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LECTURE X - TO WIN SOULS REQUIRES WISDOM (reading)

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by Charles Finney

TEXT. --*He that winneth souls is wise.* --PROVERBS xi. 30.

THE most common definition of wisdom is, that it is the choice of the best end and the selection of the most appropriate means for the accomplishment of that end--the best adaptation of means to secure a desired end. "He that winneth souls," God says, "is wise." The object of this evening's lecture is to direct Christians in the use of means for accomplishing their infinitely desirable end, the salvation of souls. To-night I shall confine my attention to the private efforts of individuals for the conversion and salvation of men. On another occasion, perhaps I shall use the same text in speaking of what is wise in the public preaching of the Gospel, and the labors of ministers. In giving some directions to aid private Christians in this work, I propose,

I. To show Christians how they should deal with careless sinners.

II. How they should deal with awakened sinners.

III. How they should deal with convicted sinners.

I. The manner of dealing with careless sinners.

1. In regard to the time. It is important that you should select a proper time to try to make a serious impression on the mind of a careless sinner. Much depends on timing your efforts right. For if you fail of selecting the most proper time, very probably you will be defeated. True, you may say, it is your duty at all times to warn sinners, and try to awaken them to think of their souls. And so it is; yet if you do not pay due regard to the time and opportunity, your hope of success may be very doubtful.

(1.) It is desirable, if possible, to address a person that is careless, when he is disengaged from other employments. In proportion as his attention is taken up with something else, it will be difficult to awaken him to religion. People who are careless and indifferent to religion are often offended, rather than benefited, by being called off from important and lawful business. For instance, a minister perhaps goes to visit the family of a merchant, or mechanic, or farmer, and finds the man absorbed in his business; perhaps he calls him off from his work when it is urgent, and the man is uneasy and irritable, and feels as if it was an intrusion. In such a case, there is little room to expect any good. Notwithstanding it is true that religion is infinitely more important than all his worldly business, and he ought to postpone everything to the salvation of his soul, yet he does not feel it, for if he did he would no longer be a careless sinner, and therefore he regards it as unjustifiable, and gets offended. You must take him as you find him, a careless, impenitent sinner, and deal with him accordingly. He is absorbed in other things, and very apt to be offended if you take such a time to interfere and call his attention to religion.

(2.) It is important to take a person, if possible, at a time when he is not strongly excited with any other subject. If that is the case, he is in an unfit frame to be addressed on the subject of religion. In proportion to the strength of that excitement, would be the probability that you would do no good. You may possibly reach him; persons have had their minds arrested and turned to religion in the midst of a powerful excitement on other subjects. But it is not likely.

(3.) Be sure that the person is perfectly sober. It used to be more common that it is now for people to drink spirits every day, and become more or less intoxicated. Precisely in proportion as they are so, they are rendered unfit to be approached on the subject of religion. If they have been drinking beer, or cider, or wine, so that you can smell their breath, you may know there is but little chance of producing any lasting effect on them. I have had professors of religion bring persons to me, pretending they were under conviction; for you know that people in liquor are often very fond of talking upon religion; but as soon as I came near them, so as to smell their breath, I have asked, Why do you bring this drunken man to me? Why, they say, he is not drunk, he has only drank a little. Well, that little has made him a little drunk. He is drunk if you can smell his breath. The cases are exceedingly rare where a person has been truly convicted, who had any intoxicating liquor in him.

(4.) If possible, where you wish to converse with a man on the subject of salvation, take him when he is in a good temper. If you find him out of humor, very probably he will get angry and abuse you. Better let him alone for that time, or you will be likely to quench the Spirit. It is possible you may be able to talk in such a way as to cool his temper, but it is not likely. The truth is, men hate God, and though their hatred may be dormant, it is easily excited, and if you bring God fully before their minds when they are already excited with anger, it will be so much the easier to arouse their enmity to open violence.

(5.) If possible, always take an opportunity to converse with careless sinners when they are alone. Most men are too proud to be conversed with freely respecting themselves in the presence of others, even their own family. A man in such circumstances will brace up all his powers to defend himself, while if he was alone he would melt down under the truth. He will resist the truth, or try to laugh it off, for fear that if he should manifest any feeling somebody will go and report that he is serious.

