

What Will Bring Revival in America?

Charles G. Finney:

by Jonathan Duttweiler (adapted from Charles Finney's writings).

Much is being written and preached today concerning Revival. From every corner we hear America must have Revival or it will die (never realizing that she is dead already, thereby necessitating Revival!). Others proclaim that Revival is already here, that we are, at least in some places, experiencing great Revival. A disinterested observer might agree that there is fervor, there is excitement, there is Church growth, there are even wonderful outpourings of God's Spirit. However, is there enough evidence to convince one that true Revival is happening here in America? If history can afford us any lessons, particularly histories of Revivals past, America has a long way yet to go before Revival is truly here!

The great Revivals of the past shook nations. They were not just meetings to stir up the faithful, to energize the "choir", or to record notches on an evangelist's gun, but shakings of the very foundations that Church and society rested upon!

The Great Awakening of 1735, the first great Revival on American soil, laid the Christian foundation of this nation. The great preaching of Jonathan Edwards, William Tennet, George Whitfield and others, helped shape the course of America for a hundred years. It has been said that the Wesleyan Revival, taking place in England during this same period, saved the British Empire from the same type of bloody revolution which befell France.

During the Revivals in the years from 1799 to 1803, epitomized by the Cain Ridge Revival, it is estimated that the Methodists gained 2000 members per year and that the Baptist added 10,000 members. The Western Conference of the Methodist Church had a membership of 2700 before the Revivals and over 12,000 after. All this in what was then the frontier of America; Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee (although Revivals shook the New England area as well).

Can we compare the so-called Revivals of our day to those of the Second Great Awakening? Have we preachers comparable to Lyman Beecher or Charles Finney? When was the last time all the bars in a city were put out of business because the town was converted? Which of our modern Revivals put a dent in TV ratings, or caused attendance at sporting events to drop because the conviction of sin was so great upon the un-churched that they sought out the preacher to get saved?

How many of the converts from these present day "revivals" persevere? When great evangelistic crusades are held in our cities today, not only is the general population unaffected, but our Churches barely notice the difference! The Revivals which occurred around Rochester, NY, in the early 1830s resulted in between 50,000 to 100,000 conversions in a little over one year! From 1830 to 1835 reports stated that 200,000 souls were saved in this area. Of those people converted under the ministry of Charles Finney, it is said that above 80% were stable Church members 10 years later. Can we claim such success?

Real Revival is taking place, but not in America. It is occurring in Korea, where the Church has grown from less than a million 25 years ago, to over 12 million today. And in Africa, where the Church is growing so fast that Muslims attack preachers and disrupt meetings to try to stop its progress. It is taking place in Central and South America, in China and Malaysia, but in America? No! We are so smug in our presumed spiritual superiority, so at ease in our comfortable buildings, so fat in our land of plenty that we have no need of God. Oh, when we are desperate enough we may throw a few crumbs His way. When the doctors can't help us, we may cry out to Him. When we feel we might not be quite as good as we ought, we might respond to an invitation and let the preacher massage our conscience by telling us that now that we have accepted Jesus we're alright. We might come to God to be "blessed", we might go to meetings to hear how God wants to "prosper" us and make us wealthy - but surrender to God? Devote our whole lives, hearts, minds, souls and strength, to His cause? Never! We might have to leave our Cadillacs, country club memberships and six bedroom houses!

There is no real Revival in America because Americans are not convinced they really need God. Or when they do think they need God it's because they've been told God is the way to the "American Dream". We do so many things on our own, are able to accomplish so much through hard work, that really, God is just an afterthought,

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an addendum, an insurance policy. Will America fall? She has already fallen and she cannot get up! America is spiritually paralyzed but too spiritually blind to realize it. All our preaching, all our crusades, all our TV and radio, have produced a spiritually obese Church content to be merely on its way to heaven while the rest of the world is on its way to hell!

Can anything be done? Can America be saved? It can, but only if we begin to pay more than lip service to God and His Word. 2 Chronicles 7:14 states "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." We have heard it preached, we have perhaps preached it ourselves, but we must believe it and obey it if we are to see God move in our land. Our leaders must obey the admonition of Joel, who declares, "Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people." (Joel 2:17) In Habakkuk 3:2 the prophet prays, "O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." This must become the Church's heart cry!

