

Lecture Xx. - Instructions to Converts (Continued).

by Charles Finney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of instructing young converts on what religion consists in and how they should be treated by the church, with a focus on self-denial, sanctification, perseverance, and temperance.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, John 21:15

Topics: "Instruction of Young Converts", "Obedience and Self-Denial"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the critical need for the church to provide thorough and accurate instruction to young converts, outlining essential teachings about the nature of true religion, the importance of self-denial, and the necessity of obedience to God. He warns against the dangers of defective instruction, which can lead to confusion, doubt, and backsliding among new believers. Finney calls for the church to actively engage and train young converts, ensuring they understand their role in spreading the Gospel and living a life of holiness. He stresses that true religion is not merely about knowledge or emotional experiences but is rooted in heartfelt obedience and self-denial. The preacher urges that the church must take responsibility for nurturing these new believers to prevent spiritual stagnation and promote growth in faith.

Transcript

TEXT.--Feed my lambs.--JOHN xxi. 15.

I REMARKED on this text in my last lecture, and was obliged, for want of time, to omit many of the points which I wished to present in regard to the

INSTRUCTION OF YOUNG CONVERTS.

To-night I propose to continue the subject by noticing,

I. Several other points upon which young converts ought to be instructed.

II. To show the manner in which young converts should be treated by the church.

III. Mention some of the evils which naturally result from defective instructions given in that stage of Christian experience.

I. I shall pursue the subject, taking it up where I left off, by mentioning some further instructions which it is important should be given to young converts.

1. It is of great importance that young converts should early be made to understand what religion consists in. Perhaps you will be surprised at my mentioning this. "What! Are they converts, and do they not know what religion consists in?" I answer, They would know, if they had had no instruction but such as is drawn from the Bible. But multitudes of people have imbibed such notions about religion, that not only young converts, but a great part of the church do not know what religion consists in, so as to have a clear and distinct idea of it. There are many ministers who do not. I do not mean to say that they have no religion, for it may be charitably believed they have; but what I mean is, that they do not discriminate as to what it consists in, and cannot give a correct statement of what does and what does not constitute real religion. It is important that young converts should be taught.

Negatively, what religion does not consist in

(1.) Not in doctrinal knowledge. Knowledge is essential to religion, but it is not religion. The devil has doctrinal knowledge, but he has no religion. A man may have doctrinal knowledge to any extent without a particle of religion. Yet some people have very strange ideas on this subject, as though having doctrinal knowledge indicated an increase of piety. I once heard a remark of this kind: in a certain instance, where some young converts had made rapid progress in doctrinal knowledge, a person who saw it said, "How these young converts grow in grace." Here he confounded improvement in knowledge with improvement in piety. The truth was, that he had no means of judging of their growth in grace, and it was no evidence of it because they were making progress in doctrinal knowledge.

(2.) They should be taught that religion is not a substance. It is not any root, or sprout, or seed, or anything else in the mind, as a part of the mind itself. Persons often speak of religion as if it was something that may be covered up in the mind, just as a spark of fire may be covered up in the ashes, which does not show itself, and which produces no effects, but yet lives and is ready to act as soon as it is uncovered. And in like manner they think they may have religion, as something remaining in them, although they do not manifest it by obeying God. But they should be taught that this is not the nature of religion. It is no part of the mind itself, or of the body, nor is it a root, or seed, or spark, that can exist and yet be hid and produce no effects.

(3.) Teach them that religion does not consist in raptures, or ecstacies, or high flights of feeling. There may be a great deal of these where there is religion. But it ought to be understood that they are all involuntary emotions, and may exist in full power where there is no religion. They may be the mere workings of the imagination, without any truly religious affection at all. Persons may have them to such a degree as actually to swoon away with ecstasy, even on the subject of religion, without having any religion. I have known one person almost carried away with rapture, by a mere view of the natural attributes of God, his power and wisdom, as displayed in the starry heavens, and yet the person had no religion. Religion is obedience to God, the voluntary submission of the soul to the will of God,

(4.) Neither does religion consist in going to meeting or reading the Bible, or praying, or any other of what are commonly called religious duties. The very phrase, "religious duties," ought to be stricken out of the vocabulary of young converts. They should be made to know that these acts are not religion. Many become very strict in performing certain things, which they call religious duties, and suppose that is being religious; while they are careless about the ordinary duties of life, which in fact constitute A LIFE OF

PIETY. Prayer may be an expression and an act of piety, or it may not be. Going to church or to a prayer meeting, may be considered either as a means, an act, or an expression of pious sentiment; but the performance of these does not constitute a man a Christian, and there may be great strictness and zeal in these, without a particle of religion. If young converts are not taught to discriminate, they may be led to think there is something peculiar in what are called religious duties, and to imagine they have a great deal of religion because they abound in certain actions that are commonly called religious duties, although they may at the same time be very deficient in honesty or faithfulness or punctuality, or temperance, or any other of what they choose to call their common duties. They may be very punctilious in some things, may tithe mint, anise and cummin, and yet neglect the weightier matters of the law, justice and the love of God.

