

Christian Warfare

by Charles Finney

The Christian warfare is a conflict between the will and the sensibility, and it involves a war between the will and Satan, the world, and other temptations.

Scripture: Galatians 5:16

Topics: "Christian Warfare", "Temptation vs. Sin"

Description

Charles Finney delivers a powerful sermon on 'Christian Warfare,' emphasizing the internal conflict between the will and the sensibility, and clarifying that true Christian warfare is not against inbred sin but against temptation. He explains that walking in the Spirit enables believers to resist the lusts of the flesh, and he outlines the nature of this warfare, including the differences between careless and convicted sinners, as well as the struggles faced by saints versus unconverted professors. Finney stresses that this warfare is a necessary part of the Christian experience, which will continue in some form while believers are in the body, and he encourages reliance on Christ for victory over temptation.

Transcript

'This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things ye would.'--Gal. 5:16, 17.

This passage has been greatly misunderstood, or else the Apostle has contradicted himself. Leaving out of view the 16th verse, and that the design of the 17th is to assign the grounds of the assertion in the 16th, many of the expounders of the Scriptures have understood the 17th to declare, that in consequence of the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, persons who really wish to be holy cannot. So it has all along been generally understood. Now I repeat, that if this interpretation be true, the Apostle contradicts himself. The 16th positively asserts that those who walk in the Spirit shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. This interpretation of the 17th verse, makes him say, that in consequence of the opposition between the flesh and the Spirit, those who walk in the Spirit, after all, cannot but fulfill the lusts of the flesh. But this interpretation entirely overlooks the fact, that the 17th verse is designed to establish the assertion made in the 16th. In the 16th, the Apostle says, 'walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.' Why? 'Because,' says he, 'the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other,' that is, they are opposites. What then? Why the obvious inference, 'that ye (that is, who walk in the Spirit,) cannot do the things that ye would,' in case you were not

walking in the Spirit. In other words, you who are walking in the Spirit cannot fulfill the lusts of the flesh. The simple principle is, that you cannot walk after the Spirit, and fulfill the lusts of the flesh at the same time, because it is impossible to perform two opposites at once.

In further remarking on this text, I design to show,

I. WHAT THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE DOES NOT CONSIST IN.

II. WHAT IT DOES CONSIST IN.

III. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CARELESS AND CONVICTED SINNERS.

IV. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAINTS AND CONVICTED, BUT UNCONVERTED PROFESSORS.

V. THAT A WARFARE WOULD HAVE EXISTED IF MAN HAD NEVER SINNED.

VI. TO POINT OUT THE CAUSES OF THE AGGRAVATION OF THIS WARFARE SINCE THE FALL.

VII. HOW IT MAY BE MODIFIED AND ABATED.

VIII. THAT IT WILL, UNDER A MORE OR LESS MODIFIED FORM, CONTINUE WHILE WE ARE IN THE BODY.

I. What the Christian warfare does not consist in.

1. It does not consist in a conflict between the will or heart, and the conscience: for the Christian has a new heart, and the new heart and the conscience are at one. The new birth consists in the will's rejection of self-gratification as the supreme end, and adoption of the law of reason. Therefore regeneration harmonizes the will and the conscience, for the conscience is nothing else but the reason in a given function.

2. It does not consist in a war with inward sin, but with temptation. Some persons talk about fighting with inbred sin. But what do they mean by such language? I have no objection to such persons using such language, if they will only tell what they mean, but the truth is, to talk of a Christian's fighting with inbred sin, is to talk stark nonsense. What is sin? Sin is an act of the will. It is choosing self-gratification in preference to the will of God. This, and nothing else is sin. To talk therefore of fighting inbred sin, is to talk of the will fighting itself. It is a choice warring upon itself, than which nothing can be more absurd. We may fight with temptation, but not with sin in ourselves.

