knees and burst into loud weeping. What a scene—to see a skeptic beginning to give her God credit for love and truth! To see the door of light and hope opened, and heaven's blessed light breaking in upon a desolate soul! Have you ever witnessed such a scene? When this young woman next opened her lips, it was to praise her Savior!

The Bible assumes that you have enough light to see, to do your duty, and to find the way to heaven. A great many of you are perhaps bewildered in regard to your religious opinions, believing in loose and skeptical ideas. You have not seen that it is the most reasonable thing in the world to acknowledge and embrace this glorious truth. Will you allow yourself to go on, bewildered, without considering that you are yourself a living, walking revelation of truth? Will you refuse to come into a relationship with God and Christ that will save your soul?

In my early years, when I was tempted to skepticism, I can well remember that I said to myself, "It is much more probable that ministers and the multitudes of good men who believe the Bible are right, than that I am right. They have examined the subject, but I have not. It is therefore entirely unreasonable for me to doubt."

There is no reason why you should not say, "I know the Gospel is suited to my needs. I know I am afloat on the vast ocean of life, and if there is no Gospel, there is nothing that can save me. It is therefore doing no good for me to stand here and raise frivolous objections. I must examine this matter. I can at least see that if God offers me mercy, I must not reject it." Doesn't this Gospel show you how you can be saved from hell and from sin? Oh, then,

believe it! Let the blessed truth find a heart open to it. When you dare to give God credit for all His love and truth, and when you bring your heart under the power of this truth and yield yourself up to its blessed influence, that will be the dawn of morning to your soul! “*Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely*” (Revelation 22:17).