

WHAT GENUINE REVIVAL MEANS TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

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The following article was not written as a complete Position Paper, but rather was 'scribbled' by a pastor sharing 'random' thoughts that have grown in his heart for several years. God deeply touched his personal life. His is a small church. It has not been involved in any 'revival' crusade. The pastor's name and church location are not important. What is important are the thoughts shared about whether or not the concepts of 'death to self', 'the exchange of life', and "the filling of the Spirit" must be applied corporately to the program of the local church as well as to individual lives in order to insure God's blessing. If so, how can this happen in the present structure of the average local church? No attempt has been made to edit or "dress" this article in any fashion.

- Vernon Brewer

Revival is a fascinating, intriguing, tantalizing subject. Ask 100 different people and get 100 different definitions—possibly all correct. Revival may be:

- Deliverance from unbelief and fear
- Cleansing from the lusts of the flesh
- Escape from the prison of bitterness.

For all, it is to abandon pretense and theoretical Christianity—a coming into the freshness, power, and joy of reality.

If I were to choose one single verse to represent the heart of revival truth it would have to be Matthew 22:37,

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

Revival is deposing the usurper who sits upon the throne which belongs to God alone. It is a returning to a totality of affection, loyalty, and obedience which God deserves and for which we were designed.

I would like us to give some thought to what revival means to the corporate body, the church.

I do not believe revival is automatically self-sustaining—that is not to say that individual Christians could not or have not walked with God all alone in the midst of unbelief and apostasy. I am saying that it is God's plan for the Body of the Christ, the visible, functioning organization known as the church to operate on the revival premise found in Matthew 22:37. The church should fortify, promote, and implement the will of God to love Him in totality.

In the individual experience this revival experience often comes about as a result of enormous struggle—an ordeal so costly and dramatic that the Bible describes it as dying to self. The reason it is so traumatic is because we are dealing with the basic, underlying principle of our entire Christian experience. We come to realize that to continue to live according to feelings and carnal appetites, defending imagined rights, is to walk in the flesh and to know only failure. To abandon that life is to ruthlessly deal with our own sin and to begin a new life full of a sense of our own need and the sufficiency of our Lord.

I believe that the church, if it is going to operate in revival, is going to face the same desperate, painful, costly experience. The individual must walk in the flesh or in the Spirit. They are mutually exclusive—they cannot co-exist in peace. There will be a premise, announced or unannounced. It will be a commitment to honesty and purity or a continuing deception, a spiritual charade, an exercise in futility and frustration.

It is possible for a church to accept into its corporate body individual members whose lives have been transformed by revival and still retain as its premise principles which are utterly carnal. In that case, the revival cannot long continue.

It is plain to me that the goal, the passion, the longing of the average church is something other than loving the Lord God with our total being. Our goals are varied; and, in most cases, these goals are in answer to the

nagging realization that all is not well, that our churches are not fulfilling the Divine pattern, that we are weighed in the balance and found wanting. Some have said what we need is to be bigger. So we adopt programs, promotions, methods, hire a pastoral P.R. man, and build an organization. To this group, statistics are the badge of success, the evidence of legitimacy, the mark of faithfulness. To others, it is separation. To others, it is a favorite doctrine which consumes them and promises the spiritual life and vitality which they long for so fervently. In spite of extravagant claims, prodigious efforts, and impressive church success stories, the terrible moral disintegration of our society continues. The impact of the church in forestalling our moral breakdown is barely discernible, if it exists at all.

Recently I read an article by a Christian leader who suggested that persecution came upon the church because of their super-aggressiveness. In my estimation that is nonsense. The New Testament Church was hated and persecuted because it loved the Lord Jesus with a passionate love which refused to be extinguished. This love countenanced no rival nor would it be enticed by any substitute. It was an extravagant, courageous love, careless of any possible consequences that its expression might bring. Their shameless, irresistible courage was not a result of a pre-planned aggressiveness—it came forth spontaneously, individually from hearts consumed with love for the Savior.

