

Principles of Righteousness

Finney's Lessons on Romans

Volume I

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition

**SAMPLES
FIRST LESSON
PARTS OF
COWLES COMMENTARY
STUDY QUESTIONS**

C. G. Finney

Books by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

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Principles of Righteousness

Finney's Lessons on Romans
Volume I

Charles Grandison Finney

With Commentary from Henry Cowles
The Longer Epistles of Paul

Compiled and Newly Edited for Today by
L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”—Romans 14:17



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The Charles G. Finney Lessons on Romans

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Principles of Righteousness

Volume I

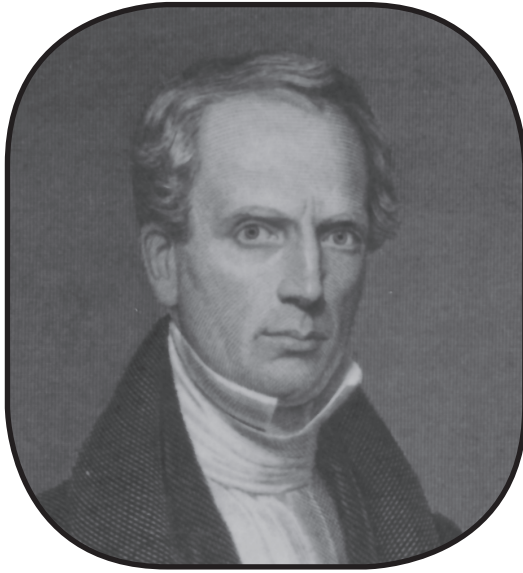
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Charles Grandison Finney

Revivalist, Pastor, and Theologian

1792-1875



“The writer is inclined to regard Charles G. Finney as the greatest evangelist and theologian since the days of the apostles. Over eighty-five in every hundred persons professing conversion to Christ in Finney’s meetings remained true to God. Finney seems to have had the power of impressing the conscience with the necessity of holy living in such a manner as to procure the most lasting results.”

From *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* by James Gilchrist Lawson, Anderson, Indiana: The Warner Press, 1978, page 175.

Preface

Charles G. Finney's *Principles of Righteousness: Finney's Lessons on Romans*, Volume I, begins the new "Finney's Principles" series, which commenced twenty-five years ago with the first book in the series *Principles of Prayer*, published by Bethany House Publishers in 1980. No one knew at the time that Finney's lectures and sermons in this series would become immensely popular. Of course, many devoted Christians promoted Finney's teachings.

Finney's inspired preaching eventually led him to be named "America's Greatest Revivalist." He inspired Christians all around the world to live totally for Jesus Christ. Most of the revivals that followed Finney's successful endeavors relied either directly or indirectly on the principles and theology that Finney used and taught, especially in his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*.

As I reflect on the past twenty-five years, many of the best teachers of Finney's revival theology have gone to be with the Lord. I think especially of those who tremendously helped me in my Christian walk, Harry Conn and Gordon Olson. The popularity and life-transforming teachings of Finney, promoted in so many effective ways by these two men and others, gave many the desire to read as many of the sermons and lectures by Finney as they could find. In turn, the Holy Spirit moved me to compile and edit the first "Finney's Principles" series. Though not a real part of that series, the last Charles Finney book that I helped compile and edit was *Finney's Systematic Theology*.

Agion Press revives the "Finney's Principles" series beginning with *Principles of Righteousness*, the first of three volumes of Finney's Lessons on the Apostle Paul's *Letter to the Romans*. To help more people study Finney today, I have newly edited *Finney's Lessons on Romans* for today's

reader. Also, in this new series, you will find Study Questions for Individuals and Groups in the back of the book, and the Commentary by Henry Cowles on the key verses that relate to *Finney's Lessons on Romans*. Agion Press has enlarged the type and the book size for easier reading, annotating, and study. The titles *Principles of Righteousness*, *Principles of Peace*, and *Principles of Joy in the Holy Spirit* come from the theme of Romans 14:17, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Study guides, notebooks, and additional free resources are available on the "Finney's Principles" website at FinneysPrinciples.org.

