

# LECTURES

ON

## REVIVALS OF RELIGION;

BY

WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ALBANY:

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

BY LEONARD WOODS, D. D.

ALSO

### AN APPENDIX,

CONSISTING OF LETTERS FROM THE REVEREND DOCTORS ALEXANDER, WAY-  
LAND, DANA, MILLER, HYDE, HAWES, M'DOWELL, PORTER, PAYSON,  
PROUDFIT, NEILL, MILLEDOLER, DAVIS, LORD, HUMPHREY, DAY,  
GREEN, WADDEL, GRIFFIN, AND REV. C. P. McILVAINE.

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## LETTER VII.

FROM THE REVEREND JOHN M'DOWELL, D. D.

Pastor of the first Presbyterian Church, Elizabethtown, New-Jersey.

*Elizabethtown, March 5, 1832.*

REV. AND DEAR BROTHER,

Agreeably to your request, I will endeavor to give you a brief account of the revivals of religion, with which it has pleased a sovereign and gracious God to favor the church of which I am pastor. Of the early history of this church, I have been able to discover very little. It is an ancient church, having been founded about 160 years since. Whether it was visited with revivals, during nearly the former half of the period of its existence, I have not been able to ascertain. The first revival of which any account has been transmitted to us, was in the latter part of the ministry of that eminent servant of God, the Rev. Jonathan Dickinson, author of "the Five Points," and of many other valuable works.

Of this revival, a particular and very interesting account was given by Mr. Dickinson, in a letter to the Rev. Mr. Foxcroft, of Boston, which letter is in print. From this it appears, that this special work visibly commenced in June 1740, under a sermon addressed to the youth. "The inward distress and concern of the audience," (Mr. Dickinson observes,) "discovered itself by their tears, and by an audible sobbing and sighing in almost all parts of the assembly." On the character and effects of this revival, he goes on to remark—"Meetings for sinful amusements were abandoned by the youth; and meetings for religious exercises substituted in their place. Numbers daily flocked to their pastor for advice in their eternal concerns. More came to see him on this errand in three months, than in thirty years before. The subjects of the work were chiefly youth. A deep sense of sin, guilt, danger, and despair of help from themselves, preceded a hope in Christ. All the converts were for a considerable time under a law work, before they had satisfying views of their interest in Christ. The number of those who were savingly the subjects of this work was about sixty."

In 1772, this church was again blessed with a considerable revival of religion, under the ministry of the Rev. James Caldwell.

In 1784, this church was again visited in a special manner with the influences of the Holy Ghost. This was just after the close of the revolutionary war; and the people were without a house of worship, and without a pastor; the church having been burned and the pastor slain near the close of the war. This revival continued about two years; and time has abundantly proved that it was a genuine and glorious work of God. A number of the subjects are still living, and are truly fathers and mothers in Israel. Nearly all the session, and almost half the members of the church, when the writer settled here, were the fruits of this revival; and he has had an opportunity of knowing them by their fruits; he has been with many of them when about to pass over Jordan, and from their triumphant death as well as exemplary life, he can testify to the genuineness of the work.

From the time of this revival to the settlement of the writer, there were two seasons of more than ordinary interest, when the number of additions to the communion of the church was considerably increased.

The subscriber was settled as pastor of this congregation December 1804. In August 1807, a powerful and extensive revival commenced. The first decisive evidence of the special presence and power of the Holy Spirit, was on the Sabbath, under a powerful sermon on Prayer, by the Rev. Dr. Gideon Blackburn. A number were awakened that day; and new cases of conviction, and hopeful conversion were for a considerable time occurring at almost every religious meeting. The special attention continued for about 18 months, and the number added to the communion of the church as the fruits of this gracious work, was about 120. The subjects of it were generally deeply exercised; and most of them continued for a considerable time in a state of distress, before they enjoyed the comforts of the hope of the gospel. This revival was the first I had ever seen; and it was a solemn situation, for a young man, totally inexperienced in such scenes. It was general through the congregation, and in a few weeks extended into neighboring congregations, and passed from one to another, until in the course

of the year, almost every congregation in what was then the Presbytery of Jersey, was visited.

