

How to Prevent Our Employments From Injuring Our Souls

by Charles Finney

Charles Finney's sermon teaches how to engage in lawful employment diligently while ensuring it does not hinder one's spiritual life.

Scripture: Romans 12:11, Colossians 3:23

Topics: "Diligence in Work", "Spirituality in Daily Life"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the necessity of diligence in our employments, arguing that idleness is incompatible with true religion and love for God. He asserts that every individual is called to engage in lawful work that benefits both themselves and society, and that diligence in one's calling is essential for spiritual growth. Finney warns against allowing secular or spiritual employments to become snares for the soul, urging believers to maintain a fervent spirit while serving the Lord in all aspects of life. He encourages constant prayer and a single-minded devotion to God in every endeavor, highlighting that true spirituality can coexist with diligent work. Ultimately, Finney calls for a holistic approach to work that glorifies God and serves humanity.

Transcript

Text. Rom. 12:11--Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.

In remarking upon this subject, I design to show:

I. THAT IDLENESS IS INCONSISTENT WITH RELIGION.

II. THAT ALL PERSONS ARE BOUND TO PURSUE SOME LAWFUL EMPLOYMENT.

III. THAT THEY ARE TO BE DILIGENT IN THEIR CALLING WHATEVER IT IS.

IV. HOW TO PREVENT EMPLOYMENTS, EITHER SECULAR OR SPIRITUAL, FROM BECOMING A SNARE TO THE SOUL.

I. Idleness is inconsistent with religion.

1. Because it is wholly inconsistent with love to God. Whoever loves God with all his heart, will certainly set himself to do the will of God, and will no more be idle than God will be idle.
2. It is wholly inconsistent with love to man. The love of our race will certainly lead us to exert ourselves to promote their happiness.
3. Idleness can result only from selfishness. A man must love his own ease supremely to be idle in a world like this.
4. Idleness is sponging out of the community in which we live. A man that does not earn his bread--who does not contribute as much to the happiness and good things of the world, as he consumes--who lives upon the common stock without contributing his share, is a drone. If he is not engaged in some employment that promotes the well-being of man, he is subtracting continually from the common stock of blessings, and sponging from the universe of God.
5. Idleness is injustice. This follows from what has just been said. A man has no more right to live by sponging than he has to live by stealing. Indeed it involves the same principle.
6. It is absolute and downright disobedience to God. God as much forbids idleness as he does theft or murder, and a man or a woman can no more be religious without pursuing some employment by which God may be glorified and the world benefited, than an habitual drunkard can be religious.

II. All persons are bound to pursue some lawful employment.

This is a plain inference from what has already been said.

But what is a lawful employment? This is an all-important question, in answer to which I observe,

1. To be lawful, an employment must not be injurious to our own best interests, or the best interests of mankind.
2. Speculation is not a lawful employment. To embark in uncertain speculations involves in it the principle of gambling, and is eminently the spirit of gambling. It is a game of chance, where one of the parties must gain and the other lose, and where selfishness stalks abroad naked to grasp every man's wealth without blushing.
3. To be lawful, an employment must not be selfish. All selfishness is sin. And every employment however lawful it may be in itself, is rendered unlawful by being selfishly pursued.
4. To be lawful there must not be too much or too little of it. A business lawful in itself may become unlawful when too much is undertaken or too little is performed, so that on the one hand a man is crushed, or on the other he is idle; but,
5. To be lawful, a business must be useful, i.e. it must be such an employment as is calculated in its nature to benefit mankind.
6. To be lawful, a business must be suited to your capacity. You cannot lawfully employ yourself in that for which you are not fitted. By this I do not mean, that you are to be perfectly qualified for the transaction of any business, before you can lawfully engage in it, but that you should be as well or better fitted for that particular employment than any other.

7. To be lawful, it must be that employment to which you are called of God. You are to be wholly the Lord's, and to consult his will in all things--and never to be engaged in any employment to please yourself or promote your own separate or private interest. You are bound therefore to submit yourself to the direction of the Lord in all things, and to select no employment for life, or for any length of time but under the direction of God.

It is generally admitted, that ministers are to be specially called of God to the work of the ministry. But all men are to be equally devoted to God, and all employments are to be pursued equally for the glory of God. Every faculty, every day, and moment of all men are to be devoted to the Lord. And all men are equally bound to consult the will of God in the selection and pursuit of their employments. And no man can give himself up to employments to which he is not called of God, or to which he does not really believe himself to be called of God, without thereby apostatizing from the service of God. Now every one of you would say that if a minister should select the ministry to please himself he would lose his soul. This is equally true of every other employment.

