

Stirred but Not Changed Jaded Baptists

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Every sound Baptist preacher with whom I have spoken on the matter deplores the sad spiritual state of the majority of Christians today. On the one hand there is the sad spiritual state of those poor professing Christians – perhaps genuine children of God among them – who have been fed a diet of “milk” polluted with the poison of Arminianism. Then there are those Baptists who profess to believe in sovereign grace, but who have never been really taught the Bible. They have heard topical sermons, doctrinal sermons, allegorical preaching, textual preaching and the like: all of which is “milk.” But they have not heard consistent expository or exegetical preaching. Remember: “milk is what you get from the cow, but the meat is the cow herself.” Apply that to preaching. If preaching is just “from the Bible” it is milk. If the Word itself is “served up” - that is, taught expositively, it is spiritual meat. Expository or exegetical Bible teaching is explaining the Word itself: what they did in Ezra's day: **“So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading,”** (Nehemiah 8:8). Reading, explaining the meaning, and enabling people to understand the Word: what is wrong with doing that today? Those who are fed only “milk” will remain babies, spiritually. But on the other hand, Baptists are supposed to be people of the Book. They ought to be healthy “spiritual carnivores” excitedly feeding on the meat of the Word.

Paul observed babyhood (carnality) in the saints in Corinth. He wrote: “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto

carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). Few will disagree that prolonged infancy among God's people is a problem today just as it was in Corinth. We have looked for a cure for this ailment, but settled for "snake oil."

Not too far back in Baptist history - in the 1800's - a new movement swept into American Baptist ranks. It was supposed to be the cure-all for carnality, deadness and apathy. Its foremost promoter was a man named Charles Finney. This fellow Finney was a Presbyterian who had rejected the concept of God's absolute sovereignty and ran to the extreme free-will position. He is possibly the one Protestant that has influenced American Baptists more than any other. Finney was an advocate of the notion that man's will had not been affected by Adam's fall. He believed that all men could come in a saving way to Christ apart from any work of grace.

Today's popular views of those that object to God's sovereignty are properly called neo-Arminianism (new Arminianism) and semi-pelagianism – a somewhat modified form of the doctrines of Pelagius. We generally lump all these "free-willers" together and just call them Arminians. However, neither Arminius nor historic Arminians would have tolerated the practices of those who follow their teaching. Today's Arminians have run to seed on easy-believe-ism. Whether they call upon the lost to come to the front, pray a prayer, lift their hands, blink at the preacher or make a decision for Christ – or perhaps one of a half-dozen other things – they practice such things because of their belief. And their belief is that man's will was not ruined or even affected by Adam's fall. Man is a sinner: this they will admit. But they believe that man is a sinner because he sins. He can, they say, of his own free will choose Christ and good. The Bible, however, teaches that man sins because he is a sinner: that he was ruined by the fall of Adam and therefore

will not and cannot do what is required of him in order to please God. Romans 8:8 proves that a natural man cannot please God: "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Furthermore, sinners cannot come to Christ apart from God's drawing them. The Lord Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day," (John 6:44). Whatever you believe about the natural (unregenerate) man's will, by his will he cannot please God and cannot come to Christ in a saving way. None of his choices, decisions, or acts please God! "Revival meetings" are based upon Finney-ism: the idea that men can please God if stirred up. Uh-oh! These two ideas are incompatible! Either Finney-ism (revivalism) is right or the Bible is right! Which will you choose?

So we have this fellow Charles Finney come upon the American scene. Prior to his "ministry" Baptists believed that true revival was a move of the sovereign God among His people. They believed the prayers of God's people were a scriptural means. Consequently, they believed the saints of God needed to be occupied with prayer for revival. The old Baptists believed that a real revival had to be "prayed down." It came from heaven and was sent by God in answer to the prayers of His people. Mr. Finney did not believe that a revival had to be "prayed down," but rather that it could be "worked up." Organization, publicity, musical specials of the right type, loud enthusiastic preaching, scare tactics, prolonged "altar calls," emotional appeals to come forward – these and other psychologically manipulative tricks have been adopted and used by the followers of Finney. The fact that such "invitation system" tactics were never employed by the apostles did not matter to Finney. Nor does that fact matter to those who follow after the traditions inherited from Finney and his followers.

