

Phineas Fletcher letter to Sally Dean, March 16, 1822

The Baptized church of Kingsbury & Hartford

To Sister Sally Dean

Dear Sister

When we recollect the good profession which you made before many witnesses and the many seasons in which we sat together in heavenly [places?] in Christ Jesus our hearts are pained on learning that you have departed from the simplicity of the gospel. We are creditably informed that you have united with the people who call themselves Shakers.

Consequently you must have cast off your covenant [ours?] which you entered into with us. Not having been particularly acquainted with that people we do not profess to know all their departures from the Scriptures of truth which ought to be the basis of our faith. However there are a few things which we will mention for your consideration.

1st Their practice has a tendency to break up families, to make women widows while their husband are living and children orphans before their parents decease.

2nd Their doctrine denies the resurrection of the body a point clearly substantiated in the fifteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians and elsewhere.

And 3^d They neglect the ordinances of the Gospel viz. Baptism and the Lord's supper which Christ instituted and commanded his followers to perpetuate to the end of the world. Many more things we might [*illegible word*] which I think are not according to the scriptures to the scriptures of truth; but we forbear, hoping that you will soon return and make our hearts glad by resuming your walk with the church. But if we are to be disappointed we have one request to make which we trust you will cheerfully comply with viz. that you will give us the reason which induced you to leave us; and a relation of your present faith or system of belief.—N. B. This to direct your communication to the subscriber Sandy Hill Washington County N. York. Done by order and in behalf of the church Kingsbury March 16th, 1822. Phineas Fletcher, Jr., clk.

Source: Shaker Manuscripts, MS. 3944, Series IV Folder 34. Western Reserve Historical Society Library, Cleveland, Ohio. Used with permission.

Transcribed by Glendyne Wergland, June 9, 2007.

Sally Dean's Letter to Phineas

New Lebanon, County of Columbia N.Y. April 14th 1822 -

Respected friend Phineas,

I received yours of the 16th March; and now, agreeable to your handsome request I condescend to state to you and to the Church in whose behalf you wrote, the reasons why I left them; and to give a short relation of my faith. 1.Pet. 3.15 and in doing this, I desire to give no occasion of offence to any of my former companions. My reasons are as follows.

When I visited this society called Shakers I found they were a kind, honest & upright people, who bro't forth the fruits of goodness, justice & true christianity. I found the flying reports against them to be totally false: and by their outward order and morals I was led to believe that their inward order & principles were from a good source. "By their fruits shall ye know them". Mat.7.20. &c. I found they possessed greater light of God than I had ever experienced before. Therefore I opened my heart & eyes to receive understanding & light; and I soon saw my former errors, and that I had been trusting in false hopes. I found that to be a true follower of Christ, I must deny all ungodliness & every worldly lust, and take up my cross, follow him in the regeneration, and work out my own salvation, being worker together with God. Phil.2.12. But I saw I could never do this by virtue of my former profession, nor maintain my connection with my former Church companions, for I had cause to believe they were servants to sin as well as myself, for they professed to be unable to live out of sin, consequently they could not be servants of Christ. Mat.6.24. John 8.34. Thus I settled the matter that those who maintained this profession would surely commit sin, and consequently be of the Devil 1John 3.8. and the devil would have them, except they repent: and tho' they might do many good deeds, even cast out Devils, yet Christ would say to them [" "]Depart, ye workers of iniquity." Mat.7.23. And having received divine light in the words of the scripture, I understood St Paul, where he says, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passing away &c." 2.Cor.5.17. & 2Pet.3.10. And so I concluded to quit my old foundation & serve God in newness of life, by which I found that light & power of God which enabled me to live out of all sin, which power was promised at his second appearing Heb 9.28. And here I was established in my present faith in his second coming. And now I declare my faith unto you; viz. That Christ is come in

New Haven, County of Columbia N.Y. April 14th 1822-

Respected friend Phineas,

I received yours of the 16th March, and now agreeable to your honest request I send you to state to you and to the Church in whose behalf you wrote, the reasons why I left them; and to give a short relation of my faith. 1 Pet. 3. 15. and in doing this, I desire to give no occasion of offence to any of my former companions. My reasons are as follows.

