

Charles G. Finney:

"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." 1 Timothy 4:16.

I beg leave in this article to suggest to my younger brethren in the ministry some thoughts on the philosophy of so preaching the gospel as to secure the salvation of souls. They are the result of much study, much prayer for divine teaching, and a practical experience of many years.

I understand the admonition at the head of this article to relate to the matter, order, and manner of preaching.

The problem is, how shall we win souls wholly to Christ? Certainly we must win them away from themselves.

1st. They are free moral agents, of course rational, accountable.

2nd. They are in rebellion against God, wholly alienated, intensely prejudiced, and committed against Him.

3rd. They are committed to self-gratification as the end of their being.

4th. This committed state is moral depravity, the fountain of sin within them, from which flow by a natural law all their sinful ways. This committed voluntary state is their "wicked heart." This it is that needs a radical change.

5th. God is infinitely benevolent, and unconverted sinners are supremely selfish, so that they are radically opposed to God. Their committal to the gratification of their appetites and propensities is known in Bible language as the "carnal mind"; or, as in the margin, "the minding of the flesh," which is enmity against God.

6th. This enmity is voluntary, and must be overcome, if at all, by the Word of God, made effectual by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

7th. The gospel is adapted to this end, and when wisely presented we may confidently expect the effectual cooperation of the Holy Spirit. This is implied in our commission, "Go and disciple all nations, and lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

8th. If we are unwise, illogical, unphilosophical, and out of all natural order in presenting the gospel, we have no warrant for expecting divine cooperation.

9th. In winning souls, as in everything else, God works through and in accordance with natural laws. Hence, if we would win souls we must wisely adapt means to this end. We must present those truths and in that order adapted to the natural laws of mind, of thought and mental action. A false mental philosophy will greatly mislead us, and we shall often be found ignorantly working against the agency of the Holy Spirit.

10th. Sinners must be convicted of their enmity. They do not know God, and consequently are often ignorant of the opposition of their hearts to Him. "By the law is the knowledge of sin," because by the law the sinner gets his first true idea of God. By the law he first learns that God is perfectly benevolent, and infinitely opposed to all selfishness. This law, then, should be arrayed in all its majesty against the selfishness and enmity of the sinner.

11th. This law carries irresistible conviction of its righteousness, and no moral agent can doubt it.

12th. All men know that they have sinned, but all are not convicted of the guilt and ill desert of sin. The many are careless and do not feel the burden of sin, the horrors and terrors of remorse, and have not a sense of condemnation and of being lost.

13th. But without this they cannot understand or appreciate the gospel method of salvation. One cannot intelligently and heartily ask or accept a pardon until he sees and feels the fact and justice of his condemnation.

14th. It is absurd to suppose that a careless, unconvicted sinner can intelligently and thankfully accept the gospel offer of pardon until he accepts the righteousness of God in his condemnation. Conversion to Christ is an intelligent change. Hence the conviction of ill desert must precede the acceptance of mercy; for without this conviction the soul does not understand its need of mercy. Of course, the offer is rejected. The gospel is no glad tidings to the careless, unconvicted sinner.

15th. The spirituality of the law should be unsparingly applied to the conscience until the sinner's self-righteousness is annihilated, and he stands speechless and self-condemned before a holy God.

16th. In some men this conviction is already ripe, and the preacher may at once present Christ, with the hope of His being accepted; but at ordinary times such cases are exceptional. The great mass of sinners are careless, unconvicted, and to assume their conviction and preparedness to receive Christ, and, hence, to urge sinners immediately to accept Him, is to begin at the wrong end of our work, to render our teaching unintelligible. And such a course will be found to have been a mistaken one, whatever present appearances and professions may indicate. The sinner may obtain a hope under such teaching; but, unless the Holy Spirit supplies something which the preacher has failed to do, it will be found to be a false one. All the essential links of truth must be supplied.

