

# Professor Finney's Letters to Christians No. 3.

by Charles Finney

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*Charles Finney emphasizes the moral implications of tobacco use and the necessity of self-denial for the glory of God and the benefit of others.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:16, Romans 12:1-2, Romans 14:21, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Galatians 5:24, Philippians 2:15-16, 1 Thessalonians 5:22, James 4:17, 1 Peter 2:16

**Topics:** "Christian Witness", "Self-Indulgence"

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## Description

Charles Finney addresses the issue of tobacco use among Christians, emphasizing that example is a powerful teacher, often leading children to adopt habits contrary to their parents' teachings. He argues that using tobacco cannot be justified as it does not glorify God and is a form of self-indulgence that can dominate one's life, making it a sin. Finney challenges the notion that tobacco is beneficial, asserting that any perceived benefits are outweighed by the harm it causes to both the individual and society. He encourages Christians to deny themselves for the sake of others and to consider the moral implications of their actions. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to live in a way that promotes the glory of God and the well-being of others.

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## Transcript

WHY DO YOU USE TOBACCO?

[Continued from previous letter--Ed.]

Example is the highest moral influence that can be exerted.

Said a father, who used tobacco, "I do not know how it is, I have told my boys again and again not to use tobacco, but, in spite of all my advice, every one of them has got into the practice." "Yes, father," said one of them, "example is more forcible than precept. By precept you taught us not to use it, and by example you taught us to use it. We follow your example because it has more weight than precept."

In my last, I inquired of professed Christians--tobacco users--whether they deliberately intend to promote the use of tobacco among all classes and especially among the rising generation, to the utmost of their ability. Now, Brother, to this inquiry I presume you will answer--no. This, you say, is not the reason why you use it. You do not use it for the purpose of promoting its use. By why do you use it? "Whatsoever ye do, whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God." Do you do it for the glory of God? If you do not, the

use of it by you is sin. Of this you may rest assured. If you habitually use it for any lower reason than as a duty to God, you live in habitual sin. But you say, I do not mean to sin. The thing at which you aim is not sin. You do not use tobacco because it is sinful, but notwithstanding it is so. So with the intemperate man in any thing else. The drinker of strong drink, for example, does not drink because it is sinful, but notwithstanding it is so.

But, you say, I don't think it is sinful to use tobacco. But remember that all self-indulgence, not demanded and approved by the law of love to God and man, is sin, whether you consider it so or not. But, you say, I do not think it sin in me to use it. Why not? "Because I have become so habituated to it that I cannot give it up." Then this form of self-indulgence is your master. You have become so accustomed to this indulgence that you cannot live without it. Now if this is your excuse, remember and mark what I say. If you can't mortify this appetite, you can't possibly be saved. "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die. But if through the Spirit ye do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

If you suffer any appetite, passion, or propensity whatever to have dominion over you, you cannot possibly be saved. Cleaving to any one form of self-indulgence is just as fatal to your salvation as if you wallowed in all filth. If you but clearly realized what sin is, you would see that indulging in the use of tobacco for the sake of the gratification, or because you have so long been accustomed to it, is just as really sinful as for the inebriate to do the same. His habit is no more really and truly self-indulgence than yours, and he has the same excuse for it, namely, that he can't break off the form of habit.

But you say, perhaps, I am sure that my tobacco does me good. I feel decidedly better when I use it than when I do not use it. I have tried this experiment and find that I can perform more labor, think better, and even pray better when I have my tobacco. Yes, and the drunkard might with equal truth say the same. It may be true that both you and the drunkard feel decidedly better when you have your accustomed stimulants, but does that prove that either of you receive any real benefit from your indulgence? It gives you present relief to the seen and lasting injury of your body, and if you persist for such a reason, to the certain ruin of your soul.

But you say I was directed to use it by a physician. If so, surely "he was a physician of no value." ["I take it for the tooth-ache, or for a cold, or acid stomach, or some ailment for which my physician prescribed the use of tobacco." Now you ought to know that all such advice is mere quackery and nonsense.-- There is not one of those or any other form of disease that is not aggravated by the use of tobacco.

Tobacco like alcohol may appear to afford relief by rallying the vital powers to resist its action. But it rapidly exhausts the vitality of the system upon which life and health depend, and thus in the end but aggravates instead of curing the disease.

But suppose it really was a benefit to you. Is this a sufficient reason why you should use it? Every body will not know why you use it. You do not believe it is well for all persons to use it. Ought you not then to suffer an evil if it be useful to you rather than run the risk of entailing the curse of it by your example on those to whom the use will be a greater injury than it is to you a benefit? If you should injure others by the use of it, ought you not to deny yourself even if it be a real sacrifice?

You recollect that when the temperance reformation began, the pledge was to abstain from ardent spirits, except as a medicine. A worthy brother in N. York, said; The use of spirits is a great evil in the land--While I use a little as a medicine, others will use it as an indulgence; therefore I will sacrifice my life if die I must without it, before I will use it even as a medicine.

This was noble. The fact is, you do not need it for your health. Just set down your foot that you will not use it come what may, and look to God for help against the temptation, and in a few months you will see that you are much better off even in the very respect for which you take it, than you are with it. But even if you think you need it, yet for the sake of doing good or of preventing evil, deny yourself. Do you think that you would or could be the worse by it? I tell you nay. Your life is the Lord's. It is good for nothing only as it can be used to promote the glory of God and the good of man. Why should you try to prolong it if it can be done only by means that will tend only to the injury of others? Will you strive to live by means that are deeply injurious to your fellowmen? Why right have you to live if you must live by such means?

But that you cannot live without it is all a mistake. Go to the records of the state-prison and learn that the total abandonment of the use of tobacco by the tobacco-takers that go there is found in no case to be an injury to them, but on the contrary invariably a benefit.

By Brother, you do not really need it. But if you did, can you not at once abandon it, rather than be so powerfully instrumental in entailing it upon all succeeding generations?

Your Brother,

C.G. FINNEY

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