

# Lecture Xv. - Hindrances to Revivals.

by Charles Finney

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*Charles Finney discusses the essential elements and hindrances to revivals, emphasizing the active role of Christians in sustaining spiritual awakenings.*

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 7:14, Nehemiah 6:3, Matthew 28:19-20, Romans 12:1-2, Galatians 6:9, Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Hebrews 10:24-25, James 5:16, 1 Peter 5:8-9

**Topics:** "Revival", "Church Engagement"

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## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the critical nature of revivals in the church, drawing parallels to Nehemiah's determination to rebuild Jerusalem despite opposition. He outlines various hindrances to revivals, including lack of faith, complacency among Christians, and distractions from worldly concerns. Finney argues that the church must actively engage in promoting revivals through prayer, repentance, and a commitment to God's work, warning against pride and self-indulgence that can quench the Spirit. He calls for a collective effort to address issues like slavery and temperance, asserting that the church's stance on these matters directly impacts the success of revivals.

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## Transcript

TEXT. --I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you.-- NEHEMIAH vi. 3.

THIS servant of God had come down from Babylon to rebuild the temple and re-establish the worship of God at Jerusalem, the city of his fathers' sepulchres. When it was discovered by Sanballat and certain individuals, his allies, who had long enjoyed the desolations of Zion, that now the temple, and the holy city were about to be rebuilt, they raised a great opposition. Sanballat and the other leaders tried in several ways to divert Nehemiah and his friends, and prevent them from going forward in their work; at one time they threatened them, and then complained that they were going to rebel against the king. Again, they insisted that their design was not pious but political, to which Nehemiah replied by a simple and prompt denial, "There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart." Finally, Sanballat sent a message to Nehemiah, requesting him to meet in the plain of Ono, to discuss the whole matter amicably and have the difficulty adjusted, but designed to do him mischief. They had found that they could not frighten Nehemiah, and now they wanted to come round him by artifice and fraud, and draw him off from the vigorous prosecution of his work. But he replied, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I come down to you?"

It has always been the case, whenever any of the servants of God do anything in his cause, and there appears to be a probability that they will succeed, that Satan by his agents regularly attempts to divert their minds and nullify their labors. So it has been during the last ten years, in which there have been such remarkable revivals through the length and breadth of the land. These revivals have been very great and powerful, and extensive. It has been estimated that not less than TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND persons have been converted to God in that time.

And the devil has been busy in his devices to divert and distract the people of God, and turn off their energies from pushing forward the great work of salvation. In remarking on the subject, I propose to show.

I. That a Revival of Religion is a great work.

II. To mention several things which may put a stop to it.

III. Endeavor to show what must be done for the continuance of this great revival.

I. I am to show that a Revival of Religion is a great work.

It is a great work, because in it are great interests involved. In a Revival of Religion are involved both the glory of God, so far as it respects the government of this world, and the salvation of men. Two things that are of infinite importance are involved in it. The greatness of a work is to be estimated by the greatness of the consequences depending on it. And this is the measure of its importance.

II. I am to mention several things which may put a stop to a revival.

Some have talked very foolishly on this subject, as if nothing could injure a genuine revival. They say, "If your revival is a work of God, it cannot be stopped; can any created being stop God?" Now I ask if this is common sense? Formerly, it used to be the established belief that a revival could not be stopped, because it was the work of God. And so they supposed it would go on, whatever might be done to hinder it, in the church or out of it. But the farmer might just as well reason so, and think he could go and cut down his wheat and not hurt the crop, because it is God that makes grain grow. A revival is the work of God, and so is a crop of wheat; and God is as much dependent on the use of means in one case as the other. And therefore a revival is as liable to be injured as a wheat-field.

1. A revival will stop whenever the church believe it is going to cease. The church are the instruments with which God carries on this work, and they are to work in it voluntarily and with their hearts. Nothing is more fatal to a revival than for its friends to predict that it is going to stop. No matter what the enemies of the work may say about it, predicting that it will all run out and come to nothing, and the like. They cannot stop it in this way; but the friends must labor and pray in faith to carry it on. It is a contradiction to say they are laboring and praying in faith to carry on the work, and yet believe that it is going to stop. If they lose their faith, it will stop, of course. Whenever the friends of revivals begin to prophecy that the revival is going to stop, they should be instantly rebuked, in the name of the Lord. If the idea once begins to prevail, and if you cannot counteract it and root it out, the revival will infallibly cease; for it is indispensable to the work, that Christians should labor and pray in faith to promote it, and it is a contradiction to say that they can labor in faith for its continuance, while they believe that it is about to cease.

2. A revival will cease when Christians consent that it should cease. Sometimes Christians see that the revival is in danger of ceasing, and that if something effectual is not done, it will come to a stand. If this fact distresses them, and drives them to prayer, and to fresh efforts, the work will not cease. When

Christians love the work of God and the salvation of souls so well that they are distressed at the mere apprehension of a decline, it will drive them to an agony of prayer and effort. If it does not drive them to agony and effort to prevent its ceasing; if they see the danger, and do not try to avert it, or to renew the work, THEY CONSENT THAT IT SHOULD STOP. There are at this time many people, all over the country, who see revivals declining, and that they are in great danger of ceasing altogether, and yet they manifest but little distress, and seem to care but little about it. Whole churches see their condition, and see what is coming unless there can be a waking up, and yet they are at ease, and do not groan and agonize in prayer, that God would revive his work. Some are even predicting that there is now going to be a great reaction, and a great dearth come over the church, as there did after Whitefield's and Edwards' day. And yet they are not startled at their own forebodings; they are cool about it, and turn directly off to other things. THEY CONSENT TO IT. It seems as if they were the devil's trumpeters, sent out to scatter dismay throughout the ranks of God's elect.

3. A revival will cease whenever Christians become mechanical in their attempts to promote it. When their faith is strong, and their hearts are warm and mellow, and their prayers full of holy emotion, and their words with power, then the work goes on. But when their prayers begin to be cold and without emotion, and their deep-toned feeling is gone, and they begin to labor mechanically, and to use words without feeling, then the revival will cease.

