

Sanctification--No. 9

by Charles Finney

The sanctification of the body implies the entire consecration of the soul to the service of God, and the entire consecration of all its appetites and passions to the service of God.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Topics: "Sanctification", "Consecration to God"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the necessity of entire sanctification of body, soul, and spirit, urging believers to fully consecrate their entire being to God. He explains that true sanctification involves the subjugation of bodily appetites and passions to serve God, rather than allowing them to dominate one's life. Finney warns against the dangers of indulgence in unhealthy habits and stresses the importance of understanding the physiological laws governing our bodies to achieve spiritual and physical health. He concludes by asserting that the Church's failure to attain sanctification stems from a lack of belief in its attainability, and he calls for a revival of understanding regarding Christ's role as an indwelling Savior. Ultimately, he encourages believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices, trusting in God's faithfulness to sanctify them wholly.

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.

In concluding the series of discourses upon this text, I would remark:

1. That it is useless to speculate upon any supposed distinction that might have been in the Apostle's mind between the soul and spirit of man. I understand the prayer of the Apostle to be for the entire consecration of the whole being to the service of God. I need not dwell with any more particularity upon the text, except it be to mention some things which I suppose are implied in the entire sanctification of the body.

(1.) I understand the sanctification of the body to imply the entire consecration, by the soul, of all its members to the service of God. The body is to be regarded merely as the instrument of the soul through which it manifests itself, and by which it fulfills its desires.

(2.) The entire sanctification of the body implies also the entire consecration of all its appetites and passions to the service of God, i.e. that all its appetites shall be used only for the purposes for which they were designed, not to be the masters, but the servants of the soul, not to lead the soul away from God, but to subserve the highest interests of the physical organization.

(3.) It implies the necessity of keeping the body under, and bringing it into subjection--that no appetite or passion of the body is to be indulged merely for the sake of the indulgence--that no appetite or passion is to be at any time consulted or its indulgence allowed but for the glory of God, to answer the ends of our being, and to render us in the highest degree useful. The grand error of mankind is, that the soul has been debased even to be the slave of the body, that appetite and passion have ruled, that the 'fleshly mind which is enmity against God,' has been suffered to become the law of the soul, and hence the Apostle complains that he saw "a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, bringing him into captivity to the law of sin and death," which was in his members. Hence also, it is said that "if ye live after the flesh ye shall die," that "to mind the flesh is enmity with God," that "the minding of the flesh is death," "the that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." In short it is every where in the Bible expressly taught, that one great error and sin of mankind is the indulgence of the flesh. Now the entire sanctification of the body implies the denial of the lusts of the flesh, that "we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof," that the appetites and passions be restrained and entirely subjugated to the highest interests and perfection of the soul, and to the glory of God. The highest sense in which the body may be sanctified in this life implies:

(a) The strictest temperance in all things. By temperance I mean the moderate use of things that are useful, and total abstinence from things that are pernicious.

(b) It implies also the utter denial of all the artificial appetites of the body. By artificial appetites I mean all those appetites that are not natural to man previous to all depravity of the system by any kind of abuse or violation of its laws. Among the artificial appetites are all those hankerings after various poisons, narcotics, and innutricious stimulants that are in almost universal use, such as tobacco, tea, coffee, and the like. All such substances are utterly inconsistent with perfect temperance--are worse than useless, and produce only a temporary excitement, at the expense of certain and permanent debility. They deceive mankind on the same principle that alcohol has so long deceived men, and though not to the same degree injurious and inconsistent with the highest well being of the body and soul; yet they are as really so; and therefore utterly unlawful. And nothing but ignorance, can prevent their use in any instance as an article of diet from being sin; and when the means of knowledge are at hand, this ignorance itself becomes sin.

