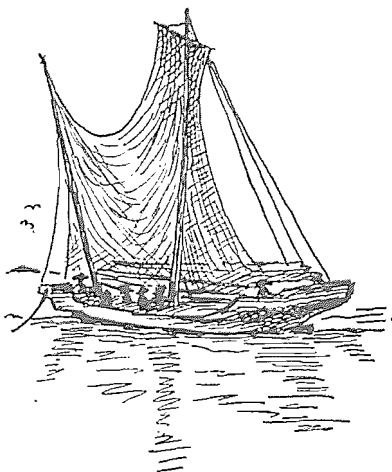


SINS AMONG CHRISTIANS
THAT
HINDER REVIVAL

By
Rev. William M. Robb
Former Missionary to China



The Author

Rev. William Melville Robb, writer of this tract, was born in 1879 in a small rural community near Morning Sun, Iowa. He was baptized in the Sharon congregation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and made his first profession of Christ in the same church. After preparatory schooling he entered Geneva College, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania and graduated there in 1903.

Under the call of God to preach the everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ, Mr. Robb entered the seminary of his denomination in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and was graduated from it in 1907. He was licensed to preach by Iowa Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1906 and was ordained as a missionary to China on August 20, 1907.

Mr. Robb married a college schoolmate, Miss Orlena May Russell of Bovina Center, N.Y., in 1907, and they sailed for South China that same year in the autumn. After three years on the field in Kwangtung, South China, Mrs. Robb's health failed and she and her husband were forced to return to America.

While at home on furlough Mr. Robb preached at Sparta, Illinois and Southfield, Michigan and at Old Bethel Church near Houston, Illinois. Two children were born to this couple, Grace Eleanor and Philip McLeod. In 1916 the family returned to Loting, West River, South China, and served until 1923, when another furlough in America came due. Because of troubled political conditions in China the two children were left with their grandmother in Walton, New York, when the Robbs returned to the China work. Another daughter, Gladys, was born in Hong Kong. It was while Mr. Robb was on a trip to the Philippine Islands in 1929 to get relief from severe headaches that the Lord suddenly took him up to his heavenly rest. Spinal meningitis was the cause of his death. His body lies in a Protestant cemetery in Manila.

Mrs. Robb and Gladys returned to America to join Grace and Philip, and this fatherless family was cared for by Mrs. Robb until the children reached maturity.

The following message was preached by Will



Photograph of Rev. William M. Robb

(1879 - 1929)

Robb at Geneva College, Beaver Falls, Pa., on April 2, 1924. It shows the influence of the Goforth revival movement in China, for Mr. Robb was much influenced by that great manifestation of God's Spirit among missionaries and Chinese.

The background of the Goforth Revival is particularly evident in Mr. Robb's insistence on confession of sin, and also in his emphasis on the ability of one unrepentant sinner to hold back the Spirit's gracious work on a group. In some expressions Mr. Robb seems to give undue authority to the power of a sinner to stay God's mighty power, but other sermons by the author show a high Calvinist doctrine of Divine Sovereignty. This is a sermon in the realm of human responsibility to warn us that we must not "Quench the Spirit" by resisting the convicting power of the Spirit. Blessing comes only to repentant, confessing sinners. Though God is the gracious giver of the grace of repentance when it comes, every Christian knows only too well the danger of pride and fear of man causing us to oppose the offered blessing of the Spirit when He calls us to make needed confession. Against that tendency of sinful hearts the following sermon wages war.

The widow and children of Mr. Robb pray that this message may still be blessed to readers and that God will use it to clear away hindrances to a new revival from the Divine fountains of mercy and power.

Will we pay the price for cleansing?

Do I want God to revive me?

—S. E. Boyle

SINS AMONG CHRISTIANS

THAT

HINDER REVIVAL

A Sermon by the late W. M. Robb

Preached in

Geneva College

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Sins Among Christians that Hinder Revival

Hosea 10:12 "Break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."

Jeremiah 4:3 "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns."

Fallow ground is that which has lain uncultivated until it has grown up with all sorts of thorns and briars and weeds. Seed that is sown there, no matter how good the seed, will not bring forth fruit. The thorns spring up and choke it. It must be broken up. The plow has to be run through it. The harrow must be dragged over it. The hard clods must be pulverized—all in preparation for the sowing of the seed, and the coming of the showers, which will cause the seed to spring up.

What is true of fallow ground thus is also true in the spiritual realm. There are multitudes of lives that are choked with thorns, briars and weeds of sin. The heart lies uncultivated, never broken up by any deep spiritual experience, never torn asunder by any tremendous upheaval, never overturned by any great spiritual catastrophe, which buries the old life and throws up the new soil to greet the sun and rain of God's grace.