We are not hated today for the reasons the New Testament Church was hated. In fact, I believe that hatred is the wrong word—today the word is contempt. The world holds the church in contempt for its unconscionable hypocrisy, its verbal allegiance to one standard and its apparent alternative for conduct.

In the heart of the church, the pastor, the board, the leaders who plan the program, spend the money, and set the spiritual tone, there must be this premise of revival. In effect, they must be willing to say that statistics are irrelevant, income of no consequence; we will aspire to obedience—we will pray and labor and long for a church which will do right regardless of price. We will have a church where Matthew 22:37 is our passion, our goal, our spiritual heart beat. If we can't have that kind, we will be glad for God to close it so that we don't continue to contribute to the hypocrisy and confusion wrought by a carnal church.

Personal revival is the cross, the grave, and the joy of resurrection. I suspect that the church in our society is so loaded with debt, so enslaved by monster ego, so thoroughly programmed by the flesh that the cross and the grave are unthinkable; and, therefore, the resurrection joy and power are an unexperienced mystery.

Let us mobilize every energy to loving our God. May He fill our world from horizon to horizon. May our Bible reading be done out of a deep longing to love the author. May our church attendance spring from a desire to foster and promote this love for

God. May the focus of our lives grow smaller and smaller until our one passion is to love Him. Then, out of these hearts, healthy and fragrant with spiritual life shall spring spontaneously all of the characteristics we have been trying to imitate and promote by artificial means.

This, then, is the new premise of the revived church—that we will love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds.

REVIVAL BRINGS A NEW PROGRAM TO THE CHURCH

In the light of this new premise of revival, what will the church program be? Whatever it is, the driving force must be the first and greatest commandment.

Let the program spring out of the Scriptural injunction to make disciples. The command is for the body of Christ to produce disciples. The word, teach, in Matthew 28:19 can also be translated disciple. Our generation of churches is recruiting admirers. We rack our brains for new ideas to keep the people entertained and comfortable. At all costs the statistical integrity of the church must be protected. Our program is aimed at the wrong purpose. The program of the church should be designed to produce disciples.

The Christian must be confronted by the Word of God continually so that his heart can remain clean and free from unconfessed sin. He must be encouraged, edified, uplifted, taught,

inspired, and comforted by the Word. Revival teaches us our great vulnerability, our great weakness, our great need. The atmosphere of the church in revival not only encourages this realistic recognition of human weaknesses but also gives the answer to that weakness through the teaching of death to self and the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Our ladies' missionary societies should be junked unless they fan the fires of love for God and produce disciples—that must be basic. Then, in that atmosphere, proper service can be rendered to the missionaries in material, creative ways.

The young people's groups are often worse than worthless. Until parents with broken, burning hearts can begin to communicate dynamic, living truths, these youth programs ought to be discarded.

Most of the things we do in our churches we do for inferior reasons. Probably the only way that it will ever be rectified is for us to discontinue them and seek the face of the Lord for His direction.

If the ladies are to meet, let them meet to share needs, blessings, and to get on their faces before God. If the men will meet, let them seek the face of God in recognition of their responsibility to provide the spiritual leadership in the church and in the home.

A friend of mine recently shared her feeling with another Christian in our city that what we need in our churches is to take the time to get right with God—to deal with sin and find cleansing and renewal. Her reply was that we don't have time. It is far less

costly personally and less time consuming to continue as we are than to fall on our faces before the God of heaven. Therefore, we are willing to perpetuate activity that is empty, powerless, and of the flesh.

Perhaps it would be worthwhile to consider the almost complete absence of real intercessory prayer in our church program. The explanation is simple. The programs and goals of our churches can be accomplished without Divine help.

