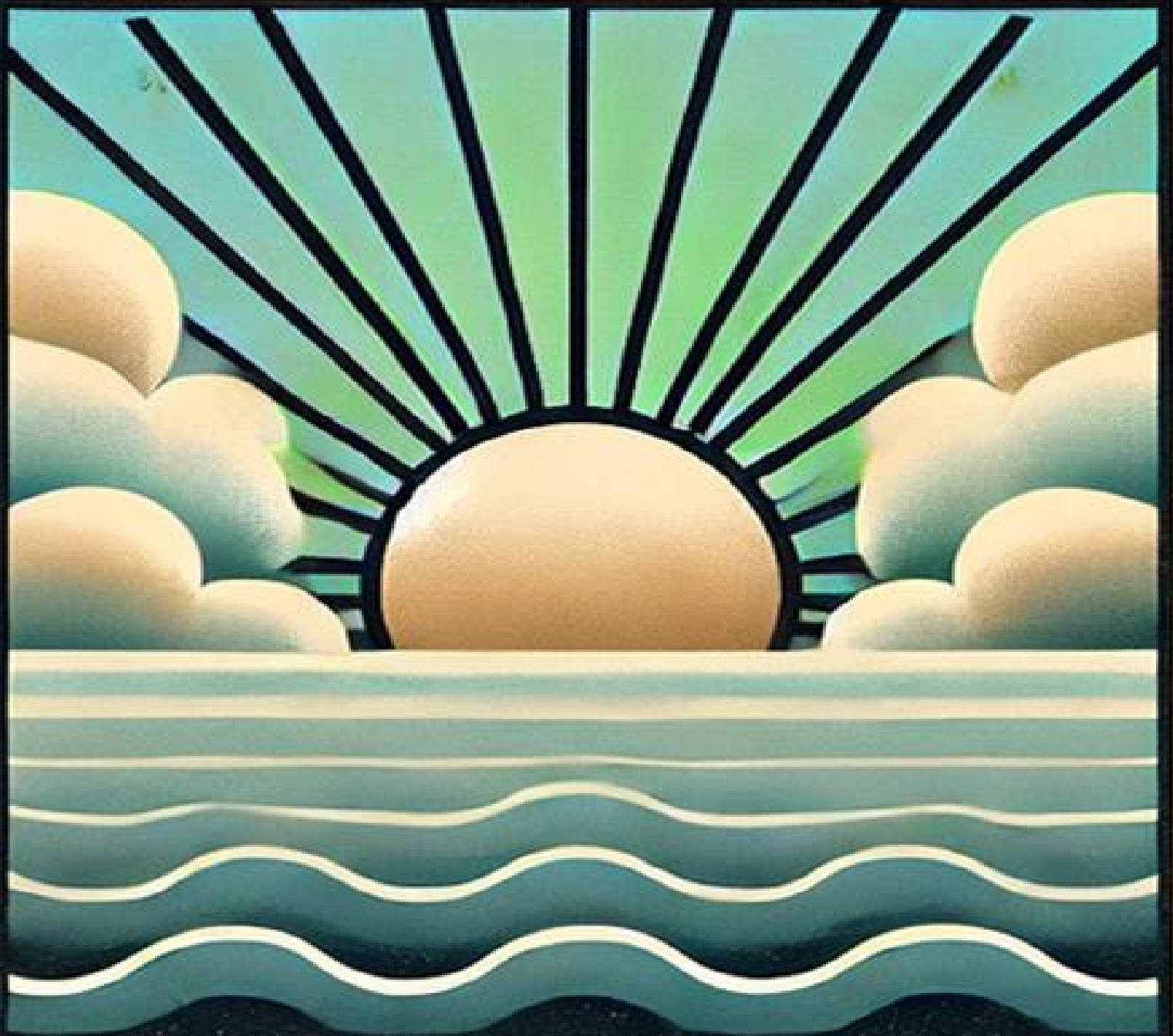


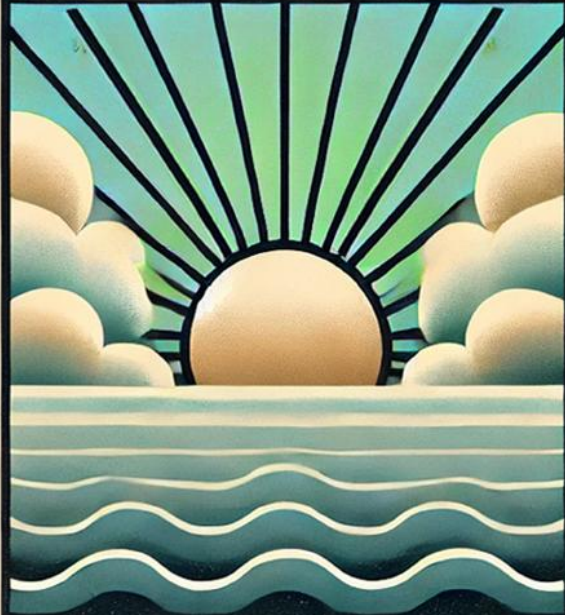
✻ LECTURES ON ✻  
Revivals of Religion



WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE

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# LECTURES ON REVIVALS OF RELIGION.

by

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### **PREFACE.**

The following Lectures were delivered during the preceding autumn and winter, to the Congregation with which the author is connected, in the ordinary course of his public ministrations. The grand object at which he has aimed has been to vindicate and advance the cause of genuine revivals of religion: and in doing this, he has endeavoured to distinguish between a genuine revival and a spurious excitement; to defend revivals against the cavils of their opposers; to show the causes which operate to prevent or retard them; to exhibit the agency of God, and the instrumentality of men, by which they are produced and sustained; to guide the inquiring sinner and establish the young convert; to guard against the abuses to which revivals are liable, and

to anticipate the glorious results to which they must lead. In the hope that the Lectures may prove a seasonable offering to the American church, at an interesting and critical period, the author has concluded to send them forth through the press; and in doing this, it is a pleasure to him that he is complying with a request from the session and trustees of the Church of which he is Pastor, as well as acting in accordance with the wishes of several respected and beloved brethren in the ministry with whom he is more immediately associated.

In the Appendix the reader will find a series of Letters on the same subject, from a number of the most distinguished Clergymen of our country, and from six different religious denominations. The object in requesting these Letters has been twofold -- First, To obtain authentic history of our revivals, in which unhappily we have hitherto been greatly deficient -- And, Second, to ascertain the manner in which revivals have been conducted by men whose wisdom, experience, and standing in the church, must at least entitle their opinion to great consideration. It was originally the author's intention to have republished the well-known Letters of Dr. Beecher and Mr. Nettleton, written several years ago, in which the same general views which this volume inculcates, are defended with great zeal and ability. But upon examination he finds they are so much identified with the occasion in which they originated, that he thinks it best to omit them. He allows himself to hope, that whatever the decision of the public may be in respect to the Lectures, they will find in the Letters which follow much authentic and important information; and he doubts not that the testimony, on this momentous subject, of such a representation from our American church, will not only be gratefully received, but considerately and

earnestly pondered. If the volume should, by the blessing of God, be instrumental, even in an humble degree, of promoting such revivals as those for which Edwards, and Dwight, and Nettleton, and a host of others, both among the living and the dead, have counted it an honour to labour, the best wish of the author of the Lectures, and no doubt of the writers of the Letters also, will be answered.

Albany, May 1, 1832.

## **LECTURE I.**

### **NATURE OF A REVIVAL.**

Isaiah xlv. 8.

"Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together."

The final and complete triumph of the church was a theme at which the mind of this prophet was always ready to kindle. So infinitely superior did he regard it to any thing that respects merely the present world, that when his predictions relate immediately to temporal mercies, they often look farther to spiritual blessings; and sometimes we find him apparently forgetting himself for a moment, and passing abruptly, and almost imperceptibly, from some national deliverance to the salvation of the gospel. In the verses immediately preceding our text, there is a manifest reference to the deliverance of

the Jews from their captivity in Babylon; but in the text itself there is a sudden transition to a subject of far higher import, even the blessings of Christ's salvation; and this latter subject continues to engross the prophet's mind to the close of the chapter. -- "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together."

There was some partial fulfilment of this prediction in the revival of true piety which attended the return of the Jews from Babylon; though it is evidently to be considered as referring principally to the more extensive prevalence of religion under the gospel dispensation. It may be regarded, in a general sense, as denoting the abundant grace by which the gospel would be attended, casting into the shade all previous measures of divine influence which had been enjoyed by the church; or it may be considered, more particularly, as referring to special occasions, on which the agency of the Spirit would be signally manifest. In this latter sense, it may be applied to the wonderful effusions of the Holy Ghost which attended the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost; and to what, in these latter days, we are accustomed to denominate revivals of religion. It is in its application to revivals that I purpose to consider it at the present time.

I here commence a series of Discourses, in which it will be my object to present before you, in its various bearings, the subject of Revivals of Religion. The reasons which have determined me to this course, and the grounds on which I beg leave to commend this subject to your special attention, are the following: --

1. It is a subject in which the church, especially in this country, is, at this moment, more deeply and practically interested than almost any other. You cannot look back upon the history of our American church, and compare the past with the present, without perceiving that within the last half century a wonderful change has taken place in the order of God's providence towards it. It is true, indeed, that through the ministry of Whitfield and others, there was a revival of considerable extent in this country, a little before the middle of the last century; but owing to various causes, which I shall not now stop to specify, the fruits of it were, in no small degree, blasted; and from that period till near the beginning of the present century, the church was only enlarged by very gradual additions. But at the period last mentioned, a different state of things seemed to commence, in the more copious and sudden effusions of the Holy Spirit; and now it has come to pass in these days in which we live, that far the greater number of those who are turned from darkness to light, so far as we can judge, experience this change during revivals of religion. It is for revivals that the church is continually praying; and to them that she is looking for accessions both to her numbers and her strength. The praise of revivals is upon her lips, and upon the lips of her sons and daughters, who come crowding to her solemn feasts. Such being the fact, no one can doubt that this is a subject which she ought well to understand -- which all should understand who care for Zion's prosperity.

2. This is a subject in which the church is not only deeply interested at the present time, but is likely to be more and more interested for a long time to come. The cause of revivals has hitherto been gradually and yet constantly gaining ground. The last year has been in this respect unparalleled in the annals of the church; and there is much



in prophecy to warrant the conviction that, as the millennial day draws near, these effusions of the Holy Spirit will be yet more frequent and powerful. Every thing decides that this is to be a practical subject, not with the present generation only, but with many generations to come. It is desirable, therefore, that we should form correct views of it, not merely for our own sake, but for the sake of those who come after us; for our views no doubt will, to a great extent, be propagated to future generations.

3. The views which we form on this subject, and the course we adopt in respect to it, must determine, in a great measure, the actual effect of revivals upon the interests of the church. This is a matter in relation to which God is pleased to leave much to human instrumentality. It is possible that his people may co-operate with him in carrying forward a revival, by such means that there may be many sound and scriptural conversions, and that his cause may thereby be greatly advanced; and it is possible that, by the neglect of duty, or by the adoption of mistaken and unscriptural measures, they may grieve away the Holy Spirit, or confirm multitudes in fatal self-deception. It is not to be questioned that what commonly passes under the name of a revival of religion is an engine of prodigious power in the church. God intends it only for good; nevertheless it is capable of being perverted to evil. As so much, then, in respect to the influence of revivals is dependent on the human agency that is employed in them, and as our conduct on this subject will take its complexion from our views, you perceive that it is a matter of great moment that our views should be correct.

4. Every member of the church, whatever may be his standing in society, has a part to act in relation to this subject, and therefore

ought to be enlightened concerning it. In days that have gone by, this may have been thought a matter almost exclusively for ministers and other officers of the church; while private Christians may have imagined, that out of their closets they had little to do in relation to it, but to look on and behold the wonderful work of God. But happily this mistake has, to a great extent, been corrected; and it seems now to be almost universally admitted, that this is a field in which even the obscurest Christian may find a place to labour. In a community in which there prevails a spirit of deep religious anxiety, and many are just forming the purpose to set their faces toward heaven, and many others are beginning to hope that they have yielded themselves to God, there must needs be much occasion for private counsel and instruction; and the persons most likely to be applied to are often those with whom the individuals concerned happen to be most intimately associated. Every one, therefore, ought to be competent to give at least some general directions. One right direction, in certain circumstances, may be the means of saving the soul. One wrong direction, in similar circumstances, of ruining it forever. If all Christians, then, are so deeply and practically interested in this subject, there is good reason why it should be brought before you as a distinct theme for contemplation and instruction.

Having now stated some reasons for bringing this subject before you at this time, I proceed to the main design of the discourse, which is to exhibit the NATURE of a revival of religion. And that we may do this intelligently, it will be necessary previously to answer the question, in a single word, What is the nature of religion?

Religion consists in a conformity of heart and life to the will of God. It consists in a principle of obedience implanted in the soul, and in

the operation of that principle in the conduct. Religion is substantially the same in all worlds; though the religion of a sinner is modified, in some respects, by his peculiar character and condition. In common with the religion of the angels, it consists in love to God - to his law, to his government, to his service; but in distinction from that, it consists in repentance of sin; faith in the merits of a crucified Saviour; resignation under trials; opposition to spiritual enemies. Moreover, religion in the angels is an inherent principle; it begins with their existence: but in the human heart it is something superinduced by the operation of the Spirit of God. Wherever there exists a cordial belief of God's truth, and submission of the will to his authority, and the graces of the heart shine forth in the virtues of the life, there is true religion: whether it be in the palace or the cottage; whether it appear in a single individual, or be diffused over a whole community.

Now if such be the nature of religion, you will readily perceive in what consists a revival of religion. It is a revival of scriptural knowledge, of vital piety, of practical obedience. The term revival of religion has sometimes been objected to, on the ground that a revival of any thing supposes its previous existence; whereas in the renovation of sinners, there is a principle implanted which is entirely new. But though the fact implied in this objection is admitted, the objection itself has no force; because the term is intended to be implied in a general sense, to denote the improved religious state of a congregation, or of some other community. And it is moreover applicable, in a strict sense, to the condition of Christians, who, at such a season, are in a greater or less degree revived; and whose increased zeal is usually rendered instrumental of the conversion of sinners. Wherever, then, you see religion rising up from a state of

comparative depression to a tone of increased vigour and strength, wherever you see professing Christians becoming more faithful to their obligations, and behold the strength of the church increased by fresh accessions of piety from the world, there is a state of things which you need not hesitate to denominate a revival of religion.

Such a state of things may be advantageously represented under several distinct particulars.

1. The first step usually is an increase of zeal and devotedness on the part of God's people. They wake up to a sense of neglected obligations, and resolve to return to the faithful discharge of duty. They betake themselves with increased earnestness to the throne of grace; confessing their delinquencies with deep humility, and supplicating the aids of God's Spirit to enable them to execute their pious resolutions, and to discharge faithfully the various duties which devolve upon them. There, too, they importunately ask for the descent of the Holy Ghost on those around them; on the church with which they are connected; on their friends who are living at a distance from God; on all who are out of the ark of safety. Their conversation becomes proportionally more spiritual and edifying. They endeavour to stir up one another's minds by putting each other in remembrance of their covenant vows, and impressing each other with their individual and mutual responsibilities. When they meet in the common intercourse of life, their conversation shows that the world is with them but a subordinate matter; and that their controlling desire is, that God may be glorified in the salvation of sinners. They find it no difficult matter to be faithful in pressing the obligations of religion upon those who are indifferent to it in warning them of their danger, and in beseeching them, with the earnestness

of Christian affection, to be reconciled to God. It is a case of no uncommon occurrence at such a season, that a professor of religion, under a deep sense of his wanderings, comes to regard his own Christian character with the utmost distrust, and sometimes wanders many days in darkness, before the joys of salvation are restored to his soul. There are indeed some professors who sleep through such a scene, and probably some who join with the wicked, so far as they dare, in opposing it; but many at least are awake, are humble, are active, and come up to the help of the Lord with renewed zeal and strength.

2. Another prominent feature in the state of things which I am describing, is the alarm and conviction of those who have hitherto been careless. Sometimes the change in this respect is very gradual: and for a considerable time nothing more can be said, than that there is a more listening ear and a more serious aspect than usual under the preaching of the word; and this increased attention is gradually matured into deep solemnity and pungent conviction. In other cases, the reigning lethargy is suddenly broken up, as if there had come a thunderbolt from eternity; and multitudes are heard simultaneously inquiring what they shall do to be saved. The young man, and the old man, and the middle-aged man -- the exemplary and orthodox moralist, the haughty pharisee, the downright infidel, the profane scoffer, the dissipated sensualist -- may sometimes all be seen collected with the same spirit in their hearts -- a spirit of deep anxiety; and the same question upon their lips -- how they shall escape the threatening woes of perdition? In some cases, the conviction which is felt prompts to silence; and you are left to learn it from downcast looks, or, as the case may be, from half-stifled sobs. In other cases, there is no effort at concealment; and the deep

anguish of the heart comes out in expressions of the most painful solicitude. Those who once would have disdained any thing which should indicate the least concern for their salvation, hesitate not to ask and to receive instruction even from the most obscure Christian, or to place themselves in circumstances which are a virtual acknowledgment to all that they feel their danger, and desire to escape from it. All the shame which they once felt on this subject they have given to the winds; and their commanding desire now is, that they may find that peace which passeth understanding, that hope which is full of immortality.

There are others who are partially awakened, whose attention is in some measure excited, but not enough to prompt to any decided and vigorous effort. They look on and see what is passing; and acknowledge God's agency in it; and at times manifest some feeling in respect to their own condition, and express a wish that they may have more. They attend regularly not only upon the ordinary, but upon some of the extraordinary means of grace, and treat the whole subject not only with great respect, but with decided seriousness; but after all do not advance to the decisive point of repentance, or even of true conviction of sin. In this state they often remain for a considerable time, until they return to their accustomed carelessness, or, by some new impulse from on high, they are carried forward, and become the subjects of a genuine conversion; or else they are taken away, in the midst of their half-formed resolutions, to a world where they will learn, to their eternal cost, that it was most dangerous to trifle with the Spirit of God.

There are still others, belonging to the same general class of awakened sinners, who struggle against their convictions, whose

consciences proclaim to them that their all is in jeopardy, but who try to discredit the testimony. These persons sometimes rush, with unaccustomed avidity, into the haunts of business or the haunts of pleasure. They throw themselves into vain company, or engage in reading idle or infidel books; and in some instances even venture to deny what is passing within them, and to jeer at what is passing around them. Wherever you hear scoffing, and witness violent opposition in a revival of religion, it is scarcely possible that you should mistake, if you should put down those by whom it is exhibited on the list of awakened sinners. The true account of it is, that there is a war between the conscience and the passions. Conscience is awake and doing its office, and the heart is in rebellion against its dictates.

3. It also belongs essentially to a revival of religion, that there are those, from time to time, who are indulging a hope that they are reconciled to God, and are born of the Spirit. In some cases the change , of feeling is exceedingly gradual, insomuch that the individual, though he is sensible of having experienced a change within a given period, is yet utterly unable to refer it to any particular time. Sometimes the soul suddenly emerges from darkness into light, and perceives a mighty change in its exercises, almost in the twinkling of an eye. Sometimes there is a state of mind which is only peaceful; sometimes it mounts up to joy and ecstasy. In some cases there is from the beginning much self-distrust; in others much, too much, confidence. But, with a great variety of experience, there are many who are brought, or who believe themselves brought, into the kingdom of Christ. They give reason to hope they have taken the new song upon their lips. Children sing their young hosannas to the Lamb that was slain. The aged tell with gratitude of what God has done for them while on the margin of the grave. Saints on earth rejoice, and,

in proportion as the work is genuine, so also do saints and angels in heaven. The church receives a fresh, and often a rich, accession both to her numbers and her strength; an accession which, in some cases, raises her from the dust, and causes her to look forth in health and beauty.

Such are the more prominent features of what we commonly call a revival of religion. But revivals, like every thing else that is good, have their counterfeits; and not unfrequently there is a spurious admixture in those which, on the whole, must be considered genuine. It becomes, therefore, a matter of great importance that we discriminate accurately between the precious and the vile; that we do not mistake a gust of animal passion for the awakening or converting operations of God's Holy Spirit. We will inquire briefly what are not, and what are, the indications of a general revival.

1. It is no certain indication of a genuine revival that there is great excitement. It is admitted, indeed, that great excitement may attend a true revival; but it is not the necessary accompaniment of one, and it may exist where the work is wholly spurious. It may be an excitement produced not by the power of divine truth, but by artificial stimulus applied to the imagination and the passions, for the very purpose of producing commotion both within and without. Instances have occurred in which Jehovah, who has declared himself a God of order, has been professedly worshipped in scenes of utter confusion; and impiety has been substituted for prayer, and the wildest reveries of fanaticism have been dealt out, instead of the sober and awful truths of God's word. Here is the highest excitement; but it surely does not prove that the scene in which it exists is a genuine revival. It does not stamp confusion, and irreverence, and



impiety, with the seal of God's Spirit. On the other hand, there may be a true revival where all is calm and noiseless; and multitudes of hearts may be broken in contrition and yielded up to God, which have never been agitated by any violent, much less convulsive emotions, nor even breathed forth a single sob, unless in the silence of the closet, and into the ear of mercy.

2. It is no certain evidence of a genuine revival, that great numbers profess to be converted. We are too much inclined, if I mistake not, to estimate the character of a revival by the number of professed converts; whereas there is scarcely a more uncertain test than this. For who does not know that doctrines may be preached, or measures adopted, or standards of religious character set up, which shall lead multitudes, especially of the uninstructed, to misapprehend the nature of conversion, and to imagine themselves subjects of it, while they are yet in their sins? We admit that there may be genuine revivals, of great extent, in which multitudes may be almost simultaneously made the subjects of God's grace; but we confidently maintain, that the mere fact that many profess to be converted does not prove a revival genuine. For suppose that every one of these individuals, or far the larger part of them, should finally fall away, this surely, we should say, would prove the work spurious. If, then, their having originally professed to be Christians proved it genuine, the same work is proved to be both genuine and spurious. Does the fact that an individual imagines himself to be converted convey any certain evidence of his conversion? But if this is not true of an individual, it certainly cannot be true of any number of individuals; for if one may be self-deceived, so may many. It follows that the genuineness of a revival is to be judged of, in a great measure, independently of the number of its professed subjects.

3. Nor yet, thirdly, is the existence of an extensive and violent opposition any evidence that a revival is genuine. There are those who will have it, that God's Spirit cannot be poured out upon a community, but that all who are unrenewed, if their hearts are not at once broken in godly sorrow, will be excited to wrath and railing. Now I admit fully that the carnal mind is enmity against God; and I am willing to admit, moreover, that in most cases, perhaps in all, in which revivals of any considerable extent exist, there are some who act out this enmity in the way of direct opposition; some who revile God's people and ministers, and who ridicule even the operations of his Holy Spirit. But in an orderly and well-instructed community, I hesitate not to say, that we are not to look for any such general exhibition as this. Facts prove that there are multitudes who pass through a revival, without becoming personally interested in it, who still never utter a word against it, and who say, and doubtless say honestly, that they feel no sensible hostility towards it. They have indeed a heart at enmity with God; but that enmity may operate in some different way, or it may be, to a certain extent, controlled and neutralized by constitutional qualities or habits of education; and they may never feel a disposition to rail at God's work, on the one hand, and may be as little inclined to yield themselves to his service, on the other. While I admit, therefore, that the natural enmity of the heart does sometimes assume the form of direct opposition against revivals, where there is nothing censurable in the manner in which they are conducted, I am constrained to believe that the opposition which is often complained of, or rather gloried in, is opposition to harsh expressions, which are fitted to irritate, but not to enlighten, to convince, or in any way to profit. And then how natural is it that the odium should be transferred, or rather extended, from the severe

language and questionable measures, to the revival with which they are connected; and so it comes to pass, that a violent prejudice really grows up in the mind against the whole subject of revivals, which originated in the imprudent and mistaken zeal of some of their friends. There are those, I know, who court opposition on these occasions, and who seem to think that nothing can be done to purpose until the voice of railing is heard from without. Such persons are sure to find the opposition they seek; and in encountering it, instead of suffering for righteousness' sake, they are buffeted for their own faults. I repeat, then, a genuine work of God's grace may be extensively opposed; but the existence of such opposition does not evince it to be genuine.

What then are some of the indications of a genuine revival of religion?

1. The fact that any thing which claims to be a revival has been effected by scriptural means, is an evidence in favour of its genuineness.

God has given us his word not only as a rule of faith, but of practice; and in the same proportion that we adhere to it, we have a right to expect his blessing; in the same proportion that we depart from it, we have reason to expect his frown. His own institutions he will honour; and the institutions of men, so far as they are conformed to the spirit of his word, he will also honour: but whenever the latter are put in place of the former, or exalted above them, or assume a shape which God's word does not warrant, we cannot suppose that he can regard them with favour; and even if, for a time, there should seem to be a

blessing, there is reason to believe that the event will show, that in that apparent blessing were bound up the elements of a curse.

Now apply this to the subject of revivals. Suppose there were to be a powerful excitement on the subject of religion, produced by means which are at war with the spirit of the gospel -- suppose doctrines were to be preached which the gospel does not recognise, and doctrines omitted which the gospel regards fundamental -- suppose that for the simple, and honest, and faithful use of the sword of the Spirit, there should be substituted a mass of machinery, designed to produce its effect on the animal passions -- suppose the substance of religion, instead of being made to consist in repentance, and faith, and holiness, should consist of falling, and groaning, and shouting, -- we should say, unhesitatingly, that that could not be a genuine work of divine grace; or if there were some pure wheat, there must be a vast amount of chaff and stubble. It may be safe to admit, even in the wildest scenes, the possibility of some genuine conversions; because there may be some truth preached, and some believing prayer offered, which God may regard and honour, notwithstanding all the error and delusion with which it may be mingled. But, in general, it is perfectly fair to conclude, that when men become dissatisfied with plain Bible truth, and simple Bible measures, and undertake to substitute doctrines or devices of their own, any excitement which may be produced, however extensive, however powerful, is of an exceedingly dubious character. If the effect partake of the same character with the cause, it must be of the earth, earthy.

On the other hand, where there is an attention to religion excited by the plain and faithful preaching of God's truth, in all its length and breadth, and by the use of those simple and honest means which

God's word either directly prescribes or fairly sanctions, we cannot reasonably doubt that here is a genuine work of the Holy Spirit. The means used may be in some respects feeble; that is, there may be the entire absence of an eloquent and powerful ministry; nevertheless, if God's truth is dispensed fairly, and fully, and with godly sincerity, and other corresponding means used in a corresponding manner, the effect which is produced may reasonably be attributed to the operation of divine grace; and it is a fact, which does great honour to the sovereignty of God, that the humblest instrumentality, when well directed, has often been honoured by a multitude of conversions, which a course of holy living has proved sound and genuine.

If, then, we have a right to say that God honours his own word and his own institutions, the means employed in producing and carrying forward a revival furnish a good criterion by which to determine its character. It may not always be easy accurately to apply this rule in given cases, because there is often a strange mixture of good and bad; but, without deciding how far any particular revival is genuine or spurious, we may safely decide that it is so in the same proportion that it is sustained by scriptural or unscriptural instrumentality.

2. A genuine revival is characterized by a due proportion of reflection and feeling.

I will not undertake to decide what amount of scriptural knowledge is necessary to conversion in any given case, or to question the fact that men under certain circumstances may be renewed where their knowledge is very limited; nevertheless it is certain that religious reflection precedes religious feeling in the order of nature. Before men can feel remorse, much more contrition, for their sins, they

must have held strongly to their minds the fact that they are sinners. They must have reflected upon what it is to be a sinner; on the character of God, not only as a Father, but a Lawgiver; on the reasonableness of their obligations to Him, and on the guilt of violating those obligations. Before they can exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they must have reflected on the character of Christ, on the fulness of his atonement, and on the freeness and sincerity of the gospel offer. The Holy Spirit employs the truth not only in the work of sanctification, but even in the work of conversion; and the truth can never find its way to the heart except through the understanding. If, then, the great truths of God's word are steadily held up before the mind as subjects of reflection, and if the feeling which is manifested by sinners, whether of anxiety and distress, or of peace and joy, be the effect of such reflection, there is good reason to believe that God's Spirit is really at work, and that that which claims to be a revival is really one. But if, in such a scene, the mind be kept in a great degree passive, if there be a great deal of feeling with very little thought -- burning heat with only dim and doubtful light -- if the sensibilities of the soul be wrought into a storm, none can tell how or why, -- then rely on it, it is not a work which God owns; or if there are some true conversions, far the greater number may be expected to prove spurious. -- But,

3. That on which we are principally to rely as evidence of the genuineness of a revival, is its substantial and abiding fruit. Precisely the same rule is to be applied to a revival as to individual cases of hopeful conversion. Those who have been most conversant with the subject of religious experience, do not rely chiefly for evidence of piety on the pungency of one's convictions, or the transports by which they may be succeeded, or the professions which may be made

of devotedness to Christ; for they have learned that all this is equivocal, and that delusion and self-deception are consistent with the most promising appearances which are ever exhibited. While, therefore, they may hope favourably from what they see at the beginning, before they form a decisive opinion they wait to see whether the individual can endure temptation; whether he is faithful in the discharge of all duty; whether he is a good soldier of Jesus Christ. And if they see the fruits of holiness abounding in the life, whether the appearance at the beginning were more or less favourable, they infer with confidence that a principle of holiness has been implanted in the heart. In the same manner are we to test the character of revivals. If an excitement on the subject of religion (no matter how great it may have been) passes away, and leaves behind little or no substantial or enduring good -- if most of those who profess to have been converted return speedily or gradually to the world, living a careless life, and exhibiting an unedifying example -- or if they manifest a spirit of pride, and uncharitableness, and a disposition to condemn all who do not exactly come to their standard, -- then rely on it, though that maybe called a revival of religion, it has little more than the name. But if, after the excitement has gone by, the fruits of holiness remain, and become more and more mature, if those who have been professedly converted hold on a course of humble, self-denied, devoted obedience, exemplifying the spirit of Christ, as well as professing his name, then you may take knowledge of them that they have come out of a true revival of religion. Religion acted out in the life is the best evidence that religion has its dwelling in the heart. Let the virtues and graces of the Christian adorn the lives of those who have professed to be converted

during a revival, and you need ask for no better evidence that there has been the agency of the Spirit of God.

Such, as it seems to me, are the characteristics of a genuine revival of religion. I shall not stop here to prove that such a state of things has every thing in it to interest the best feelings of the Christian. If you have ever felt the power of God's grace, and especially if your hearts are now awake to the interests of his kingdom and the salvation of your fellowmen, it cannot be a matter of indifference with you whether or not God's work is to be revived in the midst of us. Let me entreat you, then, as this subject is for several successive weeks to occupy your attention, to be fellow-helpers together, in humble dependence on God's grace, to procure for ourselves those rich blessings on which your meditations will turn. While we are endeavouring to form correct views of this important subject, may we get our hearts thoroughly imbued with its spirit; and be able to point, with devout joy, to what is passing in the midst of us as an example of a genuine, scriptural revival of religion.

## **LECTURE II**

### **DEFENCE OF REVIVALS.**

Acts ii. 13. "Others mocking, said, These men are full of new wine."

The occasion on which these words were spoken marked a memorable era in the history of the church. The disciples of Jesus, a



few days after his ascension, being assembled for devotional exercises in a certain room, in the city of Jerusalem, where they had been accustomed to meet, were surprised by a marvellous exhibition of the mighty power of God. There came suddenly a sound from heaven, as of a violent rushing wind; and, at the same time, there appeared unto them a number of divided tongues, made as it were of fire; and it was so ordered that one of these tongues rested upon each of them. And at the moment that these tongues, or lambent flames, touched them, they were filled, in an extraordinary degree, with the Holy Spirit; and began to speak a variety of languages, which they had never before understood, with a fluency and fervour which were beyond measure astonishing. It is hardly necessary to add, that this was a most signal attestation to the divinity of the gospel, and a glorious pledge of the Redeemer's final and complete triumph.

It is not strange that so wonderful an event as this should have been instantly noised abroad, or that it should have excited much curiosity and speculation. Accordingly, we are informed that the multitude came together, and were amazed to find that the fact was as had been represented; that these ignorant Galileans had suddenly become masters of a great variety of languages; and were talking with men of different nations as fluently as if they had been speaking in their own mother tongue. The true way of accounting for this -- that is, referring it to miraculous agency -- they all seem to have overlooked; nevertheless, as it was manifestly an effect of something, they could not but inquire in respect to the cause; and we have one specimen of the wisdom that was exercised on the occasion in the words of our text -- "Others, mocking, said, These men are full of new wine;" -- as if they soberly believed that a state of intoxication, which often deprives a man of the power of speaking his own language, had

strangely given to them the power of speaking languages not their own, and which they had never learned. All will admit that this was the very infatuation of prejudice.

The reason why this absurd and ridiculous account was given of this miraculous occurrence was, that the individuals were at war with that system of truth of which this was pre-eminently the seal; they could not admit that it was an evidence of the triumph of the crucified Jesus; and rather than even seem to admit it, they would sacrifice all claims to reason and common sense. Now I would not say that all objections that are made against revivals of religion, are made in the same spirit which prompted this foolish declaration of these early opposers of the gospel; but I am constrained to express my conviction that many of them are; and hence I have chosen the passage now read as introductory to a consideration of OBJECTIONS AGAINST REVIVALS. It was actually an effusion of the Holy Spirit which drew forth the objection contained in the text; the commencement of a scene which terminated, as revivals now do, in the conversion of many souls, and an important addition to the Christian church.

The sole object of this discourse, then, will be to consider, and so far as I can, to meet, some of the most popular objections which are urged against revivals of religion. And I wish it distinctly borne in mind, that the defence which I am to make relates not to mere spurious excitements, but to genuine revivals, -- such revivals as I have attempted to describe in the preceding discourse.

I. The first of these objections which I shall notice is, that revivals of religion, as we use the phrase, are unscriptural. It is proper that this

objection should be noticed first, because, if it can be sustained, it is of itself a sufficient reason, not only for indifference towards revivals, but for positive opposition to them; and in that case, as it would be unnecessary that we should proceed, so it would be only fair that, at the outset, we should surrender the whole ground. No matter what else may be said in favour of revivals -- no matter how important they may have been regarded, or how much we may have been accustomed to identify them with the prosperity of Christ's cause -- if it can be fairly shown that they are unscriptural, we are bound unhesitatingly to conclude that we have mistaken their true character. God's word is to be our standard in every thing; and wherever we suffer considerations of expediency, in reference to this or any other subject, to prevail against that standard, we set up our own wisdom against the wisdom of the Highest; and we are sure thereby to incur his displeasure. To the law and the testimony then be our appeal.

In order to denominate any thing that is connected with the subject of religion unscriptural, it is not enough that we should be able to show that it is not expressly commanded, but we should also make it appear that it is either expressly or implicitly forbidden. There are many things which all admit to be right among Christians, and which are even regarded as important parts of duty, for which there is no express warrant in the Bible; though no doubt they judge rightly, when they suppose that they find a sufficient warrant for these things in the general spirit of the Bible. For instance, the Bible has said nothing about the monthly concert of prayer for the conversion of the world, which is now so generally observed throughout evangelical Protestant Christendom; and of course this is not to be regarded as a divine institution: but so long as God has commanded his people to

pray for the prosperity of Jerusalem, and so long as the Saviour has promised to bless them, where only two or three are met together in his name, it would be folly for any one to contend that the monthly concert is an anti-scriptural institution. The spirit of the Bible manifestly justifies it; though the letter of the Bible may not require it. In like manner, even if we were to admit, that what we call a revival of religion, so far as human agency and influence are concerned, were not directly required by God's word, nevertheless, if it can be shown that it is consistent with the spirit of God's word, no man has a right to gainsay it, on the ground that it is unscriptural.

Now we claim for revivals, (and it is the least that we claim for them on the score of divine authority,) that there is nothing in the general spirit of the Bible that is unfavourable to them, but much of an opposite character. It is the tendency of all the instructions of God's word to form men to a habit of serious reflection; to abstract their affections from the world; to lead them to commune with their hearts, and to commune with God; and to seek with greater earnestness than any thing else the salvation of the soul. Now this is precisely what is accomplished in a revival of religion. In such a scene, if any where, is fulfilled the great design of God's word in bringing men to serious consideration, to self-communion, to a right estimate of the comparative value of the things which are seen and are temporal, and the things which are not seen and are eternal. We say nothing here of the means employed, but simply speak of the effect produced; and we are sure that no one who admits that the effect is as we have stated, will doubt that it is in keeping with the general tenor of God's word.

But we need not stop here; for the Bible has given a more direct sanction to revivals, and in various ways. Look, for instance, at many of the prayers which it records, as having been offered for the spiritual prosperity of Zion, when she was in a state of deep depression. Says the Psalmist, "Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger towards us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? Wilt thou draw out thine anger unto all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee? Show us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation." And again, "Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and behold and visit this vine, and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself." And again, the prophet Habakkuk prays, "O Lord, revive thy work; in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." These prayers were offered in behalf of the church, when she was in a state of temporal bondage, as well as of spiritual affliction: nevertheless, they relate especially to spiritual blessings; and what was meant by a revival then, was substantially the same thing as what is intended by a revival now. Accordingly, we find that these very prayers are constantly used by the church at this day; and that from a regard to them, as we cannot doubt, God often appears to lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes; the blessings of divine grace descend upon her in such profusion, that she puts on her beautiful garments, and looks forth fair as the morning.

There are also recorded in the Scriptures many signal instances in which God has poured out his Spirit, and effected a sudden and general reformation. If you go back to the Jewish dispensation, you will find this remark strikingly verified in the reigns of David and Solomon, of Asa and Jehoshaphat, of Hezekiah and Josiah. After the

church had languished during the long and gloomy period of the Babylonish captivity, her interests were signally revived under the ministry of Ezra. A similar state of things existed in the days of John the Baptist, when the kingdom of heaven is said to have suffered violence, and many of the most profligate part of the community became impressed with religious truth, and were baptized unto repentance. On the occasion referred to in our text, no less than three thousand, and on the day following two thousand more, were subdued to the obedience of the truth, and were added to the Lord. Shortly after this, multitudes in Samaria experienced the regenerating power of the gospel; and upon the dispersion of the disciples after the martyrdom of Stephen, they were instrumental of exciting a general attention to religion in the remote parts of Judea, and even as far as the territories of Greece. Here, then, are facts recorded by the unerring finger of inspiration, precisely analogous to those which the objection we are considering declares to be unscriptural.