(5.) Religion does not consist in desires to do good actions. Desires that do not result in choice and action are not virtuous. Nor are such desires necessarily vicious. They may arise involuntarily in the mind, in view of certain objects, but while they produce no voluntary act, they are no more virtuous or vicious than the beating of the pulse, except in cases where we have indirectly willed them into existence, by voluntarily putting ourselves under circumstances to excite them. The wickedest man on earth may have strong desires after holiness. Did you ever think of that? He may see clearly that holiness is the only and indispensable means of happiness, he naturally desires it. It is to be feared, that multitudes are deceiving themselves with the supposition, that a desire for holiness, as a means of happiness, is religion. Many, doubtless, give themselves great credit for desires that never result in choosing right. They feel desires to do their duty, but do not choose to do it, because upon the whole they have still stronger desires not to do it. In such desires, there is no virtue. An action or desire to be virtuous in the sight of God, must be an act of the will. People often talk most absurdly on this subject, as though their desires had anything good, while they remain mere desires. "I think I desire to do so and so." But do you do it? "Oh, no, but I often feel a desire to do it." This is practical Atheism.

Whatever desires a person may have, if they are not carried out into actual choice and action, they are not virtuous. And no degree of desire is itself virtuous. If this idea could be made prominent, and fully riveted in the minds of men, it would probably annihilate the hopes of half the church, who are living on their good desires, while doing nothing for God.

(6.) They should be made to understand that nothing which is selfish, is religion. Whatever desires they may have, and whatever choices and actions they may put forth, if after all the reason of them is selfish, there is no religion in them. A man may just as well commit sin in praying, or reading the Bible, or going to meeting, as in anything else, if his motive is selfish. Suppose a man prays simply with a view to promote his own happiness. Is that religion? What is it, but attempting to make God his almighty servant? It is nothing else but to attempt a great speculation, and put the universe, God and all, under contribution to make him happy. It is the sublime degree of wickedness. It is so far from being piety, that it is in fact superlative wickedness.

(7.) Nothing is acceptable to God, as religion, unless it be performed heartily, to please God. No outward action has anything good, or anything that God approves, unless it is performed from right motives, and from the heart.

(b) Young converts should be taught fully and positively that all religion consists in obeying God from the heart. All religion consists in voluntary action. All that is holy, all that is lovely in the sight of God, all that is properly called religion, consists in voluntary action, in voluntarily obeying the will of God from the heart.

2. Young converts should be taught that the duty of self-denial is one of the leading features of the gospel. They should understand that they are not pious at all, any farther than they are willing to take up the cross daily, and deny themselves, for Christ. There is but very little self-denial in the church, and the reason is, that the duty is so much lost sight of, in giving instruction to young converts. How seldom are they told that self-denial is the leading feature of Christianity. In pleading for benevolent objects, how often will you find, that ministers and agents do not even ask Christians to deny themselves for the sake of promoting the object. They only ask them to give what they can spare as well as not, or in other words, to offer unto the Lord that which costs them nothing. What an abomination! They only ask for the surplus, for what they do not want, for what they can give just as well as not. There is no religion in this kind of giving. A man may give to a benevolent object, a hundred thousand dollars, and there would be no religion in it, if he could give it as well as not, and there was no self-denial in it. Jesus Christ exercised self-denial to save sinners. So has God the Father exercised self-denial in giving his Son to die for us, and in sparing us, and in bearing with our perverseness. The Holy Ghost exercises self-denial, in condescending to strive with such unholy beings to bring them to God. The angels exercise self-denial, in watching over this world. The apostles planted the Christian religion among the nations by the exercise of self-denial. And are we to think of being religious without any self-denial? Are we to call ourselves Christians, the followers of Christ, the temples of the Holy Ghost, and to claim fellowship with the apostles, when we have never deprived ourselves of anything that would promote our personal enjoyment for the sake of promoting Christ's kingdom? Young converts should be made to see that unless they are willing to lay themselves out for God and ready to sacrifice life and everything else for Christ, they have not the spirit of Christ, and are none of his.