8. To be lawfully employed, you must engage in that in which you can be most useful. It is not enough that you render yourself useful in some degree, you are bound to be engaged in that employment in which you can, (all things considered,) do the most good. A man might render himself useful as a pedlar but if he can be more useful in some other employment he is bound to prefer it.

9. That only is a lawful employment which can honestly and reasonably be pursued, for the glory of God. Every kind and degree of business that cannot, with an enlightened conscience, be solemnly engaged in and transacted for the glory of God, carries its own condemnation on its very front.

10. No business is lawful that is not, as a matter of fact, engaged in and pursued with the supreme desire to know and glorify God therein.

11. No business is lawful which is inconsistent with the highest degree of spirituality. I mean that only which consists with entire holiness of heart and life is a lawful employment. Any thing that Jesus Christ, or an apostle would not engage in under the circumstances is really unlawful for every body else.

III. Men are to be diligent in their calling.

1. This is implied in the text. The text is commonly quoted as if it read, "Be diligent in business." This is not the way in which it reads, though this is plainly implied in it, and its real meaning.

2. It is also plainly implied in the law of God.

3. The necessities of the world require it. There is enough for every man to do. And no man has any right to be idle or dilatory in his calling.

4. Every degree of slothfulness is injurious to yourself in many ways.

5. It is also injurious to those with whom you are immediately connected. They have a right to expect the diligent use of your powers in promoting their common interests.

6. Every degree of slothfulness in you is injurious to the world at large, and to the universe, inasmuch as there is just so much less of real good in the universe for every moment's idleness in which you indulge.

7. It is a bad example in you to be idle for a day or an hour or to be in any manner negligent or slothful in your employment. Its tendency is to produce universal idleness which would ruin the universe.

8. You are bound to do all the good you can in every way, both to the bodies and souls of men, and this obligation is entirely inconsistent with any degree of slothfulness.

IV. How to prevent secular or spiritual employments from being a snare to the soul.

It has come to be a subject of almost universal complaint, that our employments lead us away from God. Men complain of their cares, and having so much business on their hands as to secularize their spirit--blunt the edge of devotional feeling--and more or less insensibly, but certainly to draw off their hearts from God. And those who are engaged in intellectual and even spiritual occupations, such as teachers of science and teachers of religion, are by their employments apt to fall into an intellectual and hardened frame of mind, and to wander far from God. It seems to be understood that there is a kind of necessity in the case, and that we are naturally unable to attend to the various duties and callings incidental to our relations in this world without secularizing our spirit, and annihilating a devotional state of mind. Now to suppose there is any necessity for this result is to charge God foolishly. He has never placed us here surrounded with these necessities to be a snare and a curse to us. On the contrary, all the employments that are strictly lawful, instead of being a snare, are indispensable to the highest development of our powers, and to the growth and consummation of our piety. The whole difficulty lies in the abuse of a thing eminently wise and good. That the facts are according to the general complaint cannot be doubted. Men really are ensnared by their employments. But why? Many seem to suppose that the only way to maintain a spiritual frame of mind is by a total abstraction from those employments, in which it seems to be necessary for men to engage in this world. It was this conceit that led to the establishment of nunneries and monasteries, and to all those fanatical and odious seclusions from society that have abounded among the Papists. The truth is that the right discharge of our duties to God and man, as things are, is indispensable to holiness. And voluntary seclusion from human society and abstracting ourselves from those employments by which man may be benefited, are wholly inconsistent with the principles and spirit of the Christian religion. So did not Christ nor the Apostles. They were eminently active, zealous and useful, in promoting the glory of God and the good of man, in every way in their power. It is a desideratum, therefore, in religion, to understand the secret of making our employments, whatever they are, the means of increasing instead of destroying our spirituality. A great deal needs to be said upon this subject. I can now only say the following things, and may at a future time, if God permit, resume the subject.

1. If you would not that your employment should be a snare to your soul, see to it, that it is not unlawful, i.e. see to it, that it is not an injurious employment--that you are not engaged in that, the natural tendency of which is to injure yourself or your fellowmen.

