

# True Revival

By Tom Hill

**Bible text:** Luke 11:13

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Revivals and spiritual awakenings have come to Christians and the Church of Jesus Christ for centuries. These revivals and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit differ from a mere revival of religion and more devout religious practice as many religions of the world might emphasize.

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. Despite its current popularity, ignorance and errors about revival abounds.

## **Fallacies Of Revival**

### **Confusion over revival**

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. In addition, 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:

- “It’s here. The river of revival flows at...”;
- “We do not need revival. Everything is going great.”; and
- “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, Christians 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. These changes identify significant effects in the believer's life. For example:

- They oftentimes deify humanity and dethrone the sovereignty of God.
- They center Christianity around self and personal gratification.
- They keep Christians from obeying God.
- They rob God of what rightly belongs to Him by denying Him glory, honor, praise, adoration, and fear.
- They degrade His character and nature.
- They abase the truth of Scripture about revival.
- They degrade and even reject the works of Christ: His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension, and His rule over the Church.
- 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, ignorance of the Biblical truth of revival causes the greatest confusion. Sadly, much of the Church of Jesus Christ has become Biblically ignorant, especially on revival. They simply do not know that Scripture speaks about it.

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, Christians distort the means of revival. Additionally, the misunderstandings lead people to mistake some religious expressions for revival. In so doing, they prescribe a formula built upon certain methods and means. If followed, they will produce a revival, so they say.

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

## **Crossroads for Christians**

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

On the other hand, they can correct the present path to seek spiritual reformation and revival by God's grace.

This latter path requires Christians 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.

### **Clarification of fallacies**

Because 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. Moreover, although some of them contain a kernel of truth, they miss the whole of the truth. They appear convincing. However, a closer examination reveals their falsity. The following observations expose their errors.

**Evangelism.** Many Christians today confuse evangelism with revival. They are not the same. True, revival results in the salvation of lost souls. But, it occurs because of the effects of true revival.

Evangelism pertains to reaching lost men and women with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It then, of necessity, reaches to the world, the nonChristian. It entails the message of regeneration by the Holy Spirit who brings saving faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners.

These who are dead in their trespasses and sins need regeneration, to be born 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. (See 2 Chronicles 7.1-3.) 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. However, 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 usually mean updated and modern facilities, with the latest in design. Additionally, modern equipment, they say, spurs worship and makes it more meaningful (than what?). They prize location of the church property 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 and location 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 that 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, while 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, Christians 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 practice, 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. However, this conclusion ignores the marks of true revival and the manifestations that reveal the need for revival. Therefore, 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 their country or the world. The world and every 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 to produce a revival. If the Church will follow certain steps, they say, a revival will result. To them, revival is an entitlement. It comes to those who do it right.

Nevertheless, many Godly, well-intentioned people have tried this approach with dismal failure. Joel the prophet called God's people to repentance and spiritual renewal, 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 their spiritual renewal 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 today result from transfers from other churches in the locality. They want to become part of something new, different, big, or fun. This is not true Church growth by adding new Christians.

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. Nevertheless, 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 today, perhaps you and your Church. In essence, they almost entirely set aside the agency of the Holy Spirit in revival. They represent revival as an article of manufacture. You only have to set the machinery in motion, raise the steam of excitement, and you have revival.

They take no account of the fuel used to make it happen. Artifices catch the attention of the masses. Devices entrap the careless. An exaggerated style of preaching produces alarm, shakes suspicious hopes, and raises a state of general excitement, no matter what kind. It does not seem important. It brings people to hear, and converts result, proponents say. However, truth, reverence, humility, and faith vanish over such machinations.

## **Realities Of Revival**

### **Definition of revival**

The current condition of the Church requires an accurate, Biblical definition of revival. The many fallacies of revival cause confusion within the Church. In addition, the spiritual decline of the Church and individual Christians demands a clear statement to give proper direction for its solution.

Biblical revival describes an evangelical spiritual experience when God pours out His glorious presence upon the child (ren) of God through an extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit that produces extraordinary effects in the child (ren) of God and in the world.

In essence, this sentence definition identifies four critical, fundamental areas that call for more detailed explanation. They are the nature of revival, the source of revival, the objects of revival, and the effects of revival.

### **Nature of revival**

As declared in the simple definition, revival describes an extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the child (ren) of God. In revival, God manifests His glorious presence. He overwhelms people, and they fall before Him in worship, fear, and adoration. God's presence permeates all of life.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones described this manifest presence of God in revival. He characterized it in this fashion.

“It is a consciousness of the presence of God the Holy Spirit literally in the midst of the people. Probably most of us...have never known that, but that is exactly what is meant by a visitation of God's Spirit. It is all beyond the highest experiences in the normal life and working of the Church. Suddenly those present in the meeting become aware that someone has come

amongst them, they are aware of a glory, they are aware of a presence. They can not define it, they can not describe it, and they can not put it into words. They just know that they have never known anything like this before. Sometimes they describe it as ‘days of heaven on earth.’ They really feel that they are in heaven, they have forgotten time; they are beyond that, time has no longer any meaning for them, nor any real existence, they are in a spiritual realm. God has come down amongst them and has filled the place and the people with a sense of His glorious presence.”<sup>(1)</sup>

This describes revival. God pours out His glorious presence and manifests Himself to believers who note His presence. They feel Him. He reveals Himself in unmistakable fashion through an outpouring of His Holy Spirit. His Spirit fills them, and His awesome presence brings a wonder and amazement all of its own. It is clearly Him and not a manufactured or manipulated feeling.

