

Lecture IX. - Means to Be Used With Sinners.

by Charles Finney

Christians are called to testify to the truth of the Bible and the reality of the Gospel by living in accordance with its teachings and by being competent witnesses to its truth.

Scripture: Isaiah 43:10, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 5:20, Philippians 2:15-16, Colossians 3:17, James 1:22, 1 Peter 2:9, 1 John 1:6

Topics: "Witnessing", "Christian Conduct"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the critical role of Christians as witnesses for God, urging them to testify to the truth of the Bible and the reality of sin and salvation. He explains that the effectiveness of their testimony is not only in words but significantly in their actions and lifestyle, which should reflect their beliefs. Finney highlights the necessity of living a life that demonstrates the immortality of the soul, the vanity of earthly pursuits, and the love of Christ, as well as the importance of holiness and integrity. He warns that inconsistency between professed beliefs and daily conduct undermines the church's witness and hinders the conversion of sinners. Ultimately, he calls for a higher standard of Christian living to effectively reach the world with the Gospel.

Transcript

TEXT.--Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen. --ISAIAH xliii:10.

IN the text it is affirmed of the children of God, that they are his witnesses. In several preceding lectures I have been dwelling on the subject of Prayer, or that department of means for the promotion of a revival, which is intended to move God to pour out his Spirit. I am now to commence the other department:

MEANS TO BE USED FOR THE CONVICTION AND CONVERSION OF SINNERS.

It is true, in general, that persons are affected by the subject of religion, in proportion to their conviction of its truth. Inattention to religion is the great reason why so little is felt concerning it. No being can look at the great truths of religion, as truths, and not feel deeply concerning them. The devil cannot. He believes and trembles. Angels in heaven feel in view of these things. God feels. An intellectual conviction of truth is always accompanied with feeling of some kind.

One grand design of God in leaving Christians in the world after their conversion, is that they may be witnesses for God. It is that they may call the attention of the thoughtless multitude to the subject, and

make them see the difference in the character and destiny of those who believe and those who reject the Gospel. This inattention is the grand difficulty in the way of promoting religion. And what the Spirit of God does is to awaken the attention of men to the subject of their sin and the plan of salvation. Miracles have sometimes been employed to arrest the attention of sinners. And in this way, miracles may become instrumental in conversion, although conversion is not itself a miracle, nor do miracles themselves ever convert any body. They may be the means of awakening. Miracles are not always effectual even in that. And if continued or made common, they would soon lose their power. What is wanted in the world is something that can be a sort of omnipresent miracle, able not only to arrest attention but to fix it, and keep the mind in warm contact with the truth, till it yields.

Hence we see why God has scattered his children everywhere, in families and among the nations. He never would suffer them to be all together in one place, however agreeable it might be to their feelings. He wishes them scattered. When the church at Jerusalem herded together, neglecting to go forth as Christ had commanded, to spread the Gospel all over the world, God let loose a persecution upon them and scattered them abroad, and then "they went every where preaching the gospel." In examining the text, I propose to inquire.

I. To what particular points Christians are to testify for God.

II. The manner in which they are to testify.

I. To what points are the children of God required to testify?

Generally, they are to testify to the truth of the Bible. They are competent witnesses to this, for they have experience of its truth. The experimental Christian has no more need of external evidence to prove the truth of the Bible to his mind, than he has to prove his own existence. The whole plan of salvation is so fully spread out and settled in his conviction, that to undertake to reason him out of his belief in the Bible would be a thing as impracticable as to reason him out of the belief in his own existence. Men have tried to awaken a doubt of the existence of the material world. But they cannot succeed. No man can doubt the existence of a material world. To doubt it, is against his own consciousness. You may use arguments that he cannot answer, and may puzzle and perplex him, and shut up his mouth; he may be no logician or philosopher, and unable to detect your fallacies. But what he knows he knows.

So it is in religion. The Christian is conscious that the Bible is true. The veriest child in religion knows by his experience the truth of the Bible. He may hear objections from infidels, that he never thought of, and that he cannot answer, and he may be confounded, but he cannot be driven from his ground. He will say, "I cannot answer you, but I know the Bible is true."

