

Letters on Revival--No. 17.

by Charles Finney

Charles Finney argues for a balanced approach to revival efforts, emphasizing the need for consistent spiritual engagement alongside everyday responsibilities.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Hebrews 10:24

Topics: "Revival", "Consistency in Faith"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the issue of 'spasmodic efforts' in promoting revival, criticizing the tendency of some Christians to rely solely on protracted meetings for spiritual growth while neglecting consistent, year-round efforts. He argues that a balanced approach is necessary, where regular meetings for preaching and prayer are held without disrupting daily responsibilities. Finney emphasizes the importance of maintaining a steady spiritual focus, especially as worldly distractions increase, and encourages churches to engage in continuous outreach rather than sporadic bursts of activity. He believes that a healthy church should integrate spiritual efforts with everyday life, ensuring that both spiritual and secular duties are fulfilled. Ultimately, Finney calls for a more sustainable and proactive approach to revival efforts.

Transcript

THE IMPOLICY OF SPASMODIC EFFORTS

[continued in No. 18--Ed.]

To All The Friends And Especially All The Ministers Of Our Lord Jesus Christ:

Dear Brethren:

There is another class of Christians than those to whom I referred in my last, that seem to me to have fallen into an error opposed to that of which I then spoke. This class instead of taking the ground that no extra means are to be used for the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of the church, seem to have settled down in the belief that nothing can be done without protracted meetings, and the most exciting means that can be used. Hence they seem to be for doing up all their religious work in protracted meetings, giving up nearly their whole time to protracted effort, or a series of meetings, during a small part of each year, and make little or no effort to sustain the interests of religion, promote the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of the church, at other seasons.

Now it seems to me that this class of persons as radically misconceive the proper and only healthful method of promoting religion, as that class of Christians do to whom they stand opposed.

Now that a series of meetings, continued for days and weeks, may be useful, and in some instances demanded by the state of thing I think there can be no reasonable doubt. But as a general thing, it seems to me, that it would be more healthful for religion, to have meetings for preaching, and prayer, and promoting the spirituality of Christians, so frequently, at all seasons of the year, as to secure the attention of the people, and yet so unfrequently as not to disturb their ordinary, or to say the least their necessary duties, in the relations which they sustain.

When I was first acquainted with revivals of religion, my own practice was this--and so far as I know it was the general practice of ministers and churches which endeavored to promote revivals of religion. We added to the services of the Sabbath as many meetings during the week as could well be attended, and yet allow the people to carry forward their necessary worldly business; and we went no farther than this. I have seen most powerful revivals of religion in the midst of harvest in a neighborhood of farmers, and found that it could be sustained by holding as many meetings as were consistent with farmer's securing their crops, and no more. The grand error which seems to me to have prevailed for the last few years, is this: Churches that are attempting to promote revivals, break in for a time on all the ordinary and necessary duties of domestic, commercial, agricultural and mechanical life; and make every day a Sabbath for a great number of days in succession, and then seem to be under the necessity of holding no meetings for a long time except on the Sabbath. They have neglected their worldly business so much and so long, that now they must make as much extra effort to bring up the arrears in that department, as they have made in their protracted meeting to bring up the arrears in the spiritual department. They go from one extreme to another, from holding meetings every day in the week, to holding meetings on which there is any thing like a general attendance, no day in the week; from going to meeting nearly all the time until they have greatly neglected their worldly business, they break off and go to meeting at no time except on the Sabbath. Now it does seem to me that this is entirely unwise, and that its results are demonstrating to the churches, that the action of this course of things is not healthful, and that a better course would be to keep up as many meetings at all seasons of the year as can be sustained, and yet the necessary secular business transacted.

As excitement increases on other subjects, we shall find it necessary in the same proportion to increase the frequency and urgency of our appeals to mankind on the great subject of salvation. As I said in my last, if worldly men increase the means of exciting the people on worldly subjects, we must at least in equal proportion multiply the means for securing the attention of men to spiritual subjects. This seems to me to be a law of mind; and instead of this being set aside by the fact that revivals are produced by the Spirit of God, and instead of its being thereby rendered unnecessary to multiply means--inasmuch as means are essential to the Spirit's work, they must be multiplied if we expect divine influence to produce the desired result. Ministers have perceived with pain that through the instrumentality of protracted meetings the churches are taking on more and more the type of a spasmodic and temporary excitement on the subject of revival, seizing on those seasons of the year when they have but little else to do, or neglecting whatever they have to do, and giving themselves up to a protracted effort, going to meetings day and night for a few days or weeks, and then relapsing to no effort. Whereas the churches should make a steady effort and put forth their energies every day, to secure the attention of people in proportion to the exciting topics on other subjects that are so pressed on them by worldly men, and worldly influences as to endanger their souls.

Your Brother,
C.G. FINNEY

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/letters-on-revival-no-17/>

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