When the fervent desire of the church is for genuine deep conviction of sin there must be intercessory prayer since God alone can bring sorrow for sin. Only the Holy Spirit can strip man of his self-righteous pretense and leave him bleeding, broken, and undone before the holy law. Today, we are recruiting admirers of God. This requires dedication, talent, and persistence but not supernatural power. After all, many other sects and 'isms' are successful in their quest for followers; and we certainly wouldn't attribute their success to Divine help.

Then there is the matter of the church's aims. In days gone by, the expressed goal of the church was to produce disciples. This involves death to self and the undisputed Lordship of Christ. The ultimate aim is that Christians would live lives of true holiness in the midst of outright rebellion against the King. All of this is clearly impossible to accomplish by the unassisted arm of flesh. It demands a moment by moment, day by day reliance upon the power of God.

Today, we aim to keep people happy who are already in our churches and to add as many more as possible. For this we have invented many ingenious and effective techniques to make church going fun, comfortable, and, in many cases, profitable. They range from the Mickey Mouse prizes of bubble gum, kites, and pony rides to the big time of bikes, cars, and trips abroad given to reward the most effective scalp gatherers. Jesus refused to be made king on the basis of being a food wholesaler. Can you imagine what use the church of gold-fish swallows and karate experts would have for someone who could supply free food for the eager multitude? He could easily be booked for years in advance! All of this at no personal price, no tears, no long hours of intercession, no desperate, continuing dependence upon convicting, life changing power from heaven.

As a result of all this, the prayer meeting is an incidental part of the church's program. It is a half-hearted gesture of respect to past days. Our prayer now is for 'God's blessing'. Of course, this means more people and more money.

The average pastor today would not even consider investing time for intercessory prayer. His activities are consistent with those of the church, as might well be expected. They are egocentric. They have to do with the organizational and promotional aspects of the church. Lengthy intervals of prayer have no ego value—they do not minister to the overall image. The pastor today is a high-profile man. He

must justify the wisdom of the people who hired him by being successful. These pressures and demands cry out for a man to be busy about the business of building an organization. The temptation, even of a pastor whose church has been touched with revival, is to harness that revival to the chariot of ego.

REVIVAL BRINGS NEW POWER TO THE CHURCH

Much has been said in the New Testament about power. The book of Acts is filled with evidence of Divine power being exercised to confound the unbelievers, convince the skeptic, and convict the sinner. It is a power to shake and shatter the self-confidence of rebellious men. It humbled proud Saul, slew Annanias and Saphira, and shook the Roman Empire to its very foundation. It has been a long time since the church of our society has experienced anything that even remotely resembles this.

In desperate efforts to know this kind of invasion from heaven, some have invented strange doctrinal perversions regarding the Holy Spirit. They have shouted, spoken in tongues, jumped over pews, and indulged in many other emotional excesses. The faithful smile at one another and declare their satisfaction. Then, they depart with the same emptiness.

Others of us have accommodated ourselves to spiritual poverty in a different way. Since God is not free to work in the midst of the Body of

Christ, we have been forced to find alternatives.

One of the alternatives has been to put the invitation on the sensual level. Instead of watching in wonder as God slays people with His holy law, bringing them under profound conviction, we have now turned the invitation into a profitable proposition. There are so many reasons why people should be saved. It is so profitable, so advantageous, so much fun. Our invitations are studies of psychological pressure.

Recently, we have seen the introduction of Christian horror movies, with gross, frightening films; some men are seeking to do what God has been hindered from doing because of unconfessed sin among the believers.

In our visitation programs, we teach all manner of clever ways of manipulating people into agreement. All of these things reflect an ominous, disturbing reality. God is hindered from doing the things He wants to do; and, therefore, conviction is largely absent in most churches.

Revival is the restoration of purity and honesty in the body of Christ. If a church will commit itself to a continuing experience of walking in the truth, God will indeed work among sinners again.

It is said of Joseph in prison, "the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper". How glorious it would be for the unexplainable, mysterious, irresistible activity of God to begin once again to bring about deep, genuine, transforming conversions.