Elisha exclaimed, "Where is the God of Elijah?" But God is now crying out, "Where are the Elijahs of God?" America can have Revival if the Church recognizes the need and does what it takes to bring it about.

What can we do, how can we bring Revival to this land?

We must first understand just what Revival is. Many in the Church, especially in the Bible belt where I live, think of Revival as simply a series of special evangelistic meetings. For these, Revival is synonymous with Revival meetings. But this is not what is meant by the term Revival, either historically or biblically. "O LORD, revive thy work ...," Habakkuk prays. Revival in the biblical and historical sense, is a work of God's Spirit whereby the love and zeal of Christians' are renewed and rekindled leading to the conversion of sinners and the transformation of society.

That Revivals are the work of God does not mean that they are spontaneous miracles, mysteriously beginning and ending according to some hidden plan of God. Charles Finney, in his Lectures on Revival, states Revivals, rather than being miracles, "arise from the right use of God-given means... Revival as naturally and certainly results from its occasion as a crop does from its cause."

None have written as profusely on the subject nor have had as great success in the propagation of Revivals as Finney. Finney never failed to see Revival come as a result of following the principles he believed flowed from the Spirit of God as outlined in his Lectures on Revival. Finney states that Revival consists of conviction, repentance and reformation. Revival begins with Christians convicted of sin. A backslidden, cold-hearted Church cannot regain its zeal and begin to serve God without a deep soul searching of the Holy Spirit. Then there must be true repentance. Many believe and act as if simply feeling deeply sorry or remorseful over sin is sufficient. However, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:10, 'For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.' Finney wrote that true repentance is a breaking the heart, getting down into the dust before God with deep humility, and forsaking sin. Only then can the Christian's faith be renewed and reformed. Reformation involves a return to Godly living and work springing forth from a heart filled with love. A cold church is unconcerned about the world about, it exists only in a legalistic fog, asserting the truthfulness of God's commands but denying the power thereof. A revived Church is renewed and refired so that its love for God and, consequently, lost souls, is rekindled to burn bright again. When the Church is thus revived, the power of the world and sin is broken over it and so the conversion and reformation of sinners follows. When the Church catches on fire, the world will come to watch it burn!

(1) To experience true Revival, the Church will have to rediscover the principles that Finney followed to such great blessings from God! We in America will have to recognize that the Church is the hindrance! Sin in the Church prevents Revival from coming. Revival must begin with the leaders, a Church rises no higher than its leadership. The ministers of God must cry out as Joel proclaimed, "Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach." Revival takes aim at the Church not the world. It sweeps people out of the world, but it must start with the Church. If we have no Revival it is because the Church hinders it with:

Coldness of heart. We have no zeal for God, no passion for His will. Psalms 69:9 "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me."

Sin in the Camp. The Church winks at sin. Oh, not the gross sins, but rather those that are respectable. Pride,

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envy, covetousness, strife and divisiveness, lasciviousness, greed and materialism, hatred and bigotry; these are the sins that are not so easily seen, yet spread like cancer destroying the Church's power, purity and effectiveness.

Division and strife. In America you must be number one or nothing, and to be number one in ministry means to have the most members, the most TV or radio time, the most money, the most cars, the most books. And any who have more than we are not our helpers, our partners in the Lord's work, but our competition. Much division and strife in the American Church stems out of this spirit of competition more than anything else.

Prayerlessness. Has there ever been a time when prayer was needed more yet exercised less? Perhaps the greatest sin of our age is the Church's prayerlessness, and make no mistake it is sin! In Luke 18:1, Jesus stated "...that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;" Men ought. Not I wish men to or perhaps it would be good, but men ought always to pray! If we ought, than to not do it must be sin! The Church today does not pray and so cannot have Revival.

Emphasis on wrong doctrine and wrong emphasis on right doctrine. There are doctrines which are wrong and then there are doctrines which may be biblically true, but men have put the wrong emphasis on them and so produced great harm to the cause of Christ!

Every doctrine that centers our attention on man rather than Jesus hinders Revival.

Every doctrine that makes man the center of God's attention rather than God the center of man's devotion hinders Revival.

Every heart that is seeking or serving God for what He will do for them is a backslidden heart in need of Revival!

