

Lecture Xvi. - the Necessity and Effect of Union.

by Charles Finney

To prevail in prayer, we must be united in our desires, motives, and reasons, and agree on the necessity of divine agency to produce a revival.

Scripture: Psalm 133:1, Matthew 18:19, Acts 1:14, Romans 15:5-6, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 2:2, Colossians 3:14, James 5:16, 1 John 5:14-15

Topics: "Revival", "Unity in Prayer"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the necessity of unity in prayer and effort among believers, illustrating that true agreement is essential for effective prayer. He explains that agreement must encompass shared desires, motives, and faith, as well as a collective understanding of the importance of revivals. Finney warns against selfish motives in prayer and stresses that genuine unity can lead to powerful outcomes in the church and the salvation of souls. He calls for churches to remove obstacles to revival and to work together harmoniously, as the promise of God is contingent upon their unity. Ultimately, he urges believers to recognize their responsibility in prayer and action to fulfill God's promise.

Transcript

TEXT. --Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.--MATTHEW xviii. 19.

SOME weeks since, I used this text, in preaching on the subject of prayer meetings. At present I design to enter more into the spirit and meaning of the text. The evident design of our Lord in this text was to teach the importance and influence of union in prayer and effort to promote religion. He states the strongest possible case by taking the number two, as the least number between whom there can be an agreement, and says that "where two of you are agreed on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." It is the fact of their agreement, upon which he lays the stress, and mentioning the number two, appears to have been designed merely to afford encouragement to the smallest number between whom there can be an agreement. But what are we to understand "being it agreed as touching" the things we shall ask? I will answer this question under the two following heads:

I. By showing that we are to be "agreed" in prayer.

II. We are to agree in everything that is essential to obtaining the blessing that we seek.

I. In order to come within this promise, we are to be agreed in prayer. This is particularly taught in the text. That is,

1. We should agree in our desires for the object, It is necessary to have desires for the object, and to be agreed in those desires. Very often individuals pray in words for the same thing, when they are by no means agreed in desiring that thing. Nay, perhaps some of them, in their hearts desire the very opposite. People are called on to pray for an object, and they all pray for it in words, but God knows they often do not desire it, and perhaps he sees that the hearts of some may, all the while, be resisting the prayer.

2. We must agree in the motive from which we desire the object. It is not enough that our desires for an object should be the same, but the reason why must be the same. An individual may desire a revival, for the glory of God and the salvation of sinners. Another member of the church may also desire a revival, but from very different motives. Some, perhaps, desire a revival in order to have the congregation built up and strengthened, so as to make it more easy for them to pay their expenses in supporting the gospel. Another desires a revival for the sake of having the church increased so as to be more numerous and more respectable. Others desire a revival because they have been opposed or evil spoken of, and they wish to have their enemies know that whatever they may think or say, God blesses them. Sometimes people desire a revival from mere natural affection, so as to have their friends converted and saved. If they mean to be so united in prayer as to obtain a blessing, they must not only desire the blessing, and be agreed in desiring it, but they must also agree in desiring it for the same reasons.

3. We must be agreed in desiring it for good reasons. These desires must not only be united, and from the same motives, but they must be from good motives. The supreme motive must be to honor and glorify God. People may even desire a revival, and agree in desiring it, and agree in the motives, and yet if these motives are not good, God will not grant their desires. Thus parents may be agreed in prayer for the conversion of their children, and may have the same feelings and the same motives, and yet if they have no higher motives than because they are their children, their prayers will not be granted. They are agreed in the reason, but it is not the right reason.

In like manner, any number of persons might be agreed in their desires and motives, but if their motives are selfish, their being agreed in them will only make them more offensive to God. "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" I have seen a great deal of this, where churches have been engaged in prayer for an object, and their motives were evidently selfish. Sometimes they are engaged in praying for a revival, and you would think by their earnestness and union that they would certainly move God to grant the blessing, till you find out the reason. And what is it? Why, they see their congregation is about to be broken up, unless something can be done. Or they see some other denomination gaining ground, and there is no way to counteract them but by having a revival in their church. And all their praying is only an attempt to get the Almighty in to help them out of their difficulty, and is purely selfish and offensive to God. A woman in Philadelphia, was invited to attend a female prayer meeting at a certain place. She inquired what they met there for, and for what they were going to pray? She was answered that they were going to pray for the outpouring of the Spirit upon the city. "Well," said she, "I shall not go; if they were going to pray for our congregation I would go, but I am not going there to pray for other churches!" Oh, what a spirit!

I have had a multitude of letters and requests that I should visit such and such places, and endeavor to promote a revival, and many reasons have been urged why I should go, but when I came to weigh their reasons, I have sometimes found every one of them selfish. And God would look upon every one with abhorrence.

In prayer meetings, how often do we hear people offer such reasons why they desire such and such blessings, as are not right in the sight of God. Such reasons, that if they are the true ones, and if Christians are actually excited by those reasons, it would render their prayers not acceptable to God, because their motive was not right.

