



Revive

us

Again!

*A SERIES OF STUDIES ON THE
BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF REVIVAL*

*“Will You not revive us again, so that Your people may rejoice in You?”
Psalm 85:6*

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PREFACE

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My parents were Christians long before I was born, so I had a Christian upbringing. At the age of 14, I had a real experience of salvation and a personal relationship with the Lord.

In January 1964, while reading through the book of Acts, I began to see there was a huge difference between my Christian life, the churches I knew, and the early Christian Church. I began to ask the Lord why there was such a difference. I came to realise that it had something to do with power – the power of God in early Christians, compared with my life and the churches I knew.

Later that month, a friend shared with me about the baptism in the Holy Spirit – something I had never heard of, even though Acts 2 (Pentecost) showed how the early Church ‘started’. He prayed for me and several of my Christian friends, and we were all filled with the Spirit. This transformed my life and my ways.

That year revival began to spread widely around the country. A conference later in the year drew about 300 people to hear about, and experience, God’s Spirit in new ways. This move of God’s Spirit continued to grow and spread throughout the country.

Then, 8 years later, I woke up early one morning, and heard God say that I should call Christians to “Pray for the Nation”. In January 1972, I started printing and distributing a 4-page monthly Prayer Letter, calling Christians to pray for our nation. I hoped for 200 people to start doing this but was somewhat disappointed when only 80 responded. I thought, ‘even 80 will do!’ Since then, many thousands of people have taken up this call to pray for their nation.

Every month, for the past 50 years, the Prayer Letters have contained a 2-page Bible Study on topics related to prayer, revival, the Church, evangelism and the nation. Over the years, these have been published as books and online.

This book, “Revive Us Again”, was first published in 1979 as “Principles of Revival”. It was birthed in a time of revivals around the world. Sadly, the world has, in many places and ways, turned away from the Lord and His ways. But for all those who will listen to, and obey, His call to us to pray for our nation and the nations, the Church and God’s people, we pray ...

“Will You not revive us again, so that Your people may rejoice in You?”

Psalm 85:6

1

Introduction: Why do we need Revival?

In these days in which we live, many people (including many people who are not Christians) are concerned about the state of our nation. Morally, racially, and spiritually, especially; and in other ways, our nation is far from what it could, and should be like.

With increasing immorality and permissiveness, the breakdown of homes and families, abuse, serious crime, lawlessness, rebellion, increasing interest in the occult, other religions and cults, drugs, etc., there is great cause for concern.

Many Christians, concerned at these events, have prayed for a tightening of our laws and sought reform at the political level. Indeed, it is part of the Christian's responsibility to be "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13), bringing about and helping to preserve a Christian "flavour" in our society, seeking to uphold Christian standards and Biblical principles in our nation.

Christians are also called to be "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14), setting before the world an example of what Christlike lives should be. We need not only to protest against evil, but also to demonstrate what good, wholesome, Godly lives are like and how this is really the only sensible way to live.

The only way many non-Christians will get a reasonable idea of what Jesus is like, and what the Bible teaches, is by observing the lives of Christians. What do they observe in our lives?

Many Christians have sought moral and social reforms through the reform of the laws of our country. While it is good and right that we should do what we can to influence our country in this way, this can never be an end in itself because, as any thinking Christian will soon realise, you cannot legislate right living. No-one was made holy by having good and righteous laws enforced on them.

The only way a person can become Godly is by the life-transforming power of Jesus Christ, Who alone can forgive, cleanse and change a sinner into a saint. So in order to see our nation changed, we must see individuals' lives changed, and this calls for evangelism and a move of God's Holy Spirit.

But here we strike another problem. If the Church is to effectively evangelise, then the Church itself must be in such a right relationship with God that His Spirit can move through it in saving power and demonstration of the Gospel, and it must also be able to teach and disciple those who are brought to Christ.

If 3000 people were converted in one city, in one day, as they were on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41) would the churches of that city know what to do? Would they be able to handle such a revival? Or would the "birds of the air", the "stones" and the "thorns" (Matt. 13:1-23) ensure that most new converts never reached any reasonable degree of spiritual maturity?

"The time has come for judgement to begin with the Household of God" (1 Pet. 4:17). There is much that needs to be done in the Church by way of cleansing, personal relationships, unity, humility, discipleship, Christian maturity; and getting rid of apathy, for example, before God can really entrust a revival ingathering of people into the Church. Put simply: are we ready for revival?

We are living in the days of preparation, in which there is relatively little evangelistic outreach and harvesting in our nation, but God is moving and preparing those who are willing, for what He is about to do.

So before we preach to sinners, God has to speak to Christians – to revive the Church; and this revival, in turn, calls for fervent intercession.

Our nation needs changing:

- This means peoples' lives must be changed.
- This means that we need effective evangelism.
- This means that the Church must be right, in order to evangelise and disciple properly.
- This means we need revival.
- This means we need intercession.

Intercession → revival → evangelism → salvation → a nation turned back to God

This, surely, must be the longing of all true Christians who have a heart for God, for His Body the Church, and for the lost.

While intercession must, at times, deal with “negative” influences and pray against certain things (evil, sin, the powers of darkness, etc.), it is primarily positive. We must always pray from the position of faith, not from doubt or despair.

Through intercession we have “to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow” in order that we might then “build and plant” (Jer. 1:10). This is the work of revival.

What is revival?

When we refer to revival, we do not simply mean a revival meeting, in the sense of an evangelistic meeting at which the Gospel is preached and a few people are saved. This may bring personal revival to the individuals concerned, but it usually does not awaken the Church or community at large.

Strictly speaking, revival refers primarily to the Church, not to the world; although, having affected the Church it must, of necessity, affect the world afterwards. No true move of God can fail to reach out to a lost and needy Christless world. We are saved, healed, delivered, filled with the Holy Spirit, not only to worship God, but also to be Christ's ambassadors to a dying world.

There are a number of words in the Bible which are similar to revival, and while they do not have exactly the same meaning, they each bring a particular perspective to the whole concept of revival.

Revival

To “revive” means to bring back to life again. “Will You not revive us again, so that Your people may rejoice in You?” (Ps. 85:6). “O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years” (Hab. 3:2). See also Isaiah 57:15; Hosea 6:1-3 and Ezra 9:8-9.

Renewal

To “renew” means to make something new again. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). See also Is. 40:31; Lam. 5:21; Ps. 103:5; Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:10; Tit. 3:5.

Restoration

To “restore” means to bring something back to its original, new, fresh state. “I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten” (Joel 2:24-25). See also Ps. 51:10-12.

Refreshing

To “refresh” means to make something fresh, clean and new again. “Repent, therefore, and turn again, so that your sins may be blotted out and that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). See also Philemon 7.

Awakening

To “awake” means to come out of a time of sleepiness, apathy or sleeping. “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep” (Rom. 13:11-14). See also Eph. 5:14.

Each of these five words has a similar idea behind it: something was alive, new, glorious, fresh, awake, but it is no longer. In revival it is restored to its former newness, life, glory, vitality and alertness. Surely we need to earnestly pray that the Church will be revived in these days!

So we see that revival is more than just an evangelistic meeting; more than simply God’s blessing poured out on a small group of believers; more than a time of spiritual excitement.

What we mean here by “revival” is something far greater and more widespread than this. By “revival” we mean a Sovereign move of God’s Spirit upon people in such a way that there is deep conviction and repentance for sin, and a real seeking after God, both on an individual and city- or nation-wide scale. There is an awareness of the presence of God throughout the community and a whole nation becomes God-conscious.

This does not mean, of course, that everyone becomes a Christian (people still have free-will, and some will still stubbornly and arrogantly refuse to bow their knee to the Lord), but everyone will know that there is a God. No longer will people say, “Where is their God?” (Joel 2:17)

Revival begins with the Household of God – God’s family, the Church – which has, in many ways, fallen into disrepair and disrespect (cf. 2 Chr. 29 and Neh. 1:1-4). Hence it is a **revival** which brings back to life those people who were at the point of spiritual death (Rev. 3:1-3); a **renewal** which makes all things new again; a **restoration** of the former glory which Christ gave to His Church in the beginning; a **refreshing** in which the wind of the Spirit blows afresh on the people of God and through the nation; an **awakening** in which the spiritual lives of those who are still living in sin are awakened to their serious spiritual state.

And yet it is more than this: God not only wants to return to the glories of the past; His desire is that “the latter glory shall exceed the former glory” (Hag. 2:3-9) so that the final great ingathering far exceeds even the ingathering on the day of Pentecost.

Revival, renewal and restoration are all part of God’s plan for His Church. May we be granted the privilege of seeing such a revival in our land in this day, as God pours out His Spirit upon the world in a way that has never been seen before; as His House is built, His Kingdom is enlarged, His Church is perfected, in preparation for the soon-coming King!
“Even so, come Lord Jesus!”

QUESTIONS

1. Some Christians work at moral and political reform, while others pray for revival. How do we find the balance between these two ways of operating?
2. What is revival?
3. Does revival primarily affect the individual Christian, the Church, or the community?
4. What hinders revival?
5. Is revival solely a sovereign work of God, or are there things we must do to encourage it?
6. What past revivals do you know of, and what were some of the key features or characteristics of them?

2

Some Biblical Principles of Revival

Any assessment of more recent revivals, which have occurred since the Bible was written, should be examined in the light of Biblical principles, rather than vice versa. That is, we do not interpret the Bible by means of present-day experiences; we interpret experiences in terms of the Bible.

A key verse

2 Chronicles 7:14 is a key verse. God has promised blessing as a result of obedience, punishment for disobedience, and forgiveness where there is repentance. For example, Leviticus 26 shows:

- God's promised blessings on obedience (verses 3-13)
- God's threat of judgement on disobedience and sin (verses 14-39)
- God's promise of forgiveness when there is true repentance (verses 40-45)

This is summed up in 2 Chronicles 7:14 in the words:

"If **My** people, who are called by My Name, will ...

- humble themselves
- pray
- seek My face, and
- turn from their wicked ways

then I will ...

- hear from Heaven
- forgive their sin, and
- heal their land"

Read 2 Chronicles 7:12-22 for the full context of this verse.

God's conditions call on **His people** (not the world as a whole) to humble themselves (and this is often related to fasting as well), to pray, to really seek His face, to repent and turn from their wicked ways. It is always easy to judge others for their sin, but God is calling the **Church** to repentance! (See 1 Peter 4:17).

In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, God's tells the churches 8 times to repent!

Then God promises to hear our prayers, forgive our sin and bring healing to our land, physically as well as spiritually.

Key books of the Bible on revival

Some key books which illustrate revival and revival principles are:

Judges

Israel had declined as a result of compromise, idolatry, inter-marriage and immorality. God raised up 12 successive judges to bring them back to Himself. In the book of Judges we see successive cycles of sin, suffering (judgement and usually defeat), repentance, prayer,

forgiveness, deliverance and blessing (e.g., Judges 3:7-11). Unfortunately Israel never seemed to learn the lesson, and they went through the cycle again and again!

2 Chronicles

The first seven chapters of 2 Chronicles deal with Solomon's building of the Temple, its dedication, the glory of the Lord descending on it, and God's words to Solomon of both warning and promise of blessing.

After Solomon, the kingdom of Israel was divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Judah went through a succession of kings, some of whom turned their backs on God and led Judah into times of apostasy. Other kings were Godly and led their nation back to God and into times of revival. Five such Godly kings, mentioned in 2 Chronicles, were Asa (ch. 14-16), Jehoshaphat (ch. 17-20), Joash (ch. 24), Hezekiah (ch. 29-32) and Josiah (ch. 34-35).

Some of the principles of revival found in these chapters are as follows. It is interesting to see very similar patterns in each case.

The key features of each of these revivals were:

1. Idols were removed.
2. Although there were attacks from enemy nations, through prayer and seeking God, victory was won.
3. Repentance.
4. Vows to God were renewed.
5. There was a restoration of the Temple, sacrifice (which speaks of cleansing from sin) and a sanctifying of the people.
6. There was a restoration of worship and the Word of God, the Law.
7. Prophets played a prominent part in these periods of revival.
8. Tragically, all of the kings failed in some area, and in some cases their lives ended in defeat rather than in victory.

Ezra and Nehemiah

These two books will be dealt with in a later study.

Joel

Joel's prophecy called the people back to God, in true repentance, so that God would forgive and bless them, and pour out His Spirit upon them.

Jonah

Jonah's preaching caused the city of Nineveh to repent and be forgiven, thus averting God's judgement on it for its wickedness.

Haggai

When the people neglected God and His House (the Temple), and were busy renovating their own houses instead, God called His people to remember Him and to rebuild His Temple.

The Gospels

Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Law and to do what the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.

By writing God's Law on men's hearts, and through the impartation of the Holy Spirit and the new birth (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27), people were restored to a right relationship with God. Thus, through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the experience of being born again, the greatest of all personal revivals began.

Acts

The New Testament Church was born the day Jesus rose from the dead, triumphant over death and hell, and breathed His Holy Spirit into His disciples (John 20:19-22). Forty days of Jesus' appearances and instructions followed, then ten days of prayer in the upper room, before the Day of Pentecost finally came and the greatest of all revivals in Biblical times began. "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me ..." (Acts 1:8). "So being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, they ..." [began to witness in the power of the Spirit] (Acts 13:4). "... the Lord worked with them and confirmed the Word with [miraculous] signs following" (Mark 16:20).

QUESTIONS

1. How do recent revivals compare with the principles of revival outlined in this study?
2. To what sort of situations can 2 Chronicles 7:14 justifiably be applied?
3. Must we forever repeat the mistakes of the past and continue in the cycle of sin, suffering, repentance and blessing; or can we live in "continuous revival"?
4. What message has Haggai for our country today?
5. What were the failures of Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah and Josiah?
6. What part should prophets play in a present-day revival?

3

Some Biblical Principles of Revival (*continued*)

Ezra and Nehemiah

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are books of **Restoration**.

About the year 960 BC, King Solomon built a Temple to the Lord in Jerusalem. Centuries later, the people turned away from God and because of their backsliding, sin and apostasy, God allowed the Temple to be destroyed in 586 BC by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, and God's people were taken into exile and captivity in Babylon. The wall around Jerusalem was also broken down and in disrepair. While in exile for 70 years there was little concern to do anything about this fallen state, until God stirred in the heart of King Cyrus of Persia who allowed the people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem's walls. Over some years, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah led some of their people back to Jerusalem to begin this work of rebuilding and restoration.

