

Revival and a PASTOR'S Dream Congregation

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Revival and a Pastor's Dream Congregation

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For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

—Isaiah 57:15

Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

—Matthew 22:36

Preface

Revival is a major topic of discussion these days. I hear it preached about in meetings, see it written about in publications, and hear it talked about in small discussion groups. Observation is leading the saints to conclude that churches today are suffering from a lack of enthusiasm for assembly and for ministry. Soulwinning is decreasing and carnality is increasing. Pastors and church members alike seem to be either satisfied with mediocre spirituality or resigned to endure it with much frustration. There are always new gimmicks on the market for reviving the saints, but there is only one solution that produces the fruit of true revival and Spirit-filled lives. A church that learns to love God with all her heart, soul, and mind will experience daily revival. The members will eagerly seek to serve the Lord with a joyful spirit, and the pastor will spend more time leading than pushing. The cry of revival should be "Love God, love God!" Until we learn this lesson, true revival will always be an unrealized dream and nothing more than a topic for discussion.

True revival is spiritual revival

Webster's dictionary defines revival as a "renewed attention and interest in something." The fact is, revival can be observed in many people for a variety of reasons. A low ranked football team can be revived with a winning game. A drunk can be revived with a cold bucket of water. A drowned victim can be revived with mouth to mouth resuscitation. Sin can be revived in one's life: Romans 7:9 "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Slaves can be revived with freedom: Ezra 9:8 "And now for a little space grace hath been showed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage." A thirsty man can be revived with water: Judges 15:19 "But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof Enhakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day." Jesus was revived from the dead: Romans 14:9 "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. However, spiritual revival is renewed attention and interest in Jesus Christ. True revival is a spiritual revival that restores vitality and commitment to a dulled and irresponsible life. Revival begins with the passing from death to life at the moment of salvation and continues in spiritual living. Carnal Christians need revival to flee sin and to embrace spirituality. Nominal Christians need revival to escape mediocrity and to increase their resolve to serve Christ wholeheartedly. Every Christian needs revival to maintain a fresh and vital outlook on loving the Lord. Like polished silver, Christians need spiritual polishing to maintain revival. Spiritual revival is what we want: a renewal of commitment to righteousness,

obedience to God, boldness in witness, and joy in the Lord. With this perspective, Christians need daily revival: revival to walk in works of the living Spirit and to bring the works of death in the flesh under subjection. But true, spiritual revival is not caused by greater activity in doing right, or an increase in excitement and enthusiasm, or informative meetings. True, spiritual revival is caused by loving God (having a personal relationship with your Savior).

Beware of counterfeit revivals

Unfortunately, spiritual *revival* is confused with emotionalism, meetings, and crowds of people. Webster's Dictionary refers to the common meaning of *revival* as an "often highly emotional evangelistic meeting or series of meetings." Can you imagine a revival without loud music, clapping, hand raising, shouting, and loud preaching? Probably not. Revival is all about having a good time, or is it? Interestingly, Webster's Dictionary also describes revival as "a period of renewed religious interest." An emotional revival produces renewed interest in religion that lasts for only a period of time. It is sad to think that revivals are known for their temporary impact. The fact is, emotionalism is short-lived. This is not to say that revival meetings where everyone is having a great time, singing and praising God, are not good. Emotions are good. We are created by God to be emotional. Emotional meetings can help to draw people closer to God and to raise one's level of commitment to serve God. Therefore, emotional meetings are good when they involve spiritual revival. However, emotional meetings should be the result or the effect of revived spirits. When the goal and expectation is to create intensified emotions, true revival is forsaken. Saints should gather together to have a good time because they love God not in order to love God. Revivals contrived to externally induce emotions and produce excitement are counterfeit revivals and are not much different from entertaining parties. An emotional meeting resulting from the moving of God's Spirit should be expected. But a meeting designed to produce emotions instead of seeking the Spirit is pursuing the wrong goal. Many try to by-pass God to get to the fruit of revival, namely, the feel-good emotionalism. The name of God is invoked, but the hearts are not drawn to God. With their lips they draw near to God, but their hearts are far away from Him. Raised hands reach for heaven but dirty feet are firmly planted in the dirt.

