

# Letters on Revivals--No. 22.

by Charles Finney

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*Charles Finney's sermon emphasizes the urgent need for spiritual training and reform within the Church to sustain true revivals and deepen piety among believers.*

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:11, 2 Timothy 4:2

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

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## Description

Charles Finney addresses the decline of revivals, emphasizing the need for ministers to focus on elevating the standard of piety within the church rather than solely converting sinners. He expresses concern that the church has neglected spiritual growth and training for new converts, leading to a superficial understanding of faith. Finney laments the resistance from both ministers and congregations to efforts aimed at reforming and deepening spiritual life, warning that without such efforts, the church risks losing its essence. He calls for a return to deep spirituality and a commitment to holiness, urging ministers to embrace reproof and correction for the sake of the church's future. Finney's heartfelt plea is for a revival that begins within the church itself, fostering genuine spiritual growth and maturity.

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## Transcript

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

Dear Brethren:

More than ten years since I was led I think by the Spirit of the Lord to perceive that the course of things was tending rapidly towards the decline of revivals. Especially in this respect--there was very little of the right kind of preaching to the church, very little done and doing comparatively to elevate the standard of piety in the churches and to promote their permanent spirituality. Ministers, for the most part, were preaching and laboring directly for the conversion of sinners. This was the order of the day. For a time God greatly prospered this course; but as great multitudes of young converts were introduced into the churches it was indispensable to the continuance of a healthful state of piety that there should be very much and very discriminating preaching to the Church on the one hand, and every encouragement held out to make high attainments in spirituality and deep piety on the other. I perceived that this was greatly neglected by ministers in general, and that I had to some extent neglected it in my labors from church to church as an Evangelist: for in this course of labor, my principal and in many instances my almost exclusive efforts were made for the conversion of sinners. I expected that ministers and old professors of religion would follow up these powerful revivals by a thorough course of training of young converts. But I

saw that my expectations in this respect were by no means realized, and that consequently there was comparatively little growth in grace in the churches, and that their increase of spiritual strength and of aggressive power was by no means commensurate with their increase of numbers.

I believe it will be admitted by nearly all persons who are acquainted with the facts, that the converts in the revivals to which I allude have been to a great extent the strength and power of those churches from that time to this; and yet it is true that in those and in all other revivals of which I could hear, I perceived that they were not followed by that spiritual culture and training which promises to make the converts deeply spiritual and efficient Christians. The consequence has been that the converts in their turn set about the conversion of sinners with but a superficial piety of their own. Being untrained in deep spirituality and walking with God, and not being aware of the wiles of the devil, the Church to a great extent fell into a mechanical method of promoting revivals; which I could not but see would be attended with most disastrous consequences. Indeed I saw that the Church generally were getting into such a state that they would soon be wholly unable to promote true revivals of religion. I saw that they were losing the spirit of prayer and power with God, and that the tendency of things was to ruin revivals by substituting for them spurious forms of excitement.

Under this apprehension of things my own soul labored with great earnestness and agony for a deeper work in my own heart, that I might be able myself to exhibit more spiritual religion to the churches so far as I had access to them. When it pleased the Lord Jesus Christ to reveal himself more fully to my soul than he ever had done, and to show me heights and depths and lengths and breadths of the divine life which I never had perceived before, I was greatly impressed with the importance of elevating the standard of piety in the churches and of promoting among them a new type of religion in order to have them become so established in grace as to be kept from those temporary backslidings and effervescings that were disgracing religion.

But I can never reveal to man my astonishment and sorrow when I found that the ministry and the churches were so generally opposed to efforts to elevate the standard of piety among themselves. The cry was raised immediately--Why don't you preach to sinners? Why don't you labor for the conversion of sinners? Why are you endeavoring to reform the Church? I was astonished to find it generally assumed that the Church is well enough, and that the great and almost the only business of ministers is to promote the conversion of the ungodly.

Now I must say that this appeared to me then and has since to be a kind of spiritual infatuation. The state of the Church was fast becoming such as to render it a hopeless effort to aim at the real conversion of multitudes of the ungodly. The Church had been so little edified and built up in their most holy faith that they knew little or nothing of Christ except that he had died as an atoning sacrifice. Of the indwelling and energizing of his spirit within them--of holy walking and communion with Him--of being led by the Spirit--of denying all ungodliness and every worldly lust--of living above the world--of entire and universal consecration--of being filled with all the fullness of God; of these and such like things they were becoming to an alarming extent ignorant. Like people, like priest; the ministers to a great extent were in the same state. This I could not but perceive, and it filled me with unutterable agony.