(2) Next, the Church must begin to pray all Revival is birthed by prayer. Paul wrote of the Galatians "whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you..."

Prayer is the communion with God by which the Church is impregnated with concern for lost souls; the avenue by which the Church travails for those souls. Prayer is the mid-wife of Revival and the nursemaid by which converts are stabilized and fixed! For Revival to come the Church must pray! Finney wrote in his Memoirs "In regard to my own experience, I will say that unless I had the Spirit of prayer I could do nothing. If even for a day or an hour I lost the Spirit of grace and supplication, I found my self unable to preach with power and efficiency, or to win souls by personal conversation...I found myself having more or less power in preaching and in personal labor for souls just in proportion as I had the Spirit of prevailing prayer."

(3) The Church must then be filled with the Holy Spirit! Only anointed preaching which conveys the conviction of the Holy Spirit will bring Revival.

Much passes these days for Spirit filled preaching which is only spirited preaching. The preacher has studied, he has prepared, but he has not prayed, he has not struggled in prayer until he knows that what he has is from God and that unless he brings it forth he shall burst! Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Unction [anointing] is a thing which you cannot manufacture, and its counterfeits are worse than worthless. Yet it is, in itself, priceless, and beyond measure needful if you would edify believers and bring sinners to Christ."

(4) To have Revival, the Church's chief motive must be to please God. It is God, in Christ, Who has suffered and died in order that all men everywhere might be saved, He deserves souls. Love for souls is good, but love for God must be first!

(5) If we are to have Revival ministers must deal directly with the people where they are - don't preach to the choir! Ministers of God must learn to deal with the people they have before them, not to some group of sinners unrelated to the congregation at hand.

(6) The Church must preach the Word and leave out doctrines and traditions of men and denominations if we are to have real Revival. Many hold to the notion that doctrines are unimportant and that as long as we have fire and zeal and love for God we will see results. But hear this loud and clear, the truth matters! The truth is the Holy Spirit's instrument to probe the hearts and minds of men and bring about conviction. Paul told Timothy that he must learn to rightly divide the word of truth.

For there to be Revival, we must preach:

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The total and voluntary moral depravity of unregenerated man. The sinner must be made to see that apart from submission to, and faith in, the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing he does is acceptable or pleasing in the sight of God! The sinner must be thoroughly disavowed of the modern notion that he may decide for himself what is morally right and acceptable and the Law of God must be held up as the only acceptable standard to God.

The sinfulness of sin, not simply the positive aspects of the Gospel. The fact is that people don't realize how abominable their actions are before God. They have no concept at all of His unequivocal hatred of sin nor do they comprehend the awful judgement which their sin demands. We must declare that sinners are not poor miserable creatures to be pitied, but monstrous criminals rebelling against the government of God!

The reality of hell! The Church no longer believes in hell. If it did it could not tolerate the condition that most around them are in. It could not tolerate the millions who die daily lost for eternity. Hell is real, Jesus preached it and so must the Church today if we are to see Revival!

The necessity of a radical change of heart, through the truth revealed to the heart by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Peter preached in Acts 3, "that you repent, and be converted..." The new birth is not something God deposits in us, but a fundamental change in the ultimate purpose of our lives to cease serving self and serve God and do His will! The life that is not transformed by the Gospel has been untouched by it!

The divinity and humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ and His vicarious atonement, equal to the needs of all humanity. Preach the offense of the Cross, Christ crucified as the only way to God, sufficient for the salvation of all humanity!

The divinity, agency and gift of the Holy Spirit as a real presence in the lives of people that they might be converted, live a life of holiness before the Lord and demonstrate the power of God to a lost world.

Repentance - man's ability and responsibility to turn from his sin to God! The sinner must understand that any delay, any putting off from turning away from all known sin toward God has its origin and foundation in his will alone, and not in any presumed inability. It is not that the sinner cannot turn from sin, but that he will not!

Faith - absolute and unconditional surrender to, and trust in, the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Faith is not an acceptance of, or intellectual belief in, some truth or postulation, but rather the committment of one's self to that truth. Saving faith in Jesus Christ is nothing less then committal of one's whole self to His care and rule.