The book of Ezra describes the rebuilding of the Temple under the decrees of Cyrus and Darius, the work being led by Zerubbabel and others. In spite of much opposition, rebuilding the Temple was completed about 516 BC. Ezra was a scribe and teacher associated with the later stages of the reformation.

The book of Nehemiah describes the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem during the reign of King Artaxerxes, the work being led by Nehemiah and completed about 444 BC.

There are many points of similarity between these two works of restoration, and many important principles of revival contained in these two books.

E Z R A

God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, King of Persia (1:1), giving him a command to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem (1:2-4). The Lord also stirred up the spirits of the people to go to Jerusalem to do the rebuilding (1:5). When God moved on the people in this way there was a generous spirit of giving (1:6; 2:68-69; 7:16). The altar was rebuilt, and the foundation laid, amidst great praise and rejoicing (3:2-13).

Opposition from the enemy

Then came opposition from the enemy! It came in seven different ways:

1. Temptation to compromise (4:1-3)
2. Discouragement (4:4)
3. Fear (4:4)
4. False counsellors (4:5)
5. Frustration (4:5)
6. False accusation (4:6-16)
7. Force used against them (4:23)

As a result, the work of rebuilding ceased for 16 years (4:24). Then, once again the people were stirred into action, this time by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (5:1-2; 6:14-15; Hag. 1:2-11). Finally, King Artaxerxes' decree to stop building was reversed (chapters 5 and 6) and the rebuilding was completed in about four years (4:24; 6:15). With great

rejoicing the temple was dedicated to the Lord and the people sanctified themselves – that is, they rededicated themselves to the Lord (6:16-21).

Chapter 7 commences about 51 years after chapter 6 ends. God's Word was restored (7:10), obedience to God's laws was enforced (7:23-26), the people fasted and sought God (8:21-23; 9:3-5; 10:6), inter-marriage with the heathen was abandoned (9:1-2), and there was deep repentance amongst the people (10:1-5, 10-17).

Ezra's example

Ezra sets a great example for us (7:10):

- He set his heart to study the Law of the Lord. The Law had been neglected and forgotten, but Ezra sought after it.
- He set his heart to practice it (cf. James 1:22-25). Before he taught it to others, he lived it first! If we do not practice what we hear and teach, we may end up in deception; and we are hypocrites if we try to teach others when we do not practice it ourselves!
- He taught it, both by word and by example.

Note the order: first he studied God's Word (so that he knew and understood what it said), then he obeyed it, then he taught it to others. What a great example for us to follow!

Ezra's prayer

In Ezra's prayer (9:6-15), note his confession, his identification with the sins of his nation, his claiming of God's faithfulness, and his trusting in the mercy of God.

Thus we see the temple restored, but more than that, a nation was restored to God.

NEHEMIAH

Although the temple had now been rebuilt for about 72 years, the walls and gates around Jerusalem were still broken down. Nehemiah now arrives on the scene. Nehemiah was a man with a:

- **Concern** (1:2), while others around him seemed unconcerned.
- **Prayer** (1:4-11), while others seemed prayerless. Like Ezra, Nehemiah in his prayer identified with his people, repenting of and confessing their sins, and reminding God of His promises – claiming the promise after he had fulfilled the conditions! The earnestness of his concern and prayer are shown by his weeping, mourning and fasting.
- **Vision** (2:5), while others had lost their vision.

Opposition from the enemy

Again, with this move of God and Nehemiah's desire to restore the gates and walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah met with persistent opposition and attempts at demoralisation:

1. Derision (2:19)
2. Despised (2:19)
3. Ridicule (4:1-3)
4. Confusion (4:8)
5. Fighting (4:8)
6. Compromise (6:2)
7. False accusation (6:6)
8. Threats (6:7)
9. Fear (6:9)
10. False prophecy (6:10 -

Yet in spite of this opposition, he went ahead to **work** and to **fight** in **faith** (4:14). Nehemiah both **built** and **battled**; he worked with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other – faith and works!

Restoration of the gates

Nehemiah and his friends rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem and its ten gates:

1. Sheep gate (3:1), which speaks of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.
2. Fish gate (3:3), which speaks of witness and evangelism.
3. Old gate (3:6), which speaks of the restoration of “old” truths.
4. Valley gate (3:13), which speaks of humbling.
5. Dung gate (3:14), which speaks of clearing out sin and filth.
6. Fountain gate (3:15), which speaks of cleansing and the Word of God.
7. Water gate (3:26), which speaks of the fulness of the Holy Spirit.
8. Horse gate (3:28), which speaks of warfare.
9. East gate (3:29), which speaks of the second coming of the Son of God.
10. Muster gate (3:31), which speaks of the gathering together of the sheep.

Principles of restoration

Nehemiah restored the wall and gates of Jerusalem (1:3; cf. Isaiah 60:18). He also restored:

1. The Word of God (8:1-8)
2. Worship (8:6)
3. Repentance (8:9) – national repentance, with weeping.
4. Obedience (8:13-18)
5. Rejoicing in God (8:17)
6. Fasting and confession (9:1-3)
7. Prayer (9:6-37). Note how he mentions God’s promises, God’s warnings, man’s disobedience, God’s punishment, and God’s mercy.
8. Acts of reformation (10:28-39; 13:1-31): sanctification, obedience to God’s laws, restoration of worship, sacrifice, giving of tithes and offerings, separation from the heathen (“unbelievers”) and no mixed marriages with them, observance of the Sabbath day (the day of rest) to keep it holy.

We have a lot to learn from the examples of Ezra and Nehemiah!

QUESTIONS

The following were major factors during the periods of restoration in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Discuss their importance in those days, and in revival and restoration today:

1. Prayer and fasting.
2. National repentance.
3. Restoration of the Word of God and the House of God.
4. Sanctifying the people and obedience to God’s laws.
5. Separation from the heathen (the ungodly)
6. Opposition from the enemy but victory over the enemy.

4

The Place of Prayer in Revival

In the last two studies we have been looking at some of the Biblical principles of revival in broad outline, as seen especially in the Old Testament.

In the following studies we will look at some of those individual principles in more detail, including the greatest of all revivals – the coming of the Son of God and the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ – as recorded in the Gospels and Acts.

All true revivals are born as a result of prayer, are carried on through prayer, and result in much fervent prayer. The travail of intercession by God's faithful people has always been foundational to the coming of revival and the sustaining of it. When prayer wanes, revival ceases.

Some people may ask "Which comes first, revival or prayer?" It is a bit like the age-old question, "Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?" Does God wait until there is "enough" prayer before He will move in revival; or is prayer a result of God moving? Do I pray "every time I feel the Spirit moving in my heart"; or do I feel the Spirit moving in my heart when I pray?

No doubt both of these are true. Revival comes in answer to the prayers of God's people (see 2 Chronicles 7:14), and God's people are also especially stirred into the ministry of prayer and intercession during times of revival.

Nevertheless, lest we wait passively for God's moving before we do anything, let us not forget that God is looking for watchmen who will both stand in the gap, interceding on behalf of their people, and who will warn the people of impending judgement if they fail to repent and get right with God (Ezekiel 3:17-19; 22:30; Isaiah 59:16).

Then, in God's time and wisdom, as He begins to pour out His Spirit in revival power, intercessors are raised up who carry the revival through. It is borne by the spirit of intercession which is given to those who are called to this ministry. This ministry of intercession involves travail in prayer – prevailing prayer that lays hold of God and sees mighty things accomplished as a result. Such a ministry is a God-given ministry in the Spirit; no-one can work it up or carry it on in the flesh!

God always longs for a pure, vital, Spirit-filled, witnessing Church, and Christlike children. So if we are willing, and fulfill His requirements, God will move, and revival will come. He is always willing to forgive those who are repentant, and to save those who will come to Him (2 Peter 3:9).

When we intercede, and obey God's commands and fulfill His requirements, we will see a sovereign move of God; indeed, it will have already begun! It is up to us to obey; it is up to God to do the rest (see 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If My people will ... then I will ...")

Thus revivals are born through prayer, and revivals inspire prayer.

Biblical examples

Moses. Moses was an intercessor. He spent two periods of 40 days on Mount Sinai, alone with God, in prayer and fasting. On one occasion as he prayed for Israel he so identified

with his people whom he loved, that he said, “But now, if You will forgive their sin – and if not, blot me, I pray, out of Your book which You have written.” (Exodus 32:32).

Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah (see previous studies).

Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel. Read Ezra 9:5-15; Nehemiah 9:6-37; and Daniel 9:3-20. Notice especially in these passages:

(a) Fasting and weeping accompanied their intercessions. These men were deeply moved in their spirits as they prayed in earnest for their people, and interceded for their nation.

(b) Identification with their people over the sins of the nation. Their sins were confessed specifically – by name – and repented of, publicly, before God. There was no desire to point the finger at other people’s sins: “we have sinned ...” Their sole desire was national repentance, confession and forgiveness (cf. Jonah 3).

(c) Casting themselves on God’s mercy. Reminding themselves of God’s goodness and greatness, of His promises, His desire to forgive and to bless, they cast themselves on God’s mercy. Intercession is very humbling!

Anna. Prior to Jesus’ birth and ministry, we see people like Anna who “did not depart from the Temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:37). Probably Joseph, Mary, Simeon, Zechariah, Elizabeth and (later) John the Baptist were also looking forward to the coming of the Messiah with prayer and eager expectation (cf. Luke 2:25-32). The coming of the Son of God was thus prepared by prayer. “Prepare the way of the Lord!” (Luke 3:4). God obviously revealed much to John the Baptist in the wilderness, regarding the Messiah who was about to be revealed to Israel, and no doubt John prayed much for that day (cf. John 1:29-34).

Jesus. Jesus’ whole life was permeated by prayer. How else could He say that He only did those things which His Father told and showed Him? (John 5:19-20). Immediately after He was baptized in water and the Spirit, He spent 40 days in prayer and fasting in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-2), before He began His public ministry. He spent all night in prayer before choosing His disciples (Luke 6:12-16), and He spent several hours in prayer the night before He went to the cross. Even now, today, “He ever lives to make intercession for us” (Hebrews 7:25).

The disciples before Pentecost, together with the women, spent 10 days in united prayer and waiting for the promise of the Father (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:1 - 2:4, especially 1:14). Then God poured out His Spirit and Israel saw the greatest spiritual awakening ever as thousands upon thousands of people found Jesus Christ as their Lord, Saviour and Messiah, and went out with the Gospel to “turn the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

There are many other examples in Scripture and throughout history, of individuals and nations being called to prayer and fasting in order to prepare for a move of God in revival, restoration, deliverance, repentance and forgiveness, etc. Nations were called to prayer and fasting, with repentance, and God moved to save them and restore them. Prayer and fasting played a major part prior to all Old Testament revivals.

Tragically, the revivals usually only lasted a few decades at the most. Each generation needs its own revival, for we cannot live on the revival blessings which our parents received! “Revive *me*, O God!”

Why pray?

1. Because prayer shows our total dependence on God. Nothing of eternal value is ever achieved by human might or power. It is only by the sovereign moving of God's Spirit that such things are accomplished (Zechariah 4:6). Unless we pray, unless we cast ourselves upon God and His mercy, we will not see the revival we desire. We are utterly dependent upon God. No man can bring revival; it cannot be organised or worked up; it must be prayed down. We must pray!
2. Because God has told us to pray. "Ask and you shall receive" (see Luke 11:5-13). "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). In other words, there are some things God desires to give us and to do for us which we do not receive simply because we do not ask. See also Isaiah 65:1-2.
3. Because it is through prayer that God can reveal His ways to us. In seeking to move with God we need His revelation – a vision of what He is doing and going to do. "Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). We need to seek God in prayer, in order to know His will and be in such a place that we can move with God. As we seek God, so we get to know Him better. As we pray, God can reveal hindrances in our lives. As we wait on God, He can prepare us, to use us for His glory.

The place of prayer in the NT Church

- Ten days of prayer preceded the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (the "promise of the Father") on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14)
- It was on the way to the place of prayer that a miraculous healing occurred, as a result of which about 5000 people were converted (Acts 3:1; 4:4)
- Prayer preceded a further outpouring of the Spirit and bold witness (Acts 4:24-33)
- Deacons, elders and apostles were chosen and ordained after prayer and fasting (Acts 6:6; 13:2-3; 14:23)
- The Holy Spirit was outpoured on the Gentiles as a result of the constant prayers of Cornelius and Peter (Acts 10:2, 9, 30)
- Peter was released from prison as a result of prayer (Acts 12:5); so were Paul and Silas, and a Philippian jailer and his household were saved as a result (Acts 16:25)
- Miracles, healings and the raising of the dead were associated with, and accomplished through, the prayers of the believers (e.g., Acts 9:37-40; 19:11-12; 20:9-12; 27:9, 21-25, 33-35)

Would we like to see the same results? Then we need to pray too!

QUESTIONS

1. At what stage of "revival" do you believe we are in now?
2. What can we do in order to hasten the coming of revival?
3. "Your people shall be willing in the day of Your power" (Psalm 110:3). What does this mean?
4. What is a "spirit of travailing prayer" and what can we do so that God gives such a spirit of prayer to His people?
5. Discuss the inter-relationship between prayer and revival; that is, prayer bringing about revival and revival bringing about a new release in prayer.
6. "The key to God's blessing in revival is a passionate desire to know the Lord more closely and more deeply". Discuss this statement.

5

A Return to the Word of God

One of the things which marks backsliding and apostasy is a denial of, or turning away from, the Word of God. When God's Word is neglected and persistently disobeyed, moral and spiritual problems quickly follow. This is just as true of society as a whole, as it is of individuals.

"The Law is a school teacher to bring us to Christ" (Galatians 3:24), but if this Law is watered-down, liberalized, "re-interpreted" (that is, given token acknowledgment but in fact denied), then sin will abound, leading to apostasy.

Conversely, in all times of true revival, there has been a return to the Word of God as the authoritative, inspired direction and laws of God for His people. E.g., Ezra (Ezra 7:10, 25-26), Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:14-33); cf. Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36:1-32). In times of revival there is a return to the reading, studying and preaching of the Bible as the authoritative, inspired Word of God, the authority by which our lives are to be governed.

