

Revivals And Church History :: What a revival of religion is C G Finney.

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WHAT A REVIVAL OF RELIGION IS

O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy. - Habakkuk 3:2.

It is supposed that the prophet Habakkuk was contemporary with Jeremiah, and that this prophecy was uttered in anticipation of the Babylonish captivity. Looking at the judgments which were speedily to come upon his nation, the soul of the prophet was wrought up to an agony, and he cried out in his distress: "O Lord, revive Thy work." As if he had said: "O Lord, grant that Thy judgments may not make Israel desolate. In the midst of these awful years let the judgments of God be made the means of reviving religion among us. In wrath remember mercy."

Religion is the work of man. It is something for man to do. It consists in obeying God. It is man's duty. It is true God induces him to do it. He influences him by His Spirit, because of his great wickedness and reluctance to obey. If it were not necessary for God to influence men, if men were disposed to obey God, there would be no occasion to pray: "O Lord, revive Thy work." The ground of necessity for such a prayer is that men are wholly indisposed to obey; and unless God interpose the influence of His Spirit, not a man on earth will ever obey the commands of God.

A "Revival of Religion" presupposes a declension. Almost all the religion in the world has been produced by revivals. God has found it necessary to take advantage of the excitability there is in mankind, to produce powerful excitements among them, before He can lead them to obey. Men are so sluggish, there are so many things to lead their minds off from religion and to oppose the influence of the Gospel, that it is necessary to raise an excitement among them, till the tide rises so high as to sweep away the opposing obstacles. They must be so aroused that they will break over these counteracting influences, before they will obey God.

Look back at the history of the Jews, and you will see that God used to maintain religion among them by special occasions, when there would be a great excitement, and people would turn to the Lord. And after they had been thus revived, it would be but a short time before there would be so many counteracting influences brought to bear upon them, that religion would decline, and keep on declining, till God could have time, so to speak, to convict them of sin by His Spirit, and rebuke them by His providence, and thus so gain the attention of the masses to the great subject of salvation, as to produce a widespread awakening. Then the counteracting causes would again operate, religion would decline, and the nation would be swept away in the vortex of luxury, idolatry, and pride. There is so little principle in the Church, so little firmness and stability of purpose, that unless it is greatly excited, it will go back from the path of duty, and do nothing to promote the glory of God. The state of the world is still such, and probably will be till the millennium is fully come, that religion must be mainly promoted by means of revivals. How long and how often has the experiment been tried, to bring the Church to act steadily for God, without these periodical excitements! Many good men have supposed, and still suppose, that the best way to promote religion is to go along uniformly, and gather in the ungodly gradually, and without excitement. But however sound such reasoning may appear in the abstract, facts demonstrate its futility. If the Church were far enough advanced in knowledge, and had stability of principle enough to keep awake, such a course would do. But the Church is so little enlightened, and there are so many counteracting causes, that the Church will not go steadily to work without a special excitement. As the millennium advances, it is probable that these periodical excitements will be unknown. Then the Church will be enlightened, and the counteracting causes removed, and the entire Church will be in a state of habitual and steady obedience to God. Children will be trained up in the way they should go, and there will be no such torrents of worldliness, and fashion, and covetousness, to bear away the piety of the Church, as soon as the excitement of a revival is withdrawn. It is very desirable that the Church should go on steadily in a course of obedience without these excitements. Our nervous system is so strung that any powerful excitement, if long continued, injures our health, and unfits us for duty. If religion is ever to have a pervading influence in the world, this spasmodic religion must be done away with. Indeed, it will then be uncalled for. Christians will not sleep the greater part of the time, and once in a while wake up, and rub their eyes, and bluster about, and vociferate a little while, and then go to sleep again. Then there will be no need that ministers should wear themselves out and kill themselves, by their efforts to roll back the flood of worldly influence that sets in

on upon the Church. But as yet the state of the Christian world is such, that to expect to promote religion without excitement is unphilosophical and absurd. The great political and other worldly excitements that agitate Christendom, are all unfriendly to religion, and divert the mind from the interests of the soul. Now, these excitements can only be counteracted by religious excitements. And until there is sufficient religious principle in the world to put down irreligious excitements, it is in vain to try to promote religion, except by counteracting excitements. This is true in philosophy, and it is a historical fact.

It is altogether improbable that religion will ever make progress among heathen nations except through the influence of revivals. The attempt is now in making to do it by education, and other cautious and gradual improvements. But so long as the laws of mind remain what they are, it cannot be done in this way. There must be excitement sufficient to wake up the dormant moral powers, and roll back the tide of degradation and sin. And precisely so far as our land approximates to heathenism, it is impossible for God or man to promote religion in such a state of things but by powerful excitements. This is evident from the fact that this has always been the way in which God has done it. God does not create these excitements, and choose this method to promote religion, for nothing, or without reason. Men being so reluctant to obey God, will not act until they are excited. For instance, how many there are who know that they ought to be religious, but they are afraid that if they become pious they will be laughed at by their companions. Many are wedded to idols; others are procrastinating repentance until they are settled in life, or until they have secured some favorite worldly interest. Such persons never will give up their false shame, or relinquish their ambitious schemes, till they are so excited by a sense of quiet and danger they cannot hold back any longer.

These remarks are designated only as an introduction. I shall now proceed with the main design, to show:

I. What a revival of religion is not.

II. What it is. And

III. The agencies employed in promoting it.

I. A REVIVAL IS NOT A MIRACLE.

1. A miracle has been generally defined to be a Divine interference, setting aside, or suspending, the laws of nature. A revival is not a miracle in this sense. All the laws of matter and mind remain in force. They are neither suspended nor set aside in a revival.

2. A revival is not a miracle according to another definition of the term "miracle" - something above the powers of nature. There is nothing in religion beyond the ordinary powers of nature. It consists entirely in the right exercise of the powers of nature. It is just that, and nothing else. When mankind become religious, they are not enabled to put forth exertions which they were unable before to put forth. They only exert powers which they had before, in a different way, and use them for the glory of God.

