

Professor Finney's Letters--No. 24.

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of patience, meekness, and charity in the face of opposition or persecution, and encourages believers to remain in their churches and promote holiness.

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, Romans 12:21, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:2, Philippians 2:14-15, Colossians 3:12-14, 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Hebrews 12:14, James 1:4, 1 Peter 2:23

Topics: "Unity in the Church", "Patience in Trials"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the importance of patience and love in the face of trials and opposition within the church. He reflects on the early Methodists' perseverance and their ability to promote holiness without withdrawing from their churches, urging believers to remain steadfast and exhibit kindness towards those who oppose them. Finney advises against speaking ill of ministers and encourages a charitable understanding of opposition, highlighting the need for humility and a spirit of unity. He warns against the dangers of a censorious attitude and calls for believers to maintain their witness within their congregations, promoting the doctrine of entire sanctification through their actions and character.

Transcript

Beloved in the Lord:

The present is a time of trial with you, and I feel as if it was of the utmost importance, that in these days you should "possess your souls in patience"--that "patience should have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." As I have heard much of our trials in some places, and know, in some measure, how many of you are situated, in respect to your church relations, will you permit me, in the bowels of Jesus Christ, to give you a little fraternal advice.

I have often thought, that the early history of Methodism, were it known to churches of other denominations generally, might, in many respects, be very useful at the present day. Wesley, as you probably know, belonged, till the day of his death, to the High Episcopal Church of England. And during his day, the Methodists continued in the Episcopal or National Church. I have often been struck with his admirable meekness, patience, disinterestedness, and fear of God, in sustaining the opposition and persecution which he did, without either withdrawing, or being driven from the Episcopal Church. He visited various parts of England, together with his brother and other coadjutors, and preached a full salvation from sin. He formed what were called "Bands," in the different churches, composed of those members that were seeking after holiness of heart, and salvation from all sin. These "Bands" had their

regular prayer and conference meetings by themselves, at such times and places as were convenient, for prayer, conference, and mutual edification. Those only were admitted as members who were seekers for the great blessing, after which they were pressing. These "Bands" were committed to the superintendence, either of one of the preachers, or of some laymen who was fitted to take the charge of them. But as my memory is not very definite in respect to the particulars, I have adverted to them principally for the purpose of saying, that those "Bands," or Methodists, as soon as they avowed themselves such in the different churches to which they belonged, were extensively and bitterly opposed by the churches of which they were members. They were said to consider themselves better than others. They were called sanctimonious, hypocritical, perfectionists, and almost any thing and every thing, that prejudice, irreligion, pride, and ignorance of God, could heap upon them.

Now, instead of retiring disgusted, or from any conscientious scruples, from the bosom of the churches to which they belonged, they remained as quietly as possible in them. And by their admirable meekness, sweetness, and charity, extended their influence, and promoted holiness in those churches to an astonishing extent. They, no doubt, did a hundred times as much good as they could have done, by withdrawing from the churches, setting up separate meetings on the Sabbath, forming themselves into distinct churches, & thus arraying themselves in the attitude of a distinct denomination.

After Wesley's death, they had become so very numerous, that they withdrew from the Episcopal Church, and organized themselves into a distinct denomination. As to the wisdom of this measure, I have nothing to say, as I am not sufficiently informed in respect to the particulars, to have any opinion about it. But I have been greatly affected, edified, and, I may say, blessed, in contemplating the spirit, and movements, and success of the early Methodists in England.

And another thing is worthy of remark, that notwithstanding the carnal state of the Episcopal Church in general, at that time, the Methodists were by no means hunted from their churches, as such heretics as not to be worthy of communion. As much as has been said about the High Church, and the high-handed notions of that church, in respect to church organization, and ecclesiastical denomination; yet the Methodists were allowed to remain in their communion, without excommunication or suspension. Their ministers were allowed to preach the doctrine of entire and continued sanctification in this life. They were allowed to visit the churches, through the length and breadth of the land, and as it were to form churches within churches; or, in other words, establish their "Bands," and promote the work of God in their own way; without being set at naught, or excised from the churches. This was Episcopacy in the days of its strength, and at a time when it possessed its most unbroken power. How all this will compare with the movements of some of our Congregational and Presbyterian churches and ecclesiastical bodies, at the present day, I need not say.

The things which I wish to say, particularly, at the present time, are the following:

1. I advise and beseech you, to be filled with the love of Jesus Christ; and on all occasions, to exhibit entire patience, kindness, and forbearance, towards those who differ from you, and who oppose you.
2. Do not allow yourselves to talk about the opposition you meet with from ministers and Christians. Do not pray for yourselves or for others, as if you or they were persecuted. Especially, do not do this in public; nor suffer your minds to dwell upon the opposition you meet with, lest you should be "overcome of evil."
3. If you are accused of things of which you are not guilty--if slanderous and ill-founded reports are circulated about you--if they come to your ears, I beg of you not to open your mouths in reply, 'lest you

should speak unadvisedly with your lips.' Preserve entire silence; and go aside and pray, and feel, and know, that your reputation is of no value, only as it can promote the interests of the kingdom of Christ. Leave your reputation, then, entirely with Him, and possess your souls in entire patience.

