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Worldly Amusements - Finney - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2006/7/31 23:46

WORLDLY AMUSEMENTS

BY PRESIDENT CHARLES G. FINNEY.

THE INDEPENDENT.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26, 1872

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.

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."

Re: Worldly Amusements - Finney, on: 2006/8/1 3:13

Dear Brother Paul, Thank you for posting this. I have read much of Finneys works and am always encouraged by them. How would you or any of the other posters summarize what Charles Finney has taught in this article? Lord bless, John

Re: Worldly Amusements - Finney - posted by Tears_of_joy, on: 2006/8/1 7:13

Wonderful article!

The fullness of the Spirit will answer all your questions and settle all your problems about worldly amusements. Never again will you have to ask, "Is it right to go here? Is it wrong to go there? May I attend the theatre? What harm is there in the dance? May I play cards?" You will be so filled with Him that you will not want the world. It will be the expulsive power of a new affection. The new will expel the old. You will find your greatest delight in God's service, and you will discover that you are miserable and unhappy in the world.

-Oswald Smith (The Enduement of Power)

Re: Worldly Amusements - Finney - posted by crsschk (), on: 2006/8/1 10:05

Quote:
-----... 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.

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Glad for that addendum

Quote:
-----I have seen many illustrations of this mistake. Christians should live so far above the world as not to need or seek its pleasures

Quote:
-----live above a desire

Quote:
-----not to feel the necessity

Quote:
-----the downward tendency of their souls

Bereft of these things and you are off on a tangent of legalism. The tone of this can come across all wrong, as it seems too ... The usual would be to separate out into camps of 'for/against', 'compromise/legalist' but that is far too easy. The looming question is more cutting at what the heart desires.

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh. Col 2:20-23

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 1Jo 2:15,16

Seems what is more telling is what can be done away with, without fanfare, without mention or notice, without concern or

r seeking after acclaim for 'take notice of what I do not do' or as Colossians puts it 'giving an appearance of' one way or the other i.e. ...

God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

On the other hand, that so much of this has been taken to the extreme in this day, the time that Finney wrote seems to apply less now to the concerns of the bottom line in one regard; That now these matters are no longer strange bedfellows but accepted props for the church that must be *entertaining*. God alone not enough to hold the attention span, let alone generate any excitement, awe or wonder.

With infinite possibilities at each and every moment, to awake each morning with everything new, to be given the privilege of prayer, the awareness of the incredible miracle, *Christ in you* ... To ponder the multitude of overlooked 'minor miracles', the things that *seem* so utterly common, "coincidences" we subtly have regulated to the subconscious, answers to prayer that are taken for granted being so un-grandiose as to warrant no attention. The minuteness of ...

Mat 10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.
Mat 10:30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

And not have great gratitude swelling up within. Worship? Thankfulness? Not a morning goes by that I am not thanking God that even my dear beloved cat was not struck by a car, that an opportunity presents itself for all those I love to turn to the Lord and seek Him and the privilege to pray that they might come to do so. That once again the day is presented to have the disposition altered, wrong thought's corrected and put to death, to present everything more at the required level of pure honesty and that He be all in all. To help the saints in whatever way possible, even to suffer gladly for His sake (and have no pride of it), quite different than suffering for our own mistakes... This life is vast and incredible and awe in spiring. Weariness, trouble, toil, difficulty, part and parcel, challenges and hard work physically, mentally, but even more so spiritually...

There is no 'entertainment' in the world that doesn't pale by way of comparison. It seems this age and the church has gone to dumbing down most everything and settling for alternative or 'extra' measures to buttress what is lacking and largely that is by way of ceasing to *think* and to *ponder* long on the enormity of Who God is.

Re: Worldly Amusements - Finney - posted by Compton (), on: 2006/8/1 10:09

It is interesting to consider that this article was written in a time when people didn't have the ocean of amusements we have today. (Edit: even churches use these things as "ministry"...)

Yet this is profound:

Quote:
-----...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,..."

I find this concern is very serious even for our own families. We parents are portrayed in popular media as needing to 'relate' to our children's desire to be entertained, to be their buddies and to get excited about their attraction to snowboarding or videogames or whatever in order to prove we care. This is such a foolish and hurtful sense of "duty."