When I visited this society called Abolitionists I found they were a kind, honest, upright people, who bore forth the fruits of goodness, justice & true Christianity. I found the flying reports against them to be totally false; and by their outward order and morals I was led to believe that their inward order & principles were from good sources. "By their fruits shall ye know them." Mat. 7. 20. &c. I found they hoped for greater light of God than I had ever experienced before. Therefore I opened my heart to give understanding & light; and I soon saw my former errors, and that I had been trusting in false hopes. I found that to be true, follower of Christ, I must deny all ungodlings & every worldly lust, and take up my cross, follow him in the regeneration, and work out my own salvation, being united together with him. Mat. 22. 12. But I saw I could never do this by virtue of my former profession, nor maintain my connection with my former Church companions, for I had come to believe they were unworthy to den as well as myself, for they professed to be unable to live out of sin; consequently they could not be servants of Christ. Mat. 6. 23. John 8. 34. I thought with the master that those who maintained this profession would surely commit sin, and consequently be of the Devil.

his latter day glory, that he dwells in all his true followers, even in us, who have come into the spiritual resurrection & baptism of the Holy Ghost. I believe in the remission of sins by honest confession & repentance, and that confession is to be made in the presence of Christ's witnesses, and not in the dark or privately, where no more is known than was before. In this way we come to judgment and rise out of a sinful state. I believe in a virgin life, in rejecting adultery, fornication, uncleanness, & all the fruits of the flesh, that I may obtain the heavenly world & Christ the true resurrection. Luke 20.34 & 35. – I believe Christ is not a local being, but a divine element or power, which can be manifested in one as well as in another. Jesus' being anointed with this, constituted him Christ. This same Christ was in the apostles. ["]Christ in them, the hope of glory." Col.1.27. I believe that Christ's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. John 18.36. and I consider all things respecting it accordingly. But the inward order and evidence of this kingdom cannot possibly be known by those who are without – by those who are natural. 1 Cor.2.14. As well may an ignorant farmer stand in midnight darkness & declare that he sees and perfectly understands all the inward parts of the sun, as for any man to think he knows about Christ or his kingdom, when he is a sinner and has not Christ within. And now I protest unto you that if Christ has not come the second time then he is not on earth for the falling away took place many hundred years ago. 2 Thes.2.3. & 7. But if he is on earth, how can he appear again? And if he is not on earth, then we are all reprobates, 1 Cor.13.5. Titus 1.16. the kingdom that has been on earth in the name of Christ is divided and subdivided so much that it cannot stand long. It cannot be that Christ has been in the midst of such confusion. Therefore I have left this tumult, & took up my abode in the mansions of peace, where dwells the spirit of Christ. And now the former heavenly places are passing away from me with some noise. 2.Pet.3.10. And I feel a sure and inward evidence that I have received the spirit & power of Christ, discernment between good & evil, salvation from sin, & an increasing victory over the nature of evil. I live in a church whose faith is one, who live in peace, who possess all things jointly; whose interest is one; & who possess the gifts and doctrine of the apostolic church. And unless it can be proved that Christ does not dwell here, and that he has not come the second time, I must in reason be allowed to enjoy my faith. I think it unnecessary to take time and paper to explain all the points of my belief, but they are not without proof, they are confirmed by scripture and reason, and the evidences are as endless as

the truth of God. Thus far concerning my faith, But I wish to notice the different points of your letter, in which I must be more lengthy.

You observed that our “practice has a tendency to break up families; to make women widows while their husbands are living, and children orphans before their parents decease” I ask, what if it has? does that reflect dishonor upon us? Who has been morally injured by this widow and orphan making? What society are more kind & helpful to the widow & orphan? When we are continually extending [*illegible word*] benefits to the needy, take in the widow; receive in many destitute children, & shelter the orphan, we think it unfair to be reproached on that ground. We appeal to the conscience of any well informed person to show wherein we have used any unjust measures in these matters. But what think ye of the warrior, who spreads devastation & misery? do not they cause the cries of the widow & orphan to ascend up? and do not the baptists think it right to fight? But perhaps you forgot that saying of St Paul; “They that have wives shall be as tho’ they had none.[”] 1 Cor.7.29. This must be the widow making you speak of, there is no other that can apply to us: if there is any other it must apply to those who quarrel & fight. But ye may well know that Shakers reject fighting, both at home & abroad.

