

How Did We Get Here?

A Short Course on Church History

A Changing World and the Second Great Awakening (1750-1850)

“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,” (Colossians 2:8-9 ESV)

The Enlightenment (Age of Reason)

The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement that stressed _____ as the way to truth. During this era there was a self-confident and optimistic belief in human ability to make progress.

Enlightenment thinkers shared the common idea that humans have the ability to _____ the world; and the ability to _____ the world.

Enlightenment thought meant that _____ served only to promote morality and virtue. There was an attempt to reduce religion to its simplest and most prominent features.

Religious teachings of the Enlightenment challenged traditional Christianity at several points. Enlightenment religion provided an alternative in American Protestantism...instead of a faith where God is sovereign, they could opt for a faith where human reason is sovereign.

The Enlightenment brought many challenges for Christianity. Some people responded by surrendering or compromising the faith, while others held to the biblical faith.

The Second Great Awakening

Many American Christians responded to the doubts of the Enlightenment and the spiritual depression after the Revolution by going out and preaching the simple Gospel message.

From about 1795 into the first decades of the 1800s, a series of revivals known as the “Second Great Awakening” swept through America, and forever changed the new nation. Most of the Second Great Awakening took place in the towns, villages, and camps of America, particularly the frontier. Denominational distinctive began to blur as Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists all joined together to preach huge outdoor revivals.

For better or worse, _____ marked the beginning of decades of revival camp meetings in the new country – some genuine, others more suspect.

Enlightenment thought and rationalism crept in during the Second Awakening.

Charles Finney (1792-1875)

Finney was a lawyer by trade. He was a tall, bold, charismatic, and influential man. Finney conducted revivals in upstate New York. He joined evangelism with social reform and used his platform to work on abolishing slavery, promoting temperance, caring for the poor, and promoting education.

Finney’s theology was an intentional departure from the doctrine of the sovereignty of God that dominated the First Great Awakening. Finney was a product of the Enlightenment in that, for him, the final authority was human reason.

Finney’s theology led to his evangelistic methods, known as “_____.”

The famous method Finney introduced was the “_____,” which led to what we now refer to as the “altar call.”

Even though Finney was flawed in some serious ways, many believe his preaching did lead to some genuine fruit. Finney was followed by men like D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham.

From Revival to “Revivalism”

In *Revival and Revivalism*, Ian Murray explains how evangelicals—Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and more—got to where we are today. He examines 1750 to 1858, and explains how American evangelicals’ understanding and experience of evangelism morphed from “revival” to “revivalism.”

_____ emphasizes the work of man and the decision of man—at the expense of God’s sovereign work.

The term _____, on the other hand, represents a genuine move of God.

By the 1820s and 1830s, two major shifts had occurred throughout American evangelicalism. The first was a doctrinal shift regarding _____. Up to 1800, evangelicals almost universally believed and preached that God must sovereignly give someone a new nature to enable him or her to repent and believe. By the 1830s, this was widely replaced by an understanding of conversion in which the decision to repent and believe lay entirely within an individual’s own power.

This led to a shift in _____. Many evangelicals adopted practices that sought to bring about an immediate decision. Thus, revivalism was born. Unlike previous generations, evangelicals after 1830 gained the ability, so to speak, to put a “revival” on the calendar months in advance.

Ian Murray’s *Revival and Revivalism* should inspire us to reflect critically and carefully about our churches and our evangelistic practices.

Seven Lessons for Church Members from “Revival and Revivalism”

(Adapted from Bobby Jamieson at 9Marks.org)

1. Don’t Confuse an _____ with _____.

Murray writes about the beginnings of the altar call,

“Nobody, at first, claimed to regard it as a means of conversion. But very soon, and inevitably, answering the call to the altar came to be confused with being converted. People heard preachers plead for them to come forward with the same urgency with which they pleaded for them to repent and believe.”

2. Beware of Producing _____.

Murray cites Samuel Miller who went so far as to say the “anxious seat” promotes “the rapid multiplication of superficial, ignorant, untrained professors of religion”—that is, false converts.

3. Be Cautious about Giving Immediate _____ of Salvation.

Murray points out that the new revivalistic methods were actually founded on the promise of immediate assurance:

“The anxious-seat evangelism wanted to do away with any doubts in those who made the public response. The whole strength of its appeal...lay in its suggestion that a response would ensure salvation. To have conceded that there was no sure connection between answering a public appeal and being converted would have been to undermine the whole system.” (368)

4. Tether your Ministry to What God Requires in his _____.

In some ways, the crucial turning point in Murray's narrative comes when the early nineteenth-century Methodists came to regard certain extra-biblical practices as the crucial keys to producing conversions.

5. Make Sure your _____ Drives your _____, not Vice Versa.

Murray writes about the spread of the altar call among Baptists, who in the early 19th century were almost unanimously reformed in their soteriology:

"It had not captured anything like the majority of the churches in the 1830s but there can be no doubt that, with the Baptists also, it was the alleged success of the new evangelism which hastened both its adoption and the gradual doctrinal shift to justify it."

6. Don't Equate _____ with a _____.

Murray writes, "What was indisputable was that making 'conversion' a matter of instant, public decision, with ascertainable numbers immediately announced in the religious press, produced a display of repeated 'successes' on a scale never before witnessed."

7. Celebrate the _____.

Murray writes of the earlier generation of ministers who regarded revival as a gift from God, "The men of the Old School, while believing in revival as fervently as they did...nevertheless knew no biblical reason to be cast down by the normal... they "believed that God would grant his blessing in the measure that was appropriate—whether in its heightened form...or in quieter ways."

Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God

1 John 4:1-8 (ESV) Test the Spirits

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. ⁴ Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. ⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Using John's first letter, Edwards believed that a true work of the Spirit can only be measured by biblical criteria. He presented the following criteria in his book, *Distinguishing Marks*.

1. A growing esteem for _____ (1 John 4:2-3)

2. A discernible spirit of _____ (1 John 4:4-5)

3. A fierce devotion to the _____ (1 John 4:6)

4. An interest in _____ (1 John 4:6)

5. An evident love for _____ (1 John 4:7-8)

When Jonathan Edwards applied these measures to the First Awakening, he concluded that, while there were some excesses and carnal expressions, the Holy Spirit was genuinely at work in revival.

Questions for church members to consider

1. Are those being baptized continuing to walk in the faith years down the line?

2. Do we have a clear way of discipling people?

3. How many of the attendees in a worship gathering participate in small groups?

4. Can our members articulate the gospel?

5. If we asked ten people in our community who do not attend our church to describe what they think of it, what would they say?

6. If the church shut down tomorrow, would the community care?