

# Experiencing Revival Today - Part 1

by Charles Finney

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*Charles Finney emphasizes the importance of prayer and repentance in seeking revival, and that the gift of the Holy Spirit is available to all who pray in faith and with a pure heart.*

**Scripture:** Luke 11:11

**Topics:** "Prayer", "Revival"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the necessity of a fervent spirit of prayer among Christians as a precursor to experiencing revival. He asserts that true revival can only be expected when believers earnestly seek it with deep longing and travail of soul, reflecting a genuine desire for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Finney illustrates that many pray for revival without the necessary commitment to repentance and self-examination, which are crucial for spiritual awakening. He encourages Christians to break up their fallow ground, indicating that a heart prepared for revival is essential for receiving God's blessings. The preacher calls for a collective effort in prayer and unity among believers to facilitate a genuine revival in their communities.

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## Transcript

"A revival may be expected when Christians have a spirit of prayer for a revival. That is, when they pray as if their hearts were set upon it. When Christians have the spirit of prayer for a revival. When they go about groaning out their hearts desire. When they have real travail of soul."

compiled by greg gordon

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#### Introduction

"Righteousness is sustained in the human soul by the indwelling of Christ through faith and in no other way. It cannot be sustained by purposes or resolutions self-originated and not wrought by the Spirit of Christ." - Charles Finney

Finney was a different type of preacher. He was not school taught but Spirit taught. God used his acumen as a lawyer to ruthlessly give points breaking down the conscience of the hearers were they had to respond to God. Leonard Ravenhill said: "64% of D. L. Moody's converts backslid, 72% of the Finney's converts remained faithful, because he knew how to attack the human will, not just the emotions." People claim that his ministry caused a burnt out district for the gospel, but the opposite happened, there was renewed vigour to spread the everlasting gospel. But as with any testimony of the Lord if not held to strongly and passed on carefully, apostasy and the vacuum of evil fills the gap. We see it over and over in Scripture where the testimony was lost in the second generation: "When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel." (Judges 2:10).

Oswald J. Smith shared: "Let us look at one of Finney's meetings. Oh, that we could repeat it today! He tells us that one time when he was conducting meetings in Antwerp, an old man invited him to preach in a small school house near by. When he arrived the place was packed so that he could barely find standing room near the door. He spoke for a long time. At last he began to press home upon them the fact that they were an ungodly community; for they held no services in their district. All at once they were stricken with conviction. The Spirit of God came like a thunderbolt upon them. One by one they fell on their knees, or prostrate on the floor, crying for mercy. In two minutes they were all down, and Mr. Finney had to stop preaching for he was unable to make himself heard. At last he got the attention of the old man who was sitting in the middle of the room and gazing around him in utter amazement, and shouted to him at the top of his voice to pray. Then taking them one by one he pointed them to Jesus. The old man took charge of the meeting while he went to another. All night it continued, so deep was the conviction of sin. The results were permanent, and one of the young converts became a most successful minister of the gospel."

Open your heart wide as you read this volume and be willing to allow God to do surgery in your spirit. In the end it will produce the peaceable fruits of godliness.

"Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:10-11).

#### Chapter One

#### On Prayer for the Holy Spirit

"Christ not only in heaven, but Christ within us, as really and truly inhabiting our bodies as we do, as really in us as we are in ourselves. This is the teaching of the Bible and it must be spiritually apprehended by a divine, personal, and inward revelation to secure our abiding in Him." - Charles Finney

"If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or, if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"--Luke 11:11-13.

Asking for the Holy Spirit These verses form the concluding part of a very remarkable discourse of our Lord to his disciples on prayer. It was introduced by their request that he would teach them how to pray. In answer to this request, he gave them what we are wont to call the Lord's Prayer, followed by a forcible illustration of the value of importunity, which he still further applied and enforced by renewing the general promise--"Ask and it shall be given you." Then, to confirm their faith still more, he expands the idea that God is their Father, and should be approached in prayer as if he were an infinitely kind and loving parent.

This constitutes the leading idea in the strong appeal made in our text. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or, if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or, if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Remarking upon this text, I first observe that when we rightly understand the matter, we shall see that the gift of the Holy Ghost comprehends all we need spiritually.

It secures to us that union with God which is eternal life. It implies conversion which consists in the will's being submitted to God's control. Sanctification is (1.) this union of the will to God perfected and perpetuated; (2.) the ascendancy of this state of the will over the entire sensibilities, so that the whole mind is drawn into union and sympathy with the mind and heart of God. It is supremely easy to obtain this gift from God. In other words, it is easy to obtain from God all spiritual blessings that we truly need.

If this be not so, what shall we think of these words of Christ? How can we by any means explain them consistently with fair truthfulness? Surely, it is easy for children to get really good things from their father. Which of you, being a father, does not know it to be easy for your children to get good things from you? You know in your own experience that they obtain without difficulty, even from you, all the real good they need, provided it be in your power to give it. But you are sometimes "evil," and Christ implies that, since God is never evil but always infinitely good, it is much more easy for one to get the Holy Spirit than even for your children to get bread from your hands.

"Much more!" What words of meaning in such a connection as this! Every father knows there is nothing in the way of his children getting from him all the good things they really need and which he has to give. Every such parent values these good things for the sake of giving them to his children. For this, parents toil and plan for their children's sake. Can they then be averse or even slow to give these things to their children? Yet God is much more ready to give his Spirit. My language, therefore, is not at all too strong.