There are a great many things often said in favor of the cause of missions, which are of this character, appealing to wrong motives. How often are we told of six hundred millions of heathens, who are in danger of going to hell, and how little is said of the guilt of six hundred millions engaged and banded together as rebels against God, or of the dishonor and contempt poured upon God our Maker by such a world of outlaws. Now I know that God refers to those motives which appeal to our mere natural sympathies, and compassion, and uses them, but always in subordination to his glory. If these lower motives are placed foremost, it must always produce a defective piety and zeal, and a great deal that is false. Until the church will look at the dishonor done to God, little will be done. It is this which must be made to stand out before the world, it is this which must be deeply felt by the church, it is this which must be fully exhibited to sinners, before the world can ever be converted.

Parents never agree in praying for the conversion of their children in such a way as to have their prayers answered, until they feel that their children are rebels. Parents often pray very earnestly for their children because they wish God to save them, and they almost think hard of God if he does not save their children. But if they would have their prayers prevail, they must come to take God's part against their children, even though for their perverseness and incorrigible wickedness he should be obliged to send them to hell. I knew a woman who was very anxious for the salvation of her son, and she used to pray for him with agony, but still he remained impenitent, until at length she became convinced that her prayers and agonies had been nothing but the fond yearnings of parental feeling, and were not dictated at all by a just view of her son's character as a wilful and wicked rebel against God. And there was never any impression made on his mind until she was made to take strong ground against him as a rebel, and to look on him as deserving to be sent to hell. And then he was converted. The reason was, she never before was influenced by the right motive in prayer, desiring his salvation with a supreme regard to the glory of God.

4. If we would be so united as to prevail in prayer, we must agree in faith. That is, we must concur in expecting the blessing prayed for. We must understand the reason why it is to be expected, we must see the evidence on which faith ought to rest, and must absolutely believe that the blessing will come, or we do not bring ourselves within the promise. Faith is always understood as an indispensable condition of prevailing prayer. If it is not expressed in any particular case, it is always implied, for no prayer can be effectual but that which is offered in faith. And in order that united prayer may prevail, there must be united faith.

5. So, again, we must be agreed as to the time when we desire the blessing to come. If two or more agree in desiring a particular blessing, and one of them desires to have it come now, while others are not ready to have it quite yet, it is plain they are not agreed. They are not united in regard to one essential point. If the blessing is to come in answer to their united prayer, it must come as they prayed for it. And if it comes, it must be at some time. But if they disagree as to the time when they will have it, plainly it can never come

in answer to their prayer.

Suppose a church should undertake to pray for a revival, and should be all agreed in desiring a revival, but not as to the time when it shall be. Suppose some wish to have the revival come now, and are all prepared, and their hearts waiting for the Spirit of God to come down, and are willing to give time and attention and labor to it NOW; but others are not quite ready, they have something else to attend to at present, some worldly object which they want to accomplish, some piece of business in hand and want just to finish this thing, and then--but they cannot possibly find time to attend to it now, they are not prepared to humble themselves, to search their hearts and break up their fallow ground, and put themselves in a posture to receive the blessing. Is it not plain that here is no real union, for they are not agreed in that which is essential? While one part are praying that the revival may come now, the others are praying with equal earnestness that it may not come now.

Suppose the question were now put to this church, whether you are agreed in praying for a revival of religion here? Do you all desire a revival, and would you all like to have it come now? Would you be heartily agreed now to break down in the dust, and open your hearts to the Holy Ghost if he should come to-night? I do not ask what you would say, if I should propose the question. Perhaps if I should put it to you now, you would all rise up and vote that you were agreed in desiring a revival, and agreed to have it now, You know how you ought to feel and what you ought to say, and you know you ought to be ready for a revival now. But, I ask, would GOD see it to be so in your hearts, that you are agreed on this point? Has there been a time, since I came back from the country, that this church were all agreed in desiring and praying for a revival, and in wishing to have it come now? Have any two of you agreed on this point, and prayed accordingly? If not, when will you be agreed to pray for a revival? And if this church cannot be agreed among yourselves, how can you expect a revival? It is of no use for you to take the outward attitude, and stand up here and say you are agreed, when God reads the heart, and sees that you are not agreed. Here is the promise--"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." Now this is either true, or it is false. Which ground will you take? If it is true, then it is true that you are not agreed, and never have been, except in those cases where you have had a revival.

But we must agree not only upon a time, but it must be the present time, or we are not agreed in everything essential to the work. Unless we agree to have the revival now, we shall not now use the means. But until the means are used, it cannot come. It is plain, then, that we must be agreed upon the present time, that is, we are not agreed in the sense of the text, until we agree that now we will have the blessing, and conduct accordingly. To agree upon a future time is of no use, for when that future time comes, we must then be agreed upon that present time, and use means accordingly, so that you see you are never properly agreed until you agree that now is the time.

II. We are to agree in everything that is essential to obtaining the blessing that we seek.

You see the language of the text, "If two of you shall agree as touching anything that they shall ask." Many people seem to read it as if it referred merely to an agreement in asking, and they understand it to promise, that whenever two are agreed in asking for any blessing, it shall be given, But Christ says there must be an agreement "as touching" the thing prayed for. That is, the agreement or union must comprise everything that is essential to the bestowment and reception of the blessing.

1. If Christians would enjoy the benefits of this promise in praying for a revival, they must be agreed in believing revivals of religion to be a reality. There are many individuals, even in the church, who do not in their hearts believe that the revivals which take place are the work of God. Some of them may pray in words for an outpouring of the Spirit and a revival of religion, while in their hearts they doubt whether there are any such things known in modern times. In united prayer there must be no hypocrisy.

