

True Saints

by Charles Finney

True friends of God and man are characterized by perfect holiness, abhorrence of sin, zeal for God's honor, and sympathy with God, and their leading object is to reconcile sinners to God.

Scripture: Exodus 32:26, Matthew 5:14

Topics: "True Friendship with God", "The Nature of True Saints"

Description

Charles Finney's sermon 'True Saints' emphasizes the distinction between three classes of professing Christians, focusing on the true friends of God who are characterized by their sincere benevolence, abhorrence of sin, and a deep desire to reconcile others to God. He highlights that true saints are not motivated by self-interest or public opinion but are driven by a genuine love for God and a commitment to holiness. Finney urges listeners to examine their own lives and motivations, stressing that true piety is marked by a relentless pursuit of the salvation of souls and a heartfelt prayer life focused on others. He challenges the congregation to reflect on whether they embody the characteristics of true friends of God and man, as defined by their actions and desires.

Transcript

TEXT.-- "Who is on the Lord's side?" -- Exodus xxxii. 26.

THIS question was addressed by Moses to the professed people of God, immediately after their great departure from God while Moses was in the Mount, when they went and worshipped a golden calf which had been cast for them by Aaron. After expostulating with the guilty nation, he called out, "Who is on the Lord's side?" It is not my intention to dwell on the history of this case particularly, but to come at once to the main design I have in view this evening, which is to show that there are

THREE CLASSES OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANS.

I. The true friends of God and man.

II. Those who are actuated by hope and fear, or in other words, by self-love or by selfishness.

III. Those who are actuated by public opinion.

These three classes may be known by attending to the characteristic developments which show what is the leading design in their religion. It needs not be proved, that persons may set out in religion from very

different motives, some from real love to religion, and some from other motives. The differences may be arranged in these three classes, and by attending to the development of their real design in becoming religious, you learn their characters. They all profess to be servants of God, and yet by observing the lives of many, it becomes manifest that instead of their being God's servants they are only trying to make God their servant. Their leading aim and object is to secure their own salvation, or some other advantage for themselves, through the medium of the favor of God. They are seeking to make God their friend, that they may make use of him to serve their own turn.

I. There is a class of professed Christians who are the true friends of God and man.

If you attend to those things which develop the true design and aim, of their religion, you will see it to be such. They are truly and sincerely benevolent.

1. They will make it manifest that this is their character, by their carefulness in avoiding sin.

They will show that they hate it in themselves, and they hate it in others. They will not justify it in themselves, and they will not justify it in others. They will not seek to cover up or to excuse their own sins, neither will they try to cover up or to excuse the sins of others. In short, they aim at PERFECT HOLINESS. This course of conduct makes it evident that they are the true friends of God. I do not mean to say that every true friend of God is perfect, no more than I would say that every truly affectionate and obedient child is perfect, or never fails in duty to his parent. But if he is an affectionate and obedient child, his aim is to obey always, and if he fails in any respect, he by no means justifies it, or pleads for it, or aims to cover it up, but as soon as he comes to think of the matter, is dissatisfied with himself, and condemns his conduct.

So these persons who are the true friends of God and man, are ever ready to complain of themselves, and to blame and condemn themselves for what is wrong. But you never see them finding fault with God. You never hear them excusing themselves and throwing off the blame upon their Maker, by telling of their inability to obey God, or speaking as if God had required impossibilities of his creatures. They always speak as if they felt that what God has required is right and reasonable, and themselves only to blame for their disobedience.

2. They manifest a deep abhorrence of the sins of other people.

They do not cover up the sins of others, or plead for them and excuse them, or smooth them over by "perhaps" this, or "perhaps" that. You never hear them apologizing for sin. As they are indignant at sin in themselves, they are just as much so when they see it in others. They know its horrible nature, and abhor it always.