Quote:
-----...let no man think to gain a really Christian influence over another by manifesting a sympathy with his worldly aspirations.

MC

Re: Worldly Amusements - Finney - posted by MSeaman (), on: 2006/8/1 12:33

Thanks for posting this Paul. I so want to get to the point that worldly distractions don't affect me at all.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2006/8/1 12:54

Quote:
-----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 a
n enjoyment so spiritual and heavenly as to render the low pursuits and joys of worldly men disagreeable and repulsive.

I think this statement by Charles Finney clarifies his position not just as one of rejecting those things of the world but rather showing that our love for the things of heaven should be so high in comparison that we begin to distaste some of the things of this world. The popular idiom is: "to be so heavenly minded we are of no earthly use."

Re: Worldly Amusements - Finney - posted by Tears_of_joy, on: 2007/12/9 1:13

The Mission of Amusement Produces No Converts by Charles Spurgeon (written in 1887)

An evil resides in the professed camp of the Lord so gross in its impudence that the most shortsighted can hardly fail to notice it. During the past few years it has developed at an abnormal rate even for evil. It has worked like leaven until the whole lump ferments. **The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the Church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them.** From speaking out as the Puritans did, the Church has gradually toned down her testimony, then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she tolerated them in her borders. Now she has adopted them under the plea of reaching the masses.

My first contention is that providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in the Scriptures as a function of the Church. If it is a Christian work why did not Christ speak of it? **Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.** That is clear enough. So it would have been if He has added, **and provide amusement for those who do not relish the gospel.** No such words, however, are to be found. It did not seem to occur to Him. Then again, **He gave some apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry.** Where do entertainers come in? The Holy Spirit is silent concerning them. Were the prophets persecuted because they amused the people or because they refused? The concert has no martyr roll.

Again, providing amusement is in direct antagonism to the teaching and life of Christ and all His apostles. What was the attitude of the Church to the world? **Ye are the salt, not sugar candy—something the world will spite out, not swallow.** Short and sharp was the utterance, **Let the dead bury their dead.** He was in awful earnestness!

Had Christ introduced more of the bright and pleasant elements into His mission, He would have been more popular when they went back, because of the searching nature of His teaching. I do not hear Him say, **Run after these people, Peter, and tell them we will have a different style of service tomorrow, something short and attractive with little preaching. We will have a pleasant evening for the people. Tell them they will be sure to enjoy it. Be quick, Peter, we must get the people somehow!** **Jesus pitied sinners, sighed and wept over them, but never sought to amuse them.** In vain will the Epistles be searched to find any trace of the gospel amusement. Their message is, **Come out, keep out, keep clean out!** Anything approaching fooling is conspicuous by its absence. They had boundless confidence in the gospel and employed no other weapon.

After Peter and John were locked up for preaching, the Church had a prayer meeting, but they did not pray, **Lord grant Thy servants that by a wise and discriminating use of innocent recreation we may show these people how happy we are.** If they ceased not for preaching Christ, they had not time for arranging entertainments. Scattered by persecution, they went everywhere preaching the gospel. They **turned the world upside down.** That is the difference! **Lord, clear the Church of all the rot and rubbish the devil has imposed on her and bring us back to apostolic methods.**

Lastly, the mission of amusement fails to affect the end desired. It works havoc among young converts. Let the careless and scoffers, who thank God because the Church met them halfway, speak and testify. Let the heavy-laden who found peace through the concert not keep silent! Let the drunkard to whom the dramatic entertainment has been God's link in the chain of their conversion, stand up! There are none to answer. **The mission of amusement produces no converts. The need of the hour for today's ministry is believing scholarship joined with earnest spirituality, the one spiri**

nging from the other as fruit from the root. The need is biblical doctrine, so understood and felt, that it sets men on fire.

-Charles Spurgeon (1887)

Re: - posted by tjservant (), on: 2007/12/9 10:20

Quote:
-----The need of the hour for today's ministry is believing scholarship joined with earnest spirituality, the one springing from the other a
s fruit from the root. The need is biblical doctrine, so understood and felt, that it sets men on fire.

Amen!

Thanks Kire. This is an excellent addition to an already splendid thread.