

Sanctification--No. 2

by Charles Finney

Entire Sanctification implies a state of being where one exercises love of the heart, benevolence, complacency, gratitude, and disinterested love towards God and fellow men, with a supreme disposition to glorify and serve God.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Topics: "Sanctification", "Love for God and Others"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the concept of entire sanctification, which involves a profound love for God and others, characterized by a willful and disinterested devotion. He explains that this love must be supreme, benevolent, and impartial, extending even to enemies, and that it should govern all actions and desires. Finney also highlights the necessity of complete conformity to God's will, a deep sense of His presence, and a commitment to glorifying God in all aspects of life. The sermon calls for a rejection of selfishness and a recognition of the rights and interests of others, urging believers to live in a way that reflects their love for God and humanity.

Transcript

TEXT.--1 Thess. 5:23-24. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it.

I come now to show,

IV. What is implied in entire Sanctification.

Under this head, I shall refer to and repeat some things (as I have already done) which I said a number of months since in my lectures on the law of God.

1. Love is the sum of all that is implied in entire Sanctification. But I may and should be asked what is the kind of love implied? I shall consider

The kind of love to be exercised towards God.

(1.) It is to be love of the heart, and not a mere emotion. By the heart I mean the will. Emotions, or what are generally termed feelings, are always involuntary states of mind, and no further than they are indirectly

under the control of the will, have they any moral character; i.e. they are not choices or volitions, and of course do not govern the conduct. Love, in the form of an emotion, may exist in opposition to the will; e.g. we may exercise emotions of love contrary to our conscience and judgment, and in opposition to our will. Thus the sexes often exercise emotions of love towards those to whom all the voluntary powers of their mind feel opposed, and with whom they will not associate. It is true, that in most cases, the emotions are with the will. But they are sometimes, nay often opposed to it.

Now, it is a voluntary state of mind that the law of God requires; i.e. it lays its claims upon the will. The will controls the conduct. And it is, therefore, of course, the love of the heart or will that God requires.

(2.) Benevolence is one of the modifications of love which we are to exercise towards God. Benevolence is good will. And certainly we are bound to exercise this kind of love to God. It is a dictate of reason, of conscience, of common sense, and of immutable justice, that we should exercise good and not ill-will to God. It matters not whether he needs our good will or whether our good or ill-will can in any way affect him.--the question does not respect his necessities, but deserts.

God's well-being is certainly an infinite good in itself, and consequently, we are bound to desire it--to will it--to rejoice in it; and to will it and rejoice in it, in proportion to its intrinsic importance. And as his well-being is certainly a matter of infinite importance, we are under infinite obligation to will it with all our hearts.

(3.) Another modification of this love, is that of complacency or esteem. God's character is infinitely good. We are therefore bound, not merely to love him, with the love of benevolence; but to exercise the highest degree of complacency in his character. To say that God is good and lovely is merely to say that he deserves to be loved. If he deserves to be loved, on account of his goodness and love, then he deserves to be loved in proportion to his goodness and loveliness. Our obligation, therefore is infinitely great to exercise toward him the highest degree of the love of complacency of which we are capable. These remarks are confirmed by the Bible, by reason, by conscience and by common sense.

(4.) Another modification of this love is that of gratitude. As every moral being is constantly receiving favors from God, it is self-evident, that love in the form of gratitude is universally obligatory.

(5.) Another peculiarity of this love which must, by no means, be overlooked, is that it must be disinterested; i.e. that we should not love him for selfish reasons. But that we should love him for what he is--with benevolence; because his well-being is an infinite good--with complacency; because his character is infinitely excellent--with the heart; because all virtue belongs to the heart. It is plain, that nothing short of disinterested love is virtue. The Savior recognizes and settles this truth, in Luke 6:32-34: "For if ye love them who love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again." These words epitomize the whole doctrine of the Bible on this subject, and lay down the broad principle, that to love God, or any one else, for selfish reasons, is not virtue.

(6.) Another peculiarity of this love is that it must be in every instance supreme. Any thing less than supreme love to God, must be idolatry. If any thing else is loved more, that is our God.

I have been surprised to learn that some understand the term supreme in a comparative sense, and not in a superlative sense. They suppose therefore that the law of God requires more than supreme love.