### **Source of revival**

The stated definition says, in part, “...God pours out His presence...” That phrase recognizes the role of the sovereignty of God in revival. Revival comes from God when and where He pleases.

This statement, however, flies in the face of popular opinion. All of the fallacies have one common theme. Humanity can meet certain requirements that, when fulfilled, guarantee and produce revival. Nevertheless, history and Scripture prove the error of that conclusion.

God acts sovereignly in revival for at least four reasons. First, it demonstrates that the true nature of humanity, which is too weak in the flesh to attain God's righteous demands, requires God's sovereign work. Second, it reveals the attributes of God, loving, just, gracious, and merciful, to name just a few of them. Third, it shows mankind's complete dependence upon God. Finally, it exposes the futility of formulas to produce it. In other words, revival begins and ends with God. He maintains complete control over every aspect of it.

Charles Spurgeon referred to the Psalms to describe God's sovereign work in his London ministry. You will recognize the reliance upon God's sovereignty in this example from Psalms 80:18-19:

“So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. {19} Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.”

The psalmist prays to God for relief, but he shows his utter reliance upon God for it. God must quicken His people even before they will seek Him. He must turn His people and cause His face to shine upon them.



Finally, the outpouring of God's glorious presence on Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 confirms unmistakably the sovereignty of God in revival.

In contrast, Charles Finney, for example, believed that any one could produce revival simply by following stated means. In his writings, Finney outlined the specific steps that would culminate in revival. Numerous Godly men and women faithfully followed them, including many today. Yet, they have failed to experience revival. He neglected the sovereignty of God in revival.

God holds revival, the manifestation of His glorious presence, in His hand to dispense as He wills, when He wills, and where He wills.

### **Objects of revival**

The definition of revival identifies the objects of revival, the child (ren) of God. They contrast with the world. The world of the unsaved needs regeneration, not revival. They require the new birth, which the Holy Spirit gives to God's chosen ones. To revive means to impart new health, vigor, or spirit to it. The one revived has spiritual life restored to use. Since unbelievers have no existing spiritual life, they need that new life. Once born from above by the Spirit, they can experience the outpouring of God's glorious presence.

Numerous Scripture references establish this truth. However, one reference ties the origin of revival together with the objects of revival, Acts 2. It shows the sovereignty of God as the source of revival as well as the people of God as its object. Those who believed on Christ as a result of Pentecost entered, too, into the glorious experience of God's poured out Spirit.

Church history records it in application as well. In this regard, many examples exist to substantiate it. Charles Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, documented it in his ministry. God sent revival to Spurgeon's work in London for many years. He said very simply:

“A true revival is to be looked for in the Church of God.”(2)

When God sends revival, it comes to His people.

### **Outcome of revival**

Finally, Biblical revival produces extraordinary effects in the child (ren) of God and in the world. But, it reveals itself first in the Church. Of the many effects displayed in revival, I will identify only a few of them.

In revival, doctrinal truth becomes a primary emphasis. The Scriptures actually become the foundation of life and practice. Christians view God as actually sovereign, not an old man helplessly observing His creatures. Once again, the Church recognizes Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church. Believers no longer quench, grieve, nor resist the Holy Spirit. Salvation becomes more than a catch phrase or an innocuous decision.

In revival, God also exhibits His great power. For example, he displays it in believers' changed lives. Holiness and separation from the world mark the believer's life. Christians increase their faithfulness to God. True repentance and sorrow from long forgotten sins characterize everyday life in revival.

The world receives the impact of His power, too. Flocks of unbelievers feel a deep sense of conviction for sin and come to true saving faith in Jesus Christ. The holiness of Christians together with the salvation of nonChristians frequently changes society. The blatant immorality, drunkenness, and debauchery of life ceases in great measure.

Finally, God sends revival for one great reason, His honor and glory. Mark well the statement in Isaiah 64:1-2:

“Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence. {2} As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!”

### **Cry For Revival**

No more pressing need has ever existed for God to display His presence and power in revival than today. What can the Church of Jesus Christ and believers do, then, in the face of this staggering necessity? The Scriptures by abundant example and exhortation call the Church to pray and seek God's mercy. (See Hebrews 4.16.)

However, this kind of prayer can result only from the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit. One passage in particular gives hope to the believer. It is the example of the disciples at prayer in Acts 4:25-30:

“Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? {26} The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. {27} For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, {28} For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. {29} And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, {30} By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.”

It shows both their prayer for God to manifest Himself and their reliance upon God's sovereignty.

Furthermore, Jesus encouraged believers by a promise to send His Holy Spirit to those who ask. Note His promise in Luke 11:13:

"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

Jesus has promised additional and greater outpourings of His Spirit in answer to believing prayer. This promise will hearten those who pray for spiritual revival.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will prompt you to join with countless others who cry day and night to our God that He will indeed pour out His glorious presence upon His people through a mighty effusion of His Holy Spirit. May He come to you personally today in grace and bring this spiritual encounter in your life. May He come to His people in a glorious effusion to His honor, glory, and praise.

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## References

1. Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn, M.D. Revival. Crossway Books: Westchester, IL. 1987. P. 306.
2. Edwards, Brian. Revival! A People Saturated With God. Evangelical Press: Durham, EN. 1990. P. 27.