2. They must agree in feeling the necessity of revivals. There are some who believe in the reality of revivals, as a work of God, while at the same time they are unsettled as to the necessity of having them in order to the success of the gospel. They think there is a real work of God in revivals, but after all, perhaps it is quite as well to have sinners converted and brought into the church in a more quiet and gradual way, and without so much excitement. Whenever revivals are abroad in the land, and prevail, and are popular, they may appear in favor of them, and may put up their cold prayers for a revival, while at the same time they would be sorry on the whole to have a revival come among them. They think it so much safer and better to indoctrinate the people, and spread the matter before them in a calm way, and to bring them in gradually, and not run the risk of having animal feeling or wild-fire in their congregations.

3. They must be agreed in regard to the importance of revivals. Men are not blessed with revivals, in answer to prayers that are not half in earnest. They must feel the infinite importance of a revival before they will pray so as to prevail. Blessings of this kind are not granted but in answer to such prayers as arise from a sense of their importance. As I have shown before, when preaching on the subject of prevailing prayer, it is when men desire the blessing with UNUTTERABLE AGONY, that they offer such prayer as will infallibly prevail with God. Those who feel less of the importance of a revival may pray for it in words, but they will never have the blessing. But when a church has been united in prayer, and really felt the importance of a revival, they never have failed of having one. I do not believe a case can be found of such a church being turned empty away. Such an agreement, when sincere, will secure an agreement also on all other subjects that are indispensable.

4. They must be agreed also, in having correct scriptural notions about several things connected with revivals.

(1.) The necessity of divine agency to produce a revival. It is not enough that they all hold this in theory, and pray for it in words. They must fully understand and deeply feel this necessity, they must realize their entire dependence on the Spirit of God, or the whole will fail.

(2.) Why divine agency is necessary. There must be an agreement on correct principles in regard to the reason that divine agency is so indispensable. If they get wrong ideas on this point, they will be hindered. If Christians get the idea that this necessity of divine influence lies in the inability of sinners, or if they feel as if God was under obligation to give the Holy Spirit, in order to make sinners able to obey the gospel, they insult God, and their prayers will not avail. For in that case they must feel that it is a mere matter of common justice for God to pour out his Spirit, before he can justly require Christians to work, or sinners to repent.

Suppose a church get the idea that sinners are poor, unfortunate creatures, who come into the world with such a nature that they cannot help sinning, and that sinners are just as unable to repent and believe the gospel as they are to fly to the moon, how can they feel that the sinner is a rebel against God, and that he deserves to be sent to hell? How can they feel that the sinner is to blame? And how can they take God's part when they pray? If they do not take God's part against the sinner, they cannot expect God will regard

their prayers, for they do not pray with right motives. No doubt one great reason why so many prayers are not answered, is that those who pray do in fact take the sinner's part against God. They pray as if the sinner was a poor unfortunate being, to be pitied, rather than as if he was a guilty wretch, to be blamed. And the reason is that they do not believe sinners are able to obey God. If a person does not believe that sinners are able to obey their Maker, and really believes that the Spirit's influences are necessary to make him able, it is impossible, with these views, to offer acceptable and prevailing prayer for the sinner, and it is not wonderful that persons with these views should not prevail with God, and should doubt about the efficacy of the prayer of faith.

How often do you hear people pray for sinners in this style, "O Lord, help this poor soul to do what he is required to do--O Lord, enable him to do so and so." Now this language implies that they take the sinner's part, and not God's. If it was understood by those who use it, as it is sometimes explained, and if people meant by it what they ought to mean when they plead for sinners, I would not find so much fault with it, But the truth is, that when people use this language, they often mean just what the language itself would be naturally at first sight, understood to mean, which is just as if they should pray, "Lord, thou commandest these poor sinners to repent, when, O Lord, thou knowest they cannot repent unless thou givest them thy Spirit, to enable them to do it, though thou hast declared that thou wilt send them to hell if they do not, whether they ever receive the Spirit or not, and now, Lord, this seems very hard, and we pray thee to have pity upon these poor creatures, and do not deal so hardly with them, for Christ's sake." Who does not see that such a prayer, or a prayer which means this, whatever language it may be couched in, is an insult to God, charging him with infinite injustice, if he continues to exact from sinners a duty which they are unable to perform without that aid which he will not grant. People may pray in this way till the day of judgment, and never obtain a blessing, because they take the sinners part against God. They cannot pray successfully, until they understand that the sinner is a rebel, and obstinate in his rebellion--so obstinate that he never will, without the Holy Spirit, do what he might do as well as not, instantly, and this obstinacy is the reason, and the only reason, why he needs the influence of the Holy Spirit for his conversion. The only ground on which the sinner needs divine agency is to overcome his obstinacy, and make him willing to do what he can do, and what God justly requires him to do. And a church are never in an attitude in which God will hear their united prayers, unless they are agreed in so understanding their dependence on God, as to feel it in perfect consistency with the sinner's blame. If it is the other way, they are agreed in understanding it wrong, and their prayers for divine help to the unfortunate instead of divine favor to make a rebel submit, are wide of the mark, are an insult to God, and they never will obtain favor in heaven.