The fruit of revivals

Confusing counterfeit revivals with the real thing is easy to do because external excitement, feeling high, clapping hands, and having a good time looks the same regardless of the reason for being happy. I express happiness and joy in church the same way I do at home when my daughter tells me a funny story. Expressions of happiness are legitimate fruit of revival. Thus, it may be impossible to distinguish between real and counterfeit revivals based on the participants' excitement and feelings. The real test of revival is the sustained interest people have to serve and obey Christ after the revival meeting: inside their homes, behind closed doors, and in secret. The fruit of true, spiritual revival may include emotionalism, but it always includes faithfulness and commitment to Christ. It results in a renewed commitment to serve Christ and an adjustment in lifestyle to improve one's service to Christ. Outward expressions of joy should be viewed as the

fruit of spiritual revival, not as a substitute for it or the cause of revival. Outward expressions are legitimate, but people should look inside themselves for true revival. I enjoy an exciting environment, but what happens inside is what counts. Unless I am provoked to love God, to improve my personal relationship with Him, to trust Him more, and to be sustained by true repentance and a commitment to Him, I am not spiritually revived. Counterfeit

revivals produce Sunday Christians, who come for the spiritual uplift and then revert to carnal living during the week. Like Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Sunday Christians are sweet and respectable during assemblies but carnal during weekdays. Then there is the junkie Christian who comes to revival meetings for the emotional high. Like a drug addict looking for a high, these Christians have no sustaining power to live for Christ outside of an emotional meeting. Their revival is strictly physical: a physical high that must be sustained by physical stimulation. Counterfeit revivals produce superficial spirituality and fruit that look real in the meetings but fail to produce a sustained commitment to and love for Christ. True, spiritual revival produces solid commitment and sustained resolve to love and obey God.

The real test of revival is the sustained interest people have to serve and obey Christ.

The danger of counterfeit revivals

The danger of counterfeit revivals is substituting the Creator with the creation. Romans 1:25 says they "... changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever." It may not be obvious at first but consider the revival meetings where a counterfeit gospel is preached, where the message does not save souls, and where the Lord is obviously absent. Pentecostals, who believe in works and speaking in tongues for salvation, have exciting meetings, but they have substituted their own creation of emotionalism for God. They come for the experience and pleasure of the meeting, not for God. The Church of Christ folks substitute the law in place of God. The Catholics substitute ritual for God. In each example where revival appears to take place among those who believe in a false Gospel, a creation of man is being worshipped rather than the Creator Himself. Baptists are in danger of focusing on the wrong god as well. Some revivals focus on how many people there are, the emotionalism generated, the liveliness of the music, the wittiness and loudness of the preacher. I am not advocating unemotional meetings or the shunning of plans for a great meeting. I am contending that we must focus our eyes on the reason for revival: our love for God. We must stay focused on the real goal, the ultimate goal. When reviving emotion becomes the goal, it becomes a substitute for God.

Something is wrong

Why is there talk about revival? Because something is wrong. People may not be able to put their finger on the problem, but they recognize something is not right. There may seem to be a lack of enthusiasm and zeal to serve the Lord, to assemble, to study the Bible. Church members may seem to be withdrawing and unavailable to participate in ministries. Sin may seem to be increasing in the lives of church members, and stories of saints succumbing to temptation may seem more prevalent. Often, people find themselves asking questions such as: where is the commitment of times past, where is the zeal of the earlier days in the church, where are the saved souls, where are the soul-winners, and where are the meaty sermons that fed the souls?

Observation suggests that something is wrong, and revival becomes the topic of discussion. Many think that revival is needed to get the church out of the doldrums of lukewarm Christianity and carnality. Revival is needed to energize the saints into action once again. But revival, in the commonly used sense of the word, is not the answer. The lack of zeal to serve Christ and the struggle with sin are symptoms of a spiritual problem that requires a spiritual solution.

