

Reformation  
& Revival



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The fundamental issue remains the issue of truth, the truth of theological assertions. No work on theology will be worth its weight if that fundamental issue is obscured.

*Carl F. H. Henry*

Some people, to be sure, have reached the...conclusion [that] since man is finite and fallen...since he cannot discover God by his intellect and God must reveal himself, therefore the mind is unimportant. But no. The Christian doctrine of revelation, far from making the human mind unnecessary, actually makes it indispensable and assigns to it its proper place. God has revealed himself in words to minds. His revelation is a rational revelation to rational creatures. Our duty is to receive his message, to submit to it, to seek to understand it and to relate it to the world in which we live.

*John R. W. Stott*

## *Prelude to Revival: A Christian Response to Culture Wars*

Bryan Chapell

### What Will Make a Difference?

We are agreed. *Newsweek* magazine's headline declares that America is at war over cultural values, and weeks later *Christianity Today* follows with its own cover article reporting the battle fully engaged. Factions may not agree with each other's values, but all concur we are living through a cultural war. If you want some evidence of the culture's rifts you have only to stand in a "Hands Across America" lifechain along a major traffic thoroughfare as my family and I did a few weeks ago. Waves and shouts of encouragement from pro-life drivers, other gestures and profanities from those of opposing views—even toward my children—make it clear how deeply we as a people are divided and how differing are our values.

Over a decade ago Francis Schaeffer warned of the impact eroding morals and retreating churches. With this early salvo he challenged Christian churches to wake up to their loss of spiritual influence upon society:

... [A]ll the most devastating things in every area of our culture, whether it be art or music, whether it be law or government, whether it's the schools, permissiveness and all the rest, all these things have come climactically in our adult lifehood.... But the mentality of accommodation did not raise the voice, it did not raise the battle, it did not call God's people to realize that this is a part of the task—to speak out into the culture and society against that which was being so undercut and lost and largely thrown away.

With this call to arms and many similar ones the war now rages on every front: arts, politics, law, business, medicine, education ... even at the level of reading curricula in the nation's grammar schools. The battles touch every area of our lives involving the most basic issues of our being: family, gender, sexuality, race, ethics, personal responsibility, the sanctity of life itself.

The scope of the issues that are being debated well indicate that we may have arrived at a defining moment—a watershed mark in history that will determine the shape and form of our world for many years to come. Such a realization has led to a consistent call among believers for reformation and revival in our society. Clergy and laity across denominational, socio-economic, and ethnic lines have united their voices to summon the spiritually concerned to make a difference at this crucial time. But what really will make a difference? Solutions do not lie in easy answers nor human wisdom. The magnitude of our situation presses us to search for answers in this Scripture where an apostle sought revival in a church and reform in its society at a time no less troubled than our own.

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power (1 Cor. 1:26-2:5).

### The Chasuble Syndrome

Did you know the earliest Christians wore a uniform? It was not plaid. Rather, the chasuble, a hooded cloak made of woolen material, was the common garment of the first-century disciples. In the Roman world common folk, laborers, and slaves wore chasubles as a fits-any-purpose, takes-any-abuse overall that would stand up to grime, labor, and weather. No ruler or Roman professional would be caught dead in a chasuble. So when Christians of all classes adopted the chasuble as their daily wear they were making more than a fashion statement. They were repudiating the finery of the world and revoking the distinctions of class, rank, and influence to identify with the most common and least influential.

The chasuble became so identified with the church that when customs changed churchmen continued to wear the garment—but not always for the same purpose. In the Middle Ages, as the power and influence of the church grew, the chasuble changed. The cloak of poor monks became the robe of rich clerics. Wool yielded to linen and silk. Drab colors that would hide grime eroded into brilliant hues to display wealth. Jewels and gold braid on chasubles worn by those of highest rank replaced crude patches and ravelled hems. What once identified with the common man now distinguished the most influential.

The evolution of the chasuble is a telling metaphor of the all too common course of human choices even among Christians. We gravitate to power: to holding it, to displaying it, to wielding it. We may respect humility, but we want influence—which is not wrong in all respects. God calls Christ’s followers to be salt and light in the world for the sake of His name. Still, we should recognize that how we achieve that influence challenges our motives, our faith, and our obedience. God charges us to promote the cause of Christ without adopting the ways of the world. This is never

easy because the world so clearly indicates what makes a difference in the ordinary course of affairs. "Amass power, exert influence, gain control," the world says. However, Christians are called to heed what the Bible says will usher forward reformation and revival.

