

Preparing For Revival By John A. Harvey

Classic Christian Writings:

The idea that prayer brings revival can be somewhat of a copout. It is generally accepted that prayer is the path toward the renewal of God's presence and power in the church, but prayer alone won't do it. The proof text for the prayer cure for dying churches is Second Chronicles 7:14 and the much-quoted words are: "will humble themselves and pray and seek my face" (NIV). In addition to this Scripture is the oft-repeated "historical evidence" of prayer meetings that brought revival.

A closer look at the Second Chronicles passage makes plain that it is not prayer that causes God to hear from heaven, but genuine repentance. In the context of repentance, prayer becomes the vehicle for confession of sins and aids the implementation of repentance. The core issue of sin that caused decline in the first place must be directly confronted, and repentance is the only way of dealing with sin.

Peter makes it clear to the Jews that if they wanted "times of refreshing [to] come from the Lord" then they had to "repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19). When Jesus walked this earth, Israel was experiencing revival by His presence.

John the Baptist proclaimed that for the Lord to come they needed "to make straight paths for him" (Luke 3:4). Straight paths were made by "fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8). If John the Baptist were here today, he would say the pathway to revival is in returning to God in full obedience, forsaking our worldliness. All the prayer meetings in the world are not going to bring revival until sin is dealt with radically and thoroughly.

I, for one, can testify that it is fairly easy to have people praying for revival while ignoring the obvious. Of course, they won't be all that fervent about it, and they won't be all that persistent either. While prayer for revival by the unrepentant is hypocritical, it is as common as other deadly forms of carnal religion.

If prayer is the solution for revival, then the absence of power from on high is God's fault. If repentance is the solution, then the absence of revival is our fault. Once we accept responsibility for the condition of the church, then revival is within our grasp.

Here is the amazing truth: We can have revival if we really want it. To say that the ball is totally in our court regarding revival is probably an oversimplification, for God's sovereignty is always a factor. However, the Scriptures make clear we have a role to play in the outpouring of power from above, and that role is repentance. My message is not to diminish the value of prayer, but rather to emphasize that prayer is no substitute for forsaking our sins when it comes to bringing back the glory.