The inspired, authoritative, infallible Word of God

1. Inspired

By "inspired" we mean that the Bible was inspired by God and that, while He used men to write it down, the thoughts and content were of divine inspiration, not human invention. Therefore we cannot argue against it; as Christians we are to obey it! The Bible is not like a lamb which needs to be defended; it is like a lion – let it loose and it will defend itself!

Over 200 years ago a very well-known French philosopher Voltaire said that within 100 years the Bible would be a forgotten book. One hundred years later the house he had lived in was the headquarters of the Geneva Bible Society! Voltaire is almost unknown today, while the Bible continues to be the world's best seller! Voltaire has no effect on most people's lives today, while the Bible has a profound effect on the lives of hundreds of millions of people!

2. Authoritative

Because the Bible is inspired by God, it is the supreme authority in the life of the Christian, and the Church as a whole. Unscriptural traditions, superstitions, the doctrines of men, etc., are to be rejected. There is one book, the Bible, that is uniquely inspired and our sole authority; there is no other such book. This does not, of course, mean that we should never read other Christian books. It simply means that while other Christian books may have some measure of inspiration, they do not have the stamp of total divine inspiration and authority, or infallibility. All other books will pass away, but God's Word will never pass away (Mark 13:31).

There is no other basis for doctrine, correction, reproof, Christian conduct, morality, etc., other than God's Word (2 Timothy 3:14-17). All Christian faith, hope, belief and living is based on it.

God's Word is not relative; it is absolute! God does not say "I think this ... or possibly this is true". He says "Thus saith the Lord ..." and "I am the truth" (John 14:6).

In these days when there is so much “relative” teaching (“situation ethics”, “political correctness”, etc.), where nothing is taught as black and white but everything is taught as shades of grey, it is reassuring to know that there is a sure foundation upon which we can stand; a basis for discerning right from wrong, truth from error, good from evil.

3. Infallible

By “infallible” we mean that the Bible, as originally given, was without error of any kind. It is completely true, correct and perfect in every sense of the word.

The earliest parts of the Bible were probably written about 3500 years ago, and the latest about 1900 years ago. So we no longer have the original manuscripts, and the copies we do have may differ slightly in various parts, especially in the Old Testament where the meaning of some phrases is uncertain. Moreover, all English Bibles are translations of what was originally Hebrew, Chaldean, Aramaic (a derived Hebrew dialect) and Greek.

However, God has so over-ruled in the preservation of very old texts, and in translation, that there is no major doctrine or important fact that is in dispute as a result of this. While the meaning of a few verses or parts of verses may be still in doubt, they in no way affect the life, faith or conduct of Christian believers today. God has miraculously preserved His Word over 3500 years of history!

So the Bible is the only basis on which we can discuss differences in doctrine, Church practice, etc. It is our sole authority, our final judge, in all matters of faith and conduct.

A warning!

However, having said that, let us beware that we do not allow doctrine to divide true Christians. In “defending the faith” we must beware that we do not attack fellow Christians! Herein lies the problem: while we must earnestly seek after and practice the truth, we will find that other true believers differ in some points from us. If they are born-again Christians who believe God’s Word, and are seeking to do His will, we should by all means discuss doctrinal differences but not allow them to divide us.

How can we know the truth?

The Bible is our final authority in all matters of faith and conduct. If something is Scriptural, then we are to believe it and do it. If it is contrary to Scripture, then we must have no part in it.

Jesus said to the Jews who believed in Him, “If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the Truth, and the Truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32). Notice that those who know the truth are those who are true believers in Jesus Christ and who obey His word. Jesus also said that “When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all the Truth” (John 16:13). In both these passages the word “you” is in the plural; that is, the whole Truth is not given privately to individual Christians but the Truth is revealed by the Holy Spirit to the Church as a whole (cf. 2 Peter 1:20).

Thus, to know the Truth we must **believe**, we must **obey**, and we must have our ears open to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to and through the Church as a whole. If we do not believe the Bible to be the inspired, authoritative Word of God then our own minds will lead us into all sorts of heresies. If we do not obey the Bible then we will deceive ourselves (James 1:22); in fact, we have to deceive ourselves in order to disobey what we know is true! If we fail to realise that God is revealing Truth to the whole Church, the whole of His Body, then we will become petty, introverted, exclusive, narrow-minded little denominational

cliques, instead of the mighty Church of Jesus Christ that we are meant to be. It is, of course, “exclusive truth”, usually revealed to one individual person, that begins a cult.

The written Word

In the Bible we have the written eternal Word of God (*logos*) given to all people for all time. We must, of course, be careful how we apply this Word to our lives. Picking verses out of context for guidance, picking out promises, etc., can lead us into error. However, it is the objective, un-changing Word of God which keeps us from going into the extremes of existentialism or the experiential. Over-emphasis on spiritual experiences and the supernatural, to the exclusion of God’s written Word, has hindered revivals in the past. We need both the Spirit, and the Word, of God.

The quickened Word

The quickened Word (*rhema*) is when the Holy Spirit takes a portion of the written Word and applies it very directly to our lives today. It is quickened (made alive) to us in such a way that we *know* God has spoken to us then and there, by His Spirit.

The revealed Word

The revealed Word (*apokalupto*) of God is when the Holy Spirit speaks directly to our mind and spirit, giving us a personal word or revelation concerning His will for us. He may bring understanding of the Scriptures, reveal the future, guide us, assure us, or help us in some particular area of need, etc. This, however, in no way excludes the need for the written and quickened Word. All three must be kept in balance.

QUESTIONS

1. What promises has God given to those who meditate on his Word? (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2-3)
2. How can we distinguish truth from error in the Church? If some doctrine or tradition is neither found in the Bible nor contrary to it, what should we do?
3. What is the significance of the fact that three times in Matthew 4:1-11 Jesus said, “It is written ...”, and that the devil also quoted Scripture?
4. Can there be authority in our preaching if we do not preach and use God’s Word? (cf. Acts 2:14-36 where almost half of Peter’s sermon, as recorded, was quoted Scripture).
5. Why is there so little true *expository* preaching of the Bible today?
6. Does 1 John 2:27 mean that we no longer need to read the Bible or listen to people teach God’s Word? If not, what does it mean?

6

Revival: A Supernatural Move of God

One of the key features of revival is that God moves in a supernatural way – that is, He does things which He does not normally do. While some things, like evangelism, preaching, prayer meetings, etc., may be organized, revival goes far beyond this, and at times God moves sovereignly and quite independently of people. This may be seen, too, in the fact that God often moves quite suddenly and unexpectedly in times of revival – He takes us by surprise! (For example, see 2 Chronicles 29:36; Malachi 3:1; Acts 2:2 “suddenly”).

The presence and power of God

During times of revival, the presence and power of God are revealed in unique ways. The supernatural and the miraculous are so evident that “why should they say among the people, ‘Where is their God?’.” (Joel 2:17)

Today, many people question or even deny the existence of God, while others, worshipping false gods, claim their gods are true. But when God lays bare His arm in revival power, no-one will question if there is a God and Who He is – people will know! They may still choose to turn their backs on Him, but they will do so, knowingly.

When revival occurs in a nation, the nation will know! No revival ever occurred in secret! In the revival we read about in Acts, the early Christians were accused, by *unbelievers*, of turning the world upside down! (Acts 17:6).

God’s Spirit is outpoured

“I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17). During revival, Christians are awakened, filled with the Holy Spirit, endued with power from on High, equipped with supernatural gifts of the Spirit and become zealous in sharing their renewed faith with the lost. This is well illustrated by the examples of Jesus, His 120 followers in Acts 2, Paul, etc., all of whom, after their baptism in water and the Holy Spirit, were used by God to perform miracles and to preach the Gospel with power and authority, thus leading thousands into salvation.

Supernatural (divine) manifestations and miracles accompanied the preaching of the Gospel, “the Lord ... confirming the Word with signs following” (Mark 16:20).

Notice that Jesus promised that signs would accompany “those who believe” (Mark 16:15-20). We can be either a “believing believer” who sees these signs occur because we believe, or we can be an “unbelieving believer” who does not see God’s miraculous working in and through our lives because we do not believe, even though we may be saved. God wants believing believers! Moreover, there is a real need for *corporate* faith within the Church, and not just in individual believers, if we are really to see God’s power released in the world.

The place of miracles

While God, in His grace, may give signs to confirm His Word and minister blessing to His people, we must beware of just seeking signs and wonders for their own sake. On one occasion (John 6) Jesus was disappointed that people followed Him because He had miraculously fed them with five loaves and two fish. Seeing that their interests were so carnal, Jesus spoke to them very frankly concerning His death and the true Bread of Life

which He would give to those who would follow Him. As a result, “many of His disciples drew back and no longer went about with Him” (v. 66).

The Lord Himself is far greater and far more important than all the miracles, signs and wonders He may perform, good though they are. Let us not get our eyes off Him and onto things instead. We must seek Him, rather than gifts, etc. The latter He graciously gives to those who hunger after Him (cf. Matthew 6:33).

Praise God for miracles, but miracles in themselves do not necessarily indicate Godliness or great spirituality. They should lead us closer to God, and are certainly a blessing to us, but let us not be like the “evil and adulterous generation” which seeks signs but still will not follow the Lord (Matthew 12:38-42). This does *not* mean that it is evil and adulterous to ask God for signs or miracles; it does mean that evil people demand signs and wonders and when they are given, they still refuse to repent and follow Christ. In fact, Jesus gave these scribes and Pharisees the greatest of all signs (His death and resurrection) but many still refused to believe. See also John 12:9-11, 37-43.

Praise God for supernatural moves of His Spirit, for signs and wonders and miracles, but let us not become too preoccupied with them, lest our hearts be turned away from God and onto them.

Emotions

All times of revival have been times of great joy, ecstasy and emotion. Emotions, of course, are not wrong in themselves; in fact they are God-given. But emotionalism, the over-emphasis on emotions and seeking emotional experiences for their own sake, can be very harmful, especially to our Christian lives. Excessive emotionalism has caused many problems in past and present revivals. Once again, balance is needed!

The early and the latter rain

In Joel 2, the chapter where God promises to pour out His Spirit on all flesh (v. 28), He also mentions both “the early and the latter rain” (v. 23). The early rain was needed, after the sowing of the seed, in order to cause the seed to germinate and begin to grow. The latter rain was needed, just before the harvest, to bring the grain into full maturity. James 5:7-8 indicates that this, spiritually, refers to the outpouring of God’s Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in AD 30 (“the early rain”), and the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit just prior to the return of the Lord Jesus to reap the harvest at the Second Coming (“the latter rain”).

Steps towards revival

God usually moves on church leaders – pastors, elders (“priests”; cf. Joel 2:17-19; Haggai 1:12-14); then He moves on Christians in the church; then the unconverted church-goers (nominal Christians), and then on the community at large (cf. 1 Peter 4:17). God sets His Household in order first, starting at the top with His leaders, and then moves out into the rest of the world.

When the leaders of the churches first get right with God and with each other, the sheep will follow, and it will soon affect the world at large.

Move with God

The Israelites in the Old Testament, after their deliverance from bondage in Egypt, were miraculously led and provided for by God. During the day God went before them in a pillar of cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. The cloud protected them from the scorching desert

sun and the fire protected them from wild animals and provided warmth during the cold nights (cf. Psalm 121). It was thus most important to move when the cloud moved and to remain still when the cloud remained still (Exodus 40:36-38). If we want to be at the centre of God's will and to see revival come, we too must be prepared to move with God, not trying to run ahead of Him, nor lagging behind, nor refusing to go further, but simply moving where and when He leads. Thus we are not to be like the horse which tries to run ahead, nor like the stubborn mule which will not move (Psalm 32:8-9). We must move with God – that's where the glory is!

QUESTIONS

1. What place should miracles have in a Christian's life and witness?
2. What is meant in this study by an "unbelieving believer"?
3. Revivals are often associated with miracles, and a supernatural or sovereign move of God. What problems might this cause?
4. How can we be sure that we always continue to move with God and not stagnate at some point in our Christian experience or in God's ongoing restoration move?
5. Is it true that revival always begins with leaders, then involves the people, and then the world? If not, why not?
6. Discuss the statement: "Restoration and reformation are our duty; revival is God's duty".

7

Opposition to Revival

Whenever there are times of revival, there is always a counterattack from the enemy of men's souls. Obviously Satan is not at all pleased when people repent, confess their sin and are born again; when they renounce the devil and all his works of unrighteousness; when they acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ in their lives, and when they become engaged in spiritual warfare against evil principalities and powers.

However, although the enemy will counter-attack, *we must not fear him*, for "greater is He (the Spirit of Christ) Who is within you, than he (the devil) who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

This opposition from the enemy may come in a variety of ways, and it may be either personal or corporate – against an individual Christian who is really determined to go on with God, or it may be against a group (e.g., a local church) in which God is moving and which is experiencing a revival touch from God. It may even be more widespread and affect a city or a nation.

Today, around the world, God is pouring out His Spirit upon believers in a wonderful way – upon "all flesh", old and young, mature and new Christians, leaders and people alike (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18) but there are also strong Satanic attacks and deception.

These attacks involve widespread sexual immorality and perversion, rebellion (violence, terrorism, persecution), and idolatry (occult, worship of false gods, cults, humanism and atheism), all of which have many associated evils.

Tragically these have also affected the church: even some people within the churches have been affected by immorality, drugs, rebellion and idolatry (especially materialism and self-centredness).

Attacks against believers

The spiritual attacks against Christians are many and varied. Some of them include:

1. Counterfeit manifestations

While God has been imparting spiritual gifts to His people, and these have been a great blessing, the enemy always sows weeds amongst the wheat – evil, counterfeit manifestations – and often great discernment is needed to distinguish the true from the false, and to know how to deal with the false.

The early Church faced the same sorts of deception, Satan mingling the false with the genuine move of God (e.g., Acts 4:32 – 5:11; 8:4-24; 13:4-12; 16:16-18). Note, however, God's ultimate victory in every case.

