

Sermon #1

**What is
Revival?**

For years I thought revival was for fanatic Christians and had strange connotations which I did not like. When I thought of revival I envisioned a street meeting with loud music, a huge banner which says, "Revival" and an uneducated preacher belching out, "Repent, friends, repent!" Of course this was a stereotype on my part and a wrong understanding of revival. However, I might say that my stereotype was more accurate than my own understanding of revival which was almost nil.

The whole idea of revival was scary to me. I heard about people screaming out, passing out and laughing out and that all seemed too radical for me. After all, I am an educated man and I must avoid all emotionalism and extremism of any kind. Above all, I had to protect my reputation.

Yet, the more I studied, thought through and prayed over the whole concept of revival, the more fascinated I became with it and I began to understand that this concept is very much a biblical truth and part of my Calvinistic, Presbyterian heritage.

DEFINITION OF REVIVAL

Source of Revival. Christians get the concept of revival from the Old Testament as it related to the nation of Israel. There are several verses which actually use the word revival (at least in the NASB and NKJ), but the concept of revival is taught in many places in the Old and New Testaments.

Habakkuk 3:2: Habakkuk cried out, "***O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years***" (NKJ). He realized Israel was going into captivity in Babylon although he did not know it was for 70 years. The prophet was praying that the worship of Jehovah-God would come through a mighty revival when the nation was in captivity. Habakkuk also realized that God's wrath was on Israel for its disobedience and he asked God for mercy for the people. God would have to give mercy and send revival if the people were to stay true to Jehovah-God while in captivity.

Psalm 85:6: "***Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?***" The Psalmist writes this psalm after the seventy years captivity in Babylon. He begs God to revive the people so that the people again can rejoice in Jehovah-God.

It is very clear in scripture that God alone brings revival. ***“Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name” (Psalm 80:18)***. If God does not choose to bring revival, no matter how much praying, believing, witnessing or preaching is done, it will not happen. However, if God chooses to bring revival, He will do it through the means of prayer, believing, witnessing and preaching. Revival is the prerogative of God alone. Revival comes from God alone and is not made by man. It is wrong to think if we implement certain revival techniques revival is bound to occur because God must bless our effort. You cannot put a sign out front of the church which says, “Revival” and say that revival is occurring. That is man-made manipulation and is not of God.

Meaning of Revival. The basic idea in the concept of revival is “to give life” or “to stir life.” Revival bring spiritual life to saved and unsaved alike.

“Revival is a supernatural acceleration of the conversion process under the preaching of the Word of God.” Jonathan Edwards (Calvinist, Great Awakening).

“Revival is the renewal of the first love of Christians in the awakening and conversion of sinners to God.” Charles Finney (Arminian, Finney revivals)

“Revival is a sovereign, powerful, extraordinary moving of the Holy Spirit through the preached Word which spiritually convicts, arouses and enlivens professing, backslidden Christians in the church and which results in a supernatural acceleration of the conversion process to the unsaved” (Jack Arnold).

“Revival days are not normal days in the life of the church. They are supernormal, supernatural. They are great days of the church when God manifests His presence in overwhelming reality. They leave you with a profound realization of God’s greatness and transcendence and of your own unworthiness and dependence on Him. God’s presence and power are so mightily and extensively at work during revival that God accomplishes more in hours or days than usually results from years of faithful, non-revival ministry. Revival usually involves some preaching and evangelism but revival is far more than evangelism. Man can evangelize—only God can give revival.

During revival people are moved toward Christ, people who can be moved in no other way. Many prayers that have gone unanswered for years are gloriously answered. Often the very atmosphere seems awesomely filled with God’s power. Christians recognize it as the holy presence of God.

Sinners feel a fearsome awareness of God's presence and their own sinfulness" (Dewey, Revival Five).

Other Terms for Revival. Sometimes Christians refer to revival as "an outpouring of the Holy Spirit," "times of refreshing" or "extraordinary manifestations of God's grace." These terms more clearly stress the supernatural aspect of revival. NOTE: Revival may last a few hours, a few days, a few weeks or months and even in some cases a few years. God brings revival; God continues revival and God stops revival. Revival may come to individuals, single churches, groups of churches, geographical areas and even to a nation. Revival is biblical but not a normal experience of the Christian or church.

"One thing to be borne in mind is that since the days of Pentecost there is no record of the sudden and direct work of the Spirit of God upon the souls of men that has not been accompanied by events more or less abnormal. It is, indeed, on consideration, only natural that it should be so. We cannot expect an abnormal inrush of Divine light and power, so profoundly affecting the emotions and changing the lives of men, without remarkable results. As well expect a hurricane, an earthquake, or a flood to leave nothing abnormal in its course, as to expect a true Revival that is not accompanied by events quite out of our ordinary experience" (A.T. Schofield).

Comparisons

Renewal. Renewal is a spiritual stirring in the hearts of true Christians by the Holy Spirit which causes a greater love for Christ and His kingdom but does not bring massive numbers of unsaved to salvation. Renewal may lead to revival but does not have to.

