

LECTURES ON REVIVALS OF RELIGION - by: Rev. CHARLES G. FINNEY

Delivered in New York in 1835 (*words in italics were added to the original text*)

Lecture 17 FALSE COMFORTS for SINNERS (*and rebelling CHRISTIANS*)

The world Gal 3:22 *The scripture says that the whole world is under the power of sin*

Christians Jam 5:19-20 *My brothers, if one of you wanders away from the truth and another one brings him back again...whoever turns a sinner back from his wrong way will save that sinner's soul from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins (the reference here to a sinner is to a Christian) TEV*

Charles Finney 1792-1875 led over 500,000 souls to Christ. Not to just a new birth but to a full salvation, meaning saved from both the penalty and the power of sin. 85% of those he led to Christ were found actively walking with God 10 years after conversion compared to less than 1% today.

FINNEY'S TEXT "How then can you comfort me with empty words, since
Falsehood remains in your answers?" Job 21:34

Finney: "No doubt, millions and millions are now in hell, because there were those around them who gave them false comfort. Who had so much false pity, or were themselves so much in the dark, that they would not let them remain in anxiety (*over their sins*) until they had submitted their hearts to God. But administered falsehood, and relieved their distress in this way, and now their souls are lost.

I have often had Christians bring anxious sinners to me (*those under a deep conviction about their sin*), and beg me to comfort them. And when I have probed their consciences to the quick, the believers have shuddered, and sometimes taken the sinners' part. It is sometimes impossible to deal effectively with young people who are convicted of sin, in the presence of their parents, because they have so much more compassion for their children, than regard for the honor of God. This is all wrong, and with such views and feelings you had better hold your tongue, than to say anything to the anxious sinner".

1 Pe 4:18 **And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?** (*Yet Christians keep playing with sins*).
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Finney: "The object of many Christians is to comfort sinners and they are often so intent upon this that they do not regard what kind of comfort. They see their friends distressed, and they pity them, they feel very compassionate, "Oh, oh, I cannot bear to see them so distressed, I must comfort them somehow," and so they try one way, and another.

Now, God desires they should be comforted. He is benevolent, and has kind thoughts, and his heart yearns over them, and he sees them so distressed (*for He is the God of all comfort - 2 Cor 1:3*). But he has fixed the terms as unyielding as his throne, on which he will give a sinner relief. And he will not alter. He knows that nothing else will do the sinner any lasting good, for nothing can make him happy, until he repents of his sins and forsakes them, and turns to God. And therefore God will not yield. The fact is, our prime object should be to induce the sinner to obey God. Many seem to have no higher motive than sympathy or compassion for the sinner. Here are some of the false comforts given:"

1. "Don't feel so bad about yourself": Finney: "Sometimes a sinner convicted about his sin is comforted by being told that Christianity does not consist in feeling bad. I once heard of a Doctor of Divinity, giving an anxious sinner such counsel, when he was actually writhing under the arrows of the Almighty. Said he, "Christianity is cheerful, religion is not gloomy, do not be distressed, be comforted, dismiss your fears, you should not feel so bad," and such like miserable comforts, when, in fact, the man had infinite reason to be distressed, for he was resisting the Holy Spirit, and in danger of grieving God's Spirit away for ever.

The sinner is on the very verge of hell, he is in rebellion against God, and his danger is infinitely greater than he imagines. Oh what a doctrine of devils to tell a rebel against heaven not to be distressed. What is all his distress but rebellion itself? He is not comforted because he refuses to be comforted. God is ready to comfort him. You need not think you're more compassionate than God. He will fill him with comfort, in an instant, if he will submit. But there he stands, fighting against God, and against the Holy Spirit, and against conscience, until he is distressed almost to death, and still he will not yield. And now someone comes in, "Oh, I hate to see you feel so bad, do not be so distressed, cheer up, Christianity does not consist in being gloomy, be comforted." It's just horrible!"

2. Saying to the sinner "Let me tell you my experience." Finney: "This is a dangerous snare, and often gives the devil a handle to lead him to hell. If you tell your experience and he thinks its Christian, he will usually try to imitate it, and instead of following the gospel, or the leading of the Spirit in his own soul, he is following your example. This is absurd as well as dangerous. And it is calculated to impede the work of God in his soul".