The next revival with which the Lord favored my ministry, visibly commenced in December 1812. It was on a communion Sabbath. There was nothing peculiarly arousing in the preaching. I was not expecting such an event; neither as far as I have ever discovered, was there any peculiar engagedness in prayer, or special desire or expectation on the part of christians. I saw nothing unusual in the appearance of the congregation; and it was not until after the services of the day were ended, when several called in deep distress to ask me what they should do to be saved, that I knew that the Lord was specially in this place. This was a day of such power, (though I knew it not at the time,) that as many as *thirty* who afterwards joined the church, were then first awakened. And it is a remarkable circumstance that the same powerful influence was experienced, on the same day, in both of the Presbyterian churches in the neighboring town of Newark. It was also communion season in both those churches. This revival continued about a year; and the number of persons added to the communion of this church as its fruits was about one hundred and ten.—The subjects of this revival generally were deeply and long distressed, and in many instances, their distress affected their bodily frames. Frequently sobbing aloud was heard in our meetings, and in some instances, there was a universal trembling, and in others a privation of bodily strength, so that the subjects were not able to get home without help. In this respect this revival was different from any others which I have witnessed. I never dared to speak against this bodily agitation, lest I should be found speaking against the Holy Ghost; but I never did any thing to encourage it. It may be proper here to relate one case of a young man, who was then a graduate of one of our Colleges, and is now a very respectable and useful minister of Christ. Near the commencement of the revival, he was led for the first time, reluctantly, and out of complaisance to his sisters, to a meeting in a private house. I was present, and spoke two or three times between prayers in which some of my people led. The audience was solemn; but perfectly still. I commenced leading in the concluding prayer. A suppressed sob reached my ears—it continued and increased: I brought the pray-

er speedily to a close, and cast my eyes over the audience, when behold, it was this careless proud young man, who was standing near me, leaning on his chair sobbing, and trembling in every part like the Philippian jailer. He raised his eyes towards me, and then tottered forward, threw his arms on my shoulders, and cried out, "what shall I do to be saved?" A scene ensued, the like of which I never witnessed. The house was full, and there was immediately, by the power of sympathy I suppose, a universal sobbing through the assembly. He repeatedly begged me to pray for him. I felt so overcome with the solemnity of the scene, and fearful of the disorder which might ensue in the excited state of feeling, that I held this trembling young man for half an hour, without speaking a word. I then persuaded him to go home with me, and the audience to retire. His strength was so weakened that he had to be supported. From that hour he appeared to give his whole soul to the subject of religion. He continued in a state of deep anxiety and distress for nearly two months, when he settled down in a peaceful state of mind, hoping in the Saviour.

About the beginning of February 1817, this church was again visited with a great revival of religion. It commenced most signally, as an immediate answer to the united prayers of God's people. The session, impressed with a sense of the comparatively low state of religion among us, agreed to spend an afternoon together in prayer. The congregation were informed of this on the sabbath, and a request made that Christians would at the same time retire to their closets, and spend a season in prayer for the influences of the Spirit to descend upon us. The season appointed was the next afternoon; and that evening was the monthly concert of prayer, which was unusually full and solemn; and before the week was out, it was manifest that the Lord was in the midst of us, in a very special manner. Many cases of awakening came to my knowledge; and the work soon spread throughout the congregation. This revival was marked, not by the deep distress of the preceding; but by a general weeping, in religious meetings. There was doubtless much of sympathy. A larger proportion than usual of the subjects were young, and many of them children. Some were long in darkness; but most of them, much sooner than in either of the former revivals of my ministry, professed to have

embraced the Saviour. The number in the congregation who professed to be seriously impressed, amounted to several hundreds. The special attention continued about a year; and the number added to the communion of the church during that time was about one hundred and eighty. It was during this revival that you visited this place, and spent some time with us while a student in Princeton Seminary.