3. They must be taught what sanctification is. "What!" you will say, "do not all who are Christians know what sanctification is?" No, many do not. Multitudes would be as much at a loss to tell intelligibly what sanctification is, as they would be to tell what religion is. If the question were asked of every professor of religion in this city, What is sanctification? I doubt if one in ten would give a right answer. They would blunder just as they do when they undertake to tell what religion is, and speak of it as something dormant in the soul, something that is put in, and lies there, something that may be practised or not, and still be in them. So they speak of sanctification as if it were a sort of washing off of some defilement, or a purging out of some physical impurity. Or they will speak of it as if the faculties were steeped in sin, and sanctification is taking out the stains. This is the reason why some people will pray for sanctification, and practise sin, evidently supposing that sanctification is something that precedes obedience. They should be taught that sanctification is not something that precedes obedience, some change in the nature or the constitution of the soul. But sanctification is obedience, and, as a progressive thing, consists in obeying God more and more perfectly and perpetually.

4. Young converts should be taught so as to understand what perseverance is. It is astonishing how people talk about perseverance. As if the doctrine of perseverance was "Once in grace, always in grace," or "Once converted, sure to go to heaven." This is not the idea of perseverance. The true idea is, that if a man is truly converted, HE WILL CONTINUE TO OBEY GOD. And as a consequence, he will surely go to heaven. But if a person gets the idea, that because he is converted, therefore he will assuredly go to heaven, that man will almost assuredly go to hell.

5. Young converts should be taught to be religious in everything. They should aim to be religious in every department of life and in all that they do. If they do not aim at this, they should understand that they have no religion at all. If they do not intend and aim to keep all the commandments of God, what pretence can

they make to piety? Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. He is justly subject to the whole penalty. If he disobeys God habitually in one particular, he does not in fact obey him in any particular. Obedience to God consists in the state of the heart. It is being willing to obey God; willing that God should rule in all things. But if a man habitually disobeys God, in any one particular, he is in a state of mind that renders obedience in anything else impossible. To say that in some things a man obeys God, out of respect to his authority, and that in some other things he refuses obedience, is absurd. The fact is that obedience to God consists in an obedient state of heart, a preference of God's authority and commandments to everything else. If, therefore, an individual appears to obey in some things, and yet perseveringly and knowingly disobeys in any one thing, he is deceived. He offends in one point, and this proves that he is guilty of all; in other words, that he does not, from the heart, obey at all. A man may pray half of the time and have no religion; if he does not keep the commandments of God, his very prayer will be hateful to God. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." Do you hear that? If a man refuses to obey God's law, if he refuses to comply with any one duty, he cannot pray, he has no religion, his very devotions are hateful.

6. Young converts, by proper instructions, are easily brought to be "temperate in all things." Yet this is a subject greatly neglected in regard to young converts, and almost lost sight of in the churches. There is a vast deal of intemperance in the churches. I do not mean intemperate drinking, in particular, but intemperance in eating, and in living generally. There is in fact but little conscience about it in the churches. And therefore the progress of reform in the matter is so slow.

Nothing but an enlightened conscience can carry forward a permanent reform. Ten years ago, most ministers used ardent spirit, and kept it in their houses to treat their friends and their ministering brethren with. And the great body of the members in the churches did the same. Now there are but few of either, who are not actual drunkards, that will do it. But still there are many that indulge without scruple in the use of wine. There are some ministers, and many professors, who will drink down wine that has as much spirit in it as brandy and water.

This is intemperance. Chewing and smoking tobacco are mere acts of intemperance. If they use these mere stimulants when there is no necessity for it, what is that but intemperance? That is not being temperate in all things. Until Christians shall have a conscience on this subject, and be made to feel that they have no right to be intemperate in anything, they will make but little progress in religion. It is well known, or ought to be, that TEA AND COFFEE have no nutriment in them.

They are mere stimulants. They go through the system without being digested. The milk and sugar you put in them are nourishing. And so they would be just as much so if you mixed them with rum, and made milk punch. But the tea and the coffee afford no nourishment. And yet I dare say, that a majority of the families in this city give more in a year for their tea and coffee, than they do to save the world from hell. Probably this is true respecting entire churches. Even agents of benevolent societies will dare to go through the churches soliciting funds for the support of missionary and other institutions, and yet use tea, coffee, and in some cases tobacco.

Strange! There is now in this city an agent employed in soliciting funds, who uses all three of these worse than useless stimulants. And he is, moreover, a minister of the gospel! No doubt many are giving five times as much for mere intemperance as they give for every effort to save the world. If the church could be made to know how much they spend for what are mere poisons, and nothing else, they would be amazed. Sit down and talk with many persons, and they will strenuously maintain that they cannot get along without

these stimulants, these poisons, and they cannot give them up--no, not to redeem the world from eternal damnation.

And very often they will absolutely show anger if argued with, just as soon as the argument begins to pinch their consciences. Oh, how long shall the church show her hypocritical face at the Monthly Concert, and pray God to save the world, while she is actually throwing away five times as much for sheer intemperance, as she will give to save the world. Some of you may think these are little things, and that it is quite beneath the dignity of the pulpit to lecture against tea and coffee.