In visiting families, instead of calling the family together at the same time to be talked to, the better way is to see them all, one at a time. There was a case of this kind. Several young ladies, of a proud, gay, and fashionable character, lived together in a fashionable family. Two men were strongly desirous to get the subject of religion before them, but were at a loss how to accomplish it, for fear they would all combine, and counteract or resist every serious impression. At length they took this course. They called and sent up their card to one of the young ladies by name. She came down and they conversed with her on the subject of her salvation, and as she was alone, she not only treated them politely, but seemed to receive the truth with seriousness. A day or two after, they called in like manner on another, and then another, and so on, till they had conversed with every one separately. In a little time they were all, I believe, every one, hopefully converted. This was as it should be, for then they could not keep each other in countenance. And then the impression made on one was followed up with the others, so that one was not left to exert a bad influence over the rest.

There was a pious woman who kept a boarding house for young gentlemen; she had twenty-one or two of them in her family, and at length she became very anxious for their salvation; she made it a subject of prayer, but saw no seriousness among them. At length she saw that there must be something done besides praying, and yet she did not know what to do. One morning after breakfast, as they were retiring, she asked one of them to stop a few minutes. She took him to her room, and conversed with him tenderly on the subject of religion, and prayed with him. She followed up the impression made, and pretty soon he was hopefully converted. Then there were two, and they addressed another, and prayed with him, and soon he was prepared to join them. Then another, and so on, taking one at a time, and letting none of the rest know what was going on, so as not to alarm them, till every one of these young men was converted to God. Now if she had brought the subject before the whole of them together, very likely they would have turned it all into ridicule; or perhaps they would have been offended and left the house, and then she could have had no further influence over them. But taking one alone, and treating him respectfully and kindly, he had no such motive for resistance as arises out of the presence of others.

(6.) Try to seize an opportunity to converse with a careless sinner, when the events of Providence seem to favor your design. If any particular event should occur, calculated to make a serious impression, be sure to improve the occasion faithfully.

(7.) Seize the earliest opportunity to converse with those around you who are careless. Do not put it off from day to day, thinking a better opportunity will come. You must seek an opportunity, and if none offers make one. Appoint a time and place, and get an interview with your friend or neighbor, where you can speak to him freely. Send him a note, go to him on purpose, make it look like a matter of business, as if you were in earnest in endeavoring to promote his soul's salvation. Then he will feel that it is a matter of importance, at least in your eyes. Follow it up till you succeed, or become convinced nothing can now be done.

(8.) If you have any feeling for a particular individual, take an opportunity to converse with that individual while this feeling continues. If it is a truly benevolent feeling, you have reason to believe the Spirit of God is moving you to desire the salvation of his soul, and that God is ready to bless your efforts for his conversion. In such a case, make it the subject of special and importunate prayer, and seek an early opportunity to pour out all your heart to him and bring him to Christ.

2. In regard to the manner of doing all this.

(1.) When you approach a careless individual to endeavor to awaken him to his soul's concerns, be sure to treat him kindly. Let him see that you address him, not because you seek a quarrel with him, but because you love his soul, and desire his best good in time and eternity. If you are harsh and overbearing in your manner, you will probably offend him and drive him farther off from the way of life.

(2.) Be solemn. Avoid all lightness of manner or language. Levity will produce any thing but a right impression. You ought to feel that you are engaged in a very solemn work, which is going to affect the character of your friend or neighbor, and probably determine his destiny for eternity. Who could trifle and use levity in such circumstances if his heart was sincere?

(3.) Be respectful. Some seem to suppose it necessary to be abrupt, and rude, and coarse in their intercourse with the careless and impenitent. Nothing can be a greater mistake. The Apostle Paul has given us a better rule on the subject, where he says, "Be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing." A rude and coarse address is only calculated to give an unfavorable opinion both of you and your religion.

(4.) Be sure to be very plain. Do not suffer yourself to cover up any circumstance of the person's character, and his relations to God. Lay it all open, not for the purpose of offending or wounding him, but because it is necessary. Before you can cure a wound, you must probe it to the bottom. Keep back none of the truth, but let it come out plainly before him.

(5.) Be sure to address his conscience. In public addresses, ministers often get hold of the feelings only, and thus awaken the mind. But in private conversation you cannot do so. You cannot pour out the truth in an impassioned and rousing manner. And unless you address the conscience pointedly, you get no hold of the mind at all.