But such times are necessary in the soul and in society—in the life of the church itself to give it new power. There are multitudes of people who call themselves Christians, and would be insulted if you suggested they were not, who nevertheless do not exhibit any power in their lives. They have a name to live while they are dead. If they were not mingling with Christian people, you could not, for the life of you tell whether they were Christians or worldlings. Yet one would not dare to say they have not accepted Christ as their Savior. But they are not living Christ. He is not such a reality that they feel constrained to reveal him to others. They are converted, but not surrendered to Christ. They need reviving. Conversion means to make alive in Christ. Re-viving means to live again, to stir up the life that is in them. Lots of people seem to have the idea that

a revival means for a lot of half-baked Christians to get out and make a big hullabaloo through the town for other folks who have not gone through the formality of identifying themselves with the church. That is not my idea of a revival. Mine is that those who profess to be Christ's people shall wait before God till He reveals Himself to them, and themselves to themselves, and they are brought under such an overpowering sense of sin that they flee to God for cleansing and forgiveness and empowering.

One writing recently has thrown out this thought that "It was in the midnight of the dark ages that the huge revival which we call the Reformation, breaking out in an Augustinian monastery, convulsed Europe, and changed the history of the world.

"The conditions before the arrival of Wesley and Whitefield have been thus described: 'Death in the churches, rottenness in public morals, infidelity coming in like a flood.'

"Blackstone, the commentator on the laws of England, under George III says he went to every church in London of note, and found it impossible to discover whether the clergyman was a follower of Confucius, Mohammed, or Christ.

"So, before the last great general revival, that of 1860, the lands the revival visited were those lying under a pall of reckless waste, an unparalleled fever for riches, deepening doubt, and alarming ungodliness." — Pastor D. M. Panton

Do any worse conditions than these prevail today? If God's grace and power were able to break through the barriers then, can He not today? He can.

Sins Among Christians That Hinder Revival

1. Smug Self-satisfaction

That phrase came to me out in China. We were waiting on God and had been for days. During our sessions a searching article was read, in which that expression was used. Later, when the Holy Spirit came down upon us in convicting power, one of the lady missionaries confessed

that this was the expression which had gone like a sharp arrow of rebuke into her soul. She is one of the most efficient workers on the field. She is loved by the Chinese almost without exception, which is more than some of us can say. Yet the Spirit convicted her of that sin so deeply that it was with great emotion she could speak of it at all. The word in that article that smote me was the word "insult"—that the sins of the Christian were an **insult** to Jesus Christ.

Smug self-satisfaction—what a world of it there is in the church today. Those who call themselves the saints of God living lives utterly powerless to move men Godward, and yet entirely content with the situation; ordained in this world as the witnesses of the risen Christ, and yet impotent in declaring a testimony for Him. Plenty of people in the pew and in the pulpit, too, who think they are good enough as they are, and need no transformation in their lives whatever. I tell you that is a pathetic condition. Some are even tragic in their state, for they are steadily deteriorating in their Christian life and walk and yet apparently wholly unconscious of the fact. Hosea describes such in this language, speaking of Ephraim, "Strangers have devoured his strength and he knoweth it not; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not." Strength decaying and he did not know it. Old age approaching, and yet he was unaware of it. Spiritually there is nothing more tragic than that.

My wife came to me once—I'll not say how long ago—and she began to examine my head with unusual interest. Finally she said, "Why, Will Robb, you have gray hairs in your head." I did not know anything about it, of course. As for her, she thought she had married one of those fair-haired Saxons who never get gray-headed. How did she convince me, do you suppose? Why, she brought me the mirror, of course. And I looked and saw, and I saw and believed. She was kind enough to tell me what she saw. And if we will hold the mirror of God's Word up to ourselves, and ask the friends of God to tell us plainly what is wrong, we will find out many things that will rout our

sense of self-satisfaction.

So much of our satisfaction comes from the feeling that it is always the other person who is in the wrong. Do you know, we are apt to be quite mistaken as to what the real hindrances to spiritual growth are. Most of us think that the hindrances are outside of ourselves. If some one were to ask us why we are not more kind, sweet, cheerful, victorious in our Christian life, we would nearly all attribute the defect to some person or circumstances or combination of them. We all want to put the blame on the other fellow. It is very hard to believe and harder yet to admit—that is so mortifying—that all our spiritual obstructions lie within our own hearts. But the "Word of God everywhere locates all barriers to growth and all antagonism to holiness within the heart." Out of the **heart** proceedeth all manner of evil (Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:20). A hot spring will pour forth a stream of hot water despite the facts of ice and frost about it. It is warm at its source.