What does the Bible say will prompt spiritual renewal in people? As we move toward the close of the twentieth century amidst a universally acknowledged culture war Christ's disciples must discern, and act upon, scriptural priorities. At the same time, *we need to make sure the implications of our actions do not wander from the affirmations of our faith.* We must ensure that the tendencies evident in the warped evolution of the chasuble do not resurge in us.

To guard against temptations that lie in the pursuit of change through the promotion of human power we need to ask again in the light of Scripture, "What will really make a difference in the cause of Christ?" Biblical answers will become clear only as we again clarify the nature of *our mission, heaven's means, and Christ's mandate.* True reformation and revival cannot come till we understand these fundamentals of our faith.

#### Our Mission

Knowing precisely what God desires for His followers to accomplish should determine our course of action. The apostle Paul's words to the Corinthian church help us discern our aim by clarifying the goals he set for himself. Paul identified his mission as *promoting the glory of God in the person of His Son.*

**His Glory.** Divisions were tearing apart the church at Corinth. This community in the midst of Greek affluence and intellectual sophistication had unconsciously begun to reflect culture more than Christ by splintering into various factions over perceived variations in the teachings of their leaders. Party lines formed behind alleged differences in the

messages of Apollos, Peter, Paul, and even Christ. Each group was vying for the intellectual and political upper hand that would render control of the church. Paul challenged and chastened all the cliques by reminding them *who they were and who God is* (vv. 25-30).

**A Reminder of Themselves.** Paul first reminded those who were trying to promote themselves that they personally had nothing to brag about. The apostle recalled for his readers that not many of them were wise by human standards and few were influential when God brought them into the church (v. 26). Which being interpreted means, "Where do you get off being uppity?" Paul simply would not allow these people to form ranks over any supposed superiority. Their common roots and humble origins made prideful divisions ridiculously pretentious.

**A Reminder of Their Sovereign.** As a correction to these persons' attempts to glorify themselves Paul offers a refresher course on whom alone deserves glory. He reminds the Corinthians that God has worked throughout history so as to reserve all glory for Himself. He chose foolish things to confound the wise (v. 27), weak things to shame the strong (v. 27), the lowly despised things—the things that are not—to nullify the things that are (v. 28). Since God uses what has no influence to determine eternal destinies the apostle's reasoning directs all praise toward heaven. Paul concludes that God works through these means "so that no one may boast before Him" (v. 29). Only God should receive honor. Thus, the mission of both ancient and modern followers is to glorify Him alone.

This goal and these truths reflect the priorities of faith fathers who revitalized orthodoxy in the church during the great Reformation of the sixteenth century that still echoes through biblical Christianity. The distinctive trumpet calls of that Reformation—*sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), *sola fides* (faith alone), and *sola gratia* (grace alone)—all re-

sound in this passage:

The principle of *sola scriptura* which teaches that the church should turn to the Bible alone for its spiritual authority reflects the apostle's contention that God's saving "wisdom," rather than any human determinations, provides our only hope in this fallen world (v. 30). Affirmation of our dependence on God's wisdom instructs Christians to turn to the Bible alone to determine matters of faith and practice. Only in God's Word do we learn *what* it means to be "in Christ Jesus" (v. 30).

In this same passage the apostle reveals the means by which we may enter a saving relationship with the Savior attested in Scripture. Our works do not bring us to God. Look at the words beginning the key clauses in verses 27-28: "But God chose...; God chose...; He chose..." In this triune affirmation of God's sovereign action in our behalf Paul reminds all Christians that divine work rather than human effort establishes our relationship with Him. We are saved solely through faith in what God has done rather than by any contribution of our own goodness—*sola fides*.

Paul underscores our divine dependence by writing, "It is because of Him (i.e., God) that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (v. 30). Christians stand righteous and holy before God because Christ purchased our redemption from the consequences of sin at the price of His own life. Thus, all that makes us right before God comes from His own gracious hand. God secures our salvation by grace alone—*sola gratia*.

