

Justification

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of obedience to God's law and walking after the Spirit, rather than after the flesh, in order to be justified and experience true salvation.

Scripture: John 15:4, Romans 8:1

Topics: "Justification", "Walking In The Spirit"

Description

Charles Finney's sermon on 'Justification' emphasizes that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, highlighting the necessity of walking after the Spirit rather than the flesh. He explains that being in Christ means having a living faith that leads to obedience, and that true justification is contingent upon this obedience. Finney critiques various misconceptions about justification, particularly the idea that one can be justified while continuing in sin, asserting that such beliefs undermine the law and the essence of true faith. He concludes that genuine believers experience peace and freedom from condemnation through their relationship with Christ, which transforms their lives and compels them to share the gospel with others.

Transcript

'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.' Rom. 8:1.

In this discourse, I shall notice,

- I. WHAT IT IS TO BE IN CHRIST JESUS.
- II. WHAT IS INTENDED BY NO CONDEMNATION.
- III. WHY THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION TO THEM WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS.
- IV. WHAT IS INTENDED BY NOT WALKING AFTER THE FLESH, BUT AFTER THE SPIRIT.
- V. NONE, EXCEPT THOSE WHO WALK AFTER THE SPIRIT, ARE IN A JUSTIFIED STATE.

I. What it is to be in Christ Jesus.

Four answers have been given to this question, which I will briefly consider, and then give what I suppose to be the true one.

1. The first I notice, is the doctrine of eternal justification by imputed righteousness. The doctrine is, that a certain number were unconditionally chosen from all eternity, to whom, Christ sustained the relation of Covenant Head, in such a sense that they are eternally justified. This gross and absurd notion is now exploded and generally rejected. As I have given my views of imputation in a former lecture, I will not dwell on it here.

2. The second answer I notice, is that of perpetual justification by one act of faith. The doctrine is, that the first act of faith, brings the soul into such a relation to God, as never afterwards to be condemned or exposed to the penalty of the law, whatever sins it may commit. The simple idea is, that as it respects Christians, the penalty of the law is wholly set aside.

(1.) Now respecting this, the first remark I make is, that justification is of two kinds, legal and gospel. Legal justification, consists in pronouncing a moral agent innocent of all violation of the claims of the law, so that it has no charge against him. Gospel justification, consists in pardoning a sinner for whatever transgressions he may have committed, that is, in arresting or setting aside the execution of the penalty which he has incurred.

(2.) Legal justification is out of the question, as all the world has become guilty before God. And to maintain that a soul is perpetually justified by once believing, is antinomianism, and one of the worst forms of error. It is to maintain, that as it respects Christians, the law of God is abrogated. The law is made up of precept and penalty, and if either is detached, it ceases to be law. It matters not whether it be maintained that the precept be set aside, or the penalty, it is to maintain an abrogation of the law, and is a ruinous error. It is the nature of a pardon, to set aside the execution of the penalty due to past violations of the law, and to restore the person to governmental favor, during good behavior. More than this, it cannot do, without giving an indulgence to sin. If no future sins can incur the penalty, it follows that the Christian could not be in danger of hell, however many or gross sins he might commit, or even should he die in a state of the foulest apostasy. What an abomination is such a doctrine!

(3.) This doctrine cannot be true, for no being can prevent condemnation where there is sin. I said in a former lecture, that the law is not founded in the arbitrary will of God, but in the nature and relations of moral beings. Whatever penalty is due to any act of sin, is due therefore, from the nature of the case, so that every act of sin subjects the sinner to the penalty. Pardon cannot then be prospective--sin cannot be forgiven in advance, and to maintain that it is, is to make Christ the minister of sin.

(4.) Again, if Christians are not condemned when they sin, they cannot be forgiven, for forgiveness is nothing else than setting aside the penalty. And therefore, if they are not condemned, they cannot properly pray for forgiveness. In fact, it is unbelief in them to do so. What else can it be, when the sin, whatever it may be in enormity, has not exposed its perpetrator at all to the penalty of God's law?

