

Lecture Xix. - Instructions to Converts.

by Charles Finney

Young converts should be encouraged to have a cheerful, settled hope in Christ, and should be taught what religion is and how to live it out in their daily lives.

Scripture: John 21:15

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Nurturing Young Converts"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the importance of nurturing young converts in their faith, using the example of Peter's restoration by Christ to illustrate the need for deep spiritual preparation before leading others. He outlines essential instructions for young converts, including the significance of immediate church membership, the dangers of false hopes, and the necessity of correct teachings to avoid doubts and backsliding. Finney warns against common misconceptions that can hinder spiritual growth, urging that young believers should be taught to act on principle rather than emotion, and to maintain a focus on usefulness rather than comfort in their Christian walk.

Transcript

TEXT. --Feed my lambs.--JOHN xxi. 15.

YOU, who read your Bibles, recollect the connection in which these words are found, and by whom they were spoken. They were addressed by the Lord Jesus Christ to Peter, after he had denied his Lord, and had professed repentance. Probably one of the designs which Christ had in view, in suffering Peter to sin so awfully as to deny his master, was to produce a deeper work of grace in him, and thus fit him for the peculiar duty to which he intended to call him, in laying the foundations of the Christian Church, and watching over the spiritual interests of the converts. It needed a peculiar work of grace in his soul, to fit him to lead others through those scenes of trial and temptation to which the early Christians, in particular, were exposed.

It is evident, that, though Peter had special natural qualifications for such a work, yet he was quite a superficial saint. He was probably converted before this, but he was weak, and there was left so much of his natural roughness and turbulence of temper, that he was still ready to bristle up on any occasion, and take offence at everything that crossed him, so that he was still quite unfit for that particular work to which he was destined. Christ designed him for such a peculiar service, that it seems something was indispensable to fit him for it, and make him such a saint, that future opposition would not irritate him, nor difficulties dishearten him, nor success and honor spoil him, by lifting up his heart with pride. And,

therefore, Christ takes the effectual method recorded before us, of dealing with him once for all, to secure a thorough work in his soul.

He asked him this question, to remind him, in an affecting manner, at once of his sin and of the love of Christ, "Simon, son of Jona, lovest thou me more than these?" Strongly implying a doubt whether he did love him. Peter answers, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." He said unto him, "Feed my lambs." He then repeated the question, as if he would read his inmost soul, "Simon, son of Jona, lovest thou me?" Peter was still firm, and promptly answers again, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." Jesus still asked him the question again, the third time, emphatically. He seemed to urge the point, as if he would search his inmost thoughts, to see whether Peter would ever deny him again. Peter was touched, he was grieved, it is said; he did not fly into a passion--he did not boast, as he did on a former occasion, "Though I should die with thee, yet would I not deny thee," but he was grieved, he was subdued, he spoke tenderly, he appealed to the Saviour himself, as if he would implore him not to doubt his sincerity any longer, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." Christ then gave him his final charge, "Feed my sheep."

By the terms sheep and lambs here, the Saviour undoubtedly designated Christians, -members of his church; the lambs probably represent young converts, those that have but little experience and but little knowledge of religion, and therefore, need to have special attention and pains taken with them, to guard from harm, and to train them for future usefulness. And when our Saviour told Peter to feed his sheep, he doubtless referred to the important part which Peter was to perform in watching over the newly formed churches in different parts of the world, and in training the young converts, and leading them along to usefulness and happiness.

My last lecture was on the subject of giving right instruction to anxious sinners. And this naturally brings me along, in this Course of Lectures, to consider the manner in which young converts should be treated and the instructions that should be given to them.

INSTRUCTIONS TO YOUNG CONVERTS.

In speaking on this subject, it is my design,

- I. To state several things that ought to be considered, in regard to the hopes of young converts.
- II. Several things respecting their making a profession of religion, and joining the church.
- III. The importance of having correct instruction given to young converts.
- IV. What should not be taught to young converts.
- V. What particular things are specially necessary to be taught to young converts.
- VI. How young converts should be treated by church members.

I. I am to state several matters in regard to the hopes of young converts.

1. Nothing should be said to them to create a hope. Nothing should ordinarily be intimated to persons under conviction, calculated to make them think they have experienced religion, till they find it out themselves. I do not like this term, "experienced religion," and I use it only because it is a phrase in common use. It is an absurdity in itself. What is religion? Obedience to God. Suppose you should hear a

good citizen say he had experienced obedience to the government of the country. You see it is nonsense. Or suppose a child should talk about experiencing obedience to his father. If he knew what he was saying, he would say he had obeyed his father, just as the apostle Paul says to the Roman believers, "Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you."

What I mean to say is, that ordinarily, it is best to let their hope or belief that they are converted spring up spontaneously in their own minds. Sometimes it will happen that persons may be really converted, but owing to some notions which they have been taught about religion, they do not realize it. Their views of what religion is, and its effect upon the mind, are so entirely wide of the truth, that they do not think that they have it. I will give you an illustration of this point.

Some years since, I labored in a place where a revival was in progress, and there was in the place a young lady from Boston. She had been brought up a Unitarian, she had considerable education, and was intelligent on many subjects, but on the subject of religion she was very ignorant. At length she was convicted of sin. She became awfully convinced of her horrible enmity against God. She had been so educated as to have a sense of propriety, but her enmity against God became so great, and broke out so frightfully, that it was horrible to hear her talk. She used to come to the anxious meetings, where we conversed with each one separately. And her feelings of opposition to God were such that she used to create disturbance. By the time I came within two or three seats from her, where she could hear what I said in a low voice to others, she would begin to make remarks in reply, so that they could be heard. And she would say the most bitter things against God, and against his providence, and his method of dealing with mankind, as if God was an infinite tyrant. She would speak of him as the most unjust and cruel being in the universe. I would try to hush her, and make her keep still, because she distracted the attention of others. Sometimes she would stop and command her temper awhile, and sometimes she would rise and go out. I have seldom seen a case, where the enmity of the heart rose so high against God. One night at the anxious meeting, after she had been very restless, as I came towards her, she began as usual to reply, but I hushed her, and told her I could not converse with her there, but invited her to my room the next morning, and then I would talk with her. She promised to come, but, says she, "God is unjust, he is infinitely unjust. Is he not almighty? Why then has he never shown me my enmity before? Why has he let me run on so long? Why does he let my friends at Boston remain in this ignorance? They are the enemies of God, as much as I am, and are going to hell. Why does he not show them the truth in regard to their condition?" And in this temper she left the room.

