

# Letters on Revivals--No. 24.

by Charles Finney

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*The church's fear of spurious excitement is preventing them from promoting genuine revivals and leading to a lack of enthusiasm for the gospel.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:19-20, John 7:37-38, Acts 2:17-18, Romans 12:11, 1 Corinthians 14:40, 2 Corinthians 5:20, Ephesians 4:15, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 2 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 10:24-25

**Topics:** "Revival", "Excitement in Faith"

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## Description

Charles Finney addresses the church's fear of religious excitement, arguing that this apprehension hinders the progress of revivals. He emphasizes that while spurious excitements can arise, the solution lies in preaching the fundamental truths of the gospel with power and urgency, rather than suppressing all forms of excitement. Finney warns that if the church does not guide the excitement towards the truth, it will lead to chaos and division among the people. He encourages ministers to embrace the excitement that comes with genuine revivals and to use it as an opportunity to direct the public mind towards Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a proactive approach to promote revivals rather than a defensive stance against perceived false excitements.

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## Transcript

THE PERNICIOUS ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH ON THE REFORMS OF THE AGE.

[Pt. 2]

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

Dear Brethren:

Another subject upon which I wish to address my brethren, has respect to an error, which I fear is greatly interfering with the progress of revivals. I mean the fears that are so generally entertained respecting religious excitement, and indeed excitements on any branch of reform. Many seem to dread excitements greatly, and to be rather guarding against them than laboring to promote revivals of religion.

I have before said something upon the subject of excitement; but I am continually becoming more and more acquainted with the extent to which these fears of excitement prevail, and the great consequent evils. Many ministers seem to be so much afraid lest religious excitement should be spurious, and are guarding so strongly against spurious excitement that they really prevent all excitement.

Now it seems to me that few things can be more directly calculated to put down a revival should it commence, or to keep it down and prevent its even commencing, than to be continually guarding the people against false excitements, pointing out the marks of spurious excitements and turning the mind away from the great truths of the gospel by which men are to be sanctified, to consider those spurious forms of excitement that have often cursed the world. The fact is that spurious excitements almost always result from preaching error. Preaching truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and especially those great and fundamental truths that are indispensable to salvation, keeping clear of all admixture of error and fanaticism, either in the doctrine taught, or in the spirit of preaching, tends in the highest degree to beget a wholesome excitement, and no other than this. To arouse the attention strongly, and fix it upon those truths in their soundness and power, is the most ready way to prevent all spurious excitements and to promote those which are sound, healthful, and evangelical. Whereas to neglect to preach this class of truths, and devote one's self to guarding the people against spurious excitement is almost sure, either wholly to allay all excitement, or to arouse the combativeness of any who may have begun to drink in a spirit of spurious excitement, and drive them still farther from the truth.

The fact is, my dear brethren, a great many ministers and churches appear to be too much afraid of spurious excitements to use any thorough means to promote revivals. They are afraid to make a powerful appeal--are afraid to lift up their voice like a trumpet, and blow a blast long and loud in the ears of the people, and to press them with overcoming urgency to lay hold on eternal life, lest they should promote a spurious excitement. If at any time an excitement commences in the church, manifesting itself in prayer and conference meetings, forthwith some over prudent elder, deacon or minister begins to throw out cautions against spurious excitements. Now this is the very way to render revivals impossible. The proper way is to guard against all those doctrines and measures that are calculated to inflame the imagination and stir up an ocean of excitement, without informing the intelligence; and to press most importunately, frequently, and powerfully the real truths of the gospel--those truths which sinners and professed saints most need to know, and if possible, to rivet and hold them so thoroughly to those truths as to afford no room for fanaticism, in doctrine or feeling, to get a footing. Then if at any time suspicious things appear, the best of all ways to correct them, so far as my experience goes, is, when it can be done, to labor in private with the individuals who are under the false excitements, and if it can possibly be avoided, not to divert the congregation to preaching upon the subject. Let the congregation be held fast by the great truths that are adapted to break their hearts, and if a dash of fanaticism or enthusiasm appears now and then, I would advise by all means, as I have said in a former letter that private interviews should correct these evils without letting the congregation know that any notice has been taken of them.

The thing I am recommending, is by no means to aim at promoting great excitement. But it should be remembered that great revivals of religion can never exist without deep excitement of feeling; and yet it is the revival of religion at which we ought to aim; and since some excitement is naturally and necessarily incidental to a revival of religion, let it come and do not fear it. Do let us remember and believe my brethren, that the readiest of all ways to prevent enthusiasm, fanaticism, and spurious excitements, is to thunder forth with power and in demonstration of the Spirit the solid and fundamental truths of the gospel, both in season and out of season.

One thing I wish to press especially upon the brethren. The people will be excited; and they will be excited on the subject of religion. If you keep out that wholesome excitement which the naked and sound gospel is adapted to promote, you may rest assured that sooner or later, spurious excitements, or excitements that you cannot control will spring up among your people, and will distract and carry them away as with a flood.

Brethren, this is no age of the world for us to dream that we can keep the churches from excitement. They cannot be kept from it, and they ought not to be. The indications of providence are plain and palpable that the excitements now abroad in the land are not to cease. Every turn in Divine Providence only multiplies the occasions and the means of excitement, and it is madness for us to throw ourselves in the way of Divine Providence, and suppose that we can correct this railroad movement of the public mind. Our enquiry should be; how shall we guide it? How shall we so control and promote it as to prevent evil and secure good results? How shall we direct and keep it within its proper channels? To attempt to arrest it were as idle as to attempt to cut off the waters of the Mississippi. Dam it across in one place, it will break out and flow in another. If we don't keep those mighty currents of excited mind in their proper channel, they will desolate the whole land. Who does not see that if we succeed in arresting excitement on one subject, immediately the waters swell and break out in another direction.--Another and another subject comes up and keeps the public mind in perpetual fermentation. Who can prevent it? No man; and it ought not to be prevented. If ministers and professed christians instead of taking advantage of the present state of things, and making clear the proper channel and guiding the public mind right by a powerful exhibition of the gospel--if instead of this, they will attempt to arrest all excitement, they must expect their people to become divided; factions and excitements will spring up; anarchy and misrule will prevail, until ministers--the shepherds of the flock, have lost their influence, and error and fanaticism carry away the public mind.

Brethren, we have the means in our hand of guiding the public mind--of moulding or modifying the excitements that overspread the land. Let ministers and Christians take their station beside the pool of life, and lift their voices above the winds and waves of popular excitement and cry, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters and he that hath no money come; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Instead of being afraid of spurious excitement, with the experience and the means that we have, it seems to me to be certain, that the church can go forward in the promotion of revivals, until the whole land and the whole world are subdued to Christ, without the introduction and prevalence of one spurious religious excitement.

The gospel is adapted to promote a healthful excitement. Let us throw it out upon the people in all its length and breadth and power. Then, whatever excitement is incidental to such a procedure, let it come. Let ministers and christians be sober-minded and hold fast to the truth and to the form of sound words, and use those measures and those only, which are needed and are most adapted to secure a universal attention to the truth, and bring about as speedily and universally as possible a thorough submission to God. My brethren, do not let us stand timidly by, and criticise and warn against false excitements, and hush every thing down and keep our people asleep, till ere we are aware, they break loose from our influence and run headlong and in masses after some fanatical leader to the ruin of their souls.

Your brother,

C.G. FINNEY

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