II. In what the Christian warfare does consist.

1. It consists in a conflict between the will and the sensibility. By the sensibility, as I have repeatedly said, is intended that primary faculty of the mind to which all feelings, desires, and passions belong. The desires and passions of the sensibility are generally called propensities. The Christians warfare, is a warfare kept up between the will and these. For example: the appetite for food seeks its own gratification, and so do all the other propensities of the mind. Inasmuch as gratification is the only end at which the sensibility aims, it of course is blind to every thing else. It knows nothing of measure or degree. To give the will up to the gratification of these, therefore, is to subject it to a lawless power, and wholly to set aside the law of God as revealed in the reason. This is sin, it is giving the will up, to seek gratification for its own sake. This is the whole business of sinners. But in regeneration, the will rejects the gratification of these for its own

sake, as an end, and gives itself up to the end demanded by the reason: that is, to universal well-being. It takes ground right over against these. But they still exist, and must be resisted. That the sensibility and its susceptibilities still need a curb, after regeneration, is a matter of universal experience with Christians, and is directly asserted in the Bible. In the text the Apostle says, addressing Christians, 'Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not obey the lusts of the flesh.' The term flesh in the Apostle's time, represented what we now mean by the sensibility. The reason why I use the term sensibility rather than the term flesh, is, I think it expresses the idea intended more definitely at the present time. When a term which once definitely expressed an idea, has, in the wear of time, become less exact, it is our duty to adopt modern language representing the same idea. To express the idea of the text, I would say, 'Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the propensities of the sensibility.'

2. The Christian warfare is a war between the will and Satan. It is his great object to keep the will in subjection to the propensities of the sensibility. Hence he directs all his efforts to arouse these propensities, and through them to enslave the will.

3. This warfare is a warfare between the heart and the world. The world presents ten thousand allurements on every hand, adapted to arouse the propensities and to lead the will to gratify them. Against these allurements, therefore, a war must be kept up.

4. It is a warfare against constitutional temperament. How many temptations originate in peculiar temperaments; for example, in persons of peculiarly sanguine and impetuous temperament, or of a nervous temperament. Few have failed to observe the influence of temptation arising from this source.

5. It is a warfare with habit. When habits have been formed, every one knows the difficulty of overcoming them. Why is this? Because habit naturally originates temptation and this temptation is great in proportion to the strength of the habit.

6. It is a warfare with a polluted imagination. Many persons have kept their imagination upon such objects, and brooded over them so long, that it almost spontaneously creates the most polluting pictures and presents to the will the most seductive conceptions. Who does not know this? A warfare must be steadily maintained against all these creations of a polluted imagination.

7. It is a warfare with temptations arising from the law of association. By the law of association, I mean that capacity of the mind by which one thought suggests another, and that again another, until a whole series have passed before the mind. Now where the associations are corrupt, they present powerful temptations to the will, and with these a warfare must be maintained.

8. It is a warfare for the control of the attention and thoughts. How many things there are in a world like this, within and without, to catch the attention and carry off the thoughts and through them to arouse clamorous temptations. Every one is aware, to a greater or less extent, of the effort which it costs, in certain circumstances and relations, to restrain and keep under control the thoughts and attention. All these temptations, in the last analysis, arise in the sensibility, and Satan, the world, constitutional temperament, polluted imagination, the law of association, and vagrant thoughts are but different forms in which the susceptibilities of the sensibility are peculiarly aroused and inflamed.

III. The difference between careless and convicted sinners.

1. The careless sinner has no warfare between his will and his sensibility at all. He is not convicted of the evils of self gratification, and sees not where his propensities are leading him. Hence he is led along without even attempting resistance. The convicted sinner, on the contrary, sees the evil of sin--that the reign of his propensities is a ruinous despotism from which he must have deliverance. Hence he attempts to resist their demands, but is continually overcome. All his efforts are unsuccessful and his resolutions are blown away as chaff before the wind.

2. The careless sinner does not know what temptation is. While floating upon the current he is unconscious of its strength, and because he moves with it, even fancies that he does not move at all. But the convicted sinner has learned its nature. He has become aware that he is floating on the stream of death, and of the necessity of escaping from its current. He therefore attempts to stem it, but finds it all in vain. He finds that when he would do good, evil is present with him.

