

SUM BIBLE COLLEGE AND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

HOW TO PROMOTE A REVIVAL  
*REVIVAL LECTURES* BY CHARLES G. FINNEY

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## **How to Promote a Revival** *Revival Lectures by Charles G. Finney*

I follow a daily Bible reading plan. Psalm 51 was part of my scripture reading for today. Many sermons have been preached on David's moral failure and his subsequent repentant heart. Inevitably, the warnings are given that we must guard our hearts and be about God's business so that we are not caught up in the varying lusts of the flesh and the enticement of the devil towards their fulfillment. Certainly, these sermons are important to heed. I do not invalidate their necessity. However, when I read what I believe to be the key verse in this passage, I am always prompted to see something else. God's mercy is given to who-so-ever will come, but the offering required is specific. *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* Psalm 51:17.<sup>1</sup>

Why do I take issue over the nuances of our application of Psalm 51? Because I find that in most of our churches today, we have forgotten the pit that we were pulled out of when the gospel hit our own hearts. We have replaced the understanding of the utter preciousness of the grace of God with religious form and duty. Instead of gratitude for the cleansing blood of Jesus, much of the time we are full of presumption that we are righteous while we justify our fleshly ways. We spiritualize our lack of love by calling it discernment. We hold onto bitterness and unforgiveness because we believe that the pain we have endured is justification. We live in fear that our brothers and sisters will see the real condition of our heart so we succumb to perfectionism in order to fit into the status quo. All the while, our hearts are getting harder, our thoughts are turning increasingly worldly, and our prayer life is difficult at best. But hey, we are not murderers and adulterers, right?

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Bible, Psalm 51:17 (English Standard Version).

This is the condition that Finney addresses when he speaks of breaking up the fallow ground. He defines fallow ground as “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.”<sup>2</sup> He goes on to say, “To break up the fallow ground, is to break up your hearts, to prepare your minds to bring forth fruit unto God.”<sup>3</sup> From this definition, we can say that revival starts with individuals who are seeking that the fallow ground of their hearts be tilled up and fit for God’s use. Any self-justification is done away with as the Holy Spirit is invited to explore the inner man as that one cries out, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*”<sup>4</sup>

Once the Lord has an individual or group who is willing to let Him plow up their hearts, then He has those who will intercede for others in prayer. Finney writes much as he defines intercessory prayer, prevailing prayer, and even spells out the procedures of a public prayer meeting. But we must understand that the prayer Finney speaks of is not of a frivolous nature. It’s not, “Lord bless Sue and smile upon Mary today.” Romans 8:26 says, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”<sup>5</sup> Finney states, “The meaning of this, I understand to be, that the Spirit excites desires too great to be uttered except by groans – making the soul too full to utter its feelings by words, so that the person can only groan them out to God, who understands the language of the heart.”<sup>6</sup> Finney spends much time explaining this

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<sup>2</sup> Charles G. Finney, *Revival Lectures*, Fleming H Revell Company: United States of America, p 35.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p 35.

<sup>4</sup> The Holy Bible, Psalm 139: 23-24 (ESV).

<sup>5</sup> The Holy Bible, Romans 8:26 (ESV).

<sup>6</sup> Finney, *Revival Lectures*, p 101.

kind of agonizing before God. In the midst of intercession, we must not allow worldly mindsets to take us out of the Spirit's grip, nor must we cease to confess and forsake our own sins. He stresses that if we have any relationship with sin, we will grieve the Spirit and our prayers will not be effectual.

It is human nature to want the formula, or the "10 steps to a successful revival service," but Finney teaches us that God has not established a sure pattern for revival. He reminds us that Jesus upset the Jews because He would not adhere to their formalities.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the history of the church, men have been in constant upheaval concerning personal preferences they believe to be the only way of doing things. But Finney points out to us that when the Lord finds a man, or group, in which He can use, they often bring about change within the church or the culture. He makes his argument using first the Apostles, then Luther and the Reformers, Wesley and his companions, and then the man he addresses as President Edwards (Jonathan Edwards).<sup>8</sup> Finney states, "All these were devoted men, seeking out ways to do good and save souls. And precisely the same kind of opposition was experienced by all, obstructing their path and trying to destroy their character and influence."<sup>9</sup> True revival will bring hostile opposition from both man and devils. We can make the case that it is all of a demonic nature since "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood."<sup>10</sup> However, I believe that the flesh that has not been crucified is also a valid opponent, whether it is from others who do not want to face themselves through the eyes of the "Spirit of Truth" or those areas within ourselves that we are not willing to completely give over.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p 281

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp 292-293.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp 294-295

<sup>10</sup> The Holy Bible, Ephesians 6:12 (ESV).

Are we influenced by the demonic realm to hang onto our faulty strongholds? – certainly. Can we blame this completely on the devil? – no. The idolatry in our own hearts is for us to cling to or forsake. That choice is ours and God will help us get free of any besetting sin that is too entrenched to change through our own efforts. When we don't desire freedom – or when we do not understand this complete forsaking of sin and self as true revival – we will oppose it. And those that oppose it always believe they are doing the Lord's work to keep the established order.

Finney spells out much that will hinder true revival, but he ends his lectures on what it means for the newly converted to grow in grace. Thus, in between these two thoughts Finney expounds on the importance for the church to agree in prayer for the need of the Spirit to move within the church and for the converting of sinners. His words on what should be agreed upon are challenging to say the least. The different areas of agreement that he eludes to all have to do with prevailing faith. There must be an agreement that revival is a reality and that it is God's work. There must be an agreement that revival is necessary to advance the Kingdom. There must be an agreement in agonizing prayer over the importance of revival. There must be an agreement that in order to see revival, there has to be a complete dependence on the Spirit of God.<sup>11</sup>

This leads me back to my scripture I read this morning. If God does not despise a broken and contrite spirit, does that mean by default that He does hold disdain for a hardened heart? The Hebrew word for despise in this verse is bazah.<sup>12</sup> It carries the connotation of having an accusation attached. If after experiencing the liberty of salvation, we allow our hearts to grow cold and fallow – does not God have a right to accuse us of bringing a wrong sacrifice before

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<sup>11</sup> Finney, Revival Lectures, pp 355-356.

<sup>12</sup> Bible Hub, Strong's Concordance, <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/959.htm>, (accessed February 24, 2016).

Him? Make no mistake, His mercy is new every day. It is readily available to His children. He tells us in 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*<sup>13</sup> I don't believe that our name is erased from the Book of Life every time we sin. But, has not the Lord paid the ultimate price so that we may be completely His? Has He not brought us into His marvelous light so that we may be the vessel that carries that light to others? If we allow darkness to remain, does it not cast a shadow instead of allowing us to shine forth the true kingdom? Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of God is within.<sup>14</sup> He also teaches that if there is lust in our hearts – we have committed adultery, or hatred within – we have murdered. Is it not more pleasing to God to be honest about such things and bring to him a broken heart over that which we are powerless to fix? If we find ourselves covering that which should be forsaken, rest assured – we are in need of revival. If we find that we are sick of ourselves and are willing to come into the light as He is in the light in true brokenness – a contrite heart, He will not despise.

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<sup>13</sup> The Holy Bible, 1 John 1:9, (ESV).

<sup>14</sup> The Holy Bible, Luke 17:21, (ESV).

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