

On Offering Praise to God

by Charles Finney

Offering praise to God is a universal duty that glorifies God, promotes our own happiness, and influences others to seek God.

Scripture: Psalm 34:1, Psalm 50:23, Psalm 67:5-6, Psalm 100:4, Psalm 150:6, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Hebrews 13:15, Revelation 4:11

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Praise"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the significance of offering praise to God, explaining that true praise stems from a heart filled with confidence, affection, and a sense of dependence on Him. He argues that acceptable praise is not merely verbal acknowledgment but requires a sincere appreciation of God's goodness and a union of our will with His. Finney highlights that praising God is a universal duty that not only honors Him but also transforms us spiritually and influences others positively. He warns against the dangers of withholding praise, which can lead to spiritual stagnation and misrepresent God's character to the world. Ultimately, he calls for a revival of the spirit of praise within the church to enhance both personal spirituality and collective witness.

Transcript

"Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me." --Ps. 50:23

Praise is commendation. To praise one, is to commend him.

The text affirms that he who offers praise glorifies God. Let us enquire--

I. What is implied in offering acceptable praise to God?

1. Of course it implies confidence in him. We cannot honestly praise him, unless we have this confidence. And this implies not merely a conviction that he is a good being, but also a state of heart in harmony with this conviction. Suppose Satan were convinced that God is good, and should say so; this saying so could not be acceptable praise, for he does not feel it. He has no corresponding state of heart. No doubt Satan now knows that God is good, and he might confess it with his lips; yet, nothing is plainer than that this cannot be acceptable praise. Praise, therefore, implies the confidence of the heart.

2. Acceptable praise implies the spirit of worship and adoration. This involves an appreciation of his goodness and merits. By this, I do not mean that we must appreciate him perfectly, and with an

appreciation equal to his worth, for this would be infinite, and of course utterly beyond our capacity. But I do mean that we should appreciate him according to our means of knowledge and our capacity. With such an appreciation, we shall feel deeply, and shall honestly mean what we say. It is of no use to tell God coldly what we think of him. It does no good to talk over his attributes in a prosy way, with no heart in what we say. In acceptable praise, the mind must be deeply in earnest.

3. It implies, also, supreme affection for him. Suppose a man really hated God, and yet would acknowledge his goodness. Would this be offering praise? Certainly not. No amount of mere saying that God is good, can be acceptable praise, unless it breathe sincere regard and affection. It is obvious, moreover, that true praise implies complacency in God's character--that is--it implies that you are truly pleased with him, and cordially approve his character.

4. Acceptable praise also implies a sense of dependence on him as the Benefactor, both of ourselves and of the Universe. For, if we have no sense of our dependence on him, our hearts will not burst forth with sincere commendation and praise.

5. It implies some degree of light in the intellect, coupled also with corresponding love of the heart. We must both know and love. There is such a thing as light without love. But those who have light enough to produce the conviction that God is good, and yet withhold their heart's love, are of all men farthest from real praise. These convictions may be ever so deep, even amounting to agony, yet there can be no praise without love.

6. Real praise implies a union of our will with God's will. So long as there is collision and chafing between our will and God's, there can be no praise. If you are fretting against his providence, or against any truth taught in his word, you cannot praise him. Any want of cordiality precludes acceptable praise. Everything depends on this state of sincere cordiality. You know what it is as between yourself and your friends. You understand it there, and can readily discern its manifestations. The same must exist between your own soul and God before you can offer acceptable praise to him. You must heartily approve the ways of his providence and the plan of his gospel. Without this cordial approbation of God, there can be no praise; with it, your heart spontaneously praises God.

7. Offering acceptable praise implies an abundance of this feeling. It must fill the heart; then, out of the abundance, the mouth will speak, and its full utterances are real praise.

II. What is it, we next enquire, to glorify God?

You cannot fail to understand that it means to honor and exalt him.

Theologians are accustomed to distinguish between God's essential and his declarative glory--the former denoting his essential character and attributes; the latter, his character as manifested before his creatures. Now, it is very plain that, in the former sense, we cannot exalt God higher than he is already; but, in the latter sense, we can exalt him. We cannot change his intrinsic character; we can make it more widely and perfectly known. In the latter sense only, can we be said to glorify God.

