

Praying for Revival?

We live in a day that is a cause of concern for many. Governments, local and national, often seem to see any discussion of Christ or godliness in the public arena to be unnecessary at best or completely forbidden at worst. There is surely decay in our society on many levels and in the midst of all of this, there has been a cry from the faithful for revival. "Only a national revival," some have said, "will get our nation back on track." But even though the prayers and the call for revival are right, how do we get there from where we are? In other words, does prayer play a part in revival? How hard should we pray? What are the prerequisites for a national or even a local revival?

In this article, I want to suggest three different views of revival that are often spoken of by those who have studied the subject. The following three views on revival come from the excellent work by Christian author, Iain Murray entitled, "Pentecost Today?" The first view holds that the whole concept of occasional revivals is not biblical at all. This group believes that for those who prayed for revival in the Old Testament, God promised that he would revive his people by the outpouring of the Spirit which he did after Christ ascended and the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost. According to this view, revival is a part of the church's present inheritance and Christians need only to realize what is already theirs. Any talk of further revival as a future event to be awaited and prayed for is seen as unbiblical by this first group.

The second view, held by many evangelical churches today, teaches that the presence or absence of revival is completely conditioned upon the obedience of the church and the behavior of Christians. One segment of this group believes that revival can be secured by intense and prayerful evangelistic effort. This follows the teaching of 19th century revivalist advocate, Charles Finney who taught that, "Revival is as naturally a result of the use of appropriate means as a crop is of the use of its appropriate means." Another segment of the 'conditioned by obedience' group teaches that revival comes, not so much by evangelism, but by repentance and renewed personal holiness. This is often connected with the misapplied verse of scripture, 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." It is important to affirm that God does use means such as preaching, prayer and holiness in life. But the issue is whether our obedience *produces* revival in some type of cause and effect manner as if revival *must* come if we are faithful.

The third view, which I believe is the biblical view, agrees with the first in that at Pentecost, the Spirit was given to the church never to be removed and therefore the work of conversion and sanctification will continue as we await the return of Christ. The third view also agrees with the second in that human responsibility is involved in revival, but as an instrument of means. That is to say that the third view holds that God is Sovereign and we are responsible. But ultimately, this third view holds that revival comes in small or large ways when, where and

how God determines. The church must seek to be faithful in the ordinary means of preaching, prayer and calling for ongoing repentance from sins while always keeping in mind that revival is God's plan, and what he does is always better than anything that we might try to produce in and of ourselves. In closing, I'll remind us that we should never fail to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in the 'normal' areas of life even as we pray that God will bring about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in extraordinary degrees on our churches and in the world.

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