

The Church Bound to Convert the World Pt.--2

by Charles Finney

The church's failure to convert the world is due to a lack of faith, consecration, and a sectarian spirit, and the church must overcome its barriers to mission to achieve its ultimate goal of converting the world to Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 28:18

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "Great Commission"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the church's responsibility to convert the world, arguing that the failure to do so is not due to a lack of resources or numbers, but rather a lack of faith, consecration, and unity. He identifies sectarianism as a major hindrance, suggesting that divisions among Christians weaken their collective efforts to spread the gospel. Finney calls for a renewed commitment to the Great Commission, urging believers to recognize their duty to make disciples and to rely on Christ's promise of support. He warns that the blood of the lost is on the church's hands if it fails to act, and stresses the importance of deep sympathy with Christ's mission for the world. Ultimately, he challenges Christians to prioritize the conversion of souls over sectarian interests and worldly ambitions.

Transcript

"And Jesus came, and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Matthew 28:18-20

V. I am to show the causes of failure hitherto.

1. It is not for want of numbers. The church has always had numbers enough to have accomplished this work, if she had had a heart for it.
2. It is not for want of means. She has always possessed all needed means for its accomplishment.
3. It is not for want of a sufficient number of educated men to carry this work forward. The church has always possessed education enough, and the means of education sufficient to have accomplished this work.
4. It is not because God has not been ready.

5. Nor again is it for want of time, nor for the want of resources of any kind. All these things have always been at the church's disposal. But,

1. A want of faith has been the fundamental difficulty, a want of real confidence in the truth that Christ possesses all power, and is always present, ready and willing to grant all needed aid for success.

2. A want of entire consecration to this work. The few individuals living in different ages, who have been manifestly consecrated to this work, have really accomplished much. I have recently been reading an account of the spread and success of the gospel in every century since the commencement of the christian era, and it is greatly edifying to see what individual effort has done--to see how much individuals who have really been consecrated to this work have effected. The fact is that wherever a man or a woman has had faith, and the spirit of consecration to this work, they have effected much. And it is very plain from what they have effected, that nothing is needed but the general consecration of the professed church of God to this work to have accomplished it centuries ago.

3. Sectarianism has been one cause of failure, perhaps the chief. Sectarian ambition, jealousy, collision--these and innumerable other evils have clustered around this growing abomination. Nine tenths, and perhaps I might say ninety-nine hundredths, of both ministerial and lay effort has lost its power by reason of a sectarian spirit. Go where you please over this great west and over the east too, and what do you see? Why! in a small village with a population perhaps just enough to make one respectable congregation, you find half a dozen or more feeble churches, of diverse sects with as many half-starved, and deservedly half-starved ministers, keeping up their sectarian bars, and perhaps undesignedly keeping alive the very prejudice that prevents the success of the gospel. One man comes on to the ground to attend to the Presbyterian or Congregational interests in that place and region. Another must be thrust in to attend to the Close Baptist interests and another to attend to the Free-will Baptists interests. Next there must be two or three Methodist ministers to attend to the Episcopal interests and the Wesleyan Methodist interests, and the low church Episcopal interests; next, but not least, the New School interest, and the Old School interest, and among them all, they seem very generally to attend pretty thoroughly to the devil's interests. I mean that by this arrangement the devil's interest is really in the best way secured; not that they really intended any such thing; God forbid that I should make any such insinuation. They really mean, (as they profess) to secure the interests of their respective denominations. But in this way they most effectually hinder the success of the kingdom of Christ. In this way just those jealousies are kept up which grieve the Spirit, alienate the hearts of Christians from each other, weaken the hands of the ministers, disgust the impenitent, and please the devil. Now I have not the least doubt that in the great majority of cases, if not in nine cases out of ten, if all the ministers but one, in such villages should leave the ground, and let him belong to one of the evangelical denominations, I care not which, he could do more, perhaps ten times more than they can all do together. If they would all go off to the heathen, or to destitute regions in our own country, and spread themselves out, and never again think of their denominational interests, we should never again hear such things as going out to nurse the interests of this sect and that sect. They would give themselves directly to the work of converting the world to God, and almost infinitely more could be done than is done now.

