

# Henrietta Bissell

by Charles Finney

---

*Charles Finney's letter to Henrietta Bissell details his ministry efforts in England, highlighting the challenges and successes of revival work.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 55:11, Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 16:9

**Topics:** "Revival", "Faith in Ministry"

---

## Description

Charles Finney addresses Henrietta Bissell, sharing the progress of his ministry in England, where he has been met with both enthusiasm and opposition. He recounts the overwhelming response to his preaching, with churches filled to capacity and many conversions taking place. Despite facing criticism and warnings from other ministers, Finney emphasizes the importance of standing firm in truth and the power of God to transform lives. He expresses gratitude for the support he receives and the collaborative spirit among different denominations in the revival efforts. Finney encourages prayer for the ongoing work and the need for faith in God's ability to bring about change.

---

## Transcript

To Henrietta Bissell

c. 24 April 1850

[MS in Finney Papers, Supplement # 29. The first part of the letter is by Elizabeth Finney. Finney's letter starts on page 8]

Worcester April 22d 1850

My very dear Sister

Your kind letter of the 23d of March I

received by the last steamer - Your letters are always interesting but at this time, in a land of strangers it was indeed a refresh-ing cordial - And yet I do not feel like a stranger in a strange land, for we every where find the kindness and attention which the dearest friends could bestow - I was thinking of writing you again as I wish to keep you informed - not only of where we are but of what we are doing, and of the success attending our labors

I do not remember exactly what I wrote you in my last letter and At the risk of repeating some things, I wish to give you a brief history of the way we have been led by our blessed guide, and of the present prospects for the success of the work which our blessed Lord seems to have entrusted to our hands - You know Mr Finney labored three weeks at Houghton

The letters to yourself & Mrs Livingston, with the extracts I made from letters received, will give you some idea of the work there I would just say here - this blessed work still continues, and one clergyman in writing Mr Finney says - "Brother Harcourt has now a working church, and preaches in a praying atmosphere"

We went to Birmingham early in December - Mr Finney preached for Mr Roe, a Baptist minister - Friday after Christmas, at Mr James' request the dissenting ministers met Mr Finney at breakfast, at Mr James', to decide upon the best course

then

to be ^ pursued - It was agreed then, that Mr Finney should

except the Methodists

preach around all the dissenting chapels ^ - commencing in John Angel James' - There he delivered three sermons - Mr James said they were good - just what was needed - but most dreadfully searching - After preaching around for four or five weeks Mr Finney's labors were confined to the Ebenezer Chapel - the second largest in Birmingham - The house full on week evenings, and so crowded on Sunday evenings that hundreds went away for want of room - The inquirers were so numerous that a school room which would hold five hundred would be filled and sometimes all could not gain entrance - Things were in this state when the adversary

[page 2]

took the alarm - Mr James began to receive letters, warning him against Mr Finney and his doctrines - extracts from the review of Dr Duffield were reprinted in some of the periodicals in which the "God dishonouring - man exalting philosophy" of Mr Finney was denounced - this was sent to Mr James - He very frankly com-municated these facts to Mr Finney, and also showed him some letters of caution which he had received - In these letters the writers appealed to Mr James on account of his very high standing, and the great influence he had over ministers

careful

throughout the kingdom to be very ^ and warned him against admitting Mr Finney into his pulpit - All this Mr James made known to Mr Finney and confessed himself exceedingly tried with the subject - My Husband replied, Mr James you can fully satisfy yourself upon this subject - you need not be in doubt as to my orthodoxy - You can hear for yourself - My opinions are given to the public in my Theology which is here and at your service, and there is a responsibility on the other side of the subject - If you have this great influence it is quite important how you use this influence, and you must see to it that it is on the side of truth - You and I shall soon pass into that world where we must give an account of the use we have made of our influence - I think you are required to see, and judge for yourself and not take the slang from the other side of the water and judge from that, but read, hear, and judge for yourself - Mr Finney then told Mr James how he had answered Dr Duffield, and gave some reasons why Dr Duffield had taken the position he had with regard to his writings - Mr James took home the books - He sent for Dr Redford I

presume, for in a day or two Mr James called with Dr Redford to see Mr Finney - here let me say Dr Redford is the great Theologian among the Independents and of whom Dr Camp-bell says "there is not a wiser man in all England" - After Mr James and the Dr had conversed an hour or two with Mr F

Dr Redford says, well Mr James, I can not see but Mr Finney and ourselves are agreed in all important points - His manner of stating his subjects differ a little from our own, but I cannot see but he is correct in all of his opinions

[along the left hand margin of page 2]

Mr James and Dr Redford are both about 65 years of age - both do stand high in this kingdom for intelligence and moral worth - Perhaps no two men have more influence in England than these two divines

[page 3]

My Husband said if we differ at all I think it will be on the doctrine of sanctification - but even here they did not disappro

prove Dr Redford remained at Birmingham three or four nights hearing Mr F- preach, and then took his books home to read.