Offering praise to God is a universal duty, binding always, every where and on all. This is true because God always and every where deserves it of all his intelligent creatures.

For proof of this, we readily appeal to the irresistible convictions of every such being. When you have received a favor, do you not feel that you do wrong if you refuse to acknowledge it? Could you think

yourself commendable if you refused to honor your parents, supposing them to be good? When you have abused your loving and kind father or mother, can you escape self-reproach? Do you not both know and feel that you have neglected a plain duty, and done them a great wrong? The fact is, that praise in such a case is intrinsically demanded. As regards God, you know that he deserves to be praised. If you neglect it, you do him great injustice. You know he is worthy of it, and you cannot refuse without the conviction that you withhold it from him most wickedly.

It is most injurious to his feelings to withhold the praise that is due to him. We can judge of this by our own feelings under circumstances somewhat similar. When we have done a friend a real favor, and he refuses to acknowledge it, we feel wounded and grieved. So, also, if others have done us a great favor, and we refuse to acknowledge it, we are conscious of doing them great wrong. Suppose you were persistently to withhold all commendation from your wife. Would you expect her life to be a happy one? Or could you think well of yourself? Or suppose you were never to thank those who watch over you and nurse you when you are sick, would this commend itself to your better judgment and feelings? Indeed, if one simply manifests his good will towards you, do you not feel that you do him wrong if you refuse to acknowledge your reciprocal regard? And must not God be greatly tried when his feelings are so abused--when those who are infinitely obliged to him, persistently withhold from him the praise that is his due? We feel thus when such things are done to us. If we lay ourselves out to do good to others, and they seem not to recognize it at all, we feel it most keenly. Scarce anything wounds the human heart more deeply. These expressions of gratitude are appropriate and every way in accordance with the nature of things.

Yet, further, the withholding of due praise from God tends to injure his government. For, it should be considered, his government is a moral one, and must be sustained by moral influence. To withhold our praise, is to withhold testimony to his goodness, and this is often equivalent to leaving his character under suspicion. For his established order is to employ his people in revealing himself to the wicked. He says to them, "Ye are my witnesses." First revealing himself to them, he depends on them to communicate what they learn of him to their ungodly neighbors. Suppose they refuse to do so. It amounts, practically, to bearing witness against God. This very neglect virtually proclaims--I have known God, but I have nothing good to say of him. You must make your own inference; this is all I have to say. You do not hear me commend God. You must judge for yourself whether I should do so, if I thought he deserved it!

Now, who does not see that, if this took place between a son and his father, this very silence would be a terrible stab? Who could bear it? When Christians take this course towards God, must it not tend naturally to injure his interests among men? If you, young men, were never to speak well of your father, would you not greatly detract from his influence? If you wished to sustain and establish his influence, could you hope to do it by withholding all due commendation? Suppose you should never speak well of him; could you hope, in this way, to honor him?

In fact, to commend God, is the way to extend his influence greatly. This is its natural influence. Consequently, to withhold praise, must be an awful sin against God and against his kingdom. Persisting in this sin, do you not deserve to be denied all further gifts? If you will not praise God, why should he continue to load you with his benefits?

The offering of praise to God is important for its bearing, (1.) Upon God; (2.) Upon ourselves; (3.) Upon others.

(1.) As towards God. We have seen that it is and ought to be most grateful to his feelings. We judge so, in part from our own feelings under similar circumstances. Scarcely anything is more grateful to our feelings than to be commended where we deserve it. If a student has done well, it does him good to commend him for it. I have seen the tears gather in the eye of those who come before the congregation to receive their diploma when allusion is made to their good behavior, and to their faithful discharge of their duties as students. On the other hand, the utter withholding of all commendation would be sad. You would feel the lack of justice in it.

In the application of this point to God, men are prone to overlook the fact that God's susceptibilities are infinite, and that, consequently, he must feel far more acutely than any other being can. All is right in his character. If he were insensible to praise, it would be a great defect in him. We could not approve his character if he were regardless of the esteem in which his creatures hold him. For, this would be equivalent to being regardless of their happiness.

Hence, the praises of heaven are not only useful to those who offer them, but are grateful to Him to whom they are offered. They aid him in carrying out his purposes of love, because they lead his creatures to a better appreciation of his character and works. If it be useful to an earthly monarch to have his subjects speak well of him, how much more so to God!