If God is much more ready and willing to give his children good things than you are to give to yours, then surely it must be easy and not difficult to get spiritual blessings, even to the utmost extent of our wants. Let this argument come home to the hearts of those of you who are parents. Surely, you must feel its force. Christ must be a false teacher if this be not so. It must be that this great gift, which in itself comprehends all spiritual gifts, is most easily obtained, and in any amount which our souls need.

How very injurious and dishonorable to God are the practical views of almost all men on this subject. The dependence of men on the Holy Spirit has come to be the standing apology for moral and spiritual delinquency. Men every where profess to want the Holy Spirit, and more or less, to feel their need and to be praying for this gift; but continually and every where they complain that they do not get it. These complaints assume, both directly and indirectly, that it is very difficult to get this gift;--that God keeps his children on [a] very low diet; and on the smallest possible amount even of that; that he deals out their spiritual bread and water in most stinted amount--as if he purposed to keep his children only an inch above starvation.

Pass among the churches and hear what they say and how they pray;--and what would you think? How would you be shocked at the strange, may I not say, blasphemous assumptions which they make concerning God's policy in giving, or rather not giving, the Holy Spirit to those that ask him! I can speak from experience and personal observation. When I began to attend prayer-meetings, this fact to which I have alluded struck me as very strange. I had never attended a prayer-meeting till I had come to manhood, for my situation in this respect was very unlike yours here.

But after I came to manhood, and prayer-meetings were held in the place where I lived, I used to attend them very steadily. It was a matter of great interest to me, more than I can explain, or well express. I was filled with wonder to hear Christians pray, and the more so as I then began to read my Bible, and to find in it such things as we have in our text to-day. To read such promises, and then hear Christians talk was surprising. What they did say, coupled with what they seemed to mean, would run thus: I have a duty to perform at this meeting; I cannot go away without doing it.

I want to testify that religion is a good thing--a very good thing--although I have not got much of it. I believe God is a hearer of prayer, and yet I don't think he hears mine--certainly not to much purpose. I believe that prayer brings to us the Holy Spirit, and yet, though I have always been praying for this Spirit, I have scarcely ever received it. Such seemed to be the strain of their talking and thinking, and I must say that it puzzled me greatly. I have reason to know that it has often puzzled others.

Within a few years past, I have found this to be the standing objection of unconverted men. They say--"I cannot hold out if I should be converted--it is so difficult to get and to keep the Holy Spirit." They appeal to professed Christians and say, Look at them; they are not engaged in religion; they are not doing their Master's work in good earnest, and they confess it; they have not the Spirit, and they confess it; they bear a living testimony that these promises are of very little practical value.

Denying the truths of the Bible Now, these are plain matters of fact, and should be deeply pondered by all professed Christians. The Christian life of multitudes is nothing less than a flat denial of the great truths of the Bible. Often, when I am urging Christians to be filled with the Holy Ghost, I am asked--Do you really think this gift is for me? Do you think all can have it who will? If you tell them of instances, here and there, of persons who walk in the light, and are filled with the Spirit, they reply:--Are not those very special cases?

Are they not the favored few, enjoying a blessing that only a few can hope to enjoy? Here you should carefully observe, that the question is not whether few or many have this blessing; but--Is it practically within reach of all? Is it indeed available to all? Is the gift actually tendered to all in the fullest and highest sense? Is it easy to possess it? These being the real questions, we must see that the teachings of the text cannot be mistaken on this subject. Either Christ testified falsely of this matter, or this gift is available to all,

and is easily obtained.

For, of the meaning and scope of his language, there can be no doubt. No language can be plainer. No illustrations could be more clear, and none could easily be found that are stronger. How shall we account for this impression, so extensively pervading the church, that the Holy Spirit can rarely be obtained in ample, satisfying fullness, and then only with the greatest difficulty? This impression obviously grows out of the current experience of the church. In fact, but few seem to have this conscious communion with God through the Spirit; but few seem really to walk with God and be filled with his Spirit.

When I say few, I must explain myself to mean, few relatively to the whole number of professed Christians. Taken absolutely, the number is great and always has been. Sometimes, some have thought the number to be small, but they were mistaken. Elijah thought himself alone, but God gave him to understand that there were many--a host, spoken of as seven thousand--who had never bowed the knee to Baal. Ordinarily, such a use of the sacred number, seven, is to be taken for a large, indefinite sum, much larger than if taken definitely.

It may be so here. Even then, in that exceedingly dark age, there were yet many who stood unflinchingly for God. It is a curious fact that persons who have really the most piety are often supposed to have the least, so few there are who judge of piety as God does. Those who preach the real gospel are often refreshed to find some in almost every congregation who manifestly embrace it. You can judge by their very looks,--their eyes shine and their faces are all aglow--almost like the face of Moses, descended from the mount.

But theirs is not the common experience of professed Christians. The common one which has served to create the general impression as to the difficulty of obtaining the Holy Spirit, is indeed utterly unlike this. The great body of nominal Christians have not the Spirit, within the meaning of Romans 8th. They cannot say--"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." It is not true of them that they "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Comparatively few of all, know in their own conscious experience that they live and abide in the Spirit.

Current Experience of Nominal Christians Here is another fact. Many are praying- apparently--for the Spirit of God, but do not get it. If you go to a prayer-meeting, you hear every body pray for this gift. It is so, also, in the family, and probably in the closet also. Yet, strange to tell, they do not get it. This experience of much prayer for this blessing, and much failure to get it, is every where common. Churches have their prayer-meetings, years and years in succession, praying for the Spirit, but they do not get it.