(6.) Bring the great and fundamental truths to bear upon the person's mind. Sinners are very apt to run off upon some pretext or some subordinate point, especially some point of sectarianism. For instance, if the man is a Presbyterian, he will try to turn the conversation on the points of difference between Presbyterians and Methodists. Or he will fall foul of old school divinity. Do not yield to him, or talk with him on any such point; it will do more hurt than good. Tell him the present business is to save his soul, and not to settle controverted questions in theology. Hold him to the great fundamental points, by which he must be saved or lost.

(7.) Be very patient. If he has a real difficulty in his mind, be very patient till you find out what it is, and then clear it up. If what he alleges is a mere cavil, make him see that it is a cavil. Do not try to answer it by argument, but show him that he is not sincere in advancing it. It is not worth while to spend your time in arguing against a cavil, but make him feel that he is committing sin to plead it, and thus enlist his conscience on your side.

(8.) Be careful to guard your own spirit. There are many people who have not good temper enough to converse with those who are much opposed to religion. And such a person wants no better triumph than to see you angry. He will go away exulting because he has made one of these saints mad.

(9.) If the sinner is inclined to intrench himself against God, be careful not to take his part in anything. If he says he can not do his duty, do not take sides with him, or say any thing to countenance his falsehood. Do not tell him he cannot, or help him maintain himself in the controversy against his Maker. Sometimes a careless sinner will go to finding fault with Christians. Do not take his part or side with him against Christians. Just tell him he has not got their sins to answer for, and he had better see to his own concerns. If you fall in with him, he feels that he has you on his side. Show him that it is a censorious and wicked spirit that prompts him to make these remarks, and not a regard for the honor of religion or the laws of Jesus Christ.

(10.) Bring up the individual's particular sins. Talking in general terms against sin will produce no results. You must make a man feel that you mean him. A minister who cannot make his hearers feel that he means them, cannot expect to accomplish much. Some people are very careful to avoid mentioning the particular sins of which they know the individual to be guilty, for fear of hurting his feelings. This is wrong. If you know his history, bring up his particular sins, kindly but plainly, not to give offence, but to awaken conscience, and give full force to the truth.

(11.) It is generally best to be short, and not spin out what we have to say. Get the attention as soon as you can to the very point, say a few things and press them home, and bring the matter to an issue. If possible, get them to repent and give themselves to Christ at the time. This is the proper issue. Carefully avoid making an impression that you do not expect them to repent NOW.

(12.) If possible, when you converse with sinners, be sure to pray with them. If you converse with them, and leave them without praying, you leave your work undone.

II. The manner of dealing with awakened sinners.

1. You should be careful to distinguish between an awakened sinner, and one who is under conviction. When you find a person who feels a little on the subject of religion, do not take it for granted that he is convicted of sin, and thus omit to use means to show him his sin. Persons are often awakened by some providential circumstance, as sickness, a thunderstorm, pestilence, death in the family, disappointment, or the like, or by the Spirit of God, so that their ears are open, and they are ready to hear on the subject of religion with attention and seriousness, and some feeling. If you find a person awakened, no matter by what means, lose no time in pouring light upon his mind. Do not be afraid, but show him the breadth of the Divine law, and the exceeding strictness of its precepts. Make him see how it condemns his thoughts and life. Search out his heart, find what is there, and bring it up before his mind, as far as you can. If possible, melt him down on the spot. When once you have got a sinner's attention, very often his conviction and conversion is the work of a few moments. You can sometimes do more in five minutes, than in years or a whole life while he is careless or indifferent.

I have been amazed at the conduct of those cruel parents, and other heads of families, who will let an awakened sinner be in their families for days and weeks, and not say a word to him on the subject. Why, they say, if the Spirit of God has begun a work in him, he will certainly carry it on! Perhaps the person is anxious to converse, and puts himself in the way of Christians, as often as possible, expecting they will converse with him, and they do not say a word. Amazing! Such a person ought to be looked out immediately, as soon as he is awakened, and let a blaze of light be poured into his

mind without delay. Whenever you have reason to believe that a person within your reach is awakened, do not sleep till you have poured in the light upon his mind, and tried to bring him to immediate repentance. Then is the time to press the subject with effect. If that favorable moment is lost, it can never be recovered.

