

...FOR THOSE SEEKING THE EMPOWERING PRESENCE OF THE *Holy Spirit*

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Should We Pray for *Revival?*

by Paul Anderson

I am cautious about preaching on it. Here are some reasons:

Jesus and the apostles preached repentance and obedience as a prelude to revival, not revival itself. I would call the season of Pentecost a time of revival. Peter didn't preach revival before it happened. When it happened, he said, "This is that." To preach it in advance may require hype, because it is not there yet. Why not preach what might make revival happen? This strikes me as more authentic. Then we can say, "It is here," rather than, "It is coming." What does it do for people to say it is coming, that we are on the verge of a great awakening? Does it make people more obedient? It could, but it could also put them to sleep. In Peter's second sermon, he concluded, "*Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing (revival of sorts) may come from the presence of the Lord...*" (Acts 3:19). No hype, just a call to repent. That is more realistic than simply talking about what needs to happen or what may be happening in the near future.



Talking about what might be coming can keep people from seeing what is before them. I have seen this on a variety of occasions. I saw it at a Bible school in California as people crying out for revival missed what God was doing in the school. Their attitudes toward the present soured as they hoped for better times. I saw it also at a Presbyterian church that felt insignificant because of its small size. My good friend a few miles from our church pastored it. I was invited to share there one Sunday night, so I brought a team of prayer ministers with me, and we almost outnumbered them. As we surrounded them in a circle and prayed, a vision (picture) came to one of us of a flower. This interpretation followed: "You see yourself as insignificant because you are so small. You wish you were bigger, more powerful. But God sees you as a beautiful flower. You bring Him joy just as you are, not as you think you ought to be. You can relax and enjoy the present rather than strive to be what you are not." I wanted to add, "Quit praying for revival and enjoy what God has given you." Their prayers were not building faith; they were complaints about what they didn't have.

How about praying for true humility, for a more gracious response to a spouse, for a positive spirit rather than a spirit of judgment? Some people (certainly not all) who pray for revival develop a critical outlook. Others develop an edge and start majoring in minors. They develop peripheral teachings that

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soon replace foundational truths. We see it all the time. What are we actually praying for when we pray for revival? Why don't we name it instead—and personalize it?

I like to say to couples who have “fallen out of love,” “What would you do if you knew that you were in love?” I hear things like, “I'd probably pick up my clothes...I would be kinder in my responses...I would respect him/her and not criticize.” My response, “Okay, those are what you need to do now. Act as if you are in love, because that will change your heart.” It is easier, as I once heard on the radio, to act your way into a new way of feeling than to feel your way into a new way of acting. Quit saying you don't feel it and act as if you have it. John the Baptist told the resisters, “Bring forth the fruit of repentance...”

How about asking those who are longing for revival, “What would you do differently if you knew that you were in revival?” If they answer, “I might go to my neighbors and see if they had any needs...I would probably rejoice in the work of God...I would expect more to happen...I would pray with more confidence...” then I would say, “Okay, do it. That is the fruit of repentance that can help to bring what you are longing for.” The prayer for revival can actually create passivity in our hearts. We may be asking God to do what we are disinclined to do. When He does the mighty stuff, then He makes it easy for us to do what we are now reluctant to do. Could this be why John, Jesus, and the apostles preached repentance and obedience rather than revival?

We are told by some authors that revival has everything to do with God and nothing to do with us—God can do whatever He wants to do. The record of Scripture, however, tells us that His sovereignty is not incompatible with human responsibility and that He more often works in concert with us than independent of us. Some revivalists, like Charles Finney, for instance, would see that we have a definite part to play in revival, and I hear that refrain echoed in the words of John and Jesus, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”



Paul Anderson

Is there a place to talk about revival? Seems that prophets and leaders in the Old Testament reminded Israel of what God had done in the past to give them hope and to call them to faithfulness. If talking about revival creates emotionalism (and not just emotion), or if it makes us whiners, complainers, or passive saints, it is bad fruit. But if it helps us to better live in the present and to prepare for the future, it is bringing good fruit. So, to answer the original question, the answer is, “Maybe.”



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Plan Ahead!

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