3. Relieving the sinner of blame: Finney: "Whatever relieves the sinner from a sense of blame, is calculated to give him false comfort. The more a man feels himself to blame, the deeper is his distress. But anything that lessens his sense of blame lessens his distress, but it is a comfort full of death. If anything will help him divide the blame, and throw off a part of it on God (*or someone*), it will afford comfort, but it is a relief that will destroy his soul (*Prov 28:13 ...whoever confesses and forsakes his sins will have mercy*).

An anxious sinner is often willing to do anything else, but the very thing which God requires him to do. He is willing to go to the ends of the earth, or to pay his money, or to endure suffering, or anything but full and instantaneous submission to God. Now, if you will compromise the matter with him, and tell him of something else that he may do, and yet evade that point (*of obedience to God*), he will be very much comforted. He likes that instruction. He says, "Oh, yes, I will do that, I like that minister, he is not so severe as others, he seems to understand my particular case, and knows how to make allowances."

Acts 3:19 So repent, turn around and return to God, that your sins may be erased AMP

4. Saying to the sinner "I have faith you'll be converted (or restored to God)" Finney: "The very object of the Spirit of God, is, to tear away from the sinner his last vestige of a hope, while remaining in sin. To annihilate every crag and twig he may cling to. And the object of your instruction should be the same. You should fall in with the plan of God. It is only in this way that you can ever do any good, by hemming him in until he is willing to submit at once and leave his soul in the hands of God. But when one that he thinks is a Christian

tells him "I have faith to believe you will be converted (*or restored to God*)," it strengthens him in his false expectation. Instead of tearing him away from his false hopes and throwing him on Christ, you just encourage him to rest content on your faith, and find comfort because you have faith for him. This is all false comfort; that works death".

5. Misapplying Bible promises. Finney: "Another fatal way, in which false comfort is given to sinners, is by applying to them certain Scripture promises, which were designed for the righteous. This is a great device of the devil (e.g. *Rom 8:1 "There is now no condemnation when they should be under condemnation; this verse is "to those who are in Christ Jesus who do not walk after the flesh (sinners are in the flesh) but who walk after the Spirit".)*

6. Errors in praying for people - as poor sinners. Finney: "Does the Bible ever use any such language as this? The idea that he is poor, rather than wicked, unfortunate, rather than guilty, relieves the sinner greatly. I have seen the sinner writhe with agony under the truth, in a meeting, until somebody begun to pray for him as a poor creature. And then he would gush out into tears, and weep profusely, and think he was greatly benefited by such a prayer. "Oh, what a good prayer that was." If you go now and converse with that sinner, you will find he is pitying himself as a poor unfortunate creature...but his CONVICTIONS OF SIN, his deep impressions of AWFUL GUILT, are all gone".

Finney's conclusion: "This treatment of anxious sinners, giving them false comfort, is, in fact, cruelty. It is as cruel as the grave, as cruel as hell, for it is calculated to send the sinner down to hell's burning abyss. Christians feel compassion for the anxious, and so they ought. But the last thing they ought to do is to cave in just when the sinner has come to a crisis. They should lay open to the sinner the awfulness of his case, expose his guilt and danger, and then lead him right up to the cross, and insist on his instant submission.

Never tell a sinner anything, or give him any direction, that will lead him to stop short of, or that does not include, absolute submission to God. To let him stop at any point short of this, is infinitely dangerous. Suppose you are at a gospel or a prayer meeting, and tell a sinner to pray, or to read a book, or anything short of the repentance needed for salvation and he should fall and break his neck that night, of whom would his blood be required?

Ezek 3:19 *If you do warn an evil man and he doesn't stop sinning, he will die, still a sinner, but your life will be spared (his blood won't be on your hands) TEV*

Oh, it is enough to make one's heart bleed, to see so many miserable comforters for anxious sinners, in whose answers there remains falsehood. What a vast amount of spiritual quackery there is in the world, and how many "forgers of lies" there are, and "physicians of no value". Who know no better than to comfort sinners with false hopes, and delude them with their "old wives' fables," and nonsense. Or, who give way to false tenderness and sympathy, until they don't have enough firmness to apply the sword of the Spirit (*God's word*), to cut men to the soul, and lay open the sinner's naked heart".

Rom 2:13-15 ...*For down in their hearts they know right from wrong. God's laws are written within them; their own conscience accuses them, or sometimes excuses them... They know what is right but don't do it. After all, salvation is not given to those who know what to do, unless they do it.*

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