2. Division

One of the surest ways of rendering anything ineffective is to cause division within it. Again, even the early Church in its time of revival faced situations which caused division, although, praise God, the situations were handled in the right way so that once again the enemy's tactics were frustrated (see Acts 6:1-6; 9:22-31; 11:1-18; 15:1-33, 36-41; 21:20-26; Gal. 2:11-14).

One of the most devilish things that the communists did in the churches in China, in Watchman Nee's time (1960s and 1970s), was to hold "accusation meetings" in the churches, at which Christians were encouraged to criticise their pastors and elders, point out their faults, enumerate their sins, etc. Tragically, the Christians did just this, and it caused so much mistrust, division and demoralisation that the communists could then remove the leadership without the Christians objecting! United we stand; divided we fall! No wonder God gives us strict instructions concerning being "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3), about how to deal with differences (Matt. 18:15-17), and how to deal with accusations against elders (1 Tim. 5:19).

3. Sin

If the enemy cannot succeed in bringing down Christians in other ways, he will always use temptation. Often Christians are perplexed at the strong temptations they face, especially when they have been Christians for many years and yet still face strong temptations in certain areas. Temptation, sin and consequent condemnation are almost certain to discourage the Christian more than anything else.

The tragedy is that the spirit of this world – "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16) – still take their toll on Christians, and even Christian leadership, seeking to bring the whole Gospel into disrepute.

As never before, the Church must rise up, individually and corporately, and come against the spirit of worldliness and against these works of the flesh. Only a clean Church can ever hope to stand in the face of strong opposition from the enemy. We must put off the old nature, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God, in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:22-24).

4. Persecution

Whenever Christians take a stand for the Lord and are determined to follow His ways of righteousness, rather than the ways of the world, there may be opposition, scorn and ridicule. While this at times can be very hard to face, nevertheless we can be victorious through the strength that God gives us. Moreover, God has given some wonderful promises to those who overcome such opposition and persecution (Rev. 2:7, 10-11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21).

"All who desire to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). We need to realistically face this fact, and, indeed, face it joyfully, not with fear (Matt. 5:10-12). In this area, perhaps more than any other, Christians need to stand together in unity, to strengthen and support one another, remembering that Jesus has promised never to fail us, nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Never fear, God is near, and victory is ours! (Rev. 7:14; 12:11).

In times of revival ...

In the Old Testament we see that when genuine revival came, the people repented of their sins and forsook them, put away their idols, broke down the house of Baal and its altars, removed the heathen priests, cleansed and restored the Temple and its worship of God, and restored the Sabbath day. These same areas need to be dealt with in our day and generation, in our nation. When revival comes, they will be!

A sad indictment on the spiritual state of the Church today is that often when Christians stand for righteousness and the ways of God, they face not only demonic opposition from the world but even from some within the Church itself (cf. Ezra 10:10-15).

Opposition, persecution and bloodshed frequently follow revival (see Acts 7:51-60; 12:1-4). When God moves, the devil always opposes. Demons are stirred up, and with them come hatred, opposition and persecution. This happened in the early Church, and this has also happened in countries in more recent times. But we should never fear persecution; in fact Peter says “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you ... but rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, so that when His glory is revealed, you will be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

What should be of greater concern to us is that if we do not pray for, and work towards, revival, God may allow judgement and persecution to come in order to revive us. May this not be so, but so great is God’s concern for a revived Church and nation that He will, if necessary, use even persecution to bring about revival.

What must we do?

If we are to really see God move in revival power and in personal revival, we need to:

1. **Put away all idols.** Everything in our lives which takes the place that the Lord should have, must be put away. As Christians we must renounce all such idols and idolatry: the occult, and all idolatrous things such as immorality, materialism, worldliness, etc. (Deut. 6:10-15; 8:11-20).
2. **Be clean before God.** Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and life, revealing all sin, and for the cleansing Blood of Jesus to cleanse and deliver you from all the works of the flesh or the enemy. Specific deliverance from Satanic bondages may also be required.
3. **Renounce the enemy.** Renounce the enemy and all his works, being careful however not to ridicule or revile him (Jude 9-10). See Acts 19:11-20.
4. **Become engaged in spiritual warfare,** especially intercession, and persevere until you come through to a place of victory! Jesus said, “He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with Me on My throne, as I Myself conquered and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21).

QUESTIONS

1. Most moves of God are not just opposed by those outside the Church, but also by many within it. Why?
2. Does moral and/or spiritual decline necessarily precede revival? Does persecution necessarily follow revival?
3. The thought of tribulation, persecution or even strong opposition can cause us to fear, or try to hide from it, or ignore it by burying our heads in the sand and pretending it is not really true. How can we overcome these undesirable alternatives? How should we face opposition or persecution?
4. How can we “rejoice” in the face of persecution?
5. How can we discern counterfeit manifestations and demonic deception within the Church?
6. Why is unity so important in these last days?

8

Repentance

Repentance is a subject that is not often preached in many churches today. We often try to excuse sin by calling it a “weakness” or a “problem”, saying that it is a “sickness” or has been inherited (“genetic”). But until we call sin “sin”, we will never truly repent of it, and until we really repent of it, we will never receive forgiveness, cleansing or deliverance from its power.

Repentance is the only way into the Kingdom of God.

The words “repent” and “repentance” occur over 100 times in the Bible. The call to repentance was a frequent occurrence in the messages of the prophets. John the Baptist’s message began with a call to repentance (Matthew 3:2, 8), so did Jesus (Matthew 4:17), so did the early disciples (Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30). Repentance is *fundamental* to the Gospel message and to salvation. **There is no salvation without repentance and forgiveness!** It is, therefore, God’s will that everyone, everywhere, should repent rather than perish (2 Peter 3:9).

We cannot excuse sin, hide it or deny it; we can only repent of it.

What does it mean to repent?

“Godly grief works unregrettable repentance, leading to salvation; but the grief of the world leads to death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly grief, leading to true repentance and forgiveness, is demonstrated in the life of Peter (Luke 22:31-32, 54-62; John 21:15-19). Worldly sorrow, leading to death, is shown by the life of Judas (Matthew 26:47-57; 27:3-10).

“Repentance” means a genuine sorrow, remorse or grief for sin; a turning away from that sin; changing one’s mind or heart or attitude towards that sin; seeking God’s forgiveness, with a desire and determination not to commit that sin again.

Repentance – deep repentance – is not just being sorry because we have been caught, or because of some of the bad consequences or punishment that results from that sin. Only “Godly grief” can lead to true repentance. In Acts 2:37 the people were “cut to the heart” – that is Godly sorrow.

As individuals, and as a nation, we need a supernatural conviction of sin – the Holy Spirit convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:8-11), leading to deep repentance.

In times of past revivals, the conviction of sin has often been so great that people have been convicted of sin in the streets or in their homes, without anyone preaching to them or witnessing to them. Such conviction, when it leads to Godly sorrow and repentance, produces real conversion and a life that is permanently transformed (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). Dare we accept anything less?

While it is the Christian preacher’s task to preach the Truth and the full counsel of God, it is primarily the Holy Spirit’s task, not ours, to convict people of sin. The Truth, preached under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, will do its work (cf. Hebrews 4:12-13) but we must beware that we do not bring people into condemnation by our own judgement of them (cf. Romans 8:1-4).

Repentance is an unpopular word when preached to a resisting heart, but when it is preached in love, in the context of God's grace, mercy and forgiveness, then it is like water for the thirsty soul, to those who will respond.

Repentance must not be legalistically preached, but taught with compassion, just as Jesus said: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and *sin no more*" (John 8:11).

When repentance is complete and forgiveness is received, a burden is lifted, and this leads to great joy, relief and enthusiasm for the things of God.

National repentance

In the lives of individuals, and in the Church, we have seen a measure of repentance. We have yet to see repentance on a national level – where our nation, recognising its backsliding and sin, through its leaders (both secular and spiritual) repents and turns back to God and *His* ways.

Christian leaders especially need to call our nation to repentance. We need to humble ourselves before God, confess our sins of the past and pray for divine intervention in the affairs of our nation, so that we will follow a new course.

The alternative is judgement. Tragically, so often in history God has had to allow judgement in order to bring a nation to its knees in repentance, because it would not repent in any other way. For example, Nineveh in Jonah 3; and the Israelites under the judges (e.g., Judges 3:7-11). Also, when Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go, and God sent 10 signs or plagues and judgements against Egypt, until Pharaoh let them go.

Chapters 9 and 10 of Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel all show the effects of national humbling, repentance and seeking God. God will always forgive under such conditions and turn defeat into victory.

Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 both declare God's blessings for obedience, the curses of disobedience, and God's willingness to show mercy and forgiveness whenever a nation repents.

The portion of the verse "Be sure your sin will find you out" (read Numbers 32:16-23) is often applied to the individual, but it is just as true of a nation as a whole. "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked. For whatever a man [or nation] sows, that will he also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will, from the flesh, reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will, from the Spirit, reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7-8). In many cases, the punishment which we reap is in-built in the sin itself; we cannot avoid it. The "fruit" are the results of what we sow.

Individually, God is calling us to cleanse our lives from all sin. He is calling for a return to righteousness and holiness (holy living). Corporately, He desires that we have righteous, God-fearing leaders who will lead our nation out of the ways of the enemy and back to God. This does not mean, of course, that everyone will respond, but the righteous laws and commands of God need to be proclaimed to the nation, and the nation as a whole needs to be called back to God through true repentance and confession of sin.

So great is God's love towards us that if we will not heed the gentle call and warnings of His Spirit, He may allow tribulation and judgement to come upon our land in order that people's hearts will be turned back to Himself, for He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

QUESTIONS

1. Illustrate how, with many of our nation's sins, the punishment is inbuilt in the sin itself without God having to intervene by bringing punishment, and thus how we literally "reap what we sow".
2. Show how the nation of Israel's sins of failing to destroy her enemies, and compromise, resulted in her sins "finding her out" (Numbers 32:16-23)
3. "The subject of repentance should not be associated with legalism but with grace". Discuss this, and show how it can be done.
4. How does true repentance affect:
 - (a) the intellect
 - (b) the emotions
 - (c) the will?
5. How can a nation be brought to repentance? Is divine intervention essential?
6. Discuss the various aspects of national repentance, as described in chapters 9 and 10 of Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel.

9

The Lordship of Christ and Holiness

When revival comes ...

“Who can abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire ...” (Malachi 3:2). We are to be a holy people, and one of the marks of true revival is a restoration of holiness amongst God’s people, as God convicts them of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:7-11). “Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). Sin is exposed and people become aware of the holiness and majesty of God, during times of revival (see Acts 2:43; 5:1-16). In fact, we will all react in one of two ways: either we will praise and worship God, or we will confess our sins, when God comes in this way. Those with clean hearts will worship Him; those without clean hearts will confess to Him! (see Isaiah 6:1-7).

A fear of God will come over people, which will keep them from sin. This involves a deep awe and reverence for God; respect for, and obedience to, His laws; and a real sense of His sovereignty and Lordship. See Exodus 20:18-20; Jeremiah 32:39-40. “The fear of the Lord is the hatred of evil” (Proverbs 8:13). Godly fear leads to obedience (Haggai 1:12).

Backslidden Christians will be restored, unbelievers will be converted, sin will be dealt with at a much deeper level than ever before. There will be great conviction of sin, followed by deep and true repentance, and confession (Psalm 24:3-4; Isaiah 57:15).

When revival comes, vice will decline. In revivals of the past, when God’s holiness has been seen and conviction of sin is great, pubs, brothels, gambling places, theatres, dance halls and evil places closed down through lack of patronage!

In the day of God’s power, when His presence is revealed, there will be an awareness that He is truly “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16). In fact, if any Christian is ever to reach maturity in Christ, and if any revival is ever to be more than superficial and transient, there must come a real awakening to, and practical awareness of, the full meaning of the Lordship of Christ and the holiness which is required in the Christian’s life. “Strive ... for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

In our personal preparation for revival we need a revelation of the sovereignty and holiness of God. We need to earnestly seek after personal holiness, sanctification, true discipleship – something a lot deeper than most of us realise. This is not just an intellectual acceptance of our “righteousness in Christ”; it is something far more, something which is evidenced by the fruit of transformed Christian lives, a practical outworking of our righteousness in Christ, in our daily lives. And this is neither automatic, nor easy. This is why Hebrews 12:14 says “Strive for holiness ...”

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

Two great themes of the Christian faith, as far as the life of Christ is concerned, are His death and resurrection. In the death of Christ we see the full payment of the penalty or wages for our sin – we see Christ as our Saviour. In the resurrection of Christ we see His victory over death and His exaltation to glory and power (see Philippians 2:9-11); here we see Him as Lord. Thus we have the twin roles of Jesus – our Saviour and Lord.

As in most things, it is important that we maintain a balance between these, as the Bible does. We must never lose sight of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and all that means to us. But too often we are ready to acknowledge Him as Saviour, without really making Him Lord of our lives.

It is interesting to note that the word “Lord” occurs in the New Testament over 700 times, but the word “Saviour” only occurs 24 times (and in 8 of those times it occurs with the word “Lord”).

God not only wants to save us from our sins, but He also wants to be Lord of our lives – and this is where the test really comes. Who wouldn’t accept God’s forgiveness, so freely offered, if God asked nothing of us? But God demands all! “Whoever would save his life will lose it,” said Jesus, “but whoever loses (or gives up) his life for My sake, shall find it” (Luke 9:24). Have you lost your life by trying to selfishly keep it for yourself, or have you really found life, by giving it up to God?

The Lordship of Christ

Read Matthew 7:21-23. This may be a difficult passage to interpret, but one thing is certain: calling Christ “Lord” means nothing unless it is accompanied by a life of obedience to Him. No amount of good works, miracles, or anything else can substitute for a life which is totally yielded to, and under the control of, the Holy Spirit. There is a lot of truth in the saying “Lord of all, or not Lord at all!” A soldier is expected to be totally obedient, without question, to his superiors. How much more should we be, to the Lord of Hosts! In Acts 10:14 Peter says “No, Lord”. Now this is a contradiction: if Jesus is Lord, then you cannot say “No” to Him; if you say “No” to Him then He is not your Lord!

“If you confess with your lips that ‘Jesus is Lord’, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead (to an exalted place of Lordship) you will be saved” (see Romans 10:9-13). “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

What does “Jesus is Lord” imply?