I do wish to thank my family for loving and helping me in many ways over the years as I have served as a pastor and have studied Finney's works. Once again, Kathryn Winterscheidt has created a beautiful book cover, as she did for my *Prayer Steps to Serenity: The Twelve Step Journey* and the new *Prayer Steps to Serenity: Daily Quiet Time Edition*. All the love, praise, and thanksgiving goes to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, in whose Kingdom I am honored and blessed to serve.

Love in the Lamb of God
L.G. Parkhurst, Jr..
November 30, 2005

1

The Wrath of God Against Those Who Withstand His Truth

1857

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them.—Romans 1:18-19—KJV

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.—Romans 1:18-19—NIV

The context shows that in these words the apostle has his eye especially on those who, not having a written revelation from God, might yet know Him in His works of nature. Paul's view is that God's invisible attributes are apparent to the human mind. Since the creation of our world, God has revealed His attributes by the things He has made. In and by means of His works, we may learn of His eternal power

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and His real divinity. Hence, everyone has some means of knowing the great truths that pertain to God, our infinite Creator. Therefore, God may justly hold people responsible for accepting this truth reverently, and rendering to their Creator the homage due Him. They are utterly without excuse if they withhold the honor God deserves to receive from them.

What is the true idea of unrighteousness?

Unrighteousness cannot be less than the negation of righteousness, and may imply more or less of positive wickedness. Here the question will arise—what is righteousness? To which I answer, rightness—moral rightness. Originally, the term was used in regard to material things to denote what is straight, for example, a straight line. Unrighteousness, the opposite of this, must mean what is morally crooked, distorted—not in harmony with the rightness of God's law. To denote sin, the scriptures employ some terms which properly signify a negation, or utter absence of what should be. Some theologians have maintained that the true idea of sin is simply negative, supposing sin to consist in not doing and not being what one ought to do and to be. This idea is strongly implied in our text. Sin is, indeed, a neglect to do known duty and a refusal to comply with known obligation. Inasmuch as love is required always and of all people, sin must be a state of real disobedience. Suffice it then to say that unrighteousness is an omission—a known omission—a refusal to be what we should be, and to do what we should do. Of course, it is only and wholly voluntary. The mind's refusal to obey God is a matter of its own free choice.

What is "holding the truth in unrighteousness"?

The original definition of "hold" means to hold back, to restrain. The idea here is that a person restrains the legitimate influence of the truth and will not let it have its proper sway over his will.

God so constituted the human mind that truth is its natural stimulus. The stimulus of truth, if the truth is not restrained and held back, would lead the mind naturally to obey God. A person holds back the

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truth through his own unrighteousness when for selfish reasons he overrules and restrains its natural influence and will not allow the truth to take possession and hold sway over his mind.

What is “the wrath of God revealed from heaven”?

God, manifesting himself from heaven, has revealed His high and just displeasure against all restraining of the truth and withstanding of its influence. Before I proceed to show *why* God reveals His wrath from heaven, I must come very near to some of you and talk to you in great frankness and faithfulness. I do not charge on you that you have been outwardly immoral, but you have restrained the truth, you have withstood its influence. Therefore, you are the very persons against whom God reveals His wrath. This is true of everyone who has not given himself up to the influence of truth. You have restrained the natural influence of truth; therefore, God has revealed His wrath against you.

This is a terrible thing. The wrath of a king is terrible. How much more so is the wrath of God! Who can stand before Him when once He shall arise in His wrath to avenge His truth and His own glorious name!

Why does God’s wrath wax hot against this sin?

Comprehensively the reason is this: “Withstanding the truth is resisting God’s revealed claims of love and obedience and is therefore the whole of sin.” When you withhold the truth, you compromise everything. This is the very essence—the true idea of sin. Sin is deliberate, intelligent, and intentional rebellion against God. There could be no obligation until your conscience affirms it to you. The conscience cannot affirm obligation until some knowledge of God is revealed to your mind. When this knowledge of God is revealed, then conscience must and will affirm obligation. After this, the more conscience is developed, the more it unfolds, the more strongly it affirms your obligation to obey God.

Suppose a person were created asleep. Until he awakes, there could be in his mind no knowledge of God—not one idea of God; consequently no sense of obligation to obey God. As soon as the moral functions of

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the reason and the conscience create a sense of obligation, then the mind must make a decision. It must choose either to obey or to disobey God. It must elect either to take God's law as its rule of duty or reject it.