3. Careless sinners make no effort to amend, and consequently do not know what resistance they would meet with if they should. They are like a man who has been bound in his sleep, who even when he awakes remains ignorant of what has been done and consequently makes no attempt to break his bonds. But the convicted sinner does make strenuous efforts. He sees himself standing on a slippery place from which he must immediately escape or perish. He is on an inclined plane, moving rapidly towards the verge, from which he must plunge to the depths of hell. He therefore makes mighty resolutions of amendment; but without success. He slides downward with an accelerated ratio, finding that the commandment which was ordained to life, is unto death, for sin taking occasion by it, deceives and slays him.

4. Both are slaves, but the careless sinner is not aware of his bondage. He knows not to what an imperious tyrant he is subject; but a convicted sinner does. He sees that he is a captive sold under sin. He is alarmed, and exerts himself to escape from his bondage. He arises to flee, but is overtaken by his master, and dragged back to his service.

Such are the prominent differences between careless and convicted sinner. The 7th of Romans is an illustration of the warfare of a convicted sinner.

IV. The difference between saints, and convicted but unconverted professors and backsliders.

1. Both have constitutional appetites, passions, and propensities, which are liable to be excited in the presence of those objects to which they are correlated. Hence both are liable to temptation from these sources. These appetites and propensities have in themselves, no moral character in either case. Since they are wholly involuntary, how should they be sinful. A man would be called deranged, who should talk of the appetite for food being sinful. But it is as much so as any other appetite, desire, or propensity whatever. Sin, therefore, neither in the true nor deceived professor, consists in these, but in consenting to indulgence under forbidden circumstances.

2. Both see the necessity of resisting their excited appetites and propensities, and both make resistance of some sort. But the Christian's resistance is effectual. He holds them in subjection. This is the uniform representation of the Bible. The text says, 'walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.' So in Romans 6:14, it is said, 'sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace.' On the contrary, the unconverted professor or backslider's efforts are ineffectual, and his temptations continually overcome him. In the 7th of Romans, the Apostle is speaking of exactly this state. He is there putting a case to show the ineffectual struggles of the mind attempting to overcome sin by

resolutions, but without love, and therefore uniformly overcome. Nothing can be more certain than that the Apostle here designed to show that the law could not sanctify the mind. He is manifestly speaking, all along in the chapter, of the relations of the law to the selfish mind. When he says I, he merely supposes it to be his own case as an illustration, just as any other speaker or writer often does. We say I, not intending to describe our present actual state, but to set the case before the mind of those we address. The representation undeniably is, that he is continually overcome of temptation, which in the 8th chapter, and in numberless other places in the Bible, is denied to be true of a real Christian. The truth is, this chapter is an exact history of the experience of every mind laboring under conviction, and I may add, it is the exact opposite of the gospel experience.

3. The unconverted professor or backslider's heart is with the temptation. This is the real difficulty with him, and his conscience only distresses and leads him to wish and resolve, in opposition to the real choice of his heart. Now while his heart remains devoted to self-gratification, of course all the resolutions and efforts which he makes in opposition to it, must be without love, and therefore legal. They are wrung out of him by the action of his conscience arousing his fears, and since his heart remains unchanged, and since the heart or ultimate intention always governs the conduct, his resolutions always fail of course. It is impossible that any resolution or effort should stand and be effectual against the supreme preference of the will. But the Christian's heart, on the contrary, is with his conscience, and therefore his resistance is effectual. Since he really chooses what his reason demands, temptation is in direct opposition to his supreme choice, and if he yield to it, it must be by a radical change of his ultimate intention. He is therefore able to put down temptation, and to keep it under his feet.

4. The convicted professor resolves and tries in the absence of love, and of course fails and is overcome, but the Christian does not make resolutions. He has tried them effectually and found that they avail nothing. Perhaps there never was a sinner converted, nor a backslider restored, until he had tried his resolutions and legal efforts so thoroughly as to be compelled to give them up, absolutely despairing of ever escaping by them. But when he has used up all his own stock, and finds himself totally bankrupt, then he will come to Christ for capital--he goes directly to Him as the only deliverer. This leads him away from himself, renders him benevolent, and makes him free. While, therefore, the legalist depends on watchfulness, prayer, and resolutions, to keep him from falling under temptation, the Christian knows better and depends wholly on the strength of Christ.