(c) Temperance implies a knowledge of, and compliance with, all the laws of our physical system. There is scarcely any branch of knowledge more important to mankind than a knowledge of the structure and laws of their own being. Nor is there scarcely any subject, upon which men are so generally and so shamefully ignorant. It seems not at all to be known by mankind in general, or even suspected, that everything about their bodies is regulated by laws, as certain as the law of gravitation; and that a perfect knowledge of and conformity of those laws, would render permanent health as certain as the motion of the planets. The world is full of disease and premature death, and these things are spoken of as mysterious providences of God, without ever so much as dreaming, that they are the natural and certain results of the most outrageous and reckless violations of the laws of the human constitution.

(d) Temperance in all things implies correct dietetic and other habits in respect to exercise and rest. And in short, such obedience in all respects to the physiological laws of the constitution as to promote in the

highest degree its physical perfection, and thus preserve it in a state in which it will be in the highest degree capable of being used by the soul, to fulfill all the will of God. There are no doubt, occasions on which the bodily strength and the body itself may be sacrificed to the interests of the soul, and of the Redeemer's kingdom--cases in which the violation of physical law may be justifiable and even a duty, where the kingdom of Christ demands the sacrifice. Christ gave up His body a sacrifice. The Apostles and Martyrs gave up theirs. And in every age multitudes have given themselves up to labors for the kingdom of Christ, that have soon ended their mortal lives. This is not inconsistent with the highest sanctification of the body, and of the whole being to God. But on the other hand, it is one of the highest instances of such consecration. But where the circumstances do not demand it, the sanctification of the body, implies that its strength shall not be exhausted, or any of its powers debilitated or injured, by any neglect of exercise, or by any over-working of its organs, or by any violation of its laws whatever. It implies the utmost regularity in all our habits of eating, drinking, sleeping, labor, rest, exercise, and in short a strictly religious regard to all those things that can contribute to our highest perfection of body and soul. Can a glutton, who is stupefied two or three times a day with his food, be entirely consecrated, either body or soul to God? Certainly not. His table is a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block to him. Can an epicure, whose dainty palate loathes every correctly prepared article of diet, and who demands that every meal should be prepared with seasonings and condiments highly injurious to the health of his body and the well-being of his soul, can he be in a state of entire consecration to God? No! surely. His 'god is his belly.' His 'glory is in his shame.' He 'minds earthly things.' And an Apostle would tell him, 'even weeping, that his end is destruction.' It is appalling to see the various forms of disease and wretchedness with which mankind are cursed on account of their wanton disregard of the laws of their being. The highest power of the human mind can never be developed, nor its highest perfection attained, in a diseased body; and probably scarcely a single member of the human family in their present state, has any thing like perfect health. Many suppose themselves to be perfectly healthy, simply because they never saw a person who had perfect health, and also because they do not know enough of themselves to know that many of their organs may be fatally diseased without their being conscious of it.

The influence of dietetic and other habits upon the health of the body is known to but a very limited extent among mankind, and far less is it understood that whatever affects the body, inevitably affects the mind, and that the temper and spirit of a man are in a great measure modified by the state of his health. It is known to some extent that an acid stomach begets fretfulness, and that certain nervous diseases, as they are called, greatly affect the mind. But it is not so generally known as it ought to be, that all our dietetic and other physiological habits have a powerful influence in forming and molding our moral character. Not necessarily but by way of temptation, acting on the mind through our bodily organs, all stimulants and every thing injurious to the body act most perniciously upon the mind. Let me say therefore, beloved, in one word, as I cannot dwell upon this subject longer, that if you would expect the sanctification of body, soul, and spirit, you must acquaint yourselves with the true principles of temperance and physiological reform, and most religiously conform yourself to them not only in the aggregate but in the detail.

But I have already protracted the discussion of this subject so far that I will not add more at present, except to conclude what I have to say with several brief

REMARKS.

1. There is an importance to be attached to the sanctification of the body, of which very few persons appear to be aware. Indeed unless the bodily appetites and powers be consecrated to the service of God--unless we learn to eat, and drink, and sleep, and wake, and labor, and rest, for the glory of God,

entire sanctification is out of the question.

