

**Revivals And Church History :: SUPERFICIAL REVIVALS -Finney**

**SUPERFICIAL REVIVALS -Finney - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2006/7/17 2:26**

**SUPERFICIAL REVIVALS**

I have observed, and multitudes of others also I find have observed, that for the last ten years, revivals of religion have been gradually becoming more and more superficial. All the phenomena which they exhibit testify to this as a general fact. There is very much less deep conviction of sin and deep depth of humility, and much less strength in all the graces exhibited by converts in late revivals, than in the converts from the revivals which occurred about 1830 and 1831 and for some time previous. I have observed, as have others also, that revivals are of much shorter duration, and that a reaction comes on much more suddenly and disastrously than formerly. Also, that fewer of the converts make stable and efficient Christians; that those who do persevere, appear to have less of the Spirit of Christ than in former revivals;--not so much of the spirit of prayer, and are not so modest and humble. In short, all the phenomena of the more recent revivals, judging from my own experience and observation and from the testimony of other witnesses, show that they have at least very extensively, taken on a much less desirable type than formerly.

Christians are much less spiritual in revivals, much less prevalent in prayer, not so deeply humbled and quickened and thoroughly baptized with the Holy Ghost as they were formerly. These statements I do not suppose to be universally applicable to modern revivals, but I do believe them to be applicable generally. As revivals now exist, I believe ministers are not nearly as desirous of seeing them in their congregations as they formerly were, nor have they good reason to be. Those ministers who have witnessed none but the later revivals of which I speak, are almost afraid of revivals. They have seen the disastrous results of modern revivals so frequently, that they honestly entertain the doubt whether they are, upon the whole, desirable. Those, as I have good reason to know, who saw the revivals which occurred ten or twenty years ago, greatly prefer revivals of that type. They are distressed with the superficiality of many recent revivals. I make this as a general, not a universal remark, and state only my own opinion of public sentiment. I have often heard it said, both among ministers and private Christians, We long to see the days return when we shall have such revivals as we saw years ago. I have been anxiously watching the progress of things in this direction, and inquiring as carefully and prayerfully as I could into the causes which are operating to produce these results. If I am not misinformed, and have not greatly misapprehended the case, the following will be found among them:

1. There is much less probing of the heart by a deep and thorough exhibition of human depravity, than was formerly the case. It has been of late a common remark, and a brother who has long labored as an evangelist made the same remark, that for the last few years there has been little or no opposition made by impenitent sinners to revivals. Now it is not because the carnal mind is not still enmity against God, but I greatly fear it is for the want of thoroughly turning up to the light the deep foundations of this enmity in their hearts. The unutterable depravity of the human heart has not, I fear, been laid open to the very bottom as it formerly was.

A few sermons on the subject of moral depravity are generally preached in every revival, but I fear this is by no means the great theme of the preaching so much and so long as it ought to be, in order thoroughly to break up the fallow ground of the sinner's and the professor's heart. From my own experience and observation, as well as from the Word of God, I am fully convinced that the character of revivals depends very much upon the stress that is laid upon the depravity of the heart. Its pride, enmity, windings, deceitfulness, and everything else that is hateful to God, should be exposed in the light of His perfect law.

2. I fear that stress enough is not laid upon the horrible guilt of this depravity. Pains enough is not taken, by a series of pointed and cutting discourses, to show the sinner the utter inexcusableness, the unutterable wickedness and guilt, of his base heart. No revival can be thorough until sinners and backsliders are so searched and humbled, that they can not hold up their heads. It is a settled point with me, that while backsliders and sinners can come to an anxious meeting, and hold up their heads and look you and others in the face without blushing and confusion, the work of searching is by no means performed, and they are in no state to be thoroughly broken down and converted to God. I wish to call the attention of my brethren especially to this fact. When sinners and backsliders are really convicted by the Holy Ghost, they are greatly ashamed of themselves. Until they manifest deep shame, it should be known that the probe is not used sufficiently, and they do not see themselves as they ought. When I go into a meeting of inquiry and look over the multitudes, if I see them with heads up, looking at me and at each other, I have learned to understand what work I have to do. Instead of pre

ssing them immediately to come to Christ, I must go to work to convict them of sin. Generally, by looking over the room, a minister can tell, not only who are convicted and who are not, but who are so deeply convicted as to be prepared to receive Christ.

