



# THOMAS & BETH HALE MINISTRIES

## A Kingdom Multiplier

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This document is researched, ordered and presented by Dr. Thomas Hale. Its goal is to accelerate and enrich the personal studies of others through a structured guide.

## TRUE AND FALSE CONVERSION

by Charles G. Finney

"Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine, ye shall lie down in sorrow." -- Isaiah 50:11

Evidently, Isaiah was addressing those who professed to be religious and who flattered themselves that they were in a state of salvation. But their hope was a fire of their own kindling, and the sparks were created by themselves. This discussion will be of no use except to those who are honest in applying it to themselves. If you will do this, I may be able to lead you to discover your true state and, if you are now deceived, direct you to the true path of salvation.

The natural state of men before conversion is pure, unmingled selfishness. They have no gospel benevolence. Selfishness is supremely regarding one's own happiness and seeking one's own good because it is his own. Selfish men place their own happiness above other interests of greater value, such as the glory of God and the good of the universe. That men, before conversion, are in this state is evident from many considerations.

Every man knows that all other men are selfish. All the dealings of mankind are conducted on this principle. If any man overlooks this and tries to deal with people as if they were not selfish, he will be thought deranged.

Benevolence is choosing the happiness of others. In a converted state, man's character becomes benevolent or loving. An individual who is converted is benevolent and not supremely selfish. This is God's state of mind.

We are told that God is love. Benevolence comprises His whole character. All His moral attributes are only manifestations of His benevolence. A converted person is in this respect like God. I don't mean that no one is converted unless he is as purely and perfectly benevolent as God is. But his prevailing choice is benevolence. He sincerely seeks the good of others for its own sake. By disinterested benevolence I do not mean that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit. He seeks the happiness of others for their own sake and not for promoting his own happiness.

God is purely benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of promoting His own happiness but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for their own sake. Of course He does feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification. The disinterested man feels happy in doing good. If he did not love and enjoy doing good, it would not be virtue in him.

Benevolence is holiness. The law of God requires that "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind....thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:37,39). The converted man yields to the law of God; and, as much as he is like God, he is benevolent. It is the leading feature of his character.

True conversion is a change from a state of supreme selfishness to benevolence. It is a change in the end of pursuit and not a mere change in the means of attaining the end. That the converted and the unconverted differ only in the means they use, while both are aiming at the same end, is false. Gabriel and Satan are not both aiming to be happy. The archangel does not obey God for the sake of promoting his own happiness.

## **MOTIVE AND ACTION**

A man may change his means and yet have the same end: his own happiness. He may not believe in Jesus or in eternity and yet may see that doing good will be to his advantage in this world. Suppose, then, that his eyes are opened and he sees the reality of eternity. He may take up

religion as a means of happiness in eternity. No virtue lies in this. It is the motive that gives character to the act, not the means employed.

The true and false convert differ in this. The true convert chooses, as the end of his pursuit, the glory of God and the good of His Kingdom. He views this as a greater good than his own happiness. He is not indifferent to his own happiness but prefers God's glory because it is a greater good. He looks on the happiness of every individual according to its real importance, as far as he is capable of valuing it, and chooses the greatest good as his supreme object.

There are ways in which true saints and deceived people agree and ways in which they differ. They may agree in leading a moral life. The difference is in their motives. The true saint leads a moral life because he loves holiness. The deceived person uses morality as the means to effect his own happiness.

They may be equally prayerful as far as the form of praying is concerned. Again, the difference is in their motives. The true saint loves to pray, while the other prays because he hopes to derive some benefit to himself from praying. The true saint expects a benefit from praying, but that is not his leading motive. The other prays from no other motive.

Both may be equally zealous in religion. One may be zealous because his zeal is according to knowledge, and he sincerely desires and loves to promote Christianity for its own sake. The other may show equal zeal to assure his own salvation or because he is afraid of going to hell if he doesn't work for the Lord. He wants to quiet his conscience and doesn't love Christianity for its own sake.

They may be equally responsible to their duties--the true convert because he loves to work for the Lord and the other because he dares not neglect it.

Both may pay equal regard to what is right--the true convert because he loves what is right and the other because he knows he cannot be saved unless he does right. He is honest in his business transactions because it is the only way to secure his own interest. He has the reputation of being honest; but if he has no higher motive, he will have no reward from God.

They may agree in their desire, in many respects. They may agree in their desire to serve God. The true convert serves God because he loves the service of God; and the deceived person serves God for the reward, as the hired servant serves his master.