As if a man should look in a mirror, and say, "That's my face." How do you know it is your face? "Why, by its looks." So when a Christian sees himself drawn and pictured forth in the Bible, he sees the likeness to be so exact, that he knows it is true. But more particularly, Christians are to testify--

1. To the immortality of the soul. This is clearly revealed in the Bible.
2. The vanity and unsatisfying nature of all earthly good.
3. The satisfying nature and glorious sufficiency of religion.

4. The guilt and danger of sinners. On this point they can speak from experience as well as the word of God. They have seen their own sins, and they understand more of the nature of sin, and the guilt and danger of sinners.
5. The reality of hell, as a place of eternal punishment for the wicked.
6. The love of Christ for sinners.
7. The necessity of a holy life, if we think of ever getting to heaven.
8. The necessity of self-denial, and living above the world.
9. The necessity of meekness, heavenly-mindedness, humility, and integrity.
10. The necessity of an entire renovation of character and life, for all who would enter heaven. These are the subjects on which they are to be witnesses for God. And they are bound to testify in such a way as to constrain men to believe the truth.

II. How are they to testify?

By precept and example, on every proper occasion, by their lips, but mainly by their lives. Christians have no right to be silent with their lips; they should rebuke, exhort, and entreat with all long-suffering and doctrine. But their main influence as witnesses is by their example.

They are required to be witnesses in this way, because example teaches with so much greater force than precept. This is universally known. Actions speak louder than words. But where both precept and example are brought to bear, it brings the greatest amount of influence to bear upon the mind. As to the manner in which they are to testify; the way in which they should bear witness to the truth of the points specified; in general--they should live in their daily walk and conversation, as if they believed the Bible.

1. As if they believed the soul to be immortal, and as if they believed that death was not the termination of their existence, but the entrance into an unchanging state. They ought to live so as to make this impression full upon all around them. It is easy to see that precept without example on this point will do no good. All the arguments in the world will not convince mankind that you really believe this, unless you live as if you believed it. Your reasoning may be unanswerable, but if you do not live accordingly, your practice will defeat your arguments. They will say you are an ingenious sophist, or an acute reasoner, and perhaps admit that they cannot answer you; but then they will say, it is evident that your reasoning is all false, and that you know it is false, because your life contradicts your theory. Or that, if it is true, you do not believe it, at any rate. And so all the influence of your testimony goes to the other side.

2. The vanity and unsatisfying nature of the things of this world. You are to testify this by your life. The failure in this is the great stumbling block in the way of mankind. Here the testimony of God's children is needed more than any where else. Men are so struck with the objects of sense, and so constantly occupied with them, that they are very apt to shut out eternity from their minds. A small object, that is held close to the eye, may shut out the distant ocean. So the things of the world, that are near, magnify so in their minds, that they overlook every thing else. One important design in keeping Christians in the world is to teach people on this point, practically, not to labor for the meat that perisheth. But suppose professors of religion teach the vanity of earthly things by precept, and contradict it in practice. Suppose the women are just as fond of dress, and just as particular in observing all the fashions, and the men as eager to have

fine houses and equipage, as the people of the world. Who does not see that it would be quite ridiculous for them to testify with their lips, that this world is all vanity, and its joys unsatisfying and empty? People feel this absurdity, and it is this that shuts up the lips of Christians. They are ashamed to speak to their neighbors, while they cumber themselves with these gewgaws, because their daily conduct testifies to every body the very reverse. How it would look for some of the church members in this city, male or female, to go about among the common people, and talk to them about the vanity of the world! Who would believe what they say?

3. The satisfying nature of religion. Christians are bound to show by their conduct, that they are actually satisfied with the enjoyments of religion, without the pomps and vanities of the world; that the joys of religion and communion with God keep them above the world. They are to manifest that this world is not their home. Their profession is, that heaven is a reality, and that they expect to dwell there for ever. But suppose they contradict this by their conduct, and live in such a way as to prove that they cannot be happy unless they have a full share of the fashion and show of the world, and that as for going to heaven, they had much rather remain on earth, than to die and go there! What do the world think, when they see a profession of religion just as much afraid to die as an infidel? Such Christians perjure themselves--they swear to a lie, for they testify that there is nothing in religion for which a person can afford to live above the world.