But I tell you it is a great mistake of yours, if you think these are little things, when they make the church odious in the sight of God, by exposing her hypocrisy and lust. Here is an individual who pretends he has given himself up to serve Jesus Christ, and yet he refuses to deny himself any darling lust, and then he will go and pray, "O Lord, save the world; O Lord, thy kingdom come." I tell you it is hypocrisy. Shall such prayers be heard? Unless men are willing to deny themselves, I would not give a groat for the prayers of as many such professors as would cover the whole United States.

These things must be taught to young converts. It must come to this point in the church, that men shall not be called Christians, unless they will cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye, and deny themselves for Christ's sake. A little thing? See it poison the spirit of prayer? See it debase and sensualize the soul! Is that a trifle beneath the dignity of the pulpit? When these intemperate indulgences of one kind and another, cost the church five times if not fifty times more than all they do for the salvation of the world.

An estimate has recently been made, showing, that the United States consume seven millions of dollars worth of coffee yearly; and who does not know that a great part of this is consumed by the church. And yet, grave ministers and members of Christian churches are not ashamed to be seen countenancing this enormous waste of money; while at the same time the poor heathen are sending upon every wind of heaven their agonizing wail for help. Heaven calls from above, "go preach the Gospel to every creature." Hell groans from beneath, and ten thousand voices cry out from heaven, earth and hell, "Do something to save the world!" Do it now! Oh, NOW, or millions more are in hell through your neglect. And Oh, tell it not in Gath, the church, the ministry, will not deny even their lusts to save a world. Is this Christianity? What business have you to use Christ's money for such a purpose? Are you a steward? Who gave you this liberty? Look to it, lest it should be found at last that you have preferred self-gratification to obedience, and made a "god of your belly."

The time to teach these things with effect is when they are young converts. If they are not properly taught then, if they get a wrong habit, and begin with an easy, self-indulgent mode of living, it is rare that they are ever thoroughly reformed. I have conversed with old professors on these subjects, and have been astonished at their pertinacious obstinacy in indulging their lusts. And I am satisfied that the church never can rise out of this sloth until young converts are faithfully taught in the outset of their religious course to be temperate in all things.

7. They should be taught to have just as much religion in all their business, as they have in prayer, or in going to meeting. They should be just as holy, just as watchful, aim just as singly at the glory of God, be just as sincere and solemn in all their daily employments, as when they come to the throne of grace. If they are not, their Sabbath performances will be an abomination.

8. They should be taught that it is necessary for them to be just as holy as they think ministers ought to be. There has for a long time been an idea that ministers are bound to be holy and practice self-denial. And so

they are. But it is strange they should suppose that ministers are bound to be any more holy than other people. They would be shocked to see a minister show levity, or running after the fashions, or getting out of temper, or living in a fine house, or riding in a coach. Oh, that is dreadful. It does not look well in a minister. Indeed! For a minister's wife to wear such a fine bonnet, or such a silk shawl. Oh, no. But they think nothing of all this in a layman or a layman's wife. That is no offence at all. I am not saying that these things do look well in a minister; I know they do not. But they look, in God's eyes, just as well in a minister as they do in a layman. You have no more right to indulge in vanity and folly and pride than a minister. Can you go to heaven without being sanctified? Can you be holy without living for God, and doing all that you do to his glory? I have heard professedly good men speak against ministers having large salaries, and living in an expensive style, when they themselves were actually spending a great deal more money for the support of their families than any ministers. What would be thought of a minister living in the style in which many professors of religion and elders of churches are living in this city? Why everybody would say that they were hypocrites. But, it is just as much an evidence of hypocrisy in a layman to spend God's money to gratify his lusts, or to please the world, or his family, as it is for a minister to do the same. It is distressing to hear some of our foremost laymen talk of its being dishonorable to religion to give ministers a large salary, and let them live in an expensive style, when it is a fact that their own expenses are, for the number of their families and the company they have, far above that of any minister. All this arises out of fundamentally wrong notions imbibed while they were young converts. Young converts have been taught to expect that ministers will have all the religion, especially all the self-denial, and so long as this continues there can be no hope that the church will ever do much for the glory of God, or for the conversion of the world. There is nothing of all this in the Bible. Where has God said, "You, ministers, love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength," or "You, ministers, do all that you do to the glory of God?" This is said to all alike, and he who attempts to excuse himself from any duty or self-denial, from any watchfulness or sobriety, by putting it off upon ministers, or who ventures to adopt a lower scale of holy living for himself than he thinks is proper for a minister, is in great danger of proving himself a hypocrite, and paying the forfeit of his foolishness in hell.

Much depends on the instructions given to young converts. If they once get into the habit of supposing that they may indulge in things which they would condemn in a minister, it is ten to one if they ever get out of it.