3. Another thing in which this spirit manifests itself, is zeal for the honor and glory of God.

They show the same ardor to promote God's honour and interest, that the true patriot does to promote the honor and interest of his country. If he greatly loves his country, its government and its interest, he sets his heart upon promoting its advancement and benefit. He is never so happy as when he is doing something for the honour and advancement of his country. So a child that truly loves his father, is never so happy as when he is advancing his father's honor and interest. And he never feels more indignant grief, than when he sees his father abused or injured. If he sees his father disobeyed or abused by those who ought to obey and love and honor him, his heart breaks forth with indignant grief.

There are multitudes of professing Christians, and even ministers, who are very zealous to defend their own character and their own honor. But this one class feel more engaged, and their hearts beat higher when defending or advancing God's honor. These are the true friends of God and man.

4. They show that they sympathize with God in His feelings towards man.

They have the same kind of friendship for souls that God feels. I do not mean that they feel in the same degree, but that they have the same kind of feelings. There is such a thing as loving the souls of men and hating their conduct too. There is such a thing as constitutional sympathy, which persons feel for those who are in distress. This is natural. You always feel this for a person in distress, unless you have some selfish reason for feeling malevolent. If you saw a murderer hung, you would feel compassion for him. The wicked have this natural sympathy for those that suffer.

There is another peculiar kind of sympathy which the real child of God feels and manifests towards sinners. It is a mingled feeling of abhorrence and compassion, of indignation against his sins, and pity for his person. It is possible to feel this deep abhorrence of sin mingled with deep compassion for souls capable of such endless happiness, and yet bound to eternal misery.

I will explain myself. There are two kinds of love.--One is the love of benevolence. This has no respect to the character of the person loved, but merely views the individual as exposed to suffering and misery. This God feels towards all men. The other kind includes esteem or approbation of character. God feels this only towards the righteous. He never feels this love towards sinners. He infinitely abhors them. He has an infinitely strong exercise of compassion and abhorrence at the same time. Christians have the same feelings, only not in the same degree, but they have them at the same time. Probably they never feel right unless they have both these feelings in exercise at the same time. The Christian does not feel as God feels towards individuals, nor feel according to the true character of the individuals, unless both these feelings exist in his mind at the same time. You see this by one striking characteristic. The Christian will rebuke most pointedly and frequently those for whom he feels the deepest compassion. Did you never see this? Did you never see a parent yearning with compassion over a child, and reprove him with tears, and yet with a pungency that would make the little offender quail under his rebuke. Jesus Christ often manifested strongly these two emotions. He wept over Jerusalem, and yet he tells the reason, in a manner that shows his burning indignation against their conduct. "O Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee!"--Ah! what a full view he had of their wickedness, at the moment that he wept with compassion for the doom that hung over them. It is just so with this class of Christians. You never find one of them addressing a sinner so as merely to make him weep because somebody is weeping for him. But his most tender appeals are accompanied with strong rebuke for sin.

I wish you to remember this point--that the true friend of God and man never takes the sinner's part, because he never acts through mere compassion. And at the same time, he is never seen to denounce the sinner, without at the same time manifesting compassion for his soul, and a strong desire to save him from death.

5. It is a prominent object with such Christians, in all their intercourse with men, to make them friends of God.

Whether they converse, or pray, or attend to the duties of life, it is their prominent object to recommend religion and to lead everybody to glorify God. It is very natural they should do this, if they are the true friends of God. A true friend of the government wishes every body to be a friend of the government. A true

and affectionate child wishes every body to love and respect his father. And if any one is at enmity, it is his constant aim and effort to bring him to reconciliation. The same you would expect from a true friend of God, as a leading feature of his character, that he would make it a PROMINENT object of his life to reconcile sinners to God.

