

Preparation For Revival By Charles H. Spurgeon

Classic Christian Writings:

Abridged from a sermon delivered October 30, 1864 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, England

As a church we have had our hearts set upon a revival in our midst. Many of us will be grievously disappointed if such a revival shall not take place. We have felt moved to cry for it. Already there are signs that God is visiting us in a very remarkable manner, but our souls are set upon a greater work than we have ever seen. Dear friends, we need as the first and most essential thing in this matter that God should walk with us. In vain we shall struggle after revival unless we have His presence. If, then, we desire to have His presence with us, we must see to it that we are perfectly agreed with Him both in the design of the work, and in the method of it; and I desire to stir up your pure minds to heart-searching and vigilant self-examination, that every false way may be purged from us, since God will not walk with us as a church, unless we be agreed with Him.

We Desire to Walk with God

Let us first avow our desire that in our present effort we may walk with God; otherwise our strivings after revival will be very wearisome.

"If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Ex. 33:15), was the request of Moses. I think we may rather disapprove than desire a revival if God's presence be not in it.

"Lord, let us stay as we are, crying and groaning to see better days, rather than permit us to be puffed up with the notion of revival without Thine own power in it. Let us have no special prayer meetings merely for the sake of them, but let us receive special blessings as the result of prayer..." During a course of meetings by which we desire to excite the hearts of believers to a deeper interest in spiritual things, if there be not a gracious power in them, you will soon perceive a dullness, a flagging, a heaviness, a weariness stealing over the assembly. The numbers will decline, the prayers will become less fervent, and the whole thing will degenerate into a hollow sham or a mournful monotony. To come up from the wilderness is hard climbing unless we lean on our beloved. "O Thou who art our beloved and adorable Lord, lest our souls grow weary in well-doing and faint for heaviness, be pleased to let us enjoy communion with Thyself."

Not only is there weariness in our own attempts, but they always end in disappointment, unless God walks with us. You may pray and pray and pray, but there shall be no conversions, no sense of quickening until the Spirit's working be distinctly recognized. The minister shall be just as much a preacher of the mere letter as ever he was. The church officers shall be as formal and official as ever they were. The church members shall be as inconsistent and as indifferent as they were accustomed to being. The congregation shall be as uninterested and as unmoved as they were in the worst times, except the Spirit of God work with us.

In this thing we may quote the words of the psalmist: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." (Psa. 127:1). O friends, it is well to have a holy industry and a devout perseverance; it is well to strain every nerve, and put forth every effort; but all this must end in the most sorry, heart-sickening failure, unless the Lord rend the heavens and come down.

I am telling you what you all do know, and what I trust you feel, but it is what we are constantly forgetting. Many are they who go on a warfare at their own charges, and so become both bankrupt and defeated, and many be they who would build God's house simply by stress of human effort, but they fail, because God is not there to give them success.

Yet more: supposing that in this our attempt at revival, we should not be favored with the presence of God, then prayer will be greatly dishonored. When a church draws near to God in special prayer asking any mercy, if she does not receive that mercy on account of some disagreement with God, then her belief in prayer is greatly weakened, and this is a most serious evil. Anything which makes men doubt the efficacy of prayer, is an injury to their spirituality. We must go on. It would be ruin to forbear or to turn our backs. As a church we must now conquer or die....

O dear friends, we have felt in our souls, not that we may have revival, but that we must have it! When we think of the incalculable damage that shall be done to us all if the Lord does not visit us, I am sure we must again draw near to the angel and wrestle afresh with this determination, that we will not let him go unless he bless us.

We may be confirmed in our anxious desire to have the Lord walking with us in this thing, when we consider the blessings which are sure to flow from His presence. Ah, what holy quickening shall come upon every one of us! Every action shall be fraught with vigor, every thought shall glow with earnestness, every word shall be clothed with divine power. Let God arise and doubts and fears shall betake themselves to their hiding places, as the bats conceal themselves at the rising of the dawn. Let the Lord visit you, and difficulties which frown like Alps, will sink to plains. Let Him arise, and all your enemies shall flee before you, as the smoke before the wind; the heavens shall drop with showers of mercy; and even your sins and all the guilt thereof, shall shake as Sinai shook at the presence of the God of Israel. A church with God's presence in it is holy, happy, united, earnest, laborious, successful; fair as the moon before the Lord, and clear as the sun in the eyes of men. She is terrible as an army with banners to her enemies.