About the close of the year 1819, it pleased a gracious God to grant to this church another season of special refreshing. This was not so general through the congregation as the former; but was confined to particular neighborhoods. Christians did not appear to be specially awake to the subject, either before it commenced or during its progress. The subjects were generally from among the most unlikely families and characters; from the highways and hedges; while the children of the kingdom were generally passed by. The special attention continued about a year; and the number added to the communion of the church as its fruits, was about sixty.

In the early part of the year 1824, there was a considerable increase of attention to the subject of religion, which continued through the year 1825. About sixty were added to the communion of the church during this time, as the fruits of this special influence. But the work did not terminate with this ingathering. These were but as drops before a mighty shower. About the beginning of December 1825, the work was greatly increased. It commenced visibly on a day of Fasting and Prayer, appointed by the Synod of New-Jersey, on account of the absence of divine influences from their churches generally. Within a few weeks many were awakened and brought to seek the Lord. This revival, with few exceptions, was not marked by deep distress, and the subjects of it, generally, soon professed to hope in Christ. It continued through the year 1826, during which time about one hundred and thirty were added to the communion of this church, as its fruits.

In the winter and spring of 1829, a partial season of refreshing was again experienced, and about twenty-five were added to our communion. Again it pleased a gracious God specially to visit some neighborhoods of the congregation, through the winter and

spring of 1831. The fruits of this visitation, which have been gathered in through the year past, amount to about forty.

In 1820, a second Presbyterian church was organized in the town; and in the revivals which we have experienced since that congregation was formed, a similar gracious influence has been enjoyed among them.

Thus I have given you a brief statement of facts respecting what the Lord has done among the people of my charge. Allow me now to close the narrative with a few remarks. Between these seasons of special refreshing we have constantly had additions to the church. As to the genuineness of the work, I have had time to form a judgment, especially with respect to the revivals in the earlier part of my ministry; and I can testify that the subjects of them have generally manifested that they had experienced a true work of grace in their hearts. Very few apostacies have occurred among those who have been added to the church in revivals—quite as few in proportion to their numbers, as among those who have been brought in, when there was no special attention; and the former have generally been as steadfast, and adorned their profession quite as well as the latter. Of the subjects of the revivals which have occurred under my ministry, a number have become ministers of the gospel. In looking over the list I find the names of twelve who have since entered the ministry, several of whom are now usefully occupying important stations in the church, and some have gone to their gracious reward. Nine more are now in the different stages of education preparatory to the gospel ministry.

Another remark I would make, is, that we have carefully guarded against a speedy admission to the privileges of the church. Seldom in times of revival have we admitted persons to the communion in less than six months after they first became serious. Again I would remark, that from what I have seen, I have drawn the conclusion, that it is wrong to prescribe any particular manner for the Spirit's operations. There has been a difference in this respect in almost every revival which I have witnessed. There have been diversities of operations; but time has shown that it was the same Spirit. The subjects of these revivals and additions to the church, have, the great majority of them, been in the morn-

ing of life, and many while yet children have been impressed ; but we have very seldom received any very young persons to communion. The means which have been constantly employed during my ministry, and which God has blessed, besides the preaching of the word on the sabbath, and frequently on other days of the week in different neighborhoods of the congregation, have been catechetical and bible class instruction, and family visiting ; and to these may be added meetings for social prayer.

In conclusion I would add, that appearances among my people at present are very favorable. There is much increase of attention to the means, and of solemnity in attending upon them. Many Christians appear to be much quickened in duty, and to be earnestly praying that the Lord would appear again in his glory in the midst of us to build up Zion ; and a number have recently been awakened to serious concern about their soul's salvation. We are anxiously looking for a time of general revival ; but what will be the result time must show.

With sincere and fraternal respect, I am,

Dear Sir, yours,

JOHN M'DOWELL.

REV. W. B. SPRAGUE, D. D.