

Letter From Prof. Finney to Miss a.e. of Vermont--No. 4.

by Charles Finney

Charles Finney advises considering the law of universal love and the circumstances when making decisions in public duties, rather than relying solely on impulses or feelings.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 5:16, Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Galatians 5:13, Philippians 4:5, 1 Timothy 2:9-10, James 1:5, 1 Peter 3:15, 1 John 4:18

Topics: "Guidance of the Holy Spirit", "Public Duties"

Description

Charles Finney addresses Sister A's concerns about public duties and the role of women in spiritual gatherings. He emphasizes that the guiding principle should be universal love rather than mere impulses or feelings, cautioning against being led by strong impressions that may come from Satan. Finney encourages her to consider the circumstances and the impact of her actions on others, asserting that true guidance from the Spirit is calm and reasoned. He also discusses the importance of maintaining a balanced approach to diet and health, warning against becoming enslaved to strict dietary rules. Ultimately, he reassures her that acting in love and seeking God's glory should guide her decisions.

Transcript

Dear Sister A:

Your fourth enquiry relates to public duties. You say, "I am very much tried in relation to duties, particularly public ones; and here, may I ask what you think to be the appropriate public duties for a female who is willing to do the whole will of God. What part should she bear in conferences and lectures, where there is no invitation extended to the sisters and where it is not expected that they will bear a part? I will tell you what I have done and how my mind is exercised upon this point. I do not know what makes me feel thus, and why I should have so much anxiety. I have felt it my duty to take a part, and did not dare refuse. I have sometimes felt tempted and did refuse, and thereby brought deep anguish of soul upon myself because I felt it was an act of disobedience; and because I have disobeyed, there is a fear that I shall again do so, so that my mind is in an anxious state. My mind is enquiring what I shall say on such occasions, and then I have much suggested to me; but when the opportunity occurs, I some how cannot express it as I thought I could. Where is the defect in me? If it is of the Lord that I should speak or pray, why have I not freedom and influence, and why any solicitude in relation to another opportunity."

My dear sister, I could relate to you a great many cases similar to yours, where persons have been greatly perplexed with suggestions, impulses and feelings, and have sometimes given way to them and have been led from step to step into most ridiculous absurdities. Now here remember again, that the law of universal love is your rule in meeting and out of meeting, and not any suggestions, and impulses, or mere feelings. If benevolence manifestly requires you to speak or pray anywhere, at any time, your duty is plain; but impulse, mere feelings, and suggestions are no rule of duty. They may and often do come from Satan, and I should think from what you say that Satan is trying to make you appear ridiculous. For a woman to pray or speak, in a prayer of conference meeting is certainly neither right nor wrong in itself, but its propriety must be determined in view of all the circumstances of the case. I know some have supposed that the Scriptures plainly prohibit the speaking or praying of women in promiscuous assemblies. I do not so understand the teachings of the Bible. Your question, if I understand you, does not involve the enquiry whether or not the bible forbids this practice. You seem not to have any scruples upon this subject, but in respect to the where and the when. Now the where and the when must be decided by all the circumstances of the case. If you feel constrained by the love of Christ to pray or speak, and the circumstances are such that by doing so you would not offend God's little ones, you may no doubt do so with propriety. But when the opinions of your brethren and sisters are such that this course would really shock and grieve them, this should be taken into the account, and in most instances doubtless should decide you not to do it. But I can conceive of circumstances in which it might be your duty to do so even should they object, but then, I should not consider a bare impulse or feeling of any kind as sufficient evidence that this is your duty. The question is, what are the circumstances? where are you? what have you to say? what is the demand for saying what is upon your mind? The truth is, my sister, that many persons mistake by supposing that the Spirit of God leads christians by impulses and by creating certain feelings and impressing it upon them that such and such things are duty, without the mind once considering whether the course thus impressed upon their minds is demanded by the law of benevolence. Now let it always be remembered that the Spirit of God influences the mind by truth. The mind in order to act virtuously must have reasons which appear to it to be good, and sufficient reasons for any given conduct. It is true that where we have an express revelation of the will of God, that is a good and sufficient reason and we need enquire no further; but we are never to regard a mere impression or feeling as obligatory where we can perceive no other reason for the given course.

Considering the standard you have set up and the attainments to which you are aspiring, it is not at all wonderful that Satan should endeavor to vex and divert you by all sorts of suggestions, putting you up to make promises which he knows you will not and cannot keep, and then tormenting you by accusing you of having broken your promises. That he should suggest to you trains of thought, and impress you to speak in public assemblies is not wonderful or new. Should you begin to give way and follow these suggestions, as I have often known persons to do, you would soon be impressed with the duty of arising and interrupting the preacher and producing disorder in public worship. If you refuse to follow these suggestions, it is natural that he should accuse you of pride, the fear of man, and all such things. Now, my sister, I do not believe that this is the way in which God leads his children.

Again, you speak of the impressions being very strong upon your mind. This also, in my view, is a suspicious circumstances. I have learned by experience as well as from observation, that oftentimes the impulses of Satan are much more powerful than those by which the Spirit of God leads his people; that is, the impression on the imagination and feelings is much stronger. The mind of God is calm and mild; and in general no doubt the leadings of his Spirit are calm and mild also, and more like a still small voice; whereas Satan is boisterous and often deeply exciting in his suggestions and impulses. I do not mean to

say that God is not sometimes so, but that the strength of an impression is not by any means decisive proof of its coming from God. In my own experience I can remember some instances in which I laid too much stress upon the strength of an impression, and was afterwards satisfied that it was from Satan.

You say you are tried with the subject of eating and drinking. This is also very natural, considering the position which you have taken to live in all things wholly to the glory of God. The same rule, remember, is to be applied to this as to every thing else. "Whatsoever ye do, whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God." Quantity, quality, times of eating, and every thing about it should have respect to the best physical condition of the body and through this to the glory of God. Act, my sister, according to the best light you can get for the time being. As opportunity may offer, study the laws of life and health, and conform to those laws as far as other duties will permit, and make such changes from time to time as increased light demands. Be not brought into bondage on this subject. My observation has shown me that persons are liable to be brought into bondage in different directions upon the subject of diet, and dress and many other things of this kind. When I first read Graham's work on Physiology and Dietetics, I was deeply interested in it, and as it was at the time the best light as I supposed which I had, I became very scrupulous in my conformity to his views. After a while, I found myself in complete bondage to what is called Grahamism.

Some are manifestly in bondage to their appetite and have no command over themselves. Others are in bondage to Grahamism or to some other ism, so as to be ready to starve themselves well nigh to death, unless they can get a particular kind of diet. Now all this appears to me to be taking upon our necks a yoke which God has never imposed upon us. If I understand the rule with respect to diet it is that we shall as far as circumstances admit, prefer those things which are most consistent with and conducive to the best physical state of our bodies, not hesitating, however for conscience sake to eat such things as are set before us in our journeyings and wanderings, provided they are not positively injurious.

Your Brother,

C.G. FINNEY

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/letter-from-prof-finney-to-miss-ae-of-vermont-no-4/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

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

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

www.sermonindex.net