

Letters on Revival--No. 19.*

by Charles Finney

The growing sectarianism of the church is hindering revivals, and ministers and Christians must be candid and honest to be open to conviction and communion with God.

Scripture: John 17:21, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Galatians 5:15, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 2:2, Colossians 3:14, James 3:16, 1 Peter 3:8, 1 John 4:20

Topics: "Unity in the Church", "Overcoming Sectarianism"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the detrimental effects of growing sectarianism within the church, emphasizing that this division hinders the spirit of revival. He warns that ministers and Christians often fail to recognize their own sectarian attitudes, which lead to strife and prejudice rather than unity and love. Finney argues that true revival cannot flourish amidst such discord and urges the church to prioritize brotherly love and the conversion of souls over sectarian disputes. He calls for a self-examination among ministers and believers to ensure they are not contributing to this decline in spiritual fervor. Ultimately, he stresses the need for open-mindedness and a commitment to truth to restore the church's power and communion with God.

Transcript

HINDRANCES TO A REVIVAL SPIRIT

To All The Friends And Especially All The Ministers Of Our Lord Jesus Christ:

Dear Brethren:

Another thing that is working an immense evil in the present day is the growing sectarianism of the church. It seems to me that the leading denominations that have heretofore been most zealous and successful in promoting revivals of religion, are within the last ten years becoming highly sectarian in their spirit and measures. The collision and sectarianism manifested by the former leading denominations, does not, I should think, increase in its degree or virulence, but these leading denominations are becoming divided amongst themselves, and seem to be very much given up to the spirit of schism and sectarianism. There is High Church and Low Church, Old School and New School, Reformers and Conservatives in all the denominations; and these seem to be pressing their peculiarities in a spirit, and by measures that are highly sectarian. Sectarian conventions, ecclesiastical meetings, councils, synods and all the parade and paraphernalia of sectarianism, seem to an alarming extent to be engrossing the mind of the Church.

Now this is certainly a great evil; and unless a counteracting influence can be brought to bear on the churches; unless ministers cease from this sectarian spirit,--cease from these janglings and strife of words,--cease from creating prejudices,--cease from heresy-hunting, and all the management of ecclesiastical ambition, and give themselves up directly to promoting brotherly love, harmony in the church, the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of the saints, it is certain that revivals of religion cannot exist and go forward in purity and power.

What is peculiarly afflicting in view of this state of things is, that ministers and many Christians have become so thoroughly sectarian and are so thoroughly and deeply imbued with the spirit of sectarianism, as to be wholly unconscious that they are sectarian. They seem to suppose that it is a pure love of the truth, that they are only contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, that they are really and only jealous for the honor of God and the purity of the church. They have exalted their peculiar views in their own estimation, into fundamental doctrines, and contend for them with as much pertinacity and vehemence as if all must be reprobates who do not embrace them.

Now it is remarkable that so far as my knowledge extends, all the seasons of great revivals with which the church has been blessed from the very first, have been broken up and the revival influence set aside by an ecclesiastical and sectarian jangling, to preserve what they call the purity of the church and the faith once delivered to the saints. I believe it to be a truth, that ministers, as a class, have always been responsible for the decline of revivals; that their own sectarianism, ambition and prejudice have led them to preach and contend, to run to synods, councils, and other ecclesiastical meetings, until the churches, at first pained and even shocked with this tendency of things, have come to adopt their views, imbibe their spirit, and get entirely away from God.

My beloved brethren, who does not know that a vast many ministers are too much under the influence of prejudice to have communion and power with God? Who does not know that they are not sufficiently honest, uncommitted, upright, whole-hearted lovers of truth to be thoroughly open to conviction on every subject, willing to examine patiently, and to judge charitably on every question on which they are to have or give an opinion? I have in my own experience learned that to maintain communion with God, I must wholly give up prejudice on every subject. I must hold my mind open to conviction; I must be thoroughly a candid and honest man. I must not allow myself to have or express an opinion on a subject that I have not carefully and prayerfully examined. There are many in these days that seem to have forgotten what God has said of those that "speak evil of things they understand not." And it is amazing to see to what an extent both ministers and professed Christians are given up to denouncing and speaking evil of things which they do not understand.

Now these ministers and Christians cannot pray. God will not hear them; they do not prevail with God, and every body sees that they do not. They are not men that have power with God and with men and can prevail. They will denounce certain doctrines and certain things in a manner that is unutterably shocking to those who certainly know that they do not understand what they are talking about,--who know that they are confounding things that radically differ, and making distinctions where there is no difference.

Now I might mention a great many facts and illustrations of this; but almost everyone is aware that it has been and still is perfectly common for ministers and private Christians to persist in confounding the views of entire sanctification which are entertained here with Antinomian Perfectionism. Now certainly those who do this, either do not mean what they say, or they have not well examined the subject. They are speaking what they do not know, and speaking evil of things that they understand not.

Now, my beloved brethren, I say not this to reproach any one. But who does not know, after all, that this is true; or at least who may not know that it is true?

Now whether our peculiar views are true or false, it is wholly unfair to confound them with views which we abhor as much as they do.

Now if our views are untrue, let them be examined and stand or fall on their own merits. It may be convenient for those who oppose them to confound them with Antinomian Perfectionism or with Popery or with Universalism, or with any other ism that will attach to them so much opprobrium as to make the church unwilling ever to examine them for themselves. But let me say to my dear brethren, that whether our views are true or false, that way of disposing of them is certain to bring leanness into your own souls, and into the souls of your churches. And I ask of you, brethren, if it is not as a matter of fact producing this result? When you have been engaged in denouncing our views, or confounding them with antinomianism, or persecuting them in ecclesiastical meetings, or in any way engaged in creating prejudices in opposition to them,--I beseech you to consider, have you not found that this was bringing leanness into your own souls,--that you were less spiritually-minded, had less communion with God, less heart to preach the gospel, less unction in preaching, and more and more of a sectarian spirit?

My beloved brethren, will you--ministers as well as laymen--candidly settle this question by laying open your heart at the throne of grace before the Lord?

Your Brother,

C.G. FINNEY

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