

Carefulness a Sin

by Charles Finney

Carefulness is a sin that implies distrust of God's wisdom and benevolence, and can be avoided by cultivating a spirit of trust in God and committing everything to Him in prayer.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 40:28-31, Matthew 6:25, Luke 10:41, John 14:27, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 7:32-34, Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Trust in God", "Carefulness"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that carefulness, as described in Philippians 4:6, is a sin that stems from distrust in God's providence and care. He explains that while some forms of care are virtuous, the anxious and distressing kind is forbidden by God and leads to spiritual and emotional turmoil. Finney urges believers to recognize this state of mind as a rebellion against God, to cultivate trust and gratitude, and to commit their concerns to Him in prayer. He provides practical steps to avoid carefulness, including reflecting on God's past faithfulness and maintaining a calm spirit. Ultimately, he calls for a rejection of this sin, encouraging believers to embrace peace and trust in God's provision.

Transcript

Text. Phil. 4:6: Be careful for nothing.

In this discussion, I design to show,

I. WHAT CAREFULNESS, AS USED IN THIS TEXT, IS.

II. THAT THIS STATE OF MIND IS SIN.

III. HOW TO AVOID IT.

I. I am to show the meaning of the word carefulness.

The terms care, and carefulness, are used in two different senses, in the Bible--one good--the other bad. The one kind of care is virtue--the other kind is vice. I will quote a few passages, to illustrate both these senses. In some of the passages, the words care and carefulness are not used in the translation; but in every instance the same word is used in the original, that in the text is translated careful. In 1 Cor. 12:25, the Apostle says, "the members should have the same care one for another." In Phil. 2:20, he also says, "For I have no man like minded who will naturally care for your estate." In 1 Pet. 5:7, care is spoken of as

being exercised by God.

It is manifest, that the state of mind described in these passages, is a virtuous state--it is that degree of wakeful desire and solicitude for our own, or the happiness of others, that begets due attention, and produces that prompt and diligent use of means necessary to obtain a desirable end. This state of mind does not imply doubt, distress, corroding anxious suspense, and concern. This kind of care, however, may be very intense, and in its degree, amount to real travail of soul; and even to those "groanings which cannot be uttered," and yet be a virtuous, and highly commendable state of mind. For this, instead of being the peevishness of unbelief, and the corroding anxiety and carefulness which are the result of unbelief, is faith mightily wrestling with God, for promised blessings.

But in the following passages, we have the term used in a different sense: Matt. 6:25, "Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on." And in the 27th verse, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" And v. 28, "Why take ye thought for raiment?" &c. And v. 31, "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat, what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Luke 10:41, Christ says, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and troubled about many things." 1 Cor. 7:32-34, "But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is a difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband." And in the text, the Apostle says, "Be careful for nothing."

Now it is manifest from these passages, in which the same original word is used, as in the text, that the term is used in a bad sense. It implies doubtfulness, anxiety, absorbing and anxious concern, and unhappiness. This state of mind is but too common, and needs very little description to be understood by almost every one.

II. I am to show, that this kind of carefulness is sin.

1. It is sin because it is expressly forbidden by God himself. Not only does the text forbid it; but it is expressly, or impliedly forbidden in all the texts I have quoted, where it is used in a bad sense. It is, therefore, as much a violation of the law of God as profanity, drunkenness, or any other abomination. It is as expressly forbidden, and as diametrically opposed to the command of God, as a lustful, covetous, thievish, or licentious state of mind.

2. Because it is distrust of the wisdom and benevolence of God. Who that believes in a divine providence can suffer himself to be exercised with carefulness, without directly impeaching, or denying the wisdom and benevolence of the blessed God. If God exercises a universal providence, then whatever comes to pass is, in some way, directly or indirectly, brought about by the providence of God. To suffer ourselves then to be made unhappy--to be filled with anxiety, solicitude, and suspense, is either to deny that God is wise and good, in bringing about these events, or is a virtual declaration on our part, that, however wise and good he may have been in producing them, we are very far from being pleased with his providence. So that carefulness is either infidelity in regard to the providences of God, or downright rebellion against him.

