

To Ministers of the Gospel of All Denominations [#1]

by Charles Finney

The Church is in a state of gross sensuality, ignorance, and unbelief, prioritizing earthly things over piety and leading to a public denial of the gospel.

Scripture: Matthew 6:24, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Galatians 5:17, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 3:19, 2 Timothy 3:5, Hebrews 12:1-2, James 4:4, 1 John 2:15-17

Topics: "Unity in the Church", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

Charles Finney addresses ministers of the Gospel, urging them to reflect on the current state of the Church, which he perceives as being ensnared by sensuality, materialism, and division. He highlights the detrimental effects of conformity to worldly standards and the prevalence of selfishness among believers, which undermines true piety and faith. Finney expresses concern over the Church's inefficiency in evangelism and warns that their behavior may contradict the very gospel they profess. He calls for a return to genuine faith and a focus on spiritual rather than earthly pursuits, emphasizing the need for unity among denominations. His message is a heartfelt plea for ministers to lead with humility and a commitment to the true essence of the Gospel.

Transcript

BELOVED BRETHREN:

In addressing you, agreeably to the plan which I suggested in the last volume of the Evangelist, I would by all means, commence by saying, and I beg you to understand, and all along to remember, that I would by no means take the position of a censor or dictator in regard to those things that pertain to your responsible duties. But on the contrary, I would get down at your feet, and beg leave humbly to suggest some things for your consideration which have long pressed upon my mind. I have had almost nothing to do with the ecclesiastical janglings of any denomination of Christians, and never intend to have. But I have watched with great interest, and with much concern, the movements of the Church, and the results of the various influences that are acting upon the cause of Christ. As by the Spirit and providence of God, you are made the leaders of the hosts of God's elect, it appears to me proper, that I should make my suggestions directly to you, and spread at least some of the thoughts that have been so long weighing upon my mind before you, for your consideration. Permit me to begin by suggesting several things in relation to the present state of the Church.

1. Is it not evident, that the Church as a body, are sunk in gross sensuality, and that they have lost sight in a great measure of the fact, that "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit," and is one of the most potent enemies of the soul? Is it not true, that very little is said or seems to be thought of the influence of the appetites and passions of the body upon the spirituality of the soul--that instead of eating and drinking for the glory of God, the Church, as a body, are as much enslaved by their appetites, and are as decidedly making a god of their belly, as any part of the world--that in regard to these things, they are almost entirely conformed to the world?

2. Is it not true, that the Church are exceedingly blind and ignorant in regard to the philosophical and certain effects of sensuality upon the mind--that they overlook in a great measure, that fact that in this life the mind is dependent upon the state of the physical system for all its developments--and that every species and degree of intemperance, whether in eating, drinking, exercise, or dress, necessarily impairs the physical organization, through which and by which the mind acts, and therefore certainly and absolutely curtails the capabilities of the mind in all its healthy manifestations? In respect to the article of alcohol, the Church is to some extent informed with regard to its action on the mind through the physical system. But are there not innumerable forms of intemperance, an immense amount of gluttony, and gross violations of the laws of life and health which are working disease and death, both to the body and soul, of which the Church are entirely ignorant?

3. Are not Christian Churches almost universally given up to minding earthly things--extending their business operations and their worldly possessions as far as possible,--and literally immersing their minds in the subject of money making, politics, and other things that are earthly, sensual, and devilish? Are they not so far away from God as not at all to understand the philosophical and certain bearing of these pursuits upon their piety? These and other earthly things fill up their thoughts, time, and conversation, insomuch that communion with God is almost entirely excluded.

4. Are not the Church in a state of great unbelief, so much so as to have lost, in a great measure, a right understanding of what faith is? They do not seem to understand that faith is a felt, conscious assurance of mind, that what God has said will assuredly come to pass. And even the lowest exercise of real faith has come to be looked upon by the Church as a very rare attainment, and that to which very few persons ever do actually attain in this life. They suppose that unrealizing assent to the truth which almost all persons have, to be real faith, and that realizing assurance which in reality is faith, they suppose to be fanaticism; or, as I have said above, some very rare attainment which is not to be expected in this life, except by a very few.