In Paul’s time, every Roman soldier, once a year, had to make an oath of allegiance to imperial Rome and say “Caesar is lord”. To say this meant total allegiance, obedience and surrender to his commands. To say “Jesus is Lord” is to give total allegiance, obedience and surrender to the commands of Christ.

Paul (Titus 1:1), James (1:1), Peter (2 Pet. 1:1) and Jude (1:1) all call themselves servants or slaves of Christ. When we come to Christ, spiritually we are set free – no force can bind us; and yet we also become slaves of Christ! (See 1 Corinthians 7:22). At first this thought may not seem very pleasant – we all want to live for ourselves: “I want to be my own boss and run my own life”. But, strange as it may seem, no one is really free. 2 Peter 2:19 says that those who try to cast off all restraints “promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption”. See also Romans 6:20-22. In other words, we are either slaves of sin or slaves of God. Has Christ set us free from bondage to sin and to the world? If so, then we are free slaves of Christ! A slave – how terrible? No, how wonderful to freely serve the King of kings!

But a master does not expect partial obedience from his servants; he expects total obedience. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other” (Luke 16:13). Christ demands total, undivided allegiance. Do you love the Lord? If you say you do, did you know that Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Imagine a person volunteering for the army but stating that he would only join on the condition that he did not have to obey all the orders, but could choose whether or not he would obey each one! The army would have no hesitation in giving him the boot! Neither do we have the choice if we are to truly acknowledge Jesus as Lord. It's all or nothing. We are either "hot or cold", or else He will spew us out of His mouth (Revelation 3:15-16). There are only two types of servants, as Jesus shows us in Matthew 24:45-51. The faithful and wise servant does his master's will; the wicked servant is tossed out – he is no servant at all!

Where do we stand in the realm of obedience to the Lordship of Christ?

What is a "slave of Christ"?

The Greek word "*doulos*" means servant, slave or bond-slave. But what does this really mean? Basically, a slave had only one right: the right to obey his master. Too often we Christians want to stand on our rights: "I had the right to answer him back"; "I was within my rights to get even with him"; "I'm not going to let people trample over me!"

No, the slave of Christ has no rights except to lovingly obey and serve his Lord. This means that we have no rights in business, in our homes, in our jobs, in our personal relationships, in the way in which we use our time, money, possessions or talents; in our reputation, or even our life, except to do the will of God. We gladly, joyfully submit to His will!

How terrible? No, how wonderful! How glorious it is to know that our whole life is in the hands of, and under the full control of, a loving God who desires only the best, only His perfect plan, for our lives! **Yes, Lord!**

If we believe that God has all wisdom, that He has all power, and that He loves us with a perfect, everlasting love, then surely His desire is for the very best possible for our lives. God knows best; God wants us to have the best. So gladly I surrender all to Him!

Lip service or true Lordship?

See Mark 10:17-22. When Jesus said "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone", what did He mean? Was He denying His deity? Certainly not! This man came running to Jesus, knelt before Him and called Him "Good Teacher" [or "Good Lord"]. Outwardly he acknowledged the Lordship and deity of Christ, but inwardly he refused to submit to the authority of Jesus and obey what He said; he would not give his riches to the poor. This is why Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father" (Matthew 7:21). Do we just say "Lord", or do we allow Him to fully control our lives and so make Him Lord in practice? Do we give Christ lip-service or true Lordship?

Conclusion

1. Because God loves us with an everlasting love, and because He knows far better than we do, what is best for us, to submit to His Lordship and authority is the most sensible, wonderful and satisfying thing we can ever do. Any choice we make which is not according to His will, is far inferior to what He would have chosen for us. This is why the Psalmist said, "I delight to do Thy will, O Lord" (Psalm 40:8) and why the Bible says that God's commandments are not grievous to us (1 John 5:3). We should gladly acknowledge Jesus as Lord and delight in God's will and His commands.

2. God never takes away from us our free will. At any stage we can choose to disobey Him and go our own way. We are not machines in God's hands; but to choose otherwise can only lead to sin, frustration and a very poor second-best in our lives.

3. We do not necessarily have to give away all our possessions, or give up our job, our friends, or anything else, but we must be willing to, and we must do whatever God shows us is right. We must seek God's will and then be obedient.

4. Read Isaiah 6:1-9a. Isaiah saw the Lord. He saw Him in all His authority, power and glory. He saw God's holiness and his own unworthiness. He confessed his guilt, it was taken away, and his sins were forgiven. In the Christian sense he was converted and knew forgiveness. But the story does not end there at verse 7. In verse 8 the Lord extends the challenge to obedience – not enforced obedience, but willing, loving obedience: "Who shall I send and who will go for us?" In response and obedience to the Lordship of his God, Isaiah says "Here I am, send me!" And the Lord said "Go!". Let us therefore count the cost (Matthew 16:24-26; Luke 14:25-33) and having discovered the infinite worth and joy of serving the Lord, let us gladly submit to His Lordship in every area of our lives as we press on towards maturity and greater holiness through the redeeming work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. A person may be a "believer" but not a "disciple". What is the difference?
2. "When we have a revelation from God that: (a) He loves us with an everlasting, perfect love and so longs for the very best for us; (b) He has all wisdom and so knows what is best for us; (c) He has all power and so is able to bring that about in our lives; then to submit to His Lordship is the most wonderful, sensible thing any Christian could possibly do". Discuss this statement.
3. "I surrender all ..." What does or should this really mean in the life of a Christian?
4. Why did Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16:22), Paul (Acts 9:4-6), and John (Revelation 1:17) all fall prostrate on their faces before the Lord?
5. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose" said Jim Elliott, who was martyred in Ecuador. What did he mean?
6. What "rights" does a Christian have?

10

Unity

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity! ... For there the Lord has commanded the blessing – life for evermore.” (Psalm 133:1, 3).

One thing is certain – if God commands blessing then nothing and no one can stop it. But the commanded blessing is for those who dwell together in unity, and when the condition is fulfilled then the promise is that they will have life for evermore.

In many ways this is the crux of revival – Christians dwelling together in unity, and God blessing them with life which reaches out into the community, bringing life to others in turn.

Unity in the Church

It is interesting and important to notice the times in the book of Acts when the concepts of unity and being in one accord are mentioned.

1. Prior to the day of Pentecost “all these, with one accord, devoted themselves to prayer” (1:14).
2. When the day of Pentecost came “they were all together in one place” (2:1).
3. After the day of Pentecost, they were “day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes ... with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people, and the Lord added to their number” (2:46-47).
4. When they faced opposition “they lifted up their voices with one accord to God” (4:24).
5. They shared with those in need: “The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no-one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony ... and great grace was upon them all” (4:32-33).
6. When witnessing, “many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles, and they were all with one accord” (5:12).
7. As a result of Philip’s miraculous preaching, “the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said” (8:6).
8. In making decisions, “It seemed good to us, becoming of one mind, to send chosen men to you” (15:25).
9. In basic matters of Church life and fellowship, “they continued steadfastly [together] in the teaching of the apostles, and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (2:42).

So we see in the early Church, a fundamental unity between the believers in their teaching, prayer, witness, fellowship, etc. As a result, God commanded the blessing, the Christians were blessed, received “great grace” and “great power” (4:33), many people were saved, and the Church grew. That is, there was revival!

The two-fold nature of unity

1. In one sense, all true Christians are already united in Christ. This is shown by the following Scriptures:

John 10:16 While there are many Christian “folds” (churches), there is only one Shepherd and only one Flock (Church).

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 When we were born again, “by one Spirit we were all baptised into one Body (the Church) ... and all were made to drink of the one Spirit”.

Galatians 3:28 “You are all one in Christ Jesus”.

Ephesians 2:13-19 Through the death of Christ the dividing wall has been broken down and we are reconciled both to God and to one another.

Ephesians 4:4-6 “There is one Body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all”.

2. However, the problem comes in the practical outworking of this unity in our daily lives and in the functioning of local churches. In many instances there is obvious disunity between believers. (Note that we are not here talking about differences between Christians and non-Christians, but division between true Christian believers). Hence, in the New Testament, there are exhortations to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ... until we all attain to the unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:3, 13).

Paul wrote strongly to the Corinthian Christians about the division between them, calling them “carnal” (fleshly or worldly) Christians rather than spiritual or mature, because of their disunity (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-9). Later he wrote, “Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace” (2 Corinthians 13:11); and “be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (Philippians 2:2). “Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit ... love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind” (1 Peter 3:8).

Jesus, in His prayer prior to His crucifixion, reminds us that the world will believe that the Father sent His Son, when they see the unity of Christians (John 17:20-23).

What is true in the Spirit must be worked out in our daily lives, lest we be guilty of not discerning the Body of Christ and thus eating and drinking judgement upon ourselves when we share communion together (1 Corinthians 11:27-32; cf. 10:16-17).

What separates us?

There are four major things which divide Christians, and none of these are Scriptural reasons for separation.

1. **Denominations:** For convenience, our churches have various names, but there is no way in which we can justify our being *divided from one another* on the basis of denominations. If we are ever to see true unity then the day will have to come when we are prepared to fellowship with all true Christians, irrespective of denominational names. We must see Christ in our brothers and sisters, and our prejudices, suspicions and “party spirit” must go (Galatians 5:20).
2. **Traditions:** While some traditions are not wrong in themselves, if they become a point of division within the Body of Christ then this is wrong. Again, we must be big enough to see that while some people prefer to worship the Lord one way, others prefer to worship in other ways. See Romans 14:1-23; Colossians 2:16-17.
3. **Leadership:** We all have our preferences as far as who we prefer to be our pastors, teachers, elders, etc., within the church, but division over leadership is carnal. “When one says, ‘I belong to Paul’, and another says, ‘I belong to Apollos’ are you not carnal and walking as [worldly] men?” (1 Corinthians 3:4).

4. **Doctrine:** This is the major cause of division within the Church, and yet there is no Scriptural basis for division over doctrine between born again Christians. Concerning fundamental issues of our faith and salvation we are, of course, agreed, but while we must earnestly seek after the truth we should not, in so doing, allow it to destroy our fellowship with other Christians who differ in some minor point of doctrine from ourselves.

What unites us?

1. The fact that we are saved, born again by the Holy Spirit, and have received divine life, thus becoming children of God.
2. Our belief in, and sincere love for, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
3. Our genuine desire to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, to serve Him, and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves (Luke 10:27).
4. As a result we will seek to base our lives on God's Word, the Bible, we will desire fellowship with other believers (Hebrews 10:25; 1 John 1:3, 7), and we will worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:23-24).

Like the spokes and hub of a wheel, as we get closer to the Lord we will also get closer to each other.

Since all true Christians will one day spend eternity around the throne of God, worshipping and serving Him (Revelation 7:9-17) let us begin now to tear down the dividing walls and learn to appreciate and love one another in the same way that God Himself loves each of us.

The only basis for not usually fellowshipping with other Christians should be that our geographical locality is such that it is impracticable (normally) to travel so far to be with them, or that the size of the group would be so large that more intimate fellowship would not be possible.

Praise the Lord that with the transport and venues we have available, it is often possible to fellowship with a fairly large cross-section of believers in our nation, and with very large groups of Christians, through Christian conferences, etc.

Unity versus Truth

In our desire for unity, God is not calling us to compromise the truth (that is, what we believe). We are not, in this study, advocating a watered-down "unite with everybody in spite of what they do or believe", or a lowest common denominator Gospel. All of us must earnestly seek after the truth as it is revealed by the Holy Spirit through the Bible. The Bible is our sole authority, divinely inspired and infallible, for all matters of faith and Christian conduct. As we search the Word together, with hearts open towards God, His truth, and towards one another, He will lead us (plural) into all truth (John 16:13).

Unity will come out of a divine love for one another (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-21), as we submit to one another in this love (Ephesians 5:21), and as we are eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

QUESTIONS

1. What is the “life for evermore” which is promised in Psalm 133:3?
2. What does it mean to be of “one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32)? How is it possible to be of one heart and mind with other Christians?
3. What practical things can we do, (a) individually, and (b) as a local church or Christian group, to help bring about Christian unity?
4. Can we be united in the Faith before we are united in the Spirit? (Ephesians 4:3, 13).
5. How does having “a love for the brethren, a tender heart, and a humble mind” help us to have “unity of spirit”? (1 Peter 3:8).
6. “Unity and division are primarily heart attitudes and are not necessarily dependent upon whether or not we fellowship together regularly”. Discuss.

11

Evangelism

Revival and evangelism

Revival is not evangelism – it is not even mass evangelism on a large scale. Revival may come as a result of evangelism, and evangelism always comes as a result of revival, but the two are not the same.

Evangelism is basically an organised means of reaching non-Christians with the Gospel and bringing them to Christ and into His Church.

Revival cannot be organised – we cannot turn it on, nor can we turn it off! In true revival, God simply takes over; we see a supernatural, sovereign God at work, and human organisation is almost incidental. Also, revival primarily and mainly affects Christians – the Church. It is a restoration of life, vitality and glory to the Church. Certainly this will affect the nation and unbelievers as a result, but that is the second step, not the first.

Evangelism has to do with the initial stage of the Gospel, and revival involves the backslidden state of the Church. Though they may occur together, they are not the same – saving (evangelism) has to do with the spiritual state of the unconverted; sanctifying (revival) has to do with the spiritual state of the converted.

Revival is a time when God breaks through into human history to awaken spiritual fervour in Christians, to touch them afresh by His Spirit, bringing renewal to the Church and creating a greater impetus for evangelism.

Evangelism can be, and ought to be, occurring everywhere in the world at all times, in obedience to Mark 16:15 and 2 Timothy 4:5.

Revival is a sovereign act of God on whom He will, and where He will. When God sees the necessary requirements being fulfilled, He can begin His work of revival.

The greatest revival in the Bible took place in an upper room when 120 fearful believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and their lives were completely revolutionised. No longer fearful, frightened, confused and uncertain, they now had boldness, authority, zeal and eloquence in preaching and testifying. They went out to turn the world upside down, and won 3000 people to Christ on the first day! (Acts 2).

During times of revival there will be much evangelism, not in the power of the flesh, but in the power of the Holy Spirit, with multitudes being converted as a result (Acts 5:11-16). All facades are stripped away, materialism, pride, sophistication are dealt with, and lose their power, and in their place there is a real openness and brokenness, a new love, joy, praise, worship, liberty and concern for the lost.