(5.) This notion cannot be true, because the Bible uniformly makes perseverance in holiness, that is, in obedience, just as much a condition of final acceptance with God, as repentance, or one act of faith. For my part, I must say, I don[']t know where the Bible makes salvation depend on one act of faith. Those who hold this dogma, ought to tell us where it is taught.

(6.) The Bible, on the contrary, expressly declares that 'when a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquities, and dieth in them, for his iniquity that he hath done, shall he die.' What can be more distinct or explicit than this declaration? I know not how it has been overlooked, or can be evaded.

(7.) If this doctrine be true, it follows that if Christians are not condemned for one sin, they would not be for ten thousand, and that the greatest apostates could be saved without repentance. But what kind of a gospel is that? It would overthrow the entire government of God. A pretty gospel! Strange kind of good news!

(8.) Moreover, as I have before said, if the penalty is abolished as it respects believers, the law must be. To them, its precept ceases to be anything else than simple advice, which they may do as they please about adopting.

(9.) Finally, every Christian's experience condemns this doctrine. Who of them does not feel condemned when he sins? Now, he either is condemned when his conscience affirms that he is, or it is at opposition to the government of God--affirming what is not true. And when, under its rebukes, persons go and ask pardon, in yielding to it, they are guilty of unbelief, and thus add one sin to another. The truth is, every Christian's conscience condemns the doctrine, and it obviously is evil, and only evil, and that continually, in its whole tendency.

3. The third answer I notice, is, that there will be no final condemnation. Without saying any thing of the truth or falsity of that doctrine, here, I remark that the text says no such thing. It says, 'there is now no condemnation.' With this agrees Romans 5:1, 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Indeed, this is the general representation of the Bible.

4. The fourth answer which has been given, is this. To be in Christ, is to have a personal, living faith in Him--it is to abide in Him by a living faith. John 15:4-7. 'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me, ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch that is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' 1 John 3:5-6. 'And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins: and in Him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in Him, sinneth not: whosoever sinneth, hath not seen Him, neither known Him.' 2 Cor. 5:17. 'Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.' I might quote many other passages, all setting forth that there is no condemnation to those whose faith secures in them, an actual conformity to the divine will. To all others, there is.

5. To be in Christ, is to be so under his influence, as not to walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit; that is, to receive constant divine influence from Him, as the branches derive nourishment from the vine. This intimate connection with Christ, and spiritual subjection to his control, are fully taught in many passages in the Bible. Gal. 2:20. 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.' And 5:16-25. 'This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts 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 that ye would. But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which, I tell you before as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit, is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against

such there is no law. And they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.'

II. What is intended by no condemnation.

1. To be condemned, is to be under sentence of law. Those who are condemned, are not only not pardoned for the past, but also their present state of mind is blameworthy and condemned. They are not justified on the ground of either law or gospel, but the whole penalty due to all their iniquity is out against them.

2. When it is said there is no condemnation, it is not intended that they never were condemned, but that their past sin is all pardoned. They are wholly delivered from exposure to the penalty, due to their sins. In addition to this, it is intended, that in their present state of mind, they obey the law, so that the law does not condemn their present state. It does not mean that they will not be again condemned if they sin, but that while they are in Christ Jesus, they are free from all present condemnation.

III. Why there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.

1. Not because they are of the elect and eternally justified.

2. Not because Christ's righteousness is so imputed, that we can sin without incurring exposure to the penalty of the law.

3. Not because we are perpetually justified by one act of faith. This, as we have attempted to show, is an antinomian and pernicious error.

