

Lecture II. - When a Revival Is to Be Expected.

by Charles Finney

A Revival of Religion is a necessary movement of God's Spirit that brings people back to a living faith in Christ, often marked by a renewed sense of purpose, joy, and spiritual growth.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 85:6, Ezekiel 36:26-27, Matthew 5:14-16, Acts 3:19, Romans 12:10, 2 Timothy 1:6-7, Hebrews 10:24-25, James 5:16, 1 Peter 4:8

Topics: "Revival", "Spiritual Awakening"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the necessity and importance of a revival of religion, particularly when there is a lack of brotherly love, dissensions, and a worldly spirit among Christians. He outlines the conditions under which a revival is needed, such as when the church is backslidden or when sinners are indifferent to their fate. Finney asserts that a revival is essential not only for restoring confidence and love among believers but also for averting God's judgments and preventing the church's decline. He encourages Christians to recognize the signs of a coming revival, including a spirit of prayer and a willingness to sacrifice for the cause of Christ, and to actively seek revival in their hearts and communities.

Transcript

TEXT. --Wilt thou not revive us again; that thy people may rejoice in thee? --PSALM lxxxv. 6.

THIS Psalm seems to have been written soon after the return of the people of Israel from the Babylonish captivity; as you will easily see from the language at the commencement of it. The Psalmist felt that God had been very favorable to the people, and while contemplating the goodness of the Lord in bringing them back from the land where they had been carried away captive, and while looking at the prospects before them, he breaks out into a prayer for a Revival of Religion. "Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?" Since God in his providence had re-established the ordinances of his house among them, he prays that there may be also a revival of religion, to crown the work.

Last Friday evening I attempted to show what a Revival of Religion is not; what a Revival is; and the agencies to be employed in promoting it. The topics to which I wish to call your attention to-night, are,

I. When a Revival of Religion is needed.

II. The importance of a Revival when it is needed.

III. When a Revival of Religion may be expected.

I. WHEN IS A REVIVAL OF RELIGION NEEDED?

1. When there is a want of brotherly love and Christian confidence among professors of religion, then a revival is needed. Then there is a loud call for God to revive his work. 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 when they are all alive, and active, and living holy lives. The love of benevolence may be the same, but not the love of complacency. God loves all men with the love of benevolence, but he does not feel the love of complacency toward any but those who live holy. Christians do not and cannot love each other with the love of complacency, only in proportion to their holiness. If Christian love is the love of the image of Christ in his people, then it never can be exercised only where that image really or apparently exists. A person must reflect the image of Christ, and show the spirit of Christ, before other Christians can love him with the love of complacency. It is in vain to call on Christians to love one another with the love of complacency, as Christians, when they are sunk down in stupidity. They see nothing in each other to produce this love. It is next to impossible that they should feel otherwise toward each other, than they do toward sinners. Merely knowing that they belong to the church, or seeing them occasionally at the communion table, will not produce Christian love, unless they see the image of Christ.

2. When there are dissensions, and jealousies, and evil speakings among professors of religion, then there is 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.

3. 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.

4. 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 such things are taking place, as give the enemies of religion an occasion for reproach, it is time for the church to ask God, "What will become of thy great name?"

5. When there is a spirit of controversy in the church or in the land, a revival is needful. The spirit of religion is not the spirit of controversy. There can be no prosperity in religion, where the spirit of controversy prevails.

6. When the wicked triumph over the church, and revile them, it is time to seek for a Revival of Religion.

7. 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 of the firemen to awake when a fire breaks out in the night in a great city. The church ought to put out the fires of hell which are laying hold of the wicked. Sleep! Should the firemen sleep, and let the whole city burn down: what would be thought of such firemen? 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.

II. I AM TO SHOW THE IMPORTANCE OF A REVIVAL OF RELIGION IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES.

1. 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. You may do any thing else you please, and you can change the aspects of society in some respects, but you will do no real good; you only make it worse without a Revival of Religion. You may go and build a splendid new house of worship, and line your seats with damask, put up a costly pulpit, and get a magnificent organ, and every thing of that kind, to make a show and dash, and in that way you may procure a sort of respect for religion among the wicked, but it does no good in reality. It rather does hurt. It misleads them as to the real nature of religion; and so far from converting them, it carries them farther away from salvation. Look wherever they have surrounded the altar of Christianity with splendor, and you will find that the impression produced is contrary to the true nature of religion. There must be a waking up of energy, on the part of Christians, and an outpouring of God's Spirit, or the world will laugh at the church.