But, in addition to this, there is much in the prophecies which might fairly lead us to expect the very scenes which we denominate revivals of religion. If you read the prophetical parts of Scripture attentively, you cannot, I think, but be struck with the evidence that, as the millennial day approaches, the operations of divine grace are to be increasingly rapid and powerful. Many of these predictions respecting the state of religion under the Christian dispensation, it is manifest, have not yet had their complete fulfilment; and they not only justify the belief that these glorious scenes which we see passing really are of divine origin, as they claim to be, but that similar scenes, still more glorious, still more wonderful, are to be expected, as the Messiah travels in the greatness of his strength towards a universal

triumph. I cannot but think that many of the inspired predictions in respect to the progress of religion appear overstrained, unless we admit that the church is to see greater things than she has yet seen; and that they fairly warrant the conclusion, that succeeding generations, rejoicing in the brighter light of God's truth, and the richer manifestations of his grace, may look back even upon this blessed era of revivals as a period of comparative darkness.

If, then, the general spirit of the Bible be in favour of revivals -- if the prayers which holy and inspired men have offered for them are here recorded -- if there be many instances here mentioned of their actual occurrence -- and if the spirit of prophecy has been exercised in describing and predicting them, -- then we may consider the objection that they are unscriptural as fairly set aside; nay, we may regard them as having the sanction of divine authority in the highest and clearest possible manner.

II. It is objected, again, that revivals of religion are unnecessary. In the mouth of an infidel this objection would doubtless imply that religion itself is unnecessary; and so, of course, must be all the means used for its promotion. But in this view it does not fall within our present design to consider it. There are those who profess to regard religion, who maintain that revivals are modern innovations; and that they are unnecessary, on the ground that the cause of Christ may be sustained and advanced, as it has been in other days, without them. This is the only form of the objection which it concerns us at present to notice.

The first thing to be said in reply, is, that the objection supposes what is not true -- namely, that revivals are of modern origin. The

truth is, that if, as the objection asserts, the cause of religion in preceding ages has been sustained and carried forward without them, so also it has been sustained and carried forward with them; and during the periods in which they have prevailed, the church has seen her greatest prosperity. You have already seen, that, instead of being of recent origin, they go back to an early period in the Jewish dispensation. And, passing from the records of inspiration, we find that revivals have existed, with a greater or less degree of power, especially in the later periods of the Christian church. This was emphatically true during the period of the Reformation in the sixteenth century: Germany, France, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, the Low Countries, and Britain, were severally visited by copious showers of divine influence. During the season of the plague in London in 1665, there was a very general awakening; in which many thousands are said to have been hopefully born of the Spirit. In the early part of the seventeenth century, various parts of Scotland and the North of Ireland were blessed, at different periods, with signal effusions of divine grace, in which great multitudes gave evidence of being brought out of darkness into marvellous light. During the first half of the last century, under the ministrations of Whitfield, Brainerd, Edwards, Davies, the Tennents, and many other of the holiest and greatest men whose labours have blessed the church, there was a succession of revivals in this country, which caused the wilderness to blossom as the rose, and the desert to put on the appearance of the garden of the Lord. And when these revivals declined, and the church settled back into the sluggish state from which she had been raised, then commenced her decline in purity, in discipline, in doctrine, in all with which her prosperity is most intimately connected. And this state of things continued, only



becoming worse and worse, until, a little before the beginning of the present century, the spirit of revivals again burst forth, and has since that period richly blessed especially our American church. The fact, then, most unfortunately for the objection we are considering, turns out to be, that if the church has been sustained at some periods without these signal effusions of the Holy Spirit, she has barely been sustained; and that the brightest periods of her history have been those in which they have prevailed with the greatest power. To object to revivals then on the ground that they are modern, or that they are unnecessary to the best interests of the church, betrays an utter ignorance of their history.

But let us inquire a little further, why the old and quiet way, as it is often represented, of becoming religious, is the best. If you mean that you prefer that state of religion in which the dew of divine grace continually descend, and Christians are always consistent and active, and there is a constant succession of conversions from among the impenitent, to the more sudden and rapid operations of God's Spirit --be it so; there is as truly a revival in the one case as the other. But the state of things which this objection contemplates is that in which religion is kept in the back ground, and only here and there one at distant periods comes forward to confess Christ, and the church is habitually in a languishing state. And is such a state of things to be preferred above that in which the salvation of the soul becomes the all-engrossing object, and even hundreds, within a little period, come and own themselves on the Lord's side? Is it not desirable that sinners should be converted immediately? Are they liable every hour to die, and thus be beyond the reach of mercy and of hope; and is it not right that they should be pressed with the obligations of immediate repentance; and is it not necessary that they should exert

themselves to escape the tremendous doom by which they are threatened? Is it more desirable that the mass of sinners should be sleeping on in guilty security, liable every hour to fall into the hands of a sin-avenging God, or that they should be escaping by multitudes from the coming wrath, and gaining an interest in the salvation of the gospel? He, and only he, who will dare to say that the former is most desirable can consistently object to revivals, on the ground that the church had better revert to the quiet uniformity of other days.

Still farther: before you decide that revivals are unnecessary, you must either settle it that they are not the work of God, or else you must assume the responsibility of deciding that he is not doing his work in the best way. Will you take the former side of the alternative, and maintain that this is not God's work? If you say this, then I challenge you to prove that God ever works in the renovation of men; for the only evidence of the existence of a principle of religion in the heart, is the operation of that principle in the life; and I hesitate not to say, that I can show you as unequivocal fruits of holiness produced from a revival of religion, as you can show me in any other circumstances. Unless then you will assume the responsibility of saying that all the apparent faith, and love, and zeal, and holiness, which are produced from a revival, and which, so far as we can judge, have every characteristic of genuineness, are spurious, it were rash to decide that this is not a work effected by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

But if you admit that this is God's work, you surely will not dare to say that his way of accomplishing his purpose is not the best. Suppose that nothing appeared to render this course of procedure especially desirable, yet the point being established that it is the

course which God hath chosen, the reflection that God's ways are not as our ways, ought to silence every doubt. But who, after all, will say that it even appears inconsistent with infinite wisdom and goodness, as the cause of God is advancing towards a complete triumph, that he should operate more powerfully, more suddenly, than in some other periods; in short, precisely as he does in a revival of religion? Has God bound himself that he will convert men only by small numbers, or by a very gradual influence; or does he not rather, in this respect, claim the right of absolute sovereignty? I ask again, in view of the bearing which this objection has upon the character of God, who will dare say that revivals are unnecessary?

III. Another objection against revivals is, that they are the nurseries of enthusiasm.

If by enthusiasm you mean a heated imagination, that prompts to excesses in conduct, then you meet with it in other departments beside that of revivals. You will see as much enthusiasm in a political cabal, or in an election of civil officers, or in a commercial speculation, or even in the pursuits of science, as you will find in a revival of religion. Yes, believe me, there is a worldly as well as a religious enthusiasm: and let me inquire how it comes to pass that you can tolerate the former, nay, perhaps, that you can exemplify and cherish it, and yet can regard the latter with so much disapprobation and abhorrence? Does it not look a little as if your objection lay rather against religion, the subject in respect to which the enthusiasm is exercised, than against the enthusiasm itself?

But are you sure, that in passing judgment on the enthusiasm connected with revivals, you always call things by their right names?

Is it not more than possible, that much of what you call by this name may be the fervour of true love to God, and of genuine Christian zeal? Suppose you were to go into a meeting composed entirely of persons of the same religious character with Isaiah, or David, or Paul, and suppose they were to utter themselves in expressions not more fervent than these holy men have actually used, do you not believe that you would think there was some enthusiasm in that meeting, and that the exercises would be better if they partook a little more of the earthly, and a little less of the heavenly? Between enthusiasm on the one hand, and conviction of sin and love to God, and zeal in religion on the other, there is really no affinity; they are as unlike each other as any genuine quality is unlike its counterfeit; but is there not some danger that they who have a heart opposed to religion, and who are willing to find excuses for the neglect of it, will brand some of the Christian graces, when they shine with unusual brightness, with the opprobrious epithet of enthusiasm?

But suppose there is some real enthusiasm mingled with revivals, (and, to a certain extent, this no doubt must be admitted,) shall we on this ground reject them altogether? Because some few individuals in such a scene may act the part of enthusiasts, is all the true Christian feeling, and Christian conduct, which is exemplified by many others, to be considered of no account? Or suppose, if you will, that a small degree of enthusiasm may pertain to all, does this nullify all the exercises of genuine and perhaps elevated piety with which it may happen to be connected. Where is the man who adopts the same principle in respect to his worldly affairs? If you should import the productions of some foreign clime and should discover that a small part of the quantity had been injured by the voyage, and that the rest had not suffered at all, would you cast the whole of it from you, or

would you not rather make a careful separation between the good and the bad, retaining the one, and rejecting the other? Or if you should hear a lecture on science, or politics, or religion, or any other subject, in which you should discover a few mistakes, while nearly the whole of it was sound, and practical, and in a high degree instructive, would you condemn the whole for these trifling errors, and say it was all a mass of absurdity, or would you not rather treasure it up in your memory as in the main excellent, though you felt that, like every thing human, it was marred by imperfection? And why should not the same principle be admitted in respect to revivals? Is it right, is it honest, because there may be in them a small admixture of enthusiasm, to treat them as if they were made up of enthusiasm, and nothing else? Would it not be more equitable, would it not be more candid, to separate the precious from the vile, and to let the sentence of condemnation fall only where it is deserved?

But perhaps I shall be met here with the declaration, that there are scenes, which pass for revivals of religion, in which there is nothing but enthusiasm and its kindred evils -- scenes which outrage the decorum of religious worship, and exert no other influence upon religion than to bring it into contempt. Be it so. If there be such scenes, whatever name they may assume, they are not what we plead for, under the name of revivals; on the contrary, every friend of true revivals must, if he be consistent, set his face against them. And I maintain further, that it is gross injustice to the cause of revivals, to confound those scenes in which there is nothing but the wild fire of human passion, with those in which there is the manifest operation of the Holy Spirit. Suppose you should see a man practising the extreme of avarice, and calling it by the honest name of economy, or

suppose you should see a man inflexibly obstinate in an evil course, and calling his obstinacy virtuous independence, would this justify you in setting at naught a habit of economy and independence, as if a virtue could be turned into a vice by the misapplication of a name? And suppose that any man, or any number of men, choose to yield themselves up to gross fanaticism, and to attempt to pass it off' under the name of religion, or of a revival of religion, who is there that does not perceive, that the existence of the counterfeit contributes in no way to debase the genuine quality? Prove to me that any thing that takes the name of a revival is really spurious, and I pledge myself, as a friend of true revivals, to be found on the list of its opposers. Names are nothing. Things, facts, realities, are everything.

IV. Another objection to revivals, closely allied to the preceding, is, that the subjects of them often fall into a state of mental derangement, and even commit suicide.

The fact implied in this objection is, to a certain extent, acknowledged; that is, it is acknowledged that instances of the kind mentioned do sometimes occur. But is it fair, after all, to consider revivals as responsible for them? Every one who has any knowledge of the human constitution must be aware, that the mind is liable to derangement from any cause that operates in the way of great excitement; and whether this effect, in any given case, is to be produced or not, depends partly on the peculiar character of the mind which is the subject of the operation, and partly on the degree of self-control which the individual is enabled to exercise. Hence we find on the list of maniacs, and on those who have committed suicide, many in respect to whom this awful calamity is to be traced

to the love of the world. Their plans for accumulating wealth have been blasted, and when they expected to be rich they have suddenly found themselves in poverty, and perhaps obscurity; and instead of sustaining themselves against the shock, they have yielded to it; and the consequence has been the wreck of their intellect, and the sacrifice of their life. You who are men of business well know that the case to which I have here referred is one of no uncommon occurrence; but who of you ever thought that these cases reflected at all upon the fair and honourable pursuit of the world? Where is the merchant who, on hearing that some commercial adventurer had become deranged in consequence of some miserable speculation, and had been found dead with a halter about his neck, ever said, "I will close my accounts and shut up my store, and abandon this business of buying and selling, which leads to such fatal results?" Is there one of you who ever made such an inference from such a fact; or who ever relaxed at all in your worldly occupation, on the ground that some individuals had perverted the same occupation to their ruin? Here you are careful enough to distinguish between the thing and the abuse of it; and why not be equally candid in respect to revivals of religion? When you hear of instances of suicide in revivals, remember that such instances occur in other scenes of life, and other departments of action; and if you are not prepared to make commerce, and learning, and politics, and virtuous attachment, responsible for this awful calamity, because it is sometimes connected with them, then do not attempt to cast this responsibility upon religion, or revivals of religion, because here, too, individuals are sometimes left to this most fearful visitation.

I have said that some such cases as the objection supposes occur, but I maintain that the number is, by the enemies of revivals, greatly

overrated. Twenty men may become insane, and may actually commit suicide from any other cause, and the fact will barely be noticed: but let one come to this awful end in consequence of religious excitement, and it will be blazoned upon the house-top, with an air of melancholy boding, and yet with a feeling of real triumph; and many a gazette will introduce it with some sneering comments on religious fanaticism; and the result will be that it will become a subject of general notoriety and conversation. In this way the number of these melancholy cases comes to be imagined much larger than it really is; and in the common estimate of the opposers of revivals it is no doubt multiplied manifold.

But admitting that the number of these cases were as great as its enemies would represent -- admit that in every extensive revival there were one person who actually became deranged, and fell a victim to that derangement, are you prepared to say, even then, upon an honest estimate of the comparative good and evil that is accomplished, that that revival had better not have taken place? On the one side, estimate fairly the evil, and we have no wish to make it less than it really is. There is the premature death of an individual -- death in the most unnatural and shocking form, and fitted to harrow the feelings of friends to the utmost. There may be a temporary loss of usefulness to the world, and, as the case may be, a loss of counsel, and aid, and effort, in some of the tenderest earthly relations. Yet it is not certain but that the soul may be saved; for though, at the time the awful act is committed, there may be thick darkness hanging about it, and even the phrenzy of despair may have seized hold of it, yet no mortal can decide that God's Spirit may not after all have performed its effectual work, and that the soul, liberated from the body by the most dreadful act which man can commit, may not find its way to



heaven, to be for ever with the Lord. But suppose the very worst -- suppose this sinner who falls in a fit of religious insanity, by the violence of his own hand, to be unrenewed -- why in this case he rushes prematurely upon the wrath of God, he cuts short the period of his probation, which, had it been protracted, he might, or might not, have improved to the salvation of his soul. Look now at the other side. In the revival in which this unhappy case has occurred, besides the general quickening impulse that has been given to the people of God, perhaps one hundred individuals have had their character renovated, and their doom reversed. Each one of these was hastening forward, perhaps to a death-bed of horror, certainly to an eternity of wailing; but in consequence of the change that has passed upon them, they can now anticipate the close of life with peace, and the ages of eternity with unutterable joy. There is no longer any condemnation to them, because they are in Christ Jesus. And, besides, they are prepared to live usefully in the world -- each of them to glorify God, by devoting himself, according to his ability, to the advancement of his cause. Now far be it from us to speak lightly of such a heart-rending event as the death of a fellow-mortal, in the circumstances we have supposed; but if any will weigh this against the advantages of a revival, we have a right to weigh the advantages of a revival against this, and to call upon you to decide for yourselves which preponderates? Is the salvation of one hundred immortal souls (supposing that number to be converted) a light matter, when put into the scale against the premature and awful death of a single individual, or, to suppose the very worst of the case, his cutting short his space for repentance, and rushing unprepared into the presence of his Judge?

V. It is farther objected against revivals, that they occasion a sort of religious dissipation; leading men to neglect their worldly concerns for too many religious exercises; exercises, too, protracted, not unfrequently, to an unseasonable hour.

No doubt it is possible for men to devote themselves more to social religious services than is best for their spiritual interests; because a constant attendance on these services would interfere with the more private means of grace, which, all must admit, are of primary importance. But who are the persons by whom this objection is most frequently urged, and who seem to feel the weight of it most strongly? Are they those who actually spend most time in their closets, and who come forth into the world with their hearts deeply imbued with a religious influence, and who perform their secular duties from the most conscientious regard to God's authority? Or are they not rather those who rarely, if ever, retire to commune with God, and who engage in the business of life from mere selfish considerations; who, in short, are thorough-going worldlings? If a multitude of religious meetings are to be censured on the ground of their interference with other duties, I submit it to you, whether this censure comes with a better grace from him who performs these duties, or from him who neglects them? I submit it to you, whether the man who is conscious of living in the entire neglect of religion, ought to be very lavish in his censures upon those who are yielding their thoughts to it in any way, or to any extent? Would it not be more consistent, at least, for him to take care of the beam, before he troubles himself about the mote?

Far be it from me to deny that the evil which this objection contemplates does sometimes exist -- that men, and especially

women, do neglect private and domestic duties for the sake of mingling continually in social religious exercises: nevertheless, I am constrained to say, that the objection, as it is directed against the mass of Christians, during a well-regulated revival, is utterly unfounded. For I ask who are the persons who have ordinarily the best regulated families, who are most faithful to their children, most faithful in their closets, most faithful and conscientious in their relative duties, and even in their worldly engagements? If I may be permitted to answer, I should say, unhesitatingly, they are generally the very persons who love the social prayer meeting, and the meeting for Christian instruction and exhortation; those, in short, who are often referred to, by the enemies of revivals, as exemplifying the evil which this objection contemplates. God requires us to do every duty, whether secular or religious, in its right place; and this the Christian is bound to keep in view in all his conduct. But there is too much reason to fear, that the spirit which ordinarily objects against many religious exercises, is a spirit which, if the whole truth were known, it would appear had little complacency in any.

But it is alleged that, during revivals, religious meetings are not only multiplied to an improper extent, but are protracted to an unseasonable hour. That instances of this kind exist admits not of question; and it is equally certain, that the case here contemplated is an evil which every sober, judicious Christian must discourage. We do not believe that in an enlightened community, it is an evil of very frequent occurrence; but wherever it exists, it is to be reprobated as an abuse, and not to be regarded as any part of a genuine revival, or as any thing for which a true revival is responsible. But here, again, it may be worth while to inquire how far many of the individuals who offer this objection are consistent with themselves. They can be

present at a political cabal, or at a convivial meeting, which lasts the whole night, and these occasions may be of very frequent occurrence, and yet it may never occur to them that they are keeping unseasonable hours. Or their children may return at the dawn of day, from a scene of vain amusement, in which they have brought on an entire prostration both of mind and body, and unfitted themselves for any useful exertion during the day; and yet all this is not only connived at as excusable, but smiled upon as commendable. I do not say that it is right to keep up a religious meeting during the hours that Providence has allotted to repose: I believe fully that in ordinary cases it is wrong; but sure I am that I could not hold up my head to say this, if I were accustomed to look with indulgence on those other scenes of the night of which I have spoken. It is best to spend the night as God designed it should be spent, in refreshing our faculties by sleep; but if any other way is to be chosen, judge ye whether they are wisest who deprive themselves of repose in an idle round of diversion, or they who subject themselves to the same sacrifice in exercises of devotion and piety.

VI. It is objected against revivals, that they often introduce discord into families, and disturb the general peace of society.

It must be conceded, that rash and intemperate measures have sometimes been adopted in connection with revivals, or at least what have passed under the name of revivals, which have been deservedly the subject of censure, and which were adapted, by stirring up the worst passions of the heart, to introduce a spirit of fierce contention and discord. But I must be permitted to say, that whatever evil such measures may bring in their train, is not to be charged upon genuine revivals of religion. The revivals for which we plead are

characterized, not by a spirit of rash and unhallowed attack on the part of their friends, which might be supposed to have come up from the world below, but by that wisdom which cometh down from above, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated. For all the discord and mischief that result from measures designed to awaken opposition and provoke the bad passions, they only are to be held responsible by whom those measures are devised or adopted. We hesitate not to say, that there is no communion between the spirit that dictates them and the spirit of true revivals.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that there are instances in which a revival of religion, conducted in a prudent and scriptural manner, awakens bitter hostility, and sometimes occasions for the time much domestic unhappiness. There are cases in which the enmity of the heart is so deep and bitter, that a bare knowledge of the fact that sinners around are beginning to inquire, will draw forth a torrent of reproach and railing; and there are cases, too, in which the fact that an individual in a family becomes professedly pious, will throw that family into a violent commotion, and waken up against the individual bitter prejudices, and possibly be instrumental of exiling a child, or a wife, or a sister, from the affections of those most dear to them. But you surely will not make religion, or a revival of religion, responsible for cases of this kind. Did not the benevolent Jesus himself say, that he came not to send peace on the earth, but a sword; meaning by it this very thing -- that in prosecuting the object of his mission into the world, he should necessarily provoke the enmity of the human heart; and thus that enmity would act itself out in the persecution of himself and his followers? The Saviour, by his perfect innocence, his divine holiness, his uncompromising faithfulness, provoked the Jews to imbrue their hands in his blood;

but who ever supposed that the responsibility of their murderous act rested upon him? In like manner, ministers and Christians, by labouring for the promotion of a revival of religion, may be the occasion of fierce opposition to the cause of truth and holiness; but if they labour only in the manner which God has prescribed, they are in no way accountable for that opposition. It will always be right for individuals to secure the salvation of their own souls, let it involve whatever domestic inconvenience, or whatever worldly sacrifice it may. And so, too, it will be always right for Christians to labour in God's appointed way for the salvation of others; though, in doing so, they should kindle up against them the fiercest opposition. Where such opposition is excited, the opposers of religion may set it to the account of revivals; but God, the righteous Judge, will take care that it is charged where it fairly belongs.

VII. It is objected, again, to revivals, that the supposed conversions that occur in them are usually too sudden to be genuine, and that the excitement which prevails at such a time must be a fruitful source of self-deception.

That revivals are often perverted to minister to self-deception cannot be questioned; and this is always to be expected when there is much of human machinery introduced. Men often suppose themselves converted, and actually pass as converts, merely from some impulse of the imagination, when they have not even been the subjects of true conviction. But, notwithstanding this abuse, who will say that the Bible does not warrant us to expect sudden conversions? What say you of the three thousand who were converted on the day of Pentecost? Shall I be told that there was a miraculous agency concerned in producing that wonderful result? I answer, there was

indeed a miracle wrought in connection with that occasion; but there was no greater miracle in the actual conversion of those sinners than there is in the conversion of any other sinners; for conversion is in all cases the same work, and accomplished by the same agency; namely, the special agency of the Holy Spirit. This instance, then, is entirely to our purpose; and proves at least the possibility that a conversion may be sound, though it be sudden.

Nor is there any thing in the nature of the case that should lead us to a different conclusion. For what is conversion? It is a turning from sin to holiness. The truth of God is presented before the mind, and this truth is cordially and practically believed; it is received into the understanding, and through that reaches the heart and life. Suppose the truth to be held up before the mind already awake to its importance, and in a sense prepared for its reception, what hinders but that it should be received immediately? But this would be all that is intended by a sudden conversion. Indeed we all admit that the act of conversion, whenever it takes place, is sudden; and why may not the preparation for it, in many instances, be so also? Where is the absurdity of supposing that a sinner may, within a very short period, be brought practically to believe both the truth that awakens the conscience, and that which converts the soul; in other words, may pass from a state of absolute carelessness, to reconciliation with God? The evidence of conversion must indeed be gradual, and must develop itself in a subsequent course of exercises and acts; so that it were rash to pronounce any individual in such circumstances a true convert: but not only the act of conversion, but the immediate preparation for it, may be sudden; and we may reasonably hope, in any given case of apparent conversion, that the change is genuine.

I may add, that the general spirit of the Bible is by no means unfavourable to sudden conversions. The Bible calls upon men to repent, to believe, to turn to the Lord now: it does not direct them to put themselves on a course of preparation for doing this at some future time; but it allows no delay; it proclaims that now is the accepted time, now the day of salvation. When men are converted suddenly, is there any thing more than an immediate compliance with these divine requisitions which are scattered throughout the Bible?

But what is the testimony of facts on this subject? It were in vain to deny that some who seem to be converted during the most genuine revivals fall away; and it were equally vain to deny that some who profess to have become reconciled to God, when there is no revival, fall away. But that any considerable proportion of the professed subjects of well-regulated revivals apostatize, especially after having made a public profession, is a position which I am persuaded cannot be sustained. I know there are individual exceptions from this remark; exceptions which have occurred under peculiar circumstances: but, if I mistake not, those ministers who have had the most experience on this subject will testify, that a very large proportion of those whom they have known professedly beginning the Christian life, during a revival, have held on their way stronger and stronger. It has even been remarked, by a minister who has probably been more conversant with genuine revivals than any other of the age, that his experience has justified the remark, that there is a smaller proportion of apostacies among the professed subjects of revivals, than among those who make a profession when there is no unusual attention to religion.



After all, we are willing to admit that the excitement attending a revival may be the means of self-deception. But we maintain that this is not, at least to any great extent, a necessary evil, and that it may ordinarily be prevented by suitable watchfulness and caution on the part of those who are active in conducting the work. To accomplish this, requires an intimate knowledge of the heart, and of God's word, and of the whole subject of experimental religion. But with these qualifications, whether in a minister or in private Christians, and with the diligent and faithful discharge of duty, we believe that little more is to be apprehended in respect to self-deception during a revival, than might reasonably be in ordinary circumstances.

VIII. It is objected, that revivals are followed by seasons of corresponding declension; and that therefore nothing is gained, on the whole, to the cause of religion.

This remark must of course be limited in its application to those who were before Christians; for it surely cannot mean, that those who are really converted during a revival lose the principle of religion from their hearts after it has passed away. Suppose then it be admitted, that Christians on the whole gain no advantage from revivals, on account of the re-action that takes place in their experience, still there is the gain of a great number of genuine conversions; and this is clear gain from the world. Is it not immense gain to the church, immense gain to the Saviour, that a multitude of souls should yield up their rebellion, and become the subjects of renewing grace? And if this is an effect of revivals, (and who can deny it?) what becomes of the objection, that on the whole they bring no gain to the cause?

But it is not true that revivals are of no advantage to Christians. It is confidently believed, if you could hear the experience of those who have laboured in them most faithfully and most successfully, you would learn that these were the seasons in which they made their brightest and largest attainments in religion. And these seasons they have not failed subsequently to connect with special praise and thanksgiving to God. That there are cases in which Christians, during a revival, have had so much to do with the hearts of others that they have neglected their own; and that there is danger, from the very constitution of the human mind, that an enlivened and elevated state of Christian affections will be followed by spiritual languor and listlessness, I admit; but I maintain that these are not necessary evils, and that the Christian, by suitable watchfulness and effort, may avoid them. It is not in human nature always to be in a state of strong excitement; but it is possible for any Christian to maintain habitually that spirit of deep and earnest piety, which a revival is so well fitted to awaken and cherish.

IX. The last objection against revivals which I shall notice is, that they cherish the spirit of sectarism, and furnish opportunities and inducements to different denominations to make proselytes.

I own, brethren, with grief and shame for sin: common imperfections, that the evil contemplated in this objection frequently does occur: and though, for a time, different sects may seem to co-operate with each other for the advancement of the common cause, yet they are exceedingly apt, sooner or later, to direct their efforts mainly to the promotion of their own particular cause; and sometimes it must be confessed the greater has seemed to be almost forgotten in the less. Wherever this state of things exists, it is

certainly fraught with evil; and the only remedy to be found for it is an increased degree of intelligence, piety, and charity, in the church.

But here again let me remind you, that, let this evil be as great as it may, the most that you can say of its connection with revivals is, that they are the innocent occasion of it, not the faulty cause. Suppose an individual, or any number of individuals, were to take occasion from the fact that we are assembled here for religious worship, to come in, in violation of the laws of the land, and by boisterous and menacing conduct to disturb our public service -- and suppose they should find themselves forthwith within the walls of a jail, -- the fact of our being here engaged in the worship of God might be the occasion of the evil which they had brought upon themselves, but surely no man in the possession of his reason would dream that it was the responsible cause. In like manner, a revival may furnish an opportunity, and suggest an inducement, to different religious sects to bring as many into their particular communion as they can; and they may sometimes do this in the exercise of an unhallowed party spirit; but the evil is to be charged, not upon the revival, but upon the imperfections of Christians and ministers, which have taken occasion from this state of things thus to come into exercise. The revival is from above; the proselyting spirit is from beneath.

But the fallacy of this objection may best be seen by a comparison of the evil complained of, with the good that is achieved. You and I are Presbyterians; but we profess to believe that our neighbours of many of the different denominations around us hold the fundamental truths of the gospel, and are walking in the way to heaven. As Presbyterians we have a right, and it is our duty, to take special heed to the interests of our own church; but much as we may venerate her

order or her institutions, who among us is there that does not regard Christian as a much more hallowed name? In other words, where is the man who would not consider it comparatively a light matter whether an individual should join our particular communion, or some other, provided he gave evidence of being a real disciple of Christ? Now apply this remark to revivals. The evil complained of is, that different sects manifest an undue zeal to gather as many of the hopeful subjects of revivals as they can into their respective communions. Suppose it be so -- and what is the result? Why that they are training up, not as we should say, perhaps, under the best form of church-government, or possibly the most unexceptionable views of Christian doctrine, but still in the bosom of the church of God, under the dispensation of his word, and in the enjoyment of his ordinances, and in communion with his people -- are training up to become members of that communion in which every other epithet will be merged in that of sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Place then, on the one side, the fact that these individuals are to remain in their sins, supposing there is no revival of religion, and on the other, the fact that they are to be proselyted, if you please, to some other Christian sect, provided there is one; and then tell me, whether the objection which I am considering does not dwindle to nothing. I would not deem it uncharitable to say, that the man who could maintain this objection in this view, that is, the man who could feel more complacency in seeing his fellow-men remain in his own denomination, dead in trespasses and sins, than in seeing them join other denominations, giving evidence of being the followers of the Lord Jesus -- whatever other sect he may belong to, does not belong to the sect of true disciples. Whatever may be his shibboleth, rely on it, he has not learned to talk in the dialect of heaven.

I have presented this subject before you, my friends, at considerable length, not because I have considered myself as addressing a congregation hostile to revivals -- for I bear you testimony that it is not so -- but because most of the objections which have been noticed are more or less current in the community, and I have wished to guard you against the influence of these objections, on the one hand, and to assist you to be always ready to give an answer to any one that asketh a reason of your views of this subject, on the other. I hope that what has been said may confirm your conviction, that the cause of revivals is emphatically the Saviour's cause; and that you may be disposed, each one to labour in it with increased diligence and zeal. And may your labours be characterized by such Christian prudence, and tenderness, and fidelity, that while you shall see a rich blessing resting upon them, they may have a tendency to silence the voice of opposition, and increase the number of those who shall co-operate with you in sustaining and advancing this glorious cause.

### **LECTURE III.**

#### **OBSTACLES TO REVIVALS.**

1 Corinthians ix. 12.

-- "Lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ"

It is impossible to contemplate either the life or writings of the apostle Paul, without perceiving that the ruling passion of his

renewed nature was a desire to glorify God in the salvation of men. For the accomplishment of this end there was no service which he would not perform -- no earthly comfort which he would not surrender -- no suffering which he would not endure. A charming illustration of his disinterestedness in the cause of his Master occurs in the chapter which contains our text. He maintains, both from Scripture and from general equity, the right which a minister of the gospel has to be supported by those among whom he labours; and then shows how he had waived that right in favour of the Corinthians, that the purpose of his ministry might be more effectually gained. -- "If others be partakers of this power over you," says he, that is, "if it is the privilege of ministers in general to receive their support from those for whose benefit they labour, are not we rather entitled to this privilege -- we who have been instrumental not only of instructing and comforting you, but of leading you to the profession of Christianity? Nevertheless we have not used this power, but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ: we cheerfully submit to many inconveniencies and deprivations, that our success in winning souls to Christ, through the gospel, may not be in any degree hindered by the cavils of those who are always on the alert to misrepresent and censure us."

The text takes for granted that there may exist certain hinderances to the influence of the gospel. As every genuine revival of religion is effected through the instrumentality of the gospel, it will be no misapplication of the passage to consider it as suggesting some of the obstacles which often exist in the way of a revival: and in this manner I purpose to consider it at the present time.

What then are some of the most common hinderances to a scriptural revival of religion?

I. Ignorance or misapprehension of the nature of true revivals.

It is not to be concealed or denied, that much has passed at various periods under the name of revivals, which a sound and intelligent piety could not fail to reprobate. There have been scenes in which the decorum due to Christian worship has been entirely forgotten; in which the fervour of passion has been mistaken for the fervour of piety; in which the awful name of God has been invoked not only with irreverence, but with disgusting familiarity; in which scores, and even hundreds, have mingled together in a revel of fanaticism. Now unhappily there are those, and I doubt not good men too, who have formed their opinion of revivals from these most unfavourable specimens. These perhaps, and no others, may have fallen under their observation: and hence they conclude, that whatever is reported to them under the name of a revival, partakes of the same general character with what they have witnessed; and hence too they look with suspicion on any rising religious excitement, lest it should run beyond bounds, and terminate in a scene of religious phrenzy.

There are others, (I here speak particularly of ministers of the gospel, for their influence is of course most extensively felt on this subject,) who are led to look with distrust on revivals, merely from constitutional temperament, or from habits of education, or from the peculiar character of their own religious experience; and while they are hearty well-wishers to the cause of Christ, they are perhaps too sensitive to the least appearance of animal feeling. Besides, they not improbably have never witnessed a revival, and, as the case may be,

have been placed in circumstances least favourable to understanding its nature or appreciating its importance. What is true of one individual in this case may be true of many; and if the person concerned be a minister of the gospel, or even a very efficient and influential layman, he may contribute in no small degree to form the opinion that prevails on this subject through a congregation, or even a more extensive community.

Now you will readily perceive, that such a state of things as I have here supposed must constitute a serious obstacle to the introduction of a revival. There are cases, indeed, in which God is pleased to glorify his sovereignty, by marvellously pouring down his Spirit for the awakening and conversion of sinners, where there is no special effort on the part of his people to obtain such a blessing; but it is the common order of his providence to lead them earnestly to desire, and diligently to seek the blessing, before he bestows it. But if, instead of seeking these special effusions of divine grace, they have an unreasonable dread of the excitement by which such a scene may be attended -- if the apprehension that God may be dishonoured by irreverence and confusion, should lead them unintentionally to check the genuine aspirations of pious zeal, or even the workings of religious anxiety -- there is certainly little reason to expect in such circumstances a revival of religion. I doubt not that a case precisely such as I have supposed has sometimes existed; and that an honest, but inexcusably ignorant conscience, on the part of a minister or of a church, has prevailed to prevent a gracious visit from the Spirit of God.

II. Another obstacle to a revival of religion is found in a spirit of worldliness among professed Christians. The evil to which I here



refer assumes a great variety of forms, according to the ruling passion of each individual, and the circumstances in which he may be placed. There are some of the professed disciples of Christ, who seem to think of little else than the acquisition of wealth; who are not only actively engaged, as they have a right to be, to increase their worldly possessions, but who seem to allow all their affections to be engrossed by the pursuit; who are willing to rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, to become rich; and whose wealth, after it is acquired, serves only to gratify a spirit of avarice, or possibly a passion for splendour, but never ministers to the cause of charity. There is another class of professors, whose hearts are set upon worldly promotion; who seem to act as if the ultimate object were to reach some high post of honour; who often yield to a spirit of unhallowed rivalry, and sometimes employ means to accomplish their purposes which Christian integrity scarcely knows how to sanction. And there is another class still, not less numerous than either of the preceding, who must be set down, in a modified sense at least, as the lovers of pleasure: far enough are they from encouraging or tolerating any thing gross or offensive to a cultivated worldly taste; but they mingle unhesitatingly in scenes of amusement, from which they know beforehand that every thing connected with religion must be excluded; and they talk afterwards with enthusiasm of the enjoyment they have experienced in such scenes; and if the consistency of their mingling in them with Christian obligations happens to be called in question, not improbably they will defend themselves with spirit against what they are pleased to call a whimsical or superstitious prejudice. There are professors of religion among those who take the lead in fashionable life: they seem to breathe freely only when they are in circles of gaiety; and if they were

taken out of the ranks of pleasure, the language of their hearts, if not of their lips, would doubtless be, "Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more?" I am willing to hope that the number to whom this can apply, in all its extent, is, at this day, comparatively small -- certainly it is becoming smaller; but there are many who are ready to make a partial compromise with conscience on this subject, and who, in keeping aloof from the extreme of too great strictness, slide too near, to say the least, to the confines of the opposite error. All these different classes, if their conduct is a fair basis for an opinion, have the world in some form or other, uppermost. They are quite absorbed with the things which are seen and are temporal. Their conversation is not in heaven. It breathes not the spirit of heaven. It does not relate to the enjoyments of heaven, or the means of reaching these enjoyments. The world take knowledge of them, not that they have been with Jesus, but that, like themselves, they love to grovel amidst the things below.

That the evil which I have here described existing in a church, must be a formidable obstacle to a revival of religion, none of us probably will doubt. Let us see, for a moment, how it is so.

The individuals concerned constitute the church, or a portion of the church -- the very body in which, according to the common course of God's providence, we are to expect a revival to begin. But the prevalence of this worldly spirit of which I have spoken, is the very opposite of the spirit of a revival, and can have no more communion with it than light with darkness. So long as it exists, then, it must keep out that general spirituality and active devotedness to the cause of Christ in which a revival, as it respects Christians, especially

consists; and of course must prevent all that good influence which a revival in the church would be fitted to exert upon the world.

But suppose there be in the church those who are actually revived, and who have a right estimate of their obligations to labour and pray for the special effusion of divine influences, how manifest is it that this spirit of worldliness must, to a great extent, paralyze their efforts! How painfully discouraging to them must it be, to behold those who have pledged themselves to co-operate with them in the great cause, turning away to the world, and virtually giving their sanction to courses of conduct directly adapted to thwart their benevolent efforts! And how naturally will careless sinners, when they are pressed by the tender and earnest expostulations of the faithful to flee from the wrath to come, shelter themselves in the reflection, that there is another class of professors who estimate this matter differently, and whose whole conduct proclaims that they consider all this talk about religion as unnecessary -- not to say fanatical! I know that a few Christians have, in some instances, been enabled by God's special blessing to stem such a current as this, and have been permitted to witness the most glorious results from their persevering labours; but I know too that nothing is more disheartening to a few devoted disciples of Christ -- nothing more directly fitted to render their exertions of no effect, than for the mass of professors around them to be buried up in the world; to be found with them at the communion-table, commemorating the death of Christ, but never to go with them in any effort for the advancement of his cause. But while this spirit of worldliness mocks in a great degree the efforts of the faithful, it exerts a direct and most powerful influence upon those who are glad to find apologies to quiet themselves in sin.

I know that it is a miserable fallacy, that the inconsistent lives of professed Christians constitute any just ground of reproach against the gospel; nevertheless it is a fact, of which no one can be ignorant, that there are multitudes who look at the gospel only as it is reflected in the character of its professors, and especially in their imperfections and backslidings. These are all strangely looked at, as if religion were responsible for them; and whether it be a particular act of gross transgression, or a general course of devotedness to the world, it will be almost sure to be turned to account in support of the comfortable doctrine, that religion does not make men the better, and therefore it is safe to let it alone altogether: or else it is inferred, that if religion be any thing, it may be safely delayed; for it is so small a matter that it may be taken up at any time: or possibly the individual, referring his own character to the low standard which he may observe among professors, may charitably conclude that he is already a Christian; and thus, by playing off upon himself the arts of self-deception, may lull himself into a lethargy, out of which he will never awake, until he is roused, by the light of eternity, both to conviction and despair. None surely will question, that whatever exerts such an influence as this on the careless and ungodly, must constitute a powerful barrier to a revival of religion.