What a desperately exhausting business it is to keep the business of God running at a pace brisk enough to satisfy the ranks of professional Christianity. At the same time, it is all pathetically inadequate in satisfying the great longings of the Christian's heart.

O for the glorious thrill of being able to say "the Lord was with us, and all that we did, the Lord made it to prosper".

In that day, the Lord God will receive the glory and not clever, ambitious men who succeed in ignoring the sin in the church and proceed to build an impressive program in the energy of the flesh.

REVIVAL BRINGS NEW PROCEDURES TO THE CHURCH

Based upon all that has been said there will now be new procedures. Stated briefly, it will be that of allowing God to do what He wants to do.

God wants to make disobedient Christians miserable. God sometimes finds it necessary to chastise His rebellious children. In the mind of God, anything is preferable to a Christian living in unconfessed, sometimes secret sin. Paul tells the Corinthian church that God sometimes prefers killing Christians to letting them go into the disgrace and disaster of sin.

Today, our consuming desire is to assure the serenity of everyone and to make every effort to guarantee an atmosphere pleasing to everyone.

Let me pause long enough to say that the atmosphere of the church should be happy, satisfying, and serene to the obedient Christian. It should be a place of encouragement and edifying to everyone who loves God pre-eminently. The music, the dress, the appearance of those serving in public capacity should be carefully designed to conform to Scriptural patterns and, therefore, pleasing to the Holy Spirit and to those He is controlling. To seek to relate to the worldly mind, attract the carnal appetite or to allure the unsaved by programming methods is dead wrong. Our yearning should be to please God in everything.

It is incredible but true that in many churches professing Christians can sit for years with hearts overflowing with bitterness and hatred and never feel threatened by the message from the pulpit. These people serve on our committees and sometimes preach our sermons.

Our prayer would be that God would indeed convict disobedient believers. We should cry out to God for cleansing at whatever the cost.

If blind Saul had happened along in one of our assemblies we would have rushed him off to the ophthalmologist for a quick diagnosis. God deliberately blinded Saul, and during those days of sightlessness God was dealing with his heart and teaching him many things. Any attempt to mitigate his discomfort or alleviate his inconvenience would have been a controversion of the Divine purpose.

There are many circumstances in the life of the church that call for ten-

der comfort, encouragement, and a reaching out of the hand of love.

At the same time, we need desperately to learn that there is also a time for loving a person but leaving them to God. Who are we to interfere and, by our spiritual insensitivity, abort the convicting work of the Holy Spirit?

Do we desire an atmosphere of such spiritual intensity that if our distinguished choir director refuses to get right with God he will be compelled by his misery to leave the church? Are we willing for talented, prominent, well-to-do people to leave the church because the convicting power of God's Holy Spirit is so irresistible?

Under the premise that bigness is best, there must be an atmosphere which is inoffensive. The crucial, all-important matters of heart-purity are necessarily diminished in importance. We will overlook anything, accommodate ourselves to whatever is necessary if only we can be big—if only we can lay claim to something statistically impressive.

Size is not bad. However, it is always wrong if that is our primary goal. We can never seek size and maintain any kind of spiritual integrity. God wants the undiluted love of our total beings. He wants worship springing forth from pure, thankful hearts.

REVIVAL BRINGS A NEW PURSUIT TO THE CHURCH

Revival calls people in a local church to new goals which are attained

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only in a long-term, consistent experience of obedience.

John speaks in contradiction to many voices in our contemporary evangelical community. In his third epistle, John declares:

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

This is the Spirit-prompted longing of the corporate church living in revival. The practical manifestations of that goal are simple but basic to everything in the life of the church. They are expressed in simple, easy to understand terms.

- *Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands.*
- *Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church.*
- *Children obey your parents.*
- *Fathers, provoke not your children to anger.*
- *Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters.*
- *Love one another.*
- *Forgive one another.*
- *Speak evil of no man.*
- *Pray for one another.*

Then there is the capstone on the subject of conduct in Romans 8:29,

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren.