2. See to it that you do not introduce some unlawful ingredient into a business otherwise lawful, and thus vitiate the whole, and render it a curse to you and those around you, e.g. A man who is an innkeeper. To keep a house of public entertainment is, in itself, lawful and useful. But if a man to increase his profits or to please all classes of people will sell ardent spirits, this is absolutely unlawful, and an abomination in the sight of God, and it introduces an element into his business which vitiates the whole and renders his business a curse to mankind. A merchant perhaps does the same thing. In order to increase his profits or please his customers, he sells tobacco, and other fashionable but injurious narcotics. And while he deals in many things that are useful and important, he does not hesitate to buy and sell almost any thing upon

which he can make a profit. Now if he admits into his business any ingredient that is injurious to the interests of mankind he renders the whole an unlawful business. It demonstrates that he is not and cannot be pursuing his employment from right motives. And it is impossible that he should pursue a business of this kind in a manner that shall be acceptable to God. In other words his business itself is an apostasy from God. God has said, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Now the principle involved here is, that while a man admits any form of sin whatever to be habitual in his employment, it is rendering all obedience for the time being wholly impossible. He is in the exercise of a spirit which is in itself disobedience to the whole law and a setting aside the authority of God.

3. Be sure that you do nothing selfishly. If you allow selfishness in any of its forms to come in and to have a place in your employments, you are already departed from God, and your business, whether spiritual, intellectual or whatever it may be, has become an abomination to God.

4. See that your business is strictly and properly a lawful one. If it be not in the most proper sense a lawful employment, it will, if persevered in, certainly ruin your soul. To be lawful, I have already said, that it must be some employment that is useful--suited to your capacity--that to which you are called of God--that in which you can become useful--that which can be truly, and honestly, and solemnly dedicated to God, and performed for him--that which as a matter of fact, is thus dedicated to and performed for God--that which is consistent with the highest degree of spirituality, with perfect holiness of heart and life--and such as Christ and the Apostles would engage in under the same circumstances.

5. See that your eye is single, that you have but one great leading motive, and that to glorify God and serve your generation.

6. Consult God at every step of your employment. Do every thing with prayer. Let every day and every hour bear witness that you are transacting every thing for God, and consulting him at every step of your progress. You would no doubt, feel shocked, should you know that a minister went about his preparation for the pulpit without prayer to God. Should he not, on going out to visit his people, pray for divine direction, and when he returned from such visits, should he not spread the whole matter and what he had done before the Lord--in short should he not take counsel of God in all the departments of his employment, you would feel shocked. And should he become exceedingly hardened and reprobate in his work, and should his employment be the snare and ruin of his soul, you would not wonder, for this would be the very result, that under the circumstances you would anticipate. And it is to be feared that this is the very course, and the very result with multitudes of ministers. Now as every thing is God's, and every man is his, and every employment is to be pursued as much for his glory as the employment of a minister, it follows of course that every person is bound to have as single an eye, to consult God at every step, and to make his employment a subject of daily prayer, as a minister is. And if he does not, he will surely apostatize from God.

7. Be sure to do every thing in a spirit of entire consecration to God. Maintain perpetually, in every thing, a spirit of as entire consecration, as you know and feel that you ought to maintain in the exercises of the Sabbath day. It is impossible that men should ever pursue their employment without ensnaring their souls, until they understand that the business of every day is to be as sacredly devoted to God, and performed in a spirit of as entire consecration to his service as the holy exercises of the Sabbath. This must not only be understood in theory, but must be reduced to practice. The Sabbath must be distinguished from other days only in the peculiarity of its employments. You must cease to suppose that the Sabbath is God's day, and that the week days are yours--that you may serve God one day, and yourself six days in the week.

The Sabbath has its specific and appropriate duties. And so have other days. But every day, and every hour, and every employment, and thought, are to be wholly consecrated to God. And until you have habituated yourself to go to your farms, to your shops, or to your merchandise, as to a business that belongs wholly to God, and is to be performed in a spirit of as true devotion as are the duties of your closet or of the sanctuary, your whole employment will be an everlasting snare, and the final ruin of your souls.

8. In short, do nothing, be nothing, buy nothing, sell nothing, possess nothing, do not marry nor decline marriage, do not study nor refrain from study, but in a spirit of entire devotion to God. Consecrate your sleep, your rest, your exercise, your all to God. Learn to do this--practice this, or your employment, whatever it may be, will be the snare and ruin of your soul.

