

Definition of Revival, Part I: Fallacies of Revival

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: 2 Chronicles 7:13-14

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The interest in revival has mushroomed during recent years. Prayer groups for revival have sprung up all over the world. Some even urge fasting and prayer for it.

Articles in magazines and periodicals as well as books on the subject have exploded into the marketplace. In the midst of all the popularity of revival, some people have announced its arrival.

Confusion over revival

Despite its popularity, however, the notoriety surrounding the issue of revival causes problems. Misunderstanding and ignorance about the meaning of revival grows unabated.

The announcements of its arrival by certain groups cause confusion. As a result, others dismiss the whole belief about revival.

Any one who investigates the current discussions on revival senses these problems. The clues that they exist are many.

These frequent statements identify their presence:

1. "It's here. The river of revival flows at...";
2. "We do not need revival. Everything is going great.";
3. "I do not believe in revival. That is Old Testament practice."

These remarks barely scratch the surface of the problem. I have personally discovered that few people even want to discuss revival.

For example, when I tell friends and acquaintances of my ministry and desire for revival, they frequently walk away without further comment.

Some of them switch the subject to another topic. Others who remain to discuss it usually reveal great confusion about it.

Consequences of confusion

Ignorance and misunderstanding about revival produce consequences. First, they affect you personally. Thus, believers lack spiritual power. They miss God's glorious manifest presence. Sometimes, individual believers separate over the issue.

The greatest repercussion, however, comes from their impact upon the Christian's relationship with God. The changes identify significant effects.

1. They oftentimes deify mankind and dethrone the sovereignty of God.
2. They center Christianity around self and personal gratification.
3. They keep believers from obeying God.
4. They rob God of what rightly belongs to Him by denying Him glory, honor, praise, adoration, and fear.
5. They degrade His character and nature.
6. They abase the truth of Scripture about revival.
7. They degrade and even reject the works of Christ: His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension, and His rule over the Church.
8. They reject the work of the Holy Spirit by grieving and quenching His ministry.

Cause of confusion

Although numerous reasons for this confusion exist, a few major explanations emerge. First and foremost, ignorance of the Biblical truth of revival causes the greatest confusion. The Scriptures repeatedly speak of revival. They record at least 9 different occasions of revival in the Old Testament. The following summary reveals other times that the Bible clearly speaks to it.

1. Several Old Testament books assign their major content to revivals: Judges, Ezra, and Nehemiah, for example.
2. The Psalms record numerous prayers for revival: Psalm 79, 80, 85, and portions of 119, to name a few of them.
3. The book of Acts records frequent outpourings of the Holy Spirit in revival.
4. The Apostle James recorded a strong call to revival in James 4.4-10.
5. Of the seven letters to the Churches recorded in Revelation 2-3, five of them call for revival.

Indeed, the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, speaks frequently about revival. Not only does it make reference to its occurrence, it outlines its necessity, its features, and its requirements.

Sadly, much of the Church of Jesus Christ has become Biblically ignorant, especially on revival.

Second, believers doubt God's word as it relates to this important issue. They deny that the Bible speaks about revival or its need in the present day. They ignore the signs for its need and question its possibility today.

Third, other Christians misunderstand the Biblical record on revival. This error leads to several different manifestations. In some instances, believers distort the means of revival.

In so doing, they prescribe a formula built upon certain methods and means. If followed, they will produce a revival.

But God is not a jack-in-the-box. He moves sovereignly in revival even when sincere believers follow Biblical means for revival. Simply following methods and means used in other revivals does not guarantee it.

Last, many simply disobey God's word as it speaks about revival. Granted, some fail to follow it out of ignorance. As stated earlier, this kind of disobedience can be corrected by the study and application of God's word.

But sadly, multitudes resist the Bible's demands wilfully. They clearly understand its call and its mandate. But they fail to obey them, seeking to satisfy the flesh instead.

Crossroads for believers

Christians and the Church of Jesus Christ stand today at a crossroads. They can continue the present downhill path in spiritual decline. Sadly, most believers choose this path.

Or, they can correct the present path to seek spiritual reformation and revival.

This latter path requires believers to read and study their Bibles to learn of God's great works in revival. The confusion, which they experience over revival, would disappear with the application of Scriptural truths.

By God's grace and mercy, it would lead to an effusion of the Holy Spirit upon believers and the Church that would result in revival.

Cry for revival

Of the many Scriptures on revival, I call your attention to 2 Chronicles 7:13-14:

"If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

I do so for several reasons. You probably know the verse by heart. If not, you no doubt know of the verse and possess some knowledge of its implications.

Further, it contains all of the features and requirements of Biblical revival. Consequently, then, an understanding of this reference can clear the confusion and lead to personal revival.