Webster's definition of supreme and supremely is "in the highest degree," "to the utmost extent." I understand the law to require as high a state of devotion to God, of love and actual service as the powers of body and mind are capable of sustaining.

Observe, that God lays great stress upon the degree of love. So that the degree is essential to the kind of love. If it be not supreme in degree it is wholly defective and in no sense acceptable to God.

I will now consider the kind of love to be exercised towards our fellow men.

(1.) It must be the love of the heart, and not mere desire or emotion. It is very natural to desire the good of others--to pity the distressed--and to feel strong emotions of compassion towards those who are afflicted. But these emotions are not virtue. Unless we will their good, as well as desire it, it is of no avail. James 2:15, 16: "If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food. And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

Now here the Apostle fully recognized the principle, that mere desire for the good of others, which of course will satisfy itself with good words instead of good deeds, is not virtue. If it were good willing, instead of good desiring, it would produce corresponding actions; and unless it is good willing, there is no holiness in it.

(2.) Benevolence to men is a prime modification of holy love. This is included in what I have said above, but needs to be expressly stated and explained. It is a plain dictate of reason, of conscience, of common sense, and immutable justice, that we should exercise good will towards our fellow men--that we should will their good, in proportion to its relative importance--that we should rejoice in their happiness, and endeavor to promote it, according to its relative value in the scale of being.

(3.) Complacency towards those that are virtuous is another modification of holy love. I say towards those that are virtuous, because while we exercise benevolence towards all, irrespective of their character, we have a right to exercise complacency towards those only who are holy. To exercise complacency towards the wicked is to be as wicked as they are. But to exercise entire complacency in those that are holy, is to be ourselves holy.

(4.) This love is to be in every instance equal. By equal I do not mean that degree of love which selfish beings have for themselves; for this is supreme. There is a grand distinction between self-love and selfishness. Self-love is that benevolence to self or regard for our own interest, which its intrinsic importance demands. Selfishness is the excess of self-love: i.e. it is supreme self-love--it is making our own happiness the supreme object of pursuit, because it is our own. And not attaching that importance to other's interests, and the happiness of other beings, which their relative value demands. A selfish mind is therefore in the exercise of the supreme love of self.

Now the law of God does not require or permit us to love our neighbor with this degree of love, for that would be idolatry. But the command, "to love our neighbor as ourselves," implies

(a) That we should love ourselves less than supremely, and attach no more importance to our own interests and happiness than their relative value demands--So that the first thing implied in this command is that we love ourselves less than supremely, and that we love our neighbor with the same degree of love which it is lawful for us to exercise towards ourselves.

(b) Equal love does not imply that we should neglect our own appropriate concerns, and attend to the affairs of others. God has appointed to every man a particular sphere in which to act, and particular affairs to which he must attend. And this business, whatever it is, must be transacted for God and not for ourselves. For a man, therefore, to neglect his particular calling under the pretence of attending to the business of others, is neither required or permitted by this law.

Nor are we to neglect our own families, and the nurture and education of our children, and attend to that of others. "But if any provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."--To these duties we are to attend for God. And no man or woman is required or permitted to neglect the children God has given them, under the pretence of attending to the families of others.

Nor does this law require or permit us to squander our possessions upon the intemperate, and dissolute, and improvident. Not that the absolute necessities of such persons are in no case to be relieved by us, but it is always to be done in such a manner as not to encourage, but to rebuke their evil courses.

Nor does this law require or permit us to suffer others to live by sponging out of our possessions, while they themselves are not engaged in promoting the good of men.

Nor does it require or permit us to lend money to speculators, or for speculating purposes, or in any way to encourage selfishness.

(c) But by equal love is meant, as I have said, the same love in kind and degree, which it is lawful for us to exercise towards ourselves. It is lawful, nay, it is our duty to exercise a suitable regard to our own happiness. This is benevolence to self, or what is commonly called self-love. The same, both in kind and degree, we are required to exercise to all our fellow men.

(5.) Another feature of holy love is that it must be impartial; i.e. it must extend to enemies as well as friends. Else it is selfish love, and comes under the reprobation of the Savior, in the passage before quoted, Luke 6:32-34: "For if ye love them who love you what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same," &c.