9.* They should aim at being perfect. Every young convert should be taught that if it is not his purpose to live without sin, he has not yet begun to be religious. What is religion, but a supreme love to God and a supreme purpose of heart or disposition to obey God. If there is not this, there is no religion at all. It is one thing to profess to be perfect, and another thing to profess and feel that you ought to be perfect. It is one thing to say that men ought to be perfect, and can be if they are so disposed, and another thing to say that they are perfect. If any are prepared to say that they are perfect, all I have to say is, Let them prove it. If they are so, I hope they will show it by their actions, otherwise we can never believe they are perfect.

But it is the duty of all to be perfect and to purpose entire, perpetual and universal obedience to God. It should be their constant purpose to live wholly to God, and obey all his commandments. They should live so that if they should sin it would be an inconsistency, an exception, an individual case, in which they act contrary to the fixed and general purpose and tenor of their lives. They ought not to sin at all; they are bound to be as holy as God is, and young converts should be taught to set out in the right course, or they will never be right.

10.** They should be taught to exhibit their light.

If the young convert does not exhibit his light, and hold it up to the world, it will go out. If he does not bestir himself, and go forth and try to enlighten those around him, his light will go out, and his own soul will soon be in darkness. Sometimes young converts seem disposed to be still and not do anything in public till they get a great deal of light, or a great deal of religion. But this is not the way. Let the convert use what he has; let him hold up his little twinkling rush-light boldly and honestly, and then God will pour in the oil and make him like a blazing torch. But God will not take the trouble to keep a light burning that is hid. Why should he? Where is the use?

This is the reason why so many people enjoy so little in religion, They do not exert themselves to honor God. They keep what little they do enjoy so entirely to themselves, that there is no good reason why God should bestow blessings and benefits on them.

11.*** They should be taught how to win souls to Christ. Young converts should be taught particularly what to do for this, and how to do it, and then taught to live for this end as the great leading object of life. How strange has been the course sometimes pursued. These persons have been converted, and there they are. They get into the church, and then they are left to go along in their business just as they did before; they do nothing and are taught to do nothing for Christ, and the only change is that they go more regularly to church on the Sabbath, and let the minister feed them, as it is called. But suppose he does feed them, they do not grow strong, for they cannot digest it, because they take no exercise. They become spiritual dyspeptics. Now the great object for which Christians are converted and left in this world, is to pull sinners out of the fire. If they do not effect this, they had better be dead. And young converts should be taught this as soon as they are born into the kingdom. The first thing they do should be to go to work for this end, to save sinners.

II. I am to show how young converts should be treated by the church.

1. Old professors ought to be able to give young converts a great deal of instruction, and they ought to give it. The truth is, however, that the great body of professors in the churches do not know how to give good instruction to young converts, and if they attempt to give them instruction, give only that which is false. The church ought to be able to teach her children; and when she receives them, she ought to be as busy in training them to act, as mothers are in teaching their little children such things as they will need to know and do hereafter. But this is far enough from being the case generally. And we can never expect to see young converts habitually taking right hold of duty, and going straight forward without declension and backsliding, until young converts shall be intelligently trained by the church.

2. Young converts should not be kept back behind the rest of the church. How often is it found that the old professor will keep the young converts back behind the rest of the church, and prevent them from taking any active part in religion, for fear they should become spiritually proud. Young converts in such churches are rarely or never called on to take a part in meetings, or set to any active duty, or the like, for fear they should become lifted up with spiritual pride. Thus the church become the modest keepers of their humility, and teach them to file in behind the old, stiff, dry, cold members and elders, for fear that if they are allowed to do anything for Christ, it will make them proud. Whereas, the very way to make young converts humble and keep them so, is to put them to their work and keep them there. That is the way to keep God with them, and as long as God is with them, He will take care of their humility. Keep them constantly engaged in religion, and then the Spirit of God will dwell with them, and then they will be kept humble by the most effectual process. But if young converts are left to fall in behind the old professors, where they never can do anything, they will never know what spirit they are of, and this is the very way to run them into danger of

the worst species of spiritual pride.