The next morning she came to my room, as she had promised. I saw as soon as she came in that her countenance was changed, but I said nothing about it. "Oh," said she, "I have changed my mind, as to what I said last night about God, I do not think he has done me any wrong, and I think I shall get religion sometime, for now I love to think about God. I have been all wrong; the reason why I had never known my enmity before, was, that I would not. I used to read the Bible, but I always passed over the passages that would make me feel as if I was a lost sinner, and those passages that spoke of Jesus Christ as God, I passed over without consideration, and now I see that it was my fault, not God's fault, that I did not know any more about myself; I have changed my mind now." She had no idea that this was religion, but she was encouraged now to expect religion at some future time, because she loved God so much. I said nothing to make her imagine that I thought her a Christian, but left her to find it out. And, for a time, her mind was so entirely occupied with thinking about God, that she never seemed to ask whether this is religion or not.

It is a great evil, ordinarily, to encourage persons to hope they are Christians. Very likely you may judge prematurely. Or if not, it is better they should find it out for themselves, suppose they do not see it at once.

They may break down lower than ever, and then they will come out so clear and decided, that they will know where they are.

2 When you see persons expressing a hope, and yet they express doubts too, it is generally because the work is not thorough. If they are convicted, they need breaking up. They are still lingering around the world, or they have not broken off effectually from their sins, and they need to be pushed back, rather than urged forward. If you see reason to doubt, or if you find that they have doubts, most probably there is some good reason to doubt. Sometimes persons express a hope in Christ, and afterwards remember some sin, that needs to be confessed to men, or some case where they have slandered, or defrauded, where it is necessary to make satisfaction, and where either their character, or their purse, is so deeply implicated that they hesitate, and refuse to perform their duty. This grieves the Spirit, brings darkness over their minds of course, and justly leads them to doubt whether they are truly converted. If a soul is truly converted, it will generally be found when there are doubts, that on some point they are neglecting duty. They should be searched as with a lighted candle, and brought up to the performance of duty, and not suffered to hope until they do it. Ordinarily it is proper just there to throw in some plain and searching truth, that will go through them, something that will wither their hopes like a moth. Do it while the Spirit of God is dealing with them, and do it in the right way, and there is no danger of its doing harm.

To illustrate this: I knew a person, who was a member of the church, but an abominable hypocrite, proved to be so by her conduct, and afterwards fully confessed to be so. In a revival of religion she was awakened and deeply convicted, and after a while she got a hope. She came to a minister to talk with him about her hope, and he poured in the truth to her mind in such a manner as to annihilate all her hopes. She then remained under conviction many days, and at last she broke out in hope again. The minister knew her temperament, and knew what she needed, and he tore away her hope again. And then she broke down, clear to the ground, so that she could not stand or go. So deeply did the Spirit of God PROBE her heart, that, for a time, it took away all her bodily strength. And then she came out subdued. Before, she had been one of the proudest rebels against God's government that ever was, but now she became humbled, and was one of the most modest, tender, lovely of Christians. No doubt that was just the way to deal with her. It was just the treatment that her case required.

It is often useful to deal with individuals in this way. Some persons are naturally unamiable in their temper, and unlovely in their deportment. And it is particularly important that such persons should be dealt with most thoroughly whenever they first begin to express hope in Christ. Unless the work with them, is, in the first place, uncommonly deep and thorough, they will be vastly less useful, and interesting, and happy, than they would have been, had the probe been thoroughly and skilfully applied to their heart. If they are encouraged at first, without being thoroughly dealt with, if they are left to go right along, and not sufficiently probed and broken down, these unlovely traits of character will remain unsubdued, and will be always breaking out to the great injury, both of their personal peace, and their general influence and usefulness as Christians.

It is important to take advantage of such characters while they are just in these peculiar circumstances, so that they can be moulded into proper form. Do not spare, though it should be a child, or a brother, or a husband, or a wife. Let it be a thorough work. If they express a hope, and you find they bear the image of Christ, they are Christians. But if that appears doubtful--if they do not appear to be fully changed, just tear away their hope, by searching them with the most discriminating truth, and leave the Spirit to do the work more deeply. If still the image is not perfect, do it again--break them down into a child-like spirit, and then let them hope. They will then be clear and thorough Christians. By such a mode of treatment, I have often

known people of the crookedest and hatefulest natural character, so transformed in a few days, that they appear like different beings. You would think the work of a whole life of Christian cultivation had been done at once. Doubtless this was the intent of our Saviour's dealing with Peter. He had been converted, but became puffed up with spiritual pride and self-confidence, and then he fell. After that, Christ broke him down again, by three times searching him with the inquiry, "Simon, son of Jona, lovest thou me?" after which, he seems to have been a stable and devoted saint the rest of his days.

3. There is no need of young converts having or expressing doubts as to their conversion. There is no more need of a person doubting whether he is now in favor of God's government, than there is for a man to doubt whether he is in favor of our government or another. It is, in fact, on the face of it, absurd, for a person to talk of doubting on such a point, if he is intelligent and understands what he is talking about. It has long been supposed to be a virtue, and a mark of humility, for a person to doubt whether he is a Christian, and this notion that there is virtue in doubting is a device of the devil. "I say, neighbor, are you in favor of our government, or do you prefer that of Russia?" "Why, I have some hopes that I love our own government, but I have many doubts." Wonderful! "Woman, do you love your children?" "Why, sir, I sometimes have a trembling hope that I love them, but you know the best have doubts." "Wife, do you love your husband?" "I do not know--I sometimes think I do, but you know the heart is deceitful, and we ought to be careful and not be too confident." Who would have such a wife? "Man do you love your wife, do you love your family?" "Ah, you know we are poor creatures, we do not know our own hearts. I think I do love them, but perhaps I am deceived." Ridiculous!

