

What Saith the Scripture?

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Revival- No. 3

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

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Lecture XIX

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Text.--Psa. 85:6: "Wilt Thou not receive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?"

VII. I will now notice some objections that are sometimes urged to revivals of religion.

- 1. It is objected to them that there is a great deal of excitement connected with them.

To this I reply,

- (1.) Is there not a good reason for excitement? What is excitement but a quickened activity of the Intelligence, of the Sensibility, and of the Will? Now is there not everything in religion that is calculated to excite the mind? Can it avoid being excited if it has any realizing apprehension of the great truths of religion? Men may be excited on any and every other subject; and why not be excited on the subject of religion?

Indeed, politicians, business men, all classes of men, if they wish to secure public action on any subject, try to excite the people, to interest them, to get their attention. to arouse them to excited action and feeling. Now this is all philosophical; it is common sense, as every one knows. Now why should not this be done on the subject of religion? Is there not the best of all reasons for being excited on this subject?

- (2.) I would ask those who make this objection, if they really expect an individual case of sound conversion to occur without any excitement. Suppose a professed convert were to come and make application for admission into the church. You ask him, as usual, to tell his religious experience, his reason for thinking himself a Christian. Now suppose in his narrative there should be no appearance of his having any peculiar interest in religion. You find that he has not been excited at all; there has been nothing unusual occurring in his mind so far as its excited state on religious questions is concerned.

Would you believe him a true convert? Would you not tell him, No Sir; the fountain of the great deep in your heart has not been broken up. You have not

been truly convicted of sin; you have not truly come to Christ with all your heart.

But suppose, on the contrary, you found that he had been strongly but intelligently excited; that he had had true conviction of sin; that the fountain of the great deep had been broken up in his soul; and suppose he should tell you an experience which showed that the whole power of his being had been drawn into action in his religious experience -- who is there among you who would not prefer this form of experience in an individual case? Very well? now what is a revival but the occurrence of many such cases at the same time? Where masses are convicted, the great mass of professors greatly stirred up and interested in the salvation of souls, and individual cases of conviction and conversion are multiplied till it moves the community. This is the case in a general revival of religion. Here then is a general excitement -- but is there not good reason for it? What objection is there to all this? What otherwise could be expected?

What otherwise could be desired? It is the very thing that is needed. It is the very manner in which God has always wrought. Why, then, is excitement objected to as connected with revivals of religion? The objection is manifestly absurd. Could you be made, in short, to believe that that was a true revival of religion where there should be no excitement manifested by the church or the world? No; you could not believe that it was. In every age of the world when the Spirit of God has been poured out, men have been convicted of sin and the truth of God has been made plain by the Holy Ghost. It has aroused the community; it has moved individual minds; and even the masses have been moved as the trees of the forest are moved in a tempest. And what is the objection to all this? There is no valid objection to it.

- 2. Danger of delusion.

Many persons have the impression that converts are much likely to be deceived, or to obtain a false hope, in a revival of religion, than when they are more calm, and when there are no external circumstances of excitement, and no revival. But why should this be so?

- (1.) In the first place, if a revival is judiciously managed; if the preaching be thorough, and searching, and practical; if it be to the point; if it strip away the sinner's refuges; if it shut him up to Christ, and real revival preaching always does -- why should there be more danger of delusion under such circumstances, though many are attending to it at the same time? The reason that has been assigned for this danger is this: they say that many are affected by sympathy. They see others affected, and they become affected by sympathy. Now, what is intended by this? Is it supposed that the Holy Ghost never works through the principle of sympathy in human beings? Is this assumed? If it is, the assumption is as false as possible. Why set human beings to persuade human beings? Why set friends to labor with friends? The fact is, that through what we call sympathy,

the Holy Ghost works largely, and always did. The very tears the minister sheds when preaching to the ungodly -- these tears preach, as well as the words. The look of anguish, the look of affection, the earnestness of manner and voice -- why these all preach; these all communicate truth; these all serve to impress the mind, and give to the audience a higher appreciation of the truths of the Gospel. Just so the tears that accompany the pleadings of young converts; their earnest appeals; the concern which they manifest for souls; the love which they manifest for Christ; all this, to be sure, is calculated to excite sympathy, but also to beget attention, to make the truth appear to be truth, and everything of this kind.

All the earnestness of the community, all the earnestness of converts, all the earnestness of convicted sinners -- all the whole movement in a revival, is preaching. It is the loudest, most effectual appeal to the conscience and the heart of all around. It serves to make truth real and to wake up an interest in the masses; and it seems as if it were next to impossible that persons should be deceived. So many instrumentalities are used, and there is so much on every side to make truth real, that if ever we might expect persons truly to embrace the truth, truly to understand the truth, truly to be subdued by it, these are the very circumstances under which we should expect such results.

- o (2.) But, an examination has been made on a large scale for the very purpose of testing this question, and deciding it.

