

“The History of Revival”
(Reformation 2012)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation:

1. Over the years, we’ve looked at several things regarding the Reformation:
 - a. The things that led up to it.
 - b. The Reformation itself.
 - c. And those movements that came out of it.
 - d. Because of how important this movement was to the wellbeing of the church.
2. We looked at:
 - a. It’s theology:
 - (i) The so-called Five Points of Calvinism.
 - (ii) The five Solas – both of which reminded us that our justification is the work of God alone – we don’t contribute anything; God alone gets all the glory.
 - (iii) And the principles of biblical worship –
 - (a) Which reminded us of how the Lord tells us to worship Him,
 - (b) And how important it is that we do.
 - b. We saw the movements leading up to the Reformation:
 - (i) We looked at John Wycliffe –
 - (a) The effect of his teachings on John Hus,
 - (b) The school of preachers he established called the Lollards.
 - (ii) The Waldenses – another group the Lord raised up before the Lollards that preached and practiced New Testament Christianity.
 - (iii) And the schools of Mysticism and Scholasticism – both of which strongly influenced Martin Luther.
 - c. We saw the Reformation itself and its leading characters:
 - (i) Martin Luther – whom the Lord used to start the Reformation.
 - (ii) Ulrich Zwingli – who led the Reformation in Switzerland.
 - (iii) John Calvin – who systematized the theology of the Reformation.
 - (iv) As well as that movement which sought even more radical reforms in the church – the Anabaptists.
 - d. We saw how the Reformation spread –
 - (i) To Scotland, through such men as George Wishart, Patrick Hamilton and John Knox.
 - (ii) And to England, through Henry VIII, William Tyndale, Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, Edward VI and Elizabeth I.

- e. We saw how its influence continued to spread in England through
 - (i) The Puritans and the Westminster Assembly.
 - (ii) Ending this subject by looking at the lives and writings of such men as Richard Sibbes, Jeremiah Burrows, Thomas Brooks, Thomas Watson and John Bunyan.
- f. And we saw those the Lord used to commit these truths to music: Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, John Newton and Horatius Bonar.

B. Preview.

- 1. Last year, we began to look at the Great Awakening in England.
 - a. We considered the main characters in that movement:
 - b. George Whitefield, John Wesley, Augustus Toplady, and Daniel Rowlands.
- 2. This year, we're going to look at the Great Awakening in New England.
 - a. This time, we're not going to focus so much on the characters themselves, but on the revival.
 - b. More specifically, we'll look at:
 - (i) What revivals are, along with a brief history of revival.
 - (ii) The revival of 1735.
 - (iii) The Great Awakening of 1740-43.
 - (iv) The distinguishing marks of a true revival.
 - (v) And finally, what we can do to promote revival.

II. Sermon.

A. Let's begin by defining what we mean by a revival.

- 1. There are those today who no longer want to use this word to describe it because of the negative connotations it's developed.
 - a. Our brother Jonathan Merica, in his sermon here last Lord's Day evening, showed some of that concern, preferring to call it a visitation.
 - b. The reason is because of a concept we have come to call revivalism.
 - c. Let's begin our study by distinguishing between the two.

2. Revival versus Revivalism.

- a. Perhaps a simple definition of both would help:
 - (i) Revivalism is man's attempt to bring about revival; while a true revival is something God sends sovereignly.
 - (ii) Better, revivalism is man's attempt at spiritual renewal using the ordinary means God has provided; but revival is God's blessing the use of these means in an extraordinary way to transform church and society.
 - (iii) Iain Murray distinguishes the two in this way,
 - (a) "On the basis of such promises as that of Christ to be with us 'always,' preachers believed that there would always be an ongoing work of grace in the churches. At some periods, however, the ingathering was large and sudden, and the name revival came into use, being understood as an exceptional work of the Spirit of God.