3. They should be watched over by the church, and warned of their dangers, just as a tender mother watches over her young children. Young converts do not know at all the dangers by which they are surrounded. The devices of the devil, the temptations of the world, the power of their own passions and habits, and the thousand forms of danger they do not know; and if not properly watched and warned, they will run right into danger. See that mother watching her little child. Does she let it put its little hand in the candle, or allow it to creep where it will fall, because its own blindness and ignorance does not prevent it from desiring to do so? The church should watch over and care for her young children, just as mothers watch their little children in this great city, for fear the carts may run over them, or they may stray away and be lost; or as they watch them while growing up, for fear they may be drawn into the whirlpools of iniquity. The church should watch over all the interests of her young members, know where they are, and what are their habits, temptations, dangers, privileges, state of religion in their hearts, spirit of prayer. Look at that anxious mother, when she sees paleness gather round the little brow of her child. "What is the matter with you, my child? Have you eaten something improper? Have you taken cold? What ails you?" Oh, how different it is with the children of the church, the lambs that the Saviour has committed to the care of his churches. Alas! Instead of restraining her children, and taking care of them, the church lets them go anywhere, and look out for themselves. What should we say of a mother who should knowingly let her little child totter along to the edge of a precipice? Should we not say she was horribly guilty for doing so, and that if the child should fall and be killed, its blood would rest on the mother's head? What then is the guilt of the church, in knowingly neglecting her young converts? I have known churches where young converts were first totally neglected, and regarded with suspicion and jealousy; nobody went near them to strengthen or encourage or counsel them; nothing was done to lead them to usefulness, to teach them what to do, or how to do it, or open to them a field of labor. And then--what then? Why, when they find that young converts cannot stand everything, and find them growing cold and backward under their own treatment, they just turn round and abuse them because they did not hold out.

4. Be tender in reproofing them. When Christians find it necessary to reprove young converts, they should be exceedingly careful of their manner in doing it. Young converts should be faithfully watched over by the elder members of the church, and when they begin to lose ground, or to turn aside, they should be promptly admonished, and if necessary, reproofed. But to do it in a wrong manner is worse than not to do it. It is sometimes done in a manner that is abrupt, harsh, coarse, and apparently censorious, more like scolding than like brotherly admonition. Such a manner, instead of inspiring confidence, or leading to reformation, is just calculated to harden the heart of the young convert, and confirm him in his wrong courses, while at the same time it closes his mind against the influence of such censorious guardians. The heart of a young convert is tender, and easily grieved, and sometimes a single unkind look will set them into such a state of mind as will fasten his errors upon him and make him grow worse and worse.

You who are parents know how important it is when you reprove your children, that they should see that you do it from the best of motives, for their benefit, because you wish them to be good, and not because you are angry. Otherwise they will soon come to regard you as a tyrant, rather than a friend. just so with young converts. Kindness and tenderness, even in reproof, will win their confidence, and attach them to you, and give an influence to your brotherly instructions and counsels, so that you can mould them into finished Christians. Instead of this, if you are severe and critical in your manner, that is the way to make them think you wish to lord it over them. Many persons, under pretence of being faithful, as they call it, often hurt young converts in such a severe and overbearing manner as to drive them away, or perhaps

crush them into despondency and apathy. Young converts have but little experience, and are easily thrown down. They are just like a little child when it first begins to walk. You see it tottering along, and there it stumbles over a straw. You see the mother take up everything from the floor, when her little one is going to try to walk. just so with young converts. The church ought to take up every stumbling block, and treat them in such a way as to make them see that if they are reprov'd, Christ is in it, and then they will receive it as it is meant, and it will do them good.

5. Kindly point out things that are faulty in the young convert which he does not see. He is but a child, and knows but little about religion, and will of course have a great many things that he needs to learn, and a great many that he ought to mend. Whatever there is that is wrong in spirit, or unlovely in his deportment, or uncultivated in manner, that will impede his usefulness or impair his influence as a Christian, ought to be kindly pointed out and corrected. To do this in the right way, however, requires great wisdom. Christians ought to make it a subject of much prayer and reflection, that they may do it right, so as not to do more hurt than good. If you rebuke him merely for the things that he did not see, or did not know to be improper, it will grieve and disgust him. Such instruction should be carefully timed often it is well to take the opportunity after you have been praying together, or after a kind conversation of religious subjects, calculated to make him feel that you love him, and seek his good, and earnestly desire to promote his sanctification, his usefulness, and his happiness. Then a mere hint will often do the work. Just suggest that "Such a thing in your prayer" or "your conduct so and so, did not strike me pleasantly. Had you not better think of it, and perhaps you will judge better to avoid the same thing again." Do it right, and you will help and do him good. Do it wrong and you will do ten times more hurt than good. Often young converts will err, through ignorance; their judgment is unripe, and they need time to think and make up an enlightened judgment, on some point that at first appears to them doubtful. In such cases the church should treat them with great kindness and forbearance. Should kindly instruct them and not denounce them at once for not seeing, at first, what perhaps they did not themselves understand, for years after they were converted.

6. Do not speak of the faults of young converts, behind their backs. This is quite too common among old professors, and by and by they hear of it; and what an influence it must have to destroy the confidence of young converts in their elder brethren, to grieve their hearts and discourage them, and perhaps drive them away from the good influence of the church.