Demonic activity frequently increases during times of revival, but demons will be cast out in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and God will confirm His Word with signs following – miracles, healings, visions, dreams, prophecies, etc. (Mark 16:15-20; Acts 2:16-21). The new love and fervour will also result in much greater social concern – it will unite people; people will share with one another and help each other in times of need (Acts 2:41-47; 4:31-37).

The answer to moral degradation

Many Christians are deeply concerned at the rapid decline in morality these days. While there is a place for protesting against the lowering of standards, and for encouraging the government to uphold decency and morality, ultimately the solution to the problem is not legislation but in people's lives being transformed by the power of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is thus the ultimate and only totally effective means of dealing with the moral and spiritual problems our nation is facing. When a person's life is changed by the power of God (2 Corinthians 5:17), when God puts a new heart and a new spirit within a person (Ezekiel 36:25-27), the external legislation loses its importance – God's law is "written on our heart" (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and we become a new person. As a nation is evangelised, the character of the nation can be changed – a nation can be turned back to God. Of course this does not mean that everyone will be converted, but there can be a God-consciousness throughout the land – the presence and power of God are obviously real, even to the non-Christian. The whole of the book of Acts demonstrates this fact.

What is evangelism?

Evangelism is the proclamation of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Evangelism should be the spontaneous overflow of Spirit-filled lives – "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" within our hearts and then overflowing to those around us (see John 4:13-14, 39-42).

Evangelism is ordinary people boldly sharing Jesus with the lost.

Our nation needs to know real conviction of sin; it needs a revelation of the Cross of Christ and all that means; it needs deep repentance, cleansing and salvation. In short, it needs *revival* in the Church, and *evangelism* in the world. We need to see lives transformed and the fruit of righteousness in our land.

The alternatives

The Church is surrounded by a dying and needy world. If the Church does not evangelise, it too will die, and God will require the blood of the lost at our hand (Ezekiel 33:1-9). Conversely, evangelism will bring life, growth, vitality and freshness to the Church. It is an interesting but tragic fact, that if a church does not reach out to the lost, it begins to stagnate and die; it often becomes introverted and actually turns in on itself in criticism of one form or another, splits, or in other ways dries up. Evangelism is not optional, it is imperative – "evangelise or perish".

Many churches in our land today would see their problems of doctrine, leadership, criticism, disunity, apathy, discouragement, etc., disappear if they turned their prayers and energies towards evangelism. On the whole there is not a great deal of evangelism being engaged in either individually by most Christians, or by churches. Our nation is largely unevangelised as far as having a clear Gospel message preached in the power and under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, is concerned. "We are not doing right. This is a day of Good News; if we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell ..." (2 Kings 7:9).

QUESTIONS

1. Why is the Church not effectively reaching our nation with the Gospel? What can we do about it?
2. To what extent do we again need to see God "confirming the Word with signs following" (Mark 16:20)? What effects would this have on our nation?

3. What is the relationship between evangelism and revival? How do they differ?
4. "Evangelism, rather than legislation, is the real answer to our nation's moral problems". Discuss.
5. What are some of the problems that a church is likely to face if it does not have an effective evangelistic outreach? What are some of the blessings a church will experience if it does have effective evangelism?
6. "Evangelism should be the spontaneous overflow of Spirit-filled lives". Discuss. See Acts 1:8.

12

Social concern

One of the dangers in what we call “evangelism” is that we can be so concerned to “save souls” that we forget that these “souls” may also have very real physical, social and economic needs. In our desire to “get them saved” we must not forget these other needs and problems: souls have bodies, and both have needs! In fact, many people who may not respond to the traditional methods of evangelism may be reached by showing genuine Christian love and concern by ministering to their other needs first.

As in most things, a balance is required. If we simply preach at people and ignore their real hurts and problems, we may alienate them as far as the Gospel is concerned. And yet, if all our efforts are put into social welfare and we fail to tell people of the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, then while we may help them in this life, they may still not have found the Lord.

The balance, then, is to show both genuine Christian love and concern for the lost, and tell them of the saving grace of Jesus whose love constrains us to minister to both the material and spiritual needs of people.

James puts it this way: “Religion [true Christianity] which is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27). “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled’, without giving them the things they need for the body, what does it profit? So faith, by itself, if it has not works, is dead” (James 2:14-17).

The Gospel is Good News, not only for the next life, but also for this! Jesus spent much of His time here on earth ministering to those who were poor, needy, oppressed, fatherless and widows. In fact, Jesus Himself knew what it was to be poor, needy, oppressed and fatherless! He was deeply concerned for people’s hurts as well as their eternal welfare. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised a widow’s son from the dead, brought sight to blind beggars, washed dirty feet, wept with those who wept, brought comfort to the fearful and liberty to those in bondage. Jesus was concerned for the whole person: body, soul and spirit. He ministered wholeness in the power of the Spirit, and so must we!

What God requires as well as fasting

Fasting is one of the things mentioned in the Bible – “When you fast...” (Matthew 6:16-18). It is important to notice, however, that unless our fasting is accompanied by other things, this is not all that God really wants. “Is not this the fast that I choose:”, God says, “to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house, and to clothe the naked? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say ‘Here I am’.” (Isaiah 58:6-14).

This is not to minimize the importance of fasting, but simply to point out that fasting, by itself, is not enough, unless it is combined with acts of compassion to the poor and needy.

In a somewhat similar way Jesus said “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, but have neglected the weightier matters of the law – justice, mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others” (Matthew 23:23).

The example of the early Church

Right from the foundation of the Church in Acts 2, while evangelism was of paramount importance, the social needs of people were not neglected. “All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45; see also Acts 4:32-37).

When the needs of the Greek widows were being neglected, the first deacons were chosen to rectify this situation (Acts 6:1-6). When there was a famine in Judea, the Christians in Antioch sent relief to the believers there (Acts 11:27-30).

So we see that the early Church cared for both the spiritual and material welfare of its people. In fact, one of the meanings of the word “fellowship” (*koinonia*) is to share material blessings with those in need: “Those in Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution (*koinonia*) for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it and indeed they are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share (*koinonia*) in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings” (Romans 15:26-27). The same concept also occurs in Romans 12:13, “Contribute (*koinonia*) to the needs of the saints”. Galatians 6:6, “Let him who is being instructed in the Word share (*koinonia*) with the one instructing, in all good things”. Also see Philipians 4:10-19.

However, we need not only to minister to the needs of those within the Church (i.e., needy Christians), but also to the needs of the unconverted. In this way we “let our light so shine before people that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father Who is in Heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Materialism versus Christian socialism

In the West we live in a very materialistic society and this “capitalist spirit” has invaded the Church and the lives of many Christians, almost as much as it has the rest of our society. A competitive spirit, coupled with greed, selfishness, individualism and materialism has made this system of capitalism just as evil as communism. Believe it or not, God is not pro-capitalist and anti-socialist; both have their good and bad sides!

As we have seen in Acts, the early Christian Church practised a form of socialism based on sharing with those in need. Acts 5:4 (“While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?”) implies that the Christians did not necessarily have to sell all they owned and put everything into a common pool, but they held material things so lightly that they shared freely with those in need and so there “was not a needy person among them” (Acts 4:32-37).

For those of us who find it hard to break away from the idea of what “we own” (“This is mine and that is yours”) we do well to remember the example of our Lord Who “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form He humbled Himself ...” (Philipians 2:4-8).

Of course, to avoid abuses of this system of Christians sharing all things in common, requires great wisdom, and this is why the first deacons that were chosen had to be “of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3).

As the last days approach, and the Church faces increased persecution, and the world faces greater and greater economic and social crises, the need for Christian social action is going to be increasingly important as the Church stands out from the world in stark contrast, showing the genuine love, sharing, giving and concern of the people of God, compared to the increasing selfishness, competitiveness and greed in the world.

May the Church today be characterised by these Christlike qualities as it ministers to the poor, the oppressed and the needy.

QUESTIONS

1. “I don’t talk to people about Jesus, I just show them by my life.” Is this enough? Why or why not?
2. We live in a welfare state, so do Christians really need to be concerned with helping the poor? Discuss the statement: “Christians should be concerned with spiritual needs; non-Christians can minister to people’s other needs”.
3. Should the Church be capitalist or socialist?
4. Why is it important to maintain a balance between evangelism (the “evangelical Gospel”) and ministering to material needs (the “social Gospel”), and how can this be achieved?
5. What are some of the social needs in our society today which the Church is not adequately ministering to?
6. In what ways should the Church today be a caring, sharing community, having “all things in common”?

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Revival – the Past

Ezekiel 47:1-12

This vision which God gave to Ezekiel can be applied both to our own individual Christian lives, and also to the life of the Church as a whole.

Water (v.1) is a type or illustration of the Holy Spirit, and of life (see John 4:13-14; 7:37-39; Joel 2:23; Isaiah 44:3). All that God is doing in the Church today He is doing by His Spirit, and it is bringing new life to people, and to the Church. But there is also another spirit at work in the world today, and it is most important that we discern between the two.

The water of God issues from the Throne in the Temple (v.1, 12). We need to make certain that all revelation we receive comes from the Throne of God, that it has His authority, and that it is totally consistent with His Word. Strangely enough, God is not revealing new truth; He is merely uncovering truth that has been “hidden” in His Word for about 2000 years or more, and much of it we are only just beginning to see again! (Compare this with the recovery of the Law during the reign of Josiah, in 2 Chronicles 34:14-33). Old truth, that has been buried, ignored or forgotten, is being restored! However, this does not mean that we are to be gullible and accept everything; we should test all things by God’s Word and the Spirit, and hold fast only to that which is good and of God.

In God’s dealings with us He first leads us into ankle-deep water, then He takes us further into knee-deep water, then into water that is up to the waist, and finally into water that is so deep, so swift and so strong that it cannot be passed through – we are borne up and carried along by the mighty flow of the Spirit of God (v.3-5).

The tragedy is that so often we stop short of this and say “This far and no further!” In all that God desires to do for us, there is a very real danger of us getting to a stopping place where we refuse to go any further with God and enter into all that He has for us.

Some people stop before ever going to Church; others go to Church but stop short of committing their lives to Christ. Still others are prepared to receive Christ into their lives but refuse to make Him Lord of every area of their lives. Others stop short of being filled with the Holy Spirit; others will not go on to maturity or sanctification, or entering into their ministry.

May God forgive us for our stopping places! May we, like Ezekiel, go on and on and on with God, into the depths of all He wants to show us, and do in and through us. As Jesus said to His disciples, “Launch out into the deep!” (Luke 5:4)

The same danger faces the Church. History shows us that time and time again the Church has stopped short of what God has wanted it to do. Denominations have formed because God has moved on but some people have stopped still. Like the Israelites of old, we need to stop only when the cloud stops, and move on when the cloud moves on (Exodus 40:34-38). We should not move ahead of the cloud, nor lag behind it when it moves on, for there is protection, warmth and guidance where the cloud is. May the Church always move with the Spirit of God, and never hold back. May it go deeper and deeper with God until it is borne along by the swift, strong, powerful moving of His Spirit, and accomplish all He desires it to.

Where the pure, fresh water from the sanctuary enters the salty, stagnant waters of the Dead Sea, the water becomes fresh (v.8). The Church should be bringing life to a dead and dying world; everything should live where this river flows (v.9). The early Church had a

tremendous effect on the world around it, until even a non-believer had to admit that it had turned the world upside down! (Acts 17:6). Does the Church do this today?

The reason the Dead Sea is dead, and contains no animal or plant life, is that it constantly takes in, but never gives out! That is the quickest way to “die”, either as an individual or as a Church! We should be bringing freshness and life to people. God forbid that we should stagnate or stop short of all that He wants to do or reveal! And may we pass on what we have received, rather than keep it to ourselves!

Some will not receive this message. For one reason or another there will be those, like the seed on the hard and rocky ground (Matthew 13:18-22) who will not receive what God is saying, but will stop short and refuse to move on. These will eventually dry up and bring death; they are the stagnant swamps and marshes which refuse to become fresh; they are to be left to become salt for they will not receive what the Spirit has to say – and too much salt kills! (v.11). There is no life in the Dead Sea because of its extreme saltiness; only the Spirit brings life, the letter kills (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Will we receive what God has to say? Will we move on with His Spirit, or have we already found our stopping place? If we will hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church, and move with Him, then we will be like the trees which are planted by the river, whose “leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail. They will bear fresh fruit every month because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing” (v.12). May we not be like stubborn Jerusalem, over whom Jesus wept, saying “How often I would have ... *but you would not!*” (Matthew 23:37).

History of the Church

Revival: The Church was ‘born’ about the year 30 AD, and began to grow in a time of revival (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14)

Heresies: Within a generation heresies had started to creep into the Church. Some of the books of the New Testament were written to counteract these heresies. For example, Colossians was written against the Judaizers who were trying to amalgamate Christianity and Judaism, and return to the keeping of the Old Testament law. 1 John was written against the Gnostics who held that all flesh is evil and therefore Jesus did not really come in the flesh; He was only a spirit. These heresies began about 60 AD.

Decline: During the 2nd and 3rd centuries the Church went through a time of great persecution, and declined especially after the time of Constantine (320 AD) when Christianity became the state religion and was forced upon both believers and unbelievers alike. Union between the Church and the Roman empire began, and while persecution decreased, nominal Christianity increased.

Apostacy: From the 4th to the 15th century, during the Dark and Middle Ages, the Church on the whole (although there were some notable exceptions) went through a time of spiritual decline and apostacy – far, far different from the Church in the book of Acts, and even from the Church as we know it today. Many doctrines and traditions of men were accepted even though contrary to the Bible; the spirituality of the Church declined as it became increasingly political, and religion became formal, ritualistic and often superficial; personal faith in Jesus Christ and personal Christian experience and commitment were superceded by loyalty to the Church as an institution; there was little personal prayer life by most people – most prayers were formal (liturgical) prayers said in church, or confessions made to a priest; Bibles were rare and most people could not or did not read them (only priests were permitted to interpret them).

Reformation: Then, in 1517, the Reformation began, as prophesied by Peter almost 1500 years earlier.