3. Because it is setting aside all the evidence which God has given that he cares for us. He has given us the most ample assurances, by his providences--in his word--and by giving his only begotten Son to die

for us, that he cares for us, and all our interests with all the tender solicitude of an infinitely benevolent Father; and yet we set aside all his declarations, and all these evidences, and refuse to cast our care upon him. We suffer our minds to be corroded, and borne down, and banished out of the presence of God, by carefulness.

4. Because it can do no good. It is a waste, and worse than a waste of time, and energy, and life. Who among you ever found yourselves benefitted, in any respect, by this kind of carefulness? Does your worldly business prosper any better for indulging this state of mind--do you pay your debts, or manage any part of your business any better by suffering your mind to be borne down with care? Do you get along any better in religion? Are your prayers any more prevalent--do you use any better directed, and successful means for your own, or the spiritual improvement of others, when oppressed with carefulness? And let me ask, can you in any instance recollect, that this kind of carefulness ever resulted in any good?

5. Because it is highly injurious to yourself. I beseech you to reflect upon your past history. Have you not found, in multitudes of instances, that this kind of carefulness was a real obstruction to your worldly business? And have you not found that the more you indulged this state of mind, the more embarrassed and perplexed your secular affairs became? And no wonder, for in this state you are in some sense a maniac, and not qualified to manage business of any kind. How many persons there are, who, instead of keeping calm, and preserving a state of mind, in which they can act with discretion and wisdom, will become so filled with carefulness as to incapacitate themselves for superintending their affairs with discretion; and they wonder, that, after all their attention, and carefulness, and anxiety they do not succeed any better. They seem to think that the providence of God is wholly adverse, and is designed to perplex them, while in reality nothing uncommon has happened in the providence of God; and their foolish and wicked carefulness is that to which they may ascribe their failure.

It is just so in matters of religion. Multitudes suffer themselves, in the peevishness of their unbelief, to be so distracted and confounded with carefulness about their spiritual state, or the spiritual state of those around them, that they are forever whining, complaining, and murmuring, as if it were the most difficult matter in the world to persuade God to be good, and kind, and gracious. They seem to act as if it were as difficult a matter to get hold of the grace of God, as to be saved by the law. And notwithstanding all the declarations in regard to the freeness of gospel salvation, it would seem as if they supposed the wells of salvation were infinitely deep, and their waters infinitely beyond their reach; and the promises of eternal life were infinitely high above their heads. Indeed, they are in that state of mind, that from its own nature excludes the grace of the gospel, and sets aside all the promises of God. Now let me ask, did you ever find that this kind of carefulness has resulted in any thing else than evil to your own souls? Why then indulge in it? Persons in this state are very apt to think their circumstances, and condition deserve commiseration. They look around for sympathy, and pity; and often secretly blame God for not pitying them, when they have so carefully sought him. Now this is a state of horrible rebellion against God. Here is an ocean of the waters of eternal life, flowing at your feet--here is a table spread before you with infinite provisions for your souls, and as free as the heart of God, and yet you stand and distress yourself, and complain, and are filled with vast cares, and anxieties, lest you should lose your soul--starving, thirsting, dying with these provisions and waters of eternal life before you. Precious soul, lay aside your carefulness, I beseech you, and believe, or you must perish.

6. Because your carefulness is a great stumbling block and injury to those around you. Are they professors of religion--they are emboldened to exercise this same temper because they see it in you. Are they impenitent sinners--they wonder what religion is good for. They see you fretted with the same cares

and anxieties that others are who have no hope in Christ. What inference can they draw from witnessing your state, only that religion is a name that has no consolation or salvation in it.

