

To Believers in the Doctrine of Entire and Continued Sanctification in This Life. No. 2

by Charles Finney

Charles Finney urges believers to remain in the church and not withdraw due to disagreements, emphasizing the importance of covenant with God and the church.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4

Topics: "Church Unity", "Sanctification"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the challenges faced by believers in the doctrine of entire and continued sanctification, emphasizing the importance of maintaining covenant commitments to the church despite potential excommunication. He urges members to reflect on their covenant obligations and to respond to church discipline with grace rather than bitterness. Finney encourages believers to exemplify their faith through their actions, asserting that true religion is rooted in love and benevolence towards all. He reassures those facing exclusion from their churches to remain steadfast in prayer and to trust in God's ultimate plan.

Transcript

Beloved in the Lord:

In my last I expressed the hope, if not the opinion, that no Christian church would excommunicate you simply for believing the doctrine of entire and permanent sanctification in this life. Since writing that letter, I have learned with surprise and grief, that at least a portion of the Christian Church has resolved to put away from its communion believers in this blessed doctrine, either by excommunication, or by desiring or suffering you to withdraw from their communion.

Now, beloved, will you permit me in this letter, to suggest a few thoughts upon this subject for your consideration. I have supposed, and never until recently did I know that a different opinion was entertained by any minister of the gospel, especially of the Presbyterian or Congregational order--that persons who had once entered into solemn covenant with God and with his Church on earth, could never recall that covenant, or by any possibility get out of the Church so as not to be subject to its discipline, or so as not to have a right to the enjoyment of its ordinances, except by death, regular dismissal from one church to join another, or by excommunication. And now permit me to observe,

1. That you who are members of churches, are in solemn covenant with God and with the church, and that you cannot withdraw from the communion of a church, unless with the express design of joining the communion of another church. I suppose you have a right, in case a regular dismissal and recommendation should be denied you, by the church to which you may belong, to withdraw from the watch, discipline, and communion of one church for the purpose of uniting with another under certain circumstances, for this is not withdrawing from the Church, neglecting its ordinances, or refusing its discipline. But you have no right in any case whatever, to withdraw from the church militant, to neglect its ordinances or its discipline. This would be a direct and palpable breach of covenant.

2. No church has a right to ask you to withdraw from their communion, or to suffer you to do so, should you request it, only as you request it, and they grant it for the purpose of your uniting with some other church.

3. If the church to which you belong desire you to be out of their communion, they must suppose themselves to have some good reason for it; and if there is some good reason why you should not belong to their communion, they should by no means suffer you to withdraw, but should take the responsibility of excommunicating you, and thus bear a public testimony against your errors or your sins. To me it is a novel idea that if churches wish to get rid of the influence of any of their members, they do well to give them leave, or even request them to withdraw from the church, and thus break their covenant with God and with his Church. Have churches a right so to dispose of the covenant obligations of their members? If this is so, I have been, and still am mistaken. By what authority, I would ask, do churches suppose themselves to act when they take it upon them to give their members advice or leave to withdraw from the communion and discipline of the Church of God.

4. Permit me to inquire in the tenderest manner, whether you who have withdrawn from the communion of the churches to which you belong, have well considered and understood what has become of your covenant engagements? Do you complain that you were ill-treated in the churches to which you belong? But is this a good reason why you should break your covenant with God and with his Church.[?]

Do you say you were not edified and built up in the faith under the influence of the churches to which you belong? But is this a good reason why you should break your covenant with God?

But do you say that your usefulness was destroyed, and that you could do not good by remaining in those churches? But again I ask, what became of your covenant engagements? How do you know how much good you might have done had you persevered in your endeavors to do them good?

But do you say that you could not fellowship them because they rejected the glorious doctrine of entire sanctification?

And is this a reason why you should withdraw from them, and virtually excommunicate them? Do you hold and believe that none can be christians who do not receive this doctrine? Do you believe that you had never been converted until you became acquainted with it? If you withdraw from their communion because they do not believe this doctrine, do you not thereby maintain that the difference between you and them is so great as to render it impossible or improper for you to walk together? In this case certainly you should not complain of those churches that excommunicate persons of your belief, because the difference between them and the Church is too great to be tolerated.