This subject used to be the burden and agony of my soul before I came to this place. When I first came here I was resolved on using whatever influence I had to secure the adoption of a creed that should comprehend only the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, and also to secure a most perfect toleration of opinion on all minor points, so that all true Christians could unite. Then, if ever sectarians crept in, they should not do it under the pretense that their members were excluded from our communion. They should

take the entire responsibility of introducing into this community that abomination from the pit, a sectarian spirit. Here we are thus far one congregation, and see what a crown I have around me; but what should we do if we were divided into a half dozen congregations, with as many ministers to stickle for their sectarian peculiarities? It would be the curse and the ruin of the place, of the Institution, and of the cause of Christ in our midst. I wish to make a strong impression on this subject, and I would that I could succeed in making the church feel that sectarianism is doing more to prevent the world's conversion a thousand fold, than all the Infidelity and Universalism and Romanism, and every other ism that curses the world together. I fear this is not duly considered. Let any one man create among a people sectarian jealousies and prejudices, and he can never promote true and undefiled religion there. There is much delusion on this subject. Many who do nothing but promote sectarian interests seem to be fondly dreaming that they are promoting the cause of Christ. They think they are making real Christians, and converting men to God, but they are deceiving themselves. If they are creating sectarian prejudice, if they are merely fostering denominational interests, they may be compassing sea and land, and making many proselytes, but they are making them two-fold more the children of hell than themselves.

The fact is that the spirit of sectarianism instantly cools individual piety; it curses churches; it ruins communities; it swallows up a great part of the ministerial influence of the church. In most of the villages throughout the land, where they should all unite in one congregation, and where if they would, they are abundantly able to support the ministry and do much for the spread of the gospel abroad, being cut up as they are into little churches, they must build each of them a house, a little house, that will hold two or three or four hundred people, and get a minister, and measure out to him his salt and his potatoes, and he must preach on the sabbath to some fifty or a hundred souls, and spend his week-time chiefly either on a farm, or in some other lucrative employment to keep his family in bread. Now what do my brethren think themselves engaged in? Is this the way for ministers to be used up? What! when twenty thousand ministers are at once demanded in India, and hundreds of thousands in other parts of the world? Why, men and brethren, we might better than not spare eight tenths of all the ministers in the land, if they would clear out, and but one stay in a place. I have long thought that I never would consent to settle down and give myself up to preach the gospel under such circumstances as I have named. I would never occupy a position where there were a number of ministers, and the work might as well and better be done by one. I do not believe that God can ever bless any such thing as this, and I am agonized and pained to my very heart to see this the general state of the church over the whole land. I have known that many of my brethren have felt with me, distressed on this subject. The remedy is at hand. Let the true spirit of the world's conversion only take possession of the entire ministry, and the days of sectarianism are numbered and finished. Then the present ministry may be spread over a field five or ten times as great as that which they now occupy, and even then much more fully meet the real wants of the people than they now do.

4. Another cause of failure has been that the church to a great extent has lost sight of the true spirit of what Christ says in the text. As I was presenting this thought not long since, to wit, that the church was commanded to convert the world, and through the strength and grace of Christ had power to do so, a brother remarked to me, Why this is new! This is entirely a new view of the subject. The church has not understood this. Now I would ask, To whom is it new? The brother to whom I replied did not mean that it was not the true meaning of the text, but that he and the church had not so considered it. I am afraid that it is new to hundreds and thousands of the professed followers of Christ. It would appear indeed that either they have not so understood it, or that they have really intended to disobey Christ. I suppose indeed that it has been lost sight of in a great measure. If I mistake not, Christians do not generally understand that the text requires them to make disciples of the sinners around them. But certainly this is its true meaning.

I fear many parents do not understand themselves to be required, even to convert their own children, and that churches do not generally understand themselves as being responsible for the conversion of the impenitent in their midst. But yet this is no doubt the truth of revelation. Who can deny that this is the true spirit and meaning of what Christ says in the text? If he commanded the church to make disciples or Christians of all nations, on the ground that he possesses all power in heaven and in earth, and will be with and aid them in this work, is it not our duty to convert those immediately around us? to make disciples of those in our own houses? who can deny it?

5. But not only has the command been lost sight of, but the annexed promise also, 'Lo I am with you.' The true spirit and meaning of what Christ here says seems not to be generally recognized and felt. Neither ministers nor lay-men seem to take hold upon and anchor down upon what Christ really here intended. It is as if he had said, "I possess almighty power; Go forth, therefore, and convert all nations; and I will be with you and give you success." It is true, therefore, that whenever we go forth to this work we should expect to accomplish it. We are to rest assured that Christ is with us, and that in his strength the work can be, will be, and must be done.