- (b) “But in the nineteenth century, a school of thought developed that believed revivals could be permanent if only the churches were faithful and used the right methods. The argument was that just as one individual is converted by accepting Christ, why cannot numbers be induced to accept Him at the same time? According to this thinking, ‘revivals’ occur in proportion to human effort. The mistake was to ignore that regeneration (a change of nature) is the true cause of conversion, and it is not within the ability of speaker or hearer to determine when anyone passes from death to life (Eph. 2:8). The church is to preach Christ, but He determines the increase (Acts 13:48; 1 Cor. 3:6). It was when this truth was ignored that methods to achieve ‘conversions’ multiplied and ‘revivalism’ was born. The controversy that followed was not between those for or against evangelism; it was about what evangelism really means . . . Men of outstanding stature opposed the new teaching when it entered in the nineteenth century, and their biographies are among the best in Christian literature.”
- (c) <http://www.erictyoung.com/2011/08/13/iain-murray-on-the-difference-between-revival-and-revivalism/>
- b. Perhaps we can better understand what revivalism is all about by considering the thoughts of one of its leading proponents in the nineteenth century: Charles Grandison Finney.
- (i) In his opening lecture of a series that would later be published as *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, he gives us his basic premises:
- (ii) First, he tells us what revivals are not – *they are not miracles*. What he means is they are not supernatural interventions by God.
- (a) “1. A miracle has been generally defined to be, a Divine interference, setting aside or suspending the laws of nature. It is not a miracle, in this sense. All the laws of matter and mind remain in force. They are neither suspended nor set aside in a revival.
- (b) “2. It is not a miracle according to another definition of the term miracle – *something above the powers of nature*. There is nothing in religion beyond the ordinary powers of nature. It consists entirely in the *right exercise* of the powers of nature. It is just that, and nothing else. When mankind becomes religious, they are not *enabled* to put forth exertions which they were unable before to put forth. They only exert the powers they had before in a different way, and use them for the glory of God.” (When we come to examine the marks of a genuine work of God, we’ll see that Finney could not have been more wrong here.)
- (c) “3. It’s not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means – as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means. There may be a miracle among its antecedent causes, or there may not. The apostles employed miracles, simply as a means by which they

arrested attention to their message, and established its Divine authority. But the miracle was not the revival. The miracle was one thing; the revival that followed it was quite another thing. The revivals in the apostles' days were connected with miracles, but they were not miracles.

- (iii) Does Finney mean by this that God isn't involved in revivals at any level?
 - (a) No. But He is only involved in the same way He always is in the normal functioning of the world. He doesn't do anything special.
 - (b) As we'll see in a moment, when Finney states that revivals don't take place without God's blessing, he means they won't happen without those blessings He has already given – man's ability to be moved and to choose what is right.
 - (c) This is really no different between this work of God and that necessary to make the plants grow – *i.e.*, God's ordinary providential governing of all things.
 - (d) "I said that a revival is the result of the *right* use of the appropriate means. The means which God has enjoined for the production of a revival, doubtless have a natural tendency to produce a revival. Otherwise God would not have enjoined them. But means will not produce a revival, we all know, without the blessing of God. No more will grain, when it is sowed, produce a crop without the blessing of God. It is impossible for us to say that there is not as direct an influence or agency from God, to produce a crop of grain as there is to produce a revival. What are the laws of nature, according to which, it is supposed, that grain yields a crop? They are nothing but the *constituted manner* of the operations of God. In the Bible, the word of God is compared to grain, and preaching is compared to sowing seed, and the results to the springing up and growth of the crop. And the result is just as philosophical in the one case, as in the other, and is as naturally connected with the cause.
 - (e) "I wish this idea to be impressed on all your minds, for there has long been an idea prevalent that promoting religion has something very peculiar in it, not to be judged of by the ordinary rules of cause and effect; in short, that there is *no connection* of the means with the result, and no tendency in the means to produce the effect. No doctrine is more dangerous than this to the prosperity of the church, and nothing more absurd" (*italics added*).
 - (f) Please understand that what he just characterized as the opposing view is not our view.
 - (1) Revivals do not happen apart from the means, but neither do they take place merely through the means – the means being repentance, prayer, and evangelism.

- (2) He almost appears to be addressing those holding to hyper-Calvinism – a movement which seems to hold little use for the means of grace.
- (iv) He does say some things we can all agree on with regard to the conditions under which revivals come and what they produce.
- (a) “It presupposes that the church is sunk down in a backslidden state, and a revival consists in the return of the church from her backslidings, and in the conversion of sinners.
- (b) “1. A revival always includes conviction of sin on the part of the church.
- (1) “Backslidden professors cannot wake up and begin right away in the service of God, without deep searchings of heart.
- (2) “The fountains of sin need to be broken up. In a true revival, Christians are always brought under such convictions; they see their sins in such a light, that often they find it impossible to maintain a hope of their acceptance with God. It does not always go to that extent; but there are always, in a genuine revival, deep convictions of sin, and often cases of abandoning all hope.”
- (3) Conviction of sin is not a bad thing, but good. As long as we’re relatively indifferent to our sins, we are largely asleep in the light.
- (c) “2. Backslidden Christians will be brought to repentance. A revival is nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God. Just as in the case of a converted sinner, the first step is a deep repentance, a breaking down of heart, a getting down into the dust before God, with deep humility, and forsaking of sin.
- (d) “3. Christians will have their faith renewed. While they are in their backslidden state they are blind to the state of sinners. Their hearts are as hard as marble. The truths of the Bible only appear like a dream. They admit it to be all true; their conscience and their judgment assent to it; but their faith does not see it standing out in bold relief, in all the burning realities of eternity. But when they enter into a revival, they no longer see men as trees walking, but they see things in that strong light which will renew the love of God in their hearts. This will lead them to labor zealously to bring others to him. They will feel grieved that others do not love God, when they love him so much. And they will set themselves feelingly to persuade their neighbors to give him their hearts. So their love to men will be renewed. They will be filled with a tender and burning love for souls. They will have a longing desire for the salvation of the whole world. They will be in agony for individuals whom they want to have saved; their friends, relations, enemies. They will not only be urging them to give their hearts to God, but they will carry them to God in the arms of faith, and with strong crying and tears beseech God to have mercy on them, and save their souls from endless burnings.

