

## REVIVE US AGAIN?

An important part of the life of most evangelical churches in the nineteenth and the beginning and middle of the twentieth century was the yearly revival meeting, something the contemporary church and very few young preachers know anything about today. It was the revival meeting that played a significant role in the development of the religious life of the early pioneers of the country. As Kenneth Scott Latourette in his monumental work *A History of Christianity* stated: "Revivals were a feature of much of Protestantism in the new country even before political independence and had broken out spectacularly in the Great Awakening, and the camp meetings. The 'evangelism' which was already characteristic of American Protestantism and which had as its aim winning all the population to the Christian faith stressed revivals as a normal way of attaining the goal". This was a time when a visiting evangelist was called to hold a one or two week meeting, which sometimes lasted three weeks or more (becoming known as a "protracted meeting"). The revival was usually held in the fall of the year and it was at this time that there was expected to be a harvest of souls. Most conversions and church memberships happened during the revival meeting. Most churches were helped and benefited spiritually by the revival meeting. There were many real and sincere conversions and many lukewarm Christians rededicated themselves to faithful service and many times the revival meeting was a time for healing of conflicts within the church. It was a time when the community responded more than they would to the regular weekly services. Much depended on the kind of preaching during the meeting. One of the voids the revival meeting filled was to provide preaching for churches that had only part time ministers. It was not uncommon for a preacher to minister to two or more churches, which meant they had preaching only once or twice a month. However as Bible Colleges and Seminaries began to produce more preachers and more churches went "full time" the need for revival meetings dwindled. Churches then began having revivals lasting only a week. As interest began to wane and church programs began to change the three day revival came into prominence. These usually either began on Sunday and closed on Wednesday or began on Wednesday and closed on Sunday. This gave way to what was called "week-end" revivals which were held only on Saturday and Sunday. Some churches dropped the term "revival" and used such terms as "Gospel Meeting" "Evangelistic meeting" and "Spiritual encounters". Then the inevitable moved in and revival meetings about came to an end. Some churches still have the week-long meetings and many others have turned to special programs which supplanted the revival meeting.

Since revivals played such an important part in the development of the church we should take a look at the Scriptural meaning of the term "revival". The word is used very infrequently in Scripture. I Kings 17 is the record of Elijah raising the widow of Zarepath's son from the dead. Verse 22 states "And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he *revived*." The word is used in II Kings 13:21: "And as they were burying a

man, they saw a marauding band; and they cast the man into the grave of Elisha and when the man touched the bones of Elisha he *revived* and stood up on his feet." These two passages teach that to be revived is to be raised from the dead. A more familiar use of the word is found in the prayer of Habbakkuk "O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years" (Hab. 3:2).

If "revival" means a rising from the dead we need to understand there are two kinds of death: physical and spiritual. Jesus makes this distinction in John 5:25-29: "The hour is coming *and now is* when the dead shall hear the voice of the son of God and those who hear shall live...do not marvel at this for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice and shall come forth". The prodigal son was said to be "dead" and had "come to life again" (Luke 15:24). At one time we were all "dead in trespasses and sins" but were "made alive" by God through Christ (Eph. 2:1,5). Through the years the call for revival has been directed toward nations, churches and individuals. If this is a legitimate call, then the logical conclusion is that nations die (Ezekiel 37), churches die (Rev. 3:1), and individuals die spiritually (I Tim. 5:6). The major cause of the death of nations is idolatry. Israel serves as an example: "If your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish" (Deut. 30:17,18). Jim Nelson Black in *When Nations Die* says "When nations die, they do not simply disappear. Obviously certain elements of culture survive and forms of cultures that once dominated nations live on." This, then, influences both churches and individuals. It is the tenor of the times, the culture in which we live and the accepted standards of the nation which many times determines the status of both the church and the individual. In a nation that has made a god of money, a god of sex, a god of fashion, a god of leisure and a god of youth it isn't hard to explain some of the modern attitudes found in our churches. Herbert Scholossberg in *Idols for Destruction* states: "the master of the American church is likely to be whatever cultural or intellectual fad has gained the ascendancy." When Israel embraced idolatry it did not openly renounce the worship of God, they simply combined their worship with the paganism they embraced. This is illustrated in II Kings 23 in the record of the religious revival under Josiah (which didn't last very long after his death). He commanded that the vessels in the temple that had been used in the worship of Baal, Molech and Ashtoreth be removed. This is evidence that they had combined the pagan worship of the heathen with the worship of Jehovah, and displayed it in His temple.

The god of money has been so embraced by the modern church that the majority of offerings in church today are used to pay preachers to preach to Christians and to construct and maintain their buildings while the idea of preachers evangelizing the lost and church offerings being used to feed and care for the poor are lost concepts. The church that has the money to build modern buildings is considered a success.

That the god of sex has invaded the church is evident from the many tragic cases of immorality among the religious leaders and the divorce rate among Christians equaling that of the world, not to mention the modern debates concerning the ordination of homosexuals to the ministry. The extent to which the god of sex has influenced the church was recently seen in our area when a local church ran a full page ad in a local magazine showing the naked belly of a pregnant woman. Evidently the idea was to show “relevancy”.