Acts 3:19-21

“(Jesus) Whom Heaven must receive until the time for establishing (or, the time of restoration of) all things which God spoke through the mouth of His holy prophets from of old” (v. 21).

Over the last few centuries, since 1517, God has been restoring truths to the Church which had been “lost” (or, rather, neglected). These truths are all in His Word – they were spoken or written many centuries ago by God’s holy prophets and apostles – but we have yet to see the full restoration of all of them. Bit by bit over these last few centuries these truths have started to be restored to the Church. Each denomination began by restoring some truth to the Church; the tragedy has been that we have been so slow to learn, and worse, that often we have gone back on what God had shown previously. Like waves of the sea on an incoming tide, as each successive wave goes further than the last, so it should be with the restoration of the truths of God’s Word – each “new” move should both incorporate all that went before it, as well as going further, so that the Church progresses to the place that God longs for it to have. Thus each successive wave of God’s revealed truth should go further than the last one.

Unfortunately most of the Church has been like the waves which come in, only to roll back, so that while the tide slowly comes in overall, much new ground is being lost by a return to the former way of things. Progression has been very slow for this reason. Also, when the Church has held onto a doctrine with a “This far but no further” attitude, it has fossilised into a denomination and become a hard, inflexible wineskin.

What is even worse is that frequently those who have been involved in one move of the Spirit have opposed and even persecuted those who are involved in the next move of the Spirit. It is usually those involved in the last move that most strongly oppose the new move.

Denominations are formed when God moves on but some people (those who have chosen their stopping place) have stopped still. We need to realise that **a** truth is not **the whole** truth!

Christ has said “I will build My Church” (Matthew 16:18) and Paul says that He will return for a Bride that is one of “splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing ... holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). Could it be that Christ could have returned early in the first century (as the early Christians appear to have expected) had it not been for the fact that the Church did not go on to perfection, but turned back; and now, 2000 years later, God is still restoring it to the glory He always intended for it to have?

QUESTIONS

1. What are the principal lessons in Ezekiel 47:1-12 as they apply to the Church?
2. How can we be sure that we always move on with God and do not stop short or lag behind what He is doing?
3. How can we discern a genuine move of God’s Spirit in contrast to a fleshly human movement, or a Satanic deception such as the origin of most cults and extreme “Christian” groups?
4. What does Acts 3:21 mean?
5. What are some of the truths God has been restoring to the Church, (a) over the last 500 years? (b) over the last 50 years?
6. How and why do denominations form?

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Revival – the Past (continued)

Steps in restoration

Let us look briefly at the history of the Christian Church and see what has already been restored. In doing so it is most important to bear in mind that this is a generalization, and is in no way intended to be a criticism or condemnation of Christians in any particular denomination – its aim is simply an objective look at the historical facts.

In the past we have obviously seen two streams of restoration:

1. **Personal:** salvation by faith; water baptism; the fullness of the Holy Spirit; unity; outreach; sharing the Gospel; evangelism.
2. **Church leadership:** pope, bishops, clergy, elders, pastors, autonomous churches, lay people in ministry.

How will we receive what God has been restoring to the Church? Will we move on, step by step, wave upon wave, like an incoming tide, or will we stop short (or even go back) on what God is revealing? Will the Church, in a few decades time, be one which has seen “the restoration of all things which God has spoken” (Acts 3:21) and thus be ready for the return of His Son? That depends on us!

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Through the Dark and Middle Ages, and even in more recent times, the Church in many ways has been like a valley full of disunited, dead, dry bones. But God’s Spirit is moving, God is speaking, life is coming back! Ezekiel was told to prophesy to the bones and say, “Hear the Word of the Lord”. Let it be emphasised once again that God is not saying new things – He has not changed His mind – He is saying what He has always said in His Word, and we must start to preach it and teach it again. “Hear the Word of the Lord” – listen to what God has to say! “He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches”.

Restoration has always come through prayer, proclaiming the Word of the Lord, the leading of God’s Spirit; and it always will come this way.

First, the bones must come together. If ever the Church is to be restored, then unity must come. Three types or illustrations of the Church are: a Bride, a Building, and a Body. In each case there is only one – one Bride, one Building, one Body. Today we are seeing a coming together of God’s people, but having come together we then separate into our own little denominations again. Not only must the bones come together but they must be joined together in a true unity of the Spirit.

Second, sinews must join these bones together – they must be bound together in such a way that they will not come unstuck again. This is far more than just bringing the bones together; this is uniting them in a way in which they will not break apart again. Only divine love and our willingness will bring about this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3, 15-16). As we pray together, worship together and serve the Lord together, this bond will be strengthened, and the world will know!

Third, flesh must come upon the skeleton. Bones are good and necessary, but until they are covered with flesh and skin, they will not be functional. Love and unity are but the start of what God is wanting to do. God is building, and He will not be satisfied until that building is complete. Until every member is added to the Church, until every person who will respond to the Gospel has heard and responded, God will not rest.

Fourth, the flesh is covered with skin. There is little beauty or purpose in raw flesh, so God covers the bones, sinews, and flesh with skin, so that the beauty of His creation may be seen. The Church that God is creating will be a beautiful Bride for His Son, without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:25-27). “Behold how good and pleasant (beautiful) it is when brethren dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133).

Fifth, when the body is complete it still needs the life of the Spirit breathed into it. (The same Hebrew word “*ruach*” means both “breath” and “spirit”). Then the Church will become like a mighty army – an exceedingly great host.

Let us not stop short of what God is wanting to do. By His grace may we move on with Him. Let us heed the sign which says, “NO STOPPING”, and keep moving! Let God complete His work so that He may send His Son “Whom Heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things ...”

Revivals in the past three centuries

During the past three centuries there have been some wonderful times of revival when God has moved by His Spirit, bringing new life to the Church, and bringing the lost into salvation. The Church has been restored (at least in part) and extended by these sovereign moves of God. Biographies and historical accounts of the following people, and the revivals associated with them, are well worthwhile reading, and help to build a hunger for, and faith for, a similar move of God in our own day.

Jonathan Edwards (1734)

Charles Finney (1857)

John Wesley (1738)

Dwight Moody (1880)

George Whitefield (1738)

Evan Roberts (1904)

... and many more in the past century, including times of revival in the Congo, Indonesia, South Korea, South America, Cambodia, parts of Africa and the Western world. There are many books, videos, etc., concerning these and similar events.

It is most encouraging to read accounts of these moves of God in the past few decades, and pray that once more God will move by His Spirit, bringing renewal, restoration and revival.

Helps and hindrances to revival

What factors have helped to bring about revival, and what has hindered or stopped revivals? Over the past three or four centuries, the following factors stand out as those which seem to have **promoted** revival:

1. A desire for simplicity in the Christian life. Overemphasis on theology and doctrine have tended to have been replaced by simple, practical Christian teaching and living.
2. A return to the study of the Bible and an acceptance of it as authoritative, divinely inspired, and a source of daily practice and inspiration.
3. A belief that the new birth is a definite act, more than just ‘growing up’ in the Church.
4. A desire for an experiential faith, not merely intellectual belief.

5. Fervent, continual prayer led by the Holy Spirit, praying for a revival of faith, and the power of God to come in new ways.

The following factors have **hindered or stopped** revivals in the past:

1. Opposition to “emotionalism” and “revivalist methods”.
2. Excessive (fleshly) emotionalism and lack of wisdom, discernment, real love and consideration for non-Christians.
3. Liberalism and a denial of the Scriptures; rationalism, heresies and some practices which have split the Church.
4. Pre-occupation with other things – the world and all its ‘attractions’; politics and the world’s problems; the efforts of satan to try to distract Christians from God’s calling, and distract those who are not Christians from hearing about, believing in, and following Jesus Christ.

May God again raise up people who are true and faithful to Him, so that we may again see the Lord “open the windows of Heaven, and pour down such an overflowing blessing that there will not be enough room to contain it!” (Malachi 3:10).

QUESTIONS

1. Why did denominations form? Did people intend to start them? Was it necessary for them to be formed? Are they helpful?
2. What truths is the Holy Spirit revealing to the Church today?
3. What do you think is hindering revival today?
4. What is our part in helping to bring about revival?
5. What is unique about the current move of God’s Spirit?
6. What are some of the blessings and problems associated with the charismatic renewal within denominational churches today?

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Revival – the Present

In Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-29), quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18), God promised to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. Joel also talks of this outpouring as both "early rain" and "latter rain" (2:23). James 5:7-8 takes up this point too. In Israel, seed was planted just prior to the early rain which caused the seed to germinate, and then, just before the harvest, the latter rain brought the grain to full maturity. For a good harvest, both the early and the latter rains were essential.

On the Day of Pentecost (about 30 AD) God began to pour out the early rain on the seed which Jesus had been sowing for the previous three and a half years. As a result, the seed began to germinate, and the Church began to grow. Throughout the succeeding 2000 years there have been times when God has sent showers of refreshing and revival, gradually restoring the Church to the strength and maturity He desires for it to have. And so the Church has grown over the past 20 centuries.

Just before the harvest, God will send forth the latter rain – the greatest outpouring of His Spirit the world has ever seen, so that the latter glory of the Church will exceed its former glory (cf. Haggai 2:9). The harvest will be ripe and mature, ready for reaping at the return of the Lord of the Harvest, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus God will have prepared for His Son "a Bride, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Ephesians 5:27).

Together with this great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, bringing about a worldwide revival, there will also be great apostasy and persecution of the Church. God always prepares His people for whatever they will have to face. "There has no temptation (testing) taken you but such as is common to people, but God is faithful and will not let you be tempted (tested) above that you are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way of escape, so that you are able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

God has also promised, "I will never fail you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). There is no need to fear persecution, tribulation or suffering for Christ's sake, for His "grace is sufficient for you, for His strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9. See also Matthew 5:10-12; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12-14). Apostasy, heresies, deception, falling away, etc., will come – and woe to those by whom they come – but the true Spirit-filled Christian is safe and secure in His hands and God will supply all the faith, power and courage we will need to face any situation. This is why God is pouring out His Spirit today and preparing His people for what they will have to face in the future.

It is interesting to notice how God has always prepared His Church before persecution comes, by sending revival. Especially last century, it seems that revivals have always come before, for example, communist take-overs or major wars.

Praise God, His Church may suffer (and is already suffering – great tribulation has already come to many parts of the Body of Christ throughout the world), but God will always see it through. Persecution purifies and strengthens that which is true. The Church, while it may be forced to meet in secret in some places, has never been eradicated, not even in Albania (which once proclaimed itself "the world's first totally atheistic state"!) or China, or North Korea, and other places where Christians are severely persecuted.

In these last days God will separate the wheat from the tares (weeds), so that what is true will be separated from what is false. Read the parable of the Wheat and the Tares carefully, together with Jesus' interpretation of it (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43).

God's ultimate purpose in allowing persecution, and in pouring out His Spirit, is to purify the Church, separate the true ('wheat') from the false ('weeds'), and bring His Church into unity and maturity, so that His Name will be glorified throughout the earth, and His Son's death will be vindicated.

The present state

As we saw in the previous study, God has already restored much truth to the Church. Over the past few centuries, God has been moving by His Spirit, restoring the Church, imparting the baptism and gifts of the Spirit to His people, releasing new praise and songs of worship, bringing a new joy and a new liberty in the Spirit.

The 'charismatic movement' has affected all branches of the Church. While God does not condone error in the Church – and the Holy Spirit is restoring truth – nevertheless God is looking for those whose hearts are right towards God, and in spite of some “doctrinal errors” and non-Biblical traditions; in spite of denominationalism and a measure of disunity; God is moving, bringing renewal both to individual Christians and local churches as a whole. May we be flexible enough to receive all that God is saying; may we move with God and be open to His moving in other Christians who may differ in some ways from us. As the Church is revived and united, so ultimately it will affect the whole nation.

Biblical truths God is restoring

1. What it means to be a true Christian – a born-again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ; a true disciple, and follower of Jesus, God's Word and His Spirit.
2. The baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit-filled life.
3. Praise, singing and worship, in Spirit and in Truth; the writing of new Scripture choruses, hymns and spiritual songs and a new freedom in worship.
4. The priesthood of all believers: a breaking down of clergy / laity barriers; the plurality and equality of elders who are responsible for a local church; the open communion table where all true Christians may participate, irrespective of 'denomination'; and greater participation in the work, ministry and life of the church by all Christians, not just the “ordained” or full-time workers.
5. Unity in the Spirit and increased unity in practical ways; the universal Church as the invisible Body of Christ, and the churches (that is, believers in a community) as the visible expression of the Church; a breaking down of denominationalism – we are one Body in Christ!
6. Healing and deliverance ministries.
7. Evangelistic and missionary zeal, especially in unreached or closed nations and people groups. Water baptism of believers by immersion.
8. Home groups for fellowship, prayer, Bible study, mutual edification and growth, and counselling. Prayer and fasting. Intercession for the Church, nation, government, etc.
9. The ministries of Ephesians 4:11 – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (shepherds), teachers.
10. Autonomous (self-governing) local churches – independent and yet inter-dependent.
11. Generous giving – tithes, offerings and more!
12. Holiness, sanctification and true discipleship.

Stay in or come out?

An inevitable conflict arises when a person sees what God is doing and longs to move with God's Spirit, and yet is involved in a church which does not. Similarly, where serious doctrinal error or immorality is tolerated, and nothing is done about it. What should we do? Some people say "Be loyal. Stay where you are. Let God use you to bring the truth to your church". Others say, "Come out from among them and be separate".

There is really only one answer – each individual (or Christian family) must seek God's direction for themselves. There is no point dying in a sinking ship! If staying on leads to compromise, then we may have to come out. But if God is using you to bring light and truth to your church, and if you are having an effect for good in your church, then God may want you to stay.

God will lead some to remain where they are, even in a far-from-perfect situation, in order to minister to the needs of people there and possibly to help lead the church on in God's ways and purposes. Others will find themselves cut off from the church – neither receiving anything from it nor allowed to contribute in any way to it (other than financially!). To these people God may well say "Come out. There is somewhere else where I want you to minister and receive ministry". Each person must know in their own heart where God wants them and, in whatever situation that may be, fulfill their God-given ministry to the glory of God and for the upbuilding of the saints.

Ultimately, we are all accountable to God for the decisions we make, but He will guide us if we ask Him.