These are but a very few of a long list pertaining to the conduct of the Christian.

Few would dispute the presence of all manner of uncleanness in the church. Things such as bitterness and lovelessness are the common experience among believers today. It is no secret that many wives are unwilling to be in submission to their husbands. It is, likewise, obvious that many Christian husbands are not willing to accept the responsibility for spiritual leadership. Young people in Christian homes are in obvious, open rebellion. The best we can do about these anomalies is to crack feeble jokes or offer a half-hearted prayer request.

In the church with a new premise of love for the Lord, our conscious pursuit will be obedience in these matters which relate to basic, fundamental relationships within the body.

It is absolutely absurd for us to expect the unhindered outpouring of God's blessing when we ignore these vital matters.

In our church life, we have made the primary matters of importance secondary and the secondary matters primary—we have majored in the minors!

Let us remember that the spiritual credentials of any Christian leader from Pastor to the lowliest officer, are established in the home. The mania to build a program and evangelize at the expense of the home life is not of God. The willingness to overlook obvious failure in the home when conferring spiritual responsibilities is certainly foolhardy and displeasing to God.

REVIVAL BRINGS A NEW POVERTY TO THE CHURCH

The spiritual needs of the contemporary church are deep and desperate. This poverty will not be solved by cosmetic changes in personnel or program. Nor will the church be restored to health merely by a four-week campaign where a number of people meet God, as desirable and admirable as that may be.

The vitality of the church will never be restored to the degree it should be until we become desperate enough to give everything back to the sovereign, holy God. We must give to him unqualified permission to do with us as He will.

In personal revival, we have come to appreciate brokenness in our Christian experience. This same contriteness and desperation must become part of the experience of the church. It must be found in the board. It must permeate the nucleus of the body. It must be the expected, accepted, longed-for criteria for fellowship and service.

God places great value upon brokenness because it is a genuine recognition of need, a sense of total dependence upon His own all-sufficiency.

What little sense of deep, desperate need we find today. In some churches, the prayer meeting has been replaced by an evangelistic service. We don't need to pray because we are not needy. We are rich, increased in goods and have need of nothing. As in Malachi's

day, when the prophet delivered the message of rebuke from God, the people responded with injured innocence, saying over and over again, "wherein" have we failed?

We have the technique; we have the know-how; we can buy the talent; why should we spend precious hours on our faces before God? And while God waits for the fragrant outpouring of our love for Him, we offer instead, feverish activity, clever plans, and statistical evidence of our success.

REVIVAL AND YOU

Are you ready for revival to come
And to have it begin in you?
Are you ready your life to lose,
That yours He might live through?
The Cross is no longer optional;
And, really, it never has been.
Our life to save we must lose, (Matt.
16:25)
If we are a new life to begin.

Preaching the Cross, the power of God,
(1 Cor. 1:18)
Is the message believers need;
But the pleasure-mad throng drives
onward—
Blinded by self, and refusing to heed.
It is not easy ourselves to deny (Luke
9:23,24)
And to find our meaning in Him; (Col. 3:4)
But without revival in the church,
The future of our nation is dim.

His challenge to us is simple:
Allow the Spirit our hearts to search;
(Ps. 139:23,24)
Only as we're transformed, one by one,
(Rom. 12:2)
Will there be life in His Body, the
Church.
The world has chosen darkness; (John
3:19)
Humanism and sin are a blight.
We must die in order to live;
If to the world we're to be the light.
(Matt. 5:14,16)

I am dead with Christ yet I live, (Gal. 2:20)

And as the branch in the vine, I abide; (John 15:5)

The world is crucified unto me;

Unto the world I am crucified. (Gal. 6:14)

All is not lost, if we're willing to lose

Our lives as the Scripture saith; (John 12:25)

Thanks be to God for triumph in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14)

As we overcome the world by faith. (1 John 5:4)

Charles R. Solomon

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