Ordinarily, the very idea of a person's expressing doubts, renders his piety truly doubtful. A real Christian has no need to doubt. And when one is full of doubts, ordinarily you ought to doubt for him and help him doubt. Affection to God is as much a matter of consciousness as any other affection. A woman knows she loves her child. How? By consciousness. She is conscious of the exercise of this affection. And, then, she sees it carried out into action every day. In the same way a Christian may know that he loves God, by his consciousness of this affection, and by seeing that it influences his daily conduct.

In the case of young converts, truly such, these doubts generally arise from their having been wrongly dealt with, and not sufficiently taught, or not thoroughly humbled. In any case, they should never be left in such a state, but should be brought, if possible, to such a thorough change, that they will doubt no longer. It is inconsistent with the greatest usefulness, for a Christian to be always entertaining doubts. It not only makes him gloomy. but it renders his religion a stumbling block to sinners. What do sinners think of such religion? They say, "These converts are always afraid to think they have got any thing real. They are always trembling, and doubting whether it is a reality, and they ought to know whether there is anything in it or not; for if it is any thing, these people seem to have it, and I am inclined to think it rather doubtful. At any rate, I will let it pass for the present; for I do not believe God will damn me for not attending to what appears so uncertain." No, a cheerful, settled hope in Christ, is indispensable to usefulness, and therefore you should deal so with young converts, as to lead them to a consistent, well-grounded, stable hope. Ordinarily this may be done, if pursued wisely, at the proper time, and that is at the commencement of their religious life. And they should not be left till it is done.

I know there are some exceptions; there are cases where the best instructions will be ineffectual, but these generally depend on the state of the health, and the condition of the nervous system. Sometimes you find a person incapable of reasoning on a certain topic, and so their errors will not yield to instruction. But most commonly they mistake the state of their own hearts, because they judge under the influence of a physical disease. Sometimes persons under a nervous depression will go almost into despair. I will not

take time now to show the connection, but persons who are acquainted with physiology will easily explain the matter, and this will make it plain that the only way to deal with such cases is first to recruit their health, and get their nervous system in a proper tone, and thus remove the physical cause of their gloom and depression, and then they will be able to receive and apply your instructions to the state of their minds. But if you cannot remove their gloom and doubts and fears in this way, you can at least avoid doing any positive harm, by giving them wrong instructions. I have known even experienced Christians to have the error fastened upon them, thinking it was necessary, or was virtuous, or a mark of humility to be always in doubt, and Satan would take advantage of it, and of the state of their health, to drive them almost into despair. You ought to guard against this, by avoiding the error in teaching young converts. Teach them that instead of there being any virtue in doubting, it is a sin to have any reason to doubt, and a sin if they doubt without any reason, and a sin to be gloomy, and disgust sinners with their despondency. And if you teach them thoroughly what religion is, and make them SEE CLEARLY what God wishes to have them do, and lead them to do it promptly and decidedly, ordinarily they will not be harrassed with doubts and fears, but will be clear, open-hearted, cheerful and growing Christians, an honor to the religion they profess, and a blessing to the church and the world.

II. I proceed to mention some things worthy of consideration in regard to their making a profession of religion, or joining the church.

1. Young converts should, ordinarily, offer themselves for admission to some church of Christ immediately. By immediately, I mean that they should do it the first opportunity they have. They should not wait. If they set out in religion by waiting, most likely they will always be waiting and never do anything to much purpose. If they are taught to wait under conviction, before they give themselves up to Christ, or if they are taught to wait after conversion, before they give themselves publicly to God, by joining the church, they will probably go halting and stumbling along through life. The first thing they should be taught, always is, NEVER TO WAIT WHERE GOD HAS POINTED OUT YOUR DUTY. We profess to have given up the waiting system, let us carry it through and be consistent.

While I say it is the duty of young converts to offer themselves to the church immediately, I do not say that they should, in all cases, be received immediately. But the church may, and have an undoubted right to assume the responsibility of receiving them immediately or not. If the church are not satisfied in the case, they have the power to bid candidates wait till they can make inquiries, or in any other way obtain satisfaction, as to their character and their sincerity. This is more necessary in large cities than it is in the country, because the church is liable to receive so many applications from persons that are entire strangers, where it is necessary to make inquiries before admitting them to communion. But if the church think it necessary to postpone an applicant, the responsibility is not his. He has not postponed obedience to the dying command of Christ, and so he has not grieved the Spirit away, and so he may not be essentially injured if he is faithful in other respects. Whereas, if he had neglected the duty voluntarily, he would soon get into the dark, and very likely backslide.

If there is no particular reason for delay, ordinarily the church ought to receive them when they apply. If they are sufficiently instructed on the subject of religion to know what they are doing, and if their general character is such that they can be trusted as to their sincerity and honesty in making a profession, I see no reason why they should delay. But if there are sufficient reasons, in the view of the church, for making them wait a reasonable time, let them do it, on their responsibility to Jesus Christ. They should, however, remember, what is the responsibility they assume, and that if they keep those out of the church who ought to be in it, they sin, and grieve the Holy Spirit.

It is impossible to lay down particular rules on this subject, applicable to all cases. There is so great a variety of reasons which may warrant keeping persons back, that no general rules can reach them all. Our practice, in this church, is to propound persons for a month after they make application, before they are received to full communion. The reason of this is, that the Session may have opportunity to inquire respecting individuals who offer themselves, as so many of them are strangers. But in the country, where there are regular congregations, and all the people have been instructed from their youth in the doctrines of religion, and where everybody is perfectly known, the case is different, and ordinarily I see no reason why persons of fair character should not be admitted immediately. If a person has not been a drunkard, or otherwise of bad character, let him be admitted at once, as soon as he can give a rational and satisfactory account of the hope that is in him.