5. The unconverted professor or backslider calls upon Christ, and thinks he depends upon Him, but in fact, he really knows not what dependence is, while the true Christian actually depends on Christ. It is remarkable that those who have no faith call themselves in their prayers, poor creatures, make their promises, tell Christ they will trust Him, and yet after all do not overcome. But the true Christian knows he once made this mistake, and now makes it no more. He now knows what it is to depend on Christ by faith, and by love to serve Him. He is sustained by the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit.

V. A warfare would have existed had man never sinned.

1. Because the constitutional appetites and susceptibilities would have existed. They did exist before the fall, otherwise our first parents could not have fallen. In our mother Eve, for example, these appetites could be excited into a temptation by their appropriate objects; otherwise, objects of temptation might as well be presented to this table. These excited susceptibilities had no moral character in themselves, they were excited in her, in her pure state, and if she had resisted them she would not have sinned. So they would have existed in all the race if we never had fallen, and in presence of their appropriate objects would have

invited the will to seek their gratification. They are an inherent part of the constitution, and all moral beings, doubtless, find it necessary to curb them in conformity to the demands of their higher nature. Satan and all his angels actually fell under the temptation which they presented to them; and, as I showed in my last lecture, every child, in beginning to act morally, does the same.

2. Temptation, under some form, may, and doubtless will exist forever. As long as moral beings have constitutions, this must be so always, and in all worlds. As we have already said, Satan and all his angels, and our first parents were actually tempted in their holy state, and we know that Jesus Christ was, and had a mighty warfare--to such a degree as to have no appetite for food, and to seek the wilderness in his distress, just as you and I have often, under similar circumstances, gone into the woods or some other seclusion to be alone. What Christians has not often felt so? They are beset so tremendously, and such a struggle created, that they can have no peace day nor night, and often seek a place where they can give vent to their prayers or groans alone. Thus was Christ tempted, and thus, in his warfare, did He fly from the face of man and seek the solitude of the wilderness, where He might contest the point even unto death. He seems to have been assaulted in all the weakest points of human nature, and when, in his agony, He had fasted till He was well nigh famished, then He was besieged through his appetite for food, and in every other way the devil could invent, until he saw it was all in vain and left Him. The apostle says, 'He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.' It is in vain then, to think that temptation is peculiar to a fallen state, and if men had understood this, they never would have fallen into the ridiculous blunder, of calling their constitutional susceptibilities indwelling sin. They would have taught men to control and regulate, rather than call the nature God has given them, sinful.

VI. Several causes that have aggravated this warfare.

1. The sensibility originally responded with equal integrity to all the perceptions of the mind, whether of sense or reason. It was alike susceptible to all its objects. We all know that when we look at certain objects, corresponding feelings begin to glow in the sensibility. For example, if we look at a beautiful object, the corresponding feelings will naturally be awakened. Now all the susceptibility of the constitution, were naturally equally linked to their objects, and excited with equal ease, by the perception of these objects. The sensibility responded with equal readiness, to an affirmation of duty, as to an object of sensual desire. It was not clamorous, and uproarious, in any thing, but duly and sweetly balanced.

2. But it is capable of sudden and monstrous developments in any given direction. To explain myself; Suppose a mother loses her child. There is a sudden crash, and in a moment her little blooming babe, lies before her face pale in death. Now what will be the effects of this? Why, always afterwards, the sight of a dead child will produce a greater effect on her sensibility, than it ever did before. She indeed used to be affected--even to tears; but now such a sight seems to absorb her whole sensibility--she stands convulsed whenever she looks upon it, and sobs, and pours forth her scalding tears like rain. Now why is this? Because there is such a development of her sensibility in that direction as to overbalance every thing else. She sits, thinking and weeping, and goes sighing about the house, and every object her eye rests on connected with her darling, opens up anew the subject of her grief. Just so it is in other things. The susceptibility to fear may be instanced. A man is thrown from a horse, or run away with his wagon, in circumstances of great danger, and he is peculiarly fearful in similar circumstances all his life after. Perhaps his house is enveloped in flames when he awakes in the night, and it is with great difficulty he makes his escape. Now this event may bring his sensibility into such a relation to fires, that all his life after, whenever the fire bells ring, he is thrown into a tempest of agitation, and finds it as much as he can do to control himself. It is said of a young man, one of those who escaped from the Erie, which was burnt on