Some are looking around, and manifest no shame at all; others can not look you in the face, and yet can hold up their heads; others still can not hold up their heads, and yet are silent; others, by their sobbing, and breathing, and agonizing, reveal at once the fact that the sword of the Spirit has wounded them to their very heart. Now, I have learned that a revival never does take on a desirable and wholesome type any further than the preaching and means are so directed, and so efficient as to produce that kind of genuine and deep conviction which breaks the sinner and the backslider right down, and makes him unutterably ashamed and confounded before the Lord, until he is not only stripped of every excuse, but driven to go all lengths in justifying God and condemning himself.

3. I have thought that, at least in a great many instances, stress enough has not been laid upon the necessity of Divine influence upon the hearts of Christians and of sinners. I am confident that I have sometimes erred in this respect myself. In order to rout sinners and backsliders from their self-justifying pleas and refuges, I have laid, and I doubt not that others also have laid, too much stress upon the natural ability of sinners, to the neglect of showing them the nature and extent of their dependence upon the grace of God and the influence of His Spirit. This has grieved the Spirit of God. His work not being honored by being made sufficiently prominent, and not being able to get the glory to Himself of His own work, He has withheld His influences. In the meantime, multitudes have been greatly excited by the means used to promote an excitement, and have obtained hopes, without ever knowing the necessity of the presence and powerful agency of the Holy Ghost. It hardly need be said that such hopes are better thrown away than kept. It were strange, indeed, if one could lead a Christian life upon the foundation of an experience in which the Holy Ghost is not recognized as having anything to do.

**Re: SUPERFICIAL REVIVALS -Finney - posted by RobertW (), on: 2006/7/17 7:56**

Thanks for sharing this Bro. Greg!

Quote:  
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I think this comes about also as ministers seek to employ a particular means not knowing that the Holy Spirit has chosen a different means. For example, hell-fire preaching is a means of bringing a person face to face with their estate; yet it is equally true that a revelation of the goodness of God, in light of what a person knows to be their own rebellion can have a powerful effect.

I think also that we are in danger at times of not rightly presenting the grace and mercy of God. Ministers present God at times almost as if He is standing with His hands on His hips looking down His nose at a sinner begrudging the mercy and forgiveness. This is not how God forgives. God shows mercy 'cheerfully' and welcomes sinners home with rejoicing.

One thing that I have realized is that folk will not long serve God out of intimidation. An ongoing questioning of their salvation is not healthy and I might argue it is *demonic*. Yes, let a man examine himself, but this is not the same as a perpetual tightrope walk that leads to joylessness and despair. It leads to **hardness of heart**.

A friend recently bought me a book of devotionals that were compiled from Wesley's writings. I must say, it is the most discouraging devotional I have ever held in my hands. Page after page of fear, uncertainty, and doubt (F.U.D) undertones the work. Monday, "Are you holy enough?" Tuesday, "Are you spotless in perfection?" and on and on and on. It is a constant ploy to lead a person into a relationship with God by intimidation. Constantly causing them to wonder if God really loves them or if they are holy enough to make heaven. Away with it all.

I believe teaching Christian perfection *apart* from true reformation justification is a most disastrous doctrine. Finney says it himself; *"In order to rout sinners and backsliders from their self-justifying pleas and refuges, I have laid, and I doubt n*

*ot that others also have laid, too much stress upon the natural ability of sinners, to the neglect of showing them the nature and extent of their dependence upon the grace of God and the influence of His Spirit."*

I have seen it in my short life. Many people who sincerely want to serve the Lord live under a constant cloud of feeling they can't live it. I told the story once of an old holiness lady I once knew in a nursing home who did the bun hair do and all. She said once to us, "I sure hope I make it (to heaven that is)." The woman lost her mind and as far as I know died in a caged hospital bed.