2. Nothing else will restore Christian love and confidence among church members. Nothing but a Revival of Religion can restore it, and nothing else ought to restore it. There is no other way to wake up that love of Christians for one another, which is sometimes felt, when they have such love as they cannot express. You cannot have such love without confidence; and you cannot restore confidence without such evidence of piety as is seen in a revival. If a minister finds he has lost in any degree the confidence of his people, he ought to labor for a revival as the only means of regaining their confidence. I do not mean that this should be his motive in laboring for a revival, to regain the confidence of his people, but that a revival through his instrumentality, and ordinarily nothing else, will restore to him the confidence of the praying part of his people. So if an elder or private member of the church finds his brethren cold towards him, there is but one way to remedy it. It is by being revived himself, and pouring out from his eyes and from his life the splendor of the image of Christ. This spirit will catch and spread in the church, and confidence will be renewed, and brotherly love prevail again.

3. At such a time a Revival of Religion is indispensable to avert the judgments of God from the church. This would be strange preaching, if revivals are only miracles, and if the church has no more agency in producing them, than it has in making a thunder storm. To say to the church, that unless there is a revival you may expect judgments, would then be as ridiculous as to say, If you do not have a thunder storm, you may expect judgments. The fact is, that Christians are more to blame for not being revived, than sinners are for not being converted. And if they are not awakened, they may know assuredly that God will visit them with his judgments. How often God visited the Jewish church with judgments, because they would not repent and be revived at the call of his prophets! How often have we seen churches, and even whole denominations, cursed with a curse, because they would not wake up and seek the Lord, and pray, "Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?"

4. Nothing but a Revival of Religion can preserve such a church from annihilation. A church declining in this way cannot continue to exist without a revival. If it receives new members, they will, for the most part, be made up of ungodly persons. Without revivals there will not ordinarily be as many persons converted as will die off in a year. There have been churches in this country where the members have died off, and there were no revivals to convert others in their place, till the church has run out, and the organization has been dissolved.

A minister told me that he once labored as a missionary in Virginia, on the ground where such a man as Samuel Davies once flashed and shone like a flaming torch; and that Davies's church was so reduced as to have but one male member, and he, if I remember right, was a colored man. The church had got proud,

and was all run out. I have heard of a church in Pennsylvania, that was formerly flourishing, but neglected revivals, and it became so reduced that the pastor had to send to a neighboring church for a ruling elder when he administered the communion. (*Why not, in such a case, let any member of the church, male or female, distribute the elements? Is it indispensable to have an elder?)

5. 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. Better were it for them if there were no means of grace, no sanctuary, no Bible, no preaching, and if they had never heard the Gospel, than to live and die where there is no revival. The Gospel is the savor of death unto death, if it is not made a savor of life unto life.

6. There is no other way in which a church can be sanctified, grow in grace, and be fitted for heaven. What is growing in grace? Is it hearing sermons and getting some new notions about religion? No--no such thing. The Christian who does this, and nothing more, is getting worse and worse, more and more hardened, and every week it is more difficult to rouse him up to duty.

III. I AM TO SHOW WHEN A REVIVAL OF RELIGION MAY BE EXPECTED.

1. 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. There is a conspiring of events to open the way, a preparation of circumstances to favor a revival, so that those who are looking out can see that a revival is at hand, just as plainly as if it had been revealed from Heaven. Cases have occurred in this country, where the providential manifestations were so plain, that those who are 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 favoring the employment of means, by the weather, health, etc.

2. When the wickedness of the wicked grieves and humbles and distresses Christians. Sometimes Christians do not seem to mind any thing 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. Indeed this is a revival begun already. 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. Frequently the most outrageous wickedness of the ungodly is followed by a revival. If Christians are made to feel that they have no hope but in God, and if they have sufficient feeling left to care for the honor of God and the salvation of the souls of the impenitent, there will certainly be a revival. Let hell boil over if it will, and spew out as many devils as there are stones in the pavements,

if it only drives Christians to God in prayer--they cannot hinder a revival. Let Satan get up a row, and sound his horn as loud as he pleases; if Christians will only be humbled and pray, they shall soon see God's naked arm in a revival of religion. I have known instances where a revival has broken in upon the ranks of the enemy, almost as suddenly as a clap of thunder, and scattered them--taken the very ringleaders as trophies, and broken up their party in an instant.

