

To the Professors of Religion Who Were Members of the Church Previous to the Late Great Revivals

by Charles Finney

Old professors have a responsibility to watch over, nurture, and guide converts in their spiritual journey, and must counteract the bad influence they have exerted by confessing and forsaking their iniquity.

Topics: "Spiritual Revival", "Personal Transformation"

Description

In this sermon, Charles Finney addresses those who claim to be followers of Christ but may have become complacent in their faith, particularly in the context of the recent great revivals. He likely challenges his audience to examine their hearts and actions, urging them to move beyond mere profession of religion to a deeper, more vibrant experience of Christianity. Finney's message may emphasize the importance of personal revival and the need for believers to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than simply going through the motions of religious ritual. As a prominent figure in the Second Great Awakening, Finney's words would have been a call to authenticity and spiritual renewal for his listeners.

Transcript

BELOVED BRETHREN AND SISTERS.

In the last volume of the Evangelist, I addressed several letters to the converts of the recent great revivals. Among other things I pointed out to them some of the reasons why they had not grown more in grace. I then designed long before this time to have addressed you upon the subject of your influence over those converts, but have been prevented hitherto by the pressure of multiplied duties.

And now, beloved brethren, permit me in the bowels of Jesus Christ to approach your consciences and your hearts upon this subject. In some places it has been somewhat common, for the old professors to complain of the spiritual state of many who were hopefully converted in those revivals. And I have no doubt there has been much reason for complaint. But, beloved, let me inquire how much of the guilt of their present state lies at your own door? What as a matter of fact has been your real influence over them? It must have been great at all events, either to make them better or worse--to encourage and press them forward, or to depress, discourage, and hinder them in their christian course.

When they were converted in the midst of you, they were like new born infants thrown into your arms as nursing fathers and nursing mothers, to watch over, nurture, and guide in the paths of life. Now have you not these responsibilities, and what account can you give of the manner in which you have treated these young children of God? It is probable you will not deny that you were bound to exercise as much watchfulness over them as if God had really committed to your care a company of children in a state of infancy to train up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Now suppose there had been committed to you the training up of a great number of children and you had paid very little attention to them--suffering them to go where they listed by day and by night--to choose their own employments, books, associates, and amusements, and to spend their whole time according to their own inclinations, with very little counsel or reproof administered by you. And suppose that they had, as would almost certainly be the case, fallen into temptation, and the snare of the devil, and become any thing but what was desirable. Now suppose that you had been under oath and solemn covenant engagement, entered into in the house of God over the broken emblems of the dying body and shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, to watch over them with all fidelity, and tenderness, to seek their purity, peace, and edification. And notwithstanding, you had conducted towards them as in the case I have supposed above. Now who can describe or even conceive the guilt of such persons under such circumstances? And if these children should become vagabonds, and outlaws, and pirates, and every thing that is injurious to themselves and to their country, who would not hold you in a great measure chargeable with these results? And now suppose that under such circumstances, instead of blaming yourselves, you should complain of them behind their backs, and talk among yourselves of the state into which they have fallen--would not such conduct in you be regarded as an instance of almost unparalleled depravity?

Now, beloved brethren, I suppose that a great many of the converts of these revivals, have, notwithstanding the pernicious influence of some of you, stood as high in point of spirituality as any member of your churches. They have been led by the grace of Christ, against all the untoward influences that many of you have exerted over them, to maintain a life of comparative engagedness and zeal in the cause of Christ. Others of them have been discouraged, and stumbled, and finally have been turned back by the tide of influence poured down upon them by the example and instruction of old professors of religion.

And now let me inquire have you not taught them either by precept or example or perhaps both that they must expect to backslide and become cold in religion?

Have not your worldly spirit and temper, your carnal and sensual lives, been the most impressive lessons that you have or could inculcate upon them to lead them to backsliding and spiritual death? Nay, have you not expressly taught them that they must expect to backslide? A brother is with me now who says the first thing told him after his conversion was that he must expect to backslide and lose the peace of God which then filled his soul. And this was by an aged man who had been for years a christian. For weeks this was the great lesson inculcated upon him, and it finally contributed in a great measure to draw him away from God into a state of backsliding and sin.