4. The revival will cease whenever Christians get the idea that the work will go on without their aid. The church are co-workers with God in promoting a revival, and the work can be carried on just as far as the church will carry it on, and no farther. God has been for one thousand eight hundred years trying to get the church into the work. He has been calling and urging, commanding, entreating, pressing and encouraging, to get them to take hold. He has stood all this while ready to make bare his arm to carry on the work with them. But the church have been unwilling to do their part. They seem determined to leave it to God alone to convert the world, and say, "If he wants the world converted, let him do it." They ought to know that this is impossible. So far as we know, neither God nor man can convert the world without the co-operation of the church. Sinners cannot be converted without their own agency, for conversion consists in their voluntary turning to God. No more can sinners be converted without the appropriate moral influences to turn them; that is, without truth and the reality of things brought full before their minds either by direct revelation or by men. God cannot convert the world by physical omnipotence, but he is dependent on the moral influence of the church.

5. The work will cease when the church prefer to attend to their own concerns rather than God's business. I do not admit that men have any business which is properly their own, but they think so, and in fact prefer what they consider as their own, rather than to work for God. They begin to think they cannot afford sufficient time from their worldly employments to carry on a revival. And they pretend they are obliged to give up attending to religion, and let their hearts go out again after the world. And the work must cease, of course.

6. When Christians get proud of their great revival, it will cease. I mean those Christians who have before been instrumental in promoting it. It is almost always the case in a revival, that a part of the church are too proud or too worldly to take any part in the work. They are determined to stand aloof, and wait, and see what it will come to, and see how it will come out. The pride of this part of the church cannot stop the revival, for the revival never rested on them. It begun without them, and it can go on without them. They may fold their arms and do nothing but look on and find fault; and still the work may go on. But when that part of the church who work, begin to think what a great revival they have had, and how they have labored

and prayed, and how bold and how zealous they have been, and how much good they have done, then the work will be likely to decline. Perhaps it has been published in the papers what a revival there has been in the church, and how much engaged the members have been, and they think how high they shall stand in the estimation of other churches, all over the land, because they have had such a great revival. And so they get puffed up, and vain, and then they can no longer enjoy the presence of God, and the Spirit withdraws from them, and the revival ceases.

7. The revival will stop when the church gets exhausted by labor. Multitudes of Christians commit a great mistake here in time of revival. They are so thoughtless, and have so little judgment, that they will break up all their habits of living, neglect to eat and sleep at the proper hours, and let the excitement run away with them, so that they overdo their bodies, and are so imprudent that they soon become exhausted, and it is impossible for them to continue in the work. Revivals often cease, and declension follows, from negligence and imprudence, in this respect, on the part of those engaged in carrying them on.

8. A revival will cease when the church begins to speculate about abstract doctrines, which have nothing to do with practice. If the church turn off their attention from the things of salvation, and go to studying or disputing about abstract points, the revival will cease, of course.

9. When Christians begin to proselyte. When the Baptists are so opposed to the Presbyterians, or the Presbyterians to the Baptists, or both against the Methodists, or Episcopalians against the rest, that they begin to make efforts to get the converts to join their church, you soon see the last of the revival. Perhaps a revival will go on for a time, and all sectarian difficulties are banished, till somebody circulates a book, privately, to gain proselytes. Perhaps some over-zealous deacon, or some mischief-making woman, or some proselyting minister, cannot keep still any longer, and begins to work the work of the devil, by attempting to gain proselytes, and so stirs up bitterness, and raising a selfish strife, grieves away the Spirit, and drives Christians all into parties. No more revival there.

10. When Christians refuse to render to the Lord according to the benefits received. This is a fruitful source of religious declensions. God has opened the windows of heaven to a church, and poured them out a blessing, and then he reasonably expects them to bring in the tithes into his store-house, and devise and execute liberal things for Zion; and lo! they have refused; they have not laid themselves out accordingly to promote the cause of Christ, and so the Spirit has been grieved and the blessing withdrawn, and in some instances a great reaction has taken place because the church would not be liberal, when God has been so bountiful. I have known churches who were evidently cursed with barrenness for such a course. They had a glorious revival, and afterwards perhaps their meeting-house needed repairing, or something else was needed which would cost a little money, and they refused to do it, and so for their niggardly spirit God gave them up.

11. When the church, in any way, grieve the Holy Spirit.

(1.) When they do not feel their dependence on the Spirit. Whenever Christians get strong in their own strength, God curses their blessings. In many instances, Christians sin against their own mercies, because they get lifted up with their success, and take the credit to themselves, and do not give to God all the glory. As he says, "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and, I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart." There has been a great deal of this in this country, undoubtedly. I have seen many things that looked like it, in the papers, where there seemed a disposition

in men to take credit for success in promoting revivals. There is doubtless a great temptation to this, and it requires the utmost watchfulness, on the part of ministers and churches, to guard against it, and not grieve the Spirit away by vain-glorying in men.

( 2.) The Spirit may be grieved by a spirit of boasting of the revival. Sometimes, as soon as a revival commences, you will see it blazed out in the newspapers. And most commonly this will kill the revival. There was a case in a neighboring State, where a revival commenced, and instantly there came out a letter from the pastor, telling that he had a revival. I saw the letter and said to myself, That is the last we shall hear of this revival. And so it was. In a few days, the work totally ceased. And such things are not uncommon. I could mention cases and places, where persons have published such things as to puff up the church, and make them so proud that little or nothing more could be done for the revival.

Some, under pretence of publishing things to the praise and glory of God, have published things that savored so strongly of a disposition to exalt themselves, have made their own agency to stand out so conspicuously, as was evidently calculated to make an unhappy impression. At the protracted meeting held in this church, a year ago last fall, there were five hundred hopefully converted, whose names and places of residence we knew. A considerable number of them joined this church. Many of them united with other churches. Nothing was said of this in the papers. I have several times been asked why we were so silent upon the subject. I could only reply, that there was such a tendency to self-exaltation in the churches, that I was afraid to publish anything on the subject. Perhaps I erred. But I have so often seen mischief done by premature publications, that I thought it best to say nothing about it. In the revival in this city, four years ago, so much was said in the papers, that appeared like self-exaltation, that I was afraid to publish. I am not speaking against the practice itself, of publishing accounts of revivals. But the manner of doing it is of vast importance. If it is done so as to excite vanity, it is always fatal to the revival.