In view of this fact, we must conclude, either that the promise is not reliable, or that the prayer does not meet the conditions of the promise. I shall take up this alternative by and by; just now, my business is to account for the prevalent impression that the Spirit of God is hard to get and keep, even in answer to prayer,--a fact which obviously is accounted for by the current experience of nominal Christians. It should also be said that the churches have been taught that God is a sovereign, in such a sense that his gift of the Spirit is only occasional, and is then given without any connection with apparent causes--not dependent, by any means, on the fulfilment of conditions on our part.

The common idea of sovereignty excludes the idea that God holds this blessing free to all, on condition of real prayer for it. I say real prayer, for I must show you by and by that much of the apparent praying of the church for the Spirit is not real prayer. It is this spurious selfish praying that leads to so much misconception as to the bestowment of the Holy Spirit. Some of you may remember that I have related to

you my experience at one time, when my mind was greatly exercised on this promise,--how I told the Lord I could not believe it.

It was contrary to my conscious experience, and I could not believe any thing which contradicted my conscious experience. At that time the Lord kindly and in great mercy rebuked my unbelief, and showed me that the fault was altogether mine and in no part his. Multitudes pray for the Spirit as I had done, and are in like manner disappointed because they do not get it. They are not conscious of being hypocrites; but they do not thoroughly know their own spirits. They think they are ready to make any sacrifices to obtain it.

They do not seem to know that the difficulty is all with them. They fail to realize how rich and full the promise is. It all seems to them quite unaccountable that their prayer should not be answered. Often they sweat with agony of mind in their efforts to solve this mystery. They cannot bear to say that God's word is false, and they cannot see that it is true. It is apparently contradicted by their experience. This fact creates the agonizing perplexity. In the next place, how can we reconcile this experience with Christ's veracity?

How can we explain this experience according to the facts in the case, and yet show that Christ's teachings are to be taken in their obvious sense, and are strictly true? I answer, what is here taught as to prayer must be taken in connection with what is taught elsewhere. For example, what is here said of asking must be taken in connection with what is said of praying in faith--with what is said by James of asking and not receiving because men ask amiss, that they may consume it upon their lusts.

If any of you were to frame a will or a promissory note, binding yourself or your administrators to pay over certain moneys, on certain specified conditions, you would not think it necessary to state the conditions more than once. Having stated them distinctly once, you would go on to state in detail the promise; but you would not expect any body to separate the promise from the condition, and then claim the promise without having fulfilled the condition, and even perhaps accuse you of falsehood because you did not fulfil the promise when the conditions had not been met.

Now, the fact is that we find, scattered throughout the Bible, various revealed conditions of prayer. Whoever would pray acceptably must surely fulfil not merely a part, but all of these conditions. Yet in practice, the church, to a great extent, have overlooked, or at least has failed to meet these conditions. For example, they often pray for the Holy Spirit, for selfish reasons. This is fearfully common. The real motives are selfish. Yet they come before God and urge their request often and long,--perhaps with great importunity; yet they are selfish in their very prayers, and God cannot hear.

They are not in their inmost souls ready to do or to suffer all God's Holy will. God calls some of his children through long seasons of extremest suffering, obviously as a means of purifying their hearts; yet many pray for pure hearts and for the Spirit to purify their hearts, who would rebel at once if God should answer their prayers by means of such a course of providence. Or, God may see it necessary to crucify your love of reputation, and for this end may subject you to a course of trial which will blow your reputation to the winds of heaven.

Are you ready to hail the blessings of a subdued, unselfish heart, even though it be given by means of such discipline? Often your motive in asking for the Spirit is merely personal comfort and consolation--as if you would live all your spiritual life on sweet-meats. Others ask for it really as a matter of self-glorification. They would like to have their names emblazoned in the papers. It would be so gratifying to be held up as a miracle of grace--as a most remarkable Christian.

Alas, how many in various forms of it, are only offering selfish prayers! Even a minister might pray for the Holy Spirit, from only sinister motives. He might wish to have it said that he is very spiritual, or a man of great spiritual power in his preaching or his praying; or he might wish to avoid that hard study to which a man who has not the Spirit must submit, since the Spirit does not teach him, nor give him unction. He might almost wish to be inspired, so easy would this gift make his preaching and his study.

He might suppose that he really longed to be filled with the Spirit, while really he is only asking amiss, to consume it on some unhallowed desire. A student may pray for the Spirit to help him study, and yet only his ambition or his indolence may have inspired that prayer. Let it never be forgotten, we must sympathize with God's reasons for our having the Spirit, as we would hope to pray acceptably. There is nothing mysterious about this matter. The great end of all God's spiritual administrations towards us in providence or grace, is to divest us of selfishness, and to bring our hearts into harmony with his in the spirit of real love.

Quenching the Spirit while praying for Him Persons often quench the Spirit even while they are praying for it. One prays for the Spirit, yet that very moment, fails to notice the Spirit's monitions in his own breast, or refuses to do what the Spirit would lead and press him to do. Perhaps they even pray for the Spirit, that this gift may be a substitute for some self-denying duty to which the Spirit has long been urging them. This is no uncommon experience. Such persons will be very likely to think it very difficult to get the Spirit.

A woman was going to a female prayer-meeting, and thought she wanted the Holy Spirit, and would make that her special errand at that meeting. Yet when there, the Spirit pressed her to pray audibly and she resisted, and excused herself. It is common for persons to resist the Spirit in the very steps He chooses to take. They would make the Spirit yield to them; He would have them yield to him. They think only of having their blessings come in the way of their own choosing; He is wiser and will do it in his own way or not at all.