The true saint desires the conversion of souls because it will glorify God. The deceived person desires the favor of God for personal gain. He will be motivated in this just as he is in giving money. A person can give money to a Bible society or a missionary society from selfish motives alone. He can also desire and work for the conversion of the world from purely selfish motives.

## **HOLINESS AND SELFISHNESS**

Both true and false converts may desire to repent. The true convert abhors sin because it dishonors God. The other desires to repent because he knows that unless he does he will be damned.

They may agree not only in their desires but in their resolutions. Both may resolve to give up sin, obey God, and witness for the Kingdom. They may both resolve it with great strength of purpose but with different motives.

Their designs may be similar. They may both design to glorify God, to convert men, and to extend the Kingdom of Christ. The true saint works from love to God and holiness, and the false convert works for the sake of securing his own happiness. One chooses it as an end, while the other chooses it as a means to promote a selfish end.

Both may design to be truly holy--the true saint because he loves holiness and the deceived person because he knows that he can't be happy any other way.

They may both love the Bible. The true saint loves it because it is God's truth, and he delights in it. The other reads it and applies it to his egocentric hopes.

The true saint loves God because he sees God's character to be supremely lovely and excellent in itself. The other thinks God is his particular friend and is going to make him happy forever. He connects the idea of God with his own interests.

They both may love Christians. The true convert sees in them the image of Christ. The deceived person loves them because they belong to his own denomination or because they are on his side.

They may also agree in hating the same things. They both may hate infidelity and oppose it strenuously--the true saint because it is opposed to God and holiness and the deceived person because it injures his own interests.

The true convert hates sin because it is odious to God, and the deceived person hates it because it is harmful to himself. Many individuals have hated their own sins and yet not forsake them. Often the drunkard looks back at what he once was and abhors alcohol because it has ruined him. And still he continues to drink, although when he looks at the effects, he feels indignation.

## **LOVE OF SAINTS AND SINNERS**

The true saint graciously opposes sinners and abhors any character or conduct calculated to overthrow the Kingdom of God. The false convert opposes sinners because they contradict his religion.

Both may rejoice in the conversion of souls--the true convert because he has his heart set on it and loves it for its own sake. The deceived person loves it because he thinks he has an advancing concern.

Both the true and false convert may mourn at the lack of zeal in the Church. The true convert is distressed because God is dishonored, and the deceived person grieves because his own soul is not happy.

The true convert enjoys spiritual conversation, but the deceived person hopes to derive some advantage from the saints' company. The first enjoys it because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The latter loves to talk about the great interest he feels in religion and the hope he has of going to heaven.

The true saint delights in worship, prayer, hearing the Word of God, and being in communion with God and His saints. The other thinks a religious meeting supports his special hopes. He may have a hundred reasons for loving meetings, yet not because he loves worship in itself.

While both may find pleasure in prayer, the true saint draws near to God and finds delight in communion with Him. No embarrassments keep him from going right to God. The deceived person finds satisfaction in it because it is his duty to pray in secret, and he feels a self-righteous satisfaction in doing it. He may feel a certain pleasure in it, from a kind of excitement of the mind that he mistakes for communion with God.

They both may love God's law. The true saint loves it because it is excellent, holy, just and good. The other thinks it will make him happy if he loves it.

Although each may consent to the penalty of the law, only the true saint consents to it because he feels it just for God to send him to hell. The deceived person thinks he is in no danger from it. He feels a respect for it because he knows that it is right, and his conscience approves it. But he has never consented to it in his own case.

They may be equally liberal in giving to charitable organizations. Two men may give equal sums to a worthy cause but from different motives. One would be just as willing to give even if he knew that no other living person would give. The other gives for the credit of it, to quiet his conscience, or because he hopes to purchase the favor of God.

They may be equally self-denying in many things. Self-denial is not confined to true saints. Look at the sacrifices of the Muslims going on pilgrimages to Mecca. Look at the papists going up and down over the sharp stones on their bare knees until they bleed. But we know that this isn't Christianity. The true saint denies himself for the sake of doing more good to others. He is more set on this than on his own indulgence or his own interest. The deceived person may go to equal lengths from purely selfish motives.

Both may be willing to suffer martyrdom. Read the lives of the martyrs, and you will have no doubt that some were willing to suffer from a wrong idea of the rewards of martyrdom. They would seek their own destruction because they thought it was the sure road to eternal life.

In all these cases, the motives of one class contradicts the other. The difference lies in the choice of different ends. One chooses God's interest. For a person to pretend that both these classes aim at the same end is to say that an impenitent sinner is just as unselfish as a real Christian.

## **WHO AM I?**

If these two classes are so similar, then how are we to know our own true character? We know that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. How do we know if we are seeking God's love and His holiness or whether we are seeking God's favor for our own benefit?