(3.) They must be agreed in understanding that revivals are not miracles, but that they are brought about by the use of means like other events. No wonder revivals formerly came so seldom and continued so short a time, when people generally regarded them as miracles, or like a mere shower of rain, that will come on a place and continue a little while, and then blow over; that is, as something over which we have no control. For what can people do to get a shower of rain? Or how can they make it rain any longer than it does rain? It is necessary that those who pray should be agreed in understanding a revival as something to be brought about by means, or they never will be agreed in using them.

(4.) They must be agreed in understanding that human agency is just as indispensable to a revival as divine agency. Such a thing as a revival of religion, I venture to say, never did occur without divine agency, and never did occur without human agency. How often do people say, "God can, if he pleases, carry on the work without means." But I have no faith in it, for there is no evidence of it. What is religion? Obedience to God's law. But the law cannot be obeyed unless it is known. And how can God make

sinner's obey but by making known his commandments? And how can he make them known but by revealing them himself, or sending them by others--that is, by bringing THE TRUTH to bear upon the person's mind till he obeys it. God never did and never can convert a sinner except with the truth. What is conversion? Obeying the truth. He may communicate it himself, directly to the sinner. But then, the sinner's own agency is indispensable, for conversion consists in the right employment of the sinner's own agency. And ordinarily, he employs the agency of others also, in printing, writing, conversation, and preaching. God has put the gospel treasure in earthen vessels. He has seen fit to employ men in preaching the word. That is, he has seen that human agency is that which he can best employ in saving sinners. And if there ever was a case, of which we have no evidence, there is not one in a thousand, if one in a million, converted in any other way than through the truth, made known and urged by human instrumentality. And as the church must be united in using those means, it is plainly necessary that they should be united in understanding the true reason why means are to be used, and the true principles on which they are to be governed and applied.

5. It is important that there should be union in regard to the measures essential to the promotion of a revival. Let individuals agree to do anything whatever, and if they are not agreed in their measures, they will run into confusion, and counteract one another. Set them to sail a ship, and they never can get along without agreement. If they attempt to do business as merchants when they are not agreed in their measures, what will they do? Why, they will only undo each other's work, and thwart the whole business of the concern. All this is pre-eminently true in regard to the work of promoting a revival. Otherwise the members of the church will counteract each other's influence, and they need not expect a revival.

(1.) The church must be agreed in regard to the meetings which are held, as to what meeting shall be held, and how many, and where, and when they shall be held. Some people always desire to multiply meetings in a revival, as if the more meetings they had, the more religion. Others are always opposed to any new meetings in a revival. Some are always for having a protracted meeting, and others are never ready to hold a protracted meeting at all. Whatever difference there may be, it is essential that the church should come to a good understanding on the subject, so that they can go on together in harmony, and labor with zeal and effect.

(2.) They must be agreed as to the manner of conducting meetings. It is necessary that the church should be united and cordial on this subject, if they expect to offer united prayer with effect. Sometimes there are individuals who want to adopt every new thing they can hear of or imagine, while others are totally unwilling to have anything altered in regard to the management of the meeting, but would have everything done precisely as they are accustomed to. They ought to be agreed in some way, either to have the meetings altered, or to keep them on in the old way. The best possible way is, for the church to agree in this, that they will let the meetings go on and take their course, just as the Spirit of God shapes them, and not even attempt to make two meetings just alike. The church never will give the fullest effect to the truth, until they are agreed in this principle,--that in promoting a revival they will accommodate their measures to circumstances, and not attempt to interrupt the natural course which pious feeling and sound judgment indicate, but cast themselves entirely upon the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, introducing any measure, at any time, that shall seem called for in the Providence of God, without laying any stress upon its being new or old.

6. They must be agreed in the manner of dealing with impenitent sinners. This is a point immensely important, that the church should be agreed in their treatment of sinners. Suppose that they are not agreed, and one will tell a sinner one thing and another another. What confusion! How can they agree in

prayer, when it is plain that they are not agreed as to the things they shall pray for. Go among such a church, and hear them pray for sinners. Attend a prayer meeting and listen. Here is one man prays that the sinners present may repent. Another prays that they may be convicted, and perhaps, if he is very much engaged, will go so far as to pray that they may be deeply convicted. Another prays that sinners may go home solemn, and pensive, and silent, meditating upon the truths they have heard. Another prays in such a manner, that you can see he is afraid to have them converted now. Another prays very solemnly that they may not attempt to do anything in their own strength. And so on. How easy it is to see that the church are not agreed as touching the things they ask for, and of course they have no interest in the promise.

If you set them to talk with sinners, their courses would be just as discordant, for it is plain that they are not agreed, and have no clear views in regard to what a sinner must do to be saved, or of what ought to be said to sinners, to bring them to repent. And the consequence is, that sinners who are awakened and anxious, presently get confounded, and do not know what to do, and perhaps give it all up in despair, or conclude there is in reality nothing rational or consistent in religion. One will tell the sinner he must repent, immediately. Another will give him a book, Doddridge's Rise and Progress perhaps, and tell him to read that book. Another will tell him he must pray and persevere, and in God's time he will obtain the blessing. A revival can never go on for any length of time amidst such difficulties. If it begins, it must soon run out; unless, perhaps, the body of the church will keep still and say nothing at all, and let others carry on the work. And there the work will suffer materially for want of their co-operation and support. A church ought to be agreed. Every Christian ought to have a clear understanding of this subject, and all speak the same thing, and give the same directions. And then the sinner will find no one to take his part, and can get no relief or comfort till he repents.