Lake Erie several months since, that he cannot even hear it named, without going well nigh distracted. I am now speaking of facts which every one knows respecting monstrous developments of the sensibility, and these facts incontestably prove that the balance of the sensibility may be destroyed. Now whenever such a development exists, it seems to put out the eyes of the sensibility on other subjects, so that such persons don[']t feel as much respecting them as formerly. The mother, in the case supposed, will never feel towards multitudes of other things as she formerly did, and so it is in every case, in exact proportion to the strength of this absorbing peculiarity of feeling.

3. In most cases, the sensibility is greatly developed in respect to objects of sense, and very slightly in respect to truths revealed by the reason. In presence of objects of sense, every one knows how readily the feelings respond to such objects. I need not stop to illustrate this. On the other hand, it is equally known that the Reason itself is but slightly developed, and the sensibility which was originally designed to wake up and respond, with instant readiness, to reason's voice, is scarcely disturbed into unquietness by its loudest utterance. Now why is this? Because the monstrous development of the sensibility, respecting objects of sense, has turned its eyes away from the reason and its demands. It has given all its love to sensual objects; and this has greatly aggravated the power of temptation arising from such objects.

4. In some, one appetite or passion is more largely developed, and in others, some other; hence, one has, as we say, a passion for one thing, and another, for another. One, for example, has a passion for money, or for company, or for novel reading, or for gaming; but cares very little for traveling, or intemperance, or licentiousness; but almost every one has some ruling object of gratification to which his sensibility peculiarly responds, and the stronger this passion, or monstrous [its] development becomes, the more certain it is mightily to influence the will, and of course to be an aggravated temptation.

5. The imagination of some is greatly polluted. They have allowed themselves to read such books, to converse on such subjects, and to muse on, or perhaps mingle in, such scenes, as have filled their associations with the most fiery combustibles, and the least incident kindles the sensibility, through these, into a flame, and temptation is thus greatly aggravated.

6. A diseased nervous system is often the source of great temptations. Perhaps there is scarcely any one whose nervous system is not, in some degree, diseased, but in some it is peculiarly so. Now, since the mind develops itself through the nervous system, and an intimate connection exists between them, it often happens, that the nerves become the source of the fiercest temptations. Cases have come under my observation most strikingly illustrating this point.

7. Another source of aggravated temptation is, that the will has not subjected the thoughts, appetites, desires, and passions to its control. Instead of control[ing], it has consented to them in almost all their demands, except where they conflicted one with the other, so that the mind was compelled to choose between them. Now it is of vast importance that the will should early acquire the ascendancy and control of all the susceptibilities, and this it may be taught to do as readily as any thing else that will accomplishes. Many do not seem to see this. Now how is it that the will of a human being gets possession of any of his own powers and susceptibilities? The process is easily seen. See the child--at first it hardly knows how to move any of its muscles, and it is not till after sundry efforts that it can control its little hands. Next it undertakes to walk, but it don[']t know how, and must learn how to control its voluntary muscles. But by many efforts it at last succeeds in getting them under its voluntary control. So with the use of its tongue. All the various uses and movements to which the tongue is appropriated are actually learned, and to control it by the will, is as much an art, as the movement of an organist's fingers is an art. Thus a continual effort is

going on in the child, to get itself under its own control, and it succeeds respecting its physical powers, but does not get the control of its mental susceptibilities. Now why is this? Because there is a defect in its training, and not because there is naturally an insuperable difficulty in the one case more than the other. That he can, to some extent, acquire control of his mental powers, is well known. What is the object of sending the child to school? To discipline his mind. One of the great difficulties with undisciplined minds is that they have not mastered themselves, but in process of time they will acquire such self-control as to concentrate attention for hours on the driest mathematical problems. But having never attempted, nor acquired the art of controlling the various propensities of the sensibility, the full grown man finds himself at as great a puzzle to regulate them, as the infant is to control his muscles. He has not learned the art, and hence in their turbulent outbreaks, they are continual temptations.