3. 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 neighborhoods, and 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 them down. It is the same, so far as the philosophy of the mind is 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 thoughts 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. The man's 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. They have had an actual travail of soul for sinners, till 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 says, "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 till there was prayer 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. It is a revival begun so far as this spirit of prayer extends.

When this feeling exists in a church, unless the Spirit is grieved away by sin, there will infallibly be a revival of Christians generally, and it will involve the conversion of sinners to God. This anxiety and distress increases till the revival commences. A clergyman in W---n told me of a revival among his people, which commenced with a zealous and devoted woman in the church. She became anxious about sinners, and went to praying for them, and she prayed and her distress increased; and she finally came to her minister, and talked with him, and asked him to appoint an anxious meeting, for she felt that one was needed. The minister put her off, for he felt nothing of it. The next week she came again, and besought him to appoint an anxious meeting; she knew there would be somebody to come, for she felt as if God was going to pour out his Spirit. He put her off again. And finally she said to him, "If you do not appoint an anxious meeting I shall die, for there is certainly going to be a revival." The next Sabbath he appointed a meeting, and said that if there were any who wished to converse with him about the salvation of their souls, he would meet them on such an evening. He did not know of one, but when he went to the place, to his astonishment he found a large number of anxious inquirers. Now do not you think that woman knew there was going to be a

revival? Call it what you please, a new revelation, or an old revelation, or any thing else. I say it was the Spirit of God that taught that praying woman there was going to be a revival. "The secret of the Lord" was with her, and she knew it. She knew God had been in her heart, and filled it so full that she could contain no longer.

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 or women, have the spirit of prayer for a revival of religion, so that they will hold on and prevail with God, till 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, till 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 over all 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. Now, do you think that woman was deceived? I tell you, no. She knew she had prevailed with God in prayer. She had travailed in birth for souls, and she knew it. This was not the only instance, by many, that I knew in that region.

Generally, there are but few professors of religion that know any thing 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 any thing 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 they gained the blessing. It may have found the minister and the body of the church fast asleep, and they would wake up all of a sudden, like a man just rubbing his eyes open, and running round the room pushing things over, and wondering where all this excitement came from. But though few knew it, you may be sure there has been somebody on the watch-tower; constant in prayer till the blessing came. Generally, a revival is more or less extensive, as there are more or less persons who have the spirit of prayer. But I will not dwell on this subject any further at present, as the subject of prayer will come up again in this course of lectures.

4. 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 at the conversion of sinners. Most of the time the labors of ministers are, it would seem, directed to other objects. They seem to preach and labor with no particular design to effect the immediate conversion of sinners. And then it need not be expected that there will be a revival under their preaching. There never will be a revival till 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. As I explained last week, the connection between the right use of means for a revival, and a revival, is as philosophically sure as between the right use of means to raise grain, and a crop of wheat. I believe, in fact, it is more certain, and that there are fewer instances of failure. The effect is more certain to follow. The paramount

importance of spiritual things makes it reasonable that it should be so. Take the Bible, the nature of the case, and the history of the church all together, and you will find fewer failures in the use of means for a revival, than in farming, or any other worldly business. In worldly business there are sometimes cases where counteracting causes annihilate all a man can do. In raising grain, for instance, there are cases which are beyond the control of man, such as drought, hard winter, worms, and so on. So in laboring to promote a revival, there may things occur to counteract it, something or other turning up to divert the public attention from religion, which may baffle every effort. But I believe there are fewer such cases in the moral than in the natural world. I have seldom seen an individual fail, when he used the means for promoting a revival in earnest, in the manner pointed out in the word 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 other 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. It seemed as though Satan had interposed every possible obstacle to a revival. The three churches were at variance; one had no minister, one was divided and about to dismiss their minister. An elder of the third Presbyterian church had brought a charge of unchristian conduct against the pastor of the first church, and they were just going to have a trial before the presbytery. After the work began, one of the first things was, the great stone church gave way, and created a panic. Then one of the churches went on and dismissed their minister right in the midst of it. Another church nearly broke down. Many other things occurred, so that it seemed as if the devil was determined to divert the public attention from the subject of religion. 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, till finally a wave of salvation rolled over the place.