If we are truly seeking benevolence and holiness, it will appear in our daily transactions. If selfishness rules our conduct there, as sure as God reigns, we are truly selfish. If we are selfish with men, then we are selfish with God. "For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20)

Christianity is not merely love to God but to man also. If our daily transactions show us to be selfish, we are unconverted. Otherwise, benevolence is not essential to the faith, and a man can be a Christian without loving his neighbor as himself.

If you are disinterested, Christian duties will not be a task to you. You will not labor as if your work were a nuisance. The false convert wouldn't work if he didn't have to. It is a task, and if he takes any pleasure in it, it is for its anticipated results--the support and comfort of his family or the increase of his property.

This is the attitude some people have in regard to Christianity. They act like a sick man taking medicine. They desire its effects, and they know they must have it or die. They would never do it for its own sake. Suppose men love labor like a child loves play. They would do it all day long without any other incentive than pleasure. When Christianity is loved for its own sake, no weariness exists.

If it is a time of general coldness in the church, real converts will still enjoy their own relationship with God. But the deceived person will then invariably be found embracing the world. Then, when true saints rise up and shout about their joy so that Christianity begins to revive, the deceived will soon bustle about and appear even more zealous than true saints. He is impelled by convictions and not affections. When there is no public interest, he feels no conviction. But when the church awakes, he is compelled to stir about to keep his conscience quiet. This is only selfishness in another form.

If you are selfish, your joy will depend mainly on the strength of your hopes of heaven and not on your affections. Your enjoyments are not in the employments of Christianity but of a vastly different kind from those of the true saint. They are mostly from anticipating. When you feel very certain about going to heaven, then you enjoy your faith. It depends on your hope and not on your love.

People tell of having no enjoyment in religion when they lose their hopes. The reason is plain. If they loved Christianity for its own sake, their enjoyment would not depend on their hope. A person who loves his job is happy anywhere. And if you loved the employments of Christianity, you would be happy if God put you in hell, provided He let you work for Him there.

Of course, true saints enjoy their hope, but they think very little about it. The deceived person on the contrary, is aware that he does not enjoy his duties. He only enjoys them as a man does who thinks that by hard work he will have great wealth.

The true saint enjoys the peace of God because heaven has already begun in his soul. He not only has the prospect of it, but eternal life has actually begun in him. He has that faith that is the very substance of things hoped for. (See Hebrews 11:1) He knows that heaven has begun in him and that he is not obliged to wait until he dies to taste the joys of eternal life. His enjoyment is in proportion to his holiness and not in proportion to his hope.

## **THE OBEDIENCE OF LOVE**

Another way to tell whether you are selfish in religion is this: the deceived person has only a purpose of obedience while the true saint has a preference of obedience. This is an important distinction, and I fear few people make it. Multitudes have a purpose of obedience but have no true preference of obedience. Preference is actual choice or obedience of heart. Individuals speak of purposing to obey but fail to do it. And they will tell you how difficult it is to execute their purpose.

On the other hand, the true saint prefers and chooses obedience. The one has a purpose to obey, like that which Paul had. Before Paul was converted, he had a strong purpose of obedience, but he did not obey because his heart was not in it. (See Romans 7) The false convert purposes to be holy because he knows that it is the only way to be happy. The true saint chooses holiness for its own sake, and he is holy.

The true convert and the deceived person also differ in their faith. The former has confidence in the character of God that leads him to complete submission to God. Confidence in the Lord's promises depends on knowing God's character.

Human or divine, governments are obeyed on only two principles: fear and confidence. It doesn't matter whether it is the government of a family, a ship, a nation or a universe. All obedience springs from one of these two principles.

In one case, individuals obey from hope of reward and fear of the penalty. In the other, they obey from that confidence in the character of the government that works by love. One child obeys his parents from confidence. His faith works by love. The other yields an outward obedience from hope and fear. The true convert has faith to obey God because he loves God. This is the obedience of faith.

The other has only partial faith and partial submission. The devil has partial faith. He believes and trembles. (See James 2:19) A person may believe that Christ came to save sinners and submit to him to be saved. But does he submit himself to God's government? No! His submission is only on condition that he be saved. It is never with that unreserved confidence in God's whole character that leads him to say, "Let thy will be done."

He only submits to salvation. His religion is the religion of law. The other is gospel faith. One is selfish, and the other is benevolent. Here lies the true difference between the two classes: One is outward and hypocritical, and the other is that of the heart, holy and acceptable to God.