The alternative of rejecting God makes it necessary to hold back the truth and withstand its claims. We might almost say that these processes are substantially identical—resisting the natural influence of God's truth on the mind, and withstanding the known claims of God. When you know the truth concerning God, the great question becomes whether or not you will obey it. If your heart says "No," you do of course resist the claims of truth. You hold it back through your own unrighteousness.

The very apprehending of moral truth concerning God renders it impossible to be indifferent. Once seeing God's claims, you cannot avoid acting upon them one way or the other. After you know your duty, to stop and hold your mind aloof from obedience is being just as wicked as you can be. You disown your whole obligation toward God, and practically say unto God, "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of Your ways." Is not this as wicked as you can be, with the light you may have at the time? What thing could you do more wicked?

Look at this matter a little further. Holding back the truth through unrighteousness implies the total rejection of the moral law as a rule of duty. This must be the case, because when light or understanding concerning the meaning of this law comes before this person, he repels it and resists its claims, thus virtually saying, "That law is no rule of duty to me." Thus resisting the influence of truth, he practically denies all obligations to God. Truth coming before his mind, he perceives his obligation, but he withholds his mind from its sway.

You may have observed that some people seem to have no sense of any other obligation except that created by human law. Legal obligation can reach them, but not moral. They will not pay an honest debt unless it is in such a shape that the strong hand of the law can take hold of them. Others have no sensibility to any claims except those that serve their business reputation. Take away their fear of losing their reputation; remove all the inducements to do right except those that pertain to moral obligation, and see if they will ever do what is right. In a practical sense, they reject and deny God's rights altogether, and equally so, their own obligations to

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God. Their conduct, put into words, would read, “I have some respect for human law and some fear of human penalty; but, for God’s law or penalty I care nothing!” It is easy to see that to hold back the truth in this manner is the perfection of wickedness. Suppose a person refrains from sinning *only* because of his obligations to human laws: he shows that he fears human penalties only and has no fear of God.

Holding the truth in unrighteousness settles all questions regarding a person’s moral character. You may know the person with unerring certainty. He has taken his position. His course is fixed. As to moral obligation, he cares nothing. The fact is this: perceived moral obligation does not influence his actions at all. He has become totally dishonest. This settles the question of his character. Until he reveres God’s authority, there is not a particle of moral goodness in him. He does not act with even common honesty. His moral character toward God is formed and is easily known. If he had any moral honesty, the perceived fact of his own moral obligation would influence his mind; but we see it does not at all. He shuts down the gate on all the claims of truth and will not allow them to sway his will; hence, it must be that his heart is fully committed to wickedness.

God reveals His wrath from heaven against all who hold back the truth because this attitude of the will shows that they are reckless of their obligations toward God. It shows that a moral claim on their heart and conscience goes for nothing. If you restrain the truth from influencing your mind, this very fact proves that you do not mean to serve God. Some of you know that you are not doing what you know to be your duty. You are conscious that the presence of known duty does not move you. You have not done one act of obedience to God’s claims *because* they are God’s claims.

Not only does this settle the question of moral character—which is of itself a good reason for God’s wrath—but it also settles the question of moral relations. Because it shows that your moral character is altogether corrupt and wrong, it also shows that with regard to moral relations, you are really God’s enemy. From the moment you resist the claims of moral truth, God must regard you as His enemy, and not by any means as His obedient subject. Not in any figurative sense, but in its most literal sense,

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you are God's enemy; therefore, God must be highly displeased with you. If He were not, His own conscience would condemn Him. You must know that it must be His duty to reveal to you His displeasure. Since He must feel it, He ought to be open and honest with you. You could not, with good reason, wish God to be otherwise. All of you who know moral truth, yet do not obey it—who admit obligation which yet you refuse to obey—you are the people who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Settle this in your minds—if you restrain the influence of any truth known concerning God and your duty, then against you is His wrath revealed from heaven.

Wherein and how is God's wrath revealed?

Perhaps you are already asking yourself this question. Moralists are prone to make it and to say, "We do not see any wrath coming. If we are as good as those who profess to be Christians, why shall we not be saved as well as they?" Therefore, how does God reveal His wrath against this great wickedness?