Now, mark me! If this is not the leading feature of your character, if it is not the absorbing topic of thought and effort to reconcile men to God, you have not the root of the matter in you. Whatever appearance of religion you may have, you lack the leading and fundamental characteristic of true piety. It wants the leading feature of the character and aims of Jesus Christ, and of his apostles and prophets. Look at them, and see how this feature stands out in strong and eternal relief, as the leading characteristic, the prominent design and object of their lives. Now let me ask you, what is the leading object of your life, as appears in your daily walk? Is it to bring all God's enemies to submit to him? If not, away with your pretensions to religion. Whatever else you have, you have not the true love of God in you.

6. Where there are persons of this class, you will see them scrupulously avoid every thing that in their estimation is calculated to defeat their great end.

They always wish to avoid every thing calculated to prevent the salvation of souls, every thing calculated to divert attention, or in any way to hinder the conversion of souls. It is not the natural question with them, when any thing is proposed which is doubtful, to ask, "Is this something which God expressly forbids?" The first question that naturally suggests itself to their minds is, "What will be the bearing of this upon religion? Will it have a tendency to prevent the conversion of sinners, to hinder the progress of revivals, to roll back the wheels of salvation?" If so, they do not need the thunders of Sinai to be pealed in their ears, to forbid their doing it. If they see it contrary to the spirit of holiness, and contrary to the main object they have in view, that is enough.

Look at the temperance reformation for an illustration of this. Here let me say, that it was the influence of intemperance in hindering the conversion and salvation of sinners that first turned the attention of the benevolent men who commenced the reformation, to inquire on the subject. And the same class of persons are still carrying it on. Such men do not stand and cavil at every step of the way, and say "Drinking rum is no where prohibited in the Bible and I do not feel bound to give it up." They find that it hinders the great object for which they live, and that is enough for them, they give it up of course. They avoid whatever they see would hinder revival, as a matter of course, just as a merchant would avoid any thing that had a tendency to impair his credit, and defeat his object of making money by his business. Suppose a merchant was about to do something that you knew would injuriously affect his credit, and you go to him in the spirit of friendship and advise him not to do it, would he turn round and say, "Show me the passage where God has prohibited this in the Bible?" No. He don't ask you to show him any thing more than this, that it is inconsistent with his main design.

Mark this, all of you. A person who is strongly desirous of the conversion of sinners does not need an express prohibition to prevent his doing that which he sees is calculated to prevent this. There is no danger of his doing that which will defeat the very object of his life.

7. This class of professing Christians are always distressed, unless they see the work of converting sinners going on.

They call it a lamentable state of things in the church, if no sinners are converted. No matter what else is true, no matter how rich the congregation grows, nor how popular their minister, nor how many come to

hear him, their panting hearts are uneasy unless they see the work of conversion actually going on. They see that all the rest is nothing without this--yea, that even the means of grace are doing more hurt than good, unless sinners are converted.

Such professors as these are a great trouble to those who are religious from other motives, and who therefore wish to keep all quiet and have every thing go on regularly in the good old way. They are often called "uneasy spirits in the church." And mark it! if a church has a few such spirits in it, the minister will be made uneasy unless his preaching is such as to convert sinners. You sometimes hear of these men reproving the church, and pouring out their expostulations for living so cold and worldly, and the church reply, "O, we are doing well enough, do you not see how we flourish, it is only because you are always uneasy." When in fact their hearts are grieved and their souls in agony because sinners are not converted and souls are pressing down to hell.

8. You will see them when manifesting a spirit of prayer, praying not for themselves but for sinners.

If you know the habitual tenor of people's prayers, it will show which way the tide of their feelings sets. If a man is actuated in religion mainly by a desire to save himself, you will hear him praying chiefly for himself--that he may have his sins pardoned and enjoy much of the Spirit of God, and the like. But if he is truly the friend of God and man, you will find that the burden of his prayers is for the glory of God in the salvation of sinners, and he is never so copious and powerful in prayer, as when he gets upon his favorite topic--the conversion of sinners. Go into the prayer meeting where such Christians pray, and instead of seeing them all shut up in the nutshell of their own interests, spending their whole prayer upon themselves, and just closing with a flourish about the kingdom of Christ, you will hear them pouring out their souls in prayer for the salvation of sinners. I believe there have been cases of such Christians who were so much absorbed in their desires for the salvation of sinners, that for weeks together they did not even pray for their own salvation. Or if they pray for themselves at all, it is that they may be clothed with the Spirit of God, so that they can go out and be mighty through God in pulling souls out of the fire.