But this worldly spirit is to be looked at, moreover, in the relation which it bears to the Spirit of God; for God's Spirit, let it always be remembered, is the grand Agent in every revival. What then do professing Christians virtually say to the Holy Spirit, when they lose sight of their obligations, and open their hearts and their arms to the objects and interests of the world? Do they thereby invite him to come, and be with them, and dwell with them, and to diffuse his convincing and converting influences all around? Or do they not

rather proclaim their indifference, to say the least, to his gracious operations; and sometimes even virtually beseech him to depart out of their coasts? But it is the manner of our God to bestow his Spirit in unison with the desires, and in answer to the prayers of his people; can we suppose, then, that where the spirit of the world has taken the place of the spirit of prayer, and the enjoyments of the world are more thought of than the operations of the Holy Ghost -- can we suppose, I say, that He, who is jealous of his honour, will send down those gracious influences which are essential to a revival of religion?

Whether, therefore, we consider a worldly spirit among professed Christians in its relation to themselves, to their fellow-professors who are faithful, to the careless world, or to the Spirit of God, we cannot fail to perceive that it must stand greatly in the way of the blessing we are contemplating.

III. The want of a proper sense of personal responsibility among professed Christians, constitutes another obstacle to a revival of religion. You all know how essential it is to the success of any worldly enterprise, that those who engage in it should feel personally responsible in respect to its results. Bring together a body of men for the accomplishment of any object, no matter how important, and there is always danger that personal obligation will be lost sight of; that each individual will find it far easier to do nothing, or even to do wrong, than if, instead of dividing the responsibility with many, he was obliged literally to bear his own burden. And just in proportion as this spirit pervades any public body, it may reasonably be expected, either that they will accomplish nothing, or nothing to any good purpose. Now, let this same spirit pervade a church, or any community of professed Christians, and you can look for nothing

better than a similar result. True it is, as we have already had occasion to remark, that in a revival of religion there is much of divine agency, and of divine sovereignty too: but there is human instrumentality also, and much of what God does, is done through his people; and if they remain with their arms folded, it were unreasonable to expect that God's work should be revived. Let each professor regard his own personal responsibility as merged in the general responsibility of the church, and the certain consequence will be that the church, as a body, will accomplish nothing. Each member may be ready to deplore the prevalence of irreligion and spiritual lethargy, and to acknowledge that something ought to be done in the way of reform; but if, at the same time, he cast his eye around upon his fellow-professors, and reflect that there are many to share with him the responsibility of inaction, and that as his individual exertions could effect but little, so his individual neglect would incur but a small proportion of the whole blame -- if he reason in this way, I say, to what purpose will be all his acknowledgments and all his lamentations? In order that God's work may be revived, there must be earnest prayer; but where is the pledge for this, unless his people realize their individual obligations? There must also be diligent, and persevering, and self-denied effort; but where are the persons who are ready for this, provided each one feels that he has no personal responsibility? Who will warn the wicked of his wicked way, and exhort him to turn and live? Who will stretch out his hand to reclaim the wandering Christian, or open his lips to stir up the sluggish one? Who, in short, will do any thing that God requires to be done in order to the revival of his work, if the responsibility of the whole church is not regarded as the responsibility of the several individuals who compose it? Wherever you see a church in which this mistaken view

of obligation generally prevails, you may expect to see that church asleep, and sinners around asleep; and you need not look for the breaking up of that slumber, until Christians have come to be weighed down under a sense of personal obligation.

Moreover, let it be remembered, that the evil of which I am speaking is fitted to prevent the revival of God's work, inasmuch as it has within itself all the elements of a grievous backsliding. Wherever you find professors of religion who have little or no sense of their own obligations apart from the general responsibility of the church, there you may look with confidence for that wretched inconsistency, that careless and unedifying deportment, that is fitted to arm sinners with a plea against the claims of religion, which they are always sure to use to the best advantage. And, on the other hand, wherever you see professing Christians realizing that arduous duties devolve upon them, as individuals, and that the indifference of others can be no apology for their own, there you will see a spirit of self-denial, and humility, and active devotedness to the service of Christ, which will be a most impressive exemplification of the excellence of the gospel, and which will be fitted at once to awaken sinners to a conviction of its importance, and to attract them to a compliance with its conditions. In short, you will see precisely that kind of agency on the part of Christians which is most likely to lead to a revival, whether you consider it as bearing directly on the minds of sinners, or as securing the influence of the Spirit of God.

IV. The toleration of gross offences in the churchy is another serious hinderance to a revival of religion.

We cannot suppose that the Saviour expected that the visible church on earth would ever be entirely pure, or that there would not be in it those who were destitute of every scriptural qualification for its communion, or even those whose lives would be a constant contradiction of their profession, and a standing reproach upon his cause. He himself hath said, "It must needs be that offences come;" though he has added, with awful emphasis, "Wo unto that man by whom they come." And the whole tenor of God's word goes to show that it is required of the church -- of the whole body, and of each particular member -- that they keep themselves unspotted from the world; that they have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; that they exhibit, in all respects, that character which becomes "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." And inasmuch as there was danger, from the imperfection and depravity of man, that the church would embody a greater or less amount of hypocrisy and corruption, it pleased the great Master to prescribe rules for the maintenance of her purity. Hence Christians are exhorted to stir up one another, by putting each other in remembrance; to reprove and admonish each other with fidelity as occasion may require; and in case of scandalous offences persisted in, or not repented of, the church, as a body, is bound to cut off the offender from her communion. In performing this last and highest act of discipline, as well as in all the steps by which she is led to it, she acts not according to any arbitrary rules of her own, but under the authority, and agreeably to the directions of her Head.

Now it is impossible to look at the state of many churches, without perceiving that there is a sad disregard to the directions of the Lord Jesus Christ, in respect to offending members. It sometimes happens, that professors of religion are detected in grossly



fraudulent transactions -- that they grind the face of the widow and orphan -- that they take upon their lips the language of cursing, and even profanely use the awful name of God -- not to speak of what has been more common in other days, their reeling under the influence of the intoxicating draught, -- I say it sometimes happens that Christian professors exemplify some or other of these vices, and still retain a regular standing in the church, and perhaps never even hear the voice of reproof, especially if the individuals concerned happen to possess great worldly influence, and the church, as it respects temporal interests, is in some measure dependent upon them. But rely on it, brethren, this is an evil which is fitted to reach vitally the spiritual interests of the church, and wherever it exists, it will, in all probability, constitute an effectual obstacle to a revival of religion.

For its influence will be felt, in the first place, by the church itself. The fact that it can tolerate gross offences in its members, proves that its character for spirituality is already low; but the act of tolerating them must necessarily serve to depress it still more. It results from our very constitution, and from the laws of habit, that to be conversant with open vice, especially where there is any temptation to apologize for it, is fitted to lessen our estimate of its odiousness, and to impair our sense of moral and Christian obligation. If a church tolerates in its members scandalous sins, it must know, as a body, that it is in the wrong; nevertheless, each individual will reconcile it to his own conscience as well as he can; and one way will be, by endeavouring to find out extenuating circumstances, and possibly to lower a little the standard of Christian character. Thus it will almost of course come to pass, that that deep and awful sense of the evil of sin, which the Christian ought always to cultivate, and which is essential to a high degree of spirituality, will

no longer be found; and in place of it there will be, if not an exhibition of open vice, yet a disposition to regard iniquity in the heart, and a readiness to partake of other men's sins.

Besides, the neglect of one duty always renders the neglect of others more easy; not merely from the fact that there is an intimate connection between many of the duties which devolve upon Christians, but because every known deviation from the path of rectitude has a tendency to lower the tone of religious sensibility, and to give strength to the general propensity to evil. Let the members of a church do wrong in the particular of which I am speaking, and it will make it more easy for them to do wrong in other particulars. A disregard to their covenant obligations in this respect will render them less sensible of the solemnity and weight of their obligations generally: in short it will lead, by almost certain consequence, to that state of things which is characterized by spiritual insensibility and death, and which is the exact opposite of all that belongs to a revival of religion.

But the evil to which I refer is not less to be deprecated in its direct influence upon the world, than upon the church. For here is presented a professing Christian, not only practising vices which, it may be, would scarcely be tolerated in those who were professedly mere worldly men, but practising these vices, for aught that appears, under the sanction of the church. Wherever this flagrant inconsistency is exhibited, the scoffer looks on and laughs us to scorn. The decent man of the world concludes, that if the church can tolerate such gross evils, whatever other light she may diffuse around her, it cannot be the light of evangelical purity. And even those who feel the weight of Christian obligation, and who desire to join in the

commemoration of the Redeemer's death, will sometimes hesitate whether they can become members of a community in which the solemn vows of God are so much disregarded. Need I say that there is every thing here to lead sinners to sleep on in carnal security to their dying day?

But observe still farther, that this neglect to purify the church of scandalous offences, is an act of gross disobedience to her Head -- to Him who has purchased for her all good gifts, and whose prerogative it is to dispense the influences of the Spirit. Suppose ye then that he will sanction a virtual contempt of his authority, by pouring down the blessings of his grace? Suppose ye that, if a church set at naught the rules which he has prescribed, and not only suffer sin, but the grossest sin, in her members, to go unreprieved, he will crown all this dishonour done to his word, all this inconsistency and flagrant covenant-breaking, with a revival of religion? No, brethren; this is not the manner of Him who rules King in Zion. He never loses sight of the infallible Directory which he has given to his church; and, if any portion of his church lose sight of it, it is at the peril of his displeasure. Disobedience to his commandments may be expected always to incur his frown; and that frown will be manifested, at least, by withholding the influences of his grace.

V. Another powerful hinderance to a revival of religion, is found in the absence of a spirit of brotherly love among the professed followers of Christ.

Christianity never shines forth with more attractive loveliness, or addresses itself to the heart with more subduing energy, than when it is seen binding the disciples of Jesus together in the endearing bonds

of a sanctified friendship. Let it be said of Christians, as it was in other days, "Behold how they love one another;" let them evince a strong regard to each other's interests, and a tender sympathy in each other's woe, and a ready condescension to each other's infirmities, and a willingness to bear each other's burdens; and, rely on it, this kindly spirit will diffuse a grateful influence all around; and even the enemies of religion will not be able to withhold from it at least the homage of their respect and approbation; and, there is good reason to hope, that it may be instrumental of subduing many to the obedience of the truth. But, on the other hand, let the professed followers of the Saviour manifest towards each other a jealous or contentious spirit -- let them appear more intent on the advancement of their own personal, or selfish, or party ends, than upon the promotion of each other's edification and benefit, -- and those who see them, instead of taking knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus, will take knowledge of them that they have imbibed the very spirit of the world. The influence of such an example upon the careless, must be to lower their estimate of the importance of religion, and furnish them an excuse for neglecting to seek an interest in it. Oh, how often has it been said by infidels, and the enemies of godliness, to the reproach of the cause of Christ, that when Christians would leave off contending with each other, it would be time enough for them to think of embracing their religion!

But the want of brotherly love operates to prevent a revival of religion, still farther, as it prevents that union of Christian energy, in connection with which God ordinarily dispenses his gracious influences. It prevents a union of counsel. As the Saviour has committed his cause, in a sense, into the hands of his people, so he has left much as respects the advancement of it to their discretion.

And they are bound to consult together with reference to this end, and to bring their concentrated wisdom to its promotion. But if there be a spirit of alienation and discord among them, either they will never come together at all, or else their counsels will be divided, and they will do little else than defeat each other's purposes. The same spirit will prevent a union in prayer. This is the grand means by which men prevail with God: and the prospect of their success is always much in proportion to the strength of their mutual Christian affection; for this is a Christian grace; and if it is in lively exercise, other Christian graces, which are more immediately brought into exercise in prayer, such as faith, repentance, and humility, will not be asleep: and as concentrated effort is the most powerful in all other cases, so it is in this -- let the united prayers of many hearts go up to heaven for the revival of God's work, and they may be expected to exert an influence which will tell gloriously on the destinies, perhaps, of many dinners. But, on the other hand, if there be not this feeling of brotherly-kindness among professed Christians, even if they come together to pray for the outpouring of the Spirit, their prayers will at best be feeble and inefficient, and their thoughts will not improbably be wandering, and unchristian feelings towards each other kindling, at the very time they are professedly interceding for the salvation of sinners. And the same spirit is equally inconsistent with a union of Christian effort; for if they cannot take counsel together, if they cannot pray together, they surely cannot act together. Who does not perceive, that a spirit of mutual unkindness among the professed followers of Christ, thus carried out into action, must, if any thing, oppose a powerful obstacle to the revival of God's work?

But suppose some, whom you should regard as Christians, should adopt measures in relation to revivals unauthorized by God's word,

and, to say the least, of very doubtful tendency, and you should decline to co-operate in such measures, and your conduct in this respect should be considered as evincing the want of brotherly love -- where, in this case, would the blame really rest? Most unquestionably not on you, but on those who accused you. There is nothing in the obligation of good-will which Christians owe to each other, to set aside the paramount obligation which they owe to their Master, to take his word as the rule of their practice. Whatever you conscientiously believe to be unscriptural, you are bound to decline at any hazard; and if you do it kindly, (no matter how firmly,) and the charge of being wanting in brotherly love is preferred against you, you have a right to repel it as an unchristian accusation. If, in such a case, evil result from the want of concentrated action, and the measures adopted are really unscriptural, the responsibility rests upon those who, by the adoption of such measures, (however honestly they may do it,) compel you to stand aloof from them. You may indeed, in other ways, give evidence of not possessing the right spirit towards them; and it becomes you to take heed that, you do not give such evidence: but the mere fact of refusing your co-operation certainly does not constitute it. And it would be well if they should inquire, whether they are not at as great a distance from you as you are from them, and whether their departure from you does not indicate as great a want of brotherly love as is indicated by the fact of your refusing to follow them?

But it may be asked, whether a spirit of brotherly love may not exist between Christians whose views on points not fundamental may differ? I answer, yes, undoubtedly; it may and ought to exist among all who trust in a common Saviour. We may exercise this spirit even towards those whom we regard as holding errors, either of faith or

practice, provided we can discover in them the faintest outline of the image of Christ. They may adopt opinions in which we cannot harmonize, and measures in which we cannot co-operate, and the consequence of this may be, a loss of good influence to the cause of Christ, and perhaps positive evil, resulting from disunion in effort; nevertheless, we may still recognise them as Christians, and love them as Christians, and cordially co-operate with them wherever our views and theirs may be in harmony. The right spirit among Christians would lead them to make as little of their points of difference, and as much of their common ground, as they can; and where they must separate, to do it with kindness and good-will, not with bitterness and railing.

I must not dismiss this article without saying, that the Spirit of God, who is active in awakening and renewing sinners, is the Spirit of peace; he dwells not in scenes of contention; and we cannot reasonably expect his presence or agency, where Christians, instead of being fellow-workers together unto the kingdom of God, are alienated from each other, and sell themselves to the service of a party. In accordance with this sentiment, it has often been found, in actual experience, that the Spirit of God has fled before the spirit of strife; and a revival of religion, which promised a glorious result, has been suddenly arrested by some unimportant circumstance, which the imperfections of good men have magnified, till they have made it an occasion of controversy. While they are yet scarcely aware of it, their thoughts, which had been engrossed by the salvation of their fellow-men and the interests of Christ's kingdom, are intensely fastened upon another object; and they wake up, when it is too late, to the appalling fact, that the work of grace among them has

declined, and that sinners around are sinking back into the deep slumber of spiritual death.

VI. The last hinderance to a revival which I shall notice is, an erroneous or defective exhibition of Christian truth.

As it is through the instrumentality of the truth that God performs his work upon the hearts of men, it is fair to conclude, that just in proportion as any part of it is kept back, or is dispensed in a different manner from that which he has prescribed, it will fail of its legitimate effect. It is not at the option of God's ministers to select one truth from the Bible and omit another; but they are required to preach the whole counsel of God: and where they neglect to do this, it were unreasonable to expect a blessing. In the exercise of their own judgment on this subject, they may come to the conclusion, that particular parts of divine truth are of little importance, and that even some of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel may well enough be lightly passed over; but this is an insult to the Author of the Bible, which they have good reason to expect he will punish, by sending them a barren ministry.

There is a way of preaching certain doctrines out of their proper connection, which is exceedingly unfriendly to revivals of religion. Suppose, for instance, the doctrine of God's sovereignty be exhibited in such a partial or insulated manner as to leave the sinner to infer that it is but another name for tyranny -- or suppose the doctrine of a divine influence be preached in such a way as to authorize the inference, that man has nothing to do in respect to his salvation but wait to be operated upon like a mere machine -- or suppose the doctrine of man's apostacy be so exhibited as to lead sinners to deny



their responsibility for their transgressions, and to take refuge from the accusations of conscience in the relation which they bear to the father of our race, -- in either of these cases, there is little probability that they will be converted, or even awakened. It is natural for them to find excuses for remaining in a state of sinful security as long as they can; and so long as they are furnished with such excuses as these, and by the ministers of the gospel, there is not the least ground for expecting that their consciences will be disturbed. The evil to which I refer has, I have no doubt, often existed, in all its extent, where the minister has actually believed all the truths of God's word; and yet he has exhibited some in such a manner as to neutralize the power of others, and even to prevent the legitimate effect of those he has attempted to enforce.

There is also an unnatural mixing up of human wisdom with God's word, which, so far as it has any effect, must be unfriendly to the influence of divine truth. Let the naked sword of the Spirit be brought home to the consciences of men, and the effect of it must and will be felt, and the anxious inquiry will be heard, and sinners, in all probability, will be renewed. But let the wiredrawn theories of metaphysicians be substituted in place of the simple truth, or even let the genuine doctrines of the gospel be customarily exhibited in connection with the refined speculations of human philosophy, and though I dare not say that God, in his sovereignty, may not bless the truth which is actually preached, yet I may say, with confidence, that but little effect can be reasonably expected from such a dispensation of the word. And the reasons are obvious; for God has promised to bless nothing but his own truth; and the refinements of philosophy are to the mass of hearers quite unintelligible.

I may add, that a want of directness in the manner of preaching the gospel, may prevent it from taking effect on the consciences and hearts of men. It is only when men are made to feel that the gospel comes home to their individual case, that they are themselves the sinners whom it describes, and that they need the blessings which it offers -- it is only then, I say, that they hear it to any important purpose. Suppose that its doctrines, instead of being exhibited in their practical bearings, and enforced by strong appeals to the conscience, are discussed merely as abstract propositions, and with no direct application, the consequence will be, that though the great truths of the Bible may be presented before the mind, yet they will rarely, if ever, sink into the heart. Sinners will hear them, and, instead of realizing that they involve their immortal interests, will probably be as indifferent as if they were matters of idle speculation. So it has been in a multitude of instances; and so, from the very nature of man, it must continue to be.

I might mention, also, as another important hinderance to a revival, the want of a simple dependence on God; but as this will come up in another form in a subsequent discourse, I shall waive, for the present, a distinct consideration of it.

In closing this view which we have taken of the obstacles to a revival of religion, I know not, my Christian brethren, how we can use the subject, in a single word, to better purpose, than to gather from it a deeper impression of our own responsibility. Christians, ye who profess to desire a revival of religion, and to make this a commanding subject of your prayers, let me ask, whether, in view of what you have now heard, you have no reason to fear that you may yourselves be standing in the way of the bestowment of the very

blessing for which you profess to plead. The great obstacles to the revival of God's work are no doubt to be sought in the church: what these obstacles are, at least some of the more prominent of them, you have now heard; and I appeal to each of your consciences, as in the presence of the Searcher of the heart, whether the guilt of hindering God's work, in some or other of these ways, does not lie at your door? Wherefore is it that the Holy Spirit is not now as manifestly in the midst of us, by his awakening and converting influences, as he has been in other days? Is it not because you have relapsed in some measure into a habit of worldliness; or because you value the blessing less; or because you are less united and vigorous in your efforts to obtain it? Or is it for any other of the reasons which have now been spread before you? Christians, awake, one and all, to a deeper sense of your responsibility. Let it not be told in heaven that God's people on earth are opposing obstacles to the salvation of perishing men. In doing this, ye parents, you may be keeping your own children out of heaven! In doing this, ye who have unconverted friends, sustaining to you the tenderest earthly relations, you may be assisting to fix their doom in woe forever! In doing this, ye Christians of every class and of every condition, you are opposing the interests of God's holy kingdom, opposing the design of the Saviour's death, opposing the salvation of immortal souls! But you cannot do this, and think what you are doing. It must be that you are acting incautiously. Awake then to solemn reflection. Awake to earnest prayer. Awake to faithful and persevering action. Else there may be sinners who will greet you at the last day, as the stumbling-blocks over which they fell into eternal perdition.

## **LECTURE IV**

### **DIVINE AGENCY IN REVIVALS.**

Habakkuk III, 2.

"O Lord, revive thy work."

There are few, if any, who acknowledge the existence of a God, but will be ready to admit that he has some kind of agency in the government of the world. What the precise nature or extent of this agency is, however, it were rash even to attempt to determine. Part of it is direct, but much the greater part of it, at least so far as we are concerned, is mediate; and it is not easy for us accurately to draw the line between the one and the other. Besides, he has created a vast multitude of agents, and moral agents; but though he has given them the power of action, he has not made them independent beings; though they act with perfect freedom, yet he acts in them and by them. Is not every man in this respect a mystery to himself? Who will venture to determine, in reference to his own conduct, precisely the measure of influence that is exerted upon him by that Almighty Agent, in whom are all the springs, not only of physical, but intellectual and moral being?

As it is admitted by all, except the downright atheist, that God has some kind of agency in the government of the world, while yet there is much in respect to the nature and extent of that agency which we cannot understand, so also it is admitted by all Christians, that he exerts an influence in the sanctification of men, though they do not

pretend exactly to define the character of that influence. On the same general principle, those who believe in revivals of religion, believe that God is the grand Agent in producing them; though they are well aware, that here, as in other departments of his agency, he "moves in a mysterious way;" and that this is no field for a roving fancy or rash speculation. Something however may be known on this subject from God's word; and on a matter of such deep and awful concern, while we are to take heed that we keep fairly within our own province, it surely becomes us to gather up, with devout attention, even the most obscure of the divine intimations. I design therefore, in this discourse, to bring this subject before you; and, keeping an eye on the law and the testimony, in connection with the unequivocal dictates of experience, reverently to inquire respecting the agency of God, in revivals of religion. The passage which I have read to you, taken from the prayer of Habakkuk, may be a fit introduction to this subject: for, though the petition is made up of five words -- "O Lord, revive thy work" -- it recognises the fact of God's agency in a revival, in two different ways: -- it declares that the work is God's -- and it is the direct expression of a desire that he would revive it.

This agency may be advantageously considered under two distinct heads: --

I. The agency of Providence,

II. The agency of the Spirit

I. Of Providence. -- It is one of the most simple deductions from the perfections of God, that he orders all things according to the counsel of his own will; in other words, that he has a plan which includes all events, which extends even to the numbering of hairs and the falling

of sparrows. Of course, nothing ever occurs to an individual but is designed to answer some purpose in the chain of events; and it is reasonable to consider the less important events as ordered in reference to the more important, -- the one sustaining to the other the relation of means to an end: though it must be acknowledged, that if particular events are viewed in relation to the whole system of Providence, our views are too limited to enable us to judge of their comparative importance. Now it will readily be acknowledged, that no event ever occurs in the life of an individual so important to him as his conversion; the change of his character -- from being a subject of pollution to a subject of holiness; and of his destiny -- from being an heir of misery to an heir of glory. It is reasonable therefore to suppose, that many events in his life, which, taken by themselves, may seem of little moment, may nevertheless be designed by Providence to lead to this wonderful change. And if I mistake not, every Christian, especially every one whose first experience has been strongly marked, will find, on review, that he was led to the fountain of atoning blood by a path which he knew not; that God was working by circumstances of which, at the time, he himself made no account, to prepare him to come out of darkness into marvellous light. Perhaps his serious impressions originated in what seemed an accidental conversation with some friend -- a conversation which he did not court, and which would have been avoided, if he had happened to walk on the opposite side of the street; or perhaps he was brought to reflection by some discourse, which he had gone to listen to from mere curiosity; or possibly some circumstance may have occurred, where he would least have looked for it, in connection with his amusements or his excesses, which God has overruled as a means of stopping him in his career of guilt. I doubt not that there

are those among you, Christian friends, who may, at this moment, be going back in your thoughts to some event which, at the time, you scarcely noticed, as having marked the era of your first setting your face towards heaven; and now that you can look at that event in some of its more remote influences, you are ready, in devout thanksgiving to the providence of God, to connect with it all the joy that you have in believing in Jesus, and in the hope of hereafter seeing him as he is.

Now, if it is right to consider God as ordering the events of his providence with reference to the conversion of a single individual, it is certainly safe to form the same conclusion in respect to the conversion of many individuals; in other words, in regard to a revival of religion. There may be obstacles to be removed which seem to lie beyond all human power; but these God not unfrequently puts aside, by an agency so silent and simple, that men do not even observe it: while in other cases, though more rarely, he accomplishes the same end by some signal dispensation, which almost bears the aspect of a miracle; waking up even the careless mind to the reflection, "What hath God wrought!" Sometimes, by the death of an individual, there is an organized and efficient opposition to the gospel put down; and sometimes, by an individual changing his residence, there is a large accession of religious influence to some community; and the means of grace are multiplied, and a revival of religion succeeds. There may be some alarming dispensation of providence to arouse many simultaneously to reflection; or some one, whose influence is extensively felt, may become the subject of renewing grace, and may be a kind of central point, from which good influences shall extend in every direction. It is fully believed, that, in all ordinary cases in which a revival takes place, it would be no difficult thing to mark a distinct

providential agency preparatory to it; and especially where the cause of religion has greatly languished, and the means of religion are but partially enjoyed, this agency is sometimes so manifest, as to constitute of itself a distinct and solemn call to sinners to awake out of sleep. -- But,

II. There is also an agency of the Spirit. -- This we proceed now to contemplate.

Of those general facts in relation to this subject, which are clearly matter of revelation and experience, we may mention the following; -

1. The fact that the Spirit actually does operate in the whole work of man's sanctification. -- Hear the Spirit's own testimony on this subject: -- "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name. Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through the sanctification of the Holy Ghost." "A new heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."

But beside many passages of Scripture, of which those now recited are a specimen, in which the doctrine of the Spirit's agency is clearly taught, there are many facts recorded in the Bible, by which the same truth is abundantly confirmed. How will you account for it, for instance, that the preaching of the Son of God produced so little



effect, and the preaching of his apostles so much? How was it that multitudes were aroused, and pricked to the heart, and actually converted, under the preaching of Peter, who had sat with indifference, or rather been excited to opposition, under the preaching of Him who spake --as never man spake? Whence was it that the jailor, who had doubtless often heard the apostle before the night of his conversion, remained indifferent till that time; and then evinced so much anxiety and alarm, and finally a disposition to own Jesus as his Saviour and his Master, and to walk in his steps? And, in general, whence was it that such marvellous success attended the ministry of the apostles; that by preaching a doctrine which enlisted against it the strongest prejudices and worst passions of the heart, they undermined the thrones of Paganism, and caused tens of thousands to gather around the standard of the cross? Here is a problem that has always been too hard for the jeering infidel to solve, and which most infidels have manifested but little disposition to encounter. There is no solution of it, except in the fact, that God works in the hearts of men by his Spirit, and that he dispenses it in the sovereignty of his wisdom.

2. Another fact in relation to this subject, of which we have the fullest evidence, is, that the Spirit, in performing his work upon the hearts of men, has respect to the laws of their moral nature. -- God has made man what he is -- a voluntary, accountable agent. He has given him the power not only of distinguishing, but of choosing between good and evil, has constituted him in such a manner that he is susceptible of the influence of motives; and every one must perceive that this involves responsibility. Inasmuch, then, as this constitution of our nature is derived from God, it were to be expected, that whatever influence he should exert upon the mind would be

consistent with it; in other words, that he should not contradict his own works. It would do little honour to infinite wisdom, to suppose that he should have formed man with such a nature, that he could not have access to it, without violating the laws which he had himself established.

But the conclusion to which we should arrive on this subject from the very perfections of God, is abundantly corroborated by the testimony of his word. Says Joshua to the people of Israel, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." And again, our Saviour says, "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Indeed, what are all the exhortations, and promises, and threatenings, of the Bible, but a mass of evidence, that God operates upon the hearts of men as moral agents; that he takes for granted that they are to be active in the work of their sanctification, notwithstanding he is himself the efficient cause of it? Admit that men are operated upon as mere machines, and then read any part of the Bible, and see what meaning you can find in it.

And I may add, that the experience of Christians on this subject is in exact correspondence with the teachings of God's word. Let the Christian, who is just entering heaven, give himself to the work of reviewing his own experience -- let him look back to the hour when he first trembled under a conviction of his guilt -- or to the time when he first felt the preciousness of the Saviour's love -- or to his subsequent conflicts with corruption and temptation -- or to any or every part of his progress in holiness, -- and, while he will

acknowledge, with gratitude and delight, that the Spirit has been active in it all, and deserves all the glory, he will be completely satisfied that there has never been the least interruption of his moral agency. He will find that he has been working out his salvation with fear and trembling, while God has wrought within him both to will and to do.

3. Another fact on this subject, which is ascertained to us by the best evidence, is, that the Spirit operates by means of the truth, -- It is partly in reference to this, that He is called "the Spirit of truth;" and so also men are said to be "sanctified by the truth," -- not by the truth independently of the Spirit, but by the Spirit operating by means of the truth. Sometimes the agent alone is mentioned, and sometimes the instrument; but where one is spoken of, the other is always implied.

In the work which the Holy Spirit performs upon the heart, he makes use of every part of the great system of truth which God has revealed. But particular truths are adapted to accomplish particular ends: some are especially fitted to alarm the conscience; others to bring peace and joy into the soul; others to quicken and encourage to a course of vigorous activity and Christian self-denial: and the Spirit, in different parts of his work, uses these various truths discriminatingly, according to the particular end he may design to accomplish. When we say, however, that God's truth is adapted to the work of man's sanctification, we must beware of the idea, that the efficacy resides ultimately in the instrument: it is the great agent who produces the effect; and the truth, wielded by any other power than his, would never sanctify a single heart, even though it might be preached to every creature. It is indeed a well-adapted -- a divinely-

adapted instrument; but it is an instrument still; and it is only through God that it is mighty to the pulling down of strong-holds.

We will contemplate, for a moment, the work of the Holy Spirit in some of its distinct parts: in conviction of sin -- conversion to God -- and subsequent progress in the divine life.

1. The Spirit is active in convincing men of sin. Our Saviour distinctly recognised this among the great purposes for which the Spirit was to be sent into the world. "And when he is come," said he, "he will reprove the world of sin." This office he performed in the case of the three thousand who were pricked in the heart on the day of Pentecost, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" A similar effect was produced in the case of the jailor, who, at midnight, called for a light, and sprang into the prison, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And the same thing substantially occurs in the case of every awakened sinner. And the agent to whom this work is, in every instance, to be ultimately referred, is the Holy Spirit. This is always the first step to the effectual application of the benefits of Christ's death; though there are multitudes who experience this, and perish notwithstanding.

That faculty, or principle of the soul, which is especially the subject of the Spirit's operation in conviction of sin, is the conscience. It is this which recognises the difference between right and wrong, and passes a sentence of approbation or disapprobation on our own actions. This, therefore, is the appropriate principle to be brought into exercise in the work of conviction; and to this the Spirit always addresses Itself. Hence conviction is uniformly attended by remorse,

and not unfrequently so pungent, as to amount to agony. Hence, too, convinced sinners are said to be "pricked in the heart;" an expression which denotes the most excruciating anguish.

The kind of truth which the Spirit uses in accomplishing this work, is primarily the law of God, "By the law," says the apostle, "is the knowledge of sin." God's law is nothing else than a transcript of his moral character; requiring all his creatures to be holy, according to their measure, as he is holy. It is the eternal standard of right; and every departure from it is sin -- the abominable thing which God hateth. But if men are practically ignorant of this standard, they will, of course, be in the same degree ignorant of their sins; and it is only in proportion as the law is brought home to them in its high and awful bearings, that they can have any conviction of sin. And the more they view the law in its amazing extent, as reaching to the thoughts, affections, purposes -- as taking cognizance of the whole inner man, and during every period of their existence -- the more they view it in connection with the awful attributes of Jehovah, especially his omnipotence, his omniscience, his holiness and his truth, -- so much the more black and dreadful appears the guilt of sin; so much the more numerous and appalling their own personal transgressions. I say, then, that the law is the great instrument which the Spirit of God wields in producing conviction of sin. Let that never be brought in contact with the conscience, and the sinner would go slumbering to his grave. If we might suppose the case that it should be kept out of view in the next world, the hell which the Bible describes could not exist.

There are indeed other parts of divine truth, besides the law, which the Spirit uses in the work of conviction; but they are subordinate to

this. For instance, the great doctrine of Christ crucified for the sins of men, has often a powerful influence in convincing men of sin, -- for herein the honours of the law are maintained; and the argument which the Spirit uses with the sinner's conscience is, that if sin be such a tremendous evil as to demand for its expiation the death of the Son of God, then repentance of sin must be an immediate and imperative duty. And I doubt not that many a sinner, while he has yet been blind to the glories of redemption, has derived his deepest conviction of sin from the views which he has taken of this doctrine; and the question has forced itself upon his conscience, with fearful urgency, "If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

The same is true of various other parts of divine truth: the Spirit, in his gracious sovereignty, uses them to convince men of sin; and sometimes even those truths which might seem to us least adapted to that end; but the influence which they exert is indirect, and uniformly terminates in bringing God's law to bear upon the conscience.

2. There is also an agency of the Spirit in the work of conversion -- in the turning of the soul from sin to holiness. -- This is what is referred to by our Saviour, when he says, "Except a man be born of the Spirit he cannot see the kingdom of God." The work which the Spirit here performs, is the renovation of man's moral nature; changing an enemy of God into a friend of God: and if we have a right to compare the different kinds of influence which he exerts upon the children of men with each other, perhaps it is a reasonable conclusion, that more of his omnipotence is exerted here than in any other part of his work. What is done in conviction is only a preparation for this; what

is done in sanctification is but a continuation of it. As the act of conversion may be considered in some respects the most decisive in its bearing upon man's destiny, so we may suppose, that it brings him more closely into communion with the almighty energies of God's Spirit than any other.

The Spirit, in his converting influences, instead of bringing the truth to bear directly upon the conscience, addresses it to the will and the affections. The will, or the faculty by which we determine our actions, has naturally a wrong direction; and in regeneration it is set right: the affections are naturally placed upon forbidden objects; and in regeneration they are recalled to objects which are worthy of them. Or, to avoid all appearance of philosophical distinctions, the soul that has hitherto loved and chosen sin, experiences a change, in consequence of which it will hereafter love and choose holiness. Hence, the Scripture speaks of it as a change of heart, by which we mean, in common language, a change of disposition. Man in his natural state is said to possess "a heart of stone;" in his renewed state, "a heart of flesh," or "a new heart." As this, then, is the part of his nature in which the change primarily takes place, to this we must suppose the agency of the Spirit, in performing the change, is especially directed.

And as the work of conversion is performed on a different department of man's nature from that of conviction, so also it is accomplished through the instrumentality of a different part of the system of divine truth. It is not only of the incorruptible seed of the word of God that men are born to newness of life, but it is by the gospel, in distinction from the law, that this work is effected. It was the law that made the jailor tremble; it was the gospel that brought

peace and gladness to his soul. It was the law that caused the three thousand to be pricked in the heart; it was the gospel -- Christ crucified -- that melted them into contrition, and transformed them into disciples. And you see the reason of it -- the law speaks terror, and nothing else: it points to a most eventful trial; and anticipates the eternal wrath of God. The gospel proclaims good news. It tells the sinner that his case, though deplorable, is not desperate: and hope encourages exertion. It holds up the glorious truth, that, through the merits of Christ's atoning blood, there is eternal life; and the sinner, through the agency of the Holy Ghost, seizes hold of this truth, as of life from the dead; and in view of it, he melts down, in humble submission, at the foot of the cross. I do not mean that the gospel, in its more particular, and even less important doctrines, may not sometimes be directly instrumental of producing this change; though certain it is, that wherever it takes place, it is the gospel, in distinction from the law, that accomplishes it. As it is not a common thing, to say the least, for men to know, with absolute assurance, the precise period of their conversion, so they cannot ordinarily determine what particular part of divine truth was then directly before the mind; but if it were possible to ascertain, they would doubtless always find that it had a more or less intimate connection with the cross of Christ.

3. There is, moreover, an agency of the Spirit in the whole progress of the soul in holiness. -- Says the apostle to the Thessalonians, "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." The regenerating act leaves the soul far from a state of perfect holiness. The general current of its desires and purposes is changed; but,



notwithstanding this change, the Christian finds a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin. Hence there is much to be done subsequently to his regeneration, to prepare him for heaven; and in every part of this work the Spirit has a more or less direct agency. Sometimes he is to be reclaimed from a course of backsliding; sometimes to be fortified against the influence of temptation; sometimes to be stimulated to great and arduous enterprises; now there is to be enkindled a spirit of elevated devotion, and now a spirit of stirring activity; but in all this, and in all which belongs to the work of sanctification, a divine influence is to be exerted. All the various powers of the soul -- the conscience -- the will -- the affections -- the whole spiritual man -- are to be brought into exercise, according to the particular end which the Spirit may design to accomplish. And so also every part of revealed truth -- the law and the gospel, and each particular doctrine of the gospel, are used by this divine Agent in carrying forward his work. And thus the whole man becomes more and more pure, until he reaches at last the fulness of the stature of a perfect person in Christ.

I have thus given you what I suppose to be a scriptural view of the agency of the Spirit, in respect to a single individual, who finally reaches heaven. Now, what I have here described in respect to a single case, takes place in a revival of religion in many cases. Many sinners are the subjects of conviction and conversion; and God's people are advanced in the spiritual life. Nevertheless, there are some points of view in which the divine agency in a revival deserves to be more particularly contemplated.

In every revival we are distinctly to recognise the sovereignty of God. As this is displayed in the influence by which a single soul is converted, it certainly is not less manifest in those copious showers of influence by which hundreds are converted. He who causes it to rain on one city, and not on another, directs the motion of those clouds in the spiritual world, from which descend the blessings of reviving and quickening grace. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." And so, too, is every revival of religion.

