

Sanctification--No. 8

by Charles Finney

Entire sanctification is attainable at any time, on the ground of natural ability, through full faith in the word and promises of God.

Topics: "Faith", "Sanctification"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that entire sanctification is attainable for Christians through faith in God's promises, as outlined in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. He argues that this state of holiness is not only promised but also requires active faith and cannot be achieved through works or by imitating others' experiences. Finney asserts that the realization of God's love and the acceptance of His truth are essential for achieving sanctification, which is a spontaneous act of the heart rather than a forced effort. He encourages believers to focus on God's character and promises rather than their own shortcomings, as true sanctification comes from a deep understanding of God's nature and love. Ultimately, Finney concludes that entire sanctification is a gift from God, made possible through faith alone.

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.

VIII. I am next to show when entire sanctification is attainable.

1. The blessing of entire sanctification is promised to Christians. The promises in--

Jeremiah 31:31-34: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them."

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."

Eph. 1:13: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise."

These and many others show that the promise is made to those who have some degree of faith, i.e. who have been regenerated. In the last it is said, "We are sealed after that we believe."

2. Faith is always the expressed or implied condition of the promises. It has been supposed that the promise in Jer. 31, together with other kindred promises, are absolute in such a sense as to have no condition whatever. To this it may be replied, that the things which they promise are of such a nature as that they cannot possibly be received but by faith. The law of love cannot possibly be written in the heart, but through the faith which works by love. Therefore from necessity this promise, as well as all other promises of spiritual blessings, is conditioned upon faith in us. Should it be said that the promise to write the law in our hearts, includes the doing of all that which is essential to its fulfillment, and that therefore a promise to beget love is virtually also a promise to produce faith, I reply, that in some sense this is true. A promise to secure an end is virtually a promise to secure the right use of the means necessary to that end. But this is as far as possible from excluding our own agency and responsibility. When Paul had declared, that not a hair of any man's head on board the ship should perish, this did not exclude the necessity of the sailors remaining on board. For he afterwards informed them, "except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved." Now it is true that in a very important sense, the promise that the hair of no man's head should perish, implied that God would secure the use of the requisite means to preserve them. Yet who would infer from this that that promise was not conditioned upon the sailors remaining on board, and the right use of the voluntary agency of Paul and all the rest on board to preserve themselves. So it should be remembered, that the promises, to create a new heart and a new spirit--to make a new covenant with the house of Israel--and to write the law in their hearts--are certainly and necessarily conditioned upon the faith of every one who would receive their fulfillment.

3. This state is attainable on the ground of natural ability at any time. If this state were not attainable on the ground of natural ability, it would not be required, and its absence would not be sin. But it has been doubted whether the work of entire sanctification is such, in its own nature, that it can be accomplished at once. To this I reply:

(1.) If it cannot be instantly accomplished, it would not be instantly required.

(2.) If it were not, in its own nature, capable of being attained at once, the non-attaining it at once would not be sin. All that would be required would be to press forward as fast as we could.

(3.) But in this case the pressing forward would be a sinless state, because it would be all that could be required. So that we should possess at once, what according to the supposition, is naturally impossible, i.e. a state of entire sanctification.

(4.) I have already shown that provision is made against every temptation. And as temptation, under some form, is the cause of all sin, if sufficient provision is made against all present and future temptation, it follows that a state of entire sanctification is attainable at once.

4. Full faith in the word and promises of God, naturally, and certainly, and immediately produces a state of entire sanctification. Let it be understood that by faith, I mean--

(1.) A realization of the truth and meaning of the Bible.

(2.) A laying hold upon all those truths upon which this state of mind depends, especially a full realization and belief of the sacred record God has given of His Son, "that his blood cleanseth us from all sin." It is easy to see that the realization and belief of the infinite love of God, as manifested in Christ Jesus, would have a tendency to fill the mind with unutterable and constant love to God--to annihilate selfishness--and beget the most cordial and perfect love to man. This result is instantaneous on the exercise of faith, and in this sense sanctification is an instantaneous work.

5. God is able to produce entire sanctification in any soul, when he is pleased to do so.

This appears to be plainly taught by Christ, when he spoke of the ability of God to save the rich. He asserts that their salvation is more difficult "than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." And when the disciples expressed their astonishment, He replied, that "with God all things are possible." Now this seems to be a case in point. To sanctify the rich is the only difficulty in the way of their salvation. And Christ has asserted, that God is able not only to sanctify them, but that "all things are possible with Him," i.e. that there is no limit to His ability in this respect.