That is evidently the way the apostles did. There is not the least evidence in the New Testament, that they ever put off a person that wanted to be baptized and join the church. I know this does not satisfy some people, because they think the case is different. But I do not see it so. They say the apostles were inspired. That is true; but it does not follow that they were inspired to read the characters of men, so as to prevent their making mistakes in this matter. On the other hand, we know they were not inspired in this way, for we know they did make mistakes, just as ministers may do now, and, therefore, it is not true that their being inspired men alters the case on this point. Simon Magus was supposed to be a Christian, and was baptised and admitted to the communion, and remained in good standing till he undertook to purchase the Holy Ghost with money. The apostles used to admit converts from Heathenism immediately, and without delay. If they could receive persons who, perhaps, never heard more than one gospel sermon, and who never had a Bible, nor attended a Sabbath-school or Bible-class in their lives, surely it is not necessary to wake up such an outcry and alarm, if a church thinks proper to receive persons of fair character who have had the Bible all their lives, and been trained in the Sabbath-school, and sat under the preaching of the gospel, and who, therefore, may be supposed to understand what they are about, and not to profess what they do not feel.

I know it may be said that persons who make a profession of religion now, are not obliged to make such sacrifices for their religion as the early believers were, and, consequently, people may be more ready to play the hypocrite. And, to some extent, that is true. But then, on the other hand, it should be remembered, that, with the instructions which they have on the subject of religion, they are not so easily led to deceive themselves, as those who were converted without the previous advantages of a religious education. They may be strongly tempted to deceive others, but I insist upon it, that, with the instructions which they have received, the converts of these great revivals are not half so liable to deceive themselves, and take up with a false hope, as they were in the days of the Apostles. And on this ground I believe that those churches who are faithful in dealing with young converts, and who exhibit habitually the power of religion, are not likely to receive so many unconverted persons, as the Apostles did.

It is important that the churches should act wisely on this point. Great evil has been done by this practice of keeping persons out of the church a long time to see if they were Christians. This is almost as absurd as it would be to throw out a young child into the street, to see whether it will live; to say, if it lives and promises to be a healthy child, we will take care of it, when that is the very time it wants nursing, and taking care of, at the moment when the scale is turning, whether it shall live or die. Is that the way to deal with young converts? Should the church throw her new-born children out to the winds, and say, if they live there, let them be raised; but if they die, they ought to die. I have not a doubt that thousands of converts, in consequence of this treatment, have gone through life, and never have joined any church, but have

lingered along, full of doubts, and fears, and darkness, and in this way have spent their days, and gone to the grave without the comforts or the usefulness which they might have enjoyed, simply because the church, in her folly, has suffered them to wait outside of the pale, to see whether they would grow and thrive, without those ordinances which Jesus Christ established particularly for their benefit.

Jesus Christ says to his church, "Here, take these lambs, and feed them, and shelter them and watch over them, and protect them:" and what does the church do? Why, turn them out alone upon the cold mountains, among the wild beasts, to starve or perish, to see whether they are alive or not. This whole system is as unphilosophical as it is unscriptural. Did Jesus Christ tell his churches to do so? Did God of Abraham teach any such doctrine as this, in regard to the children of Abraham? Never. He never taught us to treat young converts in such a barbarous manner. It is the very best way that could be taken to render it doubtful whether they are converts. The very way to lead them into doubts and darkness, is to keep them away from the church, from its fellowship, and its ordinances.

I have understood there is a church, not very far from here, who have passed a resolution that no young converts shall be admitted till they have had a hope for at least six months. Where did they get any such rule? Not from the Bible, nor the example of the early churches.

3. In examining young converts for admission to the church, their consciences should not be ensnared by examining them too extensively or minutely on doctrinal points. From the manner in which examinations are conducted in some churches, it would seem as if they expected that young converts would be all at once acquainted with the whole system of divinity, and able to answer every puzzling question in theology. The effect of it is, that young converts are perplexed and confused, and give their assent to things they do not understand, and thus their conscience is ensnared, and consequently weakened. Why, one great design of receiving young converts into the church, is to teach them doctrines, but if they are to be kept out of the church till they understand the whole system of doctrines, this end is defeated. Will you keep them out till one main design of receiving them is accomplished by other means? It is absurd. There are certain cardinal doctrines of Christianity, which are embraced in the experience of every true convert. And these, young converts will testify to, on their examination, if they are questioned in such a way as to draw out their knowledge, and not in such a way as to puzzle and confound them. The questions should be such, as are calculated to draw out from them what they have learned by experience, and not what they may have got in theory before or since their conversion. The object is, not to find out how much they know, or how good scholars they are in divinity, as you would examine a school, or a number of young men striving for a premium. It is to find out whether they have a change of heart, to learn whether they have experienced the great truths of religion by their power in their own souls. You see therefore how absurd, and injurious too, it must be, to examine as is sometimes done, like a lawyer at the bar, cross-examining a suspicious witness. It should rather be like a faithful physician anxious to find out his patient's true condition, and therefore leading his mind, by inquiries and hints, to disclose the real symptoms of his case.

You will always find, if you put your questions right, that real converts will see clearly those great fundamental points, the divine authority of the scriptures, the necessity of the influences of the Holy Spirit, the divinity of Christ, the doctrine of total depravity and regeneration, the necessity of the atonement, justification by faith, and the justice of the eternal punishment of the wicked. By a proper course of inquiries you will find all these points come out, as a part of their experience, if you put your questions in such a way that they understand them.

A church session in this city have, as we are informed, passed a vote, that no person shall join that church till he will give his assent to the whole Presbyterian Confession of Faith, and adopt it as his "rule of faith and practice and Christian obedience." That is, they must read the book through, which is about three times as large as this hymn-book, and must understand it, and agree to it all, before they can be admitted to the church, before they can make a profession of religion, or obey the command of Christ. By what authority does a church say that no one shall join their communion till he understands all the points and technicalities of this long confession of faith? Is that their charity, to cram this whole confession of faith down the throat of a young convert, before they let him so much as come to the communion? He says, "I love the Lord Jesus Christ, and wish to obey his command." "Very well, but do you understand and adopt the confession of Faith?" He says, "I do not know, for I never read that, but I have read the Bible, and I love that, and wish to follow the directions in it, and to come to the table of the Lord." "Do you love the confession of faith? If not, YOU SHALL NOT COME," is the reply of this charitable session, "you shall not sit down at the Lord's table, till you have adopted all this confession of faith." Did Jesus Christ ever authorise a church session to say this--to tell that child of God, who stands there with tears, and asks permission to obey his Lord, and who understands the grounds of his faith, and can give a satisfactory reason of his hope, to tell him he cannot join the church till he understands the confession of faith? No doubt, Jesus Christ is angry with such a church, and he will show his displeasure in a way that admits of no mistake, if they do not repent. Shut the door against young converts till they swallow the confession of faith! And will such a church prosper? Never.