By conscience. Your conscience affirms that God must be displeased with you. It certifies to you beforehand that you are guilty and that God cannot accept you.

By remorse. Remorse, which sometimes affects sinners, confirms even more God's displeasure. True, the feeling of remorse belongs to the sensibility or feelings; never the less, remorse does give admonitory warning. Its voice must be accounted as the voice of God in the human soul. God, who made that sensibility so that it will sometimes recoil under a sense of guilt and turn back to consume the life and joy of the soul, did not make it to lie. It is strange that anyone should suppose remorse to be itself the punishment threatened of God against sin and the whole of it. Far from it! Remorse is not that punishment which God has threatened; it is only a premonition of it.

By fear. The very fears people feel are often to be taken as an indication that the thing they dread is a reality. Why is it that people in their sins are so often greatly afraid to die? It is no other than a trumpet-tone of the voice of God sounding up from the depths of their very nature. How

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can they overlook the fact that these grim forebodings of coming doom are indeed a revelation of wrath made in the very nature God has given them!

By judicial abandonment. Another revelation of God's wrath is His judicial abandonment of sinners. God manifests His despair of doing any thing more for their salvation when He manifestly withdraws His Spirit and gives them over to hopeless abandonment. Withdrawing His Spirit, God leaves them in great moral blindness. They may have been able to see and to discriminate spiritual things somewhat before. But after God forsakes them, they seem almost utterly void of this power. Everything is dark; all is confused. Once the light of the Holy Spirit is withdrawn, it is practically vain for the sinner himself or for his sympathizing friends to expect his salvation. This mental darkness over all spiritual things is God's curse on his rejection of truth and significantly forebodes his speedy doom.

By moral paralysis. Analogous to judicial abandonment is the indication given in a moral paralysis of the conscience. Strangely, it seems to have lost its sensibility; its ready ability of moral discrimination is gone. Its perceptions seem unaccountably obtuse, and the tone of its voice waxes feeble and almost inaudible. Practically speaking, one might almost as well have no conscience at all. What does this paralysis of conscience indicate? Plainly, that God has abandoned that soul. The conscience, so long over-borne by a perverse will, gives way; and God ceases to sustain its vitality any longer.

It is painful to see how people in this condition of judicial abandonment and paralysis of conscience strain their endeavors when such debility comes down upon them. They become indifferent and diverting influences are so potent that they drop their endeavors, powerless. Once, their conscience had some activity. Truth fell on their mind with appreciable force, and they were aware of resisting it. However, by and by, a state of moral feeling resulted in which their mind was no longer conscious of refusing; indeed, it seems scarcely conscious of anything whatever. The person has restrained the influence of truth until conscience has mainly suspended its function. Like the drunkard who has lost all perception of the moral wrong of intemperance, and who has brought this insensibility

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on himself by incessant violations of his better judgment, so the sinner has refused to hear the truth, until the truth now refuses to move him. What is the meaning of this strange phenomenon? It is one of the ways in which God reveals His indignation at a person's great wickedness.

Consider this case: an ungodly student, put on the intellectual race-course alongside of his classmates, soon becomes ambitious and jealous. At first, he will probably have some sense of this sin; however, he soon loses this sense and passes on as if unconscious of any sin. What is this but a revelation of God's displeasure?

By direct punishment. The wrath of God against those who hold back the truth in unrighteousness is abundantly revealed in the Bible. Think of what Jesus Christ said to the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees: "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers" (Matthew 23:32—KJV). What did Jesus mean by that? Their fathers had filled their cup of sin until God could bear with them no longer. Then He filled up His cup of wrath and poured it forth on the nation and there was no remedy. Christ intimates that this shall be with the Scribes and Pharisees. What is this but to reveal His wrath against them for holding back the truth through unrighteousness?

