

# 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.

---

PUBLISHED BY

WEBSTER & SKINNERS, O. STEELE, AND W. C. LITTLE, Albany; J. P. HAVEN  
AND J. LEAVITT, New-York; TOWAR & HOGAN, Philadelphia;  
AND CROCKER & BREWSTER, Boston.

---

Packard & Van Benthuyzen, Printers, Albany.

.....  
1832.

---

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year eighteen hundred and thirty-two, by Joseph Alexander, in the office of the Clerk of the Southern District of New-York.

---

## LETTER XIII.

FROM THE REVEREND PHILIP MILLEDOLER, D. D.

President of Rutgers' college, New-Brunswick, New-Jersey.

*New-Brunswick, April 3, 1832.*

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

Your esteemed favor of March 12th has been duly received. The application made in it needs no apology. It involves a subject of deep interest to the whole church of God. Viewing it in this light, I feel no reluctance in attempting to comply with your request.

The phrase "Revival of religion" has respect to two sorts of persons:—1. To those who are awakened from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life: and, 2. To those who being thus awakened, are reanimated after seasons of depression, by a renewed and divine unction or impulse. Both these operations are recognised in the sacred scriptures; and both are attributed to the Holy Spirit. Hence those who are born again are said to be born of the Spirit; and times of reviving or refreshing are every where attributed to him as their undoubted author.

This influence of the Spirit is exhibited under various symbols or emblems: For example, under the emblem of the *rain*. Hence it is predicted of Messiah, that "he should come down as rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth."\* Under the emblem of *fire*—"He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."† Also under the emblem of the *wind*—"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."‡ The movements of this element are, as we know, exceedingly diversified. It sometimes gently breathes upon, and at others moves with tremendous and resistless power over the face of the earth. In both cases, it is unseen: in neither case, unfelt. Its operations are, indeed, every where perceptible, whilst the laws by which it is governed are, in

---

\* Ps. lxxii. 6. † Luke iii. 10. ‡ John iii. 8.

many respects, deeply mysterious. The prophet, in his vision of the valley of dry bones, was commanded to prophesy to the wind. He did so, and the wonderful result was not merely the symbol of a political, but also of a spiritual, and even of a physical resurrection at the last day.\*

That human experience accords with this scriptural account of the works of the Spirit, there can be no doubt. For, 1. We have almost numberless instances of a resurrection from a death of sin to a life of righteousness. 2. There are many examples recorded in scripture of the ebbing and flowing of the tide of spiritual influence: or, in other words, of the communication and comparative withdrawal of that influence both from individuals and from churches. The alternations of hope and fear thereby produced are strikingly exhibited in the experience of David, of Job, of the Apostle Paul, of the Asiatic churches, and of many churches both of Europe and America in our own day. And are we not authorized to infer that the changes experienced in this respect by individuals, may occur on a larger scale; that is, in families, churches, districts of country, and whole nations?

Now if this view be correct, it is strange that the reality of revivals should be called in question, and especially by those who read the Bible, are acquainted with church history, or have any knowledge whatever of the ordinary or extraordinary operations of the Spirit of God upon the soul.

I have witnessed two revivals during my own ministry. The first occurred between the years 1800 and 1805, whilst I was officiating as pastor of the Pine-street church, Philadelphia. The second between the years 1807 and 1812, whilst officiating as pastor of the Rutgers-street church, New-York. The former continued more than eighteen months; the latter three years. Both occurred under the regular administration of the Word and Sacraments. Large additions were made during their continuance to the communion of those churches. The church in Rutgers-street grew in a few years from somewhere about eighty to upwards of seven hundred communicating members. This work was connected with no extra means, except an additional weekly

---

\* Ezekiel xxxvii.

lecture or prayer meeting. It was attended with no extravagant demonstrations of any description whatever; but with much apparent humility, with Christian affection, and there is reason to believe, also, with much searching of heart, and of the Holy Scriptures. Of those admitted to full communion at that time, few, if any, are known to have apostatized. I do not myself recollect a single instance of apostacy. That which was witnessed in the cases above mentioned, has occurred in various parts of our country.

