

Revivals And Church History :: Hindrances to REVIVAL by Charles G. Finney

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"And I sent messengers to them, saying, I am doing a great work and cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3)

1. Pride enters the workers because of the revival.

It is almost always the case in a revival, that a part of the Church will be too proud or too worldly to take any part in the work. They are determined to stand aloof to wait and see what it will come to. The pride of this part of the Church cannot stop the revival, for the revival never rested on them. It began without them, and it can go on without them. They may fold their arms and do nothing but look out and find fault; and still the work may go on.

But when the part of the Church that does the work that has promoted the revival begins to think what a great revival they have, how they have labored and prayed, how bold and how zealous they have been, and how much good they have done, then the work will likely decline. When news begins to spread of a revival, how absorbed and devoted the members have been, they can think how high they will stand in the estimation of other Churches because they have had such a great revival. And so they get puffed up, and vain, and they can no longer enjoy the presence of God. The Spirit withdraws from them, and the revival ceases.

The Spirit is grieved by the spirit of boasting. Some, under pretence of publishing things to the praise and glory of God, have published things that savored so strongly of a disposition to exalt themselves-making their own agency stand out conspicuously-as were evidently calculated to make an unhappy impression. There was a case in a neighboring state, where a revival commenced, and instantly there came out a letter from the pastor, telling that he had a revival. I saw the letter, and said to myself: "That is the last we shall hear of this revival." And so it was. In a few days the work totally ceased. I could mention other places, where persons have published such things as to puff up the Church, and make the people so proud that little more could be done for the revival.

2. Churches or denominations try to use the revival to proselytize for themselves.

Perhaps a revival will go on for a time, and all sectarian difficulties are banished, until somebody circulates a book, privately, to gain proselytes. Perhaps some over-zealous deacon, or some mischief-making woman, or some proselytizing minister, cannot keep still any longer, but begins to work the work of the devil, by attempting to gain proselytes, and so stirs up bitterness; and, raising a selfish strife, grieves away the Spirit, and drives Christians into parties. There will be no more revival when this spirit enters!

3. A revival can be expected to cease, when Christians lose the spirit of brotherly love.

Jesus Christ will not continue with people in a revival any longer than they continue in the exercise of brotherly love. When Christians are in the spirit of revival, they feel this love, and then you will hear them call each other "Brother" and "Sister," affectionately. But when they begin to get cold, they lose this warmth and glow of affection for one another, and then this calling "Brother" and "Sister" will seem silly, and they will leave it off in some Churches they never call each other so; but where there is a revival Christians naturally do it, I never saw a revival, and probably there never was one, in which they did not do it. But as soon as this begins to cease (which is evidence of the departure of brotherly love), the Spirit of God is grieved, and departs from among them.

4. The inability of denominations to lay aside their prejudice.

Vast multitudes of professors of religion have indulged prejudice to such a degree as to be unwilling to read and hear, and come to a right understanding on the subject. But Christians cannot pray in this state of mind. I defy anyone to possess the true spirit of prayer while he is too prejudiced to examine this or any other question of duty. Where ministers, individual Christians, or whole Churches, resist truth upon this point, I do not believe they will or can enjoy a revival of religion.

5. Failure, during a protracted meeting, to allow it to be conducted throughout by the same minister, if possible.

Sometimes through courtesy, visiting ministers are asked to speak, and there is no blessing. The reason is obvious—they did not come in a state of mind which was right for entering into such work; and they did not know the state of people's minds, so as to know what to preach.

Suppose a person who is sick should call a different physician every day. Neither would know what the symptoms had been, what was the course of the disease or of the treatment, what remedies had been tried, or what the patient could be cured. The method would certainly kill the patient. Just so in a protracted meeting, carried on by a succession of ministers. None of them get into the spirit of it, and generally they do more harm than good.

A protracted meeting should not, ordinarily, be appointed, unless they can secure the right kind of help, and get a minister or two who will agree to stay on the ground till the meeting is finished. Then they may secure a rich blessing.

6. The unwillingness of those who minister to confront the pride of the unbelievers.

Preach to the sinner, and at the moment he thinks he is willing to serve the Lord, bring him to the test; call on him to do one thing, to take one step that shall identify him with the people of God or cross his pride, and his pride comes up, and he refuses; his delusion is brought out, and he finds himself a lost sinner still. Whereas, if you had not confronted him, he might have gone away flattering himself that he was a Christian. If you say to him: "Come out and avow your determination to be on the Lord's side," and if he is not willing to do so small a thing as that, then he is not willing to do anything, and there he is, brought out before his own conscience. We must uncover the delusions of the human heart, and prevent a great many spurious conversions, by showing those who might otherwise imagine themselves willing to do anything for Christ, that in fact they are willing to do nothing.

The Church has always felt it necessary to have something of the kind to answer this very purpose. In the days of the apostles baptism answered this purpose. The Gospel was preached to the people, and then all those who were willing to be on the side of Christ were called on to be baptized. It held the precise place that the anxious seat (altar call) does now, as a public manifestation of a determination to be a Christian.