3. A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means - as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means. There may be a miracle among its antecedent causes, or there may not. The apostles employed miracles simply as a means by which they arrested attention to their message, and established its Divine authority. But the miracle was not the revival. The miracle was one thing; the revival that followed it was quite another thing. The revivals in the apostles' days were connected with miracles, but they were not miracles.

I said that a revival is the result of the right use of the appropriate means. The means which God has enjoined for the production of a revival, doubtless have a natural tendency to produce a revival. Otherwise God would not have enjoined them. But means will not produce a revival, we all know, without the blessing of God. No more will grain, when it is sown, produce a crop without the blessing of God. It is impossible for us to say that there is not as direct an influence or agency from God, to produce a crop of grain, as there is to produce a revival. What are the laws of nature according to which it is supposed that grain yields a crop? They are nothing but the constituted manner of the operations of God. In the Bible, the Word of God is compared to grain, and preaching is compared to sowing the seed, and the results to the springing up and growth of the crop. A revival is as naturally a result of the use of the appropriate means as a crop is of the use of its appropriate means.

I wish this idea to be impressed on your minds, for there has long been an idea prevalent that promoting religion has something very peculiar in it, not to be judged of by the ordinary rules of cause and effect; in short, that there is no connection of the means with the result, and no tendency in the means to produce the effect. No doctrine is more dangerous than

n this to the prosperity of the Church, and nothing more absurd.

Suppose a man were to go and preach this doctrine among farmers, regarding their sowing of grain. Let him tell them that God is a Sovereign, and will give them a crop only when it pleases Him, and that for them to plow, and plant, and labor, as if they expected to raise a crop, is very wrong, that it amounts to taking the work out of the hands of God, that it is an interference with His Sovereignty, and that there is no connection between the means and the result on which they can depend. Suppose the farmers should believe such a doctrine? Why, they would starve the world to death.

Just such results would follow on the Church being persuaded that promoting religion is somehow so mysteriously a subject of Divine Sovereignty, that there is no natural connection between the means and the end. In fact, what are the results? Why, generation after generation has gone to hell, while the Church has been dreaming and waiting for God to save them without the use of the means. It has been the devil's most successful means of destroying souls! The connection is as clear in religion as it is when the farmer sows his grain.

There is one fact under the government of God worthy of universal notice and of everlasting remembrance; which is, that the most useful and important things are most easily and certainly obtained by the use of the appropriate means. This is evidently a principle in the Divine administration. Hence, all the necessities of life are obtained with great certainty by the use of the simplest means. The luxuries are more difficult to obtain; the means to procure them are more intricate, and less certain in their results; while things absolutely hurtful and poisonous, such as alcohol and the like, are often obtained only by torturing nature and making use of a kind of infernal sorcery to procure death-dealing abominations.

This principle holds true in moral government, and as spiritual blessings are of surpassing importance, we should expect their attainment to be connected with great certainty with the use of the appropriate means; and such we find to be the fact. And I fully believe that, could facts be known, it would be found that when the appointed means have been rightly used, spiritual blessings have been obtained with greater uniformity than temporal ones.

II. WHAT A REVIVAL IS.

It presupposes that the Church is sunk down in a backslidden state, and a revival consists in the return of the Church from her backslidings, and in the conversion of sinners.

1. A revival always includes conviction of sin on the part of the Church. Backslidden professors cannot wake up and begin right away in the service of God, without deep searchings of heart. The fountains of sin need to be broken up. In a true revival, Christians are always brought under such conviction; they see their sins in such a light that often they find it impossible to maintain a hope of their acceptance with God. It does not always go to that extent, but there are always, in a genuine revival, deep convictions of sin, and often cases of abandoning all hope.

2. Backslidden Christians will be brought to repentance. A revival is nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God. Just as in the case of a converted sinner, the first step is a deep repentance, a breaking down of heart, a getting down into the dust before God, with deep humility, and a forsaking of sin.

3. Christians will have their faith renewed. While they are in their backslidden state they are blind to the state of sinners. Their hearts are hard as marble. The truths of the Bible appear like a dream. They admit it to be all true; their conscience and their judgment assent to it; but their faith does not see it standing out in bold relief, in all the burning realities of eternity. But when they enter into a revival, they no longer see "men as trees, walking," but they see things in that strong light which will renew the love of God in their hearts. This will lead them to labor zealously to bring others to Him. They will feel grieved that others do not love God, when they love Him so much. And they will set themselves feelingly to persuade their neighbors to give Him their hearts. So their love to men will be renewed. They will be filled with a tender and burning love for souls. They will have a longing desire for the salvation of the whole world. They will be in an agony for individuals whom they want to have saved - their friends, relations, enemies. They will not only be urging them to give their hearts to God, but they will carry them to God in the arms of faith, and with strong crying and tears beseech God to have mercy on them, and save their souls from endless burnings.

4. A revival breaks the power of the world and of sin over Christians. It brings them to such vantage ground that they get a fresh impulse towards heaven; they have a new foretaste of heaven, and new desires after union with God; thus the charm of the world is broken, and the power of sin overcome.

5. When the Churches are thus awakened and reformed, the reformation and salvation of sinners will follow. Their hearts will be broken down and changed. Very often the most abandoned profligates are among the subjects. Harlots, and dr

unkards, and infidels, and all sorts of abandoned characters, are awakened and converted. The worst of human beings are softened and reclaimed, and made to appear as lovely specimens of the beauty of holiness.

III. THE AGENCIES EMPLOYED.

Ordinarily, there are employed in the work of conversion three agents and one instrument. The agents are God; some person who brings the truth to bear on the mind; and the sinner himself. The instrument is the truth. There are always two agents, God and the sinner, employed and active in every case of genuine conversion.

1. The agency of God is twofold: by His Providence and by His Spirit.

(a) By His providential government He so arranges events as to bring the sinner's mind and the truth in contact. He brings the sinner where the truth reaches his ears or his eyes. It is often interesting to trace the manner in which God arranges events so as to bring this about, and how He sometimes makes everything seem to favor a revival. The state of the weather and of the public health and other circumstances concur to make everything just right to favor the application of truth with the greatest possible efficacy. How He sometimes sends a minister along just at the time he is wanted! How He brings out a particular truth just at the particular time when the individual it is fitted to reach is in the way to hear!