(3.) So the Spirit is grieved by saying or publishing things that are calculated to undervalue the work of God. When a blessed work of God is spoken lightly of, not rendering to God the glory due to his name, the Spirit is grieved. If anything is said about a revival, give only the plain and naked facts just as they are, and let them pass for what they are worth.

12. A revival may be expected to cease, when Christians lose the spirit of brotherly love. Jesus Christ will not continue with people in a revival any longer than they continue in the exercise of brotherly love. When Christians are in the spirit of a revival, they feel this love, and then you will hear them call each other brother and sister, very affectionately. But when they begin to get cold, they lose this warmth and glow of affection for one another, and then this calling brother and sister will seem silly and contemptible and they will leave it off. In some churches they never call each other so, but where there is a revival, Christians naturally do it. I never saw a revival, and probably there never was one, in which they did not do it. But as soon as this begins to cease, the Spirit of God is grieved, and departs from among them.

13. A revival will decline and cease, unless Christians are frequently re-converted. By this I mean, that Christians, in order to keep in the spirit of a revival, commonly need to be frequently convicted, and humbled, and broken down before God, and re-converted. This is something which many do not understand, when we talk about a Christian's being re-converted. But the fact is that in a revival the Christian's heart is liable to get crusted over, and lose its exquisite relish for divine things; his unction and prevalence in prayer abates, and then he must be converted over again. It is impossible to keep him in such a state as not to do injury to the work, unless he pass through such a process every few days. I have never labored in revivals in company with any one who would keep in the work and be fit to manage a

revival continually, who did not pass through this process of breaking down as often as once in two or three weeks. Revivals decline, commonly, because it is found impossible to make the church feel their guilt and their dependence, so as to break down before God. It is important that ministers should understand this, and learn how to break down the church, and break down themselves when they need it, or else Christians will soon become mechanical in their work, and lose their fervor and their power of prevailing with God. This was the process through which Peter passed, when he had denied the Saviour, and by which breaking down, the Lord prepared him for the great work on the day of Pentecost. I was surprised, a few years since, to find that the phrase "breaking down" was a stumbling block to certain ministers and professors of religion. They laid themselves open to the rebuke administered to Nicodemus, "Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?" I am confident that until some of them know what it is to be "broken down," they will never do much more for the cause of revivals.

14. A revival cannot continue when Christians will not practice self-denial. When the church have enjoyed a revival and begin to grow fat upon it, and run into self-indulgence, the revival will soon cease, Unless they sympathize with the Son of God, who gave up all to save sinners; unless they are willing to give up their luxuries, and their ease, and lay themselves out in the work, they need not expect the Spirit of God will be poured out upon them. This is undoubtedly one of the principal causes of personal declension. Let Christians in a revival BEWARE, when they first find an inclination creeping upon them, to shrink from self-denial, and to give in to one form of self-indulgence after another. It is the device of Satan, to bait them off from the work of God, and make them dull and gross, and lazy, and fearful, and useless, and sensual, and drive away the Spirit and destroy the revival.

15. A revival will be stopped by controversies about new measures. Nothing is more certain to overthrow a revival than this. But as my last lecture was on the subject of new measures, I need not dwell longer on the subject now.

16. Revivals can be put down by the continued opposition of the Old School, combined with a bad spirit in the New School. If those who do nothing to promote revivals continue their opposition, and if those who are laboring to promote them allow themselves to get impatient, and get into a bad spirit, the revival will cease. When the Old School write their letters in the newspapers, against revivals or revival men, and the New School write letters back again against them, in an angry, contentious, bitter spirit, and get into a jangling controversy, revivals will cease. LET THEM KEEP ABOUT THEIR WORK, and not talk about the opposition, nor preach, nor print about it. If others choose to publish their slang and stuff, let the Lord's servants keep to their work, and all the writings and slander will not stop the revival, while those who are engaged in it mind their business, and keep to their work. It is astonishing how far this holds true in fact.

In one place where there was a revival, certain ministers formed a combination against the pastor of the church, and a plan was set on foot to ruin him, and they actually got him prosecuted before his Presbytery, and had a trial that lasted six weeks, right in the midst of the revival, and the work still went on. The praying members of the church laid themselves out so in the work, that it continued triumphantly throughout the whole scene. The pastor was called off, to attend his trial, but there was another minister that labored among the people, and the members did not even go to the trial, generally, but kept praying and laboring for souls, and the revival rode out the storm. In many other places, opposition has risen up in the church, but a few humble souls have kept at their work, and a gracious God has stretched out his naked arm and made the revival go forward in spite of all opposition.

But whenever those who are actively engaged in promoting a revival get excited at the unreasonableness and pertinacity of the opposition, and feel as if they could not have it so, and they lose their patience, and feel as if they must answer their cavils and refute their slanders, then they get down into the plains of Ono, and the work must cease.

17. Any diversion of the public mind will hinder a revival. Anything that succeeds in diverting public attention, will put a stop to a revival. In the case I have specified, where the minister was put on trial before his Presbytery, the reason why it did not ruin the revival was, that the praying members of the church would not suffer themselves to be diverted. They did not even attend the trial, but kept praying and laboring for souls, and so public attention was kept to the subject, in spite of all the efforts of the devil.

But whenever he succeeds in absorbing public attention on any other subject, he will put an end to the revival. No matter what the subject is. If an angel from heaven were to come down, and preach, or pass about the streets, it might be the worst thing in the world for a revival, for it would turn sinners all off from their own sins, and turn the church off from praying for souls, to follow this glorious being, and gaze upon him, and the revival would cease.