I have often seen Christians in revivals, who were constantly on the look-out to see if any persons appeared to be awakened. And as soon as they saw any one begin to manifest feeling under preaching, they would mark him, and as soon as the meeting was out, invite him to a room and converse and pray with him, and if possible not leave him till he was converted. A remarkable case of this kind occurred in a town at the West. A merchant came to the place from a distance to buy goods. It was a time of powerful revival, but he was determined to keep out of its influence, and so he would not go to any meeting at all. At length he found everybody so much engaged in religion that it met him at every turn, and he got vexed, and swore he would go home. There was so much religion there, he said, he could not do any business, and he would not stay. Accordingly he took his seat for the stage, which was to leave at four o'clock the next morning. As he spoke of going away, a gentleman belonging to the house, who was one of the young converts, asked him if he would not go to a meeting once before he left town. He finally consented, and went to the meeting. The sermon took hold of his mind, but not with sufficient power to bring him into the kingdom. He returned to his lodgings, and called the landlord to pay his bill. The landlord, who had himself recently experienced religion, saw that he was agitated. He accordingly spoke to him on the subject of religion, and the man burst into tears. The landlord immediately called in three or four young converts, and they prayed and exhorted him, and at four o'clock in the morning, when the stage called, he went on his way rejoicing in God! When he got home, he called his family together, confessed to them his past sins, and avowed his determination to live differently, and prayed with them for the first time. It was so unexpected that it was soon noised abroad, people began to inquire, and a revival broke out in the place. Now, suppose these Christians had done as some do, been careless, and let the man go off, slightly impressed? It is not probable he ever could have been saved. Such opportunities are often lost for ever, when once the favorable moment is passed.

III. The manner of dealing with convicted sinners.

By a convicted sinner I mean one who feels himself condemned by the law of God, as a guilty sinner. He has so much instruction as to understand something of the extent of God's law, and he sees and feels his guilty state, and knows what his remedy is. To deal with these often requires great wisdom. There are some most trying cases occur, when it is extremely difficult to know what to do with them.

1. When a person is convicted and not converted, but remains in an anxious state, there is generally some specific reason for it. In such cases, it does no good to exhort him to repent, or to explain the law to him. He knows all that, he understands all these general points. But still he does not repent. Now there must be some particular difficulty to overcome. You may preach and pray, and exhort till doomsday, and not gain anything.

You must then set yourself to inquire what is that particular difficulty. A physician, when he is called to a patient, and finds him sick with a particular disease, first administers the general remedies that are applicable to that disease. If they produce no effect, and the disease still continues, he must examine the case, and learn the constitution of the individual, and his habits, diet, manner of living, etc., and see what the matter is that the medicine does not take effect. So it is with the case of a sinner convicted but not converted. If your ordinary instructions and exhortations fail, there must be a difficulty. The particular difficulty is often known to the individual himself, though he keeps it concealed. Sometimes it is something that has escaped even his own observations.

(1.) Sometimes the individual has some idol, something which he loves more than God, which prevents him from giving himself up. You must search out and see what it is that he will not give up. Perhaps it is wealth, perhaps some earthly friend, perhaps gay dress, or gay company, or some favorite amusement. At any rate there is something on which his heart is so set that he will not yield to God.

(2.) Perhaps he has done an injury to some individual, that calls for redress, and he is unwilling to confess it or to make a just recompense. Now, until he will confess and forsake this sin, he can find no mercy. If he has injured the person in

properly, or character, or has abused him, he must make it up. If you can find out, tell him plainly and frankly, that there is no hope for him till he is willing to confess it, and to do what is right.

(3.) Sometimes there is some particular sin, which he will not forsake. He pretends it is only a small one, or tries to persuade himself it is no sin. No matter how small it is, he can never get into the kingdom of God till he gives it up. Sometimes an individual has seen it to be a sin to use tobacco, and he never can find true peace till he gives it up. Perhaps he is looking upon it as a small sin.

But God knows nothing about small sins in such a case. What is the sin? Why it is injuring your health, setting a bad example, and taking God's money, which you are bound to employ in his service, and spending it for tobacco. What would a merchant say, if he found one of his clerks in the habit of going to the money drawer, and taking money enough to keep him in cigars? Would he call it a small offence? No, he would say he deserved to be sent to the State prison. I mention this particular sin, because I have found it to be one of the things to which men who are convicted will hold on when they know it is wrong, and then wonder why they do not find peace.

