

Revivals And Church History :: Why So Few REVIVALS? by Charles G. Finney

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I rejoice that the inquiry is beginning to agitate the church: "Why are there not more revivals, and why is their character so changed?" The inquiry is also made, "What can be done to promote revivals, and to promote them under a desirable and permanent pattern?"

Now, my dear brethren, I hope and trust that you will not be offended with me if I speak my mind on this subject with great plainness. The circumstances of the church, the decline of revivals, and the whole aspect of the Christian world demand it. I have seen in the public papers various reasons assigned for this declension of revivals, this absence of revival influence, this powerless preaching of the gospel.

We who are ministers should not be searching for the fundamental difficulty beyond and apart from ourselves; for, whatever else may be an occasion of the great falling off and decline in revivals, our own spiritual state is certainly one, if not the primary and fundamental, reason of this decline. A lack of personal holiness, unction, power in prayer and in preaching the Word, consecration to the work of self-denial and energetic effort in the ministry -these, no doubt, are the principal reasons why revivals are so few and far between, and of such superficial character in the present day.

Religious Diversions

The fact is, ministers have turned aside, in a great degree, to vain janglings. They have given up their attention to church politics, church government, and ecclesiastical proceedings of various kinds. The ministers have been diverted, to an alarming and most injurious extent, from promoting revivals of religion and holiness in the church.

I appeal to you, my brethren of all denominations: is it not a fact in your own experience and observation that ministers have to a great and alarming extent allowed themselves to be diverted from the direct work of promoting the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of the church? This is too notorious to need any proof. The publications of the day, the movements of ecclesiastical bodies, the doctrinal collisions, and even the ambitious projects within the past few years, bear clear testimony to the fact that the great mass of ministers are turned aside from promoting revivals and the complete consecration of the church.

While this is so, does it not oblige us to confess it, bewail it, and understand that whatever else needs to be corrected and set right, we must ourselves repent and receive a new unction for the work? It is of no use for us to look elsewhere for reasons, while the principal of all the reasons lies at our own door. While our hearts are cold, our zeal in revivals abated; while we are turned aside and running here and there to attend conventions, councils, and ecclesiastical bodies; while we are engaged in reading the vituperative publications of the day and jangling about church government and politics-it is no wonder that both the church and the world are asleep.

Until the ministers are baptized with the Holy Spirit, until we are awake and in the field with our armor on, and until our souls are anointed with the Holy Spirit, it certainly is a waste of our time to be looking round at a distance for a cause of the decline in revivals. I have no doubt that the primary and most God-dishonoring cause of all is this: that the ministers are not themselves so anointed and full of faith and power as to be instrumental in leading the churches into the field for the promotion of revivals.

To a considerable extent, the churches seem not to be aware of the state of the ministry today and the reason many ministers are in a state of decline. The decline of vital godliness in the ministry has brought about such decline in the churches that they are hardly aware either of their own state or of the spiritual state of the ministry.

Honestly Facing Our Need

Now, my dear brethren, I hope it will not be said that by writing in this way I am undermining the influence of the ministry and encouraging a fault-finding spirit in the church. I would by no means do this. But unless we are frank enough, and

humble enough, and honest enough, to look the true state of things in the face, God will undoubtedly raise up other instruments to do His work, and set us aside. If we do not confess and forsake our sin, He will raise up others, we know not whom, to go forth and possess the land.

Among all the religious and ecclesiastical meetings of the present day, one of a different character might be greatly useful. If we could have a ministerial gathering for prayer, confessing our faults one to another, getting into a revival spirit, and devising the best ways and means for the universal promotion of revivals throughout the length and breadth of the land, I would rejoice.

Are we not greatly in fault? Have not those in ministry, to a great extent, lost the spirit of revivals? Is there not a great lack of unction and power among us? And have we not allowed ourselves to be greatly and criminally diverted from this great work? If so, shall we not return? Shall we not see our fault, confess it to the churches and to the world, and return, in the name of the Lord, to lift up our banner?

Superficial Spirituality

The greatest of all hindrances to the promotion of revivals has been a superficial work of grace in the hearts of ministers themselves. Unless there is a spirit of revival in the ministry, it is in vain to expect it in the church. The proper place for the shepherd is in advance of the sheep. If he advances in the work of the Lord, the sheep will almost inevitably follow him wherever he leads. But if he attempts to drive them before him, he will scatter them in every direction. And, if the shepherd falls away from a revival spirit, the sheep will naturally decline in zeal too.

My brethren, believe me that I say this not censoriously or in the spirit of faultfinding. It is the full and deliberate conviction of my own mind—an opinion formed, not hastily, but from protracted observation and an intimate acquaintance with great numbers of the ministers of Christ of different denominations.

When the ministers are filled with the Spirit of God, the church, as a general rule, will not backslide. Nevertheless, in spite of all that the most vigilant minister can do, there at times may be influences brought to bear on believers that will divert them from the promotion of holiness and the conversion of sinners.

Great political excitements, great commercial embarrassments, great depressions or elevations in the business and pecuniary state of the world, may for a time divert people from deep spirituality, though the ministers are faithful. Yet the general truth is that if ministers are baptized with the Holy Spirit and deeply anointed with the revival influence, so will be the church— "Like priest like people."

Promoting Revival Fires

When we ourselves as ministers are thoroughly in a revival spirit, our call to the churches to arise and engage in the general promotion of revivals will be immediately responded to. I doubt whether any minister in the spirit of revival can preach for three Sabbaths without finding revival waking up in the church.

Let this experiment be tried: Let us wake up to the importance of this subject, confess and forsake our own sins, and cry aloud to the church. Let us lift up our voice like a trumpet and rally the host of God's elect. If they are deaf to the call, then let us earnestly inquire of the Lord as to what is next to be done. But until we are anointed for the work, let us not tempt the Lord or abuse the church by looking for factors outside ourselves for the cause of spiritual decline.

Do not misunderstand me. I know that the church is in a state of decline and needs greatly to be quickened and aroused; but I am confident that the prime cause of this decline is to be found in the fact that the ministers have been diverted from their appropriate work. And I am also confident that the only remedy for this state of things is, first and foremost of all, for ministers themselves to come into a deeply spiritual and revived state of mind.

As soon as this comes to pass, there will be a general revival. But I am not looking for it to come until ministers thoroughly wake up to their own state and the state of the church.