There is one grand principle of our nature, which the Holy Spirit makes great use of in a revival, that is not brought into exercise in a single conversion, and which perhaps, more than any thing else, distinguishes the character of his agency in the two cases -- I mean the principle of sympathy. The operation of this principle is familiar to us all in the common intercourse of life. You all know what it is to have a fellow-feeling; to be affected by the affection of another, with feelings correspondent with those you witness in him. Who, for instance, has not been made to feel joyful, merely by coming in contact with those whose countenances have worn the aspect, and whose conversation has breathed the spirit, of joy? And who has not felt his heart melting with sorrow, and even his eyes suffused with tears, merely from being cast into a scene in which there were bleeding hearts and streaming eyes? Now this principle, with which we are all so perfectly familiar in common life, is brought into exercise with great effect in a revival of religion. A brother, for instance, sees a sister, or a husband a wife, or a parent a child, weeping under a sense of sin; and inquiring, it may be with agony, in respect to her salvation. That brother, or husband, or parent, must

be destitute of all natural sensibility, not to be moved by such a spectacle. But the first exercise of the soul in such a case will not be repentance -- it will not be conviction; but it will be simply a fellow-feeling for a beloved friend in distress. Now it is acknowledged, that there is no natural affinity between this state of mind and religion; nevertheless, the former constitutes a happy preparation for the latter, and often the first step towards it. For how natural for the sinner to inquire, at such a moment, whether there be any adequate cause for this distress; and how probably will the answer to this inquiry bring up the solemnities of eternity before the mind, and set the conscience at work; and then the dream of thoughtlessness is interrupted, and the cord which binds the soul to the world is loosed; and, having advanced so far, there is reason to hope that he will hold on his way, till he comes into the marvellous liberty of a child of God. The same principle is often brought into exercise in the worshipping assembly. Let there be that deep and awful solemnity pervading a congregation that is induced by the special presence of the Spirit of God -- let there be many countenances, and many eyes, that shall betray a deep, though silent anxiety, -- and believe me, every anxious countenance, every fixed eye, will preach; and it will utter a mysterious language, that will not improbably waken up the sensibilities of the careless sinner; and this will naturally serve to open his ear to God's truth: and thus conviction may take the place of sympathy, and in the train of that may soon follow the clean heart and the right spirit. I know, brethren, that this is a true description of the manner in which many a sinner has passed from thoughtlessness to alarm, from darkness to light. And I doubt not that the same principle is often brought into exercise in advancing the believer's

sanctification; especially in rousing him from spiritual sloth, and in stirring him up to a higher tone both of feeling and of action.

Let no one dream that there is any thing in this which casts suspicion on the reality, or derogates from the dignity, of a revival in religion. I repeat, mere sympathy is not religion; though no doubt it is sometimes mistaken for it. It has no one of all the ingredients of religion; and may exist, and does exist, in connection with rank hatred and bitter opposition to the gospel. Nevertheless, it is an original principle of human nature, which, when operating on other subjects than that of religion, is considered amiable and even noble: and wherefore is it, that, in respect to this, it degenerates into a pitiable weakness? It is manifestly adapted to bring men to a sense of religion; and why should not the Holy Ghost use it for the accomplishment of that end?

There is yet another influence which the Spirit renders subservient to sustaining a revival of religion -- I mean that of example. There is no department of human action in which this influence is not powerfully realized; and there is as little mystery in respect to the manner in which it operates in a revival as any where else. Here are individuals becoming impressed with religious truth, and inquiring what they shall do to be saved, and actually believing on the Lord Jesus Christ that they may be saved. How natural that this fact should speak to the consciences of others, nor merely through sympathy, but through the understanding, and thus put them upon a course which will terminate in genuine conversion! Besides, every one knows that one of the most formidable obstacles to entering on a religious life, is a false shame -- a dread of being singular; but in a revival the current of example is in favour of religion; and the anxious sinner has

nothing to fear from the shafts of ridicule being pointed at him; or if they are pointed at him, they fall powerless at his feet. It is not uncommon on these occasions for men of great worldly influence and distinction to come out from the world, and openly proclaim themselves on the Lord's side: and every such event, almost of course, makes an impression upon many minds; and others in the same walks of life, who have been accustomed perhaps to regard religion as a matter chiefly for the lower classes, are waked up to serious reflection; and begin to conclude, that it is at least worth while to inquire, whether that which receives the sanction of the intelligent, and the learned, and those who are best qualified to judge, may not be a serious reality. And this may lead to examination; and examination, to conviction; and conviction, to an actual renovation of heart. The history of revivals records many facts, like the cases which I have here supposed; and I should hazard little if I were to say, that there are probably individuals before me, whose hearts are full of Christian joy and hope, who refer their first religious impressions to the influence of example, in the midst of some revival of religion. I hardly need add, that there is no natural connection between such an influence and true piety; nevertheless, the Holy Spirit renders the one subservient to the production and the advancement of the other.

Moreover, the Spirit of God operates, during a revival, to bring into exercise a far more vigorous and efficient human instrumentality, than on ordinary occasions. He impresses ministers more deeply with their responsibility, causing them to bring home the truth to the consciences of their hearers with unwonted earnestness. He renders Christians more circumspect, more active, more earnest in prayer, more ready to warn the sinner of his wicked way, more desirous of

abounding in all respects in the work of the Lord. In short, he causes the whole system of means to be wielded with a greatly increased energy. The truth of God bursts forth upon the conscience of the sinner on every side; and the reason is, that God is making his ministers and his people feel their responsibility, by impressing them more deeply with their obligations to Christ, and by carrying them forward to the solemnities of the judgment-day.

With two inferences we shall conclude the discourse.

1. We may see, in view of our subject, that it is possible to attribute to the Spirit too little agency, and too much, in revivals of religion.

There are those, on the one hand, who attribute too little to this almighty Agent. They do this by the manner in which they speak of revivals -- as if they were produced altogether by man; and if the Spirit is mentioned at all, it is in a way that would indicate that we had little to do with it. They do this by the measures which they adopt in carrying forward revivals; substituting human inventions for divinely-appointed means; and urging the doctrine of moral agency, not in connection with that of a divine influence, but in a great degree to the exclusion of it. -- On the other hand, there are those who attribute too much to the agency of the Spirit. They do this who speak of revivals, as if God only was at work in them, and man a mere passive recipient of impressions. They do this, who do not exert themselves to the utmost to co-operate with God, on the ground that a revival is a mere matter of sovereignty, and that God is able to carry forward his own work independently of means. They do this, also, who speak of every thing that may happen to be connected with a revival as the immediate effect of divine influence; who set down to

the account of the Holy Spirit peculiar tones of voice, and expressions of countenance, and violent gestures, which are supposed to indicate deep and strong feeling: and any thing that is harsh, or boisterous, or in any respect irregular, even though it may seem to be associated with the greatest imaginable fervour. These things, no doubt may all exist in connection with a true revival; but they are the work of men, not the work of God.

The two evils of which I have spoken may possibly co-exist in respect to the same persons; that is, the same individuals may attribute too much to the Spirit in some respects, and too little in others. His agency in carrying forward the great work may practically be recognised but little; and yet he may be familiarly spoken of as being present in particular scenes, and as prompting to particular actions, which he could not fail to disown. Brethren, we honour the Holy Spirit most when we give him precisely the place which he claims -- when we recognise him as the efficient Author of conviction, conversion, and sanctification: but he is offended when we undertake to palm upon him what we ought to take with shame to ourselves.

2. Our subject teaches us, that if we would labour successfully in the cause of revivals, we must labour with a spirit of dependence on God.

This is the spirit that is most likely to bring success to our labours, because it is most likely to render us active and faithful. He who depends upon his own strength has but a feeble motive to exertion; for his strength is but weakness: and when viewed in relation to the object to be accomplished -- the conversion of the soul -- it is the weakness of an infant. But he who depends on God has the most

powerful motive for action that can be presented; for he realizes that the almighty and everlasting arm is round about him in his work; and this is the only pledge of success that he needs. With this encouragement he is prepared to labour vigorously and perseveringly; to labour in the face of appalling obstacles; to labour even in the darkest times: for he knows, that God's grace is sufficient to render the feeblest of his efforts mighty to the pulling down of strong-holds.

Besides, it is a spirit of dependence that honours God. In it there is a practical acknowledgment of our own weakness, and of his greatness and goodness, of his ability and readiness to help. In the exercise of it, man sinks down before the throne as nothing, and, with the confidence of a child, lifts up his heart to God as all in all. And them that honour him, in the exercise of this spirit, he will honour by sending down, in answer to their prayers, the blessings of his grace. And on this subject I appeal with confidence to facts. Wherever God's people have been truly humbled before him, and have been brought deeply to feel their own impotence, and have been willing to be used as mere instruments, and to let him have all the glory, there you will find that a rich blessing has usually been bestowed; and on the other hand, where they have had little sense of their need of divine influence, and have addressed themselves to their work with a spirit of self-confidence, however diligently they may have laboured, they have ordinarily been compelled to witness barrenness and lethargy in the train of their efforts; or, if there has been the appearance of a revival, there is much reason to apprehend that there is in it little of the presence or power of God.



What then, Christians, is the great practical inference which you ought to deduce in respect to yourselves? It is, that in all your labours for the revival of God's work in the midst of you, or for the promotion of the general cause of revivals, you should feel more deeply that the Lord Jehovah is your strength. Every effort that you make in the spirit of self-confidence is an insult to the Holy Ghost. Go forth, then, leaning upon the Almighty arm. Go and do your duty, to each other and to the world; go and instruct the ignorant, and guide the inquiring, and put forth every effort you can to bring souls to Jesus; but remember after all, and remember for your rich encouragement, the doctrine of sovereign grace. Yes, even in the moments when you feel the weakest, and when your work seems the greatest, and when obstacles the most appalling rise up in your path, and when your heart is driven from every other source of hope, even then, remember the doctrine of sovereign grace, and hold on your way, labouring, yet rejoicing.

## **LECTURE V**

### **GENERAL MEANS OF PRODUCING AND PROMOTING REVIVALS.**

Philippians i. 27.

-- "Striving together for the faith of the gospel"

The apostle uniformly manifested a cordial regard and complacency towards all who loved the Lord Jesus Christ. But there were reasons why the Philippian Christians occupied a higher place in his affections than many others. It was through his instrumentality that they had been converted to the faith of the gospel. They had manifested a faithful adherence to their principles in the midst of much opposition. They seem, moreover, to have given some special evidences of sympathy and attachment towards him during his imprisonment at Rome -- such as became the relation they sustained to him as his own children in the gospel. Hence it is not strange that he should have honoured them with an epistle; or that it should have been characterized by expressions of most affectionate regard, and of the deepest concern for their spiritual welfare. At the date of the epistle he was still confined in prison; and it does not appear that the time of his release was then fixed: hence, in exhorting them to fidelity and perseverance, he alludes to the fact, that he might or might not make them a visit; but in either case, he earnestly desires that they may continue steadfastly engaged in the cause to which they were devoted: "Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel."

The direction contained in the text may properly be considered as pointing, in a general manner, to the duty of Christians in relation to a revival of religion. In a preceding discourse we have contemplated the agency of God in a revival: in the present, we are to contemplate the agency of man; in other words, we are to consider some of the more prominent MEANS, in the hands of the church, which the Holy Spirit honours in reviving, and sustaining, and advancing his work.

These means may be considered as of two kinds: those which are expressly prescribed by God -- and those which are adopted by men, professedly in accordance with the spirit of the gospel.

In respect to the former, namely, the instituted means of grace, we must suppose that they are fitted to accomplish their end in the best possible manner. He who devised them made the mind, and is perfectly acquainted with all its moral disorders, and knows by what means it can be best approached, and what kind of instrumentality is most in accordance with its constitution. Unquestionably then, in all our efforts to cure the disorders of the mind, or, what is the same thing, to produce or promote a revival of religion, we are to depend chiefly on the means which God himself has appointed; and we are to expect the greatest and best effect from them when they are used in their greatest simplicity -- precisely in the manner in which God designed they should be used. It is possible, no doubt, that a divine institution may be so perverted, that nothing more than the form of it shall be retained; and it is possible that it may be so encumbered with human additions, that though the substance of it may be said in some sense to remain, yet it loses in a great degree its life and power. In opposition to this, we are to retain both the substance and the form of God's institutions: let his word be preached -- let his worship be celebrated -- let all the appointed means of grace be used, exactly in accordance with his own directions, -- and then we may expect, with the greatest confidence, that he will honour them with his blessing.

But God has not limited his people, in their efforts to advance his cause, to what may properly be called divine institutions: he permits them to adopt means, to a certain extent, of their own devising;

though, in exercising this liberty, they are to take heed that they depart not at all from the spirit of the gospel. In all the departments of benevolent action, the invention of man is, in a greater or less degree, laid under contribution: the great system of moral machinery which has been put in operation, in these latter days, for evangelizing the world, is to be attributed immediately to the wisdom and energy of the church; and every one knows that this has been crowned with the special favour of God. In the same manner, he permits his children to exercise their own judgment, to a certain extent, in the adoption of measures for carrying forward a revival: and if those measures are in accordance with the general tenor of his word, though not in all cases expressly enjoined by it, they have a right to expect that he will affix to them the seal of his approbation; but if they are contrary to the spirit of the gospel, they must inevitably incur his displeasure.

What, then, are some of the general characteristics of those measures which the Bible authorizes in connection with a revival of religion? The true answer to this question may not only enable us to distinguish between right and wrong measures of man's devising, but also to decide when the instituted means of grace are or are not used in a scriptural manner.

1. All the means which God's word authorizes are characterized by seriousness.

It will be admitted, on all hands, that if any subject can be presented to the mind which claims its serious regard, it is religion; or if any occasion ever occurs in which the semblance of levity is unseasonable and revolting, it is a revival of religion. For then the

world, for a season at least, falls into the back ground, and the interests of the soul become the all-engrossing object. Then men are letting go the things which are seen and are temporal, and grasping after the things which are not seen and are eternal. The work which is attended to then is deep reflection, and earnest prayer, and agonizing conviction, and effectual repentance, and the forming of holy resolutions, and the renewing of spiritual strength. Many sinners are coming into the kingdom; and saints, and no doubt angels, are looking on with deep concern, lest others should abandon their convictions, and provoke the Spirit to depart from them for ever. I may appeal to any of you who have been in the midst of a revival, whether a deep solemnity did not pervade the scene; whether, even if it is your common business to trifle, you were not compelled to be solemn then? And if you have wished at such a moment to be gay, have you not felt that that was not the place for it; and that before you could get your mind filled with vain thoughts, and your heart with light emotions, you must withdraw, and mingle in some different scene?

Now then, if there be a high degree of solemnity belonging essentially to a revival of religion -- if there never be a scene on earth more solemn than this,-- surely every measure that is adopted in connection with it ought to partake of the same character. It were worse than preposterous to think of carrying forward such a work by any means which are not marked by the deepest seriousness, or to introduce any thing which is adapted to awaken and cherish the lighter emotions, when all such emotions should be awed out of the mind. All ludicrous anecdotes, and modes of expression, and gestures, and attitudes, are never more out of place than when the Holy Spirit is moving upon the hearts of a congregation. Every thing

of this kind is fitted to grieve him away; because it directly contradicts the errand on which he has come -- that of convincing sinners of their guilt, and renewing them to repentance. Nor is the case at all relieved by the occasional introduction of what may be really solemn and weighty; for its legitimate effect is almost of course neutralized by the connection in which it is presented; and that which might otherwise fall with awful power upon the conscience, is thus rendered utterly powerless and unimpressive. And not only so, but there is often, in this way, an association formed in the mind, which is exceedingly hostile to subsequent religious impressions; an association between solemn truths, which ought to make the sinner tremble, and ludicrous expressions, which will supply him with matter for jests.

I doubt not, that, in reply to this, I shall be referred to the wonderful success of Whitfield, and a few others, whose preaching has been characterized by what I have here set down as an exceptionable peculiarity. But I would say, that these cases constitute exceptions from the common course of human experience. God had given to these men a power over the human passions altogether peculiar; so that they could sometimes make use even of the lighter feelings, in giving to divine truth its deepest impression. But they are not in this respect an example for other men. All experience proves, that when men of common minds attempt to tread in their footsteps, they accomplish nothing to any good purpose: and, even in the case of the individuals referred to, it may reasonably be doubted, whether the good effect of their labours was not often diminished, rather than assisted, by the use which they made of this extraordinary power; certainly this was true in every instance in which the lighter emotions were ultimately left to preponderate.

But surely no one will say, that the Bible treats the subject of religion otherwise than in the most serious manner. Every thing that is there said respecting it, takes for granted that it is a concern of the deepest moment. So, too, in all the accounts which the Bible records respecting revivals of religion, there is nothing that even approaches the confines of levity. All that is recorded as having been spoken or done on these occasions was of a deeply serious character; and as these revivals were conducted by inspired men, we have a right to conclude, that the course which they adopted was, in all respects, most in accordance with the designs of infinite wisdom.

2. Another characteristic of those means for promoting a revival, which are authorized by God's word, is order.

The apostle, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, dwells at length on the importance of avoiding all irregularities in religious worship; declaring that "God is not the author of confusion;" and exhorting that "all things be done decently and in order." And what the apostle hath said on this subject is in entire correspondence with the general tenor of God's word; and I may add, with all just and rational views of the divine character. In every thing that God has done there is perfect order; insomuch that it has been said by a poet, with inimitable beauty, that "order is heaven's first law." In the pure and elevated worship of heaven, though there are ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, who join in it, yet each harp and each voice is in unison with every other; and there is not the semblance of disorder in that whole glorified community. Surely, then, in all our religious services, and in all the measures we adopt for co-operating with the Holy Spirit in the great work of saving men, it becomes us to take heed that we never violate even the spirit of the

apostle's precept; that we do every thing not only with sincerity and zeal, but with that reverent decorum, which so well becomes us when engaged in the immediate service of the infinite God. And hence we are obliged to look with strong condemnation on that indecorous familiarity which is sometimes manifested in prayer; on expressions which, to say the least, border upon vulgarity, and would scarcely be regarded decent in common intercourse between man and man; on every thing like groaning, or shrieking, or shouting, during a religious service; on the praying of females in meetings composed of both sexes; on the speaking, whether in prayer or exhortation, of several individuals at the same time; on every thing, in short, which contributes to render a religious exercise in the least degree boisterous or irregular. We do not doubt that many of these evils may exist, not only where there is sincerity, but more or less of genuine Christian feeling; but we insist, that they are totally inconsistent with the decorum that belongs essentially to religious worship; and therefore ought to be discouraged.

But possibly it may be asked, whether the fervour which often exists in connection with these irregularities is not to be admitted as an apology for them; and whether we ought not to be slow in condemning the one, lest we should seem to pass sentence against the other? I answer, unhesitatingly, No. The highest degree of genuine religious fervour, even that which the redeemed experience, while they cast their crowns at the Saviour's feet, is consistent with perfect order; and I venture to say, that their worship, full of elevated rapture as it is, is associated with a degree of reverence of which even Isaiah and Paul could here form no adequate conception. But that kind of fervour which is the parent of irregularities, which makes an individual apparently forget that he is on earth, and the Being whom



he addresses, in heaven, is, to say the least, of exceedingly doubtful origin; and there is too much reason to fear, that it will be found at last to have been a mere earthly affection. But even if it be admitted, that a truly Christian fervour may be associated with gross irregularities, we maintain that there is no natural connection between them: the one is right, and the other wrong; and whenever they are found together, the true way is to hold fast the one, and let go the other. -- I observe,

3. That another characteristic of the means which God authorizes, in connection with a revival, is simplicity: and by this I mean the opposite of all parade and ostentation.

It is admitted, that, under the Jewish dispensation, there were many things connected with religious worship which were adapted to make a strong appeal to the senses; but all that machinery was abolished at the introduction of the Christian economy. Now, every thing in relation to the worship of God is simple; even the ordinances which are addressed to the senses, though they are full of meaning, are yet capable of being understood by a child. And all the means which are adopted for the advancement of religion, ought surely to correspond with the general spiritual character of the dispensation. And wherever there is a departure from this principle in reference to a revival, there is not only a palpable violation of Scripture precept, but there is a bad influence exerted, as well upon those who are Christians as those who are not. The effect upon Christians is to awaken or cherish spiritual pride, and to lead them to lose sight of the great Agent, in their own self-complacent instrumentality. Its effect upon those who are mere spectators will probably be, to lead them to pass severe judgment on the revival itself, or else, admitting

what they see to be scriptural, to lower their views of the humility of the gospel. And if it be admitted, that, in the use of such means, persons become truly regenerated, is there not much reason to fear, that they will be born into the kingdom with an overweening self-confidence, and that they will exhibit from the beginning a cast of character, not the most favourable either to Christian enjoyment or Christian usefulness? Let all our means for sustaining and advancing revivals be simple and unostentatious, and while we shall be acting in consistency with the spirit of the gospel, we may hope to do most, and do best, for our Master's honour, and the salvation of our fellow-men.

4. Another characteristic of the means which God approves for carrying forward a revival, and closely connected with the preceding, is honesty: by which I mean, the opposite of all worldly artifice.

It is true, indeed, that mere sincerity does not constitute religion; because a man may be very sincere in that which is very wrong; nevertheless, there is no religion without sincerity; and while the gospel abounds in direct exhortations to cultivate it, the general tendency of the gospel is to form a perfectly honest character. Now, in accordance with this general feature of Christianity, every measure which is adopted for bringing sinners to repentance, ought to be marked by entire Christian sincerity. The maxim, that the end justifies the means, has sometimes been adopted in this department of Christian duty; and there is reason to fear, that ministers, and good ministers too, have acted under its influence; and, instead of preaching God's truth in all its length and breadth, have selected some particular parts of it to the exclusion of others, thus separating things which God hath joined together; and instead of preaching

God's truth just as it is, they have made high-wrought and overstrained statements, which the Bible does not authorize: and this they have done from a conviction, that such statements are best adapted to produce powerful impression; as if the word of God would be tame and powerless if it should come forth in its native simplicity. I confess I know not how to characterize this in juster terms, than that it is "handling God's word deceitfully." It were presumption in any one to suppose that God has revealed any thing which is not profitable, or that he has omitted any thing which is important. What God requires his ministers to do, is not to frame any thing new, or even to correct or revise his own word, but to dispense it just as they receive it at his hands: and if they do this, he will take care for consequences. But if they adopt any different course, they may fairly expect, that, in some way or other, the divine displeasure will be visited upon their presumption. And what is true of the preaching of the word is equally true of all other means for carrying forward a revival -- they must all be characterized by Christian honesty; honesty as well towards God, in whose service they are professedly employed, as towards the immortal souls whose salvation they are designed to effect.

5. The last general characteristic which I shall notice of the means which God's word authorizes for promoting a revival, is affection.

The gospel is pre-eminently a system of benevolence. The great object which it designs to accomplish, namely, the redemption of sinners, is the most benevolent object for which the heart of man or angel ever beat. And it is directly fitted to form in man a spirit of benevolence. It enjoins the exercise of kindness and good-will, in all circumstances and all relations. And surely if there be any occasion

on which the tenderness which the gospel inculcates ought to be exercised, it is in the efforts which are made to bring men to conviction and repentance; in other words, to carry into effect the gracious purpose of God in their redemption. Witness the exhibition of this spirit in the ministry of the holy apostle, who, with all his firmness and energy, (and no man ever had more,) was uniformly courteous and affectionate. Witness, too, a greater than Paul -- even our great Model and Master: observe the meekness and gentleness that characterized all his conduct -- listen to his pathetic exclamation over the guilty city of Jerusalem, and to the inimitably tender petition which he offered in his last moments in behalf of his enemies and murderers, -- and then say, whether the benevolent spirit which he inculcates in his instructions does not shine forth with unparalleled brightness in his character? But who does not know, that all this is the exact opposite of what has sometimes appeared among the professed followers of Christ, even in their labours to advance his cause? And who does not see, that it conveys a pointed rebuke to all those ministrations which are characterized by unhallowed severity -- to all addresses, whether public or private, designed to waken up the bad passions, and draw forth expressions of resentment -- to every thing, in short, which is not according to the meekness and benevolence of the gospel?

Let no one suppose that I am pleading for a temporizing course, either as it respects ministers or private Christians, or that I object to the use of great plainness of speech. I would have the naked sword of the Spirit brought directly in contact with the sinner's conscience. I would have no covering up, or softening down, of plain Bible truth. I would have the terrors of the invisible world, and the fearful depravity and doom of the sinner, held up in the same appalling

terms in which they are represented in God's word. But never was there a greater mistake, than to suppose that all this may not consist with an affectionate and inoffensive manner. Let the benevolent spirit of the gospel have its legitimate operation in a minister, and it will lead him to proclaim the most solemn and alarming truths with a tenderness which will be well fitted to open a passage for them to the heart. Let the same spirit possess the breast of a private Christian, and he too will earnestly exhort sinners to flee from the wrath to come; but while he commends himself to their consciences, on the one hand, by his fidelity and honesty, he will ordinarily commend himself to their feelings of good-will, on the other, by his kindness and affection.

Having thus noticed some of the characteristics of those means which God's word authorizes in connection with a revival of religion, we are now prepared to inquire more particularly what those means are. We shall consider, indiscriminately, those which are of divine appointment, and those which are not.

1. And the first we notice is, the faithful preaching of God's word.

As divine truth is the instrument by which the work of sanctification is accomplished, so we have a right to expect its greatest influence, when it is wielded by means of an institution which God himself has ordained. Accordingly we find, that God honours the preaching of the gospel in the conversion of men more than all other means; and if this institution were to be abolished, even though the Bible should still be left in the world, there is no reason to doubt, that the great cause of moral renovation would be arrested, and a darkness that could be felt speedily settle over the earth.

But in order that the preaching of the gospel may exert its full influence, especially as a means of promoting revivals, it is necessary that the institution should be maintained in all respects agreeably to the design of its author. Particularly, it is essential that the great doctrines of the gospel should be distinctly and fairly exhibited; in opposition to human philosophy, on the one hand, and to mere exhortation, on the other. I acknowledge, that by earnest and impassioned addresses, in which there is little or nothing of God's truth, there may be produced a feverish excitement of the mind, and that, through the influence of sympathy, may be extended over a congregation; but if the great doctrines of the Bible are not brought in contact with the conscience and the heart, I expect to look in vain for any thing like an intelligent conviction of sin, much less for the peaceable fruits of righteousness. It is when the law of God is exhibited in all its extent and spirituality, and the gospel in all its grace and glory, that we may expect to see men brought to a sense of guilt, and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ that they may be saved. Other things being equal, you may calculate, with confidence, on the best effect of the preaching of the gospel when its distinguishing doctrines are exhibited with the greatest prominence.

But then these doctrines must be held up in their practical bearings. They may be stated ever so clearly, and defended ever so skilfully, in the form of abstract propositions, and yet all this will be to little purpose, unless men can be made to feel that they describe their own character, and condition, and relations, and prospects. When the law of God is exhibited, the aim should be, to bring it home to every conscience as the standard of duty, and to make each one estimate his own character in view of it. When the doctrine of depravity is proclaimed, it should be in that spirit of direct and personal

application, which is adapted to bring up before the sinner his own pollution and guilt. When the great doctrine of Christ's atonement is held up, it should be exhibited in its most practical relations, and brought directly in contact with the feelings of the heart, and urged as a rebuke to impenitence on the one hand, and an encouragement to exertion, and a foundation of hope, on the other. It is only when men are brought to contemplate the gospel as a practical system, bearing directly on all the interests of both worlds, that it can become, in respect to them, the power of God unto salvation.

Much also depends on the right adaptation of divine truth. In a season of revival, especially, one of the most difficult duties which devolve upon a minister, is the selection of appropriate topics of public instruction. Suppose, at such a time, he were to bring before his people that fundamental truth in all religion -- the existence of a God, and should attempt, by a process of reasoning, to vindicate it against the objections of atheism, or, suppose he were to discuss, in an elaborate manner, the historical evidence of Christianity, this, in certain circumstances, might be very proper; but it would be ill adapted to guide inquiring souls to the Lord Jesus Christ, or to prevent them from grieving away the Holy Spirit. It is obvious, that the great peculiarities of the gospel should, in some form or other, at such a time, constitute the whole burden of a minister's public instructions; nevertheless, there is great wisdom requisite to determine in what form, and in what combinations, these truths will be likely to come with the greatest power; what proportion of effort should be employed to alarm the careless, to guide the inquiring, and to prove and establish those who are hopefully born of the Spirit.

In order to prepare the way, under God, for a revival of religion, it is proper that those truths should be urged with special prominence, which involve most directly the great subject of Christian obligation, and which are best fitted to awaken sluggish and backslidden professors to a sense of their duty: for so long as Christians remain asleep, it cannot be expected that sinners will be awake; so long as Christians do not pray, or pray only in a formal manner, there is little reason to hope that sinners will begin to inquire. And in the progress of a revival, the duties of Christians should still be frequently pressed upon them, that they may not become weary in well-doing; and the law should be proclaimed with all its thunders, that there may be a constant waking up from the dreams of self-security among sinners; and the gospel should be constantly exhibited, in all the richness and adaptation of its provision, and in the full extent of its conditions, that inquirers may not mistake the way to the fountain of atoning blood. I do not say, indeed, that God in his sovereignty may not work, and work powerfully, where his ministers fail exceedingly in rightly dividing the word of truth; nevertheless, as the truth is the instrument by which he works, and as particular parts of it are adapted to particular ends, we have a right to conclude, that when it is preached in its right adaptation, and with a judicious reference to circumstances, it will ordinarily be preached with the greatest effect. And, if I mistake not, this remark is confirmed by the history of revivals. Wherever ministers have selected their subjects with the greatest wisdom, addressing different classes with proper discrimination, and in due proportion, there have usually been witnessed the greatest displays of divine power, in the conviction and conversion of sinners, in the edification of Christians; in short, in a consistent and glorious revival of religion.



I only add farther, under this article, that, during a season of revival, a larger amount of public religious instruction is demanded than in ordinary circumstances. For then there is a listening ear; and the understanding and conscience are awake; and the truth of God tells with mighty effect upon all the powers of the soul. Indeed men will hear the gospel preached at such a time; and if they cannot hear it in one city, they will flee to another; and, if they cannot hear it in its purity, take heed lest they should put themselves under the ministrations of some fanatic or heretic. And this demand for religious instruction must be met, -- not indeed, in all cases, to the full extent; for it is possible, even in a revival, that public services maybe multiplied to such a degree as to prevent their good effect; and men under the influence of strong excitement, are not always best qualified to judge: nevertheless, while there is room here for the exercise of wisdom, it admits not of question, that the truth ought to be kept, so far as may be, constantly before the mind; and this is to be effected principally by means of public instruction.

It has long been a practice in some parts of the church, and has recently become common in this country, to hold a succession of religious exercises, through a period of several days. In respect to this measure, though I am aware that it is liable to great abuse, yet, in itself considered, I confess that, in certain circumstances, and with certain limitations, it seems to me unobjectionable. One principal reason why sinners are not converted, is, that the impression which the truth makes upon them in the house of God, yields almost instantly to the cares and levities of the world. Now then, if, before this impression can have time to escape, it be followed up by another exhibition of truth, and another, there is reason to hope that it may become permanent, and that the result may be a genuine conversion

to God: and this effect, it cannot be denied, is likely, in many cases, to be secured by a succession of several public religious services. But while I am free to express my conviction that such a meeting may be -- has been, an important means of good, I think it cannot be questioned, that the benefit to result from it must depend greatly on the circumstances in which it is introduced, and the manner in which it is conducted. Let it be regarded as an extraordinary measure, not frequently to be repeated -- let it be held when the minds of a congregation are waking up to God's truth -- and let it be conducted with solemnity and decorum, becoming the exercises of the sanctuary on the Sabbath, -- and I doubt not it may be rendered truly, and even greatly subservient to a revival of religion. But, on the other hand, let it be regarded as a common measure, often to be repeated -- let it be held without any reference to the peculiar circumstances of a congregation -- and, especially, let it be conducted with an irreverent disregard to the order of religious worship, or in a spirit of forwardness, or censoriousness, or fanaticism, -- and then it becomes a measure which the adversary wields with powerful effect against the purity of revivals, and the interests of the church.

2. Another important means to be used in connection with a revival, is, private and social prayer.

It is in the closet, especially, that Christians must expect to get the flame of devotion enkindled; and if the closet be neglected, whatever of a devotional frame they may suppose themselves to possess while mingling in public exercises, they have great reason to suspect is the mere operation of sympathy or animal feeling. And while that spirit of prayer in which a revival begins, usually originates in the closet, there the Christian may wrestle in behalf of Zion with as much

earnestness as he will: there he may pour out his whole soul in tears, and sighs, and broken petitions, and the ear on which his importunity falls will never be offended by it. There, too, he may bring before God the cases of his individual friends, and even plead for them by name, and mention minute circumstances of their condition, (which would be entirely inconsistent with the decorum of public worship,) and earnestly supplicate for them the convincing and renewing influences of the Spirit. It is probable that, during every true revival, the most fervent and effectual prayers that are offered go up from the closet, and are never heard by any other ear than that which hears in secret.

But there should be much of social, as well as private prayer, connected with a revival. Much may be effected by the frequent meetings, for this purpose, of a few friends, whose hearts are closely joined together, who have a common interest not only in regard to the general cause, but in respect to particular individuals; and whose communings together serve to increase that interest, as well as to heighten in each other the spirit of earnest intercession. The record of these retired meetings, noiseless and unknown to the world, will, I have no doubt, show, at the last, that there was often mighty energy there, and that the Spirit made intercession with groanings which could not be uttered. And in larger circles, too, God's people are often to meet, for the express purpose of supplicating the influences of his Spirit; and though, on these occasions, the prayers must necessarily be more general, yet they should have direct reference to the advancement of God's work. And these prayers, instead of being offered in the spirit of formality, should be the deep and earnest longings of the soul, should go up from hearts bathed with the reviving influences of the Holy Ghost.

Prayer, as a means of grace, or a means of promoting revivals, is distinguished, in one respect, from every other: all other means are addressed immediately to men -- this, directly to God. And all others are dependent, in no small degree, for their success on this; for ministers and Christians may labour, no matter how faithfully, and it will be to no purpose without a divine influence; and that influence is to be secured only by prayer. God has said, that he will be "inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Prayer, then, let it never be forgotten, secures the blessing on every other means which the church employs. Prayer, too, may reach individuals whom the preaching of the gospel could never reach; because they will not come within the sound of it. You may have irreligious friends, to whom you dare not open your lips concerning their salvation; and yet you can go and pour out your whole soul before God in their behalf: and that prayer, for aught you can say, may carry the Holy Spirit to their hearts, to work a genuine work of conversion. Believe me. Christians, you cannot, at any time, estimate prayer as a means of saving the souls of your fellow-men too highly. Though it cannot take the place of other means, it is that without which all others would be utterly in vain; and besides, it has a direct influence, the extent of which it is impossible fully to estimate. -- Therefore, brethren, pray without ceasing.

3. Much is to be done, in producing and sustaining a revival, by means of conversation.

This is a duty which devolves not only upon the minister and other officers of the church, but upon all private Christians, according to their ability. And it is a duty which may be performed in a great variety of circumstances. There may be frequent opportunities for it

in the common intercourse of life; and, no doubt, a suitable degree of attention would discover many opportunities which are suffered to pass without observation. But this is a duty which, especially in a season of revival, should hold a distinct and prominent place among Christian duties; and should not be left to the control of any contingency. There should be, so far as possible, a regular system of visiting, especially on the part of church officers, with a view to alarm, to direct, or to quicken, according to the circumstances of each individual with whom they may converse.

It belongs to Christians, on these occasions, to stir up the minds of each other; to endeavour to make each other feel more deeply their responsibility, and the value of the souls around them, and the danger of their being lost; and if there be among their number any who are sluggish, and disposed to excuse themselves from coming up to the help of the Lord, they are to be entreated affectionately, yet earnestly, to shake off their apathy, and give themselves actively to the great work. And, while Christians are to be faithful in their conversation with each other -- to encourage, to arouse, to quicken, so also are they to be faithful in warning the wicked of his wicked way, and in endeavouring to open his eyes on the destruction that threatens him. And those whose consciences are awake, they are to press with the obligation of immediate repentance; explaining to them, if need be, the terms of the gospel, and endeavouring to lead them without delay to the cross of Christ. They have an important duty to perform, also, in respect to those who have professedly come out of darkness into light; in assisting to detect false hopes, and confirm good hopes; to guard against temptation, and establish principles of holy living, and form plans for future usefulness. Many a Christian has had occasion through his whole religious life to

reflect, that much of his usefulness, and much of his happiness, was to be referred, under God, to an unreserved intimacy, or perhaps to a single conversation, with some judicious Christian friend, at that critical moment subsequent to his conversion, when he was adopting principles for the regulation of his conduct.

You will not understand me here as recommending that every one should assume the office of a religious teacher, or that all Christians indiscriminately should take it upon them to give particular counsels and directions to the awakened sinner. The general direction, to exercise repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it may come within the scope even of the humblest intelligence to give; but to counsel an inquiring sinner aright, sometimes becomes an exceedingly delicate and difficult duty, and may well put in requisition the experience and wisdom of the most advanced and judicious Christians; and the assumption of this office by those who are inadequate to it, it is easy to see, must greatly jeopardize the souls of men. While, therefore, every Christian, however circumscribed his field, or however limited his attainments, has something to do, by his conversation, in helping forward God's work, let every one take heed that he attempt nothing in this way which his knowledge or experience will not justify.

4. Another important means for producing and sustaining a revival, is Sabbath-school and Bible-class instruction.

As the work of sanctification is begun and carried forward by means of the truth, it is manifest that the greater the degree of truth that is lodged in the mind, the greater the probability, other things being equal, that the individual will become a subject of conversion. And as

the mind is far more easily impressed and directed in the period of childhood and youth, than after it has reached maturity, and its habits have become fixed, so it is in the morning of life that the truth is likely to exert its greatest influence. Now then, as it is the design of the Sabbath school to throw the light of truth into the mind, and into the youthful mind -- in other words, to wield the great instrument of moral renovation in circumstances most favourable to its success, -- it cannot be doubted, that this institution is a most powerful auxiliary to the cause of revivals. A child who could gain but little from the ordinary instructions of the pulpit, in consequence of their exceeding his capacity, may, from the more simple and familiar instructions of the Sabbath school, be learning at least the elements of Bible truth; and at a very early period, no one can say how early, may have truth enough in his mind for the Spirit to use in the sanctification of his heart.

But there is a still more direct influence exerted by Sabbath schools in favour of revivals. It ought to be, and we doubt not, is, to a great extent, regarded as the duty of every teacher, not merely to enlighten the understanding, but to impress divine truth upon the heart and conscience of each of his pupils; aiming at nothing short of a thorough moral renovation. Here is the best possible opportunity for the teacher to find his way to the heart. If, in the intercourse which he holds with his pupils, he is amiable and conciliatory, he will almost of course secure their confidence; and this is a most important preparation for their listening to him with attention and profit. And then let him, from time to time, commune faithfully with their consciences; let him show them how the truths which he inculcates involve their interests and destiny for eternity; let him press them frequently with those considerations which are most

fitted to make them feel that religion is the one thing needful, and that there is no apology for neglecting it. Let him carefully watch every serious impression, following it up by suitable admonitions and counsels, and, finally, let him bear the interests of these children before the throne of the heavenly grace, and he has good reason to expect that such instrumentality will be honoured in saving souls from death. It is familiar to you all, that the records of Sabbath schools, and the records of revivals, are to a great extent identified; that the noblest triumphs of God's grace have often been found in these nurseries of knowledge, virtue, and piety.