Abiding in Christ

True, spiritual revival requires that we understand first of all that revival is not the solution or the cause of an improved spiritual walk with Christ. Revival, is itself, the fruit of something far more important. Focusing on revival as the goal will mislead us in our attempts to achieve true revival. Focusing on carnality and nominalism as the problem in our lives will mislead us in our attempts to solve our problems. John 15:1-4 illustrates the correct way to look at solving our spiritual problems. Christ is the vine, we are the branches, and revival, along with the many other works of ministry, is the fruit of the Spirit. If there is a lack or absence of fruit, the problem is in the branch not in the fruit (or in the vine). I have a peach tree that my dog likes to chew on. When the branches are broken, the leaves turn brown, and, of course, there is no hope of fruit being produced. The solution is obvious: If I reattach or graft the branch to the trunk of the tree, I can expect fruit. The problem of lacking spiritual fruit is easily resolved when the branch is reattached to the vine. This is called abiding in Christ. If a church is suffering from carnality, lack of revival, spiritual failure, and dwindling commitment and faithfulness to ministry responsibilities, the problem is a lack of love for God. Rather than talk about revival, we should talk about loving God. A pastor should seek ways to bring the congregation back to an abiding relationship with Christ. When the goal among Christians becomes revival (a spiritual fruit or result of abiding in Christ) rather than restoring their love for God, they have missed the mark. Fruit of ministry activity can be produced without loving God. Witness can be increased, numerous sermons on how to edify and not gossip can be preached and bring about improved relationships, workers can be found for Sunday school and the bus ministry, but the fruit will be short-lived, the members will need to be evermore frequently pumped up externally, the pastor will become

frustrated by having to push and prod people into obedience, and the members will eventually become resentful and bitter. New and innovative ways to motivate people will be devised and all manner of inducements to produce fruit will be experimented with, but in the long run these solutions will fail to sustain the coveted fruit of spirituality. The solution is simple: love God with all your heart, soul, and mind.

Loving God is the golden rule of revival

The golden rule of true revival is to love God. In Matthew 22:36-38 a Pharisee asked Jesus which of the commandments in the law was the greatest, and Jesus told him: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." Many read the Bible and see all that God wants us to do and then lose sight of the most important command. The Pharisees probably had endless arguments about which commandment was the most important, but Jesus gave them the bottom line. God wants our love first, which in turn produces a willingness to serve and obey Him. The Pharisees were experts at conforming to the commandments of the law, but this is not what God wanted. He wanted their hearts first. He wanted their love first. Anyone can conform to God's law, but only those who love Him can please Him

by doing so. From this example, we understand that love is not in the action but rather in the desire. A love for God results in a desire to obey

The Golden Rule for Revival

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

Him. This is why Jesus said in John 14:21 and 23 respectively: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me..." and "If a man love me, he will keep my words..." Failure to love God is the root cause of Christians being spiritually dull and irresponsible. Love for God results in obedience. However, the outward appearance of obedience does not necessarily mean that one loves God. Revival

meetings can stir hearts, but true revival occurs in the heart when one renews his love for God. Perhaps the very discussion of revival is misleading and harmful because the term *revival* creates the expectation of outward appearances when the inward love for God is the real need. A congregation's renewed love for God will cause a revival. However, revival meeting can only fan the flames of revived hearts and influence one to desire to love God; it cannot cause one to love God. The Pharisees were able to produce the appearance of obedience and fruit, but it was self-generated. Likewise, the church at Ephesus was following the same path as the Pharisees which in time would result in a congregation of Christian Pharisees. If obedience to God's commandments could cause one to love Him, then the Ephesians would never have left their first love.

Replacing love for God with works for God

In the absence of a relationship with God, it is possible to substitute works of love for the heart of love. The Ephesians were guilty of this. In Revelation 2:2-4 God says to the church at Ephesus, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Their love for God's commandments had replaced their love for God. I am sure that an interview with the Ephesians would reveal their confusion. After all, they were obeying God's commandments and anyone who loves God will obey him. However, First Samuel 15:22 records Samuel explaining to Israel that performing the works of the law is not necessarily obedience or an expression of love for God, saying: "Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Israel was offering sacrifices to God as an act of obedience, but imperfectly. They were guilty of unwillingly conforming to the law, and consequently their imperfect sacrifices reflected their reluctance. If works of obedience could cause one to love God, the Pharisees and the Ephesians would not have displeased the Lord. In fact, preaching

the Gospel of salvation without works would not be necessary because obedience and performance of the law would eventually provoke souls to love God. However, this is not the case. The Lord is pleased only by obedience because we love Him, not because we are commanded to do so. When God asked the people to give materials and offer talents for the building of the tabernacle, He said: "Take ye from among you an offering unto the LORD: whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the LORD; gold, and silver, and brass ..." (Exodus 35:5). God is pleased by our obedience when it is an expression of love. Serving God without willingness and love is abominable and distasteful to God. Attempts to generate the fruit of revival and outward obedience to God's commandments is unacceptable to God and harmful to the spiritual well-being of the saints. The solution to a lack of zeal in serving God is renewing our love for God. Focusing on producing fruit instead of our love for God will result in Ephesianitis (obedience without love) and eventually resentment and bitterness. If there is a problem, we must return to the origin of our error: the loss of love for God.