No church on earth has a right to impose its extended confession of faith on a young convert, who admits the fundamentals of religion. They may let the young convert know their own faith on ever so many points, and they may examine him, if they think it necessary, as to his belief; but suppose he has doubts on some points not essential to Christian experience, as the doctrine of Infant Baptism, or of Election, or the Perseverance of the Saints, and suppose he honestly and frankly tells you he has not made up his mind concerning these points. Has any minister or church a right to say, he shall not come to the Lord's table till he has finished all his researches into these subjects? That he shall not obey Jesus Christ till he has fully made up his mind on every such point on which Christians, and devoted ones too, differ among themselves? I would sooner cut off my right hand than debar a convert under such circumstances. I would teach a young convert as well as I could in the time before he made his application, and I would examine him candidly as to his views, and after he was in the church, I would endeavor to make him grow in knowledge as he grows in grace. And by just as much confidence as I have that my own doctrines are the doctrines of God, I should expect to make him adopt them, if I could have a fair hearing before his mind. But I never would bid one, whom I charitably believed to be a child of God, to stay away from his Father's table, because he did not see all I see, or believe all I believe, through the whole system of divinity. The thing is utterly irrational, ridiculous and wicked.

4. Sometimes persons who are known to entertain a hope dare not make a profession of religion for fear they should be deceived. I would always deal decidedly with such cases. A hope that will not warrant a profession of religion is manifestly worse than no hope, and the sooner it is torn away the better. Shall a man hope he loves God, and yet not dare obey Jesus Christ? Preposterous. Such a hope had better be given up at once.

5. Sometimes persons professing to be converts will make an excuse for not joining the church, that they can enjoy religion just as well without it. This is always suspicious. I should look out for such characters. It is almost certain they have no religion. Ordinarily, if a person does not desire to be associated with the

people of God, he is rotten at the bottom. It is because he wants to keep out of the responsibilities of a public profession. He has a feeling within him that he had rather be free, so that he can by and by go back to the world again if he likes, without the reproach of instability or hypocrisy. Enjoy religion just as well without obeying Jesus Christ! It is false on the face of it. He overlooks the fact that religion consists in obeying Jesus Christ.

III. I am to consider the importance of giving right instruction to young converts.

Ordinarily, their Christian character through life is moulded and fashioned according to the manner in which they are dealt with when first converted. There are many who have been poorly taught at first, but have been afterwards re-converted, and if they are then dealt with properly, they may be made something of. But the proper time to do this is when they are first brought in, when their minds are soft and tender, and easily yield to the truth. Then they may be led with a hair, if they think it is the truth of God. And whatever notions in religion they get then they are apt to cleave to for ever afterwards. It is almost impossible to get away a man's notions that he got when he was a young convert. You may reason him down, but he cleaves to them. How often is it the case where persons have been taught certain things when first converted, that if they afterwards get a new minister, who teaches somewhat differently, they will rise up against him, as if he was going to subvert the faith and carry away the church to error, and throw everything into confusion. Thus you see that young converts are thrown into the hands of the church, and it depends on the church to mould them, and form them into Christians of the right stamp. Much of their future comfort and usefulness depends on the manner in which they are instructed at the outset. The future character of the church, the progress of revivals, the coming of the millennium, depend on having right instruction given, and a right direction of thought and life to those who are young converts.

IV. I am to mention some things which should not be taught to young converts.

1. "You will not always feel as you do now." When the young convert is rejoicing in his Saviour, and calculating to live for the glory of God and the good of mankind, how often is he met with this reply, "You will not always feel so." Thus preparing his mind to expect that he shall backslide, and not to be much surprised when he does. This is just the way the devil wants young converts dealt with, to have old Christians tell them, your feelings will not last, and that by and by you will be as cold as we are. It has made my heart bleed to see it. When the young convert has been pouring out his warm heart to some old professor, and expecting to meet the warm burstings of a kindred spirit responding to his own, what does he meet with? This cold answer, coming like a northern blast over his soul, "You will not always feel so." SHAME! Just preparing the young convert to expect that he shall backslide as a matter of course; so that when he begins to decline, as under the very influences of this instruction it is most likely he will, it produces no surprise or alarm in his mind, but he looks at it just as a thing of course, doing as every body else does.

I have heard it preached as well as prayed, that seasons of backsliding are necessary to test the church. They say, "when it rains, you can find water anywhere: it is only in seasons of drought that you can tell where the deep springs are." Wonderful logic! And so you would teach that Christians must get cold and stupid, and backslide from God, and for what reason? Why forsooth, to show that they are not hypocrites. Amazing! You would prove that they are hypocrites in order to show that they are not.

Such doctrine as this is the very last that should be taught to young converts. They should be told that now they have only begun the Christian life, and that their religion is to consist in going on in it. They should be

taught to go forward all the time, and grow in grace continually. Do not teach them to taper off their religion, let it grow smaller and smaller till it comes to a point. God says, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more to the perfect day." Now whose path is that which grows dimmer and dimmer until the perfect night? They should be brought to such a state of mind that the first indications of decay in spirituality or zeal will alarm them and spur them up to duty. There is no need that young converts should backslide as they do. Paul did not backslide. And I do not doubt that this very doctrine, "You will not always feel so," is one of the grand devices of Satan to bring about the result which it predicts.

2. "Learn to walk by faith and not by sight." This is sometimes said to young converts in reference to their continuing to exhibit the power of religion, and is a manifest perversion of scripture. If they begin to lose their faith and zeal, and to get into darkness, some old professor will tell them, "Ah, you cannot expect to have the Saviour always with you, you have been walking by sight, you must learn to walk by faith and not by sight." That is, you must learn to get as cold as death, and then hang on to the doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance, as your only ground of hope that you shall be saved. And that is walking by faith. Cease to persevere, and then hold on to the doctrine of perseverance. "One of guilt's blunders, and the loudest laugh of hell." And living in the enjoyment of God's favor and the comforts of the Holy Ghost, they call walking by sight! Do you suppose young converts see the Saviour at the time they believe on him? When they are so full of the enjoyments of heaven, do you suppose they see heaven, and so walk by sight? It is absurd on the face of it. It is not faith, it is presumption, that makes a backslider hold on to the doctrine of perseverance, as if that would save him, without any sensible exercise of godliness in his soul. Those who attempt to walk by faith in this way had better take care, or they will walk into hell with their faith. Faith indeed! Faith without works is dead. Can dead faith make the soul live?