17th. When the law has done its work, annihilated self-righteousness, and shut the sinner up to the acceptance of mercy, he should be made to understand the delicacy and danger of dispensing with the execution of the penalty when the precept of law has been violated.

18th. Right here the sinner should be made to understand that from the benevolence of God he cannot justly infer that God can consistently forgive him. For unless public justice can be satisfied, the law of universal benevolence forbids the forgiveness of sin. If public justice is not regarded in the exercise of mercy, the good of the public is sacrificed to that of the individual. God will never do this.

19th. This teaching will shut the sinner up to look for some offering to public justice.

20th. Now give him the atonement as a revealed fact, and shut him up to Christ as his own sin offering. Press the revealed fact that God has accepted the death of Christ as a substitute for the sinner's death, and that this is to be received upon the testimony of God.

21st. Being already crushed into contrition by the convicting power of the law, the revelation of the love of God manifested in the death of Christ will naturally beget great self-loathing, and that godly sorrow that needeth not to be repented of. Under this showing the sinner can never forgive himself. God is holy and glorious; and he a sinner, saved by sovereign grace. This teaching may be more or less formal as the souls you address are more or less thoughtful, intelligent, and careful to understand.

22nd. It was not by accident that the dispensation of law preceded the dispensation of grace; but it is in the natural order of things, in accordance with established mental laws, and evermore the law must prepare the way for the gospel. To overlook this in instructing souls is almost certain to result in false hope, the introduction of a false standard of Christian experience, and to fill the Church with spurious converts. Time will make this plain.

23rd. The truth should be preached to the persons present, and so personally applied as to compel everyone to feel that you mean him or her. As has been often said of a certain preacher: "He does not preach, but explains what other people preach, and seems to be talking directly to me."

24th. This course will rivet attention, and cause your hearers to lose sight of the length of your sermon. They will tire if they feel no personal interest in what you say. To secure their individual interest in what you are saying is an indispensable condition of their being converted. And, while their individual interest is thus awakened, and held fast to your subject, they will seldom complain of the length of your sermon. In nearly all cases, if the people complain of the length of our sermons, it is because we fail to interest them personally in what we say.

25th. If we fail to interest them personally, it is either because we do not address them personally, or because we lack unction and earnestness, or because we lack clearness and force, or certainly because we lack something that we ought to possess. To make them feel that we and that God means them is indispensable.

26th. Do not think that earnest piety alone can make you successful in winning souls. This is only one condition of success. There must be common sense, there must be spiritual wisdom in adapting means to the end. Matter and manner and order and time and place all need to be wisely adjusted to the end we have in view.

27th. God may sometimes convert souls by men who are not spiritually minded, when they possess that natural sagacity which enables them to adapt means to that end; but the Bible warrants us in affirming that these are

exceptional cases. Without this sagacity and adaptation of means to this end a spiritual mind will fail to win souls to Christ.

28th. Souls need instruction in accordance with the measure of their intelligence. A few simple truths, when wisely applied and illuminated by the Holy Ghost, will convert children to Christ. I say wisely applied, for they too are sinners, and need the application of the law, as a schoolmaster, to bring them to Christ, that they may be justified by faith. It will sooner or later appear that supposed conversions to Christ are spurious where the preparatory law work has been omitted, and Christ has not been embraced as a Savior from sin and condemnation.

29th. Sinners of education and culture, who are, after all, unconvicted and skeptical in their hearts, need a vastly more extended and thorough application of truth. Professional men need the gospel net to be thrown quite around them, with no break through which they can escape; and, when thus dealt with, they are all the more sure to be converted in proportion to their real intelligence. I have found that a course of lectures addressed to lawyers, and adapted to their habits of thought and reasoning, is most sure to convert them.

30th. To be successful in winning souls, we need to be observing to study individual character, to press the facts of experience, observation, and revelation upon the consciences of all classes.