The god of fashion has so influenced the church that Abercrombie and Fitch, the Malls and designer clothing demand more attention from our children than anything related to their spiritual growth. Many Christians think nothing of paying a hundred dollars for a pair of tennis shoes or a pair of jeans yet gripe if the preacher mentions money.

The god of youth is a relative new phenomenon to invade the church. The present youth subculture is described in the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* as: “Until 1950, youth subculture as such did not exist. Children aspired to (or were pushed into) adulthood as fast as their physical development allowed. Since then, however, the media and advertisers, among others, have made youth the dominant culture of Western societies, to the point that many people retain adolescent attitudes far into adulthood.” Youth is the predominant factor in most churches today. Michael Spencer in *Those Magnificent Young Men In Their Pastoring Machines* states: “Youth ministry, in general, was the American church’s great experiment with pragmatism. If it worked, i.e. got the kids interested and kept them in church, it was alright. Any honest youth minister would tell you that he or she could get away with all kinds of things that would never be done by anyone else in the church, because the church wants young people in the house. The idea of ‘if it works, then God will use it’, was grown from youth ministry to everything that is evangelical seeker sensitive ministry today. Most seeker churches are grown up youth groups. They are doing what we taught them was OK in youth ministry, and now they are redecorating the church to suit themselves. And they are good at it.” Concerning the modern use of rock music in the church David Wilkerson in his book *Set The Trumpet To Thy Mouth* says: “One of the reasons God’s Spirit was lifted from the Jesus Movement was their refusal to forsake their old music. They gave up pot, heroin, alcohol, promiscuous sex, and they even gave up perverted lifestyles. But they refused to give up their beloved rock. Its hold is stronger than drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. It is the biggest mass addiction in the world’s history. Rock music, as used and performed in Christians circles, is of the same satanic seed as that which is called punk, heavy metal, and is performed in devilish rock concerts worldwide.”

I will end this section on Idolatry causing death by quoting A.W. Tozer. (I do not know the source of the quote. It was sent to me by my son, Mark. Tozer died in 1963. I wonder what he’d say about the situation today). “It is now common practice in most evangelical churches to offer the people, especially the young people, a maximum of entertainment and a minimum of serious instruction. It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God. One can only conclude that God’s professed children are bored with Him, for they must be wooed to meeting with a stick of striped candy in the form of

religious movies, games and refreshments. This has influenced the whole pattern of church life, and even brought into being a new type of church architecture, designed to house the golden calf. So we have the strange anomaly of orthodoxy in creed and heterodoxy in practice. The striped candy technique has been so fully integrated into our present religious thinking that it is simply taken for granted. Its victims never dream that it is not a part of the teachings of Christ and his apostles. Any objection to the carryings on of our present golden calf Christianity is met with the triumphant reply, ‘But we are winning them!’ And winning them to what? To true discipleship? To cross carrying? To self denial? To separation from the world? To crucifixion of the flesh? To holy living? To nobility of character? To despising of the world’s treasures? To hard self discipline? To love for God? To total committal to Christ? Of course the answer to all these questions is no.”

The idolatry of the nation influences the church and the individual, yet the conduct of the individual Christian and the church determines the course of the nation. Revival will not come to our nation until revival comes to the church. Revival will not come to the church until there is a revival in the lives of its members. What, then, is the cause of the spiritual death from which individuals, the church and the nation need to be revived? To answer this we go back to the beginning. Many questions can be answered by understanding the events recorded in the book of Genesis. The basic reason for death entering the world was twofold: Deception and deliberate decisions. II Cor. 11:3: “But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ”. And I Tim. 2:14: “And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression”. To be deceived is to accept as true or valid what is false or invalid. This imposes a false idea that causes ignorance and the end result, scripturally, is death. The Apostle Paul warns that “evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (II Tim. 3:13). The second reason death entered the world was a deliberate decision made in the garden. Note that the woman “...took of the fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.” Adam was not out tending the garden when Eve sinned. He was “with her”. He knew full well what he was doing. In Deuteronomy 30:19 God said: “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live”. James 1:14,15 is pertinent to this point: “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust, then when lust has conceived it gives birth to sin, and when sin is accomplished it brings forth death”. Sin is deceptive, but it is also a choice. I Tim. 5:6 warns: “But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.” A dead church is a body without the Spirit (James 2:26); a body without the blood (Heb. 9:22); and a body without the head (Col 2.19). Anytime a church is determined to forsake the Scriptural teachings on these subjects and substitute what the world wants to hear is signing their own death certificate.

The “how” of revival is illustrated in Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones (Ezk. 37): It is the preaching of the word of God and the empowering of the Spirit of God that revives the dead. We can add to this the fervent prayers of God’s people (II Chron. 7:14; Rev. 8:3-5). We ask: Do we need revival?