3. "Wait till you see whether you can hold out." When a young convert feels zealous and warm-hearted, and wants to lay himself out for God, some prudent old professor will caution him not to go too fast. "You had better not be too forward in religion, till you see whether you can hold out; for if you take this high ground and then fall, you will disgrace religion." That is, in plain English, "Do not do anything that constitutes religion, till you see whether you have religion." Religion consists in obeying God. Now these wise teachers tell a young convert, "Do not obey God till you see"--what?--till you see whether you have obeyed him--or, till you see whether you have gotten that substance, that mysterious thing which they imagine is created and put into a man, like a lump of new flesh, and called religion. This waiting system is all alike, and all wrong. There is no scripture warrant for telling a person to wait, when the command of God is upon him and the path of duty before him. Let him go along.

Young converts should be fully taught that this is the only consistent way to find out whether they have any religion.--The only evidence they can have is to find that they are heartily engaged in doing the will of God. To tell him to wait, therefore, before he does these things, till he gets his evidence, is reversing the matter, and is absurd.

4. "Wait till you get strength, before you take up the cross." This is applied to various religious duties. Sometimes it is applied to prayer, just as if prayer was a cross. But I have known young converts advised not to attempt to pray in their families, or not to attempt quite yet to pray in meetings and social circles. "Wait till you get strength." Just as if they would get strength without exercise. Strength comes by exercise. You cannot get strength by lying still. Let a child lie in the cradle all his life, and he would never have any strength, he might grow in size, but he never could be any thing more than a great baby. This is a law of nature. There is no substitute for exercise in producing strength. The body as every one knows,

can be strengthened only by exercise. It is so in the nature of things. And it is just so with the mind. It is so with the affections, so with the judgment, so with conscience. All the powers of the soul are strengthened by exercise. I need not now enter into the philosophy of this. Every body knows it is so. If the mind is not exercised, the brain will not grow, and the man will become an idiot. If the affections are not exercised he will become a stoic. To talk to a convert about neglecting Christian action till he gets strength, is absurd. If he wants to gain strength, let him go to work.

5. Young converts should not be made sectarian in their feelings. They should not be taught to dwell upon sectarian distinctions, or to be sticklish about sectarian points. They ought to examine these points, at a proper time, and in a proper way, and make up their minds for themselves, according to their importance. But they should not be taught to dwell upon them, or to make much of them in the outset of their religious life. Otherwise there is great danger that their whole religion will run into sectarianism. I have seen some most sad and melancholy exhibitions of the effects of this upon young converts. And whenever I see professed converts taking a strong hold of sectarian peculiarities, no matter of what denomination of Christians, I always feel in doubt about them. When I hear them asking, "Do you believe in the doctrine of election?" or, "Do you believe in sprinkling?" or, "Do you believe in plunging?" I feel sad. I never knew such converts to be worth much. Their sectarian zeal soon sours their feelings, eats out all the heart of their religion, and moulds their whole character into sinful sectarian bigotry. They generally become mighty zealous for the traditions of the elders, and very little concerned for the salvation of souls.

V. I proceed to mention some of the things which it is important should be taught to young converts.

1. One of the first things young converts should be taught is to distinguish between emotion and principle in religion. Do you understand me? I am going to explain what I mean, but I want you to get hold of the words, and have them fixed in your mind. What I want is to have you distinguish between emotion and principle.

By emotion, I mean that state of mind of which we are conscious, and which we call feeling, an involuntary state of mind, that arises of course when we are in certain circumstances or under certain influences. There may be high-wrought feelings, or they may subside into tranquillity, or disappear entirely. But these emotions should be carefully distinguished from religious principle. By principle I do not mean any substance or root or seed or sprout implanted in the soul. But I mean the voluntary decision of the mind, the firm determination to act out duty and to obey the will of God, by which a Christian should always be governed. When a man is fully determined to obey God, because it is RIGHT that he should obey God, I call that principle. Whether he feels any lively religious emotion at the time or not, he will do his duty cheerfully, and readily, and heartily, whatever may be the state of his feelings. This is acting upon principle, and not from emotion. Many young converts have mistaken views upon this subject, and depend almost entirely upon the state of their feelings to go forward in duty. Some will not lead in a prayer meeting, unless they feel as if they could make an eloquent prayer. Multitudes are influenced almost entirely by their emotions, and they give way to this, as if they thought themselves under no obligation to duty unless urged on by some strong emotion. They will be very zealous in religion when they feel like it, when their emotions are warm and lively, but they will not act out religion consistently, and carry it into all the concerns of life. They are religious only as they are impelled by a gush of feeling. But this is not true religion.

Young converts should be carefully taught, when duty is before them to do it. However dull their feelings may be, if duty calls, DO IT. Do not wait for feeling, but DO IT. Most likely the very emotions for which you

would wait will be called into exercise when you begin to do your duty. If the duty is prayer, for instance, and you have not the feelings you would wish, do not wait for emotions before you pray, but pray, and open your mouth wide. And in doing it, you are most likely to have the emotions for which you were inclined to wait, and which constitute the conscious happiness of religion.

