

Renewal, Revival, and Revitalization

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Having experienced God's special outpouring, both in my personal life as well as at public gatherings, I find it not hard to see what is holding back revival or renewal. The reason is simple: we want more of God but are hesitant to draw closer to his Word or to give him more of ourselves.

Our Blindness is Hindering Revival

In many traditional churches, the problem is that their doctrinal interpretation not only causes an assumption of salvation, holding them back from introducing their own people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, but also diminishes the outpouring of God's Spirit in their midst.

Oh yes, some of their people may have been touched by God, but that touch may have come from outside sources filtering in, sources that really didn't relate to their theology. For example, I think of the Keswick Conferences of the past, the Billy Graham crusades, the Bill Gothard messages, and now the Alpha Course. In addition, great books written by people outside their denomination have blessed many people, although these texts might be far removed from their denominational views.

Many, however, seek a self-gratifying salvation by accepting Christ, but for what? Wholehearted following? Acknowledging Christ's lordship and supernatural control over their church? Oh no, these people only want Christ for personal salvation, eternal life, and other benefits the Spirit may offer; however, they are not ready for Christ's supernatural control over their church or in their personal pursuits.

Seeking Self is Hindering Revival

"Everyone is seeking their own and not the things of Christ," wrote the apostle Paul to the Philippian church. How true this is of the church today. Most pastors feel it is their duty to lead and to control the church. In reality, Christ is the One who wants to use His Spirit to reveal to a godly team of elders how to direct and to control the church.

Israel of old was continually in need of renewal and restoration. Each time they turned in renewed obedience and repentance to the Lord, God gave them revival. So it is for the church today:

*"If my people who are called by my name will **humble** themselves and **pray and seek** my face and **turn** from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (II Chronicles 7:14).*

In this passage, we have God's promise for renewal and restoration whether in our churches or in our personal life. Such restoration is based upon God's three conditions.

Pride Hinders Revival

As a church, we have no doubt gone astray. We have reduced God's requirements of salvation to merely intellectual knowing instead of radical following. We have turned the

priesthood of all believers into merely a slogan by dividing the church into laity and clergy. We have put the clergy over the church, thus taking away Christ's control; paying them wages, thus making hirelings of them; and turning the church into a commercial entity, thus seeming that we have a bought-and-paid-for ticket to heaven.

Churches, as well as believers have become wealthy in storing up treasures on earth and eliminating dependency on God. We no longer look for biblical requirements for elders, but we look for those who are generous in giving, who agree with the system, and who are willing to serve.

Currently, preaching is focused on drawing in new people. To achieve this process, we offer a costless salvation instead of total commitment and wholehearted following of the Lord. As an earthly church membership, we now only stress the love of God, not the requirements of God or the reality of hell.

Prayerlessness Hinders Revival

First of all, seeking God's face is knowing what God requires of us as believers. We cannot pray for forgiveness unless we first know from what we need to repent and admit how far we have gone astray. As believers, we must turn again to the Bible and know and practice what it teaches. We must pray in agreement with each other with every intent of giving Christ the rightful place in the church. It was the Lord's desire to build His church rather than our desire to steal His vineyard.

When does the church become Christ's again? When men are no longer in control. When self-sufficiency has been eliminated. I have seen this in mission agencies and their workers who live on a shoestring budget from month to month. We can see that in places where the church is being persecuted and their strength and growth is totally of the Lord. Yes, we must not only pray for revival, but also we must repent and turn to God so that He will take delight in us and have reason to respond.

Sin Hinders Revival

The wicked sin that we have committed is making the church men-controlled. It is Christ's kingship over everything in our lives that also demands His control over the church. Turning churches into commercial operations by making them "seeker friendly" is turning them into entertainment centers. Some groups use attractive lectures or empty repetitious songs, while others seek spiritual power demonstrations.

None of these actions will turn believers into disciples; rather they are turned into spectators seeking entertainment and will continue breaking God's laws. Such spectators see nothing wrong in how the church is structured today, but accept unbiblical church leadership, immorality, divorce, indulgent lifestyles, abuse of money, and neglect of the poor and the unreached.