If God shall be pleased to be with His church, then direct good shall visit our congregation. The immense increase of our church gives us the hope that the day will come when every seat will be occupied by a believer, but it is not the case yet. Now let our cries be heard for the Master's presence, and we shall soon see hearts of stone turned to flesh. The iron of the Word shall break the northern iron and steel; Jehovah Jesus shall ride victoriously through those gates which have been barred against Him, and there shall be shouting in heaven because the Lord hath gotten Him the victory.

Wider blessings will follow. A church is never blessed alone. If any one church shall stand in the vigor of piety, other churches shall take example therefrom, and make an advance toward a better state. We have around us many churches, hills which God has blessed, but they, like ourselves, have a tendency to slumber. Let God pour out His Spirit here, and the shower will not be confined to these fields, but will drop upon other pastures, and they shall rejoice on every side. Our testimony for God rings through this land, from one end of it to the other. Our ministry is not hidden under a bushel nor confined to a few. Tens of thousands listen every week to our word, and if the Lord shall be pleased to bless it, then shall it be as ointment poured forth, to load the moral atmosphere with a savor of Christ crucified.

One nation cannot feel the power of God without communicating some of its blessing to another....If God should bless our island, all the whole earth must feel the power thereof. Therefore do we feel encouraged mightily to pray. O my brethren, the world grows old; man's faith is getting weary of long waiting; the false prophets begin again to appear and cry, "Lo, here," or "Lo, there." But the Lord must come; of this are we confident. In such an hour as we think not, He may appear.

How would we have Him find us at His coming? Would we have Him find His servants sleeping? His stewards wasting His goods? His vinedressers with neglected vines? His soldiers with swords rusted into their scabbards? No! We would have Him find us watching, standing upon the watchtower, feeding His sheep, tending His lambs, succoring the needy, comforting the weary, helping the oppressed.

Gird up your loins then as men that watch for their Lord. If my words could have the power in them which I feel they lack, I would stir you up, dear brethren and sisters, to seek unto the mighty God of Jacob, that when the Son of Man cometh, if He find no faith upon the earth elsewhere, at least He may find it in you. If zeal shall be extinct in every other place, at least may He find one live coal yet glowing in your bosom. For this we want His presence, for without it we can do nothing.

We Must Agree with God

This brings me, in the second place, to observe that if we would have the presence of God, it is necessary that we should be agreed with Him.

We must be agreed with God as to the end of our Christian existence. God has formed us for Himself, that we may show forth His praise. The main end of a Christian man is that having been bought with precious Blood, he may live unto Christ, and not unto himself. There are many professors who at least appear to believe that the main end of their Christian existence is to get to heaven, to get as much money as they can on earth, and to leave as much as they can to their children when they die. I question, if it were not for their happiness to go to heaven, whether they would care much about going, if it were only for God's glory. Their way of living upon earth is always this: "What shall I eat? What shall I drink? Wherewithal shall I be clothed?" They can judge and they can weigh, and plot, and plan to get money, but they have no plans as to how they can serve God. The cause of God is scarcely in their thoughts.

It is just and right in a man to seek to make money to supply the wants of his family, or even to provide for them on his own decease, but whenever this gets to be the main thought, and I am persuaded it is the leading

thought of too many professors, such men forget whose they are, and whom they serve. They are living to themselves. They have forgotten Who it is that has said, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as with silver and gold" (1 Peter 1:18).

I pray God that I may feel that I am God's man, that I have not a hair on my head which is not consecrated, nor a drop of my blood which is not dedicated to His cause. And I pray that you may feel the same, that selfishness may die out of you, that you may be able to say without any straining of the truth, "I have nothing to care for, nor to live for in this world, but that I may glorify God and spread forth the savor of my Savior's name."

We cannot expect the Master's blessing till we are agreed about this. This is God's will. Is it our will today? I know I have around me many faithful hearts who will say, "My desire is that whether I live or die, Christ may be glorified in me." If we be all of that mind, God will walk with us. But everyone who is of another mind, and of a divided heart is a hindrance and an injury to us in our progress....

If we would have God with us we must be agreed as to the real desirableness and necessity of the conversion of souls. God thinks souls to be very precious, and His own words are, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but had rather that he should turn unto Me and live" (Ezek. 33:11). Are we agreed with God in that? Our God thinks souls to be so precious, that if a man could gain the whole world and lose his soul, he would be a loser. Are we agreed with Him there?