By strong delusion. God lets such sinners die in their sins. Observe how, step-by-step, God gave them one revelation after another of His wrath against their sin—remorse, moral blindness, decay of moral sensibility, and the plain assertions of His word. All these failing, He gives them up to some strong delusion that they may believe a lie. God himself says, "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12—KJV). It is painfully instructive to study the workings of modern delusions, especially spiritualism—to notice how it has come in following the track of those great revivals that blessed our country a few years ago. I know scores of people who passed through those revivals unblessed, and now they are mad with this delusion. They saw the glory of God in those scenes of revival power; but they turned away, and now they are mad on their idols, and crazy under their delusions. Having rejected the blessed Holy Spirit, they now follow deceiving spirits. God's word declares, "evil

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men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13—KJV). “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done” (Romans 1:28—NIV). God has given them up to die in their sins, and it will be an awful death! Draw near them gently, and ask a few kind questions. You will soon see that they make no just moral discriminations. All is dark which needs to be light, before they can see and find the gate of life.

REMARKS

You may notice the exact difference between saints and sinners, including among sinners all who profess Christianity who are not in an obedient state of mind. The exact difference is this: saints have adopted Gods’ will as their law of activity, the rule that shall govern all their life and all their heart. You reveal God’s will to them—this settles all further controversy. The very opposite of this is true of the sinner. With the sinner, the fact of God’s supposed will has no such influence at all; usually no influence of any sort, unless it be to excite his opposition. Again, the true Christian, instead of restraining the influence of truth, acts up to his convictions. If the question of oughtness is settled, all is settled.

Suppose I say to a Christian, “I want you to do a certain thing. I think you must give so much of your money to this object.” Then he replies, “I don’t know about that, my money costs me great labor and pains.” But I resume and say, “Let us look calmly at this question.” And then I proceed to show him that the thing I ask of him is beyond a doubt his duty to God and to others. He interposes at once, “You need not say another word; that is enough. If it is my duty to Christ and to His people, I ask no more.”

The sinner is not moved in this way. He knows his duty beforehand, but he has long disregarded its claims on him. You must appeal to his selfish interests if you would reach his heart. With the Christian, you need not appeal to his hopes or his fears. You only need to show him his duty to God. The sinner you can hope to move only by appeals to his self-interests. The reason for this is that his adopted course of life is to serve his

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own interests, nothing higher.

With sinners, the question of religion is one of loss and gain. With Christians, it is only a question of right and duty toward God. This makes truth to the Christian important and duty imperative. But the sinner only asks, "What shall I gain? Or what shall I lose?" It is wholly a question of reward or danger. Indeed, so true is this that ministers often assume that the only availing motive with a sinner must be an appeal to his hopes and fears. They have mostly dropped out the consideration of right as between the sinner and God. They seem to have forgotten that in so far as they stop short of the idea of right and appeal only to the sinner's selfishness, their influence tends to make spurious converts.

If people enter upon the Christian life only for gain in the line of their hopes and fears, you must keep up the influence of these considerations and must expect to work upon these only. That is, you must expect to have selfish "Christians" and a selfish church. If you say to them, "This is your duty," they will reply, "What have we ever cared for duty? We were never converted to the doctrine of doing our duty. We became Christians, only for the sake of promoting our own interests, and we have nothing to do in the Christian life on any other motive." Now observe, they may modify this language a little if it seems too repugnant to the general convictions of decent people; nevertheless, this is their real meaning. They modify its language only on the same general principle of making everything subservient to self.

We see how great a mistake selfish "Christians" make when they say, "Am I not honest toward others? And is this not a proof of my piety?" What do you mean by "honest?" Are you honest toward God? Do you regard God's rights as much as you wish God to regard yours? Perhaps you ask, as many do, "What is my crime?" I answer, "Is it not enough for you to do nothing—really nothing—toward obedience to God? Is it not something serious that you refuse to do God's will and hold back the claims of His truth? What is the use of talking about your morality while you disregard the greatest of all moral claims and obligations—those that bind you to love and obey God? What can it avail you to say perpetually—Am I not moral and decent toward others?"

Sinner, if you think you are almost as good as Christians; in fact, it

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is much nearer the truth to say that you are almost as bad as devils! Indeed, you are fully as bad, except that you do not know as much as devils; therefore, you cannot be as wicked. You say, “We are kind to each other.” So are devils. Their common purpose to war against God compels them to act in unity. They went together into the man possessed with a legion of devils, as we learn in the gospel history (see Mark 5:1-20). Very likely they are as kind toward each other in their league against God and goodness as you are toward your neighbors. Selfish people have little reason to compliment themselves on being kind and good to each other, while they withstand God. In these respects, sinners are only like devils in hell.