2. It is plain, that very few persons are aware of the great influence which their bodies have over their minds, and of the indispensable necessity of bringing their bodies under, and bringing them into subjection.

3. Few people seem to keep the fact steadily in view, that unless their bodies be rightly managed, they will be so fierce and overpowering a source of temptation to the mind, as inevitably to lead it into sin. If they indulge themselves in a stimulating diet, and in the use of those condiments that irritate and rasp the nervous system, their bodies will be of course and of necessity the source of powerful and incessant temptation to evil tempers and vile affections. If persons were aware of the great influence which the body has over the mind, they would realize that they cannot be too careful to preserve the nervous system from the influence of every improper article of food or drink, and preserve that system as they would the apple of their eye, from every influence that could impair its functions.

4. No one who has opportunity to acquire information in regard to the laws of life and health, and the best means of sanctifying the whole spirit, soul, and body, can be guiltless if he neglect these means of knowledge. Every man is bound to make the structure and laws of both body and mind the subject of as thorough investigation as his circumstances will permit, to inform himself in regard to what are the true principles of perfect temperance, and in what way the most can be made of all his powers of body and mind for the glory of God.

5. From what has been said in these discourses, the reason why the Church has not been entirely sanctified is very obvious. As a body the Church has not believed that such a state was attainable in this life. And this is a sufficient reason, and indeed the best of all reasons for her not having attained it.

6. From what has been said, it is easy to see that the true question in regard to entire sanctification in this life, is its attainability, as a matter of fact. Some have thought the proper question to be, are Christians entirely sanctified in this life? Now certainly this is not the question that needs to be discussed. Suppose it be fully granted that they are not; this fact is sufficiently accounted for, by the consideration that they do not know it, or believe it to be attainable in this life. If they believed it to be attainable, it might no longer be true that they do not attain it. But if provision really is made for this attainment, it amounts to nothing, unless it be recognized and believed. The thing then needed is to bring the Church to see and believe, that this is her high privilege and her duty. It is not enough to say that it is attainable, simply on the ground of natural ability. This is as true of the devil, and of the lost in hell, as of men in this world. But unless grace has put this attainment so within our reach, as that it may be aimed at with the reasonable prospect of success, there is, as a matter of fact, no more provision for our entire sanctification in this life than for the devil's. It seems to be trifling with mankind, merely to maintain the attainability of this state on the ground of natural ability only. The real question is, has grace brought this attainment so within our reach, that we may reasonably expect to experience it in this life? It is admitted, that on the ground of natural ability both wicked men and devils have the power to be entirely holy. But it is also admitted, that their indisposition to use this power aright is so complete, that as a matter of fact, they never will use this power aright, unless influenced to do so by the grace of God. I insist, therefore, that the real question is, whether the provisions of the gospel are such, that, did the Church fully understand and lay hold upon the proffered grace, she might as a matter of fact attain this state?

7. We see how irrelevant and absurd the objection is, that as a matter of fact the Church has not attained this state, and therefore it is not attainable. Why, if they have not understood it to be attainable, it no more proves its unattainableness, than the fact that the heathen have not embraced the gospel proves that they will not when they know it.

8. You see the necessity of fully preaching and insisting upon this doctrine, and of calling it by its true scriptural name. It is astonishing to see to what an extent, there is a tendency among men to avoid the use of scriptural language, and cleave to the language of such men as Edwards, and other great and good divines. They object to the terms perfection and entire sanctification, and prefer to use the terms entire consecration, and other such terms as have been common in the Church.