- (e) “4. A revival breaks the power of the world and of sin over Christians. It brings them to such vantage ground that they get a fresh impulse towards heaven. They have a new foretaste of heaven, and new desires after union to God; and the charm of the world is broken, and the power of sin overcome.
- (f) “5. When the churches are thus awakened and reformed, the reformation and salvation of sinners will follow, going through the same stages of conviction, repentance, and reformation. Their hearts will be broken down and changed. Very often the most abandoned profligates are among the subjects. Harlots, and drunkards, and infidels, and all sorts of abandoned characters, are awakened and converted. The worst part of human society are softened and reclaimed, and made to appear as lovely specimens of the beauty of holiness.
- (v) Again, we might agree with Finney on these points – but we must strongly disagree with his insistence that revivals can be created merely by using the means, without any extraordinary intervention on God’s part.
 - (a) He creates a false dichotomy – that a revival either has everything to do with God, or it has nothing to do with Him outside of His ordinary way of working.
 - (b) “For a long time, it was supposed by the church, that a revival was a miracle, an interposition of Divine power which they had nothing to do with, and which they had no more agency in producing, than they had in producing thunder, or a storm of hail, or an earthquake. . . . Even in New England, it has been supposed that revivals came just as showers do, sometimes in one town, and sometimes in another, and that ministers and churches could do nothing more to produce them, than they could to make showers of rain come on their own town, when they are falling on a neighboring town.
 - (c) “Mistaken notions concerning the sovereignty of God, have greatly hindered revivals. Many people have supposed God’s sovereignty to be something very different from what it is. They have supposed it to be such an arbitrary disposal of events, and particularly of the gift of his Spirit, as precluded a rational employment of means for promoting a revival of religion. But there is no evidence from the Bible, that God exercises any such sovereignty as that. There are no facts to prove it. But everything goes to show, that God has connected means with the end through all the departments of his government – nature and in grace.”
 - (d) “And yet some people are terribly alarmed at all direct efforts to promote a revival, and they cry out, ‘You are trying to get up a revival in your own strength. Take care, you are interfering with the sovereignty of God. Better keep along in the usual course, and let God give a revival when he thinks it is best. God is a sovereign, and it is very wrong for you to attempt to get up a revival, just because *you*

think a revival is needed.’ This is just such preaching as the devil wants. And men cannot do the devil’s work more effectually, than by preaching up the sovereignty of God, as a reason why we should not put forth efforts to produce a revival.”

(e) <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/religion/finney1.html>