You that are here can tell how it is with your prayers, whether you feel most and pray most for yourself or for sinners. If you know nothing about the spirit of prayer for sinners, you are not the true friend of God and man. What! no heart to feel, when sinners are going to hell by your side! No sympathy with the Son of God, who gave his life to save sinners! Away with all such professions of religion. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Don't tell me men are truly pious, when their prayers are droned over, as much a matter of form as when the poor Popish priest counts over his beads. Such a man deceives himself, if he talks about being the true friend of God and man.

9. These persons do not want to ask what are the things they are required to do for the conversion of sinners.

When any thing is presented to them that promises success in converting sinners, they do not wait to be commanded to do it, on pains and penalties if they do not. They only want the evidence that it is calculated to advance the object on which their hearts are set, and they will engage in it with all their soul. The question is not with them all the while, "What am I expressly commanded to do?" but, "In what way can I do most for the salvation of souls, and the conversion of the world to God?" They do not wait for an express command in the Bible, before they will engage in the work of missions, or Sabbath schools, or any other enterprise that promises to save souls; but they are ready to every good word and work.

10. Another characteristic of such Christians is a disposition to deny themselves to do good to others.

God has established throughout all the universe the principle of giving. Even in the natural world, the rivers, the ocean, the clouds, all give. It is so throughout the whole kingdom of nature and of grace. This diffusive principle is every where recognized. This is the very spirit of Christ. He sought not to please himself, but to do good to others. He found his highest happiness in denying himself to do good to others. So it is with this class of persons, they are ever ready to deny themselves of enjoyments and comforts, and even of necessities, when by so doing they can do more good to others.

11. They are continually devising new means and new measures for doing good.

This is what would be expected from their continual desire to do good. Instead of being satisfied with what does not succeed, they are continually devising new ways and means to effect their object. They are not like those persons who make themselves satisfied with doing what they call their DUTY. Where an individual is aiming mainly at his own salvation, he may think if he does his duty he is discharged from responsibility, and so he is satisfied--he thinks he has escaped from divine wrath and gained heaven for himself, by doing what God required him to do, and he cannot help it, whether sinners are saved or lost. But with the other class, it is not so much their object to gain heaven and avoid wrath, but their leading object is to save souls and to honor God. And if this object is not advanced, they are in pain. Such a man is the one whose soul is all the while devising liberal things, and trying new things, and if one fails, trying another and another, and cannot rest till he has found something that will succeed in the salvation of souls.

12. They always manifest great grief when they see the church asleep and doing nothing for the salvation of sinners.

They know the difficulty--the impossibility of doing anything considerable for the salvation of sinners while the church are asleep. Go into a church where the great mass are doing nothing for the conversion of sinners, and floating along on the current of the world, and you will find that the true friends of God and man are grieved at such a state of things. Those who have other objects in view in being religious, may think they are going on very well. They are not grieved when they see the professed people of God going after show and folly. But if there are any of this class, you will find them grieved and distressed at heart, because the church is in such a state.

13. They are grieved if they see reason to think their minister temporizes, or does not reprove the church pointedly and faithfully for their sins.

The other classes of professors are willing to be rocked to sleep, and willing their minister should preach smooth, flowery and eloquent sermons, and flattering sermons, with no point and no power. But these are not satisfied unless he preaches powerfully and pointedly, and boldly, and rebukes and entreats and exhorts, with all long-suffering and doctrine. Their souls are not fed, or edified, or satisfied with any thing that does not take hold, and do the work for which the ministry was appointed by Jesus Christ.