"Old timers" told of going to "camp meetings" and "revivals" just to watch the emotional displays of those affected by revivalist tactics. Later they would watch the "conversions" and "re-dedications" fizzle away into nothingness as "converts" and "rededicated" folk most often went back to

their old lifestyles. Such "revival meetings" provided entertainment prior to the days of radio, movies, and TV. Today confusion reigns in the minds of people as to the purpose of "revival meetings." Often what is called a "revival meeting" is actually an effort to "get folks saved" as the Arminians say. In other words, it is a series of evangelistic meetings. Occasionally folk understand that "revival meetings" are held to stir up the church to more zeal and activity – and perhaps living a more holy life. Thus "altar calls" for "salvation" and "re-dedication" are commonplace in spite of the total absence of such things in the New Testament. "Get 'em emotionally wound up, make 'em feel guilty, get 'em down the aisle to weep and "dedicate" or "rededicate" and send 'em home:" that's how it goes. If they stick, they stick. If they do not, too bad. Maybe next time they go through the cycle they will stick. And on the "revival circuit" many are recycled repeatedly year after year!

Not all revivalists are of the sort I am about to describe, but one Pentecostal preacher of a bygone day told a younger preacher how to tell when the revival was over in a place. He said, "When you can turn all the people upside down and cannot shake any more money out of them, the revival is over." How is it that in "revival meetings" and "evangelistic services" most Baptist churches take offerings? No doubt "wisdom is justified of her children," (Matthew 11:19) and someone will come up with a soothing answer for my criticism. But passing the hat among unsaved folk asking them to pay for their own evangelization seems contrary to apostolic principles as stated in 3 John 1:7.

Now back in the good old days revival meetings were different than today. Many times only the beginning date was announced. Meetings would be held both during the daytime and the evening. The idea of no ending date was that the series of meetings would last as long as "God was working." Later, in order to allow the "evangelist" to schedule more meetings (and perhaps because of the decreased interest on the part of the people) "revivals" were shortened to two weeks. Then, beginning sometime later in

the mid to late 1900s they were shortened to only a week: later, to only Monday through Friday evenings. And in some places now there are "weekend revivals" held on Friday and Saturday evenings and perhaps Sunday mornings. The entertainment value of "revivals" has been surpassed by sports, movies, restaurant meals and weekend trips. "Revival preachers" just cannot even begin to compete unless they are themselves really unusual and unusually good at something or another: music, karate, slight of hand, being ethnically different, preaching while standing on their heads, or perhaps being the world's fastest guitar picker or the world's strongest man or an "ex" secret agent, "ex" pugilist or "ex" something or other.

A good number of years ago a pastor said to me: "I am tired of being stirred and not being changed." His words have remained with me. Perhaps it is your experience too! Is that not what the "revivalist" does? His aim is to stir people up. If he is a "good preacher," he is able to excite the flesh and that is what he does. His means is to affect at least some of people's five senses. We have yet to hear of a revivalist who is a great chef and delights Baptist congregations with his cooking skills and thus tickles their taste buds. But the other four senses: feeling, hearing, seeing and, yes, smelling, have all been targeted by "revivalist" type preachers. I was in a Baptist meeting where the preacher had prearranged with certain men to spray air freshener into the air conditioning system at the proper moment so that it was smelled throughout the building. His topic: "The Secret Ingredient In The Anointing Oil." The climax of his message was: "Can you smell it?" And for a moment, a thrill of wonderment went through the crowd as the fragrance spread – I repeat, for a moment. The people were stirred, but not changed: entertained, but not blessed! In speech classes we used to be required to prepare and make speeches with different aims. One kind of speech had the aim to entertain. How many "revival" sermons only entertain? The more of the five senses the "evangelist" can entertain and consequently the more he can stir people determines how good an "evangelist" he is. (Nobody goes away from a "revival meeting" saying, "I really heard some deep teaching from the Word of God tonight.") Let no one

think that most "revivalists" do not use all sorts of psychological manipulative methods/tricks. The "invitation system" itself is psychological manipulation! Is it any wonder that the pastor just quoted – and we think a large number of other Baptists – are "tired of being stirred and not being changed." Is that is the case with many if not most of God's children who have experienced spiritual nausea by the repeated "stirring" without real spiritual change? God's children hunger and thirst after righteousness: personal growth in holiness. If you are not concerned about being more like the Lord Jesus whom you profess to follow, there is something wrong with your experience. You do not need a "revival" or a "re-dedication" (whatever that is). You need to be born again!