6. Another thing that has greatly hindered the work has been that too much has been expected from human learning, and not enough by any means from Christ or from the Holy Spirit. Human learning has its place, and its importance, but learned men are altogether too apt to place too much reliance on their learning, and too little on the Holy Ghost. This also is a great error. They are looking for a man of talents, a man of eloquence in the church, a man of learning, instead of a deeply spiritual, praying man. The choice that the churches make of men to preach the gospel, proves to a demonstration that they really place more reliance on human eloquence and learning than they do on deep spirituality, and the power of the Holy Ghost. Where have you known a church in fact lay the principal stress on the faith, the piety, and deep spirituality of the man of their choice? No; the first thing sought is talents; the second, piety, last of all, deep spirituality and great faith and power in prayer. Now they have directly reversed the true order. Until they practically lay the principal stress on the deep piety, faith and spirituality of the man whom they choose as pastor, they may expect curses from God rather than blessings. The fact is, God will not give his glory to another; and where this stress is laid on human learning, and the idea of spiritual influence is thrown so much into the background, God cannot secure to himself the glory, and therefore he will not work.

7. The work has been greatly retarded by a want of deep sympathy with Christ. The church has not loved a ruined world as Christ loved it, and as the Father loved it. Why, when parents will love their children as Christ loved them, they will make such sacrifices for their salvation as Christ made;--nay, when they will but begin to approach this, they may expect their children to be soon converted. When the church really enters into sympathy with Christ, and so loves the world as to be willing to give themselves for its salvation, to live and to die for this purpose; when this spirit becomes common, and the church will go forth as Christ went, and live and labor as Christ lived and labored, and lay down their lives on the battle-field as Christ laid down his, then the work will be soon accomplished. I verily believe it might as well be converted in fifty years as in five hundred or five thousand.

8. But again, the church has been discouraged. She has had so little faith that her efforts by way of missionary labor have accomplished comparatively little. Her success has no doubt equaled her faith, and perhaps surpassed it, but still she has been so unbelieving that comparatively little has been accomplished. Little can be accomplished until she will believe the promises of God.

9. Conformity to the world in almost every respect has been another great, and I may say, growing impediment to the world's conversion. This subject branches out in so many directions, I can but just name it.

10. Another hindrance has been that the attention and efforts of the church are directed to mere outward reforms. At this I have often been unutterably pained. Instead of doing as the apostles did, directly addressing ourselves to the hearts and consciences of men; instead of beginning within to reform, the church has been to a great extent satisfying herself with a mere outward reform.

11. Worldly ambition in young men who are professors of religion has stood greatly in the way of the world's conversion. They are in such a state that they have come to look on the ministry as rather a drivelling business, and not recognizing themselves as pledged to convert the world, as soon as possible, they turn aside into other professions, and to other business, and leave the world and the cause of Christ to take care of themselves.

12. Another difficulty in the way has been clerical ambition. The whole history of the church shows this. In almost every age of the Christian church there has been a grasping after power, even among the ministers of Christ. They have become jealous of lay influence and have taken every thing into their own hands. It would seem that they would fain do the work alone, but they never can. That is the best and most successful minister who knows best how to bring the greatest amount of lay effort to bear on the world, and who actually accomplishes this. Ministers can do but a very small part of this work, and if they suffer themselves to become jealous of lay influence, and keep the lay-men and women still, and undertake to feed them and promote their piety without requiring them to consecrate their personal service to the work, they will surely find themselves greatly mistaken. It cannot be. It is contrary to the true nature of religion.

Every man and woman must have some spiritual labor constantly on their hands, or they cannot grow in grace. The great thing, it seems to me, which ministers ought to do is principally to plan labors for the lay men; to feed them with the sincere milk of the word; to give them spiritual food enough, and then press them up to perform the work.

I might mention a great many other causes of failure hitherto in this great work, but must not protract remarks under this head.

VI. I must proceed to the sixth and last head of this discourse, to wit, to consider in few words the guilt of this failure.

1. The truth we here insist on is this; that the blood of the world is in the skirts of the church. God informed the prophet that if he did not warn and do his duty to the wicked, the wicked should die in his sins, but his blood would he require at his hand. Now under the Christian dispensation the whole church are placed in the same position with the prophet in this respect. It was the prophet and the priest on whom principally the duty of warning the guilty devolved. But Christ has commissioned and commanded the whole church to do this. He has required her to teach and disciple all nations. This principle applied formerly to the prophet, must now be applicable to the whole church.