If they cannot accept of his way, there can be no agreement. Often when persons pray for the Spirit, they have in their minds certain things which they would dictate to him as to the manner and circumstances. Such ought to know that if they would have the Spirit, they must accept Him in his own way. Let him lead, and consider that your business is to follow. Thus it not infrequently happens that professed Christians maintain a perpetual resistance against the Holy Spirit, even while they are ostensibly praying for his presence and power.

When he would fain draw them, they are thinking of dictating to him, and refuse to be led by him in his way. When they come really to understand what is implied in being filled with the Spirit, they draw back. It is more and different from what they had thought. That is not what they wanted. The difficulty is always and all of it, in us, not in God. You may write this down as a universal truth, from which there can be no exceptions. The difficulty lies in our voluntary state of mind, and not in anything which is involuntary and beyond our control.

Therefore, there is no excuse for our retaining it, and it should be at once given up. There is no difficulty in our obtaining the Holy Spirit if we are willing to have it; but this implies a willingness to surrender ourselves to his direction and discretion. We often mistake other states of mind for a willingness to have the Spirit of God. Nothing is more common than this. Men think they are willing to be filled with the Spirit, and to have that Spirit do all its own work in the soul; but they are really under a great mistake.

To be willing to be wholly crucified to the world and the world unto us, is by no means common. Many think they have a sort of desire for this state, who would really shrink from it if they saw the reality near at

hand. That persons do make continual mistakes and think themselves willing to be fully controlled by the Spirit, when they are not, is evident from their lives. The will governs the life, and therefore, the life must be an infallible index of the real state of the will.

As is the life, so is the will, and therefore, when you see the life alien from God, you must infer that the will is not wholly consecrated to his service--is not wholly in sympathy with God's will. When the will is really on God's altar, entirely yielded up to God's will in all respects, one will not wait long ere he has the Spirit of God in the fullest measure. Indeed, this very consecration itself implies a large measure of the Spirit, yet not the largest measure. The mind may not be conscious of that deep union with God into which it may enter.

The knowledge of God is a consciousness of God in the soul. You may certainly know that God's Spirit is within you, and that his light illumines your mind. His presence becomes a conscious reality. The manner in which spiritual agencies, other than human[,] manifest themselves in the mind of man, seems to some very mysterious. It is not necessary that we should know how those agencies get access to our minds; it suffices us to know beyond all question that they do. Christians sometimes know that the devil brings his own thoughts into the very chambers of their souls.

Some of you have been painfully conscious of this. You have been certain that the devil has poured out his spirit upon you. Most horrid suggestions are thrust upon your mind--such as your inmost soul abhors, and such as could come from no other, and certainly from no better, source than the devil. Now, if the devil can thus make us conscious of his presence and power, and can throw upon our souls his own horrid suggestions, may not the Spirit of God reveal his? Nay, if your heart is in sympathy with his suggestions and monitions, may he not do much more?

Surely none can doubt that he can make his presence and agency a matter of positive consciousness. That must be a very imperfect and even false view of the case which supposes that we can be conscious of nothing but the operations of our own minds. Men are often conscious of Satan's thoughts, as present to their minds;--a fact which Bunyan well illustrated where he supposes Christian to be alarmed by some one whispering in his ear behind him, and pouring horrid blasphemies into his mind.

Cases often occur like the following. A man came to me in great distress, saying, "I am no Christian; I know of a certainty. My mind has been filled with awful thoughts of God." But were those awful thoughts your own thoughts, and did you cherish them and give your assent to them? "No, indeed; nothing could have agonized me more." That is the work of the devil, said I. "Well, said he, perhaps it is, and yet I had not thought of it so before." So God's Spirit within us may become no less an object of our distinct consciousness.

And if you do truly and earnestly wait on God, you shall be most abundantly supplied of his fullness. To be filled with the Holy Ghost, so that he takes full possession of our souls, is what I mean by sanctification. This glorious work is wrought by the Spirit of God; and that Spirit never can take full and entire possession of our hearts without accomplishing this blessed work. I do not wonder that those persons deny the existence of any such state as sanctification who do not know anything of being filled with the Holy Ghost. Ignoring his glorious agency, we need not wonder that they have no knowledge of his work in the soul.

**A Need for Watchfulness** Often the great difficulty in the way of Christian progress is an utter want of watchfulness. Some are so given to talking that they cannot hold communion with the Spirit of God. They have no leisure to listen to his "still small voice." Some are so fond of laughter, it seems impossible that

their minds should ever be in a really serious frame. In such a mind, how can the Spirit of God dwell? Often in our Theological discussions, I am pained to see how difficult it is for persons engaged in dispute and mutual discussion, to avoid being chafed.

Some of them are watchful and prayerful against this temptation, yet sometimes, we see persons manifestly fall before this temptation. If Christians do not shut down the gate against all abuse of the tongue, and, indeed against every form of selfishness, there is no hope that they will resist the devil and the world so far as to be conquerors at last. The Spirit of God troubles or comforts us, according as we resist or receive this great gift. The gospel scheme was purposed for the end of accomplishing this complete union and sympathy between our souls and God, so that the soul should enjoy God's own peace, and should be in the utmost harmony with its Maker and Father.

Hence, it is the great business of the Spirit to bring about this state. If we concur, and if our will harmonizes with his efforts, he comforts us; if we resist, he troubles us;--a struggle ensues;--if, in this struggle, we come to understand God, and submit, then his blessings come freely and our peace is as a river; but so long as we resist, there can be no fruit of the Spirit's labor to us, but rebuke and trouble. To us he cannot be the author of peace and comfort. How abominable to God it must be for the church to take ground in regard to the Spirit which practically denies the truth of this great promise in our text!