What God is doing in many parts of the world today

To a large extent, what God is doing throughout the world today is not recorded in the secular press, but there are real moves of God in many or most parts of the world. The beginnings of revival – at this stage perhaps small in some places, but spread over much of the world – can be seen as God prepares the ground for the final outpouring of the latter rain.

God is moving by His Spirit, bringing renewal, new life, and enthusiasm to His people. This has affected many hundreds of thousands of Christians as well as some local churches as a whole, and has had a major influence in traditional churches today.

In some places and some countries there have been significant revivals which have not merely touched a few individual Christians but have begun to affect the nation as a whole – reaching out to the lost, bringing many to salvation and many more to a new awareness of the presence of God. The gifts and baptism of the Spirit have played a major part in such revivals.

The latter rain is beginning to be outpoured – let us make sure that as it comes it touches our lives and, through us, the lives of many others! Let us continue to pray for a mighty outpouring of God's Spirit upon the world, bringing both glory to God and the extension of His Kingdom here on earth.

QUESTIONS

1. Compare the Pentecostal movement with the charismatic movement in the denominational churches. Where do autonomous charismatic fellowships and home groups fit into what God is doing in the Church today?
2. Must we compromise truth in order to remain in a church which does not believe all that we do?
3. Are both revival and persecution inevitable? How can revival, apostasy and persecution all occur at the same time?
4. What keeps Christians from fear when facing the future?
5. What does the Bible say the Church will be like just prior to the return of Christ?
6. How can we, as individual Christians, and the Church as a whole, "prepare the way of the Lord" for revival?

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Revival – the Future

As we look towards the future, in a desire to see revival come, and in preparation for future persecution that the Church will have to face, we see some very important truths which must increasingly become part of our Christian lives, both individually and corporately.

1. Maturity

Because Israel refused to go on into the Promised Land, they went back into the wilderness to wander round and round in circles until they died. All of life is a progression – onwards and upwards, or back and down. We must go on to maturity and perfection (see Hebrews 5:11 – 6:2). Shallowness must be changed for depth in our Christian walk and experience; we are no longer to be babies, but mature adults. If we do not grow, we will go backwards. We either advance or retreat!

As we mature, we must be willing to take more responsibility and exercise our God-given ministries. The time comes when we no longer need to be spoon-fed. This implies two things – we must be prepared to do something, and those in leadership in the church must be willing to allow us and encourage us. This calls for faith on both sides – faith that God can and will use us, and faith by leadership that those growing to maturity are capable of fulfilling their God-given roles with God's help.

2. Christlikeness and spirituality

The Corinthian church was gifted, not lacking in spiritual gifts, but was still carnal (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). This carnality expressed itself in immaturity, sexual immorality, division and worldliness. One of the problems Paul deals with in Romans, and also in his letters to the Corinthians and Galatians, are the two extremes to which we can go, both of which are corruptions of God's grace. One is that we can become so familiar with God's grace that we go into sin, especially sexual immorality and worldliness. We become shallow, careless and disrespectful about the things of God, and the world squeezes us into its mold. The other extreme (typified by the Galatians) was legalism, "enforced righteousness" – trying in the flesh to fulfill what the flesh cannot do. The Pharisees were a good example of this.

We live under grace, not Law, and yet we must not allow this grace to excuse our sin (Romans 6). If God's grace is persistently abused, we will end up in deception – so deceived that we cannot even see the error of our ways. Balance is all-important in the Christian life. If we "walk in the Spirit" (and in the Word!) then we will be balanced and not go into these extremes of either the flesh or legalism. Christ Himself is our example, and we are to follow in His steps. We are to be spiritual, not carnal; holy and sanctified in thought, word and deed.

God's ultimate desire for each one of us is that we become Christlike in our lives – that His character becomes fully formed in us, and corporately, that the Bride of Christ radiates the glory of God's own Son.

As we seek to follow Christ's example, once we have been born of the Spirit, baptised in water and the Holy Spirit, we need to go on into sanctification (the "baptism with fire", Matthew 3:10-12), where the holiness of God and the Lordship of Christ in every area of our lives, become a daily experience. We need to walk in the fear of the Lord, having truly died to self and living only for Him (Galatians 2:20). This maturity in the Spirit is desperately

needed in the Church today. When revival comes, we will see both conviction of sin in the world, and the fear of the Lord in the Church.

*To be like Jesus, this hope possesses me,
In every thought, word, deed – this is my aim, my creed.
To be like Jesus, this hope possesses me,
His Spirit helping me, like Him I'll be.*

*Thou mighty Christ, come forth in me,
My will, my way, I yield to Thee ...*

3. Unity

One of the tragedies of what has happened over the years as God has poured out His Spirit upon “all flesh” (irrespective of denomination, doctrine or tradition) is that somehow it has often been contained within a local church or denomination and has not really brought about the full unity of the Spirit that it should have. Praise God for the exceptions, but as a rule we have a long way to go before we get a real unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace – a unity which will lead, eventually, to a unity of the Faith, and cause the world to believe that God really did send His Son and that we are His disciples (John 13:34-35; 17:21). Re-read John 17; pray this as your prayer; seek to let God work it out in your life and that of your church.

When Jesus presents His Bride to the Father, she will not be a disjointed, bickering, suspicious, fragmented jumble – she will be “without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing” (Ephesians 5:27). God will purify her; He will “shake”, so that what cannot be shaken will remain (Hebrews 12:25-29). He will “remove from the Kingdom all that offends, so that the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:41, 43). He will purge out the dross, and bring forth pure gold (1 Peter 1:6, 7). May we be part of that which remains, not that which is removed! (cf. “I will come to you and remove your candlestick from its place, unless you repent”. (Revelation 2:5).

Note that unity implies unity with all true Spirit-filled believers. Unity with unbelievers or with carnal Christians is not really possible, for they are of a different spirit. Being Spirit-filled is not an “optional extra” for Christians; it is a command – “Be (continuously) filled with the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). All true Christians should seek this.

We must work together, function together, witness together, pray together, move together, minister together in practical ways as the one Body of Christ – one, and yet with our differences – differences in ministries, different ways of worship, yet still ONE. None of us individually has everything, but together in Christ we have it all!

Relationships are important:

- (a) **our relationship with God** – through prayer, Bible study, our daily walk of obedience, worship, service, etc.
- (b) **with other Christians** – within families (husband, wife, children); between denominations and churches; within churches (leaders, elders, people); between Christians – all working together. Carnal divisions and barriers must all be broken down. Dedication and commitment to Christ, His Church and His people are so important.
- (c) **with non-Christians** – we are “in the world but not of the world”. We need, both in word and deed, a united witness to those who do not yet know Christ. We must live a consistent Christian life.

4. Vision

“Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). We must wait on God and find out His plans and purposes for us as individual Christians, in our Christian fellowships, and God’s plan for the Church as a whole. Then, as God leads, we must seek, with Him, to fulfill that plan. The Christian, or church, which has no vision or has lost its vision will gradually die. “May Your will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

We must press on with God in His purposes (cf. Philippians 3:12-14). If we think we “have arrived” and refuse to press on further with God, then it is almost certain that we are actually drifting backwards. Besides, to remain stationary when God is moving on, is to go back! To fail to go on to maturity is sad – whether it is in the physical, mental or spiritual realm.

What we are doing may be good – but is it of God? Good is the enemy of the best! It is not how seemingly good it is, that matters, but is it what God wants us to be doing?

The most tragic thing is that some people are actually satisfied to stay where they are. When God said that Israel would wander in the wilderness until every adult had died, while they mourned, no-one pleaded with God to change His mind – it appears they were satisfied to die in the wilderness and never enter the Promised Land. In fact, having heard the spies’ evil report they did not want to go into the Promised Land, but rather, wanted to go back into Egypt and to slavery! (Numbers 13 – 14). God forbid that we should be like that!

5. Action

One of the biggest dangers in the Church today is that of becoming isolated from the world – a “holy club”, a “bless me” fellowship, where we minister to one another but forget the other 90% of the population who never go to church.

The fulness and empowering of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit, are primarily for evangelism (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). The dynamic power of the Holy Spirit needs to be unleashed in the world, not just in the Church, so that unbelievers will believe and be saved. The whole book of Acts demonstrates the outworking of the power of the Holy Spirit through the lives of believers, resulting in the salvation of “multitudes”, as well as the upbuilding of the Church. We are to be the “light of the world” and the “salt of the earth” – not a light hidden under a bucket, nor salt sitting in a salt-shaker!

As never before Christians need to witness by both word and deed to their friends, relatives, neighbours, workmates – in their homes, communities, and workplaces – wherever they are, and see the Kingdom of God extended on earth. We need a passion for the lost, and a passion for the Kingdom of God!

QUESTIONS

1. Much praise to God is said and sung; how much is really lived out in the lives of Christians? To what extent is Matthew 15:8-9 true of many Christians today?
2. Why has the holiness emphasis been largely lost from the Church today? What can we (or should we) do about it?
3. Three seriously lacking elements in the life of the Church and of Christians today are: deep repentance, real intercession, and genuine (not superficial) unity from the heart. What can be done about these lacking elements?
4. “The key to revival and national prosperity lies within the Church, not the world or the government”. Discuss.

5. What do you think are the most important factors in preparing for the coming revival – “preparing the way of the Lord”? Why?
6. Revival will affect both the Church and the world, but in different ways. What are some of the ways?

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Pray for Revival

How can we prepare for revival?

1. **We must see the need for revival.** If our eyes are blinded so that we cannot see the need for revival then we will never have the faith to really intercede for it, or prepare for it. Leonard Ravenhill said, "If the Church will only obey the conditions, we can have the revival any time we want it. The problem of the Church is the problem in the garden of Gethsemane – asleep!"

2. **We need to be ready.** Revival comes suddenly, so we need to be prepared and ready, having the faith to believe that the time could be now! We need to pray that God will show us any ways in which we are not ready, and help us to be prepared. "Watch and pray" (Matthew 26:41).

3. **We need to pray.** The four pre-requisites given in 2 Chronicles 7:14 are that we must:

- (a) humble ourselves.
- (b) pray – sincere, earnest, continuous, inter-cession.
- (c) seek God's face.
- (d) turn from our wicked ways – true repent-ance, confession, restitution; God requires that we are holy, open, and broken before Him (Psalm 51:7-13).

We must pray for labourers. While the human element is not nearly as important in times of revival as at other times, God may still use us to initiate revival, or during revival.

We need to pray that the Lord will raise up Godly people with a vision and calling to revival, who, under God, are anointed and inspired to lead God's people in a time of revival (Matthew 9:36-38). We need to pray for preachers, teachers, evangelists, leaders and prayer warriors.

4. **We must be united.** One major characteristic of the Church in Acts was that they were united – "of one accord", "of one heart and mind" (Acts 1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24, 32; 5:12; 8:6; 15:25)

5. **We must learn how to pray against the powers of darkness.** God has given us authority and power to bind the powers of darkness (Matthew 16:18-19; James 4:7)

We need to pray that God will raise up Christians who will have the discernment and power to bring deliverance to all those who are bound by the powers of darkness – for example, the occult, demon-possession, spiritism, etc.

6. **We must learn to praise.** Praise, worship and great joy accompany revival. The battle is not ours, but the Lord's (2 Chronicles 20:1-30, especially verses 15 and 17).

7. **We must avoid dangers.** Four dangers which must be faced in times of revival are:

- (a) seeking experiences for their own sake.
- (b) relying on feelings and physical manifest-ations.
- (c) spiritual pride.
- (d) excess and fleshly manifestations.

We need to pray that God will give us the wisdom to avoid all the dangers associated with revival, and that in the outpouring of God's Spirit in these last days we will see a true, deep work of God's Spirit that will bring glory to Him, that will save the lost, and revive and restore the Church.

“Will You not revive us again, so that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us Your mercy, O Lord, and grant us Your salvation!”

(Psalm 85:6-7)

REVIVALS IN THE 1960s to 1980s

During the 1960s through to the 1980s, revivals swept through many countries. Millions of people came to salvation, thousands were baptised in the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit were evident in many ways and places, and many new churches were formed.

Key points about these revivals were ...

1. **Initiated by God's Spirit.**
2. **A hunger and passion for God** and His ways. “Blessed are those who *hunger and thirst for righteousness*, for they will be *filled*.” (Matthew 5:6)
3. **Seeking God**, His Kingdom and His righteousness. “Seek *first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness*, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33)
4. **Baptism in the Holy Spirit**, followed by living the Spirit-filled life.
5. **Prayer**, led and inspired by the Holy Spirit.
6. **Word of God** shared and inspired by the Holy Spirit – in Spirit and in Truth.
7. **Presence of God** in worship – centred on the Lord, not on “me”. The singing of Scripture.
8. **Gifts, fruit, and ministries** of the Holy Spirit.
9. **Outreach** – a strong emphasis on sharing the Gospel and teaching new Christians.
10. **Growth and power** in the Church of Jesus Christ. Building up the Church, and unity in the Body of Christ – not fragmentation. See the book of Acts – New Testament Church life, principles, and functioning.
11. **Priesthood of all believers** – each person using the gifts God has given them, in the Church and in the world.
12. **Freedom in Christ** to do all that is led by God's Spirit, and which brings glory and praise to Him.

Hindrances to continuing revival ...

- The flesh – being centred on people (including “me” and my wants), and not focused on the Lord.
- Being controlled by leaders, rather than being led by the Spirit.
- Human methods – not Spirit-led, inspired and anointed by moving in the Spirit. Using worldly ways of trying to get Heavenly results – for example, trying to “get” the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit without hunger for God, repentance, and righteousness.
- Pride in what we have achieved.
- False teaching and practices.
- Becoming performances; extremes, and “new teachings” which are not Scriptural.

QUESTIONS

1. How can we, as individual Christians and as churches, prepare for revival?
2. What things, in the Church and in society, show us the need for revival?
3. Can we “have revival any time we want it” as Leonard Ravenhill suggested?

4. What are some prerequisites to revival?
 5. What are some of the dangers that need to be avoided during times of revival?
 6. Will God revive us again?
-

FINALLY ...

The LORD bless you and keep you.

The LORD make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.

The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

Now, to Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of His glory with rejoicing; to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time, now and forever. Amen!

Jude verses 24-25