

Professor Finney's Letters--No. 27

by Charles Finney

In this sermon, Charles Finney emphasizes the importance of preserving a collected state of mind, focusing on the love of God and Christ, and promoting God's glory and the salvation of souls.

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, Romans 12:21, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:2, Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3:12-14, 2 Timothy 2:24-26, James 1:19, 1 Peter 3:15, 1 John 4:7

Topics: "Perseverance in Faith", "Unity in the Church"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the importance of maintaining a calm and patient spirit in the face of persecution and opposition within the church. He encourages believers to focus on God's love and promises rather than defending their own reputations or engaging in controversy. Finney warns against forming uncharitable opinions about those who differ in doctrine and advocates for a spirit of kindness and forbearance to win others to the truth. He stresses that the true evidence of a doctrine's validity lies in the spirit and life it produces in believers. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to promoting God's glory and the salvation of souls above all else.

Transcript

Beloved in the Lord:

In my last letter I made some remarks upon the impropriety of your withdrawing from the churches to which you belong, either upon your own suggestion, or upon the suggestion of the churches themselves, unless for the purpose of uniting with some other evangelical church. Permit me now to make the following additional suggestions in respect to your present circumstances.

I have always observed, that where the fear and love of God do not prevent or rebuke a spirit of persecution or ecclesiastical violence, that public sentiment will effectually do it whenever the crisis is sufficiently formed. Now there can be no doubt that if you possess your souls in patience, and observe several conditions which I wish to mention to you, that should the churches to which you belong, or the ecclesiastical bodies of which you may be members proceed to any uncharitable and excising measures, public sentiment will severely and effectually rebuke them, and compel them to desist from such proceedings.

1. The first condition upon which you may expect this to be done is, that you keep yourselves quiet--that you avoid becoming excited, and getting into a vociferous and scolding manner of speaking, praying, or

preaching, upon the subject of your peculiar views. And especially in reference to the opposition that is made to them. Be sure to preserve a collected state of mind. Be sure to walk softly before the Lord. Commune with your own heart, and with God, and be still.

2. In order to this do not suffer yourself to dwell in your thoughts and meditations upon the opposition you meet with, nor upon the unreasonableness of your opposers. Avoid such contemplations, or they will probably be too great a temptation to you and you will be "overcome of evil."

3. Give up your mind to the contemplation of the love of God, of the patience and meekness and gentleness of Christ. Dwell upon the exceeding great and precious promises, and enrich your mind and inflame the love of your hearts by a continued perusal, with much prayer and supplication, of the blessed oracles of God.

4. Do not cry persecution, and self-complacently hold out the idea that you are persecuted for righteousness' sake. If this be really the fact, let others see and say it rather than yourselves.

5. Do not give up your time and thoughts to defending your own reputation or character. --Concern yourself only to promote the glory and honor of God, and leave your reputation to be taken care of by Him. If you attempt to defend your own reputation, you may expect that God will leave you to the defense of it without defending it Himself. But if he sees that you are concerned only to promote his reputation, He is then concerned to defend your reputation as the means of promoting his own. Some of you are aware that in the providence of God, I have had some experience in respect to the influence of slanderous reports and injurious treatment upon christian character and usefulness. In view of all the experience I have had, and the observation I have been able to make, I do not recollect ever to have seen a minister or private christian become excited about, and give himself up to the defense of his character, without manifestly losing the Spirit of God, and eventually suffering a severe and permanent loss in respect to his own reputation. Nor do I on the other hand recollect ever to have seen an instance in which a minister or private christian kept calm, unexcited, about his own reputation, and gave himself up to promoting the honor and glory of God, by laboring for the salvation and sanctification of souls, in which God did not sooner or later, appear for his defense, and "make even his enemies to be at peace with him," and "bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day."

6. Be sure that your labors are as abundant, and as extensive as the providence of God will permit, for the conversion and sanctification of sinners. Do not let it be said of you, at least with any degree of truth, that your religion is of an antinomian character. But let your belief and love of the truth lead you to imitate Christ, laying your whole being upon the altar of prayer, and laboring for the salvation of souls.

7. Avoid controversy. Few persons can engage extensively even in discussions that assume the form of controversy, without sooner or later getting into a bad spirit.

8. Be sure that you are not uncharitable in the opinions you form and express in relation to the piety of those who differ from you in their views. Most minds are very apt, by dwelling a great deal upon some one doctrine of the Bible, so to magnify that particular point as to make it seem as of fundamental importance in the scheme of religious truth. They consequently come to the conclusion that none can be Christians who do not embrace and magnify that particular topic as they themselves do. I have had an opportunity to witness with pain, the developments of this principle of the mind for many years. To this principle may be traced almost all the sectarian zeal in our land and in the Church of God. One man dwells upon the mode of baptism until it assumes such an importance in his mind that he seriously and sincerely doubts whether

any can be Christians who do not view it as he does. He feels as if he could give up his life to extending his particular views upon that subject. Another gives up his mind to the contemplation of the subject of infant baptism until he comes to conclusions either in favor of or against it, and until his mind becomes so absorbed in it, to the exclusion of almost every thing else, that that is with him the great and important point in the gospel. The millennium can never come until the Church is set right upon that subject. Hence he seriously doubts whether there is any religion any farther than there are right views upon this subject, and is ready to launch forth as an apostle for the extension and defense of his particular views. Now who has not been pained and grieved by witnessing the development of this principle of the human mind, on almost every topic that agitates and has agitated the Church of God.

And now beloved, let me say that great and momentous, and glorious, and blessed, as the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life is, it may, no doubt be looked at in such relations, and by certain ardent minds in such a manner as to lead to the conclusion that none are Christians except those who embrace it. Be therefore, I beseech you, on your guard, lest before you are aware, you find yourself forming uncharitable opinions in respect to your brethren who differ from you. Remember also, I beseech you, that the way to convince them of the truth of this doctrine, is not to denounce them as hypocrites, heretics, or cold-hearted, but treat them with great candor and forbearance, and as you have opportunity, make such suggestions, present such passages of scripture and considerations as may tend to bring them into the light upon this subject. And do this in such a spirit of kindness, as rather to win than repel them. Let it be borne continually in mind that your spirit and life, rather than your arguments, are to carry conviction to the minds of the opposers of this doctrine. I know it has been singularly said in some instances by those who oppose this doctrine, that the spirit of those who believe it, is both commendable, and excellent; but that the doctrine itself is detestable. But the common sense of mankind will soon correct such loose statements as these. Such a sentiment as this cannot often be bandied about without meeting the rebuke of common sense. What, the spirit of the Christian religion excellent, but its doctrines pernicious? This is strange logic. A doctrine is pernicious, but the spirit and temper of mind produced by it excellent! "By their fruits shall ye know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?" This applies as much to doctrines as to men. The natural tendency or fruit of a particular doctrine or system of doctrines, is not only a legitimate, but one of the most conclusive evidences of its truth or falsehood. Therefore, beloved, let me repeat that if you exemplify in your daily deportment, temper, and manner of life, the spirit of entire consecration of God, the Church will sooner or later receive this testimony, and declare in favor of this blessed doctrine, to which your life bears most emphatic testimony.

But I must close. You may expect, the Lord willing, to hear from me again soon upon this subject.

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

C.G.FINNEY

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