Shall we continue with the vain traditions received from Charles Finney and some of our Baptist fathers or shall we turn again to the Lord? The Psalmist prayed thus: "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" (Psalm 85:6). He knew that revival – true revival – had to come from God. He prayed to God for it. Revival is to be desired because it brings joy (not mere happiness or fleshly delight) to God's people. This verse says so! Have we forgotten that joy – real inner joy – is important, yea, necessary to God's people? Nehemiah 8:10 says, "...the joy of the LORD is your strength." Little joy equals little strength. Do you desire the spiritual strength necessary to change? Will you seek a revival – a real move of God – in your life and in your church? Or will you reason this way: to be on the safe side: churches should hold prayer meetings – special prayer meetings – begging God for revival – and just to be sure, bring in the best, high-powered "stirrer" ("evangelist") around. In this way we can trust God and trust Finney at the same time! How sad that we might even consider such a thing!

Do not the words, "I am tired of being stirred and not being changed," reflect that jaded condition that exists among many Baptists because of the failed methods of Charles Finney and his followers? The word jaded is defined as, "feeling or showing a lack of interest and excitement caused by

having done or experienced too much of something." Jaded by having experienced too much stirring without any real change! What should we have expected? Can our Baptist churches really think to experience true revival by humanistic means? Should we not have seen this "burn out" - this jaded condition - coming? Is not the apathy and casual attitude toward the things of God not due at least in large part to "stirring" people, but without change? This jaded condition is not the fault of the church members. It is not even the fault of the pastors. It is the fault of Arminian thinking. It is the fault of Charles Finney. It is the fault of Baptist tradition! (Many a pastor will be criticized and opposed by some members and fellow pastors in his clique if he dares suggest not having the "annual revival." After all, it is a tradition! You cannot be spiritual or succeed without Finney in your church.) Anybody remember what the Lord Jesus and Paul said about tradition? (See Mark 7:9 & 13; Colossians 2:8).

What is the solution? Bigger, more impressive and more entertaining "revivalists?" Having seen that bringing in the clowns has not only not worked, but has done harm, shall we continue with the same entertainment-based tradition? Being already in this rut shall we continue down it? Someone said "a rut is just a grave with both ends knocked out." Are we too dead, dense and spiritually blind to see that the "revival rut" is not bringing growth and spiritual change to God's people? Seeing that the "revival meeting" path leads nowhere spiritually profitable, shall we Baptists blindly follow traditions of our own making? Or shall we get back to the Bible? Shall we go back to the methods of the apostles? What an innovative thought! Go back to Bible methods: apostolic methods? Just patiently preaching and teaching expository messages through the Bible? But that is so slow, unglamorous, and unattractive to the world and the flesh! Yes it is! But who are we fooling? Are we trying to be attractive to the world and the flesh? Or are we sincerely desiring to experience true revival: true change? Is it not both reasonable and biblical to think that feeding babes in Christ healthy "meat" - God's Word - will result in healthy, real and lasting growth? And is not spiritual growth the "change" that God's people need and want? After all,

spiritual growth is positive change. And spiritual growth does not come from hearing "top-water" preaching. Shallow topical, textual, running-commentary-type preaching is not the meat of the Word! It takes time and effort to prepare a meal: it takes time and work to prepare a hearty spiritual meal. The apostles said, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word," (Acts 6:4): and this in their own local, Jerusalem church!

Churches do not need a gymnasium or a "dynamic young wavy haired evangelist" or any kind of religious entertainment. Churches do not need a gun club, or a concealed carry class. Churches do not need Awana, a ladies aid society, a ball team or even new uniforms. In short, churches do not need any more fleshly tripe. (Tripe is literally the stomach of an animal eaten as food: by implication it means, "something that is worthless, unimportant, or of poor quality.") A church needs healthy meals – spiritual meals – served however often she meets. She is to be served for the most part by her pastor and other gifted men whom God may have placed within. Preachers are servants to the congregations, you know. That is what Paul wrote: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake," (2 Corinthians 4:5). Barnes says this means the pastor's time, talents and best efforts and plans belong to the congregation of which the preacher is the bond-slave. Feeding a congregation "spiritual meat" will require intensive study on the part of those men and prayer on the part of the whole church – prayer for them – and prayer for revival. The recognition of a need is the first step is resolving that need. Will you be done with tripe and seek a true revival at the throne of grace? Will you seek the meat of the Word? May God so move upon His churches that they cease desiring mere "stirring" by psychological tricks and methods and seek real spiritual growth by feeding upon the consistent expository teaching of the Word of God. God has given us His "manual" and we have substituted Finney's methods for it. Our doing is our undoing. Oh that the members of Christ's congregations may be changed and not merely stirred!