(4.) See if there is not some work of remuneration, which he is bound to do. Perhaps he has defrauded somebody in trade, or taken some unfair advantage, contrary to the golden rule of doing as you would be done by, and is unwilling to make satisfaction. This is a very common sin among merchants and men of business. I have known many melancholy instances, where men have grieved away the Spirit of God, or else have been driven well nigh to absolute despair because they were unwilling to give satisfaction where they have done such things. Now it is plain that such persons never can have forgiveness until they do it.

(5.) They may have intrenched themselves somewhere, and fortified their minds in regard to some particular point, which they are determined not to yield. For instance, they may have taken strong ground that they will not do a particular thing. I knew a man who was determined not to go into a certain grove to pray. Several other persons during the revival had gone into the grove, and there, by prayer and meditation, given themselves to God. His own clerk had been converted there. The lawyer himself was awakened, but he was determined that he would not go into the grove. He had powerful convictions, and went on for weeks in this way, with no relief. He tried to make God believe that it was not pride that kept him from Christ; and so, when he was going home from meeting, he would kneel down in the street and pray. And not only that, but he would look round for a mud-puddle in the street, in which he might kneel, to show that he was not proud. He once prayed all night in his parlor, but he would not go into the grove. His distress was so great, and he was so angry with God, that he was strongly tempted to make way with himself, and actually threw away his knife for fear he should cut his throat. At length he concluded he would go into the grove and pray, and as soon as he got there he was converted, and went and poured out his full heart to God.

So individuals are sometimes intrenched in a determination that they will not go to a particular meeting, perhaps the inquiry meeting, or some prayer meeting, or they will not have a certain person pray with them, or they will not take a particular seat, such as the anxious seat. They say that they can be converted just as well without yielding this point, for religion does not consist in this, going to a particular meeting, or taking a particular attitude in prayer, or a particular seat. This is true, but by taking this ground they make it the material point. And so long as they are intrenched there, and determined to bring God to their terms, they never can be converted. Sinners will often yield any thing else, and do any thing in the world, but yield the point upon which they have committed themselves, and taken a stand against God. They cannot be humbled until they yield this point, whatever it is. And if without yielding it they get a hope, it will be a false hope.

(6.) Perhaps he has a prejudice against some one, a member of the church perhaps, on account of some faithful dealing with his soul, or something in his business that he did not like, and he hangs on this and will never be converted till he gives it up. Whatever it be, you should search it out and tell him the truth plainly and faithfully.

(7.) He may feel ill will towards some one, or be angry, and cherish strong feelings of resentment, which prevent him from obtaining mercy from God. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also

which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But, if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."

(8.) Perhaps he entertains some errors in doctrine, or some wrong notions respecting the thing to be done, or the way of doing it, which may be keeping him out of the kingdom. Perhaps he is waiting for God. He is convinced that he deserves to go to hell, and that unless he is converted he must go there, but he is waiting for God to do something to him before he submits. He is in fact waiting for God to do for him what he has required the sinner to do.

He may be waiting for more conviction. People often do not know what conviction is, and think they are not under conviction, when in fact they are under powerful conviction. They often think nothing is conviction unless they have great fears of hell. But the fact is, individuals often have strong convictions, who have very little fear of hell. Show them what is the truth, and let them see they have no need to wait.

Perhaps he may be waiting for certain feelings, which somebody else has had before he obtained mercy. This is very common in revivals, where some one of the first converts has told of remarkable experiences. Others who are awakened are very apt to think they must wait for just such feelings. I knew a young man thus awakened; his companion had been converted in a remarkable way, and this one was waiting for just such feelings. He said he was using the means, and praying for them, but finally found that he was a Christian, although he had not been through the course of feeling he expected.

Sinners often lay out a plan of the way they expect to feel, and how they expect to be converted and in fact lay out the work for God, determined that they will go in that path or not at all. Tell them this is all wrong, they must not lay out any such path beforehand, but let God lead them as he sees to be best. God always leads the blind by a way they know not. There never was a sinner brought into the kingdom through such a course of feeling as he expected. Very often they are amazed to find that they are in, and have had no such exercises as they expected.

It is very common for persons to be waiting to be made subjects of prayer, or for some particular means to be used, or to see if they cannot make themselves better. They are so wicked, they say, that they cannot come to Christ. They want to try, by humiliation, and suffering, and prayer, to fit themselves to come. You will have to hunt them out of all these refuges. It is astonishing into how many corners they will often run before they will go to Christ. I have known persons almost deranged for the want of a little correct instruction.