After reading them partly through, he wrote Mr Finney a very gratifying letter - speaking of the clearness of his statements and the perfect satisfaction he had had from its perusal - I can not now give you his exact language but if I can find his note will do so before closing this letter\*- At this time he begs him to come to Worcester and says my pulpit is open for you at any time - He also urged Mr Finney's publishing the book before he left this country - After this, Mr Finney continued preaching a week or two at Ebenezer chapel - then went for a week at Mr James' - then two weeks at Mr Roe's - afterward two weeks at Ebenezer again - here he found his strength exhausted and left Birmingham unexpectedly to the people and when the revival was in its most interesting and powerful form

Two persons were up from Huntingtongshire wishing us to go with them but my Husband said I must rest - Just at this time we received pressing letters from Oberlin and the brethren who are interested in Oberlin, to go home - My Husband said unless something occurred here to mark his path of duty plain to remain he must go home in April - We came to this place to visit Mr Hutchinson, an old friend and a spiritual child of Mr Finneys

As soon as we arrived the request was made that he would commence a series of services at Dr Redfords chapel and in the Baptist chapel

Mr Finney says I have come here for rest - beside I have letters from America which will make my return necessary - Dr Redford says you may rest, but do not return home - I wish you to go to London with me in May to meet the general association of ministers

I wish to introduce you to them, and we wish to make some general movement for a revival of religion throughout the kingdom

I think I can promise you the hearty co-operation of almost all my Brethren in the ministry - We wish you to occupy the largest chapels in our principal cities and towns and we will go into the smaller places and labor and see if something can not be done to revive religion throughout the kingdom

Mr Finney said, that view of the subject certainly was important and if this plan could be carried into effect it would be such an opening in the providence of God as to make him hesitate about his duty in returning to America

[in the left-hand margin is the following]

\* Your system is well arranged, and carried out to its logical consequences in almost every particular

[page 4]

After a weeks rest Mr Finney commenced preaching in this place The truth is taking effect - Some of the stout hearted are beginning to yield - many are deeply convicted and there are many interesting conversions - Last evening the house was crowded aisles and every place the vestries opening out of the church and every door way was filled - My Husband preached two hours - all was most solemnly still - the persons standing scarcely moved during the sermon & it was manifest that God was there with great power - There was no place unoccupied where they could invite the anxious & Mr Finney was himself too much exhausted for continuing the services - Since we have been in Worcester my Husband has received letters from Dr Campbell of London requesting him to hold a series of services in his chapel - He has two of the largest chapels in the city under his care - they are about three miles apart in the heart of the city - These places were built for Whitfield and Dr Campbell says Mr F shall have the hearty cooperation of himself and colleague - Dr Campbell is the editor of the Christian Witness and Banner - both of these papers have an extensive circulation - He is delighted with Dr Redfords idea and says my Husband will have access to every pulpit among the Independents in the Kingdom

Dr Campbell says he is ready for a long pull - a strong pull and a pull altogether - Mr Finney now proposes to leave here Monday the 5th of May - After the meeting of ministers to commence a series of sermons on the conditions of prevailing prayer - these Dr Campbell designs reporting and printing that they may be scattered to the four winds of Heaven - Now dear Sister if the Lord opens such a door will it not be a "great door" and will you not expect it to be an 'effectual door' for the salvation of souls - This does so seem like the work of God that we cannot but adore, and wonder and wait to see what all these things mean - We read that Mary after receiving the adoration of the Shepherds which they paid to the infant Jesus, 'kept all these things and pondered them in her heart' - The Lord give to us great faith - a single eye and his own power to rest upon us that his own great and glorious name may be magnified - Should this movement be made it would truly seem that "God was taking to himself his mighty power" to rule & reign

[page 5]