III. I am to mention some of the evils of defective instruction to young converts.

1. If not fully instructed, they never will be fully grounded in right principles. If they have right fundamental principles, this will lead them to adopt a right course of conduct in all particular cases. In forming a Christian character, a great deal depends on establishing those fundamental principles which are correct on all subjects. If you look at the Bible you will see there, that God teaches right principles which we can carry out in detail in right conduct. If the education of young converts is defective, either in kind or degree, you will see it in their character all their lives. This is the philosophical result, just what might be expected, and must be always so. It could be shown, if I had time, that almost all the practical errors that have prevailed in the church, are the natural results of certain false dogmas, which have been taught to young converts, and which they have been made to swallow as the truth of God, at a time when they were so ignorant as not to know any better.

2. If the instruction given to young converts is not correct and full, they will not grow in grace, but their religion will dwindle away and decay. Their course instead of being like the path of the just, growing

brighter and brighter to the perfect day, will grow dimmer and dimmer, and decay and finally perhaps go out in darkness. Wherever you see young converts let their religion taper off till it comes to nothing, you may understand that it is the proper result of defective instruction. The philosophical result of teaching young converts the truth, and the whole truth, is that they grow stronger and stronger. Truth is the food for the mind--it is what gives the mind strength. And where religious character grows feeble, rely upon it, in nine cases out of ten it is owing to their being neglected, or falsely instructed, when they were young converts.

3. They will be left justly in doubt whether they are Christians. If their early instruction is false, or defective, there will be so much inconsistency in their lives, and so little real evidence of real piety, that they themselves will finally doubt whether they have any. Probably they will live and die in doubt. You cannot make a little evidence go a great way. If they do not see clearly they will not live consistently, if they do not live consistently they can have but little evidence, and if they have not evidence they must doubt, or live in presumption.

4. If young converts are rightly instructed and trained, it will generally be seen that they will take the right side on all great subjects that come before the church. Subjects are continually coming up before the churches, on which they have to take ground, and on many of them there is often no little difficulty to make all the church take right ground. Take the subject of Tracts, or Missions, or Sabbath schools, or Temperance, for instance, and what cavils and objections, and resistance, and opposition, have been encountered from members of the church in different places. Go through the churches, and where you find young converts have been well taught, you never find them making difficulty, or raising objections, or putting forth cavils. I do not hesitate to charge it upon pastors and older members of churches, that there are so many who have to be dragged up to the right ground on all such subjects. If they had grounded them well in the principles of the gospel at the outset, when they were first converted, they would have seen the application of their principles to all these things. It is curious to see, and I have had great opportunity to see, how ready young converts are to take right ground on any subject that may be proposed. See what they are willing to do for the education of ministers, for missions, for moral reform, for the slaves. If the great body of young converts from the late revivals had been well grounded in gospel principles, you would have found in them, throughout the church, but one heart and one soul in regard to every question of duty that occurs. Let their early education be right, and you have got a body of Christians that you can depend on. If it had been general in the church, Oh, how much more strength there would have been in all her great movements for the salvation of the world.

5. If young converts are not well instructed they will inevitably backslide. If their instruction is defective, they will probably live in such a way as to disgrace religion. The truth, kept steadily before the mind of a young convert, in proper proportions, has a natural tendency to make him grow up into the fullness of the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus. If any one point is made too prominent in the instruction given, there will probably be just that disproportion in his character. If he is fully instructed on some points and not in others, you will find a corresponding defect in his life and character.

If the instruction of young converts is greatly defective, they will press on in religion no further than they are strongly propelled by the emotions of their first conversion. As soon as that is spent they will come to a stand, and then they will decline and backslide. And ever after you will find that they will go forward only when aroused by some powerful excitement. These are your periodical Christians, that are so apt to wake up in a time of revival, and bluster about as if they had the zeal of an angel, a few days, and then die away as dead and cold as a northern winter. Oh how desirable, how infinitely important it is, that young converts

should be so taught, that their religion will not depend on impulses and excitements, but that they will go steadily onward in the Christian course, advancing from strength to strength, giving forth a clear and safe and steady light all around.

REMARKS.

1. The church is verily guilty for her past neglect, in regard to the instruction of young converts.

Instead of bringing up their young converts to be working Christians, the churches have generally acted as if they did not know how to employ young converts, or what use to make of them. They have acted like a mother, who has a great family of daughters, and knows nothing how to set them to work, and so suffers them to grow up idle and untaught, useless and despised, and to be the easy prey of every designing villain.

