

Charles Finney Said These 3 Attitudes Will Destroy Revival in America

According to the Pew Research Center, Christianity in America is declining at an alarming rate. In the 1990s, 86% of Americans identified themselves as Christian. By 2007 that number had dropped to 78.4% and only 7 years later, in 2014, it had dropped another 6% to 70.6%. By 2021 it had dropped another seven percentage points to 63%.

During the same period, the percentage of Americans who describe themselves as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” has increased dramatically. From 2007 to 2021 their number jumped from 16% to 29%. Also, the number of Americans who identify with non-Christian faiths has grown, especially among Muslims and Hindus.

These facts should provoke us to ask, “Why?” Why is this happening despite all our mega churches and conferences, our new apostolic order, our prayers and intercessions, our prophetic declarations and our revivals?

Charles G. Finney (1792-1875), known as the “prince of revivalists,” has something to say to us in this regard. Finney saw entire communities transformed by the revivals he spearheaded, and he wrote extensively on the subject.

Whereas today we tend to look for a better method or different strategy for producing a revival, Finney would say we need to examine the attitude of our hearts and consider our motives. Here are three attitudes that Finney says will hinder and destroy revival.

Attitude No. 1

When Christians seek revival from selfish motives – The Pharisees did a lot of good things—praying, fasting, tithing—but were on the receiving end of the most severe rebukes from Jesus. He rebuked them, not for “what” they did, but for “why” they did it. Their self-righteous, prideful motives were abhorrent to the Lord.

This is true when it comes to revival. Are we seeking revival from pure motives, to see God’s kingdom advanced and souls come to Christ, or do we want revival for our own personal advancement and success?

During the revivals of the 1990s, a pastor told how God revealed to him his selfish motive in praying for revival. He was going to his church each morning at 6 a.m. and praying for revival. One morning the Holy Spirit brought another church in his city to mind and asked, “What if I choose to begin the revival for which you are praying in this congregation.” He replied, “Lord, you wouldn’t!”

Finney told of how he encountered so many pastors and churches wanting revival for very personal and selfish reasons. Some wanted revival to increase their numbers so they could build a new and larger building. Others wanted revival because they felt competitive with another church in the community and wanted to raise their status and visibility. Finney said:

“I have had a multitude of letters and requests that I would visit such and such places, and endeavor to promote a revival, and many reasons have been urged why I should go. But when I came to weigh their reasons, I have sometimes found every one of them to be selfish. And God would look upon every one with abhorrence.”

Attitude No. 2

When Christians get proud of their revival – One danger that must be guarded against in times of revival is the temptation to become proud and puffed up about “our” revival. Throughout

history, revivals have come to an end because ministers and churches got an inflated idea of their own importance because of God's blessing on their lives.

Instead of nurturing humility and thanking God for His mercy and grace in sending them a revival, they have begun to think that there must be something special about themselves. They think, "We must be a notch above other Christians and churches, for look how God is blessing us."

This is dangerous for as 1 Peter 5:5b says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Finney warned his generation to be on guard against this revival-killing attitude, saying:

"Perhaps it has been published in the papers what a revival there has been in that church, so they think how high they will stand in the estimation of other churches all over the land because they have had such a great revival. And so they get puffed up and vain, and they can no longer enjoy the presence of God. The Spirit withdraws from them and the revival ceases."

Attitude No. 3

When Christians do not feel their dependence on the Holy Spirit – When we begin to think that by our own gifts and talents we can produce a revival, true revival will evade us. We may produce hyped religious events and emotional highs, but we will not see a genuine, heaven-sent revival.

During a prayer drive along the east coast in which we passed through many of the cities transformed in the Great Awakening, I heard the Holy Spirit say, "You can fake it, but you can't make it."

Finney addressed this issue head on, describing what happens when ministers and churches begin depending on their own talents and strengths to produce a revival. He said:

“Whenever they get strong in their own strength, God curses their blessings. In many instances they sin against their own mercies because they get lifted up with their success, and take credit to themselves, and do not give the glory to God. There is doubtless a great temptation to this and requires the utmost watchfulness on the part of ministers and churches, to guard against it, and not to grieve the Spirit away by vain glorying in men.”

The Way Forward from Here

No, we do not need a new method, means or strategy to see another Great Awakening. We need a new attitude of heart. It is a time to cast our crowns, titles and proud achievements before His throne and acknowledge that we are nothing apart from His mercy and grace. It is a time to remember Isaiah 66:2 where God reminded His people:

“These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite [broken] in spirit, and who tremble at my Word” (NIV).

It is not too late for America. If we will take seriously His call to humility and prayer, we could yet see a turn-around that will astound us all—a turn-around initiated, not from Washington D.C., but from the throne of God.

“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chr. 7:14). {eoa}

Dr. Eddie Hyatt is a recognized expert on revivals in history and his book, *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity*, is used as a textbook in colleges and seminaries around the world. He has written several books on America's birth out of the Great Awakening, including *1726: The Year that Defined America*, available from Amazon and his website at www.eddiehyatt.com.

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