The solution for fruitlessness

Fortunately, correcting our problem of fruitlessness does not require that we understand what caused our loss of love for God. All we have to know is how to restore and nurture our love for God. God's love plus our love results in revival and consequently the fruit of revival such as witnessing, serving, giving, and attributes associated with the fruit of the Spirit. God showed His love toward us by sending His Son Jesus Christ to us and sacrificing Him for our sins. He makes His love known to us by His Spirit through the process of conviction, which involves understanding our guilt of sin and the reality of Christ's work and promise to save us from our sins. During the experience of conviction, we must make a decision to accept or reject Jesus Christ as our Savior. Our acceptance of Him involves rejecting sin and self-reliance, and is the beginning of a new relationship with God, a relationship of love and fulfillment. Realizing what Christ has done for us provokes appreciation and love for Him. Even the Christian needs to be convicted of his sin when he falls into carnal living. Though a Christian never loses his salvation, upon repentance, his relationship with God is revived. Thus, we can write our equation for revival another way: conviction plus repentance results in revival.

Your love for God must be nurtured

It is necessary to cultivate and nurture our love and relationship with God. A review through the Scriptures shows us that our relationship with God must be cared for. Solomon and Saul are two of the prominent individuals who failed to continue in their love for God. As mentioned earlier, the church at Ephesus left their first love, and Second Peter 1:9 tells us that it is possible to become so alienated from God that we become blind and forget that we have been saved. Because it is possible to become distant in our relationship with God it is imperative that we discover how to maintain and nurture our love for God.

As with any relationship, spending time with God improves and nurtures our relationship with Him. Jesus spent time with His Father in prayer. His example shows us the importance of spending time with God during a time of prayer and devotion. Because God wants to have a good relationship with you, you can ask for His help to love Him as you should. He will honor that request. This request is especially important when you have no desire or love for God but realize that you should. To make the most of your devotional, remember to: (1) confess your sins, (2) confirm your commitment to serve Him and love Him, (3) intercede for the needs of others, and (4) pray that God will help you apply His Word in your life.

Also, God has given us three very important resources (the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the Church) that are vital to our spiritual well-being and to nurturing our love for Christ. As we read the Word of God your soul is fed and enriched with His teachings, but most importantly, you grow in your knowledge of Jesus Christ and the love He has for you. Because we are designed by God to be creatures of response, when we learn of God's love for us, we are provoked to love God in return. Reading, studying, and learning from the Word of God is an important part of nurturing our love for God. Second, our love for God is nurtured by the Holy Spirit as we spend time with Him in prayer. It is during the times of fellowship and communion with God that God's unfailing love is shed abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:1) confirming our eternal position by His side. When the Spirit manifests this love to us, we are provoked to respond in love toward God. Third, fellowship in a true, new testament church nurtures our love for God by the

**Nurturing love with
Resources & Disciplines**

Bible

Study

Holy Spirit

Prayer

Church

Ministry

examples around us and the expression of God's love through the lives of Spirit-filled brethren. All three resources are vital to our relationship with God. We need to use all three resources in order to nurture our love for God.

One other vital activity essential to nurturing our love for God and experiencing revival is our obedience to God. In John 14:21 Jesus says: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." Furthermore, in verse 23 Jesus says: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." If you love God, you will obey God. You will want to know His will and do it. You will want to please Him by serving Him. In turn, your expression of love for God (obedience) provokes God to manifest Himself to you and to abide in you. This personal interaction is very rewarding and fulfilling, and it provokes you to love Him even more. Obviously, obedience out of love is essential to nurturing your love for God. However, God will not reward and manifest Himself to those who serve out of duty and coercion. We should obey God because we love Him, not in order to be loved by Him. Loving and willing obedience to God is important to maintaining revival and love for God. If you do not desire to obey God; pray for help, read His Word, search for the presence of God's Spirit, find fellowship with church brethren, and obey His Word.

