

Letters on Revival--No. 21.

by Charles Finney

The key to successful revival efforts is to have a deep inward walk with God and a single eye, which will enable us to distinguish between spurious and genuine revivals of religion.

Scripture: Psalm 126:5

Topics: "Revival", "Spiritual Awakening"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the hindrances to revivals of religion, emphasizing the necessity of deep sympathy with Christ among ministers and the church. He argues that true revival cannot occur without a genuine spiritual state and a heartfelt love for God and others. Finney warns against mechanical and policy-driven approaches to revivals, which often lead to spurious conversions rather than genuine spiritual awakenings. He calls for ministers to first experience personal revival before attempting to lead others, stressing that a collective revival among ministers is crucial for a broader revival in the church. His passionate plea urges the church to return to a state of deep communion with God to effectively promote true revivals.

Transcript

HINDRANCES TO REVIVALS.

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

Dear Brethren:

In noticing the hindrances to revivals of religion I must not forget to urge more definitely and strongly than I have hitherto done, the great want of sympathy with Christ in the ministry and in the church. It cannot be expected and ought not to be, that the Spirit of God should be poured out and the labors of the church and the ministry be blessed in the salvation of souls any farther than there is a single eye, and a deep sympathy with Christ in the hearts of those who are forward as co-workers with him in the great work.

The Bible abundantly teaches that it is time for God to work and that the time to favor Zion has come, when the church "takes pleasure in her stones and favors the dust thereof." When the church and the ministry are deeply exercised with disinterested love to God and man--when they have such love for the brethren that they would die for them, and such love for precious souls as to be willing to toil and make any sacrifices, and even lay down life itself for their salvation,--then, rely upon it, their labors will be

blessed. And until they have this spirit they may indeed succeed in many instances in promoting an excitement and what they may call and may suppose to be revival of religion; but ordinarily time will show that in truth it was no real revival of true religion.

When Christians and ministers are not in sympathy with God, they are not in a state to distinguish between spurious and genuine revivals of religion. Hence they often go forward with a series of efforts until many supposed converts are numbered, when in reality there is not a genuine convert among them. The reason is, those who have been laboring in the work have begotten children in their own likeness. Not having the spirit of Christ themselves--not being deeply imbued with the true spirit of revival, they mistake their own excitement and the excitement around them for true religion, when it is perhaps any thing else than a real work of the Holy Spirit. Now the more such efforts are multiplied, the more spurious conversions there are, so much the more are revivals brought into contempt and so much the more deeply the cause of Christ is injured.

Now I wish I could succeed in making the impression and fastening it not only on my own mind, but upon the minds of all the brethren that we cannot expect to succeed in promoting true revivals of religion any farther than we are truly revived ourselves--truly and deeply spiritual--having a general and all-absorbing sympathy with God;--any farther than we are full of prayer and faith and love and the power of the Holy Ghost. There are so many kinds of excitement that are unfavorable to genuine religion, and yet so often mistaken for it that no man can safely engage in attempting to promote revivals of religion any farther than he truly and deeply communes with God and deeply enters into his sympathies. He must go forth and labor in the very spirit in which Christ came to die for sinners. He must have so single an eye that his whole body shall be full of light--that he will have deep spiritual discernment and be able in a moment in the light of God's Spirit shining in his own heart to detect every form and modification of spurious excitement. He wants to walk in such deep sympathy with God that his spirit will naturally repel every spirit that is not of God. There is, no doubt, such a state of mind as this.

But the thing which I wish more particularly to insist on in this letter is that the true revival spirit has been in a great measure grieved away from the church, and as far as my observation and knowledge extend, efforts to promote revivals of religion have become so mechanical, there is so much policy and machinery, so much dependence upon means and measures, so much of man and so little of God, that the character of revivals has greatly changed within the last few years, and the true spirit of revivals seems to be fast giving way before this legal, mechanical method of promoting them.

Now the thing that needs to be done is for every one who would attempt to promote revivals of religion to be sure that he himself has a single eye, has a deep inward walk with God, has the life of God so richly developed within himself as to be able not only to prevail with God in prayer, but to preach the gospel to others with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

It would seem as if the ministry and the churches proposed to promote revivals in the hardness of their own hearts, and without deeply breaking up their own fallow ground. They get up protracted meetings and go to work to promote a revival without beginning first in their closets and thoroughly breaking down their hearts before the Lord, and getting all melted and subdued, filled with faith and with the Holy Ghost. They seem to expect that they shall get waked up during the meeting. They appoint a meeting while in a backslidden state, and of course in a selfish state of mind. They begin the meeting and perhaps continue day after day, the minister laboring for the conversion and waking up of the church while perhaps he himself is crusted over, hard-hearted, full of unbelief, worldly-mindedness, and with much respect to his

own reputation as being deeply concerned in the progress of the work. Thus the meeting will continue day after day until they become considerably excited, have some confessions, and perhaps a few real conversions; but upon the whole, they have sowed among thorns instead of breaking up their fallow ground. Little else has been done perhaps than to produce discouragement and disgust in respect to revival efforts.

The fact is brethren, a revival must take place among ministers. If there could be a protracted meeting for ministers--if some hundreds of ministers would assemble and preach and pray and labor for each other's spiritual welfare until there was a deep and thorough revival of religion among them--if they would deal so faithfully with each other and so affectionately as to get their hearts together, and together get into a deep sympathy with Christ, they would no doubt return from such a meeting to their several charges and the result would be a general revival of religion throughout their churches.

Brethren, what can be done to affect the ministry rightly, to bring them off from this jangling and sectarianism, ambition and every evil way, and engage their hearts to live and die for Christ and for souls? O, this is the great thing needed. If this can be attained, the day of Zion's glory has dawned. But if ministers are to backslide and turn aside to vain jangling--to church politics and maneuvering, as they have for the last few years, I am persuaded that God must either let the churches under their influence go into a state of still deeper degradation and backsliding, or else He must set them aside and introduce some instrumentality independent of them to build up the wastes of Zion.

My soul is greatly troubled and my spirit is stirred within me in looking at the state of the ministry. Brethren, will you let me speak in love? Will you be offended with me if I tell you all my heart? For Zion's sake, I cannot rest and for Jerusalem's sake I cannot hold my peace. Will the brethren wake up and lay hold on God for a general revival of religion? When shall it once be?

Your Brother,

C.G. FINNEY

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