But were it not for the pleasures of man & wife, and because we keep not the command of God, as the lovers of lasciviousness call it, we should not be blamed for breaking up of families &c &c. But ye know the command of God is not your ruling object in that matter, it is your fleshly gratifications. If the works of man & wife agree with the command of God, then surely whoremongers & harlots appear much more strict to obey it than common civil christians, or at least are more bold in it. Those works of which it is a shame to speak particularly, must appear wofully ridiculous in the eyes of an all-seeing God. This command (if so it be called) seems to come very natural, & one might suppose it was an unnecessary one, for I dare say that many keep it who never heard it was a command of God and the beasts keep it too, as really as any christian. However, we do not wish to condemn marriage; it is well enough for those who are natural & earthly & have nothing to do with Christ, to people the earth; but it is inconsistent to think that that work belongs to the spiritual kingdom of Christ. But as to breaking up of families &c if we appeal to the scriptures, what shall we say of Christ & his apostles, who did it to a great degree? They made great disturbance, their great numbers were not added to their Church without breaking up of families; and Christ appears to be foremost in the work, as

his words declare. “Think not that I am come to send peace” &c. Please to read Matt. 10th from 34 to 38. & 19th 29. also Luke 18th 29 & 30. Christ called them from their most important concerns, and would not even suffer the son to bury his father, nor would he allow them to bid their household farewell. Thus how can we be condemned in this thing unless Christ can? If we preach our doctrine to others, telling them the consequences, & they receive our faith and choose to unite, it is their lookout, we use no compulsion, and are not responsible for what may arise.

And now as to the resurrection of the natural body, I must own we plumply deny it, for our trust is not in human carcasses, but in Christ the true resurrection. John 11th 25. God’s work is not contrary even to natural reason: and I think the inconsistency of the plan is enough to render it contemptible. Our flesh is but dust, and will return to dust, and if it rise it will still be but dust. The properties of our flesh and blood cannot be changed and that which rises must be either the same or not the same: if it is the same, it cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and if it is not the same the case is decided. Our bodies are undoubtedly made of what we eat. Then what will become of those that are destroyed by beasts, or by man-eaters who will have the best right to the body that was eaten up? The case is plain, the former body becomes forever annihilated, because it becomes another. If one has lost a limb, he will have as good right to claim all the flesh and blood that ever grew on his bones, & every thing that ever pertained to his body as to claim that, and were his claim granted or denied, he would make a ridiculous appearance in the angelic host. But further, I ask, what need is there of resuming the body? Is not the soul superior to the body? (John 6.63. 2nd Cor. 5.1 &c.[.]) Is not the soul capable of being glorified without the body? If not, what will all the holy angels do, who never possessed human bodies? And lastly, is not the body, when divested of the soul, a mere lump of dead matter, which may pass into the elements a thousand different ways, and can never, by any process, be changed into a spiritual substance? I think reason must answer yea. If so, it can never inherit the spiritual world, and the whole plan of this resurrection overthrows itself. Thus far setting the scripture aside, we have reason for our guide.

But our doctrine is not void of proof from holy writ, and tho it be never so “clearly substantiated” in the opinions of some, that the natural body will rise, there is not a single sentence that proves it will, for there is not a sentence but that will consistently apply to the spiritual resurrection,

but there are many which cannot apply to the natural. See Rom.6.4. Eph.2.5 & 6. &c. It may be said Christ's resurrection after his crucifixion is a proof that our bodies may rise. But there is nothing said in scripture which proves that Christ did resume his natural body: and if he or any of his disciples ever said that Christ's or any other human body ever went to heaven or ever was going there, St Paul must be guilty of a bold contradiction when he says "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." 1.Cor 15.50. But no mortal knows what became of his body; we must leave that for Michael and the Devil to settle. Jude 9th Now reason will teach us that flesh and blood could not pass thro closed doors. Paul says "he that ascended is the same that descended.["] but his body never descended, that was of the virgin Mary. See Eph.4.10. John 3.13. & 6.62. Christ said "A spirit has not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.["] Luke 24.39. No one will dispute but that Christ was in the spiritual world & was a spirit after the crucifixion of his body. Hence there was some mystery in the case, & it was not his flesh & bones that they saw for if he was a spirit he could not have flesh & bones; but Christ was capable of assuming any appearance that was necessary to confirm their faith in him. St Paul says much of the resurrection and yet says "Behold I shew you a mystery": Now it is foolish for any to pretend to understand the prophetic mystery of a work which they are not in. Dan.12.9. & 10. But it is said we are to be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air." Now what the natural man calls up is in all possible directions, and in the course of 24 hours is completely reversed, if he suppose Christ to be a local being and expects him to come down from above, his plan destroys itself, for a local being cannot come in all possible directions; and more also he cannot appear in more than one place at a time. But Paul plainly shows what is meant by rising &c. thus "That like as Christ was raised from the dead even so we also should walk in newness of life.["] Rom.6.4 & 5. Moreover he affirms they were already quickened & raised with Christ, Eph 2.6. Thus I think the matter is plain. But those who have no other treasure in Christ the true resurrection, than to feed on the hopes of a carnal resurrection, may keep their hopes, but they may perhaps miss of both by the means.