7. They must be agreed in removing the impediments to a revival. If a church expect a revival, they must take up the stumbling blocks out of the way.

(1.) In the exercise of discipline. If there are rotten members in the church, they should be removed, and the church should all agree to cut them off. If they remain in the church, they are such a reproach to religion, as to hinder a revival. Sometimes when an attempt is made to cast them out, this creates division, and thus the work is stopped. Sometimes the offenders are persons of influence, or they have family friends who will take their part, and make a party, and thus create a bad spirit, and prevent a revival.

(2.) In mutual confessions. Whenever wrong has been done to any, there should be a full confession. I do not mean a cold and forced acknowledgment, such as saying, "If I have done wrong, I am sorry for it." But a hearty confession, going the full length of the wrong, and showing that it comes out of a broken heart.

(3.) Forgiveness of enemies. A great obstruction to revivals is often found in the fact that active and leading individuals harbor a revengeful and unforgiving spirit towards those who have injured them, which destroys their spirituality, makes them harsh and disagreeable in their manner, and prevents them from enjoying either communion with God in prayer, or the blessing of God to give them success in labor. But let the members of a church be truly agreed in breaking down and confessing their own faults, and in cherishing a tender, merciful, forgiving, Christ-like spirit toward those who they think have done them wrong, and then the Spirit will come down upon them not by measure.

8. They must be agreed in making all the necessary preparations for a revival. They should be agreed in having all necessary preparation made, and agreed in bearing their part of the labor or expense of making

it. There should be an equality, and not let a few be burdened and the rest do little or nothing, but every one his proportion, according to his several ability. Then there will be no envying nor jealousy, nor any of those mutual recriminations and altercations and disrespectful remarks about one another, which are so inconsistent with brotherly love, and such a stumbling block in the way of sinners.

9. They must be agreed in doing heartily whatever is necessary to be done for the promotion of the revival. Sometimes a slight disagreement about a very little thing will be allowed to break in and destroy a revival. A minister told me that he once went to labor in a place as an evangelist, and the Spirit of God was evidently present, and sinners began to inquire, and things looked quite favorable, until some of the members in the church began to agitate the inquiry how they should pay him for his services. They said "If he stays among us any longer, he will expect we should give him something," and they did not see how they could afford to do it. And they talked about it until the minds of the brethren got distracted and divided, and the minister went away. Look at it. There God stood in the door of that church, with his hands full of mercies but these parsimonious and wicked professors thought it would cost something to have a revival, and their expenses were about as much as they felt willing or able to bear. And so they let him depart and the work ceased. The minister would not have left at the time, whether they gave him anything or not, for what he should receive, or whether he should receive anything from them, was a question about which he felt no concern. But the church by their parsimonious spirit got into such a state as to grieve the Spirit, and he saw that to stay longer with them would do no good. Oh, how will those professors feel when they meet sinners from that town in judgment, when it will all come out, that God was ready and waiting to grant them a blessing, but they allowed themselves to get agitated and divided by inquiring how much they should have to pay!

10. They must be agreed in laboring to carry on the work. It is not enough that they should agree to pray for a revival, but they should agree also in laboring to promote it. They should set themselves to it systematically, and as a matter of business, to visit and converse and pray with their neighbors, to look out for opportunities of doing good; to watch the effect of the word, and watch the signs of the times, that they may know when anything needs to be done, and do it.

(1.) They should be agreed to labor.

(2.) They should be agreed how to labor.

(3.) They should be agreed to live accordingly.

11. They must agree in a determination to persevere. It will not answer for some members of the church to-day to begin to move and bluster about, and then, as soon as the least thing turns up unfavorable, to get discouraged, and faint, and one-half of them give over. They should be all united and agree to persevere, and labor, and pray, and hold on, until the blessing comes.

In a word, if Christians expect to unite in prayer and effort, so as to prevail with God, they must be agreed in speaking and doing the same things, in walking by the same rule, and maintaining the same principles, and in persevering till they obtain the blessing, so as not to hinder or thwart each other's efforts. All this is evidently implied in being agreed as touching the things for which they are praying.

REMARKS.

1. We see why it is that so many of the children of professing parents are not converted.

It is because the parents have not been agreed as touching the things they should pray for in behalf of their children. Perhaps they never had any kind of agreement respecting them. Perhaps they were never agreed even as to what was the very best thing they could ask them. Sometimes parents are not agreed in anything, but their opinions clash, and they are perpetually disagreeing, and their children see it, and then no wonder they are not converted.

Or perhaps they may not be agreed as touching the salvation of their children. Are they sincere in desiring it? Do they agree to desire and agree from right motives? Do they agree in regard to the importance of it? Are they agreed how their children ought to be dealt with, to effect their conversion--what shall be said to them--how it shall be said--when--by whom. Alas! in how many cases is it evident they are not agreed. Probably few cases will be found, where children remain unconverted, but what it will prove that the parents were never truly agreed as touching the things they should ask for the salvation of their children.