In modern times, even those who have been violently disposed toward the anxious seat have been obliged to adopt some substitute, or they could not get along in promoting a revival. Some have adopted the expedient of inviting the people who were anxious for their souls, to stay, for conversation, after the rest of the congregation have retired. But what is the difference? This is as much setting up a test as the other. Others, who would be much ashamed to employ the anxious seat, have asked those who have any feeling on the subject to retain their seats when the rest retire. Others have called the anxious to withdraw into a lecture-room. The object of all these is the same, and the principle is the same: to bring people out from the refuge of false shame.

7. The failure of the preaching to address the problems of the age.

It is evident we must have more preaching to meet the character and wants of the age. Ministers are generally beginning to find this out, but some of them complain of it, and suppose it to be "owing to new measures," as they call them. They say that such ministers as our fathers would have been glad to hear, cannot now be heard, can neither obtain a pastorate nor secure an audience. And they think that new measures have perverted the taste of the people. But this is not the difficulty. The character of the age is changed, but these men retain the same prosy style of preaching that answered half a century ago.

Look at the early Methodists. Many of their ministers are unlearned, in the common sense of the term, many of them taken right from the shop or farm, and yet they have gathered congregations and won souls everywhere. Wherever the Met

Methodists have gone, their plain, pointed and simple, but warm and animated mode of preaching has always gathered congregations. Few Presbyterian ministers have gathered such large assemblies, or won so many souls. Now, are we to be told that we must pursue the same old, formal mode of doing things, amidst all these changes? Those who adopt a different style of preaching, as the Methodists have done, will run ahead of those who do not. We must have powerful preaching, or the devil will have the people. Many ministers are finding out already that a Methodist preacher, without the advantages of a liberal education, will draw a congregation around him which a Presbyterian minister, with perhaps ten times as much learning, cannot equal, because he has not the earnest manner of the other, and does not pour out fire upon his hearers when he preaches.

8. Failure to understand our partnership with God.

Some have talked very foolishly on this subject, as if nothing could hinder a genuine revival. They say: "If your revival is a work of God, it cannot be stopped: can any created being stop God?" Now I ask if this is common sense? Formerly, it used to be the established belief that a revival could not be stopped, because it was the work of God. And so they supposed it would go on regardless of what might be done to hinder it, in the Church or out of it. But the farmer might just as well reason so, and think he could go and cut down his wheat and not hurt the crop, because it is God that makes grain grow. A revival is the work of God, and so is a crop of wheat; and God is as much dependent on the use of means in one case as the other. And therefore a revival is as liable to be injured as a wheat field.

9. A revival will cease Christians become mechanical in their attempts to promote it.

When their faith is strong, and their hearts are warm and mellow, and their prayers full of holy emotion, and their words with power, then the work goes on. But when their prayers begin to be cold and without emotion, and they begin to labor mechanically, and to use words without feeling, then the revival will cease.

10. The revival; will stop when the Church gets exhausted by the labor.

Multitudes of Christians commit a great mistake here in time of revival. They have so little judgment that they will break up their normal habits of living, neglect to eat and sleep at the proper hours, and let the excitement run away with them, so that they overdo their bodies, and are so imprudent that they soon become exhausted, and it becomes impossible for them to continue in the work. Revivals often cease from negligence and imprudence, in this respect, on the part of those engaged in carrying them on, and declensions follow.

11. When Christians cease to feel their dependence on the Spirit.

Whenever they get strong in their own strength, God curses their blessings. In many instances, they sin against their own mercies because they get lifted up with their success, and take the credit to themselves, and do not give all the glory to God. As He says: "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto My name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings; yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart" (Malachi 2:2). There has been a great deal of this, undoubtedly. I have seen many things in the papers that suggested a disposition in men to take credit for success in promoting revivals. There is doubtless a great temptation to this, and it requires the utmost watchfulness, on the part of ministers and churches, to guard against it, and not to grieve the Spirit away by vain-glorying in men.

12. A revival will decline and cease, unless Christians are frequently revived.

By this I mean, that Christians, in order to keep in the spirit of revival, commonly need to be frequently convicted and humbled and broken before God. This is something which many do not understand, when we talk about a Christian being revived. But the fact is, that in a revival, the Christian's heart is liable to get crusted over, and lose its exquisite relish for divine things; his unction and prevalence in prayer abate, and then he must be renewed over again. It is impossible to keep him in such a state as not to do injury to the work, unless he passes through such a process every few days. I have never labored in revivals in company with anyone who would keep in the work and be fit to manage a revival continually, who did not pass through this process of breaking down as often as once in two or three weeks.

13. The continued opposition of the Old School, combined with a bad spirit in the New School.

If those who do nothing to promote revivals continue their opposition, and if those who are laboring to promote them allow themselves to get impatient, and get into a bad spirit, the revival will cease. When the Old School write letters in the papers against revivals or revival men, and the New School write letters back again in a contentious spirit, revivals will cease. LET THEM KEEP ABOUT THEIR WORK, and neither talk about the opposition, nor preach upon it, nor rush into print about it. If others choose to publish "sland," let the Lord's people keep to their work. None of the slander will stop the revival, while those who are engaged in it mind their business, and keep to the work.

14. Neglecting the claims of Missions.

If Christians confine their attention to their own Church, do not read even their missionary magazine or use any other means to inform themselves on the subject of the claims of the world, but reject the light, and will not do what God calls them to do in this cause, the Spirit of God will depart from them.