2. The great law of benevolence requires the church to do all in her power for the conversion of the world, and holds her guilty of the world's blood if she suffers it to be lost. Christ said of the church, "Ye are the light of the world. Ye are the salt of the earth." If therefore the world is not enlightened, it is the fault of the church. If it is not preserved from moral putrefaction, it is the fault of the church. If the name of Jesus is not

familiar to every human being in every language and in every clime, it is the fault of the church. The church have had the time enough, have possessed all the requisite means, have had the promise of him who has "all power in heaven and in earth," to be with them, and give them all necessary aid. Where then is the blood of the world but in the skirts of the church?

I must close what I have to say with a few

REMARKS.

1. This guilt attaches to every Christian to whom the command in the text has come, and who is not entirely consecrated to the work of saving souls. It is high time that every Christian should understand his duty in this matter, and the greatness of his responsibility. He should daily consider to what he stands pledged, and the guilt he will incur if he suffers himself to be diverted from the great work for the accomplishment of which he is permitted to live in the world.

2. When God makes inquisition for blood, what will become of those professors of religion who have turned aside from this work and are attending to something else? I have said that the ambition of young men and I might add, of many young men who ought to prepare for the ministry, has turned them aside into law-offices and land-offices, and merchandize, and all manner of worldly employments, because these courses of life open to them prospects of obtaining greater wealth or worldly influence. To say the least, they have manifestly not taken the position in which they might most successfully and directly prosecute the great work of the world's conversion.

Now, young man, when God shall make inquisition for the blood of souls, he will say to you, Where is thy brother? The voice of thy brother's blood cries unto me from the ground. Where art thou? What hast thou done? Wherefore hast thou not given thyself wholly and directly to the work of the world's conversion? "Take this unprofitable servant; bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The same may and must be said of all Christians who have turned aside from this great work of their own interests, and left the world in its blood to sink down to hell.

From this subject we can easily see how great a mistake was made by the church soon after the death of the Apostles. Various causes soon came into operation that developed an ascetic idea of religion. This immediately diverted the church from the great end of the world's conversion to seek after what they imagined to be a higher state of spirituality. Soon after the Apostle's days, as we learn from history, and indeed to some extent while some of the Apostles were yet living, the idea had gained considerable currency that the world was coming to an end; that Christ's second advent was at hand; and that he was coming to judge the world. This idea doubtless had great influence in bringing about the state of things which I am just about to mention. They seem to have given up the idea of the world's conversion and supposed mankind to be, at least chiefly, devoted to destruction. Great multitudes retreated from the world and betook themselves to what they supposed to be a strictly religious life, practicing celibacy and various austerities, mortifications, and self-denials. They shut themselves out from society and lived in seclusion, seeming to suppose that to live in the world and associate with men as Christ and his apostles had done, was not consistent with the highest degrees of spirituality. They therefore betook themselves to an entirely different course of life, lost altogether the true idea of religion, and attempted to be spiritual without a particle of benevolence, or, in other words, without religion. They sought a spirituality that was anything but true Christianity. Instead of pressing the world's conversion with ardor, they began to build nunneries and monasteries and to establish institutions for the very purpose of secluding the spiritual ones from

intercourse with the world. They shut themselves up in those places of spurious spirituality. Every reader of church history must be acquainted with the deplorable and fundamental mistake into what a great part of the church thus fell. Here, to a great extent, the efforts for the world's conversion ceased. Here a dark cloud shut down over the prospects of dying humanity.

3. From what has been said it is easy to see the mistake into which our Second Advent brethren of the present day have fallen. Many of them have given up altogether not only the idea of the world's conversion, and consequently all efforts to save the world, but have given up, and so far as their influence extends are endeavoring to persuade others to give up the idea and expectation of anymore sinners being converted at all. Now I would ask, by what authority do they shrink from carrying out the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, contained in the text? Suppose it were true that Christ is to come at any given time this year, or next year, is not the command in the text binding until he does come? And is not the annexed promise that he will be with us in this work good until the end? Has he said, "Go and make disciples of all nations until such a time and then cease?" I trow not. Now whether it be true or false that Christ is soon to come, it is a wretched mistake for them to give up efforts for the conversion of sinners.

