

How We Can Keep the Revival Fires Burning

Why do revivals and moves of God dry up and die or greatly diminish from their original strength? What has happened to denominations like Methodism, Lutheranism and Presbyterianism that began in a blaze of spiritual fire and revelation, but then gradually decreased over the years? What of the Salvation Army and other parachurch organizations? Here, I will endeavor to reveal the roots of spiritual decline and offer Spirit-designed solutions to keeping the fires of revival burning through time.

Today's church needs to be reinvented. It is impossible to read the New Testament without any preconceived notions and a traditional mindset and realize how different the spirit, structure and emphasis of the early church were in comparison to much of the church today.

There are three aspects of the New Testament church I'd like to briefly address: Life, doctrine and structure. Revival is the restoration of divine life. It has to do with the wine of the Spirit. The New Testament writers wrote much about the inner life of the believer. They were also diligent to lay down a foundation of sound doctrine. And they established a form of church government or structure that promoted liberty among ministers and members of the body of Christ and removed the controls out of the hands of any one individual.

When Jesus came on the scene, many of the Jewish scribes and religious leaders did not receive Him, mainly because of those three areas. Jesus taught and practiced a life that they could not grasp: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:4-5, NKJV).

They also could not understand His doctrine. "What is this? What new doctrine is this?" (Mark 1:27b). Finally, they couldn't corral Him or confine Him to their own structure and way and system of doing things. "'There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day'" (Luke 13:14).

In the following brief excerpt from my newest book, "The Nature of the Kingdom of God," we will focus on the structure, or the wineskin, if you will. And because Jesus carried the new wine of the Spirit to the earth, a new wineskin was a necessity. The scribes and religious leaders did not understand this either.

"Then He spoke a parable to them: 'No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, "The old is better"' (Luke 5:36-39).

More than just contrasting the system of the Law and the traditions of the elders who were reluctant to receive the gospel, Jesus is telling His disciples that yesterday's structures and forms (wineskins) are incapable of handling today's dynamic spiritual life (new wine). In other words, we must avoid imposing past traditional structures on the present day moving and operations of the Holy Spirit.

This is the reason revivals die, and much of the time, we are not able to conserve the legacy and long-term fruit of any great revival. Listen to these wise words from a spiritual man:

"There's no question that God works, often powerfully, in the

old structures. But it is inevitable that those very structures put serious limitations on His working. It is all too easy for the ground gained to be lost, for the situation to revert, and for the whole process to need repeating within a short space of time. Take the 1950 Lewis awakening. Though confined to certain Presbyterian churches in the Outer Hebrides, this was a powerful movement of the Spirit that deeply affected those communities at that time. Many found faith in Christ, and some of these are now in full-time service. But the fact remains that in less than a decade you could visit those very churches where God had worked so powerfully, and never suspect that they had ever tasted revival. Without a change of structure it is virtually impossible to conserve the fruits of revival.”—Arthur Wallis

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