Make the case our own. How would you increase my usefulness? Suppose you were to do as a friend of mine did many years ago, when I was young in the ministry. I had begun to preach in a place; the Spirit of the Lord came among us with power; but the adversary, true to his usual instincts, began to circulate all sorts of false and foul stories about me and my former labors. This friend came in just at that moment, and denounced those false stories, told them what he knew of me, and showed them that these rumors were malicious slanders, gotten up to injure especially the work of God. These efforts of my friend were greatly blessed.

God's influence in the universe depends greatly on the praise offered to him by his people, and by all who know him. This praise is the more effective for good because where sin goes, there goes unbelief, and a want of confidence in God. The praises of his people bear a direct testimony against this wicked withdrawal of confidence from God. Then, let us never overlook the fact that God's influence is augmented by our testimony to his goodness.

II. On the importance of praise to ourselves let us consider,

1. It is impossible to be in a spiritual state without praising God. Praise cultivates spirituality. It is indispensable as a means of changing us into the same image as our Savior bears. While we praise, we are insensibly transformed into the same image. This effect is in harmony with a known law of mind. The things we admire, we unconsciously imitate. Hence, the study of God's excellencies of character and conduct, serve to assimilate us to those excellencies. Consequently, nothing tends more powerfully to promote and establish our sanctification than praise.

2. Praise increases our usefulness, and is altogether essential to it. Not having the spirit of praise, a man can do little good, whatever else he may have. Some Christians you know walk mournfully all their days. They live on the shady, not the sunny, side of life; but they need never expect to convert sinners so. David said--"Restore unto me the joys of thy salvation; then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." So long as he was "writing bitter things against himself"--"his bones waxing old through his roaring all the day," he could not convert sinners. Let it be understood, then, that this spirit and

these acts of praise are essential to our success in winning souls to God.

3. Praise is essential to our own happiness, and almost constitutes its chief element. Praise is the great employment of the holy in heaven, and no doubt constitutes the chief means of their blessedness. They have such a sense of his goodness and lovingkindness and also of his purity--indeed, this is all but one generic idea, holiness; they have such views of his holiness, they cannot but praise and adore. Wherever in scripture you catch a glimpse of heaven, you hear them crying--"holy, holy, HOLY, Lord God Almighty!" Why should not they shout his praises! What else should you expect?

The spirit of praise in us is essential to our fitness for heaven. Without it, there could be no sympathy between our spirit and theirs. I have sometimes thought that old professors would object to heaven--there is so much enthusiasm there!

4. Praise greatly opens the way for God to manifest himself to his people. You may see this idea beautifully brought out in Psalm 67. "Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us and all the ends of the earth shall fear him."

Another striking illustration of the same truth we read in the closing verses of 2 Chron. 5--a passage which details the services performed at the solemn dedication of the temple. Of this the historian says--"It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth forever; that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord;

"So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God."

No doubt your own observation, and I hope also, your experience has given you instances in which praise has seemed to bring down great blessings upon the people. When the spirit of praise bursts forth, then the Lord himself breaks forth in his glorious mercy.

III. Our praises of God is also important to others. I could not but remark in the revival at Rochester, last winter, that the spirit of praise seemed to be exceedingly sincere and earnest. It was so prominent that it arrested the attention of the wicked, and they said--"How strange this is! How little have we ever thought of God's goodness before!" It convicted them of the sin of ingratitude, and of their own sins in this respect. When they heard Christians bursting forth in heart-felt utterances of praise, adoring God for all his mercy to themselves, it contrasted so widely with their own state of mind, they could not help seeing their own dreadful guilt against God. They saw themselves unfit for heaven. They knew then that the spirit of heaven was not in them, and that they must be converted to God ere they could hope to see heaven. The very countenance of Christians beaming with the joy of praise, struck home to many this conviction. Such a glow of heavenly praise, said they, on their very faces, gave us a new idea of heaven. That, said they, must be the spirit of heaven; we have it not; but we must have it! I recollect the case of one lady in R. converted in a striking manner, after her friends had been long time praying for her. Her countenance was so resplendent that none could see her without an impression that this is the halo of heaven, beaming on her face. It was truly wonderful! This brought a new conviction on the minds of sinners. Never before had they such an impression of the value of praise and of Christian joy, as related to the conviction and conversion of sinners. When they saw the contrast between one under conviction, and the same person

when converted, it made them feel that they, too, must find Christ.