This is the finality of, *"In order to rout sinners and backsliders from their self-justifying pleas and refuges, I have laid, and I doubt not that others also have laid, too much stress upon the natural ability of sinners, to the neglect of showing them the nature and extent of their dependence upon the grace of God and the influence of His Spirit."* This is what happens when ministers feel the need to constantly cause people to feel on egg-shells in order to manipulate them and control them into living a life of perfection. It is a deadly doctrine and God will close doors to the preachers and withdraw the influence of His Spirit in the meetings. It is a misrepresentation of the Gospel and the grace of God and character of God. A healthy fear of the Lord is one thing, but a perpetual life of fear and intimidation through the doctrine of salvation by sanctification is totally unacceptable. Folk need to serve God out of love.

Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. (Isaiah 12:3)

**Re: - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2006/7/17 8:54**

Quote:

-----A friend recently bought me a book of devotionals that were compiled from Wesley's writings.

Are you referring to "Renew My Heart?"

**Re: the surprising power of grace - posted by roadsign (), on: 2006/7/17 10:01**

Iâ'm wondering, could our society have become immune to the value of pain - the pain that God may be using to bear down on us and bring conviction? We have become masters at whisking away discomfort in a flash. Our instinctive response to pain is to think, "What can I do to get rid of this?" We automatically go for that magic button - and there are many to choose from.

Consider what our society has done over the last 50 years to eradicate pain and discomfort of death, waiting, anxiety, ailing and aging bodies - immunizations, climate controlled homes, entertainment, surgeries, counselling, leisure, birth control, viagra, etc. We have come to believe that we are entitled to a pain-free and happy life - and believe that experiencing pain and loss is a bad thing that must be avoided at all cost. Our medicine cabinets have become a box of magic potions - where we can find something for most of our common physical discomforts.

It was not like that even 50 years ago. And so with our modern mindset, we create a god in our own image - that fits our mindset. And we have built a religion that also idolizes the pain-free life.

And now having said that I suspect my mindset is somewhat out of whack. After all, God is a God of surprises.

For those of us who value the pain that brings confessions, our longings for the "pain that brings gain" may very well be a subtle desire to sidestep God's method that may best benefit us in the long run.

Quote:

----- stress enough has not been laid upon the necessity of Divine influence upon the hearts of Christians and of sinners. I fear that stress enough is not laid upon the horrible guilt of this depravity.

I wonder if we really can we accept whatever divine influence God brings us. It may not fit into our mental frames, as Robert points out:

Quote:

-----For example, hell-fire preaching is a means of bringing a person face to face with their estate; yet it is equally true that a revelation of the goodness of God, in light of what a person knows to be their own rebellion can have a powerful effect  
-----

For me personally, I find it far more difficult to accept God's goodness than anything else about him. That is perhaps the most powerful strike against my pride that I know. Even thinking about it causes me to weep. I can more easily accept chastisement, because after all, I deserve it -- but a free gift --... No! no! First let me pay at least a little something for it. Let me improve a bit first.

You see what I mean? Could I be reflecting the secret thoughts of many?

Quote:

-----I think also that we are in danger at times of not rightly presenting the grace and mercy of God.  
-----

Perhaps the challenge for us is to BELIEVE in the power of God's grace and mercy. After all, that is the thing that causes us to beat our chests like the sorrowful tax-collector, and fall on our faces before our gracious God.

Is God's goodness so uncomfortable to us that we prefer to reject it, and more willingly invite bad stuff (which may be less painful to our pride)?

Diane

**Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2006/7/17 10:33**

Hi Paul,

Yes. The first few pages seem to place the glory and emphasis on God's goodness and grace. Yet, as I have gone through the book since I received it and looked back to former entries pre-July, I find it constantly probing. This is not a new disagreement I have with Wesley. I am NOT anti-Wesley, but I do not think the approach of probing at a person's security as a believer day after day or making statements that cause the topic to come up before the mind is healthy unless a person is in a state of hardness of heart. There are times to plow, plant, water and grow. You can't be plowing all the time. This is my point.

If man is accepted by God only if he is without fault, Christian living is not free from condemnation as Paul insisted in Romans 8:1. It is rather a continual exercise in soul-searching and penance, full of fear and condemnation and void of the joy and confidence that a knowledge of salvation can bring. (See Romans 5:9-11 where it is clear that the God who loved us enough to provide for our salvation loves us enough to provide for us all the way to glory. This assurance gives us joy in Him.) (AoG)

**Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2006/7/17 10:46**

Hi Diane,

Quote:

-----No! no! First let me pay at least a little something for it. Let me improve a bit first.  
-----

This is the story of the man who took the one who owed him a small price by the throat. He told his lord, "be patient with me and I will pay thee all." (Matthew 18) I have guess-timated his debt to be about \$160 billion dollars in our times, but the man said, "give me time and I will pay up!" This is the underlying attitude that was his downfall in my estimation.