2. Young converts should be taught that they have renounced the ownership of all their possessions, and of themselves, or if they have not done this they are not Christians. They should not be left to think that any thing is their own, their time, property, influence, faculties, bodies or souls. "Ye are not your own;" all belongs to God; and when they submitted to God they made a free surrender of all to him, to be ruled and disposed of at his pleasure. They have no right to spend one hour as if their time was their own. No right to go any where, or do anything, for themselves, but should hold all at the disposal of God, and employ all for the glory of God. If they do not, they ought not to call themselves Christians, for the very idea of being a Christian is to renounce self and become entirely consecrated to God. A man has no more right to withhold anything from God, than he has to rob or steal. It is robbery in the highest sense of the term. It is an infinitely higher crime than it would be for a clerk in a store to go and take the money of his employer, and spend it on his own lusts and pleasures. I mean, that for a man to withhold from God, is a higher crime against HIM, than a man can commit against his fellow man, inasmuch as God is the owner of all things in an infinitely higher sense than man can be the owner of any thing. If God calls on them to employ anything they have, their money, or their time, or to give their children, or to dedicate themselves, in advancing his kingdom, and they refuse, because they want to use them in their own way, or prefer to do something else, it is vastly more blamable than for a clerk or an agent to go and embezzle the money that is intrusted to him by his employer, and spend it for his family, or lay it out in bank stock or in speculation for himself.

God is, in an infinitely higher sense, the owner of all, than any employer can be said to be the owner of what he has. And the church of Christ never will take high ground, never will be disentangled from the world, never will be able to go forward without these continual declensions and backslidings, until Christians, and the churches generally, take the ground, and hold to it, that it is just as much a matter of discipline for a church member practically to deny his stewardship as to deny the divinity of Christ, and that covetousness fairly proved shall just as certainly exclude a man from communion as adultery.

The church is mighty orthodox in notions, but very heretical in practice, but the time must come when the church will be just as vigilant in guarding orthodoxy in practice as orthodoxy in doctrine, and just as prompt to turn out heretics in practice as heretics that corrupt the doctrines of the gospel. In fact, it is vastly more important. The only design of doctrine is to produce practice, and it does not seem to be understood by the church, that true faith "works by love and purifies the heart," that heresy in practice, is proof conclusive of heresy in sentiment. The church are very sticklish for correct doctrine and very careless about correct living. This is preposterous. Has it come to this, that the church of Jesus Christ is to be satisfied with correct notions on some abstract points, and never reduce her orthodoxy to practice? Let it be so no longer.

It is high time these matters were set right. And the only way to set them right, is to begin right with those who are just entering upon religion. Young converts must be told that they are just as worthy of damnation, and that the church cannot and will not hold fellowship with them, if they show a covetous spirit, and turn a deaf ear when the whole world is calling for help, as if they were living in adultery, or in the daily worship of idols.

3. Teach them how to cultivate a tender conscience. I have often been amazed to find how little conscience there is, even among those who we hope are Christians. And here we see the reason of it. Their consciences were never cultivated. They never were taught and told how to cultivate a tender conscience. They have not even a natural conscience. They have dealt so rudely with their conscience, and resisted it so often, that it has got blunted, and does not act. The usefulness of a Christian, greatly depends on his knowing how to cultivate his conscience. Young converts should be taught to keep their conscience just as tender as the apple of the eye. They should watch their conduct and their motives, and let their motives be so pure and their conduct so disinterested as not to offend or injure or stifle conscience. They should maintain such a habit of listening to conscience, that it will be always ready to give forth a stern verdict on all occasions. It is astonishing to see how much the conscience may be cultivated by a proper course. If rightly attended to, it may be made so pure, and so powerful, that it will always respond exactly to the word of God. Present any duty to such a Christian, or any self-denial, or suffering, and only show him the word of God and he will do it without a word. In a few months, if properly taught and attended to, young converts may have a conscience so delicately poised that the weight of a feather will turn them. Only bring a "Thus saith the Lord," and they will be always ready to do that, be it what it may.

4. Young converts should be taught to pray without ceasing. That is, they should always keep up a watch over their minds, and be all the time in a prayerful spirit. They should be taught to pray always, whatever may take place. For the want of right instruction on this point many young converts suffer loss and get far away from God. For instance, sometimes it happens that a young convert will fall into some sin, and then he feels as if he could not pray, and instead of overcoming this he feels so distressed that he waits for the keen edge of his distress to pass away. Instead of going right to Jesus Christ in the midst of his agony, and confessing his sin out of the fulness of his heart and getting a renewed pardon and peace restored, he waits till all the keenness of his feelings have subsided, and then his repentance, if he does repent, is cold and half-hearted. Let me tell you, beloved, never to do this, but when your conscience presses you, go then right to Christ, confess your sin fully, and pour out your heart to God.

Sometimes people will neglect to pray because they are in the dark, and feel no desire to pray. But that is the very time when they need prayer. That is the very reason why they ought to pray. You should go right to God and confess your coldness and darkness of mind. Tell him just how you feel, Tell him, "O Lord, I have no desire to pray, but I know I ought to pray." And the first you will know, the Spirit may come, and lead your heart out in prayer, and all the dark clouds will pass away.

5. Young converts should be faithfully warned against adopting a false standard in religion. They should not be left to fall in behind old professors, and keep them before their minds as a standard of holy living. They should always look at Christ as their model. Not aim at being as good Christians as the old church members, and not think they are doing pretty well because they are as much awake as the old members of the church. But they should aim at being holy, and not rest satisfied till they are as perfect as God. The church has been greatly injured for the want of attention to this matter. Young converts have come forward, and their hearts were warm and their zeal ardent enough to aim at a high standard, but they were not directed properly, and so they soon settle down into the notion that what is good enough for others is good enough for them, and therefore they never aim higher than those who are before them. And in this way the church instead of rising with every revival, higher and higher in holiness, is kept nearly stationary.

6. Young converts should be taught to do all their duty. They should never make a compromise with duty, nor think of saying "I will do this as an offset for neglecting that." They should never rest satisfied till they

have done their duty of every kind, in relation to their families, the church, Sabbath Schools, the impenitent around them, the disposal of their property, the conversion of the world. Let them do their duty, as they feel it when their hearts are warm; and never attempt to pick and choose among the commandments of God.

7. They should be made to feel that they have no separate interest. It is time Christians were made actually to feel that they have no interest whatever, separate from the interest of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. They should understand that they are incorporated into the family of Jesus Christ, as members in full, so that their whole interest is identified with his. They are embarked with him, they have gone on board, and taken them all. And henceforth they have nothing to do, or nothing to say, except as it is connected with this interest and bears on the cause and kingdom of Christ.