Often there is such disagreement that we could not expect any good to result, or anything but ruin to the children. The husband and wife often disagree entirely and fundamentally in regard to the manner of bringing up their children. Perhaps the wife is fond of dress, and display, and visiting, while the husband is plain and humble, and is grieved and distressed, and mourns and prays to see how his children are puffed up with vanity. Or it may be that the father is ambitious, and wants to have his daughters fashionably educated and make a display, and his sons become great men, and so he will send his daughters to a polite boarding-school, where they may learn anything but their duty to God, and will be all the time pushing his sons forward, and goading their ambition, while the mother grieves and weeps in secret to see her dear children hurried on to destruction, and all her own influence counteracted, and her sons and daughters trained up to serve the god of this world, and go to hell.

2. We see the hypocrisy of those who profess to be praying for a revival while they are doing nothing to promote it. There are many who appear to be very zealous in praying for a revival, while they are not doing anything at all for one. What do they mean? Are they agreed as touching the things they ask for? Certainly not. They cannot be agreed in offering acceptable prayer for a revival until they are prepared TO DO what God requires them to do to promote it. What would you think of the farmer who should pray for a crop, and not plough or sow? Would you think such prayers pious, or an insult to God?

3. We see why so many prayers offered in the church are never answered. It is because those who offered them never were agreed as touching the things they asked for. Perhaps the minister never laid the subject before them, never explained what it is to be agreed, nor showed them its importance, nor set before them the great encouragement which the promise before us affords to churches that will agree. Perhaps the members of the church have never conferred together, and compared their views, to see whether they understood the subject alike, whether they were agreed in regard to the motives, grounds, and importance of being united in prayer and labor for a revival. Suppose you were to go through the churches in this city, and learn the precise views and feelings of the members on this subject. How many would you find who were agreed even in regard to the essential and indispensable things, concerning which it is necessary Christians should be agreed in order to unite in prevailing prayer? Perhaps no two could be found who are agreed[,] and if two were found whose views and desires were alike, it would probably be ascertained that they are unacquainted with each other, and of course neither act nor pray together.

4. We see why it is that this text has been generally understood to mean something different from what it says. People have first read it wrong. They have read it as if it was, "If any two of you shall agree to ask

anything, it shall be done." And as they have often agreed to ask for things, and the things were not done, they have said, "The literal meaning of the text cannot be true, for we have tried it and know it is not true. How many prayer meetings have we held, and how many petitions have we put up, in which we have perfectly agreed in asking for blessings, and yet they have not been granted?" Now the fact is, that they have never yet understood what it is to be agreed as touching the things they are to ask for. I am sure this is no strained construction of the text, but is its true and obvious meaning, as a plain, pious reader would understand it, if he inquired seriously and earnestly the true import. They must be agreed not only in asking, but in everything else that is indispensable to the existence of the thing prayed for. Suppose two of you were agreed in desiring to go to London together. If you were not agreed in regard to the means, what route you shall take, and what ship you will go in, you will never get there together. Just so in praying for a revival, you must be agreed in regard to the means and circumstances, and everything essential to the existence and progress of a revival.

5. We may ordinarily expect a revival of religion to prevail and extend among those without the church, just in proportion to the union of prayer and effort within. If there is a general union within the church, the revival will be general. If the union continues, the revival will continue. If anything begins to break in upon this perfect union in prayer and effort, it will begin to limit the revival. How great and powerful would be the revival in this city, if all the churches in the city were thus united in promoting it!

There is another fact which I have witnessed, worthy of notice. I have observed, that a revival will prevail out of the church, among persons in that class of society, amongst whom it prevails in the church. If the females in the church are most awake and prayerful, the work may ordinarily be expected to prevail mostly among females out of the church, and more women will be converted than men. If the youth of either, or of both sexes, in the church are most awake, the work is most likely to prevail among youth, male or female, or both, as the work may be in the church, in this respect. If the heads of families and the principal men in the church are awake, the revival is, I have observed, more likely to prevail among that class out of the church. I have known a revival mostly confined to females, and few males converted, apparently because the male part of the church did not take hold and work. Again I have repeatedly known the greatest number of converts among men, owing apparently to the fact that the male part of the church were most engaged. When the revival does not reach a particular class of the impenitent, pains should be taken to arouse that portion of the church who are of their own age and standing, to make more direct efforts for their conversion. There seems to be a philosophy in this fact, which has often been witnessed. Different classes of professors naturally feel a sympathy for the impenitent of their own sex and age and rank, and more naturally pray for them, and have more intercourse with them, and more influence over them, and this seems to be at least one of the reasons why revivals are apt to be the most powerful and general in that class without the church, who are the most awake in the church. Christians should understand this, and feel their responsibility. One great reason why so few of the principal men are sometimes converted in revivals, doubtless is, that that class in the church are often so worldly, they cannot be aroused. The revival will generally prevail mostly in those families where the professors belonging to them are awake, and the impenitent belonging to those families where the professors are not awake, are apt to be left unconverted. One principal reason, obviously is, that when the professors in a family or neighborhood are awake, there is not only prayer offered for sinners in the midst of them, but there are corresponding influences acting upon the impenitent among them. If they are awake, their looks and lives and warnings, all tend to promote the conversion of their impenitent friends. But if they are asleep, all their influences tend to prevent their conversion. Their coldness grieves the Spirit, their worldliness contradicts the gospel, and all their intercourse with their impenitent friends is in favor of impenitence, and calculated to

perpetuate it.

