

# **PREACHING SO AS TO CONVERT NOBODY**

**by CHARLES G. FINNEY**

The design of this article is to propound several rules, by a steady conformity to any one of which a man may preach so as not to convert anybody. It is generally conceded at the present day that the Holy Spirit converts souls to Christ by means of truth adapted to that end.

It follows that a selfish preacher will not skilfully adapt means to convert souls to Christ, for this is not his end.

1. Let your supreme motive be to secure your own popularity; then, of course, your preaching will be adapted to that end, and not to convert souls to Christ.
2. Aim at pleasing, rather than at converting your hearers.
3. Aim at securing for yourself the reputation of a beautiful writer.
4. Let your sermons be written with a high degree of literary finish.
5. Let them be short, occupying in the reading not to exceed from twenty to twenty-five minutes.
6. Let your style be flowery, ornate, and quite above the comprehension of the common people.
7. Be sparing of thought, lest your sermon contain truth enough to convert a soul.
8. Lest your sermon should make a saving impression, announce no distinct propositions or heads, that will be remembered, to disturb the consciences of your hearers.
9. Make no distinct points, and take no disturbing issues with the consciences of your hearers, lest they remember these issues, and become alarmed about their souls.
10. Avoid a logical division and sub-division of your subject, lest you should too thoroughly instruct your people.
11. Give your sermon the form and substance of a flowing, beautifully written, but never-to-be-remembered essay; so that your hearers will say "it was a beautiful sermon," but can give no further account of it.
12. Avoid preaching doctrines that are offensive to the carnal mind, lest they should say of you, as they did of Christ, "This is a hard saying. Who can hear it?" and that you are injuring your influence.

13. Denounce sin in the abstract, but make no allusion to the sins of your present audience.
14. Keep the spirituality of God's holy law, by which is the knowledge of sin, out of sight, lest the sinner should see his lost condition, and flee from the wrath to come.
15. Preach the Gospel as a remedy, but conceal, or ignore the fatal disease of the sinner.
16. Preach salvation by grace; but ignore the condemned' and lost condition of the sinner, lest he should understand what you mean by grace, and feel his need of it.
17. Preach Christ as an infinitely amiable and good-natured being; but ignore those scathing rebukes of sinners and hypocrites which so often made his hearers tremble.
18. Avoid especially preaching to those who are present. Preach about sinners, and not to them. Say they, and not you, lest any one should make a personal and saving application of your subject.
19. Aim to make your hearers pleased with themselves and pleased with you, and be careful not to wound the feelings of any one.
20. Preach no searching sermons, lest you convict and convert the worldly members of your church.
21. Avoid awakening uncomfortable memories by reminding your hearers of their past sins.
22. Do not make the impression that God commands your hearers now and here to obey the truth.
23. Do not make the impression that you expect your hearers to commit themselves upon the spot and give their hearts to God.
24. Leave the impression that they are expected to go away in their sins, and to consider the matter at their convenience.
25. Dwell much upon their inability to obey, and leave the impression that they must wait for God to change their natures.
26. Make no appeals to the fears of sinners; but leave the impression that they have no reason to fear.
27. Say so little of Hell that your people will infer that you do not believe in its existence.
28. Make the impression that, if God is as good as you are, He will send no one to Hell.