Now I would by no means contend about the use of words; but still, it does appear to me, to be of great importance, that we use scripture language and insist upon men being "perfect as their Father in Heaven is perfect," and being "sanctified wholly body, soul, and spirit." This appears to me to be of the most importance for this reason, that if we use the language to which the Church has been accustomed upon this subject, she will as she has done, misunderstand us, and will not get before her mind that which we really mean. That this is so is manifest from the fact that the great mass of the Church will express alarm at the use of the terms perfection and entire sanctification, who will neither express or feel any such alarm if we speak of entire consecration. This demonstrates, that they do not, by any means, understand these terms as meaning the same thing. And although I understand them as meaning precisely the same thing, yet I find myself obliged to use the terms perfection and entire sanctification, to possess their minds of my real meaning. This is Bible language. It is unobjectionable language. And inasmuch as the Church understands entire consecration to mean something less than entire sanctification or Christian perfection, it does seem to me of great importance, that ministers should use a phraseology which will call the attention of the Church to the real doctrine of the Bible upon this subject. And I would submit the question with great humility to my beloved brethren in the ministry, whether they are not aware, that Christians have entirely too low an idea of what is implied in entire consecration, and whether it is not useful and best to adopt a phraseology in addressing them that shall call their attention to the real meaning of the words which they use?

9. Young converts have not been allowed so much as to indulge the thought that they could live even for a day wholly without sin. They have as a general thing no more been taught to expect to live even for a day without sin, than they have been taught to expect immediate translation, soul and body, to Heaven. Of course they have not known that there was any other way, than to go on in sin, and however shocking and distressing the necessity has appeared to them in the ardor of their first love, still they have looked upon it as the unalterable fact, that to be in a great measure in bondage to sin was a thing of course while they live in this world. Now with such an orthodoxy as this, with the conviction in the Church and ministry so ripe, settled, and universal, that the utmost that the grace of God can do for men in this world is to bring them to repentance and to leave them to live and die in a state of sinning and repenting, is it at all wonderful that the state of religion should be as it really has been?

10. Christ has been in a great measure lost sight of in some of His most important relations to mankind. He has been known and preached as a pardoning, justifying Savior, but as an actually indwelling and reigning Savior in the heart, He has been but little known. I was struck with a remark, a few years since, of a brother whom I have from that time greatly loved, who had been for a long time in a desponding state of mind, borne down with a great sense of his own vileness, but seeing no way of escape. At an evening meeting the Lord so revealed Himself to him as entirely to overcome the strength of his body, and his

brethren were obliged to carry him home. The next time I saw him, he exclaimed to me with a pathos I shall never forget, "Brother Finney, the Church have buried the Savior." Now it is no doubt true, that the Church has become awfully alienated from Christ--has in a great measure lost a knowledge of what He is and ought to be to her--and a great many of her members I have good reason to know, in different parts of the country, are saying with deep and overpowering emotion, "They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him."

11. With all her orthodoxy, the Church has been for a long time much nearer to Unitarianism than she has imagined. This remark may shock some of my readers, and you may think it savors of censoriousness. But, beloved, I am sure it is said in no such spirit. These are "the words of truth and soberness." So little has been known of Christ, that, if I am not entirely mistaken, there are multitudes in the orthodox churches, who do not know Christ, and who in heart are Unitarians, while in theory they are orthodox.

I have been, within the last two or three years, deeply impressed with the fact, that so many professors of religion are coming to the ripe conviction that they never knew Christ. There have been in this place almost continual developments of this fact, and I doubt whether there is a minister in the land who will present Christ as the gospel presents Him, in all the fulness of His official relations to mankind, who will not be struck and agonized with developments that will assure him that the great mass of professors of religion do not know the Savior. It has been to my own mind a painful and a serious question, what I ought to think of the spiritual state of those who know so little of the blessed Jesus. That none of them have been converted, I dare not say. And yet, that they have been converted, I am afraid to say. I would not for the world "quench the smoking flax or break the bruised reed," or say any thing to stumble or weaken the feeblest lamb of Christ; and yet my heart is sore pained, my soul is sick; my bowels of compassion yearn over the Church of the blessed God. O, the dear Church of Christ! What does she know in her present state of gospel rest, of that "great and perfect peace they have whose minds are stayed on God"?