I have also felt like this. Maybe many have? Matthew Henry talks about a people who are *awakened* to and convinced of their sin, but are not *humbled* to accept the free gift of salvation. Conviction and pride are walking together. If we say, "Lord have patience with me and I will get my act together" we have said little different than the man in Matthew 18. What did the man do? He throttled his neighbor because of a small debt he owed him. He choked him half to death as was a Roman accepted practice for folk who were indebted (see Robertson's).

There is a pride and highhandedness that attends folk who have walked out of court and not realized they were forgiven. Almost like they think they were given an acceptable and achievable installment plan that brought them up to speed with their Lord? They are intolerant of others 'debt'. They do not show mercy and certainly not with 'cheerfulness'. This is important because we don't see the Spirit of God attending to our works like we ought to. Finney was right and I think he hit the nail on the head.

Re: - posted by Compton (), on: 2006/7/17 12:25

Quote:  
-----If man is accepted by God only if he is without fault, Christian living is not free from condemnation as Paul insisted in Romans 8:1. It is rather a continual exercise in soul-searching and penance, full of fear and condemnation and void of the joy and confidence that a knowledge of salvation can bring.  
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-----

Quote:  
-----For me personally, I find it far more difficult to accept God's goodness than anything else about him.  
-----

Robert and Diane,

I think you are making important observations here.

Without God's gift of salvation, a "revival" is just vain religious straining and writhing. We need to be dead to ourselves, and alive to Christ...but instead find more and more reasons to tighten our focus back on ourselves! If some diligently test themselves and they conclude they are not in Christ, then turn 180 and come to Christ! If others test themselves and find they are in Christ, but distracted or deceived by worldly concerns, then take the steps needed to obey Christ.

The point is we shouldn't let anything keep us from the Lord. Yet we spiritually narcissistic creatures are prone to let many things hinder our trust in God's provision for salvation as well as obedience. What shall separate us from the love of God? Shall our piousness, religion, guilt, shame, anger, unforgiveness, or worldliness, and many other dizzy distractions keep us from settling our anxious hearts on the saving faith, and the saving grace found in Christ alone?

MC

**Re: resisting God's goodness - posted by roadsign (), on: 2006/7/17 13:37**

Quote:  
----- people who are awakened to and convinced of their sin, but are not humbled to accept the free gift of salvation. Conviction and pride are walking together.  
-----

Robert, the parable you explain is taking on new meaning to me. I'd like to drive this point deeper by sharing some recent personal experiences.

Recently a variety of Christian friends have felt exercised to lavish us with generosity in various tangible ways. Yesterday, after three weeks of this, I was feeling overwhelmed with all this "spoiling", and I wanted to resist.

Well, in a church on Sunday, during the worship time my mind began meditating on this unusual downpour of temporal blessings. I suddenly noticed a song-line on the screen about God's amazing love to us. Suddenly it really hit me - how God has been pouring love on me and I keep feeling reluctant to accept it. I wept. After the service, my friend, not aware of this divine moment, said, "I see you still hold to some values from your past. You have trouble letting yourself enjoy a good time."

Let me say, my reluctance to enjoy God's goodness doesn't feel like pride. In fact, it feels like humility. It feels polite!

I suspect that our most depraved sin is not the typical stuff we assume, but it is our prideful resistance to receive God's goodness. Someone once said, "Our biggest sin is not letting God love us." And, might I suggest, that all the sins that we see can be traced to that one root. And unless our conviction reaches down to that point, pride will always lurk - and stain our convictions. And we will be grabbing sinners by the scruff of their necks demanding they feel guilty about their sins and pay back by doing penance.

I realize, that you already said all that, Robert.... Just had to add my own version.

