

# Letters on Revival--No. 1.

by Charles Finney

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*Charles Finney shares his insights and experiences on revivals to guide and caution fellow ministers in their practices and understanding.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:42, Romans 12:11, 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, Ephesians 4:11-13, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21, 2 Timothy 1:6, Hebrews 10:24-25, James 1:5

**Topics:** "Revival", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

Charles Finney addresses the ministers and friends of Christ, sharing his reflections on revivals based on his two decades of experience. He expresses a desire to communicate his insights and lessons learned, acknowledging his past errors and the importance of understanding the dynamics of revivals. Finney emphasizes the need for careful methods in conducting revivals to avoid fanaticism and misrule, and he highlights the role of settled pastors in nurturing spiritual growth among converts. He plans to publish a series of letters to guide the church in these matters, aiming to foster a deeper understanding of revival practices.

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## Transcript

To All The Friends And Especially All The Ministers Of Our Lord Jesus Christ:

Beloved in the Lord:--Many of you are aware that several years since a series of Lectures on the subject of Revivals was published through the columns of the N. York Evangelist. These Lectures were preached by me to my own congregation in the city of N. York, and reported by the editor of that paper. Since the publication of those Lectures, my observation and experience on the subject have been continually developing and ripening until I am very desirous of saying many additional things to my brethren on this subject.

When I first began to preach, I was without knowledge and without experience on the subject of revivals. I had but a very limited Christian experience. The Lord led me in a way that I knew not. I have recently thought that it might be useful to the churches, to communicate to them my ripened experience and convictions upon the same subject. I can see that in some things I erred in manner and in spirit; which things I want to point out both by way of confessing my own faults, and as a warning to others. In many things also, I fell short of securing all the desirable results which might have been secured, had I been free from the faults to which I have alluded, and had I understood and applied all the necessary means and truths to bring forward and promote that ripeness of experience and growth in grace which is

indispensable to prevent reaction and disasters following revivals.

It is no part of my design to wage a war of words or opinions with my brethren, nor indeed is controversy in form or spirit, any part of my object. It is not a difference of metaphysical or theological views between myself and my brethren, upon which I wish to insist. But the thing I desire, is to be permitted to call their attention to certain facts and results with their causes, which it seems to me of the highest importance to the church well to consider.

What I have to say, I propose to publish through the columns of the Oberlin Evangelist, and wish that I had the means of sending a copy to every minister of every denomination in the land. These letters I design to write as the Lord gives me light and opportunity. I hope to be able to publish a letter in each succeeding number of the Evangelist, until the series is completed.

I wish the brethren particularly to understand that I lay no claim to infallibility upon this subject. I only wish to give my opinions with that modesty which becomes my ignorance, and which is demanded also by the nature of the subject.

I have had a continual experience upon the subject of revivals of religion, now for about twenty years; in the course of which experience, I have watched narrowly and with much solicitude the various types, developments, results, and indeed all the phenomena pertaining to them, and resulting from them. I have occasionally seen remarks in some of the newspapers assuming that since my residence in Oberlin, I have ceased to witness powerful revivals of religion in connection with my labors and the labors of those connected with me; but this is a great mistake, as my brethren generally would have been informed had not some of the leading papers which have made the assumption just mentioned, declined giving to the public the facts as they are and have been. I do not mention this either to censure those editors, or to boast of the success of my own labors and of those associated with me, but simply to bespeak your unbiased attention to what I have to say as coming not from one whose observation and experience in revivals have long ago ceased, but from one whose opportunities from observation and experience have continued in their freshness up to the present hour. Since I have been here, my position at home and my observation abroad, have given me peculiar advantages for judging of the expedience and inexpediency of certain measures. I have seen powerful revivals in this place from time to time now for about ten years, and indeed the state of things has generally been such here as would elsewhere have been considered a revival state. Scarcely a week or even a day has passed without more or less cases coming under my observation of manifest divine influence. I have had an opportunity to witness the results of revivals in their influence over young men preparing for the ministry, over ministers themselves, over the community at large, and for years after their occurrence. I have marked with the deepest interest their rise, their progress, their temporary decline, and again their revival, the various types they have taken on, and the occasion of these modifications together with what I deem to be disastrous, dangerous, useful.

There is a considerable number of topics to which I desire to call the attention of my brethren. In the providence of God, I have witnessed a great variety of methods in conducting revivals. When I first began to be acquainted with them, and for about ten years of my earliest labors, what are now termed protracted meetings were not known; since which, these meetings first styled 'conferences of churches,' then 'three day's meetings,' then 'four day's meetings,' and subsequently 'protracted meetings,' extending continuously through several weeks, have been the order of the day. In respect to the expedience as manifested in the results of these different methods, I have several things to say, to which I invite the prayerful consideration of all classes of christians. Also with respect to the great care that should be taken

to prevent their degenerating into a spirit of fanaticism and misrule, as in at least some instances they manifestly have done. I wish also to call the attention of the brethren to the occasions of those disastrous results. Also to the great importance of stated or settled pastors to watch over, carry out, and secure the desirable results of revivals, and the almost certainly disastrous consequences of disturbing the pastoral relation. I have also many things to say on the subject of cultivating high spirituality in converts, and securing them against those declensions which have so disgraced revivals. I cannot pretend at this time to enumerate the topics on which I wish to write, but would only at present bespeak the attention of my brethren to the series of short letters which I intend to address to them. I have another series in contemplation, upon the subject of the controversies, and the controversial spirit of the present day, which I hope to lay before my brethren at no distant period, should the Lord spare my life and give me opportunity.

Your brother,

C.G. FINNEY.

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