5 page-

Mr Finney has received very kind letters from Mr Parsons the author of "Anti Bachus" requesting his services in that place which he calls Whitfields Valley" - says there are 49 000 inhabitants

all the brethren will heartily cooperate in the work and begs him to come -One of the distinguished lawyers would be happy to have us as guests - He does not wish to overwork my Husband but says the air is fine and a plenty of vehicles to take us to ride and thinks he may be benefited in health, and they blessed by our labors - Baptist Noel has sent a request for Mr Finney to come and occupy his pulpit in London - Now dear Henrietta you would wonder at all this if you knew the efforts which have been made from the other side to awaken suspicion against my precious Husband - He has been represented as infidel - Unitarian

and, I know not what - At one of the ministers meetings in Birmingham, one minister a stranger was present who said he had just had an

at his house

American (I think a minister) ^ who said Mr Finney was not at all respected at home - No one would ask him to preach at least none of the leading ministers in the cities - That is a mistake said Mr James & It is not true - I know Mr Finney preached for Mr Beecher in Brooklyn as he came here, and I know he had other invitations for I have seen them & I have now a letter from Mr Kirk speaking in the highest terms of Mr Finney - I know also he preached three times in Boston - It is as you once said "amusing" if such serious consequences were not involved in such reports to see what efforts are made to injure a devoted servant of God - One who literally is living to benefit souls - But the Lord knows how to take "the prey from the mighty" we have seen that the Lord "is stronger than the strong man armed the lawful captive shall be delivered" - I have written these things to you dear Sister that you may know how to pray for us, and how to pray for the church on this side - But does it not seem as if the set time to favor Zion had really come

I am ready to say to every one let us believe for the blessing

[page 6]

Let us expect it now - Is not this a wonderful movement on the part of ministers - If you could see the number of letters pouring in - The Macedonian cry from every quarter greeting our ears, and the union of different denominations in the same place urging my Husband to come and help - and then take into consideration the effort that has been made to prejudice the people against revivals - representing the churches in America as gone back - sunk lower than they were before those great revivals and This coming to[o] from Ministers and those who profess to know all about it you would wonder at the cordiality with which we have ever been received, and the pulpits which from the first have been opened to my Husband - I know it is not impossible but that we may yet have to meet with trials and difficulties greater than as yet we have had to encounter

I know Satan will not yield his empire without a struggle but I know too, that when Christ comes at last, he comes as conqueror - he will assert his right to every heart and take to himself his mighty power - "his eyes are as a flame of fire and on his head are many crowns and his name is called the word of God" - The truth is to become effectual - error is to be discovered - May the Lord hasten this glorious day

And Oh my dear, dear Sister may he teach us what we can do to hasten its approach - Mr Finney is now preaching to crowded houses in Dr Redfords chapel - and most attentive listeners

Wednesday 24th - Sunday the chapel was crowded after bringing in all the seats that could be placed in the aisles, the vestries - door ways - gallery stairs - pulpit stairs were all crowded - The truth is taking powerful hold upon the people - rich and poor - high and low - professors and unconverted all are feeling the searching power of truth and I trust are yielding to the claims of God - ready to live henceforth to serve him - Last night the chapel was again full - My Husband preached two hours, but no one moved - from this you can see and understand the influence truth is having over the mind - Dear Henrietta I hope you will not think this is boasting you know, or I trust you know, that I feel, and deeply feel that God only can accomplish these results - but it does seem to me this is to be the effect of truth when Christ comes as

[page 7]

conqueror. He comes then, as the word of God and why should not the truth of God plainly preached be just as powerful now, and just as effectual as in the days of the Apostles - Are there more prejudices to meet, are any more deeply prejudiced than were the Jews against the gospel of Christ? why then is there not more faith that the word shall not return void, but shall accomplish that which God intends, and prosper that that whereunto it is sent - Mr Finney's health remains good for the amount of labor he has to perform - He had a severe cold after he came to Worcester - lost his voice for two or three days, and failed to meet the engagements made for him for three services - He is now recruited, and is looking nicely

Since we came to Worcester my Husband had not preached every evening as he had done in other places - he had only reserved Saturday evening for his rest, and even that would often be spent in a prayer meeting - Now he preaches only three week evening and twice on the Sabbath - My own health is good - I can endure more fatigue than almost any person of my age -

about the 6th of April

I wrote Sarah Hills ^ one of my long letters and directed it to her at the Astor House - Since that I have heard of her as spending some time in Washington - I fear she may not receive the letter

I ought to apologize to my friends for sending them such ill written letters - but I am obliged to write in great haste often, just as I can take a little time here and there so that I sometimes commence a sentence and when ready to finish it I have forgotten what I was intending to write