Sometimes such people think their sins are too great to be forgiven, or that they have grieved the Spirit of God away, when that Spirit is all the while convicting them. They pretend their sins are greater than Christ's mercies, thus actually in sulting the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes sinners get the idea that they are given up of God, and that now they cannot be saved. It is often very difficult to beat persons off from this ground. Many of the most distressing cases I have ever met with have been of this character, where persons would insist upon it that they were given up and nothing would change them.

In a place where I was laboring in a revival I went one day into the meeting, and before the exercises commenced I heard a low moaning, distressing, unearthly noise. I looked and saw several women gathered round the person who made it. They said it was a woman in despair. She had been a long time in that state. Her husband was a drunkard. He had brought her to meeting and gone himself to the tavern. I conversed with her and saw her state, and that it was very difficult to reach her case. As I was going away to commence the exercises she said she must go out, for she could not hear praying or singing. I told her she must not go, and told the ladies to detain her, if necessary, by force. I felt that if the devil had hold of her, God was stronger than the devil, and could deliver her. The exercises began, and she made some noise at first. But by and by she looked up. The subject was chosen with special reference to her case, and as it proceeded, her attention was gained, her eyes were fixed--I never shall forget how she looked--her eyes and mouth open, her head up, and she almost rose from her seat as the truth poured in upon her mind. Finally, as the truth knocked away eve

ry foundation on which her despair had rested, she shrieked out, put her head down, and sat perfectly still till the meeting was out. I went to her, and found her perfectly calm and happy in God. I saw her long afterwards, and she remained so. Thus Providence threw her where she never expected to be, and compelled her to hear instruction adapted to her case. You may often do incalculable good by finding out precisely where the difficulty lies, and then bring the truth to bear right on that point.

Sometimes persons will strenuously maintain that they have committed the unpardonable sin. When they get that idea into their minds, they will turn every thing you say against themselves. In some such cases, it is a good way to take them on their own ground, and reason with them in this way; "Suppose you have committed the unpardonable sin, what then? It is reasonable that you should submit to God, and be sorry for your sins, and break off from them, and do all the good you can, even if God will not forgive you. Even if you go to hell you ought to do this." Press this thought and turn it over until you find they understand and consent to it,

It is common for persons in such cases to keep their eyes on themselves; they will shut themselves up and keep looking at their own darkness, instead of looking away to Christ. Now if you can take their minds off from themselves, and get them to think of Christ, you may draw them away from brooding over their own present feelings, and get them to lay hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel.

2. Be careful, in conversing with convicted sinners, not to make any compromise with them on any point where they have a difficulty. If you do, they will be sure to take advantage of it, and thus get a false hope. Convicted sinners often get into a difficulty, in regard to giving up some darling sin, or yielding some point where conscience and the Holy Ghost are at war with them. And if they come across an individual who will yield the point, they feel better and are happy, and think they are converted. The young man who came to Christ was of this character. He had one difficulty, and Jesus Christ knew just what it was. He knew he loved his money, and instead of compromising the matter and thus trying to comfort him, he just put his finger on the very place and told him, "Go sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come follow me." What was the effect? Why the young man went away sorrowful. Very likely, if Christ had told him to do anything else, he would have felt relieved, and would have got a hope; would have professed himself a disciple, joined the church, and gone to hell.

People are often amazingly anxious to make a compromise. They will ask such questions as this, Whether you do not think a person may be a Christian and yet do such and such things; or if he may not be a Christian and not do such and such things? Now, do not yield an inch to any such questions. These questions themselves may often show you the very point that is laboring in their minds. They will show you that it is pride, or love of the world, or something of the kind, which prevents their becoming Christians.

Be careful to make thorough work on this point, the love of the world. I believe there have been more false hopes built on wrong instructions here, than in any other way. I once heard a Doctor of Divinity trying to persuade his hearers to give up the world; and he told them "if they would only give it up, God would give it right back to them again. He is willing you should enjoy the world." Miserable! God never gives back the world to the Christian, in the same sense that he requires a convicted sinner to give it up. He requires us to give up the ownership of everything to him, so that we shall never again for a moment consider it as our own. A man must not think he has a right to judge for himself how much of his property he shall lay out for God. One man thinks he may spend twenty thousand dollars a year to support his family; he has a right to do it, because he has the means of his own. Another thinks he may lay up five hundred thousand dollars. One man said the other day, that he had promised he never would give any of his property to educate young men for the ministry. When he is applied to, he just answers, "I have said I never will give to any such object, and I never will." Man! did Jesus Christ ever tell you to do so with his money? Has he laid down any such rule? Remember it is his money you are talking about, and if he wants it to educate ministers, you withhold it at your peril. That man has yet to learn the first principle of religion, that he is not his own, and that the money which he possesses is Jesus Christ's.