There is another point of view in which the influence of Sabbath schools on revivals appears most desirable -- I refer to the fact that they contribute to their purity. One principal reason why revivals are sometimes corrupted is, that there is so much ignorance and error at work in the midst of them; and every one knows that this is the natural food of fanaticism. Let the Sabbath school exert its proper influence in imbuing the minds of children with a knowledge of God's word, and in establishing them in the great principles of the gospel, and it will constitute the best security against those false and fanatical notions which tend so directly to fatal self-deception. Let God's Spirit be poured out upon a community well instructed in the truths of the gospel, and the happiest results may confidently be expected; for here is the natural preparation for a revival, on the one hand, and the best pledge against all perversion and abuse, on the other.

The remarks which have been made in respect to Sabbath schools, apply, in general, with equal force, to Bible classes. Indeed, the latter may, in one point of view, be considered as more intimately



connected with revivals than the former; inasmuch as those who attend them are usually somewhat more advanced, and of course more capable of understanding and improving doctrinal instruction. Hence, revivals have perhaps, of late, more frequently commenced in Bible classes than any where else; and not a few instances have occurred, in which all, or nearly all, the members of a class have become hopefully the subjects of renewing grace; while the work, which had its beginning here, has extended on the right hand and on the left, till multitudes have experienced its quickening and renovating influence.

5. The faithful discharge of parental duty, is another important means of promoting a revival.

There is no human influence ever exerted in forming the character, more decisive, whether for good or evil, than that of parents; and if it be a well directed religious influence, we have a right to expect, both from the nature of the case, and from actual experience, that it will secure the happiest results. Let a parent train up his children in the way which the Bible prescribes -- let him faithfully instruct them in the truths of God's word as soon as they are capable of being taught - - let him render his instructions as familiar and practical as possible, mingling with them appropriate counsels and admonitions -- and let him pray with them, and for them, and teach them to pray for themselves, -- and if all this is not immediately instrumental of their conversion, it will, at least in all ordinary cases, render them peculiarly promising candidates for converting grace; will be a happy preparation for the effectual work of God's Holy Spirit.

I know it has been sometimes said, that the subjects of revivals are most commonly selected from the haunts of open irreligion and profligacy; while those who have been educated under the benign influences of Christian instruction and example, more commonly remain entrenched in a habit of mere morality and self-righteousness. But I appeal to the whole history of revivals, for evidence that this is not so. I know, indeed, that God glorifies his sovereignty, by extending his renewing grace to some who would seem to be at the greatest distance from him; but as a general rule, he puts direct and visible honour upon his own institutions, by bringing those to experience the sanctifying influence of his truth, who have been in the way of hearing and studying it. If it be asked, whence come the greater number of the subjects of our revivals, we answer, from our Sabbath schools, and Bible classes, and from families in which the parental influence is decidedly religious; and the reason why some have held a different opinion, is, that when a profligate or an infidel is hopefully converted, it excites much attention and remark; and thus the number of such conversions is frequently estimated far higher than it should be. Go into any place you will, where the Holy Spirit has been extensively and powerfully at work, and you will find that the families which have been specially blessed, are those in which God has been honoured by the faithful discharge of parental duty, and the general influence of Christian example; while only here and there one is taken from those families in which there is no parental restraint, nor instruction, nor prayer; and in which, as a natural consequence, the youthful mind is pre-occupied with sentiments and feelings most unfriendly to the work of the Holy Spirit.

It deserves also to be remarked, that much devolves upon Christian parents, in immediately sustaining and carrying forward a revival. If they see their children, at such a time, manifesting an indifference to the things of religion, they are to press them most earnestly and affectionately with its obligations. If they see in them the least anxiety, they are to endeavour, by every means, to cherish it, and put them on their guard against grieving away the Holy Spirit, and take them by the hand, and lead them, if possible, to the Lamb of God, If they see them rejoicing in the hope that their sins are forgiven, they are to aid them, by lessons from God's word and their own experience, to ascertain the true character of their religious exercises, and to avoid the hope of the hypocrite. It is a reproach to many Christian parents, that they suffer a false delicacy to prevail against the faithful discharge of their duty in these most interesting circumstances. As God has constituted them the guardians of their children, it devolves upon them to be especially watchful in respect to their immortal interests; and never is neglect more culpable, than when the Holy Spirit is offering to cooperate with them to secure their children's salvation.

6. The last means for promoting a revival which I shall notice, is, an exercise designed particularly for awakened sinners.

It is generally admitted, I believe, by those who are friendly to revivals, that there should be some occasion on which persons of this class should be distinctly addressed; and which, by bringing them together as inquiring souls, may serve in a measure to get them over their indecision, and commit them to a course of successful striving, to enter in at the strait gate; though special care should be taken that this act of commitment is not perverted to yield aliment to a self-

righteous spirit. What the precise character of this exercise should be, you are aware, is a point in relation to which there is a diversity of opinion. I confess the result of my own reflection and observation on this subject, has been a conviction, that no better course could be adopted than that with which you, as a congregation, are already familiar. At the close of a public service, in which God's truth has been exhibited and enforced, let those who have been impressed by it, and who wish to have their impressions deepened, and to be instructed in reference to their duty and salvation, be requested to remain after the rest of the assembly have retired. And then let the minister, or some other competent person, address them earnestly and affectionately in reference to their peculiar condition; connecting with the address one or more prayers; and afterwards, so far as circumstances may admit, or occasion require, let them be met in a more private way, and let the particular state of each mind be ascertained; and let each receive appropriate counsel and instruction. In all this there is nothing ostentatious, nothing which peculiarly exposes to self-deception, while yet the individual commits himself, as truly as he could by any more public act, to cherish his serious impressions, and places himself in a condition in which the prayers of Christians, and scriptural instruction and counsel, are effectually secured to him. I do not say that some different course may not appeal more strongly to the passions; but I confess, that I know of none which seems to me better adapted to impress upon the conscience and heart Bible truth; and thus subserve a genuine revival of religion.\*

\*From the experience I have had on this subject, I am inclined to think that this mode of treating inquirers is to be preferred to that which has been common, and which I have myself formerly

adopted -- of holding a meeting of a more public nature, for the express purpose of inquiry. It is no doubt of great importance, that an opportunity for inquiry should be given; but the more private, other things being equal, the better. In an extensive revival of religion, however, especially where the burden of conducting it devolves chiefly on a single individual, it may sometimes be a matter of necessity for him to meet a greater number of inquirers at a time than would otherwise be desirable.

With two or three remarks, by way of inference, we shall conclude the discourse.

1. Our subject may assist us to form a correct judgment of any particular measures which may be proposed in connection with a revival.

There may be danger, on this subject, of erring on the right hand and on the left. It is wrong to decide against any particular measure, merely because it is new; and it is equally wrong to adopt it merely because it is new. It would be strange, when the invention of the church is so constantly in exercise, if there should not be some new things connected with religion which are good; and it would be strange, in view of the waywardness and extravagance that pertain to human nature, if there should not be others of evil tendency. Here, then, is an argument for our examining carefully every measure, or course of measures, that is proposed to us, and referring it to the proper standard. If it will abide that standard, it were an unworthy prejudice not to adopt it. If it will not abide that standard, to adopt it

were at once a weakness and a sin. It were to refuse the privilege which God has given us, of judging for ourselves what is right.

If you will know, then, whether it is safe and proper to adopt any particular measures in connection with revivals, which may be comparatively new in the church, bring them to the test which has been presented in the former part of this discourse. Are they characterized by seriousness; by the entire absence of every thing that approaches to levity? Are they marked by that order, and decorum, and reverence, which God requires in every thing connected with his worship? Is there the absence of all ostentation, of all pious fraud, of all unhallowed severity; and is there godly simplicity, and Christian honesty, and sincere affection? If these be the characteristics of the measures proposed, then you may safely adopt them; but if any of these characteristics are wanting, they are not in accordance with the spirit of the gospel, and you cannot consistently, in any way, give them your sanction.

But it may be asked, whether there is not a much better test than this; whether the effect produced by particular measures does not more clearly determine their character? I answer, if the entire and ultimate effect be intended, the standard which it furnishes will always be in consistency with that to which we have just referred; though it must after all, furnish an inadequate rule for judging; for in many cases, at least, it is so general in its character that it is not easy to be traced. If only the immediate and partial effect be intended, then I insist that this is no standard at all; for it admits not of question, that there may be a violent religious excitement, which, at the moment, may seem to many to be doing good, which, nevertheless, may pass over like a hurricane in the natural world,

marking its course with the wrecks even of God's own institutions. Judge not then by this uncertain standard. If you are to judge of any great change by effects, you must wait till they are fully developed, till you can see not only the more immediate, but the more remote effects; the latter of which are often the most important: and these are usually developed gradually. Hold fast, then, to the law and the testimony as your rule of judging; and as, in so doing, you will honour God most, so you will be most likely to be kept out of the mazes of error.

2. Our subject may assist us to discover the causes of the decline of a revival.

I admit that there is more or less of sovereignty here; and that the Spirit of God operates whenever and wherever, in infinite wisdom, he pleases. I acknowledge, too, that the strong excitement which often attends a revival, cannot, so far as respects the same individuals, be kept up for a long time; nor is it at all essential, or even desirable, that it should be. But so far as a healthful and vigorous state of religious feeling is concerned on the part of Christians, and I may add, in view of the promises of God to answer prayer, so far as the conversion of sinners is concerned, it is not irreverent to say, that while he is himself the great Agent, he commits his work, in an important sense, into the hands of his people; and if it decline, there is blame resting upon them. It is because they have grown weary in their supplications, or because they have relaxed in the use of some other of the means which he has put within their reach. Let Christians, then, tremble in view of their responsibility; and when God is sending down his Spirit to work with them, let them take heed that they render a hearty and persevering co-operation. Let

them take heed that they grieve not this divine agent to depart, either from their own souls, lest they should be given up to barrenness, or from the souls of inquiring sinners, lest there should fall upon them the curse of reprobation.

3. Once more: How great is the privilege and the honour which Christians enjoy, of being permitted to co-operate with God in carrying forward his work!

When you are labouring for the salvation of sinners around you, when you are using the various means which God has put into your hands to waken them to conviction and bring them to repentance, you are labouring in the very cause which is identified with the success and the glory of Christ's mediation. Nay, you are a fellow-worker with the Holy Ghost; and, while he honours your efforts with his saving blessing, they are set down to your account in the book of God's remembrance. Yes, Christian; all that you do in this cause brings glory to God in the highest, contributes to brighten your immortal crown, and subserves the great cause of man's salvation! What remains, then, but that you take these considerations to your heart, as so many arguments to labour in this holy cause with more untiring zeal, with more holy fidelity? Is it a cause that demands sacrifices? You can well afford to make them, for it brings happiness, and glory, and honour in its train. Let it be seen on earth, and let the angels report it in heaven, that you are co-workers with God, in giving effect to the purposes of his grace, and in training up immortal souls for the glories of his kingdom.



## **LECTURE VI**

### **TREATMENT DUE TO AWAKENED SINNERS.**

Acts iii. 19. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted"

There is scarcely a period of so much interest in the life of an individual, as that in which he is brought to earnest inquiry respecting the salvation of his soul. It is a state of mind which comes between the utter neglect of religion and the actual possession of it. The dream of thoughtlessness is disturbed. Conscience wakes to its office as an accuser. This world holds the soul with an enfeebled grasp, and the realities of another weigh upon it with deep and awful impression. But then, on the other hand, there is as yet no submission to the terms of the gospel -- no melting down in penitence at the feet of mercy -- no yielding up of the heart to God -- no thankful, cordial acceptance of Christ and his salvation. But between these two states of mind there is no uniform connection; for though conviction is essential to conversion, yet the sinner who is only convinced, may, instead of being converted, return to the world; and thus his last state be worse than his first. It is reasonable to suppose, in any given case of conviction, that the sinner, who is the subject of it, is on the eve of having his destiny decided for eternity: for if he press forward, he secures his salvation; but if he linger and fall back, there is, to say the least, an awful uncertainty whether he is ever again the subject of an awakening influence.

Now you will readily perceive, that it is a most responsible office to counsel and direct an individual in these interesting circumstances. The mind is in a state to be most easily influenced; and influenced on

a subject that involves all the interests of eternity: there is a sort of balancing of the soul between religion and the world, between heaven and hell; and no one can be certain, that the weight of a single remark may not turn the scale one way or the other. Of what vast importance is it, that all the suggestions and counsels that are offered at such a time should be scriptural -- seasonable -- the very instructions of the Holy Ghost!

But if it be a responsible office for an individual to direct a single inquiring sinner, what shall be said of the responsibility of the church during a revival of religion; in which there are many, on every side, pressing the inquiry, "what they shall do to be saved?" And how important is it, that members of the church should be so enlightened, as to be safe guides on this momentous subject; that thus they may never put in still greater jeopardy the interests of those whom they attempt to direct! A large part of the conduct of a revival consists in counselling THE AWAKENED: and on the manner in which this duty is performed, as much as any thing, depend both the character of the work and its results. It is proper, therefore, that, in a series of discourses like the present, this should be made a distinct and prominent topic: and this is what I am about to bring before you for our present exercise.

The direction which the apostle in our text gives to the Jews -- that they should repent and be converted -- is applicable to sinners of every description, and especially to those who are in any measure awakened. It is proper to direct every inquiring sinner to repent and turn to God, in a way of holy obedience; and this may be considered an epitome of all appropriate teaching in such circumstances: nevertheless, this direction is to be given in a variety of forms,

adapted to a diversity of cases, and accompanied with many cautions and admonitions. -- My design will be,

I. To consider, in general, the treatment due to an awakened sinner: and,

II. To contemplate some of the most prominent cases which require more special counsel and instruction

I. I am to present before you the general course proper to be taken with an awakened sinner.

When a person in these circumstances comes to ask your counsel, the first thing you have to determine is, what is his amount of knowledge, and his amount of feeling.

It is possible that he may have much feeling, and little knowledge. He may have learned so much of God's law, as to have wakened up his conscience, and brought him to a sense of danger, and made him tremble in anticipation of a fearful hell. But his knowledge even of the law may be very limited; and how to secure the forgiveness of his sins, and an escape from the tremendous doom that threatens him, he may be utterly ignorant? Of the nature of the gospel salvation, of the conditions on which it is offered, of the repentance of sin, of the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of the life of holy obedience, he may know almost literally nothing. Possibly his habits of life may have rendered him a voluntary exile from the means of religious knowledge: but it is by no means certain that he may not have been a regular attendant on Christian institutions; for facts prove that it is possible for an individual to sit under the faithful preaching of the gospel, during a long life, and yet to hear with such entire

inattention, that there is gained no distinct knowledge of any one of the doctrines of the Bible. Yes; it has often happened, in respect to men of general intelligence, and high worldly consideration, that when they have been awakened, they have themselves acknowledged that they were entirely ignorant of Bible truth; and, with all their talents, and learning, and maturity, have had to begin at the very alphabet of the gospel. Now, wherever you discover in an anxious sinner such gross ignorance, whether he be a man of high or low degree, your first business should be to instruct him. And let your instructions be characterized by the utmost plainness; for a mind to which the subject of religion is in a great degree new, (no matter how familiar it may be with other subjects,) will find it difficult to apprehend the truth, unless it is presented in its most simple form. Teach him what God has done for his salvation, and what God requires him to do; and the reasonableness of that requirement, and the necessity of its being complied with. It may be necessary, in some cases, that these things should be presented in different forms, and by a succession of efforts, before they come to be fairly understood: nevertheless, it were wrong to withhold any thing that is essential to salvation, on the ground that the mind is not thoroughly enlightened in all those truths which have the precedence in the order of nature; for if you leave an awakened sinner without having set Christ distinctly before him, as the only foundation of hope, and without having taught him in what manner the benefits of redemption may be secured, before you see him again, he may have been brought to a stand by not knowing what to do, and may have actually settled down with a determination that he will do nothing. Or else your next meeting with him may be at the judgment; and you may be compelled to reflect, that the last opportunity which was enjoyed on

earth of directing him to the cross of Christ, you enjoyed, but neglected.

It is possible, on the other hand, that you may find a good degree of knowledge, and comparatively little feeling. There may even be a correct and intelligent view of all the evidence and doctrines of the gospel, which has resulted from laborious, critical, and long-continued examination -- there may be an ability, rarely to be met with, to confound sceptics and gainsayers, -- and yet the impression of divine truth may be feeble, and the conscience only partially awake. There may be conviction enough to bring the sinner to you for counsel, when there is not enough to bring him to Christ for salvation. In this case your duty manifestly is, to endeavour to impress more deeply upon his mind the truths which he understands and admits; to bring him to examine his heart more closely by the searching light of God's law; and to look at every doctrine, in its practical bearings, in connection with his own character and destiny. The amount of conviction necessary to conversion may vary in different cases, according to the character of the mind, and its previous opportunities for acquiring religious knowledge: but conviction there must be, in every case; and wherever it is feeble and wavering, it is fair to presume, that something more is necessary in this way, in order to bring the soul to rest upon its Saviour.

The awakened sinner may be benefited by some such counsels and cautions as the following: --

Let him be admonished, first of all, that the duty of devoting himself to God, by a compliance with the terms of the gospel, is of immediate obligation; and that he is guilty, and becoming more and more guilty,

in the neglect of it. -- For is not this duty reasonable? Is it not due to God, as a Creator, as a Preserver, and especially as a Redeemer, that every human being should love him with all his affections, and serve him to the extent of his powers? And if the sinner has never done this hitherto, nay, if he has never ceased from a course of rebellion against God, and has not performed a single act from a regard to his authority, surely it is reasonable that he should change his course without delay; that he should at once wake, not only to a sense, but to a performance, of the duties which God requires of him. Would it be right that a child, who had broken away from parental restraints, and set at naught parental love, when pressed to submit to a father's authority, and return to a father's aims, should plead that he had not wounded and insulted that father as long as he wished; and that though he felt the obligation to yield, yet he did not consider it as binding him to do so immediately? Would it be right for a rebel, when urged to throw down arms against a wise and benevolent sovereign, to acknowledge the reasonableness of the requisition for a future day, but to deny it in respect to the present? Let not the sinner, then, dream that he has any excuse for continuing unreconciled to God for an hour. Press him with the obligation of immediate repentance, and faith, and submission to God. Endeavour to make him feel, that, apart from all considerations of personal interest, this is a duty which he owes to God, and which ought to press upon him with the weight of a mountain, until he has discharged it.

Let the awakened sinner be admonished, farther, that the present is the best time for securing his soul's salvation, -- For then there are facilities for becoming religious which do not exist at any other period. Supposing him, as I here do, to be in the midst of a revival,

there is an energy and efficiency in all the means of grace, which is, to a great extent, peculiar to such a scene. Ministers are encouraged to preach with unaccustomed earnestness, and are enabled to bring out the truth of God with great pungency and effect. Christians, too, pray with unwonted fervour, and converse with peculiar fidelity; and there is the current of example setting strongly in favour of religion; and the very atmosphere around seems to be pervaded by deep solemnity; and, with all this, the sinner's own attention is awake, and the Holy Spirit is striving with him to bring him to repentance. Let him be inquired of what circumstances can exist more favourable to his conversion than now exist. Let him be reminded, that he has no reason to expect that such an assemblage of circumstances will again occur in the course of his life; and that even if they should, the same disposition which would lead him to resist the Spirit now, might lead him to resist it then. Dwell upon the appalling fact, that trifling with divine influences must serve greatly to harden the heart; and that if he return to the world, from the point which he has now gained, he will, in all probability, go back to a point of obduracy, at which he will be left, without any farther divine interposition, to take his own way, down to the chambers of eternal death.

Admonish him, farther, that he is in danger, from various causes, of losing his serious impressions. -- This is a point, in relation to which he may not improbably think himself safe; and though he may not be able to anticipate any favourable result of his convictions, yet so pungent and overwhelming are they, that he cannot realize that there is any danger of their leaving him. But even the strongest religious impressions are sometimes driven away from the soul almost in an hour; though, in general, the process is a gradual and almost imperceptible one. Admonish him to beware of the levities of the

world; for one light conversation with a careless friend may change decisively the current of his thoughts. Guard him against the influence of worldly care, even of his necessary daily employments; for any thing of a mere worldly nature, that occupies the mind, is liable to turn it off from the great subject of salvation. Caution him, also, against yielding to a false shame; for this cannot long prevail without grieving away the Holy Spirit. Urge upon him the importance of holding God's truth to his mind as constantly as possible, that thus the impressions which have already been made by it may have no opportunity to escape. And, to give the greatest effect to all these cautions, point him to examples, in the way of illustrating them; and let him know, that there are multitudes, now in the ranks of profligacy and infidelity, who once even trembled under the awakening influences of God's Spirit. In view of the tremendous evil which must result from the departure of this divine Agent from the soul, on the one hand, and of the ease with which he may be grieved away, on the other, you are to ring a monitory peal in the ear of the awakened sinner, adapted to make him cherish his impressions with the most watchful diligence.

And then, again, you are to put him on his guard against seeking salvation in a spirit of self-righteousness. -- There is no natural predilection in man for the gospel plan of salvation: on the contrary, there is a strong original bias in favour of being saved by the deeds of the law; though, unhappily, there is no disposition to perform the deeds which the law requires. Hence the sinner, when he is first awakened, almost always puts himself upon a course of self-righteous effort, and practically asks, with the young man in the gospel, "what good thing he shall do, that he may inherit eternal life." He forthwith begins an attendance upon all the means of grace, if he



has neglected them before; or if he has been accustomed to attend upon them, he does it now with an increased degree of seriousness. He listens attentively to God's word -- is found in the meeting for social prayer and religious conference -- passes much time in his closet, and in conversing with Christian friends -- and, in short, aims to perform externally every duty which God requires of him. And in all this the secret feeling of his heart is, even though he may not always be sensible of it, that he is performing something meritorious, which will catch and please the eye of God, and cause his name to be enrolled in the Lamb's book of life. Now, it devolves upon you carefully to guard him against this error; for so long as it is retained, it must be an effectual barrier to a compliance with the terms of the gospel. Do not discourage him from striving, but admonish him to strive in the spirit of the new covenant, and not of the old. Tell him that there is no merit in any of his striving, and that he can never be saved till he becomes convinced of this, and falls down helpless at the feet of mercy, and is willing to accept of salvation as the free gift of God through Christ, without any respect to his own deservings. The mistake to which I here refer may be made by those who speculatively understand the way of salvation, as well as those who do not; and the only means by which it is discovered, is faithful communion with one's own heart. To the duty of self-communion, then, with special reference to this point, every inquiring sinner should be earnestly exhorted.

Counsel him, moreover, to beware of making comfort, rather than duty, an ultimate end. -- A state of conviction is a state of anxiety and alarm, and of course unhappiness. As the sinner, from the very constitution of his nature, desires happiness, it is not strange, that in the agony of conviction he should often fasten his eye upon that as an

ultimate object; though nothing is more certain, than that, so long as he pursues it as such, true religious comfort will never be attained. In doing this, he places himself before God merely as a sufferer desiring to be relieved from distress; whereas the attitude which he ought to assume, is that of a guilty offender, acknowledging and forsaking his evil courses, and turning unto the Lord. What God requires of him is the discharge of duty -- repentance, faith, obedience; and in this way only has he a right either to seek or to expect comfort. He is to regard himself first as a sinner, and then as a sufferer: if he repent of his sins he has reason to expect relief from his sufferings; but if he hold fast his sins, how much soever he may supplicate God's mercy, he will either experience no relief, or none which he ought to desire. He must understand, that it is the economy of God's grace that true Christian comfort can never be gained except as it is made a secondary consideration. He must keep his eye constantly fixed on duty; he must stir himself up to do what God requires of him; and God will take care that he is no stranger to the joys of his salvation. It may be well to caution him, also, against seeking aid from too many advisers; especially where their religious views do not harmonize. -- There are among Christians, we all know, shades of difference in their views of the truths of the gospel; and though they all hold the Head, and recognise each other as members of the same family, yet on some minor points they do not speak the same language; and indeed, though the real difference may not be great, yet they may differ in their phraseology, even in respect to the essentials of religion, and may be accustomed to contemplate these great truths in different relations and combinations. The consequence of this may be, that several persons, who are really agreed on all fundamental doctrines, may counsel an awakened sinner each in his own way, and

each substantially in the right way; and yet there may be, after all, to his apprehension, a disagreement, which may be the source of much painful perplexity. His mind will be liable to become confused by the variety of directions which he receives, and will be far less likely to profit by any, than if this confusion had been avoided. It were better for the awakened sinner that he should have a single judicious counsellor, or at the extent a few such, than to be soliciting or receiving the advice of every one indiscriminately.

I add, once more, that he should be advised to pass much of his time in the closet. -- It is proper, indeed, that he should avail himself of frequent opportunities to hear the preaching of God's word; and that he should mingle in the social prayer meeting; and should receive appropriate counsels and instructions from Christian friends; but this can never take the place of private meditation and self-communion. The searching and probing of his own heart, and the recollection of his sins, is a work peculiarly for the closet; because there the mind is least likely to be diverted by external objects and circumstances. I know there is a strong tendency, in most persons who are awakened, to mingle continually in public religious exercises. This may be the easiest, but it is not the safest or most desirable course. I do not say, that many who adopt it do not become true Christians; but, to me at least, it appears that there is more danger of a spurious conversion, or if it be not spurious, that the principle of spiritual life will be feeble and sickly, than if there had been more of that knowledge of the hidden abominations of the heart, which is to be acquired especially by private self-examination.

While you are giving to the awakened sinner these various directions, you can hardly repeat too often the caution, that he should not mistake the design of the means which you are recommending. -- Let him understand, clearly, that the only end to be answered by them, so far as respects himself, is to bring him to the conviction, that he is all pollution, and guilt, and un worthiness, and that he can do nothing toward his salvation, but throw himself into the arms of sovereign mercy. When he is brought to this state of mind, means have done all that they can do for him as an impenitent sinner; and if, instead of yielding himself up to God, he goes on still in the use of means, there is great reason to fear, that they will prove the stumbling-block over which he will fall into perdition.

II. Having now marked out a general course of treatment adapted to an awakened sinner, I proceed. Secondly, to contemplate some of the great variety of cases which require more special counsel and instruction.

Suppose the sinner says, that though he is aware that his case is as bad as you represent it, yet he can do nothing to render it any better, and therefore must he contented to remain where he is, -- You are to endeavour, in the first place, to convince him, by a direct appeal to his conscience, that the inability under which he labours, is nothing more than a settled aversion of the heart from God; and therefore is entirely without excuse. Let him see that he has all the powers of a moral agent -- that he has a conscience to distinguish between right and wrong, and a will by which he may choose the one and refuse the other. Let him see, that in withholding his heart from God, he is as free as in any other course of action; and therefore blameworthy: and

therefore condemned in the plea which he sets up for doing nothing.

But let it be admitted, as it certainly must be, that every sinner, if left to himself, will perish; that though the inability is of a guilty sort, yet it really does prevail; -- still you are to show the awakened sinner that this is nothing to him in the way of discouragement: for he is not left to himself; the Holy Spirit has already come to his aid, and is offering not only to convince him of guilt, but to renew him to repentance. What if it be true, that, by his unassisted powers, he will never enter in at the strait gate, yet so long as the almighty energy of divine grace is actually proffered to his assistance, how can he stand still on the plea of inability? Let the sinner bring his own powers into exercise to the utmost, and he need have no fear but that God will work within him both to will and to do, to secure his salvation.

But suppose he should say, that he has made thorough trial of his own powers, and yet has accomplished nothing -- Let him be inquired of in what manner he has been striving. -- Is it not more than possible, that the secret of his ill success lies in the fact that he has been trying to do too much, or rather, that he has done nothing with a right spirit; that the influence of all his exertions has been neutralized by the self-righteous notion of merit being attached to them? Or may not his striving have been inconstant; frequently interrupted by the cares of the world, and never so earnest as the object of it demands? But suppose it really appears to him, on reflection, that he has done all that he can do, inasmuch as the interests of his eternity are suspended on the result, he surely will not think it prudent to adopt a course which he knows must land him in perdition. If he give up all effort, his case is certainly hopeless; if

he continue to strive, he can but perish -- and he may be saved. It were better that he should sacrifice a thousand worlds, were they in his possession, than to forego the possibility, if there were nothing more, of his escaping hell and obtaining heaven.

But what if he should plead still farther, as a ground of discouragement, that many of his friends who were awakened at the same time with himself have apparently given themselves to the Saviour, and are rejoicing in hope: and that hence he has no reason to believe that there is any mercy for him. -- Answer this plea by showing that God has given the same powers of moral agency to him as to them; that he has made the same gracious provision for him as for them; and that in both cases the offer is equally free, equally sincere. Remind him, that God has nowhere promised that he shall have the comforts of a good hope at any particular time, but he has promised that they who seek in a proper manner shall find; and that promise he will certainly fulfill. If his friends have come into the kingdom before him, instead of ministering to his discouragement, let it be an argument with him to press forward; for He who has had compassion on others, is equally ready to extend compassion to him.

But suppose the sinner allege, as another ground of discouragement, the doctrine of election; presuming that he is not among the elect, and therefore all efforts to secure his salvation must be in vain. -- Take care that, in reply to this, you say nothing to bring this doctrine into question. Instead of even seeming to doubt it, or to treat it as if it were a mere speculation, admit it, prove it, and show that if it be not true, God has not spoken plainly in his word, and that he does not even exercise a providence. But show him, at the same time, that the secret purposes of God do not in the least infringe the moral agency

of man. Appeal to his own consciousness for the truth of this; and then confess to him your ignorance of the manner in which these two doctrines harmonize; and at the same time, expose to him the folly of rejecting any truth which is susceptible of absolute proof, only because we cannot discover its harmony with some other proof, which is no less clearly proved. And you may go farther still, and show him that this very doctrine of election, when rightly understood, so far from being a discouraging doctrine, lies near the foundation of the sinner's hope; for if all, when left to themselves, are inclined to reject salvation, where is there hope for any, independently of God's sovereign grace? But this is nothing more nor less than the Scripture doctrine of election.

If however, the sinner, under the influence of an awakened conscience, should be disposed to indulge in cavils, respecting this or any other doctrine, it were better not to attempt to follow him. The safest course in such a case, were to appeal from the speculations of his understanding, to the honest dictates of his conscience. If you undertake to answer all his objections, and do not answer them to his satisfaction, he may regard your supposed defeat as proving the weakness of the cause you have attempted to defend; and, in this miserable delusion, he may find a refuge from his convictions. Or let the result of your conversation with him, in this respect, be as it may, the very fact of his being engaged in such a dispute, would be fitted to diminish his anxiety, and not improbably might be the first step in his return to his accustomed carelessness.

Suppose the sinner should complain of great insensibility, and should express an earnest desire that he might have more pungent convictions. -- While you endeavour to keep his thoughts fastened

upon those great truths which are most fitted to convince and to dissolve, such as the holiness of God, the perfection of his law, the deep depravity of the heart, and the compassion and grace of a dying Saviour, you are to institute a faithful inquiry as to the ground of this desire; and it is not improbable that you will discover that its leading element is self-righteousness; that the sinner desires conviction, because he imagines that there will be something of merit in it, to recommend him to the divine favour. He may not, indeed, be sensible of this, and it may not be easy to convince him of it; for so deceitful is the heart, and so busy is the adversary at such a moment, that inquiring sinners are exceedingly apt to mistake their own feelings; but wherever you discover any evidences of the workings of this spirit, you must endeavour, if possible, to make the individual perceive it, that he may escape from its influence. Let him fully understand, that he is just as depraved, just as worthy of eternal death in the sight of God, when he is in an agony of conviction, as he was in the depth of his carnal security; that the difference in the two cases, is precisely the difference that exists between two criminals who are sentenced to die, one of whom views the reality of his condition, and anticipates with horror the appalling scene of execution; while the other, in the confident expectation of a pardon, gives himself up to absolute unconcern. Let him see, that in conviction he only looks at himself as he is; and let his own conscience decide, whether there can be any merit in merely beholding his guilt. The man who is convinced that his house is on fire, and that he shall be burnt to death if he remain in it, will make a hasty escape, and his conviction of danger will have brought him to it; though no one would say that there was any thing of merit in that conviction. In like manner, the sinner who is effectually convinced,



that he must perish if he remain impenitent, and that he can be saved only by the free grace of God in Christ, actually throws himself, a guilty and helpless creature, into his Saviour's arms; and it is the conviction he has of his ruin that leads him to do this; but will the sinner himself say, that there is more of merit in this case than in the other.

Suppose the sinner to be sinking down, under the burden of his guilt, into a state of despair, with an impression that his sins have been so aggravated that mercy cannot be extended to him -- what you have to do in this case, is to give him juster views of the gospel. He has practically lost sight of the truth, that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; and this is the doctrine which you are to hold up to him in all its extent and glory. Bring to his mind God's own declarations, "that he is able and willing to save all that come unto him; that whosoever believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and whosoever will, may come and take the water of life freely." Tell him that a bloody Manasseh, and a persecuting Saul, and even some of the murderers of the Son of God, have obtained mercy; and, if he will have it that his guilt is more aggravated than theirs, urge upon him the fact, that there is a boundlessness in the compassions of God, and an infinite value in the blood of Christ, which no measure of guilt and pollution can possibly transcend. Dwell, moreover, on the wonderful consideration, that, as God is glorified in the forgiveness of every penitent sinner, so he is most glorified in the forgiveness of the greatest sinners; for then each of his moral perfections, and especially his grace, shines forth with the brightest lustre; and hence it is the privilege of the penitent, to urge the greatness of his guilt before God, as an argument for his being forgiven. Endeavour to make him realize, that if his guilt, instead of having risen to the

height of a mountain, had been limited to a single transgression, he could never have atoned for it by any exertions or sufferings of his own; but that the sacrifice which Christ has offered, forbids him to despair, notwithstanding his guilt appears so appalling. His eye has been already fixed long enough exclusively upon his guilt; it is time that it should be turned away to the cross of Christ. Hold him, if you can, to the blessed gospel. Let him see the richness, the preciousness, the freeness of its provision; that it exactly meets the exigencies of those who feel that they are great sinners, and can do nothing but sink away into the arms of mercy. Admonish him, moreover, that despair is in itself a sin of fearful magnitude; that though it may excite the compassion of man, it awakens the abhorrence of God; that one of its primary elements is cold distrust of the offers and promises of the gospel; and that the indulgence of it is only putting the soul at a more awful distance from Christ, and clouding still more deeply the prospect of its salvation.

Suppose the sinner to become impressed with the idea, that he has had no conviction of sin, and that all that he supposed to be conviction, was delusion, when at the same time he furnishes the most conclusive evidence, that he is really a subject of powerful divine operation -- in a case of this kind, I would endeavour to convince him, what is beyond all peradventure true -- that the adversary is at work, trying to drive away his convictions, by making him believe that he has none. I would show him how reasonable it were to expect that it should be so, -- that the great enemy of all good should be upon the alert, in the use of his wiles, when he sees that he is in danger of losing one of his subjects. And I would refer to the experience of many others, who have passed through similar trials, and who have at length become fully satisfied that they were

suffering under a delusion, which was the effect of Satanic influence. And when the point is once gained, that the sinner really believes that this impression, in respect to his having no convictions, is from below, he is prepared to resign it; and the delusion vanishes.

It may be useful sometimes, in order to correct his views on this subject, to set him to account for his own unhappiness, on the ground that he has no conviction. The fact, that he has no peace, that he is even wretched, he will be willing enough to acknowledge. He is not as he was in other days, when his spirits were gay and buoyant, and no thoughts concerning the salvation of his soul ever rose in his mind. There is some cause in operation now, which did not operate then; else there would have been no change in his feelings -- no change in his conduct. Suppose he could exclude the subject of religion from his thoughts -- suppose he could regard it with the same indifference he formerly did -- suppose he could revert to the former impression, that there was little or no danger in his case, -- and would not all the unhappiness which he now feels, instantly fly away? If he reflects, will he not acknowledge that this would be the case? Let him say, then, what else it is, than the conviction that he is a sinner, that disturbs the peace of his mind? If he had no conviction of the truth of religion, and of the interest which he has in it, and of his exposure to the woes of perdition in consequence of having offended God, why is it that he is thrown into a state of wretchedness, from which he would give the world, if it were at his command, to be delivered?

But if the awakened sinner persevere in the mistaken notion that he has no conviction, I know of no other course than to hold up to his view those great truths which are fitted to produce it. If he will have

it, that he has hitherto had no just sense of sin, we can only proclaim to him the evil of sin, and point him to the fountain that is opened for sin and uncleanness. It is desirable, however, in such cases, to dwell chiefly on the glorious provision of the gospel; for though the soul is unwilling to admit that it feels its need, yet it actually does realize it; and if Christ be continually held up, it may let go its favourite delusion long enough to embrace him; and when Christ is really received, the delusion is gone for ever.

There is yet one more attitude in which we may contemplate the awakened sinner -- I mean by gradually falling under the power of a settled melancholy, -- As this is an evil greatly to be deprecated, so the very first tendencies to it, ought, if possible, to be promptly counteracted; for unless it be early checked, it may soon become habitual, and may lead to the most disastrous, and even fatal results. Wherever this state of mind exists in connection with the subject of religion, it will usually be found to have been occasioned by an erroneous view of some particular truth. It is a matter of much importance, therefore, to ascertain what is the error to which the individual is yielding himself; and this may ordinarily be done by close and diligent inquiry. It is, however, often more easy to ascertain the error than to remove it; for the very fact that it operates so powerfully as to destroy, in some measure, the balance among the faculties, proves that it has gained a strong hold of the mind, and is not probably to be dislodged by any feeble effort. In attempting to remove it, it is often wisest to avoid coming at once to the point, lest the mind should take the alarm, and put itself into the attitude of defence. Let the effort be directed first to impress upon the disordered intellect some of the great truths which it may not be disposed to question, but which are utterly inconsistent with the

notion which has plunged it into gloom; and let it be left, in some measure, to its own reflections and conclusions; and when the particular error is approached, let it be in an easy and delicate, and not in a harsh and revolting manner: and there is good reason to hope that it may be delivered from its bondage to the error; and thus the clouds of melancholy may go off, and light, and peace, and comfort, may succeed.