(b) God's special agency by His Holy Spirit. Having direct access to the mind, and knowing infinitely well the whole history and state of each individual sinner, He employs that truth which is best adapted to his particular case, and then drives it home with Divine power. He gives it such vividness, strength, and power that the sinner quails, and throws down his weapons of rebellion, and turns to the Lord. Under His influence the truth burns its way like fire. He makes the truth stand out in such aspects that it crushes the proudest man down with the weight of a mountain. If men were disposed to obey God, the truth is given with sufficient clearness in the Bible; and from preaching they could learn all that is necessary for them to know. But because they are wholly disinclined to obey it, God makes it clear before their minds, and pours in upon their souls a blaze of convincing light which they cannot withstand; and they yield to it, obey God, and are saved.

2. The agency of men is commonly employed. Men are not mere instruments in the hands of God. Truth is the instrument. The preacher is a moral agent in the work: he acts; he is not a mere passive instrument; he is voluntary in promoting the conversion of sinners.

3. The agency of the sinner himself. The conversion of a sinner consists in his obeying the truth. It is therefore impossible it should take place without his agency, for it consists in acting right. He is influenced to this by the agency of God and by the agency of men. Men act on their fellow-men, not only by language, but by their looks, their tears, their daily deportment. See that impenitent man, who has a pious wife. Her very looks, her tenderness, her solemn, compassionate dignity, softened and molded into the image of Christ, are a sermon to him all the time. He has to turn his mind away, because it is such a reproach to him. He feels a sermon ringing in his ears all day long.

Mankind are accustomed to read the countenances of their neighbors. Sinners often read the state of a Christian's mind in his eyes. If his eyes are full of levity, or worldly anxiety and contrivance, sinners read it. If they are full of the Spirit of God, sinners read it. The ungodly are often led to conviction simply by, seeing the countenance of Christians. An individual once went into a manufactory to see the machinery. His mind was solemn, as he had been where there was a revival. The people who labored there all knew him by sight, and knew who he was. A young lady who was at work saw him, and whispered some foolish remark to her companion, and laughed. The person stopped and looked at her with a feeling of grief. She stopped; her thread broke - and she was so much agitated that she could not join it. She looked out at the window to compose herself, and then tried again; again and again she strove to recover her self-command. At length she sat down, overcome by her feelings. The person then approached and spoke with her; she soon manifested a deep sense of sin. The feeling spread through the establishment like fire, and in a few hours almost every person employed there was under conviction; so much so that the owner, though a worldly man, was astounded, and requested to have the works stopped and a prayer-meeting held; for he said it was a great deal more important to have these people converted than to have the works go on. And in a few days the owner and nearly all the persons employed in the establishment were hopefully converted. The eye of this individual, his solemn countenance, his compassionate feeling, rebuked the levity of the young woman, and brought her under conviction of sin; and probably in a great measure this whole revival followed from so small an incident.

If Christians themselves have deep feeling on the subject of religion, they will produce deep feeling wherever they go. And if they are cold, or light and trifling, they inevitably destroy all deep feeling, even in awakened sinners.

I knew a case once of an individual who was very anxious, but one day I was grieved to find that her convictions seemed to be all gone. I asked her what she had been doing. She told me she had been spending the afternoon at a certain place, among some professors of religion - not thinking that it would dissipate her convictions to spend an afternoon with professors of religion! But they were trifling and vain people, and her convictions were lost. And no doubt those professors of

f religion, by their folly, destroyed a soul, for her convictions did not return.

The Church is required to use the means for the conversion of sinners. Sinners cannot properly be said to use the means for their own conversion. The Church uses the means. What sinners do is to submit to the truth, or to resist it. It is a mistake of sinners, to think they are using means for their own conversion. The whole drift of a revival, and everything about it, is designed to present the truth to your mind, for your obedience or resistance.

REMARKS.

1. Revivals were formerly regarded as miracles. And it has been so by some even in our day. And others have ideas on the subject so loose and unsatisfactory, that if they would only think, they would see their absurdity. For a long time it was supposed by the Church that a revival was a miracle, an interposition of Divine power, with which they had nothing to do, and which they had no more agency in producing than they had in producing thunder, or a storm of hail, or an earthquake. It is only within a few years that ministers generally have supposed revivals were to be promoted, by the use of means designed and adapted specially to that object. It has been supposed that revivals came just as showers do, sometimes in one town, and sometimes in another, and that ministers and Churches could do nothing more to produce them than they could to make showers of rain come on their own town, when they were falling on a neighboring town. It used to be supposed that a revival would come "about once in fifteen years, when all would be converted that God intended to save," after which the Church must wait until another crop came forward on the stage of life. Finally, the time got shortened down to five years; it was supposed there might be a revival about as often as that!

I have heard a fact in relation to a pastor who entertained this supposition - that a revival might come about once in five years. There had been a revival in his congregation. The next year there was a revival in a neighboring town, and he went there to preach, staying several days, till he became engrossed in the work. He returned home on a Saturday, and went into his study to prepare for the Sabbath. His soul was in agony. He thought how many adult persons there were in his congregation at enmity with God. He reasoned thus: "There are so many still unconverted; so many persons die yearly - such a portion of them unconverted; if a revival does not come under five years, so many adult heads of families will be lost." He put down his calculations on paper, and embodied them in his sermon for the next day, with his heart bleeding at the dreadful picture. As I understood it, he did not do this with any expectation of a revival; but he felt deeply, and poured out his heart to his people; and that sermon awakened forty heads of families, and a powerful revival followed; and so his theory about a revival once in five years was exploded. Thus God has overthrown, generally, the theory that revivals are miracles.