Eph. 3:20, proved the same point. Here the Apostle asserts that God is able to do "abundantly above all that we ask and above all that we think," exceeding abundantly, &c. Now we can both think of and ask for the blessing of entire, and permanent, and instantaneous sanctification, and if this passage of scripture is true God is able to grant it.

That God is able not only to produce present but also to confirm us in a state of perpetual sanctification, is plain from many other passages of scripture. Jude 24: "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." Upon this passage, I remark:

(1.) Here it is asserted, that God is able to keep us from falling.

(2.) To present us faultless before the presence of His glory.

(3.) To keep us and present us faultless, is to preserve us in a state of permanent sanctification. And this it is declared He is able to do.

To this it has been objected that moral government implies the power to resist every degree of motive. This I most fully admit. But it is one thing to have the power thus to resist, and quite another thing to use that power. God certainly knew when he created moral agents to what extent, under their circumstances, they would actually exercise their powers of resistance, and therefore whether He could sanctify and save them or not. As a matter of fact, He has overcome the voluntary resistance of all who are converted. And if He has broken down their enmity, and so far subdued them, is it incredible that He should be able wholly to sanctify them, and preserve them blameless?

IX. I am to show how entire sanctification is attainable.

1. A state of entire sanctification can never be attained by an indifferent waiting God's time.

2. Nor by any works of law, or works of any kind performed in your own strength, irrespective of the grace of God. By this I do not mean that were you disposed to exert your natural powers aright, you could not at once attain to this state in the exercise of your natural strength. But I do mean, that as you are wholly indisposed to use your natural powers aright without the grace of God, no efforts that you will actually make in your own strength or independent of his grace, will ever result in your entire sanctification.

3. Not by any direct efforts to feel right. Many spend their time in vain efforts to force themselves into a right state of feeling. Now it should be for ever understood, that neither faith, love, nor repentance, nor any other right feeling is ever the result of a direct effort to put forth those exercises. But on the contrary, they are the spontaneous actings of the mind when it has under its direct and deep consideration the objects of faith, and love, and repentance. By spontaneous, I do not mean involuntary. They are the voluntary and the most easy & natural states of mind possible under such circumstances. So far from its requiring an effort to put them forth, it would rather require an effort to prevent them, when the mind is intensely considering those objects & considerations which have a natural tendency to produce them. This is so true that when persons are in the exercise of such affections, they feel no difficulty at all in their exercise, but wonder how any one can help feeling as they do. It seems to them so natural, so easy, and I may say, so almost unavoidable, that they often feel and express astonishment that any one should find it difficult to love, believe, or repent. The course that many persons take on the subject of religion has often appeared wonderful to me. They make themselves, their own state and interests, the central point, around which their own minds are continually revolving. Their selfishness is so great, that their own interests, happiness, and salvation, fill their whole field of vision. And with their thoughts and anxieties, and whole souls clustering around their own salvation, they complain of a hard heart--that they cannot love God--that they do not repent, and cannot believe. Being conscious that they do not feel right, they are the most concerned about themselves, which concern but increases their embarrassment and the difficulty of exercising right affections. The deeper they feel, the more they try to feel--the greater efforts they make to feel without success, the more they are alarmed and discouraged, the more are they confirmed in their selfishness, and the more are their thoughts glued to their own interests, and they are of course at a greater and greater distance from any right state of feeling. And thus their selfish anxieties beget ineffectual efforts, and ineffectual efforts but deepen their anxieties. And if in this state, death should appear in a visible form before them, or the last trumpet sound, and they should be summoned to the solemn Judgment, it would but increase their distraction, confirm and almost give omnipotence to their selfishness, and render their sanctification morally impossible.

4. Not by any efforts to obtain grace by works. In my lecture on Faith, in the last volume of the Evangelist, I said the following things:

(1.) Should the question be proposed to a Jew, "What shall I do that I may work the works of God?"--in other words, how shall I obtain a state of entire obedience to the law of God, or entire sanctification?--he would answer, keep the law, both moral and ceremonial, i.e. keep the commandments.

(2.) To the same inquiry an Arminian would answer, improve common grace, and you will obtain converting grace, i.e. use the means of grace, according to the best light you have, and you will obtain the grace of salvation. In this answer it is not supposed, that the inquirer already has faith, and is using the

means of grace in faith; but that he is in a state of impenitency, and is inquiring after converting grace. The answer, therefore, amounts to this: you must get converting grace by your impenitent works; you must become holy by your hypocrisy; you must work out sanctification by sin.