And another version (by MC):

Quote:  
-----Yet we spiritually narcissistic creatures are prone to let many things hinder our trust in God's provision for salvation as well as obedience.  
-----

Diane

**Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2006/7/17 14:09**

Hi Diane,

Well said!

My observation was not original. I heard it used by a minister named Blaesus Fultang.

God Bless,

-Robert



**Re: - posted by n7rooivalk7n (), on: 2006/7/17 14:09**

hi RobertW,

Thanks for your insights. I would just like to add one thought to the testimony that you gave earlier on the old holiness lady that died insane. It reminds me of the story of Nebecatzeezer in the old testament that also became temporarily insane because he boasted in his own abilities. Isn't that the same as what some of these holiness people are doing. They are trying to be "holy" through their own power and then secretly boast about it in their hearts?

Nebecatzeezer's story had a happy ending, solely by the grace of God and I can testify of a similar experience in my life. When God is on the throne and He receives all the glory, then we don't have to try and live holy lives by ourselves. It will happen through the power of God! (Phil 4:13)

Be blessed

**Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2006/7/17 15:31**

Hi n7rooivalk7n,

Quote:  
-----Isn't that the same as what some of these holiness people are doing. They are trying to be "holy" through their own power and then secretly boast about it in their hearts?  
-----

Could be. I think maybe it varies from person to person. By and large I believe most want to really live right and serve God in obedience. I also think it is due to some bad teaching or good teachings gone mad.

For Finney and others like him there was a strict standard of 'holiness'. But holiness is not a legalistic lifestyle, but a life led of the Holy Spirit producing the fruit of the Spirit. Could you imagine it being a sin to salt your food because you were eating for pleasure and not sustenance? No sweets because they are tasty and we could not have tasty foods as that would be decadence. No flowers either. Why? They cumbereth the ground.

When ministers in the old days had ran out of sermons they started preaching their convictions. Many of them fell in the faith. Why? They could not live their own 'gospel'.

Moreover, there are things that some repentance preachers think is 'OK' to do that would make a guy like me cringe. They preach a strong message, but the longer I "listen and watch" the less I am hearing what I am hearing. So there is a serious communication break down when it comes to this whole topic. When I think of 'perfection' I am looking at a certain pattern of life and the consequences that *not* living that brings. Some perfection ministers believe in a strong security for the believer; others have their hearers on a tight rope.

Some perfection ministers believe in the 'tight rope' thing, but their standard of perfection only extends to a certain point. So it is a mixed bag in these circles that can cause some serious misunderstandings. Some take such a strict view of the scriptures that they remove teachings that bring balance to keep the noose as tight as possible on a person's life. I'm just being honest here. They are looking for reasons to cast a person into hell it seems. This is not right and I think it is an attitude God needs to deliver some folk from.

And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. (Luke 9:53-55)

This is what I see happening today. Folk are ready to rain fire upon people who do not 'receive Him' or 'them' and their teachings. This is the wrong spirit. It is not the attitude of the Holy Spirit. This is man reacting in frustration at being rejected. This is man unable to control folks and getting angry about it. If they don't get the message, we'll just "turn up the heat". This is the carnal mind. This is preaching from the wrong motivation. What did the Lord say? *But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*

This is a vicious circle. If the message mis-presented then God will not back it. If God does not back it then the people

will not respond. No response = more frustration. So on and so forth until you literally have people carrying signs that say, "GOD HATES YOU!!" Why not just do what you're told? If they reject the message don't resort to name calling or pressing in with more and more heat. Wipe the dust off your feet and move on.

**Re: - posted by n7rooivalk7n (), on: 2006/7/18 12:58**

Hi RobertW,

I think the reference you made to Luk 9:53 is crucial indeed. It's not always so much the physical actions that we do that count, but the spirit behind those actions. Two people can both do the same action, e.g. keeping from immorality, but the one does it out of self-justification, the other because the joy of serving and knowing God drives him to it.

A last thought that I want to convey is that of love. The bible says that faith works by love. I really believe that through the operating of the love of Christ in our lives we can make a deep impact in others' lives. Telling people the truth is important (it might include hell-fire preaching from time to time), but it must be coupled with the love of Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 13 says after all that we can achieve nothing if we have no love. If we have no love our actions are of no worth. Where there is no love, there is death, death and more death. A very somber picture