14. This class of persons will always stand by a faithful minister, who preaches the truth boldly and pointedly.

No matter if the truth he preaches hits them, they like it, and say, Let the righteous smite me, and it shall be an excellent oil. When the truth is poured forth with power, their souls are fed, and grow strong in grace. They can pray for such a minister. They can weep in their closet, and pour out their souls in prayer for him, that he may have the Spirit of God always with him. While others scold and cavil at him and talk

about his being extravagant, and all that, you will find Christians of this sort will stand by him, yea, and would go to the stake with him for the testimony of Jesus. And this they do for the best of all reasons--such preaching falls in with the great design for which these Christians live.

15. This sort of Christians are especially distressed when ministers preach sermons not adapted to convert sinners.

I mean when the sermon is not specially addressed to the church, to stir them up. Others may approve the sermon, and praise it, and tell what a great sermon it is, or how eloquent, or lucid or grand or sublime, but it does not suit them if it lacks this one characteristic--a tendency to convert sinners. You will find some people that are great sticklers for the doctrine of election, and they will not believe it is a gospel sermon unless it has the doctrine of election in it, but if the doctrine of election is in it they are suited whether it is adapted to convert sinners or not.--But where a man has his heart set on the conversion of sinners, if he hears a sermon not calculated to do this, he feels as if it lacked the great thing that constitutes a gospel sermon. But if they hear a sermon calculated to save souls, then they are fed and their souls rejoice.

Hence you see the ground for the astonishing difference you often find in the judgment which people pass upon preaching. There is in fact no better test of character than this. It is easy to see who they are that are filled with the love of God and of souls, by the judgment which they pass upon preaching. The true friends of God and man, when they hear a sermon that is not particularly designed to probe and rouse the church and bring them to action, if it is not such as to bear down on sinners and does not tend to convert sinners, it is not the sermon for them.

16. You will always find this class of persons speaking in terms of dissatisfaction with themselves, that they do no more for the conversion of sinners.

However much they may really do for this object, it seems that the more they do the more they long to do. They are never satisfied. Instead of being satisfied with the present degree of their success, there is no end of their longing for the conversion of sinners. I recollect a good man, who used to pray till he was exhausted with praying for individuals and for places and for the world's conversion. Once when he was quite exhausted with praying, he exclaimed "Oh! my longing, aching heart! There is no such thing as satisfying my unutterable desires for the conversion of sinners. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath." That man, though he had been useful beyond almost any other man of his age, yet he saw so much to do, and he so longed to see the work go forward and sinners saved, that his mortal frame could not sustain it. "I find," said he one day, "that I am dying for want of strength to do more to save the souls of men; Oh, how much I want strength, that I may save souls."

17. If you wish to move this class of persons, you must make use of motives drawn from their great and leading object.

If you wish to move them, you must hold up the situation of sinners, and show how they dishonor God, and you will find this will move their souls and set them on fire sooner than any appeal to their hopes and fears. Roll on them this great object. Show them how they can convert sinners, and their longing hearts beat and wrestle with God in prayer, and travail for souls, until they see them converted and Christ formed in them the hope of glory.

I might mention many other characteristics which belong to this class of professing Christians-- the true friends of God and man, did time and strength permit. But I must stop here, and postpone the

consideration of the other two classes till next Friday evening, if we are spared and the Lord permit.

Now, do you belong to this class, or not? I have mentioned certain great fundamental facts, which when they exist, indicate the true character of individuals, by showing what is their main design and object in life. You can tell whether this is your character. When I come upon the other part of the subject, I shall endeavor to describe those classes of professing Christians, whose religious zeal, prayers and efforts have another design, and to show their character and how this design is carried out.

And now, beloved, I ask you before God, have you these characteristics of a child of God? Do you KNOW they belong to you? Can you say, "O Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee, and that these are the features of my character!"

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