(3.) To this question, most professed Calvinists would make in substance the same reply. They would reject the language, while they retained the idea. Their direction would imply, either that the inquirer already has faith, or that he must perform some works to obtain it, i.e. to obtain grace by works.

Neither an Arminian, nor a Calvinist would formally direct the inquirer to the law, as the ground of justification. But nearly the whole Church would give directions that would amount to the same thing. Their answer would be a legal, and not a gospel answer. For whatever answer is given to this question, that does not distinctly recognize faith, as the foundation of all virtue in sinners, is legal. Unless the inquirer is made to understand, that this is the first, grand, fundamental duty, without the performance of which all virtue, all giving up of sin, all acceptable obedience, is impossible, he is misdirected. He is led to believe that it is possible to please God without faith; and to obtain grace by works of law. There are but two kinds of works--works of law, and works of faith. Now if the inquirer has not the "faith that works by love," to set him upon any course of works to get it, is certainly to get faith by works of the law. Whatever is said to him that does not clearly convey the truth, that both justification and sanctification are by faith, without works of law, is law, and not gospel. Nothing before, or without faith, can possibly be done by the unbeliever, but works of law. His first duty, therefore, is faith; and every attempt to obtain faith by unbelieving works, is to lay works at the foundation, and make grace a result. It is the direct opposite of gospel truth.

Take facts as they arise in every day's experience, to show that what I have stated is true of almost all professors and non-professors. Whenever a sinner begins in good earnest to agitate the question, "what shall I do to be saved?" he resolves as a first duty, to break off from his sins, i.e. in unbelief. Of course, his reformation is only outward. He determines to do better--to reform in this, that, and the other thing, and thus prepare himself to be converted. He does not expect to be saved without grace, and faith, but he attempts to get grace by works of law.

The same is true of multitudes of anxious Christians, who are inquiring what they shall do to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. They overlook the facts, that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith," that it is with "the shield of faith" that they are "to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." They ask why am I overcome by sin? why can I not get above its power? why am I thus the slave of my appetites and passions, and the sport of the devil? They cast about for the cause of all this spiritual wretchedness and death. At one time, they think they have discovered it in the neglect of one duty; and at another time, in the neglect of another. Sometimes, they imagine they have found the cause to lie in yielding to one sin, and sometimes in yielding to another. They put forth efforts in this direction, and in that direction, and patch up their righteousness on one side, while they make a rent in the other side. Thus they spend years, in running around in a circle, and making dams of sand across the current of their own corruptions. Instead of at once purifying their hearts by faith, they are engaged in trying to arrest the overflowing of its bitter waters. Why do I sin? they inquire; and casting about for the cause, they come to the sage conclusion, it is because I neglect such a duty, i.e. because I do sin. But how shall I get rid of sin? Answer: by doing my duty, that is, by ceasing from sin. Now the real inquiry is, why do they neglect their duty? Why do they commit sin at all? Where is the foundation of all this mischief? Will it be replied, the foundation of all this wickedness is in the corruption of our nature--in the wickedness of the heart--in the strength of our evil propensities and habits? But all this only brings us back to the real inquiry again--How are this corrupt nature, this wicked heart, and these sinful habits, to be overcome? I answer,

by faith alone. No works of law have the least tendency to overcome our sins; but rather confirm the soul in self-righteousness and unbelief.

The great and fundamental sin, which is at the foundation of all other sin, is unbelief. The first thing is, to give up that--to believe the word of God. There is no breaking off from one sin without this. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." "Without faith, it is impossible to please God."

Thus we see, that the backslider and convicted sinner, when agonizing to overcome sin, will almost always betake themselves to works of law, to obtain faith. They will fast, and pray, and read, and struggle, and outwardly reform, and thus endeavor to obtain grace. Now all this is in vain and wrong. Do you ask, shall we not fast, and pray, and read, and struggle? Shall we do nothing--but sit down in Antinomian security and inaction? I answer, you must do all that God commands you to do; but begin where He tells you to begin, and do it in the manner in which He commands you to do it; i.e. in the exercise of that faith that works by love. Purify your hearts by faith. Believe in the Son of God. And say not in your heart, "who shall ascend up into heaven, i.e. to bring Christ down from above; or who shall descend into the deep, i.e. to bring up Christ again from the dead. But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that is, the word of faith which we preach."