4. Does not the command with the subjoined promise in the text authorize and require the church to go forth to the conversion of the world, with the expectation that the world will be converted? Suppose the church should now arise and address herself to this work and lay hold of the promise of Christ; can it be supposed that Christ would say,--O you are too late now. I shall not wait for you now to convert the world. I shall not go with you now. I said I would be with you to the end of the world, but I shall be with you no longer. You need not go forth to this work; it is now altogether too late." Who believes that Christ would take back his promise and fail to go forth with his church to the conversion of the world?

5. From this subject we can see the mistake of those Antinomians who are waiting God's time, and who are saying, "The time has not come to build the house of the Lord;" and are accusing us of going to work in our own strength if we attempt to promote revivals, and of trying to take the work out of the hands of God, of interfering with his sovereignty, of compassing sea and land to make one proselyte, &c. Why, what do they mean! waiting God's time! I have heard some of them talk in this way. They would insist that they must have an inward impulse or revelation to go forth to this work. They must wait to be sent of God. They don't believe in going out to convert sinners unless they are sent of God. Now what an infinite mistake is here! Has not Christ commanded the whole church to go; and now, shall she say she must wait for a revelation from God before she can go? Must she overlook the true letter and spirit of this command and promise, and wait for some other revelation? Indeed, there are certain individuals who it seems would fain persuade the church not to go until she is sent by the Spirit, not to move until God moves, and are telling those who would do something for the conversion of sinners that God has not required this at their hand, that they must remain quiet and rest until God moves them to this work. Now here is certainly a great error, a great and ruinous error. If God has required us in his written word to do any thing, are we to wait for any other revelation? If God commands sinners to repent, are they to wait for some other revelation of his will? If he requires Christians to go right forth and convert the world are they to wait eighteen hundred years and then continue to sing the lullaby, "wait God's time, don't run before you are sent"?

6. These notions of the Adventists and Antinomians are doing very much to retard the great work of converting souls to God. The Adventists seem not only wholly to have lost their confidence and interest in this work, but they have really shaken the confidence of a great number who are not Adventists, so far at least as greatly to have abated their zeal. I find it has come to be very extensively doubted whether the nations are really to be converted to God, or can be. The Adventists, many of them, have boldly

proclaimed that it cannot be; that the nations must be destroyed and cannot be made the disciples of Christ; that to christianize the world is out of the question; that the world is too wicked to be christianized. They seem to have taken up a view of the Christian religion which is the exact opposite of our Savior's representation. They boldly proclaim--I have heard them proclaim, that the tendency of things in this world is to run out the Christian religion every where; to extinguish its light, and drive it from the world. But Christ's representation is exactly the reverse of this. He says, The kingdom of heaven, meaning by this true religion, is like a little leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened; that it is like a mustard seed, which is the least of all seeds, but when sown in the earth springs up and becomes a great tree. Daniel said it was like a stone cut out of the mountain, which rolled and grew as it proceeded until it became a great mountain and filled the earth. Now there are a vast many passages of scripture that thus speak of the kingdom of God, or of true religion in the world. These representations are exactly opposite to the representations of our Advent brethren. The only kingdom of God according to them, which can ever stand and prosper in this world is a kingdom set up all at once, filling the whole earth by the destruction of the wicked. Is this like leaven? a little leaven hid in three measures of meal till the whole is leavened?

But to return to the point which I stated in the beginning of this paragraph, viz., that these brethren had done much to dishearten the church, to shake their confidence, to create doubts in many pious minds on this subject, and thus to weaken the energies of the church when she has just begun to awake to the importance of this great enterprise. In whose skirts shall the blood of thousands that will perish in consequence of it be found? With my present views, nothing could persuade me to put a damper on the rising hopes of the church in this direction.

7. I am fully persuaded that nothing but the absence of love, or in other words, of true religion, is the occasion of the sectarianism that is dividing and cursing the church. Nothing is wanting but for the church to be thoroughly imbued with the spirit of brotherly love, and of sympathy with Christ in respect to the world's conversion, to unite her energies, and concentrate them on this great work. It is really amazing and agonizing that mere differences of opinion on points of minor importance, (as all are agreed,) should rend the church into parties, destroy her unity, and not only jeopardize, but awfully hasten and aggravate the ruin of the world.