It sometimes happens, that the calamity of which I am speaking is connected with great physical derangement; and that it would never have existed, but for some predisposing cause in the bodily system. In this case, the mind and body have a mutual action and re-action upon each other: the mind becoming more gloomy on account of the disease of the body; and the body more diseased on account of the gloom of the mind. Sometimes important benefit may be derived from medical aid, and still more frequently, perhaps, from gentle relaxation and exercise. It has not unfrequently happened that change of scenery, change of surrounding objects, change of daily associates, has helped to restore the health of the body, while it has contributed, in the same degree, to bring back the balance of the mind.

There is one caution which ought always to be diligently observed, but which there is reason to fear is too often overlooked, in the treatment of a person in these painful circumstances -- I refer to the fact, that no measures should be taken which are fitted to carry his mind ultimately away from religion. It is not uncommon for those whose friends have fallen into this state, to manifest a strong disposition to separate them from all religious influences, to divorce them from the company of Christians, and to urge them into the

society of the gay and thoughtless. But never was there a greater mistake. The contrast which, in that case, exists between the world without and the world within, between the cheerless and wretched state of the soul, and the joyous bounding of hearts amidst the vanities of life, instead of relieving melancholy, is fitted to change it into agony. But if the point be ultimately gained by such a course, let me ask, what is it that is gained? It is not merely relief from gloom; but it is freedom from all concern for the soul. It is a deliberate rushing back upon the vanities and gaieties of life. It is turning away the thoughts from God, and from Christ, and from salvation, in a manner which renders it extremely probable that they will never in this world be seriously directed to these objects again; at least not in circumstances in which reflection will be likely to be availing. If, instead of this violent course, there should be adopted one which should be fitted to break up gloomy associations on the one hand, without driving away serious thought on the other -- which should surround the individual with cheerful, and yet with religious influences, -- there might be just reason to hope, that in escaping from the dominion of melancholy, he would pass, not into the thoughtlessness of the world, but into the peace and joy of the true Christian.

Two brief remarks, by way of inference, will conclude the discourse.

1. Our subject exposes two opposite errors, both of which, it is believed, are common in the treatment of awakened sinners.

The first is the error of those who limit themselves to the simple direction to repent, or believe, or submit to God. Any thing beyond this they consider as putting the sinner upon the use of the means of

grace; and they ask how they can consistently do this, when the sinner is liable to die every moment, and thus be alike beyond repentance, and beyond mercy? And then again, they say, that all that he does while he remains impenitent is sinful; and that by exhorting him to do any thing before repentance, they exhort him to sin. But it is not difficult to see where lies the mistake in this matter. All will admit that it is the duty of a sinner to repent without delay. But he cannot repent until he knows what repentance is, and until he understands those great truths, in view of which repentance is exercised. And to this end, if he be ignorant, he must be instructed out of God's word, either by reading the Bible himself, or hearing its truths presented by others; in other words, he must be put upon the use of the means of grace. True it is, that he may die before he has knowledge enough to exercise evangelical repentance; but even if it should be so, they who direct him are not responsible for the event; because some degree of knowledge is essential to repentance. And can it reasonably be said that any thing is sinful, which is necessarily involved in a compliance with God's command? If he commands the sinner to repent, he commands him to do all that is necessary to enable him to repent; and as some knowledge of his truth is necessary, if he do not possess it already, he is bound to gain it; and surely there can be nothing in that to excite the divine displeasure.

The other error is that of directing inquiring sinners to use the means of grace, without, at the same time, enforcing the obligation of immediate repentance. This direction is fitted to abate a sense of guilt, and finally to bring back to the soul its accustomed spiritual torpor. One of two results, from such a direction, you may confidently expect -- either that the sinner will lull himself to sleep in the use of means, and will soon be disposed to abandon them, or else

that he will put himself upon a course of self-righteous effort, and imagine that he is going rapidly towards heaven, when he has totally mistaken the path that leads thither. Means are nothing to an awakened sinner, except to bring before him those truths which are necessary to the exercise of repentance. To exhort him to the use of means with reference to any other end than this, were undoubtedly to mistake their design, and to expose him to be dangerously and fatally misled.

Take heed then, brethren, that you avoid both these errors. Before you put off the sinner with the simple direction to repent, be sure that you are not speaking to him a language which he does not understand. Be sure that he understands those truths, without a knowledge of which, your direction, though true and good, would leave him to grope in the dark. And on the other hand, when you direct him to study his Bible, and attend on the various means of religious instruction, take care that you do not leave the impression, that this is a substitute for repentance, instead of the means of it; or, at least, that repentance will by and by come along in the train of these means, without any more direct personal effort. In short, endeavour to put him in the best way for understanding those truths which are involved in the exercise of repentance; but, at the same time, let him distinctly know, that it is of such vital importance, and such immediate obligation, that if he dies a stranger to it, he must reap the fruit of his neglect in a scene of interminable anguish.

2. Finally, Our subject teaches us what are the best qualifications for directing and counselling awakened sinners.



It is essential that a person who undertakes this office should have a good knowledge of God's word; for this is the great instrument by which the whole work is to be accomplished. It will not suffice, that there should be a mere superficial acquaintance with divine truth; but it should be deep and thorough: the doctrines of the Bible should be understood in their various bearings and connections. There should also be an intimate knowledge of the human heart -- the subject on which this work is to be performed. There should be an ability to guide the sinner in the work of self-examination; to ferret sin out from its various lurking places; to bring principles and motives to bear upon the various faculties and affections of the soul, with discrimination and good effect. In short, there should be an intelligent and devoted piety; for this secures a knowledge of divine truth on the one hand, and an acquaintance with the springs of human conduct on the other. I hardly need say, that the knowledge necessary to the right discharge of this office is especially of an experimental character; for he who undertakes to direct an inquiring sinner in a path in which he has never walked, is as the blind leading the blind. A man may be destitute in a great degree of human learning, he may be a babe in the wisdom of the world, and yet he may have that divine and spiritual knowledge, which shall render him a competent guide to inquiring souls. And on the other hand, he may be a proficient in every branch of human knowledge, he may have even studied thoroughly the philosophy of the mind, and the criticism of the Bible, and yet, from having never felt the power of divine truth upon his own heart, he may be a most unskillful and unsafe guide in the concern of the soul's salvation.

Wherefore, Christian brethren, be exhorted to larger attainments, both in knowledge and in piety. I might urge you to this, on the

ground that it will increase your comfort here, and brighten your crown hereafter. I might urge you to it, also, on the ground of general usefulness; for there is no department of benevolent action for which such attainments would not better prepare you. But I exhort you now to aim at these attainments from the consideration, that your lot is cast at a period when much devolves upon you in the way of directing inquiring souls; and while, on the one hand, they may keep you from being instrumental, even in your well-meant efforts, of great evil; on the other, they may secure to you the blessing of accomplishing great good. Go then, Christian, often into your closet, and study your own heart. Open God's blessed word, and apply yourself to its precious truths. Keep your soul constantly imbued with its spirit. Then the inquiring sinner may find in you a safe and skilful guide. Then you may hope that God will honour you as an instrument of saving souls from death, and hiding a multitude of sins.

## **LECTURE VII**

### **TREATMENT DUE TO YOUNG CONVERTS.**

2 Cor. xiii. 5.

"Prove your own selves."

This exhortation was addressed, by the apostle, to professed Christians. It takes for granted, that they were not absolutely assured of their discipleship, and were liable to be deceived in the views

which they formed respecting their own character. It enjoins the duty of referring their character to the proper test; proving whether Christ is in them by the sanctifying influences of his Spirit, or whether they are mere nominal Christians, finally to be cast off as reprobate.

The advice contained in the text was addressed to the Corinthian church indiscriminately; and it may properly apply to all Christians, without any reference to age or standing. It is, however, especially applicable to those who have just entered, or professedly entered, on the Christian life; for if they mistake their own character then, there is reason to fear that the mistake will be fatal. It therefore becomes every minister, and every private Christian, who undertakes the office of a counsellor and guide, during a revival of religion, to make much use of the exhortation -- "Prove your own selves."

It is, if I mistake not, becoming a somewhat popular notion, that nearly all the efforts which are made during a revival, should be directed to the awakening and conversion of sinners; and that, comparatively, little attention is needed by those who have indulged the hope that they have become reconciled to God. Far be it from me to say, or to think, that too much is done to effect the former of these objects; but I am constrained to believe that there is far too little done in reference to the latter. True it is, that the sinner, while trembling under a conviction of guilt, is in circumstances of awful interest; for if the Spirit of God depart from him, it may be the eternal death of his soul; but it is no less true, that the period of his first cherishing a hope in God's mercy is an exceedingly critical one; for if he build on a sandy foundation, he may never discover it, until it slides from beneath him, and lets him into the pit. Let no Christian then imagine, that his responsibility, in connection with a revival,

terminates in the duty which he owes to awakened sinners: let him remember that there is another class who as truly claim his attention as they, and who cannot be neglected, but at the peril of encouraging self-deception, and corrupting the purity of the church. Lend me your attention, therefore, while I endeavour, in this discourse, to exhibit an outline of the TREATMENT WHICH IS DUE TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HOPEFULLY THE SUBJECTS OF A RECENT CONVERSION.

We will consider the object which ought to be kept in view -- and the means by which it may be most successfully accomplished.

I. The object to be aimed at, in all our treatment of those who hope they have been recently converted, is twofold: to save from self-deception, and to build up in faith and holiness.

1. To save from self-deception.

That there is danger that many persons will practise deception upon themselves in these circumstances, must be obvious to any one who gives the subject the least consideration. For the mind is then in an excited state, when it is most liable to misjudge of its own exercises; and the heart has been burdened with anguish, and has been longing for relief, and is prepared to welcome with transport the least evidence of pardon; and of course is in danger of grasping at a shadow, and mistaking it for the substance. Besides, there is a chapter in the record of experience, which teaches a most impressive lesson on this subject; which exhibits instances innumerable, of persons who have, for a season, felt confident of their own conversion, and have been hailed by Christians as fellow-helpers in the work of the Lord, who have, nevertheless, subsequently been

convinced themselves, and forced the conviction upon others, that what they had called Christian experience was mere delusion. And, while there is danger that self-deception will take place in these circumstances, no one can doubt that this is an evil greatly to be deprecated; for there is comparatively little reason to hope, in any given case, that it will be removed: and if it be not removed, it is in the very worst sense fatal. Surely then it devolves upon all who are active in conducting a revival of religion, to guard those who hope they have been recently converted, against self-deception. Even amidst all the peace and rapture which they may experience, in connection with what they suppose to be a conversion to God, it is the duty of those who counsel them, though they may rejoice in their joy, to rejoice with trembling, lest it should prove, that the hope with which their joy is connected should be the hope of the hypocrite, which shall finally prove as the giving up of the ghost.

2, The other great end to be kept in view, in respect to the class of which I am speaking, is, to build them up in faith and holiness.

If they have actually been regenerated, they will certainly, in a greater or less degree, bring forth the fruits of holiness; for it is impossible that a gracious principle should exist in the soul, and be habitually and entirely inoperative. Nevertheless, it is not every Christian who lets his light shine as he ought -- not every one that exerts any thing like the amount of influence in favour of the cause of Christ, that is fairly within his power. It therefore becomes a matter of great moment, that, at the very beginning of the Christian life, each one should be impressed with his obligations to labour for his Master to the extent of his ability; and should be assisted, so far as may be, to form a character, which will ensure at once the highest

degree both of comfort and of usefulness. Whatever is done then to mould the character, will probably exert a far more decisive influence, than any thing which could be done at a future period; and upon the counsels and directions which an individual receives, at such a moment, may depend in a great degree, the amount of good which he is to accomplish during his whole future life. Surely, then, it is no unimportant office, to counsel and guide the young Christian. He who does it aright may be instrumental of opening fountains of blessing, which shall send forth their purifying streams in every direction.

II. We proceed, secondly, to consider some of the means by which this twofold object is to be attained.

I. Let those who hope they have been the subjects of a recent conversion, be put on their guard against too confident a belief that they have been truly regenerated, I remember to have heard of an individual, who was afterwards greatly distinguished for piety, going to the elder Jonathan Edwards, to whose congregation he belonged, to tell him what God had done for his soul; and after that great and good man had listened to the account of his supposed conversion, and had heard him speak with rapture, of the new and delightful views which he had of spiritual objects, and when the individual was expecting that he would do nothing less than congratulate him upon having become a child of God, he was disappointed beyond measure, by simply hearing him say, that what he had experienced was an encouragement to him to persevere; though the man himself, in relating the circumstance many years after, when he had come much nearer the fulness of the stature of a perfect person in Christ, cordially approved the course which his minister had adopted. It is

not always easy to satisfy persons in these circumstances, even of the possibility, that the hope and joy which they experience may be spurious; but it is much to be desired, both as it respects their safety and their usefulness, that this should be effected; that while they acknowledge, with devout gratitude to God, the least evidence that he has extended to them a gracious forgiveness, they should fear lest a promise being left of entering into rest, they should seem to come short of it.

You cannot do better service to those who believe themselves to have been recently converted, than by presenting distinctly before them the evidences of Christian character. Let them clearly understand, that the mere fact, that the clouds which hung over their minds are dispersed, and that they are rejoicing in bright sunshine, constitutes no sufficient evidence of their regeneration. Encourage them to analyze their feelings, to examine the motives and principles of their conduct, especially to inquire whether they have the humility of the gospel, whether they cordially approve its conditions, and whether they glory in sovereign grace, as it is manifested in the gospel scheme of salvation. Show them, moreover, that the evidence of Christian character, in order to be decisive, must be progressive; that it consists especially in a fixed purpose, and a steady course of endeavours, in reliance on God's grace, to do whatever he would have them to do; that they must add to their faith all the virtues and graces of the Christian; and that, if they fail of this, whatever other experience they may have, must be set down as nothing. Caution them against the wiles of their own hearts, and the wiles of the great adversary; and urge them to settle the question respecting their claim to Christian character, by referring their experience to the simple standard of God's word.

It is matter of great moment that they should be impressed, from the beginning, with the importance of habitual self-examination; for this is not more essential to ensure them against self-deception, than it is to all their attainments in holiness. Let them be exhorted not only to inspect narrowly their motives and feelings from day to day, with a view to give a right direction to their prayers, and to ascertain the measure of their growth in grace, but also frequently to revolve the great question, whether they have really been born of the Spirit? Such a course honestly and faithfully pursued, in the light of God's word, is hardly consistent with cherishing the hypocrite's hope, or with making low attainments in piety.

2. Endeavour to impress them with the consideration, that if they have really been renewed, they are just entering on a course of labour and conflict.

It too often happens, that, in the rapture which the soul experiences when it emerges suddenly into light from the gloom of deep conviction, there is little else thought of than its own enjoyment; and the bright visions of heaven, by which it is well nigh entranced, occasion a temporary forgetfulness of the trials and conflicts, and all the more sober realities, of the Christian life. Now it is highly important that an individual should not, at this interesting moment, take up the idea that he is born into the kingdom to enjoy a state of perpetual sunshine; that he has nothing to do but fold his arms, and sit quietly down in the cheering and bright light of God's countenance. Let him once get this impression, or any thing like it, and the effect, in the first place, will be painful disappointment; for it is almost certain, that, at no distant period, he will have to encounter days of darkness; and he will find a law in his members warring



against the law of his mind; and not improbably he may be ready to give his hope to the winds, and resign himself to the conviction, that all the joy he had experienced was the effect of delusion. Besides, such an impression, there is reason to fear, might exert an influence that would be felt through life, unfavourable to his Christian activity, and might abate, in no small degree, his zeal, and efficiency, and usefulness, in the cause of his Master, Strive, then, to impress the young convert, from the very beginning, with the conviction, that God has called him into his kingdom to struggle with the corruptions of his heart -- to war with principalities and powers. Admonish him, that there is still an evil principle within him; and that if its operations seem to be suspended for a season, it yet retains a deadly energy, which will call him, ere long, to severe conflict. Admonish him, also, of the temptations of the world; tell him how insidious they are -- in what a variety of forms they present themselves -- how many, who have imagined themselves secure against their influence, have, nevertheless, been assailed by them with success. Remind him also that he has a powerful, invisible enemy to contend with -- the enemy of all good -- against the influence of whose wiles no condition in life can secure him. Let him understand, that he is never so much in danger of falling into the hands of his spiritual enemies, as when he yields to a spirit of self-confidence or carelessness, and either practically forgets that such enemies exist, or else thinks to encounter them in his own strength. He cannot be girded for conflict too early -- or observe their movements too vigilantly -- or meet them too resolutely and boldly. Let him determine, that he will wear the whole armour of God at all times, and especially in every scene of temptation into which his duty may call him, and then he may be able to stand.

But he has something more to do than merely to contend with enemies; he has to labour directly for the advancement of Christ's cause. His lot is cast in a world lying in darkness and wickedness; and it is for him to lend his aid to enlighten and reform it.

At home and abroad there are multitudes thronging the road to perdition; it is for him to put forth a hand to arrest them, and, by God's blessing upon his efforts, to turn them into the path of life. The Lord Jesus Christ has given to the world his gospel; and he has left an injunction upon his people to carry it to the ends of the earth, that its light may every where be diffused, and its influence every where felt; and every one who is born into his kingdom becomes specially obligated to lend himself to this glorious work, and to continue in it till he shall be taken from his labours to his reward. Every young convert should be made to feel, that this is a matter of personal concern with himself; and that, from the hour of his conversion to God, all his affections, and faculties, and possessions, are, in some way or other, to be consecrated to his glory.

Let it farther be impressed upon him, that it is most unworthy of any one who believes himself called into the kingdom of Christ, even to desire an exemption from labour and trial. For what were the sufferings and sacrifices of him to whom the Christian looks as the foundation of his hopes and joys? And what is the utmost that he can do or suffer, when compared with the exceeding and eternal weight of glory which awaits him in heaven? It is a law of God's providence, that, on the whole, the highest degree of happiness is connected with the most faithful discharge of duty; so that, while he calls the Christian to glory, he calls him also to virtue; in other words, he brings him into his kingdom to find his enjoyment in a course of

obedience to his commandments. And while these commandments, in themselves, are not grievous, the keeping of them brings peace to the soul, inasmuch as it furnishes the best, the only satisfactory evidence of true discipleship. Surely the young Christian cannot resist, will not desire to resist, the force of such considerations.

3. Let it be impressed on the mind of the young convert, that much of his comfort and usefulness in the religious life will probably depend on the resolutions he forms, and the principles he adopts, at the beginning.

It is in religion as in every thing else -- the first steps that are taken are usually the most decisive. The man who sets out well in any worldly enterprise, who carefully counts the cost, and engages in it with a prudence, and zeal, and resolution, corresponding to its importance, we expect, in all ordinary cases, will succeed; and we calculate that the amount of his success will be very much in proportion to the discretion and energy which characterize his earliest efforts. On the other hand, let an individual engage in the same enterprise with but little reflection and zeal, and instead of making it, at the beginning, a commanding object, let him regard it as a matter to be taken up and laid aside as circumstances may seem to dictate, and you may expect, with confidence, that the end will be like the beginning -- little attempted, little accomplished. In like manner, suppose the young Christian to set out with a decided purpose, formed in the strength of divine grace, to do the utmost in his power for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause -- suppose he adopt fixed principles for the regulation of his whole conduct, and begin with a firm resolution that he will never yield them up in any circumstances, -- and you may hope, with good reason, to see him

holding on his way in the face of appalling obstacles, and exhibiting through life the character of a good soldier of Jesus Christ. But if he begin, satisfied with some general intentions to do his duty, and without any definite plan for the regulation of his conduct -- if he adopt the principle of yielding improperly to circumstances, and endeavour to make a compromise with conscience for the neglect of duties that require great self-denial, -- rely on it, his course will, in all probability, be marked by little either of comfort or usefulness; and if he is saved at last, it will be so as by fire. I acknowledge, indeed, that there are some cases in which an unpromising beginning is followed by an active and useful life; in which an early course of conformity to the world is terminated by means of some dispensation of Providence, and is followed by a course of exemplary and devoted obedience: but in all ordinary cases, the man who adopts a low standard at the beginning, never rises to a more elevated one at any subsequent period.

Let the young convert, then, be admonished to begin the Christian life with such resolutions and principles as will be likely to secure the greatest amount of activity and usefulness. Let him contemplate the importance of doing the utmost in his power for the honour of his Master and the advancement of his cause, as well as of reaching the highest attainable degree of personal holiness -- let him determine that nothing shall divert him from the purpose of following Christ through bad as well as good report, and that, in the strength of his grace, he will march on in his service, in spite of any obstacles that may lie in his way -- let him resolve that he will keep the eye of faith steadily fixed, now upon the Saviour's cross, and now upon the crown of glory -- in short, let him form a plan of holy living, that shall reach onward to his entrance into the abodes of light, -- and, in these

holy resolutions and purposes, I expect to find the germ of an actively useful, and eminently happy life. I expect there will prove to have been that which will reflect an additional lustre on his immortal crown.

4. Let him be exhorted, farther, to draw all his religious opinions, and all his maxims of conduct, directly from God's word.

I know there are many human productions in which the doctrines of the gospel are stated and defended with great ability; and he would do himself injustice, as well as evince a criminal ingratitude for God's goodness, who should refuse to avail himself of them, as helps towards building himself up in the most holy faith. But let them always be considered as subordinate to God's word; and let them be tried by it: and let whatever will not stand that test be thrown among the wood, and hay, and stubble. He who derives his views of religion from any uninspired works, however much of general excellence they may possess, will, of course, be liable to an admixture of error; and besides, even if he should chance to gather from them the uncorrupted truth, he could not have the same deep and powerful conviction of it, as if it had been drawn directly from the lively oracles. And how much less is God honoured in the one case than in the other! How much less, by believing the truth because we may have been taught it in our catechisms and confessions, than because it has beamed forth upon our own intellectual eye, from the very page on which the mind of the Spirit has been recorded!

I would say then, to every one just entering on the Christian life, study the Bible for yourself. Study it with humility, diligence, and prayer. What you find written there, believe; whatever is not written

there is either not true or not important. And be not discouraged in your efforts to ascertain the truth for yourself, by the fact that the world is full of different opinions respecting it: for the truth is clearly revealed; and besides, most of the disputes which exist among Christians relate rather to human philosophy than to the matter of God's word. Remember that God himself hath said, that "the meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way."

But it is not less important, that the new convert should derive the rules of his conduct, than the principles of his faith, directly from the Bible. There are, indeed, many particular cases in which men may be called to act, in relation to which there are no express directions given in God's word; but there are general rules to be found there, which admit of application to every possible case, and which an enlightened conscience will always know how to apply. Let the young Christian, then, be exhorted to study the Bible diligently as a rule of duty, to ascertain, from God's own word, what he would have him to do in the various conditions in which he is placed, and to refer every question of right and wrong which he is called practically to decide, to this standard, and no other. Let his character be formed under this influence, and it cannot fail to rise in fair and goodly proportions. There will be in it a dignified stability, which will secure it from the undue influence of circumstances. Its possessor will be enabled to act not only with rectitude, but with confidence and decision; and while he keeps a conscience void of offence, he will commend himself to the good-will of his fellow-men, and to the special favour of God. The current of public opinion not unfrequently sets in a wrong direction, and yet is exceedingly rapid and powerful; and he who attempts to resist, may be obliged to do it at the expense of bearing a heavy load of obloquy; but he who makes God's word the rule of his conduct will

be able to do this notwithstanding -- to stand firm, even when the waves of opposition are rolling over him. Many a young Christian has been carried, by the influence of custom and example, far into courses over which he has subsequently had just occasion to weep; when, by having adhered to the scriptural standard of duty, he would have kept a conscience void of offence, and prevented the occasion for bitter repentance.

You, then, who may be called to counsel those who are just setting out in the Christian life, should charge them, by a regard to their comfort, their character, their usefulness, to have nothing to do with any other standard of conduct than that which they find in the Bible. Let them be exhorted to adhere to this, even though it should subject them to the greatest temporal inconvenience. Let them determine that they will regulate by it the whole conduct of their lives -- not only what may seem to them their most important, but also their least important actions. When they have settled the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" then, and only then, are they prepared to act with freedom and confidence; in a manner that is fitted to keep peace in their consciences, and to bring down upon them the blessing of God.

5. Let the young convert be admonished to ascertain, as soon as possible, his besetting sin; and to guard against it with the utmost caution.

It is true of every Christian, that there is some one sin to which he is more inclined than any other: what that sin will be, in any particular case, may depend on the previous moral habits of the individual, or on the circumstances in which he is placed, or on some original

infirmity or obliquity of constitution; for as bodily disease is most likely to seat itself in the part which is originally the weakest, so the depravity of the heart usually concentrates its energies in some passion or appetite, which is marked by the greatest degree of natural perverseness. He, therefore, who ascertains in his own case what this sin is, and who regards it as the most formidable enemy to be encountered in his conflict, and succeeds in gaining a victory over it, accomplishes much in the way of his sanctification. He who neglects to guard against the besetting sin, while he takes care to avoid sins to which he is not specially inclined, acts as unwise a part as a general who should employ all his skill and energies to prevent an attack from some scattered and unimportant part of a hostile army, while, without any effort at resistance, he should suffer the main body to move toward his ranks, and open upon them in a fierce discharge of artillery.

There is no difficulty in ascertaining the besetting sin in any given case, provided there is a faithful use of the means which God has put within our power; nevertheless, from a neglect of these means, there is no doubt a lamentable degree of ignorance on this subject. Let the young Christian, then, be exhorted to watch closely all the tendencies of his mind -- to observe on what forbidden objects his affections most readily fasten -- in what manner his thoughts are occupied, when his mind is most at leisure, and subject to the least restraint -- and what circumstances and occasions operate most powerfully upon him in the way of temptation, -- and the result cannot fail to be, that he will know what is the sin which most easily besets him. And when he knows it, he is prepared to guard against it. This he must do by keeping a watchful eye upon that particular part of his moral nature in which this sin has its operation; by avoiding, as much as possible,



those objects and occasions which are likely to furnish temptations to it; or if called into scenes of temptation, in the providence of God, by placing a double guard at the vulnerable point; by earnest prayer for grace to be enabled to gain the victory; and by cultivating, in a high degree, general spirituality of character. As the indulgence of the besetting sin, whatever it may be, is unfavourable to the growth of all Christian affections, so the general culture of these affections, the abounding in all the virtues and graces of the gospel, is the most certain means of destruction to the besetting sin. It can never flourish in a soil which is habitually watered with heavenly grace.

6. Impress the young convert with the danger of the least departure from duty -- of taking the first step in the way of spiritual decline.

It rarely happens that an individual becomes a great backslider at once; on the contrary, it is usually the work of time, and generally has a small and almost imperceptible beginning. When the first step is taken, there is probably, in most cases, an intention not to take another -- certainly not to go far: but it is a law of our moral constitution, that one step renders the next easier; and hence the facility with which we form our habits, especially evil habits. The young convert, upon the mount of Christian enjoyment, is able to form but an inadequate idea of the conflicts of the religious life; he realizes then, much less than in subsequent parts of his course, the need of constant watchfulness against temptation; and this lack of vigilance throws open the doors of the heart, and not unfrequently the tempter has planted himself there, and begun his work, before any danger has been apprehended. And the soul, which was just now burning with ecstasy, wakes to the fact, that not only its joys are

rapidly upon the wane, but that its desires are becoming earthly, and its impression of invisible things feeble and inconstant.

Caution the young Christian, then, against the least allowed violation of duty. Admonish him, that, if he enter on such a course, he can never know where it will end. Point him to examples of those who have taken the first step with a firm purpose never to take another, who have, nevertheless, continued to backslide, until there was scarcely the semblance of Christian character remaining. Let him understand that no degree of joy, or even of spirituality, which he can possess on earth, can be any security against his losing his evidences and his comforts, and sinking into a state of the most chilling spiritual indifference. And if, at any time, he find that he has actually begun to wander, let him know that he has the best reason to be alarmed, and that every hour that he continues his wanderings, he is making work for bitter repentance, and bringing a dark cloud over his religious prospects.

7. Put the young convert on his guard against neglecting the duties of the closet.

It is in the closet, especially, that every Christian must labour to keep alive the flame of devotion in his own soul. Here, more than any where else, is carried forward the work of self-examination: here are the silent communings of the soul with its God, in acts of confession, and thanksgiving, and supplication: here the believer becomes acquainted with his sins and his wants; and while he unburdens his soul before the throne of mercy, gathers strength and grace, by which he is sustained and carried forward amidst the various duties and trials which meet him in the world. Hence it always happens, that, in

proportion as the duties of the closet are neglected, religion languishes in the heart, and the exhibition of it in the life becomes faint and equivocal. It is manifest to those who see him and converse with him, that there is a canker corroding the principle of his spiritual life. And he himself knows that his joys have fled, and his conscience has become his accuser, and he has no evidence which ought to satisfy him that he is walking in the path to heaven.

But this evil -- that of neglecting the closet -- is one to which the young convert is exceedingly liable. He may not be liable to it in the very earliest stage of his Christian experience; for then the duties of the closet are usually a delight to him: but when his first joys have partially subsided, and he has begun to be conversant with the more sober realities of the religious life, there is great danger that he will find some apology for a partial and irregular attendance on these duties. One source of danger is found in the fact, that he may neglect them, and still be unobserved by the world -- that he may neglect them without forfeiting, even in the view of his fellow Christians, who, of course, are ignorant of it, his claim to Christian character. And then these duties being of a peculiarly spiritual kind, are the very first to lose their attractions to a Christian who is losing his spirituality. Other duties bring him before the world; these bring him only before his own conscience, and the Searcher of his heart. And, besides, where circumstances may seem to render it inconvenient to engage in closet devotion, it is too easy a matter to satisfy the conscience with an indefinite resolution, that it shall be attended to at a subsequent period: and no resolution is more easily broken than this; and let it be broken in a few instances, and a habit of comparative indifference to the closet is the consequence. I doubt not that I might appeal to the experience of a large part of those who

have professedly entered on the Christian life, for evidence of the fact, that no habit is formed with more ease than that of neglecting, in a greater or less degree, this class of duties.

If, then, the faithful discharge of private religious duties be so essential to a vigorous and healthful tone of religious feeling and action, and if there be peculiar temptations to neglect them, then every person, at the commencement of the Christian life, ought to be admonished of his danger on the one hand, and exhorted to fidelity on the other. Counsel him to have his stated seasons for private devotion, in which nothing but imperative necessity shall keep him out of his closet. Counsel him to take heed that he do not substitute the form, for the spirit of prayer; that he does not satisfy his conscience by appearing before God with the bended knee, without the broken heart. Counsel him to mingle with his private prayers, self-examination and the reading of God's word; that thus his communion with God may be more intelligent on the one hand, and more spiritual on the other. Counsel him never to turn his back upon his closet, because he may find his affections low and languid, and may imagine that he should have little enjoyment in attempting to pray: let this rather be urged as an argument for hastening to his closet, and confessing and lamenting his indifference, and endeavouring to get the flame of devotion rekindled in his bosom. In short, urge upon him the importance of private meditation and devotion in all circumstances; urge him to redeem time for that purpose, under the greatest pressure of worldly care; and keep him mindful of the connection which this duty has with every thing that belongs to Christian character, and Christian enjoyment.

8. Admonish him to beware of the world. Every one who has made much progress in the Christian life, has been taught by his own experience, that the world is a deadly enemy to the believer's growth in grace. It is not easy for an advanced Christian to be very familiar with it, and retain a high degree of spirituality; and accordingly you will find, that there are few, comparatively, whose secular callings keep their faculties under an almost constant contribution, who habitually evince a deep and strong religious sensibility. Even the cares of the world, to speak of nothing more, are exceedingly apt to mar the Christian character; but there are, in addition, the pleasures of the world, the honours of the world, the riches of the world; all of which, in turn, seize hold of the heart with a mighty grasp. And sometimes the world laughs and scoffs at the young Christian, and tries to persuade him that he is giving himself to fanaticism and folly. Sometimes it flatters and caresses him, and, by its artful blandishments, seeks to draw him aside from the plain path of duty. And sometimes it would fain persuade him that he is right in the general, but unreasonably scrupulous in respect to particulars; and that the self-denial to which he is disposed to yield, is little better than Pharisaical austerity; and that if he will go, at least to a moderate degree, into the amusements of the world, there is enough in the Bible in favour of cheerfulness and joy, to bear him out in it. Indeed the world will assume any form, or turn into any thing, to draw the Christian, especially the young Christian, away from God and from duty.

How important, then, that you put him on his guard, at the very beginning, against this dangerous enemy! If he is in the morning of life, as well as young in Christian experience, there is reason why you should caution him especially against the levities and amusements of

the world; for this is the point at which he will be most in danger. Let him beware of the influence of former careless associates. Not that he should say 'to them, by his conduct, "Stand by, I am holier than thou;" not that he should be encouraged to assume a single distant or unsocial air towards them; but he should take heed that they do not imperceptibly draw him into forbidden paths; that they do not, either by flatteries on the one hand, or sneering insinuations on the other, prevail over his scruples, and bring him under the lash of his own conscience, in consequence of unjustifiable and unchristian compliances.

9. Another important part of duty towards those who are just entering on the Christian life, is to encourage them gradually to bear a part in social religious exercises, I do not mean that this is to be done in every case; for I well know that there are a few persons, who, from some difficulty of utterance, or some peculiarity of constitutional temperament, are disqualified to conduct the devotions of an assembly to edification; and wherever cases of this kind exist, it were wrong to urge, or even to encourage, the individuals to attempt this service. But these cases, I believe, are not frequent; in far the greater number of instances where they are supposed to exist, the individuals, I doubt not, mistake their own powers. Wherever there is the gift of prayer in a common degree, it is exceedingly desirable that its possessor should be trained to the exercise of it in public; for if he improve it in that way discreetly, it cannot fail greatly to increase his usefulness. I would not however advise, in ordinary cases, that a young Christian, especially if he be a very young person, should be brought at once to conduct the devotions of a large assembly; for I should expect that it would serve to embarrass and dishearten him, on the one hand, or to puff him up

with spiritual pride, on the other; and withal, that there would be little to edify those whose devotions he should attempt to conduct. I would advise, therefore, that his first attempts to lead in social prayer should be on some occasion where there are literally but two or three gathered together; and it were well, that those should be persons whose feelings correspond with his own, and whose presence would be least fitted to embarrass him; and from leading occasionally in such an exercise, he might soon acquire that composure and self-command, which would enable him to guide, in a proper manner, the devotions of a larger circle; and ultimately, and at no distant period, to perform the duty of public prayer, wherever he should be called to it. Let him be preserved from the extreme of being driven to this service prematurely, on occasions altogether public, and let him be kept from the opposite extreme of yielding to a timidity, which shall prevent him from engaging in it at all, and the greatest amount of good will be secured to him -- the greatest amount of good will be secured to the church and the world, through his instrumentality.

10. I observe, once more, that every young convert should be encouraged, at a proper time, to make a public profession of religion.

This is a duty which he owes to himself, to the church, and to his Master; and he cannot deliberately and voluntarily neglect it, but at the expense of his comfort, his usefulness, and even his claim to Christian character. It is his privilege to come into the church; for it is refreshing to sit under the shadow of its ordinances, and in the communion of saints on earth, to anticipate the more elevated and rapturous communion of heaven. It is his duty to come into the

church; for hereby, especially, he is enabled to let his light shine before men, so that they, seeing his good works, may glorify our Father who is in heaven.

But while every young Christian should be encouraged to make a profession of religion, he should be encouraged to do it at the proper time -- neither too early nor too late.

There is a possibility of doing this too early. In this case there would be no sufficient opportunity of testing the character, or of guarding against self-deception, or, as the case maybe, of understanding what is implied, and what is required, in a Christian profession. On the other hand, it may be deferred too long; and then the desire for it may become feeble, the mind clouded, and all the Christian graces languish, for want of that appropriate nourishment which is supplied by Christian ordinances. It is not easy, nor indeed possible, to establish any certain rule, which shall apply in all cases, in respect to the time of admission to the privileges of the church; because there must needs be a difference, corresponding with the variety of constitutional temperament, external advantages, degrees of knowledge, and degrees of evidence of Christian character: but it is manifest that either extreme is fraught with danger; that great precipitancy, or long delay, may be the occasion of serious evils.

The young convert should be well instructed in relation to the nature and obligations of a Christian profession; and should be encouraged to come with humility, in view of his unworthiness; with gratitude, in view of the greatness of the privilege; with strong resolutions of holy living, in view of the peculiar obligations of acknowledged discipleship; and with full dependence on divine grace, in view of his



own weakness on the one hand, and the arduous duties of the Christian life on the other. Let him come with this spirit, at the proper time, and we may reasonably hope that it will be good for him, that it will be good for the church, that he joins himself to her communion.

Let it not be thought, however, that the church owes no peculiar duty to young Christians, after she has received them into her fellowship, or that the same cautions and counsels which she has given them before, are not to be repeated subsequently to this act. She is to bear in mind, that they are new in the duties and conflicts of the Christian life; that they are peculiarly exposed to the temptations of the world; that they need to be counselled and instructed with Christian fidelity and affection; to be assisted in forming and executing their plans of usefulness; and encouraged to come up prudently, and yet fearlessly and decidedly, to the help of the Lord against the mighty. As a tender mother cherisheth her children, so she is to cherish them. Like the great Shepherd, she is to take the lambs in her arms, and carry them in her bosom.

Without extending my remarks farther on this subject, I think we are fairly brought to the conclusion, that every revival of religion is dependent for its good effect, in no small degree, upon the course which is adopted with those who are professedly its subjects. Whether the effect of a revival is to be, that the purity of the church shall be increased, as well as its numbers, or that, with what is truly good, it is to receive a large amount of dross and chaff -- whether those who have really been renewed are to begin and hold on a course of consistent, active. Christian obedience, or are to have their religious character marred, and their usefulness abridged, by being

conformed to false and unscriptural standards,-- depends, in no small degree, upon the instruction and counsel they receive while they are yet babes in Christ. Let every Christian, then, who undertakes to perform this important office, realize deeply his responsibility. Let him bear in mind, that the influence which he exerts, will tell not only on individual character, but on the future efficiency and purity of the church. And let all seek to qualify themselves for this arduous work, (for there are none upon whom it may not at some time devolve,) by the faithful study of God's word, by earnestly supplicating divine grace, and by constantly aiming at a high standard of Christian experience. With the furniture thus acquired, you may mingle among your younger brethren and sisters in Christ with delight and profit, both to yourselves and them. You may be increasing in the knowledge of God, while you are building them up in the most holy faith. You may be walking in the path of eminent usefulness, towards the abodes of immortal glory.

## **LECTURE VIII**

### **EVILS TO BE AVOIDED IN CONNECTION WITH REVIVALS.**

Romans xiv. 16.

"Let not then your good be evil spoken of."

This direction of the apostle was suggested by a particular case, which was the subject of controversy in the church at Rome, when

this epistle was written. You will instantly perceive, however, that the rule here prescribed is of universal application, and that it is founded in general principles of Christian prudence and charity. The design of it is not only to direct us in the practice of that which is good, but to lead us to unite wisdom with our pious activity; that we may, so far as possible, prevent incidental evils from being connected with our well-meant efforts, and that our good may be inoffensive and irreproachable.