4. The guilt and danger of sinners. Christians are bound to warn sinners of their awful condition, and exhort them to flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on everlasting life. But who does not know that the manner of doing this is every thing? Sinners are often struck under conviction by the very manner of doing a thing. There was a man once very much opposed to a certain preacher. On being asked to specify some reason, he replied, "I cannot bear to hear him, for he says the word HELL in such a way that it rings in my ears a long time afterwards." He was displeased with the very thing that constituted the power of speaking that word. The manner may be such as to convey an idea directly opposite to the meaning of the words. A man may tell you that your house is on fire in such a way as to make directly the opposite impression, and you will take for granted that it is not your house that is on fire. The watchman might sing out FIRE, FIRE, in such a way that every body would think he was either asleep or drunk. A certain manner is so usually connected with the announcement of certain things that they cannot be expressed without that manner. The words themselves never alone convey the meaning, because the idea can only be fully expressed by a particular manner of speaking. Go to a sinner, and talk with him about his guilt and danger; and if in your manner you make an impression that does not correspond, you in effect bear testimony the other way, and tell him he is in no danger of hell. If the sinner believes at all that he is in danger of hell, it is wholly on other grounds than your saying so. If you live in such a way as to show that you do not feel compassion for sinners around you; if you show no tenderness, by your eyes, your features, your voice; if your manner is not solemn and earnest, how can they believe you are sincere?

Woman, suppose you tell your converted husband, in an easy, laughing way, "My dear, I believe you are going to hell;" will he believe you? If your life is gay and trifling, you show that either you do not believe there is a hell, or that you wish to have him go there, and are trying to keep off every serious impression from his mind. Have you children that are unconverted? Suppose you never say any thing to them about religion, or when you do talk to them it is in such a cold, hard, dry way as shows you have no feeling; do you suppose they believe you? They don't see the same coldness in you in regard to other things. They are in the habit of seeing all the mother in your eye, and in the tones of your voice, your emphasis, and the like, and feeling the warmth of a mother's heart as it flows out from your lips on all that concerns them. If,

then, when you talk to them on the subject of religion, you are cold and trifling, can they suppose you believe it? If your deportment holds up before your child this careless, heartless, prayerless spirit, and then you talk to him about the importance of religion, the child will go away and laugh, to think you should try to persuade him there is a hell.

5. The love of Christ. You are to bear witness to the reality of the love of Christ, by the regard you show for his precepts, his honor, his kingdom. You should act as if you believed that he died for the sins of the whole world, and as if you blamed sinners for rejecting his great salvation. This is the only legitimate way in which you can impress sinners with the love of Christ. Christians, instead of this, often live so as to make the impression on sinners that Christ is so compassionate that they have very little to fear from him. I have been amazed to see how a certain class of professors want ministers to be always preaching about the love of Christ. If a minister preaches up duty, and urges Christians to be holy, and to labor for Christ, they call it all legal preaching. They say they want to hear the Gospel. Well, suppose you present the love of Christ. How will they bear testimony in their lives? How will they show that they believe it? Why, by conformity to the world, they will testify point blank, that they do not believe a word of it, and that they care nothing at all for the love of Christ, only to have it for a cloak, that they can talk about it, and so cover up their sins. They have no sympathy with his compassion, and no belief in it as a reality, and no concern for the feelings of Christ, which fill his mind when he sees the condition of sinners.

6. The necessity of holiness in order to enter heaven. It will not do to depend on talking about this. They must live holy, and thus testify that men need not expect to be saved, unless they are holy. The idea has so long prevailed that we cannot be perfect here, that many professors do not so much as seriously aim at a sinless life. They cannot honestly say that they ever so much as really meant to live without sin. They drift along before the tide, in a loose, sinful, unhappy and abominable manner, at which, doubtless, the devil laughs, because it is, of all others, the surest way to hell.