The more I see of the working of things in the midst of us in this place, the more I am satisfied of the great error of division in the church in consequence of differences of opinion on points of doctrine not fundamental. Our Confession of Faith and Covenant were designed to embrace only those points of Christian doctrine that are supposed by us to be fundamental to the existence of the true church of God. We have by the blessing of God been enabled to live together now ten years as one church. Persons from nearly all the evangelical churches in the land have come and united with us. We have gone on without controversy and division hitherto, on the principle of the most affectionate toleration of theological opinions in respect to every thing not fundamental. We have not yet found any difficulty in the prosecution of this work. There has been now and then a sectarian spirit here who has felt uneasy, and has made occasional efforts to introduce sectarianism, and put up sectarian bars in the midst of us. But the religious sentiment of the community has hitherto looked coldly on all such efforts, and the really pious among us, whatever their peculiar shades of opinion, have hitherto seemed to be united in frowning down all sectarian movements. Now why may not this be so in every village and every town in the land? I can see no reason why this should not be so.

8. If the ministers of all evangelical denominations would so thoroughly wake up to the world's conversion as to agree among themselves that two ministers should not occupy any field that could be supplied by one, and the Christians should not be encouraged to separate on account of doctrinal views where their differences are not fundamental, and if ministers should determine that they would no longer suffer themselves to be settled over little feeble churches where Christians are divided by sectarian prejudices; if they would resolve that no more than one minister of an evangelical denomination should be spared to one field, and if they would insist on it that where a village or town is not too large for one congregation but one minister should be left to occupy that field, such a state of things as this, would be as life from the dead. It would be vastly better for every village and every town in Christendom that the ministers should take this stand, and if all the rest were in heaven, or in Hindoostan, or in any part of the universe, it would be better than for them to be huddled together, three or four ministers in reality supplying but one congregation or only souls enough to make one, and this too under such circumstances as must almost entirely exclude all true religion from the place. It does seem to me that ministers should resolve not to do this. When they find a town or a village occupied by a decidedly evangelical and pious minister where there are not people enough for more than one large and healthy congregation, they should refuse to settle under any circumstances to gratify the prejudices of a few sectarian spirits who wish to get up a church of another denomination. This is low business; it is anti-christian. No; such sectarian spirits should rather be rebuked.

9. But again, I have often wondered how ministers could think themselves in the path of duty, in thus giving themselves up to minister to sectarian prejudices and to nurse the interests of a party--of one sect, instead of going forth in the spirit of true catholicism to pull souls out of the fire. There is no describing in words the folly and anti-christian tendency of all such things as these. Just look at the church; see the ministers go from place to place, and where they find a few Presbyterians or a few Methodists or a few Baptists, they say, here are a few of our members; here we must plant a church.

Here the interests of our sect must be nursed. They immediately set about gathering little churches, sticking up their stakes, putting up their sectarian bars and gathering around them all the paraphernalia of sectarianism. Now on comes a minister of another denomination and finds a few whose prejudices favor his sect, and he must gather a church, and then another minister does the same, and another, till you will see their little meeting-houses or other places of worship scattered here and there, with a few sectarian spirits gathered around a sectarian minister, all jealous of each other and making efforts as they say and as they suppose, to convert the world.

Now what is the result? Why, one of these churches must have a protracted meeting. They must make an effort of a revival as the other congregations are perhaps gaining the advantage of them in point of numbers and influence. They must get the most eloquent preacher they can, and make an effort to build up their congregation, and establish their sect. The other churches look coldly on, and directly begin to feel, as if their church and congregation were in danger of being encroached upon, so they must begin a similar effort and have a protracted meeting.

They must, if possible, get a more eloquent preacher than the other. They must bluster and pray and visit from house to house and appear to feel for souls; when it is greatly to be feared that the real spirit of their efforts and their prayers is, "Lord, build up our sect, make our congregation popular, add to our numbers so that we can more easily support our minister, and give us decidedly the most popular and wealthy congregation in the place, amen." By this time another and another of these little churches begins to move in the same direction and for the same reason.

They thus act on each other till they all become inflamed with great zeal, and greatly provoke each other, not to love and good works, but to sectarianism and party efforts. The result of the whole may be, some real converts, a number of thorough sectarian additions to the different churches, but much disgrace in the estimation of a thinking but impenitent community. Now how infinitely better had it been for but one minister to have occupied this field, no matter of what peculiar evangelical denomination.

How much better were it if ministers would give no countenance whatever to the division of Christians into different sects in a place where they might just as well all unite in one church and in one congregation. It is almost ruinous to the cause of Christ to make these divisions. It is a stumbling-block to the church, a curse and an abomination the world, and when God makes inquisition for blood, then let sectarians be ready to answer. But it may be asked, what shall ministers do?