Now concerning the baptism & the Lord's supper, it is true we do not celebrate them outwardly for we consider them as but outward signs & not the substance. [*Here Dean inserts an "X", to locate the insertion of the following sentence – this sentence was an afterthought, and was written vertically along the left margin of the third page.*] But we do not condemn any outward sign, we do

not count them sinful, those who sincerely feel it their duty to uphold any outward ceremony, ought to do it, but we believe it unnecessary where the true substance is present. They that have the substance, have no need of the sign. Tho' Christ was baptized of John, yet he himself baptized none, and he never commanded his disciples to baptize with water. And tho' he kept the passover, yet he never ordered them to continue it, but knowing it would be continued, he told them as oft as they did it to do it in remembrance of him[.]

How inconsistent it is to suppose that the bread and wine in this Jewish ceremony, is the body & blood of Christ, either visibly or invisibly, or helps in the least to salvation when the wickedest villain on earth could partake of it as well as any body: & so of the baptism of water, any one can partake & be none the better. John the first baptist was the forerunner of Christ, & his baptism was but a sign of the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire. Mat 3.11. John says "This my joy therefore is fulfilled, he must increase but I must decrease". And Christ says The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. We have therefore no account that a water baptist ever went to heaven. It may be said Paul baptized, truly, but he thanked God he had baptized no more. 1 Cor.1.14. Christ and his apostles did many things merely in conformity to the times and circumstances. Read 1 Cor.9.19 to 22. and tho' Christ was baptized & ate the passover, & Paul baptized, so Christ underwent the eighth day ceremony of the Jews, and so did Timothy; why do ye not plead for that? As for these signs I am sure there is no need of them where the substance is present. But those who have not the true substance of the holy spirit which purifies from sin, may remain content with water, and see if they do not land with the foolish virgins. [*Here Dean adds another mark (#) to locate the insertion of the following lengthy sentence – again, an afterthought and written vertically along the left margin of the fourth page.*] Some may object to us & say that we cannot be perfect followers of Christ so long as we reject the examples which he himself set[showed?] us, but let such understand that we do not consider his outward temporal transactions to be the rule for our conduct, it is his commands and doctrine & his pure motives that we are to imitate. Mat.25[.]11.12. & 30 — One thing more I would observe. Ye "do not profess to know all our departures from the scriptures of truth." I think if ye were well informed respecting us, ye must be convinced that we pay strict attention to scripture doctrine. But because we do not build Arks as Noah did, or because we take not wives in imitation of Hosea because we keep not the passover as Christ did, or

baptize not as John did, or submit not to the ceremony of the law as did Timothy, do we thereby reject that part of the scripture that applies to us? Moreover we cannot agree with you that the scriptures ought to be the basis of our faith. Christ is our foundation, our chief corner stone, even the indwelling spirit of Christ which is the power of God unto salvation. 1 Cor 3.11. If any man hath not the spirit of Christ he is none of his. Romans 8.9. The bible is of no more use than a receipe without ingredients, for tho' it points out the way of salvation, yet it does not give the power, for instance, tho' it says love thy neighbour, yet that love must be within the heart, it cannot be found in the bible.

It is remarkable that those who know themselves to be sinners, lost from God, & sunk deep in a wicked nature, will pretend to know all about Christ & his way will trust in shadows & signs & plead justification by the works & goodness of others; that they will twist so many ways to get by the substance, any way to shun the cross, to save their own carnal pleasures, their own ways & desires. If they plead Christ's example why do they not plead that he neither married nor gave in marriage? That he lived a holy life by self denial & The cross? that being tempted in all points, yet was not overcome? Why do they not preach perfection and a sinless life, seeing he both lived it & taught it? Mat.5.48 1 Pet.1.15 & 16. 1 John 3. from 3 to 10. But nay, they choose to plead his example in outward ceremonies wherein they hope to find some justification, to daub over their sinful life. But as well might they plead that he justified the adulteress & drunkards. John 8.11. & 2.8. But when their guilty souls come to tremble in the presence of God's holy spirit, when they feel the gnawings of a guilty conscience, & sense the indignation of God against every sin & all unrighteousness of fallen man, they will no longer care about the carnal resurrection, or any thing else but to obtain the mercy of God before it is too late, they will be willing to receive his favor thro whatever [*illegible word*] he is pleased to bestow it.

