

## Revivals And Church History :: Hindrance to Revival: defective exhibition of Christian truth

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As it is through the instrumentality of the truth that God performs his work upon the hearts of men, it is fair to conclude that at just in proportion as any part of it is kept back, or is dispensed in a different manner from that which he has prescribed, it will fail of its legitimate effect. It is not at the option of God's ministers to select one truth from the Bible and omit another; but they are required to preach the whole counsel of God; and where they neglect to do this, it were unreasonable to expect a blessing. In the exercise of their own judgment on this subject, they may come to the conclusion that particular parts of divine truth are of little importance; and that even some of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel may well enough be lightly passed over; but this is an insult to the author of the Bible which they have good reason to expect he will punish by sending them a barren ministry.

There is a way of preaching certain doctrines out of their proper connection, which is exceedingly unfriendly to revivals of religion. Suppose, for instance, the doctrine of God's sovereignty be exhibited in such a partial or insulated manner as to leave the sinner to infer that it is but another name for tyranny;—or suppose the doctrine of a divine influence be preached in such a way as to authorize the inference that man has nothing to do in respect to his salvation, but wait to be operated upon like a mere machine; or suppose the doctrine of man's apostacy be so exhibited as to lead sinners to deny their responsibility for their transgressions, and to take refuge from the accusations of conscience in the relation which they bear to the father of our race;—in either of these cases, there is little probability that they will be converted or even awakened. It is natural for them to find excuses for remaining in a state of sinful security as long as they can; and so long as they are furnished with such excuses as these, and by the ministers of the gospel, there is not the least ground for expecting that their consciences will be disturbed. The evil to which I refer, has, I have no doubt, often existed in all its extent, where the minister has actually believed all the truths of God's word; and yet he has exhibited some in such a manner as to neutralize the power of others, and even to prevent the legitimate effect of those he has attempted to enforce.

There is also an unnatural mixing up of human wisdom with God's word, which, so far as it has any effect, must be unfriendly to the influence of divine truth. Let the naked sword of the Spirit be brought home to the consciences of men, and the effect of it must and will be felt, and the anxious inquiry will be heard, and sinners, in all probability, will be renewed. But let the wire-drawn theories of metaphysicians be substituted in place of the simple truth; or even let the genuine doctrines of the gospel be customarily exhibited in connection with the refined speculations of human philosophy; and though I dare not say that God in his sovereignty may not bless the truth which is actually preached, yet I may say with confidence that but little effect can be reasonably expected from such a dispensation of the word. And the reasons are obvious; for God has promised to bless nothing but his own truth; and the refinements of philosophy are to the mass of hearers quite unintelligible.

I may add that a want of directness in the manner of preaching the gospel, may prevent it from taking effect on the consciences and hearts of men. It is only when men are made to feel that the gospel comes home to their individual case, that they are themselves the sinners whom it describes, and that they need the blessings which it offers,—it is only then, I say, that they hear it to any important purpose. Suppose that its doctrines, instead of being exhibited in their practical bearings, and enforced by strong appeals to the conscience, are discussed merely as abstract propositions, and with no direct application, the consequence will be that, though the great truths of the Bible may be presented before the mind, yet they will rarely, if ever, sink into the heart. Sinners will hear them, and instead of realizing that they involve their immortal interests, will probably be as indifferent, as if they were matters of idle speculation. So it has been in a multitude of instances; and so, from the very nature of man, it must continue to be.