18. Resistance to the Temperance Reformation will put a stop to revivals in a church. The time has come that it can no longer be innocent in a church to stand aloof from this glorious reformation. The time was when this could be done ignorantly. The time has been when ministers and Christians could enjoy revivals, notwithstanding ardent spirit was used among them. But since light has been thrown upon the subject, and it has been found that the use is only injurious, no church member or minister can be innocent and stand neutral in the cause. They must speak out and take sides. And if they do not take ground on one side, their influence is on the other. Show me a minister that has taken ground against the temperance reformation who has had a revival. Show me one who now stands aloof from it who has a revival. Show me one who now temporizes upon this point who does not come out and take a stand in favor of temperance who has a revival? It did not use to be so. But now the subject has come up, and has been discussed, and is understood, no man can shut his eyes upon the truth. The man's hands are RED WITH BLOOD who stands aloof from the temperance cause. And can he have a revival?

19. Revivals are hindered when ministers and churches take wrong ground in regard to any question involving human rights. Take the subject of SLAVERY, for instance. The time was when this subject was not before the public mind. John Newton continued in the slave trade after his conversion. And so had his mind been perverted, and so completely was his conscience seared, in regard to this most nefarious traffic, that the sinfulness of it never occurred to his thoughts until some time after he became a child of God. Had light been poured upon his mind previously to his conversion, he never could have been converted without previously abandoning this sin. And after his conversion, when convinced of its iniquity, he could no longer enjoy the presence of God, without abandoning the sin for ever. So, doubtless, many slave dealers and slave holders in our own country have been converted, notwithstanding their participation in this abomination, because the sinfulness of it was not apparent to their minds. So ministers and churches, to a great extent throughout the land, have held their peace, and borne no testimony against this abominable abomination, existing in the church and in the nation. But recently, the subject has come up for discussion, and the providence of God has brought it distinctly before the eyes of all men. Light is now shed upon this subject, as it has been upon the cause of temperance. Facts are exhibited, and principles established, and light thrown in upon the minds of men, and this monster is dragged from his horrid den, and exhibited before the church, and it is demanded of them, "IS THIS SIN?" Their testimony must be given on this subject. They are God's witnesses. They are sworn to tell "the truth, the

whole truth, and nothing but the truth." It is impossible that their testimony should not be given, on one side or the other. Their silence can no longer be accounted for upon the principle of ignorance, and that they have never had their attention turned to the subject. Consequently, the silence of Christians upon the subject is virtually saying that they do not consider slavery as a sin. The truth is, it is a subject upon which they cannot be silent without guilt. The time has come, in the providence of God, when every southern breeze is loaded down with the cries of lamentation, mourning and wo. Two millions of degraded heathen in our own land stretch their hands, all shackled and bleeding, and send forth to the church of God the agonizing cry for help. And shall the church, in her efforts to reclaim and save the world, deafen her ears to this voice of agony and despair? God forbid. The church cannot turn away from this question. It is a question for the church and for the nation to decide, and God will push it to a decision.

It is in vain for the churches to resist it for fear of distraction, contention, and strife. It is in vain to account it an act of piety to turn away the ear from hearing this cry of distress.

The church must testify, and testify "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," on this subject, or she is perjured, and the Spirit of God departs from her. She is under oath to testify, and ministers and churches who do not pronounce it sin bear false testimony for God. It is doubtless true that one of the reasons for the low state of religion at the present time is that many churches have taken the wrong side on the subject of slavery, have suffered prejudice to prevail over principle, and have feared to call this abomination by its true name.

20. Another thing that hinders revivals is neglecting the claims of missions. If Christians do not feel for the heathen, neglect the monthly concert, and confine their attention to their own church, do not even read the Missionary Herald, or use any other means to inform themselves on the subject of the claims of the world, and reject the light which God is throwing before them, and will not do what God calls them to do in this cause, the Spirit of God will depart from them.

21. When a church rejects the calls of God upon them for educating young men for the ministry, they will hinder and destroy a revival. Look at the Presbyterian church, look at the 200,000 souls converted within ten years, and means enough to fill the world with ministers, and yet the ministry is not increasing so fast as the population of our own country, and unless something more can be done to provide ministers, we shall become heathen ourselves. The churches do not press upon young men the duty of going into the ministry. God pours his Spirit on the churches, and converts hundreds of thousands of souls, and if then the laborers do not come forth into the harvest, what can be expected but that the curse of God will come upon the churches, and his Spirit will be withdrawn, and revivals will cease. Upon this subject no minister, no church should be silent or inactive.

22. Slandering revivals will often put them down. The great revival in the days of President Edwards suffered greatly by the conduct of the church in this respect. It is to be expected that the enemies of God will revile, misrepresent and slander revivals. But when the church herself engages in this work, and many of her most influential members are aiding and abetting in calumniating and misrepresenting a glorious work of God, it is reasonable that the Spirit should be grieved away. It cannot be denied that this has been done, to a grievous and God-dishonoring extent. It has been estimated that in one year, since this revival commenced, ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND SOULS were converted to God in the United States. This was undoubtedly the greatest number that were ever converted in one year, since the world began. It could not be expected that, in an excitement of this extent, among human beings, there should be nothing to deplore. To expect perfection in such a work as this, of such extent, and carried on by human

instrumentality, is utterly unreasonable and absurd. Evils doubtless did exist and have existed. They were to be expected of course, and guarded against, as far as possible. And I do not believe the world's history can furnish one instance in which a revival, approaching to this in extent and influence, has been attended with so few evils, and so little that is honestly to be deplored.

But how has this blessed work of God been treated? Admitting all the evils complained of to be real, which is far from being true, they would only be like spots upon the disc of the glorious sun; things hardly to be thought of, in comparison of the infinite greatness and excellence of the work. And yet how have a great portion of the Presbyterian church, received and treated this blessed work of God? At the General Assembly, that grave body of men that represent the Presbyterian church in the midst of this great work, instead of appointing a day of thanksgiving, instead of praising and glorifying God for the greatness of his work, we hear from them the voice of rebuke. From the reports that were given of the speeches made there, it appears that the house was filled with complainings. Instead of devising measures to forward the work, their attention seemed to be taken up with the comparatively trifling evils that were incidental to it. And after much complaining, they absolutely appointed a committee, and sent forth a "Pastoral Letter" to the churches, calculated to excite suspicions, quench the zeal of God's people, and turn them off from giving glory to God for the greatness of the blessing, to finding fault and carping about the evils. When I heard what was done at that General Assembly, when I read their speeches, when I saw their pastoral letter, my soul was sick, an unutterable feeling of distress came over my mind, and I felt that God would "visit" the Presbyterian church for conduct like this. And ever since, the glory has been departing, and revivals have been becoming less and less frequent--less and less powerful.

