

Further Thoughts on Revival

In a recent article I spoke to the issue of revival that many Christians would love to see in our world today. I would like to offer a few further remarks to help us to think about, particularly, the work of the Holy Spirit in revival.

It is likely that no one in the history of the church—outside of Holy Scripture—has taught us more about revival than 18th century pastor and theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was instrumental in the revival that took place in America known from Church history as the ‘First Great Awakening.’ In Edwards’ writings we gain important biblical and practical insight into the nature of revival as well as the work of the Holy Spirit in revival. Edwards writes extensively of the effects of revival on his town of Northampton, Massachusetts.

“The work soon made a glorious alteration in the town. So that in the Spring and Summer following it seemed that [the people of the town were] full of the presence of God. It never was so full of love nor so full of joy and yet so full of distress (over sin) as it was then. There were remarkable tokens of God’s presence in almost every house. It was a time of joy in families on account of salvation being brought to them....God’s day was a delight....The congregation was alive in God’s service. Everyone intent on the public worship. Every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth. The assembly in general were from time to time in tears while the Word was preached. Some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors.”

That is a beautiful, descriptive picture of the working of the Holy Spirit in revival and how the entire town was positively affected. You can hardly read that without desiring to be blessed with revival on such a large scale. But, even on a smaller scale, the same Spirit is at work in individual lives. When the Holy Spirit is regularly at work in our hearts and lives we will know true love, joy, desires for the Scriptures, for worship and for holiness. But is there some hidden mystery to how the Holy Spirit is actively involved in our lives? Should we expect some type of euphoric feelings to ensure us that this is truly the Spirit’s work? I suggest that we can know how the Holy Spirit works in our lives because God’s Word in Scripture gives us clear teaching so that we may not be confused.

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, in his book entitled, “The Holy Spirit” writes, “The ministry of the Holy Spirit in reshaping us to be more like Christ can be said to be the central function of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian believer.” I want to give a brief list of ways in which the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives and in Christ’s Church.

--The Spirit brings life to the spiritually dead (John 3; 6:63; Ephesians 2:1). We’re then to join in membership with a local body of believers. Thus, Paul’s analogy of the body and the teaching on the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12 is very instructive. The Spirit gives gifts to the body for use in the body; any thought of isolation from the local church is not the work of the Spirit.

--The Spirit points us to Jesus Christ in all his beauty and glory (John 15:26; 16:14). We should want to know Christ more deeply.

--The Spirit comes to us as the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). The Holy Spirit gives us a hunger for God's word as well as bringing guidance, comfort and conviction through the word.

--The Spirit is also the Spirit of holiness. This means that the Spirit works in us so that we desire to grow in our likeness to Jesus Christ in word and deed. You can be sure that when we desire to turn from sin and turn to Christ in repentance, this is the work of the Spirit (Romans 8:13).

--The Spirit prompts our desire for worship (Philippians 3:3)

May we continue to pray daily for the Spirit's work in our lives.

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