

Old Baptist Weekly Supplement #3 Sins that Prevent Revival—Repentance Needed

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19-21 KJV)

In contemplating the current situation in our culture and our churches, more than a few people have questioned; historically after a season of trial the church has experienced spiritual revival and ingathering. We've had our trial with the impact of COVID on our gatherings, but we see no signs of revival. Why? And my answer, based on the Lord's message to the Ephesian Church (Revelation 2:5), blessings restored and sins forgiven and healed in the family of God, churches included, are always contingent on repentance, true change of conduct repentance, and return to the Lord. I have written of two sins which I sincerely believe are among many that contemporary Christians, our own dear people included, continue to practice and defend rather than confess and repent. In this writing, I will address two additional sins. Until we abandon pride and self, confessing and repenting of these or other sins, we have no Biblical basis on which to expect or hope for revival and healing. God warned His people of this same prerequisite in the Old Testament. (2 Chronicles 7:14) Observe in this verse that God's requirement of "**turn from their wicked ways,**" as this whole verse, is addressed to "**my people which are called by my name,**" not to the nation in which we live, but we, the people of God whose name and banner we claim. Until this spirit of repentance prevails among the Lord's people, we shall likely not see the blessed healing of revival or restoration.

I sincerely confess my personal need. During the last two years, I have struggled through seasons of frustration and unbiblical reaction. I need to repent as well as—likely—most of us if we care enough to long for and sacrifice self for that blessed day of revival.

How Should Believers Treat Their Enemies?

The common response to trials that fails to follow the faith way of Scripture often looks for some evil person or thing to blame for the bad things in our life. "They" are responsible for all this evil. That idea does not at all agree with God's words to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:14. Nor does it agree with the Lord's warning message to the Ephesian Church. (Revelation 2:5)

I have witnessed various "Conspiracy theories" for a good part of my adult life. Most of them focus on a secret group of elite humans who have conspired to slowly mold the whole globe to their ideas so that they intend eventually to control the whole world. When people talk to me about their belief in this idea, I often wonder. If this group is so large and powerful, they don't know you exist. You or I can't do anything to remotely impact them or their schemes, real or imagined. So why do these dear people literally become obsessed with thinking and talking about anything other than these evil people and their supposed powerful and wicked designs?

That wicked men exist who have evil intentions no Bible student would question. And Scripture repeatedly reminds us. It is our God who brings such powerful and wicked designs down, not believers. Psalm 2 prophetically describes the most powerful and the most wicked “Conspiracy” of human history. It was God, not His people, who laughed (Not obsessed) at them and took them down. If godly people in our day sincerely believe such evil people have these designs, we need to be praying to the Lord, not obsessing about the wicked and their supposed all-powerful designs against decent people.

In my observation of a number of “Conspiracy” theorists, folks who believe these ideas, I’ve noticed that every one, no exception, becomes nearly obsessive about their ideas. They seldom want to think or talk about anything other than their conspiracy ideas. This behavior alone should serve a solemn warning to believers to avoid them. We can’t obsess against evil men and devote our whole being to God and His people. (Matthew 22:37-39) If we love God with all our being, and further love our neighbor as ourselves in like manner, how can we rationalize the time we spend in near obsessive focus on anything else? And the Bible answer is simple. We can’t. And we shouldn’t.

This study nudged me to raise the basic question. If we believe Scripture, and if we believe our God who gave us Scripture, what does God in Scripture tell us about how we are to treat those people whom we regard as our enemies? The passage listed above from Romans 12:19-21 quite directly addresses this issue and teaches us how to deal with our enemies. There is an interesting feature to this lesson. It implies that the person described as our “Enemy” is someone who lives within our circle of acquaintances. We feed him, we give him water. Perhaps we shouldn’t invest so much time imagining people to be our enemies whom we do not know and shall never know. Every hour we spend thinking or talking about evil people whom we shall never know robs us of precious time visiting and ministering to people in our church, people whom we neglect because of our ideas. When did you last visit an older or ailing member of your church family? Or even phone them to encourage them?