6. We see why different denominations have been suffered to spring up in the church, and under the government of God.

Christians often see and deplore the evils that have arisen to the church of God, from the division of his people into jarring sects. And they have wondered and been perplexed, to think that God should suffer it to be so. But in the light of this subject we can see, that considering what diversities of opinions and feelings and views actually exist in the church, much good results from this division of sects. Considering this diversity of opinion, many would never agree to pray and labor together, so as to do it with success, and so it is better they should separate, and let those unite who are agreed. In all cases where there cannot be a cordial agreement in labor, it is better that each denomination should labor by themselves, so long as this difference exists. I have sometimes seen revivals broken up by attempting to unite Christians of different denominations in prayer and labor together, while they were not agreed as to the principles or measures by which the work was to be promoted. They would then undo each other's work, and destroy each other's influence, perplex the anxious, and give occasion to enemies to blaspheme, and soon their feelings would get soured, and the Spirit of God is grieved away, and the work stops, and perhaps painful confusion and controversy follow.

7. We see why God sometimes suffers churches to be divided. It is because he finds that the members are so much at variance that they will not pray and labor together with effect. Sometimes churches that are in such a state, will still keep together from worldly considerations and worldly policy, because it is so much easier for the whole to support public worship. Perhaps both parties want to keep the meeting-house, or both want to retain the minister, and they cannot agree which shall go off, and so they continue along, jealous and jangling for years, accomplishing little or nothing for the salvation of sinners. In such cases, God has often let something turn up among them, that would tear them asunder, and then each party would go to work in their own way, and perhaps both would prosper. While they were in the same church, they were always making each other trouble, as they did not think nor feel alike, but as soon as they were separated, every thing settled down in peace, and made it evident that it was better they should divide. I have known some cases in this State, where this has been done with the happiest results, and both churches have been speedily blessed with revivals.

8. It is evident that many more churches need to be divided. How many churches there are, who are holding together, and yet are doing no good, for the simple reason that they are not sufficiently agreed. They do not think alike nor feel alike on the subjects connected with revivals, and while this is so, they never can work together. Unless they can be brought to such a change of views and feelings on the subject as will unite them, they are only a hindrance to each other and to the work of God. In many cases they see and feel that it is so, and yet they keep together, conscientiously, for fear a division should dishonor religion, when in fact the division that now exists may be making religion a by-word and a reproach. Far better would it be if they would just agree to divide amicably, like Abraham and Lot. "If thou wilt take the left hand, I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." Let them separate, and each work in his own way, and they may both enjoy the blessing.

9. We see why a few individuals, who are perfectly united may be successful in gathering and building up a new church, and may do so much better than a much larger number who are not agreed among themselves. If I were going to gather a new church in this city, I should rather have five persons, or three, or even two that were perfectly agreed as touching the things they were to pray for, and the manner in

which they should labor for them, and in all that is essential to the prosperity of a church, and who would stand by me, and stand by each other, than to have a church to begin with, or five hundred members who were not agreed.

10. We see what glorious things may be expected for Zion, whenever the churches generally shall be agreed on these subjects. When ministers shall lay aside their prejudices, and their misconstructions, and their jealousies, and shall see eye to eye, and when the churches shall understand the Bible alike, and see their duty alike, and pray alike, and shall be "agreed as touching the things they shall ask for," a nation shall be born in a day. Only let them feel as the heart of one man, and be agreed as to what ought to be done for the salvation of the world, and the millennium will come at once.

11. There is vast ignorance in the churches on the subject of revivals. After all the revivals that have been enjoyed, and all that has been said and written and printed concerning revivals, there are very few who have any real, consistent knowledge on the subject. And when there is a revival, how few are there who can take hold to labor and promote it as if they understood what they were about. How few persons are to be found, who have ever taken up revivals of religion as a subject to be studied and understood. Every body knows, that in a revival Christians must pray, and must do some things which they have not been in the habit of doing. But multitudes know nothing of the REASON WHY they should do this, or why one thing is better than another, and of course they have no principles to guide them, and when anything occurs which they did not expect, they are all at a fault and know nothing what to do. If men should go to work to build a house of worship, and know as little how to proceed as many ministers and professors know how to build the spiritual temple of God, they never would get up a house in the world. And yet people make themselves believe they are building the church of God, when they know nothing at all what they are about, and are utterly unable to give a reason why they are doing as they do, or why one thing should be done rather than another. There are multitudes in the church who never seem to suppose that the work of promoting revivals of religion is one that requires study, and thought, and knowledge of principles, and skill in applying the word of God, so as to give every one his portion in season. And so they go on, generally doing little or nothing because they are attempting nothing, and if they ever do awake, go headlong to work, without any system or plan, as if God had left this part of our duty out of the reach of sound judgment and good sense.

12. There is vast ignorance among ministers upon this subject, and one great reason of this ignorance is, that many get the idea that they already understand all about revivals, when in reality they know next to nothing about them. I once knew a minister come in where there was a powerful revival, and bluster about and found fault with many things, speaking of his knowledge of revivals, that he had been in seventeen of them and so on, when it was evident that he knew nothing as he ought to know of revivals.