7. Because it grieves the Spirit of God. What would a husband say should he observe that his wife had no confidence in his providence, and was perpetually exercised with great carefulness, lest he should not fulfill to her the duties implied in his relation to her? And suppose that your children should groan about the house, under the distressing apprehension that their wants would be overlooked. Would not husbands and parents feel themselves grieved and insulted by such a course? How, then, must this shameful carefulness appear to the Spirit of the blessed God? He is your comforter, but you refuse to be comforted--he cares for you, but you refuse to cast your care upon him, and insist upon bearing your own burdens. Do not, I beseech you, thus grieve the Holy Spirit of God, "whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

8. Because it is as highly dishonorable to God, as it is grievous to the Holy Ghost. What can be more dishonorable to the father of a family, than for its members to be filled with carefulness through distrust of his providence. And how does it gratify hell to see the children of God weighed down with carefulness, as if their heavenly Father were unable or unwilling to provide for them.

9. Because it is selfishness. Persons are never filled with carefulness unless they have some selfish interest in that which excites their care. You see the most diligent and efficient clerks, and those employed in other people's business; and while they have a sufficient solicitude to be prompt and energetic in the business of their employers, yet they are not filled with care about it. When they have performed their duty they can eat, and sleep calmly, and quiet themselves without corroding carefulness, with regard to the results of their business.

Just so with the servants of God, if their hearts are right. They perform every thing for him, and consider nothing as their own business--are prompt and energetic in the discharge of their duties; and calmly and quietly leave all the results to the disposal of his providence. It is just so with them on all religious subjects. They know that themselves, and all they have, are his, for time and eternity. And they can as cheerfully submit their spiritual, as their temporal interests to his disposal without carefulness, "always rejoicing in the Lord."

III. I am to show how to avoid carefulness.

1. Consider the reasons against it. Many persons are so inconsiderate as never to avoid any sin of heart, or life to which they are strongly tempted. But without consideration it is not to be expected that sin of any kind will be avoided. Consideration might and doubtless would have prevented the sin of our first parents. And it is not probable, that any being does or would sin with all the considerations against sin fully before, and subject to the attention of the mind. Let a mind fully consider the moral character of this state, and all the reasons against it, even should it go no further than I have described in this discourse--that it is forbidden of God--that it is infidelity--that it is rebellion--that it is setting aside all the evidences of God's love--that it can never benefit you, nor any one else--that its tendency is only evil, and that continually--that it destroys your own happiness, and the happiness of those with whom you are connected--that it is a stumbling block to the Church, and an occasion of blasphemy to the world--that it grieves and dishonors the blessed God--and is one of the most loathsome and detestable forms of selfishness--let the mind, I say, consider these things, and it would put away this sin from the heart.

2. Consider the reasons for an opposite state of mind--that you may, and ought to be in a state of cheerful serenity, and calmness and peace--that God's providences, and promises, and grace are such a sure foundation, and afford such infinite reasons for repose in God, that calmness, quietude, a deep unbroken repose in God, is the most reasonable state of mind that can be conceived. Consider that God requires you always to rejoice in him; and has made such infinite provisions for your help, consolation, and eternal salvation--and to meet the necessities of the Church, and the world, that there is no room left for carefulness, except it exists in the form of downright rebellion against God.

3. Cultivate a considerate state of mind. Let no temptation to carefulness prevail without taking time to consider the reasons against it, and for an opposite state of mind.