These rallying cries of the Reformation unite to signal one compelling purpose for Christ's church. Since all believers' standing before God relies solely on His wisdom and influence, then our efforts should exalt Him alone. *Sola scriptura*, *sola fides*, and *sola gratia* indicate God alone deserves our praise. Their sum is *Soli Deo Gloria*; i.e., "to

God alone be glory." Our mission is His honor alone. His name alone—not Paul's, not Apollos', not Peter's, and no other name—must beacon from our midst.

**His Son.** The divine name that must echo from our ranks further defines our purpose. Paul's own example indicates that *our mission is to glorify God by proclaiming His Son*. The apostle clearly spells out his mission and ours with these words of focused intent: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (2:2).

**Words That Shock.** These last words should shock us. Even a small exposure to Paul's ministry will cause us to respond, "What are you talking about, Paul? In your teaching and preaching (including this very letter) you addressed topics as diverse as the qualifications of church officers, correct worship practices, biblical family relationships, proper stewardship of resources, how we should relate to government authorities, and dozens of other issues. You cited Israel's history and quoted Greek poetry. You wrote about your own experiences. You certainly did more than talk about Christ and His atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Apparently Paul would disagree with this assessment. In his mind all the apostle did and said had a center-focus of purpose. Paul's solitary mission was the ministry of Jesus: proclaiming who He was and what He did on the cross. Paul discussed other matters only because he believed they reflected upon or resulted from the ministry of Jesus.

**Words That Instruct.** The ministry of the Apostle Paul reminds us that while there are many dimensions of the Christian mission there is only one center-focus for the work of the church. Our pulpits are reserved for the cross.

We live in a time that requires Christian leaders to pay careful attention to the instruction implicit in the apostle's words. Political campaigns, social activists, personality promoters, and our own interests and injuries scream for

the attention of the church. This is **not** all wrong. Few of us want to return to the head-in-the-sand days when Christ's people did not bother themselves with matters controversial or social. Francis Schaeffer rightly reminded us that concern for the holiness of God requires us to be a voice for justice and morality in our culture. Martin Luther King, Jr., justifiably charged the church with too long acting as a taillight rather than a headlight with regard to these issues. At the same time, there is always the temptation to make the church a servant of an issue, individual, cause, or party. Here we deeply err. For while we must confess that there are many matters deeply deserving of the church's attention and efforts, our ultimate mission is something fundamentally different than social reconstruction or political reform. We are about nothing but Jesus and Him crucified.

Christians must keep learning from their own history. All owe an immense debt to wise leaders who stood against overt attempts to politicize the evangelical church in the 1950s and 60s. However, as our culture continues to polarize over issues of morality and justice the danger of the church becoming solely identified with certain parties and personalities encroaches again. The danger lies not so much in any particular cause but in the persistently fed perception that the church's primary purpose is something other than Christ.

The lines of proper influence and expression grow increasingly fuzzy. Many issues in our age demand the voice of the church. However, balancing the need to proclaim biblical truth against the mere lust for human power necessitates careful thought and constant vigilance. The "chastable syndrome" always threatens the church. We should never minimize the wrestling of conscience required to make sure that we are speaking to our culture for the sake of Christ and not merely for the promotion of our own

interests. Wrestle we must because our mission requires no less of us than the constant examination of our words and actions to determine whether long-term consequences will diminish our capacity to carry out the primary aim of the church. Thankfully we do not need to thrash about blindly as we weigh our priorities. The Word of God gives us guidance in our decisions.

We stay on target by making Paul's example our resolve. Christians today also must maintain the focus on Jesus *and* His sacrifice for sin. The church is about "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." As important as are the issues of morality and government, whenever these issues become divorced from the cross the church does not merely promote a partially biblical message, it promotes an anti-Christian message. As odd as it may sound, amidst the din of cultural Christianity, we recognize that foundationally Christ's people are *not* about family values, traditional values, the Judeo-Christian ethic, or any other standard of morality (as highly as I regard such standards). When we are faithful to our mandate we *are* about the failure of any standard to make us right before God. Righteousness apart from the cross is the message of every *other* faith, but not ours. Our message is that people have standing before God only when covered by His righteousness alone. We are the people of the cross. The standards of Christ and the need of His crucifixion are wed in our testimony, and when they come apart the message is no longer of Christ.

The cross must stay center stage. To the extent that we speak less of it, think less of it, relate less to it, act less grateful for it, we abandon the true priority of the church. To the extent that we let other voices drown out Christ's ministry, or let other issues dilute His cause, we abandon our true mission. We speak about other issues when to be silent about them would be to diminish our testimony of Him. But even then the issues are not our fundamental

cause. He is!