Now observe that this test must always be applied to the kind of love we exercise to our fellow men, in order to understand its genuineness--God's love is love to enemies. It was for his enemies that he gave his Son. Our love must be the same in kind--it must extend to enemies, as well as friends. And if it does not, it is partial and selfish.

2. Entire Sanctification implies, entire conformity of heart and life to all the known will of God however it may be made known--to both physical and moral law so far as they are known.

3. It implies such a perfect confidence in him as to be willing that all events should be at his sovereign disposal--such a confidence as to preclude all carefulness and undue anxiety about ourselves or our friends, our temporal or eternal interests, the interests of the Church or of the world. Let me be understood. I am as far as possible from supposing a state of entire Sanctification is inconsistent with the greatest desire, and most earnest and prevailing wrestlings with God for blessings, both spiritual and temporal upon ourselves and the world. But I suppose that a soul in a state of entire conformity to the will of God, will never so distrust his providence and grace as to be thrown into a state of feverish anxiety about any event. It will, on all occasions, most sweetly acquiesce and rejoice in the will of God, in

whatever way that will is revealed.

4. Entire Sanctification implies a supreme disposition to glorify and serve God--that this is the ruling principle of our life--that we live for no lower or other end than this--that all other things that we desire are esteemed as a means to this end--that life and health, and food and raiment, and houses and furniture, and every thing else that we possess are regarded by us as a means to this one great absorbing end, the Glory of God.

5. It implies that the principle of love should have such energy as to control every design and action directly or indirectly.

6. It implies an abiding sense of the presence of God. From what I have already said, you will understand me of course not to mean that God is the direct object of thought, attention and affection, but that there should be such a sense of his presence at all times as to have an important bearing upon our whole lives. Every one knows by his own experience, what it is to have a kind of sense of the presence of a person, who is not at the time the direct object of our thoughts. A man in the presence of an earthly prince, or of an august court, under the eye of a human judge, would be continually awed, and restrained, and affected with a kind of sense of where he was, and in whose presence, and under whose eye he was acting although his mind might be so intensely employed in the transaction of business as not at all to make the judge or prince the object of direct thought, attention, or affection. In this sense, I suppose a sanctified soul will have an abiding sense, at all times and places, of the presence of God. And when the mind is withdrawn from necessary pursuits, it will naturally return to God, and be sensible of His presence in a vastly higher sense than this. It will be so impressed, and melted, and affected, by His presence as can never be expressed in words, but as a matter of experience is familiar to all those who walk with God.

7. It does imply deep and uninterrupted communion with God. But here let me correct a mistake into which, as I think, some have fallen. Many seem to recognize nothing as communion with God except that sweet peace and joy, and flowing, and glowing love that the soul often experiences in seasons of communion. But God no doubt often has seasons of intercourse and communion with the soul and with the sanctified soul, in which he reminds it of past sins and follies. And in order to keep it in a sanctified state he gives it such a view of its past history as to fill it with unutterable shame, and self-abhorrence, and contempt. Now persons are apt to conceive of this state of mind as a state of darkness, & to conceive of themselves as being under the hidings of God's countenance, when in fact they are never perhaps more thoroughly in the light than at such seasons. They are never perhaps nearer to God than on such occasions. To be sure their thoughts are not occupied with those sweet and heavenly visions that fill the mind with joy. Yet they are occupied with considerations of no less importance and no less indispensable to continuing them in a state of holiness, than those sweet truths which at other times so greatly rejoice them.

8. It implies a greater dread of offending God than of any other evil. This is implied in supreme love. It is a contradiction to say that we love God supremely, and yet do not dread offending Him so much as we dread some other evil. If we love Him more than any earthly friend, we shall dread to offend Him more than that friend. If we love Him more than we do ourselves, we should dread offending Him more than we do that evil should befall ourselves. If he is dearer to us than our own souls we should dread remaining in sin more than we should dread the loss of our souls.

9. It does imply the subjugation of all our appetites and passions to the will of God,[.] I have already said that the sin of Adam consisted in preferring the gratification of his appetites to the will of God. This is the sin of all men. This is the substance and the history of selfishness. Now entire obedience to the law of God does imply that no appetite or susceptibility of body or mind shall be gratified in opposition to the known will of God. But on the other hand, that "the whole body[.] soul and spirit" shall be held in a state of entire consecration to God.