5. The Church is in a sad state of division and sectarianism. How few Christians of any denomination can relish the preaching, the prayer meetings, the revivals, the biographies, of other denominations! And how lamentable is the fact, that in little villages throughout the whole land, where one minister might instruct the whole population, some half a dozen or more sects, and perhaps as many sectarian ministers, are occupying the ground, scarcely able to sustain the ordinances of religion, simply because they are so divided! And thus thousands of ministers are retained in this country, who should be abroad teaching the heathen, simply because of the sectarianism of the Church! Is it not a great and crying and God-dishonoring sin in the Church, to be so divided, to be so sticklish for their peculiar sectarian notions, as to retain among them so many hundreds and thousands of Christian ministers, all holding the essentials of the Christian faith, who at once ought to be spared, and but for the sectarianism of the Church would be spared to preach the gospel to the perishing heathen?

6. Is not the sectarian spirit of the Church likely, in its results, to destroy all the piety of the ministry? The sectarian interests of every village and congregation lead them to feel that they must have a talented minister, a learned, eloquent, impressive, and popular speaker, a man of genteel manners and worldly refinements. Now is it not true, that these qualities in ministers are much more prized by the Church than humble, devoted piety, and a deep experimental acquaintance with the truths of the gospel? This is the natural and necessary result of sectarianism in the churches. The denominational interests of the different sects, of course, lead them to the selection of a popular minister; i.e. a minister who will be popular, not with the piously devoted few, but with the great mass of the people.

7. Are not the Church rapidly advancing towards the same state of things that exists in Germany? Who does not know that the cry for a learned rather than a holy ministry, has, by degrees, filled the church in Germany with little less than a learned, infidel ministry? And for one, I must say, I tremble for the prospects of the Church in this country, when I see that as a matter of fact, so much more stress is laid upon learning than upon piety, upon a through education of the head than of the heart.

8. Are not the Church, in a great measure, in a state of almost entire conformity to the world? In their spirit, temper, business, politics, habits of life, dress, equipage, tables, furniture, and almost every thing, do they not follow closely in the footsteps of the world? I speak not now of conformity to the world in things that are necessary, and convenient, and important to the comfort and usefulness of Christians. For I believe it is their bounden duty, so far as the providence of God puts it in their power, to provide things honest, and suitable, and convenient for them in their circumstances. But I speak of that conformity in those things that are useless, extravagant, and in multitudes of instances of positive evil tendency.

9. Does not great selfishness prevail almost every where in the Church? And does not selfishness discover itself in almost every form in which it shows itself among worldly men? Have not the Church, to a great extent, the impression that selfishness is compatible with true religion; in other words, that selfishness and true religion can co-exist in the same mind?

10. Is it not true, that even those who are supposed to be the most pious in the Church, have a legal and unhappy religion--are warring against sin and their lusts in their own strength--that they have very little practical knowledge of where their true strength lies, and are almost perpetually overcome and discouraged by the prevalence of their sins; while great multitudes in the Church have not had conviction enough even to make them unhappy, or thoroughly to feel the necessity of a salvation from sin?

11. Are not the Church amazingly inefficient, so much so, that in many places where there are hundreds of professors of religion, the whole of them will not, by their instrumentality, effect the conversion of ten sinners in a year?

12. Lastly--are not the Church in their present state, a standing, public, perpetual denial of the gospel? Do they not stand out before the world, as a living, unanswerable contradiction of the gospel; and do more to harden sinners and lead them into a spirit of caviling and infidelity, than all the efforts of professed infidels from the beginning of the world to the present day?

Now I have not made these inquiries in a spirit of railing or accusation, but in deep seriousness. They are not the language of vituperation and censoriousness, but of solemn truth. Nay, indeed, they are but a hint at the real facts as they exist almost every where. In my next, the Lord willing, I intend to hint at some of the reasons for this state of things, as they present themselves to my own mind. Your brother in the bonds of the gospel,

C.G.FINNEY.

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