If we want revival, if we want change, if we want restoration of Christian values, then we must be willing to say with the apostle, "We resolve to be about nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Christ alone—*sola Christus*—must be the cry of our reformation if we are to be true to the values of the Reformers we say we respect.

Our churches gain nothing of eternal value if they make of secondary priority or lesser emphasis the message that Jesus died for sin and that sinners are lost eternally without faith in Him. Consider this: If we were to achieve social and political goals that promote morality without an awareness of the need for atonement, we could actually create a society farther from the cross than we are at present. Self-righteousness is no nearer to revival than immorality—and may actually be far more resistant to the Gospel. If our society were more moral without any more dependance on the cross, then it would be no nearer to revival than were the Pharisees!

Since the success of the church's biblical mission hinges on focused efforts to promote the glory of God through the proclamation of His Son's person and work, Christians next must ask, "How?" What means does God give us to make the eternal differences that are the focus of the Gospel? What will bring true reformation and revival to our culture? How do we change the world?

#### The Means

No mystery lies in how to orchestrate massive change in a society: set goals, develop an organizational structure, recruit influential people, develop a financial base, create a media strategy, and then seek to amass enough popular strength that political and economic power bring about desired changes. This is the way the world works, and some Christians may be tempted to believe that such measures will accomplish their spiritual goals. They are wrong. Nei-

ther the world's goals nor its means are compatible with Christ's purposes.

**Not by Our Powers.** Common sense should tell us how beyond human means lies pervasive national and cultural revival. Currently those identifying themselves as born-again Christians comprise fifteen to twenty-five percent of the electorate, depending on which poll you believe. If the numbers were twice or even three times that amount, would the numbers really guarantee revival? Remember we are talking about God's kingdom, not ours. Our mission lies in the world of souls, not in the world of the polls. Never has a religious group's ascendancy to power and the imposition of conservative moral standards offered guarantees of genuine spiritual awakening in a society. If the church were to possess all the power and wealth that this world can offer (and could avoid all the commensurate temptations of such influence), history offers us little hope that possession of these means would make any real difference in our ultimate mission to promote the glory of God through the ministry of His Son in the hearts of those around us.

**Our Limits.** Some who have sensed the limitations of their churches have begun to look elsewhere for power over the corruptions evident throughout our culture. The obvious place to look for such power in a democratic society is in the political arena. Yet, as important as is responsible political involvement we need to question the impact politics ultimately will have on our culture. Consider how our society increasingly trivializes its own political system. While party conventioners gather to deliberate which of their candidates can best frame the country's future, media commentators offer jibes and jokes about the process. Campaign reporting degenerates into sound bites where we listen not for substance but for mistakes. Candidate commercials become thirty-second orchestrations of selected facts and personal ridicule designed to leave im-

pressions rather than foster thought. Once a candidate assumes office the assaults of approval ratings, lobby interests, late-night talk shows, a prying press, and the specter of future campaigns largely neutralize incentive to promote meaningful change.

We should not limit ourselves to scanning the current political landscape when questioning whether political success can direct a nation toward fundamental spiritual change. Though the media typically say that evangelicals had a direct line to the White House during the twelve years of the Reagan and Bush presidencies, that is hardly the whole picture of evangelical influence. The current president and vicepresident also claim membership in a denomination claiming more evangelicals than any other. The only president who actually trumpeted his born-again commitments was in office the four years prior to Reagan, and the two presidents in office eight years prior to him largely had the support of conservative Christians. The United States is approaching a quarter century of intense evangelical leverage on the nation's most powerful office. Yet this prolonged period of evangelical influence at the highest level of government coincides precisely with the time Francis Schaeffer said our culture has seemed most to unravel. What should Christians do next if politics really holds the key to national revival? Pray for a half century of political power?! Seek more and more political candidates who will advocate an approved evangelical agenda?! While the protection of our children, the defense of decency, the promotion of fairness, and concern for our nation's future call all Christians to act responsibly and biblically in the political arena, we ignore the painfully obvious lessons of our own times if we think these actions will spawn genuine spiritual revival. If the impact of a generation of evangelical power exerted at presidential heights has been so minimal do we not have to question whether churches who bank on revival through

political one-up-manship invest in futility?