This reference describes God's promise to King Solomon upon the completion of the Temple. God had descended upon the Temple in dramatic fashion. His presence filled it and brought great fear upon the people.

No one dared to enter the Temple; they all fell prostrate before the mighty presence of God. (See 2 Chronicles 5.11-7.3.)

After contemplating the greatness of this display, Solomon feared that the people would sin against God, resulting in God withdrawing His glorious presence. He prayed in the night to God, seeking a promise from Him to return, if the people repented of their sin.

God heard Solomon's prayer and issued His promise as recorded in 2 Chronicles 7.13-14. As you can readily see, then, this passage clearly speaks to revival: its need, its requirements, and its blessings.

Clarification of fallacies

From this passage, I want to examine some particular absolute truths about the fallacies of revival and how it applies to the Church of Jesus Christ and your life today.

As a result of confusion about revival, certain fallacies have taken on the aura of truth. These false assumptions, however, do not comply with Biblical truth on the issue.

And even though some of them contain a kernel of truth, they miss the whole of the truth.

The passage clearly identifies the need of revival, the meaning of revival, and the requirements of revival. Each of these factors requires further explanation.

Future issues of Restoration will cover them in more detail in proper order.

At this time, however, a simple reading of these verses suggests the following items that describe common fallacies on revival today.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will clarify for you the truth, convict you of its need in your life, and correct you to bring about spiritual revival in you that will revolutionize and transform your life. I pray that it will lead to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Evangelism. Many Christians today confuse evangelism with revival. They are not the same. True, revival results in the salvation of lost souls, but as a consequence of revival.

Evangelism pertains to reaching lost men and women with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It then, of necessity, reaches to the world, the non-Christian. It entails the message of regeneration and saving faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners.

These who are dead in their trespasses and sins cannot be revived. They need regeneration, to be born again from above by the Spirit. (See John 3.3-8 and Ephesians 2.1-9.) Evangelism is not revival.

Excitement. Segments of the Church mistake excitement for revival. This error equates commotion, thrill, and inspiration with revival. Certainly, they say, such lively animation in religious practice must mean revival has come.

I remind you, however, of the spirited celebration of David when he first attempted to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. Yet, it resulted in God's judgment for failure to move it according to God's instructions. (See 2 Samuel 6.1-10.)

Certainly, those at the celebration of the Temple in Solomon's day would not have described it as exciting. It went beyond that. Excitement is not revival.

Enthusiasm. Numerous others interpret enthusiasm as revival. A devoted and eager interest in God and the Church must signal revival. After all, enthusiasm drives participation and cooperation with programs, even Biblically taught programs.

The disciples in Acts 1.1-8 certainly displayed enthusiasm. But, Jesus bridled their enthusiasm and instructed them on their need for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them. Enthusiasm is not revival; revival exceeds enthusiasm.

Enhancements. Others within the Christian community suggest enhancements correspond to revival. By enhancements they mean updated and modern facilities, with the latest in design.

Modern equipment, they say, spurs worship and makes it more meaningful (than what?). They prize location and rely upon external conditions and elements.

Jesus spoke emphatically to this very issue with the woman of Samaria at the well. The account is recorded in John 4.19-24. She, like these mistaken ones, thought externals resulted in proper worship.

But Jesus rebuked her, teaching her that God requires true worship, in spirit and in truth. Externals, like enhancements, have no bearing upon it. Enhancements are not revival.

Emphasis. A large number of believers deem revival as a special emphasis. This special emphasis takes on several uses. For example, to some the emphasis comes in the form of special meetings.

The Church designates a certain time of the year for these meetings and calls them “revival meetings.” Still others emphasize certain doctrines to the exclusion of the fundamental truths of Scripture.

When this concept results in perceived benefits, they believe that revival has arrived.

Finally, some promote Christian duty as revival. They stress practical Christianity and obedience to designated Biblical means. Practical Christianity certainly needs application, and it can, in some instances, lead to revival.

The Church of Ephesus, as described in Revelation 2.1-11, sounds a lot like this kind of church, one with several special emphases in practice. Yet Jesus rebuked them for their sin and called them to repentance. Emphasis is not revival.

Emotion. This particular fallacy receives vast recognition as revival. Waves of emotion usually accompany times of revival. Thus, many tend to equate the two and conclude, emotion equals revival. It does not.

Effective speakers and musicians can generate and manipulate emotion in crowds. Individuals can self-generate it, too. Some go to one extreme with an over emphasis upon it; others dismiss it entirely.

You can have emotional experiences without either saving faith in Christ or repentance. The Old Testament provides two prime examples in Cain, the murderer of Abel, and King Saul, who grieved over his mistreatment of David.

In addition, The Gospels describe Judas, who betrayed Christ, as deeply sorrowful for his sin.

