

What Saith the Scripture?

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Professor Finney's Letter of January 30, 1839

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TO THE CHRISTIAN READERS OF "THE OBERLIN EVANGELIST"

Beloved:

You perceive that I have already commenced one of the promised courses of lectures. Before I proceed any farther, permit me to bring distinctly before your minds the main object I have in view and the reasons for the course I intend to pursue.

My object is the sanctification of "your whole spirit and soul and body."

My reasons are the following:

When I was first converted and entered the ministry, my mind was powerfully drawn, as I then thought and now think, to labor for the conversion of sinners. Upon that one grand object my heart was set, and to the accomplishment of it many of you can bear witness that all my powers were devoted. My study, preaching, prayers, visiting and conversation were devoted to that end. My mind was, of course, occupied almost exclusively with that class of truths that were calculated to work the conviction and conversion of the impenitent.

I generally spent but a few months in a place, and during that time my preaching and influence were directed, as I have said, almost exclusively to the conversion of the ungodly. I only spent so much time in preaching to the church as was indispensable to arouse them and get them out of the way of sinners.

About the same time, and subsequently to my laboring as an evangelist, a number of other evangelists were and have been called forward by the Spirit of God, who have labored many for the same object. The attention and labor of pastors have also been directed mainly to the same end during the extensive revivals of the few past years.

To my own mind it appears that this unity of design and effort were, to say the least, to a great extent indispensable to the accomplishment of the great work that has been undeniably achieved. That hundreds of thousands of sinners have been converted to God by these instrumentalities I have no doubt. And I think I can see very clearly the wisdom of God in calling up the attention of so many evangelists, pastors and churches to the immediate conversion of the ungodly.

It has been represented, as perhaps some of you know, that I wholly disapprove of my own course as an evangelist and that I wholly disapprove of the course of other evangelists and pastors in this great work. Now this is by no means true. I do not by any means pretend to justify all that I have done, nor suppose that my course was faultless. Nor do I pretend to justify all that other evangelists and pastors have done to promote this work. Nor do I pretend that in everything our views of what was best to be done have been exactly alike. But with respect to myself, I feel bound to say that the more I have looked over the course in which I was led, the class of truths I preached and the means that I adopted, the more deeply have I been impressed with the conviction, that, considering the object I had in view, namely, the conversion of sinners, the course in which God led me was upon the whole wise, and such an one in almost all respects as I should pursue again, with my present experience, had I the same object in view.

I am also convinced that God has been wise in leading other evangelists and pastors in their preaching and measures. And although much of human infirmity may have and doubtless has appeared in what we have done, yet upon the whole I do not see what better could have been expected or done, under the circumstances of the case, for the accomplishment of so great and good a work.

In the midst of my efforts, however, for the conversion of sinners (and as far as my knowledge extends, it has been so with other evangelists and pastors) we have overlooked in a great measure the fact that converts would not make one step of progress only as they were constantly plied with means as well adapted to their sanctification and growth in grace, as were the means of their conversion. Believing and feeling as I did then and do now that if persons were once converted God in faithfulness would save them, I overlooked the necessity of the constant and vigorous and pointed use of means to effect this end. By this I do not mean that I did not at all feel this necessity. But it was not so fully before my mind as the necessity of the use of vigorous means for the conversion of the ungodly.

It is true that had I been impressed with this necessity, my stay in every place was too short to accomplish much in the work of leading converts to manhood in religion. The same has been true of my brethren who have been and are evangelists. And I have reason to believe that the great desire of pastors for the conversion of sinners in those congregations where revivals have prevailed and the great success that under God has attended the use of means for their conversion, has led them in a great measure to neglect the church-- to leave out of view the more spiritual truths of the gospel that constitute the food of Christians and are essential to their sanctification.

In revisiting some of the churches in which I had formerly labored, my mind was some years since from time to time deeply impressed with the necessity of doing something for the sanctification of Christians. And after I had been settled two or three years in the city of New York and had labored almost exclusively for the conversion of sinners, I was fully convinced that converts would die, that the standard of piety would never be elevated, that revivals would become more and more superficial and finally cease, unless something effectual was done to elevate the standard of holiness in the church. And in attempting to present to the church the high and pure doctrines of grace and all that class of truths which are the food and life of the Christian soul, I found to my sorrow that I had been so long in pursuit of sinners with the law, to convict them, and only enough of the gospel just to

convert them, that my mind had, as it were, run down. And those high and spiritual truths had not that place in my own heart which is indispensable to the effectual exhibition of them to others. I found that I knew comparatively little about Christ, and that a multitude of things were said about Him in the gospel of which I had no spiritual view and of which I knew little or nothing.