And now I wish it could be known, whether those ministers who poured out those complainings on the floor of the General Assembly, and who were instrumental in getting up that pastoral letter, have since been blest in promoting revivals of religion--whether the Spirit of God has been upon them, and whether their churches can witness that they have an unction from the Holy One.

23. Ecclesiastical difficulties are calculated to grieve away the Spirit, and destroy revivals. It has always been the policy of the devil to turn off the attention of ministers from the work of the Lord to disputes and ecclesiastical litigations. President Edwards was obliged to be taken up for a long time in disputes before ecclesiastical councils; and in our days, and in the midst of these great revivals of religion, these difficulties have been alarmingly and shamefully multiplied. Some of the most efficient ministers in the church have been called off from their direct efforts to win souls to Christ, to attend day after day, and in some instances week after week, to charges preferred against them, or their fellow-laborers in the ministry, which could never be sustained.

Look at Philadelphia: what endless and disgraceful janglings have distracted and grieved the church of God in that city, and through the length and breadth of the land. And in the Presbyterian church at large these ecclesiastical difficulties have produced evils enough to make creation weep. Brother Beman was shamefully and wickedly called off from promoting revivals, to attend a trial before his own presbytery, upon charges which, if true, were most of them ridiculous, but which could never be sustained. And since that time a great portion of his time has, it would seem necessarily, been taken up with the adjustment of ecclesiastical difficulties. Brother Duffield, of Carlisle, Brother Barnes, of Philadelphia, and others of God's most successful ministers, have been hindered a considerable part of their time for years by these difficulties. Oh, tell it not in Gath! When will those ministers and professors of religion who do little or nothing themselves let others alone, and let them work for God?

24. Another thing by which revivals may be hindered is censoriousness on either side, and especially in those who have been engaged in carrying forward a revival. It is to be expected that the opposers of the work will watch for the halting of its friends, and be sure to censure them for all that is wrong, and not unfrequently for that which is right in their conduct. Especially is it to be expected that many censorious and unchristian remarks will be made about those that are the most prominent instruments in promoting the work. This censoriousness on the part of the opposers of the work, whether in or out of the church, will not, however, of itself put a stop to the revival. While its promoters keep humble, and in a prayerful spirit, while they do not retaliate, but possess their souls in patience, while they do not suffer themselves to be diverted, to recriminate, and grieve away the spirit of prayer, the work will go forward; as in the case referred to, where a minister was on trial for six weeks in the midst of a revival. There the people kept in the dust, and prayed, not so much for their minister, for they had left him with God, but with strong crying and tears pleading with God for sinners. And God heard and blessed them, and the work went on. Censoriousness in those who are opposed to the work is but little to be dreaded, for they have not the Spirit, and nothing depends on them, and they can hinder the work only just so far as they themselves have influence personally. But the others have the power of the Holy Spirit, and the work depends on their keeping in a right temper. If they get wrong and grieve away the Spirit, there is no help, the work must cease. Whatever provocation, therefore, the promoters of this blessed work may have had, if it ceases, the responsibility be theirs. And one of the most alarming facts, in regard to this matter, is that in many instances, those who have been engaged in carrying forward the work, appear to have lost the Spirit. They are becoming diverted, are beginning to think that the opposition is no longer to be tolerated, and that they must come out and reply in the newspapers to what they say. It should be known and universally understood, that whenever the friends and promoters of this greatest of revivals suffer themselves to be called off to newspaper janglings, to attempt to defend themselves, and reply to those who write against them, the Spirit of Prayer will be entirely grieved away, and the work will cease. Nothing is more detrimental to revivals of religion, and so it has always been found, than for the promoters of it to listen to the opposition, and begin to reply. This was found to be true in the days of President Edwards, as you who are acquainted with his book on Revivals are well aware.

III. I proceed to mention some things which ought to be done, to continue this great and glorious revival of religion, which has been in progress for the last ten years.

1. There should be great and deep repentings on the part of ministers. WE, my brethren, must humble ourselves before God. It will not do for us to suppose that it is enough to call on the people to repent. We must repent, we must take the lead in repentance, and then call on the churches to follow.

Especially must those repent who have taken the lead in producing the feelings of opposition and distrust in regard to revivals. Some ministers have confined their opposition against revivals and revival measures to their own congregations, and created such suspicions among their own people as to prevent the work from spreading and prevailing among them. Such ministers would do well to consider the remarks of President Edwards on this subject.

"If ministers preach never so good doctrine, and are never so painful and laborious in their work, yet, if at such a day as this, they show to their people, that they are not well-affected to this work, but are very doubtful and suspicious of it, they will be very likely to do their people a great deal more hurt than good; for the very fame of such a great and extraordinary work of God, if their people were suffered to believe it to be his work, and the example of other towns, together with what preaching they might hear occasionally, would be likely to have a much greater influence upon the minds of their people, to awaken and animate

them in religion, than all their labors with them: and besides their minister's opinion would not only beget in them a suspicion of the work they hear of abroad, whereby the mighty hand of God that appears in it, loses its influence upon their minds, but it will also tend to create a suspicion of everything of the like nature, that shall appear among themselves, as being something of the same distemper that is become so epidemical in the land, and that is, in effect, to create a suspicion of all vital religion, and to put the people upon talking against it, and discouraging it, wherever it appears, and knocking it in the head as fast as it rises. And we that are ministers, by looking on this work, from year to year, with a displeased countenance, shall effectually keep the sheep from their pasture, instead of doing the part of shepherds to them, by feeding them; and our people had a great deal better be without any settled minister at all at such a day as this."