If the church had only done her duty in training up young converts to work, and labor for Christ, the world would have been converted long ago. But instead of this, how many churches even oppose young converts, when they attempt to set themselves at work for Christ. Multitudes of old professors look with suspicion upon every movement of young converts, and talk against them, and say, "They are too forward, they ought not to put themselves forward, but wait for those who are older." There is waiting again. Instead of bidding young converts "God speed," and cheering them on when they take hold with warm hearts and strong hands, very often they hinder them and perhaps put them down. How often have young converts been stopped from going forward, and turned in behind a formal, lazy, inefficient church. till their spirit is crushed, and their zeal extinguished, and after a few ineffectual struggles to throw off the cords, they conclude to sit down with the rest and WAIT. In many places, young converts cannot even attempt to hold a prayer meeting by themselves, but what the pastor, or some of the deacons, rebukes them for being so forward, and charge them with spiritual pride. "Oh, ho! you are young converts, are you? and so you want to get together and call all the neighbors together to look at you, because you are young converts." You had better turn preachers at once. A celebrated Doctor of Divinity in New England boasted at a public table of his success in keeping all his converts still. He had great difficulty, he said, for they were in a terrible fever to do something, to talk, or pray, or get up meetings, but by the greatest vigilance he had kept it all down, and now his church was just as quiet as it was before the revival. Wonderful achievement for a minister of Jesus Christ! Was that what the blessed Saviour meant when he told Peter, "Feed my lambs?"

2. Young converts should be trained to labor, just as carefully as young recruits in an army are trained for war.

Suppose a captain in the army should get his company enlisted, and then take no more pains to teach and train and discipline them, than is taken by many pastors to train and lead forward their young converts. Why, the enemy would laugh at such an army. Call them soldiers! Why, as to any effective service, they are in a mere state of babyhood, they know nothing what to do or how to do it, and if you bring them up to the CHARGE, where are they? Such an army would resemble the church that does not train her young converts. Instead of being trained to stand shoulder to shoulder in the onset, they feel no practical confidence in their leaders, no confidence in their neighbors, no confidence in themselves, and they scatter at the first shock of battle. Look at the church now. Ministers are not agreed as to what shall be done, and many of them will turn and fight back against their brethren, quarreling about New Measures, or the Act and Testimony, or something. And as to the members, they cannot feel confidence when they see

their leaders so divided. And then if they attempt to do anything--Alas! alas! what ignorance, what awkwardness, what discord, what weakness, what miserable work they make of it. And so it must continue, until the church shall train up young converts to be intelligent, single-hearted, self-denying, working Christians. Here is an enterprise now going on in this city, which I rejoice to see. I mean the Tract enterprise--a blessed work. And the plan is to train up a body of devoted Christians to do--what?--why to do what all the church ought to have been trained to do long ago, to know how to pray, and how to converse with people about their soul's salvation, and how to attend anxious meetings, and how to deal with inquirers, and how to SAVE SOULS.

3. The church has entirely mistaken the manner in which she is to be sanctified.

The experiment has been carried on long enough, of trying to sanctify the church, without finding anything for them to do. But holiness consists in obeying God. And sanctification, as a process, means obeying him more and more perfectly. And the way to promote it in the church, is to give every one something to do. Look at these great churches, where they have 500 or 700 members, and get a minister to feed them from Sabbath to Sabbath, while there are so many of them together that the great part have nothing at all to do, are never trained to make any direct efforts for the salvation of souls. And in that way they are expecting to be sanctified and prepared for heaven. They never will be sanctified so. That is not the way God has appointed. Jesus Christ has made his people co-workers with him in saving sinners, for this very reason, because sanctification consists in doing those things which are required to promote this work. This is one reason why he has not employed angels in the work, or carried it on by direct revelation of truth to the minds of men. It is because it is necessary as a means of sanctification, that the church should sympathize with Christ in his feelings and his labors for the conversion of sinners. And in this way the entire church must move, before the world will be converted. When the day comes, that the whole church shall realize that they are here on earth as a body of missionaries, and shall live and labor accordingly, then will the day of man's redemption draw nigh.

Christian! if you cannot go abroad to labor why are you not a missionary in your own family? If you are too feeble even to leave your room, be a missionary there in your bed-chamber. How many unconverted servants have you in your house? Call in your unconverted servants, and your unconverted children, and be a missionary to them. Think of your physician, perhaps, who is laying himself out to save your body, while he is losing his own soul, and you receive his kindness and never make him the greatest return in your power.

It is necessary that the church should take hold of her young converts at the outset, and set them to work, and set them to work right. The hope of the church is in the young converts.

4. We see what a responsibility rests on ministers, and elders, and all who have opportunity to assist in training young converts. How distressing is the picture which often forces itself upon the mind, where multitudes are converted, and yet so little pains taken with the young converts, that in a single year you cannot tell the young converts from the rest of the church. And then to see the old church members turn round and complain of these young converts, and perhaps slander them, when in truth these old professors themselves are most to blame. Oh, it is too bad. This reaction that people talk so much about after a revival, (as if reaction was the necessary effect of a revival,) would never come, young converts never would backslide as they do, if the church were prompt and faithful in attending to their instruction. If they are truly converted, they can be made thorough and energetic Christians. And if they are not such, Jesus Christ will require it at the hands of the church.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/lecture-xx-instructions-to-converts-continued/>

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