2. Revivals have been greatly hindered by mistaken notions concerning the Sovereignty of God. Many people have supposed God's Sovereignty to be something very different from what it is. They have supposed it to be such an arbitrary disposal of events, and particularly of the gift of His Spirit, as precluded a rational employment of means for promoting a revival. But there is no evidence from the Bible that God exercises any such sovereignty. There are no facts to prove it, but everything goes to show that God has connected means with the end, through all the departments of His government, in nature and in grace. There is no natural event in which His own agency is not concerned. He has not built the creation like a vast machine that will go on alone, without His further care. He has not retired from the universe, to let it work for itself. That is mere Deism. He exercises a universal superintendence and control. And yet every event in nature has been brought about by means. He administers neither providence nor grace with that sort of sovereignty that dispenses with the use of means. There is no more sovereignty in the one than in the other.

And yet some people are terribly alarmed at all direct efforts to promote a revival, and they cry out: "You are trying to get up a revival in your own strength. Take care, you are interfering with the Sovereignty of God. Better keep along in the usual course, and let God give a revival when He thinks it is best. God is a Sovereign, and it is very wrong for you to attempt to get up a revival, just because you think a revival is needed."

This is just such preaching as the devil wants. And men cannot do the devil's work more effectually than by preaching up the Sovereignty of God as a reason why we should not put forth efforts to produce a revival.

3. You see the error of those who are beginning to think that religion can be better promoted in the world without revivals, and who are disposed to give up all efforts to produce religious awakenings. Because there are evils arising in some instances out of great excitements on the subject of religion, they are of opinion that it is best to dispense with them altogether. This cannot, and must not be. True, there is danger of abuses. In cases of great religious as well as in other excitements, more or fewer incidental evils may be expected, of course. But this is no reason why revivals should be given up. The best things are always liable to abuses. Great and manifold evils have originated under (but not because of) the providential and moral governments of God. So in revivals of religion, it is found by experience, that in the present state of the world, religion cannot be promoted to any considerable extent without them. The evils which are sometimes complained of, when they are real, are accidental, and of small importance when compared with the amount of good produced by revivals. The sentiment should not be admitted by the Church for a moment, that revivals may be given up. It is fraught

with all that is dangerous to the interests of Zion, is death to the cause of missions, and brings in its train the damnation of the world.

4. Finally: I have not commenced this course of Lectures on Revivals to get up a curious theory of my own on the subject. I would not spend my time and strength merely to give instructions, to gratify curiosity, and furnish people with something to talk about. I have no idea of a preaching about revivals. It is not my design to preach so as to have you able to say at the close: "We understand all about revivals now," while you do nothing. Will you follow the instructions I shall give you from the Word of God, and then put them in practice in your own lives? Will you bring them to bear upon your families, your acquaintance, neighbors, and through the city? Or will you spend the time in learning about revivals, and do nothing for them? I want you as fast as you learn anything on the subject of revivals, to put it in practice, and go to work and see if you cannot promote a revival among sinners here. If you will not do this, I wish you to let me know at the beginning, so that I need not waste my strength. You ought to decide now whether you will do this or not. You know that we call sinners to decide on the spot whether they will obey the Gospel. And we have no more authority to let you take time to deliberate whether you will obey God, than we have to let sinners do so. We call on you to unite now in a solemn pledge to God, that you will do your duty as fast as you learn what it is, and to pray that He will pour out His Spirit upon this Church and upon all the city.

[Back to Top](#)

LECTURE II

WHEN A REVIVAL IS TO BE EXPECTED

Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee? - Psalm 85:6.

The Psalmist felt that God had been very favorable to the people, and while contemplating the goodness of the Lord in bringing them back from the land whither they had been carried away captive, and while looking at the prospects before them, he breaks out into a prayer for a revival of religion: "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?" Since God in His providence had re-established the ordinances of His house among them, he prays that there may be a revival of religion to crown the work.

In my first Lecture I attempted to show what a revival of religion is not, what a revival is, and the agencies to be employed in promoting it. The topics to which I now wish to call attention are:

I. When a revival of religion is needed.

II. The importance of a revival when it is needed.

III. When a revival of religion may be expected.

I. WHEN A REVIVAL OF RELIGION IS NEEDED.

1. When there is a want of brotherly love and Christian confidence among professors of religion, then a revival is needed. Then there is a loud call for God to revive His work. When Christians have sunk down into a low and backslidden state, they neither have, nor can have, the same love and confidence toward each other, as when they are all alive, and active, and living holy lives. God loves all men with the love of benevolence, but He does not feel the love of complacency toward any but those who live holy. Christians love each other with the love of complacency, only in proportion to their holiness. If Christian love is the love of the image of Christ in His people, then it can be exercised only where that image really or apparently exists. A person must reflect the image of Christ, and show the spirit of Christ before other Christians can love him with the love of complacency. It is in vain to call on Christians to love one another with the love of complacency, as Christians, when they are sunk down in stupidity. They see nothing in each other to produce this love. It is next to impossible that they should feel otherwise toward each other than they do toward sinners. Merely knowing that they belong to the Church, or seeing them occasionally at the Communion table, will not produce Christian love, unless they see the image of Christ.

2. When there are dissensions, and jealousies, and evil speakings among professors of religion, then there is a great need

ed of a revival. These things show that Christians have got far from God, and it is time to think earnestly of a revival. Religion cannot prosper with such things in the Church, and nothing can put an end to them like a revival.

3. When there is a worldly spirit in the Church. It is manifest that the Church has sunk down into a low and backslidden state, when you see Christians conform to the world in dress, equipage, and "parties," in seeking worldly amusements, and reading novels, and other books such as the world reads. It shows that they are far from God, and that there is great need of a revival of religion.

4. When the Church finds its members falling into gross and scandalous sins, then it is time to awake and cry to God for a revival of religion. When such things are taking place as give the enemies of religion an occasion for reproach, it is time to ask of God: "What will become of Thy great Name?"

5. When there is a spirit of controversy in the Church or in the land, a revival is needful. The spirit of religion is not the spirit of controversy. There can be no prosperity in religion where the spirit of controversy prevails.

6. When the wicked triumph over the Churches, and revile them, it is time to seek for a revival of religion.

7. When sinners are careless and stupid, it is time Christians should bestir themselves. It is as much their duty to awake as it is for the firemen to do so when a fire breaks out in the night in a great city. The Church ought to put out the fires of hell which are laying hold of the wicked. Sleep! Should the firemen sleep and let the whole city burn down, what would be thought of such firemen? And yet their guilt would not compare with the guilt of Christians who sleep while sinners around them are sinking stupidly into the fires of hell.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF A REVIVAL IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES.