Others have been more public, and aimed at exerting a wider influence. Some have written pieces for the public papers. Some men in high standing in the church have circulated letters which never were printed. Others have had their letters printed and circulated. There seems to have been a system of letter-writing about the country calculated to create distrust. In the days of President Edwards, substantially the same course was pursued, in view of which he says in his work on revivals:

"Great care should be taken that the press should be improved to no purpose contrary to the interest of this work. We read that when God fought against Sisera, for the deliverance of his oppressed church, they that handle the pen of the writer came to the help of the Lord in that affair. --Judges v.14. Whatever sort of men in Israel they were that were intended, yet as the words were indited by a Spirit that had a perfect view of all events to the end of the world, and had a special eye in this song, to that great event of the deliverance of God's church, in the latter days, of which this deliverance of Israel was a type, it is not unlikely that they have respect to authors, those that should fight against the kingdom of Satan with their pens. Those therefore that publish pamphlets to the disadvantage of this work, and tending either directly or indirectly to bring it under suspicion, and to discourage or hinder it, would do well thoroughly to consider whether this be not indeed the work of God, and whether, if it be, it is not likely that God will go forth as fire, to consume all that stand in his way, and so burn up those pamphlets; and whether there be not danger that the fire that is kindled in them will scorch the authors."

All these must repent. God never will forgive them, nor will they ever enjoy his blessing on their preaching, or be honored to labor in revivals till they repent. This duty President Edwards pressed upon ministers in his day, in the most forcible terms. There doubtless have been now, as there were then, faults on both sides. And there must be deep repentance, and mutual confessions of faults on both sides.

"There must be a great deal done at confessing of faults, on both sides; for undoubtedly many and great are the faults that have been committed, in the jangling and confusions, and mixtures of light and darkness, that have been of late. There is hardly any duty more contrary to our corrupt dispositions, and mortifying to the pride of man; but it must be done. Repentance of faults is, in a peculiar manner, a proper duty, when the kingdom of heaven is at hand, or when we especially expect or desire that it should come, as appears by John the Baptist's preaching. And if God does now loudly call upon us to repent, then he also calls upon us to make proper manifestations of our repentance. I am persuaded that those that have openly opposed this work, or have from time to time spoken lightly of it, cannot be excused in the sight of God, without openly confessing their fault therein, especially if they be ministers. If they have any way, either directly or indirectly, opposed the work, or have so behaved in their public performances or private conversation, as has prejudiced the minds of their people against the work, if hereafter they shall be convinced of the goodness and divinity of what they have opposed, they ought by no means to palliate the

matter, and excuse themselves, and pretend that they always thought so, and that it was only such and such imprudences that they objected against, but they ought openly to declare their conviction, and condemn themselves for what they have done; for it is Christ that they have spoken against, in speaking lightly of, and prejudicing others against this work; yea, worse than that, it is the Holy Ghost. And though they have done it ignorantly, and in unbelief, yet when they find out who it is that they have opposed, undoubtedly God will hold them bound publicly to confess it.

"And on the other side, if those that have been zealous to promote the work, have in any of the forementioned instances openly gone much out of the way, and done that which is contrary to Christian rules, whereby they have openly injured others, or greatly violated good order, and so done that which has wounded religion, they must publicly confess it, and humble themselves, as they would gather out the stones, and prepare the way of God's people. They who have laid great stumbling blocks in others' way, by their open transgression, are bound to remove them, by their open repentance."

There are ministers in our day, I say it not in unkindness but in faithfulness, and I would that I had them all here before me while I say it, who seem to have been engaged much of their time for years in doing little else than acting and talking and writing in such a way as to create suspicion in regard to revivals. And I cannot doubt that their churches would, as President Edwards says, be better with no minister at all, unless they will repent, and regain his blessing.

2. Those churches which have opposed revivals must humble themselves and repent. Churches which have stood aloof or hindered the work must repent of their sin, or God will not go with them. Look at those churches now, who have been throwing suspicion upon revivals. Do they enjoy revivals? Does the Holy Ghost descend upon them, to enlarge them and build them up? There is one of the churches in this city, where the session have been publishing in the newspapers what they call their "Act and Testimony," calculated to excite an unreasonable and groundless suspicion against many ministers who are laboring successfully to promote revivals." And what is the state of that church? Have they had a revival? Why it appears from the official report to the General Assembly, that it has dwindled in one year twenty-seven per cent. And all such churches will continue to dwindle, in spite of everything else that can be done, unless they repent and have a revival. They may pretend to be mighty pious, and jealous for the honor of God, but God will not believe they are sincere. And he will manifest his displeasure, by not pouring out his Spirit. If I had a voice loud enough, I should like to make every one of these churches and ministers that have slandered revivals, hear me, when I say, that I believe they have helped to bring the pall of death over the church, and that the curse of God is on them already, and will remain unless they repent. God has already sent leanness into their souls, and many of them know it.

3. Those who have been engaged in promoting the work must also repent. Whatever they have done that was wrong must be repented of, or revivals will not return as in days past. Whenever a wrong spirit has been manifested, or they have got irritated and provoked at the opposition, and lost their temper, or mistaken Christian faithfulness for hard words and a wrong spirit, they must repent. Those who are opposed could never stop a revival alone, unless those who promote it get wrong. So we must repent if we have said things that were censorious, or proud, or arrogant, or severe. Such a time as this is no time to stand justifying ourselves. Our first call is to repent. Let each one repent of his own sins, and not fall out, and quarrel about who is most to blame.

4. The church must take right ground in regard to politics. Do not suppose, now, that I am going to preach a political sermon, or that I wish to have you join and get up a Christian party in politics. No, I do not

believe in that. But the time has come that Christians must vote for honest men, and take consistent ground in politics, or the Lord will curse them. They must be honest men themselves, and instead of voting for a man because he belongs to their party, Bank or Anti-Bank, Jackson, or Anti-Jackson, they must find out whether he is honest and upright, and fit to be trusted. They must let the world see that the church will uphold no man in office, who is known to be a knave, or an adulterer, or a Sabbath-breaker, or a gambler, or a drunkard. Such is the spread of intelligence and the facility of communication in our country, that every man can know for whom he gives his vote. And if he will give his vote only for honest men, the country will be obliged to have upright rulers. All parties will be compelled to put up honest men as candidates. Christians have been exceedingly guilty in this matter. But the time has come when they must act differently, or God will curse the nation, and withdraw his spirit. As on the subject of slavery and temperance, so on this subject, the church must act right or the country will be ruined. God cannot sustain this free and blessed country, which we love and pray for, unless the church will take right ground. Politics are a part of religion in such a country as this, and Christians must do their duty to the country as a part of their duty to God. It seems sometimes as if the foundations of the nation were becoming rotten, and Christians seem to act as if they thought God did not see what they do in politics. But I tell you, he does see it, and he will bless or curse this nation, according to the course they take.