Looking beyond the boundaries of human power for the means of spiritual renewal does not mean that Christians must surrender to their culture nor despair of its reform. Instead realistic assessments of the limitations of the world's means of effecting change grant us greater confidence in the spiritual resources God gives us for performing His purposes. What are the resources God provides for spiritual revival? Paul answers as he writes to a Greek audience no less secular, sophisticated, and lost than our own. Our appreciation for the divine provisions grows as we scrutinize the apostle's description of God's pattern for bringing about spiritual change in this situation.

**God's Pattern.** God's pattern of sparking revival first glimmers in Paul's description of the Corinthian believers. Not many of them were sophisticated, influential, or noble born before God brought His church into being through them (v. 26). What was normal for this situation Paul quickly makes clear is typical of God. He works outside the ordinary channels of human capabilities. To the Greeks whose culture taught the importance of sophistication, power, and breeding this was an entirely counter perspective.

So contrary was this view to the Greeks' ordinary way of thinking that Paul was forced to drive it home with one allusion piled on top of another. The apostle wrote that God uses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise (v. 27)—God did not use Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato to spread his Gospel, yet it mushroomed. Paul adds that God chose the weak things to shame the wise (v. 27)—Nero, Domitian and Pilate would level the power of imperial Rome against the cause of Christ and yet the carpenter and His fishermen followers would shame them all. To these snooty Greeks Paul even says that God chose the lowly (literally the lowborn and slaves, not rulers) and the despised (publicans and prostitutes, not the privileged and elite—the *have nots*



rather than the *haves*) to nullify (make of no importance) the things that are of great importance to the world (v. 28).

The past tense repetition of “God chose” three times in these different dimensions of wisdom, power, and influence indicates that God’s determination to work apart from these means was not only true in the Corinthians’ case, but rather was the normal and ordinary way that God worked in history. Paul did not contend such means were the only way that God worked, but rather such was His common pattern. The Bible makes this clear repeatedly:

God says to Israel, “I chose you for greatness, not because you were the most numerous, but because you were the smallest of peoples and then would know God is God” (cf. Deut. 7:7-9).

Gideon started with 32,000 soldiers. “Too many,” said God. With only the three hundred who did not get on their knees to drink at the water’s edge did God save His people from the Midianites and Amalekites. His salvation focuses on His power.

To a woman named Hannah, distraught over her childlessness and thought drunk by the high priest, God promises a son, Samuel, who will guide the nation to its greatest heights and to the leader who will establish the lineage of the Savior.

When that Savior comes He arrives in a stable in Bethlehem. An itinerant carpenter and his disgraced fiancée welcome this helpless child into the world. Though angels announce Him, they speak to shepherds, not kings. In His whole adult lifetime, except for an occasional excursion, this Nazarene will rarely wander beyond what would be a few minutes drive on a highway today. Yet, with a ragtag band of fishermen, tax collectors, and cowards the carpenter’s son reaches across the world and reshapes countless eternities.

And what about Christ’s followers who are supposed to

carry out His Great Commission of spreading the Gospel that reforms and revives? The New Testament scholar Hermann Olshausen records that what happened here at Corinth was not unique:

The ancient Christians were for the most part slaves and men of low station; the whole history of the church is in reality a progressive victory of the ignorant over the learned, the lowly over the lofty until the emperor himself laid down his crown before the cross of Christ.

God chooses the weak and despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are.

Paul’s own example indicates how consistent is God’s pattern. He says at the beginning of the next chapter, “I did not come to you with eloquence or superior wisdom (v.1)...I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling” (v. 3). You would think God could have chosen a better representative than Paul to take the Gospel to this city and to the Gentile world. Paul would certainly not have made the cut if most of us were picking the evangelism team. Yet, what God did in the past He continued into the present time of the apostle and these Corinthian people. He used the least likely to perform the most impressive feats of kingdom building.

**But by His Spirit.** Why did God choose to work through somebody like Paul? Paul answers, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might rest not on man’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (2:4-5). Not by our might, but by His Spirit does God build the kingdom.

Paul reiterates the same message to the Corinthians at the end of his next letter to them. After recounting his many trials and the hurdles to his own ministry a thorn in the flesh causes, he records God’s answer as to why the apostle

needed to minister with these liabilities. God says, “Because My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). God’s means for reformation and revival are not found in our powers but in His Spirit.