A pamphlet was given to me a few years ago, containing statistics that had been gathered upon this subject by great painstaking. There had been in one of our large cities, and throughout a large district of country surrounding it, a very general revival of religion. It had been conducted mostly by a man who had been accused of being loose in his instructions, and of using a good deal of art in arresting attention and making an impression. When I heard of the manner in which those revivals were conducted, my own fears were excited. I must confess that I strongly doubted the result of such a method of conducting revivals; and indeed I do not now believe that this was a proper method of conducting revivals of religion.

After those revivals had passed some two or three years, those that opposed them began to cry out that the converts had all fallen away. Several ministers were deceived by this cry, and united in it. Those revivals were greatly stigmatized; and I had myself the impression, from what I had heard, that they had turned out disastrously.

But a good man, who lived in the region where the revival occurred, instituted an inquiry in every church to which that revival had extended. He requested the pastors to examine the church books, and see how many converts, received as the fruits of these revivals, had backslidden, had been dealt with, or censured, or deserved censure by the church. He wished to know the proportion of the whole number received that had fallen away; and

he desired the pastor to compare this with the number that had fallen away, who had been received into the church when there was no revival, and not as the fruit of a revival. The pastors made the returns to him in writing. I cannot now recollect the exact proportion; but of those that had been received as the fruit of those revivals, the number of backsliders was proportionately much smaller than was the number of backsliders among those who had been received as converted when there was no revival of religion.

This report was made four years after the revival had passed by.

Again, after four years more, making in the whole eight years, he made the same inquiry, and received substantially the same answer; that the backslidings of those who had been received as fruits of all those revivals were much less than of the same number of persons received into the church as converted when there were no revivals. These reports included a great number of churches, and a great number of converts. The result was published, as I have said; and one of the pamphlets was handed to me, which I have mislaid, or I should quote from its pages. This was highly satisfactory to me, because I had had more fears of the result than of almost any of which I have heard in this country. The examination was most fair, and the result most gratifying to the friends of revivals. But indeed, this is as might be expected. When everything favors the conversion of souls, we might expect, if ever, that they would be truly converted.

- o (3.) But, very much depends on the instruction given and the course pursued.

In the case to which I have referred, the pastors in that region of country were sound in doctrine; and no doubt, so far as their influence went, they gave sound instruction. The evangelist to whom reference has been made, is doubtless a good man, and gave correct instruction; and the means he used to make an impression, over and above the direct preaching of the gospel, although to some extent, perhaps, injurious, still did not so vary the result as to render the effect abortive, by any means.

I cannot recollect the exact proportion of backsliders as stated in the pamphlet. The impression on my mind is that it was much larger, however, than I have been in the habit of witnessing in revivals that have come under my own observation.

But still, as I have said, the proportion of those that fell away was very much less than the fallings in the same number of those that had been received when there was no revival. So that delusions under revivals conducted in that manner were not so common by any means as delusions that occur when there is no revival at all.

- o (4.) But again, why should this not be so? When everything surrounds men that is

calculated to impress them with the truth, as is the case in a revival of religion, why should they not be more likely to understand and embrace it aright, than when everything around them has a different tendency, as is the case when there is no revival of religion and the church is in a comparatively worldly state.

But, as I said, very much will depend on the course of instruction pursued, and upon the whole manner in which the thing is conducted from beginning to end. If the conduct of the work, so far as human instrumentality is concerned, be scriptural; if the preaching of the gospel be plain, and pungent, and adapted to secure sound conversion; if there is much prayer and labor on the part of God's people; if the convicted are not properly encouraged to entertain hope; if too much stress is not laid upon emotion, but the Will is thoroughly carried by the truth -- there is indeed very little danger of delusion under such circumstances, as I can testify from an experience of many years of this kind of work.

To be sure, converts will sometimes wax comparatively indifferent; but so far as my experience is concerned, they almost universally hold out better than the old members of the church that were converted when there was no revival.

I have often heard pastors testify to this, when I have inquired how the converts held out that were converted in those seasons when I had been present. The reply has been in substance, that they were the most efficient members of the church; that they held on their way a great deal better than the old members that had been received, not as the fruit of a revival, but as the fruit of ordinary ministrations in ordinary times.

Indeed, converts of powerful revivals of religion have more light, more love, more power, more consistency, greater usefulness by far than those who have joined the church when there was no revival of religion. This I believe will be the testimony of all the pastors and ministers in this country who have been acquainted with revival work. If this is not so, when this sermon comes to them let them speak out and bear opposite testimony, if an opposite testimony is the true one.

- 3. Third objection -- Re-action.

It is complained, in many case, that after a great excitement and religious revival, there is apt to be a great re-action; that the meeting will not be as well attended, that the church waxes cold and worldly, and that a discouraging state of things often succeeds a revival of religion.

To this I reply --

- (1.) What is intended by re-action? It is true that there may not be as much excitement

when the great mass of the community, or of the congregation, is converted. There may not be the same manifestation of feeling on the part of the church for the ungodly, or the same manifestation of fervor and overwhelming feeling that were exhibited by the converts on their first conversion; but surely this is not necessarily a re-action, in the sense that there is really less piety in the church when the circumstances are so changed as that the manifestations would naturally be changed.