As there is no part of Christian conduct in relation to which this direction is not applicable, so, if I mistake not, it applies especially to the part which the church is called to take in a revival of religion, indeed to the whole economy of a revival. For as there is no department of religious action in which even good men are not liable to err, so there is no other field in which the Christian is called to labour, where there is greater danger of his being misled. There is in the minds of most men a tendency to extremes; and that tendency is never so likely to discover itself as in a season of general excitement. When men are greatly excited on any subject, we know that they are in far more danger of forming erroneous judgments, and adopting improper courses, than when they are in circumstances to yield themselves to sober reflection. Now as there is often great excitement in connection with a revival, there is the common danger which exists in all cases of highly excited feeling, that our honest endeavours to do right will result in more or less that is wrong; in other words, that we shall give occasion for our good to be evil spoken of.

The conclusion to which we should be brought on this subject from the very constitution of human nature, is in exact accordance with

what we know of the history of revivals. There always has been, mingled with these scenes of divine power and grace, more or less of human infirmity and indiscretion; and in some cases, no doubt, in which there have even been many genuine conversions, there has been just reason to say, "what is the wheat to the chaff?" To say nothing of revivals in modern times -- whoever will read the history of the early revivals in New England, while he will find evidence enough that the presence and power of God was in them, and if he be a Christian, will regard the record of them as occupying one of the most blessed chapters in the history of the church, will nevertheless find just cause to weep, that they should have been clouded so much by the mistakes and infirmities even of good men. But those good men (some of them at least) lived to be satisfied that they were in the wrong; and it is to their honour that they acknowledged it; and it were impossible to read the record of their acknowledgment, without feeling a sentiment of veneration for their characters, and without wishing that the errors into which they fell, might, so far as they were themselves concerned, be blotted from the memory of the church.

I am aware, my friends, that in endeavouring to present before you the abuses to which revivals are liable, and with which they have always been, in a greater or less degree, connected, I am undertaking a task of peculiar delicacy; and I confess to you, that nothing but a strong and honest sense of duty would have led me to attempt it. I will state to you the considerations which have arisen to occasion this reluctance, and the manner in which I have felt myself obliged to dispose of them.

In the first place, I can hardly doubt, that an attempt to expose these evils may appear to some unnecessary. But so thought not the

illustrious Edwards, when his discriminating and mighty mind was occupied in framing some of the most judicious treatises which the world has seen, for the very purpose of guarding against the abuses of revivals. On the title page of those books the church has written her own name, and she claims them as her property, in a higher sense than almost any thing else, except the Bible. And is it not manifest that that illustrious man judged rightly in composing them, and that the church has judged rightly in the estimate she has formed of them?

For who does not perceive, that if revivals of religion become corrupted, there is poison in the fountain whose streams are expected to gladden and purify? And who that is competent to judge, will doubt that those treatises have done more than any other uninspired productions, to maintain the purity of revivals, from the period in which they were written to the present? If Edwards has rendered good service to the church by writing these immortal works, then surely it cannot be unnecessary for other ministers to direct their humbler efforts to the same end. It is just as necessary now to distinguish between true and false experience, and between right and wrong conduct, in a revival of religion, as it ever has been in any preceding period; and the manner in which this duty is practically regarded, must always determine, in a great degree, the amount of blessing which any revival will secure.

But it may be said, also, that what I am about to attempt should be avoided, because it is fitted to awaken controversy. I acknowledge that controversy, on the subject of religion, is not in itself desirable; for it is exceedingly liable to wake up the bad passions of men. Nevertheless, there are some cases, in which we shall all agree that it

is necessary to hazard the evils that may result from it. No being on earth ever awakened a more violent religious controversy than Jesus Christ; but if it had not been for this, where now would have been our blessed Christianity? So also, Luther, and Calvin, and Zwingli, and Knox, and the whole host of Reformers, excited a controversy concerning religion, which had well nigh set the world on fire; but if it had never existed, what evidence have you that the church would, to this hour, have witnessed the glorious Reformation. President Edwards published his "Thoughts on Revivals," and other invaluable works in connection with the same subject, at the expense of being denounced, even by some of his own brethren, as an enemy of revivals; but these publications have served to correct and prevent great abuses ever since; and if he had rendered the church no other service, for this alone she would have embalmed his memory. Controversy, then, though it is never to be desired for its own sake, cannot always be declined in consistency with Christian obligation, or without putting at fearful hazard the best interests of the church.

In the present case, however, permit me to say, that I have no intention to excite controversy, by attacking any man, or body of men. The evils which I shall endeavour to expose, are none of them peculiar to any one denomination of Christians, or to any particular period of the church: but they have existed at various periods, and among different sects; and there is always danger that they will exist, from the very constitution of human nature. If it should be said, that some of the remarks which I shall offer ought to be withheld, on the ground that they admit of application to an existing state of things in the church, I acknowledge that that seems to me a strong reason why they should not be withheld; for if the abuses of which I shall speak actually do exist in our own times, we are in the greater danger of

falling into them, and in the greater need of being guarded against them; whereas, if they were only evils of other days, I might, in speaking of them, seem to be beating the air. But I utterly disclaim all responsibility in respect to any particular application. I only say that such abuses have existed -- do exist; but my province in respect to them is, not to charge them upon any individuals, or upon any particular portion of the church, but to endeavour to guard you against them. The only point for which I hold myself responsible is, that these are really evils, and ought to be avoided.

It may also occur to some, that an exhibition of the evils which are sometimes connected with revivals, may be fitted to injure the general cause, by leading many to the conclusion, that if ministers themselves acknowledge that there is so much chaff in them, probably the whole is delusion, and worthy to be regarded only with indifference or contempt. That some men may have taken refuge from the convictions of conscience in this miserable delusion, far be it from me to question; nevertheless, I am constrained to believe, that it is a rare case, in which any good cause is ultimately injured by telling the honest truth respecting it. Besides, you may be assured that the cause of revivals is far more likely to suffer by an attempt, on the part of its friends, to pass off every thing for gold, than by giving to that which is really dross its proper name. Suppose you should introduce a mere man of the world -- if you please, a man of high intellectual culture -- into a revival in which there should be gross disorder and fanaticism, and you should endeavour, without any qualifying remarks, to impress him with the importance of the work that was going forward -- it is altogether probable he would say, or at least think, if that were a revival, he had seen enough of it -- and if that were religion, the less he had of it the better. But suppose you

should say to him, of all that is disorderly -- "that is the mere operation of human infirmity or passion -- the chaff mingling with the wheat;" and of all that is good and praise-worthy -- "that is the genuine operation of the Holy Spirit;" and he would not improbably, in view of that distinction, acknowledge the reality and importance of the work. You cannot, even if you would, make sensible men think, in ordinary cases, that that is religion, or part of a revival of religion, which is not so; and any attempt of this kind is exceedingly liable to awaken their hostility to the whole subject. Irreligious men are generally ready enough to admit the correctness of any distorted accounts of religion, especially if they get them on so good authority as that of Christians themselves; for, every such account furnishes them with an argument against the whole subject, and puts their consciences into a still deeper lethargy.

And, finally, I can suppose it may appear to some, that any attempt to expose the evils incidentally connected with revivals, may be fraught with danger, inasmuch as it is acknowledged, on all hands, that these evils exist among good men, and withal are connected with much that is praiseworthy; and it may be thought safest to let the tares and wheat flourish together, lest an attempt to remove the former, should expose the latter. As to the fact that the evils to which I refer have been found among truly devoted men, there is no ground for question. Even the well-known Mr. Davenport, who was for a while an apostle of fanaticism, and who publicly denounced, and prayed for, by name, many of the most eminent ministers of New England as the enemies of revivals, was nevertheless, beyond a peradventure, a good man; and thought, that in all his irregularities, he was faithfully serving his Master: but he did not think so always; for he afterwards penitently and publicly acknowledged his error,



and even justified the severest censure which his conduct had received. Yes, I repeat, good men do fall into these excesses; and so, also, good men are sanctified but in part. And as we do not fear that any scriptural endeavours to purify them from remaining corruption will exert a bad influence upon their Christian graces, so we ought not to apprehend, that any judicious efforts to correct the errors to which I refer, will serve in any degree to abate their truly Christian zeal and activity. There are cases, I acknowledge, in which great evils must be tolerated for a season, because any attempt to remove them would only make way for greater ones; but nothing is more certain, than that to tolerate evil in good men because they are good men, is directly contrary both to the spirit and letter of the gospel. And besides, the very fact that there is much that is praiseworthy in their characters, and much that is benign in their influence, is a reason why we should do all in our power to remove whatever may, in any degree, impair their usefulness. We would treat good men in this respect as in every other: while we would acknowledge them good, we would strive to make them better and more useful.

I have now stated to you the grounds of the delicacy which I have felt in bringing this subject before you, on the one hand, and the grounds of my conviction that my duty as a Christian minister would not permit me to pass it by, on the other. Some of the evils to which I have referred in general, I proceed now more distinctly to consider.

1. One prominent evil to be guarded against in a revival, is the cherishing of false hopes.

I surely need not undertake to prove that this is an evil, and one of appalling magnitude; for a false hope, at the gate of eternity, is a

passport to hell; and such a hope, once indulged, is exceedingly apt to hold its place till the last, though it sometimes lurks in the bosom, almost unobserved, even by the individual who is the subject of it. And where it is given up, it more commonly makes way for a kind of vague scepticism in respect to all experimental religion, and steels the conscience, in a great measure, against future conviction. There are doubtless some who indulge a false hope, that are subsequently awakened, and become true Christians; but, in general, such a hope is undoubtedly the best security which the adversary could desire, for keeping the soul under his entire dominion.

Now I admit, that in every case of supposed conversion there is a liability to a false hope. Let a revival be conducted with as much wisdom as it may, and there is danger that there will be some cases of self-deception. And the reason is obvious. For the first evidence upon which the mind fastens, is a change of feeling. But some of the operations of animal passion appear so much like truly gracious affections, that even advanced Christians often mistake, in their endeavours to distinguish between them. Certainly, then, there is far greater danger that those who have had no experience in religion, and who withal are eagerly looking out to catch the first gleam of evidence that they have been renewed -- there is far greater danger that they will mistake some accidental and joyous, yet temporary commotion of the animal feelings, for the exercise of a principle of true piety. I am sure that every person who has been conversant with revivals, must acknowledge that this is in accordance with fact. Who that has mingled even in the most genuine revival, has not witnessed, in some instances at least, a painful exemplification of the character of the stony-ground hearers, in whom, for a while, there was much

that looked like religion, but because the principle was wanting, it all gradually withered away?

Now, if there is danger of the indulgence of a false hope in every case, there is special danger of it under particular circumstances. The change which takes place in conversion is of a moral nature: it has its seat in the soul, and nowhere else. There is no natural connection between this change and any bodily postures or movements. If then the idea be held out, that conversion is usually associated with the loss of bodily strength, or with any remarkable bodily motions, or that it is more likely to happen to an individual in one place, or one posture, than another, where the same truths are proclaimed, and the same prayers offered -- 'there is great danger that this will lead to self-deception -- that, with unreflecting minds at least, that bodily exercise which profiteth little, will be put in place of that godliness which has the promise of eternal life. There is danger that the individual will substitute what is considered an external expression of anxiety for his soul, for the internal workings of genuine conviction; or if there be something of true conviction, there is danger that he will mistake the physical act of taking a particular place or posture, which is spoken of as peculiarly favourable to conversion, for the spiritual act of yielding up the soul to the Saviour,

Again, The instrument by which every conversion is effected is God's truth. If then, ministers, during a revival, fail to hold up the truth in its distinctive and commanding features, and confine themselves principally to impassioned addresses, and earnest, exhortatory appeals, there is great reason to apprehend many spurious conversions. God requires, indeed, that the truth should be preached in an earnest manner; but it must be the truth that is preached; and

that only he will honour in the conversion of men. I appeal to the whole record of revivals for evidence, that where any thing has been substituted, to any extent, in place of this -- where exhortation, instead of holding its proper place, has taken the place of instruction, there has been the least of sound, deep, abiding, religious impression, and there have been found the greatest number of hopeful converts, whose subsequent experience has proved that they had no root in themselves.

Still farther. The change which the soul experiences in regeneration is a change of mighty import -- nothing less than a new creation -- old things passing away, and all things becoming new. Any course of instruction, then, which should leave the impression that it may be accomplished independently of a divine influence -- or that a man has nothing to do but to wish himself a Christian, in order to become one -- or that it is as easy to change one's heart from the love of sin to the love of holiness, as to change one's purpose in respect to any worldly concern, or to perform any physical act, -- any such course of instruction, I say, must necessarily expose to self-deception; because it represents the conversion of the soul to God as comparatively a small matter: and if that impression be gained, how reasonable to expect, that the individual should suppose himself converted, when he is not so! The way of effecting true conversions, no doubt, is, to represent the work to be done in all its magnitude, and then to bring out the very mind of the Spirit in respect to the manner of doing it, and the means by which it is to be accomplished.

I think you will agree with me, my friends, that, in any of the circumstances which I have here supposed, there is special danger that sinners will take up with false hopes. There is yet another course

of treatment which is extremely well adapted to cherish and confirm such hopes. Let the sinner who has actually deceived himself, hear his supposed conversion spoken of with as much confidence as if it were known to be a genuine one -- let him hear himself constantly numbered among the converts, and by those in whose judgment and experience he confides -- let there be little or nothing said that implies the possibility of his being deceived, and let every thing that is done, in respect to him, seem to take for granted that he stands on safe ground -- and, above all, let him immediately be introduced into the church, -- and if he ever wakes out of that delusion, believe me, it will be little less than a miracle. This last step, particularly, is fitted, more than any other, to entrench him in a habit of self-security, which he will probably carry with him to his death-bed.

2. Another of the evils to be guarded against in a revival, is a spirit of self-confidence.

Even advanced Christians are liable to this, and sometimes exhibit it in a degree that is truly humiliating. While they are witnessing the powerful operation of God's Spirit, in the conviction and conversion of sinners, and are actively engaged in helping on the work, they lose sight, in some degree, of the fact, that they are but unworthy instruments; and though there may be an acknowledgment of divine agency occasionally upon their lips, yet in their hearts they are really taking to themselves the glory. I need not speak of the manner in which this spirit discovers itself, in the part which they bear in a revival, for no one who witnesses its operation can easily mistake it; but I may say, with confidence, that wherever it exists, it mars the beauty, and detracts from the purity, and hinders the efficacy, of the work.

But I refer here more particularly to a self-confident spirit, as it is often exhibited by young converts; and let me say, that the very same course of treatment to which I have just adverted, as being fitted to cherish and confirm a false hope, is adapted to awaken, even in those who have been truly converted, a spirit of self-confidence. This is a great evil, as it respects their own growth in grace. Wherever it exists, there will be little of self-examination; little sense of the need of being constantly taught and guided by the Holy Spirit; little of that humility which becomes a sinner redeemed by the blood of Christ, and saved by sovereign grace; and, I may add, little of that gratitude, which looks, in acts of faith and praise, toward the Lamb that was slain. That there may be much of zeal, connected with self-confidence in a young Christian, cannot be questioned; though it may reasonably be doubted, whether even that is altogether of heavenly origin: but, whether it be so or not, it usually happens, where it is found in connection with this spirit, that the flame burns with diminished brightness, until it has nearly died away.

Nor is this spirit less prejudicial to the young Christian, as connected with his usefulness. In a young convert, especially, nothing is so lovely as humility. Let him show by his deportment, rather than by his professions, that he often turns his eye upon the hole of the pit from which he hopes he has been taken -- that if he has obtained mercy, he feels that he deserves nothing but wrath -- and that, for ought he knows, he may be indulging the hope of the hypocrite -- certainly that he has much to do to make his calling and election sure, -- I say, let him manifest such a spirit in his conduct, and it will give him favour with all with whom he associates; and it will secure him access to many hearts, which might otherwise be barred against his influence. But let him, on the other hand, speak of his conversion

as if he were sure it was genuine -- let him refer with confidence to the very moment when it occurred -- let him talk of it as an event that has been brought about by mere human agency -- and let him say to others, by his deportment, "Stand by, I am holier than thou," -- and you may rest assured, especially if he be a young person, that he can have little hope of accomplishing much for the cause of Christ. There will be something in his very manner to repel those whom he should desire to win; and though he may console himself, in view of his unsuccessful efforts, by thinking and speaking of the obstinacy of sinners, yet it were more reasonable that he should humble himself, that, if he be a Christian, his conduct, in this very particular, indicates so much of remaining infirmity and corruption.

3. Another lamentable evil incident to revivals, is a spirit of censoriousness.

No doubt there is much in the conduct of many Christians and ministers, at such a time, to give just occasion for regret; and if they appear cold and worldly, it is only a Christian duty that we should affectionately admonish them of their error, and endeavour to render them more spiritual and active. But this is something quite different from that censorious, denouncing spirit, to which I here refer; which, though it be exercised in reference to religion, is nothing better than the spirit of the world. And it is easy to see how it gets into operation even in good men. Their minds are awake to the great subject of the soul's salvation, and they are oppressed by its amazing weight. They feel that something efficient ought to be done -- must be done, to wake up a slumbering world; and they desire that all Christians should go along with them in their efforts. In this state of mind, they are prepared for nothing but cordial co-operation; and where they do

not find it, corrupt nature takes advantage of the excitement they have reached, and the disappointment they feel, and perhaps withal of a naturally ardent temperament, to discharge itself not only in grievous complaints, but sometimes even bitter invective. This is the most favourable account of the exercise of this spirit. There are other cases, no doubt, in which it is identified with a spirit of self-righteousness; in which the secret and prevailing feeling of the heart is, that heaping censure upon others is an easy way of laying up treasure in heaven; that to complain of the coldness and worldliness of our fellow Christians, is an evidence of zeal and devotion in ourselves. But let this spirit have its origin in whatever state of mind it may, we shall all agree that it is a serious evil, and ought to be guarded against with the utmost care.

It is not uncommon to find this spirit marking the conduct of private Christians towards each other. There are some who will condemn their brethren as cold Christians, or perhaps even no Christians at all, because, with less of constitutional ardour than themselves, and possibly more prudence, they are not prepared to concur at once in every measure that may be suggested for the advancement of a revival; or because they talk less of their own feelings than some others; or because they attend fewer public religious exercises than could be desired; or because, from extreme constitutional diffidence, they may, either properly or improperly, decline taking part in such exercises. Many a Christian, who has been labouring faithfully and judiciously for the salvation of sinners, whose closet has witnessed to the fervour of his devotion, and whose conversation has been according to the gospel of Christ, has not only been suspected by his brethren of coldness, for some one or other of the reasons just mentioned, but has been marked, and denounced, and even prayed



for, as dead to the interests of revivals, if not dead in trespasses and sins.

On the other hand, it is not to be questioned, that men of a cautious habit, who are constitutionally afraid of excitement, sometimes unjustly accuse their more zealous brethren of rashness, and impute to spiritual pride what really ought to be set to the account of an honest devotedness to Christ. Especially, if real and great abuses actually exist, they may be so much afraid of coming within the confines of disorder, that they may rush to the opposite extreme of formality; and from that cold region they may look off upon the Christian who evinces nothing more than a consistent and enlightened zeal, and hail him as if he were burning to death in the very torrid zone of enthusiasm.

The same spirit which discovers itself in private Christians toward each other, is also frequently manifest in respect to different churches. A church which is abundantly blessed with revivals, may condemn, with a high hand, another church, in which, though religion may not be in a languishing state, yet there may never have been any general and sudden effusion of the Holy Spirit. And this may be attributed most unjustly to a cold ministry, or to some signal want of faithfulness in the members; when the fact, that the church is really in a flourishing state, (its interests being sustained by gradual, rather than by sudden accessions,) is entirely overlooked. And, where there is not only the absence of revivals, but the spiritual interests of a church are really depressed, it is still more common to hear the case spoken of with an air of unchristian severity; and not unfrequently, there is something like a sentence of reprobation passed upon the whole body, as if they were indiscriminately a

company of backsliders. Or where a church differs from another in its views of the economy of revivals, it may denounce that other as chilled with the frost of apathy on the one hand, or scorched with the fires of fanaticism on the other; when, as the case may be, the church that is the object of censure may hold correct and scriptural ground. Any church, whether it be distinguished by its zeal, or its want of zeal, that takes the responsibility of dealing out violent censures upon its sister churches, especially if they are walking in the faith and order of the gospel, certainly assumes a degree of responsibility which it can ill afford to bear; and it will have no just ground for surprise, if it should meet a painful retribution, not only in bringing back upon itself the censures of men, but in bringing down upon itself the displeasure of God.

And I am constrained to go farther, and say that ministers have sometimes erred in the same manner, judging each other as fanatics, or as drones; some supposing that their brethren were setting the world on fire, when they shed around them no worse light than that of sober consistent zeal; and others, that their brethren were in the very valley of death, as it respects religious feeling, when the principle of spiritual life was beating in strong and vigorous pulsations. I will say nothing of what exists on this subject in our own day; but I refer you to what has been in other days. I point you, for examples, to men who have long since been in their graves, and whose joy in the world of glory, will not be interrupted by our learning wisdom from the imperfections of which they are now entirely free, and which they lived bitterly to lament. In the revivals which are recorded in the early part of the history of New England, there were a considerable number of ministers, and among them the individual to whom I have already referred, as distinguished for his

extravagance, who declared the mass of their brethren to be unconverted men; who denounced them as leading souls to hell; and who endeavoured, by every means in their power, to alienate from them their congregations, that they might bring them under the influence of what they regarded a more faithful ministry. This unhappy faction, from the nature of the case, was not of long continuance; it could not be, because it lived upon the highest excitement, -- but it lasted long enough to counteract, to a melancholy extent, the benign effects of that work of grace; long enough to entail upon at least two generations, its destructive consequences. If you read the history of those days, or rather of those men, there will be every thing to make you weep, until you come to the delightful fact that they saw their error, and acknowledged it, and wept over it themselves.

I know of no way in which a censorious spirit can discover itself, whether in ministers or private Christians, that is so revolting, and, I may say, dreadful, as in prayer. The fact must be acknowledged, humbling as it is, that men have sometimes seemed to be pouring out, at the foot of the throne, their resentments against cold Christians and ministers; and have even assumed the office of judging their hearts, and have told the Almighty Being, apparently for the sake of telling the congregation, that they were as dead as the tenants of the tomb. Brethren, no apology can be offered for this -- not even the semblance of an apology. Christian charity herself can record nothing better concerning such a prayer, than that it breathes the spirit of the world in one of its most odious forms. Whatever degree of religious indifference may have called it forth, it certainly cannot furnish a juster cause for humiliation than does the prayer itself.

4. Inconstancy in religion is another evil to be avoided in connection with revivals.

Men are exceedingly prone to vibrate from one extreme to the other; and it is a law of human nature, that a very powerful excitement, in respect to the same individuals, cannot long be sustained. Hence there is danger that Christians, from the excitement to which they are liable during a revival, will gradually fall into a state of spiritual languor, and will even give occasion for the cutting inquiry, "What do ye more than others?"

Now what might be expected from the very tendencies of human nature to happen, we find actually does happen, both in respect to individuals and churches. Who has not seen the Christian, during a revival, seeming to be constantly on the mount, both of enjoyment and of action; willing apparently to wear himself out in the service of his Master, and for the salvation of souls; and in a few months after comparatively silent and inactive, and insensible on the great subject which had so lately occupied him, almost to the exclusion of every other? And who that has been much conversant with revivals, has not seen a church, during one of these seasons of special blessing, waking up to a lively sense of obligation, sending up united, and holy, and strong supplications, and labouring incessantly, with an eye now on the cross, and now on the judgment seat, and now on the crown of life; and the same church, at a subsequent period, apparently forgetting their responsibility, becoming cold in their devotions, and relaxing in all their efforts for the salvation of men? In the one case, you would have supposed, from their fidelity, that they were marching on to a high state in glory; in the other, you

would, especially if you had turned your eye off from the Bible, have almost been ready to doubt the perseverance of the saints.

Now, wherever this state of things exists, it is a serious evil, both as it respects the church and the world. It is so to the church; because it mars the consistency and beauty of her character, lessens the amount of her communion with her Head, and renders her light comparatively dim and feeble, when she is commanded to let it shine with a steady brightness. It is an evil to the world; inasmuch as it casts an air of suspicion, in the view of many, over the reality and importance of revivals; and leads them to imagine, that Christians work hard one day to purchase the privilege of doing nothing the next; and that a revival is a matter to be got up and laid aside, at the pleasure of those who engage in it. It leads them, moreover, to think less than they otherwise would of the good influence of Christians when they attempt to exert it; and when, in more favoured seasons, they show themselves active, and endeavour to rouse up the sinner's slumbering conscience, not improbably their exertions will be unavailing, from his recollection of their indifference at other times, and his impression that their zeal is a mere creature of circumstances.

You will all agree with me that this is a great evil, and ought to be guarded against with the utmost caution. One means of avoiding it, is by endeavouring to keep down animal passion, especially at the height of the revival, when it is most likely to be awakened; for the stronger the excitement of the animal nature, the greater the tendency to a universal re-action. Another means is, by endeavouring to keep up spiritual feeling, when the general excitement attending a revival begins to pass away; for that is the critical time when

religious languor usually first creeps over the soul. By using the proper caution at these two points, the church may effectually avoid the evil which I am considering; and instead of becoming listless at the close of a revival, she may show that she has renewed her strength for subsequent labours and conflicts.

5. Another evil to be guarded against, in connection with revivals, is ostentation.

I refer not here to the manner in which revivals are sometimes conducted, (having adverted to that already,) but to the manner in which they are represented, both in common intercourse, and through the press: and I cannot doubt, that, in respect to both, there is much that no discreet Christian can contemplate without regret and disapprobation.

It is not uncommon, during the progress of a revival, and sometimes in an early stage of it, to hear its glorious results spoken of with as much confidence as if they had actually been realized. Particular religious exercises, which may have been attended with unusual solemnity, are represented as having secured the conversion not only of a great, but a definite number of souls. One is represented as having preached, another as having prayed, another as having talked, so many sinners into the kingdom. Perhaps the infidel has professed suddenly to renounce his infidelity, and embrace the Saviour; or perhaps the profligate has wept in view of his profligacy, and resolved to enter upon a new life: these cases are confidently spoken of as instances of genuine conversion; and, what is still worse, they are too often spoken of as such in the presence of the very persons who are the subjects of them. It is easy to see, that, if the individuals

are true converts, the effect of this must probably be to inflate them with spiritual pride; if they are not true converts, it must fearfully aid the work of self-deception. It leaves a bad impression also upon the world; for it is the exact opposite of that humility, that sense of dependence, that disposition to acknowledge God in every spiritual blessing, which constitute some of the loveliest features of Christian character.

But what I chiefly refer to under this article is, the ostentatious complexion, and the premature date, of many of those narratives of revivals which are given to the world through our religious periodicals. It is only honest to acknowledge, that many of them, though evidently dictated by a desire to do good, are yet eminently fitted to do evil. They are written in the midst of strong excitement, when the mind is most in danger of mistaking shadows for substances; when its strong hopes that much is about to be done, are easily exchanged for a conviction that much has been actually accomplished. Hence all who are supposed to appear more serious than usual, are reckoned as subjects of conviction; and all who profess the slightest change of feeling, are set down as converts. And particular instances are detailed, in which very obstinate sinners have been made very humble, and then have become entranced with bright visions of the Saviour; and other cases are mentioned, in which a child has pressed forward into the kingdom, in spite of the opposition of a wicked parent; or a wife, notwithstanding she was persecuted by an ungodly husband. Now the narrative, containing these particulars, goes abroad into the world, and almost of course comes back immediately into the congregation whose religious state it professes to describe. And what think you will probably be the effect? What will it be upon those who here find it announced to the

world that they have been converted, and perhaps read a high-wrought and glowing story of their conversion? What, especially, must it be on those who are represented as having been the subjects of a miracle of grace; as having been great sinners, and now having become great saints? If they are really converted, the effect of this must be, as in the case just mentioned, to lessen their humility, and open their hearts to temptation. If they are cherishing a false hope, it cannot fail to add to its strength. And if, before the narrative meets them, as is a very supposable case, they have cast off their serious impressions, and returned to the world, it must provoke and irritate them; and thus fearfully increase their obduracy, and render their salvation still more improbable. And what effect will this be likely to have upon those who are designated, (if not by name, yet so as to be identified,) as having been distinguished for their malignant opposition to the work? It will awaken in them the spirit of fiends. It will embolden them to fight still more furiously against God, and against his people, and not improbably to do that which will seal their perdition. And what must its effect be upon the surrounding world? What, when they compare the written statement with what has fallen under their own observation, and find a sad disagreement? Must it not be to create and cherish a prejudice against all revivals? Must it not throw an air of suspicion over every statement respecting them which they either hear or read? Must it not even bring in question the veracity of good men?

You will by no means understand me, as intimating any disapprobation of publishing, at a proper time, even detailed accounts of revivals. So far from this, that I regard it as due to the church, due to the honour of Him whom we acknowledge as the great Agent in revivals, that such accounts should in due time be sent



forth. But let them not, in ordinary cases, be written, until the true results of the revival are in some measure known; certainly, let them be confined to palpable facts, which no one can gainsay. Let them be framed with a deliberate recollection that they are to be scanned by multitudes; that they are to exert an influence either for or against the cause of revivals; and that God is not honoured, but offended, by the least attempt to go beyond the truth, even in recording the triumphs of his grace. It is a matter of importance, that all narratives of this kind should be furnished by competent and responsible persons -- those who have opportunity to know the facts, and ability properly to estimate them. While it cannot be questioned, that there are many instances, at the present day, in which the evil of which I am speaking is strikingly exemplified, it is an occasion for joy, that there are many other cases, in which revivals are detailed seasonably, judiciously, and in a manner fitted, in all respects, to subserve the cause of truth and piety.

6. Undervaluing divine institutions, and divine truth, is another evil which often exists in connection with revivals.

It is common, and no doubt right too, during a season of special attention to religion, to increase the number of occasional services during the week; and especially the number of meetings for social prayer. And it is desirable that Christians should feel a deep interest in these exercises, and should regard it as not less a duty than a privilege to engage in them, as their circumstances may admit. But they are not to be considered, in the strict sense, as divine institutions; for, though there is a fair warrant for them in the general spirit of the gospel, and, as we believe, even a direct sanction in apostolic usage, yet the regulation of them is a matter which God

has been pleased to leave to the wisdom of the church; and whenever Christians exalt them to an equality with those institutions which are strictly divine, they may expect to incur the displeasure of the Master, as well as lose the benefit which these exercises are adapted, when kept in their proper place, to impart. But there is reason to apprehend, that many Christians, during a season of revival, actually do, in their feelings, attach an importance to these services which is even paramount to that which they recognise as belonging to the public exercises of the Lord's day. The secret feeling of the heart, there is reason to believe, often is, that to attend public worship on the Sabbath, though it is a duty, has yet too little in it that is distinctive and out of the common course, to be regarded with very deep interest; whereas those services which are observed during the week, and which seem more like a free-will offering, rise in their estimation to the highest degree of importance. There is in all this, no doubt, more or less of self-righteousness -- a sort of unacknowledged and perhaps undetected feeling, that the eye of God rests upon them even with more favour, when they are rendering him a service which he has left in some measure to their own discretion, than when they are walking in the plain and broad path of his direct commandments. These occasional services, I repeat, are not to be undervalued; for they are important helps, in every point of view, towards sustaining and carrying forward a revival; but that we may reap the benefit they are designed to secure, we must give them no higher place than the great Head of the church has manifestly assigned to them.

And while there is danger that the social exercises which the church may establish during a revival, may lead to too low a comparative estimate of the stated services of the Sabbath, there is perhaps equal

danger, that they may bring into some degree of disregard the duties of the closet. Especially if these occasional exercises are greatly multiplied, the time which is requisite for attending them, beside other duties of a more secular nature, may leave but little opportunity for self-communion, reading the Scriptures, and private prayer; and there is reason to fear, that, sometimes at least, the Christian makes a compromise with his conscience, for at least a partial neglect of these latter duties, by calling to mind his exemplary diligence and constancy in respect to the former. And besides, there is no doubt that it lays his powers under far less contribution, to be engaged in a constant round of social exercises which are fitted to excite the mind, than to enter into his closet, and commune with himself, and apply the truths and precepts of the gospel, for the regulation of his affections and conduct. It is to this practical error, I doubt not, that we are to attribute, in a great degree, the fact, that many Christians, who engage with much interest in a revival, still seem to turn it to so little account as it respects their own personal piety. Nothing is more certain, than that the neglect of closet duties, whatever other duties may be performed, must wither the believer's graces, and render his Christian character sickly and inefficient.

If you would avoid the evil which is here contemplated, and secure the good which is aimed at by those who incur the evil, let God's institutions be kept in their proper place. Regard the public services of the Sabbath as far the most important which you can attend. Think it however a blessed privilege, that you may meet for religious purposes frequently at other times; but never let such meetings be a substitute for secret devotion. And if the effect of them should ever be to keep you away from your closet, or to give you a disrelish for its duties, you need no other evidence that there is something wrong;

either that your attendance on these social services is too frequent, or not with the right spirit.

Nor is there less danger that a revival may be perverted to the undervaluing of God's truth. At such a time, especially, men love to be excited; and while those who hear the preaching of the word are apt to delight in those stirring and earnest appeals which are most fitted to rouse the feelings, there is a strong temptation on the part of ministers to feed this passion for excitement, by limiting themselves to a few topics of exhortation, rather than by holding up gospel truth in all its extent and fulness. And in this way it often comes to pass, that there is an aversion contracted to instructive preaching; the doctrines of the Bible come to be regarded, both by people and ministers, as comparatively tame; and I hardly need say, that, as a consequence, the ministry loses much of its real efficiency, and the piety of the church languishes for want of its appropriate nourishment.

Nor is this all. It cannot be questioned that revivals are sometimes made the occasion, not only of inspiring a disgust for sober scriptural doctrine, but of introducing into the church a flood of error. Ministers, in seasons of great excitement, and in the desire of saying something that shall seize hold of the feelings, sometimes make unguarded expressions, which involve some important error; and if these expressions seem to be followed by good effects, they are in danger of repeating them, until they come really to adopt the error which is thus involved. And then again, the excited multitude in such circumstances are usually carried away by the appearance of great zeal and earnestness; and he who evinces the most of these qualities is almost sure to be the favourite preacher: and if he be disposed to

commingle error with truth, there is every probability, that, in many instances at least, the one will be received with the other, without inquiry or suspicion. Such has been the history of the introduction and progress of some of the wildest reveries and grossest errors, which have disturbed the peace, and marred the purity, of the church. Let ministers and private Christians, those who preach and those who hear, be alike on their guard against this tremendous evil.

7. There are certain things which sometimes occur during a revival, that are fitted to impair the dignity and lessen the influence, of the ministerial office; an evil which should always be guarded against with great caution.

It must be acknowledged that ministers themselves not unfrequently contribute to this unhappy result. Sometimes they are carried away by strong excitement into the region of extravagance, and even gross fanaticism, and say and do things, under this influence, which, in their cooler moments, will take them to their closets for confession and humiliation. In other cases, they come, perhaps honestly, to the conclusion, that some new expedient is necessary to secure attention: and the result is, that they come out with something which not only offends a correct taste, but shocks all the finer sensibilities, or, as the case may be, convulses the audience with laughter. Let a minister be as plain, as earnest, as faithful as he will -- but the moment he violates the decorum due to the place in which he stands, or the work in which he is engaged -- the moment he introduces, or even tolerates, any thing like confusion in the worship of God, -- then, rely on it, he sins against the dignity of his office. He does that which is fitted not merely to lessen his own influence with all men of discreet and sober minds, but in the view of multitudes, he brings the

ministerial office itself into contempt. There are enough who would be glad to take such a mistaken course as a sample of the deportment of ministers in general; and a single instance of this kind furnishes them with a text-book for censure and ridicule, which they are sure to use to the best advantage.

The same evil, also, frequently results from a virtual assumption of the sacred office, by men who have neither the proper warrant nor the requisite qualifications. Not that I would intimate that judicious and intelligent laymen have nothing to do in public, beyond merely conducting the devotions of the congregation: I would have them, in many instances at least, ready to impart the word of exhortation; and in private their labours may turn to great account, in the way of counselling persons in different states of mind; but I would have it always borne in mind, that the ministry is an institution of God's appointment, and that the man who performs the appropriate duties of this office, without being regularly called to it, is chargeable with running before he is sent. And just in proportion as this is actually done -- just in proportion as men set at naught the scriptural rules pertaining to order on this subject, you may expect to see the influence of the ministry paralyzed. Let this be generally done, and who will yield to it the reverence which it claims as an institution of God?

8. There is danger, during a revival, of setting up false standards of Christian character.

Men are perpetually prone to mistake the circumstantial of religion for the substance of it. If this is owing partly to human infirmity, it is owing still more to human corruption -- to an aversion from that

self-denial which is involved in the practice of the genuine Christian virtues. This tendency frequently discovers itself even in good men; and perhaps never more frequently than during a season of revival.

There is special danger, that, at such a time, the means of religion will be substituted for religion itself. As means are of no importance in any other department of action, except as they are related to the end, and may tend to secure it, so they are of no use in any other point of view in the department of religion. Means are of use as it respects the sinner, when they bring him to repentance; and as it respects the Christian, when they build him up in faith and holiness: and any use of them which does not lead to these results, will aggravate the condemnation of the one, and retard the sanctification of the other. But there is great reason to fear, that, in seasons of revival, many Christians, in examining themselves, and estimating their growth in grace, do not go much farther than to inquire how many meetings they have attended, or how many they have failed to attend.

Instead of asking themselves, whether the means they are using are accomplishing their end -- whether their love, and faith, and humility, and all other Christian graces, are quickened, or deepened, or brightened, by what they are doing, -- they satisfy themselves with the bare use of the means, and mistake a secret self-complacency for the testimony of a good conscience. It is not uncommon to place the evidence of Christian character, especially during a revival, in talking abundantly and fervently on the subject of religion. True it is, that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; and it is impossible that religion should be in lively exercise in the soul, without giving a character to the conversation. But, at the same time,

the mere fact that an individual makes the subject of religion a constant topic in certain circumstances, and even dwells upon it with great fervour, is the most equivocal evidence of true piety that can be imagined. Who has not heard the man actually under the influence of the intoxicating cup, talk of his experiences and of his joys, as if he thought himself on the threshold of heaven? And who has not been sometimes shocked, in hearing glowing statements in respect to revivals of religion, and deep lamentations over the coldness of Christians, and strong expressions of devotedness to Christ -- who has not been shocked, I say, to find himself listening to a man, whose character he knew to be openly stained with pollution, or marked by fraud or falsehood? I say, then, that while an entire silence on the subject of religion reasonably subjects one's Christian character to great suspicion, a disposition to converse much upon it does not of itself constitute any evidence of piety, or of growth in piety, that can be relied on. This is a matter which often depends more on constitutional temperament than any thing else. Of two Christians who have the same degree of grace, and have it in the same degree of exercise, one will speak out his feelings far more readily than the other, owing solely to a difference of original constitution. And what is a more striking case still, one being of a self-confident turn, may talk like an angel about his hopes and his joys, and another, being constitutionally distrustful, may speak hesitatingly, and rarely at all, of his religious experience; and yet the former may be a miserable hypocrite, the latter a devoted Christian. But is it not true, that in revivals especially, we are too prone to estimate the piety, both of ourselves and others, by this most uncertain standard? Is there not often at least a lurking feeling, that when we have talked most on the



subject of religion, we have had the most evidence, and have given the most evidence, of being under its power?