13. How important it is that the church should be trained and instructed, so as to know what to do in a revival. They should be trained and disciplined like an army; each one having a place to fill, and something to do, and knowing where he belongs, and what he has to do, and how to do it. Instead of this, how often do you see a church in a time of revival take hold of the work to promote it, just like a parcel of children taking hold to build a house. How few are there that really know how to do--what?--Why, the very thing for which God suffers Christians to live in this world, the very thing for which ALONE he would ever let them remain away from heaven a day, is the very thing of all others that they do not study and do not try to understand.

14. We see why revivals are often so short, and why they so often produce a reaction. It is because the church do not understand the subject. Revivals are short, because professors have been stirred up to a spasmodical kind of action. They have gone to work by impulse rather than from deliberate conviction of duty, and have been guided by their feelings rather than by a sound understanding of what they ought to do. The church did not know what to do, what they could do, and what they could not, nor how to husband their strength, nor what the state of things would bear, and perhaps their zeal led them into some indiscretions, and they lost their hold on God, and so the enemy prevailed. The church ought to be so trained as to know what to do, so as never to fail, and never to suffer defeat or reaction, when they attempt to promote a revival. They should understand all the tactics of the devil, and know where to guard against his devices, so that they may know him when they see him, and not mistake him for an angel of light come to give them lessons of wisdom in promoting the revival, and so that they can co-operate wisely with the minister, and with one another, and with the Holy Ghost, in carrying on the work. No person who has been conversant in revivals can overlook the fact, that the ignorance of professors of religion concerning revivals, and their stupid blunders are among the most common things that put revivals down, and bring back a fearful reaction upon the church. Brethren, How long shall this be so? It ought not to be so, it need not be so, shall it always be so?

15. We see that every church is justly responsible for the souls that are among them. If God has given such a promise, and if it is true that where so many as two are agreed, as touching the things they ask for, it shall be done, then certainly Christians are responsible, and if sinners are lost, their blood will be found upon the church. If the churches can have what they ask, as soon as they are agreed as touching it, then certainly the damnation of the world will be required at the hands of the church.

16. We see the guilt of ministers, in not informing themselves, and rightly and speedily instructing the churches upon this momentous subject. Why, what is the end of the Christian ministry! What have they to do, but to instruct and marshal the sacramental host, and lead them on to conquest. What! let the church remain in ignorance upon the very subject, and the only point of duty, for the performance of which they are in the world, the salvation of sinners. Some ministers have acted as mysteriously about revivals, as if they thought Christians were either incapable of understanding how to promote them, or that it was of no importance that they should know. But this is all wrong. No minister has yet begun to understand, or do his duty, if he has neglected to teach his church to work for God in the promotion of revivals. What is he about? What does he mean? Why is he a minister? To what end has he taken the sacred office? Is it that he "may eat a piece of bread?"

17. We see that pious parents can render the salvation of their children certain. Only let them pray in faith, and be agreed as touching the things they shall ask for, and God has promised them the desire of their hearts. Who can be agreed so well as parents? Let them be agreed in prayer, and agreed what to do, and agreed in doing all their duty; let them thus train up their children in the way they should go, and when they are old, they will not depart from it.

And now, brethren, do you believe you are agreed, according to the meaning of this promise? I know that where a few individuals may be agreed in some things, they may produce some effect. But while the body of the church are not agreed, there will always be so many things to counteract, that they will accomplish but little. **THE CHURCH MUST BE AGREED.** Oh, if we could find one church that were perfectly and heartily agreed in all these points, so that they could pray and labor together, all as one, what good would be done! But now, while things are as they are, we see colony after colony peopling hell, because the church are not agreed. Oh, what do Christians think, how can they keep still, when God has brought down

his blessings so that if any two were agreed, as touching the things they ask for, it would be done. Alas! alas! how bitter will be the remembrance of these janglings in the church, when Christians come to see the crowds of lost souls that have gone down to hell, because we were not agreed to labor and pray for their salvation.

FINALLY.--In the light of this promise we see the awful guilt of the church. God has given it to be the precious inheritance of his people at all times, and in all places. If his people agree, their prayers will be answered. We see the awful guilt of this church, who come here and listen to lectures about revivals and then go away and have no revival, and also the guilt of members of other churches who hear these lectures and go home and refuse to do their duty. How can you meet the thousands of impenitent sinners around you, at the bar of God, and see them sink away into everlasting burnings? Have you been united in heart to pray for them? If you have not, why have you disagreed? Why have you not prayed with this promise until you have prevailed?

You will now either be agreed, and pray for the Holy Ghost, and receive him before you leave the house, or the anger of the Lord will be upon you. Should you now agree to pray in the sense of this promise, for the Spirit of God to come down on this city, the heavenly dove would fly through the city in the midst of the night and would rouse the consciences and break up the guilty slumbers of the wicked. What then is the crimson guilt of those professors of religion who are sleeping in sight of such a promise! They seem to have skipped over, or to have entirely forgotten it. Multitudes of sinners going to hell in all directions, and yet this blessed promise is neglected; yea, more, is practically despised by the church. There it stands in the solemn record, and the church might take hold of it in such a manner that vast numbers might be saved, but they are not agreed. Therefore souls will perish. And where is the responsibility? Who can take this promise and look the perishing in the face at the day of judgment?

These lectures were greatly instrumental in reviving religion in the church to which they were preached, and their publication in this country and in Europe has been the means of promoting revivals in very many places. To God belongs all the glory.

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