4. I advise and beseech you, to be exceedingly careful what you say to your minister, or of ministers in general. Be careful to "speak evil of no man," but be "gentle, showing all meekness unto all men." Be especially careful of the reputation of ministers. Treat them with great kindness, respect, and love, for their office and their work's sake. Avoid censoriousness as you would avoid a serpent; and be entreated, not only to watch over yourselves in this respect, but watch especially over your brethren and sisters, who believe as you do. Admonish, warn, or reprove them, as circumstances may require, on the first appearance of censoriousness in them.

5. Learn to account in the most charitable manner for all the opposition you meet with. Consider that in many things you may be mistaken and wrong, and also that much of the opposition you meet with, originates in mistakes and misapprehension on the part of your opposers, rather than in any ill-will to you, or opposition to what they understand to be the truth. Consider, also, how long you yourselves, have been in bondage to sin, the slaves of prejudice--how long you possessed more or less of a sectarian and a persecuting spirit--and how long it took you to rise above your prejudices and get away from under the influence of your stereotyped errors of opinion, so as to understand the liberty of the gospel. Consider the long suffering and compassion of God towards you, and how much pains He took, kindly to undermine your prejudices, to correct your opinions, and draw you over to the belief and the practice of the truth.

6. I advise and beseech you, by no means to withdraw from the churches to which you respectively belong. Why, dearly beloved, there is the very place for you to hold up your light. Do not therefore, withdraw and separate yourselves from those who are yet in the dark in respect to this glorious doctrine. Did the Apostles, when their eyes were opened on the day of Pentecost, withdraw at once, disgusted and disheartened, from their Jewish brethren, as either too unholy or too hopelessly hardened, to be associated with or won over to the truth as it is in Jesus. You will, no doubt, do a hundred times as much good, if you take the right course, in your own churches, as you will by withdrawing from them. At first, perhaps, many of you will feel yourselves shut in, and your influence for a time may be greatly curtailed or even destroyed; but this state of things will not, cannot long continue. If you really possess, and every where manifest the spirit of Christ--if your bowels of compassion yearn over your brethren--if you are meek, and kind, and forbearing, and loving--if you are really holy in your walk and conversation, it will be seen, and felt, and acknowledge--sooner or later--by your brethren and ministers; and your influence and character, will be felt and appreciated at some time, if you but continue among them, and seek their purity and edification. I have been greatly grieved, to learn, that some who believe in this glorious doctrine, have felt it to be their duty to withdraw from the communion of the churches to which they belong. I fear they have committed a great error, and shut themselves out, in a great measure, from doing the good which they otherwise might have done.

7. Some of you have been excommunicated, as I am told, and many more of you probably may be. I fear that some of you have placed yourselves in such an attitude as to compel the churches to excommunicate you, and that they have not done it so much because you hold the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life as because you declined communion with the church, and perhaps treated the minister and church in a manner that made them feel called upon to excommunicate you.

Now, dearly beloved, if any of you have been guilty of any errors, in theory or practice, that have compelled the churches to excommunicate you, I would beseech you on my knees, to confess. Make all the restitution in your power, request to be taken back into the communion of the church, and take away every reason for their not receiving you, except the fact that you hold the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life. This will throw the responsibility upon them to decide, whether for this error, as they call it, they will cut you off from their communion. I trust that not many churches of any denomination in the land will go so far as to excommunicate a member for the belief in this doctrine. At all events, I cannot think, that the Congregational, or what are denominated the New School Presbyterian Churches, will do any such thing, standing as they do, excised from the Presbyterian Church, for supposed errors in doctrine. For to me it seems impossible, that for this one point of difference between you and them, they should excommunicate you, and at the same time complain of the excising act of the Old School General Assembly, from whom they differ in very many material points of doctrine. That they should complain of being rejected from the Presbyterian Church, when, as a matter of fact, they differ so extensively and on many points of doctrine, from them, and at the same time reject you, for differing only in one point, and that, too, a point always held by the Methodists, who are acknowledged by them as evangelical, I cannot believe.

8. Before I close this letter, do let me again beseech you, whatever may occur, whether the churches tolerate you or reject you, to preserve a spirit of entire patience, sweetness, meekness, and charity. You can in no way do so much mischief, as to profess to believe the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, and at the same time exhibit a wicked spirit. All the opposition that is or can be made to this sentiment, by its opposers, can hardly begin to be so injurious to the cause of truth, as a wicked, censorious, sarcastic, denunciatory, pharisaical spirit and conversation, in those who profess to believe it. I beseech you, by the mercies of God; nay, beloved, I conjure you, by your love of truth, by your attachment to Christ, by all that is sacred and lovely, and of good report; to keep yourselves pure; to exercise the utmost patience, forbearance, and kindness, and do not let your holiness be a holiness of theory only. But let it be the very light, and temper, and spirit, and life of the blessed Son of God. Remain as quietly as possible in the churches to which you belong. Possess and exhibit an anti-sectarian spirit, on all occasions. And if you are reviled, be sure not to revile again. And if you are persecuted, threaten not. And do not let those who misapprehend your views, or misrepresent your practices, have occasion to triumph over you, as those who, while they profess holiness, exhibit a spirit that is earthly, sensual, devilish.

I may soon address you on this subject again.

Your brother in the love and fellowship of the blessed gospel,

C.G.FINNEY

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