In the person of Christ, our God wept over Jerusalem, watered with tears that city which must be given up to the flames. Have we tears, too? Have we compassion, too? When God thinks of sinners it is in this wise: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim?" (Hos. 11:8). Can we bemoan sinners in that way? Do we stir our souls to an agony of grief because men will turn from God and will willfully perish in their sin?

If, on the contrary, you and I selfishly say, "We are safe; it does not matter to us whether others are brought to know Christ," then we are not agreed. God will not work with us, and such of you as feel this indifference, this cursed lethargy, are our bane, our burden, our hindrance. God forgive you, and stir you up to feel that your heart will not rest unless poor sinners are plucked as brands from the burning. Are we agreed here?

If we would have the Lord with us, in the next place, we must be agreed as to the means to be used in revival. We are agreed that the first means is the preaching of Christ. We do not want any other doctrine than that we have received—Christ lifted up upon His cross, as the serpent was lifted up upon the pole. This is the remedy which we in this house of prayer believe in. Our only hope lies in the doctrine of a substitute for sinners, the great fact of the atonement, the glorious truth that Christ Jesus came into the world to seek and to save sinners. I think we are agreed with God in this, that the preaching of Christ is the way by which believers shall be saved.

God's great agency is the Holy Spirit. We are agreed, brethren, that we do not want sinners to be converted by our persuasion, we do not want them brought into the church by excitement. We want the Spirit's work and the Spirit's work alone. We want the Holy Spirit Himself to come forth and show what divinity can do in turning hearts of stone to flesh. In this thing I think that we are agreed with God.

But God's way of blessing the church is by the instrumentality of all her members. The multitude must be fed, but it must not be by Christ's hand alone. He gave the bread to the disciples, and the disciples, to the multitude. Are you all agreed here? I am afraid not. Many of you are engaged in works of usefulness, and I will make this my boast this day, that I had never thought that I should meet with a people so apostolic in their zeal as the most of you have been. I have marveled, and my heart has rejoiced when I have seen what self-sacrifice some of the poorest among you have made for Christ, what zeal, what enthusiasm you have manifested in the spreading abroad of the Savior's name.

But still there are some of you who are doing nothing whatever. You have a name to live, but I fear that you are dead. You are very seldom at a prayer meeting—even some church members and persons whom I know are not kept at home by business, but by sheer indifference to the cause of God. Some of you are never provoked to zeal and to good works. That you come and listen to us is something, and for what you do we are grateful. But for what you do not do, over this we mourn, because we fear that we are restrained in our efforts for the spread of the Savior's kingdom because as a church we are not agreed in God's plan. And we shall be restrained until every man in the church can say, "I will consecrate myself this day unto the Lord of hosts; if there is anything to be done, be it to be a door-keeper in the house of God, here am I."

Yet again, dear friends, are we agreed this day as to our utter helplessness in this work? I caught a good sentence the other day. Speaking with a Wesleyan minister, I said to him, "Your denomination during the past year did not increase. You have usually had a large increase to your numbers. You were never so rich as now; your ministers were never so well educated; you never had such good chapels as now, and yet you never had so little success. What are you doing, knowing this to be the fact? How are the minds of your brethren exercised with regard to this?"

He comforted me much by the reply. He said, "It has driven us to our knees. We thank God that we know our state and are not content with it. We have had a day of humiliation, and I hope," he said, "some of us have gone low enough to be blessed."

There is a great truth in that last sentence, "low enough to be blessed." I do fear that some of us never do go low enough to be blessed. A man says, "Oh, yes, we are getting on very well. We do not lack any revival that I know of." I fear he is not low enough to be blessed. When you and I pray to God with pride in us, with self-exaltation, with a confidence in our own zeal, or even in the prevalence of our own prayers of themselves, we have not come low enough to be blessed. A humble church will be a blessed church; a church that is willing to confess its own errors and failures, and to lie at the foot of Christ's cross, is in a position to be favored of the Lord. I hope we are agreed, then, with God, as to our utter unworthiness and helplessness, so that we look to him alone.

I charge you all to be agreed with God in this thing, that if any good shall be done, if any conversions shall occur, all the glory must be given to Him. God does not care to work for the honor of men, either of ministers or of laymen, or of churches either. Crowns! Crowns! Crowns! But all for Thy head, Jesus! Laurels and wreaths, but none for man, all for Him whose own right hand and whose holy arm hath gotten Him the victory. We must all be agreed on this point and I hope we are.