Now these facts show, that even under the gospel, almost all professors of religion, while they reject the Jewish notion of justification by works of the law, have after all adopted a ruinous substitute for it, and suppose that, in some way they are to obtain grace by their works.

5. A state of entire sanctification cannot be attained by attempting to copy the experience of others. It is very common for convicted sinners, or for Christians inquiring after entire sanctification, in their blindness to ask others to relate their experience, to mark minutely the detail of all their exercises, and then set themselves to pray for and make direct efforts to attain the same class of exercises. Not seeming to understand that they can no more exercise feelings in the detail like others, than they can look like others. Human experiences differ as human countenances differ. The whole history of a man's former state of mind, comes in of course to modify his present and future exercises. So that the precise train of affections which may be requisite in your case, and which will actually occur in your case, if you are ever sanctified, will not, in all their detail, coincide with the exercises of any other human being. It is of vast importance for you to understand, that you can be no copyist in any true religious experience; and that you are in great danger of being deceived by Satan, whenever you attempt to copy the experience of others. I beseech you, therefore to cease from praying for or trying to obtain the precise experience of any uninspired person, whatever. All truly christian experiences are, like human countenances, in their outline, so much alike as to be readily known as the lineaments of the religion of Jesus Christ. But no farther than this are they alike, any more than human countenances are alike.

6. Not by waiting to make preparations before you come into this state. Observe that the thing about which you are inquiring is a state of entire consecration to God. Now do not imagine that this state of mind must be prefaced by a long introduction of preparatory exercises. It is common for persons when inquiring upon this subject with earnestness, to think themselves hindered in their progress by a want of this or that or the other exercise or state of mind. They look every where else but at the real difficulty. They assign any other and every other but the true reason for their not being already in a state of sanctification.

7. Not by attending meetings, asking the prayers of other christians, or depending in any way upon the means of getting into this state. By this I do not intend to say that means are unnecessary, or that it is not

through the instrumentality of truth, that this state of mind is induced. But I do mean that while you are depending upon any instrumentality whatever, your mind is directed from the real point before you, and you are never like[ly] to make this attainment.

8. Not by waiting for any particular views of Christ. When persons, in the state of mind of which I have been speaking, hear those who live in faith, describe their views of Christ, they say, "O, if I had such views, I could believe; I must have these, before I can believe." Now you should understand that these views are the result and effect of faith. These views of which you speak, are those which faith discovers in those passages of Scripture which describe Christ. Faith apprehends the meaning of those passages, and sees in them these very things which you expect to see, before you exercise faith, and which you imagine would produce it. Take hold, then, on the simple promise of God. Take God at His word. Believe that he means just what He says. And this will at once bring you into the state of mind, after which you inquire.

9. Not in any way which you may mark out for yourself. Persons in an inquiring state are very apt, without seeming to be aware of it, to send imagination on before them, to stake out the way, and set up a flag where they intend to come out. They expect to be thus and thus exercised--to have such and such peculiar views and feelings, when they have attained their object. Now there probably never was a person who did not find himself disappointed in these respects. God says, "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not. I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." This suffering your imagination to make out your path is a great hindrance to you, as it sets you upon making many fruitless, and worse than fruitless, attempts to attain this imaginary state of mind--wastes much of your time--exhausts much of the energies of your mind--and greatly wearies the patience and grieves the Spirit of God. While He is trying to lead you right to the point, you are hauling off from the course, and insisting that this which your imagination has marked out is the way, instead of that in which He is trying to lead you. And thus in your pride and ignorance you are causing much delay, and abusing the long suffering of God. He says, "This is the way, walk ye in it." But you say no. This is the way. And thus you stand and parley and banter, while you are every moment in danger of grieving the Spirit of God away from you, and of losing your soul.

10. Not in any manner, or at any time, or place, upon which you may in your own mind lay any stress. If there is any thing in your imagination that has fixed definitely upon any particular manner, time or place, or circumstances, you will in all probability either be deceived by the devil, or entirely disappointed in the result. You will find that in all these particular items on which you had laid any stress, that the wisdom of man is foolishness with God--that your ways are not His ways, nor your thoughts His thoughts. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than your ways, and His thoughts than your thoughts. But,

11. This state is to be attained by faith alone. Let it be forever remembered, that "without faith it is impossible to please God," and "whatever is not of faith, is sin."