But have you withdrawn because of the supposed insincerity and hypocrisy of the churches to which you belong? But is this a good reason for breaking your covenant with God? Was there not a Judas in the first Christian Church? Have there not always been tares among the wheat? Suppose there are many hypocrites in the Church? Is it not your business to reform the Church instead of attempting to withdraw from it, and thereby violating your solemn covenant engagements, and dishonoring Christ?

6. If the churches to which you belong ask you to withdraw, I beseech you to remind them in the spirit of perfect meekness, that your covenant cannot thus be disposed of, and that if they wish you to be out of their communion, they must take the responsibility of excommunicating you.

7. Let me also beseech you to be very temperate in all your language and deportment, under the trials to which you are called. Remember that "a soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger." I have of late seen one or two letters in which there were some expressions that appeared intemperate, and to savor somewhat of a bitter and a denunciatory zeal. I am pained and alarmed whenever a thing of this kind comes to my knowledge. Dearly beloved, it may be impossible that offences of this kind will not come. But let me beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, that you leave wholly and forever to your opposers the use of harsh, bitter, denunciatory language. If such language must be used, leave the use of it altogether to them. If such feelings as are expressed by this language must be exercised, leave the exercise and manifestation of them wholly to your opposers. And be ye "rooted and grounded in love." "Let the law of kindness dwell upon your lips, and the peace of God rule in your hearts."

8. It is no doubt the policy of Satan to stir up within you a bad spirit. If he can only by any possible means, "provoke you to wrath," and lead you to contend for the truth in a bitter, rasping, censorious spirit, he will effectually secure his object. Let it be remembered, and I beseech you to bear it perpetually in mind, that the truth of the doctrine of entire and permanent sanctification must be illustrated and confirmed by the lives of those who profess to believe it, or it will not to any considerable extent be received by the Church.

9. If the churches to which you belong refuse to learn any thing upon the subject, if they will not read, if they misunderstand and pervert when they do read, if they will not hear you converse or pray upon the subject, you still have the most forcible possible way of communicating the truth. Remember that example is the highest possible moral influence. Let your life, temper, spirit, and daily, and hourly deportment, read them continually lectures, and declare as upon the house tops, the glorious gospel which you profess. They cannot silence your example. Nor can they resist for any length of time the power of its influence. If you are really whole-hearted, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost and let your works shine among men as you ought, this is the loudest possible preaching. It is worth more and will be more influential, yea a hundred times more powerful, than if you were allowed and encouraged to talk, and pray, and preach, and write in favor of the doctrine, continually, while your life contradicts it.

10. Remember that the whole of religion is love, not the love of a party, not complacency in those of a particular name, not a fondness for those and those only who particularly coincide with you in opinion. But religion is benevolence. It is good will to mankind in general. Complacency to the virtuous is only one of the modifications of benevolence.

Beloved, let me recommend to your frequent and prayerful consideration the thirteenth chap. of 1st Cor. Will you read it often? Will you read it on your knees with much prayer? Will you deeply consider it, and let it be copied into all your lives?

11. Do not be discouraged or at all disheartened, beloved brothers and sisters, by any excising measures of any of the churches to which you belong. If they cut you off from their communion, be sure to pray for them and not against them. And remember, that these days of rebuke and of excising will not last always, and that the more violent it is the sooner will the storm blow over. But still I cannot but hope, that the Church of the blessed God is to be spared the disgrace of the violent and anti-christian movements which at present seem to be meditated. However, if it must be so, if you or I must be excised from the Church of God for a belief of what we understand to be the glorious gospel of the blessed God, let come what may, we will rejoice, and be glad. We will, by the grace of God, be quiet as a weaned child, and not suffer ourselves "to be overcome of evil." But let us, beloved, "overcome evil with good."

You may probably hear from me again upon this subject soon.

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

C.G.FINNEY

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