31st. Be sure to explain the terms you use. Before I was converted, I failed to hear the terms repentance, faith, regeneration, and conversion intelligibly explained. Repentance was described as a feeling. Faith was represented as an intellectual act or state, and not as a voluntary act of trust. Regeneration was represented as some physical change in the nature, produced by the direct power of the Holy Ghost, instead of a voluntary change of the ultimate preference of the soul, produced by the spiritual illumination of the Holy Ghost. Even conversion was represented as being the work of the Holy Ghost in such a sense as to cover up the fact that it is the sinner's own act, under the persuasions of the Holy Ghost.

32nd. Urge the fact that repentance involves the voluntary and actual renunciation of all sin; that it is a radical change of mind toward God.

33rd. Also the fact that saving faith is heart trust in Christ; that it works by love, it purifies the heart, and overcomes the world; that no faith is saving that has not these attributes.

34th. The sinner is required to put forth certain mental acts. What these are he needs to understand. Error in mental philosophy but embarrasses, and may fatally deceive the inquiring soul. Sinners are often put upon a wrong track. They are put upon a strain to feel instead of putting forth the required acts of will. Before my conversion I never received from man any intelligible idea of the mental acts that God required of me.

35th. The deceitfulness of sin renders the inquiring soul exceedingly exposed to delusion; therefore it behoves teachers to beat about every bush, and to search out every nook and corner where a soul can find a false refuge. Be so thorough and discriminating as to render it as nearly impossible as the nature of the case will admit that the inquirer should entertain a false hope.

36th. Do not fear to be thorough. Do not through false pity put on a plaster where the probe is needed. Do not fear that you shall discourage the convicted sinner, and turn him back, by searching him out to the bottom. If the Holy Spirit is dealing with him, the more you search and probe the more impossible it will be for the soul to turn back or rest in sin.

37th. If you would save the soul, do not spare a right hand, or right eye, or any darling idol; but see to it that every form of sin is given up. Insist upon full confession of wrong to all that have a right to confession. Insist upon full restitution, so far as is possible, to all injured parties. Do not fall short of the express teachings of Christ on this subject. Whoever the sinner may be, let him distinctly understand that unless he forsakes all that he has he cannot be the disciple of Christ. Insist upon entire and universal consecration of all the powers of body and mind, and of all the property, possessions, character, and influence to God. Insist upon the total abandonment to God of all ownership of self, or anything else, as a condition of being accepted.

38th. Understand yourself, and, if possible, make the sinner understand, that nothing short of this is involved in true faith or true repentance, and that true consecration involves them all.

39th. Keep constantly before the sinner's mind that it is the personal Christ with whom he is dealing, that God in Christ is seeking his reconciliation to Himself, and that the condition of his reconciliation is that he gives up

his will and his whole being to God, that he "leave not a hoof behind."

40th. Assure him that "God has given to him eternal life, and this life is in His Son"; that "Christ is made unto him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption"; and that from first to last he is to find his whole salvation in Christ.

41st. When satisfied that the soul intelligently receives all this doctrine, and the Christ herein revealed, then remember that he must persevere unto the end, as the further condition of his salvation. Here you have before you the great work of preventing the soul from backsliding, of securing its permanent sanctification and sealing for eternal glory.

42nd. Does not the very common backsliding in heart of converts indicate some grave defect in the teachings of the pulpit on this subject?

What does it mean that so many hopeful converts, within a few months of their apparent conversion, lose their first love, lose all their fervency in religion, neglect their duty, and live on in name Christians, but in spirit and life worldlings?

43rd. A truly successful preacher must not only win souls to Christ, but must keep them won. He must not only secure their conversion, but their permanent sanctification.

44th. Nothing in the Bible is more expressly promised in this life than permanent sanctification. 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." This is unquestionably a prayer of the apostle for permanent sanctification in this life, with an express promise that He who has called us will do it.