But when they see only a legal religion, full of mourning and sadness, they are repelled. When they see the spirit of praise bursting all its banks like Jordan in harvest, and overflowing all the soul, they instinctively say--"That is good! That is worth having!" This gives them the sunny side of religion. Not that religion itself has any other than sunny sides; but the way thither through conviction, and the return to it after backslidings, may be very unlike a sunny side. These sometimes become a great stumbling block to wicked men.

Hence, praise is one of the highest means of influence over the wicked. Sometimes we fail to do good by prayer, and accomplish nothing till we turn our souls to praise.

REMARKS.

Sinners, remaining such, cannot praise God. Neither can legalists, nor back-sliders, nor those who are in spiritual bondage.

Many ministers present only the shady side of religion. Indeed, they have not been on the sunny side themselves, and therefore know too little about it to preach of it to any purpose. The same is true of many professors of religion. Their whole experience is that of conviction and complaint. They never seem to break forth in the spirit of praise and thanksgiving. Consequently they never draw sinners to Christ.

Some entire churches are in this very state. O, how grievously do they misrepresent God and religion! Of course they do but very little good. They have not the true spirit of God's children. Without the spirit of praise, how can they hope to glorify God?

No one glorifies God in his life who does not praise God. Indeed, our lives dishonor God unless we praise him.

We see why there is so much more prayer in the church than praise. We dwell more on what we lack than on what we have. This is a great evil among us, that we should forget what we have received, and thus dishonor and displease God. Another reason for so little praise in our times, is that people fear it will look like boasting to stand up and testify for God and his goodness. The case of a man, whom I saw recently in a revival, is in point here. He had been away from the place on business, and failed to appreciate the spirit that pervaded the people there. When he came back he would often whisper to me--"There seems to be a spirit of boasting here." But, curiously, after he had been there awhile, he too, caught the spirit of praise, and would pour forth his praises with loud voice and gushing tears. But after being absent awhile and returning, his first impressions were as before; and only when the spirit of praise filled his own soul did he appreciate the feelings of the brethren in their praise of Almighty God.

Another reason is, we overlook the importance and use of praise. Prayer we understand better. Less is thought and felt of the duty of praise.

Praise is one of the great instruments by which God answers our prayers. When we have prayed for souls, and then the spirit of praise comes upon us, and our souls break forth in thanksgiving, lo, then our God comes! I think now of the case of a father who had long prayed for his children. At last, the spirit of praise came upon him with great power, and then God answered his prayers in the conversion of his children.

Why should not we have more meetings for praise? I have often thought that our meetings on Thanksgiving day should suggest the wisdom of having more meetings of the same sort, in which each one should have opportunity to express his own personal grounds for thanksgiving and praise, and call on his brethren to join him in thanksgiving. On such occasions, how often have we said--Did not our hearts burn within us while we heard one and another recount the mercies of the Lord toward himself, and saw him pour out the testimony of a full heart in grateful tears? Why do we not continue these meetings, and have stated seasons for praise as well as prayer--praise-meetings, no less than prayer meetings. If we were to have a meeting for praise and recount the acts of divine goodness towards us and ours, surely it would bless us more than anything else. Let those who can praise bear witness to the goodness of their God!

O, let it be understood by all and never forgotten, that we are most ungrateful to God when we restrain praise. Shall we go on begging and begging, and never thank God for what we have? Can it be a less sin to restrain praise than to restrain prayer?

The absence of praise denotes a lack of faith. The filial, trustful spirit bears a deep sympathy with praise. And where the filial spirit is not, praise is uncongenial. I have often been struck with this, that those who have only a spirit of agony and no praise, are not wont to prevail greatly in prayer.

Those who cannot sympathize with praise are not saved; they have not the spirit of heaven. You who are in sin--what could you do in heaven? You who have no heart for praise, what would you do in heaven? You could have no sympathy with its employments, or its joy, and you would have no heart to stay in such society and amid such sympathies! None can be there but such as love to glorify God, and God is to be glorified pre-eminently by praise.

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