That revivals of religion are extraordinary operations, is admitted on all hands. That as such they must endure the ordeal of God and man is inevitable. If so, it appears to be desirable that there should be some criterion by which we may form a proper estimate of their character. The only safe rule that has occurred to me in forming such an estimate is the following, viz: That if the means used to obtain them are scriptural, and their fruits wholesome and permanent, we are authorized to conclude that they are of heavenly origin, or, in other words, that they are not the work of man, but of God.

If revivals of religion then, may, and do occur, and are so exceedingly important to the church, is it to be wondered at, if the enemy of God and man should assume the disguise of an angel of light, and should audaciously mimic or counterfeit God's glorious work to answer his own evil purposes?

I can easily conceive of at least four objects to be answered by him in making the attempt, viz:

1. To draw off the attention of Christians from a work in which he is very actively engaged, at the present day—that of suppressing God's truth, or of sowing the tares of false doctrine among the wheat in the churches.

2. To induce a presumptuous reliance on a self-determining will and power to be all, and to do all, that God requires; thus leading men to question their dependence on the Holy Spirit—to usurp his office—eventually to deny his work and influence—and what will inevitably follow, his eternal Godhead.

3. To seduce into all manner of extravagance, that the whole work of revivals may thereby be brought into disrepute. And as

men are prone to vibrate from one extreme to another, the enemy may design also,

4. To open a door for the introduction of all manner of scepticism, or at least, for what is called rational religion, or cold-blooded Socinianism.

From a careful examination of certain views and measures recently adopted in relation to revivals, I am induced to apprehend,

1. That a mere excitement of animal passions, or at most an indefinite conviction of sin, is, in many instances, mistaken for conversion.

2. That the subjects of these exercises are not unfrequently hurried into the communion of the church, before they have had time to acquire, either a competent knowledge of themselves, or of the person, offices and benefits of Christ.

I am aware that apostolical example is offered as a plea for this hurried operation. But it appears to me that the two cases are extremely dissimilar. To mention no other point of difference—the persons who embraced Christianity at that period, did so, in opposition to all their former prejudices and habits, and at the sacrifice of all their worldly comforts and prospects. It is not so at the present day. Unless ministers and ruling elders therefore will run the risk of filling the church with mere nominal professors, at the expense of diminishing its actual strength and purity, they ought to take time to know their converts, or at least to give the converts time to know something of themselves, and of God's truth. In addition to these remarks, I am constrained to add,

3. That some fruits of modern revivals are not precisely such as could be desired. The Apostle asserts in the fifth chapter of his epistle to the Galatians, that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, &c.” And we know that the marks of Christ's flock are humility, sacred regard to the truth, and a wise and heavenly charity. If then, instead of these fruits, we find in many instances, conceit, self-confidence, presumption, pride, rash judging, and lack of Christian sincerity, is it not requiring too much of us to believe that these fruits grew upon the tree of life? Do they not appear more like the grapes of Sodom and the clusters of Gomorrah? Is it to be wondered at, Reverend Sir, that the cause of revivals, under these circumstan-

ces, should be deeply injured? I have heard individuals of sound mind, and of undoubted piety, assert, and that recently, that they could no longer read with the same degree of pleasure they once did, the accounts of revivals in our public journals. And why? Not because they question the reality of revivals in the abstract—nor because they do not consider them as precious—nor because they have ceased to feel a deep interest in them; but because they are dissatisfied and disgusted with the human machinery employed in them; and because their confidence in the correctness of these accounts has, for various reasons, been exceedingly diminished.

That the publication of your Lectures on this momentous subject, may do much to maintain and advance the glorious cause of revivals in its purity on the one hand, and to expose and repel a most lamentable abuse of it on the other, is the prayer,

Reverend Sir, of your friend and  
Brother in the Lord,

PHILIP MILLEDOLER.

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