What are God's requirements for restoration and revival? First of all, repentance, for as long as we keep on sinning, God will not hear our prayers. In fact, He requires that we
"Touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, I will be a

Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters... ”
“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves
from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting
holiness out of reverence for God” (II Corinthians 6:17; 7:1).

Rejecting Christ’s Authority Hinders Revival

What is the basic issue that hinders our churches today? It is the lack of presence and rulership of Jesus Christ. Even Moses pleaded with the Lord:

“If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us from here.
How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and your people
unless you go with us?” (Exodus 33:15).

As a nation, the Israelites were a theocracy, which meant they were governed by God. The servants God used were elders, who ruled under God; prophets, such as Elisha, Jeremiah, or Daniel, who displayed certain powers, but also taught messages from God. Eventually, the Israelites became unhappy with a prophet leading them, so they asked Samuel to request that God grant them a king like the other nations. At first, Samuel was upset with that request, but God’s words of comfort were

“It is not you they have rejected, but they have
rejected me as their king” (I Samuel 8:7).

Jesus Must be Lord

When Jesus was on earth, He opposed the deceitful religious leaders who claimed to be in control of the religious realm. He opposed their twisted theological views, their love for money, and their added rules in order to be part of their system. He also promised that He would restore His Church with godly people and spiritually equipped servant leaders, such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, and pastors (Romans 12; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4).

In order to have checks and balances in knowing the mind and direction of the Spirit, Jesus intended for each church to be directly controlled by Him and to have plural leadership—not a one-man system. Like Israel, however, the church also rejected Jesus as their ruler when their basic cry was the following:

“We will not have this man rule over us” (Luke 19:14).

Jesus in Control

Their rejection brought in the New Testament church, of which Jesus now desires to be the Head and Cornerstone. Such was the New Testament church until it became as Jesus predicted, a kingdom instrument that would suffer human attacks and takeovers:

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven
has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force” (Matthew 11:12 RSV).

At first, the New Testament Church was a rapidly growing body representing Jesus on earth. The church was a mysterious body under Christ’s control, led by men who had spiritual abilities to know the leading of the Lord. Not only did they have a love for God but also for each other, as we read of them:

“All believers were of one heart and mind. They shared everything they had. There was no needy person among them and the presence and power of the Lord was with them” (Acts 4).

Rejecting Christ’s Design

When did this all changed? When did multiple churches start competing against each other for membership? When did they begin building churches by men’s design and forming religious groups upon their specific interpretation of the Bible?

Such changes occurred when spiritual disobedience evolved, a time when men forced their control on God’s church. From that time, they no longer heard the words of Jesus:

*“Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not what I say?” (Luke 6:46); or
“You are my friends if you do what I command” (John 15:14); or
“The sinful nature describes what is contrary to the Spirit” (Galatians 5:17).*

When Noah built the Ark (Genesis 6), he followed God’s instruction even though all people in his days must have called him crazy. When the Israelites built the Ark of the Covenant, it was again God’s instructions that needed to be followed. For us, the Bible is also God’s book of instructions given to believers; among other things, it describes the basics and details the requirements of being a Church by Christ’s design.

Returning to Basics

When Jesus said, “I will build my church,” He didn’t ask us for help. Even then, He warned us that if we refused to build by His design and neglected the value of His presence, the church would scatter into many groups (Matthew 12:30), each group claiming to be the best, but continuing to separate into another “better” group.

Yes, the church that Jesus intended us to have begins in the individual’s heart, but it is also a formation of believers coming together. Can we see that today? Yes, this is still possible when we look at countries like China, for in China, Christian persecution makes it impossible for men to control the church. What is happening to the church in China? She is today the largest church in the world! We could have the same, but change must begin in repentance and sorrow for the errors we and our forefathers have made. We must again turn our hearts to God by placing our churches back under Jesus’ control and the guidance of His Spirit.

Whether we come together on a large scale or whether we meet in small groups, we can again experience God’s Presence and miraculous answers to prayer, as did the early church experience (Acts).

Note: This article is based on the book, Church on the Rock(s). The publication can be obtained by contacting the author’s website: www.Richardoostra.com