How dreadful that Christians should hold and teach that it is a hard thing to be really religious! What abominable unbelief! How forcibly does the church thus testify against God before the world! You might as well burn your Bible as deny that it is the easiest thing in the world to get the gift of the Spirit. And yet, strange to tell, some hold that God is so sovereign, and is sovereign in such a sense, that few can get the Spirit at all, and those few only as it may happen, and not by any means as the result of provision freely made and promise reliably revealed on which any man's faith may take hold.

O, how does this notion of sovereignty contradict the Bible! How long shall it be so? Do you, young people, really believe that your young hearts may be filled with the Spirit? Do you really believe, as our text says, that God is more willing to give his Spirit to those that ask him, than your own father or mother would be to give you good things? Many of you are here, far from your parents. But you know that even your widowed mother, much as she may need every cent of her means for herself, would gladly share the last one with you if you needed it.

So would your earthly father. Do you really believe that God is as willing as they--as ready--as loving? Nay, is he not much more so? as much more as he is better than your father or your mother? And now, do you really need and desire this gift of the Spirit? And if you do, will you come and ask for it in full confidence that you have a real Father in heaven? Do you find practical difficulties? Do you realize how much you dishonor God if you refuse to believe his word of promise?

Some of you say--I am so poor and so much in debt, I must go away and work somewhere and get money. But you have a father who has money enough. Yes; but he will not help me. He loves his money more than he loves his son. Would not this be a great scandal to your father--a living disgrace to him? Surely, it would;--and you would be so keenly sensible of this that you would not say it if it were not very true, nor then unless some very strong circumstances seemed to require of you the painful testimony.

If your mother, being amply able, yet would not help you in your education or in your sickness, you would hardly tell of it--so greatly would it discredit her character. And now will you have the face to say--God don't [sic.] love me; he don't [sic.] want to educate me for heaven; he utterly refuses to give me the Holy

Spirit although I often ask him and beseech him to do so? Will you even think this? And can you go even farther and act it out before all the world? O, why should you thus dishonor your own God and Father!

## Chapter two

### Having Repentance Before Revival

"The number of people is legion who pray for the baptism with the Holy Ghost, but who, in their hearts, are not willing to pay the price and meet the responsibility involved in receiving the blessing, It is almost safe to say that a thousand ministers pray for this blessing for every one who is really willing to die to sin and self and the world." - Charles Finney

Break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.  
Hosea 10:12

The Jews were a nation of farmers, and it is therefore a common thing in the Scriptures to refer for illustrations to their occupation, and to the scenes with which farmers and shepherds are familiar. The prophet Hosea addresses them as a nation of backsliders, and reproves them for their idolatry, and threatens them with the judgments of God.

Fallow ground is ground which has once been tilled, but which now lies waste, and needs to be broken up and mellowed, before it is suited to receive grain.

To break up the fallow ground, is to break up your hearts, to prepare your minds to bring forth fruit unto God. The mind of man is often compared in the Bible to ground, and the Word of God to seed sown in it, and the fruit represents the actions and affections of those who receive it.

Sometimes your hearts get matted down, hard and dry, and all run to waste, until there is no such thing as getting fruit from them until they are all broken up, and mellowed and fitted to receive the Word of God. It is this softening of the heart, so as to make it feel the truth, which the prophet calls breaking up your fallow ground.

It is just as easy to make your minds feel on the subject of religion as it is on any other. God has put these states of mind just as absolutely under your control, as the motions of your limbs. If you mean to break up the fallow ground of your hearts examine thoroughly the state of your hearts, and see where you are: whether you are walking with God every day, or with the devil; whether you are serving God or serving the devil most; whether you are under the dominion of the prince of darkness, or of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Self-Examination Self-examination consists in looking at your lives, in considering your actions, in calling up the past, and learning its true character. Look back over your past history, since you professed conversion. Take up your individual sins one by one, and look at them. I do not mean that you should just cast a glance at your past life, and see that it has been full of sins, and then go to God and make a sort of general confession, and ask for pardon. That is not the way.

You must take them up one by one. It will be a good thing to take a pen and paper, as you go over them, and write them down as they occur to you. Go over them as carefully as a merchant goes over his books; and as often as a sin comes before your memory, add it to the list. General confessions of sin will never do. Your sins were committed one by one; and as far as you can come to them, they ought to be reviewed and repented of one by one. Sins of Omission Ingratitude. Take this sin, for instance, and write down

under it all the instances you can remember, wherein you have received favours from God for which you have never exercised gratitude.

Go over them three or four times and see what an astonishing amount of mercies there are for which God has never been praised. Want of love to God. Think how grieved and alarmed you would be, if you discovered any flagging of affection for you in your wife, husband, or children; if you saw another engrossing their hearts, and thoughts, and time. Perhaps in such a case you would well nigh die with a just and virtuous jealousy. Now, God calls himself a jealous God; and have you not given your heart to other loves, acted the harlot, and offended Him?

Neglect of the Bible. Put down the cases when for perhaps weeks, or longer, God's word was not a pleasure. Unbelief. Instances in which you have virtually charged the God of truth with lying, by your unbelief of His express promises and declarations. Neglect of Prayer. Times when you omitted secret prayer, family prayer, and prayer meetings; or have prayed in such a way as more grievously to offend God than to have neglected it altogether. Neglect of the Means of Grace. When you have suffered trifling excuses to prevent your attending meetings, have neglected and poured contempt upon the means of salvation, merely from disrelish of spiritual duties Your want of Love for the Souls of your Fellow-men.