If any church should know that the power of God for the building of Christ’s kingdom rests in spiritual rather than earthly power, it should be we who are the children of the Reformation. The movement that spawned us cannot be explained with power, wealth, and influence. These were all lined up against our faith forefathers. Luther, Calvin, Knox, and the Covenanters worked against odds we can hardly fathom in these days. But it was not merely in these big names that the Reformation found its strength. The sparks that fueled the Reformation’s flames were often thrown by the least likely persons:

Jennie Geddis—the Rosa Parks of the Reformation. Though a simple herb woman, she alone was brave enough openly to object to the imposition of the English liturgy at St. Giles church in Edinburgh. When she threw her sitting stool at Archbishop Laud the ensuing riot led to the renewal of the Solemn League and Covenant in 1638 and ignited the Covenanter movement of which we are all heirs. Now believe me, throwing a stool at an archbishop was not a real intelligent thing to do, but God uses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.

John Bunyan—whose *Pilgrim’s Progress* not only continues to be read by generations of school children but may have done more to frame the religious conscience of this nation than any book other than the Bible. Bunyan spent his entire life within five miles of his birthplace and wrote much of his most influential work while locked in prison, where supposedly he was powerless. God chose the weak, to shame the strong.

In our heritage are many examples that allow us to rejoice that God uses His Spirit to revive and reform. How-

ever, only a little reflection on these persons who remind us how dependent we are on God’s Spirit to do His will can lead us to frustration. If only we could bottle the Spirit, then we could achieve what *we* want. Reformation and revival would be in our grasp. Yet, in His wisdom God has determined that the Spirit “blows wherever it pleases” (John 3:8). God pours out the work of the Holy Spirit as He wishes, not as we choose. So if we know our mission, but we know at the same time God’s means to accomplish it cannot be controlled by our will, what does God require of us?

#### God’s Mandate

God’s mandate becomes apparent to us in careful analysis of the apostle’s own example (2:2). The words he used to describe how he sought to engender spiritual life in Corinth may surprise you. He wrote, “I resolved to *know* nothing while I was with you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” I expected Paul to say, “I resolved to *preach* nothing but Jesus crucified,” or, perhaps, “I resolved to *make known* nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” However, the wording is clear and unambiguous. Paul was not primarily referring to what he *said* but to what he *lived*.

The apostle chose each word so carefully. For Paul to “know” Jesus as the “Christ” (i.e., the One anointed to rule God’s people) indicates Paul humbled himself before One he recognized as the Lord of every aspect of this world. Knowing Jesus as the One “crucified” meant that Paul recognized his own need for repentance so that God might cover his sin with the blood of the Savior. To “know” Christ in this context meant Paul had resolved to live a humble and repentant life before his God. In fact the word used for “know” is that which most naturally conveys the knowledge that comes from a relationship.

Paul believed that living in a humble and repentant relationship with Jesus was the most powerful message and

means that he had to win Corinth. You might think that these Greeks would listen only to those who argued with the wisdom and sophistication of their philosophers. Paul knew better and, despite the disdain it would elicit from some, still resolved “to know nothing” but Christ and Him crucified when ministering among the Corinthians. The power of the Gospel was not in Paul’s argumentation but in his demonstration that he knew Jesus.

The message to us is as poignant as it is simple: Reformation and revival result when God’s people demonstrate they *know* Jesus in the midst of a lost and sinful society. Herbert Farmer in his classic work, *The Servant of the Word*, writes, “God’s saving approach is always through persons in relationships.” No spiritual force is more powerful than each believer living for Jesus in the place that God calls you to serve. This is not the way of the world but it is the way of the Lord: Using the personal witness and daily walk of individuals who live with an intimate knowledge of Him to redirect eternal destinies.

Vision of the power implicit in each Christian’s life of devotion inspired our Reformation forefathers to teach the dignity of each vocation and the priesthood of all believers. After all, they reasoned, how could there be second-class vocations or less spiritual callings if God could use each person in whatever place or occupation to change eternity. This great insight should remind each of us that those who “know Jesus among you” are the soldiers of the cross who alone will serve as the catalysts of revival. No force nor any means contributes more to the building of Christ’s kingdom and the destruction of the dominion of darkness than your personal, daily commitment to honor Jesus in the place where God has called you to live, work, love, learn, struggle and, even, play.