- (vi) To summarize, Finney and the revivalists of his day were reacting against the idea that revivals were sovereignly in God’s hands and that we should simply wait for Him to bring them.
 - (a) They believed that revivals could and should be happening all the time through the means God has appointed – mainly, a very animated and convicting declaration of God’s Word. This is revivalism.
 - (b) We would agree that the means are absolutely necessary – there must be the preaching of the Word, repentance, prayer and evangelism.
 - (c) But there must also be the extraordinary outpouring of His Spirit into the hearts of His people, as well as on society, before there will be a true revival.
- (vii) A revival is a sovereign visitation of God that He typically brings through the means He has appointed.
 - (a) J. I. Packer writes: “Revival I define as a work of God by his Spirit through his word bringing the spiritually dead to living faith in Christ and renewing the inner life of Christians who have grown slack and sleepy. In revival God makes old things new, giving new power to law and gospel and new spiritual awareness to those whose hearts and consciences had been blind, hard and cold. Revival thus animates or reanimates churches and Christian groups to make a spiritual and moral impact on communities. It comprises an initial reviving, followed by a maintained state of revivedness for as long as the visitation lasts.”
 - (b) *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, pp. 33-48.
 - (c) Jonathan Edwards, in his sermon entitled, “Pressing into the Kingdom of God,” – written during the revival of 1735, calls it the time of God’s mercy.
 - (d) “God hath his certain days or appointed seasons of the exercising both of mercy and judgment. There are some remarkable times of wrath, laid out by God for his awful visitation, and the executions of his anger; which times are called days of vengeance, Prov. 6:34, wherein God will visit for sin, Exo. 32:34. And so on the contrary, God has laid out in his sovereign counsels seasons of remarkable mercy, wherein he will manifest himself in the exercises of his grace and loving-kindness, more than at other times. Such times in Scripture are called by way of eminency, accepted times, and days of salvation, and also days of God’s visitation; because they are days wherein God will visit in a way of mercy; as Luke 19:44. . . . It is such a time now in this town. . . . It is indeed a day of grace with us as long as we live in this world, in the

enjoyment of the means of grace; but such a time as this is especially, and in a distinguishing manner, a day of grace. . . . when conversion and salvation work is going on amongst us from sabbath to sabbath. . . .”

(e) *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards.*

3. What is the danger of revivalism?
 - a. Aren't people converted under this kind of thinking?
 - b. If they are, then why complain against it?
 - (i) It's very likely that people are converted – not because they are right, but because they are using the means of salvation – the Gospel is preached.
 - (ii) So what's the downside?
 - (a) For one, it takes glory away from God.
 - (1) They give God credit in the sense that He has given and blessed the means of conversion.
 - (2) But it's also true in their view that man has his part to play – we must use our natural ability to believe.
 - (3) Not only does this deny what the Bible says regarding our condition – that we are spiritually dead as we come into this world – it gives part of the glory of our salvation to us – the very thing that compelled Augustus Toplady to criticize John Wesley so severely.
 - (4) Ultimately, it destroys salvation by grace through faith alone – a danger that is inherent in all forms of Arminianism.
 - (b) Second, it causes the church to look to itself or to man, rather than to God for the blessing.
 - (1) In this view, we don't really need to pray for revival.
 - (2) We just need to get out there and motivate people to the point where they will receive what God has already provided.
 - (3) Some may be saved using this method – again, since the Gospel is preached – but only because of God's mercy.
 - (4) However, God will more greatly honor us if we go into the battle looking to Him, rather than to ourselves or others.
 - (c) Third, it can also be the cause of some being forever lost.
 - (1) In this view, all you can do is stir people up emotionally to make an emotional decision.
 - (2) The problem is a decision to receive Jesus as Savior will not save you, unless it is mixed with genuine faith, which is the gift of God.
 - (3) Those who experience nothing more than an emotional response will eventually fall away, and believing there was nothing more to Christianity than what they experienced, their hearts will be hardened from listening any further.
 - (4) The result is that many of them will be lost, because they tried it and it just didn't work.

- (5) There are means to a person's damnation, just as much as there are to his conversion.
 - (6) You should never tell anyone that they're a Christian just because they're concerned about their salvation or because they prayed the sinner's prayer.
 - (7) The only evidence that a person is genuinely converted is the testimony of a changed life – that they no longer hate the Lord and disobey Him, but now love and want to serve Him with all their heart.
- 4. There is one further thing we should bear in mind regarding revivals: they are sent by God to promote that one thing that all His works are focused on – the work of Redemption.
 - a. As we saw this morning, this was God's reason for creating the universe, the world, and man.
 - (i) It's what the whole Bible is about.
 - (ii) It's the reason He sent His Son into the world; the reason that you and I are believers –
 - (iii) That God might be glorified and might glorify His Son in the salvation of His people.
 - b. The work He gives us to do is to gather in and perfect these people.
 - (i) This is why God sends revival: to boost this work.
 - (ii) Edwards believed it was the primary way God advances His kingdom.
 - (iii) He writes, "From the fall of man, to our day, the work of redemption in its effect has mainly been carried on by remarkable communications of the Spirit of God. Though there be a more constant influence of God's Spirit always in some degree attending his ordinances; yet the way in which the greatest things have been done towards carrying on this work, always have been by remarkable effusions, at special seasons of mercy. . . ."
 - (iv) To conclude: a revival is a special season of God's mercy when He pours out a greater measure of the Spirit, through the same means He typically uses to bless His church.
- B. Now as to the fact that the Lord has done His greatest work of advancing His kingdom in this way, we only need to survey the history of His church.
 - 1. In the Old Testament, we see,
 - a. There were those special times when He poured His Spirit out to bring His people to repentance, to refresh them, to get them moving again in the right direction.
 - b. Here are a few examples:
 - (i) In the days before the Flood, we read after the birth of Enosh, "Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26) – they turned from their sins and began to seek Him.
 - (ii) In the early times, the number of the faithful was quite small – sometimes as few as one – such as it was with Noah.