- o (2.) But, if the meetings should be less fully attended, and much less interest manifested than there was in the revival, the question should be asked, Is there less interest manifested than there was before the revival? I doubt whether any such case as that has occurred. To be sure, there may be a real decline after a real revival; but does the decline carry the state of things back even behind where it was before the revival? I doubt whether such a case has ever occurred, where there has been a real revival of religion.

But, so far as my own experience is concerned, I have never seen any re-action or falling away equal to that of which the apostles themselves complained in their day. It would seem from the writings of Paul, that a great re-action, or decline, or whatever you please to call it, occurred after the revivals that passed over the Roman empire under his ministry, and the ministry of the other apostles and evangelists. This is as might be expected, even were those revivals as pure as could be expected under the circumstances. The people whom the apostles taught were heathen. They had no written Bibles, or very few; they had none of the means to render converts stable that we now have. The ignorance of those idolaters that were converted to Christianity, their habits, and the state of society and their general surroundings should lead us to expect great backslidings. Nothing less than a constant miracle could have sustained them in their first love.

But we in this country are under very different circumstances. We abound in the means of instruction; and of course on every side, as might be expected, converts are, as a general thing, much more stable. There are much fewer fallings away, much fewer cases of positive and gross backsliding, than in the days of the apostles, if we are to gather the facts from their own writings.

Indeed, I doubt if the world has ever witnessed revivals more pure, more powerful, more lasting and desirable in their results than those that have occurred in this country during the last forty or fifty years. If my health will allow, I hope to write some account of the revivals that have occurred under my own observation, and since I have been in the ministry, for the purpose, if possible, of disabusing the minds of those who have been prejudiced against those revivals by false reports.

- 4. "Is there not a better way?"

I answer to this,

- o (1.) If there is, it is hoped that someone will show it. The history of the church in all time has proven, that this has been God's way hitherto of sustaining and promoting in religion the world. If He knows of a better way, He will doubtless introduce it. As circumstances have been, and as results have been, we are bound to infer that this has hitherto been the best way -- the best way with which He is acquainted, and that could be pursued consistently with the moral freedom of the race.
- o (2.) I answer, without revivals of religion, facts demonstrate that in all countries religion has become formal. I have been struck with this everywhere -- wherever there is opposition to revivals of religion, I find formality the leading feature of their Christianity. But should this not be so? Every Christian knows that in his history he has been subject to elevations and depressions, to comparative listlessness and then to great fervor; that he has alternated between comparative backsliding in heart, and real zeal and energy in religion; and that his seasons of comparative coldness have sometimes continued for a series of weeks or months until he has been distressed, convicted, and revived, and his religion has taken on again a fervent type.

Now this is the history, if I mistake not, of the Christian religion as it exists in individual minds.

Now suppose that it comes to pass that these elevations and depressions occur, not merely in an individual mind, but in the minds of a church, a community, a cluster or collection of churches throughout a region of country; then here we have revivals and declensions.

The declensions cannot be denied; and is it not a great pity to have the declensions continue, and no revival?

I have been astonished and grieved to hear professors of religion oppose revivals, who themselves need reviving, if ever anybody does. They will say -- "I believe that Christians ought always to be awake, ought always to be revived." Yes, I say, but are you revived? Are you awake?

They hold that Christians ought to be revived and so do I. But what shall we do in case they are not what they ought to be?

It is well for cold professors of a cold church to say, "We believe that Christians ought always to be awake. We do not believe in spasmodic religion; we believe that we should always be in a revival state."

Yes, I reply; and so do I. But are you in it? Are you always awake? Are you now in a revived state? If not, whatever your theory may be, you need a revival; and you must be revived, or you will lose your soul.

REMARKS.

1. And now I inquire, first, do you need a revival in your own soul, in your church, in your congregation? I say, do you need one? In view of what has been said, are not the circumstances such, as to prove that you greatly need a revival here?

2. Do you want one? You may need it, yet not be disposed to have it. Are you willing to be revived? Or, rather, do you desire it? For if you truly will it, you are revived already.

Do you feel its necessity? Are you ready to make the sacrifices essential to promote it? Are you ready to lay aside every weight and every other concern, and enter heart and soul into the promotion of a revival of religion in this place? Are you ready to fulfill all the conditions upon which a revival can be had?

3. What a responsibility rests upon you! "Thy Master has come, and calleth for thee," might be said to you.

For is not the Spirit already beginning to work and to be manifest as the Spirit of Christ among you? Now will you throw your hearts open to be searched? Will you consent yourselves to be individually revived at any cost? Will you make confession and restitution, and remove the stumbling-blocks out of the way? Will you lay aside a worldly fastidiousness, and be willing to be dealt with, in the pulpit and out of the pulpit, as the circumstances demand?

Will you lay aside prejudice, and be willing to be instructed? And lastly, will you give yourselves individually to the work? And will you heartily co-operate in the use of the means for the salvation of those around you?

Now will you decide this at once? And may God help you, in view of the solemn Judgment, to decide as you will wish you had when you stand before Him!

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in

promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to

truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.