45th. We learn from the Scriptures that "after we believe" we are, or may be, sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, and that this sealing is the earnest of our salvation. Ephesians 1:13, 14: "In whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." This sealing, this earnest of our inheritance, is that which renders our salvation sure. Hence, in Ephesians 4:30, the apostle says: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." And in 2 Corinthians 1:21 and 22 the apostle says: "Now He which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, who hath also sealed us and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." Thus we are established in Christ and anointed by the Spirit, and also sealed by the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. And this, remember, is a blessing that we receive after that we believe, as Paul has informed us in his Epistle to the Ephesians, above quoted. Now, it is of the first importance that converts should be taught not to rest short of this permanent sanctification, this sealing, this being established in Christ by the special anointing of the Holy Ghost.

46th. Now, brethren, unless we know what this means by our own experience, and lead converts to this experience, we fail most lamentably and essentially in our teaching. We leave out the very cream and fullness of the Gospel.

47th. It should be understood that while this experience is rare amongst ministers it will be discredited by the Churches, and it will be next to impossible for an isolated preacher of this doctrine to overcome the unbelief of his Church. They will feel doubtful about it, because so few preach it or believe in it; and will account for their pastor's insisting upon it by saying that his experience is owing to his peculiar temperament, and thus they will fail to receive this anointing because of their unbelief. Under such circumstances it is all the more necessary to insist much upon the importance and privilege of permanent sanctification.

48th. Sin consists in carnal-mindedness, in "obeying the desires of the flesh and of the mind." Permanent sanctification consists in entire and permanent consecration to God. It implies the refusal to obey the desires of the flesh or of the mind. The baptism or sealing of the Holy Spirit subdues the power of the desires, and strengthens and confirms the will in resisting the impulse of desire, and in abiding permanently in a state of making the whole being an offering to God.

49th. If we are silent upon this subject, the natural inference will be that we do not believe in it, and, of course, that we know nothing about it in experience. This will inevitably be a stumbling block to the Church.

50th. Since this is undeniably an important doctrine, and plainly taught in the gospel, and is, indeed, the marrow and fatness of the gospel, to fail in teaching this is to rob the Church of its richest inheritance.

51st. The testimony of the Church, and to a great extent of the ministry, on the subject has been lamentably defective. This legacy has been withheld from the Church, and is it any wonder that she so disgracefully backslides? The testimony of the comparatively few, here and there, that insist upon this doctrine is almost nullified by the counter-testimony or culpable silence of the great mass of Christ's witnesses.

52nd. My dear brethren, my convictions are so ripe and my feelings so deep upon this subject that I must not conceal from you my fears that lack of personal experience, in many cases, is the reason of this great defect in preaching the gospel. I do not say this to reproach you; it is not in my heart to do so. It is not wonderful that many of you, at least, have not this experience. Your religious training has been defective. You have been led to take a different view of this subject. Various causes have operated to prejudice you against this blessed doctrine of the glorious gospel. You have not intellectually believed it; and, of course, have not received Christ in His fullness into your hearts. Perhaps this doctrine to you has been a stumbling block and a rock of offense; but I pray you let not prejudice prevail, but venture upon Christ by a present acceptance of Him as your wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, and see if He will not do for you exceeding abundantly above all that you asked or thought.

53rd. No man, saint or sinner, should be left by us to rest or be quiet in the indulgence of any sin. No one should be allowed to entertain the hope of heaven, if we can prevent it, who lives in the indulgence of known sin in any form. Our constant demand and persuasion should be, "Be ye holy, for God is holy." "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Let us remember the manner in which Christ concludes His memorable Sermon on the Mount. After spreading out those awfully searching truths before His hearers, and demanding that they should be perfect, as their Father in heaven was perfect, He concludes by assuring them that no one could be saved who did not receive and obey His teachings. Instead of attempting to please our people in their sins, we should continually endeavor to hunt and persuade them out of their sins. Brethren, let us do it, as we would not have our skirts defiled with their blood. If we pursue this course and constantly preach with unction and power, and abide in the fullness of the doctrine of Christ, we may joyfully expect to save ourselves and them that hear us.