5. The churches must take right ground on the subject of slavery. And here the question arises, what is right ground? And FIRST I will state some things that should be avoided.

(1.) First of all, a bad spirit should be avoided. Nothing is more calculated to injure religion, and to injure the slaves themselves, than for Christians to get into an angry controversy on the subject. It is a subject upon which there needs to be no angry controversy among Christians. Slave-holding professors, like rum-selling professors, may endeavor to justify themselves, and may be angry with those who press their consciences, and call upon them to give up their sins. Those proud professors of religion who think a man to blame, or think it is a shame to have a black skin, may allow their prejudices so far to prevail, as to shut their ears, and be disposed to quarrel with those who urge the subject upon them. But I repeat it, the subject of slavery is a subject upon which Christians, praying men, need not and must not differ.

(2.) Another thing to be avoided is an attempt to take neutral ground on this subject. Christians can no more take neutral ground on this subject, since it has come up for discussion, than they can take neutral ground on the subject of the sanctification of the Sabbath. It is a great national sin. It is a sin of the church. The churches by their silence, and by permitting slaveholders to belong to their communion, have been consenting to it. All denominations have been more or less guilty, although the Quakers have of late years washed their hands of it. It is in vain for the churches to pretend it is merely a political sin. I repeat it, it is the sin of the church, to which all denominations have consented. They have virtually declared that it is lawful. The very fact of suffering slaveholders quietly to remain in good standing in their churches, is the strongest and most public expression of their views that it is not sin. For the church, therefore, to pretend to take neutral ground on the subject, is perfectly absurd. The fact is that she is not on neutral ground at all. While she tolerates slaveholders in her communion SHE JUSTIFIES THE PRACTICE. And as well might an enemy of God pretend that he was neither saint nor sinner, that he was going to take neutral ground, and pray "good Lord and good devil," because he did not know which side would be the most popular.

(3.) Great care should be taken to avoid a censorious spirit on both sides. It is a subject on which there has been, and probably will be for some time to come, a difference of opinion among Christians, as to the best method of disposing of the question. And it ought to be treated with great forbearance on both sides.

A denunciatory spirit, impeaching each other's motives, is unchristian, calculated to grieve the Spirit of God, and to put down revivals, and is alike injurious to the church, and to the slaves themselves.

In the SECOND place, I will mention several things, that in my judgment the church are imperatively called upon to do, on this subject:

(1.) Christians of all denominations, should lay aside prejudice and inform themselves on this subject, without any delay. Vast multitudes of professors of religion have indulged prejudice to such a degree, as to be unwilling to read and hear, and come to a right understanding of the subject. But Christians cannot pray in this state of mind. I defy any one to possess the spirit of prayer, while he is too prejudiced to examine this, or any other question of duty. If the light did not shine, Christians might remain in the dark upon this point, and still possess the spirit of prayer. But if they refuse to come to the light, they cannot pray. Now I call upon all you who are here present, and who have not examined this subject because you were indisposed to examine it, to say whether you have the spirit of prayer. Where ministers, individual Christians, or whole churches, resist truth upon this point now, when it is so extensively diffused and before the public mind, I do not believe they will or can enjoy a revival of religion.

(2.) Writings, containing temperate and judicious discussions on this subject, and such developments of facts as are before the public, should be quietly and extensively circulated, and should be carefully and prayerfully examined by the whole church. I do not mean by this, that the attention of the church should be so absorbed by this, as to neglect the main question, of saving souls in the midst of them. I do not mean that such premature movements on this subject should be made, as to astound the Christian community, and involve them in a broil; but that praying men should act judiciously, and that, as soon as sufficient information can be diffused through the community, the churches should meekly, but FIRMLY take decided ground on the subject, and express before the whole nation and the world, their abhorrence of this sin.

The anti-masonic excitement which prevailed a few years since, made such desolations in the churches, and produced for a time so much alienation of feeling and ill will among ministers and people, and the first introduction of this subject has been attended with such commotions, that many good ministers, who are themselves entirely opposed to slavery, dread to introduce the subject among their people, through fear that their churches have not religion enough to take it up, and consider it calmly, and decide upon it in the spirit of the gospel. I know there is danger of this. But still the subject must be presented to the churches. And if introduced with discretion, and with great prayer, there are very few churches that have enjoyed revivals, and that are at the present time anywhere near a revival spirit, which may not be brought to receive the truth on this subject. Let there be no mistake here. William Morgan's exposé of freemasonry was published in 1826. The consequent excitement and discussion continued until 1830. In the meantime the churches had very generally borne their testimony against freemasonry, and resolved that they could not fellowship adhering masons. As a consequence the Masonic Lodges generally disbanded and gave up their charters. There was a general stampede of professed Christians from the lodges. This prepared the way, and in 1830, the greatest revival the world had then ever seen commenced in the center of the anti-masonic region, and spread over the whole field where the church action had been taken until its converts numbered 100,000 souls.

Perhaps no church in this country has had a more severe trial upon this subject than this. They were a church of young and for the most part inexperienced Christians. And many circumstances conspired, in my absence, to produce confusion and wrong feeling among them. But so far as I am now acquainted with

the state of feeling in this church, I know of no ill will among them on this subject. The Lord has blessed us, the Spirit has been distilled upon us, and considerable numbers added to our communion every month since my return. There are doubtless in this church those who feel on this subject in very different degrees. And yet I can honestly say that I am not aware of the least difference in sentiment among them. We have from the beginning, previous to my going on my foreign tour, taken the same ground on the subject of slavery that we have on temperance. We have excluded slaveholders and all concerned in the traffic from our communion. By some out of this church this course has been censured as unwarrantable and uncharitable, and I would by no means make my own judgment, or the example of this church, a rule for the government of other ministers and churches. Still, I conscientiously believe that the time is not far distant when the churches will be united in this expression of abhorrence against this sin. If I do not baptize slavery by some soft and Christian name, if I call it SIN, both consistency and conscience conduct to the inevitable conclusion, that while the sin is persevered in, its perpetrators cannot be fit subjects for Christian communion and fellowship.