Now, my impenitent hearers—what do you say? Putting your conduct toward God into plain language, it would run thus: “You, Lord, call on me to repent. I shall refuse. You strive to enforce my obligation to repent by various truths. I hold back those truths from their legitimate influence on my mind. You insist on my submission to your authority. I shall do no such thing.” This is only translating your current life and bearing toward God into plain words. If you were really to lift your face toward heaven and utter these words, it would be blasphemy. What do you think of it now? Do you not admit and often assert that actions speak louder than words? Do they not also speak more truthfully?

To those of you in business, let me make this appeal. What would you think of people who treated you as you treat God? You take your account to your customer and say, “Your account has been lying a long time past due. Will you be so good as to settle it? You cannot deny that it is a fair account of value received, and I understand you have abundant means to pay it.” Suppose he very coldly refuses. You suggest the propriety of his giving some reasons for this refusal, and he tells you it is a fine time to get bigger interest on his money; therefore, he finds it more profitable to loan it out than to pay his debts. That is all. He is only selfish. All there is of it is simply this, that he cares for his own interests supremely, and cares little or nothing for yours when the two classes of interests—his and yours—come into competition. When you treat God as well as you want your creditors to treat you, you may hold up your head, as far as this goes, as an honest man. But as long as you do the very thing toward God which you condemn as infinitely selfish and mean from others toward you, you

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have little ground for self-complacent pride.

All this would be true and forcible even if God were no greater, no better, and had no higher and no more sacred rights than your own. How much more then are they weighty beyond expression, by how much God is greater, better, and holier than mortals!*

* Charles G. Finney, "The Oberlin Evangelist," December 9, 1857, *Sermons on the Way of Salvation*, 187–202, *Principles of Victory*, 30–37. For Review: Answer the Study Questions on page 171. For further study, read the Henry Cowles Commentary on the scripture text from Romans that relates to *Finney's Lessons on Romans*, Cowles Commentary is included in the back of this book and begins on page 184.

Editor's Note: To assist your study, I have included some scripture quotations that use the word "righteousness" from the Psalms, Proverbs, and Jesus on the following pages in this book: 66, 104, 124, 140, 152, 170. Rather than just include blank even numbered pages when I wanted the new chapter page to begin on the right hand (odd numbered) page, I chose to add these Bible verses in these locations. One way to discover the Bible's meaning of a word is to study how the Bible uses that word, in context, in several locations in the Bible. I hope these verses expand your Biblical understanding of the word "righteousness."

Jesus on Righteousness

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.—Matthew 3:15

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.—Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.—Matthew 5:10

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.—Matthew 5:20

Be careful not to do your "acts of righteousness" before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.—Matthew 6:1

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.—Matthew 6:33

For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.—Matthew 21:32

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.—John 16:8-11

Study Questions for Individuals and Groups

The study questions in *Principles of Righteousness* will serve as a review and help you focus your thoughts on some of the main teachings in each of Charles Finney's sermons on Paul's Letter to the Romans. You can use these questions for personal enrichment and for small group study. Experience indicates that probably no more than five questions can be discussed fully in one hour, so you may want to omit some questions or hold a longer discussion. The study questions that are obviously phrased for a group discussion can be thought about individually. You can also find these questions formatted as helpful handouts for groups or as study guides for notebooks, along with other helpful materials, at the Finney's Principles website at FinneysPrinciples.org. Some may also choose to discuss these and other questions online with people around the world. For online discussion, the editor recommends the Finney-works Group, which can be found at groups.yahoo.com, or visit FinneysPrinciples.org for more information.

1. The Wrath of God Against Those Who Withstand His Truth

1. In this lesson, what did you learn that was new to you? Did you find anything in this lesson that relates to your own life? What aspects of your own life do you need to change in order to avoid withstanding the truth of God? List three things in your life that you want to change.
2. Define these terms: sin, ungodliness, unrighteousness, and wickedness. Today, how comfortable are people when they hear these terms used in describing behavior, especially their behavior? How can Christians help people face the consequences of their behavior so they will repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?
3. Since truth is a natural stimulus to the mind, how can knowing this fact assist and encourage you in your work of evangelism?
4. How does Finney describe the workings of our conscience? Define “a sense of obligation.”
5. Why do you agree or disagree with this statement: “The very apprehending of moral truth concerning God renders it impossible to be indifferent” (see page 4)? Can you confirm or refute Finney’s belief by considering how Peter and John, Ananias and Sapphira, and the high priest and council responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ (see Acts 2-7)?
6. What is the difference between legal obligation and moral obligation? How does refusing to live in accordance with either impact both church and society?
7. Describe the difference between moral honesty and moral dishonesty. How can misunderstanding the Christian faith lead some to remain morally dishonest?
8. List and discuss three ways that God reveals His wrath. Can you think of other ways that Finney omitted in this particular sermon?