7. The necessity of self-denial, humility, and heavenly-mindedness. Christians ought to show by their own example what the religion is which is expected of men. That is the most powerful preaching, after all, and the most likely to have influence on the impenitent, by showing them the great difference between them and Christians. Many people are trying to make men Christians by a different course, by copying as near as possible their present manner of life, and conforming to them as much as will possibly do. They seem to think they can make men fall in with religion best by bringing religion down to their standard. As if the nearer you bring religion to the world, the more likely the world would be to embrace it. Now all this is as wide as the poles from the true philosophy of making Christians. But it is always the policy of carnal professors. And they think they are displaying wonderful sagacity and prudence by taking so much pains not to scare people at the mighty strictness and holiness of the Gospel. They argue that if you exhibit religion to mankind as requiring such a great change in their manner of life, such innovations upon their habits, such a separation from their old associates, why, you will drive them all away. This seems plausible at first sight. But it is not true. Let professors live in this lax and easy way, and sinners say, "Why, I do not see but I am about right, or at least so near right, that it is impossible God should send me to hell for the difference between me and these professors. It is true, they do a little more than I do, they go to the communion table, and pray in their families, and a few such like little things, but they cannot make any such great difference as heaven and hell." No, the true way is, to exhibit religion and the world in strong contrast, or you never can make sinners feel the necessity of a change. Until the necessity of this fundamental change is embodied and held forth in a strong light by example, how can you make men believe they are going to be sent to hell if they are not wholly transformed in heart and life?

This is not only true in philosophy, but it has been proved by the history of the world. Look at the missions of the Jesuits in Japan, by Francis Xavier and his associates. How they lived, what a contrast they showed between their religion and the heathen, and what results followed! Now I was reading a letter from one of our missionaries in the East, who writes, I believe, to this effect, that a missionary must be able to rank with the English nobility, and so recommend his religion to the respect of the natives. He must get away up above them, so as to show a superiority, and thus impress them with respect! Is this philosophy? Is this the way to convert the world. You can no more convert the world in this way than by blowing a ram's horn. It has no tendency that way. What did the Jesuits do? They went about among the people in the daily practice of self-denial before their eyes, teaching, and preaching, and praying, and laboring, unwearied and unawed, mingling with every caste and grade, bringing down their instructions to the capacity of every individual. And in that way the mission carried idolatry before it like a wave of the sea, and all at once their religion spread over the vast empire of Japan. And if they had not meddled with politics and brought themselves in needless collision with the government, no doubt they would have held their ground till this day. I am not saying anything in regard to the religion they taught, for I am not sure how much truth they preached with it. I speak only of their following the true policy of missions, by showing, by their lives, the religion they taught in wide contrast with a worldly spirit and the fooleries of idolatry. This one feature of their policy so commended itself to the consciences of the people that it was irresistible. If Christians contradict this one point, and attempt to accommodate their religion to the worldliness of men, they render the salvation of the world impossible. How can you make people believe that self-denial and separation from the world are necessary, unless you practise them?

8. Meekness, humility, and heavenly-mindedness. The people of God should always show a temper like the Son of God, who when he was reviled, reviled not again. If a professor of religion is irritable, and ready to resent an injury, and fly in a passion, and take the same measures as the world do to get redress, by going to law and the like, how is he to make people believe there is any reality in a change of heart? They cannot recommend religion while they have such a spirit. If you are in the habit of resenting injurious conduct; if you do not bear it meekly, and put the best construction that can be on it, you contradict the Gospel. Some people always show a bad spirit, ever ready to put the worst construction on what is done, and take fire at any little thing. This shows a great want of that charity which "hopeth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things," But if a man always shows meekness under injuries, it will confound gainsaying. Nothing makes so solemn an impression upon sinners, and bears down with such a tremendous weight on their consciences, as to see a Christian, Christ-like bearing affronts and injuries with the meekness of a lamb. It cuts like a two-edged sword.