Let me ask again, have you sought out young converts and conversed with them often upon spiritual subjects? Have you encouraged and strengthened them in the service of God and warned them against temptation?

Have you earnestly and affectionately inquired into the detail of their lives, into their business operations, and after their books and associates?

In short have you looked narrowly into those influences with which they are surrounded, and faithfully pointed out and warned them against whatever might naturally lead them astray?

Have you daily made them the subject of prayer?

Have you carefully attended all the prayer-meetings yourself, and taken pains to ascertain who among them attended such meetings and who staid away? Have you gone anxiously but kindly and often to those who staid away and inquired into the reason?

Have you taken the alarm at any indication of backsliding among them, and done your utmost to reclaim & save them from injuring the cause of Christ?

Have you been careful that all your influence and example should be such as would naturally have a salutary and heavenly influence over them?

Have you exhibited that deadness to the world, its riches, honors, amusements, friendships, and opinions, which you know they ought to exercise?

Have you carefully copied the example of Christ who says "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth?"

Have you avoided all parties of pleasure which you think Christ or an Apostle would have avoided--have you abstained from all those things and ways which had a natural tendency to divert them from walking with God?

Or have you, on the other hand, done the very things which have seduced them from the paths of holiness, and been the means of bringing them into the very state of which you complain? I heard that some of you have attended wine and card parties--that you have been deeply engaged in party politics--and have entered deeply into the speculations of the day, and in many respects have done all that was calculated to stumble and destroy the infant piety of young converts.

Now, my beloved brethren, I would get down at your feet and humbly beseech you to look at your responsibilities and guilt in these things. When young converts read this letter will not their minds revert to many of you as the instruments of their deplorable down-fall? They may be too much hardened at present to deplore deeply their state, or very sincerely or deeply to blame you. But do let me inquire what you think will be their views of your influence if God in mercy should ever reclaim them from their backsliding? Will they not look with as much abhorrence and indignation upon your influence over them as they would upon the influence of Satan himself?

And now, my brother, my sister, have you not much to do to counteract the bad influence you have exerted over them? Have you not a mountain weight of sin to repent of, and confess to God and to them in this matter? Is it not your bounded duty at once to take up the stumbling blocks out of the way--to confess your dreadful breaches of covenant--to humble yourself and cover yourself as with sackcloth and ashes in the sight of God and in their sight--deeply to mourn over your own sin, and over them as having been led astray by you? Do you not know, do not they know, do not the world around you know, and does not God know the vast amount of evil influence you have exerted over them? And do you ever expect to be forgiven without confessing and forsaking this iniquity? They have naturally regarded you as fathers and mothers in Israel. Your example has had the influence of that of parents over children.

And now, beloved, are you acquainted with the real spiritual state of these converts in your midst?

Will you not go to them and honestly inquire what influence your example has had over them? Will you not beg of them to be candid, and frank, and tell you the real truth in the case? Will you take up the subject seriously, and inquire on your knees before God what has been the moral tendency of your deportment, and spirit, and manner of life in its bearings upon their piety?

And let me ask again have not the efforts of your pastors and religious teachers been in a great measure counteracted and nullified by a spirit and temper in you that has been the direct opposite of that inculcated by them?

At present I will say no more upon this subject, but leave these questions and suggestions to be deeply pondered by you, and will go down upon my own knees, and beg of God to search out the deep foundations of your heart upon these subjects.

Will you also take this letter and retire to your closet, and read it upon your knees, praying and asking God to make an application of every sentence to your own heart?

Will you, my brother, my sister, do this honestly, earnestly, and repeatedly, until you get a knowledge of your own standing in the sight of God upon this most solemn subject? May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ incline you to do it, and to His name shall be the praise.

Your brother,

C.G.FINNEY

P.S. Will you, dear brethren, and sisters, consider this letter as addressed to each of you by name; and will you hand it to as many of that class of persons to whom it is addressed, as you conveniently can, and request them also to consider it as a private communication from me to them?

Yours, C.G.F.

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