Look round upon your friends and relations, and remember how little compassion you have felt for them. You have stood by and seen them going right to hell, and it seems as though you did not care if they did. How many days have there been, in which you did not make their condition the subject of a single fervent prayer, or even an ardent desire for their salvation? Your want of Care for the Heathen. Measure your desire for their salvation by the self-denial you practice, in giving of your substance to send them the Gospel.

Do you retrench your style of living, and scruple not to subject yourself to any inconvenience to save them? Do you daily pray for them in your room? Do you stately attend the monthly prayer-meeting? Are you from month to month laying by something to put into the treasury of the Lord, when you go up to pray? If you are not doing these things, and if your soul is not agonized for the poor benighted heathen, why are you such a hypocrite as to pretend to be a Christian? Why, your profession is an insult to Jesus Christ!

Your Neglect of Family Duties. How you have lived before them, how you have prayed, what an example you have set before them. What direct efforts do you habitually make for their spiritual good? What duty have you not neglected? Neglect of Watchfulness over your own Life. Instances where you have entirely neglected to watch your conduct, and have been off your guard, and have sinned before the world, and before the Church, and before God. Neglect to Watch over your Brethren.

How often have you broken your covenant, that you would watch over them in the Lord! Would you see your wife or child going into disgrace, or into the fire, and hold your peace? No, you would not. What do you think of yourself, then, to pretend to love Christians, while you can see them going into disgrace and say nothing to them? Neglect of Self-denial. There are many professors who are willing to do almost anything in religion that does not require self-denial. They only give of their surplus wealth; and perhaps that poor woman, who puts in twelve and a half cents at the monthly prayer-meeting, has exercised more self-denial than they have in giving thousands.

Sins of Commission Worldly Mindedness. What has been the state of your heart in regard to your worldly possessions? Have you looked at them as really yours--as if you had a right to dispose of them as your own, according to your own will? If you have, write that down. If you have loved property, and sought it for

its own sake or to gratify lust or ambition, or a worldly spirit, or to lay it up for your families, you have sinned, and must repent. Pride. Vanity is a particular form of pride.

How many times have you thought more, and taken more pains, and spent more time, about decorating your body to go to church, than you have about preparing your mind for the worship of God? You have gone to the house of God caring more how you appear outwardly in the sight of mortal men, than how your soul appears in the sight of the heart-searching God. You came to divide the worship of God's house, to draw off the attention of God's people to look at your pretty appearance.

Envy. Look at the cases in which you were envious of those whom you thought were above you in any respect. Be honest with yourself; and if you have harboured this spirit of hell, repent deeply before God, or He will never forgive you. Censoriousness. Instances in which you have had a bitter spirit, and have spoken of Christians in a manner entirely devoid of charity and love; charity, requires you always to hope the best the case will admit, and to put the best construction upon any ambiguous conduct.

Slander. The times you have spoken behind people's back of the faults, real or supposed, of members of the church or others, unnecessarily, or without good reason. This is slander. You need not lie to be guilty of slander: to tell the truth with the design to injure, is slander. Levity. How often have you trifled before God, as you would not have dared to trifle in the presence of an earthly sovereign? Lying. Understand now what lying is. Any species of designed deception. If you design to make an impression contrary to the naked truth, you lie.

How innumerable are the falsehoods perpetrated every day in business, and in social intercourse, by words, and looks, and actions, designed to make an impression on others contrary to the truth! Robbing God. Instances in which you have misspent your time, and squandered hours, which God gave you to serve Him and save souls, in vain amusements or foolish conversation, reading novels or doing nothing. Bad Temper. Perhaps you have abused your wife, or your children, or your family, or servants, or neighbours.

Write it all down. Hindering others from being useful. Perhaps you have weakened their influence by insinuations against them. You have not only robbed God of your own talents, but tied the hands of somebody else. If you find you have committed a fault against an individual, and that individual is within your reach, go and confess it immediately, and get that out of the way. If the individual you have injured is too far off for you to go and see him, sit down and write him a letter, and confess the injury, and put it into the mail immediately.

If you have defrauded anybody, send the money, the full amount and the interest. Go thoroughly to work in all this. Go now. Do not put it off; that will only make the matter worse. Confess to God those sins that have been committed against God, and to man those sins that have been committed against man. Do not think of getting off by going round the stumbling-blocks. Take them up out of the way. In breaking up your fallow ground, you must remove every obstruction. Things may be left that you think are little things, and you may wonder why you do not feel as you wish to feel in religion, when the reason is that your proud and carnal mind has covered up something which God required you to confess and remove.

Break up all the ground and turn it over. Do not "balk" it, as the farmers say; do not turn it aside for little difficulties; drive the plough right through them, beam deep, and turn the ground all up, so that it may all be mellow and soft, and fit to receive the seed and bear fruit a hundred fold. As you go over the catalogue of your sins, be sure to resolve upon present and entire reformation. Wherever you find anything wrong,

resolve at once, in the strength of God, to sin no more in that way.

It will be of no benefit to examine yourself, unless you determine to amend, in every particular, what you find wrong in heart, temper, or conduct. If you find, as you go on with this duty, that your mind is still all dark, cast about you, and you will find there is some reason for the Spirit of God to depart from you. You have not been faithful and thorough. In the progress of such a work you have got to do violence to yourself, and bring yourself as a rational being up to this work, with the Bible before you, and try your heart until you do feel.

