

Letters on Revival--No. 3.

by Charles Finney

Charles Finney warns against the dangers of modern revivalism, which often leads to spurious conversions and a lack of true faith.

Scripture: Matthew 22:37-39, John 15:5, Romans 3:23, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 3:10, James 2:19, 1 John 4:8

Topics: "True Submission", "Understanding Sin"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the need for a deeper understanding of sin and true submission to God among believers, emphasizing that many have been urged to repent and serve without comprehending the essence of pure religion, which is rooted in love and faith. He critiques the legalistic approach to faith that focuses on resolutions rather than a genuine relationship with Christ, leading to superficial conversions. Finney warns against the extremes of Antinomianism and legality, urging ministers to help individuals grasp their true spiritual condition and the necessity of a heartfelt connection with God.

Transcript

To All The Friends And Especially All The Ministers Of Our Lord Jesus Christ:

Dear Brethren:

I have already intimated that pains enough have not been taken to search the heart and thoroughly detect and expose the sinner's depravity, so as to make him see the need of the gospel remedy. If I am not mistaken there has been in many cases an error committed in urging sinners to submission before they are prepared to understand what true submission is. They have been urged to repent before they have really understood the nature and desert of sin; to believe, before they have understood their need of Christ; to resolve to serve God before they have at all understood what the service of God is. They have been pressed to make up their minds to enter immediately upon the service of God, and have been taught that they needed only to make a resolution to obey the Lord. Hence their religion, after all, has been only a religion of resolutions, instead of a religion of faith and love, and of a broken heart. In short it appears to me, that in many instances the true idea of what constitutes pure religion has not been developed in the mind, and that consequently spurious conversions have been distressingly numerous. I have been more and more surprised from year to year to find how very numerous those professors of religion are, who manifestly have not the true idea of pure religion before their minds. It seems that in many instances the idea that love is the essence and the whole of religion, is left almost, if not entirely out of view.

There seem to be two extremes towards which different classes of persons have been continually verging. These extremes are Antinomianism on the one hand, and legality on the other--both manifestly at an equal remove from the true idea of religion.

The religion of the legalist is one of resolutions. He resolves to serve the Lord. He makes up his mind, as he says. He gets the idea that to serve the Lord is to go to work--to pray in his family--to attend meetings--to visit, and talk, and bustle about, and do the work of the Lord, as he calls it--and this with a perfectly legal spirit, with none of that love, gentleness, meekness, long-suffering, and those fruits of the Spirit which characterize true Christianity. He easily works himself into an excitement, but after all, has not the root of the matter in him, and makes out to keep up what he calls his working for God only during a protracted meeting. Probably three months of the year is the utmost extent of his piety; in many instances probably, it does not amount to even half that. Now the difficulty in this case is, that the individual has not the root of the matter in him. The fountain of the great deep of selfishness has not been broken up. He has never been thoroughly convicted of sin by the Holy Ghost. His convictions of sin have been little more than those natural and necessary affirmations of his own mind under a clear exhibition of truth by the preacher without any supernatural illumination by the Spirit of God. Consequently all his ideas of God, of sin, of his own guilt and desert of punishment, his need of a Savior, the necessity of his being saved from his sins--in short, every fundamental idea of the Christian religion is apprehended by him with very little clearness. His mind is dark; his heart is hard. He has never been stripped of his self-dependence and self-righteousness; consequently, he has never known Christ, "the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings," not the "being made conformable to his death;" nor has he even an idea of what these things mean. He knows little of Christ more than the name, and an obscure idea of his mediatorial work and relations. He has never been slain by the law, and found himself a dead, condemned, and lost sinner; and consequently, dead to all tendency towards God. He has no deep consciousness of sustaining the relation of an outlaw and a condemned criminal to the government of God, and being dead to all hope in himself or in any other creature. In short, instead of seeing his necessities, his true character and relations, his views of all these things are so exceedingly superficial, that he has not apprehended and does not apprehend the necessity and nature of gospel salvation. He goes about, working for God just as he would serve a man for wages, and in the same sense. His religion is not that of disinterested and universal benevolence; but he makes up his mind to serve God, just as he would make up his mind in any matter of barter, or to render a piece of service to any body else, for value received or to be received.

This class of converts may generally be distinguished by the following, among other characteristics.

1. There is a manifest want of meekness, humility, and lowliness of mind in their religion. The fact is, they never have been humbled and broken down, and consequently they do not exhibit this state of mind. Their deportment, conversation, bearing, their prayers and exhortations, all savor of a self-righteous spirit.

2. There is a manifest want of love in their religion; in other words, their religion is not love. The manner in which they speak of old professors of religion, of Christians and ministers, and indeed of all classes, demonstrates that the law of kindness and love is not in their hearts, and consequently is not on their tongues. They are not tender of the reputation of others, regardful of their feelings, alive to their interests, gentle, kind, and courteous as those that are actuated by love. Observe them, and you will see that their religion wants the attributes laid down by Paul in 1 Cor 13. It has not that charity which suffereth long and is kind, which envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemingly, which thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. This religion, which beareth, believeth, hopeth, endureth all, is not theirs.

3. Another obvious characteristic in this class of converts is, that there is very little of Christ in their religion. They will manifest in their conversation, prayers, and in many ways, that they have not been emptied of themselves and filled with Christ.

Another characteristic will be, they are not Bible students. They do not after all, relish and deeply search the Bible. The fact is, they understand it but very slightly. They have not been so subdued that the language of the inspired writers is the natural language of their own experience. This is the secret of their not understanding, loving, and searching it. No person really understands and loves his bible, until he has such an experience as accords with the language of the bible and no farther than his experience accords with the inspired writer's, does the bible become intelligible and deeply interesting to him. Now I have observed that there are a great many professors who neither know nor care much about their bibles. There are even some young preachers, or professed preachers, who know almost nothing about their bibles, and who in fact read other things ten times as much as they read the Book of God. A vast number of professed converts know full well, and those who are well acquainted with them must also know, that they are but little interested in their bibles. Now all this shows conclusively, that their religion is not bible religion, that they are not "on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone."

Yours in Jesus,

C.G. FINNEY.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/letters-on-revival-no-3/>

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