12. If I am not mistaken, there is an extensive feeling among Christians and ministers, that much is not, that ought to be known and may be known of the Savior. Many are beginning to find that the Savior is to them "as a root out of dry ground, having neither form or comeliness;" that the gospel which they preach and hear is not to them "the power of God unto salvation" from sin; that it is not to them "glad tidings of great joy;" that it is not to them a peace-giving gospel; and many are feeling that if Christ has done for them, all that His grace is able to do in this life, that the plan of salvation is sadly defective, that Christ is not after all a Savior suited to their necessities--that the religion which they have is not suited to the world in which they live--that it does not, cannot make them free; but leaves them in a state of perpetual bondage. Their souls are agonized and tossed to and fro without a resting place. Multitudes also are beginning to see that there are many passages, both in the Old and New Testaments, which they do not understand; that the promises seem to mean much more than they have ever realized, and that the gospel and the plan of salvation as a whole, must be something very different from that which they have as yet apprehended. There are great multitudes all over the country, who are inquiring more earnestly than ever before, after a knowledge of that Jesus who is to save His people from their sins.

A fact was related in my hearing, a short time since, that illustrates, in an affecting manner, the agonizing state of mind in which many Christians are, in regard to the present state of many of the ministers of Christ. I had the statement from the brother himself, who was the subject of his narrative. A sister in the church to which he preached became so sensible that he did not know Christ, as he ought to know Him, that she was full of unutterable agony, and on one occasion, after he had been preaching, fell down at his feet with tears and strong beseechings, that he would exercise faith in Christ. At another time she was so

impressed with a sense of his deficiency in this respect, as a minister, that she addressed him in the deepest anguish of her soul, crying out-- "O I shall die, I shall certainly die, unless you will receive Christ as a full Savior," and attempting to approach him, she sunk down helpless, overcome with agony and travail of soul, at his feet.

There is manifestly a great struggle in the minds of multitudes, that the Savior may be more fully revealed to the Church, that the present ministry especially may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, and be made conformable to His death.

13. If the doctrine of these discourses is true, you see the immense importance of preaching it clearly and fully in revivals of religion. When the hearts of converts are warm with their first love, then is the time to make them fully acquainted with their Savior, to hold Him up in all His offices and relations, so as to break the power of every sin--to break them off for ever from all self-dependence, and to lead them to receive Him as a present, perfect, everlasting Savior.

14. Unless this course be taken, their backsliding is inevitable. You might as well expect to roll back the waters of Niagara with your hand, as to stay the tide of their corruption without a deep, and thorough, and experimental acquaintance with the Savior. And if they are thrown upon their own watchfulness and resources, for strength against temptations, instead of being directed to the Savior, they are certain to become discouraged and fall into continual bondage.

But before I conclude these remarks, I must not omit to notice the indispensable necessity of a willingness to do the will of God, in order rightly to understand this doctrine. If a man is unwilling to give up his sins, to deny himself all ungodliness and every worldly lust--if he is unwilling to be set apart wholly to the service of the Lord, he will either reject this doctrine altogether, or only intellectually admit it, without receiving it into his heart. It is an imminently dangerous state of mind to consent to this or any other doctrine of the gospel, and not reduce it to practice.

15. Much evil has been done by those who have professedly embraced this doctrine in theory, and rejected it in practice. Their spirit and temper have been such as to lead those who saw them to infer, that the tendency of the doctrine itself is bad. And it is not to be doubted that some who have professed to have experienced the power of this doctrine in their hearts, have greatly disgraced religion by exhibiting any other spirit than that of an entirely sanctified soul. But why, in a Christian land, should this be a stumbling block. When the heathen see persons from Christian nations who professedly adopt the Christian system, exhibit on their shores and in their countries, the spirit which many of them do, they infer that this is the tendency of the Christian religion. To this our Missionaries reply that they are only nominal Christians, only speculative, not real believers. Should thousands of our church members go among them, they would have the same reason to complain, and might reply to the Missionaries, these are not merely nominal believers, but profess to have experienced this Christian religion in their own hearts. Now what would the Missionaries reply? Why, to be sure, that they were professors of religion; but that they really did not know Christ; that they were deceiving themselves with a name to live, while in fact they were dead in trespasses and sins.