Let Us Put Away What Offends God

And now to conclude: Let us put away all those things which offend our God.

Before God appeared upon Mount Sinai, the children of Israel had to cleanse themselves for three days. Before Israel could take possession of the promised rest of Canaan, Joshua had to see to it that they were purified by the rite of circumcision. Whenever God would visit His people, He always demands of them some preparatory purging, that they may be fit to behold His presence. Two cannot walk together unless that which would make them disagree be purged out. A few suggestions then as to whether there is anything in us with which God cannot agree. Here I cannot preach to you indiscriminately, but put the task into the hand of each man to preach to himself.

Is there pride in me? Am I puffed up with my talent, my substance, my character, my success? Lord, purge this out of me or else Thou canst not walk with me, for none shall ever say that God and the proud souls are friends. He giveth grace to the humble. As for the proud, He knoweth them afar off, and will not let them come near to Him (Jas. 4:6).

Am I slothful? Do I waste hours which I might usefully employ? Have I the levity of the butterfly, which flits from flower to flower, but drinks no honey from any of them? Or have I the industry of the bee, which, wherever it lights, would find some sweet store for the hive? Lord, Thou knowest my soul; Thou understandest me. Am I doing little where I might do much? Hast Thou had but little reaping for much sowing? Have I hid my talent in a napkin? Have I spent that talent for myself, instead of spending it for Thee? Slothful souls cannot walk with God. "My Father worketh," said Jesus, "and I work" (John 5:17). You who stand in the marketplace idle may stand there with the devil, but you cannot stand there with God. Let every brother who is guilty of this purge away his sloth.

Or am I guilty of worldliness? This is the crying sin of many in the Christian Church. Do I put myself into association with men who cannot by any possibility profit me? Am I seen where my Master would not go? Do I love amusements which cannot afford me comfort when I reflect upon them, and which I would never indulge in, if I thought that Christ would come while I was at them? Am I worldly in spirit as to fashion? Am I as showy, as frivolous as men and women of the world? If so, if I love the world, the love of the Father is not in me; consequently He cannot walk with me, for we are not agreed.

Again, am I covetous? Is my first thought not how I can honor God, but how I can accumulate wealth? When I

gain wealth, do I forget to make use of it as a steward? If so, then God is not agreed with me. I am a thief with His substance. I have set myself up for a master instead of being a servant, and God will not walk with me till I begin to feel that this is not my own, but His; and that I must use it in His fear.

Again, am I of an angry spirit? Am I harsh toward my brethren? Do I cherish envy toward those who are better than myself, or contempt toward those who are worse off? If so, God cannot walk with me, for He hates envy, and all contempt of the poor is abhorrent to Him.

Is there any lust in me? Do I indulge the flesh? Am I fond of carnal indulgences by which my soul suffers? If so, God will not walk with me; for sexual immorality, and gluttony, and drunkenness, separate between a believer and His God. These things are not convenient to a Christian. Before the great feast of unleavened bread, a Jewish parent would sweep out every piece of leaven from his house. So anxious would he be, and so anxious is the Jew at the present day that he takes a candle and sweeps out every cupboard, no matter though there may have been no food put in there at any time. He is afraid lest by accident a crumb may be somewhere concealed in the house, and so, from the garret to the cellar, he clears the whole house through, to purge out the old leaven. Let us do so.

I cannot think you will do so as the effect of such poor words as mine, but if my soul could speak to you, and God blessed the utterance, you would. For my own part, I cry unto my Master, that if there be anything that can make me more fit to be the messenger of God to you and to the sons of men, however painful might be the preparatory process, He would graciously be pleased not to spare me of it. If by sickness, if by serious calamities, if by slander and rebuke, more honor can be brought to Him, then hail and welcome all these things! They shall be my joy, and to receive them shall be delight. I pray you, utter the same desire: "Lord, make me fit to be the means of glorifying Thee."

What! Do you hesitate? Do you want forever to go on in the old dead-and-alive way in which the churches are just now? Do you feel no sacred passion stirring your breast to anguish for the present, and to hope for the future? O you who dread the battle, slink to your beds. But you who have your Master's spirit in you, and would long to see brighter and better days, lift up your heads with confidence in Him who will walk with us if we be agreed.