If you are selfish, you will rejoice in the conversion of sinners only when you have a part in it. You will have very little satisfaction when someone else is involved. The selfish person rejoices when he is active and successful in converting sinners because he thinks he will have a great reward. But instead of delighting in it when done by others, he will be envious.

The true saint sincerely delights and rejoices when sinners are converted by others as much as if by himself. Some take interest in revival only when they are connected with it. It seems they would rather have sinners remain unconverted than be saved through an evangelist or a minister of another denomination. The true spirit of a child of God is to say, "Send, Lord, whomever you will--only let souls be saved and your name glorified!"

## LIVING TO GLORIFY GOD

Regard your own happiness according to its relative value. Put it next to the glory of God and the good of the universe, and then give it the value it deserves. This is precisely what God does. And this is what He means when He commands you to love your neighbor as yourself.

You will in fact promote your own happiness to the degree that you leave it out of view. Your happiness consists mainly in the gratification of virtuous desires. There may be pleasure in gratifying desires that are selfish, but it is not real happiness. But to be virtuous, your desires must be disinterested.

Suppose a man meets a beggar in the street--cold, hungry, and ready to perish. The man's feelings are touched, and he steps into a store to buy the beggar a loaf of bread. At once the countenance of the beggar lights up with unutterable gratitude. The gratification of the man in the act is in exact proportion to his motives. If he did it solely out of love, his gratification is complete in the act itself. But if he did it partly to have it known that he is a charitable and human person, then his happiness is not complete until the deed is known to others.

Imagine a sinner in his sins. He is very wicked and very wretched. Your compassion is moved, and you lead him to Jesus. If your motive was to obtain honor among men and to secure the favor of God, you are not completely happy until the deed is told. But if you wished purely to save a soul from death, then as you see it done your gratification is complete.

If you aim at doing good for its own sake, then you will be happy to the degree that you do good. But if you do good simply to secure your own happiness, you will fail. You will be like the child pursuing his own shadow: he can never overtake it because it always stays just ahead of him.

Suppose in the case I have mentioned, you have no desire to relieve the beggar but simply crave the applause of a certain individual. You will feel no pleasure at all in the relief of the beggar until that individual hears of it and commends it--then you are gratified. But you are not gratified in the thing itself. Or suppose you aim at the conversion of sinners. If it is not love to sinners that leads you to do it, how can the conversion of sinners make you happy? The truth is that God has made man so he must seek the happiness of others or he cannot be happy.

This is the true reason why men, seeking their own happiness and not the happiness of others, fail. It is always just before them. If they would stop seeking their own happiness and work to do good, they would be happy.

## **HAPPINESS THROUGH HOLINESS**

Christ despised the shame, endured the cross, and regarded the joy set before Him. But what was the joy set before Him? Not His own salvation or happiness but the great good He would do in the salvation of the world. He was perfectly happy in Himself. The happiness of others was His aim. This was the joy set before Him, and He obtained it.

Where it is said, "We love him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19), the language plainly suggests two interpretations: either that love to us has provided the way for our return and the influence that brought us to love Him, or that we love Him for His favor shown to ourselves. The latter is not the meaning because Jesus Christ fully refuted the principle in His Sermon on the Mount. "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?" (Matthew 5:46). If we love God, not for His character but for His favors to us, Jesus Christ call us reprobate.

The Bible speaks of happiness as the result of virtue, but virtue is not the pursuit of one's own happiness. If a person desire the good of others, he will be happy to the degree that he gratifies that desire.

God loves others. He desires everyone's happiness. And to be like Him, we must aim at and delight in His happiness and glory and the honor and glory of the universe.

God requires true repentance--that is, to forsake sin because it is hateful in itself. It is not true repentance to forsake sin on condition of pardon or to say, "I will be sorry for my sins, if you will forgive me." True repentance requires true faith and true submission, not conditional faith or partial submission. This is what the Bible insists.

Many people have different views of the nature of the gospel. Some view it as a matter of accommodation to mankind in which God has become less strict that He was under the law. This enables them to be fashionable or worldly, and the gospel will come in and make up their deficiencies and save them. The other class views the gospel as a provision of divine benevolence

designed to destroy sin and promote holiness. Its whole value consists in its power to make them holy.

From this discussion we can see why some people are much more anxious to convert sinners than to see the Church sanctified and God glorified by the good works of His people. Many feel a natural sympathy for sinners and wish to have them saved from hell. If that is gained, they have no further concern. But true saints are affected by sin because it dishonors God. And they are even more distressed to see Christians sin because it dishonors God more.

Some people don't seem to care how the people of the Church live if they can only see the work of conversion. They are not anxious to have God honored. It shows that they are not motivated by the love of holiness but by mere compassion for sinners.