4. Put away selfishness. If selfishness is suffered to reign, carefulness will be a thing of course. Examine yourself, therefore, attentively, and exclude selfishness, under every form. You may find sometimes, that to decide what is, and what is not selfishness, will require considerable thought and attention. Your neighbor may make a selfish demand of you, or selfishly ask you for a favor, that it may not be your duty to grant, and yet he may attribute your refusal to selfishness. In all such cases you are to weigh the matter well, and decide in the presence of God, whether the law of love requires you to act in one way, or in the other. Persons are very apt, in this matter, to fall into a mistake, and to suppose themselves to be doing as they would be done by, and to censure others for not doing as they desire, because they are unacquainted with the circumstances, e.g. I ask a favor of a man, which perhaps I have no right to ask. I think that in asking it, I am doing what, under the circumstances, I should be willing to grant myself; and yet were I to know all the circumstances, I should perceive that I had no right to make the request and should heartily approve of his refusal to comply. In a world where there is so much selfishness, a truly benevolent mind needs to be wide awake, to avoid, on the one hand, the appearance of selfishness, which will, after all, in some cases be impossible; and on the other hand, to avoid being devoured by the selfishness of others. But whenever selfishness does exist, it must be sought out--it must be put away; and wherever this kind of carefulness exists there is selfishness. Of this you may be certain. Search, then, for this leaven of wickedness. Bring it forth to the light; and go and cast it into the valley of the son of Hinnom, among the abominations that defile that image of hell.

5. Put away unbelief. Unbelief is always the cause of all this kind of carefulness. This may easily be seen, by a moment's reflection. Confidence in God would instantly banish all this distrustful carefulness from the mind.

6. Dwell much upon grace received. Cultivate a spirit of thankfulness. Instead of reflecting much upon what they have received of temporal and spiritual mercies, many persons reflect much upon the things which they yet need. Being taken up with their wants, instead of their mercies, they naturally fall into a state of repining. Now it is of great importance that you should dwell much upon your temporal and spiritual good things, and spend much time in blessing and thanking God for existence, life, health, sickness, poverty, or wealth or whatever his providence has allotted you--that you were born in this age--in this land--under such circumstances--and, in short, you ought to realize that God is equally good in every thing, and that all things are subjects of thankfulness, and praise to God. Go over, then, and over again, often and often, your mercies; and cultivate such a spirit of gratitude and thankfulness as shall naturally beget a spirit of trust in God for future blessings.

7. Reflect much upon the fact that God has always been better to you than your fears--how your former anxieties, and fears proved in the end to have been all uncalled for. In how many instances can you look

back upon your former carefulness, and say, "how have I been disquieted in vain?"

8. Commit everything to God in prayer, and know assuredly, that the result will be just what you would wish it to be, when you know all the circumstances and reasons. The Apostle says in the verse of which the text is a part, "In every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Now many persons, instead of carrying any thing that lies upon their minds to God, and committing it all to him, undertake to bear their own burdens--to work it out by their own thoughts and exertions, without committing their way unto the Lord, with the assurance that he will bring it to pass. Nothing should be undertaken without prayer; and any thing, and every thing that cannot consistently be made a subject of prayer, is to be avoided of course, as you would avoid the Devil. Now observe what I say, I do not advise you merely to pray about every thing; but to commit your way in all respects unto the Lord--so to give up your affairs to his guidance, and control, as to render all this carefulness impossible--so commit them to him as to leave the event cheerfully with him, and make up your mind to be satisfied with the result, be it what it may. Be solicitous to do your duty, leaving consequences most cheerfully and joyfully with him who careth for you.

9. Trust in Christ for grace in this thing. Do not suppose that by any unaided efforts of your own you are to avoid carefulness. Selfishness is one of your most powerful enemies; and you may as well attempt to grapple with Satan in your own strength, as to put down selfishness without the aid of Christ. Remember that he is your life, your strength, your righteousness, your salvation and redemption, not only from the curse of the law; but from every form of sin. Cleave to him, and whenever you find yourself tempted to carefulness, be sure to lay all your cares upon him. He is able and desirous to bear all your burdens.

10. Be sure to give up your own will. While you have a will of your own, separate from that of God, you will of course be often filled with care, lest you should be disappointed. Lay aside your own will, and make up your mind to be joyful always in the will of God.

11. Cultivate a calm and quiet state of mind. If temptation assail you to ruffle and disturb the deep repose of your soul in God, be quiet--keep calm--lift up your heart to God--keep still, and if possible suffer yourself not to speak until your mind becomes composed--let it be the fixed purpose of your heart not to suffer yourself to be thrown into a state of carefulness and anxiety on any occasion whatever.