Justification by faith, as taught in scriptures. Finney preached against the theological fiction of imputation as injurious to Christian experience and an affront to man's intelligence. Justification by faith is not the means whereby the righteousness of Christ, His perfect obedience, is imputed to unrighteous men, but rather the means by which men, having turned from their sin, might actually become righteous experientially, enabling God to treat them as righteous, rather than as guilty sinners justly deserving His condemnation.

Sanctification by faith - the necessity of holiness in this life! God calls us to a life of entire obedience. To see Revival we must strive to raise our experience up to God's standard, rather than bring His standard down to our experience!

Persistence in holiness as a condition of final salvation. The believer must persevere in faith if he is to finally be saved. "But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. (Ezekiel 18:24) "...but he that endureth to the end shall be saved." (Matthew 10:22)

Doctrines which must be avoided:

Predestination: God has elected from all eternity those who will be saved and, consequently, those who will be damned.

The predestination of the bible is of the way and conditions of salvation, not of the individuals who will be saved. This doctrine taken to it's logical conclusion results in fatalism and apathy on the part of God's people. If God has already determined who shall be saved, and nothing can thwart His will, what difference can the actions of men truly make?

Inability: man cannot turn to God, but must wait upon God to turn (change) him.

Has any sinner ever objected to such a doctrine? What absolves the sinner of responsibility any more than this doctrine does? If man is unable to repent then God must be unjust in requiring him to repent in order to be saved.

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Man is born sinful: every child is conceived in iniquity and enters this world guilty before God. Guilty because of Adams sin which is imputed to him, guilty because of the sin nature he is born with and ultimately guilty because of the sin he himself commits.

If this doctrine is true, every human being is under triple condemnation, even though he never consciously gave Adam power of attorney, never asked to be brought into this world of sin and never could do anything but sin due to the nature he was born with. This is hailed as God's justice? May it never be! No! Man is born innocent and he becomes a sinner because, in his rebellion, he has refused to love God with all his heart according to the light he has and he has selfishly sought his own happiness to the detriment of every other creature in the universe!

Salvation apart from consecration: you can be saved without making Jesus Lord.

No amount of complaints about Lordship salvation can alter the fact that the Word of God declares "That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved." (Romans 10:9 NASV) The word saviour occurs 37 times in scripture, the word lord occurs 6748 times. Which do you think God considers more important?

Holiness is optional: holiness is a higher calling for a chosen few, but is not necessary for the majority of Christians.

The mediocrity of the majority of Christian experience may be traced to this fundamental error believed by so many. Holiness is not optional, but rather the very purpose for which Christ died and seeks to bring us to repentance. Paul writes, "Follow...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:"

Once saved always saved: eternal security requires no perseverance in faith or continuance in holiness on the part of the believer, it is predicated solely on God's election not mans response.

No doctrine ever preached has been so calculated by the enemy as to inure mens souls to the truth of God's Word or harden their hearts to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. The man who believes his destiny secure and his fire insurance paid up may safely scoff at all calls for repentance and righteous living to his own eternal sorrow.

Conclusion

Revival can come to America - but it will only start when we reject the "me" centered gospel preached so prevalently and realize that the call of God is to serve rather than to be served, to give rather than to get, to lay down our lives rather to save them. It will come when we begin to pour our hearts out to God in earnest, desiring only His will rather than our will disguised as some "blessing" from above!

To see Revival preachers will have to preach the truth of God's word rather than traditions of men. They will have to be more concerned with God's honor and people's souls than with their "feelings". They will have to give direct invitations to their listeners and demand immediate submission. They cannot ever do anything to decrease the anxiety or discomfort of hearers. Their discomfort is a sign either of the Holy Spirit's conviction or their stiffnecked, stubborn rebellion. Both must be pressed if God's will is to be accomplished in their lives. Too many preachers want to soften up their message, make it more palatable and digestible. But God's Word is like a two-edged sword, it cuts, coming and going! Preach the Word and let God take care of binding the wounds, He is much better at it than we. Better to have the whole congregation mad at you and under conviction, than to soothe their ruffled feathers and lose their souls!

What will bring Revival in America? Nothing less then our whole hearted submission to His truth and the ways and means the Word presents in dealing with a cold Church, backslidden believers and hard hearted sinners! When Christians, and ministers of God in particular, begin to care more about what God thinks about them and their ministries than they do the people and world around them, then we will see Revival, real Revival, come to America.