- (a) Then, the Lord seems to have revived His servants by appearing personally to them,
 - (b) Such as when He appeared to Abraham (Gen. 12; 15; 17; 18) to Isaac (Gen. 26) to Jacob (Gen. 28; 32; 35), and to Moses (Ex. 3).
 - (iii) The Exodus was a great revival (Ex. 3-15) – though it also brings out the fact that not everyone is converted in a revival.
 - (iv) There were several revivals that took place under the Judges: through Othniel (Judges 3), Ehud (ibid.), Deborah (4-5), Gideon (6-8), Abimelech (9), Jephthah (10-12), Samson (13-16), and Samuel (1 Sam. 7).
 - (v) The Lord brought revival under many of the kings of Judah: David (throughout his reign), Solomon (during the building and dedication of the temple, and for a while following), Asa, Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 15, 17), Joash/Jehoida (2 Kings 11-12), Hezekiah (2 Chr. 29-31), and Josiah (34-35).
 - (vi) He brought revival under some of the prophets: Elijah (by defeating the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) and Jonah (when he preached to Nineveh, the whole city repented).
 - (vii) Sometimes it was under the leadership of a scribe, such as Ezra (Ezra 5-6) or a food taster made governor such as Nehemiah (8-10).
 - (viii) These times of individual and corporate spiritual revival helped keep God's plan of redemption moving forward.
2. In the New Testament,
- a. Who would argue that the ministry of John the Baptist wasn't a time of revival?
 - b. Or the ministry of Jesus and His disciples?
 - c. Certainly, the Day of Pentecost saw many awakened and converted.
 - d. So did Philip's ministry in Samaria (Acts 8) and Peter's in Caesarea (10-11).
 - e. Paul's ministry was very much like that of George Whitefield's with the Lord moving to awaken and convert wherever he went (Acts 13-20).
3. And throughout Church History,
- a. It's harder to trace revival through the Ancient and Medieval Church period, though there were those shining lights that the Lord used to keep the church on course, such as Athanasius, Ambrose, and Augustine – though each of these was not without their faults.
 - b. We've already seen what the Lord did to pave the way for the Reformation – these too were revivals, as was the Reformation itself.
 - (i) Though such men and Wycliffe and Hus, the Lollards and the Waldenses.
 - (ii) Then under Luther, Zwingli and Calvin.
 - (iii) In Scotland under Wishart, Hamilton and Knox.
 - (iv) In England through Henry VIII, Tyndale, Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, Edward VI and Elizabeth I.
 - (v) And through the Puritans and the Westminster Assembly.

- c. We're currently studying the revivals that took place during the 18th Century,
 - (i) Through such men as Whitefield, Wesley, Toplady and Rowlands.
 - (ii) As we begin to look at the revivals that took place in New England, our focus is going to shift somewhat to Jonathan Edwards, at least this time around.
 - (iii) There were many others the Lord used to bring revival and continuing reformation.
 - d. Of course, revivals didn't end with the Great Awakening – we'll see more of them in future series.
4. In conclusion, let's begin to ask the question we'll explore more fully in the last lecture: is there anything you and I can do to bring about revival? Yes and no.
- a. Yes, in the sense that we should be doing everything we can to revive ourselves.
 - (i) We should daily read the Word and pray.
 - (ii) We should repent from all of our sins and trust Jesus and His promises.
 - (iii) We should let these things work on our own hearts to stir them up to love and good deeds.
 - (iv) And we should do all in our power to pray for and evangelize others.
 - (v) These things are always our responsibility.
 - b. But no in the sense that we can't move God's hand to pour out His Spirit more than He is now just because we use the means.
 - (i) The seasons of His mercy are sovereignly in His hands.
 - (ii) We are to be praying constantly for them – as Jesus taught us, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."
 - (iii) But we must leave it to God to do so to the degree that is pleasing to Him and according to His plan to advance the kingdom of His dear Son.
 - (iv) And so pray, looking to God's promise to bless His Son by bringing in His people.
 - (v) And be willing to wait on His timing, without becoming discouraged.