

# Letters on Revivals--No. 10.

by Charles Finney

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*Revival preachers must be careful not to introduce fanaticism into their spirit and preaching, lest it lead to a revival of arrant fanaticism instead of pure religion.*

**Scripture:** Galatians 5:22, James 3:17

**Topics:** "Revival", "Spirit of Unity"

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## Description

Charles Finney warns revival preachers about the dangers of introducing fanaticism into their ministry, especially when faced with opposition. He emphasizes that bitterness and a censorious spirit can corrupt the revival atmosphere, leading to a loss of love and compassion. Finney reflects on historical examples, including his own experiences, to illustrate how easily a revival can shift from genuine spirituality to fanaticism. He urges preachers to maintain a Christ-like spirit, characterized by gentleness and mercy, to ensure the integrity of their work. Ultimately, he calls for self-awareness and caution in their approach to opposition and criticism.

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## Transcript

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

Dear Brethren:

I beg leave to call the attention of the brethren to the danger of revival preachers themselves introducing the spirit of fanaticism. When they meet with great opposition from the church or the world or the ministry, they sometimes indulge in a strain of remark that is strongly tinged with bitterness, or at least, with the appearance of bitterness and denunciation. There are sometimes streaks and dashes of this in the preaching and spirit of good men. Satan seems to take advantage of their circumstances to infuse, imperceptibly to themselves, into their spirit and strain of preaching, praying and talking, a dash of bitterness and vituperation. This strongly tends to beget a fanatical state of mind in their admirers.

Revival preachers have sometimes been greatly opposed by ministers until they have become sore and somewhat irritable; and in this state of mind have sometimes gone so far as to preach and speak of those ministers in a very censorious spirit. This inevitably does great mischief in the revivals in which they are engaged. It catches like fire among the converts and among those professors who are most immediately under his influence, and tends strongly to run the revival out of the spirit of love, into a spirit of recrimination and bitterness. A sore and bitter state of mind will be manifested by those who think

themselves engaged in the work of the Lord, while the spirit of meekness, gentleness, brotherly kindness and of deep and compassionate sympathy with Christ and with his church, will be almost entirely supplanted.

If I am not mistaken, revival preachers have often greatly erred in this matter. Whitfield sometimes did so, as he himself confesses, and the result was such as I have named, as every one knows who has read the history of the revivals that occurred under his labors. There is not one among the revival preachers of modern times who has not erred to a greater or less extent in this respect. I am sure that I have sometimes done so; and I do not know of a revival preacher of whom I do not think that to some extent the remarks just made are applicable.

A little spice of this spirit in a revival preacher will work like leaven until it leavens the whole lump, and if indulged in, will sooner or later totally change the character of the excitement in which he labors until it will become a revival of arrant fanaticism instead of pure religion. This result may occur without his once suspecting that such is the tendency of his spirit, preaching and movements. Hence ere he is aware, the evil is too far developed to admit of a remedy.

It does appear to me that revival preachers should be exceedingly honest with themselves on this subject, and withal very guarded, forbearing, mild and conciliatory in their manner of speaking and preaching, especially concerning those who oppose their views and measures. It is often better to take no public notice whatever of opposition, and especially not to allude to opposers, and by no means to speak of or pray for ministers or Christians in such a way as may blow up into a flame the latent sparks of fanaticism that are smothered in so many bosoms.

In thinking of this subject, in looking over the state of the church, in reading the history of revivals of religion in all ages, I have been struck and deeply affected with the innumerable instances in which promoters of revivals have erred in substantially the manner I have described. They have unwittingly imbibed more or less of a spirit of fanaticism themselves, and it manifests itself so much in their public efforts as greatly to mar the work of the Lord, and of course to grieve the Spirit of God. Indeed some revival preachers appear to me to have forsaken the right way without being aware of it, and really to have become highly fanatical in their spirit, preaching and general bearing, until God has manifestly been obliged to rebuke them by withdrawing his Spirit and closing the doors of the church against them. If revivals of pure religion are to be preserved from fanaticism, the utmost pains should be taken to preserve the leaders from this spirit. It is one of the grand devices of the devil to infuse this spirit stealthily into the leaders and thereby poison the revival to death.

In what I have said I would not be understood to intimate by any means that revival preachers alone have fallen into this error, for I am very confident that they have not so frequently fallen into it as some who have never promoted revivals of religion. The latter have more often fallen, for the reason that their general strain of preaching has so much of jangling, of controversy, of rebuke, censoriousness and bitterness against all who differ from them, that the Spirit of God seldom if ever refreshes the heritage to which they minister. I have known several such ministers who were far enough from being revival preachers, and whose preaching tended only to revive and perpetuate the spirit of fanaticism and rebuke. But what I have intended in this letter is, that revival preachers themselves have sometimes fallen into this error which is so common with many other preachers.

Indeed sectarianism in all its forms is only a modified species of fanaticism, as might easily be shown; and revival preachers who have connected sectarian movements with their revival operations, have perhaps uniformly shown that a fanatical spirit was the result.

My brethren, let us be careful that our own spirit is heavenly, Christ-like,--that we have the wisdom that cometh down from above, which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, full of mercy and good fruits." Let us labor in this spirit, and the result will show that we are workmen who need not be ashamed.

Your Brother,

C.G. FINNEY.

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