

**Classic Christian Writings:**

Holiness can never be separated from revival. If some kind of spiritual experience in an individual, or among a community, has the label "revival" pinned to it, we should always look at the lives of the Christians and the new converts. Are they a holy people who fear only God and sin, and who allow God's Word to rule their lives? If not, then we are not looking at revival. Neither loud excitement nor somber quietness, and not even love and gifts, are any necessary evidence of revival.

But a deep conviction of sin and biblical holiness are. God prefers light to heat, and holiness to happiness. Someone has described revival as the top blowing off. It is, but not before the bottom has fallen out!

In 2 Chronicles 29 not only did the Levites "consecrate themselves" (v. 15) but they and the priests "went into the sanctuary of the Lord to purify it" (vv. 15-16). They went into the sanctuary. The Revised Standard Version reads, "the inner part of the house of the Lord," and there are two things to notice about the inner part of the house of the Lord.

First, it was that part of the temple which was furthest from the eyes of men. They could have overlooked this and few would have seen it. The priests could have shovelled away all the dirt from the outer court and swept spotlessly around the great altar outside; they could have emptied out the stale, stagnant water in the great bath in front of the altar and filled it with fresh water. Everybody would have been very impressed.

But instead they went into the sanctuary and started there, furthest from the eyes of men. God judges the secrets of man. And holiness begins with an alarm at the sin lurking in the dark corners of life.

Paul never encouraged his readers merely to make promises to God, but always to take action. He writes in a blunt way to the Christians at Rome: "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness" (Rom. 6:13).

Christ said, "Blessed are those who mourn," which refers to those who feel their sin and cry over it. Sin is always a problem to the Christian who is longing for revival, and revival always deals uncomfortably with those things the world around us does not see. Revival throws light into the dark places.

In encouraging his congregations in Wales in 1904 to prepare for revival, Evan Roberts would remind them that the Spirit would not come until the people were prepared: "We must rid the churches of all bad feeling--all malice, envy, prejudice, and misunderstandings. Bow not in prayer until all offenses have been forgiven: but if you feel you cannot forgive, bend to the dust, and ask for a forgiving spirit. You shall get it then."

But the second thing about the sanctuary is that it is nearest to the eyes of God. It was the holy place, representing God's presence among His people. Only the clean Christian can live close to God. In the same verse in 2 Chronicles 29 we are told that the Levites dealt with "everything unclean," and they threw all the rubbish into the valley of Kidron. The Kidron Valley begins north of Jerusalem, passes the temple and the Mount of Olives and ends in the Dead Sea. Most of the year the Kidron Valley is a dry sunbaked riverbed, but in the rainy season it becomes a torrent. It was the city rubbish tip, because rubbish left here would eventually be swept downstream. Kidron represented a total removal, a complete cleanup. These Levites did not just leave the rubbish outside the temple.

For the same reason, Moses ground Aaron's calf to powder, King Josiah crushed the pagan altars and scattered them in the Kidron Valley, and the Ephesians burnt their books of magic. When Jesus spoke of cutting off an offending limb He meant that there is no sacrifice too great to make us fit for God to use. In Revival Christians will weep over their sins--sins that at present they entertain.

In fact it is this shame over sins that were once acceptable that we read of in 2 Chronicles 30:15: "The priests and the Levites were ashamed and consecrated themselves." All their past seemed to come before them as a great cloud of sin and they were sick of what they had been entertaining for so long. When Hezekiah reminded the leaders of the people of the disgrace of the past (29:6-9), he did so for this very reason: he wanted even the spiritual leaders to become painfully aware of how far the nation had fallen--including themselves!

It must be admitted that when revival comes, those who have longed most for it may suffer most conviction in it. Revival always touches the conscience of those who long to serve Him most. It was as the priests and

Levites were busily engaged in the revival that they became most acutely ashamed of their past. According to 2 Kings 18:4 the emblems of idolatry and the worship of the fertility goddess, Asherah, had to go; the idols of the Baal god were also removed (2 Chronicles 28:2). Worse still, many of them were reminded of the child sacrifice they once indulged in (28:3)--their own children cruelly put to death! All this came vividly before them and they were ashamed.

It is a sad fact that in normal times Christians hold on to those things that revival will snatch away from them. In Korea and Borneo Christian leaders held on to their fetishes and charms, but the revival made them so ashamed that these things were publicly confessed. The present-day secret sins of Christians will be brought into the open in revival, or at least into the mind of the Christian, and there will be no peace until all is confessed and put right.