You need not expect that God will work a miracle for you to break up your fallow ground. It is to be done by means. Fasten your attention to the subject of your sins. You cannot look at your sins long and thoroughly, and see how bad they are, without feeling, and feeling deeply. Experience fully proves the benefit of going over our history in this way. Set yourself to the work now; resolve that you will never stop until you find you can pray. You never will have the Spirit of God dwelling in you until you have unraveled this whole mystery of iniquity, and spread out your sins before God.

Let there be this deep work of repentance and full confession, this breaking down before God, and you will have as much of the spirit of prayer as your body can bear up under. The reason why so few Christians know anything about the spirit of prayer is, because they never would take the pains to examine themselves properly, and so never knew what it was to have their hearts all broken up in this way. It will do no good to preach to you while your hearts are in this hardened, and waste, and fallow state.

The farmer might just as well sow his grain on the rock. It will bring forth no fruit. A preacher may wear out his life and do very little good, while there are so many stony-ground hearers who have never had their fallow ground broken up. If your fallow ground is broken up, then the way to get more feeling is to go out and see sinners on the road to hell, and talk to them, and guide inquiring souls, and you will get more feeling.

When A Revival Is Needed

Wilt thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee? Psalm 86:6

This Psalm seems to have been written soon after the return of the people of Israel from the Babylonish captivity. Since God in His providence had re-established the ordinances of His house among them, the Psalmist prays that there may be a revival of religion to crown the work.

When a revival of religion is needed:

When there is a want of brotherly love and Christian confidence among professors of religion, then a revival is needed. When Christians have sunk down into a low and backslidden state, they neither have nor ought to have, nor is there reason to have, the same love and confidence toward each other, as then they are all alive, and active, and living holy lives.

When there are dissensions, jealousies, and evil speakings among professors of religion, then there is a great need of a revival. These things show that Christians have got far from God, and it is time to think earnestly of a revival. Religion cannot prosper with such things in the Church, and nothing can put an end to them like a revival.

When there is a worldly spirit in the Church. It is manifest that the Church is sunk down into a low and backslidden state, when you see Christians conform to the world in dress, equipage, parties, seeking worldly amusements, reading novels, and other books such as the world read. It shows that they are far from God, and that there is great need of a revival of religion.

When the Church finds its members falling into gross and scandalous sins, then it is time for the Church to awake and cry to God for a revival of religion.

When Sinners are careless and stupid, and sinking into hell unconcerned, it is time the Church should bestir themselves. It is as much the duty of the Church to awake as it is for the firemen to awake when a fire breaks out in the night in a great city. And yet their guilt would not compare with the guilt of Christians who sleep while sinners around them are sinking stupid into the fires of hell.

A revival of religion is the only possible thing that can wipe away the reproach which covers the Church, and restore religion to the place it ought to have in the estimation of the public. Without a revival, this reproach will cover the Church more and more, until it is overwhelmed with universal contempt.

Nothing but a revival of religion can prevent the means of grace from doing a great injury to the ungodly. Without a revival, they will grow harder and harder under preaching, and will experience a more horrible damnation than they would if they had never heard the Gospel. Your children and your friends will go down to a much more horrible fate in hell, in consequence of the means of grace, if there are no revivals to convert them to God.

When A Revival Is To Be Expected When the providence of God indicates that a revival is at hand. The indications of God's providence are sometimes so plain as to amount to a revelation of His will. Cases have occurred in this country, where the providential manifestations were so plain, that those who were careful observers, felt no hesitation in saying, that God was coming to pour out His Spirit, and grant a revival of religion. There are various ways for God to indicate His will to a people; sometimes by giving them peculiar means, sometimes by peculiar and alarming events, sometimes by remarkably favouring the employment of means, by the weather, health, etc.

When the wickedness of the wicked grieves, and humbles, and distresses Christians. Sometimes Christians do not seem to mind anything about the wickedness around them. Or if they talk about it, it is in a cold, and callous, and unfeeling way, as if they despaired of a reformation: they are disposed to scold at sinners--not to feel the compassion of the Son of God for them. But sometimes the conduct of the wicked drives Christians to prayer, and breaks them down, and makes them sorrowful and tender-hearted, so that they can weep day and night, and instead of scolding and reproaching them, they pray earnestly for them.

Then you may expect a revival. Sometimes the wicked will get up an opposition to religion. And when this drives Christians to their knees in prayer to God, with strong crying and tears, you may be certain there is going to be a revival. The prevalence of wickedness is no evidence at all that there is not going to be a revival. That is often God's time to work. When the enemy cometh in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him. Often the first indication of a revival, is the devil's getting up something new in opposition.

It will invariably have one of two effects. It will either drive Christians to God, or it will drive them farther away from God, to some carnal policy or other that will only make things worse. Let hell boil over if it will, and spew out as many devils as there are stones in the pavement, if it will only drive Christians to God in

prayer--they cannot hinder a revival. I have known instances where a revival has broken in upon the ranks of the enemy, almost as sudden as a clap of thunder, and scattered them, taken the ring-leaders as trophies, and broken up their party in an instant.

A revival may be expected when Christians have a spirit of prayer for a revival. That is when they pray as if their hearts were set upon a revival. Sometimes Christians are not engaged in prayer for a revival, not even when they are warm in prayer. Their minds are upon something else; they are praying for something else--the salvation of the heathen and the like--and not for a revival among themselves. But when they feel the want of a revival, they pray for it; they feel for their own families and neighbourhoods; they pray for them as if they could not be denied.