1. A revival of religion is the only possible thing that can wipe away the reproach which covers the Church, and restore religion to the place it ought to have in the estimation of the public. Without a revival, this reproach will cover the Church more and more, until it is overwhelmed with universal contempt. You may do anything else you please, and you may change the aspects of society in some respects, but you will do no real good; you only make it worse without a revival of religion. You may go and build a splendid new house of worship, and line your seats with damask, put up a costly pulpit, and get a magnificent organ, and everything of that kind, to make a show and dash, and in that way you may procure a sort of respect for religion among the wicked, but it does no good in reality. It rather does hurt. It misleads them as to the real nature of religion; and so far from converting them, it carries them farther away from salvation. Look wherever they have surrounded the altar of Christianity with splendor, and you will find that the impression produced is contrary to the true nature of religion. There must be a waking up of energy on the part of Christians, and an outpouring of God's Spirit, or the world will laugh at the Church.

2. Nothing else will restore Christian love and confidence among Church members. Nothing but a revival can restore it, and nothing else ought to restore it. There is no other way to wake up that love of Christians for one another which is sometimes felt, when they have such love as they cannot express. You cannot have such love without confidence; and you cannot restore confidence without such evidence of piety as is seen in a revival. If a minister find he has lost in any degree the confidence of his people, he ought to labor for a revival as the only means of regaining their confidence.

I do not mean that his motive in laboring for a revival should be merely to regain the confidence of his people, but that a revival through his instrumentality (and ordinarily nothing else) will restore to him the confidence of the praying part of his people. So if an elder or private member of the Church finds his brethren cold towards him, there is but one way to restore it. It is by being revived himself, and pouring out from his eyes and from his life the splendor of the Image of Christ. The spirit will catch and spread in the Church; confidence will be renewed, and brotherly love prevail again.

3. At such a time a revival of religion is indispensable to avert the judgments of God from the Church. It is his would be a strange preaching if revivals were only miracles. and if the Church has no more agency in producing them than it has in producing a thunderstorm. We could not then say to the Church: "Unless there is a revival you may expect judgments." The fact is, Christians are more to blame for not being revived, than sinners are for not being converted. And if they are not awakened, they may know assuredly that God will visit them with His judgments.

How often God visited the Jewish Church with judgments because they would not repent and be revived at the call of His prophets! How often have we seen Churches, and even whole denominations, cursed with a curse, because they would not wake up and seek the Lord, and pray: "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?"

4. Nothing but a revival of religion can preserve such a Church from annihilation. A Church declining in this way cannot continue to exist without a revival. If it receives new members, they will, for the most part, be made up of ungodly persons. Without revivals there will not ordinarily be as many persons converted as will die off in a year. There have been Churches in this country where the members have died off, and, since there were no revivals to convert others in their place, t

he Church has "run out," and the organization has been dissolved.

A minister told me he once labored as a missionary in Virginia, on the ground where such a man as Samuel Davies once shone like a flaming torch; and that Davies' Church was so reduced as to have but one male member, and he, if I remember right, was a colored man. The Church had got proud, and was "run out." I have heard of a Church in Pennsylvania, that was formerly flourishing, but neglected revivals, and it became so reduced that the pastor had to send to a neighboring Church for a ruling elder when he administered the Communion. (Why not, in such a case, let any member of the Church, male or female, distribute the elements? Is it indispensable to have an elder?)

5. Nothing but a revival of religion can prevent the means of grace from doing a great injury to the ungodly. Without a revival they will grow harder and harder under preaching, and will experience a more horrible damnation than they would if they had never heard the Gospel. Your children and your friends will go down to a much more horrible fate in hell, in consequence of the means of grace, if there are no revivals to convert them to God. Better were it for them if there were no means of grace, no sanctuary, no Bible, no preaching, than to live and die where there is no revival. The Gospel is the savor of death unto death, if it is not made a savor of life unto life.

6. There is no other way in which a Church can be sanctified, grow in grace, and be fitted for heaven. What is "growing in grace"? Is it hearing sermons and getting some new notions about religion? No; no such thing.

The Christian who does this, and nothing more, is getting worse and worse, more and more hardened, and every week it is more difficult to rouse him up to duty.

III. WHEN A REVIVAL MAY BE EXPECTED.

1. When the providence of God indicates that a revival is at hand. The indications of God's providence are sometimes so plain as to amount to a revelation of His will. There is a conspiring of events to open the way, a preparation of circumstances to favor a revival, so that those who are looking out can see that a revival is at hand, just as plainly as if it had been revealed from heaven. Cases have occurred in this country where the providential manifestations were so plain that those who were careful observers felt no hesitation in saying that God was coming to pour out His Spirit and grant a revival.

There are various ways for God so to indicate

His will to a people; sometimes by giving them peculiar means, sometimes by peculiar and alarming events, sometimes by remarkably favoring the employment of means, or by the state of the public health.

2. When the wickedness of the wicked grieves and humbles and distresses Christians. Sometimes Christians do not seem to mind anything about the wickedness around them. Or, if they do talk about it, it is in a cold, and callous, and unfeeling way, as if they despaired of a reformation: they are disposed to scold sinners - not to feel the compassion of the Son of God for them. But sometimes the conduct of the wicked drives Christians to prayer, breaks them down, and makes them sorrowful and tender-hearted, so that they can weep day and night, and instead of scolding the wicked they pray earnestly for them. Then you may expect a revival. Indeed, it is begun already.