It has often been a matter of astonishment to me, that in a Christian land, it should be a stumbling block to any, that some, or if you please, a majority of those who profess to receive and to have experienced the truth of this doctrine, should exhibit an unchristian spirit. What if the same objection should be brought against the Christian religion; against any and every doctrine of the gospel; that the great majority, and

even nine tenths of all the professed believers and receivers of those doctrines were proud, worldly, selfish, and exhibited any thing but a right spirit? Now this objection might be made with truth to the whole professedly Christian Church. But would the conclusiveness of such an objection be admitted in Christian lands? Who does not know the ready answer to all such objections as these, that the doctrines of Christianity do not sanction such conduct, and that it is not the real belief of them that begets any such spirit or conduct; that the Christian religion abhors all these things to which they object. And now suppose it should be replied to this, that a tree is known by its fruits, and that so great a majority of the professors of religion could not exhibit such a spirit, unless it were the tendency of Christianity itself to beget it. Now who would not reply to this, that this state of mind and course of conduct of which they complain, is the natural state of man uninfluenced by the gospel of Christ; that in these instances, on account of unbelief, the gospel has failed to correct what was already wrong, and what needed not the influence of any corrupt doctrine to produce that state of mind? It appears to me, that these objectors against this doctrine on account of the fact that some and perhaps many who have professed to receive it, have exhibited a wrong spirit, take it for granted that the doctrine produces this spirit, instead of considering that a wrong spirit is natural to men, and that the difficulty is that through unbelief this doctrine has failed to correct what was before wrong. They reason as if they supposed the human heart needed something to beget within it a bad spirit, and as if they supposed that a belief in this doctrine had made men wicked, instead of recognizing the fact, that they were before wicked and that, through unbelief, the gospel has failed to make them holy.

16. But let it not be understood, that I suppose or admit that any considerable number who have professed to have received this doctrine into their hearts, have as a matter of fact exhibited a bad spirit. I must say that it has been eminently otherwise so far as my own observation extends. And I am fully convinced, that if I have ever seen Christianity in the world, and the spirit of Christ, that it has been exhibited by those, as a general thing, who have professed to believe, and to have received this doctrine into their hearts.

17. How amazingly important it is, that the ministry and the Church should come fully to a right understanding and embracing of this doctrine. O it will be like life from the dead. The proclamation of it is now regarded by multitudes as "good tidings of great joy." From every quarter, we get the gladsome intelligence, that souls are entering into the deep rest and peace of the gospel, that they are awaking to a life of faith and love--and that instead of sinking down into Antinomianism, they are eminently more benevolent, active, holy, and useful than ever before--that they are eminently more prayerful, watchful, diligent, meek, sober-minded and heavenly in all their lives. This as a matter of fact, is the character of those, to a very great extent at least, with whom I have been acquainted, who have embraced this doctrine. I say this for no other reason than to relieve the anxieties of those who have heard very strange reports, and whose honest fears have been awakened in regard to the tendency of this doctrine.

18. I have by no means given this subject so ample a discussion as I might and should have done, but for my numerous cares and responsibilities. I have been obliged to write in the midst of the excitement and labor of a revival of religion, and do not by any means suppose, either that I have exhausted the subject, or so ably defended it as I might have done, had I been under other circumstances. But, dearly beloved, under the circumstances, I have done what I could, and thank my Heavenly Father that I have been spared to say this much in defence of the great, leading, central truth of revelation--the ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION OF THE CHURCH BY THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST.

And now, blessed and beloved Brethren and Sisters in the Lord, "let me beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable

service." "And may 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."

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