Here is the great reason why the church is so full of false hopes. Men have been left to suppose they could be Christians while holding on to their money. And this has served as a clog to every enterprise. It is an undoubted fact that the church has funds enough to supply the world with Bibles, and tracts, and missionaries, immediately. But the truth is, that p

Professors of religion do not believe that the "earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." Every man supposes he has a right to decide what appropriation he shall make of his own money. And they have no idea that Jesus Christ shall dictate to them on the subject.

Be sure to deal thoroughly on this point. The church is now filled up with hypocrites, because they were never made to give up the world. They never were made to see that unless they made an entire consecration of all to Christ, all their time, all their talents, all their influence, all their possessions, they would never get to heaven. Many think they can be Christians, and yet dream along through life, and use all their time and property for themselves, only giving a little now and then, to save appearances, when they can do it with perfect convenience. But it is a sad mistake, and they will find it so, if they do not employ their energies for God. And when they die, instead of finding heaven at the end of the path they are pursuing, they will find hell there.

In dealing with a convicted sinner, be sure to drive him away from every refuge, and not leave him an inch of ground to stand on, so long as he resists God. This need not take a long time to do. When the Spirit of God is at work striving with a sinner, it is easy to drive him from his refuges. You will find the truth will be like a hammer, crushing wherever it strikes. Make clean work with it, so that he shall give up all for God.

Make the sinner see clearly the nature and extent of the Divine law, and press the main question of entire submission to God. Bear down on that point as soon as you have made him clearly understand what you aim at, and do not turn off upon anything else.

Be careful in illustrating the subject, not to mislead the mind so as to leave the impression that a selfish submission will answer, or a selfish acceptance of the atonement, or a selfish giving up to Christ and receiving him, as if a man was making a good bargain, giving up his sins and receiving salvation in exchange. This is mere barter, and not submission to God. Leave no ground in your explanations or illustrations, for such a view of the matter. Man's selfish heart will eagerly seize such a view of religion, if it be presented, and very likely close in with it, and thus get a false hope.

Another time I shall call your attention to certain things that are to be avoided in dealing with sinners.

REMARKS.

1. Make it an object of constant study and of daily reflection and prayer, to learn how to deal with sinners, so as to promote their conversion. It is the great business on earth of every Christian, to save souls. People often complain that they do not know how to take hold of this matter. Why, the reason is plain enough; they have never studied it. They never took the proper pains to qualify themselves for the work of saving souls. If people made it no more a matter of attention and thought to qualify themselves for their worldly business, than they do to save souls, how do you think they would succeed? Now, if you are thus neglecting the main business of life, what are you living for? If you do not make it a matter of study, how you may most successfully act in building up the kingdom of Christ, you are acting a very wicked and absurd part as a Christian.

2. Many professors of religion do more hurt than good, when they attempt to talk to impenitent sinners. They have so little knowledge and skill, that their remarks rather divert attention than increase it.

3. Be careful to find the point where the Spirit of God is pressing a sinner, and press the same point in all your remarks. If you divert his attention from that point, you will be in great danger of destroying his convictions. Take pains to learn the state of his mind, what he is thinking of, how he feels, and what he feels most deeply upon, and then press that thoroughly, and do not divert his mind by talking about anything else. Do not fear to press that point, for fear of driving him to distraction. Some people fear to press a point to which the mind is tremblingly alive, lest they should injure the mind, notwithstanding the Spirit of God is evidently debating that point with the sinner. This is an attempt to be wiser than God. You should clear up the point, throw the light of truth all around it, and bring the soul to yield, and then the mind is at rest.

4. Great evils have arisen, and many false hopes have been created, by not discriminating between an awakened and a convicted sinner. For the want of this, persons who are only awakened are immediately pressed to submit; "you must repent," "submit to God," when they are not in fact convinced of their guilt, nor instructed so far as even to know what submission means. This is one way in which revivals have been greatly injured by indiscriminate exhortations to repent, unaccompanied with proper instruction.