I cannot avoid here adverting, in one word, to the use of a sort of technical phraseology relating to Christian experience and revivals of religion, which, in some instances, is not only an outrage upon taste, but is destitute of meaning. It may be said, that it matters little what language we use on this subject, provided it be understood: but this is not true; for if two expressions convey the same idea, and one is fitted to awaken prejudice or disgust in a large class of people, and the other is entirely unexceptionable with all, then it is not a matter of indifference which of them should be used. Now it is not to be questioned, that the cant phraseology which has gained such extensive prevalence in the church, in connection with revivals, is exceedingly revolting to men of taste; and there is reason to fear, in many instances, awakens a permanent prejudice against the whole subject. And there is nothing gained to the lower classes by the adoption of this phraseology; for no language can be more intelligible than that of the Bible and common sense. But if I do not greatly mistake, the use of this phraseology which I am condemning is, in many instances, identified with a high tone of spiritual feeling. It is evidently regarded by many as indicating a deeper spirit of devotion, a more earnest desire for the salvation of souls, in short, more of the spirit of a revival, than would be indicated by the use of the simple and pertinent language supplied by God's word. But never was there a greater mistake. The best that can be said of it is, that it is a departure from the dignity that belongs to the whole subject of religion.

You will perceive at once, that the effect resulting from these arbitrary standards of Christian character, must be unfavourable to the cause of truth and holiness. It is unfavourable upon Christians; for while it greatly interferes with their own religious improvement, it usually awakens among them a spirit of censoriousness towards each other. Its tendency in respect to sinners is to put them on a course of self-righteous effort, and thus to expose them fearfully to self-deception. Let this evil, then, be ever cautiously avoided. Let Christians remember, that, in a season of revival, as well as in a season of coldness, the evidence of piety is to be sought in the fruits of the Spirit. And let sinners remember, that no degree of attendance on means, no degree of animal fervour, can be substituted for repentance of sin and faith in the Saviour; that the existence of the former does not constitute the least evidence of the existence of the latter.

9. The last of the evils against which I would put you on your guard, in connection with revivals, is, corrupting the purity of the church.

We have indeed no right to expect that the church, during its militant state, will ever be entirely free from corruption; though this does not at all lessen our obligations to do all we can to render it so. The efficiency of a church depends greatly on its purity. Even if it consist of only a little band, and yet be eminent for its consistency and spirituality, it will exert an extensive and salutary influence. But let its numbers be increased to any extent, if it embrace a great amount of spurious religion, it will diffuse around it but a feeble and uncertain light. Every such accession is an accession of fresh weakness. Men who are destitute of religion had far better be out of the church than in it; for whether they come in as cold formalists or

heated fanatics, they will bring with them the spirit of the world in some form or other; and whatever their worldly rank may be, their influence will injure rather than assist the cause of piety. Let the church receive to her communion a large number who have deceived themselves with false hopes, knowing nothing of the power of religion, and it will be strange, if she does not soon find that her most formidable foes are those of her own household. She may calculate that the time is not distant, when she will find her own members corrupting the purity of the faith -- when she will see them bound up in the frost of a heartless formality, and even resisting, so far as they dare, her own efforts to promote the cause of Christ -- when, in a word, she will be compelled frequently to exercise her discipline, or grievously to neglect her duty.

Now there is one course, which is often adopted, in connection with a revival, which is sure to bring in its train this great evil. I refer to the practice of admitting persons to the communion with little or no probation. Experience has long since taught us, that there are many at such a time, whose feelings are excited and apparently changed, and who give promise of being devoted to Christ, who nevertheless, within even a short time, relapse into their former indifference, and neither consider themselves, nor are considered by others, as furnishing the least evidence of Christian character. These persons, not being received into the church, are ready enough to acknowledge that they have lost their interest in religion; but let them be thus received, and though you will hear from them no such acknowledgment, the real fact, in respect to their condition, will be the same. Hence we are forbidden to doubt, that where the custom prevails of admitting persons to the communion almost immediately after they are supposed to be converted, many must be received who

are no better than were the stony-ground hearers. I know it is said, in favour of this practice, that it originated with the apostles; and that Peter received to the church the three thousand who were converted on the day of Pentecost, without waiting to test their characters. But I know, too, that that case cannot be pleaded as a precedent for a similar course now, because the circumstances by which it was marked do not exist at the present day. To make a profession of Christianity then, was to expose one's self, not merely to reproach and obloquy, but to the rack and the stake; and it were impossible to conceive of any higher evidence of sincerity than such a sacrifice would involve. But now the fact of confessing Christ before the world injures no man's character, in the view of any one; and it is a rare case that it exposes to any personal inconvenience; so that, of itself, it can scarcely be said to furnish the least evidence of Christian character. Let the church, then, as she values her own purity and efficiency, beware of prematurely receiving those whom she considers the fruits of revivals, to her communion. Not that she will be able, at any period, to make an exact separation between the chaff and the wheat; but it is a duty that she owes, not only to herself, but to her exalted Head, to make that separation as accurately as she can.

Such are some of the evils with which revivals of religion may be -- have been connected. I have dwelt upon this subject at considerable length, not because it is a subject the most grateful to Christian contemplation, but because, to my own mind at least, it possesses an importance of which we can scarcely form too high an estimate. It were far more pleasant to speak of the blessings of revivals, and of the triumph of the cause of revivals, than of the evils which, through the weakness or corruption of human nature, may be associated with them. But I cannot resist the impression, that, in order to realize the

highest amount of blessing which they are fitted to secure, we must testify against their abuse, and endeavour to keep them in their purity. I invite you, then, my brethren, one and all, to labour according to your ability, not merely in the promotion of revivals, but in preventing the evils with which they are so often connected; for in doing so, you not only contribute greatly to the ultimate good influence of every such work of grace, but you disarm men of their prejudices against the cause of revivals, and thus remove, at least, one obstacle in the way of their salvation. If we knew all who had rushed into infidelity, in consequence of what they have seen and heard in connection with revivals, I fear we should be overwhelmed by the discovery; and as we would save souls from death, rather than multiply the temptations to self-destruction, we are bound to watch, and pray, and labour, that whatever assumes the sacred name of a revival, may be worthy of the character which it professes to bear.

Do you ask what you have to do in relation to this subject? I answer, when God pours down his Spirit in the midst of you, you have much to do in preventing some or other of these various evils; and this you are to effect, by a constant and watchful observation of the state of things around you, and by subjecting every thing that is proposed to be done, to the simple test of God's word. You may also exert a general influence beyond your own immediate sphere; by having your views of this subject clear and settled, and expressing them temperately, yet firmly, as occasion may require. But be careful never to mingle, in the expression of your views, the least unkind or unchristian feeling. Though you may consider your brethren in some respects wrong, and may frankly tell them so, yet you are to do it in the spirit of Christian charity, and cheerfully give them credit for their full amount of usefulness. It were greatly to be lamented, if any

of us, in our endeavours to correct the errors of others, should fall into a still greater one, should forfeit our claim to that charity which hopeth and beareth all things.

Brethren, I anticipate for the cause of revivals a glorious triumph; and one ground of this expectation is, that the friends of revivals will labour diligently for the promotion of their purity. I cast my eye toward the millennial age, and I witness these scenes of divine love and mercy, going forward with such beauty and power, that the eyes of angels are turned towards them with constantly increasing delight. I see the pure gold shining forth in its brightness, and the dross thrown aside and estimated at nothing. I see the chaff burnt up in the fire, or flying off on the winds, while the wheat is pure, and ripe, and ready for the garner. I see Christians every where co-operating with God for the salvation of men, in the very ways he has himself marked out; and while he pours out his rich blessings on the church, the church sends back her thanksgivings and praises to Him in the Highest. May God in mercy hasten this blessed consummation! And may you and I, whom he permits to labour in his cause, count it an honour that we are privileged to direct our efforts towards this high end, and to anticipate with confidence a glorious result!

## **LECTURE IX**

### **RESULTS OF REVIVALS.**

Revelation v. 13.

"Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever"

This is the new song that was heard by John in vision, as a response from the whole creation, to the sublime anthem which had just before trembled on the harps and lips of the general assembly and church of the first-born. The heavenly host, including the angels and the redeemed, shout forth their praises in this noble song: -- "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." All nature instantly becomes vocal, and sends back her amen to this loud, and thrilling, and ecstatic acclamation. -- "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."

In the series of discourses, of which the present is to form the conclusion, I have endeavoured to present before you what seems to me the scriptural view of most of the leading topics connected with revivals of religion. I have attempted to show the nature of a genuine revival, and the characteristics by which it is distinguished; to defend revivals against the cavils of those who oppose them; to note the circumstances which are unfavourable to their progress; to consider the agency of God on the one hand, and the instrumentality of the church on the other, in carrying them forward; to exhibit an outline of the treatment that is due, both to the awakened sinner and the hopeful convert; and last of all, to guard you against the evils to which revivals, through the weakness and corruption of human nature, are liable to be perverted. It only remains to direct your

attention, in the present discourse, to the results of revivals; partly in their gradual and partial development, and partly as they will be seen, when the cause shall have gained its complete triumph. And in taking up this subject, in this connection, we pass from a theme the least grateful, to one that is most grateful to the Christian's heart: we turn our back upon a region of misgivings, and difficulties, and discouragements, and enter a field of hope, and light, and glory.

But you will ask, perhaps, in what manner the glorious hymn of praise which I have selected as a text, can be considered as pointing to the results of revivals of religion? I answer, it is a hymn in which the church on earth may very properly unite, in celebrating the triumphs of God's grace as they have been manifested in the blessed effects of revivals already. It is the tendency of revivals to prepare multitudes for taking up this noble song even here, and continuing to repeat it with increasing melody and rapture for ever. And, moreover, it is the song in which the ransomed in glory are to celebrate, through eternity, the praises of redemption; and of course, the triumph of the cause of revivals, in which the purposes of God's redeeming mercy will have gone so wonderfully into effect. Whether, therefore, we consider this as a song of triumph from the church on earth, or as the everlasting song of the redeemed in heaven, it will, in either case, justify the train of thought into which I purpose to lead you in respect to the results of revivals. These results I will endeavour to present before you as they are developed,

## **I. In the present world.**

## **II. In the world of glory.**

### **I. In the present world.**



The grand result to which revivals are here tending, is the complete moral renovation of the world. This result is to be accomplished,

1 . By their direct influence, in elevating the intellectual, spiritual, and social condition of men.

There is a sluggish tendency in the human mind, which it often requires a severe shock effectually to counteract. Most men choose almost any other labour rather than the labour of thought; and hence, no doubt, many an individual, in whom there is the germ of a noble mind, never actually rises above a very moderate intellectual stature. Now, it is the tendency of a revival of religion to bring the faculties into vigorous exercise. Let the spirit of God be poured out upon a community, and you will find that the public mind there is in a wakeful state; that men seem to have lost their aversion to thinking, and have shaken off their accustomed sluggishness, and are earnest in making inquiries, and cannot rest till those inquiries are answered. There is an intellectual excitement, at such a time, pervading the whole community; for while convinced sinners are set upon a course of deep and earnest thought in respect to their salvation, the minds of Christians are laid under contribution by the demand that is made upon them for counsel and aid; and even those who are not specially awakened by the Holy Spirit, are usually, to a greater or less extent, brought into the posture of reflection or inquiry. And the subject which occupies the mind in this case, let it be remembered, is of the noblest kind. The intellect, no doubt, may be vigorously employed upon subjects of an unimportant character, and the exercise which it thus receives, may serve to develop and quicken its powers; but in a revival of religion, the subject also is fitted not only to develop and quicken, but to elevate; for it brings the

mind in contact with higher orders of being, and higher states of existence. Yes; in such a scene, men are not only trained to deep reflection, but to reflection upon matters of infinite moment; and the intellect and the heart get warm together; and while the deep and strong sensibilities of the soul are roused by means of the light that blazes in the understanding, the feelings, in turn, send back into the mind an influence that is fitted to render its perceptions more distinct and vivid. I appeal to the subjects of revivals every where for evidence of the fact, that the mind is never more active than during a season of the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

But revivals of religion are favourable to intellectual culture, not only as they bring the mind at the time into vigorous exercise, but as they originate in the subjects of them moral feelings and habits, which are peculiarly favourable to the acquisition of useful knowledge. Every true subject of a revival has been brought to realize, that his intellectual powers, and all the means he enjoys for their improvement, are a talent from the great Master, for which he will be responsible; and this impression will of course be favourable to the highest degree of diligence. And then, again, that calm state of the affections, which is thereby induced, is peculiarly favourable to a habit of intellectual abstraction, and to all high mental efforts: and hence I should expect, with great confidence, that of two individuals, one of whom had been a sharer in the blessed effects of a revival, and the other was a stranger to the power of religion -- other things being equal -- the former would be far more successful in acquiring any branch of useful knowledge than the latter; besides the fact, that in the one case there would be a security, and in the other none, that the acquisitions which were made would be consecrated to the cause of truth, virtue, and happiness. And what would be true of a single

subject of a revival, would be true of its subjects generally; they have experienced an influence which is fitted, more than any thing else, to bring out their intellectual energies, and give them a right direction.

Moreover, as it is the tendency of a revival to impress those who share in it with their obligations to cultivate their own powers, as God gives them opportunity, it is adapted, also, to awaken in them an active desire for the general promotion of useful knowledge. For though they know that knowledge is capable of being perverted to the worst purposes, and renders a bad man a much more formidable enemy to the cause of virtue and happiness than he could be without it, yet they also know, that knowledge, in itself, is an important auxiliary to that cause; and that it were as unreasonable to object to it, because it is occasionally perverted to bad ends, as it would be to call in question the utility of the sun, because, in his march through the heavens, he sometimes lights the path of the robber or the assassin. Hence we find, that, in our own country, at least, many of the most active promoters of useful knowledge, at the present day, are to be found among those who have been practically taught the great lesson of human responsibility in a revival of religion; and it is reasonable to conclude, that, in the progress of revivals, not only religious knowledge, but every other species of knowledge that is fitted to adorn and bless society, will be regularly advanced.

But if revivals serve to elevate the intellectual condition of men, they operate still more benignly, as well as powerfully, upon their spiritual condition. All who are the subjects of them were previously lying under the curse of God, and exposed to his everlasting displeasure. They were polluted in their whole moral nature, were liable not only to the fierce upbraidings of a guilty conscience, but to the tyranny of

worldly lusts, and sometimes even to a storm of malignant passion. In the hour of affliction they had no refuge; in the prospect of death, they saw nothing but agony -- to say nothing of the agony of dying for ever! And what has the revival done for them? It has changed their relations to God, and brought them within the arms of his forgiving mercy, and filled their hearts with the spirit of adoption, and opened their lips in thanksgiving and praise. It has clothed them with the beauties of a renovated nature, has delivered them from their bondage to the earthly, and brought them into close alliance with the heavenly; it has secured to them living consolation in all their trouble, and given them a pledge that there shall be nothing to harm them even in the valley of death. And those who had already begun to live for God, it has quickened to a higher tone of feeling and action; impressing upon them more deeply their Redeemer's image, and rendering them more fit to breathe the atmosphere of heaven. This it has done not for a solitary individual, or for a few individuals only, but for a multitude; thus changing the spiritual condition sometimes of entire families, and not unfrequently of a large part of an extensive community. True it is, that this change relates especially to the hidden man of the heart, and is, for the most part, beyond the reach of mortal vision; but it is not the less real, not the less momentous; indeed, it may be considered, in an important sense, as the germ of all the blessing which a revival of religion secures.

Equally true is it, that the influence of a revival extends to the social condition of men. Intelligence and virtue are the two main springs of public happiness. But we have already seen, that it is the tendency of revivals to put the mind into active operation on the one hand, and to purify the fountains of moral conduct on the other. If the heart is changed from the love of sin to the love of holiness, it must

necessarily result, that this change will discover itself in all the Christian virtues; in that very course of conduct which makes man a blessing to his fellowman, and converts all his social relations into so many channels of benign and healthful influence. Hence it is found, in point of fact, and in instances almost innumerable, that a revival has renovated not only the moral, but physical aspect of a community -- has driven away vice -- has encouraged industry -- has given a spring to intelligence -- and has caused the social virtues to look forth in smiles, where chilling selfishness, or hateful discord, or unblushing crime, seemed to have established a perpetual reign.

Revivals also exert an influence in favour of social happiness, somewhat less direct, but not less efficient, as they have a bearing on the whole machinery of civil government. This is an engine of tremendous power, and must, almost of course, secure to a people great good, or bring upon them great evil; and which side of the alternative is to be realized, in any given case, must depend on the character of the rulers, on the one hand, and the character of the people, on the other. Revivals number among their subjects not a few men of intellectual distinction, who are qualified for the higher stations in society; and there are many others, equally gifted, whose character they help to form and elevate, who, nevertheless, do not profess to have realized their highest benefit. And while the influence of revivals eminently fits these men for office, by bringing them under the power of moral or Christian principle, it is also some pledge of their elevation to office, as it serves to enlighten and purify moral sentiment throughout the community. And after they are actually elevated to public stations, the same influence will make them honest, and resolute, and faithful to their convictions of duty, even in the worst of times; while, on the other hand, it will cherish in

subjects a spirit of obedience, and lead them to co-operate with their rulers for the accomplishment of all the good ends of government. Let the true spirit of revivals prevail through our land, and we shall deserve, in respect to our social and civil interests, far more than we now do, the appellation of "a happy people."

But while such is the immediate effect of revivals upon our own public interests, I cannot resist the impression, that the revivals in this country are destined to exert a more remote influence in advancing the general cause of human society throughout the world. Where is even the superficial observer of human affairs, who does not perceive the signs of the times, in respect to the European nations, tell fearfully of revolution? Who needs be told, that the fabric of society in those nations, which has stood firm amidst the shocks of past ages, begins now perceptibly to totter; and that the day is probably at hand, when their civil institutions will be remodelled, and the whole face of society receive a new aspect? Now, I do not suppose that I claim too much for our country, when I say that the eyes of the nations will be more likely to be directed to her as a model of social and civil renovation, than any other country on earth. It is no improbable supposition, then, that the influence of our revivals -- these very scenes of divine power and grace in which we are permitted to mingle -- may dart across the Atlantic, and be felt at the very springs of society there. Yes; those institutions, to which, under God, we owe so many of our blessings, and which are sustained, in a degree at least, by the influence which comes from revivals, may be adopted by other nations, until there shall be no nation that does not rejoice in their light. The testimony of God forbids us to doubt, that there is a period approaching, when the social state of man, every where, will have reached a point of

improvement, far beyond what has ever yet been attained by any people. When the light of the millennial morning dawns upon the world, it may be easier than now to form an estimate of the results of revivals, in giving proportion, and beauty, and strength, to the edifice of human society. But,

2. Revivals tend towards the complete moral renovation of the world, by enlarging the moral resources, and quickening and directing the moral energies, of the church.

The church is much indebted to revivals for the increase both of her numbers and her graces. -- Observe this influence as it is often exerted in individual cases, and on the spiritual interests of particular communities of Christians. It were no difficult matter to find many instances, which have occurred in these latter years, in which hundreds, during a single revival, have hopefully become the subjects of renewing grace; and a large proportion of them, at least, have subsequently evinced the reality of their conversion, by a holy life. And, in many of these cases, a church, which before barely had an existence, has not only been saved from utter extinction, but has been enlarged, by great accessions to its numbers and influence; and not unfrequently has been enabled to supply itself with what before it did not enjoy -- the stated administration of Christian ordinances. And if the influence of a revival be so great and good as it respects particular instances and individual churches, what shall we say of the influence of all the revivals which take place during a single year -- much more of all which have hitherto existed, as well as those which are hereafter to exist, before the world shall be filled with the glory of the Highest. How many new churches are probably destined to grow up under this influence! How much is the standard of Christian

character -- of humility, of zeal, of devotion, of every thing that pertains to practical godliness, yet to be elevated, in consequence of these glorious effusions of the Holy Ghost! What an immense number will have been brought to the table of the Lord, and will have been enlisted actively in his service, and will count it an honour to wear themselves out in his cause, who, but for revivals of religion, might have continued to turn their backs upon the Saviour, and even have openly opposed the interests of his kingdom! And how much is our idea of the influence of revivals heightened, when we recollect that it is constantly accumulative; that those who are the subjects of one revival are prepared to labour, and actually do labour, for the promotion of others; and the subjects of these revivals, in turn, address themselves to the same work; and so on, in an uninterrupted succession, until the Redeemer shall have seen the travail of his soul, and been fully satisfied!

Again, Revivals increase the efficiency of the Christian ministry; both by increasing the qualifications of those who are engaged in it, and by bringing others to give themselves to the work. They serve to raise the tone of ministerial qualification. A minister can learn that in a revival which he can scarcely learn in any other circumstances. There he enjoys advantages which he can have no where else, for becoming acquainted with the windings of the human heart; for ascertaining the influence of different truths upon different states of feeling; for learning how to detect false hopes, and to ascertain and confirm good hopes; and I may add, for getting his soul deeply imbued with the true spirit of his work. Accordingly, it has often been remarked, that ministers, after having passed through a revival, have preached, and prayed, and done their whole work, with far more earnestness and effect than before; and they themselves have not unfrequently



acknowledged, that what they had gained, during such a season, has been worth more to them than the study of years.

But revivals contribute also to increase the number of ministers. They are the means of introducing many young men of talents and promise into the kingdom of Christ; not a small part of whom consecrate themselves to him in the ministry of reconciliation. As the population of our own country is so rapidly advancing, and as the church is waking up to the spiritual desolation both of Christendom and of the Pagan world, it is manifest that an immense number of ministers are wanted, and are likely to be wanted, to meet this constantly-increasing demand. Now then, if it were not for our revivals, we can see no alternative, but that the great work must stand still for want of labourers, or else it must be prosecuted by men who lack the most essential of all qualifications. But here, blessed be God, we are saved from both sides of this miserable alternative. We have young men, truly devoted, as well as in many instances eminently gifted young men, offering themselves to the work; and most of the younger ministers of the present generation, as well those who have gone abroad, as those who labour at home, date their conversion to some revival; and as the cause of revivals advances in coming years, we cannot doubt, that there will be a constantly-increasing number directing their eye towards the sacred office, until the Saviour's command shall actually be obeyed, to preach the gospel to every creature.

Revivals also lend an important influence to the support of our benevolent institutions. It is by means of these, especially, that the gospel is to be sent abroad to the ends of the earth, and the kingdom of Christ every where to be established. When you view the inroads

which have already been made upon the territories of darkness and sin -- when you cast an eye toward the wilderness, and see it beginning to assume the aspect of moral renovation -- when you look off upon the dominions of Paganism, and see how many idol-gods have fallen from their thrones -- how many have exchanged rites of superstition and cruelty, for a pure and rational worship of the true God -- how many Christian churches and Christian schools are already established -- and how many Bibles and tracts are in circulation, -- when you witness all this, I say, you behold nothing which has not been accomplished by the benevolent institutions, either of this or of other lands! Now, this moral machinery, so far as our own country at least is concerned, is evidently to be sustained and increased chiefly through the influence of revivals. Each individual who is converted to God, is a new labourer in this glorious cause; and the multitudes who already are, or hereafter will be, born into the kingdom, must bring to it an amount of influence of which we can form no adequate conception. Besides, it is the tendency of revivals to make those who are already Christians address themselves with more vigour and efficiency to this work; for while, what they witness and experience in such a scene is fitted to increase their general spirituality, it is especially adapted to make them feel more deeply the value of the soul, and the importance of labouring for its salvation abroad, as well as at home, to the extent of their power. Yes, my friends, it is amidst the effusions of the Spirit of God, that men are trained to engage actively and efficiently in the great enterprise of Christian benevolence: here they are to have their hearts and their hands opened in behalf of those who are sitting in the region and shadow of death: here they are to catch that spirit of zeal, and self-denial, and holy resolution, which will lead them to

attempt great things, and by God's blessing to accomplish great things, towards the moral renovation of the world. I hardly need say, that all our great benevolent institutions -- our Missionary, and Bible, and Tract, and Education, and Temperance, and all kindred societies, have flourished most where the influences of God's grace have been most abundantly experienced: and I am sure, that every thing in the aspect of providence indicates that the spirit of revivals, and the spirit of public charity, are hereafter to go hand in hand -- the one being sustained and cherished in a great degree by the other, until the earth shall be filled with the Redeemer's glory.

There is one institution which the church uses with greater effect than almost any other, which, in this country at least, derives its efficiency, in no small degree, from the influence of revivals -- I mean the Sabbath school. In order to impart to this institution the greatest moral energy, it is necessary that there should be a sufficient number of teachers, able and willing to discharge their duty in the best manner, and that all who are the proper subjects for Sabbath school instruction should be brought within its influence. You will easily see how revivals contribute to the accomplishment of both these ends. They multiply the number of adequate teachers, by bringing many persons of intelligence and discretion to a practical knowledge of the gospel; and they not only enlist them in the enterprise, but impart to them a tender concern for the salvation of their pupils, and lead them to regard this, rather than the bare communication of scriptural knowledge -- the ultimate end of their efforts. They serve also greatly to increase the number of those who are brought within the reach of the benefits of this heaven-born institution. Let Sabbath school teachers become deeply imbued with that spirit which a revival is fitted to impart to Christians -- a spirit of love to the

Saviour, and love to the souls whom he died to redeem -- and it will carry them out to the hovels of wretchedness, and lead them to gather into this sacred inclosure as many as they can: and let parents feel the influence of a revival, either in reclaiming them from a course of backsliding, or in bringing them, for the first time, to an acceptance of the Saviour, and they, too, will stand ready to co-operate in this noble enterprise, by encouraging not only their own children, but all with whom they have influence, to be found regularly in the Sabbath school. It were easy to point to many instances of this institution being first established in consequence of a revival, and that, too, where no effort of this kind could have been made at any preceding period with the least prospect of success; and to many more instances, in which a revival has raised a Sabbath school from a state of extreme depression to that of great prosperity. Its numbers have been greatly increased; its teachers have been rendered more efficient and faithful; the church have come to regard it with renewed interest; and even the world have looked upon it with favour, and extended to it a cordial and cheering patronage.

I must not omit to say, in this connection, that the Sabbath school furnishes a most interesting field for the direct action of a revival. I will say nothing here of the peculiar advantages which this institution furnishes for carrying forward a work of divine grace, having adverted to that in a preceding discourse; but I refer to the fact, that the pupils in the Sabbath school are generally in the morning of life, and that a revival in numbering them as its subjects, secures, in every instance, the influence of nearly a whole life to the cause of truth and piety. We are accustomed to feel, and very properly, that there is special reason for thanksgiving to God, when the man who has nearly worn out his life in sin, is arrested in his

guilty career just as he is on the borders of the tomb; but the peculiar interest which we take in such a conversion arises not from any expectation we can have of very extensive subsequent usefulness, but from the fact that it occurs at so late a period, as to furnish a signal instance of sovereign mercy, and to be in a peculiar sense as life from the dead. But when an individual comes into the kingdom, bringing with him the full freshness and vigour of youth, there is occasion for joy, not merely because from an heir of hell he has become an heir of heaven, but because there is reason to hope that he may be long useful in the church, and do much for the advancement of the cause of Christ. And when the dews of divine grace descend copiously upon a Sabbath school, there is an amount of influence secured in favour of the interests of the church, which outruns calculation. There are many youth saved, it may be, from exerting an influence unfriendly to the Redeemer's cause -- possibly from being its open enemies; and they enter at once on a course of vigorous effort for its advancement; and some of them may be destined to high places of trust, and their influence, whether it be greater or less, whether it be exerted for a longer or shorter period, is brought as an humble offering to their Saviour and Lord. It is a delightful thought, that, while the Sabbath school is an important auxiliary to the cause of revivals, revivals in turn do much to direct and increase the influence of the Sabbath school; rendering it a still more efficient helper to all the great and holy interests of the church.

There is yet another way in which revivals increase the moral energies of the church -- I mean by cherishing a spirit of prayer for the success of the gospel. The Christian who has the true spirit of a revival, cannot limit his prayers, anymore than his efforts, to the salvation of those who are immediately around him. As he wakes to a

more impressive sense of the value of the soul, and to the fact, that the gospel offers the only effectual remedy for its moral disorders, he feels a stronger desire that that remedy may every where be known and applied, and this desire carries him often to the throne of the heavenly grace. And no doubt the prayers of Christians for the general diffusion of the gospel, which are drawn forth by revivals, have much to do instrumentally in setting in motion, and keeping in motion, the great moral machinery of the age, as well as in securing the blessed effects which we see produced by it. And as it is now, so we have reason to believe it will be in all coming years -- the prayers of the church, which her revivals will secure, will have much, very much to do, in carrying forward the triumph of the gospel, until the church shall be able to recognise the whole world as her habitation, and to record, that the work that was given her to do has been accomplished.

Who then but will acknowledge, in review of this article, that revivals have already, both by a direct and indirect influence, accomplished wonders toward the renovation of the world? And what Christian's heart will not bound with joy in the prospect of what is yet to be done through the same instrumentality? Let your imagination anticipate a period, (how near or how remote I will not venture to say,) in which the wilderness, instead of presenting here and there a spot of moral verdure, shall every where be as the garden of the Lord -- in which Paganism, and Mahomedism, and every other false religion, shall have fled from the world -- in which every hill and valley shall echo to the Redeemer's praises, and the bright light of millennial glory spread itself over the whole earth, -- let that period come, and let the question be asked, whether on earth or in heaven, by what means this glorious triumph has been secured, and it requires no spirit of

prophecy to predict that the answer must be, that it has been, in a great degree, by revivals of religion. Such, then, is the grand result of revivals as it respects the present world.

## **II. And what is it as it respects the world of glory?**

It is a vast accession to the felicity of that world. For,

1. Revivals minister directly to the joy of the heavenly inhabitants.

The angels are by no means indifferent spectators of these scenes. Our Saviour himself hath declared, that "there is joy among the angels over one sinner that repenteth." Much more then must they rejoice, when multitudes repent and believe, and have their destiny for eternity reversed. These exalted beings are represented as eagerly penetrating into the mysteries of redemption; as employing their noble faculties to the utmost to become acquainted with this wonderful work; because, more than any other, it brings out to view the perfections of Jehovah. But it is in a revival, especially, that this work as it respects individuals, and even the whole church, advances rapidly towards its consummation. Here the provision which has been made for sinners is appropriated; the remedy is applied and proved to be efficacious. The wisdom, the power, the grace, the faithfulness of God, shine forth amidst every such scene, with a distinctness and an effulgence, which angels cannot contemplate without burning with a loftier and more admiring regard for the divine character. Yes; we have no reason to doubt, that when they cast an eye towards our world, which is the theatre of redemption, and towards our revivals, in which this redemption so wonderfully takes effect, they gain deeper, and brighter, and nobler views of God, than when they look directly at the glories of his throne.

Another reason of their joy on these occasions, is, that the benevolence of their nature leads them to delight in the happiness of men. Though they know nothing by experience of the evils from which the sinner is redeemed, yet they know much of the glory to which he is destined -- they know that he is saved from the miseries of the second death -- that he has a title to an incorruptible inheritance secured to him -- that during his residence on earth, some beams of heavenly glory will be let down into his soul -- and that, ere long, he will be taken up to be their companion, and will advance through everlasting ages, from one degree of purity and bliss to another. Inasmuch as, during a revival, the change takes place in respect to many individuals, which secures to them an exemption from so much misery, and the possession of so much glory, how natural that the angels, in contemplating this change, should rejoice; how reasonable that their native benevolence should lead them to turn an eye of transport toward the earth, while they bend with deeper reverence before the throne, in view of these wonderful displays of divine mercy.

But while revivals are a source of rich joy to the angels, we may suppose that they are so in a still higher degree to that part of the population of heaven who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It is with them, in common with angels, a reason for joy, that, in these triumphs of divine grace, they gain the most glorious view of the divine character, and also, that they contemplate in them a mighty addition to the amount of human happiness. But there are other circumstances to operate in their case, the influence of which angels cannot be supposed to feel. They know by actual experience the misery of a life of sin, and the danger that is connected with it of being cast off for ever, and the fearful



forebodings of eternal torment which have risen under the influence of a waking conscience; and they know too, on the other hand, the sweet hope that accompanies the sense of forgiveness, and the sustaining influences of piety in the hour of trial, and the cheering prospect that greets the eye of faith as it respects the future, and the aid which the soul experiences from the everlasting arm in the valley of death, and finally, they know something of the exceeding and eternal weight of glory in which the sinner's redemption is consummated. They are able, therefore, to form a far more perfect estimate than the angels, of the real importance of a revival of religion, so far as it is connected with the happiness of its subjects; because their experience enables them to put the joy that is gained in more striking contrast with the woe that is avoided. They look back to the hole of the pit from which they were themselves taken, and then consider their present condition as kings and priests unto God, and the gain of bliss and glory which is secured by one revival defies the utmost reach of their labouring conceptions.

Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose, that the joy which the redeemed feel in view of the triumphs of God's grace on earth, must be heightened in many cases by the relations which they have themselves sustained to those who are the subjects of a gracious renovation. Suppose the glorified parent looks down, and sees the children whom he left walking in the broad road to death, turning into the path to life, and setting their faces firmly towards heaven; or suppose the wife beholds her husband, or the sister her brother, for whom she had offered a thousand prayers, but had died without seeing them answered, now waking up to a concern for his salvation, and laying hold on the hope set before him in the gospel, and solemnly dedicating himself to the Lord; or suppose the faithful

pastor to have gone down to his grave mourning over the obduracy of hearts which he could never reach, and to look down from Mount Zion above, and see them pierced with conviction, and melted in penitence, and rejoicing in hope: and I ask you whether you do not believe, that, in each of these cases, there would be a new and deeper thrill of joy in the breast of that glorified immortal? Do you not believe that he would strike his harp to a higher and nobler note of thanksgiving, that those whom he loved while he was on earth, and whom he still loves, though he is in heaven, have not only been redeemed by the blood, but renewed by the Spirit of Christ, and are training up to be his companions through ages of happiness, that will know no end?

I may say too, reverently, that Jehovah himself rejoices in a revival of religion; for he beholds in it the most precious of his own works. In such an event, each person in the adorable Godhead is eminently glorified by an exhibition of the various attributes of the divine character. The Father is glorified in the display of that love and wisdom in which the plan of redemption originated: the Son is glorified in the honour which hereby comes to his mediatorial work, and especially in the efficacy which is thus proved to belong to his atoning blood: the Holy Ghost is glorified in the effectual energy of his operation on the heart; in changing stone into flesh -- in new-creating the whole man. Here is power, wisdom, mercy, faithfulness, holiness, every attribute of God, brought out in a living -- I had almost said, a palpable form. If Jehovah rejoices in his own glory, and if that glory is illustrated in the conversion of even a single soul, what shall be said of his rejoicing in view of a revival of religion -- much more of all the revivals which will have taken place when the whole number of the ransomed of the Lord shall be gathered home.

2. Revivals tend to the same grand result, by increasing the number of the heavenly inhabitants.

Who can estimate the number that have already not only had their names written among the redeemed, but have actually entered through the gate into the city, and taken up the anthems of heaven, who, but for revivals of religion, would have had no part nor lot in the matter? Limit your view, if you will, to the result of a single year, and think what a mighty accession to the heavenly host is furnished by one year's revivals. And then, with the promises of God and the signs of the times in your eye, let your thoughts travel down the tract of coming years, and see how much the revivals of each successive year serve to increase the population of heaven. And finally anticipate the time when this earth shall no longer exist as a theatre for the triumphs of redemption, and the ransomed shall all be assembled on the plains of immortality; and behold in that vast community a multitude which no man can number, who date their change of character and destiny to revivals of religion. And then think of what has been done for these myriads of immortals. Fix upon the moment when the scene of dying was over, and the spirit was rushing forth to meet its God; and estimate the importance of the change it has experienced, by all the horror which it henceforth avoids, and all the bliss which it henceforth attains. All this countless multitude have escaped the pollution, and degradation, and wailing of the pit, and have risen to the purity, and glory, and ecstasy of heaven. The day of the resurrection and the judgment, which, but for the renovation they have experienced, would have awakened in them nothing but shame and agony, is a signal for exultation and triumph. They walk in the Light of the Lamb. They know how to use angelic harps. They are kings and priests unto God. They go on from glory to

glory, constantly approaching the perfection of the Highest, while immortality endures. Whose mind is not lost in contemplating the amount of felicity, which revivals will secure to their subjects through all the ages of eternity?

Pause now for a moment on the eminence to which we are brought, and so far as you can, let your eye take in at a glance the results of revivals, as they respect both worlds. Under their influence, see the cause of moral renovation advancing, until this earth every where brightens into a field of millennial beauty. Behold, also, the inhabitants of heaven kindling with higher rapture, in view of these wonderful works of God! Not only those who have been subjects of revivals, but those who have not -- not only the ransomed of the Lord, but the principalities and powers in heavenly places -- and even Jehovah, who is over all blessed for ever, -- rejoice, and will eternally rejoice, in these triumphs of redeeming grace. And this joy and glory is not only to be perpetual, but to be perpetually progressive. Say then, whether such results will not justify the church, even now, in beginning her song of triumph? Which of the angels will think she is premature in her praises, if, when she looks abroad, and sees what God has wrought for her already in her revivals, she should begin to ascribe blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb? Be this then the song of the church, as she travels on here in the wilderness, while she rejoices in the smiles, and leans upon the arm, and looks forth upon the gracious triumphs, of her living Head. Be this her song on the morning of the millennial day. Let that bright jubilee be ushered in by the echoing and re-echoing of this hymn of praise all round the arch of heaven. Let the church on that glorious occasion count up, if she can, all the revivals which have contributed

to her enlargement, and brought glory to her Redeemer, and say, what so well becomes her as to take this language of thanksgiving upon her lips. Let this be her song when her enemies have all gone into confusion, and taken up an eternal wailing; when she is herself glorified and enthroned on the fields of immortality, and privileged to walk in the full vision of God; when the complete triumph of redemption shall every where be acknowledged, and shall awaken joy or agony that is to endure for ever. From the most distant point in eternity, which an angel's mind can reach, let the church, when she remembers these scenes of mercy through which she is now passing, still shout forth her high praises in the same noble song; and let seraphim and cherubim, and the whole angelic choir of the third heavens, join to increase the melody: -- "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen!"

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