Do write us as often as you can find time for you tell me more of the state of religion than any other person - I can not object my dear Sister

to you making such use of our letters as you shall think will best glorify God

I have great confidence in your wisdom in all this though Mr Finney does not wish his letters published in the papers - and I certainly do not wish any such course with mine, still we have no wish to keep them from any one who would be interested or benefitted by their perusal - Give much love to Dr & Mrs Parker with their children - Love to Mrs Eaton when you see her - I think Hobart and Sarah would be interested in reading this letter - Love to my dear little girls when you see them I hear of your George through Hobart - I hope these dear sons will ever love as they do now - I hear that Calhoun is dead - will not this intimidate the slaveholders - I have read with great interest Mr Websters speech and am now reading Gov Swards - May the Lord bless our beloved country - It is a blessed land a blessed people - My Husband will write you dear Sister for himself

Your very affectionate and grateful Sister E. A. Finney

[page 8 in Finney's handwriting]

Dear Sister. Dear Wife should have said that my purpose is to remain at London, at this visit, only a short time & then retire to some place to get a little rest, God willing, & return to London early in the fall for more protracted labors. She has said nothing about her own labors. The fact is Dear Sister Bissell that the Lord has opened to her a wonderful field of usefulness, & she is so wonderfully qualified to help forward this work that I can not but adore that Providence that made her my wife. Her sweet temper, her engaging manner, her ladylike address & polished manners, her ready utterance, her great faith & uncommonly rich experience as a christian, as a Mother, & her ability as a lecturer to the females & as a conductor of female prayermeetings, her ready selfdenial, untiring efforts to save souls, & in short her whole life &

deportment so commend her to all clas[s]es that she is truly a help meet for me. As a wife you know she is all affection.

The more I see of her & witness the nature & results of her efforts the more clearly can I see the wisdom of that wonderful goodness that made her my own precious wife. The appointments to meet different classes of females are made from the pulpit by the Pastors as mine are. The Lord bles[s]es her with health & she is full of spiritual labor. Dear Sister, I say not this to boast. No indeed, but considering the circumstances under which she became my wife, this testimony from me is due to her, to you & to her friends. Of course our letters are not for the press. We should not speak thus freely of ourselves & our labors, to the publick ear.

The fact is I can not fully express my admiration of my dear wife, as a wife, a mother, a christian & a colaborer in the gospel. She can be more safely trusted to converse with inquirers than almost any one I ever saw. Do let us hear from you often. Until further advised direct to us simply Birmingham England. The post master will know where we are & will send to us. It is altogether uncertain when we shall return to America. The Lord will take care of all. We speak only of present prospects & live by the day. That great trials await us is highly probable, especially if God designs to work mightily by us. Surely you will not cease to pray for us. Do present our kindest regards to Do[c]tor & Mrs Parker, & to all friends as you have opportunity

The arm of the Lord is evidently made bear, the tide of life is rising

The breath of the spirit is reviving the dry bones in this valley of vision. O, Pray dearest sister that this [ ? ] island may be inundated with the water of life. Yours in the love of christ. C. G. Finney.

[along the left-hand margin of page 5, Elizabeth Finney wrote;]

April 26th - Last night though a very rainy night the house was crowded - gallery stairs full - and all seemed solemn as the grave - The anxious too numerous for any of the vestries to hold -

Footnotes:

Rev. H. L Tuck of Fenstanton, letter to Finney, 9 April 1850.

Campbell had written: "In the person of Dr. Redford, you will have a wise Counsellor--England presents none wiser." (Campbell to Finney, 3 April 1850)

There are letters to Finney from Oberlin, from Henry Cowles dated January 9, 1850, and from John Morgan dated 7 January and 12 March 1850.

John Hutchinson, a cutlery manufacturer, was converted in Chatham Street Chapel in New York. Finney describes his conversion in the Memoirs, pp. 360-361.

There are three letters from Benjamin Parsons, the minister of the Independent Chapel in Ebley, near Stroud, in the Finney Papers.

Parsons wrote: "Several Houses are open for your reception, among others, Lindsey Winterbotham Esq, desires me to say that he would be happy to have you as his guest" (Parsons to Finney, April 8, 1850).

Charles H. Roe wrote from Birmingham to Finney:

Baptist Neoel "Wright" tells me wants you to his Pulpit.

The date of this letter is sometime after 13th March.

John Campbell published an extract from a letter which he had received from Birmingham, speaking of Finney:

a writer in the Evangelical Magazine thinks his preaching tends to Infidelity.

(in The British Banner, 10 April 1850, p. 247)

Revelation 19:12-13.

This was probably Elizabeth Selden Spencer Eaton, wife of Amos B. Eaton of Rochester.

John Caldwell Calhoun (1782-1850), the champion of the southern states and defender of slavery, died on 31 March 1850.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/henrietta-bissell/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**