Do not forget that smug self-satisfaction will hold back the tide of God's power. Remember the church of Laodicea: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." (Rev. 3:17, 18) Break up the fallow ground of smug self-satisfaction!

2. Prayerlessness

The Christian Church of today knows too little about prayer. The thing that stirred Charles G. Finney so greatly before his great empowering of the Holy Spirit was the fact that those who profess to be Christians were content to go on praying month after month without getting any answers. He just could not stand it, and it worked a transformation in him.

All great revivals have been preceded by im-

portunate prayer. Pentecost came in answer to ten days of prayer. The revivals in Wales and Korea had mighty prayer meetings. The Koreans have been known to pray for a hundred days for a revival. There must be weeping between the porch and the altar if there is to be the fire to consume the sacrifice within.

The church needs to return to the place of prayer if she will enter the place of power. The multiplied organizations and activities of the ecclesiastical life of our day have well nigh pushed the prayer life out of the church. Even where there is prayer, it is often of the general and indefinite type that accomplishes little, as well as lacking in earnestness and intensity. It takes strong crying and tears to bring heaven's blessing down to earth.

Prevailing prayer is needed. Jacob had that kind of prayer. He saw that all was lost, for his brother was coming toward him unreconciled. But when Jacob came to him next morning after prevailing prayer with God, his brother had the heart of a brother, and it was not hard to meet him.

David Brainerd had the power to prevail in prayer. He prayed, he knew not how long, and when he ceased his clothes were wet with perspiration on a cold night. He had been praying in agony, and then those wild, fighting, swearing, drunken Indians came to the place and were swept by the Spirit of God; men, women, and children, all under terrible conviction of sin.

Howe says of Livingstone that on two occasions, once in the Kirk of Shotts, and the other in Holywood in Ireland, one of these days on the Monday of communion 1500 persons were either converted or confirmed and in both cases he spent the night preceding in prayer with other Christians.

Will the time ever come when Christians will rather pray than play at religion? Where is our sense of need? Where are our heart yearnings for a display of God's power?

3. The Sin of Impurity

God the Holy Spirit cannot dwell in an unholy

dwelling. He must have clean vessels, clean temples. Think of the sons of Eli (I Samuel 2:22 f.) performing their sacred offices for gain, and even for the gratification of sensual lust. That is a picture of those whom God has exalted to be kings and priests unto God debauching themselves in unholiness and defrauding others of their rights and prostituting their sacred office to a wicked end. Terrible!

I read of a minister who was a leper, and who performed all the duties of the ministerial office for years—baptized people, broke the communion bread, everything—with his leprous hands. You shudder at that. But think of a moral leper ministering in holy things. And yet there have been such. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." But what worse is it to dispense those sacred emblems with unholy hands than to receive them with hands that are stained and leprous?

In one place in the Orient where meetings were being held a strong-faced man knelt and prayed: "O God, for the first few days of these meetings I feared man and not God. Thou knowest all about my sins. Thou knowest that I am a preacher and that if I tell all I shall be disgraced. Thou knowest my wife and boys. I have two sons and daughters in this audience. They will all be disgraced; but, O God, I do not fear man at all. I shall have to get rid of these sins. I have broken the seventh commandment."

The Spirit cannot employ men who are unclean or women who are unchaste to do the work He would do. The sins of uncleanness in thought, word and deed hold back the tide of God's power. No one can entertain impurity and please God.

Break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns of impurity.

4. The Sin of the Spirit of Unforgiveness and the Lack of Brotherly Love

Nothing can hinder the revival spirit more than this. The unforgiving spirit is directly antagonistic to the Holy Spirit. God who is love cannot work through people who are unforgiving toward others.

You remember the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35). He would not have compassion on his fellowservant as his lord had had compassion on him. The rule of forgiveness is "even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Not until 7 times but unto 70 x 7.

In the ancient church it was customary for members of a family to ask each other's forgiveness before going to the table of the Lord.

Resentment against someone burns in the heart like a fire. If it is unquenched it may break out into a fierce conflagration. It is so hard to have the right feeling toward people who rub us the wrong way. We may love 99 people very easily, but when the 100th comes along, there flames up the feeling of unlove for that person, and ere long we find ourselves actively hating him in our hearts. I want to say that our life is blocked as long as we do not adjust our differences with some other persons, for antagonism to that person puts us out of harmony with God. Go and read the Sermon on the Mount and then get off alone and see where you really stand in relation to people with whom you disagree.

