

Lecture 27 – “Revivals & Revivalism”: The Second Great Awakening in America

“Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about.” G. K. Chesterton

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18

Background Reading

Gonzalez, ch. 25, pp. 238-50

Prayer

From Archibald Alexander’s *Thoughts on Religious Experience*

“O most merciful God! I rejoice that thou dost reign over the universe with a sovereign sway, so that thou dost according to thy will, in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. Thou art the Maker of my body, and the Father of my spirit, and thou hast a perfect right to dispose of me, in that manner which will most effectually promote thy glory: and I know whatever thou dost is right, and wise, and just, and good....Grant, gracious God! that the rich blessings of the new covenant may be freely bestowed on thy unworthy servant....And now, righteous Lord God Almighty, I would not attempt to conceal any of my actual transgressions, however vile and shameful they are; but would penitently confess them before thee; and would plead in my defence nothing but the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died the just for the unjust, to bring us near to God....And grant, O Lord! that as long as I am in the body, I may make it my constant study and chief aim to glorify thy name, both with soul and body, which are no longer mine but thine; for I am ‘bought with a price’—not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. Enable me to let my light so shine that others seeing my good works shall glorify thy name. O! make use of me as an humble instrument of advancing thy kingdom on earth, and promoting the salvation of immortal souls....And when my spirit leaves this clay tenement, Lord Jesus receive it! Send some of the blessed angels to convoy my inexperienced soul to the mansion which thy love has prepared. And O! let me be so situated, though in the lowest rank, that I may behold thy glory. May I have an abundant entrance administered unto me into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; for whose sake and in whose name, I ask these things. Amen.”

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I. The Second Great Awakening

A. Between the Awakenings

1. American Revolution
2. Deism
3. Dislocation/western migration

B. Stirrings in Virginia

1. Hampden-Sydney College in 1787 (Archibald Alexander)
2. James McGready

C. Frontier revivals

1. Communion gatherings
2. Cane Ridge, Kentucky (1801)

Samuel B. Finley (who later became a Methodist preacher) at Cane Ridge: “The vast sea of human beings seemed to be agitated as if by a storm. I counted seven ministers

all preaching at one time, some on stumps, others on wagons, and one in a tree....Some of the people were singing, others praying, some crying for mercy in the most piteous accents....While witnessing these scenes a peculiarly strange sensation, such as I had never felt before, came over me, and I felt as though I must fall to the ground....I left and went into the woods, and there I strove to rally and man up my courage. After some time I returned...and stepped up onto a log where I could have a better view. The scene that then presented itself to my mind was indescribable. At one time I saw at least 500 swept down in a moment, as if a battery of a thousand guns had opened upon them, and then immediately followed shrieks and shouts that rent the very heavens....I fled for the woods a second time.”

3. Methodist camp meetings

4. Circuit riders

- a. Francis Asbury
- b. Peter Cartwright

5. Baptists

C. Revival in the East

1. The college revivals

- a. Yale (Timothy Dwight)
- b. Princeton (Daniel Baker)

2. Asahel Nettleton (1783-1844) (See Sermons)

From a sermon by Nettleton: “There are many who think they see a great inconsistency in the preaching of ministers. ‘Ministers,’ they say, ‘contradict themselves—they say and unsay—they tell us to do, and then tell us we cannot do—they call upon sinners to believe and repent, and then tell them that faith and repentance are the gift of God—they call on them to come to Christ, and then tell them that they cannot come.’ That some do preach in this manner, cannot be denied. I well recollect an instance. A celebrated preacher, in one of his discourses used this language: ‘*Come unto me*, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ In another discourse, this same preacher said: ‘*No man can come unto me* except the Father which hath sent me draw him.’ Now, what think you, my hearers, of such preaching, and of such a preacher? What would you have said had you been present and heard Him? Would you have charged Him with contradicting himself? This preacher, you will remember, was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ! And, I have no doubt, that many ministers have followed his example, and been guilty of the same self-contradiction, if you call it such” (Bennet Tyler, *Nettleton and His Labours*, 216-17).

3. Charles Finney

- a. “New Measures” (“Lectures on Revivals of Religion”)
- b. Arminian theology (“The Oberlin Evangelist 16 December 1840” and “Lectures on Systematic Theology”)
- c. Social reform

II. Results of the Second Great Awakening

A. “Revivals and revivalism”

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “In the 1820s a very subtle and unfortunate change took place, especially in the United States, from Asahel Nettleton’s emphasis on revival to Charles G. Finney’s on evangelism. There are two positions. When things were not going well, the old approach was for ministers and deacons to call a day of fasting and prayer and to plead with God to visit them with power. Today’s alternative is an evangelistic crusade: ministers ask, ‘Whom shall we get as evangelist?’ Then they organize, and ask God’s blessing on this. I belong to the old school.”

- B. The “Christianization” of America
 - 1. “The democratization of American Christianity”
 - 2. The proliferation of evangelical and interdenominational
- C. The decline of Calvinism
 - a. The growth of Methodism
 - From the *New Methodist Pocket Hymn Book*
 - “When I was blind, I could not see,
The Calvinists deceived me;
They, by the Scripture, strive to show,
That sinners nothing had to do:
At length I heard another preach,
Who ways of righteousness did teach:
He warned me of the Calvinist,
And how God’s word they would resist.”
 - b. The Baptist shift to Arminianism
 - c. The Cumberland Presbyterians and other new denominations

Questions from Class

What is the time frame of the Second Great Awakening?

For Further Study

- **The Democratization of American Christianity* by Nathan Hatch
Prize-winning history of the period of the Second Great Awakening by the provost of Notre Dame University (and brother of Jim Hatch).
- **Revival & Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858* (1994) by Iain H. Murray
Very informative study contrasting the older Edwardian approach to revivals and the newer outlook of Finney and many others who followed him.

A. Charles Finney became much better known than his contemporary Asahel Nettleton, but in his own day Nettleton was considered by many a better preacher and a better theologian. Nettleton avoided the use of “new measures,” cultivated a low profile, saw himself as a helper of local pastors, and preached Calvinistic sermons. Read Nettleton’s Sermon on the “Divine Decrees” from *Nettleton and His Labours* by Bennet Tyler.

- *What is Nettleton’s main point or proposition?
- *How does he connect prayer and the doctrine of election in this sermon?
- *What is Nettleton’s first point in his sermon on “the Perseverance of the Saints”? How does he explain Hebrews 6:4-6? Why does he say that the angels in heaven believe in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints?
- *How does Nettleton preach the “sovereignty of divine grace” from Luke 14:18?