Sometimes the wicked will get up an opposition to religion. And when this drives Christians to their knees in prayer to God, with strong crying and tears, you may be certain there is going to be a revival. The prevalence of wickedness is no evidence at all that there is not going to be a revival. That is often God's time to work. When the enemy cometh in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him. Often the first indication of a revival is that the devil gets up something new in opposition. This will invariably have one of two effects. It will either drive Christians to God, or it will drive them farther away from God, to some carnal policy or other that will only make things worse. Frequently the most outrageous wickedness of the ungodly is followed by a revival. If Christians are made to feel that they have no hope but in God, and if they have sufficient feeling left to care for the honor of God and the salvation of the souls of the impenitent, there will certainly be a revival. Let hell boil over if it will, and spew out as many devils as there are stones in the pavement, if it only drives Christians to God in prayer - it cannot hinder a revival. Let Satan "get up a row," and sound his horn as loud as he pleases; if Christians will only be humbled and pray, they shall soon see God's naked arm in a revival of religion. I have known instances where a revival has broken in upon the ranks of the enemy, almost as suddenly as a clap of thunder, and scattered them, taken the ringleaders as trophies, and broken up their party in an instant.

3. A revival may be expected when Christians have a spirit of prayer for a revival. That is, when they pray as if their hearts were set upon it.

Sometimes Christians are not engaged in definite prayer for a revival, not even when they are warm in prayer. Their minds are upon something else; they are praying for something else - the salvation of the heathen and the like - and not for a revival among themselves. But when they feel the want of a revival, they pray for it; they feel for their own families and neighborhoods; they pray for them as if they could not be denied. What constitutes a spirit of prayer? Is it many prayers and warm words? No.

Prayer is the state of the heart. The spirit of prayer is a state of continual desire and anxiety of mind for the salvation of sinners. It is something that weighs them down. It is the same, so far as the philosophy of mind is concerned, as when a man is anxious for some worldly interest. A Christian who has this spirit of prayer feels anxious for souls. It is the subject

of his thoughts all the time, and makes him look and act as if he had a load on his mind. He thinks of it by day, and dreams of it by night.

This is properly "praying without ceasing." His prayers seem to flow from his heart liquid as water: "O Lord, revive Thy work." Sometimes this feeling is very deep; persons have been bowed down so that they could neither stand nor sit. I can name men in this State, of firm nerves, who stand high in character, who have been absolutely crushed with grief for the state of sinners. The feeling is not always so great as this, but such things are much more common than is supposed. In the great revivals in 1826, they were common.

This is by no means enthusiasm. It is just what Paul felt when he said: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth." This travail of soul is that deep agony which persons feel when they lay hold on God for such a blessing, and will not let Him go till they receive it. I do not mean to be understood that it is essential to a spirit of prayer that the distress should be so great as this. But this deep, continual, earnest desire for the salvation of sinners is what constitutes the spirit of prayer for a revival.

When this feeling exists in a Church, unless the Spirit is grieved away by sin, there will infallibly be a revival of Christians generally, and it will involve the conversion of sinners to God. A clergyman once told me of a revival among his people, which commenced with a zealous and devoted woman in the Church. She became anxious about sinners, and gave herself to praying for them; she prayed, and her distress increased; and she finally came to her minister and talked with him asking him to appoint an anxious inquirers' meeting, for she felt that one was needed. The minister put her off, for he felt nothing of any such need. The next week she came again, and besought him again to appoint such a meeting. She knew there would be somebody to come, for she felt as if God was going to pour out His Spirit. The minister once more put her off. And finally she said to him: "If you do not appoint the meeting I shall die, for there is certainly going to be a revival." The next Sabbath he appointed a meeting, and said that if there were any who wished to converse with him about the salvation of their souls, he would meet them on such an evening. He did not know of one, but when he went to the place, to his astonishment he found a large number of anxious inquirers. Now, do not you think that woman knew there was going to be a revival? Call it what you please, a new revelation or an old revelation, or anything else. I say it was the Spirit of God that taught that praying woman there was going to be a revival. "The secret of the Lord" was with her, and she knew it. She knew God had been in her heart, and filled it so full that she could contain no longer.

Sometimes ministers have had this distress about their congregations, so that they felt as if they could not live unless they saw a revival.

Sometimes elders and deacons, or private members of the Church, men or women, have the spirit of prayer for a revival of religion, so that they will hold on and prevail with God, till He pours out His Spirit. The first ray of light that broke in upon the midnight which rested on the Churches in Oneida County, in the fall of 1825, was from a woman in feeble health, who, I believe, had never been in a powerful revival. Her soul was exercised about sinners. She was in an agony for the land. She did not know what ailed her, but she kept praying more and more, till it seemed as if her agony would destroy her body. At length she became full of joy, and exclaimed. "God has come! God has come! There is no mistake about it, the work is begun, and is going all over the region." And sure enough the work began, and her family were all converted, and the work spread all over that part of the country. Now, do you think that woman was deceived? I tell you, no. She knew she had prevailed with God in prayer.

Generally there are but few professors of religion who know anything about this spirit of prayer which prevails with God. I have been amazed to see such accounts as are often published about revivals, as if the revival had come without any cause - nobody knew why or wherefore. I have sometimes inquired into such cases; when it had been given out that nobody knew anything about it until one Sabbath they saw by the faces of the congregation that God was there, or they saw it in their conference-room, or prayer-meeting, and were astonished at the mysterious Sovereignty of God in bringing in a revival without any apparent connection with means.

Now mark me. Go and inquire among the obscure members of the Church and you will always find that somebody had been praying for a revival, and was expecting it - some man or woman had been agonizing in prayer for the salvation of sinners, until the blessing was gained. It may have found the minister and the body of the Church fast asleep, and they would wake up all of a sudden, like a man just rubbing his eyes open, running round the room, pushing things over, and wondering where all the excitement comes from. But though few knew it, you may be sure there had been somebody on the watch-tower, constant in prayer till the blessing came. Generally, a revival is more or less extensive, as there are more or less persons who have the spirit of prayer.