If but one minister is to occupy a field on which reside only inhabitants enough for one congregation, a great many ministers will be thrown out of employment? I answer, all the better; they can be spared to go to the heathen, or to betake themselves to other necessary and useful employments. Why shall the church be obliged to support such a number of ministers where one can do the work better than all of them?

10. Christians stand greatly in their own light in dividing themselves into different churches where a truly catholic spirit would enable them all to dwell together and unite and labor harmoniously for building up the kingdom of Christ. Why will they load themselves with the burden of supporting two, three, or even a half dozen ministers in a town or village where the work might be more healthfully accomplished by one? O! Christians are not aware how much sectarianism there is often times in their own state of mind, and how infinitely foolish it is for them to be so sticklish for dogmas in opinions confessedly not fundamental as to alienate the hearts of brethren from one another, to stumble the world and grieve the heart of Christ.

11. Another great evil is the influence of sectarian newspapers. This evil is a rapidly growing one. Each sect must have its great organ. As the sect increases, multitudes of smaller ones are got up, the conduct and policy of which is any thing but Christian. Generally they publish but one side on any question, and in multitudes of instances keep their readers entirely in the dark in respect to the real questions and facts about which they speak. There is scarcely any thing that appears more shocking and monstrous to me, more anti-Christian and God-dishonoring than the course taken by sectarian newspapers. It is not only grievous but truly shocking to see how often they are filled with misrepresentations. Now what is the effect of this, but to blind and mislead the different sects, destroy their Christian confidence in each other, sunder their hearts and their efforts; what but to chill and freeze and even drive the spirit of vital piety from among them. I have often asked myself, how can it be that the editors of these newspapers do not see, and that ministers do not see that to create such prejudices, to beget such misapprehensions, and to foster such a spirit in their churches is really to ruin them, to exclude all their real piety, and substitute nothing but bitter and sectarian zeal in its stead. With my present views, I would sooner have my right hand cut off and my right eye plucked out--indeed it seems to me that I would sooner have my heart torn from my body, than to put forth my hand to such a work as this, ministering to prejudice, alienating the hearts of brethren from each other, rending the church of God, nursing a party spirit. O! this is a work of death! When God shall make inquisition for blood, I say again, let those engaged in this work prepare to meet their God. My heart is full of this subject but I cannot enlarge.

12. Another thing has done much to retard the great work of the world's conversion. I mean a turning aside of Christians from their proper work, and from the direct effort to convert and sanctify the world to God, to various other matters of very questionable truth and tendency. I have been astonished to find that so many

ministers have from time to time given themselves up to lecturing on phrenology, mesmerism, and such like things; have gone around the country and into our cities and collected large audiences and given them a course of lectures on these subjects, with nothing more than now and then an indirect allusion to God and Christ, and the salvation of the soul. It does seem to me that this is gross apostasy from the great work of the world's conversion.

13. It hardly need be said, and it grieves me much to be obliged to say that Christians, and even many ministers have been altogether too much diverted, especially of late, by party politics. Indeed, nearly all the reforms of the day have taken on to an alarming extent the type of a mere outward and of course temporary reform. Multitudes of ministers have forsaken the direct work of converting the souls of men to God, and have gone into various agencies for the promotion of these mere outward reforms. I greatly fear that such efforts, pushed as they are at the present day, are after all making clean the outside of the cup and platter, while the "ravens and wickedness" within is left untouched.

Now, beloved, let us for a moment come right back to the question. What have we to do? What is the business to which we are to address ourselves? Here the command and promise of the text lie in all their force before us. We are to act as if Christ had just for the first time sounded this in our ears, and the church ought today to address herself to the work with as much zeal and earnestness and consecration as she would if Christ had for the first time this day stood on the earth and given out this great commission; 'All power is given me in heaven and in earth; Go ye, therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and Holy Ghost; and lo, I am with you even unto the end of the world.' Now let it be understood that no one who hears this command and does not obey in the true spirit and meaning of it, has a right to the name of a Christian, let him be who he may. If he does not consecrate himself to this work, if he does not hold on and persevere in doing what he can to accomplish it to the end of life, he has no sympathy with Christ, no regard for his requirements, and no title to eternal life.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/the-church-bound-to-convert-the-world-pt-2/>

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