

Worldly Amusements

by Charles Finney

Christians should live above a desire for worldly amusements and seek their enjoyment in a spiritual and heavenly way.

Scripture: 1 John 2:15

Topics: "Worldly Amusements", "Spiritual Joy"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the topic of worldly amusements, emphasizing that true communion with God should extinguish the desire for worldly pleasures. He argues that a genuine Christian life is marked by a repulsion towards worldly entertainments, as they distract from the spiritual joy found in a relationship with God. Finney warns that seeking enjoyment in worldly amusements misrepresents the essence of Christianity and can lead to a loss of credibility among the unconverted. He shares personal experiences to illustrate that a deep spiritual life brings a higher form of enjoyment that renders worldly pleasures unsatisfactory. Ultimately, he calls Christians to live above the world, demonstrating that true happiness is found in God alone.

Transcript

A few more words will be permitted, perhaps, on the subject of worldly amusements. In these articles I, of course, use the term amusements in the popular sense of pleasure seeking, by a resort to worldly entertainments, agreeable sports, and pastimes.

The question often arises: "Are we never to seek such amusements?" I answer: It is our privilege and our duty to live above a desire for such things. All that class of desires should be so extinguished by living so much in the light of God, and having so deep a communion with him as to have no relish for such amusements whatever. It certainly is the privilege of every child of God to walk so closely with him; and maintain so divine a communion with him as not to feel the necessity of worldly excitements, sports, pastimes, and entertainments, to make his enjoyment satisfactory.

If a Christian avails himself of his privilege of communion with God, he will naturally and by an instinct of his new nature repel solicitations to go after worldly amusements. To him such pastimes will appear low, unsatisfactory, and even repulsive. If he is of a heavenly mind, as he ought to be, he will feel as if he could not afford to come down and ask* enjoyment in worldly amusements. Surely, a Christian must be fallen from his first love, he must have turned back into the world, before he can feel the necessity or have the desire of seeking enjoyment in worldly sports and pastimes.

A spiritual mind cannot seek enjoyment in worldly society. To such a mind that society is necessarily repulsive. Worldly society is insincere, hollow, and to a great extent a sham. What relish can a spiritual mind have for the gossip of a worldly party of pleasure? None whatever. To a mind in communion with God their worldly spirit and ways, conversation and folly is repulsive and painful, as it is so strongly suggestive of the downward tendency of their souls and of the destiny that awaits them.

I have had so marked an experience of both sides of this question that I think I cannot be mistaken. Probably but few persons enjoy worldly pleasure more intensely than I did before I was converted; but my conversion, and the spiritual baptism which immediately followed it, completely extinguished all desire for worldly sports and amusements. I was lifted at once into entirely another plane of life and another kind of enjoyment. From that hour to the present the mode of life, the pastimes, sports, amusements, and worldly ways that so much delighted me before have not only failed to interest me, but I have had a positive aversion to them.

I have never felt them necessary to or even compatible with a truly rational enjoyment. I do not speak boastingly; but for the honor of Christ and his religion I must say that my Christian life has been a happy one. I have had as much enjoyment as is probably best for men to have in this life, and never for an hour have I had the desire to turn back and seek enjoyment from anything the world can give. But some may ask: "Suppose we do not find sufficient enjoyment in religion, and really desire to go after worldly amusements. If we have the disposition, is it not as well to gratify it?" "Is there any more sin in seeking amusements than in entertaining a longing for them?"

I reply that professed Christians are bound to maintain a life consisted** with their profession. For the honor of religion, they ought to deny worldly lusts; and not, by seeking to gratify them, give occasion to the world to scoff and say that Christians love the world as well as they do. If professors of religion are backslidden in heart and entertain a longing for worldly sports and amusements, they are bound by every consideration of duty and decency to abstain from all outward manifestation of such inward lustings. Some have maintained that we should conform to the ways of the world somewhat--at least, enough to show that we can enjoy the world and religion too; and that we make religion appear repulsive to unconverted souls by turning our backs upon what they call their innocent amusements. But we should represent religion as it really is--as a living above the world, as consisting in a heavenly mind, as that which affords an enjoyment so spiritual and heavenly as to render the low pursuits and joys of worldly men disagreeable and repulsive. It is a sad stumbling-block to the unconverted to see professed Christians seeking pleasure or happiness from this world. Such seeking is a misrepresentation of the religion of Jesus. It misleads, bewilders, and confounds the observing outsider. If he ever reads his Bible, he cannot but wonder that souls who are born of God and have communion with him should have any relish for worldly ways and pleasures. The fact is that thoughtful unconverted men have little or no confidence in that class of professing Christians who seek enjoyment from this world. They may profess to have, and may loosely think of such as being liberal and good Christians. They may flatter them, and commend their religion as being the opposite of fanaticism and bigotry, and as being such a religion as they like to see; but there is no real sincerity in such professions on the part of the impenitent.