4. Another sign that a revival may be expected is when the attention of ministers is especially directed to this particular o

ject, and when their preaching and other efforts are aimed particularly at the conversion of sinners. Most of the time the labors of ministers are, it would seem, directed to other objects. They seem to preach and labor with no particular design to effect the immediate conversion of sinners, and then it need not be expected that there will be a revival under their preaching. There never will be a revival till somebody makes particular efforts for this end. But when the attention of a minister is directed to the state of the families in his congregation, and when his heart is full of feeling of the necessity of a revival, and he puts forth the proper efforts for this end, then you may be prepared to expect a revival. As I have explained, the connection between the right use of means for a revival, and a revival, is as philosophically sure as between the right use of means to raise grain, and a crop of wheat. I believe, in fact, it is more certain, and that there are fewer instances of failure. The effect is more certain to follow. Probably the law connecting cause and effect is more undeviating in spiritual than in natural things, and so there are fewer exceptions. The paramount importance of spiritual things makes it reasonable that it should be so.

Take the Bible, the nature of the case, and the history of the Church all together, and you will find fewer failures in the use of means for a revival than in farming or any other worldly business. In worldly affairs there are sometimes cases where counteracting causes annihilate all a man can do. In raising grain, for instance, there are cases which are beyond the control of man, such as drought, hard winter, worms, and so on. So in laboring to promote a revival, there may things occur to counteract it, something or another suddenly diverting the public attention from religion, which may baffle every effort. But I believe there are fewer such cases in the moral than in the natural world. I have seldom seen an individual fail when he used the means for promoting a revival in earnest, in the manner pointed out in the Word of God. I believe a man may enter on the work of promoting a revival with as reasonable an expectation of success as he can enter on any other work with an expectation of success - with the same expectation as the farmer has of a crop when he sows his grain. I have sometimes seen this tried and succeed under circumstances the most forbidding that can be conceived.

The great revival at Rochester 10 began under the most disadvantageous circumstances that could well be imagined. It seemed as though Satan had interposed every possible obstacle to a revival. The three Churches were at variance. One had no minister: one was divided and was about to dismiss its minister. An elder of the third Presbyterian Church had brought a charge against the pastor of the first Church. After the work began, one of the first things was, the great stone Church gave way and created a panic. 11 Then one of the Churches went on and dismissed their minister right in the midst of it. Many other things occurred, so that it seemed as if the devil were determined to divert public attention from the subject of religion. But there were a few remarkable cases of the spirit of prayer, which assured us that God was there, and we went on; and the more Satan opposed, the Spirit of the Lord lifted up the standard higher and higher, till finally a wave of salvation rolled over the place.

5. A revival of religion may be expected when Christians begin to confess their sins to one another. At other times they confess in a general manner, as if they are only half in earnest. They may do it in eloquent language, but it does not mean anything. But when there is an ingenuous breaking down, and a pouring out of the heart in confession of sin, the flood-gates will soon burst open, and salvation will flow over the place.

A revival may be expected whenever Christians are found willing to make the sacrifices necessary to carry it on. They must be willing to sacrifice their feelings, their business, their time, to help forward the work.

Ministers must be willing to lay out their strength, and to jeopardize their health and life. They must be willing to offend the impenitent by plain and faithful dealing, and perhaps offend many members of the Church who will not come up to the work. They must take a decided stand with the revival, be the consequences what they may. They must be prepared to go on with the work even though they should lose the affections of all the impenitent, and of all the cold part of the Church. The minister must be prepared, if it be the will of God, to be driven away from the place. He must be determined to go straight forward, and leave the entire event with God.

I knew a minister who had a young man laboring with him in a revival. The young man preached pretty plain truth and the wicked did not like him.

They said: "We like our minister and we wish to have him preach." They finally said so much that the minister told the young man: "Such and such a person, who gives so much towards my support, says so-and-so; Mr. A. also says so, and Mr. B. likewise. They think it will break up the society if you continue to preach, and I think you had better not preach any more." The young man went away, but the Spirit of God immediately withdrew from the place and the revival stopped short. The minister, by yielding to the wicked desires of the ungodly, drove Him away, being afraid that the devil would drive him away from his people. So by undertaking to satisfy the devil he offended God. And God so ordered events that in a short time the minister had to leave his people after all. He undertook to go between the devil and God, and God dismissed him.

So the people, also, must be willing to have a revival, let the sacrifice be what it may. It will not do for them to say: "We a

re willing to attend so many meetings, but we cannot attend any more." Or: "We are willing to have a revival if it will not disturb our arrangements about our business, or prevent our making money." I tell you, such people will never have a revival till they are willing to do anything, and sacrifice anything, that God indicates to be their duty. Christian merchants must feel willing to lock up their stores for six months, if it is necessary to carry on a revival. I do not mean that any such thing is called for, or that it is their duty to do so. But if there should be such a state of feeling as to call for it, then it would be their duty and they ought to be willing to do it. They ought to be willing to do it at the call of God, for He can easily burn down their stores if they do not. In fact, I should not be sorry to see such a revival in New York, as would make every merchant in the city lock up his store till spring, and say that he had sold goods enough and would now give up his whole time to leading sinners to Christ.

7. A revival may be expected when ministers and professors are willing to have God promote it by whatsoever instruments He pleases. Sometimes ministers are not willing to have a revival unless they can have the management of it, or unless their agency can be conspicuous in promoting it. They wish to prescribe to God what He shall direct and bless, and what men He shall put forward. They will have no new measures. they cannot have any of this "new-light" 12 preaching, or of these evangelists that go about the country preaching! They have a good deal to say about God being a Sovereign, and that He will have revivals come in His own way and time. But then He must choose to have it just in their way or they will have nothing to do with it. Such men will sleep on until they are awakened by the judgment trumpet, without a revival, unless they are willing that God should come in His own way - unless they are willing to have anything or anybody employed that will do the most good.

8. Strictly I should say that when the foregoing things occur, a revival, to some extent, already exists. In truth a revival should be expected whenever it is needed. If we need to be revived it is our duty to be revived. If it is duty it is possible, and we should set about being revived ourselves, and, relying on the promise of Christ to be with us in making disciples always and everywhere, we ought to labor to revive Christians and convert sinners, with a confident expectation of success. Therefore, whenever the Church needs reviving, it ought and may expect to be revived, and to see sinners converted to Christ. When those things are seen which are named under the foregoing heads, let Christians and ministers be encouraged and know that a good work is already begun. Follow it up.

REMARKS.