I will mention a case to show this. A young man abused a minister to his face, and reviled him in an unprecedented manner. The minister possessed his soul in patience, and spoke mildly in reply, telling him the truth pointedly, but yet in a very kind manner. This only made him the more angry, and at length he went away in a rage, declaring that he was not going to stay and bear this vituperation. As if it was the minister, instead of himself, that had been scolding. The sinner went away, but with the arrows of the Almighty in his heart, and in less than half an hour he followed the minister to his lodgings in intolerable agony, wept, and begged forgiveness, and broke down before God, and yielded up his heart to Christ. This calm and mild manner was more overwhelming to him than a thousand arguments. Now if that minister had been thrown off his guard, and answered harshly, no doubt he would have ruined the soul of that young man. How many of you have defeated every future effort you may make with your impenitent friends or neighbors, in some such way as this. On some occasion you have showed yourself so irascible, that you have sealed up your own lips, and laid a stumbling block over which that sinner will stumble into

hell. If you have done it in any instance, do not sleep till you have done all you can to retrieve the mischief; till you have confessed the sin and done every thing to counteract it as far as possible.

9. The necessity of entire honesty in a Christian. Oh what a field opens here for remark! But I cannot go over it fully now. It extends to all the departments of life. Christians need to show the strictest regard to integrity in every department of business, and in all their intercourse with their fellow-men. If every Christian would pay a scrupulous regard to honesty, and always be conscientious to do exactly right, it would make a powerful impression on the minds of people of the reality of religious principle.

A lady was once buying some eggs in a store, and the clerk made a miscount and gave her one more than the number. She saw it at the time, but said nothing, and after she got home it troubled her. She felt that she had acted wrong, soon hurried back to the young man and confessed it and paid the difference. The impression of her conscientious integrity went to his heart like a sword. It was a great sin in her to conceal the miscount, because the temptation was so small; for if she would cheat him out of an egg, it showed that she would cheat him out of his whole store, if she could do it and not be found out. But her prompt and humble confession showed an honest conscience.

I am happy to say, there are some men who deal on this principle of integrity. And the wicked hate them for it. They rail against them, and vociferate in bar-rooms, that they never will buy goods of such and such individuals, that such a hypocrite shall never touch a dollar of their money, and all that, and then they will go right away and buy of them, because they know they shall be honestly dealt with. This is a testimony to the truth of religion, that is heard from Georgia to Maine. Suppose all Christians did so, what would be the consequence? Christians would run away with the business of the city. The Christians would soon do the business of the world. The great argument which some Christians urge, that if they do not do business upon the common principle, of stating one price and taking another, they cannot compete with men of the world, is all false--false in philosophy and false in history. Only make it your invariable rule to do right, and do business upon principle, and you control the market. The ungodly will be obliged to conform to your standard. It is perfectly in the power of the church to regulate the commerce of the world, if they will only themselves maintain perfect integrity.

And if Christians will do the same in politics, they will sway the destinies of nations, without involving themselves at all in the base and corrupting strife of parties. Only let Christians generally determine to vote for no man for any office, that is not an honest man and a man of pure morals, and let it be known that Christians are united in this, whatever may be their difference in political sentiments, and no man would be put up who is not such a character. In three years it would be talked about in taverns and published in newspapers, when any man is set up as a candidate for office, "What a good man he is, how moral, how pious!" and the like. And any political party would no more set up a known Sabbath-breaker, or a gambler, or a profane swearer, or a whoremonger, or a rum-seller, as their candidate for office, than they would set up the devil himself for president. The carnal policy of many professors, who undertake to correct politics by such means as wicked men employ, and who are determined to vote with a party, let the candidate be ever so profligate, is all wrong--wrong in principle, contrary to philosophy and common sense, and ruinous to the best interests of mankind. The dishonesty of the church is cursing the world. I am not going to preach a political sermon, I assure you. But I want to show you, that if you mean in impress men favorably to your religion by your lives, you must be honest, strictly honest, in business, politics, and every thing you do. What do you suppose those ungodly politicians, who know themselves to be playing a dishonest game in carrying an election, think of your religion when they see you uniting with them? They know you are a hypocrite!

REMARKS.