REMARKS.

1. This requirement extends to every thing, temporal and spiritual. Many persons think themselves to do well, in being perpetually filled with great carefulness about their spiritual concerns. But this spirit is just as inadmissible and wicked in spiritual, as in temporal things. It is God provoking, and dishonoring unbelief, on whatever subject it is exercised.

2. How seldom is this state of mind looked upon as a sin, even by the christian himself. Many persons claim and receive as much sympathy in this state, as if it were a dire calamity instead of a sin. Nay, they make it a matter of self-righteousness; and pride themselves in their great anxiety and trouble about spiritual things. To "rejoice in the Lord" is wholly out of the question with them. They lament over themselves, and are mourned over by others, as if they deserved infinite pity, rather than to be blamed for their unbelief.

Now, beloved, you ought to know, that your carefulness is sin, and nothing but sin--that it no more calls for commiseration, sympathy, or pity, than the crime of adultery, or drunkenness, or any abomination

whatever. It is unbelief. Away with it. It is the enemy of God.

3. This carefulness is as ridiculous as it is wicked. What would you say, should you see the children of a great and mighty prince, filled with carefulness and anxiety about their daily food, when millions were at their disposal? You could account for it only upon the principle that they were monomaniacs. But what shall we say of the children of the King of kings, and Lord of lords, whose Father is not a mere temporal prince, but possesses all the attributes of God--every where present with them--ever wakeful to their interests--whose infinite resources, moral and physical, are at their disposal; and yet they are weighed down with care. What is the matter with you, my dear soul? Are you deranged? What do you mean? What ails you? Surely you dream and disquiet yourself in vain. "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

4. How destructive to your peace and growth in grace, is the indulgence of this spirit.

5. What advantage it gives [S]atan. It is just cutting yourself loose from your moorings upon the promises of God, and giving yourself up to the merciless buffetings of the prince of hell.

6. It is our duty freely and frequently to admonish one another upon this point. There is a great fault among christians in this respect. Whenever care is depicted upon a brother's or sister's countenance, inquiry should instantly be made into the cause. They should be reprov'd for the sin; and admonished, and entreated to desist from it immediately. They should be conjured by every consideration that is lovely and of good report, to entertain no carefulness for a moment.

7. From this subject, it is easy to see how important it is for husbands and wives, and those associated in the more intimate relations of life to bear each other's burdens; and as far as possible to diminish the amount of temptations to carefulness.

8. It is very important to resist the beginnings of this sin. Many christians, and I have reason to believe, some ministers have fallen into great trouble by not resisting the beginnings of this "evil and bitter thing." They have begun perhaps by indulging carefulness about temporal things, and having by this grieved the Spirit, they are plunged into darkness in regard to their spiritual state. And as you pass by, you may hear their groanings; but there is no relief, because they will not "encourage themselves in God."

9. This truth is very applicable, and very important to indigent students, who are often so straitened in their temporal circumstances as to indulge a degree of carefulness that is very destructive, both to intellectual attainments, and to growth in grace. Such persons should remember, that their carefulness will in no instance help them. But if they indulge it, it will defeat the very ends of their education. Who can study? Who can pray? Who can walk with God in such a state of mind?

10. This requirement is applicable to all persons in all circumstances, and at all times.

And now, beloved, will you put this sin away? Shall it be from this moment the fixed purpose of your hearts, in the strength of God to overcome it forever? Will you confess it, and repent of it as a sin before God? Will you be as much ashamed of it as you would be of committing adultery, or being guilty of theft?

Will you consider it as really disgraceful, in the sight of God, and as injurious to the interests of his kingdom, as other sins and abominations are? Do, I beseech you, spread this whole subject, in tears of deep repentance, before the Lord. Put it away from you forever. Let the deep repose, and patience, and gratitude of your soul shed a balmy, and a holy influence on all around you.

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