9. But that without which all else will be in vain, is yet to be mentioned. And mark what I say. You must abide in Christ. "Without me," says Christ, "ye can do nothing." Only as you abide in him, by faith, and he in you, will you do any one of the things that have been mentioned in a right spirit. He is your life. He is the bread and water of life. Faith in him is the grand and universal condition of all true virtue and obedience to God.

REMARKS.

1. God calls you to no employment in kind or amount, that is inconsistent with entire holiness of heart and life. Whenever you find therefore that your employment really prevents your walking wholly with God, something is certainly wrong. Either your employment is unlawful in itself, or if in itself a lawful one, it is that to which you are not called, or you have taken too much upon you, or too little, or your motives have become wrong. There is utterly some fault in you. Make a solemn pause then as on the very brink of eternity, and inquire after and remove the stumbling blocks out of the way. If it be a right hand or a right eye give it up in a moment, as you love the ways and dread the wrath of God.

2. God never calls you to any business and withholds the necessary grace for the perfect discharge of your obligations. If grace be sought as it ought to be and constantly will be while your motives are right, it will not be withheld.

3. But if God calls you to a business and you become selfish in it, it is no longer acceptable to him, and your pursuing it with a selfish heart is an utter abomination to him. I fear it is not an uncommon thing for young men who suppose themselves to be called to the gospel ministry, in the course of their preparation, to become cold, and ambitious, and any thing but holy. And yet they persevere, because they dare not go back, and relinquish their course. They are sensible that they are away from God, but believing themselves to have been called to the work of the ministry, they feel as if they must go forward, partly lest they should lose their reputation with men, and partly because they fear the displeasure of God, while they know that as a matter of fact, their hearts are not right with him. And thus they go through their classical studies, hoping that when they enter upon theology, their studies will be of such a character as to make them holy. But coming as they do, in such a state of heart, to the study of Theology, they are only hardened more rapidly than before. But finding this to be the case does not deter them from going forward. They think that now they must make up their opinion on various points of doctrine, and that when they have settled all these things, and entered upon the active duties of the ministry, then they shall be aroused to a better state of feeling. But the hardening process still goes on. So that by the time they are through their course their hearts are like the nether millstone. They are all head and no heart--all intellect and no emotion. In this state they come to the active duties of the ministry, and woe to the Church that shall

employ one of them. They might as well place a skeleton in their pulpit, for he is but the shadow of a minister, and not the substance. He has the bones but not the marrow and life, and spirit of the Gospel.

4. No man has a right to undertake so much business, for any compensation whatever, as to interfere with his hours of devotion. In cases where persons labor by the day, or month, or year, allowance should always be made in the prices they receive, for sufficient time and opportunity for devotional exercises. They have no right to exact or receive such wages as to render it necessary for them to give up all their time to labor nor ought their employers to expect them to encroach, under any pretense whatever, upon those hours appointed to secret communion with God.

5. There is great danger of a diligence in business, which is inconsistent with fervency of spirit in serving the Lord.

6. From my own observation, I am persuaded that there is a great error in requiring too much study of young men who are preparing for the ministry. There is such a great cry for a learned ministry--so much stress is laid upon a thorough education--and so much competition among Colleges and Seminaries, as to present a great temptation to Instructors to push the intellectual pursuits of young men to the utmost, and even beyond the utmost limit of endurance.

Now while I am in favor of a thorough education, I do not and cannot believe, with the facts as they exist before me, that the great difference in the usefulness of ministers depends on their being learned men in the common acceptation of that term. Human science, by itself, never made a useful minister, and wherever human science is pushed beyond its proper limit, and made to encroach upon the hours and spirit of devotion--wherever the spirit of human science, instead of the Spirit of God, comes to be that fountain at which a man drinks, he may become in the language of men, a great man, but he will never be a good minister. Until there is a great change upon this subject--until the great effort of the teachers is to make their pupils pious as well as learned, and they are more anxious, and take more pains to effect the former than the latter, our Seminaries can never send out efficient ministers. To require diligence in study, without requiring fervency of spirit--to concern ourselves more that our students have their lessons than that they walk with God--that they commune with Cicero, Horace, and Demosthenes, rather than with God--for us to satisfy ourselves every day in relation to their intellectual progress, and pay little or no attention to the state of their hearts, is an utter abomination, and teachers who do so, whatever other qualifications they may have, are unfit to have the care of young men.