Reformation. Reformation is an extended work of the Holy Spirit within the visible church causing spiritual changes in Christians and the way people view reality which in turn deeply affects society.

Reformation includes Christian schooling to cause Christians to think biblically so as to affect society. Reformation takes years and may never be completely finished. Revival will help accelerate reformation but revival is not a cure for all of societies needs where reformation may be.

THE POWER FOR REVIVAL

The power for revival is God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Sometimes the words "revival fire" are used among Christians to explain the power of the Holy Spirit.

Symbol Of Fire

Elijah. The nation of Israel had gone apostate and it seemed as if there were no true believers in all of Israel. Elijah was called upon to do spiritual battle with the prophets of Baal. The situation seemed hopeless to all but Elijah who said his God would burn the altar. ***"Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire--he is God" (I Kings 18:24).*** Elijah had the altar drenched with water three times and still the fire fell from heaven. ***"Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!" (I Kings 18:38-39).*** The people then followed Jehovah and the nation was preserved. God's power is compared with fire - fire from heaven!

Mount Sinai. God came to Mt. Sinai. Thunder and lightning hit the mountain. The whole summit was covered with smoke, black clouds and deep darkness. Then Jehovah descended with fire: ***"Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently...." (Exodus 19:18).*** The top of Mt. Sinai blazed with fire. God came down in fire - fire from heaven.

Tabernacle and Temple. Fire came down from heaven to fill both the tabernacle and temple. They were filled with God's fiery glory.

Pentecost. John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptize His people with the Holy Spirit and fire. ***"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the***

Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). This happened on the Day of Pentecost. This time, however, God's fiery glory separated into individual flames of visible fire which then rested on those filled with the Holy Spirit. ***"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them" (Acts 2:1-3).*** The Holy Spirit came down from heaven as fire.

Spirit's Moving

Poured out. It is said that the Holy Spirit was poured out on people, ***"...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people ... Exalted to the right hand of God, he (Christ) has received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit and has***

poured out what you now see and hear” (Acts 2:17, 30). This pouring out came from heaven - a supernatural, special moving of the Spirit.

Fell on. The Holy Spirit is said to fall on people. ***“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on (fell) all who heard the message (Acts 10:44). As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15)***

This was a powerful, supernatural moving of the Spirit - an extraordinary moving of the Holy Spirit.

Several weeks ago I was talking with the staff of HBF and it was brought out that HBF will never be a large church because of our strong preaching and commitment to New Testament Christianity. It was said that we would grow but slowly and steadily. I replied,

“That is true, except God bring us revival and then who knows what might happen!” God can do in a matter of days or weeks what we think will take years in revival. (Bob Koopman)

PERSONAL REVIVAL

Revival will start with individuals. God will begin to work on the hearts, minds, wills and consciences of Christians.

Christians get into spiritual ruts and need a closer walk with Christ. They need not only renewal but revival. Revival starts with you and me.

In Psalm 119, the Psalmist asks God to revive him eleven times. He needed revival because he had become cold and indifferent to Jehovah-God. He needed a work of the Holy Spirit and was not afraid to admit it. The NKJ says:

“Revive me according to Your word. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, And revive me in Your way. Revive me in Your righteousness. Revive me according to Your lovingkindness” (Psalm 119:25, 37, 40, 88).

Notice closely the Psalmist is asking God to revive him. He could not do it by himself. God had to convict of sin, move the emotions, stir the will, enlighten the mind, or he would never be revived. Our prayer should be, “Holy Spirit, whatever it takes to restore my love and commitment to Christ, do it!” Personal revival starts when each Christian gets convicted about sins, confesses them and turns from them.

Sins of Omission. We need to ask God to convict us for a spirit of thanklessness and ingratitude, of our lack of love for Christ, our neglect of Bible reading and meditation, neglect of prayer, our lack of desire to see the lost saved, our failure to be involved in world missions, our neglect of our spouse and children, our refusal to exercise self-discipline, our lack of love for the brethren and many other sins of omission.

Sins of Commission. We need to ask God to convict us of our worldly spirit, our lusts, pride, jealousy, negative attitudes, slander of others, especially of Christians, lying, cheating, robbing God of time and money, addiction to bad habits, bad temper and a host of other sins that keep us from experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps you are thinking, "I'm really not interested in revival; it has no relevance to me." Yes it does, and the reason you think as you do is that you have never experienced revival on an individual or corporate level. You of all people need God to bring you revival.

If you say you are not interested in revival, you are in essence saying you are not interested in the person and power of the Holy Spirit, walking a godly, holy life. seeing the lost saved and bringing great glory to the Father through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. You, obviously need revival.

Revival begins in your life and my life. When we face our sins squarely and confess and turn from them, revival in seed form has started in our hearts because we couldn't do this unless the Holy Spirit was convicting. ***"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).***

"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction" (1 Thess. 1:4-5).