Both justification and sanctification are by faith alone. Rom. 3:30: "Seeing it is one God who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith;" and 5:1: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Also, 9:30, 31: "What shall we say then? that the Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of

the law."

That you may clearly understand this part of the subject, I will quote again from my lecture in the last Vol. The elements that constitute saving faith.

(1.) The first element of saving faith is a realizing sense of the truth of the Bible. But this is not alone saving faith, for Satan has this realizing sense of truth, which makes him tremble.

(2.) But a second element in saving faith is the consent of the heart or will to the truth perceived by the intellect. It is a cordial trust or resting of the mind in those truths, and a yielding up of the whole being to their influence. Now it is easy to see, that without the consent of the will, these can be nothing but an outward obedience to God. A wife, without confidence in her husband, can do nothing more than perform outwardly her duty to him. It is a contradiction to say that without confidence, she can perform her duty from the heart. The same is true of parental and all other governments. Works of law may be performed without faith; i.e. we may serve from fear or hope, or some selfish consideration; but without the confidence that works by love, obedience from the heart is naturally impossible. Nay, the very terms, obedience from the heart without love, are a contradiction.

(3.) This is the most simple and rational state of mind conceivable. It is that state of mind for which very young children are so remarkable. Before they have been taught to distrust by the experience of human depravity, they seem to know nothing of unbelief. They are so simple and honest, that they feel entire confidence in those around them. It is merely a trust in testimony, a resting of the heart in truths perceived by the intellect, a natural yielding of the voluntary powers to the testimony of God.

(4.) This state of mind is spontaneous. It is not, as I have said, the result of an effort to believe, but the natural resting or reposing of the mind in the truth of God. And when the soul believes, all that it can say is, that "while I mused the fire burned," when I thought on the truth to be believed, ere I was aware, I found myself believing.--As I have already said, I do not mean that this is an involuntary state of mind, but that it is voluntary in so high a sense as not to be the result of effort, but the joyful, and natural, and easy yielding up the mind to the influence of truth.

(5.) Faith discovers the real meaning, and apprehends the fulness of those passages that describe Christ. Faith therefore presents Christ to the mind not as at a distance, but as near, not as enveloped in clouds; but in those passages that describe Him, is beheld a fulness, and a glory, and a surpassing loveliness that over-powers and melts the soul.

(6.) The truths to be believed, in order to induce this state of mind, are those which comprise "the record that God hath given of His Son." The mind needs to apprehend God in Christ. To be like God, we must know what He is. To be led to a spontaneous consecration of all to Him, our selfishness must be overcome by a knowledge of what God is. And this knowledge is to be obtained only by seeing God in Christ. For this very purpose God took to Himself human nature, that He might reveal Himself to the sons of men, and thus possess their minds of a true knowledge of His character.

(7.) The natural, and certain effect of their knowing God, is a state of entire consecration to Him. I have said that while individuals are taken up with contemplating themselves, their own characters, dangers, and troubles, they cannot be sanctified, because there is no tendency in such considerations to produce this state. They may dwell upon their own misery, or their wretchedness to all eternity, without finding it possible to consecrate themselves to God, for what is there in such considerations that can in any way

produce such a result. It is a consideration of the infinite excellence of Christ's character, and this alone that can inspire faith or love. If, therefore, you ever expect to trust in God, and love Him with all your heart, you must acquaint yourselves with the reasons for thus loving and trusting Him. You must know God. You must have the true knowledge of God. God, and not yourselves, must be the object of your thoughts. Cease then, I beseech you, to expect to be sanctified by any works of your own, or any direct efforts to feel or do more or less, and remember "that faith cometh by hearing." In other words to understand and believe the record that God hath given of His Son, will at once give you an experimental acquaintance with the truth, that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

The New and Old dispensations differ in two respects.

(a) The New, is a fuller and more perfect revelation of Christ, or of those things that are indispensable to sanctification.

(b) There is a vastly greater amount of the Holy Spirit's influences exerted under this dispensation. The Old made nothing perfect, because of the obscure nature of the revelation of Christ, and because there was such a want of divine influence as fully to possess the mind of the truths indispensable to sanctification. The mind must know enough of God to slay selfishness, and without this, neither love or sanctification is possible. The New, blessed be God, with the influences of the Holy Spirit, have brought us into the clear sunlight, and so revealed God as to overcome sin.

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