4. Not because God accepts an imperfect obedience. There is a general opinion abroad, that somehow or other, God accepts an imperfect obedience as genuine. Now it seems to me, that this is a very erroneous view of the subject. The truth is, God has no option about this matter, any more than any other being, for the law exists and makes its demands, wholly independent of his will, and whatever it demands, that is, whatever the nature and relations of moral beings demand, that, as moral Governor, He is bound to enforce, and nothing else. Now what is there in reason or the Bible, to sanction the idea, that God will, or can accept an imperfect obedience? The Bible insists on our serving Him with the whole heart--on our being perfectly benevolent, and proposes no lower standard. Nor could we believe it, if it did. What kind of obedience is half, or imperfect obedience? No one can tell, and consequently, no one can intentionally render it. The very idea of it, is absurd.

5. But to him that is in Christ Jesus, there is now no condemnation, because he is in Christ Jesus in the sense above explained. Not that Christ shields him from the penalty while he continues to violate the precept, but that He saves him from sin, and thus, from desert of the penalty. Says the text, 'to those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' Now mark the result; let us read right along. In the seventh chapter, he spoke of a law in his members, which brought him into captivity to sin and death; that is, under condemnation. Now he says, (8:2-4) 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.' Here he asserts that the reason why God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, and condemned sin in the flesh, was, 'that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not

after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' Now, public justice having been satisfied by the Atonement, when the heart is thus brought into conformity to the law, that is a good reason why they should be pardoned. The same thing is meant, by 'writing the law in the heart.'

6. Again, there is no condemnation to him who is in Christ Jesus, because he 'walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' This same thought is contained in Gal. 5:16-24-- 'This I say then, walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lusts 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 that ye would. But if ye be led by the Spirit ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which, I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit, is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.' Here the fruit of the Spirit is just what the law requires, and therefore there can be no condemnation.

7. This assertion must either mean that when we are in Christ we do not sin, or that in Him we can sin without condemnation. Now, what does it mean? It cannot mean the last, for that would make Christ the minister of sin. No individual can sin without breaking the law, for sin is the transgression of the law. The first, then, must be the meaning, and this agrees with what the Scriptures teach-- 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' The reason then why there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus is,

(1.) That in Christ their former sins are pardoned on the ground of his Atonement; and,

(2.) That while in Him they do not sin. He saves them from their sins, and therefore from condemnation.

IV. What is intended by not walking after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

1. By the flesh is meant the appetites, desires, and propensities of the Sensibility. To walk after the flesh is to indulge these--to give up the will to self-gratification. It is to be in bondage to the propensities so that they are our masters and govern us. It is to be selfish.

2. But to walk after the Spirit, is to obey the Spirit of Christ--it is to obey the law of God.

V. None except those who walk after the Spirit are in a justified state.

1. By this I do not intend to say that they never were justified. For it is true that individuals who once obeyed, and were of course justified, have fallen. This is the case with the angels who kept not their first estate, and Adam and Eve. These were justified in the legal sense before they sinned. But many have also fallen into grievous iniquity, who have once been justified in the gospel sense.

2. I do not mean that they are in no sense Christians. In the common acceptance of the term, it is not limited to those who are in a state of actual conformity to the will of God, but applies to all who give credible evidence of having been converted. Moreover, it is true of Christians, that they sustain a peculiar relation to God, and the term does not indicate that they never sin or fall into condemnation, but that they sustain a certain relation to God which others do not.

3. But I do mean that no one can commit sin without condemnation. When a Christian sins, he is as really condemned as any one else, and he is no longer justified than he is obedient.

4. I mean that no one is justified or pardoned, until he obeys the law or repents, which is the same thing. By the by, it is important that all should understand that repentance is not sorrow for sin, but a real turning away from all sin to God. Now when any individual sins, he must be condemned till he repents, or forsake his sin. A great many people talk about always repenting--that the best acts we ever perform need to be repented of, &c. Now, this is all nonsense, and nothing but nonsense. I say again religion is no such thing as this, and to represent it so is to talk loosely. 'The soul that sinneth it shall die.' Repentance is a hearty and entire forsaking of sin, and entrance upon obedience to God.

5. I mean that when one has truly repented, he is justified, and remains so just as long as he remains obedient, and no longer; and that when he falls into sin, he is as much condemned as any other sinner, because he is a sinner.