What constitutes a spirit of prayer? Is it many prayers and warm words? No! Prayer is the state of the heart. The spirit of prayer is a state of continual desire and anxiety of mind for the salvation of sinners. It is something that weighs Christians down. It is the same, so far as the laws of mind are concerned, as when a man is anxious for some worldly interest. A Christian who has this spirit of prayer feels anxious for souls. It is the subject of his thought all the time, and makes him look and act as if he had a load on his mind.

He thinks of it by day, and dreams of it by night. This is properly, "praying without ceasing." His prayers seem to flow from his heart liquid as water; "O Lord, revive Thy work." Sometimes this feeling is very deep; persons have been bowed down, so that they could neither stand nor sit. I can name men in this State, of firm nerves, who stand high in character, who have been absolutely crushed with grief for the state of sinners, until they were as helpless as children. The feeling is not always so great as this, but such things are much more common than is supposed.

In the great revivals in 1826, they were common. This is by no means enthusiasm. It is just what Paul felt when he said: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth." I heard of a person in this State, who prayed for sinners, and finally got into such a state of mind, that she could not live without prayer. She could not rest day nor night, unless there was somebody praying. Then she would be at ease; but if they ceased, she would shriek in agony until there was praying again.

And this continued for two days, until she prevailed in prayer, and her soul was relieved. This travail of soul is that deep agony which persons feel when they lay hold on God for such a blessing, and will not let Him go till they receive it. I do not mean to be understood that it is essential to a spirit of prayer, that the distress should be so great as this. But this deep, continual, earnest desire for the salvation of sinners, is what constitutes the spirit of prayer for a revival.

Sometimes ministers have had this distress about their congregations, so that they felt as if they could not live unless they could see a revival. Sometimes elders and deacons, or private members, of the Church, men and woman, have the spirit of prayer for a revival of religion, so that they will hold on and prevail with God, until He pours out His Spirit. The first ray of light that broke in upon the midnight which rested on the churches in Oneida county, in the fall of 1825, was from a woman in feeble health, who, I believe, had never been in a powerful revival.

Her soul was exercised about sinners. She was in an agony for the land. She did not know what ailed her, but she kept praying more and more, until it seemed as if her agony would destroy her body. At length she became full of joy, and exclaimed: "God has come! God has come! There is no mistake about it, the work is begun, and is going all over the region." And sure enough, the work began, and her family were almost all converted, and the work spread all over that part of the country.

Generally, there are but few professors of religion that know anything about this spirit of prayer which prevails with God. I have been amazed to see such accounts as are often published about revivals, as if the revival had come without any cause--nobody knew why or wherefore. I have sometimes inquired into such cases, when it had been given out that nobody knew anything about it, until one Sabbath they saw in the face of the congregation that God was there; or they saw it in their conference room or prayer meeting, and were astonished at the mysterious sovereignty of God in bringing in a revival without any apparent connection with means.

Now mark me! Go and inquire among the obscure members of the church, and you will always find that somebody had been praying for a revival, and was expecting it--some man or woman had been agonizing in prayer for the salvation of sinners until the blessing was gained. Generally, a revival is more or less extensive, as there are more or less persons who have the spirit of prayer. Another sign that a revival may be expected is when the attention of ministers is especially directed to this particular object, and when their preaching and other efforts are aimed particularly for the conversion.

There never will be a revival until somebody makes particular efforts for this end. But when the attention of a minister is directed to the state of the families in his congregation and his heart is full of feeling of the necessity of a revival, and when he puts forth the proper efforts for this end, then you may be prepared to expect a revival. The connection between the right use of means for a revival, and a revival, is as naturally sure as between the right use of means to raise grain, and a crop of wheat.

I have seldom seen an individual fail, when he used the means of promoting a revival in earnest, in the manner pointed out in the Work of God. I believe a man may enter on the work of promoting a revival with as reasonable an expectation of success, as he can enter on any work with an expectation of success--with the same expectation as the farmer has of a crop when he sows his grain. I have sometimes seen this tried and succeed, under circumstances the most forbidding that can be conceived.

The great revival in Rochester began under the most disadvantageous circumstances that could well be imagined. But there were a few remarkable cases of the spirit of prayer, which assured us that God was there, and we went on; and the more Satan opposed, the Spirit of the Lord lifted up the standard higher and higher until finally a wave of salvation rolled over the place. A revival of religion may be expected when Christians begin to confess their sins to one another. When there is an ingenuous breaking down, and a pouring out of the heart in making confession of their sins, the flood-gates will soon burst open, and salvation will flow over the place.

A revival may be expected whenever Christians are found willing to make the sacrifice necessary to carry it on. They must be willing to sacrifice their feeling, their business, their time, to help forward the work. Ministers must be willing to lay out their strength, and to jeopardy their health and life. They must be willing to offend the impenitent by plain and faithful dealing and perhaps offend many members of the church who will not come up to the work. They must take a decided stand with the revival, be the consequences what they may.

A revival may be expected when ministers and professors of religion are willing to have God promote it by what instruments He pleases. Sometimes ministers are not willing to have a revival unless they can have the management of it, or unless their agency can be conspicuous in promoting it. Such men will sleep on until they are awakened by the judgment trumpet, without a revival, unless they are willing that God should come in His own way--unless they are willing to have anything or anybody employed, that will do good.

Do you wish for a revival? Will you have one? If God should ask you this moment, by an audible voice from heaven: "Do you want a revival?" would you dare to say: "Yes"? "Are you willing to make the sacrifices?" would you answer: "Yes"? "When shall it begin?" would you answer: "Let it begin tonight--let it begin here--let it begin in my heart NOW"? Would you dare to say so to God, if you should hear His voice tonight?

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