

Letters on Revival--No. 13.

by Charles Finney

The primary reason for the decline of revivals is the spiritual state of the ministry, which must repent, seek revival spirit, and promote revivals through prayer, planning, and effort.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8, Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20, 2 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 10:24-25, James 5:16, 1 Peter 5:2-3

Topics: "Revival", "Spiritual Leadership"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the decline of revivals in the Church, urging ministers to reflect on their own spiritual state as a primary cause for this downturn. He emphasizes the need for personal holiness, fervent prayer, and a return to the core mission of promoting conversions and sanctification. Finney calls for a collective confession and a revival of zeal among ministers, warning that neglecting this responsibility could lead to a loss of influence and the rise of alternative leaders. He advocates for a ministerial convention focused on prayer and revival, highlighting the urgency of returning to the work of God.

Transcript

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

Dear Brethren:

I am rejoiced to perceive that the inquiry is beginning to agitate the Church. --Why are there not more revivals! as well as why is there character so changed? The inquiry is also made, What can be done to promote them? and to promote them under a desirable and permanent type.

Now, my dear brethren, I hope and trust that you will not be offended with me, if I speak my mind on this subject with great plainness. The circumstances of the Church, the decline in revivals, and the whole aspect of the Christian world, demand it.

I have seen in the public papers various reasons assigned for this declension of revivals, this absence of revival influence, this powerless preaching of the gospel.

Now it does appear to me that we who are ministers, instead of looking abroad and searching for the fundamental difficulty beyond and out of ourselves, should see that whatever else may be an occasion of the great falling off and decline in revivals, our own spiritual state is certainly one, if not the primary and fundamental reason of this decline. Want of personal holiness, unction, power in prayer, and in preaching

the word--the want of holy living and consecration to the work--of self-denial, and energetic effort in the ministry--these, no doubt, are the principal reasons why revivals are so few and far between, and of so superficial character at the present day.

The fact is, ministers have turned aside, in a great degree, to vain juggling [jangling-Ed.]; have given up their attention to Church-politics, Church-government, and Ecclesiastical proceedings of various kinds. The ministers have been diverted to an alarming and most injurious extent, from promoting revivals of religion out of the Church, and holiness in the Church.

I appeal to you, my brethren, of all denominations, if it is not a fact in your own experience and observation, that ministers have to a great and alarming extent suffered themselves to be diverted from the direct work of promoting the conversion of sinners and sanctification of the Church. This is too notorious to need any proof. The Journals of the day, the movements of ecclesiastical bodies, the doctrinal collisions, and shall I say?, ambitious projects, that have come up and figured before the public, within the last few years, bear no dubious testimony to the fact that the great mass of ministers are turned aside from promoting revivals, and the holiness and entire consecration of the Church.

Now, my beloved brethren, while this is so, does it not become us to take this home, confess it, bewail it, and first of all understand that whatever else needs to be corrected and set right, we must ourselves repent and receive a new unction for the work.

Beloved brethren, it is of no use for us to go abroad and search for reasons, while the principal of all the reasons lies at our own door. While our hearts are cold, our zeal in revivals abated, while we are turned aside, and running here and there to attend Conventions, Councils, ecclesiastical bodies; while we are engaged in reading the vituperative publications of the day, and entering into church-politics and janglings about church-government and all these things, it is no wonder that both the Church and the world are asleep on the subject of revivals.

Until the leaders enter into the work, until the ministry are baptized with the Holy Spirit, until we are awake and in the field with our armour on, and our souls anointed with the Holy Spirit, it certainly ill becomes us to be looking around at a distance for the cause of the decline of revivals.

I have no doubt that there are many causes, which, the Lord willing, we will search out. But this is the first, the greatest, the most God-dishonoring of all--that the ministry are not in the work, that the shepherds have in a measure forsaken their flocks, that is, they are not leading them into the green pastures and beside the still waters--are not themselves so anointed and full of faith and power, as to be instrumental in leading the Church into the field for the promotion of revivals.

To a considerable extent the churches seem not to be well aware of the state of the ministry, and for the reason that they themselves are in a state of decline. The decline of vital godliness in the ministry has been of course the occasion of so much decline in the churches that they are hardly aware either of their own state or of the spiritual state of the ministry.

Now, my dear brethren, I hope it will not be said, that by writing in this way, I am letting down the influence of the ministry and encouraging a fault-finding spirit in the Church. I would by no means do this. But I think that we may rest assured that unless we are frank enough, and humble enough, and honest enough, to look the true state of things in the face, confess, forsake our sins, and return to the work and engage in the promotion of revivals, God will undoubtedly rebuke us, will raise up other instruments to do his work, and

set us aside; will alienate the heart of the churches from us, destroy our influence with them, and raise up we know not whom, to go forth and possess the land.

Among all the conventions of the present day, I have thought that one of a different character from any that have been, might be greatly useful. If we could have a ministerial convention for prayer, confessing our faults one to another, and getting into a revival spirit, and devising the best ways and means for the universal promotion of revivals throughout the length and breadth of the land, I should rejoice in it. It has appeared to me that of all the conventions of the day, one of this kind might be the most useful.

What shall we say brethren? Are we not greatly in fault? Have not the ministry, to a great extent, lost the spirit of revivals? Is there not a great lack of unction and power amongst us? And have we not suffered ourselves to be greatly and criminally diverted from this great work?

If so, my dear brethren, shall we not return? shall we not see our fault, confess it to the churches, to the world, and return; and in the name of the Lord lift up our banner?

Your brother,

C.G. FINNEY

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