6. I also mean that justification follows and does not precede sanctification as some have vainly imagined. I here use the term sanctification, not in the high sense of permanent sanctification, but of entire consecration to God. It is not true that persons are justified, before they forsake sin. They certainly could not be thus legally justified, and the gospel proffers no pardon until after repentance, or hearty submission of the will to God. I add, that Christians are justified no longer than they are sanctified, or obedient, and that complete permanent justification depends upon complete and permanent sanctification.

REMARKS.

1. I have often thought, and could not help drawing the conclusion that the great mass of professors of religion are mere antinomians, living in the habitual commission of known sin, and yet expecting to be saved. And when they are pressed up to holiness of heart, they say, "I am not expected to be perfect in this life. I expect Christ to make up for my deficiencies." Now such religion is no better than universalism or infidelity. See that professor of religion. What is he doing? Why indulging his appetites and propensities in various ways which he knows to be contrary to the divine will. Ask him about it and he will confess it--he will confess that this is his daily practice; and yet he thinks he is justified. But if the Bible be true, he is not. 'Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?' But he can tell an experience. Perhaps he wrote it all down lest he should forget it, and tells it over to the hundredth time, how he felt when God pardoned his sins, while he is now living in sin every day. Perhaps he never tells an experience at all, but yet rests back upon something which he felt when he imagined he was converted. Now this is nothing but antinomianism, and how astonishing it is that so many should cry out so vehemently about antinomianism who are nothing but antinomians themselves. What a terrible delusion is this!

2. Men are justified by faith in Christ, because they are sanctified by faith in Him. They do not have righteousness imputed to them, and thus stand justified by an arbitrary fiction, while they are personally unholy, but they are made righteous by faith, and that is the reason why they are justified.

3. To talk about depending on Christ to be justified by Him, while indulging in any form of known sin, is to insult Him. It is to charge him with being the minister of sin. A lady, not long since, was talking with her minister about certain females who were given up to dress in the utmost style of extravagant fashion. He said he thought the most dressy people in his church were the best Christians. They were the most humble, and dependent on Christ. That's his idea about religion. What did he mean? Why that such

persons did not pretend to be holy, and professed to depend wholly on Christ. They acknowledged themselves sinners. And well they might! But what kind of religion is that? And how did he get such a notion? How else but by supposing that persons are not expected to be holy in this life, and that they can be justified while living in sin! Now I would as soon expect a pirate, whose hands are red with blood to be saved, as professors of religion who indulge in any form of sin, lust, pride, worldliness, or any other iniquity. 'Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: Yea, we establish the law.' But what a state of things must it be, when a minister can utter such a sentiment as that?

4. Such an idea of justification is open to the infidel objection that the gospel is a system of impunity in sin. The Unitarians have stereotyped this objection against faith. Ask them why they say so. They answer, because the doctrine of justification by faith is injurious to good morals. A circuit Judge, some years since said, "I cannot admit the Bible to be true. It teaches that men are saved by faith, and I therefore regard the gospel as injurious to good morals, and as involving a principle that would ruin any government on earth." Now, did he get this idea from the Bible? No, but from the false representations made of the teachings of the Bible. It teaches no such thing, but plainly asserts that a faith that does not sanctify is a dead faith.

5. There are many hoping that they are Christians, who yet live so that their conscience condemns them. 'For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.' Now to teach that persons may be justified while their conscience condemns them, contradicts this passage. If our own conscience condemns us, God does. Shall He be less just than our own nature?

6. A great multitude of professors are merely careless sinners. Now do let me ask, if from the way many persons live in the Church, compared with the way many careless sinners live, is it not perfectly manifest that they are in no wise different. And is it censorious to say that they are mere hardened sinners? What will become of them?