29. Preach the love of God, but ignore the holiness of His love, that will by no means clear the impenitent sinner.
30. Often present God in His parental love and relations; but ignore His governmental and legal relations to His subjects, lest the sinner should find himself condemned already, and the wrath of God abiding on him.
31. Preach God as all mercy, lest a fuller representation of His character should alarm the consciences of your hearers.
32. Try to convert sinners to Christ without producing any uncomfortable convictions of sin.
33. Flatter the rich, so as to repel the poor, and you will convert none of either class.
34. Make no disagreeable allusions to the doctrines of self-denial, cross-bearing, and crucifixion to the world, lest you should convict and convert some of your church members.
35. Admit, either expressly or impliedly, that all men have some moral goodness in them; lest sinners should understand that they need a radical change of heart, from sin to holiness.
36. Avoid pressing the doctrine of total moral depravity; lest you should offend, or even convict and convert, the moralist.
37. Do not rebuke the worldly tendencies of the church, lest you should hurt their feelings, and finally convert some of them.
38. Should any express anxiety about their souls, do not probe them by any uncomfortable allusion to their sin and ill-desert; but encourage them to join the church at once, and exhort them to assume their perfect safety within the fold.
39. Preach the love of Christ not as enlightened benevolence, that is holy, just, and sin-hating; but as a sentiment, an involuntary and indiscriminating fondness.
40. Be sure not to represent religion as a state of loving self-sacrifice for God and soul; but rather as a free and easy state of self-indulgence. By thus doing, you will prevent sound conversions to Christ, and convert your hearers to yourself.
41. So select your themes, and so present them, as to attract and flatter the wealthy, aristocratic, self-indulgent extravagant, pleasure-seeking classes, and you will not convert any of them to the cross-bearing religion of Christ.
42. Be time-serving, or you will endanger your salary and, besides, if you speak out and are faithful, you may convert somebody.
43. Do not preach with a divine unction, lest your preaching make a saving impression.

44. To avoid this, do not maintain a close walk with God, but rely upon your learning and study.
45. Lest you should pray too much, engage in light reading and worldly amusements.
46. That your people may not think you in earnest to save their souls, and, as a consequence, heed your preaching, encourage church-fairs, lotteries and other gambling and worldly expedients to raise money for church purposes.
47. If you do not approve of such things, make no public mention of your disapprobation, lest your church should give them up, and turn their attention to saving souls and be saved themselves.
48. Do not rebuke extravagance in dress, lest you should uncomfortably impress your vain and worldly church-members.
49. Lest you should be troubled with revival scenes and labours, encourage parties, picnics, excursions, and worldly amusements, so as to divert attention from the serious work of saving souls.
50. Ridicule solemn earnestness in pulling sinners out of the fire, and recommend, by precept and example, it jovial, fun-loving religion, and sinners will have little respect for your serious preaching.
51. Cultivate a fastidious taste in your people, by avoiding all disagreeable allusions to the last judgment and final retribution.
52. Treat such uncomfortable doctrines as obsolete and out of place in these days of Christian refinement.
53. Do not commit yourself to much-needed reforms, lest you should compromise your popularity and injure your influence. Or you may make some branch of outward reform a hobby, and dwell so much upon it as to divert attention from the great work of converting souls to Christ.
54. So exhibit religion as to encourage the selfish pursuit of it. Make the impression upon sinners that their own safety and happiness is the supreme motive for being religious.
55. Do not lay much stress upon the efficacy and necessity of prayer, lest the Holy Spirit should be poured out upon you and the congregation, and sinners should be converted.
56. Make little or no impression upon your hearers, so that you can repeat your old sermons of ten without its being noticed.
57. If your text suggest any alarming thought, pass lightly over it, and by no means dwell upon and enforce it.

58. Avoid all illustrations, repetitions, and emphatic sentences, that may compel your people to remember what you say.
59. Avoid all heat and earnestness in your delivery, lest you make the impression that you really believe what you say.
60. Address the imagination, and not the conscience, of your hearers.
61. Make it your great aim to be personally popular with all classes of your hearers.
62. Be tame and timid in presenting the claims of God, as would become you in presenting your own claims,
63. Be careful not to testify from your own personal experience of the power of the Gospel, lest you should produce the conviction upon your hearers that you have something which they need.
64. See that you say nothing that will appear to any of your hearers to mean him or her, unless it be something flattering.
65. Encourage church sociables, and attend them yourself, because they tend so strongly to levity as to compromise Christian dignity and sobriety, and thus paralyse the power of your preaching.
66. Encourage the cultivation of the social in so many ways as to divert the attention of yourself and your church-members from the infinite guilt and danger of the unconverted among you.
67. In those sociables talk a little about religion, but avoid any serious appeal to the heart and conscience of those who attend, lest you should discourage their attendance, always remembering that they do not go to socials to be earnestly dealt with in regard to their relations to God. In this way you will effectually so employ yourself and church-members as that your preaching will not convert anybody.

The experience of ministers who have steadily adhered to any of the above rules, will attest the soul-destroying efficacy of such a course, and churches whose ministers have steadily conformed to any of these rules can testify that such preaching does not convert souls to Christ.

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