

Prof. Finney's Letters.--No. 38.

by Charles Finney

Regeneration is entire sanctification, considered as an act in opposition to a state, and faith is a holy act that is a condition of all other acts of obedience.

Scripture: Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23, John 3:3, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Hebrews 11:1, James 2:19, 1 Peter 1:15-16, 1 John 5:4

Topics: "Regeneration", "Faith and Sanctification"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that regeneration is synonymous with entire sanctification, marking a profound change in one's moral character and ultimate intentions towards obedience and benevolence. He argues that true regeneration requires a complete turning away from sin and a commitment to God, which is essential for justification and acceptance. Finney further distinguishes between sanctification as an exercise and as a state, asserting that faith is a critical act of will that leads to entire sanctification. He explains that faith is not merely belief but an active submission to God's truth, which must precede and condition the state of holiness. Ultimately, Finney concludes that holiness is a unified concept rooted in love and benevolence, with faith serving as a foundational element of the Christian experience.

Transcript

Dear Brother:

I come now, according to my plan, to show:

VII. THAT REGENERATION IS ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION, CONSIDERED AS AN ACT IN OPPOSITION TO A STATE.

1. Regeneration, or a change of heart, is a change in the ultimate intention, or in the choice of the great end or object of life; or, it is a turning from disobedience to obedience; or, from selfishness to supreme, disinterested benevolence.
2. It is described in the Bible as a radical change of moral character. It must, therefore, consist in a change of ultimate intention, or the end or object of life.
3. The Bible speaks of regenerate ones as sanctified; because, whatever they may now be, they must have been sanctified at their regeneration. In other words, they must have obeyed God at least once, if they are regenerate.

4. Regeneration is the condition of justification, pardon, and acceptance with God. This could not be, unless it consisted in obedience to God. It has been generally insisted on, by divines of all schools, that the new birth consists in giving the whole heart to God, or in an act of entire consecration to God. Nothing can be a condition of pardon and acceptance with God short of a state, for the time being, of entire obedience to God. God has no right to pardon until rebellion is given up, and sin, at least for the time being, wholly rejected. And besides, it must be the intention of the mind, to give up sin wholly and for ever. Nothing short of this can be regeneration. Nothing short of this can be the condition of justification. If any thing short of this is the condition upon which God pardons, accepts, and justifies the sinner, He has departed from the principles of his own government, abrogated the law, and introduced another rule of action. But this cannot be.

5. The uniform representation of the Bible is, that regeneration is an act or state of entire consecration to God. "Except a man forsake all that he hath he cannot be my disciple." "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself daily, and take up his cross and follow me." "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." It cannot be necessary to dwell any longer upon this subject; for if regeneration consists in a change of the ultimate intention of the mind, it must constitute entire sanctification, considered as an act.

VIII. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SANCTIFICATION AS AN EXERCISE AND AS A STATE.

1. Sanctification as an exercise, may consist in any exercise or act of obedience.
2. As a state, it consists in an abiding right ultimate intention. Or, in abiding, supreme, disinterested benevolence; including all its modifications as circumstances vary.

IX. FAITH IS ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION, CONSIDERED AS AN ACT, BUT AS A STATE ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION IS CONDITIONED UPON FAITH.

1. Faith is not conviction, or mere assent to truth.
2. Faith is not an emotion, or felt assurance of mind. But--
3. Faith is an act of will, or it could not be a holy act.
4. It is that act of will by which the truth is received. It is the yielding, or giving up of all the powers, by the will, to the influence of truth perceived, and an attitude of waiting for further light. A truth may be fully believed, so far as conviction is concerned, where there is no evangelical faith. Sinners and devils often believe the truth; but they have not faith that yields the mind up to its influence. This yielding, or committing of the mind to the influence of truth, constitutes the peculiarity or characteristic of evangelical faith.
5. Faith may exist and be viewed, either as a generic, or as a specific exercise of mind. As a generic exercise it has not necessarily any moral character. At least it is not necessarily holy. The mind may be yielded up to the influence of mathematical, philosophical, or historical truth, which, in the generic sense of the term, is an exercise of faith. But--
6. Evangelical faith is not a conviction that the Bible is the word of God--nor that it is true--nor is it a perception of its meaning, with the assurance that it is true. But evangelical faith is a species, in distinction from a genus. It is a willing to receive, or rather the actual reception by the will of the testimony of God. It is the mind's choice, intention, or willing to be governed by his truth, because it is the truth of God. It is the

yielding up of the whole being to be influenced by his testimony concerning and by his Son.

7. Faith must be a holy act, because it is a compliance with obligation. It is, therefore, in the sense of an act, entire sanctification, or consecration to God.

8. But it is only a compliance with an initial obligation. It is a consent to be duly influenced by the will and truth of God, and waits for the truth and will of God more and more fully to be made known. The state of Paul's mind at the time of his conversion will illustrate my meaning. When Paul was struck to the ground, and informed that it was Jesus who had spoken to him, he cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" This faith is that attitude of the mind or will that says, "speak, Lord, thy servant heareth. My purpose is to obey. Only let me know thy will, and I will do it." Faith is not repentance, nor love; but from its very nature must be the condition of all other acts of obedience except itself. It is a consent to receive his word, or truth, and be influence by it. It is the will taking the attitude of obedience, or submission, and wants only to know duty to be ready to do it. Faith, then, must be the condition of entire sanctification as a state. Faith, as an act, viewed by itself, is not universal obedience, nor does it constitute the whole of religion; but is only a modification, or one form of true religion.

Certainly there is no difficulty in supposing one holy act to be conditioned upon another, or holiness as a state to be conditioned upon one holy act. And, indeed, holiness as a state must be conditioned upon some first or initial act. Faith in the testimony or truth of God, must be a condition of all heart obedience to the law of God, as such; that is, because He requires it. Let it be remembered, then, that faith is the receiving of the truth and testimony of God for its own sake, and on its own account, as worthy of implicit confidence, and as excellent in itself.

9. It is easy to see, that in its last analysis, faith is a modification of benevolence, as justice, truth, mercy, repentance, &c., are. But it is not the whole of Christian character. I say again, in the last analysis, faith, and every other holy exercise, resolve themselves into a modification of benevolence. And, therefore, strictly speaking, holiness is a unit; love or benevolence comprehending the whole moral character of every holy being. The different Christian graces may be, however, and often must be viewed separately, and as presenting so many different phases of benevolence.

When faith is viewed by itself, it is easy to see, that it sustains to the other Christian graces which make up a state of sanctification, the relation of a condition, as it consists in the consent of the will, to receive and be influence by the testimony of God.

Your Brother in the love and

fellowship of the blessed Gospel,

C.G. Finney

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