Henry Cowles
Commentary on Romans

Romans 1:16-20

Romans 1:16—*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

Paul would say with the strongest emphasis that his omission to visit Rome was by no means because he was ashamed of this gospel. He knew that Rome was a proud city, and the name of the crucified Nazarene of Galilee could not be popular and welcome there. Unmeasured reproach would naturally befall him were he to lift up that cross and name as his banner before the aristocracy and wealth and culture of that great city. However, never the first sense of shame should tinge his cheek or touch his sensibilities. Rather the gospel should be his highest glory, for in it there lay embodied and embosomed the glorious power of God unto the salvation of men, whether Jew or Gentile. Grandly does Paul assume that among all the interests and goods of earth there is nothing to be compared with the soul's salvation—the real saving of people from sin and

bringing them into the purity of truth and the unselfishness of love; into the blessed sympathies of heart-communion with the Infinite God. No work can be worthier and no labor more sublime than to be accumulating and wielding those forces which bring people out of their moral darkness into God's glorious light, lifting their lost souls out of moral ruin into God's great salvation. Therefore, Paul glories in the gospel of Christ, for God works in it and through it with His effective power toward and unto this salvation.

On this passage the reader's attention should be called particularly to the three following points: (1) That in and with this gospel there goes a power of God working unto the salvation of people, a power which is here and not elsewhere, which is so thoroughly involved in this gospel that Paul declares the gospel itself to be that power. This is a truth of surpassing interest and value. (2) That this power avails not to the salvation of all, but only of "every one that believeth." Paul might have left out this limitation if the truth in the case would have borne the omission, and doubtless he would. But, this limitation is a prime condition of the gospel as he held and taught it—salvation, not to all, but only to "every one that believeth." Paul knew very well that gospel truth, like all other truth, must be believed before it can have moral force on human souls. He will have some things to say soon about truth "held in unrighteousness"—held indeed, but *held down* and *held back* so that its moral power on the soul is worse than merely paralyzed. (3) This is the first pivotal text of the epistle. It propounds the first cardinal truth in the goodly system which this epistle will present and discuss.

Romans 1:17—*For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*

This is the second pivotal passage of the epistle, holding in its nutshell form the grand truth of justification by faith as opposed to the Pharisaic scheme of justification by works of law. This passage, being thoroughly vital to the whole epistle and withal somewhat difficult by reason of its conciseness, should be carefully expounded.

I understand Paul to say that in the gospel God has revealed His mode

About Agion Press

Agion Press began in November 2005, with the publication of the limited, numbered, and signed edition of *Principles of Righteousness* by Charles G. Finney. Agion Press expands and improves the new “Finney’s Principles Series” by compiling Finney’s Lessons according to the books of the Bible. Newly edited for today’s readers, the new “Finney’s Principles Series” gives students of Finney improved textual uniformity while conforming to Finney’s meaning. To help readers focus on many of the key thoughts in Finney’s lectures and sermons, the books in the new “Finney’s Principles Series” include Study Questions for individuals and groups. A commentary by Henry Cowles or other commentators on the key verses in Finney’s Lessons will be found in the back of each book. Henry Cowles served as a Professor of Oberlin College and as Editor of the “Oberlin Evangelist,” the college newspaper that printed many of Finney’s sermons. Go to FinneysPrinciples.com for additional free resources and study guides.

Agion Press derives the name from the New Testament Greek word “agion,” which means “to make holy.” Agion Press books will teach the truth in love to help people walk in holiness with Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Charles Finney often affirmed this scriptural truth: “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Regarding Jesus Christ, Agion Press affirms: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). All Agion Press books uphold the truth that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

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