Thus I have given you a statement of my reasons & faith with plainness & candor, hoping it will be kindly received, as I wish to injure none, nor to rob them of their choice. I have no feeling to condemn any one for his or her belief, no can I do it, for "If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God" 1 John 3.20. & 21. Every one that does the best he knows, & lives up to all the light he has, will be owned of God, if he continue in so doing, let him be who or where he may. But I feel obligated to defend the faith that I have espoused. And now if any of you

feel dissatisfied with me, or wish for further information respecting our society or faith, you are welcome to come and see us. & I promise you good usage among us. But it is quite contrary to my feelings to enter into much communication by writing. I have already written largely, perhaps enough to show my faith & choice. If any feel dissatisfied with our doctrines & practice, let them be as considerate as Gamaliel the pharisee, for if this work be not of God it will fall. And I think it is the duty of everyone to consider well before he judge. And now I submit the foregoing to your candid perusal; and as I have complied with your request, I hereby earnestly request that this be read in your church that ye may all hear.

And now with well wishes for your welfare, I sign myself

Sally Dean.

To Phineas Fletcher & the baptized
Church of Kingsbury and Hartford.

P.S. When I last visited Kingsbury & Hartford, I was often questioned whether we had the bible among us, whether we read the bible &c; I have now therefore made search & found that there are, in the house wherein I live, 31 bibles & 9 testaments! which we read freely & as much as we please.

**Second letter from Sally Dean to Phineas Fletcher,
sent with first letter**

[Stampless cover] “New Lebanon / 18th April 1822” “20 [cents]”

[Addressed to] “Phineas Fletcher, / Sandy Hill; / Washington County / N. York.”

[Docketed] “Sally Dean’s / Letter.”

April 15th 1822

Kind friend,

When you read the inclosed letter, you may perhaps think that I have used great plainness & boldness, and be led to think that I have lost the feelings of humanity & respect to you & the society in whose behalf you wrote, but be assured I have not: I still respect you & all my former companions, & still acknowledge with gratitude the many favors I have received from you, nor have I the least prejudice against any one. But I have very different ideas of religion from what I formerly had, but this I consider no just ground of enmity. Every one ought to have liberty of conscience, & there is no power on earth that can condemn any one who strictly lives up to the light of his conscience. And we have not whereof to boast, we are no better by nature than any others & if we have received any greater light than others, it is thro the mercy of God, & we are obligated to live up to it, tho it is as crossing to our natures as to any other men & women. And we believe it is our right & duty to speak freely of our faith.

But the great separating bar between us & other professors is our doctrine & practice of a sinless life. But we cannot give up this only true proof of our faith. We believe that righteousness is the only true mark of a follower of Christ, & that nothing constitutes a christian but a sinless life. We believe Christ will not own any for his followers but those who are saved from sin: no one can follow him where he never went. Any one who fairly understands what the new testament so clearly points out to be the salvation of Christ, viz. salvation from sin, will not fall into the dark error of believing in sinful christians[.] Christ says “No man can serve two masters.” & also, “Whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin.[”] Therefore the sinner cannot be the servant of Christ. & without being the servant of Christ what becomes of the christian? Thus we conclude that whoever denies the possibility of a pure & sinless life, denies the possibility

of being a follower of Christ. Therefore let the profession of any one be what it may, we judge by nothing but the works: we do not wish to condemn or speak against, any tho't word or deed that is dictated by the pure spirit of Christ, nor can we justify any other. — Thus I hope I have given you satisfaction, & thrown nothing offensive in your way. I still regard you for your former favors to me. I wish your prosperity & I hope you may yet be able to say that you know you are in the only way of God, for how can there be two opposite ways to God & how can you trust your soul upon uncertainties? — Be so kind as to remember my request that my letter may be read in the Church, that all may have proper information of me. Please to remember me to all enquiring friends. I am quite healthy & comfortable, & hope this may find you so.

S.D.

Farewell.

To Phineas Fletcher.