If we have a wrong attitude of heart toward a brother, that sin is ours, not his. If I do not love a man, that sin of unlove is mine. He may even be unconscious of its existence. I know a missionary to China who had a great fight. There was another missionary in that station she just could not love. Even the appearance of the other woman walking into church would send a thrill of resentment through her whole being. It was not that the other woman did anything on such occasions. It was just unlove in her own heart. Now it is all changed. The unlove is all gone, crowded out by the expulsive power of a higher affection, and by the power of prevailing prayer. Now she loves one whom she once hated.

It is possible to redirect the energy of hate into the channel of love through the operation of the Holy Spirit. We are sons of our Father who is in Heaven. Therefore we are brothers of all who belong to His family. Brothers must not strive.

A woman who was at outs with another woman

went to a distant city and sat down to think it all over, her differences, hatreds, bitterness. Suddenly the truth came rolling in upon her soul, "God is your Father." As she meditated upon that it came to her, "That woman whom I dislike is a Christian, therefore God is her Father. We are members of His family." She found the break between her and that woman was a break in the filial relation to God. "I will arise and go to my Father," she said, and then it was easy to take the next step. "I will arise and go to my sister." She did, and the way was open to sit down and talk the whole matter over with the other woman, who said to her, "I was hoping you would come."

O how our accursed pride keeps us from taking the step that will bring liberty and joy and peace to ourselves and others.

In a case of personal enmity, what is the adjustment according to Jesus? This: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart," Lev. 19:17. "Thou shalt not bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, I am Jehovah," Lev. 19:18.

Break up the fallow ground that you sow not among thorns of unlove and unforgiveness.

5. Unwillingness to Confess Sins that Have Been Revealed by God's Spirit

If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse from all unrighteousness. But if we do NOT confess our sins God is still faithful and just — but to punish our sins. If our sins are revealed to us and we refuse to confess them, we hold back the tide of God's power.

One place in China where meetings were being held, there was very little yielding to the Spirit's working. A week after the meeting closed the Spirit broke all the barriers down completely. With shame and tears they confessed that when they heard that a certain evangelist was coming, they combined together and resolved that they were not going to let that man move them. As if anyone could move anyone. When they were ready to confess their sins, then the Spirit moved on hearts.

Another place where they had had a very delicate case to handle, two medical assistants were involved. One confessed the other's sins, which is always a dangerous thing to do. There was a big row. The female assistant was dismissed. The male assistant denied everything. That state of affairs lasted for two years. On the sixth night of the meetings the male assistant arose and said, "When I heard you were going to have these revival meetings I asked the devil to come and help me. I knew he had great power. I thought I would escape confession by getting in league with the devil. But it is vain. I cannot do it. All that was charged against me is true, and the female assistant was unjustly discharged."

The evangelist said, "I saw one man get up as many as eight times to confess his sins. The tendency is to get rid of little sins first. The devil is willing to allow these to be laid bare so that the larger ones may remain. When I saw this man striking his face, I knew that there was something bitter in his soul and that he would have to get up again. And he did get up, eight different times, till he had confessed everything. He said he had come to the meeting determined not to open his mouth but the Spirit of God was omnipotent, and a full confession was made." Things happen in an atmosphere like that.

It may be that unwillingness to confess what seems to be a very little thing hinders the Spirit. One venerable missionary told of how his loss of temper hindered the Spirit, and had to be confessed. "But the Holy Spirit is exceedingly jealous, and He must have His servants pure. He must purify the sons of Levi before they are ready to offer an offering in righteousness."

If there is unwillingness among us to confess our sins to God and our faults to one another, and to pray for one another that we may be healed, then it is time to break up our fallow ground that we sow not among thorns; and to break up our fallow ground that we may demonstrate that it is time for God to rain righteousness upon us.

You say, "You are hitting at us. You are aiming

at me." No, I am not. I have not a single stone to throw at any man. But I do have stones to cast at sin. I do have thrusts to make at wickedness. Sin is that abominable thing that God hates. I love God; therefore I hate sin. I love this community and want to see it a spiritual powerhouse, so charged with heavenly dynamite that not a single person can come within its range without being powerfully influenced Godward. But we will have to break up our fallow ground before God will give us a harvest. We will have to clean up, before God can entrust us with His power.

Repentance Unto Life

"Repentance unto life is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and word of God, whereby, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, and upon the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, he so grieves for and hates his sins, as that he turns from them all to God, purposing and endeavoring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience."
(Larger Catechism, Q. 76)

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