A pastor's dream congregation

Love is a desire to please. It is expressed toward God in obedience to His Word. We desire to spend time with God, to study His Word, and to seek ways to serve Him by ministering to others. A congregation that loves God is a pastor's dream come true. Instead of racking his brain to think of new ways to stimulate the saints into action, and exhausting his body's energies to create excitement and enthusiasm in others, and frustrating his soul with a lack of help, the pastor could spend his time guiding and leading souls eager to serve. Understanding the vital importance of loving God suggests that a vital role for the pastor is to nurture the congregation's love for God and to protect that love. After all, if loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind is the greatest commandment, then a pastor's greatest duty is to show others how to love God — not only the outward expression of love as seen in Ephesus, but most importantly the inward desire of love towards God. A congregation that loves God is not only a dream come true for the pastor, but it is also a dream offering for the Lord.

Hypocrites choose to disobey God

Carnal and immature Christians are often confused about serving God with love because of the emotions involved. Some Christians excuse themselves from obeying God's Word when they do not feel like it saying that would make them hypocrites. But this is not the case. Paul exhorted in Galatians 5:25 that: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." To live in the Spirit and then walk in the flesh is hypocrisy. Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites because they lived in the flesh (they were not born again) but lived as though they were saved. God expects every Christian to live like Christ's example and to be Spirit-filled. Brief consideration of Jesus' life shows us that His love for us sustained His resolve to suffer and die for us. Likewise, if we love God, that love will sustain our resolve to obey and please Him regardless of how we feel. Paul explained in Romans 7:21 that as long as we live in the physical body we will always have the presence of evil with us and a resistance against doing right. Not feeling like obeying

God is not an acceptable excuse for not obeying Him. Obeying God's Word is better than not obeying because choosing carnality for any reason will definitely lead to spiritual ruin. However, to escape the danger of living as the Ephesians, we should learn to love God so that our obedience is pleasing to God.

Our love for God is continually threatened

Our love for God is under continual threat. Though nothing can separate us from the love of God, our fellowship with Him can suffer. Satan seeks every possible way to interfere with our relationship with Christ. Our ever-present flesh is continually seeking carnal pleasures. Often, friends and influential people attract us to new idols. Anything that diverts us from maintaining God as our first love is a threat to true revival and our spiritual well-being. Other contributing factors that can contribute to loss of love for God include: dull services, watery sermons thin on milk and meat, lack of rest, gossip and accusations, and carnal solutions to spiritual needs. If serving God becomes dull and uninteresting, it is easy for other things in the world to gain one's attention. Thus, as a church increases in numbers of carnal Christians, spiritual disinterest and mediocrity prevail. The solution is to bring the saints back to an inward love for God.

In Exodus 20:3 God commands: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." When God is dethroned in your life, you are on the slippery slopes of spiritual failure. He must be your Master, God, Creator, and Supreme authority, or you will fall victim to sin. Make Him your first love and guard that love at all costs. Whatever He says, do. If you sense a problem and see symptoms of fruit failure in your life, seek to restore your inward love for God.

Satan seeks every possible way to interfere with our relationship with Christ.

Spiritual revival is the result of loving God

Spiritual revival is the result of conviction and repentance, but most importantly; it is the fruit of love for God. It produces faithfulness to God, a commitment to do right, a resolve to live for Him. It is manifested in a lifestyle of serving others, expressing compassion, loving others. It is evidenced by witnessing, assembling, encouraging others, and avoiding sin. Revival can be aided by many things such as assembly, singing, and fellowships, but there can be no substitute for the love of God. True revival in a meeting may cause enthusiasm, cheering, and excitement, but, most importantly, there will always be sustained faithfulness and commitment to God. If you want revival, love God.

What you must do to experience revival

Revival begins with loving God first in salvation and then nurtured during your walk with Him. Upon realizing your guilt of committing sins, your need for God, and the promise of Jesus Christ, give your life to God, forsake your sins, ask God to forgive you for your sins and to give you a new, clean heart, and trust Him to give you eternal life and salvation. Romans 10:9-11 tells us: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." God loves you and wants to save you from your sins.

If you are saved, you need to nurture your love for God by studying the Bible, surrendering your life daily to the Holy Spirit, and participating in a new testament Baptist church. Maintain a personal relationship with God by disciplining yourself to learn more about Him, spending time with Him, and obeying Him. If you fall to temptation and give in to sin, humble yourself before God and ask Him to forgive you

and to restore you in good fellowship with Him. First John 1:9 assures us that: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Though you can never lose your salvation (First Corinthians 3:15), you can lose the blessings that come with walking in close fellowship with God. Apply these principles for spiritual growth, and you will experience revival. For more study on spiritual growth and being a fruitful disciple of Jesus Christ, contact Dr. Briney and request his book, "Multiply your life in Christ."

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