

Charles G. Finney:

BELOVED BRETHREN:

In my last I intimated that I had several more suggestions to make, in regard to the instruction needed by different classes of converts. The conviction in my mind is fully ripe, that religious teachers cannot lay too much stress upon the indispensable necessity of the constantly indwelling presence and influence of the Holy Spirit, to preserve the piety of Christians. I want exceedingly to say much to my brethren, on the necessity of ministers having the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and how utterly unable they will find themselves to be to give the requisite spiritual instruction without it. But what I wish to say at present is, that all our instructions should tend to this one great end, to promote the indwelling and influence of the Holy Spirit in the heart. Any thing that quenches the Spirit, will invariably destroy the convert's piety. Any thing that will secure His indwelling and influences, will confirm and perpetuate the convert's piety. Now the grand inquiry is, how shall converts be kept from grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit? How shall they be led, in the fullest, and most perfect, and constant manner, to abide in Him, and He in them? It is very obvious, that different classes of persons are exposed to different kinds and degrees of temptation, that their weights and besetting sins are as various as their circumstances, habits, education, modes of thinking, employments, health, constitutional temperament, &c.

Now, beloved brethren, it has long appeared to me to be of the utmost importance, nay, of indispensable necessity, that ministers should look upon themselves, and be regarded by others, as a class of persons set apart to watch for souls in a much higher sense, than seems generally to have been understood, and that we should, so far as possible, in breaking the bread of life, give to each his portion in due season. This cannot be done but by looking narrowly into the circumstances of different individuals, and classes of individuals, in respect to their trials and temptations, that we may be able, as far as possible, to enter into the details of their Christian history and experience, so as to feed them with that knowledge which is indispensable to their growth in grace.

Male heads of families need instruction on many points peculiar to their relations and circumstances. They ought to feel and we ought to feel, as if it was our business, to inquire affectionately and particularly into all their habits in the relations they sustain to their families, to the Church, and to the world; to ascertain on what principles they conduct their business, in what manner and with what intentions; whether they are selfish, or entirely benevolent in their business; what influence they are exerting over business men, and what influence they are exerting to bring back the business transactions of the world to the standard of the law of God; what their political principles, in reference to party strifes and party questions, are; whether or not, they are aspiring to office, or whether they are cleaving to a party, without regard to principle; in what manner they demean themselves towards those who are in their employment; how their clerks, apprentices, or laborers are regarded and treated by them. In short, it seems to me, that we are to interest ourselves in whatever interests them, and interests Zion; and to watch over, and warn, and reprove, and encourage, and instruct them, in regard to every thing that has a bearing upon their spiritual interests.

Female heads of families also need instruction, warning and reproof, peculiar to themselves. Young men, young women, and children, all need peculiar instruction, suited to all the circumstances in which they may be placed.

I know there is a difficulty in a minister's finding time to enter fully into the details of the history, circumstances, and wants of the different individuals in his congregation; but might not much more of this be done, than really is done? And if ministers were more particularly acquainted with the wants of all classes, would not their preaching be immensely more practical and influential than it is? If meetings of inquiry were holden for different classes of professing Christians; male heads of families, female heads of families, young men, young women, merchants, lawyers, and in short, whatever classes there are in a church; and an affectionate but searching inquiry instituted in respect to all that concerns their religious character and influence, and then a course of preaching instituted that should keep pace with the developed wants and circumstances of the Church, how immensely different would the results be from those that are commonly witnessed after a season of the outpouring of the Spirit. How much every one needs to be watched over and warned, in respect to the thousands of ways in which they may quench the Holy Spirit. And O, how jealous and eagle-eyed should a watchman be, to guard every convert against every thing that can quench the tender breathings of the Spirit in his soul.

See that young woman. O how much she needs to have a plain, and searching, and personal conversation with

her pastor. How much she needs to be told what will be the result of her affectation, gay dressing, tight lacing, and the thousand foolish and Spirit-grieving things in which young women are apt to indulge.

I cannot now enter farther into particulars. It is manifest, that the old and the young, the middle aged, the robust and infirm, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the student and the laborer, all, have peculiar besetments, trials, and temptations, to which their attention needs to be particularly directed. And unless this be done by private interview, by letter, or in some other way, particularly and thoroughly done, they will inevitably disgrace religion, and fall into temptation and the snare of the devil. It should be constantly insisted, that they are expected to live wholly without sin; that this is demanded of them; that sufficient grace is proffered to them, to secure them against every kind and degree of sin. The utmost stress should be laid upon this, and no sin should be made light of; but they should be taught constantly, that it is "an evil and bitter thing to sin against the Lord;" and so instructed, as to feel as much shocked at the idea of sinning at all, as they would at the idea of theft, or drunkenness, or adultery. If they are allowed to suppose that a great deal of sin is to be expected of course of them; under such instruction it is vain to expect them to grow in grace. Until ministers will lay immensely more stress than they do upon the principle of total abstinence from sin in the churches, they have no reason to be surprised, that sin and moral desolation overspread the spiritual heritage of God. Where ministers, by their lives, their habits, and their preaching, leave the impression, that as a matter of fact, much sin is to be expected of them as long as they live; and indeed, where they do not lay themselves out with all their might to make the directly opposite impression from this, they may thank themselves for the results, when Christ is 'crucified afresh among them, and put to an open shame.'

Beloved brethren, it appears to me, that the state of religion in the Church, as a whole, very nearly corresponds with the teaching of the ministry. By the teachings of the ministry, I mean, that which upon the whole, they inculcate. Their teachings are made up of their public and private instructions; together with their daily walk, conversation, and habits of life.

And now, brethren, permit me to ask, without offence, whether there is not as little backsliding, and upon the whole, as much piety in the Church as might be expected under the influence of such a ministry as we are. Suppose that in the cause of temperance, our instructions, both by precept and example in regard to total abstinence from alcoholic drinks, were just what they are in regard to total abstinence from sin in all its forms--what might be expected to be the standard of temperance principles and habits, in our congregations. And who does not see, that unless we give the whole weight and power of our preaching, private instructions, public and private example, to the cause of total abstinence from all sin, that the tide of iniquity will overflow its banks, and desolate the Church of God.

Your brother in the bonds of the gospel,

C.G.FINNEY