In my early Christian life I heard a Methodist bishop from the South report a case that made a deep impression on my mind. He said there was in his neighborhood a slave holder, a gentleman of fortune, who was a gay agreeable man, and gave himself much to various field sports and other amusements. He used to associate much with his pastor, often invite him to dinner and to accompany him in his sports and pleasure-seeking excursions of various kinds. The minister cheerfully complied with these requests, and a

friendship grew up between the pastor and his parishioner that grew into an intimacy which continued till the last sickness of this gay and wealthy man.

When the wife of this worldling was apprised that her husband could live but a short time she was much alarmed for his soul, and tenderly inquired if she should not call in their minister to converse and pray with him. He feelingly replied: "No, my dear; he is not the man for me to see now. He was my companion, as you know, in worldly sports and pleasure-seeking; he loved good dinners and a jolly time. I then enjoyed his society and found him a pleasant companion. But I see now that I never had any real confidence in his piety and have now no confidence in the efficacy of his prayers.

I am now a dying man, and need the instruction and prayers of somebody that can prevail with God. We have been much together; but our pastor has never been in serious earnest with me about the salvation of my soul, and he is not the man to help me now." The wife was greatly affected, and said: "What shall I do, then?" He replied: "My coachman, Tom, is a pious man. I have confidence in his prayers. I have often overheard him pray when about the barn or stables, and his prayers have always struck me as being quite sincere and earnest.

I never heard any foolishness from him. He has always been honest and earnest as a Christian man. Call him." Tom was called, and came within the door, dropping his hat and looking tenderly and compassionately at his dying master. The dying man put forth his hand, saying: "Come here, Tom. Take my hand. Tom, can you pray for your dying master?" Tom poured out his soul in earnest prayer. I cannot remember the name of this bishop, it was so long ago; but the story I well remember as an illustration of the mistake into which many professors and some ministers fall, supposing that we recommend religion to the unconverted by mingling with them in their pleasures and their running after amusements.

I have seen many illustrations of this mistake. Christians should live so far above the world as not to need or seek its pleasures; and thus recommend religion to the world, as a source of the highest and purest happiness. The peaceful look, the joyful countenance, the spiritual serenity and cheerfulness of a living Christian recommend religion to the unconverted. Their satisfaction in God, their holy joy, their living above and shunning the ways and amusements of worldly minds impress the unconverted with a sense of the necessity and desirableness of a Christian life. But let no man think to gain a really Christian influence over another by manifesting a sympathy with his worldly aspirations.

[The following note is from a later publication entitled: POWER FROM ON HIGH and not found in THE INDEPENDENT.]

Pres. Finney, in forwarding his revision of the above tract for publication by the Willard Tract Repository, accompanied it with a note to Dr. Cullis, in which he said:

"The previous pages contain a condensation of three short articles that I published in the Independent. I recollect that the editor of the Advance, and one of the editors of the Independent, both of whom had published what I regard as very loose views, approving and recommending the worldly amusements of Christians, criticized those articles with an asperity that seemed to indicate that they were nettled by them. They so far perverted them as to assert that they taught asceticism, and the prohibition of rest, recreation, and all amusements. I regard the doctrine of this tract as strictly Biblical and true. But, to avoid all such unjust inferences and cavils, add the following lines.

"Let no one say that the doctrine of this tract prohibits all rest, recreation, and amusement whatever. It does not. It freely admits all rest, recreation, and amusement that is regarded, by the person who resorts to it, as a condition and means of securing health and vigour of body and mind with which to promote the cause of God. This tract only insists, as the Bible does, that 'whether we eat or drink,' rest, recreate, or amuse ourselves, all must be done as a service rendered to God. God must be our end. To please Him must be our aim in everything, or we sin."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/worldly-amusements/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net