8. As I have already intimated, the fact that the reason is so very slightly developed, gives the sensibility with all its monstrous developments full swing. By the reason I mean that power of the mind by which it reveals and imposes the law of benevolence upon itself, and also the application of this law as fast as new relations are discovered. Now where moral relations are not sought after, nor the attention given to the affirmations of the reason, of course, it must remain in very slight development. I wish here to notice a subject which every body sees, but which is peculiarly delicate. It is said that females generally are influenced by feelings, but not by reason. A certain gentleman said of his wife, if I wish to carry her will, I can never do it by reasoning with her, but must always appeal to her feelings. The question is, why is this? Not because they have not reason, not because it cannot be developed in them to operate as powerfully as in the other sex, but because, for ages, their whole training has been directly calculated to develop their sensibility, until, as it is said, they are a bundle of nerves, and their reason left to remain uncultivated and undeveloped. Now the same is true of men. Were their reason but developed as it should be, you might throw off a string of self-evident propositions, as fast as an auctioneer would knock off articles under the hammer, and they would without difficulty, at once perceive their truth. But as things are, they don't perceive them. Why? Because, while there is a monstrous development of their sensibility, their rational development is almost wholly neglected, and now instead of influencing them by simply appealing to their reason, you find such labor all in vain, unless you can also powerfully arouse their sensibility in favor of the object you are enforcing.

9. Another thing which has aggravated this warfare, is the manner in which parents train their children. In most cases, their training is exactly adapted to monstrously develop certain appetites and passions. Instead of parents, and others who have the care of children watching over them and keeping them from circumstances, and conduct calculated to arouse their sensibility unduly, they give them up to just about as much excitement as possible, until the sensibility becomes so outrageous in its demands as to carry the will in favor of whatever it demands.

10. These and other things which I might mention, show how fearfully that warfare is aggravated, which the Christian, in becoming such, enters upon with temptation. I may add to the above specifications the fact that parents have entailed diseases on their children, which continually operate to tempt their will to sin.

VII. How this warfare may be modified and abated.

1. By restoring health. If health be restored, of course all the temptations arising from disease will disappear.

2. By the development of the Reason. As the Reason wakes up, the sensibility begins also to be developed in the same direction. This is the very way in which persons become awakened and convicted, and after conversion, in proportion as the Reason lays cross breaks in the way of the sensual propensities, is their strength and tendency broken and subdued.

3. This warfare may be especially abated and modified by a great development of the sensibility, produced by a revelation of the love of Christ. It is often the case when the character of God in Christ comes to be apprehended in its true light it leaves no room for any thing else. The Reason stands on tip-toe, gazing steadfastly with its intuitive eye, and the sensibility turns its whole surface right out to receive the full impress of such a glorious vision. I recollect the case of a very ungodly man, who seemed to take delight in manifesting the highest contempt for religion. His wife was a professor of religion, but he opposed and forbade her attending meeting at a time of a revival in the church. He went so far, and things came to such a pass, that he could no longer find material and opportunity to keep himself in sport, and finally one day thought he would go to meeting that evening, and see if he could find something there to make sport about, especially as he heard a great many things about the meeting that seemed to him to promise such a result. Just before meeting time his wife went to her closet and poured out all her heart to God, and prayed Him to open the way for her to go to meeting. As she came out she met her husband, and he asked her if she wanted to go to meeting that night. Astonished, and rejoiced, she was soon ready, and they were off. While the minister was preaching, the man's attention was arrested, and about the middle of the sermon, he groaned out and fell down in his seat. He was in such agony, it seemed as if he would die, and the sermon was arrested. He exclaimed, over and over, "Oh Jesus, how I have abused Thee!" "Oh, Jesus, how I have abused Thee!"--until at last, his agitation passed off, leaving him in a state of most perfect submission. Now here was a case, where by the manifestation of his character, God as it were, almost immediately revolutionized a man. He said it was a view of the character of God in Christ which produced the effect. By degrees his convictions rapidly arose, until he could endure it no longer, and when he bowed his will, it seemed as though God said to all the propensities which formerly ruled him--'peace, be still'--and he has been a flaming light ever since. His tongue seems to be tuned with the praises of God. I have known him long and he seems always the same. Doubtless his warfare was greatly abated by that apprehension of the character of God in Christ. I know the effect of this by my own experience. When I was converted, for some time I did not know that I had any appetite left, all my susceptibilities seemed so perfectly absorbed in the things of the gospel. And in all this there is nothing strange. It is perfectly natural and just what might be expected.