1. It is unreasonable for professors of religion to wonder at the thoughtlessness of sinners.--Every thing considered, the carelessness of sinners is not wonderful. We are affected by testimony, and only by that testimony which is received by our minds. Sinners are so taken up with business, pleasure, and the things of the world, that they will not examine the Bible to find out what religion is. Their feelings are excited only on worldly subjects, because these only are brought into warm contact with their minds. The things of the world make therefore a strong impression. But there is so little to make an impression on their minds in respect to eternity, and to bring religion home to them, that they do not feel on the subject. If they examined the subject they would feel. But they do not examine it, nor think upon it, nor care for it. And they never will, unless God's witnesses rise up and testify. But inasmuch as the great body of Christians in fact live so as to testify on the other side by their conduct, how can we expect that sinners will feel right on the subject? Nearly all the testimony and all the influence that comes to their minds tends to make them feel the other way. God has left his cause here before the human race, and left his witnesses to testify in his behalf, and behold, they turn round and testify the other way! Is it any wonder that sinners are careless?

2. We see why it is that preaching does so little good; and how it is that so many sinners get gospel-hardened. Sinners that live under the Gospel are often supposed to be gospel-hardened; but only let the church wake up, and act consistently, and they will feel. If the church were to live only one week as if they believed the Bible, sinners would melt down before them. Suppose I were a lawyer, and should go into court and spread out my client's case, the issue is joined, and I make my statements, and tell what I expect to prove, and then call in my witnesses. The first witness takes his oath, and then rises up and contradicts me to my face. What good will all my pleading do? I might address the jury a month, and be as eloquent as Cicero, but so long as my witnesses contradicted me, all my pleading would do no good. Just so it is with a minister who is preaching in the midst of a cold, stupid, and God-dishonoring church. In vain does he hold up to view the great truths of religion, when every member of the church is ready to swear he lies. Why, in such a church, their very manner of going out of the aisles contradicts the sermon. They press out as cheerful and as easy, bowing to one another, and whispering together, as if nothing was the matter. Let the minister warn every man daily with tears, it will produce no effect. If the devil should come in and see the state of things, he would think he could not better the business for his interest.

Yet there are ministers who will go on in this way for years, preaching over the heads of such a people, that by their lives contradict every word they say, and they think it their duty to do so. Duty! To preach to a church that are undoing all his work, and contradicting all his testimony, and that will not alter! No. Let him shake off the dust from his feet for a testimony, and go to the heathen, or to the new settlements. The man is wasting his energies, and wearing out his life, and just rocking the cradle for a sleepy church, all testifying to sinners, there is no danger. Their whole lives are a practical testimony that the Bible is not true. Shall ministers continue to wear themselves out so? Probably not less than ninety-nine-hundredths of the preaching in this country is lost, because it is contradicted by the church. Not one truth in a hundred that is preached takes effect, because the lives of professors testify that it is not so.

3. It is evident that the standard of Christian living must be raised, or the world will never be converted. If we had as many church members now as there are families, and scattered all over the world, and a minister to every five hundred souls, and every child in a Sabbath-school, and every young person in a Bible-class, you would have all the machinery you want, but if the church contradict the truth by their lives, it never would produce a revival.

They never will have a revival in any place while the whole church in effect testify against the minister. Often it is the case that where there is the most preaching, there is the least religion, because the church contradict the preaching. I never knew means fail of a revival where Christians live consistently. One of the first things is to raise the standard of religion, so as to embody and hang out in the sight of all men, the truth of the Gospel. Unless ministers can get the church to wake up and act as if religion was true, and back their testimony by their lives, in vain will they attempt to promote a revival.

Many churches are depending on their minister to do everything. When he preaches, they will say, "What a great sermon that was. He's an excellent minister. Such preaching must do good. We shall have a revival soon, I do not doubt." And all the while they are contradicting the preaching by their lives. I tell you, if they are depending on preaching alone to carry on the work, they must fail. If Jesus Christ were to come and preach, and the church contradict it, he would fail. It has been tried once. Let an apostle rise from the dead, or an angel come down from heaven and preach, without the church to witness for God, and it would have no effect. The novelty might produce a certain kind of effect for a time, but as soon as the novelty was gone, the preaching would have no saving effect, while contradicted by the witnesses.