To the extent we invest our spiritual and emotional energy and time in such ideas, especially to the neglect of our church family, we need to repent and beg the Lord’s forgiveness and healing. Are we willing to begin this process today?

What Should Occupy Our Minds?

I introduce the answer to this question with a passage.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Philippians 4:8 KJV)

By Biblical definition (2 Timothy 3:16-17), every Bible “List” such as this verse, is both inclusive and exclusive. It covers everything God intends for us to do to attain the desired outcome. (Philippians 4:9; “...**and the God of peace shall be with you.**”) It also excludes anything not specifically contained in the

list. If we accept this basic premise of inspired Scripture as God-given and as wholly containing God's teachings to us for faith and a fruitful, God-glorifying life, we could learn a world of invaluable truth from this one verse. Paul names things that are qualified by six descriptive terms named in the verse. He concludes the verse with "...**think on these things.**" He did not write, "Think on these things, plus your favorite theories of evil men and their wicked designs."

Many years ago a very wise man observed a near universal principle of human behavior. "**Be careful choosing your enemies. You shall become just like them.**" I have lived to witness his words lived out many times since he first spoke them to me. Just recently I heard a very sincere Christian talk at length about the disgrace of a professing believer he knew who refused to pay his debts. He spoke with great fervor about the dishonorable lifestyle of this man. However, I was aware that this same man has not always been nearly as faithful as he claims about paying his own debts. He so focused on the dishonorable man as to regard the man as his enemy. Yet, even as he spoke with indignation about that man's sins, he was guilty of some of those same sins.

What most occupies your mind today? What has most occupied your mind over the last two years? Have you applied the Philippians 4:8 filter to your thoughts and avoided spiritual thinking time on other topics? Or have you invested most of your time on vaccine or no vaccine, mask or no mask, or on those awful conspirators and their evil designs?

Aside from the wise words of my friend, God warns us with a similar message in Scripture.

For as he thinketh in his heart so is he. (Proverbs 23:7)

God warns us in this verse. When we allow our minds to free-flow, especially into evil things or evil people, what we think about slowly molds our own character into that same shape. It doesn't happen overnight. It rather happens ever so slowly, so much so that we often fail to notice anything different. But this erosion of our character plays quite well with Satan and his designs for us. Not nearly as well with the Lord, a good reason He includes this warning in Scripture.

If we put a stop-watch on topics we thought about over the last year, how much time would we actually have invested in things described by Paul in Philippians 4:8? How much time have we invested in things that are more nearly mirror opposite to those six descriptive terms?

If we have allowed our minds to migrate to wicked men and their wicked designs, real or imagined, we have—in like opposite proportion—neglected godly thoughts in the form of those six descriptions.

When I first learned that churches were to be closed because of COVID, I immediately started researching how I might continue my preaching and teaching the church I have served as pastor for almost fifty years. Instead of my usual one message a week, I chose to schedule two messages. To my surprise, the study and meditation necessary for these two messages required about four or more times the time I spent in my studies. Indirectly, COVID therefore nudged me to more study time with my Bible. It also

pushed me more strongly than ever before to think and live my life one day at a time, not try to pack the next ten days into today. For such things, I am thankful to the Lord.

For those times when I allowed the lingering isolation from people I love and respect in my faith to push me toward impatience or frustration, I confess my need to spend some repenting time with the Lord. We all might well improve our spiritual health and outlook by self-examination, confession, repentance, and prayer for the Lord's forgiveness and healing.

I've limited my writing to four sins that I fear are far more common among believers during the last two years than we would like to acknowledge. No doubt you could name many more.

My reason for writing on these four examples is to address the frightening absence of revival. If we hope for revival, we must confront these sins, and whatever sins we have allowed to grow in us during this time, to the Lord, begin a season of serious repentance, and prayer for the Lord's forgiveness.

In the next writings I hope to cover four New Testament "Lists" that provide us with detailed descriptions and information regarding how we are to order our lives so as to be fruitful in our faith and honoring to the Lord.

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