5. Anxious sinners are to be regarded as being in a very solemn and critical state. They have in fact come to a turning point. It is a time when their destiny is likely to be settled for ever. The Spirit of God will not strive always. Christians ought to feel deeply for them. In many respects their circumstances are more solemn than the judgment day. Here their destiny is settled. The judgment day reveals it. And the particular time when it is done is when the Spirit is striving with them. Christians should remember their awful responsibility at such times. The physician, if he knows any thing of his duty, sometimes feels himself under a very solemn responsibility. His patient is in a critical state, where a little error will destroy life, and he hangs quivering between life and death. If such responsibility is felt in relation to the body, what awful responsibility should be felt in relation to the soul, when it is seen to hang trembling on a point, and its destiny is now to be decided. One false impression, one indiscreet remark, one sentence misunderstood, a slight diversion of mind may wear him the wrong way, and his soul is lost. Never was an angel employed in a more solemn work than that of dealing with sinners who are under conviction. How solemnly and carefully then should Christians walk, how wisely and skillfully work, if they do not mean to be the means of damning a soul!

FINALLY. --If there is a sinner in this house, let me say to him, Abandon all your excuses. You have been told to-night that they are all vain. To-night it will be told in hell, and told in heaven, and echoed from the ends of the universe, what you decide to do. This very hour may seal your eternal destiny. Will you submit to God to-night--NOW?

Re: LECTURE X - TO WIN SOULS REQUIRES WISDOM by Charles Finney - posted by RobertW (), on: 2004/12/23 8:16

In this lecture Charles Finney gives counsel on dealing with the three basic categories of the unrepentant:

- 1) Careless Sinners
- 2) Awakened Sinners
- 3) Convicted Sinners

Finney demonstrates from Proverbs 11:30 in both this lecture and the next lecture the necessity of godly wisdom in winning the lost. If you listen closely, you will hear how he personally deals with each respective category. I have personally been greatly challenged by this and the following lecture (XI) as a soul winner and a minister.

I was pondering lecture X and XI in my heart this morning and came to a conclusion as to why we do not see revival or genuine regeneration in our day as was in the days of Whitfield, Wesley, Finney, etc. Often there is no real bringing an unrepentant sinner to the point where they understand exactly what it is that they are trading for Jesus Christ and in turn, giving in exchange for their soul. Finney would probe until he uncovered exactly what it was and then he would press the point. I can almost hear a person walking away from him saying, "I am exchanging my soul for _____." Finney would take on the person's conscience in a powerful way. All the while completely leaning upon the Holy Spirit for wisdom and having prayed for an outpouring of Holy Ghost conviction. Imagine Finney ministering to a person or congregation as Daniel Nash was in the basement or a cellar some place crying out to God. No wonder people fell from their seats under the weight of their sin or had to be carried out nearly unconscious.

I particularly like the analogy he uses of how a physician responds and behaves when a person is near death. How much more sensitive to God and careful should we be when a person's eternal soul is on the line? I am personally being challenged to begin to minister in a more direct way as did our Lord and the Apostles. I pray that God will send great conviction of sin and a multitude of Finney's or such as He sees fit.

God Bless,

-Robert

Re: - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2004/12/23 12:17

Yes, lectures 9,10, & 11 are very challenging. As I have read these I see how important it is to rely on the Holy Spirit to lead and not to just follow some formula in one-on-one witnessing as is so often taught in evangelism classes. While the principles taught in the classes can be valuable tools, much more is needed to reach the lost.

We need to ask questions to get an understanding of which of Finney's categories a person fits into. Also we need to ask questions to see what areas of their lives the Holy Spirit has been dealing with them on, and to work with the Holy Spirit in applying Scriptures that deal directly with those areas of concern.

This requires that we call upon the wisdom and grace of God right there in the moment of battle for that lost soul. It requires that our hearts be prepared to minister the love of God in the grace of God and that we have a thorough knowledge of the word of God. Much quiet time in study and prayer is essential.

As I write this I am convicted of my own lack in these areas, God give me a deeper passion for Jesus so that His love may be revealed through my life to the lost.

In Christ,

Ron

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2004/12/23 12:41

Quote:
-----As I write this I am convicted of my own lack in these areas, God give me a deeper passion for Jesus so that His love may be revealed through my life to the lost.

Amen.