5. A revival of religion may be expected when Christians begin to confess their sins to one another. At other times, they confess in a general manner, as if they were only half in earnest. They may do it in eloquent language, but it does not mean any thing. But when there is an ingenuous breaking down, and a pouring out of the heart in making a confession of their sins, the flood gates will soon burst open, and salvation will flow over the place.

6. 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 feelings, their business, their time, to help forward the work. Ministers must be willing to lay out their strength, and to jeopard 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. They must be prepared to go on with the work, even though they should lose the affections of all the impenitent, and of all the cold part of the church. The minister must be prepared, if it is the will of God, to be driven away from the place. He must be determined to go straight forward, and leave the entire event with God.

I knew a minister who had a young man laboring with him in a revival. The young man preached pretty plain, and the wicked did not like him. They said, We like our minister, and we wish to have him preach. They finally said so much that the minister told the young man, "Mr. Such-a-one, that gives so much towards my support, says so and so. Mr. A. says so, and Mr. B. says so. They think it will break up the society if you continue to preach, and I think you had better not preach any more." The young man went

away, but the Spirit of God immediately withdrew from the place, and the revival stopped short. The minister, by yielding to the wicked desires of the wicked, drove him away. He was afraid the devil would drive him away from his people, and by undertaking to satisfy the devil, he offended God. And God so ordered events, that in a short time he had to leave his people after all. He undertook to go between the devil and God, and God dismissed him.

The people, also, must be willing to have a revival, let the sacrifice be what it may. It will not do for them to say, "We are willing to attend so many meetings, but we cannot attend any more." Or, "We are willing to have a revival if it will not disturb our arrangements about our business, or prevent our making money." I tell you, such people will never have a revival, till they are willing to do any thing, and sacrifice any thing, that God indicates to be their duty. Christian merchants must feel willing to lock up their stores for six months, if it is necessary to carry on a revival. I do not mean to say any such thing is called for, or that it is their duty to do so. But if there should be such a state of feeling as to call for it, then it would be their duty, and they ought to be willing to do it. They ought to be willing to do it if God calls, and he can easily burn down their stores if they do not. In fact, I should not be sorry to see such a revival in New York, as would make every merchant in the city lock up his store till spring, and say he had sold goods enough, and now he would give up his whole time to lead sinners to Christ.

7. A revival may be expected when ministers and professors 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. They wish to prescribe to God what he shall direct and bless, and what men he shall put forward. They will have no new measures. They cannot have any of this new-light preaching, or of these evangelists that go about the country preaching. They have a great deal to say about God's being a sovereign, and that he will have revivals come in his own way and time. But then he must choose to have it just in their way, or they will have nothing to do with it. Such men will sleep on till 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 any thing or any body employed, that will do the most good.

8. Strictly I should say that when the foregoing things occur, a revival, to the same extent, already exists. In truth a revival should be expected whenever it is needed. If we need to be revived it is our duty to be revived. If it is duty it is possible, and we should set about being revived ourselves, and, relying on the promise of Christ to be with us in making disciples always and everywhere, we ought to labor to revive Christians and convert sinners, with confident expectation of success. Therefore, whenever the church needs reviving they ought and may expect to be revived, and to see sinners converted to Christ. When those things are seen which are named under the foregoing heads, let Christians and ministers be encouraged and know that a good work is already begun. Follow it up.

REMARKS.

1. Brethren, you can tell from our subject, whether you need a revival here or not, in this church, and in this city; and whether you are going to have one or not. Elders of the church, men, women, any of you, and all of you--what do you say?

Do you need a revival here?

Do you expect to have one?

Have you any reason to expect one?

You need not make any mist about it; for you know, or can know if you will, whether you have any reason to look for a revival here.

2. You see why you have not a revival. It is only because you do not want one. Because you are not praying for it; nor anxious for it, nor putting forth efforts for it. I appeal to your own consciences. Are you making these efforts now, to promote a revival? You know, brethren, what the truth is about it. Will you stand up and say that you have made the efforts for a revival and been disappointed--that you have cried to God, "Wilt thou not revive us?" and God would not do it?

3. 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 to-night--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 to-night?

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