

To the Christian Readers of the Oberlin Evangelist

by Charles Finney

The author, Charles Finney, is writing these lectures to labor for the sanctification of the Church and to impart the gospel to his readers.

Scripture: John 17:17, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 4:15-16, Philippians 1:6, Colossians 3:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 1:15-16, 2 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Sanctification", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the Christian readers of the Oberlin Evangelist, emphasizing the need for the sanctification of believers alongside the conversion of sinners. He reflects on his past focus on evangelism and acknowledges the neglect of spiritual growth within the Church, realizing that converts require ongoing support for their sanctification. Finney expresses his commitment to teaching the high and pure doctrines of grace to elevate the standard of holiness among Christians. He encourages readers to seek a deeper understanding of Christ, not just as a Savior but as a sanctifying presence in their lives. Finney concludes with a plea for prayer and support as he embarks on this new course of lectures aimed at spiritual edification.

Transcript

TO THE CHRISTIAN READERS OF THE OBERLIN EVANGELIST.

BELOVED--You perceive that I have already commenced one of the promised course of Lectures. Before I proceed any further, 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 mainly 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 every thing, 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--(viz.) 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 for 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 with 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 those 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 speak of 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, that 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 in what results he brought me, previously to my leaving there. Since then, God has been continually dealing with me in mercy. And O 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, 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 any thing particular to say, that cannot well be said in a sermon. If my spiritual advice 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 re-assert. 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 represented 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 knew 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 every one 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

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/to-the-christian-readers-of-the-oberlin-evangelist/>

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