

~Other Speakers S-Z: Barton W. Stone:

We have seen many things called revivals--great revivals. We have seen congregations greatly excited--many crying aloud for mercy, and many praising God for delivering grace. We have seen this state of things continue but a short time, and then disappear for years. We have seen many of these converts soon dwindle, sicken and die, and become more hardened against the fear of God, than they were before--many of them becoming infidels, by thinking that all professors of religion are [210] like themselves deluded by strong passion and imagination. Others of them cling to the church, held there, not by delight in God, his service, or his people, but from other reasons than such as are approved of God. Others, and lamentable to tell, the fewest number by far, manifest by their holy walk and conversation, that they are truly pious and accepted of God. All must acknowledge that some good results from such revivals; but all must acknowledge that great evil also rose out of them. Those, who under strong affections, believed they were born of God, and who made a public confession of faith, and fell from it, are of all people in the most pitiable situation, seldom do they ever after embrace religion--These by their example, discourage others, and fill their minds with prejudices against religion.

After a lapse of a few years, these scenes pass off forgotten, then another similar revival takes place, and similar events succeed--Such revivals are periodical--once in a few years; but of an evanescent nature; like a flash of lightning. Indeed, the people are taught by public teachers, not to expect their continuance--by experience and observation they have found them to be of short duration.

The general sentiment has been that these revivals depend on the sovereign will of God, who at certain seasons pours out of his spirit on the people, as the Angel at certain times troubled the waters in the pool of Bethesda. This sentiment we think of dangerous tendency. It teaches that the means ordained for salvation are not always on the same efficacy--of no efficacy at all, till God by special, almighty power makes them so. "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." I ask,--Is it the power of God to save the obedient believer to day? Is it invariably his power every day to the believer! None will deny it. Now should I be taught that the gospel loses its power to save me, though I believe and obey it, until God by some non-descript operation makes it powerful to this effect, should I not view this means inadequate to the end, and wait in death for this operation? Should I not be disposed to neglect the means, believing they cannot benefit me, till they are made more powerful by the power of God? Should I reasonably feel guilty that I am carnal, lifeless, and dead, believing that the means ordained by God were able to meliorate my condition? This faith, and the legitimate fruit of it, appear evidently the reason, why true' revivals of religion are so rare, or rather why they do not always continue.

Dare we say, that God does not will, and therefore does not continue revivals without ceasing? Dare we think that God is more willing at one time than at another to grant his favors, or give his Holy Spirit? Dare we impute the long, lifeless intervals between revivals to God's pleasure or will it should be so? Dare we impute to him the bondage, carnality and death [211] experienced by his professed people--and justify these people in this state, because he willed it should be so? But few, if any, would be thus daring.

When in heart we believe and obey the gospel, God gives us his holy, quickening spirit; he gives us salvation, and eternal life--In this spirit we feel a tender concern for sinners, and are led to plead with them, and pray for them. They see our good works, and from conviction are led to glorify God--they see the light of Zion, and flow to it--they see the union of christians, and are by this means led to believe in Jesus unto salvation and eternal life. God has ordained that the unbelieving world are to be saved by the means of this truth, shining in his church on earth.