1. Brethren, you can tell from our subject, whether you need a revival or not, in your Church or in your city, and whether you are going to have one or not. Elders of the Church, men, women, any of you, and all of you - what do you say? Do you need a revival? Do you expect to have one?

Have you any reason to expect one? You need not be in any mist about it, for you know, or can know if you will, whether you have any reason to look for a revival.

2. You see why you have not a revival. It is only because you do not want one. Because you are neither praying for it, nor feeling anxious for it, nor putting forth efforts for it. I appeal to your own consciences: Are you making these efforts now, to promote a revival? You know, brethren, what the truth is about it. Will you stand up and say that you have made efforts for a revival and have been disappointed - that you have cried to God: "Wilt Thou not revive us?" and that God would not do it?

3 Do you wish a revival? Will you have one? if God should ask you this moment, by an audible voice from heaven, "Do you want a revival?" would you dare to say: "Yes"? If He were to ask: "Are you willing to make the sacrifices?" would you answer: "Yes"? And if He said: "When shall it begin?" would you answer: "Let it begin tonight - let it begin here - let it begin in my heart NOW"? Would you dare to say so to God, if you should hear His voice tonight?

[Back to Top](#)

LECTURE III

HOW TO PROMOTE A REVIVAL

Break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you. - Hosea 10:12.

The Jews were a nation of farmers, and it is therefore a common thing in the Scriptures to refer for illustrations to their occupation, and to the scenes with which farmers and shepherds are familiar. The prophet Hosea addresses them as a nation of backsliders; he reproves them for their idolatry, and threatens them with the judgments of God. I have shown in my first Lecture what a revival is not, what it is, and what are the agencies to be employed in promoting it; and in my second

and, when it is needed, its importance, and when it may be expected. My design in this Lecture is to show how a revival is to be promoted.

A revival consists of two parts: as it respects the Church, and as it respects the ungodly. I shall speak on this occasion of a revival in the Church. Fallow ground is ground which has once been tilled, but which now lies waste, and needs to be broken up and mellowed, before it is suited to receive grain. I shall show, as it respects a revival in the Church:

I. What it is to break up the fallow ground, in the sense of the text.

II. How it is to be performed.

I. WHAT IS IT TO BREAK UP THE FALLOW GROUND?

To break up the fallow ground is to break up your hearts, to prepare your minds to bring forth fruit unto God. The mind of man is often compared in the Bible to ground, and the Word of God to seed sown therein, the fruit representing the actions and affections of those who receive it. To break up the fallow ground, therefore, is to bring the mind into such a state that it is fitted to receive the Word of God. Sometimes your hearts get matted down, hard and dry, till there is no such thing as getting fruit from them till they are broken up, and mellowed down, and fitted to receive the Word. It is this softening of the heart, so as to make it feel the truth, which the prophet calls breaking up your fallow ground.

II. HOW IS THE FALLOW GROUND TO BE BROKEN UP?

It is not by any direct efforts to feel. People fall into a mistake on this subject, from not making the laws of mind the object of thought. There are great errors on the subject of the laws which govern the mind. People talk about religious feeling as if they could, by direct effort, call forth religious affection. But this is not the way the mind acts. No man can make himself feel in this way, merely by trying to feel. The feelings of the mind are not directly under our control. We cannot by willing, or by direct volition, call forth religious feelings. We might as well think to "call spirits from the vastly deep." They are purely involuntary states of mind. They naturally and necessarily exist in the mind under certain circumstances calculated to excite them. But they can be controlled indirectly. Otherwise there would be no moral character in our feelings, if there were not a way to control them. One cannot say: "Now I will feel so-and-so towards such an object." But we can command our attention to it, and look at it intently, till the proper feeling arises. Let a man who is away from his family bring them up before his mind, and will he not feel? But it is not by saying to himself: "Now I will feel deeply for my family." A man can direct his attention to any object, about which he ought to feel and wishes to feel, and in that way he will call into existence the proper emotions. Let a man call up his enemy before his mind, and his feelings of enmity will rise. So if a man thinks of God, and fastens his mind on any parts of God's character, he will feel - emotions will come up by the very laws of mind.

If he is a friend of God, let him contemplate God as a gracious and holy Being, and he will have emotions of friendship kindled in his mind. If he is an enemy of God, only let him get the true character of God before his mind, and look at it, and fasten his attention on it, and then his bitter enmity will rise against God, or he will break down and give his heart to God.

If you mean to break up the fallow ground of your hearts, and make your minds feel on the subject of religion, you must go to work just as you would to feel on any other subject. Instead of keeping your thoughts on everything else, and then imagining that by going to a few meetings you will get your feelings enlisted, go the common-sense way to work, as you would on any other subject. It is just as easy to make your minds feel on the subject of religion as it is on any other. God has put these states of mind under your control. If people were as unphilosophical about moving their limbs as they are about regulating their emotions, you would never have reached this meeting.

If you mean to break up the fallow ground of your hearts, you must begin by looking at your hearts: examine and note the state of your minds, and see where you are. Many never seem to think about this. They pay no attention to their own hearts, and never know whether they are doing well in religion or not; whether they are gaining ground or going back; whether they are fruitful, or lying waste. Now you must draw off your attention from other things, and look into this. Make a business of it. Do not be in a hurry. Examine thoroughly the state of your hearts, and see where you are: whether you are walking with God every day, or with the devil; whether you are serving God or serving the devil most; whether you are under the dominion of the prince of darkness, or of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To do all this, you must set yourself to work to consider your sins. You must examine yourselves. And by this I do not mean that you must stop and look directly within to see what is the present state of your feelings.

That is the very way to put a stop to all feeling. That is just as absurd as it would be for a man to shut his eyes on the lamp, and try to turn his eyes inward to find whether there was any image painted on the retina.

The man complains that he does not see anything! And why? Because he has turned his eyes away from the objects of sight. The truth is, our moral feelings are as much an object of consciousness as our senses. And the way to find them out is to go on acting, and employing our minds. Then we can tell our moral feelings by consciousness, just as I could tell my natural feelings by consciousness if I should put my hand in the fire.

Self-examination consists in looking at your lives, in considering your actions, i