7. Many who are accounted the most pious, are only convicted sinners. It is a most remarkable thing, and one which I have taken great pains to observe, that many, thought to be converted in the late revivals, are only convicted sinners, that is, mere legalists. The preaching makes them so. The claims of the law are held up, and obligation enforced to comply with it. They are told to trust Christ for pardon, and they attempt it. Many really do, while others stop short with mere resolutions. All this class will go back, or stay in the Church almost constantly distressed by the lashings of conscience. If you hold up the law they are distressed, and if you hold up Christ they are distressed by the consciousness that they do not exercise faith in Him. Hold up either, and they have no rest. They are really convicted sinners, and yet they think this is religion. In time of coldness they always sink back, but in times of revival they are aroused and driven to the performance of a heartless service which continually fails to appease the demands of conscience. They know of no other experience than this. They refer you to the 7th of Romans, to prove that this is Christian experience, and thus bolster up their hope. I recollect some time since when I had preached against this as Christian experience, a minister said to me, "Well, Bro. Finney, I can[']t believe that." Why? "Because that's my experience, and I believe I am a Christian." A strange reason that! I suppose it was his experience! Great multitudes have this, and suppose it genuine. I fear, in some instance, whole Churches are made up of such, and their ministers teach them that this is genuine religion. What would the minister just referred to say? That is Paul's experience, and mine too. And the people often derive much comfort from what the minister says in his experience. Oh, what teaching is this? It is high time there was an overturning in the Church on this subject. Whoever has no experience but that of the 7th of Romans is not justified at all, and were it not that great multitudes are deluded, it could not be that so many could sit down contented under this view of the subject.

8. One who walks after the Spirit, has this inward testimony that he pleases God. An individual may think he does, when he does not, just as persons in a dream may think themselves awake, find it all a dream. So individuals may think they please God when they do not, but it is nevertheless true that those who please God know it. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.

9. This view of the subject does not touch that of the final perseverance of the saints. What I am attempting to show is,

(1.) That true believers are justified or pardoned, and treated as righteous, on account of the Atonement of Christ.

(2.) That those who truly believe, are justified because they are actually righteous. The question is not whether a Christian who has fallen into sin will die in that state, but whether if he does he will be damned. Whether, while in sin, he is justified.

10. Those who sin do not abide in Christ. 'And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him neither known Him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin because he is born of God.' While they abide in Christ, they are not condemned, but if they overlook what abiding in Christ is, they are sure to fall into sin, and then, they are condemned as a matter of course. The secret of holy living, and freedom from contamination, is to abide in Christ. Says Paul, 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.' We must have such confidence in Him as to let Him have the entire control in all things.

11. Sinners can see how to be saved. They must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all their heart. They must become holy and walk after the Spirit.

12. Convicted professors can also see what to do. Have you felt misgivings and a load on your conscience. Are you never able to say, I am justified--I am accepted in the Beloved. You must come to Christ now, if you now experience condemnation*.

13. There is neither peace nor safety except in Christ, but in Him is all fulness, and all we need. In Him you may come to God, as children, with the utmost confidence.

14. If you are in Christ, you have peace of mind. How sweetly the experience of a Christian answers to this. Many of you perhaps can testify to this. You had been borne down with a burden too heavy, crying out, 'O, wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death.' But your faith took hold on Christ, and suddenly all your burden was gone. You could no longer feel condemned. The stains of sin are all wiped out by the hand of grace. You can now look calmly at your sins, and not feel them grind like an iron yoke. Are you in this state? Can you testify from your own experience that there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus? If so, you can reflect upon your past sins without being ground down into the dust under the guilty burden which rolls upon you. The instant you experience a freedom from condemnation, your whole soul yearns with benevolence for others. You know what their state is. Ah, yes, you know what it is to drink the wormwood and the gall--to have the arrows of the Almighty drink up your spirit, and when you find deliverance you must of course, want to teach others what

is the great salvation--to strengthen those that are weak. And an individual who can sit down at ease, and not find his benevolence like fire shut up in his bones--who does not even feel agonized, not for himself, but for others, cannot have yet found that there is now no condemnation. He may dream that he has, but if he ever awakes, he will find it but a dream. Oh, how many need to be aroused from this sleep of death!

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

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