4. Every Christian makes an impression by his conduct, and witnesses either for one side or the other. His looks, dress, whole demeanor, make a constant impression on one side or the other. He cannot help testifying for or against religion. He is either gathering with Christ, or scattering abroad. Every step you take, you tread on chords that will vibrate to all eternity. Every time you move, you touch keys whose sound will re-echo over all the hills and dales in heaven, and through all the dark caverns and vaults of hell. Every movement of your lives, you are exerting a tremendous influence, that will tell on the immortal interests of souls all around you. Are you asleep, while all your conduct is exerting such an influence?

Are you going to walk in the street? Take care how you dress. What is that on your head? What does that gaudy ribbon, and those ornaments upon your dress, say to every one that meets you? It makes the impression that you wish to be thought pretty. Take care! You might just as well write on your clothes, "NO TRUTH IN RELIGION." It says, "GIVE ME DRESS, GIVE ME FASHION, GIVE ME FLATTERY, AND I AM HAPPY." The world understand this testimony as you walk the streets. You are "living epistles, known and read of all men." If you show pride, levity, bad temper, and the like, it is like tearing open the wounds of the Saviour. How Christ might weep to see professors of religion going about hanging up his cause to contempt at the corners of streets. Only "let the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array, but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works;" only let them act consistently, and their conduct will tell on the world, heaven will rejoice and hell groan at their influence. But oh, let them display vanity, try to be pretty, bow down to the goddess of fashion, fill their ears with ornaments, and their fingers with rings. Let them put feathers in their hats, and clasps upon their arms, lace themselves up till they can hardly breathe. Let them put on their "round tires and walk mincing as they go," and their influence is reversed. Heaven puts on the robes of mourning, and hell may hold a jubilee.

5. It is easy to see why revivals do not prevail in a great city. How can they? Just look at God's witnesses, and see what they are testifying to. They seem to be agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord, and lie to the Holy Ghost. They make their vows to God, to consecrate themselves wholly to him, and then go bowing down at the shrine of fashion, and then wonder there are no revivals. It would be more than a miracle to have a revival under such circumstances. How can a revival prevail in this church? Do you suppose I have such a vain imagination of my own ability, as to think I can promote a revival by preaching over your heads, while you live on as some of you do? Do you not know that so far as your influence goes,

many of you are right in the way of a revival? Your spirit and deportment produce an influence on the world against religion. How shall the world believe religion, when the witnesses are not agreed among themselves? You contradict yourselves, you contradict one another, and you contradict your minister, and the sum of the whole testimony is, there is no need of being pious.

Do you believe the things I have been preaching are true, or are they the ravings of a disturbed mind? If they are true, do you recognize the fact that they have reference to you? You say, perhaps, "I wish some of the rich churches could hear it!" Why, I am not preaching to them, I am preaching to you. My responsibility is to you, and my fruits must come from you. Now are you contradicting it? What is the testimony on the leaf of the record that is now sealed for the judgment concerning this day? Have you manifested a sympathy with the Son of God, when his heart is bleeding in view of the desolations of Zion? Have your children, clerks, servants, seen it to be so? Have they seen a solemnity on your countenance, and tears in your eyes, in view of perishing souls?

FINALLY. --I must close by remarking, that God and all moral beings have great reason to complain of this false testimony. There is ground to complain that God's witnesses turn and testify point-blank against him. They declare by their conduct that there is no truth in the gospel. Heaven might weep and hell rejoice to see this. Oh, how guilty! Here you are, going to the judgment. red all over with blood. Sinners are to meet you there, those who have seen how you live, many of them already dead, and many others you will never see again. What an influence you have exerted! Perhaps hundreds of souls will meet you in the judgment, and curse you (if they are allowed to speak) for leading them to hell, by practically denying the truth of the gospel. What will become of this city, and of the world, when the church is united in practically testifying that God is a liar? They testify by their lives, that if they make a profession and live a moral life, that is religion enough. Oh, what a doctrine of devils is that! Enough to ruin the whole human race.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/lecture-ix-means-to-be-used-with-sinners/>

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