You should recognize that if you believe that the real power for revival lies in each Christian’s hour-by-hour,

minute-to-minute personal faithfulness to Christ, some will accuse you of being one of those evangelicals who is concerned only about personal salvation and lacks a real “worldview.” If the accusation comes your way, first remember it is the same charge leveled at Jesus by disciples who expected Him to dominate the world with the forces of the world. Something warped in our human nature simply will not allow us to accept the worth of efforts that do not have the trappings of human power and minimize the importance of organizational control.

Second, recall that a commitment to live consistently for Jesus does not mean that you must put *aside* efforts for social, moral, and political reform, but rather that you must place them *under* the commitment to live for Jesus in whatever position or situation He assigns you:

If your calling is politics then live for Jesus, recognizing that the need for power is never cause to abandon the testimony of Christ. If a position cannot be won with truth and respect for others, let it go. We win nothing for Christ with the politics of distortion, invective, and ridicule. Such does not indicate that we know Jesus. How much I love and respect the politicians associated with our church who make their personal testimony a priority over personal or party gains. I know they pay a high price for the consistency of their witness. I pray for more like them for the sake of reformation and revival.

If your calling is business then live for Jesus, realizing that God calls you to faithfulness more than to success. Whatever you gain at the expense of His name will mean little in terms of what is truly rewarding in this world or the next.

God may have called you to the field of education, or the arts, or the church. In each place there are forces you will be tempted to counter with what the world identifies as the instruments of power and influence. Employ them all *as long* as they do not diminish your testimony of Him. What you

long for the most—the reformation and revival of this world—requires that you know Jesus among those He places in your life’s sphere.

At the heart of this passage the Apostle Paul urges us to believe in the power of one. Each of us must grasp the wonder that the Spirit of God will use each person uncompromisingly committed to the cause of Christ in the place of their calling in a far greater way than we could ask, imagine, or orchestrate by our means:

Recently the seminary I serve hired a new professor. He is a younger man, and in future years will have the opportunity to train quite literally thousands to minister the Gospel to tens of thousands—and possibly many more—over the next generation. When the school officials interviewed him, this new professor told us something I had forgotten. He said he had come to know the Lord through the testimony of *his* brother who had come to know the Lord through the testimony of *my* brother in high school. I remember my brother in those high school years. Sometimes he was as foolish as any of us in our teenage years. He certainly had no power by the world’s standards. He had a sincere faith but no doctorate in theology nor any insider connections with the church’s hierarchy. Yet, more than twenty years ago, God chose this foolishness to confound our wisdom and change the eternity of many.

Five years ago a vet in Virginia named Jim Nash called Jesus, “Lord.” This past year he signed on for a three-year stint to work with World Vision providing health resources for refugees of sub-Saharan Africa who have suffered the double scourges of civil war and drought. He went to help them conserve water. While there he also started a daily Bible class. Five hundred now attend daily, thirsting for the living water of the Spirit as much as for the water of physical life. You would not call Jim a Bible scholar. You would not say he went to a place where he has any power. But God chose a

man who “knows Jesus” among those who have nothing and are close to being nothing to build the kingdom against the overwhelming forces of starvation and war. God uses the weak things to shame the strong.

This week near Washington, D.C., a homemaker I cannot name for you because of the sensitivity of her ministry will host a Bible study on her porch. Among the two dozen women who regularly attend are wives of justices, legislators, and executives ruling at the highest levels of our government. This simple Bible study in a home was never intended to be more than a “neighbor” ministry. Yet more profound influences for our nation, world, and millions of unborn may emanate from that porch than all the political power twelve million evangelicals think they can exert in political campaigns. God chooses the things that are not to nullify the things that are.

When you see what God can do, you know His call for you: Know Jesus and Him crucified among those He puts in your life. How He will use you I cannot say. That He will use you I am certain. How could God not use one who lives a repentant life conscious of the work of His Son?

Maybe this prescription for reformation and revival does not sound very sophisticated. It is not a call for a national game plan or an organizational scheme. This is simply a challenge to live for God in whatever calling He gives you, knowing that in the battle for souls, in the war for reformation and revival, the Holy Spirit can and will use the commitment of those who know Him more than all the forces men can muster by their might. This is the glory of the Lord! As neighbor lives before neighbor, and friend witnesses to friend, the Spirit of God moves through those who know Jesus.