10. It implies the strictest employment of our time in the acquisition of knowledge, and a consecration of what we already know to the service of God.

In my last lecture, I said that the legal maxim, "Ignorance of the law excuses no one," is true in morals to but a limited extent, and that actual knowledge is indispensable to obligation under the government of God. This I think was sufficiently proven by a reference to scripture testimony. I also said that in sins of ignorance, the sin consisted in the ignorance itself, and not in the non-performance of that of which the mind has no knowledge.

Now to avoid mistake, it is important to remark here that ignorance of our duty is always a sin where we possess the means and opportunities of information. In such cases, the guilt of the ignorance is equal to all the default of which it is the occasion. Strictly speaking the duty to do a thing does not and cannot attach until the mind has a knowledge of that thing. Yet if the means of knowledge are within reach of the mind, the guilt is just as great as all the default of which this ignorance is the occasion. So that courts of law do not inflict injustice in holding all the subjects of a government responsible for knowing the law, where the means of knowledge are within their reach. Although they are not in form pronounced guilty for their ignorance, & punished for the specific offence, but on the contrary are held responsible for breaches of those laws of which they had no knowledge, yet in fact no injustice is done them, as their ignorance in such cases really deserves the punishment inflicted.

To this it may be objected that God, under the old dispensation treated sins of ignorance as involving less guilt than sins committed against knowledge. To this I reply,

He did so. And the reason is very obvious. The people possessed but very limited means of information. Copies of the law were very scarce and utterly inaccessible to the great mass of the people. So that while He held them sufficiently responsible to engage their memories to retain a knowledge of their duty and to search it out with all diligence, yet it is plain that He held them responsible in a vastly lower sense than He does those who have higher means of information. The responsibility of the heathen was less than that of the Jews--that of the Jews less than that of Christians--and that of Christians in the early ages of the Church, before the canon of scripture was full and copies multiplied, much less than that of Christians at the present day.

11. It implies the complete annihilation of selfishness under all its forms, and a practical and hearty recognition of the rights and interests of our neighbor. Let me point out in a few particulars what the law of God prohibits and what it requires in these particulars, as stated in a former lecture.

(1.) It prohibits all supreme self-love, or selfishness. The command, "love thy neighbor as thyself," implies, not that we should love our neighbor supremely, as selfish men love themselves; but that we should love ourselves, in the first place, and pursue our happiness, only according to its real value, in the scale of being. But I need not dwell upon this; as it will not probably be doubted, that this precept prohibits supreme self-love.

(2.) It prohibits all excessive self-love: (i.e.) every degree of love, that is disproportioned to the relative value of our own happiness.

(3.) It prohibits the laying any practical stress upon any interest, because it is our own.

(4.) It prohibits, of course, every degree of ill will, and all those feelings that are necessarily connected with selfishness.

(5.) It prohibits apathy and indifference, with regard to the well being of our fellow men. But;

(6.) It requires the practical recognition of the fact, that all men are brethren--that God is the great Parent--the great Father of the universe--that all moral agents, every where, are his children--and that he is interested in the happiness of every individual, according to its relative importance. He is no respecter of persons. But so far as the love of Benevolence is concerned, He loves all moral beings, in proportion to their capacity of receiving, and doing good.

Now the law of God evidently takes all this for granted; and that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth."

(7.) It requires that every being, and interest should be regarded and treated, by us, according to their relative value; (i.e.) that we should recognize God's relation to the universe--and our relation to each other--and treat all men as our brethren--as having an inalienable title to our good will, and kind offices--as citizens of the same government--and members of the great family of God.

(8.) It requires us to exercise as tender a regard to our neighbor's reputation, interest, and well-being, in all respects, as to our own--to be as unwilling to mention his faults, as to have our own mentioned--to hear him slandered as to be slandered ourselves. In short, he is to be esteemed, by us, as our brother.

(9.) It justly reprobates any violation of the great principle of equal love, as rebellion against the whole universe. It is rebellion against God, because it is a rejection of his authority--and selfishness, under any form, is a setting up of our own interests, in opposition to the interests of the universe of God.

12. Entire Sanctification implies a willingness to exercise self-denial, even unto death, for the glory of God and good of man, did they require it. The Apostle teaches us that "we ought to be willing to lay down our lives for the brethren," as Christ laid down his life.

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