This desire to be holy becomes a burning passion in revival, and Christians persist in fighting against sin in their lives: "They began the consecration on the first day of the first month, and by the eighth day of the month they reached the portico of the Lord. For eight more days they consecrated the temple of the Lord itself, finishing in the sixteenth day of the first month" (2 Chronicles 29:17).

Here was a sixteen-day spring-cleaning until everything unclean was removed from the temple. The priests started at the center and a week later they came to the vestibule and then they started all over again! They never gave up on their warfare against all the rubbish that had accumulated in the temple.

And then the priests reported to Hezekiah: "We have purified the entire temple of the Lord, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the table for setting out the consecrated bread, with all its articles. We have prepared and consecrated all the articles that King Ahaz removed in his unfaithfulness while he was king. They are now in front of the Lord's altar" (vv. 18-19).

#### Revival Begins with Conviction

Revival is always a revival of holiness. It begins with a terrible conviction of sin. It is often the form that this conviction of sin takes that troubles those who read of revival. Sometimes the experience is crushing. People weep uncontrollably, and worse! But there is no such thing as a revival without tears of conviction and sorrow.

In January 1907 God was moving in a powerful way in North Korea, and a Western missionary recalled one particular scene: "As the prayer continued, a spirit of heaviness and sorrow for sin came down upon the audience. Over on one side, someone began to weep, and in a moment the whole audience was weeping. Man after man would rise, confess his sins, break down and weep, and then throw himself to the floor and beat the floor with his fists in perfect agony of conviction.

"My own cook tried to make a confession, broke down in the midst of it, and cried to me across the room: 'Pastor, tell me, is there any hope for me, can I be forgiven?' and then he threw himself to the floor and wept and wept, and almost screamed in agony.

"Sometimes after a confession, the whole audience would break out in audible prayer, and the effect of that audience of hundreds of men praying together in audible prayer was something indescribable. Again, after another confession, they would break out in uncontrollable weeping, and we would all weep, we could not help it. And so the meeting went on until two o'clock a.m., with confession and weeping and praying..."

He went on to describe a meeting a few nights later when many Christians were brought to a deep conviction of sin: "My last glimpse of the audience is photographed indelibly on my brain. Some threw themselves full length on the floor, hundreds stood with arms outstretched toward heaven. Every man forgot every other. Each was face to face with God. I can hear yet that fearful sound of hundreds of men pleading with God for life, for mercy. The cry went out over the city till the heathen were in consternation."

Scenes like these are typical of almost every recorded revival. There is no revival without deep, uncomfortable and humbling conviction of sin. It is this terrible conviction of sin that led the Congolese Christians, during the revival in 1953, to sing a chorus of their own making:

Receive salvation today,

This is the hour of judgment.

The missionaries wanted to change the words to "This is the hour of mercy," but were pointed to Malachi 3:2-3: God had come as "a refiner's fire."...

We must be fully aware that this deep and painful conviction of sin is an inevitable part of true revival. If all this appears to be a frightening prospect, it is well to understand that God will bring it, and that a deep, uncomfortable, and at times overwhelming, conviction of sin is an indispensable part of revival. We often have a tinted view of revival as a time of glory and joy and swelling numbers queueing to enter the churches. That is only part of the story.

Before the glory and the joy, there is conviction, and that begins with the people of God. There are tears and godly sorrow. There are wrongs to put right, secret things, furthest from the eyes of men, to be thrown out, and bad relationships, hidden for years, to be repaired openly. If we are not prepared for this, we had better not pray for revival. Revival is not intended for the enjoyment of the church, but for its cleansing.

None of this should surprise us if we understand the ways of God in the Bible. The terrible judgment upon Uzzah for his careless contempt of disobedience (2 Samuel 6:6-7) is paralleled with the remarkably similar story of Ananias and Sapphira in the early church (Acts 5:1-11). The purpose was the same: "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events" (Acts 5:11).

In revival there are none in the church and few in the community who take sin lightly. God turns His anger into mercy but still He makes people "feel" their sin. We have an unholy church today because Christians do not feel sin or fear it. The God who punished the sin of Uzzah, and before that, of Achan and of Nadab and Abihu, is still as holy now as He was then; His view of sin has not changed.

Secondly, it must be understood that this experience of conviction, and the physical crying and fainting that not infrequently accompany it, can be fraudulently copied by men. There is always the danger that foolish men try to ape the work of the Holy Spirit. To set out to create these physical responses, whatever name we give to them, is a dangerous and sinful meddling with the work of God.