What I did know of Christ was almost exclusively as an atoning and justifying Savior. But as a JESUS to save men from sin, or as a sanctifying Savior, I knew very little about Him. This was made by the Spirit of God very clear to my mind. And it deeply convinced me that I must know more of the gospel in my own experience and have more of Christ in my own heart, or I could never expect to benefit the church. In that state of mind, I used often to tell the Lord Jesus Christ that I was sensible that I knew very little about Him; and I besought Him to reveal himself to me that I might be instrumental in revealing Him to others. I used especially to pray over particular passages and classes of passages in the gospel that speaketh Christ, that I might apprehend their *meaning* and feel their *power* in my own heart. And I was often strongly convinced that I desired this for the great purpose of making Christ known to others.

I will not enter into detail with regard to the way in which Christ led me. Suffice it to say, and alone to the honor of His grace do I say it, He has taught me some things that I asked Him to show me. Since my own mind became impressed in the manner in which I have spoken, I have felt as strongly and unequivocally pressed by the Spirit of God to labor for the sanctification of the church as I once did for the conversion of sinners. By multitudes of letters and from various other sources of information I have learned, to my great joy, that God has been and is awakening a spirit of inquiry on the subject of holiness throughout the church, both in this country and in Europe.

You who read my lectures in the *N.Y. Evangelist* while I was in the city of New York may remember the manner in which God was leading my own mind-- through what a process of conviction and to what results He brought me previously to my leaving there. Since then God has been continually dealing with me in mercy. And oh how often I have longed to unburden myself and pour out my whole heart to the dear souls that were converted in those powerful revivals.

And now, dearly beloved, I have commenced this course of lectures in the hope that, should God spare my life, He will make them the instrument of doing you good. You need searching and trying and purifying and comforting. You need to be humbled, edified, sanctified. I think I know, very nearly, where great multitudes of you are in religion and will endeavor, God helping me from time to time, to adapt truth to what I suppose to be your circumstances and state of mind. As I said in my former letter [[January 1, 1839](http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Fellowship/Finney.Oberlin.Evangelist.html#letter--) -- [http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Fellowship/Finney.Oberlin.Evangelist.html#letter --](http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Fellowship/Finney.Oberlin.Evangelist.html#letter--)], I cannot visit you and preach to you orally, on account of the state of my health. And besides, I think the Spirit of God calls me for the present to remain here. But through the press, I can hold communion with you and preach to you the gospel of Christ.

In addition to the sermons which I design to preach to you, I shall probably from time to time address letters to you when I have anything particular to say that cannot well be said in a sermon. If any spiritual advise is asked by letter, as is often the case, upon any subject that can be answered in a sermon, you may generally expect to find my answer in some of my lectures-- concealing, of course, the fact that I have a particular case under my eye. If, in any case, the answer cannot well be given in

a sermon, should providence permit you may expect an answer, either privately to the individual who makes the request or in a letter in the *Evangelist*, which may not only assist the inquirer but that class of persons who are in a similar state of mind. In this case also, of course, I shall not disclose the names of the particular inquirers.

And now, dearly beloved, do not suppose that I do this because I suppose that I am the only man who can give you spiritual advice but because I am willing to do what I can. And as I have freely received, I wish freely to impart whatever of the gospel the blessed God has taught me.

One word more. I have noticed in several papers a garbled extract from a remark that I made in one of my lectures published in the *N.Y. Evangelist*, which I here mention simply because it is dishonorable to God and injurious to you. In that lecture I said

"that those converted in the great revivals in the land, although real Christians, as I believed, and the best Christians in the church at the present day, were nevertheless a disgrace to religion on account of the low standard of their piety; and if I had health again to be an evangelist, I would labor for a revival in the churches and for the elevation of the standard of piety among Christians."

Now you perceive that I have here asserted my full conviction that those revivals were genuine works of God, "that the converts were real Christians," that "they are the best Christians in the church," and yet that on many accounts they are a disgrace to religion. Now this I fully believe and reassert. And it is to win you away, if possible, from the last remains of sin that I have undertaken this work. The papers to which I allude have injuriously presented me as admitting that those revivals were spurious and the converts not Christians. I do not complain of this on my own account nor speak of it if I know my own heart, because I have any regard to its bearing upon myself, but because it is a slander upon those precious revivals, and injurious to you, as in substance denying that the grace of God ever converted you.

And now, dearly beloved, I must close this letter, beseeching you to make me a subject of earnest prayer that God will enlighten and sanctify me, fill me with the spirit of the gospel of His Son and help me to impart to you the true bread and water of life, rightly dividing truth and giving to everyone a portion in due season.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you forever.

C. G. FINNEY
A Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