I was not alone in this view of things. Here and there a brother in the ministry, and many in the churches throughout the length and breadth of the land I found had been led in the same way and had come to the same conclusions.

And now it does appear to me that the root of the difficulty that has arrested the onward, prosperous, and rising course of revivals of religion is that the Church has been neglected. It has been too much assumed that Christians would grow without food--would be established without spiritual culture--would honor God without deep, experimental piety. It seems to have been assumed that the Church would get along well enough if they could only add greatly to their numbers by the conversion of sinners. I have been deeply and unutterably grieved to find that efforts to reform the Church have been looked upon so coldly, and in many instances have been so deeply and bitterly opposed by multitudes of the Church and by great numbers of ministers. I have occasion to know that when the question has come up about my being invited to preach in certain churches, they have been willing that I should if I would preach to sinners, but they were not willing that I should preach to the Church. Once a written request was sent to me by a Presbyterian Church to come and preach a course of lectures to the impenitent. I have frequently heard of its being strongly objected to by ministers and leading church members that I should come and preach to Christians. They were unwilling to have Christians reprov'd and searched, and deeply overhauled to the very foundations of their hope. I have often heard fault found with that course of preaching which shakes the hopes of professors of religion. This kind of preaching has been spoken of again and again as so very objectionable that it was not to be tolerated.

Now when the ministers will take such a course as this, where will their people appear in the day of judgment? What! afraid to be searched, and to have their churches searched! afraid to have the broadest daylight of truth poured in upon him! "O," said one minister, as I was informed, when requested to invite me to come and labor with his people, "I should like to have him come if he would confine his preaching to the impenitent, but I cannot bear to have him rake the Church."

Now beloved brethren, I have heard much complaint of the attempts that have been made within the last ten years to revive religion in the churches, and to elevate the standard of piety among them. And is it really to this day assumed that the churches do not need reformation? Well, all I can say to my dear brethren is this--You maintain this stand but a little longer, and it does not need a prophet's ken to predict that your churches will be any thing but Christian Churches. That they are even now tending rapidly to a high church spirit is but too manifest. Can it be possible that after all the developments that have been made, any of the brethren should be so blind as not to see that a blow must be struck at the foundation. The ax must be laid at the root of every barren fig tree. Ministers must turn their attention to digging about and manuring these trees. An effort must be made to search, revive and purify the churches. Old professors and the converts of the recent revivals must be searched and overhauled; their foundations examined and their hearts entirely reclaimed. They must be built up and spiritualized and established in grace so as to be living epistles of Christ known and read of all men, or to attempt the farther promotion of revivals of religion is vain and worse than vain.

The fact is, brethren, that the resistance that has been offered to labors for the reformation of the Church has deeply grieved the Spirit of God. The ministry and the Church have to a great extent refused to be searched. They have refused to be reformed, and the result is that the Spirit of God has left and is fast leaving them.

If I should say less than this, I should not speak the whole truth; but in saying so much I am not without my fears that I shall offend some of my brethren. Dear Brethren, I beg of you not to be offended with me but suffer me to speak the whole truth to you in love. Is it not true with many of you who are ministers as well as laymen that you have refused candidly to lay your mind open to reproof, to correction, to searching, and to the light of the whole gospel of Christ? Is it not true that you have resisted the reformation of your own

heart, and the efforts that have been made to revive the Church and to elevate the standard of holiness within her borders? Have you not been more afraid of sanctification than you have of sin, and have you not resisted efforts that have been made to enlighten you and the churches over which you preside? May God help you my brother to be honest in answering these questions. Have you not in many instances not only shut your own eyes against the light, but tried to keep the light from the eyes of others? Have you not refused to read what has been written on the subject of holiness in this life, and used an influence to prevent others from reading? Have you not even spoken against this subject, and spoken contemptuously of those whose hearts are laboring and agonizing and travailing in birth for the recovery of a backsliding Church?

My brethren these are plain questions; they are intended to be. Could I see you, I could ask you these questions on my knees; and would it avail, I would wash your feet with my tears. My brethren, where are you, and where are your churches? What is your spiritual state? How stands the thermometer of your spirituality? Are you hot or cold or lukewarm? Are you agonizing to elevate the standard of holiness in the Church, and in your own heart; or are you still assuming that the Church is well enough, and looking coldly and contemptuously upon all efforts to revive her?

May the Lord have mercy on us, my brethren, and search us all out, and compel us to come to the light, to confess our sins and put them all away forever, and lay hold on the fullness there is in Christ.

Your Brother,

C.G. FINNEY

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