By this personal challenge I am not in the least trying to undermine the efforts or the value of national movements

for social, moral, and religious causes. I have the highest respect for those whose convictions have called them to stand for justice and morality in the public arenas of our culture. I stand on “life lines” with my family because I believe in the importance of such efforts in fighting societal evil. Still, we must make sure that we know where the real power of our faith *for the faith* resides.

The power for eternal changes resides in the heart of each one who lives for Jesus. Trust in worldly influences and political measures to perform God’s ultimate purposes is misplaced. The Bible specifically tells us not to put our confidence “in princes”; i.e., the powers of this world (Ps. 118:9; 146:3). The foibles, frailties, and failures of leaders we have chosen politically and ecclesiastically well confirm the wisdom of that command. Each of us has a job to do: to influence eternity where we are. If God chooses to use us in a political cause, a moral crusade, or to raise one child knowing Him, that is God’s choice, but living for the Savior changes eternity regardless. For Christ’s followers who see with His eyes this perspective grants deep satisfaction because these changes in eternity at the heart level are what real revival is all about.

What will really make a difference amidst our culture wars? You! The power of God for reformation and revival will flow through you as you resolve today to know Jesus and Him crucified above all things and among all others. Live as one who acknowledges your sin and loves your Savior. The ministry of that One flows through each one who intimately knows Him and what He has done. The power of pervasive revival resides in the personal revival of each one who resolves to know Jesus well in this sin-sick world.

#### The Resolve

Twenty years ago a leader in the Communist youth

movement in Peru named Gerry (Geraldo) came into contact with a group of missionaries from our church. We know them as Harry and Florence Marshall. For two generations this young man’s relatives had led the Communist movement in his country. Gerry had power, political savvy, and a liberal university sophistication that made him scoff at the simple faith of the missionaries. He spoke to them as much to humiliate them, as to learn their “philosophy.” Then one day the Marshalls passed along to Gerry a postcard mailed by a child in the United States. A little girl had read a prayer letter from the missionaries in which they had mentioned their conversations with the militant young leader. The postcard with a teddy bear drawn on it said simply, “I’m praying for you, Gerry.” Today this former Marxist will tell you it was the concern of that child so many thousand miles away that “broke my back.” He then bowed to the Lord Jesus.

These days in Washington, D.C., that same Gerry—Gerry Gutierrez—ministers to foreign diplomats so that they can return to their nations with knowledge of the Gospel. His efforts have already led to national prayer campaigns organized and attended by some of the most influential leaders in South America. Still, although officials now involved in these efforts wield tremendous worldly power, remember where the movement started. A child wrote a teddy bear postcard as God once again chose to use the weak and foolish things of the world to overcome the wise and the strong.

If God chooses to use this time for revival, it will not be because *we* voted wisely or organized well — as important as those things are in these days. If this is to be the moment of revival it is such because individual Christians in places unlikely to receive the world’s notice know Jesus deeply. National and world revival may even begin now in your

heart with a renewed desire, longing, and commitment to know Jesus deeply.

Let there be no mistake; I am *not* merely suggesting you “brighten the corner where you are.” I challenge you to believe something far more significant: That profound, even pervasive, changes in the eternal order of the spiritual realm ripple and reverberate from a heart that beats with the knowledge of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The force of national revival and world reformation resides in you. There is no national movement, no political solution, no public figure more critical to God’s cause than your personal resolution to know Jesus among those He puts in your life. Pervasive revival always and foundationally results from personal revival. You are the difference this world needs at this moment in history because revival at its heart is the contagion of personal holiness and dedication to the Savior that no organizational structure can mimic. The infectious faith that sparks revival resides in your personal commitment to know Jesus above all else in the place of your calling. The results of this personal revival you may not be able to measure at the polls, no one is likely to record it in the history books, but in eternity it is all that matters.

In the spiritual realm where the powers of the earth do not hold sway you are what will make the difference. This night, this hour, this moment make this your resolve: “I will live as one who knows Jesus.” You may think that you do not have the wisdom to convince anybody of anything, but remember God uses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. You may think you have no power to make an impact, but remember God uses the weak things of the world to shame the strong. You may think you have nothing to offer, but remember God uses the things that are not to nullify the things that are. From this spiritual wisdom flows the spiritual power that sparks reformation and revival. If the knowledge of the Lord is to fill the earth as water

covers the sea, it is because this commitment wells in you: “I will live as one who knows Jesus.”

#### Author

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