

# Letters on Revivals--No. 7.\*

by Charles Finney

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*True religion is about obedience to the law of the intelligence, not emotions or fear, and excessive excitement can be a hindrance to this.*

**Scripture:** Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 14:33, Galatians 5:22, James 1:19

**Topics:** "Revival", "Emotional Balance in Faith"

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## Description

Charles Finney addresses the dangers of excessive emotional excitement in religious revivals, emphasizing that true religion is rooted in the heart's obedience to God's law rather than being driven by feelings. He warns that high levels of excitement can lead to delusions and false hopes, as individuals may mistake emotional responses for genuine faith. Finney advocates for a balanced approach where excitement is limited to capturing attention without overwhelming the intelligence, allowing for true understanding and obedience to God's truth. He cautions against focusing solely on the hopes and fears of individuals, which can foster a selfish form of religion rather than a sincere relationship with God.

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## Transcript

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

Dear Brethren:

Another error which has prevailed to a considerable extent in promoting revivals of religion I apprehend is that of encouraging an unhealthy degree of excitement. Some degree of excitement is inevitable. The truths that must be seen and duly appreciated to induce the sinner to turn to God, will of necessity produce a considerable degree of excitement in his mind; but it should always be understood that excitement, especially where it exists in a high degree, exposes the sinner to great delusions. Religion consists in the heart's obedience to the law of the intelligence, as distinguished from its being influenced by emotion or fear. When the feelings are greatly excited, the will yields to them almost of necessity. I do not mean that it does absolutely by necessity, but that an excited state of feeling has so much power over the will that it almost certainly controls it. Now the mind is never religious when it is actuated by the feelings, for this is following impulse. Whatever the feelings are, if the soul gives itself up to be controlled by feelings rather than by the law and gospel of God, as truth lies revealed in the intelligence, it is not a religious state of mind. Now the real difficulty of obeying the law of the intelligence is in proportion to the amount of excitement. Just in proportion as the feelings are strongly excited they tend to govern the will, and in as far as they do govern the will, there is and can be no religion in the soul, whatever these feelings are. Now

just so much excitement is important in revivals as is requisite to secure the fixed and thorough attention of the mind to the truth, and no more. When excitement goes beyond this, it is always dangerous. When excitement is very great, so as really to carry the will, the subjects of this excitement invariably deceive themselves. They get the idea that they are religious in proportion as they are governed by their feelings. They are conscious of feeling deeply, and of acting accordingly, and because they do feel. They are conscious of being sincerely actuated by their feelings. This they regard as true religion. Whereas if they are really governed by their feelings as distinguished from their intelligence, they are not religious at all.

This is no doubt the secret of so many false hopes, in those revivals in which there is very great excitement. Where this has not been understood, and very great excitement has been rather nourished than controlled; where it has been taken for granted, that the revival of religion is great in proportion to the amount of excitement, great evils have invariably resulted to the cause of Christ. The great excitement attending revivals is an evil often incidental to real revivals of religion. But if the attention of the people can be thoroughly secured, no more excitement should be encouraged than is consistent with leaving the intelligence to exercise its full power on the will, without the obstruction of deeply excited feelings. I have often seen persons in so much excitement that the intelligence seemed to be almost stultified, and any thing but reason seemed to have the control of the will,.[.] This is not religion, but enthusiasm; and often times, as I shall have occasion to show in the course of these letters, has taken on at last the type of fanaticism.

Again, it is a dangerous thing in revivals to address too exclusively the hopes and fears of men, for the plain reason that selfish as man is, addressing his hopes and fears almost exclusively, tends to beget in him a selfish submission to God--a selfish religion to which he is moved on the one hand by fear of punishment, and on the other by hope of reward. Now it is true t

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