Yet none of these repented of their sins. (See Genesis 4.8-14; 1 Samuel 13.8-16; 15.10-31; and Matthew 27.3-10.) They sorrowed not unto repentance.

In 2 Corinthians 7.8-11, Paul warns against false emotion which does not lead to repentance. Emotional responses do not guarantee revival.

Effects. In this fallacy, believers mistake the presence of the effects of revival for revival. In this way, two particular effects get notice, unity and prayer.

Sadly, some Church leaders of today have urged unity with other religious organizations in the hopes of securing revival. Ecumenism has brought joint doctrinal statements and joint efforts. Others beg for unity at any cost, without purity and without truth.

However, this kind of agreement yields neither Biblical unity nor revival. It merely opens the door for the entrance of “false prophets and grievous wolves.” The Bible warns believers about them. (See Matthew 7.15-23 and Acts 20.29-30.)

In particular today, prayer groups for revival have mushroomed, believing that this special practice equals revival. Yet, in this so important and vital requirement for revival, error exists.

It can result from the desire for selfish advancement, without brokenness for sin, without repentance, and without seeking God's face. It succumbs to the practice of merely saying prayers.

Further, it attempts to promote prayer among those who do not and cannot agree in prayer. Such activity fails.

Still others concede to the practice of a “back door” revival. This approach persuades people that they are spiritually ok. They just need more of the same.

But this conclusion ignores the marks of true revival and the manifestations that reveal the need for revival. As a result, these people lack understanding as to why true revival eludes them.

Each of these instances describe the condition warned by Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:5:

"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

Effects, then, are not proof of revival.

Escape. In recent times, this delusion has crept into the Church of Jesus Christ. It describes those who desire revival for the sake of saving the country. The nation has indeed slid into grave sin.

Some, then, use revival as an attempt to save a nation, an organization or a career. In the process, they “pray” for revival to remove sin that they refuse to forsake. They “pray” for revival to remove problems that the Church refuses to overcome according to Scripture.

But God, contrary to this notion, sends it to glorify Himself. The disciples missed this aspect in their desire for Christ to establish the kingdom. (See Acts 1.6-8.) No, revival is not an escape.

Education. Frequently in this day, Church leaders have emphasized spiritual growth programs as revival. They implement Bible studies, exhort attendance in Sunday School, and promote spiritual growth.

Usually, however, these programs concentrate upon Biblical knowledge and “how to” sessions. Virtually never do they urge personal holiness.

Paul warned against this kind of practice by reminding the Corinthians that the letter of the law kills, but the Spirit gives life. (See 2 Corinthians 3.6.)

Entitlement. Others emphasize a formula, as stated earlier in this article. If the Church will follow certain steps, a revival will result. Revival, they say, is an entitlement; it comes to those who do it right.

But, many Godly, well-intentioned people have tried this approach with dismal failure. Joel the prophet called God's people to repentance and revival, but warned them that it was no guarantee. Note his statement in Joel 2:12-14:

“Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: {13} And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. {14} Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God?”

Joel conditioned a revival upon God's sovereignty, where it belongs. No, revival is not an entitlement.

Expansion. Church growth experts tout numerical growth as revival. They push the adoption of prescribed methods to facilitate physical expansion of a Church.

If a Church will follow these methods, they declare that it will increase in size. They will experience God's blessing, a kind of revival.

Sadly, however, most increases in Church attendance result from transfers from other smaller or less active churches in the locality. They want to become part of something big or fun. This is not true Church growth by new believers.

They have fallen into the snare that the Church of Laodicea did. Jesus described them as rich and increased in goods, but knew not that they were poor. (See Revelation 3.14-22.) Expansion is not revival.

Extravaganzas. The modern Church specializes in the extravaganza and calls it revival. Some churches emphasize the extraordinary. These may include miracles, physical manifestations, and even supernatural manifestations.

Another form stresses spectacular events. They include special productions, especially around holidays, and special programs with heroes and star-studded speakers and musicians.

Remember the Church at Corinth. Indeed, they had supernatural manifestations of the Spirit. But they also allowed and practiced grievous sin.

Even the presence of the supernatural, and certainly God still does the supernatural, does not guarantee revival.

Conclusion

With great sorrow, I conclude that these fallacies describe the Church and many believers, perhaps you and your Church. It signals the desperate need of true Holy Spirit sent, life changing, revival.

What can the Spirit accomplish in your life today with these truths? He can:

1. clarify the truth;
2. convict you of sin;
3. correct you from sin;
4. conform you to the truth.

How will you respond to them? Will you reject them? Or will you:

1. reaffirm the truth;
2. repent of your sin;
3. 3. rely upon the Holy Spirit to apply them to your life?

I pray that, in grace, the Holy Spirit will apply them to you and begin a spiritual transformation in your life today.