7. When you find yourselves proceeding in any employment without prayer for direction, support, and guidance, you may rest assured that you are selfish, and however diligent you may be, you may know that you are not fervent in spirit serving the Lord.

8. The speculations of the last few years have so secularized the Church as to annihilate her power with God. She has in reality, been engaged in gambling under the pretense of making money for God. In doing this multitudes of leading Church members have involved themselves and the cause of Christ in great embarrassment and disgrace. And it does seem as if they were deranged in their spasmodic efforts to enrich themselves.

9. No amount of money can save or even benefit the world in the hands of a secular Church. If professors of religion had made all the money they have endeavored to make, and did they possess a universe of gold, it would do nothing towards converting the world, while the very spirit and life of the Church is secular, earthly, sensual and devilish.

10. No idle person can enjoy communion with God, for the plain reason, that his idleness is perpetual disobedience to God.

11. The Apostle has commanded that they who will not work (i.e. who are idle) shall not eat. If persons are able to pursue, and can find any employment, by which they can benefit mankind, and are idle, it is no enlightened charity to feed them.

12. If idle persons eat, they cannot digest their food. It is an unalterable law of God, that men shall perform some kind of labor. This is essential to the well-being of their body and mind. Idleness is as inconsistent with health as it is with good morals. So that if men will be idle, they must suffer the penalty of both physical and moral law.

13. You see from this subject the great importance of training children to habits of industry, and of early imbibing their minds with the spirit of continually doing something that is useful.

14. Every one can do something to glorify God, and in some way benefit mankind. He can labor with his hands, or his head, or his heart--he can work, or teach, or pray, or do something to contribute his share to the common stock of good in the universe. It is the language of a sluggard, to complain that you can do no good. The truth is that if you have a spirit to do good, you will certainly be trying to do good.

15. If we do what we can, however little, it is just as acceptable to God, as if we could do a thousand times as much. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath and not according to what he hath not." Christ said of the poor widow who cast in her two mites, she has cast in more than the rich, who of their abundance cast in much. It is well if you have a heart to do a great deal more than you are able to do. It is that which you really would do for which Christ gives you credit, and not for that which you are really able to do. It is according to the largeness of your heart, and not according to the weakness of your hands that God will reward you.

16. Not one of the employments that are essential to the highest good of mankind, has any natural and necessary tendency to alienate the heart from God. By this, I do not mean that the perverted state of the human heart, is not such that it is natural for it, being in a state of selfishness, to take occasion to depart from God in these employments. But I do mean, that the real tendency of all these employments, to a mind not given up to selfishness, is to increase and perpetuate the deepest communion with God.

17. There is no excuse for a secular spirit. And, as I have already said, whenever your spirit is secular, your heart is selfish.

18. If you have been called of God to any employment, and have become selfish in it, it has become an abomination to God, and you are bound to abandon it instantly or to renounce your selfishness, and diligently pursue your employment for God. By this, I do not mean that you would do right to abandon the employment to which God has called you, but that if you will not repent, and be "fervent in spirit serving the Lord," you are as far as possible from pleasing him in pursuing your business selfishly. If God be not with you, in any employment, whether it be study, the ministry, merchandise, farming. or any thing else, if God does not go with you in it you are certainly out of the way, are bound to reform, to turn instantly and wholly to the Lord, and go not a step forward until you have evidence of the Divine acceptance.

19. Lastly, let me ask you solemnly, beloved, have you some employment, in which you are endeavoring, honestly and fervently to glorify God. What is your employment--in what manner do you pursue it--with

what design--in what spirit--and what is its effect? Do you as a matter of fact, find yourself walking with God, and does the peace of God rule in your heart? Or is there some ingredient in your business, that vitiates the whole? Are you dealing in some article of death--are you poisoning your fellowmen for the glory of God? Are you a Real-estate or a Multi-caulis speculator? Are you pursuing some scandalous traffic for some selfish purpose?

O that the Lord may search you, and pour the gaze of his eye through and through your inmost soul. And if your hands are clean, may the blessing of the Lord, that maketh rich and addeth no sorrow, be multiplied to you a thousand fold. But if you are out of the way, may he lay his reclaiming, sanctifying hand upon you, and not suffer you to rest till all you have and are, are wholly devoted to the Lord.

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