

Letters on Revival--No. 12

by Charles Finney

The fanatical spirit in revivals is a state of mind that gives itself up to impulses and impressions, mistaking the true manner of God's influence, and can lead to disorder, opposition, and a shocking disregard for true revival influences.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 7:15-20, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 11:14, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:30, Philippians 4:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, James 1:5, 1 John 4:1

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Discernment in Spiritual Matters"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the dangers of fanatical spirits during revivals, warning that some individuals may confuse genuine spiritual guidance with impulsive feelings. He emphasizes that true influence from the Holy Spirit enlightens the mind and leads to rational actions, rather than mere emotional impressions. Finney cautions that many who seem spiritually engaged can be misled by Satan, who disguises himself as an angel of light, leading them to act on misguided impulses. He encourages believers to discern between genuine compassion and mere impressions, advocating for a focus on love and prayer in their spiritual endeavors. Ultimately, Finney calls for a careful examination of one's motivations and actions during revival seasons.

Transcript

TO ALL THE FRIENDS AND ESPECIALLY ALL THE MINISTERS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST:

Dear Brethren:

I have yet many things to say on the subject of the appearance of a fanatical spirit, in connexion with revivals. The particular thing to which I would now call the attention of the brethren, is this. There is a class of minds, that in seasons of deep excitement, and especially when there is a good deal of preaching on the necessity and reality of divine influences, the spirit of prayer, being led by the Spirit, being filled with the Spirit &c., who are extremely apt to give themselves up to be led by impulses. Mistaking the true manner in which the Spirit of God influences the mind, and not realizing that he enlightens the intelligence, and leads the Christian who is under his influence to be eminently reasonable, and rational in all his views and movements, they are looking for the Spirit to make direct impressions on their feelings, and to lead them through the influence of their feelings and not through the intelligence. Hence they are very full of impressions. One has an impression that he ought to do such a thing, or say such a thing, to go to such a place, to visit a tavern for instance, and converse with the inmates of a bar-room, or to go and rebuke a

minister, or to tell the elders or deacons of the church, that God has revealed it to him that they are right in the way of the revival--in short, there is no end to the forms in which these delusions appear. Sometimes they are impressed with the conviction that they ought to get up and interrupt the speaker, during public preaching, or that they ought to break forth in prayer under circumstances that would manifestly introduce disorder,--and many such like things are very liable to occur in seasons of deep excitement in revivals of religion. Sometimes they will have particular views presented to their imaginations--that such a minister is right in the way, and leading all the souls under his influence down to hell--that terrible judgments are coming on the place--that the revival is about to cease--or that some other terrible thing is about to take place. Now if this spirit is watched, it is remarkable to see how uniformly it will take on a severe, denunciatory and turbulent type. It is remarkable to see how often it will manifest its principal hostility and opposition towards the leading and most efficient influences that are at work in promoting a genuine revival of religion. If this spirit be narrowly watched, it will soon be seen, that it is really opposition to all that is truly good in the work; and that often-times its opposition to the highest and best influences employed by the Spirit in the promotion of the revival, is truly shocking. Probably few persons who have seen powerful revivals of religion, have not witnessed with pain and astonishment, things similar to those I have described.

Now these things are exceedingly dangerous in a revival, for the reason that they often appear among those who have been regarded as most engaged in the work, most spiritual and prayerful. They often occur in connexion with experiences, or rather succeed experiences, that were manifestly truly Christian and highly spiritual.

Now with respect to these things let me remark,

1. That often times when persons are really in a spiritual frame of mind, when they are really simple-hearted, unsuspecting, and willing to be led in any direction, Satan often succeeds, by transforming himself into an angel of light, in persuading them to give themselves up to impulses and impressions; and from that moment, he leads them captive at his will.

2. I remark that as a general rule, the influence of Satan in these things may be distinguished from the influences of the Holy Spirit by this--a mere impression that you must do this or that thing, go and converse with this person or that person, go to this place or that place, is by no means to be regarded. When the Spirit of God leads an individual to take a peculiar interest, feel peculiar compassion and drawing of heart in prayer and labor for particular individuals, this influence may be safely trusted. If you find yourself drawn out in mighty prayer for certain individuals, exercised with great compassion, agonized with strong crying and tears, for a certain family or neighborhood or people, let such an influence be yielded to. If it is all compassion, an affectionate zeal for their salvation, a deep and affectionate interest in their spiritual welfare, you may safely take it for granted that this is from God, and give the mind and the outward developments up to its influence, and put forth all the efforts that may appear reasonable to secure their salvation. But let mere impressions unconnected with love, compassion, with the spirit of prayer, &c., be strongly guarded against, for to say the least, as a general rule, such impressions are not from God. It would not, perhaps, be too much to say that they never are. God's Spirit leads men by the intelligence, and not through mere impressions made on the sensibility. When the guilt and the danger of an individual is strongly set before the mind, when the great value of his soul is made to be clearly apprehended, when the heart is drawn out in prayer for his conversion and salvation, this is indeed from God. I have known some cases where persons have rendered themselves highly ridiculous, have greatly injured their own souls, and the cause of God, by giving themselves up to an enthusiastic, and fanatical

following of impressions.

[Your brother,

C.G. FINNEY]

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