8. They should be taught to maintain singleness of motive. Young converts should not begin to have a double mind, on any subject, or let selfish motives mingle in with good motives in anything they do. But this can never be, so long as Christians are allowed to hold a separate interest of their own, distinct from the interest of Jesus Christ. If they feel that they have a separate interest, it is impossible to keep them from regarding it, and having an eye to it as well as to Christ's interest, in many things that they do. It is only by becoming entirely consecrated to God, and giving up all to his service, that they can ever keep their eye single and their motives pure.

9. They should set out with a determination to aim at being useful in the highest degree possible. They should not rest satisfied with merely being useful, or remaining in a situation where they can do some good. But if they see an opportunity where they can do more good, they must embrace it, whatever may be the sacrifice to themselves. No matter what it may cost them, no matter what danger or what suffering, no matter what change in their outward circumstances, or habits, or employments it may lead to. If they are satisfied that they will on the whole do more good, they should not even hesitate. How else can they be like God? How can they think to bear the image of Jesus Christ, if they are not prepared to do all the good that is in their power? When a man is converted he comes into a new world, and should consider himself as a new man. If he finds he can do the most good by remaining in his old employment, let it be so. But if he can do more good in some other way, he is bound to change. It is for the want of attention to this subject, in the outset, that Christians have got such low ideas on the subject of duty. And that is the reason why there are so many useless members in our churches.

10. They must be taught not to aim at comfort but usefulness in religion. There are a great many spiritual epicures in the churches, who are all the while seeking to be happy in religion, while they take very little pains to be useful. They had much rather spend their time in singing joyful hymns, and in pouring out their happy feelings in a gushing tide of exultation and triumph, than to spend it in agonizing prayer for sinners, or in going about and pulling dying men out of the fire. They seem to feel as if they were born to enjoy themselves. But I do not think such Christians show such fruits as to make their example one to be imitated. Such was not the temper of the apostles. They travailed for souls, and laboured in weariness and painfulness, and in deaths oft, to save sinners. Nor is it safe. Ordinarily, Christians are not qualified to drink deep at the fountain of joy. In ordinary cases, a deep agony of prayer for souls is more profitable than high flights of joy. Let young converts be taught, plainly, not to calculate upon a life of joy and triumph. They may be called to go through fiery trials. Satan may sift them like wheat. But they must go forward, not calculating so much to be happy as to be useful, not talking about comfort but duty, not desiring flights of joy and triumph, but hungering and thirsting after righteousness, not studying how to create new flights of rapture, but how to know the will of God, and do it. They will be happy enough in

heaven. There they may sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. And they will in fact enjoy a more solid and rational happiness here, by thinking nothing about it, but patiently devoting themselves to do the will of God.

11. They should be taught to have moral courage, and not to be afraid of going forward in duty. The Bible insists fully on Christian boldness and courage in action as a duty. I do not mean that they should indulge in their bravadoes, like Peter, telling what they will do, and boasting of their courage. The boaster is generally a coward at heart. But I mean moral courage, a humble and fixed decision of purpose, that will go forward in any duty, unangered and unawed, with the meekness and firmness of the Son of God.

12. They should be so instructed as to be sound in the faith. That is, they should be early made, as far as possible, complete and correct in regard to their doctrinal belief. As soon as may be, without turning their minds off from their practical duties, in promoting the glory of God and the salvation of men, they should be taught fully and plainly, all the leading doctrines of the Bible. Doctrinal knowledge is indispensable to growth in grace. Knowledge is the food of the mind. "That the soul be without knowledge," says the Wise Man, "It is not good." The mind cannot grow without knowledge, any more than the body without food. And therefore it is important that young converts should be thoroughly indoctrinated, and made to understand the Bible. By indoctrinating I do not mean teaching the catechism, but teaching them to draw knowledge from the fountain head. Create in their minds such an appetite for knowledge that they will eat the Bible up, will devour it, will love it and love it all. All scripture is profitable, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

13. Great pains should be taken to guard young converts against censoriousness. Young converts, when they first come out on the Lord's side, and are all warm and zealous, sometimes find old professors so cold and dead that they are strongly tempted to be censorious. This should be corrected immediately, otherwise the habit will poison their minds and destroy their religion.

14. They must learn to say, No. This is a very difficult lesson to many. See that young woman. Formerly she loved the gay circle, and took delight in its pleasures. She joined the church, and then found herself aloof from all her old associates. They ask her not now to their balls and parties, because they know she will not join them, and perhaps they keep entirely away for a time, for fear she should converse with them about their souls. But by and by they grow a little bold, and some of them venture to ask her just to take a ride with a few friends. She does not like to say, No. They are her old friends, only a few of them are going, and surely a ride is so innocent a recreation, that she accepts the invitation. But now she has begun to comply, the ice is broken, and they have her again as one of them. It goes on, and she begins to attend their social visits--"only a few friends," you know, till by and by the carpet is taken up for a dance, and the next thing, perhaps, she is gone to a sleigh ride, on Saturday night, and comes home after midnight, and then sleeps all the forenoon on the Sabbath to make up for it, perhaps communion Sabbath too. All for the want of learning to say, No.

See that young man. For a time he was always in his place, in the Sabbath school and in the prayer meeting. But by and by his old friends begin to treat him with attention again, and they draw him along step by step. Every one seems a very small thing, and it would look like rudeness to deny so small a thing. He reasons that if he refuses to go with them in things that are innocent, he will lose his influence with them. And so he goes on, till prayer meeting, Bible class, and even Bible and closet are neglected. Ah, young man, stop there! Go only a little farther without learning to say, No, and you are gone. If you do not wish to hang up the cause of Christ to scorn and contempt, learn to resist the beginnings of temptation.

Otherwise it will come upon you, by and by, like the letting out of water.

15. They should be taught what is and what is not Christian experience. It is necessary, both for their comfort and their usefulness, that they should understand this, so that they need not run themselves into needless distress for the want of that which is by no means essential to Christian experience, nor flatter themselves that they have more religion than they really exercise. But I cannot dwell on this topic to-night.

16. Teach them not to count anything a sacrifice which they do for God. Some persons are always telling about the sacrifices they make in religion. I have no confid

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