To this it is objected, that there are many ministers in the Presbyterian church who are slaveholders. And it is said to be very inconsistent that we should refuse to suffer a slaveholder to come to our communion, and yet belong to the same church with them, sit with them in ecclesiastical bodies, and acknowledge them as ministers. To this I answer, that I have not the power to deal with those ministers, and certainly I am not to withdraw from the church because some of its ministers or members are slaveholders. My duty is to belong to the church, even if the devil belong to it. Where I have authority, I exclude slaveholders from the communion, and I always will as long as I live. But where I have no authority, if the table of Christ is spread, I will sit down to it, in obedience to his commandment, whoever else may sit down or stay away.

I do not mean, by any means, to denounce all those slaveholding ministers and professors as hypocrites, and to say that they are not Christians. But this I say, that while they continue in that attitude, the cause of Christ and of humanity demands, that they should not be recognized as such, unless we mean to be partakers of other men's sins. It is no more inconsistent to exclude slaveholders because they belong to the Presbyterian church, than it is to exclude persons who drink or sell ardent spirits. For there are a great many rum-sellers belonging to the Presbyterian church.

I believe the time has come, and although I am no prophet, I believe it will be found to have come, that the revival in the United States will continue and prevail, no farther and faster than the church take right ground upon this subject. The church are God's witnesses. The fact is that slavery is, pre-eminently, the sin of the church. It is the very fact that ministers and professors of religion of different denominations hold slaves, which sanctifies the whole abomination, in the eyes of ungodly men. Who does not know that on the subject of temperance every drunkard in the land will skulk behind some rum-selling deacon, or wine-drinking minister? It is the most common objection and refuge of the intemperate, and of moderate drinkers, that it is practised by professors of religion. It is this that creates the imperious necessity for excluding traffickers in ardent spirit, and rum-drinkers from the communion. Let the churches of all denominations speak out on the subject of temperance; let them close their doors against all who have anything to do with the death-dealing abomination, and the cause of temperance is triumphant. A few years would annihilate the traffic. just so with slavery.

It is the church that mainly supports this sin. Her united testimony upon this subject would settle the question. Let Christians of all denominations meekly but firmly come forth, and pronounce their verdict; let them clear their communions, and wash their hands of this thing; let them give forth and write on the head and front of this great abomination, SIN! and in three years a public sentiment would be formed that would

carry all before it, and there would not be a shackled slave, nor a bristling, cruel slavedriver in this land.

Still it may be said, that in many churches, this subject cannot be introduced without creating confusion and ill-will. This may be. It has been so upon the subject of temperance, and upon the subject of revivals too. In some churches, neither temperance nor revivals can be introduced without producing dissension. Sabbath-schools, and missionary operations, and everything of the kind have been opposed, and have produced dissensions in many churches. But is this a sufficient reason for excluding these subjects? And where churches have excluded these subjects for fear of contention, have they been blessed with revivals? Every body knows that they have not. But where churches have taken firm ground on these subjects, although individuals and sometimes numbers have opposed, still they have been blessed with revivals. Where any of these subjects are carefully and prayerfully introduced; where they are brought forward with a right spirit, and the true relative importance is attached to each one of them; if in such cases, there are those who will make disturbance and resist, let the blame fall where it ought. There are some individuals, who are themselves disposed to quarrel with this subject, who are always ready to exclaim, "Do not introduce these things into the church, they will create opposition." And if the minister and praying people feel it their duty to bring the matter forward, they will themselves create a disturbance, and then say, "There, I told you so; now see what your introducing this subject has done; it will tear the church all to pieces." And while they are themselves doing all they can to create division, they are charging the division upon the subject, and not upon themselves. There are some such people in many of our churches. And neither sabbath-schools, nor missions, nor revivals, nor anti-slavery, nor anything else that honors God or benefits the souls of men, will be carried in the churches, without these careful souls being offended by it.

These things, however, have been introduced, and carried, one by one, in some churches with more, and others with less opposition, and perhaps in some churches with no opposition at all. And as true as God is the God of the church, as certain as that the world must be converted, this subject must be considered and pronounced sin by the church. There might, infinitely better, be no church in the world, than that she should attempt to remain neutral or give a false testimony on a subject of such importance as slavery, especially since the subject has come up, and it is impossible from the nature of the case, that her testimony should not be in the scale, on the one side or the other.

Do you ask, "What shall be done--shall we make it the all-absorbing topic of conversation, and divert attention from the all-important subject of the salvation of souls in the midst of us?" I answer, No. Let a church express her opinion upon the subject, and be at peace. So far as I know, we are entirely at peace upon this subject. We have expressed our opinion; we have closed our communion against slaveholders, and are attending to other things. I am not aware of the least unhealthy excitement among us on this subject. And where it has become an absorbing topic of conversation in a place, in most instances I believe it has been owing to the pertinacious and unreasonable opposition of a few individuals against even granting the subject a hearing.

6. If the church wishes to promote revivals, she must sanctify the Sabbath. There is a vast deal of Sabbath-breaking in the land. Merchants break it, travellers break it, the Government breaks it. A few years ago an attempt was made in the western part of this State, to establish and sustain a Sabbath-keeping line of boats and stages. But it was found that the church would not sustain the enterprise. Many professors of religion would not travel in these stages, and would not have their goods forwarded in canal-boats that would be detained from travelling on the Sabbath. At one time, Christians were much engaged in petitioning Congress to suspend the Sabbath mails, and now they seem to be

ashamed of it. But one thing is most certain, that unless something is done, and done speedily, and done effectually, to promote the sanctification of the Sabbath by the church, the Sabbath will go by the board, and we shall not only have our mails running on the Sabbath, and post offices open, but by and by our courts of justice and halls of legislation will be kept open on the Sabbath. And what can the church do, what will this nation do, WITHOUT ANY SABBATH?

7. The church must take right ground on the subject of Temperance and Moral Reform, and all the subject of practi

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