4. There is one truth particularly which when the Spirit has revealed it to the mind, seems forever after to exert a powerful influence on the sensibility, and that is the relation of the death of Christ to our sins. People often talk about the Atonement, without seeming to understand its real meaning, and especially its relation to their own sins. But let them once see that their own sins actually caused his death, and where's the mind that can contemplate the fact unmoved? I have known that single thought to excite all the nerves into a quiver, and as it were, set the sensibility all on fire, so as to throw a strong man almost in a fit of apoplexy.

VIII. This warfare will, under a more or less modified form, continue while we are in the body.

Some have supposed that when persons are entirely sanctified, all the passions, desires and appetites of the sensibility will impel the will in the same direction that the reason does, invariably; but such persons do not know what they say, for all their propensities seek their objects for their own sake, and are blind to every thing else. They always and necessarily urge the will to seek their respective objects for the sake of

the gratification. This is temptation, and creates a warfare. The appetite for food, for example, seeks food for its own sake, and so does the desire of knowledge. It is nonsense, then, to say that they will not solicit the will to gratify them under improper circumstances. But when the mind is entirely sanctified, instead of the various propensities creating such a fiery and turbulent warfare when excited, the will will have them under such control as to easily keep their places, so that all the actions will be bland and tranquilized. The most that will or can be done is to harmonize them, and it is by no means desirable that they should be annihilated. Suppose, for example, the desire for knowledge were annihilated. What a calamity would that be? Or the desire for food. The truth is, all the constitutional desires should remain. They were all given for useful purposes, and all call for their appropriate objects, for food, for knowledge, &c., and are thus constantly feeling after those things which are essential to our existence, and that of our race. Besides to regulate them is a good exercise for the will, and it is difficult to see how a mind could be virtuous at all, were all the susceptibilities of its sensibility destroyed; and were any of them removed, it would doubtless be a great evil, otherwise God was not benevolent in our creation, and did not make us in the best way.

REMARKS.

1. The common notion of warring with inward sin is nonsensical and impossible. Those who use such language confound temptation with sin. They call their natural appetites and propensities sinful, and when resisting these, they say they are indwelling sin, and multitudes, doubtless, mistake the actions of the conscience, its warnings and reproofs, for the resistance of the heart to temptation. The truth is, the Christian warfare consists in a struggle between the will and temptations from without and within, and in nothing else.
2. The deceived professor's warfare is between his heart and his reason or conscience. His heart is devoted to self-gratification, and the reason constantly disapproves of and denounces the service as wrong, and thus a continual struggle is kept up within, between his heart and reason, and this he calls the Christian warfare. If so, every sinner has the Christian warfare, and doubtless the devil also.
3. The Christian overcomes in his warfare. This is an habitual fact. Rom. 6:14. "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law but under grace." Also 8:1-4. See also the text and context, besides numberless other passages directly asserting the same thing.
4. What a ruinous mistake it is to suppose the 7th of Romans to be Christian experience. I hesitate not to say that it has been the occasion of the destruction of more souls than almost any other mistake in the world. It is fundamentally to mistake the very nature of true religion.
5. The warfare of the true Christian greatly strengthens his virtue. When he is greatly tried and obligated to gather up all his energy to maintain his integrity, when he wrestles, until he is all in a perspiration, with some fiery trial, as it is sometimes necessary for him to do, it must be that when he comes out from such a scene as this, his virtue is greatly strengthened and improved.
6. We can see, from this subject, why sinners often doubt the reality of temptation, and when they hear Christians talk of their temptations, they think that Christians must be worse than they, for they do not experience such. But the reason why they are not conscious of temptations is because they have not attempted to regulate their propensities by the law of God. A man floating on a current is not conscious of its strength until he turns round and attempts to stem it. The same principle applies to those professors of religion who entertain the same doubts. Talk about temptation! Why, they say, I am not so tempted. Indeed! Perhaps you have never done any thing else but to yield to it.