It is not difficult to work people up to such a degree of intensity that they show the symptoms of conviction without the lasting fruit of peace in Christ and a holy life. Conviction of sin, and everything that goes with it, is God's work, and it is the wise Christian leader who leaves it in His capable hands.

Those who long most for revival should begin by examining their hearts and lives before the searchlight of a holy God and His Word. If we cover our sin and do not confess it now, when revival comes we may find ourselves confessing it to the church.

#### God's Presence Brings Conviction

When God came to the Congo in 1953, it was two months before the unbelieving world was touched, but those were a painful two months for the church, with missionaries, pastors, elders and evangelists confessing their sin. The reason why this deep conviction of sin is so much part of true revival is simply that the presence of a holy God is so real. A holy God makes the Christian aware of the gravity of even the smallest sins.

When Isaiah went into the temple and stood in the presence of God, his response was devastatingly self-condemning: "Woe to me!...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Isaiah 6:3).

The reason there is so little repentance among our congregations today is not just that our sermons are not directed against sin, but that God is not felt among us. Those who know themselves to be in the presence of a holy God are always aware of personal sin. Daniel is one example: "We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land" (Daniel 9:5-6).

Nehemiah was even more specific about his own personal sin when he cried to God for the derelict city of Jerusalem: "I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses" (Nehemiah 1:6-7).

An illustration of this is clearly seen in the experience at Baria in Borneo in 1973. One national Christian,

Taman Ngau, records the time when the entire village seemed to be going to the church: "There in the church we found the Lord. The whole place was full of the Spirit of the Lord. Young people were praying and worshipping. Some of them were confessing their sins and we began confessing too. We didn't realize we had sinned before, but we saw how filthy we were in the presence of a holy God."

But all this is only the beginning. Duncan Campbell declared again and again that true revival is a revival of holiness and that holiness is more desirable than happiness. One man, converted under the preaching of Campbell, claimed that his conversion cost him \$10,000; he had to return to America and work for a year "to make restitution for things I had done as a sinner."

Two-hundred years earlier Jonathan Edwards commented that one effect of revival is to bring sinners "immediately to quit their sinful practices."

This deep work of conviction always leads to a freedom and joy in the new-found experience of forgiveness. Following the "smiting of the heart" come the "outbursts of the joy of salvation." It is not our happiness that God is concerned with, but our holiness; it is impossible to read the story of revivals without understanding this.

If there are three things that are common to all true revivals they are prayer, preaching and a conviction of sin. If we are to expect revival in these days, we must expect it to hurt. In recent years we have been busy trying to convince the world by our Christian clowns and comedians, and by our big, happy events, that Christianity is fun. The reason why the world does not take Christianity seriously is because Christians don't!

Revival does not persuade the world that the Christian faith is fun, but that it is essential. There is a colossal difference. The first work of the Spirit is not to tell us that we can be happy, but that we must be holy--because God is.

The kind of men God has used in revival were men who trembled at sin and whose conscience was sensitive to the approach of sin; men who did not try to justify their lazy, careless habits, but who lived disciplined and determined lives. If there is one thing common to the men God uses in revival it is that they fear nothing but God and sin. The reason for this is that revival is always a revival of holiness, and therefore the vessels God uses must be holy.

A man may be extreme or even unwise in his leadership, but if he crosses the boundary into sin then God will set him on one side. Humphrey Jones was greatly used in Wales in 1859 until his pride robbed God of the glory, and then his effective ministry was ended.

As the leaders, so the people; there is no honor to God in an unholy people. When we look at the fruits of revival we shall see how great a reformation any revival brings to society. But the reason for deep conviction is so that the people will feel their sin and hate it. The deeper the pile-driving, the higher the building can rise.

When revival comes, priorities are focused on what pleases God. Public houses and dance halls close, betting shops are abandoned, even sports are set on one side; work output increases, and honesty is the norm. In Wales, during the revival early this century, it was claimed that the pit ponies stopped work because they no longer understood the orders from the men--no one was swearing at them!

In the light of this, how many of us are ready for revival? Have we shown God we want a revival? There is a preparation that must begin now, and a concern to be holy will show God that we care. We will be saying to God, "Lord, I long for revival, and this is how much I long: I want to be as holy as a saved sinner can be." And if there is still no revival, we shall at least have done our duty and God asks us to do no more than that. The outcome is His, the preparation is ours.

"The Lord will indeed give what is  
good, and our land will yield  
its harvest.  
Righteousness goes before Him  
and prepares the way for His  
steps" (Psalm 85:12-13)