7. See why the Apostle said so much about the opposition of the flesh and Spirit. He represents them as at hostility, throughout his epistles, especially in the 6th, 7th, and 8th chapters of Romans.

8. Many struggle for a while in their own strength, and, through continued failures, become discouraged, and give it up. The temptations of their appetites and propensities are too strong for them, while they have not learned by faith to derive strength from Christ.

9. Many despair of ever becoming sanctified, because they suppose their constitutional propensities are, in themselves, sinful. They say it is in vain to talk of entire sanctification in this life, and well they may say so, if their constitutional appetites and propensities are sinful, for we know of no promise that our nature shall be revolutionized in this life or the next.

10. Others are brought into distress and despair because they cannot control their thoughts when their will is weary. The will is that power of the mind which originates all that control which it is possible for the mind to exert over itself. But it becomes weary, or perhaps it would be more correct to say, that the brain, through which it acts, grows weary and wants rest. In sleep, the will is suspended, and hence in dreams the thoughts run lawless and without direction. It is a matter of experience with students who study hard, and for a long time, that they find it extremely difficult, after long and severe application to keep their attention and thoughts on their studies. Why? Because their will is wearied out, and needs rest. So it is with Christians who undertake to pray when they are jaded out with weariness. Their thoughts fly every where. They try to restrain their wanderings; they struggle, and, for a moment seem to get the control, and then they lose it again. They try it over and over again, but with no better success, until they are well nigh in despair. Now, what is the matter? They need rest, and ought to take it rather than attempt to force their jaded will into action. Let your will rest. God will have mercy and not sacrifice. What's the use, when a man has walked sixty miles in a day, and his will can scarcely force his exhausted muscles into further action, of his attempting to use them further, and blaming himself because he cannot? Suppose a man should never go to sleep for fear he should dream and his thoughts ramble heedless of his will! Why call such things sin? Don't mistify forever and mix up sin and holiness, light and darkness, heaven and hell, so that people cannot tell which is which.

11. Some bring forward, the fact that this warfare is presented as continuing, as an argument against the doctrine of sanctification. Just as if a soul in order to be sanctified must get beyond a warfare! What! Then Adam was not sanctified before he sinned, nor Satan; nor was Jesus Christ while on earth, for it is a simple matter of fact that He had temptation. What would you think of the argument, if it should be said that Jesus Christ had a warfare and therefore He was not wholly sanctified? And yet it would be just as good as this.

12. However sharp the conflict, if the soul prevails there is no sin. What trials had Jesus Christ? But He prevailed. 'He was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin.' So if temptation should rush like a tornado upon any of you, if you will only hold on, and fight it out, you have not sinned. Nay the sharper the conflict, the greater the virtue of resistance.

13. The saints are no doubt preparing in this world for some high stations of usefulness, and where they may be exposed to strong temptations. I infer this from the fact that they are placed here in such circumstances as are exactly calculated to ripen and fit them for such a destiny. God never acts without design, and He surely has some design in this.

14. The sanctified are sometimes in heaviness through manifold temptations if need be. Now don't infer, if you see them so, that they are not holy. Christ had his sorrows, and knew what it was to resist even unto blood, striving against temptation to sin; and the servant need not expect to fare better than his Lord. The truth is, these trials are useful--they are but for a moment, but they prepare for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Sorrows endure for the night but joy cometh in the morning. Under the pressure of the temptations the soul is in an agony, and cries out "Help, Oh Lord, help," and He comes forth and scatters the insulting foe, and the soul bounds up like a rocket, giving glory to God.

15. Many have supposed for a time their enemies were dead, but were mistaken. The fact is they are never dead in such a sense, that we do not need to watch lest we enter into temptation. But let us never overlook the distinction between temptation and sin, and ever keep in mind that the Christian warfare is not with sin, but temptation. Nor forget that Christ alone can give us the victory. O for the Spirit of Christ to baptize the Ministers and the Churches.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/christian-warfare/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net